



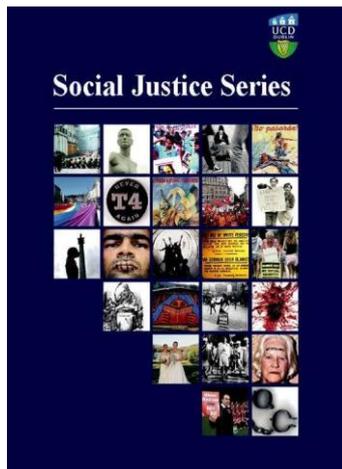
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Older people and age discrimination in the Irish labour market

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Abstract

This report presents an overview of the situation of older people in the labour market using the findings of recent research as well as information gathered from a variety of sources and organisations concerned with age and older persons and the Irish labour market. Compared to other EU countries, Ireland has a relatively young population and the ageing process will take place later than in the rest of Europe. However older people constitute one of the most vulnerable groups in Irish society. For instance, life expectancy for older people in Ireland is the lowest in Europe falling below the EU average for both males and females. The high prevalence of disability among older people illustrates the necessity for comprehensive policies towards this population that tackles their different needs and situations. Additionally, there are important employment barriers for older workers due to ageism that is deeply rooted in Irish society. In terms of gender, older women are more at risk of poverty than their male peers. The unequal distribution of care work between women and men illustrates the fact that in Irish society women continue to provide the majority of unpaid care work. This report analyses a range of key aspects of the situation of older people in the labour market. From media representations and public opinion to Government initiatives and the role that NGOs, civil society and the business sector play.

Key words

Ireland, age discrimination, discrimination, labour market, diversity, ageism, equality

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Introduction

At present in Ireland there are as many as four generations employed in the labour market. European societies are facing new challenges in the global market and multigenerationality needs to be included as a core element for a more inclusive and equal society.

Compared to other EU countries, Ireland has a relatively young population and the ageing process will take place later than in the rest of Europe (Basten et al. 2002). Ireland has a population of just over 4.4 million, distributed fairly evenly between men and women until the age of 65. In the over 85 cohort, there were only 45 men for every 100 women in the country. The Irish population is relatively young with 67% under 44 years of age (CSO 2007b). This population will age considerably over the coming decades. By 2010, there were 739,600 males aged 45 and over and 788,200 females in the same group (CSO 2010b). While by 2010 just over 500,000 people in Ireland were aged 65 or over, by 2021 the number of older people is expected to be around 775,000, a rise of 55% in just 11 years (Office for Older People 2010). By 2012 the proportion of the Irish population over 65 years will exceed those under five for the first time. Life expectancy for older people in Ireland is the lowest in Europe falling below the EU average for both males and females (Stratton 2006).

There has been an increase in research on older people and the labour market in Ireland. Several studies indicate that age discrimination continues to be the most common reason workers seek advice on facing discrimination in the Irish workplace. This report presents an overview of the situation of older people in the market using the findings of recent research as well as information gathered from different sources and organisations in Ireland concerned with age and older persons and the labour market.

There is no single fixed retirement age for employees in Ireland. This is set in the contract of employment (in some contracts there is a mandatory retirement age). The usual retirement age in contracts of employment is 65¹. In terms of intergenerational solidarity, Ireland is among the EU27 member states with higher levels of support for building relations between generations. However, respondents are very critical about the role of public authorities (EC 2009).

Important policies in relation to both the early retirement schemes and the introduction of a higher age for pension entitlements have been introduced as part of the Government agenda. The former is part of the broader policy initiative of reforming the public sector and specifically reducing public sector numbers but both policy developments are essentially about reducing public and social expenditure whether in terms of the wage bill or in terms of contributory and non contributory pension entitlements.

1. Older people and the labour market

The fifth European Working Conditions Survey (EWC), carried out in 2010, found that the employment rate in 2010 in Ireland for people aged 50 years and over was

¹ For more detail about retirement age, see www.citizensinformation.ie

lower than that among other EU27 countries (70.7% and 75.2% respectively) (EC 2010). Disaggregated by gender, the labour force participation rate for men and women in Ireland showed in 2009 that the rate for older women was consistently lower than that for older men. This gap represented 66.7% for women and 87.6% for men aged between 45-54; 52.1% for women and 76.5% for men aged 55-59; 32.1% for women and 57.2% for men aged between 60-64; and a rate of 4.3% for women compared to 14.9% for men aged 65 and over (CSO 2009). The same report states that in 2006, the average exit age from the labour force for women was 64.7 years (5 years above the 2002 EU average), while for men it was 63.5 years (3 years above the 2002 EU average).

The employment rate for persons aged 55-64 in Ireland has reached the 2001 Stockholm Council Target of a 50% employment rate for this age group by 2010. Between 1999 and 2009 the employment rate for women aged 55-64 in Ireland increased from 25.9% to 41.4%. For men, the figures were comfortably above the 2010 target, increasing from 61.5% in 1999 to 68.1% in 2007 before dropping back to 62.2% in 2009 (CSO 2010a).

In terms of unemployment rates, due to the current economic downturn, there is a large increase reflected in all ages and particularly among men. These rates increased from 6.6% in 2008 to 15.1% in 2009 for men, and from 4.4% in 2008 to 8.1% in 2009. Among older people, 10.4% of male workers aged 45-54 were unemployed compared to 4.5% among women in the same age. Among those aged 55-59, 7.7% among male and 3.9% among women; and in the age group 60-64, 8% among men and 1.6% among women.

The average income increased for men aged 45-54 (€51,011) in comparison with men aged 35-44 (€45,922). In contrast, women in the same cohorts experience a slight decrease in their income (from €29,801 among 35-44 to €29,167 among 45-54). From the age of 55-64, men experience a dramatic decrease in their salaries (€45,371) to a lower income between the ages 65-84 (€21,065). In the case of women, this decrease is even more pronounced; it goes from €24,976 among 55-64 to €14,408 among 65-85 years of age (CSO 2010a). This data illustrates the intersections of gender and age discrimination, by which female older workers are particularly vulnerable due to the particular demands of the labour market and gender and age stereotypes still presented in Irish society.

The average employment level falls by 4.2% in 2010. The greatest reduction in employment continued to be seen in the construction sector (-19%). Unemployment increased by 11.8% annually with male employment increasing by 7.6% and female unemployment increasing by 21.9%. Compared to other EU27 member states, Ireland has an average unemployment rate of 13.7% (9.3% for other EU27). There is a decrease of 1.5% in the total number of persons in the labour market force over 2010, which represents a fall in the participation rate from 61.4% to 60.4% over the year. The male participation rate decreased from 69.5% to 68.3% in 2010 while the female participation rate declined from 53.2% to 52.9% over the same period. Even though the greatest fall in the participation rates were seen among persons in the youngest age group, participation rates among older age groups increased marginally over 2010 (CSO 2010d).

In terms of inactivity, the number of people defined as not in the labour force increased by 1.8% in 2010. This compares with an increase of 4.3% in 2009. If disaggregated by gender, males 15 and over who are not in the labour force constitute 17.6% while females represent 6.5%. This data has to be analyzed in the context of the dramatic changes of the net of migration, which has been heavily concentrated among younger age groups (CSO 2010d). The number of self-employed persons aged 15 and over decreased in the last quarter of 2010, particularly among male workers. The situation is even more marked among self-employed men who run their businesses on their own (with no paid employees): there was a decrease of 9,800 self-employed men with paid employees, while there was a decrease of 15,200 self-employed men with no paid employees. Among self-employed women, the changes are less pronounced, with a decrease of 3,100 of self-employed women with paid employees, but a notable increase of 1,800 of self-employed women with no paid employees. These current figures contrast with those presented in 2007, in which self-employed males increased by 28,300 and self employed females increased by 10,900 (CSO 2010d).

2. Access to the labour market

Ireland has the third most gendered-balanced population in the 65 and over age group in the EU. The latest Census (2006) showed that for persons aged 65 and over, there were 79.4 males per 100 females (70.3 in the EU). This rose to 89.9 males per 100 females in rural areas compared to 72 males in urban areas (CSO 2007b). The Quarterly National Survey on Working Conditions produced by the CSO showed how the percentage of employees receiving training other than on the job-training paid for or provided by their employer in a year period, significantly decreases with age. The age group most likely to benefit from these training experiences are those between 25-44 (27%), then the percentages gradually decline for those aged 45-59 (24%); aged 60-64 (20%); and the less likely to receive these trainings those employees aged 65 and over (13%) (CSO 2010c).

In 2010, the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) reported a relatively positive picture for older workers in Ireland compared to other European countries in terms of suitability between workers' skills and job positions. While 58.2% of workers aged 50 and over in Ireland considered that they have the right skills for the jobs they were employed for, 57.8% of workers in the same age group reported the same situation in other EU27 countries. The Irish case is particularly important if compared with data from 2005 from the same survey when only 49.6% of respondents from this age group reported this suitability (EC 2010). In the same Survey, Irish workers showed a greater satisfaction about their present jobs than other European older workers: 86.9% of respondents aged 50 and over in Ireland stated that their job gave them a "feeling of work well done"; compared to 84.9% in other EU27 countries.

Older employees, who often fear becoming out of date in terms of their career development, report the concern that younger employers with new competences (particularly related to technology) can appear more attractive to their employees, which many times stops older employees from taking leaves at late stages of their career (Barry and Vasquez del Aguila 2009).

Formal education plays a pivotal role in the current labour market. Workers with more qualifications are more likely to be considered for job positions and promotions. Older people are fairly represented among those who completed third level education, only 16.5% of people aged 65 and over compared to 42% of the 25-64 years old age group (CSO 2008a). There is a significant number of older people who are below the retirement age who have primary school level or no formal education: 32% aged 55-59, and 37% aged 60-64. There is a risk that if workers in these age groups are made redundant, they will not be able to secure other employment (CARDI 2010). This picture confirms a much-cited feature of the high proportion of older people with no qualifications beyond basic schooling, which reinforces the disadvantages of older workers in the market.

There is a well documented need to get older workers into formal and non-formal education and training in order to maximise their potential in the labour market. The national figures about this situation illustrates the absence of older workers in such training, only 1% of people aged 65-74 had participated in formal education in the past 12 months. This situation is even more dramatic among older groups: 0% of the over 75s had participated. When it comes to non-formal education, only 7% of 65-74 year olds and 4% of the over 75s had participated in training that could help them to be more competitive in the labour market (CSO 2008a). The same survey shows that just 26% of employers have implemented strategies for retaining older staff members who want to work beyond the normal retirement age (CARDI 2010).

The effective retirement age in Ireland is relatively high (64.1) compared with the OECD or EU average (60.9). The current employment rate for older workers (aged 55-64) is over 53%. A large proportion of older workers are self-employed farmers who tend to retire later on than other workers, and at the same time, the overall participation rate of older people in Ireland remains below the OECD average due to factors such as older women never having entered the labour market. The compulsory retirement age for most new entrants to the public service has also been removed since 2004 (Barry and Vasquez del Aguila 2009).

Compulsory retirement is a controversial issue for older workers. A two-year Age Action research Programme concluded that compulsory retirement ages should be abolished. The majority of older workers require flexible working arrangements instead of fixed age for retirement². The same conclusion came from a report by the Equality Authority, significant number of older workers do not want to be forced to retire. A recent report (2010) by the Office for Older People from the Department of Health and Children, found mixed views about retirement. While some older people see retirement as an opportunity to have time to engage in hobbies and interests, others viewed it as a time of loss of social contact and reduced income. Interestingly, the loss of social contact was an issue that tended to affect more men than women (Office for Older People 2010).

² For further development on this issue, see the several campaigns and initiatives carried out by Age and Action www.ageaction.ie/

3. Discrimination of older workers at the workplace

The fifth European Working Conditions Survey of developments in working conditions between 1991 and 2010 found that 3.6% of workers aged 50 and over reported being subjected to discrimination at work in 2010 (compared to 6.5 in EU15 and 6.1 in EU27 (EC 2010)). These figures are consistent with the previous survey in 2008 in which the perception of age based discrimination is relatively low in Ireland (25%) compared to other EU27 countries (42%) (EC 2008b). However, Irish respondents consider that compared to the situation five years ago (2003-2008), discrimination against elderly people has increased (61%) compared to lower rates in the other EU27 countries (57%) (EC 2008b).

The report on Equality by the Central Statistics Office (2007) shows that in terms of the “perceived ground of discrimination”, age related discrimination was the most commonly reported (19%) followed by gender (16%); race/ethnicity/nationality (15%); family status (12%); disability (6%); and marital status (6%) (CSO 2007a). The report states that age related discrimination is perceived as higher when looking for work (33%) compared to 16% in the workplace, which illustrates the particular vulnerability of older workers in accessing a competitive labour market.

In terms of reported discrimination, a study founded by the Equality Authority found that age had relatively little impact on either self-reported work place discrimination or looking for work. In this sense, older age groups (45-54 and 55-64) were no more likely to report discrimination. The small number of over 65s in the labour market were much less likely to report either discrimination at work or seeking work (reports of age related discrimination more often come from individuals under 25 years of age) (Russell et al. 2010). The authors concluded that this low level of self-reported discrimination among older people in both the labour market and services is despite evidence of ageism.

The fact that female workers tend to build up less education/training and experience over the course of their working lives has been widely recognized in the literature. Female older workers are particularly vulnerable in terms of the depreciation product of taking some time-out of the labour market. These female workers will “fall behind in terms of changing occupational or workplace practices that have arisen as a result of technological progress: skill-biased technical change” (McGuinness et. al. 2009).

Negative perceptions about older workers result in workers failing to be called for job interviews, not getting promotions, being made redundant or forced to retire early. Age Action, in conjunction with PARTAS carried out a research founded by the EU and found that 38% of firms considered the promotion prospects for those aged over 50 to be less than for those aged under 50. These figures were even higher in the public sector (41%) and the retail sector (40%).

A recent study by Older & Bolder (2010) shows employment barriers for older worker due to employer discrimination against older workers. This discrimination may also represent a reflection of wider societal and professional ageism. The study

also highlights the importance of training and the resistances that come from both employers and older employees. The incidence of training with age declines in Ireland with 25% of employees over 55 undergoing training in the previous twelve months. Additionally, ageist hiring policies represent further barriers: older workers do not necessarily face a higher risk of job loss compared to younger workers, but in most cases they face longer spells of unemployment when they do lose their jobs. Finally, poor working conditions and lack of flexible working arrangements may be pushing older workers into early retirement (Older & bolder 2009).

A study supported by the Senior Select Retain & Retrain shows evidence of barriers to participation in the labour market that older people face in Ireland. These older workers report lack of flexible or part-time hours, lack of appropriate skills and education, low take-home pay, concerns about reductions in pensions income and benefits as a result of taking up paid employment and age discrimination (Stratton 2006).

An Equality Authority report published in 2004 found that older workers entering the workforce are almost five times more likely to take up low-paid jobs than professional positions. Two thirds were employed for less than 15 hours per week (Russell et al. 2004). The Equality Authority takes cases of age discrimination. A well know case against a discriminatory policy by *Ryanair* became a warning for other companies that explicitly discriminated against older workers³.

Say No To Ageism Week is a joint initiative of the Equality Authority and the Health Service Executive partly funded under the Progress programme of the European Union. It aims to combat discrimination faced by older people by raising awareness and by encouraging people in the services sector to take initiatives to counteract discrimination against older people and others on the age ground; take account of the needs and situation of older people in the design of their services; make reasonable accommodation for older people; contribute to the promotion of equality for older people; promote positive action measures; and display and communicate to wider society a commitment to age equality in the provision of goods and services (EA 2010).

The National Council on Ageing and Older People (NCAOP) held a national conference, towards and Age Friendly Society in Ireland in 2005. The Equality Authority and the Health Service Executive joined the NCAOP in the publication of the conference proceedings in 2006. The publication shows how Irish society see ageism, provides some valuable insights about how to build an age friendly society, reviews progress made in the implementation of equality measures for older people. In a compelling paper, Niall Crowley notes that while equality legislation in Ireland provides an important foundation for the creation of an age friendly society, the implementation of the legislation is still a distant goal that Irish society needs to work to achieve (McGivern 2006).

A recent report on attitudes to age and ageing in Ireland shows the contrast between the perception of the Irish general population and older people.

³ Ryanair published an advertisement seeking “a young and dynamic professional”. The Equality Authority won the case and Ryanair had to review its policies to make them more inclusive for older people. The case was widely covered in Ireland.

Respondents over 65 years of age are more negative about how older people are treated *vis a vis* the general population and the extent to which they are respected and valued in society. The same age group differs in relation to younger ones in relation to increasing negative attitudes towards older people. Compared to 2003, older respondents feel that they are treated less favourable than everyone else: 25% in 2003 vs. 35% in 2008. Overall, the study shows that issues relating to respect and recognition of the role of older people suggest that attitudes are becoming more positive towards older people, but there is a growing sense among the public that things are “not really that great” for older people (Gray et al.; 2010).

Multiple discrimination

Multiple discrimination occurs when a person is discriminated against on more than one ground. Personal experience of discrimination is a key influence on perceptions of multiple discrimination. Ireland is among the European countries with the highest perception of multiple discrimination. Of the Irish population, 7% compared to 4% in the EU27 consider multiple discrimination to be very widespread in their country (EC 2008b). Despite the recognition reflected in anti-discrimination and equal treatment legislation, multiple discrimination remains somewhat obscure; hence, most institutions and organisations concerned with anti-discrimination legislation and policy are still focused on the single ground approach.

There is no single fixed retirement age for employees in Ireland. Specific retirement age is set out in the contract of employment. The usual retirement age in contracts of employment is 65. Some contracts of employment have a mandatory retirement age, provisions for earlier retirement generally and/or on grounds of illness. In some cases, there is a statutory retirement age. The retirement age varies between public and private sectors. For instance, among public servants, the minimum retirement age is 65 (e.g., 70 for judges and 55 for Garda members)⁴.

Older women are more at risk of poverty rated than their male peers. Among those aged 65 and over, 23% of women are at risk of poverty compared to 19% of men in the same age (CSO 2010a). This figure illustrates the allied gender issue discussing employment and poverty. The fact that more older women live in poverty than men and women live longer than men should call attention to the need for older worker retention that will support a move out of poverty for women (EQUAL 2007).

The unequal distribution of care work between men and women illustrates the fact that in Irish society women continue to provide the majority of unpaid care work. According to a report by the National Women’s Council of Ireland (NWCi) published in 2009, the most unequal distribution of care work between women and men occurs between the ages of 30 to 64, a crucial time when careers are developed and consolidated. The pattern is most pronounced for full time carers: women comprise almost 70% of those in their thirties providing full time care. The report shows how over the course of a week, women do 82% of care to adults distributed as follows: 86% of child supervision, 69% of playing with and reading to children, 82% of care to adults, 80% of cooking, 86% of cleaning, 70% of shopping (NWCi 2009).

⁴A detailed description of retirement age in Ireland can be found at <http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/>

As the authors state, the report constitute a clear evidence of the unequal distribution of care work and the impact on women's equality. Empirical research shows that older women are more likely to feel that age is a barrier for them returning to work. Female respondents consider that age is not an issue for older men as it is for older women, and while companies appreciate men's experiences they consider older women less competitive for the current market (SSRR 2007).

The Net Migration (defined as the number of immigrants less the number of emigrants) constitutes an important indicator to see the situation of older people in the Irish labour market. Even though the most dramatic figures are found among younger individuals, particularly men aged 15-44, this situation also impact on older workers. Among those aged 45-64, the number of male emigrants rose from zero in 1999 to 1.4% in 2009, and from 0.3% to 1.3% among women in the same period.

In terms of the migrant population, there few older people among the non-Irish population residing in Ireland (CSO 2010b). In this sense, older migrants constitute a minority within a minority group, which contributes to their "invisibilisation" from the public agenda. We could not find references to studies that analyse the situation of older migrants in Ireland in relation to the labour market.

The high prevalence of disability among older people illustrates the necessity of comprehensive policies towards this population that tackles their different needs and situations. In 2006, 29.5% of persons aged 65 and over indicated they had a disability compared to 9.3% of all persons. The proportion of persons with disability increased with age, particularly for the older age groups. The disability rate varied from 18.7% for the 65-69 group to 58.6% for the 85 and over age group. Gender and age go together to predict the prevalence of disability: more older women reported they had a disability compared to their male counterparts (31.9% of women compared to 26.6% of men aged 65 and over). This gap increases to reach 61.8% for women and 51.4% for men aged 85 and over (CSO 2007b).

It is unlawful to ask for one's age on an application form under Irish legislation. However, empirical research shows that older people consider that companies use different strategies to "discover" older people's age without "breaking" the law (SSRR 2007). The Partnership Pan European Older People's Learning and Employment Network (PEOPLE Network), which includes the UK, France, Czech Republic, Spain and Slovakia, constitutes an important initiative that should be replicated to the rest of EU countries. This network promotes best practices among older workers that could fill important gaps across Europe, particularly in relation to education, training and employment, and with an emphasis on those who also suffer from multiple discriminations on grounds of ethnicity, gender and disability.

4. Representations of older people, the media and public opinion

Most of the literature reviewed shows that ageism is deeply rooted in Irish society. The media does not challenge negative stereotypes against older people, but reinforced these perceptions. It is well known that older people are under-represented in the media compared to their number in society. Ireland is not the

exception to this norm. Older people are seen as if they are a “burden” and there are not enough discourses that promote the notion that society is composed of all ages. Other common narratives about older people in the media include “feeble”, “terrified”, or “unsuspecting” and “vulnerable”. These images are consistent with the way Church prayers are offered in Ireland: “for ...the poor, the sick and the old” which also has negative impact on the perception of older people (Murphy 2004).

A recurrent theme in the media is the “vulnerability” and “dependency” of older people. Many times older people are portrayed as “paralysed” by their fears about crime. It is important that older people, particularly those who live in their own and in isolated areas can count on adequate protection from the relevant authorities and the police. However, these recurrent narratives and images about older people feeling “prisoners” in their own places and fearing to be attacked (Irish Examiner 2011), reinforces stereotypes about older people’s inability to be part of the labour market.

Labelling and naming older people in the way they want to be called constitutes a departure point to combat discrimination and ageism. Like the UN and other European and International organisations, in this report we use the term “older people” and avoid terms such as “old” or “elderly” that many studies and organisations reported as widely rejected by older people across Europe. The term “silver workers” and “senior citizens” are also frequent in media reports and among some business companies.

Age & Opportunity commissioned a study about media representations of older people in Ireland. Despite important changes in Irish society in the last decades, ageism and stereotypes against older people still prevails in the Irish media and public opinion. a) The main findings of the study are: there are news items about older people in all newspapers, however, the majority of these are either about famous older people, or about older people involved in newsworthy events such as accidents, crime or business affairs; b) less than 10% of the news items address ageing issues; c) 33% of news items address cases of Alzheimer’s disease and 20% about age discrimination in the workplace; d) the national daily newspapers give much less coverage than the local weekly newspapers; e) the national newspapers include significantly fewer photographs of older people than local weekly newspapers. These images do not transmit positive images about older people; and f) older people are absent from some sections of the newspapers (e.g. sports, editorials, etc); g) despite the fact that there are more older women than older men in Ireland, the media covers more men than women’s issues; h) daily tabloids use well-worn and predictable language, particularly in their headlines (e.g. “granny”) (Murphy 2004).

A very successful initiative of a photo exhibition of older people has been replicated for four years across cities in Ireland. The *Positive Ageing Photo Exhibition* is organized by the NGO Age Action Ireland and constitutes in a series of photographs of older people that challenge negative public perception of ageing and stereotypes against older people. The exhibition features men and women in their 60s, 70s, 80s and older who are enjoying healthy and active life as younger people could do⁵.

⁵ For a detailed description of this exhibition, visit www.ageaction.ie/positive-ageing-photo-exhibition

The Business of Ageing commissioned Amarach Research to conduct market research about older people and marketing. This first Older Consumer Survey with 500 adults aged over 50 residing in Ireland shows the disappointment of older people about the way they are portrayed by the media. Some 77% of people in this age group believe they are depicted as “vulnerable”, while one-half feel the media represents them as “unable to cope”⁶. In many ways, it seems that traditional stereotypes against older workers that the report by EQUAL pointed out still persist in Irish society: older workers are unwilling or unable to adjust to new technologies, older workers are too expensive, older workers are absent from work more often, older workers can’t or won’t learn new skills, older workers don’t stay on the job long enough, older workers aren’t flexible, older workers cost a company more (EQUAL 2007). These myths constitute barriers to the inclusion of older workers in the labour market that need to be addressed and challenged a different fronts including civil society, the media, NGOs and the Government.

In a paper presented at the Conference *Towards Age Friendly Society in Ireland*, Bob Huber discusses images and stereotypes of ageing. He notes that the stereotypes about old age include the following: all older people are alike; older people are socially isolated and lonely; most older people are in poor physical and mental health; retirement means you have nothing more to contribute; older people are dependent; older persons cannot learn; intelligence decreases with age. The author states that the way to combat stereotypes and promote intergenerational solidarity is to appeal to younger people; to involve them in a larger discussion of ageing issues in general and the situation of older people in particular. Both younger and older people may feel that they are not taken seriously by the middle generation and that their voices are not heard. Unfortunately, despite the existence of many shared concerns, there often does not seem to be much communication across generation.

This indicates the need to expand the notion of “society for all ages” adopted at the Second World Assembly on Ageing and start to focus on an intergenerational society for all, which is based on ideas of reciprocity and mutual respect (McGivern 2007). The Flash Eurobarometer *Intergenerational Solidarity* shows that Irish people are supportive of initiatives that aim to build solidarity between generations. Irish respondents were below the EU27 average accepting that young people and older people do not easily agree on what is best for society: 69% among EU27 member states compared to 58% in Ireland. This answer was consistent with the more tolerant position of Irish respondents towards availability of jobs: 47% of Irish respondents agree with the statement that as older people work until a later age, fewer jobs will be available for younger people, compared to 56% among EU27. This was also the case about the statement that “older people are a burden on society”: 9% among Irish respondents compared to 14% among EU27.

In contrast with this positive picture, Irish respondents are below the EU27 average (25%) regarding a positive perception of the role that public authorities are playing in promoting intergenerational solidarity. Only 19% of Irish people observe this support from their authorities. This perception is reinforced by the perception that there are not enough opportunities for older and younger people to meet and work together in associations and local community initiatives. Irish respondents

⁶ Business of Ageing: www.businessofageing.com and Amarach Research : www.amarach.com

present one of the highest percentages (75%) compared to the EU27 average (64%) (EC 2009).

5. Government policies and measures

The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2016 represents the Irish strategy for non-discrimination and equality. Age constitutes one of the nine grounds that Irish legislation prohibits discrimination in employment and service provision⁷. Ireland's anti-discrimination framework is primarily encompassed within the Employment Equality Act 1998, the Equal Status Act 2000, and in the Equality Acts 2004 and 2007.

Despite this legal framework, age related discrimination is the most commonly reported case among the nine grounds of non-discrimination. Older & Bolder set out a baseline for the development of a National Positive Ageing Strategy (NPAS) for Ireland (Older & Bolder 2008; 2009). This alliance of eight NGOs is seeking government recognition of older people's rights, as well as those with disabilities, and the implementation of a coherent framework that will guide a national strategy that integrates this population to the Irish society.

The fairly extensive equality legislative framework in Ireland is somewhat diminished by its national practices regarding non-discrimination mainstreaming. Age discrimination in the workplace, for example, remains a common place occurrence. The Government New Strategy on Ageing (National Positive Ageing Strategy - 2007-2012), if implemented fully, will be an important step in this regard. The plan seeks to develop a comprehensive approach beyond traditional health and social care issues. It includes factors relating to older people's participation in society; the ways in which programmes and services for older people are organised and utilised; as well as issues that are so important in determining quality of life for older people such as income; health and social care; housing; transport; education and employment; and access to information. The Government instigated a public consultation process with stakeholders and older people across the country. The work to develop a draft Strategy continues to date⁸.

The new Partnership agreement, "Towards 2016" constitutes the latest social partnership agreement between the Irish Government and the social partners, including the Trade Unions and the Civil Service Performance Verification Group. Section 32 of the agreement deals specifically with issues of older people in Ireland. Specifically in terms of the employment of older workers, the agreement states a commitment to promote education and employment opportunities for older people⁹. Among the proposals of this agreement are: the continued participation of older people in the labour market will be encouraged and facilitated to meet the challenges

⁷ The Equality Act 2004 (Number 24 of 2004) was signed into Law on 19th July 2004 and includes the following nine grounds: age; disability; family status; gender; marital status; race/ethnic group; religious belief; sexual orientation; and membership of the Traveller community. Full text available at www.equality.ie/index.asp?docID=206.

⁸ http://www.dohc.ie/issues/national_positive_ageing/

⁹ To see the full text of the agreement, visit: <http://www.sfi.ie/about/towards-2016/>

of an ageing society; a cultural mindset change will be promoted among both employers and employees to encourage older workers to remain in employment; promotion of training and upskilling of employees, particularly for low-skilled/older workers will take place to enhance employability; training and advisory services will assist older people who wish to return to the workplace.

Part-time work can become a viable option for older people who search to have a gradual transition to retirement. In a report on part-time work and health among older workers in Ireland and Britain, the authors stated that around 20% of those aged 50-64 work part time in Ireland, mainly on a voluntary basis and many more women than men (Gannon and Roberts 2008). The authors called attention to the need to address the crucial concern for part-time workers about their pension entitlement and if this work arrangement could jeopardize their pension.

There are a number of initiatives with older people who work as volunteers in diverse activities and among different populations across Ireland. One example is *Board Match Ireland*, which provides older volunteers the opportunity to support their peers who may be experiencing isolation and lack of networks, and also giving some younger volunteers the chance of working with older people¹⁰.

6. NGO'S and civil society

The Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) publishes an online section called "Equality News", which advocates for equality and non-discrimination for Irish workers across the nine grounds. SIPTU also publishes the pamphlet "The Union Post" that addresses these issues. There are also significant training programmes within trade unions on equality. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) has also significant equality initiatives that target ageism and discrimination of older workers.

The Irish Senior Citizens' Parliament (ISPC) coordinates and activates across Ireland and constitutes a bridge between other organisations and the Irish Government. The organisation also produces newsletters, blogs archives, and other important materials in order to place older people issues in the political agenda. The ISPC has over 400 affiliated organisations nationally whose memberships combine to a total of 100,000 individuals across the country¹¹. The ISPC advocates for older people at national level, calling the attention of the Government and other agencies dealing with issues that impact on older people. The ISPC is also organised on a local basis, participating in activities from local Divisions.

Age Action Ireland (an NGO working on issues of older people); Contact Recruitment; FAS (the national Irish training agency); Irish Congress of Trade Unions- ICTU (the organisation that unifies all trade Unions in Ireland); and Partas (a local community based employment support service), have developed the Senior Select Retain and Retrain (SSRR) partnership. The initiative carried out between 2001-2007 aimed to support the development, recruitment and retention of older

¹⁰ For more details about this initiative, see www.boardmatchireland.ie

¹¹ For further information about this organisation, see <http://iscp.wordpress.com>

workers through local partnerships involving older workers and job seekers, employers and recruitment agencies¹².

Older & Bolder, a national alliance of eight non-governmental organisations is committed to the development of a national strategy on ageing through research publications, newsletters and active advocacy for older people's rights¹³. Fáilte Isteach, a community based project for older people has recently extended a local initiative to a national level. Older Irish people volunteer to teach conversational English classes to migrants from non-English speaking countries. Age & Opportunity provided a manual that will assist local communities to establish similar programmes across the country. The project seeks to build inclusion and solidarity between older Irish people and migrants by promoting a sense of community, inclusion and belonging¹⁴.

The Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) and the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) are working together in a social initiative aimed to combat the isolation of rural men in Ireland. These two pivotal organisations in Irish society work to involve older men arranging outings to matches and other social and cultural events to include them in communities. The social activities have been well received by older people and communities across the country (IT 2011).

The *Community Men's Shed* constitutes another example of community-based organisations working together to prevent older men from isolation. Older men involve in this initiative work together in different activities such as restoring furniture, bicycles for a local school. This is also a space for intergenerational exchanges and building intergenerational solidarity, older and young men work together and learn about the lives of each other¹⁵.

Age & Opportunity created the initiative "AgeWise", which is a half-day workshop targeted to staff in workplaces and non-governmental organisations across Ireland. AgeWise seeks to raise awareness of attitudes to ageing and older people among organisations, identify instances of discrimination against older people, and devise strategies to counter age discrimination. Participants in the workshops work in services, workplaces and NGOs who deal directly with older people, hence resources acquired in these workshops are expected to be transformed into practice (Ni Leime and O'Shea 2010).

A recently published second edition of the report on age friendly provision of goods and services in Ireland by the Equality Authority and the Health Service Executive reaffirmed previous findings that showed that the presence and participation of older staff are key to enhance the relevance, attractiveness and

¹² This project was supported under the EQUAL Community Initiative. A report has been produced: "More than just a Number: Older Workers in Ireland", which includes issues of recruitment, unemployment, employer's attitudes toward older workers, among other issues relevant to older workers. See section 9 for more detailed about this initiative.

¹³The alliance is founded by the Atlantic Philanthropies and its eight members are: (Active Retirement Ireland; Age and Opportunity; The Alzheimer Society of Ireland; Carers Association; The Irish Hospice Foundation; Irish Senior Citizens Parliament; Older Women's Network; and the Senior Help Line.

¹⁴ www.thirdagefoundation.ie/content/view/full/58/70/

¹⁵ <http://www.menssheds.ie/>

accessibility of goods and services to older customers. The report recommends taking actions to support the recruitment and retention of older workers, particularly through flexible working arrangements, training to provide older workers to further develop their knowledge and skills, and towards a recruitment strategy to target older workers and to address the particular barriers they experience in seeking to return to work. The benefits that come from the recruitment and retention of older workers include: 1) access to a valuable source of employees; 2) achieving the business benefits of a diverse age workforce that reduced turnover and absenteeism; and 3) a staff mix that reflects age diversity in the customer sector (EA 2010).

The first study of older LGBT people in Ireland was recently published commissioned by GLEN (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network), founded by Age and Opportunity and the Health Service Executive (Higgins 2011). The study combines surveys (144 people) and interviews (36 people) aged 55 and over across Ireland. The study shows the challenges and difficulties that older LGBT are still facing in contemporary Ireland: 28% never disclose their sexual orientation and to any of their neighbors, 10% are not out to any of their close family, 35% still fear that friends will reject them if they tell them they are LGBT. Ageing in Ireland seems to be particularly challenging for this population, since 46% live alone, 43% are single and 31% feel lonelier as they age. The report highlights the need for a cross-sectoral approach to “supporting people ageing among older LGBT people”.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), the largest civil society organisation in the island of Ireland, GLEN (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network), and Equality in the Workplace published a guide for LGBT people and trade unions. The manual provides practical information about issues such as “coming out” in the workplace, the impact of newly civil partnership in the workplace, teaching LGBT workers about their rights and the role of trade unions helping them to fight against discrimination in the workplace (ICTU and GLEN 2011). This guide complements the guide published by GLEN in 2010 to promote diversity and equality among employers and trade unions (GLEN 2010).

Other ongoing developments include The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA). This represents the most ambitious and comprehensive research on ageing in Ireland. The study analyses a representative cohort of at least 8,000 people, aged 50 and over and resident in Ireland, charting their health, social and economic circumstances over a 10-year period (2006-2016). The first result of this project was recently published with contributions from scholars of different background, which provides a very integral contribution to the study of ageing in Ireland. Topics explored cover the demographic profile of older people in Ireland; health issues; family and social integration; social care; retirement and labour market participation; income; among others (Barret et al. 2011). The study constitutes a fundamental piece in the understanding of older people’s situation in contemporary Ireland.

7. Business perspective

There is a very active partnership group, the Business of Ageing (BoA) from members from the *Ageing Well Network* that includes organisations such as Intel, IBM, RTE, IBEC, Chambers of Commerce and others. The Business of Ageing (BoA) seeks to

make the Irish business community aware of the characteristics of older consumers. They developed a monthly news letter; organize conferences and other events related to older people in the Irish market. The partnership also supports employers to build a workplace and a work-culture, which fosters the experiences of older employees¹⁶.

The Business of Ageing organized this year the second annual Business of Ageing Conference under the theme “*The Business Opportunity in an ageing global economy*” (Business of Ageing 2011). Even though these conferences aim to know older people as potential consumers, they also represent important spaces to discuss the situation of older people in Irish Society. This year’s conference included academics and people from the business sector who presented different studies about older people, from health to lifestyle and labour market. Findings discussed in these conferences are widely disseminated through important channels such as newspapers and the partnership organisations websites, which all contribute to the visibility of older people in the public arena.

One of the most disseminated events during this Business of Ageing Conference was the launch of the results of the first Older Consumer Survey (March 2011) previously mentioned. The Survey warns business companies about the current carelessness by the market towards older people despite the fact that they represent a significant number of the Irish population. Influential channels such as the Irish Times widely publicized these findings that challenged stereotypes about older consumers as “inactive” or not engaged actively in the economy.

Some positive initiatives are carried out by companies at European Level. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), Europe’s largest HR development professional body, promotes the inclusion of older workers in the labour market. A recent publication, targeted at employers across Europe, analyses the advantages of incorporating and retaining older workers for companies. The author addresses the challenges that workers at a “third age” are facing in the current market and how companies can help these workers in their development as well as benefit from these workers’ skills (Banks 2010) .

The Chambers of Commerce of Ireland, the largest business network in the country, launched an initiative that supports and subsidises the training of both managers and older workers. The initiative called ARROW (Assisting the Recruitment and Retention of Older Workers) provides training for older workers in aspects such as IT skills, communication skills and occupational and health and safety. For HR managers, it provides resources for the training, motivation and recruitment of older workers (Stratton 2006).

The public sector employs more older workers than any other sector (22% versus 17% on average). The tourist sector and large companies employ higher proportion of younger workers. The lack of or limited internet access of older people can explain the small numbers of older people applying for jobs that are mainly or only advertised through the Internet. Consistent with this picture, research shows that the tourist sector more often uses the internet for advertisement and recruitment, which leaves older workers out of the competence (SSRR 2007).

¹⁶ For more information about the partnership, visit: www.businessofageing.com

Work Research Centre (WRC) and Age Action Ireland conducted in 2008 a representative survey of older people on information and communication technology (ICTs) in Ireland. The survey aimed to provide insights for policy-makers working to support older people to engage more with ICTs and the social inclusion of older people. The survey results show that a large majority (86.1%) were mobile phone users at the time of the survey, nearly one-half (48.1%) were computer users, and two-in-five (40.3%) were Internet users. Many older people are interested in learning more about ICTs and that many would be prepared to attend a course for this purpose. Particularly large numbers would be interested to learn more about computers and the Internet, but relatively large numbers would also be interested to learn more about mobile phones and how to use them (WRC 2009).

VHI (Voluntary Health Insurance), Ireland's largest private health insurance company, recently significantly increased its charges in Premium schemes which are most popular among older people. The Equality Authority was called to investigate whether VHI's proposed increase in premiums can be open to legal challenge on age discrimination grounds.

Partas¹⁷, one of the organisations involved in the Senior Select Retain and Retrain programme (SSRR) has developed training initiatives for older workers and employers. Employers are trained to acquire skills to deal with older workers; career development and planning; individual and group mentoring; information and awareness on diversity and equality issues for all management and staff; sector specific skill training; company policy and procedure advice; detailed reporting on staff progress after the programme. Participation is free to employers and older workers. Older workers participate in a one day career development review where they are given the opportunity to identify their skills, personal achievements and examine their future career paths. The programme also includes workshops for recently displaced employees over 50 years of age. The partnership aims to promote the advantages of having older workers for companies and employers¹⁸.

This initiative constitutes an innovative pilot programme designed to explore new ways of supporting the development, recruitment and retention of older workers. It involved the collaboration of local partnerships, older workers, employers and recruitment agencies. The programme also sought to disseminate the results in order to influence future employment policies and practices. There has been an evaluation supported by EQUAL-Round 2. The programme is considered successful and recommendations were made for a more mainstream national application. A detailed report has been produced (SSRR 2007), which analyses the situation of older workers in Ireland. This report includes issues of recruitment, unemployment, employer's attitudes toward older workers, among other issues relevant to older workers.

¹⁷ For more information visit www.partas.ie/EUProjects/SeniorSelectRetainRetrain.aspx.

¹⁸ For full description of the Programme: www.partas.ie/EUProjects/SeniorSelectRetainRetrain.aspx. Organisations involved: Age Action Ireland (www.ageaction.ie); Contact Recruitment (www.contact-recruitment.com); FAS (www.fas.ie); Irish Congress of Trade Unions (www.ictu.ie); Partas (www.partas.ie).

Conclusion

The numbers of older people in Ireland as a whole (both North and South) are steadily increasing. By 2041, it is estimated that there will be 1.89 million people aged 65 and over. The number of workers aged 55 or older rose by 73% in Ireland between 1998 and 2008 (up 120,000). In particular, older women have benefitted with the female labour force participation rate at age 55-59 jumping a full 20 percentage points from 30% to 50% and for women increasing from 17% to 33%.

The severe economic downturn, the sharp rise in unemployment and emigration, cuts in public and social expenditure, reduction in public service pensions and increases in both income and general taxation is impacting on the whole population. According to the Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland (CARDI, 2010), however, older people have been less affected by the current recession than their younger counterparts.

However, as detailed in previous sections there are a number of new developments that will impact directly on older people in labour market. The introduction of voluntary redundancy and early retirement schemes; changes in the terms of public service pensions and the fact that the retirement age is set to increase in 2014 all underscore the need for more research on older persons' experiences in the workforce.

There has been a spate of research in recent years on older persons in Ireland and widespread agreement among researchers that the debate about older people and the labour market has largely been absent and is only beginning in Ireland. The various reports point to the need to incorporate a more comprehensive approach that challenges traditional views about the role of older people in Irish society and that both stakeholders and the government should address the social needs of older people, their rights in the context of equality and as key actors in the Irish labour market.

The pension age in Ireland will rise to 66 in 2014 and later to 68 years. In Northern Ireland the same increase in pension age will be introduced in 2016. In relation to early retirement schemes, plans for a new voluntary redundancy and early retirement scheme for the civil service is due to be announced later this month. Last year the government introduced such schemes into the Health Service. Around 2,000 personnel in managerial, administrative, clerical and support grades left under voluntary redundancy and early retirement schemes which was far less than the 5,000 staff anticipated would leave under the schemes. The new Minister for Health has indicated further schemes will be put in place for HSE staff by autumn 2011.

In relation to extending working life past the previous retirement age, the 2006 OECD report is pertinent in that it had already recommended that the Irish Government addresses issues of flexible working conditions, assistance for older job seekers, and development of comprehensive training for older workers that will help them to face the barriers and challenges of a labour market that excludes them from full participation (OECD 2006).

The newly formed coalition Government between Fine Gael and the Labour Party reached agreement about the need to deliver the long overdue National

Positive Ageing Strategy for Ireland. The Labour Party has committed to progress the implementation of this strategy which will be part of the responsibility of the Minister of State for Older People and there is a commitment to appropriately fund the strategy.

Policies and initiatives that target the inclusion of older workers should also be cognisant that age related discrimination is not the only barrier that older workers face in the market; they also need to acquire the appropriate skills required by the demands of the market. Older workers may need training and education to update and improve their job skills. Several researchers have demonstrated that low skilled older workers are at particular risk of unemployment, particularly if they lose their current jobs and have to face the uncertainties of a new work environment.

Official figures, however, have to be treated with caution, since statistics only reflect those who are “officially” recorded as unemployed, and hides for instance relatively high levels of (early) retirement and long term sickness. Similarly, women engaged in home duties may be discouraged from job search activities and reporting unemployment (Basten 2002). In this sense, the likelihood of finding work is markedly lower for older people compared to younger age cohorts.

As highlighted by the OECD Ireland has a relatively short time to implement age-friendly policies that will encourage older workers to remain longer in the workforce. Over the long term, Ireland will face more severe pressures than other EU countries as its populations ages rapidly and there will be less room to rely on immigration for sustaining economic growth (OECD 2006). The OECD report recommends that Ireland should a) provide greater work incentives in pensions and other welfare benefits; b) strengthen job-search requirements for older job seekers in exchange for more effective assistance to find jobs; c) abolish mandatory retirement in firms and improve awareness of age discrimination legislation; and d) improve overall skills and training, especially for mid-careers workers (OECD 2006).

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