

Age diversity in job market – uncaptured value

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Head of Pan-Baltic Diversity and Inclusion
Practice, PwC Latvia
Agnese Cimdiņa

The European Union (EU) celebrates May as the month of diversity to highlight the importance of diversity and inclusion (D&I) in society. Diversity basically reflects the nature of a person's unique and distinct qualities and relates to people's different values in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, abilities and experience.

One of the D&I issues is discrimination on grounds of age, existing in the job market for a long time and affecting people of different generations. While competition in the job market is becoming increasingly intense and the law prohibits discrimination in the workplace, in reality many people still face this issue when trying to find or keep a job or being denied the opportunity to develop professionally. This issue isn't limited to these people alone – it's a wider social issue affecting organisations and communities at large. So it's important to be aware of how people are discriminated on grounds of age and to look for solutions promoting equal employment opportunities and professional growth for all age groups.

Age diversity in the workplace is a matter we can't ignore. On the contrary, we need to appreciate the important role of age diversity, in particular considering the Latvian job market, which lacks skilled and experienced workers because the Latvian population is ageing and the current recruitment practices, which often cut out a large part of the population, aren't sustainable. People in the EU, including Latvian respondents, cite the candidate's age as the main threat to employment, according to the Eurobarometer survey published in December 2023. Although the workforce availability issue is becoming increasingly relevant (PwC's Baltic CEO survey also suggests this) experienced jobseekers often face age discrimination in the job market. Data gathered by the WHO suggests the population is ageing, yet recruiting employers tend to ignore it. This trend not only neglects a significant human potential but also fosters discriminatory attitudes in society and slows down economic growth.

Agnese Cimdiņa, PhD, D&I leader at PwC Latvia says: 'Too little is being said about the positive aspects of age diversity. If we're cutting out older workers, we're losing not only a unique experience potential that complements the vision of newly graduated young people but also the innovation potential that is born in the synergies of maturity, experience and digital solutions. And rejecting older workers' contributions means we're sawing off the branch we're sitting on, as we ourselves are getting older every day. Will the perceptions and practices in the job market favour us when we're 50 years old?'

It's important to note that people aged 50+ can offer a considerable value in the job market. They have vast experience, deep knowledge and good problem-solving skills. And when it comes to willingness to learn and adapt to new working practices, they don't usually fall behind their younger colleagues. It's important for business leaders to be aware and appreciate the advantages of age diversity and to create a workplace where people can thrive despite their age. This includes not only a well-balanced age profile but also a commitment to building an open culture that appreciates every worker's experience and potential regardless of their age.

This is a particularly significant issue in the EU and Latvia, with the average age going up and people

working increasingly longer. According to the Central Statistical Office (CSP), in 2023 Latvia had slightly more than 260,000 people of working age in the 55-64 age group (around 14% of the population); 180,000 of those were employed. According to Eurostat, over 30% of the EU population are over 55 (35% of the entire population in Latvia, according to the CSP). Forecasts suggest the EU ageing rate will accelerate in the coming decades, with the percentage of older people rapidly increasing. So it's important to be aware of the potential and value of older employees.

What qualities determine a person's value in the job market? What is the ideal worker in today's organisations? What is the role of age? And what is it that prevents us from seeing the value of a 50-year-old worker? All these questions have become particularly relevant in recent years in the field of diversity management. While age discrimination is common in Latvia, age diversity challenges are often sidelined by the media highlighting other diversity dimensions such as gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or disability.

We'll be discussing this topic in more detail at the LAMPA Conversation Festival to look for ways of addressing this issue in the job market. The 'On your marks, get set - finish!' discussion will be held on 5 July at 18:30 in the Cēsis Castle Park (the Flash! stage). The discussion can also be followed online.