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## Is There any Demand For the Workers Aged 50+ in Poland?

**JEL Classification:** J11, J14, J21, E24

**Keywords:** *ageing of the population, workers aged 50+*

**Abstract:** *The process of ageing affects all the European Union Member States, including Poland. According to forecasts by the Central Statistical Office, in 2035, the population of Poland will decrease in relation to 2010 by more than 2 million, and the share of people aged 50+ in the total population will increase from 34.8% to 46.6% (Prognoza ludności 2009). In the context of current and projected demographic changes, a discussion is taking place and actions are taken to – on the one hand – extend the period of Poles' economic activity and – on the other hand – implement age management systems in enterprises, enabling the efficient exploitation of the potential of workers aged 50+.*

*The paper considers the problem of the situation of people aged 50+ in the Polish labour market. The main objective is to find out whether in Poland there is a need for the work performed by people aged 50+. The employers' views on workers 50+ and the possibilities and conditions of employment of this group are presented. The paper uses and confronts statistics related to the labour market (BAEL) and the results of quantitative and qualitative research carried out by selected Polish research centres within the framework of projects co-financed from EU funds.*

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## Introduction

The progressive ageing of the Polish population has specific consequences of economic nature. These relate mainly to the public finance system (*The 2009 Ageing Report*, p. 190), the situation on the labour market (Fura, Fura 2012; Schimanek 2009; Liwiński, Sztanderska 2010a; Liwiński, Sztanderska 2010b) and the development of so-called *silver economy* (Stround 2005) (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** The economic effects of the population ageing process

<b>The public finance system</b>	<b>The labour market</b>	<b>Silver economy</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Increased public expenditure due to payment of retirement benefits</li> <li>– Increased public expenditure due to medical services and care for seniors</li> <li>– Reduced budget revenues from income tax (reduced population of working adults) — danger of deterioration of quality and accessibility of public services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Reduced number of employees</li> <li>– Increased average age of employees</li> <li>– 'Third age' entrepreneurship</li> <li>– Competence gap</li> <li>– Loss of certain professions</li> <li>– Multigenerational workplace teams</li> <li>– Development of human resources management system focusing on age and knowledge management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Development of the consumer goods market targeted at the elderly</li> <li>– The development of education and training offers for the elderly (e.g. universities of the third age) and the training of personnel for the needs of an ageing population</li> <li>– The reorganization of the public services structure, with emphasis on the development of offers for seniors</li> </ul>

Source: own work.

The actions which have been taken at the macro level of the economy for several years are aimed at mitigating the effects of unfavourable demographic changes and building public awareness and responsibility in this regard. The active participation of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (ER2012) was the motivation for changing the stereotypical image of older people in the society and the launch of a wider public debate on demographic change (*National Action Plan 2012*). The pension reform raising the retirement age of the Poles (*Ustawa o zmianie ustawy o emeryturach 2012*) was a response to the deteriorating condition of the public finances. Classifying the people aged 50+ as 'being in a special situation in the labour market' (*The Law on Employment Promotion 2004*) enables applying additional activating instruments to the unemployed and economically inactive from this group. Moreover, in recent years three government programs dedicated to improving the situation of older workers in the labour market were developed:



- *50 plus – a programme for the employment of people over 50 years of age* (Ministry of Economy and Labour in 2004),
- *45/50 plus – an action programme for promotion of employment, alleviation of unemployment consequences and economic activation of senior non-mobile workers* (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in 2008),
- *Solidarność Pokoleń programme – measures to increase the activity of people aged over 50* (Council of Ministers in 2008).

The increasing public awareness of direction and pace of demographic changes in Poland, however, does not translate into concrete actions aimed at preparing entrepreneurs and their businesses for new challenges. There are still no system solutions.

The studies conducted among entrepreneurs within the framework of the ASPA project<sup>1</sup> show that about two thirds of them agree with the statement that an ageing population will cause problems for the labour market. The growth of older workers population relative to the total number of employees is most often expected by large enterprises (62%, compared to only 40% of small businesses expecting this type of change), and the companies operating in the public sector (56%) (Chłoń-Domińczak 2013). The most likely consequence of the increase in employment of older workers indicated by the entrepreneurs will be an increase in labour costs (76%), and the least likely – an increase in productivity (52%) (Dalen, Henkens, Schippers 2010, p. 1023).

Among the Polish entrepreneurs covered by the ASPA survey, 68% expressed the belief that the ageing of population will have an impact on the situation in the domestic labour market. At the same time, only 38% of them considered increasing the participation of older workers in their company likely (Chłoń-Domińczak 2013).

The general analysis of labour market issues in the context of the ageing of population reveals a kind of imbalance: actions aimed at increasing the labour supply among people aged 50+ are not accompanied by activities aimed at strengthening the demand side or the intensity of such activities is insufficient. Therefore, a question arises whether there is a demand for labour of workers aged 50+, and whether the employers are willing to hire them. The considerations aimed at answering these questions constitute the scope of this study. The employers' views on workers aged 50+ and the possibilities and conditions of employment of this group are one of the topics presented here. The paper uses and confronts statistics related to the labour market and the results of quantitative and qualitative research carried out by the selected Polish research centres within the framework of projects co-financed from EU funds.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.aspa-eu.com/>

## Methodology

In search of answers to the questions formulated in the introduction, the author used secondary data acquired from the Central Statistical Office (GUS) and contained in substantive reports published by institutions carrying out research on the situation of the elderly in the labour market (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** The list of data sources related to employers' evaluation of older workers used in the article

Title of report	The entity conducting research	Sample	Research method
<i>Opportunities and barriers to employment of people aged 45+ in pomorskie province</i>	The Provincial Labour Office in Gdańsk	2000 companies from the pomorskie province, employing more than 5 workers	– personal interview with the representatives of the drawn companies
<i>Equal in the labour market? The analysis of the situation of graduates and people aged 50+ in pomorskie province</i>	Wyższa Szkoła Bankowa in Gdańsk	450 medium and large companies from the pomorskie province	– direct interview based on a standardized questionnaire
<i>Take advantage of us. Workers aged 45+ in your company</i>	Polish Economic Society, The Sopot Laboratory of PBS DGA	1000 small and medium enterprises from the pomorskie province, out of which 86% of which were small and 14% were medium	– direct interview – focused group interview
<i>The determinants of organizational and psychological intermentoring in the context of retaining people aged 50+ in the labour market</i>	Żory Chamber of Commerce	60 managers from 30 organizations from the western subregion of the śląskie province, representing the three sectors of the economy: trade and services, industry and government <sup>2</sup>	– general interview – guided interview

Source: own work.

<sup>2</sup> The microenterprises employing up to 10 people and companies in which the nature of the work does not require the knowledge and use of modern information and communication technology and computer skills were excluded from the study.

The statistical data on the ongoing demographic changes in Poland and the level of activity of Poles from the older age groups were subjected to elementary analysis (Adamkiewicz-Drwiłło 2008, p. 55) and presented in the article in the form of simple graphical summaries. On the other hand, in the discussion on the employers' evaluation of older workers and the demand for labour performed by people aged 50+ the methods of comparative analysis (Goldthorpe 1997, pp.1-26) and synthesis (Adamkiewicz-Drwiłło 2008, p. 55) were used.

Due to the fact that the results contained in the sources cited by the author were obtained using different research methods and are impossible to compare in quantitative terms, the answers to questions related to the demand for labour performed by people aged 50+ are justified mainly by qualitative descriptions.

### **The Ageing Process and the Polish Labour Market**

Poland has exceeded *the demographic old age threshold*<sup>3</sup> in 1967. In 2010, the share of people aged over 65 in the total population of the country exceeded 13%, whereas according to the projections of Central Statistical Office (*Proгноza ludności 2009*) in 2035 the population of the elderly<sup>4</sup> will represent more than 23% of all Poles. The main causes of the progressive ageing of the population are:

- decreasing number of births, caused by cultural changes (i.a. perception of the family and the social function of women or an increase in the median age of women deciding to bear children) and the lack of solutions enabling women to combine the roles of mothers and workers (Grzenda 2012, pp. 179-187; *Podstawowe informacje o sytuacji demograficznej 2012*; Kwiatkowski 2011);
- lengthening of the average lifespan<sup>5</sup>, resulting i.a. from the development of medical science (Polak, et al. 2007, pp. 51-53), lifestyle (diet, physical and mental activity) and environmental factors (working conditions, the quality of the environment, climate and hygiene) (Zielińska-Więczkowska et al. 2007, pp.131-136).

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<sup>3</sup> According to the UN standards it represents a 7-percent share of persons aged 65 years and over in the general structure of the population.

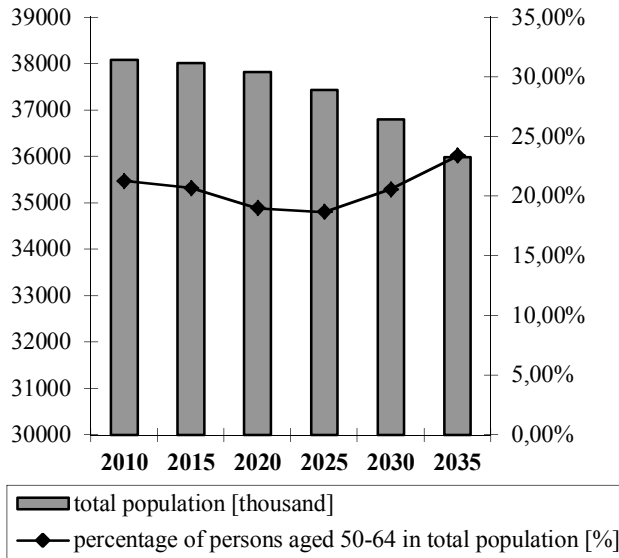
<sup>4</sup> Above 65 years of age.

<sup>5</sup> According to the Polish Central Statistical Office, the average duration of further life in Poland for men born in 1950 was 56.07 years and 61.68 for women, whereas for children born in 2011, the average duration of further life is estimated to be much longer, respectively, 72.44 years for men and 80.9 years for women (cf. *Przeciętne dalsze trwanie życia 2013*).



The prospects of decreasing population of Poland and progressive ageing of the society (see Figure 1) are the main challenges the Polish labour market will be facing in the next two decades.

**Figure 2.** The forecast of the population of Poland by 2035 (in thousands) and the share of people aged 50-64 in total population (%)

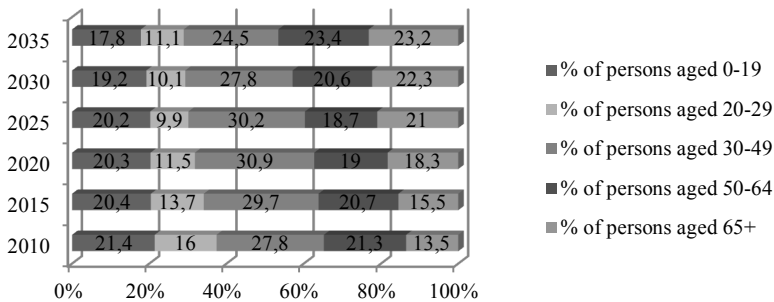


Source: own work based on (*Prognoza ludności 2009*).

The reduced availability of the people being of *prime-working-age*<sup>6</sup> in the Polish labour market until the year 2035 (see Figure 2 and Figure 3), will force – mainly the employers – to take measures aimed at increasing productivity and efficiency of the labour resources at their disposal, increasing the use of modern technology to replace human work, adapting the forms and conditions of work to the needs of the groups previously marginalized and disadvantaged in the labour market where possible and, finally, recruiting foreign workers.

<sup>6</sup> In the European Union the *prime-working-age* (the best age to work) is contained in the range of 25 to 54 years (cf. *Population and social conditions 2010*).

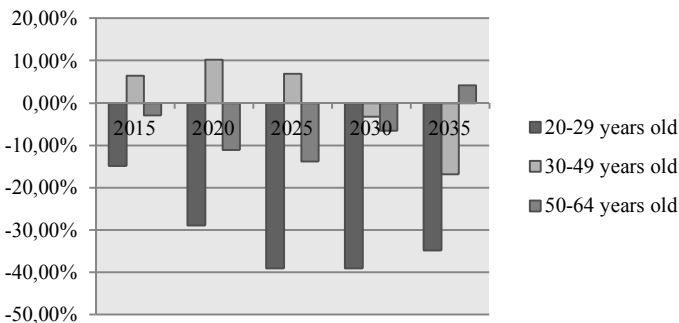
**Figure 3.** The share of age groups in the total population of Poland in the years 2010-2035



Source: own work based on (*Prognoza ludności 2009*).

Considering the current economic crisis and the difficulties with survival in the market where the unemployment rate exceeds 14%<sup>7</sup> suffered by many enterprises, talking about the labour market in view of the demographic perspective for the year 2035 is often unconvincing for entrepreneurs and the measures to increase the participation of seniors in the labour force are seen as not entirely justified (*Prognoza Pracodawców RP 2013; Stanowisko Pracodawców RP 2013*). The current market conditions may not, however, exclude the strategic orientation of activities of enterprises aimed at preparing them for the consequences of demographic changes.

**Figure 4.** The change of number of people in Poland in the selected age groups in the years 2015-2035 (2010=100)



Source: own work based on (*Prognoza ludności 2009*).

<sup>7</sup> According to the Central Statistical Office data as of the end of January 2013 – 14.2%.



## The Potential of Employees Aged 50+ as Assessed by Employer

According to the BAEL Labour Force Survey<sup>8</sup>, in the fourth quarter of 2010 people aged 50+ constituted 41.5% of the Polish population aged 15 and over (*Osoby powyżej 50. roku życia* 2012). 51.4% of this group are people who have not yet reached the formal retirement age.

The economic activity rate among people aged 50+ was 33.2%, whereas almost half (41.6%) of those being still of working age are economically inactive. Also, the people in the 50-54 years age group constitute quite a high percentage of the economically inactive (24.6%). In the subsequent age ranges the percentage is rising and amounts to 48.3% in the case of the 55-59 years age group and 79.0% in the case of the 60-64 years age group. In the fourth quarter of 2010, 70.3% of men 86.4% of women aged 60-64 years were economically inactive, mainly due to having reached retirement age.

The highest economic activity rate among people aged 50+ is seen among those having college or university education (51.7%) and post-secondary and secondary vocational education (42.7% activity rate). Most of the economically inactive from the group aged 50+ are those with the lowest education – secondary, primary and incomplete primary education.

The unemployment rate in the population of people aged 50+ at the end of 2010 was 7.3%, and was lower than the national average. Most of the unemployed in this group were people with vocational education (40.75%). Among the unemployed men aged 50+, the majority had vocational education (50.8%) and post-secondary and secondary vocational education (22.6%), whereas among unemployed women from this age group 35.5% had post-secondary and secondary vocational education. The least numerous group among the unemployed aged 50+ were the people having university and college education (less than 5%).

The above statistics show quite clearly that in the Polish market there is supply of labour offered by people aged 50+, as well as that it exceeds the demand. In addition, the significant potential of this group remains dormant due to the high rate of economic inactivity of people aged over 50 years. The prospect of the nominal increase in the number of people aged 50+ in Poland and activities for professional activation in this group will increase the overall supply of labour provided by people from older age groups.

It remains an open question whether the employers are interested in hiring such workers. The studies carried out by various Polish centres show that employers value the knowledge and experience of older workers, at the same

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<sup>8</sup> BAEL Labour Force Survey.





valuing higher the innovation, creativity and ability to acquire new skills, attributed mainly to younger workers (see Table 3). In 2008, Manpower conducted a research among 750 Polish entrepreneurs related to employing workers aged 50+ and encouraging them to remain in the employment. The responses obtained were the least optimistic out of all collected in the 28 countries where similar studies were carried out. Only 3% of Polish entrepreneurs declare that they have a programme to facilitate employment of workers aged 50+, whereas 95% of them declared that they have not prepared such a programme. Only 5% of the researched enterprises encourage employees approaching retirement age to stay in the company but 93% have no formal procedures for the retention of such employees in the company (*Nowe spojrzenie na pracowników 50+* 2013). Within the framework of the Polish part of the ASPA project, 1037 interviews with employers were conducted. 23% of the respondents agreed with the statement *'I believe that employers who are forced to limit their activities should retain first of all the younger workers'*. Most (30%) positive responses were obtained among entrepreneurs whose workforce is comprised in over 50% of those aged 50+ (Perek-Bialek, Turek 2013). Moreover, 58% of entrepreneurs participating in the study consider the early retirement of workers approaching retirement age to be an effective way to reduce employment in companies threatened by the crisis (*Activating Senior Potential* 2010).

**Table 3.** Workers aged 50+ as assessed by employers (the most often indicated positive and negative characteristics) – a review of research

Title of report	Strengths	Weaknesses
<i>Opportunities and barriers to employment of people aged 45+ in pomorskie province</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- qualifications and professional competences</li> <li>- lower labour costs</li> <li>- social skills relevant to the position held</li> <li>- older workers' greater loyalty to employer</li> <li>- lower absenteeism</li> <li>- the presence of workers of a similar age</li> <li>- high performance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- lower performance</li> <li>- lack of appropriate professional skills and competences</li> <li>- lack of appropriate social skills relevant to the position held</li> <li>- it is very cost-ineffective, not beneficial for the company</li> <li>- less loyal to employer</li> <li>- higher absenteeism</li> </ul>
<i>Equal in the labour market? The analysis of the situation of graduates and people aged 50+ in pomorskie province</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- extensive experience</li> <li>- conscientiousness</li> <li>- loyalty, responsibility</li> <li>- availability</li> <li>- expertise</li> <li>- high performance</li> <li>- determination to achieve the objectives</li> <li>- high professional skills</li> <li>- motivation, pugnacity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- health</li> <li>- habits</li> <li>- low performance</li> <li>- age and its consequences</li> <li>- routine, lack of ideas</li> <li>- passivity, lack of motivation</li> <li>- lack of knowledge of modern technologies</li> <li>- unwillingness to learn</li> </ul>

Table 3 continued

Title of report	Strengths	Weaknesses
<i>Take advantage of us. Workers aged 45+ in your company</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– loyalty, commitment to employer</li> <li>– conscientiousness, responsibility, discipline</li> <li>– availability</li> <li>– respect for work</li> <li>– professional experience, practice</li> <li>– commitment to work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– reluctance to participate in training</li> <li>– low degree of openness to new ideas</li> <li>– low adaptability, difficulty in adjusting to changes</li> <li>– high expectations regarding non-wage benefits</li> <li>– high financial expectations</li> <li>– low level of creativity</li> </ul>
<i>The determinants of organizational and psychological intermentoring in the context of retaining people aged 50+ in the labour market</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– experience</li> <li>– availability</li> <li>– resistance to stress</li> <li>– responsibility</li> <li>– loyalty and identification with the workplace</li> <li>– psychosocial competence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– difficulty with adapting to changes</li> <li>– routine</li> <li>– putting their own interests above the interests of the company</li> <li>– burnout, fear of job loss, difficulties with job change, defensiveness</li> <li>– lower productivity</li> <li>– striving for dominance in the group</li> <li>– lack of confidence in the young workers and management</li> </ul>

Source: own work.

## Conclusions

There are many reasons for the lack of interest in acquiring new workers aged 50+ and encouraging the already employed to stay in the company shown by Polish employers. The key causes are diverse, and differ depending on the enterprise chosen (see Table 4). The studies cited in the article show that the low demand for labour provided by people aged 50+ is determined first of all by: the current, unfavourable international and national socio-economic situation, the use of stereotypes in the evaluation of employees by employers, as well as the failure by people aged 50+ to comply with objective requirements modern enterprises have regarding workforce (low qualifications and inadequate professional skills).



**Table 4.** Some reasons for the low demand for labour provided by people aged 50+ in Poland

<p>On the side of the workers aged 50+</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Professional qualifications and competences not compliant with business needs</li> <li>- Lack of or inadequate skills related to using modern technologies</li> <li>- Low mobility and flexibility</li> <li>- Intergenerational barrier and the inherent difficulties in communicating</li> </ul>
<p>On the side of the entrepreneur /employer / management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of knowledge and understanding of the country's ongoing demographic changes and related consequences of macro- and microeconomic nature</li> <li>- Using stereotypes in the evaluation of workers aged 50+, e.g. with regard to poor health, low level of commitment to work, lack of motivation to develop oneself</li> <li>- Lack of knowledge and skills related to the management of the potential inherent in older workers</li> <li>- Discrimination on grounds of age</li> <li>- Intergenerational barrier (especially in the case of young entrepreneurs)</li> </ul>
<p>On the side of the internal organization of the company</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The specificity of industry (e.g. related to new technologies) in which the company operates</li> <li>- The specificity of work organization and the conditions of its performance (not adapted to the needs and abilities of the older age groups)</li> <li>- Focus on traditional management systems (lack of diversity management, age management etc.)</li> <li>- Homogeneous age structure of workforce</li> </ul>
<p>Resulting from the sector and macro environment in which the company operates</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low elasticity of Polish labour law with regard to hiring and dismissing workers aged 50+</li> <li>- High labour costs, including non-wage ones</li> <li>- High rates of unemployment among the young, which for many employers are considered more attractive job candidates</li> <li>- Regulations regarding the disability and retirement pensions, encouraging people approaching retirement age to early, permanent withdrawal from the labour market</li> <li>- Unfavourable macroeconomic situation, forcing numerous companies to limit their activities, including lay-offs</li> <li>- The negative image of older people in society, partly supported by the media, fixing the stereotypes related to this group</li> </ul>

Source: own work.

The results of the research related to the situation in the Polish labour market show clearly that the demand for labour provided by workers aged 50+ is low. What's more, the entrepreneurs do not declare that it is likely to rise in the next few years. It is likely, therefore, that the gap between demand and supply in this area will be expanding. The actions aimed at economic activation of people approaching retirement age, as well as discouraging



them from leaving the labour market permanently and retiring should be accompanied by stronger measures aimed at increasing the number of jobs for workers aged 50+. There is a need for a business support system, aimed at creating new jobs (including those dedicated to people aged 50+) and the development of management skills related to the area of human resources, with special reference to the age of employees, which in turn will enable the optimal use of the potential of senior workers

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