

Policy Agenda 2020: Investing in Participation and Employability

Summary

The agreement

By implementing the Policy Agenda 2020 [*Beleidsagenda 2020*], the Labour Foundation hopes to have substantially bolstered the labour-market position of older employees within eight years. With the 2010 Pension Agreement [*Pensioenakkoord 2010*], employers and labour unions have taken joint responsibility for offering older employees a working future. They have agreed that, in ten years, there should be no difference between the average labour-market participation figure of over 55s and that for under 55s. It must again be considered perfectly normal that employers and employees themselves do everything to continue to stay healthy, motivated and employed until they reach the age at which they may begin receiving their State Pension (“AOW age”).

The Foundation is also counting on the government in its role as an employer to make a significant contribution to the labour-market position of older employees.

Necessity

With the ageing of the working population, the labour market becoming tighter and the increase in AOW age, improving the labour-market participation of older employees has become a dire necessity. In order to succeed in making these changes, the social partners have agreed focused measures that will result in employees, both young and old, consciously taking charge of their own careers. Sustainable participation must not begin only once an employee reaches his or her 55th birthday, but must be part of every employee’s career path from early in their careers. Making smart choices throughout one’s career will help keep employees vital and productive – and employed – longer.

Changing images

The most important factor may be that the Netherlands should radically adjust attitudes about older employees – they are not more expensive, more prone to illness or less productive than their younger colleagues. That image is outdated, an anachronism left over from the 1980s. However, because a significant number of employers and employees still view this image as accurate, relatively little is invested in older employees, older jobseekers almost never succeed in landing a position and, as a result, older employees are too quick to write themselves off. The Policy Agenda 2020 therefore focuses on eliminating the unjustified image that many have of older employees.

Route planner and financing

The Policy Agenda 2020 is the route planner that sets out the core themes that the social partners on both the collective-agreement and company levels can use to transform objectives into reality. In addition to addressing the image of older employees, the Policy Agenda 2020 also deals with employability, training, vitality, working conditions, mobility, work resumption and productivity. The implementation will begin with this year's crop of collective agreements.

This new policy will be financed partly by deploying existing funds in different ways, partly by deploying new funding streams and partly by finding alternate ways to utilise government contributions. The government's contribution will be used more to provide incentives to older employees to make themselves employable, increase their mobility and return to work.

The measures

The Policy Agenda 2020 introduces a large number of measures detailing the primary goal. All the measures must be worked out at the sector and company levels. In the coming years, these issues will be the subject of attention in negotiating collective agreements as well as in meetings between employers and works councils. The most important measures are:

- setting up a **communication campaign to eliminate unjustified images** and to draw attention to the competencies possessed by older employees, such as their knowledge, experience, reliability, accuracy and loyalty;
- developing a **career policy focused on sustainable participation and employability**; parts of this include a periodic career review and periodic career scan for the employee;
- **increasing the focus of training schemes on the employee's career** and including company and/or cross-sector training in those schemes;
- intensifying the employability and training schemes for current and future older workers, for example **by introducing a personal training and/or employability budget**;
- **implementing a social plan for competency improvement** amongst older employees, which will also increase their employability;
- **introducing a personal and confidential employability scan, as well as, if needed, a periodic, employability-oriented medical examination** for the purposes of advising on the sustainable participation of these employees;
- **intensifying the working conditions approach**, including by having health and safety catalogues in place in order to decrease the risk of absence due to injury or illness;
- **promoting part-time retirement** in collective agreements and employee benefits schemes; part-time retirement can contribute to sustainable labour-market participation;
- **converting, in a budget neutral fashion, generic special schemes** into schemes focusing on the sustainable participation of all employees; this measure is to be taken if special schemes designed to contribute to the participation and employability of older employees are no longer yielding results;

- **charting out the internal promotion and career opportunities** at the sector level and at large companies in order to promote career development;
- **promoting job mobility within organisations** by investing in expanding positions, improving productive employability and/or providing incentives for internal job mobility;
- **promoting cross-sector job mobility** by providing additional training or retraining to employees through their cooperation with training and education funds [*O&O-fondsen*], the services of mobility centres, the Employees' Insurance Administration Agency ("UWV") and/or private intermediaries and creating new From Work to Work schemes.
- **making action plans** at the sector and/or large company level in order to **facilitate older job seekers' entrance onto the job market**; this can be accomplished through coaching, on-the-job training, internships, making sector funds available and formulating objectives;
- providing incentives, when candidates are suitable for a position, **to invite older jobseekers to interview for positions** and to offer them a genuine chance to be hired;
- **implementing "55 plus: still working strong", a national campaign to be run from 2012 to 2015 to help over 55s find work.** The Labour Foundation will kick off this campaign together with the UWV, Divosa and private intermediaries. In an ongoing information campaign, decentralised parties to collective agreements will be encouraged to develop their own projects and schemes to enable older jobseekers to get back to work. Examples in this regard would be focusing on filling vacancies with older employees, holding regional networking meetings or providing incentives for inviting older jobseekers for interviews.

Monitoring

The measures that have been taken will be subject to annual monitoring starting in 2012. The effect those measures have on older employees' labour-market position, employability and mobility will also be assessed. A study will also be made of the extent to which the goals for average labour-market participation are being achieved. If the main goals prove impossible to achieve with the underlying agenda, the social partners in the Labour Foundation will make interim agreements about adjusting or intensifying Policy Agenda 2020.