

# Delaying Retirement

Dirk Hofäcker • Moritz Hess • Stefanie König  
Editors

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Progress and Challenges of Active Ageing in  
Europe, the United States and Japan

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# Preface

Throughout recent decades, both the scientific as well as the public discussion on older workers and their work-retirement transitions in Western economies has changed substantially. Up until the 1990s, both discourses have mainly evolved around the dominant trend of early retirement—that is, the widespread tendency to leave employment well before reaching mandatory retirement ages. The inevitable prospect of demographic ageing and its expected consequences for public pension systems, however, has prompted many policy makers to significantly revise their labor market and social policies and to promote longer working lives. On a supra-national level, such policy shifts have often been regarded as an integral part of a general strategy of “Active Ageing” meant to promote older people’s participation in various parts of society. The designation of the year 2012 as the “Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations” by the European Commission is indicative of this general policy reorientation in Western economies.

In line with this trend, research in the social and economic sciences has started to concern itself with the topic of active ageing, providing an overview of recent trends in public pension and labor market policies. This book complements earlier publications by a sociological perspective. It systematically connects the institutional changes at the national level described in earlier studies with its repercussions at the individual level, that is, the employment behavior of older workers and social inequali-

ties. In addition, particular attention in this respect is being given to the intermediate level of enterprises and workplaces which represent the “organizational context” where employment and retirement decisions are being made.

To that end, the book brings together experts from 11 European countries, the United States and Japan to demonstrate the variety of ways in which the general idea of “Active Ageing” has been put into practice both at the policy as well as at the enterprise level. The different nation-specific constellations are then systematically compared to recent trends in older workers’ employment, thus allowing for an evaluation of the relative effectiveness of different “policy mixes” in promoting longer working life. Particular attention is paid not only to the general aggregate trend but also to the development in social inequalities among the older workforce, that is, the question who might be winners and losers of the recent policy shift. As such, the book is of substantial interest not only to scientists in social, economic and political science, but also to policy makers, union and employer representatives and practitioners in promoting older workers’ employment. It is our sincere hope that the book will steer a lively, critical and fruitful debate about the development and consequences of active ageing policies, both negative and positive.

This research was financially supported through a generous grant from the German Science Foundation (DFG) between 2012 and 2016. At the same time, it would not have been possible without the voluntary dedication of the group of international experts that have devoted much of their time and energy to this research. We are deeply grateful for this commitment.

A number of other people have contributed to the success of our research. In particular, we would like to thank David Stich and Tilman Wörz who have served as student assistants to the project and have provided valuable contributions, both organizationally and with regard to contents. Lisa Schmidhuber from Linz also spent various months as a student assistant and guest researcher at the University of Mannheim and remained a valuable contributor to our project in the months thereafter. The Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES) and its unique research infrastructure provided much needed help in bureaucratic and organizational matters as well. Both Dr. Michael Heldmann as

well as the secretary of the Work area A (Sociology), Beate Rossi, deserve special mention. Prof. Dr. Bernhard Ebbinghaus frequently provided helpful advice and guidance to the national and cross-national research. Jonathan Harrow's careful and critical editing work ensured the quality of language in our publications. Finally, the staff at Palgrave Macmillan, particularly Philippa Grand and Judith Allan, provided great support throughout the production of this book.

We are hopeful that the productive collaboration of this unique group of people has helped to eliminate most potential errors in this book; we, as editors, are responsible for those remaining.

Dirk Hofäcker  
Moritz Hess  
Stefanie König

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