

# Ageing science workforce may result in loss of knowledge, Eurostat warns

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The Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) has called for more awareness of the ageing of the scientific workforce in Europe. Since 2001, the percentage of senior science workers aged between 45 and 64 in the total working population has increased every year by 3.3% on average.

As the population is getting older, Europe needs to ensure that the hard-earned knowledge of the older science workforce is conserved, says the Eurostat report: 'The impact of this labour force ageing needs to be closely monitored, in particular regarding the highly qualified section of the labour force, to ensure knowledge transfer. The stock of human resources in science and technology is one way of measuring this.'

According to the latest figures, out of a total 85 million human resources in science and technology (HRST) in Europe in 2006, the share of senior science workers was almost 40%. The age structure is not uniform, however. The age of HRST, by definition those who have successfully completed education at tertiary level or are employed in an S&T occupation, varies widely.

The statistics show that Bulgaria has the oldest scientific workforce, with 46% of staff over 45 years of age. Bulgaria is followed closely by Finland, Germany and Sweden. 'These are also countries with a relatively old HRST population, and it is generally acknowledged that the ageing in these countries is mainly due to the large post-war

generation of baby boomers growing old,' Eurostat explains.

In Spain and Ireland, on the other hand, people working in science and technology are much younger: Only about 30% are older than 45. 'One reason is the general national age distribution, as both Spain and Ireland have larger shares of 25 to 34 year olds than the EU-average (17% compared to 14% in 2006),' the report points out. 'But that is only a partial explanation.'

At the same time, older employees in the science and technology sector showed a lot less job-to-job mobility between 2005 and 2006 than their younger counterparts: The average rate for all employed HRST in the EU was 6.2%, not a very high number in itself, the report states. However, the corresponding share for those over 45 years of age was even lower, reaching only 2.9%. 'As expected, job-to-job mobility for HRST tends to decrease with age,' the report says. 'When approaching the end of a career, people often feel comfortable with what they have and are not willing to risk that by changing their work environment.'

However, Denmark and the UK show considerably higher mobility for both older and younger employees, amounting to 7.9% (45 to 64 years) in Denmark and 5.9% (45 to 64 years) in the UK, a fact that the report attributes to labour force policies such as the Danish 'flexicurity' model. In the end, 'mobile HRST in a country can be considered to be a way of stimulating a country's economy as this results in valuable knowledge transfer,' the Eurostat report says, agreeing with the Lisbon declaration.

According to the declaration, mobility of HRST is key to improving knowledge transfer between industry, academia and research organisations, which in turn is essential to innovation and competitiveness.

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