

05/2022

Finnish Centre for Pensions, Studies

# Summary

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## **Employers' perceptions of over-55-year-old employees, support for continued working and obstacles to hiring**

In 2021, the number of workers aged 55–74 in the labour force had doubled in Finland compared to 20 years earlier. This study investigates employers' perceptions of workers older than 55, the kind of support employers provide for working until the retirement age and the types of risks employers perceive as obstacles for hiring older workers. We used survey data of employers in the private and public sector in 2021. The questionnaire was answered by 1,693 employers, with a response rate of 68 per cent.

We asked employers to indicate whether they found workers over 55 to perform similarly, better or weaker than the average worker using ten questions relating to different characteristics in a worker. Regarding four of these characteristics, more than 90 per cent of employers assessed workers older than 55 to perform similarly or better than the average worker. These characteristics were independence and taking initiative, reliability, problem-solving, as well as knowledge and skills. According to at least 50 per cent of the employers, workers older than 55 scored better on these characteristics than the average worker. As regards cooperation and interaction skills,

work motivation, as well as supervision and leadership skills, employers displayed similar levels of appreciation towards older workers' performance.

Previous research has suggested that employers' perceptions are more negative when it comes to older workers' willingness and ability to learn new things, their adaptation to change, and their physical and cognitive performance. This study did not confirm such earlier findings. Rather, according to our study, more than half of the employers believed that health and work ability, the willingness to learn new things, and the ability to adjust to change were the same among workers older than 55 as among the average worker. Still, employers found the performance of workers older than 55 on these three characteristics to be clearly weaker than their performance on the other characteristics. Approximately 40 per cent of the employers found that among workers older than 55 the ability to learn new things and adapt to change was at least slightly weaker than among the average workers. For health and work ability, this share was 27 per cent.

The willingness of employers to implement actions and policies that support the lengthening of their workers' working lives was measured via eight statements. Actions relating to maintaining and improving workers' skills were among the most popular. More than 80 per cent of the employers indicated that they pay attention to the development of their workers' professional skills and that they are ready to offer more interesting and challenging tasks to experienced workers. A similar share of employers was prepared to introduce changes in a worker's job by making working times more flexible or by adjusting the work arrangements according to the worker's age and health situation. Employers were less willing to introduce more substantial changes, such as moving a worker to a different task or position: only around 50 per cent of the employers were prepared to do so to some extent. As can be expected, task reassignments were found more difficult to introduce in smaller workplaces than in larger establishments. Our findings are in line with previous research, according to which employers often use a wide variety of measures to support the possibilities of their workers to continue working longer.

In the third part of our study, we look at the risks employers perceive when they hire new workers and whether these risks pose an obstacle for hiring someone older than 55. Slightly less than half of the employers considered the risk of sickness absence or disability retirement to be at least somewhat of an obstacle for recruiting an older worker. A larger share of employers perceived other health- or ability-related problems to be an obstacle for recruitment. Out of the eight types of risks that the employers were presented with, health- or ability-related problems were most frequently perceived to be an obstacle for recruitment, with 64 per cent of the employers seeing it as an obstacle to at least some degree. The risk of outdated knowledge and skills was perceived as an obstacle for recruitment by nearly as large a share of employers: at least 60 per cent stated that this risk is at least somewhat of an obstacle for recruiting someone who is 55 years or older. Around half of the employers considered the risks of high salary requirements and low productivity to be obstacles for recruiting workers older than 55. A short remaining working life was considered a problem by only 30 per cent of the employers.

Employers who found that working in their organisation until the age of 65 is possible, who support working until age 65 and who stated that they could recruit someone aged 55 or over had a more positive view on workers older than 55 years. In addition, employers who stated that it is possible for workers to continue in their jobs until 65 were also more willing to introduce various measures to support continued working. In addition, they perceived fewer obstacles for recruiting older workers. The same applies to employers who indicated that they are interested in recruiting workers older than 55 or people who have already retired.

Based on our study's results, employer perceptions seem to offer possibilities to increase the employment of 55-year-olds and to extend working lives. At the same time, it should be noted that, from an employers' point of view, there are risks relating to hiring over-55-years-olds. The risks may prevent employers from recruiting older workers.

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<https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-691-350-9>

[www.julkari.fi](http://www.julkari.fi) > [Eläketurvakeskus](#) > [Julkaisut](#)

ISBN 978-951-691-350-9 (PDF)

ISSN 1798-7482 (verkkojulkaisu)



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