

Socially competent and professionally and technically skilled with "Perspective 50plus"

Programme of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS) to enhance employability and employment opportunities of people over 50

Social competence is a word frequently used in connection with labour market qualifications. "Soft skills" are also often mentioned in this context. What is ultimately meant is the ability to know oneself and to interact with others. Social competence counts among the key qualifications and is considered an indispensable skill in working life. In job applicants, increasing attention is paid to this factor.

This core competence can be developed and strengthened; and this is where the Federal Programme "Perspective 50plus" – Employment Pacts for Older Workers in the Regions" comes in: "Perspective 50plus" offers, for instance, intensive and personalised counselling and group work to improve the social competence of older long-term unemployed people. Their social competence has often suffered as a result of the long period of unemployment and shrinking social contacts. This support strengthens their self-esteem thus creating the prerequisites for confidence and assertiveness. In addition, the Programme offers behavioural and communication training. The identification of competences helps clients to recognize their abilities and to better assess their strengths and weaknesses. The training encourages them to develop their independence – be it in looking for job advertisements, in writing job applications and in job interviews.

However, professional and technical skills are as vital for the labour market as social competence is. The development of their professional and technical potential also boosts clients' self-esteem and thus enhances their social competence. The Federal Labour Ministry's programme is also helpful in this respect. It helps the long-term unemployed to recognize and

develop their professional and technical strengths and to update previously acquired skills. Recognizing abilities they had not exploited so far motivates them to venture into new occupational areas thus further improving their prospects in the labour market. Accurate knowledge of the client's social and professional skills makes targeted placement into a suitable employment possible.

But support for the long-term unemployment does not end at the doorstep of the new employer. Even after successful placement "Perspective 50plus" supports continued further training. This means that companies also benefit from the Federal Programme in terms of job orientation and support for new 50plus employees.

To prepare older long-term unemployed persons for the labour market and to convince the public at large that these men and women make up a versatile labour force the Programme "Perspective 50plus" involves not only people from political and economic life but also partners from various other fields, first and foremost companies that are to be made aware of the valuable potential of this group. It should be widely known in society that "Perspective 50plus" provides effective back to work support for workers over 50. Apart from partnerships with the regional media the involvement of other major advocacy groups, such as trade unions and voluntary agencies is very helpful in this respect. Academic institutions studying demographic change can provide expert input to the Federal Labour Ministry's programme.

Individual care and support for long-term unemployed persons is a promising approach for bringing people back to work. Taking account of the requirements of employers in this process is a special concern of "Perspective 50".

The BMAS Federal Programme

"Perspective 50plus – employment pacts for older workers in the regions" is a labour market programme launched by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. It is aimed at enhancing the employability and employment opportunities of "50 plus" long-term unemployed persons. It is based on a regional approach and is supported by 62 regional job alliances. This approach makes it possible to take account of regional particularities.