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Older Persons on the Austrian and Hungarian Labor Markets

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Abstract. *In the last few decades the narrowing of the labor markets of the developed countries - caused by the continuous technological developments and by the millions of workplaces deployed into the developing world - became a well-known phenomenon. This is also the main reason why the demand for older persons as workforce has fallen back. And even worse, the drop in demand did not happen well-proportioned, but rather more drastically than in other age groups. For the employers age plays namely a key role: younger people are mostly higher motivated, can be influenced and custom tailored easier and are more likely willing to take jobs, which older persons cannot accept due to different reasons and health issues. Older persons have an out-of-date knowledge compared to the younger people, they are less willing to take part in trainings and courses, whereas on the other hand many of them are protected by law due to their age, and they usually also spend more time on sick leave. On the whole for the employers older employees are not the best selection in general. In our paper the status of older persons on the labor markets of two neighbouring countries namely Hungary and Austria are being compared. Austria is a successful member of the European Union, with dynamic development figures. Its population is growing and due to the continuously rising number of work related young migrants coming to the country Austria is less endangered by the aging itself. Its welfare system enables the introduction and maintenance of a generous retirement system. Hungary in fact is a much poorer country than Austria. The completely different type of system settled in Hungary in the times of socialism has left as heritage a very diverse labor market compared to that of the countries of the western world. The transition period has brought a mass unemployment and demanded special solutions from the state. Due to the fact that the Austrian wages and social welfare systems are much better than those in Hungary, the complete opening of the Austrian labor market has interfered in a very interesting way. Out of the estimated 500 thousand (World Bank, 2011) Hungarians working abroad over 80 thousand Hungarians are already legally working in Austria, which – together with the growing mobility and willingness of*

Hungarians to migrate abroad in general – has resulted in the lack of workforce in Hungary, which can be recognized in Western-Hungary the most. The lack of - mainly educated - workforce might give a new chance for the older persons as well. Using the official statistics and publications related to the Austrian and Hungarian labor markets we intend to give an insight into the current situation.

Keywords: aging, older persons, labor market, inactivity

Introduction

The aging of societies and the employment of older persons did not only get high importance due to questioned sustainability of the social security and health care systems, but also because the sticking of the knowledge of the older persons acquired all through their life might cause huge losses globally within the society, while of course the financial stability of older persons can also only be guaranteed in most cases with continuous work. Societies cannot escape the aging process; it is a global issue caused mainly by longer life (Lee, 1994).

For many countries including Hungary the employment of older persons is a crucial issue, because Hungary also belongs to the group of aging societies, and on top of this many of its citizens is working abroad. Therefore in some Hungarian regions and cities we already face a lack of professionals on different fields like technicians and medicals. Based on the presence of many factors influencing the Hungarian labor market at the same time - including the one that 80 thousand Hungarians are legally working in Austria already - the sustainability of the Hungarian social security- and pension system is endangered in long term.

The results of fertility, mortality and migration determine the changes in the age composition of the population in the individual European countries (EC, 2014). In the great majority of the European nation-states the aging of societies is typical; the ratio of elder generations within the total population is getting larger and larger. In the next couple of decades this trend is expected to keep on going, which challenges the nation-states. Current population forecasts for Europe count with advanced labour force and population aging and a drop in the number of those belonging to the working age population (Van der Gaag & Van der Erf, 2008; EU, 2012). The status of the older persons forecasts a rather pessimistic future for the young people also. This hits Hungary even harder due to the fact that the country does not have a good situation neither in the employment of young persons: its 23,8 ratio of employment in the age group of 15-24 is far away from the 34% average EU ratio, and even worse compared to the Austrian 56% (KSH, 2015). The processes of the Hungarian labor market were deeply influenced by the complete opening of the Austrian labor market in 2011, which has resulted in the work related migration of many active members of the younger generation to Austria; in 2012 the most

people migrating there come already from Hungary (ÖIF, 2014b). The researches related to the presence of the older persons on the national labor market make it possible to the governments to prepare on the partial transition of the labor market on the one hand, and to influence the structural changes of it to be able to keep up the economic processes.

In the last few decades the narrowing of the labor markets of the developed countries - caused by the continuous technological developments and by the millions of workplaces deployed into the developing world - became a well-known phenomenon, the lost workplaces cannot be replaced everywhere and only partially by the newly established ones appearing mainly in the tertiary and quaternary sectors. This is also the main reason why the demand for older persons as workforce has fallen back, as they are less likely willing to gather new knowledge, they cannot be custom tailored and are less motivated. And even worse, the drop in demand did not happen well-proportioned, but rather more drastically than in other age groups. On the whole the employment of older persons - regardless whether if they are retired or not - is more risky and possible more expensive for the employers; and they are not perceived by the employers as a valuable source to increase the labour supply (Connen et al., 2011).

But who are considered older persons according to the statistics in relation to employment? The retiring age in the developed countries moves nowadays around 65 years. 10 years before the retirement - mostly between 55 and 65 years of age - are the persons in an endangered status. They do not get of course pension yet, but at the same time they mostly are already less appreciated by their employers. And the other age group, the freshly retired persons, who would still like to work while being retired or even are willing to suspend their retirement status. The first group is less able to choose, because their living is financed by their daily employment. If the conditions of their employment are unfavourable, the employee aims to get retired before reaching the retirement age, if possible. Or on the contrary the employer finds solutions to get rid of his/her employee with the help of an early retirement.

It is a well-known fact that that the population of the developed countries is aging. Main reason is, that the older generation lives longer, but it is also not rare that in some countries the number of births drops. Due to the fact that the pension is being financed partly or totally from the taxes paid by the active population, it is a growing problem how the declining number of actives will be able to cover the costs of the growing pension payments. And the aging of the population indeed has a serious affect on not only the outlook of the stability of the pension system, but also endangers the health- and social care systems on the one hand, and also influences the labor market and the living conditions of the people (Kotowska, 2006; Prskawetz et al., 2008). Besides the employer and the employees there is a third person namely the state itself, playing a key role in establishing and maintaining the retirement system. The employment of the older persons is highly influenced by the retirement

system, as it can support both the employers and the employees with different tools, like for example fixing the age of retirement, with the severity or lightening the retirement, or even with the expansion of the activity. Recently in the developed countries of the world the retiring age is rising, the possibility of early retirement is being confined, the financial sources of the states cannot or do not want to compensate the opposite interests and repugnance of the employers against the older workforces.

In our paper we compare two neighbouring countries to see the current situation of the employment of older persons. We assume to have two different cases. Austria is a successful member of the European Union, with dynamic development figures. Its development was mainly consistent since World War 2, with only some fallbacks due to economic crises. It is a host country, a key target of today's work related migration activities. Its population is growing and due to the continuously rising number of work related young migrants coming to the country Austria is less endangered by the aging itself. Based on the statistics of the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF) at the beginning of 2013 already 18% of the people in the age group 15- 64 had a migration background (ÖIF, 2014a) and their proportion is expected to rise further. Its welfare system enables the introduction and maintenance of a generous retirement system. Still, even Austria is affected by the break off of many workplaces due to former deindustrialization, resulting also in the disprofit of older generations on the labor market. Hungary. It is in fact a much poorer country than Austria. The completely different type of system settled in Hungary in the times of socialism has left as heritage a very diverse labor market compared to that of the countries of the western world. The transition period has rolled over this kind of labor market. It brought a mass unemployment which the state tried to ease with the implementation of the unemployment benefit and the restructuring of the retirement system – for example the initiation of different opportunities of early retirement. With the slow stabilization of the economy sometimes stopped by the smaller- or bigger economic crisis, followed by the chance of getting employed abroad arising with the EU membership, and later with the expansion of public work program the Hungarian labor market has undergone drastical changes. Hungary is despite Austria not a host but a sender country in terms of work related migration. It still has a dual economy, and the public work program indeed has mainly a social goal and focus, debiting the budget of the state instead of being profitable. The aging of the population in Hungary – even stronger than in Austria – is a crucial issue. Due to the poverty and weaker capability of income generation of the country the continuous growth of retirement costs is a critical problem of the government.

In the last couple of years a new situation has emerged on the Hungarian labor market: the torturing shortage of labour. The wages in the public sector being kept on a relatively low level for over many years, the spread of minimum wage workplaces, the starvation wages of the public work program all effect on the wage levels of the private sector. The Hungarian wage levels do not only lag behind the EU average, but

also tail off that of the neighbouring countries. The government aimed to charm foreign investors this way, just like China. But further foreign direct investments were mainly discouraged by the unpredictable economic policy, and also the less and less skilled workforce emerging from the decreasing educational system. In consequence of the lower wages the internationally more competitive Hungarians do take jobs abroad in quantities. Besides the shortage of labour we still face an excess of labour in different scales of professions. But the unemployment has dropped doubtless. One might think that due to the facts stated above the value of the older generations on the fields of employment also has to rise. But this has only occurred in some extreme cases, in a very few professions and not changing the root position at all. Our paper presents the status and its changes in the demographic structure and on the labor market of the older generations of these two very different countries, and also compares the Austrian and Hungarian efforts of the governments to improve the situation of the employment a social status of the older persons to achieve a more efficient economic run.

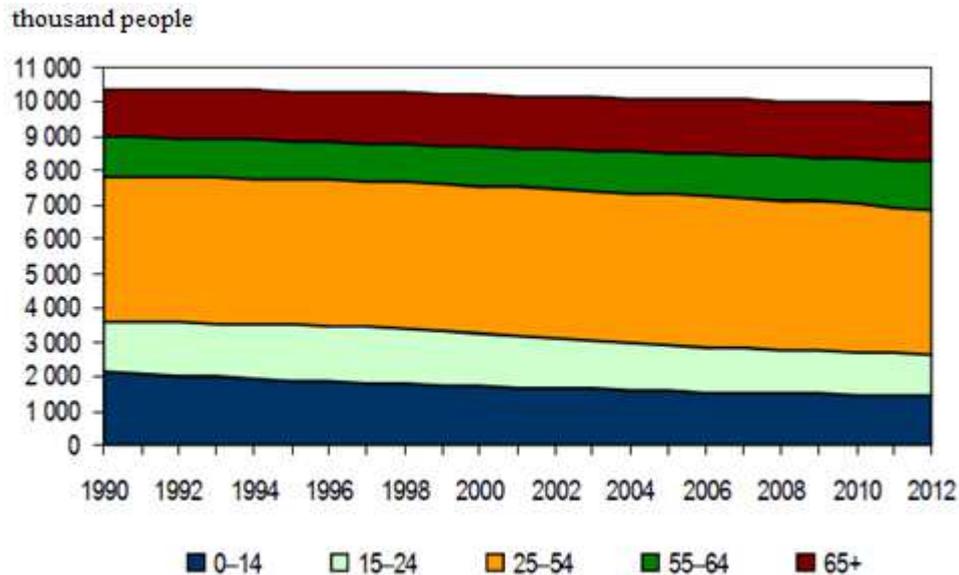
Ageing demographic structures on the labor markets

Based on the WHO forecasts by 2050 the ratio of persons being older than 60 years of age will grow to 22%, which means about 2 billion people (KSH, 2014). In Hungary the ratio of people being over 65 is similar to the EU average: on January the 1st in 2014 1.732 thousand people belonged to this age group, which is 17.5% of the total population. Based on the KSH figures the ratio of people above 65 is in Italy and Germany the biggest, the Austrian figure is about 1% higher than the Hungarian. But to get a clear picture about the status of Hungarians we also must know that compared with the rest of the EU member countries, the life expectancy of a Hungarian is 5 years shorter than the EU average, and it's the fifth lowest figure among the member states. In the ratio of the total population most of the older persons (65 and above) live in the capital Budapest, that is 19% of the total population, whereas least older persons in this age group live in West- and South-Hungary with a ratio of 10%.

The Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH) declares that the ballast falling on the active members of society related to the sustenance of the inactive ones moves on the same level since decades, because the continuously growing number of older persons is followed by the similar drop in the number of young people below the age of 15 (KSH, 2014:1). Also the census of 2011 has shown that in 2011 there were over 250 thousand people in childhood less in Hungary than 10 years earlier, but the number of people aged 60 or more has grown with almost the same number (KSH, 2013a). The figures of the census show that compared to 2001 within 10 years the population of the age group below 15 has fallen by 247 thousand, while the number of people being 60 years old or above has grown by 249 thousand. The biggest rise can be found in the age

group 60-64, where in 2011 there were over 120 thousand people more than 10 years earlier. These changes can be seen very clearly on Figure 1, showing the changes of population in the main age groups after the transition period.

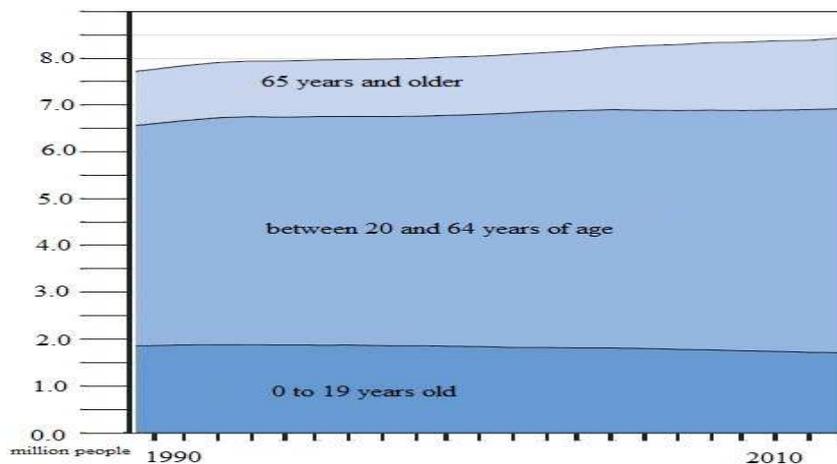
Figure 1. Changes of the Hungarian population in the main age groups between 1990 and 2012



Source: KSH (2013b)

The average life expectancy of a Hungarian person born after 2012 is about 75 years, which is almost 4 years more, than the figure expected around the turn of the millennium. The reason for this is not the rise of the living standard, but the relatively stable situation of the retired persons compared to the decaying situation of the active ones. The retired persons gave in 2013 almost one third of the population; the ratio of the retired households in 2012 was 31% (KSH, 2014). As per the Hungarian Central Statistical Office in Hungary today pension is the most stable income, and the older generation is less touched by the financial problems affecting the other age groups of society (KSH, 2014), but now the value of pension payments has already started to drop. This is caused partly by the real volume of inflation, and by the different basket of goods than the average. Most Hungarians named as the reason for choosing retirement their health status, in case of men this was 42% and in case of women 35%. The figures are partly influenced already by the fact that one fifth of the responders were retired due to their disabilities, who of course are not capable of employment (KSH, 2013b). Just like in Hungary the changes of population in the main age groups have undergone serious changes in Austria as well. Having analyzed the Hungarian figures between 1990 and 2012 it is practical to check the same in Austria. Figure 2 shows the changes of population in the main age groups in this period.

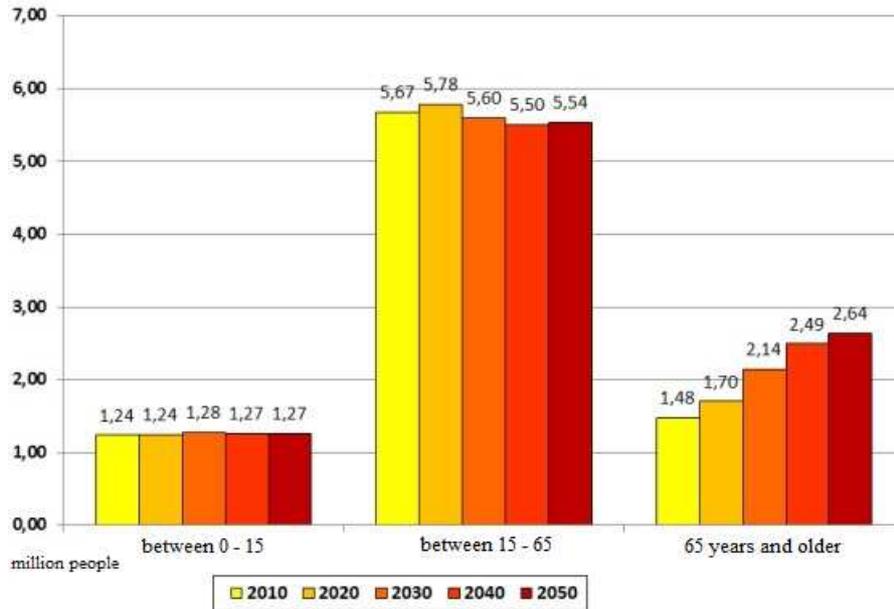
Figure 2. Changes of the Austrian population in the main age groups between 1990 and 2012



Source: Statistik Austria (2015)

Austria is one of the key migration-aimed target countries within the European Union, there is a continuous growth in the number of the migrants choosing to migrate to Austria instead of the persons deciding to leave it (ÖIF, 2014b). Forecasts show that the due to the increasing migration – counted with an estimated yearly net increase with about 32 thousand persons – and due to the increase in life expectancy - also forecasted by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office – the current population of Austria is supposed to grow from 8.5 to 9.4 million people by 2050 (Bad Ischler Dialog, 2011). Talking about life expectancy it is important to notice that against the Hungarian 75 years the life expectancy of the people born after 2012 is 78 years in case of men and 83 years in case of women (Statistik Austria, 2015). The ratio of persons 65 years or older in Austria is 17.87% as per January 2012, which is almost the same as the Hungarian figure. In Austria the total population is 8.415 thousand people, out of which 1.503 thousand people are 65 years old or above (WKO, 2015a). Figure 3 shows the forecasted changes until 2050 of the Austrian population in the main age groups.

Figure 3. Forecasted changes of the Austrian population in the main age groups



Source: *Bad Ischler Dialog* (2011)

Figure 3 also shows the expectation that similar to the Hungarian forecasted trends with the aging of the population also in Austria we will face a dramatic rise in the number and ratio of the people aged 65 and above. In numbers it seems that from the 1.480 thousand persons in this age group in 2010 we can expect a rise up to 2.640 thousand people by 2050. Upon analyzing the age groups under 15 and between 15 and 65 it is clearly visible that in the first case a minimal rise and/or stagnation is being expected, whereas in the most productive age group of 15-65 a small drop is being forecasted. This on the other hand is worse than the EU average, where a rise of 70% is being forecasted in the age group 65 and older facing a 78% expected rise in Austria. This can be compensated though by the expectation shown before in the stagnant age group 15-65, because the expectation of the EU average shows a 13% drop (Bad Ischler Dialog, 2011).

Older persons on labor markets

After the transition period the economical- social structure has also transformed in Hungary, the high rate of employment has fallen back dramatically, as a counter-pole of which thanks to the measures taken by the government new opportunities have occurred on the fields of education and social supplier systems. In this period many people with mainly social motivation have chosen retirement. Parallel with the narrowing of the labor market a huge drop has occurred in the number of work besides retirement (KSH, 2013b). The Hungarian Central Statistical Office also declares that the strengthening of the presence of the elder generations on the labor market was justified by the demographic trend,

which was reachable by the rise of the age limit of the retirement pension and the severeness of the conditions of getting disabled pension, and fostered the intention to lower the state's social expenses. In Hungary in 2010 the age limit of retirement was therefore raised to 65 years in general, implemented step by step with a 6 months raise of the limit year by year. The opportunity to retire earlier was restricted, and for women retirement was made possible after 40 years work.

The participation on the labor market for everyone above 50 years of age will be determined by the retirement rules and the special exit regulations, based on which at the moment the growing volume of employment can be forecasted for the age groups affected. The aggravation of the government back in 2013 made the retirement compulsory for some employees of the public sector, which narrowed the number of the active population. Those being forced to retire had the opportunity to choose: if they decided to keep on working, they had to waive their retirement. Under the current circumstances also the Hungarian Central Statistical Office states in its study that the number of those people is growing, who won't be entitled to get a pension salary due to their ragged career, or will receive just a very small amount, which will lead to the necessity to work also in their older ages (KSH, 2013b). This forecasts the broadening of the active participation of the older generations, mainly caused by the pressure to finance their daily living.

Taken into consideration the fact that the number of the members belonging to the main age group (people between 25-54 years of age) maintaining the system is falling back permanently, and of course after a certain age employment meets natural barriers, the aim to increase and strengthen the employment of the age group 55-64 become a key governmental goal, which is exactly the opposite of the 2013 pattern forcing mass- retirement. Table 1 shows the proportion of the Hungarian population on the labor market in the age group 50-64.

Table 1. Proportion of the Hungarian population on the labor market in the age group 50-64

2012	Age groups (%)			Total (persons)
	50-54	55-59	60-64	50-64
Employed	49	42	9	988 423
out of which: retired in his/her own right or due to disability	16	31	53	91 086
Unemployed	57	38	5	100 947
Economically inactive	13	31	56	946 779
out of which: retired in his/her own right or getting supplies before age limit	2	18	81	551 404
getting supplies due to disability	23	51	26	268 253
Retired person being economically inactive, who has never been working or is not working for at least 8 years by now	13	32	55	325 313
lost his/her job 5-8 years ago	7	17	75	185 104
lost his/her job 3-4 years ago	5	16	79	134 464
lost his/her job 2 years ago	8	26	67	65 122
lost his/her job 1 year ago	3	54	43	90 409
lost his/her job in 2012	6	50	44	23 823
Other inactives	42	45	13	122 544
Total (persons)	654 275	747 934	623 940	2 026 149

Source: own editing based on KSH (2013b) figures

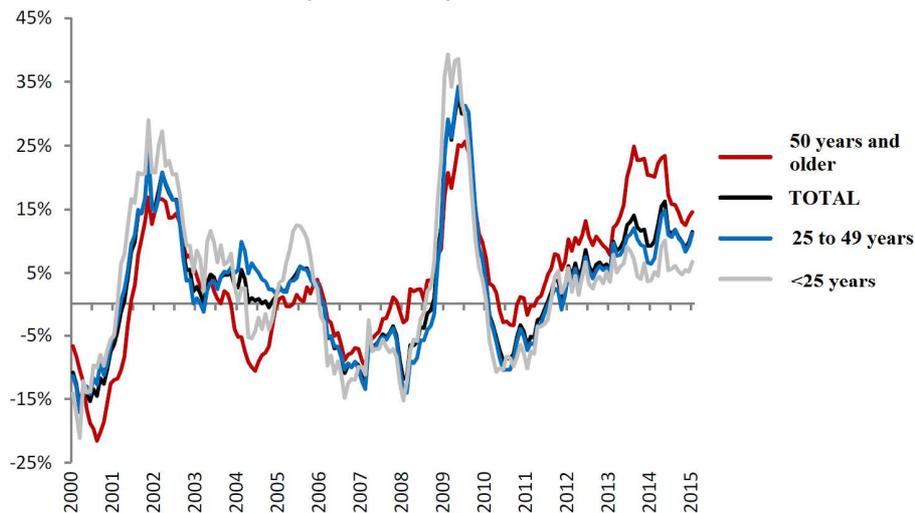
Table 1 shows that almost half of the persons belonging to the age group 50- 64 are employed, approximately the same number of people are economically inactive, and 5% is unemployed. Based on the data of Table 1 the dangerous process of aging can be followed. The number of the members belonging to the age group before retirement is steadily growing, the unemployment figures of those being in an endangered age is also increasing, while the chance of their employment is evanescent. The number of those having lost their jobs for along time is also very high. Concerning economical activity the 2011 census shows that within the total population the number and proportion of the actives has grown, while at the same time the number of people in pension and those getting child-care support has dropped (KSH, 2013a). The expansion of the public work program and the fact that Hungarians working abroad are also considered in the statistics of the national labor market for at least one year both contributed to the rise of the number of the active persons. Key reason for the increase in the number of the active persons though is the growing of the number of the older aged active persons, caused by the changes in the allowed age limit of retirement based on changes within the law. This resulted in finding women in the age groups 55- 59 and many men already being 60 years old active on the labor market in the year of the census taken, when the number of the total active population was 4.511 thousand, giving 45% of the total population.

Due to the changes of the learning habits the time when young people enter the labor market has been pushed out (AMS, 2015b). In the statistics of the different age groups of the economically active Hungarian population it is clearly visible that the number of people below 30 has fallen back significantly while the number of people above 55 years of age is more than twice as much as it was stated 10 years earlier in the census of 2011. In case of the age group 55- 59 for example in 2011 there were 280 thousand people more employed than in 2001 (KSH, 2013a). Concerning the inactives we can see that their number has fallen back by 2011 with 10%, still giving a grand total of 3 million people – around 30% of the total population. Biggest part of this group are the people in pension, effected by two key elements, namely the growth of their number due to the increasing lifespan and the drop of their number due to pushed out retirement age limit and their active ages. In total there were less people in pension in 2011 than 10 years earlier. In case of the people aged 60 and older the group of dependants almost disappeared, only 0.7% of the age group belonged to them, while 7.7% of them were active and 91.6% inactive (KSH, 2013a).

Comparing the Austrian and the Hungarian figures we can find that while there are about 1 million employees in the age group 50- 64 in Hungary, in Austria only 800 thousand (WKO, 2015a). Based on the data of the Austrian Economic Chambers (WKO) in Austria the people aged 55 years and older give 10.1% of all employees. In the 50-59 age groups we can find that concerning the proportion based on gender the 60.8% ratio in 1971 by male employees has fallen to 53.5% by 2012. Comparing the age limits of retirement we find that concerning men both in Hungary and in Austria the limit is 65 years, but concerning women in Austria the limit is 60 years, while in Hungary 65 (WKO, 2015b). According to the Public Employment Service Austria (AMS) in the last couple of years the Baby-Boomer-Generation (1961-64) has overcome their 50 years of age, which resulted in the increase of their proportion in the earning age group of 15-64 from the 2008 26.6% to 29.4% by 2013, and based on the forecasts of Statistik Austria it might reach 33.4% by 2025 (AMS, 2015a). According to AMS also the attitude to work of employees over 50 has changed in Austria, they decide less often to retire earlier than supposed, and stay this way longer in the group of active earners.

An additional problem on the Austrian labor market concerning the people 50 years or older is, that since November 2009 the number of unemployed people above 50 takes on very heavily, like in no other age group: from February 2000 to February 2015 their number has almost doubled – from 56 thousand to 104 thousand (AMS, 2015a). The outraging values show the period of the world economic crisis. Figure 4 shows the changes of unemployment in Austria in the different age groups from 2000 to 2015 compared to the figure of the previous year.

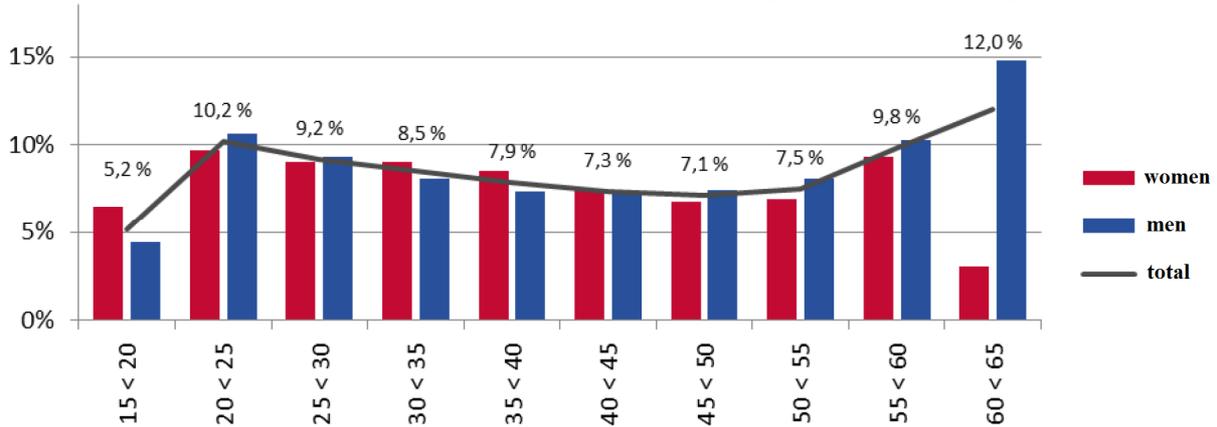
Figure 4. Changes of unemployment figures in different age groups compared to previous year's results



Source: AMS (2015a)

AMS has also analyzed the figures related to older workers suddenly losing their jobs. The statistics show that once older employees in Austria lose their jobs, they face a hard time to get out of the unemployed status finding a new employer. In February 2015 the average duration of unemployment for people below 25 years of age was 75 days, for people in the age group 25- 49 104 days, but in case of people above 50 years of age already 131 days. Unfortunately this age group is also very much affected by long term unemployment, as almost half (46,4%) of those being unemployed for over one year in February 2015 were 50 years of age or older. The unemployment ratio of the age group 55- 60 and 60- 65 was in the last couple of years always higher than that of the younger age groups. According to the AMS figures, the age group 55- 60 and - in relation with men - the age group 60- 65 is again massively leading the unemployment statistics. The low figure of women in the age group 60- 65 is caused by the low age of retirement settled by law (AMS, 2015b). Figure 5 shows the ratio of unemployment based on gender and age groups in September 2015.

Figure 5. Ratio of unemployment based on gender and age groups



Source: AMS (2015b)

As a result of closing doors leading to early retirement, the number of those retiring directly from an unemployment status is rising. At the end of 2014 there were around 30% sick or unemployed, who are just before retirement (AMS, 2014). Knowing the forecasted tendencies the Austrian government has started to work out internal reforms in order to find the best possible solutions for both the employees and the employers on the challenges generated by the aging society. The demographic process will result also in Austria in a higher average age among the work capable aged population, and will lead to the drastic raise of those intending to work over 50 years of age. As a result of this, Austrian employers will also be sort of pushed to employ people above 50 (Bad Ischler Dialog, 2011), and this way older people can stay longer in the group of the earners. With the involvement of AMS a targeted campaign has been started to convince employers to hire older workers (www.einstellungssache50plus.at). A study of the Austrian Economic Chambers (WKO, 2010) states that the knowledge and practical experience of the older people is not utilized properly. Their knowledge can bring competitive advantages, and they call the attention of Austrian employers on the importance of employing older people. Just like in Hungary, the early retirement options in Austria were forced to lower by the state as well (AMS, 2015b).

On the whole we have to see that for each government the high level of employment and low level of unemployment plays a key role in general. To reach these in the times of high level of unemployment governments try to increase the number of employees in the public sector – this was also the case in Hungary with the public work program – and the age limit of retirement is also mostly being raised. This happened both in Hungary and in Austria as well. Now the situation is changing in Hungary due to the fact that a general lack of workforce has been evoking. The government has to take measurements, they are planning to restrict the public work program, the minimal wages have been increased with 15% with the 1st of January 2017 and further raises are being planned with the intension to

slow down emigration and probably to force the reinvolvement of older persons in some specific sectors.

Conclusion

It is clear that with the forging ahead of automatization, with the unstoppable development of the robot technologies and that of the digital world the need of human resources of the globally developed countries is falling back, still the aging Europe needs the knowledge and experience of the older persons more than ever, and most probably it will also need to see them working in a very short time. Both in Hungary and in Austria the fact that the younger people push out the date to enter the labor market and also the increase in the number of people in the old age groups mean a serious problem. Without serious changes the sustainability of the social security systems cannot be assured at all. Austria has recognized that with the rise of the participation of the older people on the labor market this problem can partly be solved; therefore they started to prepare the companies on a changed labor market. In Hungary the government still believes that the solution is to push out the age limit of retirement and to close all wickets making it possible to retire earlier or to get access to other social benefits. Of course, we also have to keep in mind, that the situation of Hungary is quite different. An estimated 500 thousand people are already working abroad, and surveys show that their number will keep on going. This means that the most talented, learned and motivated workforce is leaving the country. And probably migrate to Austria.

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