

# *Many a good tune played on an old fiddle industrial relations and the ageing workforce*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The ageing workforce presents an unprecedented challenge for businesses and economies across the world. In the European Union [EU] for example, two trends have been identified that underpin this challenge. First, long term demographic changes especially falling birth rates, has meant that there are fewer younger workers: middle and older age groups now represent an ever more important part of the workforce. Concomitantly, the trend since the 1980s of the early withdrawal from the labour market of older workers along with the fall-out from economic restructuring has implications for economic growth and the long term sustainability of welfare systems (Eironline 2000). Notable EU developments to combat age discrimination in employment include: a shift toward increasing the level of participation by older workers by reinforcing their employability, reviewing employment rules and practices and promoting equal opportunities. Organisations throughout the EU are being encouraged to reconsider their personnel policies and their training concepts by equipping older workers with skills needed and the knowledge on how to renew them (Eironline2000). In most European countries new policy approaches to an ageing workforce have been adopted by government (Krenn & Oehlke 2001; Taylor and Walker 2003). Likewise in Australia, public debate and government policy agenda are becoming increasingly focussed on the older worker cohort (acirrt 2003). Big business and unions are working together to increase the number of older people remaining in the workforce. The 2003 joint ACTU and Business Council of Australia report 'Age Can Work: The case for older Australians staying in the workforce' articulated the need for organisations to combat age discrimination, support older workers and promote quality part-time jobs as a transition stage from full-time to retirement. This paper looks at measures adopted or advanced by unions in Australia and other economically developed nations to combat age discrimination and promote the employment of older workers.

## **References**

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