

Work Inequalities in Later Life Redefined by Digitalisation: Policy Workshop

On June 6th, 2024, a policy event was organised and hosted by members of the Management Discipline, J.E. Cairnes School of Business and Economics, University of Galway, at the NUI Building, Merrion Square, on behalf of the COST Action research network CA21107. The event brought together experts, policymakers, NGOs, industry leaders, and trade unions to discuss the implications of workplace digitalisation for older workers and businesses in Ireland.

Following an Introduction by Dr Áine Ní Léime from the J.E. Cairnes School of Business and Economics, University of Galway, Management Committee member for Ireland of the COST Action DIGI-net (CA21107), Dr Martina Rasticova of Mendel University, Chair of the Action, gave an overview of DIGI-net. This pan-European research collaboration aims to bridge critical knowledge gaps on how digitalisation influences work inequalities in later life, addressing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 8 and 10 on decent work and reduced inequalities. By fostering interdisciplinary collaborations and engaging stakeholders, the network aims to inform future policies and practices (SDG 17).



Image 1. (L to R) Erik O'Donovan, IBEC; Dr Nat O'Connor, Age Action; Brian McGann, IDEAS Institute and SIPTU; Mary Connaughton, CIPD Ireland; Dr Áine Ní Léime, School of Business and Economics, University of Galway; Prof. Martina Rašticová, Mendel University, Brno, Czech Republic; Dr Damian Thomas, NES; Rory Mulholland, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment; Dr Ebru Isikli, UCD; Dr Maeve O'Sullivan, School of Business and Economics, University of Galway.

Presentations were given by Dr Marie Pospíšilová from the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences, who shared insights on how new technologies impact older employees in the banking and nursing sectors in the Czech Republic, and Professor Matt Flynn from the University of Leicester, whose keynote addressed digitalisation and age management in Europe.

Following a presentation by Dinali Wijeratne, on digitalisation policy for late life work in Ireland, a policy roundtable was chaired by Dr Maeve O'Sullivan of the School of Business and Economics, University of Galway. Representatives from various organisations, including IBEC, Age Action, trade unions, NESCF, DETE, and policy experts, offered their perspectives on the influence of digitalisation on the workplace in Ireland.



Image 2. (L to R) Mary Connaughton, CIPD Ireland; Dr Maeve O'Sullivan, J.E. Cairnes School of Business and Economics, University of Galway; Dr Damian Thomas, NESCF.

The roundtable facilitated a wide-ranging discussion on managing workplace digitalisation in an equitable manner. Key themes included the need for inclusive upskilling initiatives and strategic workforce management to support older workers' adaptability amid technological change. Fostering age-friendly work environments that leverage experienced employees' expertise was emphasised. Promoting digital literacy, lifelong learning opportunities, and combating age discrimination through inclusive policies emerged as priorities. Responsible innovation driven by collaboration between policymakers, industry, and labour representatives was viewed as crucial. Evidence-based policymaking for sustainable economic growth alongside social inclusion aims was emphasised. Collectively, the discussion highlighted the necessity to develop holistic strategies to harness the benefits of digitalisation benefits while mitigating potential inequalities in the future of work.

Through facilitating a discussion and exchange of perspectives that brought to the fore the challenges and opportunities presented by workplace digitalisation, the event aims to elicit insights that will help shape a more inclusive and equitable digital future of work in Ireland via the development of a policy brief.