

Digitalisation and Culture in Organisations: Phase 1

Synthesis Report

Introduction

This report presents the findings of Working Group 2 (WG2) as part of the Diginet programme. WG2 focuses on how employers are responding to digitalisation and the ageing of labour markets, particularly addressing the digital divide to ensure that older workers are not left behind. With members across 33 countries, WG2 aims to understand the role of businesses in adapting to the challenges of an ageing workforce in a rapidly digitalising world. Currently, 25 active members contribute to core activities such as monthly and weekly meetings, a scoping review, and the development of country profiles. A leadership change occurred in July 2023 when Matt Flynn of Leicester University replaced Charlotta Niemistö of Tampere University as lead, alongside co-leads Federica Previtali also of Hanken School of Economics (Helsinki), later Åbo Academy University (or Abo Academy University until September 2024), and Anabela Mesquita of the **Polytechnic of Porto** and Maria Varlamova of the University of Krakow (from September 2024).

This report discusses the three primary projects initiated by WG2: the seminar series, the scoping review on HR interventions for older workers, and the development of country profiles to examine organisational responses to the ageing workforce.

Seminar Series

The Diginet Seminar series, which began in March 2023, aims to hold monthly seminars featuring two speakers discussing research, ongoing projects, or business engagements related to digitalisation and ageing. The format encourages discussions on topics such as age discrimination, job change, and productivity improvements for older workers in various countries, including the UK, Japan, Israel, and China. These seminars have become particularly



beneficial for early-career researchers, such as PhD students, who gain experience in presenting and defending their work in a supportive environment.

By July 2024, WG2 expanded the series by collaborating with WG5 to manage the administrative side of the seminars. With WG5, Recordings of the sessions are shared on YouTube and social media, making them accessible to both academic and non-academic audiences. This initiative aims to bridge the gap between research and real-world applications, engaging businesses and organisations that support older individuals.

Examples of the Diginet Seminar Series:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQKLc9PDpfY&t=2411s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5x8aEcwsnGM>

Scoping Review

In June 2024, WG2 launched a scoping review focusing on the current state-of-the-art HR interventions that help older workers adapt to digitalisation in the workplace. The scoping review aims to address the digital divide that contributes to premature retirement, particularly for low-skilled, lower-income workers. The review team, made up of 23 members, meets weekly to address key research questions:

- How does digitalisation contribute to workplace age inequalities?
- What skills do older workers need to stay in the workforce amidst digitalisation?
- How are employers addressing these inequalities through training, career development, and HR interventions?

The team has already identified 58 relevant articles from fields such as human resource management, sociology, gerontology, and business management. The current stage of the project involves coding and analysing the extracted material, with a goal to publish the findings in a prominent HR journal by early 2025. This research is expected to inform future policies and

offer actionable recommendations to businesses, trade unions, and workplace stakeholders on how to support older workers in a digitalised environment.

Country Profiles: Digitalisation and Ageing

Introduction

WG2 has produced country profiles that provide a snapshot of how different countries are tackling the challenges of an ageing workforce in the context of digitalisation. These profiles cover Albania, Norway, North Macedonia, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, the UK, Turkey, and Ukraine. The country profiles explore four main questions:

- What is the state of digitalisation in each country, especially for older workers?
- What are the main challenges facing employers related to digitalisation and ageing?
- How are employers and trade unions responding to these challenges?
- Are there examples of best practices in addressing the digital divide?

Countries like Sweden and Ireland are advanced in their digitalisation efforts, but they face challenges in ensuring that older workers are not excluded. On the other hand, countries such as Albania and North Macedonia are less advanced in terms of digital roll out but are working to build infrastructure and skills development programmes. The report highlights how some countries, like Albania, struggle with brain drain as younger workers emigrate to Western Europe, leaving behind an ageing workforce that must adapt to digitalisation.

The country profiles also identified drivers of employer responses to digitalisation and ageing. For example, in Albania, the National Broadband Plan¹ addresses the need for digital infrastructure to support ageing workers, while Hungary's Digital Prosperity Programme² aims

¹ <chrome-extension://efaidnbmninnbpcjpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.infrastruktura.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/National-Plan-BBAnd-EN.pdf>

²² <https://abouthungary.hu/tags/digital-prosperity-programme>

to extend digital services. In Italy and Ireland, digital inclusion efforts are linked to maintaining the countries' appeal as hubs for information and communication technology (ICT) companies.

In the next paragraphs we present some of the major findings.

Digitalisation's Impact on Businesses

Digitalisation affects industries differently across countries. For instance, in Ireland, one-third of jobs are expected to be disrupted by digitalisation, while in Norway, public services are primarily delivered through digital platforms, which poses challenges for older workers. The shift to digitalised services during the COVID-19 pandemic also reoriented work patterns toward a hybrid model in several countries, requiring new skills and workplace cultures to accommodate older employees working remotely.

A common theme in the country profiles is the digital divide between large enterprises and small- to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Large organisations often have the resources to adopt new business models, while SMEs may struggle due to a lack of time and resources to strategise and implement digitalisation. In some cases, large organisations have supported their SME partners in adopting digital tools and training staff to increase productivity.³

Ageing Populations and Business Adaptations

Ageing populations in many countries is creating significant challenges for businesses as they roll out digitalisation. In Sweden, government initiatives like SWAGE (focused on holistic support for older workers) offer mentoring, intergenerational support, and workplace adaptations.⁴ This model highlights the importance of supporting older workers' productivity through training and feeling valued.

³ <https://hrzone.com/five-ways-smes-are-supporting-older-workers/>

⁴ <https://swage.org/en/>

Countries differ in their approaches to managing older workers during the digital transformation. In Norway, employers are incentivised to provide training for older workers, given that high job security makes it more difficult to manage workers through early retirement. In contrast, the UK has lower job security but is one of the few European countries to abolish mandatory retirement. Phased retirement models allow older workers to reduce their working hours gradually, giving businesses time to plan for succession and maintain productivity.

Employers and Trade Union Responses

Employers and trade unions have implemented various initiatives to support older workers. In Norway, the government and businesses collaborate on the Seniornett programme⁵, which offers workplace training for older workers. Albania's private sector provides digital training across all age groups, while Hungary has introduced multiple digital inclusion programmes.

In the UK, efforts have focused on basic digital skills training, especially for older individuals with little prior experience. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the need for businesses to provide older workers with technology training, particularly in sectors like finance, where a rapid shift to homeworking occurred. Health and safety representatives, often union members, played a key role in helping workers transition to new technologies and addressing their concerns about remote work.⁶

Best Practices

Examples of best practices highlighted in the country profiles include:

Ireland and the UK: Phased retirement options allow older workers to gradually reduce their hours while mentoring successors. This model is offered by companies like BAE Systems and helps ensure that older workers remain economically active while planning for retirement.

⁵ <https://www.seniornett.no/>

⁶ <chrome-extension://efaidnbmninnibpcjpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/TUCHSreport.pdf>

Portugal: The Emprego + Digital programme⁷ focuses on upskilling older workers to improve their employability in a digital economy.

North Macedonia: Intergenerational programmes encourage younger workers to help older employees adapt to digital tools while facilitating knowledge transfer.

Hungary and the UK: Government and professional bodies provide support for SMEs to adopt digital tools and manage older workforces more effectively.

Conclusion

Both digitalisation and ageing workforces are significant challenges for employers worldwide. The findings of the country profiles emphasise the need to provide older workers with the necessary digital skills and support to remain economically active. Key areas of divergence include the extent to which digitalisation is integrated into broader workforce participation programmes and whether digital training is targeted specifically at low-skilled workers or provided more universally.

Future Activities for WG2

Looking ahead, WG2 will continue with its three core projects: **the seminar series, the scoping review, and the development of country profiles**. The scoping review is expected to be completed by the end of the year, with a draft paper submitted for publication in early 2025. WG2 will also collaborate with other working groups to produce **podcasts** and **other content** aimed at reaching non-academic communities, further broadening the impact of their work.

⁷ <https://www.iefp.pt/en/formacao-emprego-digital>