Synthesis of Policy Recommendations on Work and Ageing in the Digital Age

(based on materials of policy workshops held in Prague (Czech Republic, 2023), Dublin (Ireland, 2024), Tirana (Albania, 2024), Osnabrück (Germany, 2025), Kyiv (Ukraine, 2025), and Porto (Portugal, 2026))

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Introduction

The COST Action DIGI-net (CA21107), launched in 2022, is a pan-European research initiative that addresses critical knowledge gaps concerning the impact of digitalisation on work inequalities in later life. The Action directly contributes to the advancement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably SDG 8 on decent work and SDG 10 on reducing inequalities, while also reinforcing SDG 17 by fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and stakeholder engagement. Moreover, DIGI-net is aligned with SDG 4 on promoting lifelong learning opportunities, which is essential for equipping older workers with digital skills, and SDG 5 on achieving gender equality, with particular attention to the compounded disadvantages faced by older women in the labour market.

One of the key deliverables of DIGI-net is the organisation of policy workshops and the preparation of policy papers across participating countries. This report synthesises the outcomes of six policy workshops held in Prague (Czech Republic, 2023), Dublin (Ireland, 2024), Tirana (Albania, 2024), Osnabrück (Germany, 2025), Kyiv (Ukraine, 2025), and Porto (Portugal, 2026). The deliberate selection of countries representing diverse levels of economic development, digitalisation, and policy approaches towards older workers has made it possible to identify distinctive features in the design and implementation of labour policies targeting older employees within the context of digital workplace transformations.

Each of these events convened experts, policymakers, and representatives from non-governmental organisations, trade unions, and industry to examine the implications of workplace digitalisation for older workers and businesses. The workshops provided a platform to compare national experiences, highlight good practices, and discuss policy interventions that promote inclusivity, resilience, and equity in digitally transforming labour markets.

Table 1 summarises the areas and topics discussed in the policy workshops on older workers under digital transformation.

The comparative review of six policy workshops highlights several recurring areas of concern regarding older workers in the context of digitalisation. Across all participating countries, the rapid development of new technologies, including artificial intelligence and automation, was consistently identified as a challenge when combined with limited digital skills among older employees. Closely linked to this was the recognition of risks associated with job endings, particularly early retirement, involuntary job loss, and the need to promote flexible retirement pathways as alternatives to abrupt labour market exits.

Training emerged as a cross-cutting theme, with strong emphasis placed on the creation of tailored, flexible, and accessible programmes in digital skills, alongside persistent concerns about the lack of training opportunities and insufficient investment in older workers' development. Working conditions also received attention, particularly in relation to flexible work arrangements, career planning, informal employment, and widespread experiences of discrimination against older workers due to age-related biases. Health issues were less frequently addressed, though occupational health and safety was explicitly noted in some contexts.

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Table 1. Areas and topics arising across policy workshops on older workers under digitalization

Areas	Topics	Czechia	Ireland	Albania	Germany	Ukraine	Portugal
Technologies development	New technologies impact under lack of skills	+	+	+	+	+	+
	AI and automation		+	+	+	+	+
Job ending	Delay retirement		+			+	
	Risk of job loss	+		+		+	
	Early retirement	+	+			+	
	Flexible retirement	+	+	+	+		
Training	Creation of tailored, flexible, and accessible training programs in digital skills for older workers	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Lack of training for older workers	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Lack of investment in older workers		+	+	+	+	+
Work conditions for older workers	Flexible work arrangements		+		+		
	Career planning support		+				
	Informal employment			+			
	Discrimination of older workers due to biases			+	+	+	+
Health issues	Occupational health and safety				+		
Cross-sectionalyties	Age/gender	+			+	+	
	Age/refugee	+					
	Age/LGBTQI+						
Regulations	Special legislation (implementation of the anti-discrimination acts at the national and regional levels)	+	+	+		+	
	Creation of inclusive policies in workplaces	+	+	+		+	+

Source: Rašticová et al., 2023; Ní Léime et al., 2024; Xhumari et al., 2024; Genkova et al., 2025; Versal et al., 2025, Oliveira et al., 2026

The pattern emerging from Table 1 suggests that work inequalities in later life under digitalisation are not confined to a single policy area, but arise at the intersection of technological change, skills systems, organisational practices, and regulatory safeguards. The most consistent cross-country concern relates to the mismatch between the rapid development of digital technologies, including AI and automation, and the limited opportunities for older workers to

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acquire relevant, accessible, and confidence-building digital skills. Training therefore appears not as a supplementary measure, but as a central policy lever for preventing exclusion, especially where older workers remain underrepresented in upskilling initiatives or where employers underinvest in their development.

At the same time, the table shows that countries differ in the specific mechanisms through which exclusion is produced. In some contexts, the emphasis is placed on job endings, early retirement, or risks of involuntary labour market exit; in others, the focus is on workplace practices, flexible work arrangements, informal employment, or discrimination caused by age-related biases. Intersectional vulnerabilities, particularly those combining age with gender or refugee status, are present but unevenly addressed, which indicates that most policy frameworks still require more systematic integration of intersectional perspectives. Health-related issues are comparatively less visible across the workshops, suggesting a potential evidence and policy gap in linking digitalisation, ageing, work ability, and occupational health. The comparative evidence points to a need for an integrated policy approach that combines age-inclusive lifelong learning, bias-aware organisational practices, responsible AI governance, and stronger implementation of inclusive workplace policies.

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1. Common and divergent challenges related to work inequalities in later life

The workshop corpus demonstrates that inequalities in later working life within digitalising labour markets are generated not by a single factor, but by the interaction of mechanisms operating at the individual, organisational, and policy/regulatory levels. At the individual level, self-efficacy, stereotype threat, and motivation shape whether older adults choose to engage in and sustain participation in learning opportunities. At the organisational level, managerial routines and interpersonal attributions of competence determine access to training, allocation to innovation-related tasks, and opportunities for internal mobility. At the policy and regulatory level, national rules, funding arrangements, and increasingly algorithmic decision systems structure access to jobs and career progression in ways that risk embedding age-related bias.

Taken together, these dynamics illustrate the reality of multi-level ageism in digitally transforming workplaces, underscoring the need for integrated responses across individual support measures, organisational practices, and national policy frameworks.

Across cases, later-life disadvantages arise at intrapersonal (e.g., reduced self-efficacy), interpersonal (status/competence attributions), and institutional levels (biased HR routines, exclusion from innovation projects, and algorithmic screening) (Genkova et al., 2025). These mechanisms help explain why formal equality provisions alone do not eliminate disadvantage for workers 50+ (Rašticová et al., 2023; Ní Léime et al., 2024). The EU's Employment Equality Directive establishes the legal floor for age-equality in the workplace, but requires translation into organisational practice - e.g., bias-aware recruitment, inclusive work design and learning access (Council of the European Union, 2000).

"Second-level" digital divides beyond connectivity.

Workshops in Prague and Dublin emphasise that the salient barriers for older adults are not only access, but also confidence, tailored content, and stigma-free pedagogies; low-qualified older workers are particularly underserved without modular, low-barrier offers linked to real tasks (Rašticová et al., 2023; Ní Léime et al., 2024). This aligns with EU instruments that mandate personalised adult-learning pathways and validation, Upskilling Pathways and the European Skills Agenda, and with VET reforms pushing flexible, work-based provision (Council of the European Union, 2016; European Commission, 2020; Council of the European Union, 2020).

Institutional misalignment between rapid digitalisation and age-inclusive systems.

All policy papers describe a gap between technological change and the capacity of HR/adult-learning systems to respond. Osnabrück documents under-representation of workers 50-64 in further training and gender-age interactions that disadvantage older women (Genkova et al., 2025); Dublin reports few employers with explicit ageing strategies or tailored training (Ní Léime et al., 2024, p. 8); Prague workshop calls out the law-to-practice gap in employer provision for low-qualified older adults (Rašticová et al., 2023). EU guidance provides a remedy logic: the VET Recommendation promotes agile, modular, work-based learning ecosystems; the Social Rights Action Plan couples skills with fair working conditions and participation targets (Council of the European Union, 2020; European Commission, 2021).

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Algorithmic risk and age-fair AI.

Osnabrück workshop highlights how data, model design, and deployment in HR tech can magnify age bias and gender-age bias, recommending impact assessment, audits, and human oversight (Genkova et al., 2025). The EU Artificial Intelligence Act provides a risk-based compliance frame for employment-related systems (e.g., transparency, data governance), giving organisations usable levers to mitigate disparate impact on older workers (European Parliament & Council, 2024).

Demographic, geopolitical, and market pressures.

Workshop in Tirana situates later-life inequalities within informality, rural infrastructure gaps and out-migration, which depress both the demand for and supply of later-life upskilling; employers in the informal economy are reluctant to invest in older workers (Xhumari et al., 2024). Kyiv documents a policy pivot from infrastructure to human-centred inclusion and proposes instrument-level responses (short ICT courses, training vouchers, wage subsidies) to activate the 55+ talent pool amid wartime disruption and labour shortages (Versal et al., 2025). The Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030 adds measurable targets and a cooperation mechanism that national systems can use to benchmark and mainstream older-worker inclusion within digital-skills goals (European Parliament & Council, 2022).

In the workshop materials, context emerges less as a list of discrete obstacles than as a set of binding constraints that condition whether otherwise sound prescriptions can take hold. In the Czech case, the problem is not the absence of legal commitments or national digital ambition but the translation of law and strategy into delivery that reliably reaches low-qualified older adults. The papers underscore that anti-discrimination guarantees and DESI-oriented targets do little without a coordinated, modular, low-barrier upskilling offer tied to real work tasks and routine HR processes. What is required is stable financing for short, task-specific modules, guidance and validation of prior learning (RPL), and an explicit expectation that employers will open access to training, treat age as a positive diversity attribute, and normalise age-neutral internal mobility. In practice, this implies embedding anti-ageism routines (from recruitment to allocation to digital projects) and building delivery partnerships with community providers to reduce stigma and logistical frictions that deter participation among 50+ with low qualifications (Rašticová et al., 2023).

Ireland's constraint is anchored in organisational readiness rather than national infrastructure. The workshop participants describe a landscape in which explicit ageing strategies are uncommon and tailored training pathways for older workers remain the exception, even where digital tools are widely available. This is compounded by learning anxiety and confidence gaps among older cohorts, which can suppress demand for training even when supply exists. The documents point to community and social-partner provision - including one-to-one tutoring and local hubs - as credible, low-stigma channels that personalise pacing and make first contact with digital tasks less threatening. Yet these channels remain underscaled relative to need. The path forward is not merely programmatic expansion but normalising age-inclusive learning plans inside firms, co-funding SME training, and age-disaggregated monitoring (e.g., the 50-64 share of training, retention after upskilling) to drive iterative improvement (Ní Léime et al., 2024).

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Germany's materials depict a high-automation environment in which the binding constraint is organisational design. Here, later-life exclusion is reproduced by multi-level mechanisms - cultural cues, role allocation, training selection, and increasingly by the deployment of algorithmic systems in HR. The response proposed is a diagnostics-led change programme built around the Later Life Workplace Index (LLWI), which operationalises "age-friendly" capability across nine dimensions - leadership, work design, development, health, knowledge management, retirement transitions, continued employment, climate, and coverage - so that commitments translate into named actions with accountability (Genkova et al., 2025). Because algorithmic tools can harden existing biases, workshops stress AI-fairness governance: bias testing, participatory introduction with workers, and human oversight of employment-related systems. The immediate bottlenecks are managerial bandwidth, consistent social-partner involvement, and the institutionalisation of age-disaggregated KPIs (e.g., the training share accruing to 50-64, internal mobility rates) so that culture change is observable and corrigible (Genkova et al., 2025).

Across the Western Balkans, the constraint profile is systemic and cumulative. The papers describe a triangle of informality, rural infrastructure gaps, and thin adult-learning ecosystems that depress both demand for and supply of later-life upskilling. Employers operating informally face weak incentives to invest in older workers and often hold ageist priors; older workers, in turn, encounter long travel times, sparse provision, and little guidance, producing a capability trap in which low digital fluency forecloses advancement and transitions into formal employment. The recommended path is sequenced: first, extend basic connectivity and provider capacity, with special attention to rural outreach; second, finance modular digital-literacy offers and build guidance/validation functions; third, advance formalisation in tandem with training incentives; and finally, enforce anti-ageism so that new supply converts into equitable uptake. Without this ordering, isolated programs risk low take-up, selection effects, and early fade-out (Xhumari et al., 2024).

Ukraine's materials register a policy pivot from infrastructure to human-centred inclusion, with a notable emphasis on measurable instruments that can be deployed at scale under crisis conditions: short ICT courses (often ≤30 hours), retraining with documented completions among 55+, training vouchers that extend beyond those formally registered as unemployed, and wage subsidies compensating half of the minimum wage for employers hiring 55+. These instruments are designed to meet dual objectives: activate the 55+ talent pool amid labour shortages and de-risk employer hiring decisions. Yet the binding constraint over the medium term remains organisational culture and managerial behaviour: unless HR routines, performance expectations, and internal mobility practices are recalibrated, activation can yield entry without progression. Consequently, the papers argue for coupling instrument deployment with public messaging, employer engagement, and age-sensitive monitoring (placement, 6–12-month retention, wage trajectories) to prevent re-segregation and secure durable gains in job quality (Versal et al., 2025).

The Porto workshop introduces an additional constraint that cuts across otherwise well-developed digitalisation agendas: the risk that AI-enabled systems may gradually shift from supporting human work to substituting human judgement. The Portuguese materials frame this as a problem of misalignment between technological acceleration and organisational preparedness

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(Oliveira et al., 2026). Digital tools are increasingly adopted in response to efficiency pressures, but often without a clear internal framework defining when AI should support decision-making and when human interpretation, accountability, and relational judgement must remain central. This concern is particularly relevant for workers aged 55+, who are already less likely to be included in innovation projects and targeted training initiatives, despite their accumulated knowledge, professional stability, and potential contribution to organisational resilience. The binding constraint in the Portuguese case is therefore not only skills provision, but the creation of organisational and policy conditions under which older workers are actively integrated into digital transformation processes and AI remains a tool for augmentation rather than substitution.

Taken together, these context-specific constraints do not refute the common workshop playbook - human-centred design, modular learning pathways, LLWI-style diagnostics, AI-risk governance, critical digital and AI literacy, age-inclusive organisational practices, and bottom-up delivery. But they do determine where the binding point lies in each system. In some cases, the central challenge is implementation capacity and stigma-reducing delivery; in others, it is firm-level readiness, confidence-building pedagogy, and the limited institutionalisation of ageing strategies. In more highly digitalised or automated environments, the key constraint lies in diagnostic-led organisational change, algorithmic oversight, and the preservation of human judgement in AI-mediated work. Where institutions are thin, informal, or disrupted, the priority is a sequenced approach that builds the preconditions for inclusion before attempting to scale interventions.

Across all settings, the evidence suggests that age-inclusive digital transformation cannot be achieved through isolated training measures or formal equality commitments alone. It requires coordinated action across skills systems, workplace practices, technology governance, and regulatory implementation. In this sense, age-disaggregated accountability functions as the hinge between aspiration and outcome, converting normative claims into a routine of measurement, learning, and course correction. Such accountability should capture not only access to training and employment outcomes, but also whether digitalisation strengthens or weakens older workers' autonomy, confidence, participation, and capacity to remain active contributors in changing labour markets (Rašticová et al., 2023; Ní Léime et al., 2024; Xhumari et al., 2024; Genkova et al., 2025; Versal et al., 2025; Oliveira et al., 2026).

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2. Conceptual frameworks

The shared framework can be stated up front as follows: (1) a normative foundation that frames digital transformation as human-centred and age-inclusive; (2) an explanatory lens that locates later-life disadvantage in multi-level ageism; (3) an organisational capability approach that operationalises age-friendliness through diagnostic instruments (e.g., LLWI); (4) lifelong-learning ecosystems built around modular, low-barrier, personalised pathways; (5) a pragmatic instrument grammar - vouchers, short courses, public-employment intermediation, and retention-linked hiring incentives; (6) pedagogies that prioritise confidence-building and job-embedded relevance; (7) AI governance based on participatory introduction, impact assessment, bias testing, data quality, and human oversight; (8) critical AI literacy and the preservation of human judgement, ensuring that digital tools support rather than replace interpretation, professional responsibility, and decision-making autonomy; (9) bottom-up co-creation and social dialogue as standing institutions; (10) monitoring and accountability via age-disaggregated indicators; and (11) sequencing and contextual adaptation to match institutional capacity.

Taken together, these elements read less like a checklist than a governance grammar that ties legal-policy commitments to implementable practice. The human-centred, age-inclusive premise clarifies that the legal floor is non-discrimination, while the policy ceiling extends to participation, lifelong learning, job quality and dignity at work for people 50+ (Council of the European Union, 2000; European Commission, 2021). Within that horizon, multi-level ageism provides the analytic engine: intrapersonal dynamics (self-efficacy, stereotype threat), interpersonal attributions (respect/competence), and institutional routines (rules, allocation, data-driven tools) jointly shape who is selected into training, assigned to innovation tasks, or progressed—hence the shift from narrow compliance to organisation-wide capability building (Genkova et al., 2025; Ní Léime et al., 2024; Rašticová et al., 2023). Diagnostic frameworks such as the Later Life Workplace Index translate intent into baselines, targets, and accountable action plans across nine capability domains, embedding worker participation and social-partner oversight as ordinary features of people management (Genkova et al., 2025). Learning architectures then move beyond connectivity to address "second-level" divides, confidence, motivation, task-specific fluency, through short, stackable courses (often ≤30 hours), recognition/validation of prior learning, personalised guidance, and delivery through trusted local channels, in line with the EU Upskilling Pathways and the European Skills Agenda (Council of the European Union, 2016; European Commission, 2020; Ní Léime et al., 2024; Rašticová et al., 2023; Xhumari et al., 2024; Versal et al., 2025; Oliveira et al., 2026).

At system level, vouchers, PES-brokered guidance and referrals, and time-limited hiring incentives for 55+ function as light-touch levers that are measurable, auditable, and scalable, while pedagogical design micro-credentials, mentoring, mixed-age teams, learning labs turns enrolment into confident workplace use (Ní Léime et al., 2024; Versal et al., 2025). Because algorithmic tools increasingly mediate screening, assignment and appraisal, the framework makes risk-based AI governance a first-order inclusion device: participatory introduction, impact assessment, bias

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testing with age-sensitive proxies, data lineage controls, and preserved human oversight, consistent with the EU Artificial Intelligence Act (European Parliament & Council, 2024; Genkova et al., 2025).

The digital literacy cannot be reduced to the operational ability to use tools. It must also include the ability to question AI outputs, recognise their limitations, identify possible biases, and retain responsibility for final decisions (Oliveira et al., 2026). This is particularly important in professional environments where interpretation, trust, and accountability remain central, such as healthcare, education, management, and public services. For older workers, this approach shifts the policy focus from remedial skills provision to the recognition of experience-based judgement as a resource that should be embedded in human-centred digital transformation.

Finally, the model is sustained by bottom-up, multi-actor co-creation and by age-disaggregated accountability - publishing shares of training accruing to 50–64, completions/certifications among 55+, retention and wage progression after subsidised hires, internal mobility rates, and age-stratified adverse-impact ratios for algorithmic systems, within a Digital-Decade-style cooperation logic; and it remains adaptable through explicit sequencing where informality, thin provider markets, rural distance, or crisis conditions are binding constraints (Council of the European Union, 2020; European Parliament & Council, 2022; Xhumari et al., 2024).

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3. Levels of specificity and implementability of the recommendations

The workshop corpus converges on a layered implementation logic that links high-level normative commitments to operational instruments and measurable outcomes. The levels below function as mutually reinforcing stages rather than a strict sequence; jurisdictions and organisations can enter at the level that matches their current capacity.

Level A - Governance and normative framing.

Recommendations begin by asserting a human-centred, age-inclusive framing of digitalisation that is consistent with EU equality and skills acquis. This framing positions later-life employment as a mainstream objective of labour-market, VET, and enterprise policy and anchors subsequent design choices in non-discrimination principles, social dialogue, and inclusive growth (Rašticová et al., 2023; Ní Léime et al., 2024; Genkova et al., 2025; Xhumari et al., 2024; Versal et al., 2025).

Level B - System architecture and financing.

At the policy-system level, the papers propose a portfolio of scalable instruments that can be combined and financed through existing labour-market and skills channels: personalised upskilling pathways, public employment service (PES) intermediation, training vouchers, and targeted hiring subsidies for workers aged 55+, complemented where relevant by rural outreach and support to expand adult-learning supply. The architecture emphasises low administrative burden, transparent eligibility, and equity safeguards to ensure access for low-qualified older adults (Rašticová et al., 2023; Ní Léime et al., 2024; Xhumari et al., 2024; Versal et al., 2025).

Level C - Organisational diagnostics and culture change.

At the firm/public-agency level, the recommended entry point is a diagnostic-led change process using validated tools (e.g., the Later Life Workplace Index-LLWI) to identify gaps across leadership, work design, learning and development, knowledge management, health, and retirement/transition practices. Diagnostics are coupled with action plans, timeline-bound responsibilities, and mechanisms for worker participation and social-partner involvement (Genkova et al., 2025).

Level D - Programmatic instruments.

The program layer operationalises inclusion through short, modular ICT and job-embedded courses (often ≤30 hours), voucher-funded retraining in accredited providers, PES-brokered placements, and community or social-partner delivery (e.g., one-to-one tutoring, local hubs) to reduce anxiety and stigma around re-learning. Where labour shortages are acute, employer incentives (e.g., partial wage compensation for hiring 55+) are paired with retention conditions and fair-workplace commitments (Ní Léime et al., 2024; Versal et al., 2025).

Level E - Pedagogy and learner experience.

Across delivery modes, the recommended pedagogy is low-barrier, modular, and confidence-building: micro-credentials, recognition of prior learning, mixed-age teams, mentoring, job rotation, and “learning lab” environments that permit low-stakes experimentation with new tools. Instructional design explicitly targets second-level digital divides, confidence,

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task-specific fluency, and motivation, rather than connectivity alone (Rašticová et al., 2023; Ní Léime et al., 2024; Xhumari et al., 2024).

Level F - AI governance and technology introduction.

To prevent technology from amplifying age bias, the papers call for participatory digitalisation, algorithmic impact assessment, bias testing, human oversight in HR-related systems, and procurement standards that specify age-fair performance requirements. These routines are embedded into broader organisational change cycles and aligned with emerging compliance duties (Genkova et al., 2025). The implementability also depends on whether organisations define clear operational boundaries for AI use (Oliveira et al., 2026). Beyond compliance-oriented AI governance, employers and public bodies should specify which decisions may be supported by AI, which require mandatory human review, and which must remain fundamentally human because they involve interpretation, relational judgement, accountability, or ethical responsibility. Training programmes should therefore include not only technical tool use, but also critical AI literacy: questioning outputs, identifying limitations, understanding bias, and maintaining decision-making autonomy.

Level G - Monitoring, evaluation, and accountability.

Finally, implementability is underwritten by age-disaggregated indicators and feedback loops. The core measurement set includes: the share of training accruing to ages 50-64, completions and certifications for 55+, retention and wage progression after subsidised hires, changes in self-efficacy/confidence scores after community-delivered learning, and adverse-impact ratios in recruitment/internal mobility where algorithmic tools are used. Routine publication and stakeholder review of these indicators is recommended to institutionalise learning and enable course-correction (Genkova et al., 2025; Ní Léime et al., 2024; Rašticová et al., 2023; Xhumari et al., 2024; Versal et al., 2025).

Level H - Sequencing and context adaptation.

Where structural constraints exist (e.g., informality, thin provider markets, rural disparities, or crisis conditions), the guidance stresses sequenced capacity-building: (1) ensure basic connectivity and provider capacity; (2) deploy low-barrier learning offers and recognition/validation; (3) layer on incentives and enforcement against age discrimination; and (4) mainstream diagnostic and AI-governance routines as institutional capacity grows (Xhumari et al., 2024; Versal et al., 2025).

Across the diverse workshop settings, a coherent governance grammar emerges that binds legal-policy commitments to implementable practice. First, multi-level ageism functions as the central explanatory construct: disadvantage in later-life employment is read as an interaction among intrapersonal dynamics (e.g., self-efficacy and stereotype threat), interpersonal attributions (respect/competence judgments within teams), and institutional arrangements (selection, progression, and technology-mediated decision systems). Treating ageism as a nested phenomenon shifts the problem from narrow compliance to organisation-wide capability building, wherein culture, leadership, HR pipelines, and technology oversight are jointly addressed rather than in isolation. Second, this capability agenda is operationalised through validated diagnostic instruments - exemplified by the Later Life Workplace Index (LLWI) and cognate toolkits - that

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translate abstract commitments into baselines, targets, and accountable change plans across work design, learning and development, knowledge management, health, and employment transitions. In effect, diagnostics provide the measurement language that links equality norms to daily managerial practice.

Third, the learning architecture prescribed is modular and low-barrier, consistent with the EU's Upskilling Pathways and the European Skills Agenda: short, stackable courses; recognition and validation of prior learning; personalised guidance; and delivery through community, social-partner, and public-employment channels. This design explicitly targets second-level digital divides - confidence, motivation, and task-specific fluency - rather than connectivity alone, thereby raising the probability that older learners will enroll, persist, and convert training into job-embedded performance (Council of the European Union, 2016; European Commission, 2020). Fourth, the overarching transition is framed as human-centred digitalisation, aligning with the VET Recommendation and the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan: skills formation, job quality, and participation are treated as coupled objectives, so that digital adoption is evaluated not only by efficiency metrics but also by distributional effects for workers aged 50+ (Council of the European Union, 2020; European Commission, 2021).

Table 2. Evidence-to-instrument matrix

Recommendation	Specificity	Primary actor(s)	Implementation prerequisites
Short digital-skills courses for 55+	High (named, duration)	Public employment service; local providers	Course catalogues aligned to Upskilling Pathways; outreach & guidance; micro-credentialing
Training vouchers	High (counts or eligibility)	Ministry of Labour; accredited providers	Voucher rules; provider network; MIS tracking; equity criteria
Wage subsidy (50% min wage) for hiring 55+	High (rate specified)	PES; employers (SMEs, public)	Budget line; anti-displacement safeguards; monitoring of retention
LLWI-based organisational audits (9 dimensions)	Medium-high (tool validated)	Employers; HR; works councils	Leadership buy-in; staff survey; action plans; follow-up cycles
AI fairness routines	Medium-high (methods specified)	Employers; procurement; DPO	Risk classification; DPIA or impact assessment under AI Act; worker reps
One-to-one tutoring	Medium (programmes named)	NGOs; unions; local gov; libraries	Grants; volunteer training; referral pathways via PES
Organisational ageing strategies & SME readiness	Medium (practice gap flagged)	Employer federations; chambers; SMEs	Templates; advisory hubs; co-funded training via VET or Skills Agenda

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Targeted, modular offers for low-qualified 50+	Medium (design logic stated)	Ministries; PES; employers; NGOs	Modular curricula; validation; guidance; Digital Decade monitoring
Formalisation and incentives for training in informal sector	Lower–medium (sequencing)	Finance or Labour ministries; inspectorates	Legal reforms; tax or SSC incentives; PES brokerage
Critical AI literacy and support	Medium	Employers; HR; training providers; professional bodies; public agencies	internal AI-use principles; human review rules; critical AI literacy modules; accountability procedures; worker participation

Source: Rašticová et al., 2023; Ní Léime et al., 2024; Xhumari et al., 2024; Genkova et al., 2025; Versal et al., 2025, Oliveira et al., 2026

Fifth, given the diffusion of data-driven systems in recruitment, assignment, and performance management, the corpus advances a risk-based AI governance stance: procurement specifications, impact assessment, data-quality and bias testing, human oversight, and continuous monitoring of age-related adverse impact, in line with the Artificial Intelligence Act. Here, compliance is positioned as a design discipline, not a retrospective hurdle , ensuring that algorithmic tools do not entrench age-based disadvantage (European Parliament & Council, 2024). Sixth, the process architecture is bottom-up and multi-stakeholder, consonant with the Digital Decade cooperation model: iterative workshops, social dialogue, and local partnerships are institutionalised as standing mechanisms for co-producing "practice-ready" measures and for embedding age-disaggregated accountability (European Parliament & Council, 2022). Taken together, these six pillars constitute a mutually reinforcing framework: a diagnostic-driven organisational capability program nested within human-centred skills policy, governed by risk-sensitive AI rules, and sustained by participatory delivery systems and transparent metrics (Council of the European Union, 2016, 2020; European Commission, 2020, 2021; European Parliament & Council, 2022, 2024).

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4. Cross-cutting findings and thematic clusters

Cluster A - Multi-level ageism as the generative mechanism of later-life inequality.

Across the materials, later-life disadvantage is best explained by multi-level ageism - the intertwining of intrapersonal processes (self-efficacy, stereotype threat), interpersonal attributions (respect/competence judgments), and institutional arrangements (selection into training, allocation to innovation tasks, rules and routines embedded in HR and workflow systems). This nested construct reframes "age management" from narrow legal compliance toward organisation-wide capability building linking culture, leadership, and everyday people-management practices (Genkova et al., 2025; Rašticová et al., 2023; Ní Léime et al., 2024).

Cluster B - "Second-level" digital divides require pedagogical, not merely infrastructural, solutions.

The binding barriers for older workers are confidence, motivation, and task-specific digital fluency, rather than connectivity alone. Effective responses privilege short, modular, low-barrier formats (often ≤ 30 hours for ICT basics), personalised guidance and validation of prior learning, and job-embedded practice that ties learning to immediate work tasks. Community, union and library-based tutoring are highlighted as "last-mile" channels that reduce stigma and enable paced, low-anxiety entry points (Rašticová et al., 2023; Ní Léime et al., 2024; Xhumari et al., 2024; Versal et al., 2025).

Cluster C - Organisational diagnostics convert equality norms into accountable routines.

A recurring recommendation is to institutionalise diagnostic-led change via validated tools such as the Later Life Workplace Index (LLWI). By structuring nine capability domains—climate, leadership, work design, health, development, knowledge management, retirement transitions, continued employment, and coverage - diagnostics provide a common measurement language for baselining, target-setting, action planning, and follow-up, thereby operationalising age-friendliness beyond programmatic pilots (Genkova et al., 2025).

Cluster D - Human-centred policy instrumentation couples activation with inclusion.

At system level, instrument design converges on a pragmatic portfolio: training vouchers (including for non-registered job-seekers), short ICT courses, public employment service intermediation, and targeted employer incentives (e.g., wage subsidies for hiring 55+) with retention conditions. This package is explicitly human-centred - it addresses behavioural frictions on both sides of the labour market (older workers' learning anxiety; employers' risk perceptions) and is formulated to be administratively light-touch and equity-oriented (Ní Léime et al., 2024; Rašticová et al., 2023; Versal et al., 2025).

Cluster E - Risk-based AI governance is a necessary complement to culture change.

Given the diffusion of data-driven tools across recruitment, screening, internal mobility and performance management, algorithmic governance becomes a core inclusion lever. The corpus calls for participatory digitalisation, impact assessment, bias testing, data governance, and human oversight in employment-related systems, aligning operational practice with a risk-based stance

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and making age-fair performance an explicit procurement and monitoring criterion (Genkova et al., 2025).

Cluster F - Critical capacity and human judgement are central to age-inclusive AI adoption.

The Porto workshop adds a distinct cross-cutting insight: the inclusion of older workers in digital transformation cannot be achieved through technical skills alone (Olivera et al., 2026). As AI tools become embedded in information retrieval, content production, decision support, recruitment, and work organisation, the key risk is not only automation-related exclusion, but also the gradual weakening of critical capacity and decision-making autonomy. This makes critical AI literacy a core component of age-inclusive digital policy. Older workers should not be positioned merely as learners catching up with technology; rather, their accumulated experience and contextual judgement should be recognised as assets for responsible AI use. From this perspective, age-inclusive digitalisation requires organisations to define clear boundaries between AI-assisted work and decisions that require human interpretation, accountability, and professional responsibility.

Cluster G - Social dialogue and bottom-up co-creation increase implementability.

The process architecture emphasises multi-actor collaboration—academia, employers, unions, NGOs and public administration—as a standing governance feature rather than a one-off consultation method. Workshops are positioned as iterative co-production cycles that surface practice-ready solutions, improve institutional fit, and sustain learning across organisational and policy boundaries (Ní Léime et al., 2024; Xhumari et al., 2024; Rašticová et al., 2023; Genkova et al., 2025; Versal et al., 2025).

Cluster H - Monitoring, evaluation and accountability hinge on age-disaggregated metrics.

To bridge aspiration and delivery, the materials converge on a compact indicator set: the share of training accruing to ages 50-64, completions/certifications among 55+, retention and wage progression after subsidised hires, self-efficacy/confidence gains from community-delivered learning, and adverse-impact ratios in recruitment and internal mobility where algorithms are used. Routine publication and social-partner review are recommended to institutionalise feedback loops and enable course-correction (Genkova et al., 2025; Ní Léime et al., 2024; Rašticová et al., 2023; Xhumari et al., 2024; Versal et al., 2025).

Cluster I - Sequencing and preconditions for transferability.

Where informality, rural infrastructure gaps, thin provider markets, or crisis conditions prevail, inclusion requires sequenced capacity-building: (1) ensure connectivity and provider capacity; (2) deploy low-barrier modular provision with guidance and validation; (3) layer incentives and enforce anti-ageism; and (4) institutionalise organisational diagnostics and AI-governance routines as capacity matures. Framing transferability as conditional on preconditions, rather than as simple transplant, protects against low uptake and early fade-out (Xhumari et al., 2024; Versal et al., 2025).

Taken together, these clusters specify a coherent theory of change: address multi-level ageism as the generative mechanism; target second-level digital divides through pedagogical

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design; translate equality norms via diagnostic-led organisational routines; instrument the system with human-centred, administratively tractable measures that de-risk participation and hiring; govern algorithmic systems for age fairness; co-produce solutions with stakeholders; and hard-wire age-disaggregated accountability. This integrated approach increases the probability that later-life inclusion becomes a durable property of digital workplaces rather than an episodic project

This integrated approach increases the probability that later-life inclusion becomes a durable property of digital workplaces rather than an episodic project, while also ensuring that AI-supported work preserves human judgement and professional autonomy..

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5. Good practices, policy innovations, and evidence - policy gaps

A consistent body of practice-tested solutions emerges from the workshops, cutting across settings and sectors. At the organisational level, diagnostic-led improvement is repeatedly identified as a high-yield practice. The Later Life Workplace Index (LLWI) - validated across multiple countries - provides a structured way to convert inclusion intent into accountable routines spanning leadership, work design, learning and development, health, knowledge management, retirement transitions, continued employment, and coverage; the Osnabrück materials further specify practical levers (e.g., equal access to equipment, "leadership at a distance," ergonomic mobile work, and targeted health services for flexible locations), while linking these levers to measurable outcomes such as engagement, perceived work ability, and person - job fit (Genkova et al., 2025). LLWI thereby functions as a measurement language that bridges normative equality commitments and day-to-day managerial action, and – crucially -locates responsibility for change beyond HR departments alone by distributing ownership across line management and works councils (Genkova et al., 2025).

At the programmatic level, the strongest illustrations of rapidly deployable inclusion instruments combine short, modular learning. The Kyiv document sets out a particularly concrete portfolio: ≤30-hour ICT courses tailored to older learners, training vouchers open not only to registered unemployed but also to designated groups outside unemployment registers, career guidance and psychological support, and wage subsidies compensating 50 % of the minimum wage for employers hiring 55+ (with tracked counts of voucher issuance and completions for the 55+ cohort). Read together, these instruments address behavioural frictions on both sides of the market - learning anxiety and confidence deficits among older adults, and perceived hiring risk among employers - while remaining administratively tractable for scale-up (Versal et al., 2025).

A second vein of good practice is one-to-one tutoring and community-based programmes - including Age Action's long-running "Getting Started" initiative, which has trained more than 35,000 older adults since 2006 in Ireland - as credible channels for confidence-building digital entry points. The papers also highlight trade-union-employer collaborations and local hubs as vehicles for tailoring offers to sectoral and place-specific needs (Ní Léime et al., 2024). These practices operationalise what the Prague materials describe more generically as a requirement for "low-barrier" access: modular formats linked to real work tasks, accompanied by guidance and recognition/validation functions, and supported by public financing to reach low-qualified 50+ (Rašticová et al., 2023).

On the technology governance frontier, the Osnabrück discussions translate high-level principles into an actionable AI fairness routine: participatory introduction of tools, bias testing against protected-attribute proxies (including age), data-quality governance, and preserved human-in-the-loop oversight for employment-related decision systems. Framed as part of mainstream organisational change rather than a specialist audit exercise, this routine complements the LLWI by ensuring that digitalisation does not inadvertently re-create selection barriers at scale (Genkova et al., 2025).

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The Porto workshop contributes a complementary good-practice direction by reframing AI adoption as a matter of organisational responsibility and professional autonomy. Its added value lies in making the boundary between support and substitution explicit (Oliveira et al, 2026). In practice, this implies that organisations should develop internal AI-use principles, identify tasks where AI may legitimately support work, require human review where decisions affect people's careers or wellbeing, and preserve human responsibility in contexts requiring interpretation, trust, and ethical judgement. This is particularly relevant for age-inclusive workplaces because older workers' accumulated experience can strengthen decision quality, provided that they are included in digital redesign rather than marginalised from it. The evidence-policy gap here concerns the absence of operational templates for critical AI literacy, human review rules, and accountability procedures that would help organisations move from general commitments to responsible AI use in everyday work.

Several policy innovations appear as promising templates for replication. First, voucher schemes that are eligibility-broad (extending beyond the registered unemployed) and that are transparently targeted to 55+ cohorts demonstrate how financing rules themselves can act as inclusion devices; Kyiv's tracked issuance (≈12,000 vouchers as of 1 May 2025, including 2,700 to 55+) illustrates feasibility and measurability (Versal et al., 2025). Second, the embedding of psychosocial supports (counselling, confidence-building curricula) within employment-service workflows recognises that "second-level divides" - motivation, self-efficacy, task-specific fluency - are binding constraints for many older learners, not mere accessories to technical training (Versal et al., 2025). Third, social-partner delivery - involving unions and NGOs as co-producers - extends reach into populations that might otherwise self-exclude, as evidenced by Irish union and NGO programmes documented in the Dublin brief (Ní Léime et al., 2024).

The evidence-policy gaps identified across the corpus cluster around three themes. First, measurement gaps: most recommendations would benefit from routine age-disaggregated KPIs - for example, the share of training accruing to ages 50–64, completions/certifications among 55+, and 6-12-month retention and wage trajectories following subsidised hires. While LLWI-style diagnostics and Kyiv's administrative tracking show what is possible, systematic publication and social-partner review remain unevenly embedded (Genkova et al., 2025; Versal et al., 2025). Second, scaling gaps: community and one-to-one tutoring models have credible impact on confidence and uptake, yet remain underscaled relative to need; the Dublin paper explicitly notes both their effectiveness and the scarcity of digitalisation-specific best practices within parts of social-partner activity - an opportunity for targeted expansion and standard setting (Ní Léime et al., 2024). Third, governance gaps in algorithmic systems: although risk-based AI controls are now widely endorsed in principle, many organisations lack operational templates for bias testing, procurement clauses specifying age-fair performance, and continuous monitoring dashboards; the Osnabrück guidance addresses this gap but also makes clear that managerial bandwidth and consistent worker-participation arrangements are preconditions for sustained uptake (Genkova et al., 2025). A further gap concerns critical-capacity indicators: few organisations currently monitor whether AI use strengthens or weakens workers' confidence, autonomy, and ability to exercise independent judgement, especially among older cohorts (Oliveira et al., 2026).

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Finally, context-sensitive transferability is emphasised wherever structural constraints - informality, rural infrastructure deficits, and thin adult-learning supply - limit immediate absorption capacity. The Tirana workshop brief argues for a sequenced pathway (infrastructure and provider capacity - financed outreach and modular provision - formalisation with incentives - anti-ageism enforcement) to avoid low uptake and early fade-out. The same sequencing logic is compatible with both the LLWI (as a medium-term organisational capability tool) and voucher-based financing (as an early inclusion lever) and thus provides a generalisable architecture for phased scaling in other Inclusiveness Target Countries (Xhumari et al., 2024).

In sum, good practice in this domain is characterised by (a) diagnostic-driven organisational improvement (LLWI), (b) administratively light, equity-oriented instruments (vouchers, short ICT modules, wage subsidies) embedded in employment-service workflows, (c) last-mile delivery models that normalise paced, confidence-building entry, and (d) risk-sensitive AI governance that prevents digitalisation from re-inscribing age bias. The associated innovation agenda is not primarily about novel programmes but about institutionalising these routines at scale, closing the evidence–policy gap through age-disaggregated accountability and social-partner oversight.

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6. Recommendations for COST Inclusiveness Target Countries

For ITC countries, the most productive way to approach transferability is to treat later-life inclusion in digitalising labour markets as a system design challenge whose components can be recombined without loss of causal function. Rather than importing "programme brands," ITCs should prioritise interventions that perform core functions: reducing learning anxiety and capability gaps among adults 50+, de-risking employer decisions to hire and upskill older workers, and institutionalising organisational routines that make age-inclusion ordinary rather than exceptional.

A first recommendation is to normalise diagnostic-led organisational improvement as the entry point for employers and public bodies. Age-friendliness is best sustained when it is routinised through periodic assessment across culture, leadership, work design, development, health, knowledge management, employment transitions, and coverage. The practical value of this stance is that it translates legal and strategic commitments into baselines, targets, and named responsibilities, embedding worker participation and social dialogue into the everyday governance of people management. Crucially, diagnostics should be tied to access to public support (training co-funding, advisory services), so that measurement becomes the hinge between aspiration and implementation.

Second, learning architectures should be modular, low-barrier, and explicitly oriented to "second-level" digital divides. Short, stackable courses, job-embedded practice, recognition of prior learning, and personalised guidance address precisely the confidence, motivation, and task-specific fluency issues that suppress uptake among older cohorts. Delivery through trusted local channels - municipal centres, unions, libraries, NGOs - reduces stigma and reaches self-excluding groups; portability of learning entitlements across accredited providers preserves learner choice and limits administrative friction. Where provider markets are thin, especially rurally, the same design logic can be realised via mobile labs, travelling trainers, and blended formats that respect older learners' time budgets and caregiving obligations.

Third, equity-oriented financing and light-touch intermediation should be used to shift behaviour on both sides of the market. Training vouchers targeted to age and qualification profiles, public employment service guidance and follow-up, and simple, retention-linked hiring incentives for 55+ align incentives without imposing heavy administrative costs. These instruments work because they are transparent, auditable, and easy to scale; they also create a shared evidence base - issuance, redemption, completion, placement, retention - that can support iterative improvement. To avoid displacement and cream-skimming, eligibility and monitoring should be explicit about reaching low-qualified and rural older adults.

Fourth, the introduction of digital tools must be governed for age fairness. In practice this means specifying, in procurement and HR policy, a minimum routine of participatory introduction, impact assessment, bias testing with age-sensitive proxies, data-quality controls, and preserved human oversight for employment-related systems. Rather than treating compliance as an after-the-fact hurdle, this recommendation positions fairness as a design discipline that travels well across

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contexts and protects against the re-inscription of exclusion through automation. In addition, ITC countries should incorporate critical AI literacy and human-judgement safeguards into digital-skills strategies for older workers. Training should not be limited to learning how to operate digital tools, but should also develop the capacity to question AI outputs, recognise bias and uncertainty, and understand when human review is necessary. Public bodies and employers should be encouraged to adopt simple AI-use protocols that distinguish between tasks where AI can provide support and decisions where human interpretation, accountability, and relational judgement must remain central. This is particularly important in systems where institutional capacity is still developing, because poorly governed AI adoption can reproduce exclusion faster than traditional organisational routines.

Fifth, co-creation with social partners should be treated as a standing institution, not a consultation ritual. Workshops and local partnerships are effective precisely because they convert research knowledge into practice-ready artefacts (templates for action plans, sample procurement clauses, checklists for learner guidance, KPI dashboards). Institutionalising these venues accelerates mutual learning between employers, providers, unions, NGOs, and administration, reduces coordination failures, and improves the fit between national frameworks and workplace realities.

Finally, accountability must be age-disaggregated and public. A compact indicator set - share of training accruing to ages 50-64 within organisations; completion and certification among 55+; 6-12-month retention and wage trajectories following subsidised hires; internal mobility rates for older workers; self-efficacy gains after community-delivered learning; and age-stratified adverse-impact ratios where algorithms are used - provides the feedback loops that sustain course correction. Publishing these data, and reviewing them with social partners, turns inclusiveness from a project into a property of the system.

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