WORKING GROUP 5

DIGITALISATION, MEDIA AND OLDER WORKERS IN EUROPE: A COMPARATIVE SYNTHESIS

Executive Summary

Across eight European countries (Albania, Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Romania, Türkiye and the United Kingdom), digitalisation is reshaping labour markets, media systems and opportunities for participation in later life. While the countries differ substantially in their levels of economic development, digital maturity and welfare provision, the findings reveal striking commonalities. Older workers increasingly face dual challenges: adapting to rapidly changing digital environments and overcoming ageist media narratives that portray them as technologically incompetent, economically dependent or resistant to change. At the same time, the evidence consistently challenges these representations. Older workers are increasingly participating in digital societies, engaging in lifelong learning, remaining in employment for longer, and contributing valuable skills, experience and organisational knowledge. However, substantial digital divides remain, particularly among those aged 65 and over and among individuals with lower levels of education, less access to training and weaker institutional support.

The synthesis identifies three overarching themes. First, digital exclusion is primarily a social and structural issue rather than a consequence of age itself. Second, media representations often reinforce ageist stereotypes that undermine employment opportunities. Third, policy responses remain fragmented, with digitalisation, ageing, employment and media policy frequently treated as separate domains. More integrated approaches are needed to support active ageing and inclusive digital transformation.

1. Introduction

Population ageing and digitalisation are among the most significant transformations affecting contemporary European societies. Across all participating countries, ageing populations are increasing pressure on labour markets, pension systems and social welfare structures. Simultaneously, employers increasingly expect workers to possess digital competencies, creating new opportunities but also new forms of exclusion for those lacking relevant skills (Komp-Leukkunen, 2023; König and Seifert, 2022). The countries included in this synthesis represent diverse national contexts. Ireland and the United Kingdom demonstrate relatively high digital maturity and strong labour market participation among older adults. The Czech Republic and Latvia occupy intermediate positions, combining relatively strong digital infrastructures with continuing age-related inequalities. Romania, Albania and Türkiye face more significant digital inclusion challenges, while Hungary illustrates both increasing digitalisation and persistent concerns about workplace ageism. Despite these differences, similar patterns emerge regarding digital skills, media representation and labour market participation.

2. Digitalisation and the Digital Divide

A central finding across all reports is the persistence of an age-related digital divide. While internet use among older adults has increased substantially, important inequalities remain in digital skills, confidence and access. The scale of digital exclusion varies considerably. Ireland and the Czech Republic repot relatively high levels of digital competence, with almost 70% of adults possessing at least basic digital skills. However, both countries still report substantial declines in digital competence among those aged 65 years and over. Romania, Albania and Türkiye face more significant challenges. Albania reports particularly low levels of basic digital

skills among adults aged 55-74, while Romania continues to rank among the lowest-performing EU countries in digital skills. In Türkiye, use of digital public services declines sharply among older age groups.

Importantly, the findings indicate that digital exclusion should not be interpreted simply as an age effect. Access to training, educational attainment, workplace support and confidence significantly influence digital engagement. Older adults frequently demonstrate willingness to learn new technologies when opportunities and support are available. This finding aligns with broader research suggesting that digital inequalities are shaped more by social circumstances than chronological age (Xie et al., 2023; Rosales and Fernández-Ardèvol, 2020). The reports also highlight changing patterns of media consumption. While television and traditional media remain highly influential among older adults, digital participation is increasing across all countries. Older adults are engaging with online news, social media, communication platforms and digital services, although often in different ways from younger users. Rather than being absent from digital spaces, older adults frequently prioritise practical uses such as communication, information seeking and service access.

3. Media Representation and Ageism

Perhaps the strongest theme emerging across all reports concerns the persistence of ageist media narratives. Media representations frequently portray older adults through deficit-oriented frames that emphasise dependency, vulnerability, technological incompetence and social decline. In Romania, ageing is often framed as an economic burden associated with pension pressures and demographic decline. Czech tabloid reporting portrays older workers as less employable and less adaptable to technological change. Irish media have frequently represented older adults as vulnerable and dependent, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similar patterns emerge in Albania, Hungary and the UK, where older adults are often portrayed as barriers to innovation or labour market renewal. In Türkiye, research shows that older adults are often absent from media altogether or represented through passive and marginalised roles.

These findings reflect wider international evidence demonstrating that media narratives influence societal attitudes towards ageing and can reinforce workplace discrimination (Ng, 2021; Kroon et al., 2018). Media representations may shape employer expectations, recruitment decisions and older workers' own self-perceptions. Latvian research is particularly instructive in demonstrating how repeated exposure to deficit-based narratives may contribute to older adults underestimating their own digital capabilities.

Across countries, several recurring stereotypes emerge:

- Older workers are resistant to change.
- Older workers possess weaker technological skills.
- Older workers are less productive than younger workers.
- Older workers block opportunities for younger generations.
- Older adults represent economic dependency rather than contribution.

Gendered forms of ageism also emerge strongly. The Turkish report highlights the double disadvantage experienced by older women, who face both age-based and gender-based marginalisation. Similar patterns are visible in other contexts where older women are less visible than men in professional or leadership roles.

4. Employment, Employability and Digital Transformation

Digitalisation is transforming labour markets across all participating countries. Employers increasingly expect workers to possess digital competencies, online communication skills and familiarity with technology-supported work processes. As a result, digital literacy has become a prerequisite for continuing labour market participation. The reports show that many older workers have successfully adapted to technological change. However, adaptation is often uneven and influenced by access to learning opportunities. Albanian case studies reveal both successful adaptation and significant experiences of workplace stress and professional downgrading. Hungarian evidence highlights difficulties associated with digital transition but simultaneously emphasises the continued value of older workers' experience and institutional knowledge. Similarly, UK and Irish reports demonstrate that many older workers continue extending their careers and actively participate in digital workplaces.

A recurring finding across countries is that experience remains undervalued relative to technical skills. Yet numerous examples demonstrate the importance of combining experience and digital knowledge within multigenerational workplaces. Studies increasingly show that intergenerational teams can promote learning, innovation and organisational resilience (Moen et al., 2020; Parry and Urwin, 2021).

5. Positive Narratives and Emerging Good Practice

Although negative representations remain prevalent, all reports identify examples of more positive narratives that challenge ageist stereotypes. In Ireland and the UK, media coverage increasingly highlights the benefits of multigenerational workplaces, knowledge transfer and later-life employment. In Latvia and Hungary, programmes promoting digital literacy and age-inclusive participation illustrate the potential for positive change. Romanian public broadcasting initiatives have showcased older adults as active contributors and community leaders. In Türkiye, documentaries and cultural heritage programmes portray older adults as custodians of knowledge and expertise. Collectively, these examples demonstrate that media can play a valuable role in promoting more balanced understandings of ageing, highlighting adaptability, resilience and contribution rather than decline.

Several common good practices emerge across the reports:

- Intergenerational mentoring initiatives.
- Age-sensitive digital skills programmes.
- Positive public broadcasting and storytelling projects.
- Campaigns addressing ageism and stereotypes.
- Lifelong learning programmes supporting employability.
- Media guidelines promoting age-inclusive representation.

6. Policy Implications

Every country included in this synthesis has introduced policy measures addressing digitalisation, ageing or employment. However, policy responses remain fragmented. Digital skills strategies, active ageing policies, media regulation and employment initiatives are frequently developed independently rather than through integrated frameworks. Several policy priorities emerge from the evidence.

1. Digital inclusion policies should explicitly **recognise the diversity of older adults** and provide learning opportunities tailored to different educational backgrounds, confidence levels and employment situations.

2. Media regulators, journalists and broadcasters should be encouraged to **challenge ageist stereotypes and increase the visibility of older workers** in professional and leadership contexts.
3. Employers should **invest in age-inclusive recruitment, retention and development strategies** that recognise the value of experience while supporting digital upskilling.
4. **Stronger collaboration** is needed between policymakers, employers, media organisations and civil society groups to address ageism across multiple domains.

Conclusion

Across all eight countries, digitalisation, media representation and labour market participation are closely interconnected. While national contexts vary considerably, common challenges emerge regarding digital exclusion, ageist stereotypes and barriers to employment. The evidence consistently demonstrates that older workers are neither passive recipients of technological change nor inherently resistant to innovation. Rather, they represent an increasingly important source of knowledge, skills and experience that can contribute to organisational effectiveness and societal resilience.

The central lesson from these country reports is that the future of digitalisation cannot be understood solely through technological development. It also depends on how societies represent, value and support older adults. Creating age-inclusive digital societies therefore requires not only investment in digital skills but also fundamental shifts in media narratives, workplace practices and public policy.

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Source reports: Albania, Hungary, Latvia, Czech Republic, Ireland, Romania, Türkiye and United Kingdom country reports.

Countries

Albania

Czech Republic

Hungary

Ireland

Latvia

Romania

Turkije

UK

Albania Country Report: Digitalization and Media (WG5)

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1. Executive summary

This country report examines the intersection of ageing, digitalisation, and media representation in Albania, focusing on the challenges and opportunities experienced by older workers (aged 55 and above) in the digital era. As Albania undergoes significant demographic shifts and rapid digital development, ensuring the inclusion of older persons in the digital public sphere has become both a policy and societal priority.

At present, 26.4% of Albania's population is aged 55 or older, a figure projected to exceed 30% by 2050 (INSTAT, 2023). While access to digital infrastructure has expanded considerably, a generational digital divide remains. Only 23.3% of older adults (aged 55–74) possess basic digital skills, and over 30% of those aged 65–74 have never used the internet (DIGI-LEARN, 2024). This exclusion limits access to employment, services, and full social participation.

The report employs a mixed-methods approach, combining national statistical data with three qualitative case studies and a review of media narratives. Analysis of leading online news outlets (e.g. Monitor.al, Opinion.al, Tirana Post) reveals that media portrayals of older adults frequently reinforce stereotypes — depicting them as vulnerable, passive, or digitally incapable. Their own voices, experiences, and agency are largely absent from public discourse.

The case studies present both barriers and evidence of resilience. While many older Albanians lack adequate access to digital tools or targeted training, others have demonstrated adaptability through participation in volunteering, intergenerational learning, and small-scale digital entrepreneurship. However, institutional support remains limited, and ageism continues to influence employment practices and public narratives.

Although policy documents such as the National Digital Agenda (2022–2026) and the Employment and Skills Strategy 2030 reference digital inclusion, they do not sufficiently address the specific needs of older adults. Greater policy alignment and targeted action are needed.

Recommendations include:

- ✓ Expanding digital skills training tailored to older age groups
- ✓ Supporting intergenerational digital mentoring and volunteering schemes
- ✓ Promoting age-positive representation in media and encouraging older people's participation in digital content creation
- ✓ Integrating ageing-related indicators into national digital policies

This report contributes to WG5's broader objective of fostering inclusive, rights-based digital participation for older persons across Europe, highlighting both the gaps and possibilities within the Albanian context.

2. Introduction

Albania, a Western Balkan country with a population of approximately 2.83 million, is experiencing significant demographic shifts. Declining birth rates and prominent levels of youth emigration have accelerated population aging, with over 30% of Albanians projected to be 65 and older by 2050

(INSTAT, 2024). This demographic transition is reshaping the labour market, creating both challenges and opportunities for workforce participation, particularly for older workers.

At the same time, Albania is undergoing a digital transformation, modernizing public services, businesses, and employment structures. While digitalization presents new opportunities, a stark generational digital divide persists. Many older workers struggle to adapt to technological changes, facing barriers in digital literacy, workplace transitions, and access to training programs (DIGI-LEARN, 2024). The extent to which media portray older workers as digitally excluded or capable of adaptation influences societal attitudes, employer perceptions, and policy responses.

This report examines how Albanian media represents older workers in the digital economy, focusing on barriers, stereotypes, and positive portrayals in digital media. It investigates:

- How media narratives shape public perceptions of older workers' digital skills
- Whether media coverage reinforces stereotypes or promotes inclusivity
- The role of media in highlighting success stories and digital literacy challenges
- Policy initiatives that address ageism and digital exclusion

To support this analysis, the report includes three case studies based on interviews with older workers in Elbasan, Albania, providing insights into their digital literacy experiences, workplace adaptation, and media engagement patterns (Authors' interviews, 2025).

3. Basic Statistics: Albania's Demographics, Employment & Digitalization Trends

Table 1. Key Statistics on Older Adults in Albania (2023–2024)

Indicator	Statistics
Population aged 55+	26.4% (2023), projected to surpass 30% by 2050 (INSTAT, 2023)
Life expectancy	Women: 78.3 years, Men: 74.9 years (World Bank, 2024)
Employment rate (55-64 years)	58.6% (INSTAT, 2023)
Employment rate (65+ years)	17.3%, indicating early retirement trends (INSTAT, 2023)
Gender employment disparity (55-64 years)	Men: 64.2%, Women: 53.1% (INSTAT, 2023)
Digital literacy (55-74 years)	Only 23.3% possess basic digital skills, lowest in Europe (DIGI-LEARN, 2024)
Older adults who have never used the internet (65-74 years)	32.3% (DIGI-LEARN, 2024)
Primary media consumption (55-74 years)	84.5% watch TV daily; limited engagement in digital platforms (INSTAT, 2024)
Social media use (55-74 years)	39% use the internet for online news, but low engagement in digital content creation (Albanian Daily News, 2024)
Government digital initiatives	National Digital Agenda (2022-2026), National Employment and Skills Strategy 2030

Source: Source: Prepared by the authors, based on data from INSTAT (2023, 2024), World Bank (2024), DIGI-LEARN (2024), and Albanian Daily News (2024).

3.1 Demographic and Labour Market Trends

Albania is undergoing significant demographic and labour market shifts, characterized by an aging population, declining birth rates, and important levels of emigration, particularly among younger and skilled workers (INSTAT, 2023; DIGI-LEARN, 2024). As of 2023, 26.4% of Albania's population was aged 55 and older, a figure expected to surpass 30% by 2050, putting additional pressure on the workforce and pension system. Life expectancy has reached 78.3 years for women and 74.9 years for men, leading to longer working lives and necessitating policies that support continued workforce participation for older individuals (World Bank, 2024).

Despite Albania's steady economic growth, the labour market presents significant age-related disparities. In 2023, 58.6% of individuals aged 55-64 were employed compared to 72.5% of those aged 25-54 (INSTAT, 2023). Workforce participation drops significantly after age 65, with only 17.3% remaining employed, reflecting early retirement patterns and limited job opportunities for older workers. Additionally, gender disparities persist, with men aged 55-64 having an employment rate of 64.2%, whereas women in the same age group lag at 53.1% (INSTAT, 2023).

To address these challenges, the National Employment and Skills Strategy 2030 aims to enhance lifelong learning, vocational education, and digital up-skilling across all age groups (National Employment and Skills Strategy 2030, Ministry of Finance and Economy, 2024). However, older workers continue to face barriers to digital training, struggle to adapt to workplace digitalization, and encounter age-based employment discrimination (DIGI-LEARN, 2024).

Albania has demonstrated economic resilience over the past two decades, with GDP per capita tripling between 2000 and 2019 (World Bank, 2024). Despite global disruptions, the country saw a 4.8% GDP growth in 2022, driven by private consumption, foreign investments, and expansion in services, tourism, and ICT sectors (World Bank, 2024). However, inflationary pressures, labour informality, and persistent skill mismatches remain challenges in ensuring sustainable and inclusive workforce participation (National Employment and Skills Strategy 2030, 2024).

3.2 Digitalization and the Generational Divide

As Albania advances toward digital transformation, stark generational digital disparities persist. While 83.1% of the population had internet access in 2023, only 23.3% of individuals aged 55-74 possessed basic digital skills, making Albania one of the lowest-ranked European countries for digital literacy (DIGI-LEARN, 2024). Additionally, 32.3% of individuals aged 65-74 have never used the internet, underscoring barriers such as limited digital training, lack of access to technology, and fear of digitalization (DIGI-LEARN, 2024). However, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital engagement, particularly in e-government services, online banking, and communication apps.

Television remains the primary source of media consumption for older Albanians, with 84.5% of individuals aged 55-74 watching TV daily, primarily for news and entertainment (INSTAT, 2024). Digital engagement is increasing, though at a slower pace than in younger demographics. Facebook is the most used social media platform among individuals over 55, with 34% of older Albanians using it to stay connected with family and friends (INSTAT, 2023). Additionally, YouTube and online news portals are growing in popularity, whereas Instagram and TikTok remain underutilized among older adults. Despite these trends, older individuals in Albania continue to be underrepresented in digital media,

often depicted as passive consumers rather than active digital contributors (Albanian Daily News, 2024).

Albania has made substantial progress in digital transformation, primarily through the National Digital Agenda (2022-2026) and World Bank-supported initiatives, which seek to modernize e-governance, expand digital services, and integrate modern technologies across industries (World Bank, 2024). The e-Albania portal, which now offers over 1,200 digital public services, has streamlined government and administrative processes. However, this shift has also exacerbated concerns about digital exclusion, particularly among older individuals who lack digital literacy and access to training opportunities (World Bank, 2024).

A stark generational digital divide remains evident. While younger Albanians benefit from ICT-focused education reforms and increasing participation in platform-based employment, older workers remain excluded from these opportunities (Fairwork Albania Report, 2023). The gig economy is expanding, particularly in urban centres, where younger workers engage in online freelancing, e-commerce, and digital services (Fairwork Albania Report, 2023). However, older workers face barriers such as out-dated work practices, lack of formal digital training, and resistance to technological change (DIGI-LEARN, 2024).

Employers across public and private sectors increasingly demand strong digital competencies, yet many older workers lack access to targeted reskilling programs (DIGI-LEARN, 2024). Pilot initiatives, such as intergenerational digital training programs, have shown promising results in bridging the digital divide, but these efforts remain limited in scope and availability (DIGI-LEARN, 2024). Without expanded access to digital training and targeted support mechanisms, older workers risk being left behind in Albania's rapidly digitalizing economy.

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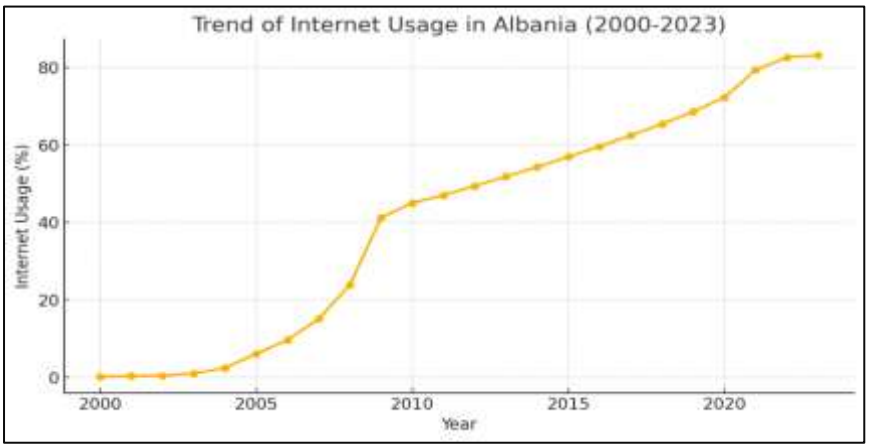
3.3 Digital Literacy Rates among Older Workers and Media Consumption Patterns.

As shown in Figure 1 Albania has experienced a remarkable digital transformation over the past two decades, with internet access increasing from just 11.4% in 2000 to 83.1% in 2023 (INSTAT, 2024). This growth has been driven by improvements in digital infrastructure, wider smartphone adoption, and government-led e-governance initiatives. However, while younger generations exhibit near-

universal internet access, older individuals face varied levels of digital engagement, reflecting a generational digital divide in usage patterns and online behaviours.

Figure 1. Trend of Internet Usage in Albania (2000–2023)



Source: INSTAT, 2024

Age and Internet Usage: A Generational Digital Divide

Younger Albanians are the most digitally active (see table 2), with individuals aged 16-54 engaging with the internet daily. 100% of people aged 16-24 and 25-34 access the internet multiple times per day, demonstrating deep digital integration into their daily lives. Even in the 35-44 and 45-54 age groups, usage remains universal, with 99.8%-100% engaging online every day (INSTAT, 2023).

However, a notable decline in internet usage is evident among older age groups. Among 55-64-year-olds, 95.5% go online multiple times daily, while 4.5% use the internet every day but less frequently. The most significant drop is observed in the 65-74 age bracket, where only 64.3% engage online multiple times daily, 33.6% access the internet once per day, and a small fraction (2.1%) use it less frequently (INSTAT, 2023).

This pattern highlights the disparities in digital inclusion among older Albanians, where a huge portion of the 65+ population remains disconnected or uses the internet infrequently, potentially limiting their access to essential digital services, information, and employment opportunities.

Social Media Engagement: The Dominance of Younger Users

Table 2: Internet Usage Frequency by Age Group (2023):

Age Group	Several Times During the Day	Every Day	At Least Once a Week	Less Than Once a Week
16-24	100.0%	-	-	-

25-34	100.0%	-	-	-
35-44	99.8%	0.2%	-	-
45-54	100.0%	-	-	-
55-64	95.5%	4.5%	-	-
65-74	64.3%	33.6%	1.6%	0.5%

Note: The dash (-) indicates negligible or zero percentage.

Source: Instat.gov.al

Social media has become a central aspect of digital life for younger Albanians, with over 94% of individuals aged 15-29 actively using social networks. Within this group, the 20-24 demographic has the highest engagement, reaching 98.2% (Albanian Daily News, 2024). Even in the 25-34 age group, social media engagement remains strong, with 34.8% of Facebook users in Albania falling within this demographic (Statista, 2021; Data Reportal, 2021). By contrast, older individuals are significantly less active on social media platforms. Among those aged 55-74, only 39% use the internet for online news consumption, indicating a preference for informational content over interactive digital engagement (Albanian Daily News, 2024). While social media remains a popular tool among younger generations for networking, entertainment, and professional growth, older users are more likely to consume news and communicate with family rather than actively engage in content creation or social interactions.

3.4 Retirement age and any relevant policy frameworks impacting older workers

Albania's retirement policies and labour regulations reflect these demographic and workforce trends. The legal retirement age is currently 65 for men and 63 for women, with planned gradual increases by 2032 (Ministry of Finance and Economy, 2024). Early retirement is permitted at 60, although it results in reduced pension benefits. The pension system faces long-term sustainability concerns due to an aging workforce and decreasing contributions from younger employees, further reinforcing the importance of extending working lives and improving digital skills among older workers.

4. Media Representation and Digital Narratives of Older Workers in Albania

4.1 Literature Review

Digitalization is reshaping the labour market and redefining societal perceptions of older workers. Media plays a crucial role in constructing these narratives, influencing both public opinion and employer attitudes (van Selm & van der Heijden, 2014). The way older professionals are portrayed in digital and traditional media can reinforce existing stereotypes or, conversely, challenge biases and promote workforce inclusivity.

A recurring theme in media coverage is the perception of older workers as technologically inept or resistant to change, which contributes to workplace discrimination and limits their career prospects (Turek & Henkens, 2019). Such portrayals frame digital transformation as an insurmountable challenge for older employees, discouraging investment in their training and development. Moreover, ageist narratives often compare older workers unfavourably to younger employees, reinforcing the idea that digital proficiency is inherently tied to age. These stereotypes affect hiring practices, career advancement, and access to reskilling opportunities, creating barriers to sustained employment (McConatha et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic further deepened these challenges by accelerating digital transitions in the workplace. Many older employees, particularly those with limited digital skills, faced difficulties in adapting to remote work and new technological demands, leading to increased risks of job displacement and exclusion (Seifert, 2020). However, research also highlights instances where media has positively shaped perceptions of older workers. By highlighting their adaptability, experience, and ability to contribute to a rapidly changing work environment, media campaigns can counteract negative biases and promote intergenerational collaboration (Kroon et al., 2018).

Additionally, policy-driven media initiatives and corporate strategies have the potential to shift narratives. Public campaigns, workplace mentorship programs, and digital inclusion efforts have successfully presented older workers as valuable contributors to the economy. Highlighting success stories, such as older workers reskilling in digital fields or older entrepreneurs leveraging technology, can help reshape media representation and foster more inclusive employment policies.

Understanding these dynamics is essential for addressing digital ageism and creating a balanced media landscape that reflects the diverse realities of older workers in the digital economy.

4.2 General overview of selected articles

To assess the portrayal of older workers in Albanian digital media, a systematic review of media coverage was conducted, focusing on articles published from 2022 onwards. The search spanned across ten major online media platforms in Albania, including:

- Opinion.al – Articles discussing census data, population aging, and workforce challenges.
- Monitor.al – Reports analysing economic trends, employment statistics, and digital transformation.
- Tirana Post – Coverage of digital infrastructure projects and their societal impact.
- Albanian Media Institute - engaged in media policy issues in Albania.

Despite an extensive review, only a limited number of articles were found that directly or indirectly discussed older workers and digital skills. Most articles covered broader demographic trends, labour shortages, and digitalization efforts at a national level, but did not explicitly address the role of older workers in the digital economy or workplace reskilling programs.

A total of 13 articles were analysed, categorized under the following criteria:

1. Source and Context Analysis – The publication's perspective, the broader context of the article, and its intended audience.
2. Key Themes and Narrative Framing – Whether older workers are framed as capable of digital adaptation or resistant to change, and whether they are seen as a burden or an untapped resource.
3. Use of Data and Evidence – Whether the article includes employment rates, digital literacy statistics, or comparisons between younger and older workers.
4. Proposed Solutions and Policy Discussions – Mentions of government or corporate initiatives, training programs, and policies addressing digital inclusion.
5. Gaps and Biases in Media Covering solutions.

A key observation from the analysis is that while demographic trends and economic challenges are frequently covered, there is a notable lack of dedicated media discussions on the digital skills of older workers in the workplace. Most articles frame the aging workforce in terms of dependency rather than as a potential resource. The media coverage tends to emphasize labour shortages and pension pressures, with little focus on potential reskilling opportunities or policy interventions aimed at helping older workers remain active in the digital economy.

4.3 Barriers to Employment in Media Representation

One of the most important themes in the articles is the impact of digitalization on employment prospects for older workers. Several reports emphasize the reducing labour force due to migration and declining birth rates, raising concerns about who will sustain the country's economic activity in the future[1]. However, while demographic trends are acknowledged, there is little focus on strategies to enhance the employability of older individuals.

A major barrier identified in multiple articles is the lack of digital skills among older workers. Reports highlight that Albania has one of the lowest digital literacy rates in Europe, with only 23.3% of individuals aged 55-74 possessing basic digital skills (DIGI-LEARN, 2024). Many older workers struggle to explore digital platforms, limiting their ability to compete in an increasingly automated job market. This issue is particularly relevant as businesses shift towards digital operations, leaving behind those without the necessary technological competencies.

Articles discussing employment trends reveal that while Albania has seen economic growth, job opportunities remain scarce for older individuals[2]. Employers increasingly demand digital proficiency, and older workers without training face job displacement. Additionally, digitalization has transformed recruitment processes, making online job applications a norm, which further disadvantages those unfamiliar with digital tools.

Despite these barriers, few media articles provide concrete recommendations for addressing the digital skills gap among older workers. Some mention the need for intergenerational knowledge-sharing and digital up skilling programs, but no structured policies are widely discussed in the analysed articles.

4.4 Biases and Stereotypes in Media

Media portrayals of older workers often reinforce stereotypes rather than challenge them. In many cases, they are portrayed as struggling with technology, resistant to change, or incapable of adapting to digitalization[3]. This framing contributes to ageist perceptions in society, where older workers are seen as a burden rather than a valuable part of the workforce.

[1] Opinion.al, April, 2024. "Who will work in Albania?! The population over 65 years old will be equivalent to 80% of the workforce by 2070."

[2] Monitor.al, February, 2025. "Young people are leaving, the elderly remain! Albania loses the advantage of a young population, according to Eurostat."

[3] Tirana Post, May, 2023. "The Pyramid of Tirana opens, Veliaj: It will be the largest digital centre in the Balkans."

Several articles focus on the financial strain caused by Albania's aging population, framing older individuals as dependent on state pensions rather than as potential contributors to the economy[4]. While it is true that a growing elderly population increases pressure on the pension system, the media rarely discusses policies that could enable older workers to remain active in the workforce, such as lifelong learning programs or flexible work arrangements.

Interestingly, none of the articles analysed include testimonials from older workers themselves, limiting their voices in the public discourse. Employer perspectives on hiring older workers are also largely absent, leaving the media narrative one-sided. Without displaying success stories of older workers who have successfully adapted to digital work environments, the media reinforces the idea that aging workers are inherently disadvantaged in the modern economy.

4.5 Showcasing Older Workers' Contributions in Media

Few media articles highlight the potential contributions of older workers to the labour market. While some mention the importance of experience and institutional knowledge, there is limited coverage of initiatives that actively engage older workers in digital up skilling or employment programs.

One notable gap in media coverage is the absence of discussions about older workers who have successfully transitioned to digital work. Articles tend to focus on the challenges rather than opportunities, leaving out narratives of individuals who have adapted through self-learning, entrepreneurship, or company-led training programs[5]. By neglecting these perspectives, the media fails to present a balanced view of older workers' role in a digital economy.

However, some articles do highlight the importance of policies that support intergenerational knowledge transfer. Reports on workforce aging suggest that younger employees could benefit from mentorship programs where older workers share their expertise, but these discussions remain theoretical rather than presenting concrete case studies[6].

4.6 Impact of Policies and Initiatives on Media Narratives

Few media articles provide an in-depth analysis of policies aimed at bridging the digital divide for older workers. While Albania's National Employment and Skills Strategy 2030 includes provisions for lifelong learning, these are not widely discussed in media coverage. Reports primarily focus on broader economic trends rather than specific initiatives designed to integrate older workers into the evolving digital economy.

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[4] Opinion.al, April, 2024. "Who will work in Albania?! The population over 65 years old will be equivalent to 80% of the workforce by 2070."

[5] Monitor, September, 2024. "OECD Report: Albania far from the EU and last in the region for digital skills."

[6] Opinion.al, April 2024. "Who will work?! The working-age population has been reduced by 349,000 people."

One recurring policy suggestion found in the articles is raising the retirement age to address labour shortages. While this is framed as a necessity due to demographic shifts, there is little discussion on whether the current workforce policies adequately support older individuals in staying employed. The role of digital training in extending working lives is overlooked, even though studies suggest that structured digital education programs can significantly enhance employability among aging workers (DIGI-LEARN, 2024).

Government and Non-Government Organizations initiatives that focus on digital inclusion for older workers are scarcely mentioned. While some articles reference the digitalization of public services through the e-Albania portal, they fail to address how these changes impact those with limited digital literacy. The assumption seems to be that digital services benefit all citizens equally, ignoring the barriers faced by older demographics.

5. Case Studies: Digitalization and Older Workers in Albania

As digitalization transforms workplaces, older workers face varying challenges and opportunities in adapting to modern technologies. To explore these dynamics, we conducted three interviews with employees aged 55 and above from different sectors, in Elbasan, Albania. The following case studies illustrate diverse experiences with digital literacy and media consumption patterns among older workers, highlighting the contrast between self-taught adaptation and struggles with technological change. These examples reveal key trends in workplace digital integration, the role of media consumption in shaping digital skills, and the broader impact on professional and personal well-being.

Case Study 1: Digital Literacy of a 55+ Worker in Event Management

The subject of this case study is a male worker aged between 55-58, originally from Tirana, Albania, with a master's degree in business administration. With over 31 years of professional experience, he currently serves as an event manager. His extensive career spans administration and management, highlighting a deep integration of traditional expertise with modern digital tools.

Digital Usage and Literacy

The interviewee demonstrates an important level of digital literacy and engagement in daily professional and personal tasks. His internet usage is extensive, with daily interactions for work-related tasks such as research, communication, and information management.

His media consumption habits show a clear preference for digital platforms. He no longer relies on traditional newspapers and instead consumes news through online articles, digital news platforms,

and video news segments. He also frequently watches industry-related video content and participates in online learning to stay updated on global management trends. Entertainment-wise, he listens to online music and radio, preferring streaming services over traditional formats. His extensive media consumption across various digital channels contributes to his adaptability and strong digital proficiency.

He considers himself moderately skilled in digital technology and is an autodidact, reflecting a proactive approach to learning and adapting to digital changes. He has access to five different IT-use locations and has been using the internet for 25 years, with 20 years of experience in web browsing on mobile devices.

Impact of Digitalization at Work

The interviewee acknowledges that digitalization has significantly improved workplace efficiency, particularly in performance enhancement and control systems. His company is in the process of perfecting management and archiving programs, which demonstrates a forward-thinking approach to digital integration.

However, digitalization has led to a reduction in communication among family members, reflecting the shifting dynamics of work-life balance in the digital era. Additionally, he notes that work no longer ends at the office but continues at home through client communication and research activities.

Despite these challenges, he believes digitalization has expanded his knowledge capacity by enabling access to research and digital platforms. He does not feel isolated at work due to digitalization, reinforcing that digital tools have enhanced connectivity rather than creating a sense of professional isolation.

Creativity and Innovation

A notable impact of digitalization in his field is the necessity of curating "vanity," a crucial element in marketing and event planning. This requires deep product knowledge, international standard comparisons, continuous online consultations, creative conceptualization, meticulous planning, and management execution. The digital space has provided him with access to global standards and facilitated efficient communication with clients, making digital literacy indispensable in his profession.

Case Study 2: Digital Challenges in Workplace Adaptation

The subject of this case study is a woman aged 55+, employed as a cashier at public administration. Holding a bachelor's degree in business administration with a specialization in accounting, she has

over 30 years of work experience. Despite her educational background, she struggles with digitalization in the workplace, describing her digital skills as "very unskilled."

Digital Usage and Learning

Her digital engagement is limited, primarily involving social interactions such as voice/video chat, texting, and casual entertainment activities like playing games. Her media consumption remains traditional, as she still prefers print newspapers and television for news rather than online sources. She rarely engages with digital learning platforms, as she finds them difficult to navigate. Her digital skills have been learned informally, mostly through family members, particularly her children and younger relatives. She has no formal digital training and finds the pace of technological change overwhelming. She has access to two IT-use locations but feels constrained by her limited digital competencies.

Impact of Digitalization at Work

She believes that digitalization has widened the knowledge gap between generations, with younger employees adapting more easily. While she has not lost her job due to digitalization, she has considered changing positions due to difficulties using digital systems at work. She also reported that learning digital tools is challenging as they become obsolete quickly, making adaptation difficult.

Emotional and Social Effects

Digitalization has led to stress at work, as she feels pressured when trying to use unfamiliar technology. The emotional strain also extends to her family life. However, she does not feel isolated at work since many of her colleagues share similar digital struggles, allowing her to socialize easily. She keeps her distance from younger, tech-savvy colleagues, as she feels unable to match their level of digital proficiency.

Financial and Career Impact

Due to her struggles with digital accounting systems, she transitioned from an accounting role to a cashier position within the same public institution, resulting in a lower salary. While digitalization offers learning opportunities, she finds it difficult to keep up with the rapid pace of technological changes, making adaptation a slow and frustrating process.

Case Study 3: Adapting to Digitalization in Customer Service

The third case focuses on a man aged 60+, employed in customer service for transport services, tax payments, and other administrative functions. With a bachelor's degree in finance and accounting, he has over 40 years of work experience and describes himself as "unskilled" in digital tools.

Digital Usage and Learning

His internet usage includes voice/video chat, reading news, listening to music, watching videos, and playing games, but he remains hesitant about using digital tools for work, shopping, and online payments. His media consumption is mixed, he still relies on television and radio for news and entertainment but occasionally browses news websites, mostly when guided by family members or colleagues. Language barriers and a lack of formal training slow his ability to fully engage with digital media and workplace tools.

Impact of Digitalization at Work

He notes that younger employees adapt more easily due to early exposure to digital tools in education. He struggles with the workplace system, requiring extensive time to learn new processes, sometimes even writing down step-by-step instructions. According to him digitalization has changed workplace dynamics, reducing direct interactions with colleagues and increasing reliance on automated transactions.

Emotional and Social Effects

He reports feeling overwhelmed by the fast pace of digitalization, which sometimes leads to workplace stress. This stress spills over into his home life, affecting his ability to manage household responsibilities. Additionally, he perceives digitalization as contributing to workplace isolation, as traditional colleague interactions have been replaced by digital workflows.

Cognitive and Career Impact

He believes that digitalization has reduced his cognitive engagement, as automated systems now handle tasks that once required manual calculation. He struggles with job applications and career progression in a digitalized work environment, limiting his mobility within his industry.

6. Cross-Case Analysis

6.1 Employment Barriers: How lack of digital skills limits opportunities.

Across the analysed media articles, digital exclusion among older workers is rarely presented as a standalone employment barrier. Instead, the prevailing narrative focuses on labour shortages, demographic shifts, and emigration, without addressing how older workers could contribute if trained in digital skills. Articles from Monitor.al[7] and Opinion.al[8] discuss workforce aging in the context of population decline, but do not provide solutions for keeping older workers engaged in the workforce through digital up-skilling.

Our case studies provide direct contrasts to these narratives. While some older employees (e.g., the event manager) demonstrate self-taught digital adaptability, others (e.g., the cashier and customer service worker) struggle with workplace digitalization, leading to job downgrades or stress in professional settings. These examples highlight the disconnect between public discourse and workplace realities, while digitalization is often framed as a broad economic trend, its impact on older workers remains underreported in Albanian media.

Additionally, there is no significant media coverage discussing how digital literacy barriers affect recruitment, job retention, or career mobility for older workers. This omission suggests that employment challenges for digitally disadvantaged older workers remain invisible, despite their increasing relevance in Albania's aging labour market.

6.2 Stereotypes versus Reality: Does real-life experience align with media portrayals?

Stereotypes about older workers and technology persist in both media narratives and workplace realities, but our analysis highlights important contradictions.

Media sources often describe older workers as a vulnerable group, particularly in articles from Monitor.al[9] and OECD reports[10], where older individuals are framed as economically dependent due to early retirement trends. However, none of these articles explore whether older workers can still be productive if given proper digital training. Instead, they reinforce the idea that aging workers are increasingly marginalized in the labour market.

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[7] Monitor.al, February, 2025. "Young people are leaving, the elderly remain! Albania loses the advantage of a young population, according to Eurostat."

[8] Opinion.al, February, 2024. "Who will work in Albania?! The population over 65 years old will be equivalent to 80% of the workforce by 2070."

[9] Monitor, August, 2021. "Eurostat: Albania's adult population is the least educated in Europe regarding technology."

[10] Monitor, September, 2024. "OECD Report: Albania far from the EU and last in the region for digital skills."

By contrast, case studies show that not all older workers struggle with digitalization, some actively engage with online tools, and manage digital workspaces and up skill independently. The event manager case study illustrates a professional who embraces technology for efficiency and innovation, contradicting the ageist media narrative that portrays older workers as resistant to change.

However, in other workplaces (e.g., the public administration sector), employees who lack digital literacy face career stagnation or a decline in professional responsibilities. This aligns with media coverage emphasizing digital skill gaps, though media discussions tend to generalize all older workers as struggling with technology rather than recognizing variation in skill levels.

Thus, while media narratives correctly identify digital exclusion as a challenge, they fail to differentiate between older workers who actively adapt and those who require targeted training programs. Addressing these nuances could help shape more balanced narratives and inform age-inclusive digital policies.

6.3 Training and Policy Impact: Are policies addressing the digital gap?

Media articles frequently mention governmental digitalization efforts (e.g., the National Digital Agenda and E-Albania platform) but rarely discuss whether these policies include training for older workers. Reports from Tirana Post[11] and Monitor.al[12] highlight the expansion of digital public services, yet they do not evaluate how accessible these services are for digitally unskilled individuals, particularly older adults.

Similarly, no media article explicitly discusses employer-led training programs aimed at older workers. This is a crucial gap, as our case studies show that some older workers are motivated to up skill but lack access to structured training opportunities. For example, the customer service worker reported difficulties in adapting to workplace automation yet received no formal digital training from his employer.

The public administration worker case study further illustrates the consequences of digital exclusion, where lack of retraining led to job downgrades. This example demonstrates the urgent need for structured reskilling initiatives, which remain absent from both media coverage and workplace policies.

Despite Albania's National Employment and Skills Strategy 2030, which includes lifelong learning initiatives, media coverage does not assess whether older workers benefit from these programs. The

[11] Tirana Post, May, 2023. "The Pyramid of Tirana opens, Veliaj: It will be the largest digital centre in the Balkans."

[12] Monitor, May, 2023. "Only 6% of the population over the age of 55 is able to download documents from e-Albania."

focus remains on youth and unemployed individuals, reinforcing the lack of visibility for older workers in Albania's digital training landscape.

Thus, while policy frameworks acknowledge the importance of digital inclusion, media narratives fail to critically evaluate their effectiveness in reducing employment barriers for older adults. A more proactive media approach could help identify gaps in policy implementation and push for better training solutions tailored to older employees.

7. Conclusions

Albania's digital transformation has progressed significantly in recent years, yet older workers remain one of the most vulnerable groups in this transition. While national strategies such as the National Digital Agenda and e-Albania have expanded access to digital services, many older individuals struggle to fully participate in the digital economy due to limited digital literacy, inadequate training opportunities, and workplace adaptation challenges. Despite the recognition of these issues in policy discussions, practical implementation remains limited in scope and accessibility.

The employment landscape for older workers is shaped by structural barriers and generational differences in digital competencies. While some individuals have actively sought to improve their digital skills through self-learning, others face significant obstacles in keeping pace with technological changes. Case studies of workers in event management, public administration, and customer service illustrate the stark contrast between those who have embraced digital tools and those who have struggled to adapt, often due to insufficient employer support, out-dated workplace practices, or personal apprehension toward technology.

The media's role in shaping public perceptions of older workers in digital workplaces is also crucial. The analysis of digital media articles reveals that coverage tends to focus on broader concerns such as demographic shifts and the economic impact of an aging workforce, rather than providing a nuanced discussion of how older workers are adapting, or struggling, to integrate digital tools into their professional lives. Many articles fail to include direct perspectives from older workers or highlight successful digital training initiatives, reinforcing a one-dimensional portrayal of aging workers as falling behind in the digital transition.

Key gaps in media coverage include:

- Limited representation of success stories, where older workers have successfully transitioned to digital work environments.
- Minimal policy analysis, with few articles discussing how government programs or employer initiatives are addressing the digital skills gap among aging employees.

- Lack of direct engagement with older workers, as most articles do not feature their voices or experiences, making it difficult to understand their challenges, aspirations, and learning journeys.

Addressing these gaps in both policy implementation and media representation is essential to ensuring a more inclusive digital transformation for Albania's workforce.

8. Recommendations

To support older workers in Albania's evolving digital economy, a multi-pronged approach is needed, one that combines targeted digital training programs, workplace inclusion initiatives, and more accurate media representation.

I. Expanding Digital Training for Older Workers

A comprehensive digital literacy strategy should be developed to equip older workers with the necessary skills to remain competitive in the workforce. This should include:

- Government-subsidized digital training programs, specifically tailored to workers aged 50 and above.
- Customized training courses that accommodate different learning paces, ensuring that older workers can gradually build digital confidence.
- Integration of digital literacy programs in vocational education and lifelong learning initiatives, making continuous training a standard option for older workers.

II. Encouraging Workplace-Based Reskilling Initiatives

Employers should play a more active role in facilitating digital up skilling for their older workers. Key recommendations include:

- Providing structured digital training within companies, particularly in sectors undergoing rapid digital transformation.
- Offering incentives for businesses that invest in reskilling their aging workforce, such as tax benefits or funding for workplace training programs.
- Developing intergenerational mentorship programs, where younger workers can support their older workers in learning digital skills, fostering knowledge exchange and reducing generational divides.

III. Promoting Accessible Digital Tools for Older Workers

Digital tools and platforms should be designed with accessibility in mind, ensuring that they are intuitive, easy to use, and compatible with older workers' learning preferences. This includes:

- Simplifying workplace technology and providing step-by-step tutorials to facilitate digital adaptation.
- Enhancing accessibility features on work-related digital platforms, ensuring that they accommodate older workers' specific needs.

Additionally, organizations should consider the unintended consequences of digitalization on work-life balance. While digital tools improve efficiency, they can also lead to extended working hours and increased workplace stress. Companies should implement clear boundaries for digital work, ensuring that technology supports productivity without negatively affecting well-being.

IV. *Improving Media Representation of Older Workers in Digital Workplaces*

Media platforms have a responsibility to present a more balanced and constructive narrative about older workers and digitalization. This can be achieved by:

- Highlighting success stories of older workers who have successfully integrated digital tools into their work.
- Shifting the focus from problems to solutions, displaying digital training programs, employer initiatives, and innovative policy interventions.
- Engaging with older workers directly, incorporating their voices into articles and reports to provide a more authentic and nuanced perspective.
- Encouraging investigative journalism to assess the effectiveness of government policies and hold policymakers accountable for their digital inclusion commitments.

V. Strengthening Policy Commitments to Digital Inclusion

Aging workers should be a priority group in Albania's digital transformation policies. Key policy recommendations include:

- Ensuring that lifelong learning policies explicitly target older workers, integrating digital training into employment programs.
- Facilitating collaborations between government, businesses, and education providers to create sustainable training opportunities for aging employees.

- Developing public-private initiatives that provide older workers with affordable technology access and on-going digital education.

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Country Report WG 5: Digitalisation and Media. Media Narratives from the Czech Republic-

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Introduction

Czechia, a Central European country with a population of approximately 10.9 million (ČSÚ, 2024a), is experiencing a significant demographic shift characterized by an aging population and structural changes in the labor force. As in many EU countries, the proportion of older adults is growing, with those aged 55 and over comprising 20.4% of the total population and 21.3% of the workforce (ČSÚ, 2024b).

This demographic trend has critical implications for the labor market and welfare system. Between 2013 and 2023, the number of employed individuals aged 55–64 rose from 750,100 to 905,400, marking a notable increase in workforce participation among older adults. Meanwhile, those aged 65+ also increased their participation—from 91,200 in 2013 to 170,500 in 2023—although their overall share remains low due to retirement patterns (ČSÚ, 2024b).

Economically, Czechia holds a strong position in the EU, with a GDP per capita of USD 31,591.2 and a low unemployment rate of 2.6% (Eurostat, 2024; ČSÚ, 2024c). Its digital transformation, supported by EU investments and national strategies, continues at a moderate pace (Ministry of Industry and Trade, 2021; 2024). However, without inclusive approaches to digital literacy, the aging population risks being left behind (Komp-Leukkunen, 2023; König & Seifert, 2022).

Digital tools can enhance older adults' participation in economic and social life, yet lack of access or skills may amplify age-related disadvantages (Stöckelová & Andreska, 2022). Media portrayals significantly shape societal attitudes toward aging and employability. Studies show that ageist language in job

advertisements (Burn et al., 2023) or biased media narratives (Ng, 2021; Kroon et al., 2018) affect both public perceptions and older workers' self-confidence. Even well-meaning campaigns may backfire by emphasizing age too strongly, triggering stereotype threats (Kroon & van Selm, 2024).

At the same time, digital competence is a key factor in older workers' employment sustainability. Access to user-friendly training and positive workplace environments boosts autonomy and engagement (Xie et al., 2023), while ignoring age-sensitive needs can cause technostress (Nedeljko et al., 2023). Policies such as the Strategic Framework for Societal Ageing (2021–2025) and the National AI Strategy 2030 aim to promote inclusive digital skills development (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2021; Ministry of Industry and Trade, 2024).

Digital Literacy Among Older Workers in the Czech Republic

Digital literacy among older workers in the Czech Republic is a critical issue as the national workforce adapts to rapid technological change. According to a labor market model by Boston Consulting Group and Aspen Institute Central Europe (2022), the share of jobs requiring at least basic digital skills is projected to increase from the current 54% to 92% by 2030. Although the Czech Republic currently performs above the EU average in terms of the percentage of the population with at least basic digital competencies, up to 2.2 million workers will still need to acquire new digital skills to meet future labor market demands. While the education system is expected to supply around 900,000 digitally equipped graduates, a significant part of this upskilling burden will fall on older and currently employed individuals, who will need to develop these skills independently (Boston Consulting Group & Aspen Institute Central Europe, 2022).

The Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), developed by the European Commission, serves as a key tool for assessing the progress of EU Member States in the area of digital transformation. The 2024 DESI Country Report for the Czech Republic highlights several important trends across key dimensions of digital performance, particularly in human capital and digital skills. In 2022, the Czech Republic ranked 19th out of 27 EU Member States, with an index score of 49, compared to the EU average of 52, reflecting a moderate position in overall digital competitiveness (European Commission, 2022). In terms of human capital, the Czech Republic has shown notable progress. According to the 2024 Digital Decade Country Report, 69.1% of the Czech population aged 16–74 possessed at least basic digital skills, exceeding the EU average of 55.6%. This improvement is largely attributed to investments in digital education, including the integration of ICT subjects into school curricula and the provision of digital tools to educational institutions (European Commission, 2024).

Trends in digital participation among older adults reflect these national developments. According to the Czech Statistical Office (ČSÚ, 2024), the share of individuals aged 65 and over who use the internet has increased significantly over the past decade—from just 13% in 2010 to 57% in 2024. A year-on-year increase of nearly five percentage points was recorded between 2023 and 2024 alone, highlighting a steady expansion of digital inclusion among seniors. Among individuals aged 55–64—typically in pre-retirement or early retirement age—usage rose from 42% in 2010 to 93% in 2024, indicating near-universal adoption. These figures show that while the younger segment of the older population is increasingly digitally active, further support is still needed to ensure full digital inclusion for those aged 65 and above (ČSÚ, 2024).

The 2025 Czech Statistical Office report offers a more granular picture of digital competencies by introducing a multidimensional framework that classifies digital skills into three levels: low, basic, and advanced. Individuals with advanced digital skills demonstrate proficiency across all five core competency areas—information, communication, content creation, safety, and problem-solving. Those with basic skills meet minimum thresholds in each domain but lack higher-level competence, while those with low skills fail to meet these basic benchmarks. Content creation (e.g. using word processors, spreadsheets, or presentation software) remains one of the more challenging areas. This framework offers valuable insights into population-level digital readiness and reveals priority areas for policy intervention and lifelong learning (ČSÚ, 2025).

According to the 2025 edition of Information Society in Figures, digital skill levels among older adults in the Czech Republic remain relatively low—especially in the 65–74 age group. Among individuals aged 55–64, only 24.7% demonstrated advanced digital skills, while 34.3% had basic skills and 29.7% remained at a low proficiency level. In the 65–74 age group, only 5.3% were classified as having advanced digital skills, 20.3% had basic competence, and 36.4% had low digital literacy (ČSÚ, 2025). These disparities highlight a significant digital divide between age cohorts and emphasize the need for tailored strategies to increase digital readiness among older workers—particularly as digital tools become embedded in nearly every sector of the economy.

Table 1 – Level of Digital Skills of People in the Czech Republic; 2023 (ČSÚ, 2024)

Group	Low (%)	Basic (%)	Advanced (%)
Total (16–74 years)	21.8	33.6	35.5
Men	21.8	33.4	36.0
Women	21.8	33.8	35.0
16–24 years	7.1	37.4	55.3
25–34 years	12.6	31.1	53.7
35–44 years	16.5	37.0	45.9
45–54 years	24.8	39.9	32.4
55–64 years	29.7	34.3	24.7
65–74 years	36.4	20.3	5.3
Primary education (25–64)	44.2	28.7	2.4
Secondary education	25.9	40.8	29.5
Tertiary education	4.2	25.8	69.8

Note: Share of total individuals in each group. Total level of digital skills was measured across 5 dimensions: communication, information search and sorting, problem solving online, safe internet behavior, and digital content creation.

Media Representations of Older Workers in Czech Tabloid Media

Research Objective and Questions

This section aims to analyze the representation of older workers in the Czech tabloid media (conducted by the authors), with a specific focus on language use, the presence of stereotypes, the framing of ageing and work, and the inclusion of positive narratives. The research primarily focuses on the Czech daily tabloid *Blesk*, which holds a significant influence in public discourse.

Research Questions (RQs):

1 What stereotypes are present in media representations of older workers in Czech tabloid media?

2 What terms and labels (e.g., "senior," "retiree," "veteran") are commonly used, and how do they frame the discourse?

3 What themes and narratives are most frequently associated with older workers?

4 Are positive portrayals of competent, active older workers present, and how are they characterized?

Thematic Findings

Thematic analysis of *Blesk* articles identified four core narrative frames that shape public perception of older workers:

Theme 1: Work and Employment – The Labour Market as a Closed Space

Older individuals are frequently portrayed as excluded from the labor market. Media narratives emphasize their difficulties in finding employment, their perceived inflexibility, and a presumed lack of economic productivity. Quotes like *"Older employees know they won't find a job"* or *"I have a whole stack of CVs from middle management aged fifty plus, and they are absolutely unmarketable..."* reflect a common pessimism.

These portrayals are linked to categories such as age discrimination, structural labor market barriers, and employer disinterest. Descriptive codes like "age prejudice" and "early retirement" illustrate how age becomes a basis for exclusion. Importantly, the absence of structural critique frames this exclusion as natural rather than problematic.

Theme 2: Digital Competence – Between Divide and Opportunity

Coverage of older adults' relationship with technology shows a binary framing. On one hand, older people are described as digitally excluded or incapable of adapting to technological change. On the other, positive examples—such as seniors attending AI courses—are presented, but as exceptional cases: *"Many seniors... didn't jump on the digital wave"* versus *"Seniors are interested in AI, courses are fully booked."*

This tension is captured in categories like "digital divide" and "normalization of digital literacy." While some articles frame older people as willing to learn, the overall tone maintains an underlying assumption of deficiency. Positive portrayals are often exceptional and not framed as part of a broader social trend.

Theme 3: Intergenerational Learning – Recognition of Experience

A more affirming frame recognizes older adults as experienced professionals who can serve as mentors. Quotes such as *"Older employees are often the only holders of unique know-how"* and *"Mixed teams allow for mutual learning"* present ageing as an asset.

These portrayals are associated with categories like "respect for experience" and "organizational learning." However, they are mostly found in expert interviews or company spokespeople's statements rather than widespread reporting, indicating that these narratives are not mainstream in the tabloid discourse.

Theme 4: Cultural Images of Ageing – Change Without a Clear Frame

Czech tabloid media occasionally address ageism, but often in a superficial way. While discrimination is acknowledged, it is rarely critically unpacked. For example: *"The most common form of discrimination is due to age. Unlike gender, we barely address it."*

Statements like this point to a discursive inconsistency—positive examples are fragmented and do not form a coherent counter-narrative. As a result, cultural images of ageing remain stereotypical or underdeveloped, reinforcing the marginalization of older individuals.

Reflection and limitations of the study

This media analysis suggests that Czech tabloid representations of older workers remain shaped by deficit-oriented frames, even if positive stories occasionally appear. The absence of sustained structural critique limits the media's potential to shape a more inclusive public discourse. It should be noted that this analysis is

based on a limited corpus from a single media source (*Blesk*) and over a specific timeframe, which may not capture the full diversity of media representation.

Nonetheless, even within this restricted context, the study reveals how language, narrative frames, and symbolic representation in mass media contribute to broader societal perceptions of ageing and employment.

Conclusion

This country report has explored the intersection of ageing, digitalisation, and media representation in the Czech Republic. The findings illustrate that while Czechia performs relatively well within the European context in terms of digital infrastructure and digital education, the ageing of its workforce poses a complex challenge that must be met with nuanced policy and communication strategies.

The expansion of digital technologies across the economy presents both opportunities and risks for older adults. On one hand, increasing internet usage and basic digital skills among those aged 55–64 signals progress in inclusion. On the other hand, digital inequality remains sharply pronounced in the 65+ cohort, particularly in more advanced areas of digital competence. Without targeted support and accessible lifelong learning initiatives, these divides risk deepening structural labor market exclusion.

Media representation plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of older workers. The thematic analysis of tabloid discourse in *Blesk* confirms that while there are isolated efforts to frame ageing as a source of knowledge and intergenerational benefit, the dominant narratives remain deficit-oriented—emphasizing unemployability, resistance to change, or digital incompetence. Such framings risk reinforcing stereotypes and undermining the ambitions of inclusive labor market and digital policies.

To ensure older adults are seen as integral contributors to a digitally transforming society, coordinated interventions are necessary. These should include:

1. Enhanced training programs tailored to older workers' learning styles and real-world tasks.
2. Reframing media narratives to emphasize diversity in ageing experiences.
3. Stronger collaboration between public institutions, employers, and media outlets to promote realistic and empowering representations.

Czechia is at a critical juncture: with proactive measures, it can become a model for inclusive digital transformation that not only addresses demographic shifts, but also recognizes the lifelong value of older citizens.

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COUNTRY REPORT HUNGARY - DIGITALIZATION AND MEDIA -WG5

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Introduction

In Hungary, digitalization and media have had and continue to have a strong impact on both the employment of older people and their social perception. Continuous technological development is transforming the labor market, but at the same time the labor market expects digital literacy, which can also be a challenge for the older generation. The level of digital literacy of older people and their slower adaptation to technology can result in discrimination in the labor market. However, there are courses for older people and digital tools specifically tailored to the needs of older people that can help narrow this gap.

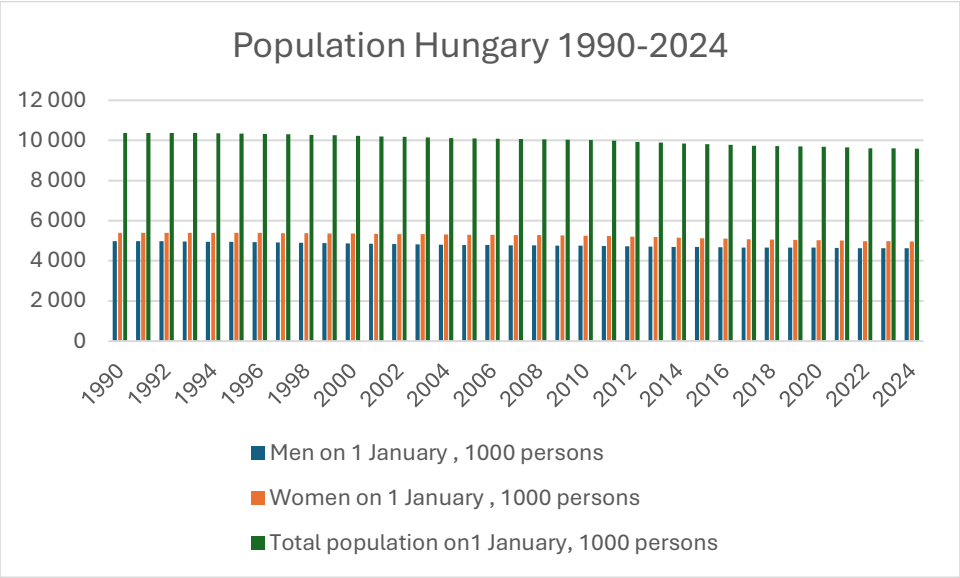
The role of the media is crucial in this process. The images and narratives appearing in the media greatly shape society's image of older persons. The National Media and Communications Authority (NMHH) launched the "Netre Fel!" (Up to the net!) program, which aims to familiarize the older generation with the basics of the digital world. As part of the campaign, the Netrefel.hu website was created, which serves as an easy-to-understand and transparent knowledge repository. In addition, social media and traditional media tools, as well as podcasts (e.g. Magenta Podcast – Telekom's podcast), are also used to support the older persons. Personal success stories, examples of intergenerational cooperation and narratives building on their mentoring role can help to ensure that the older persons are not seen as victims of digitalization, but as valuable workers who support the younger generations with their experience.

Online social platforms, virtual clubs and supportive digital networks enable older people to not only consume information but also to actively participate in the digital society, which also creates new opportunities in the labour market, such as flexible, part-time or project-based jobs.

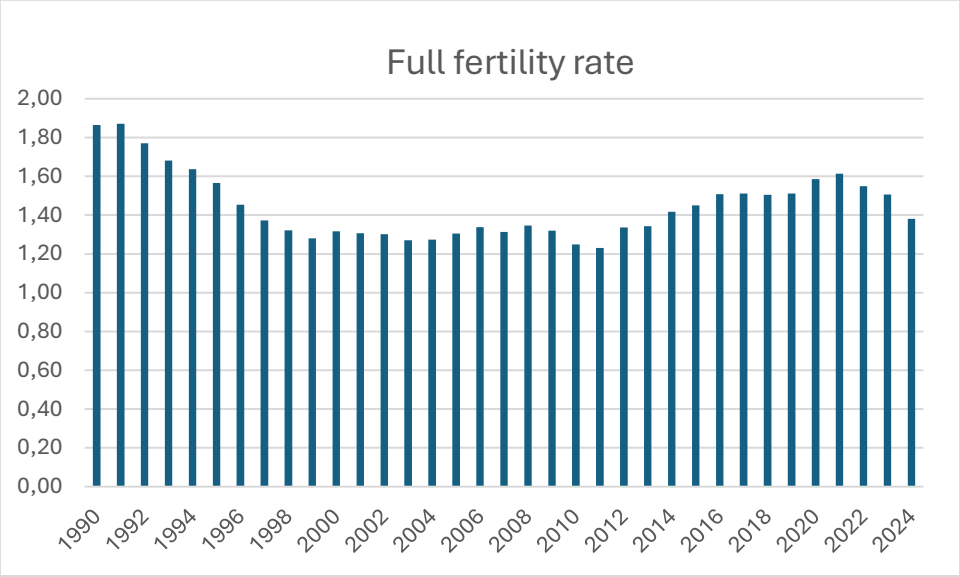
The combined impact of digitalisation and media is transforming how we see older people and the role they play in modern society and the labour market. Such efforts not only strengthen the appreciation of older people, but also promote dialogue between generations, which benefits society as a whole.

Basic statistics

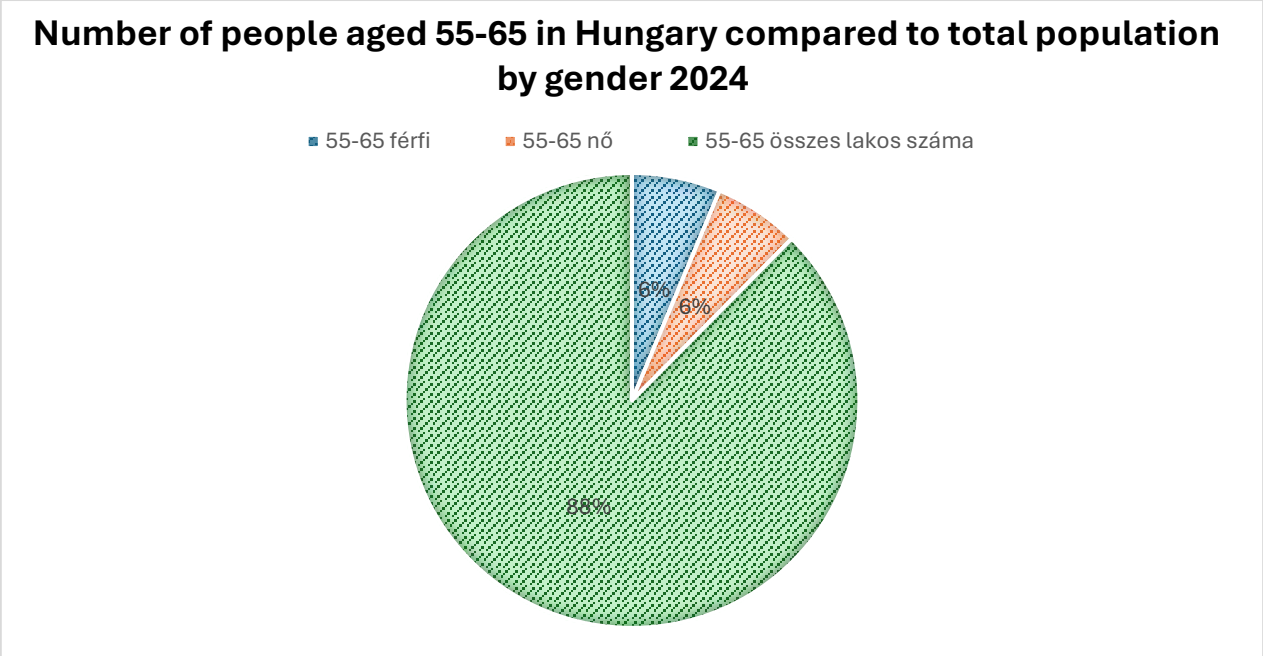
Hungary's demographic situation has been challenging in recent decades. The population has been in natural decline since the 1980s.



Although the fertility rate has improved since its lowest in 2011, it still falls short of reproduction level. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian Ukrainian war have caused economic and social uncertainty, further complicating the demographic transition.



In Hungary, the employment rate of the population over 55 has gradually increased in recent years, partly due to the increase in the retirement age and labour market demands. According to the latest data, in 2024, the employment rate of the over 55 age group was 16%, while the proportion of workers over the retirement age was around 2% of the total employed. The employment of older workers is particularly important, as it can contribute to maintaining economic activity and social integration. The digital skills of people over 50 play a key role in the workplace in a modern, technologically developing corporate environment. By applying appropriate, target-specific training programs and teaching methods, people over 50 not only learn how to use digital tools but are also able to integrate innovative technologies into their everyday work.



Within the framework of the Digital Theme Week 2024 events were also organized that were also accessible to the older generation (www.ikk.hu). Employers have increasingly recognized the potential of the older generation. The experience and extensive industry knowledge of employees aged 50 and over carry immeasurable values that help companies in strategic decisions and increase their problem-solving abilities.

In Hungary, the media consumption habits of the older generation in 2024 continue to show the dominance of traditional media, such as television. Television continues to play a prominent role among the older persons, spending more than five hours a day in front of the screen on average (www.unideb.hu).

Nevertheless, the pace of the digital revolution and the introduction of new systems often require older workers to follow different learning styles, for example, in some cases, in-person education, while in other cases, online or blended training methods may be effective. These are presented by various studies, which are proven by articles and research by the National Media and Communications Authority (NMHH).

In Hungary, the retirement age in 2024 remained at 65 years, as regulated by Act LXXXI of 1997. In order to encourage the employment of older workers, several policy measures are in place to support the active participation of older generations in the labour market, while ensuring the sustainability of the pension system.

• Opportunity to work while retired

Older workers have the opportunity to work while retired with tax relief.

• Pension system reform

Within the framework of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) adopted by the European Commission, Hungary has undertaken to review the pension system, which aims to improve the sustainability and adequacy of the system. The deadline for the reforms is March 31, 2025, but social consultations have already started in 2024.

• Employment incentives

Various incentives have been introduced to increase the employment rate of older workers, such as tax breaks for employers who employ older workers.

• Health and training

Programs are available for older workers that aim to maintain health and develop digital skills to remain competitive in the labour market.

It is important to address in this chapter the main digital basic documents of Hungary, which provide the basis for the digital development of all age groups in society:

After completing the implementation of the National Info communications Strategy for the period 2014-2020 and the Digital Wellbeing Program 2.0 ("DJP 2.0") launched in 2017, in the fall of 2021 Hungary adopted a new strategic framework for the next 10 years, for the period 2021-2030 National Digitalization Strategy (NDS). The strategy was built around four main pillars corresponding to the dimensions of DESI: digital state, digital economy, digital infrastructure and digital competence.

The overall goal of the NDS is to identify and exploit the opportunities inherent in digitization in the economy, education, research and development, innovation and public administration. All of this improves the country's competitiveness and well-being. Hungary's goal is to exceed the EU average in terms of digital development by the middle of the decade, and to be one of the 10 leading EU economies in digitalization by 2030.

The XXI. Hungary's achievements so far in the field of digital education in the 20th century:

- An organizational unit supporting the Digital Pedagogical Methodology Centre was created. Its importance is indicated by the fact that 1536/2016. (X. 13.) By government decision for the digital transformation of the public education, vocational training, higher education and adult education systems.
- The results of domestic model projects and pilots are processed and analysed (e.g.: Telenor, Vodafone, Samsung, Magyar Telekom, Microsoft, LEGO, etc.) for further development.
- They support the sharing of digital pedagogical experiences and good practices
- A framework and a measurement and evaluation tool suitable for measuring digital competences were created.
- The implementation of Hungary's Digital Education Strategy is monitored annually with a monitoring system.
- The digital education conference and exhibition is organized every year, where everyone can learn new procedures and methods.

Hungary's digital basic documents:

- "Digital Wellbeing Program" (Digitális Jólét Program-DJP and
- "National Digitalization Strategy" (NDS).

Both documents deal with the digital skills of women and families. The goal is for Hungary to be as prepared as possible for the digital transformation and to be among the top ten countries in the ranking of European countries by 2030 in terms of digitalization.

Some elements of the Hungarian Digital Welfare Program (DJP):

- Development of digital competences among women and businesses as well
- Women prepare useful practices against cyber bullies for the sake of their children and grandchildren[13]
- Recommendations are also being made for women to manage their finances remotely and electronically[14]
- methodological recommendations for the digital work schedule in public education[15]
- The Digital Chronicle was published[16]

[13] https://digitalisjoletprogram.hu/hu/hirek/hasznos-praktikak-az-internetes-zaklatokkal-szemben

[14] https://digitalisjoletprogram.hu/hu/hirek/javaslatok-penzugyeink-tavoli-elektronikus-intezesehez

[15] https://digitalisjoletprogram.hu/hu/hirek/megjelent-a-digitalis-kronika-4-szama

[16] https://digitalisjoletprogram.hu/hu/hirek/megjelent-a-digitalis-kronika-4-szama

Hungarian National Digitalization Strategy 2022-2030[17]
Digitization already accounts for 21% of domestic GDP.
The four pillars of the NDS:

- Digital infrastructure
- Digital competence
- Digital economy
- Digital state

The new NDS layes a strong emphasis on priorities.[18]

The education of the older persons also plays a prominent role in Hungary.

The Independent Media Centre launched an event series entitled **"How to Teach Media to the Older persons?".** The aim of the event series is to develop the digital and media awareness of the older persons within the framework of the education and mentoring program organized by the Independent Media Centre. The educational trainings emphasize not only everyday communication and information-gathering tasks, but also compliance with modern, digitalized workplace expectations. In this way, the program contributes to increasing the competitiveness of employees over 50.

However, the challenges do not only affect the method of education, but also the fact that the design of workplace IT systems is often tailored to the needs of younger users, which may seem complicated to older people at first. Therefore, it is essential to develop support systems, mentoring programs and continuous training opportunities that help people over 50 quickly master digital tools and applications. These initiatives not only stimulate individual development, but also contribute to corporate innovation and competitiveness, as an IT-prepared and experienced workforce creates a solid foundation for managing the challenges of the digital age.

In the context of the series of events, it is worth considering how the benefits of intergenerational cooperation in the workplace could be further exploited. Knowledge transfer between younger and older generations can not only help in expanding digital skills, but can also promote workplace cohesion, creative problem solving and innovative thinking. Furthermore, the development of digital skills is an area where technological tools, e-learning platforms, virtual reality-based education or even personalized mobile applications can greatly contribute to the efficiency of the learning process.

Research questions

1. ***What barriers do media pose to employment opportunities for older workers?***

The media may indirectly create barriers to employment opportunities for older workers in Hungary, especially in 2024. The following factors may be relevant:
o Reinforcement of negative stereotypes
The media often portrays the older generation as less flexible or less technologically competent, which may adversely affect the attitude of employers.
o Preference for young people
Advertisements and campaigns often focus on the younger generation, which may suggest that older people are less suitable for certain jobs.
o Emphasizing the lack of digital competences
The media sometimes overemphasizes the lack of digital skills of older people, which may discourage employers from hiring older workers.
o Presentation of the lack of training opportunities

[17] https://kormany.hu/dokumentumtar/nemzeti-digitalizacios-strategia-2022-2030
[18] Magyarország 2023. évi Nemzeti Reform Programja 47695a4f-d048-4ae8-bf95-303ec473dc91_hu

If the media does not sufficiently emphasize the training programs available to older people, this may hinder the integration of older people into the labour market.
These factors are not necessarily intentional, but their impact can be significant on the employment opportunities of older workers.

2. ***Are there examples where media have positively influenced perceptions of older workers?***

In Hungary in 2024, there were several concrete examples of the media positively influencing the image of older workers:
o Promoting Cooperatives of Pensioners
Campaigns by the National Association of Entrepreneurs and Employers (VOSZ) highlighted the benefits of the cooperatives of retired people, which offer flexible work opportunities for the older generation. These cooperatives not only provide financial security but also create community experiences.
o Improving the workplace environment
Surveys and campaigns conducted by PwC Hungary emphasized the importance of a supportive workplace environment in which the experiences and values of older workers are recognized (www.pwc.com).
o Presenting success stories
Media reports and interviews featured older workers who successfully adapted to the challenges of the digital world and found new career opportunities (www.hrportal.hu).
These examples contribute to improving the perception of older generations and to society better recognizing their potential.

3. ***How do different forms of media (print, audiovisual, digital) shape societal attitudes toward older workers?***

In Hungary in 2024, different forms of media contributed to shaping social attitudes towards older workers with concrete examples
o Print media
Articles entitled "Successes of Pensioner's Cooperatives" were featured in local newspapers. They show how these cooperatives help the integration of older generations into the labour market, the value of older workers' experience and flexibility.
o Audiovisual media
Television documentaries, such as the series "Generations Cooperation", have shown the benefits of cooperation between older and younger workers, thus strengthening positive social attitudes.
o Digital media
Social media campaigns, such as the "50+ Digital Heroes" initiative, have showcased older workers who have successfully adapted to the challenges of the digital world and inspired society.

4. ***What biases or stereotypes are prevalent in the media representation of older workers?***

Stereotypes and biases regarding older workers are common also in Hungary.
The study titled "Stereotypes of the Aging Workforce in the Hungarian Labor Market" indicates that, according to the survey results, the majority of HR professionals evaluates young workers more positively and stereotypes aging workers negatively. This applies mostly in the case of young and inexperienced HR professionals.
• It is often assumed that older workers are less able to adapt to new technologies or work environments.
• The media sometimes hints that older workers' work performance decreases with age.

• There is a widespread view that older workers are less ambitious and do not strive for career development.
• Older workers are often mentioned as less reliable due to health problems.
However, these stereotypes are not always true, and sometimes articles appear on HR portals that demonstrate the experience and commitment of older employees.

5. How can media platforms capture and showcase the cumulative knowledge of older workers?

The experiences and knowledge of older workers are presented in the following way in Hungary today:

a.) Portrait interviews and case studies:
During the research of Corvinus University, the stories of several older workers were presented who successfully adapted to workplace challenges and contributed to the development of companies with their experience.

• Examination of the employment intention of older workers
The research relied on the results of questionnaire surveys conducted in Székesfehérvár and Budapest in 2022. The research examined how the older generation plans to participate in the labour market in their later years. According to the results, many of them would work even after retirement, while others do not plan to retire even after reaching retirement age. in the research it was emphasized that those workplaces which adapt to the needs of older people and those where bridging jobs are available can postpone employment in older age.
• The changing role of older workers in the “workplace of the future” This study analysed the self-perception of older workers in the workplace and the attitudes of employers in 2021. There is moderate discrimination from employers, but older workers often report that their tasks have become more difficult in recent years. Older workers are slower to adapt to digital technologies and face great challenges in using new digital tools and platforms.
It also examines how workplaces are adapting to demographic changes and the role older people play in innovation and knowledge sharing. It also addresses discrimination in the workplace and how different strategies can help workplaces become more inclusive.
The analysis of the role of older workers focuses on the value of life experience, the opportunity for mentoring and the dismantling of age-related stereotypes. This study can therefore be useful for those who are concerned with future trends in the labour market.

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• "Online habits of the older population and the dangers of digitalization"
This document examined the internet usage habits of the 50–79 year old Hungarian population and the dangers of the online world in cooperation with DIMSZ (Direct and Interactive Marketing

Association) and NMHH (National Media and Communications Authority). It was prepared in 2024 and comprehensively analysed the online activities, device usage and related dangers of the older generation. It primarily focused on online habits and security issues. The data and analyses obtained in the report clearly reflect the trend that the lack of digital competencies can also be an obstacle in the workplace, as work processes are increasingly taking place on digital platforms. The effective use of modern technologies is essential for older workers.
The research focuses on:
What devices do older people use, how often and for what purposes do they go online.
The online fears of older people, data theft, phishing, computer viruses, and the mechanisms for protecting against them.
Older people's vulnerability to online fraud and regarding experiences.
Older people's digital maturity, mistrust and awareness in the online space.
• *The study "Digital illiteracy among adults aged 45-60"* examines how the digital competences of 45–60-year-olds affect their participation in the labour market. It shows that while the experience of older workers is of great value, digital illiteracy can affect their integration into the workplace. The initial resistance of older people to new technologies and the difficulty of adapting to rapidly changing work processes can be overcome. This study is a good starting point for exploring how targeted educational programmes and mentoring systems can help with digital transformation.
The research findings show that a significant proportion of older people use the internet on a daily basis, but many are less digitally prepared and therefore more vulnerable to online threats.

b.) Thematic campaigns:
• **Several Hungarian companies** have launched campaigns to promote the employment of the older generation. They emphasized the benefits of multi-generational workplaces, as combining the experience of older workers and the technological knowledge of younger generations makes work more efficient.
• "**National campaign launched to develop the digital skills of the older persons"**
The report published on April 29, 2021 presents the latest communication campaign of the National Media and Communications Authority. The aim of the campaign is to help the over-65s, who often rely on younger members of their families for digital administration, become more independent in the digital space. It focuses primarily on the development of digital knowledge. The article also addresses the challenge that the skills expected in the modern, digitalized labor market are closely linked to daily and even work tasks.

c.) Articles and videos:
• **Analysis by the Oeconomus Economic Research Foundation** shows how older workers can help alleviate labor shortages and what benefits there are in employing retirees.
• According to AAS Recruitment Hungary, older workers can be particularly valuable in industries where experience and practical knowledge play a prominent role, such as healthcare and education.

6. Are there examples where media have successfully highlighted the contributions of older workers?

The publication Supporting Active Ageing in the Workplace includes initiatives and methods that aim to enable older workers to remain actively involved in the labour market for longer. It details the maintenance of work capacity, health support, provision of training opportunities and the transformation of the workplace environment and culture to facilitate the effective work of older workers. The programme focuses on improving health and functional capacity, vocational education and training, and supporting work-life balance. In addition, company culture and management style also play an important role *in keeping older workers motivated and engaged.*

7. ***What are the local, national, or institutional policies and initiatives aiming to address stereotypes and biases in media representation?***

Local, national, and institutional policies and initiatives aiming to address stereotypes and biases in media representation are presented in the following area.

• **The National Media and Communications Authority (NMHH)** regulates the media in Hungary and aims to ensure balanced reporting. The NMHH pays particular attention to non-discriminatory content and the appropriate representation of minorities. It also monitors and supports the employment opportunities of older people.

• **The role of local governments**: Some local governments launch their own media campaigns aimed at increasing understanding and tolerance between communities. These campaigns often focus on local cultural events and opportunities for minority groups and older people.

• **Educational programs:** Media literacy education introduced in educational institutions helps young people to recognize and critically evaluate stereotypes and biases in the media.

Multimedia educational programs: These aim to develop media competences, with a particular focus on the use of multimedia in education. Such programs help to recognize the quality and credibility of media content and to critically evaluate them.

Digital Topic Week: This is a Hungarian initiative that promotes the use of digital tools and methods in education. Within the framework of the program, interested parties can learn various evaluation methods that help in media analysis and project pedagogy.

• **HR Strategy 2025:** This initiative emphasizes the exploitation of the experience and skills of older workers, especially in the field of digitalization and technological changes

• **The Association for Women's Career Development in Hungary (AWCDH) founded in 2003** received positive international acceptance (at UN and EU level) for their "Women's Career for a Lifetime" program (since 2009). The aim of our the "Women's Career for a Lifetime" awareness-raising program is to give 55+ women the chance to stay in the workforce and share their experience participate in lifelong learning, to develop their skills incl. digital skills and keep playing an active role in society, including volunteer work prepare consciously for longer, healthier and more meaningful lives.
As partner of **the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Debrecen** they have been given the opportunity to organize their sessions at their annual **Gerontology Days** for 14 years within their Women's Career for a Lifetime awareness raising program.
In recent years the Gerontology Days were organized for two days: on the first day in Hungarian in person in Nyíregyháza, Hungary, on the second day in English online.
The summary of the presentations (Hungarian and English) delivered by the AWCDH's Hungarian and international speakers have been published every year in the Special issue if the **Gerontology Hungary.**

8. ***Are there examples of "best practices" that promote positive media representation of older workers*****?**

Media channels that support positive media portrayals of older workers:

• **Duna TV:** Often shows documentaries and reports that highlight the experiences and contributions of older generations.

“Family-friendly Magazin” often deals with social issues, including the role of older generations in the labour market.

• **M1:** The news channel M1 occasionally deals with the role of older workers in the economy and society. Occasionally shows reports on the economic and social role of older workers, especially from a labor market perspective.

• **RTL Klub:** RTL Klub's programming includes programs that present the lives and work of older generations, for example in the form of interviews and reports. The reports often touch on the lives and work of older generations, including their re-employment.

Ireland Country Report: Digitalization and Media

Maeve O'Sullivan, Áine Ní Léime, Maggie O'Neill, Kristal Jericho and Olaiwola Ogunpaimo

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INTRODUCTION

In April 2025, Ireland's population was approximately 5.46 million, reflecting a 1.5% increase from 2024, driven primarily by natural growth and net migration (CSO, 2025). However, in line with many countries from the Global North, the population is ageing, with those aged 65 and over now comprising 15.8% of the total, up from 14.1% in 2019. The proportion of the population aged 55 and older is currently almost 29% - 1.5 million people (Statista, 2025). More broadly, those aged 45-64 accounted for 25.6% of the population in 2024 (CSO, 2025a).

Economically, Ireland continues to perform robustly despite global uncertainties. GDP is projected to grow by 3.4% in 2025, supported by strong exports and a resilient labour market. Modified domestic demand is expected to grow by 2.2%. Unemployment remains low at approx. 4.3%, and inflation is stable at 1.6% (European Commission, 2025). However, risks persist due to Ireland's reliance on multinational corporations and external trade, particularly with the U.S. Key challenges include housing shortages, infrastructure gaps, and fiscal pressures from an ageing population. Policy efforts are focused on improving housing supply, diversifying tax revenues, and enhancing public investment efficiency (OECD, 2025).

Against this demographic and macroeconomic backdrop, older-worker employment remains comparatively strong. Ireland's 55-64 employment rate is 68.1%, placing it above the EU benchmark and continuing an upward trend (Eurostat, 2025a). Over the past two decades, Ireland has doubled the share of its workforce aged 55 and over, with a particularly strong rise in women in their late 50s and 60s remaining in employment (Privalko et al., 2019). By 2019, one in five workers was over 55 (Privalko et al., 2019). Older workers were less likely to hold permanent contracts and those aged 55 to 65 reported higher rates of work-related illness (Privalko et al., 2019). Despite generally high retention, a key group of early leavers emerges between ages 54 and 59 (Privalko et al., 2019). Women in this group often exit the labour market due to caring responsibilities, while men are more likely to leave because of the physical demands of their work (CIPD, 2024; Privalko et al., 2019).

Relevance of digitalization and media

As workplaces increasingly adopt digital technologies, older workers face both challenges and opportunities. On one hand, digitalization can lead to job displacement, especially in routine roles that are easily automated. This may push some older individuals toward early retirement or entrepreneurship out of necessity (Zhang,

2024). Notwithstanding its challenges, digital tools can reduce physical job demands and support health management, potentially enabling older workers to extend their careers (Komp-Leukkunen, 2022). Moreover, sectors with high digital exposure—such as ICT, finance, and media—offer entrepreneurial opportunities that older individuals can leverage, especially when supported by lifelong learning and targeted digital skills training.

Media portrayal of older workers

Older people are often portrayed in the media as being digitally incompetent or resistant to change, using metaphors like “fossil” or “past the expiry date.” These narratives can marginalize older individuals and obscure the diversity of their digital competences (Rasi-Heikkinen, 2023). However, some older adults actively choose limited digital engagement, viewing it as a conscious lifestyle decision rather than a deficit. Promoting digital inclusion requires nuanced media representation, user-centered service design, and strong social support networks.

Both from organisational and societal perspectives, inclusive policies and cultural shifts are needed that recognize older adults as capable contributors in a digital society. Accordingly, this report seeks to address the following research questions, highlighting the barriers, biases and societal attitudes towards older workers and positive media examples of older workers.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- ⇒ What barriers do media pose to employment opportunities for older workers?
- ⇒ Are there examples where the media has positively influenced perceptions of older workers?
- ⇒ How do different forms of media (print, audiovisual, digital) shape societal attitudes toward older workers?
- ⇒ What biases or stereotypes are prevalent in the media representation of older workers?
- ⇒ How can media platforms capture and showcase the cumulative knowledge of older workers?
- ⇒ Are there examples where the media has successfully highlighted the contributions of older workers?
- ⇒ What are the local, national, or institutional policies and initiatives aiming to address stereotypes and biases in media representation?
- ⇒ Are there examples of "best practices" that promote positive media representation of older workers?

~~Older worker employment remains comparatively strong. Ireland's 55-64 employment rate is 68.1%, placing it above the EU benchmark and continuing an upward trend (Eurostat, 2025a). Over the past two decades, Ireland has doubled the share of its workforce aged 55 and over, with a particularly strong rise in women in their late 50s and 60s remaining in employment (Privalko et al., 2019). By 2019, one in five workers was over 55 (Privalko et al., 2019). Older workers were less likely to hold permanent contracts and those aged 55 to 65 reported higher rates of work-related illness (Privalko et al., 2019). Despite generally high retention, a key group of early leavers emerges between ages 54 and 59 (Privalko et al., 2019). Women in this group often exit the labour market due to caring responsibilities, while men are more likely to leave because of the physical demands of their work (CIPD, 2024; Privalko et al., 2019).~~

Digital Skills & Digital Exclusion

Older workers in Ireland are more likely than younger workers to experience gaps where their current skills do not meet job requirements; the risk is higher for those who are older, less educated, or in lower skilled/manual jobs (Burke & Condon, 2020). Perceptions of skills demand are also elevated: 69% of older Irish workers perceive a need for moderate/advanced ICT skills, versus 60% across the EU for the same age group (Burke & Condon, 2020). Taken together, this points to a concentration of upskilling need among specific sub-groups of older workers. It also suggests that programmes should prioritise job-embedded training opportunities to ensure support reaches those most at risk and to avoid widening inequalities.

At the population level,~~On digital skills,~~ Ireland performs well overall on digital skills but ~~shows~~ clear age gradients remain. In 2023, 72.9% of people aged 16-74 in Ireland had at least basic digital skills, well above the EU average of 55.6% (European Commission, 2024; Eurostat, 2023). Yet digital exclusion persists~~remains~~ among older adults in Ireland. Internet access declines with age. Only 38% of adults aged 80 and over have home internet, compared with 86% of those aged 50-69 and 66% of those aged 70-79 (TILDA, 2020). Smartphone ownership follows a similar pattern. Nearly 80% of adults aged 50-69 own a smartphone, compared with 59% of those aged 70-79 and just 30% of those aged 80+ (TILDA, 2020). In 2024, only 6% of all adults had never used the internet, but this figure rises to 41% among those aged 75 and older (CSO, 2024b). ~~Older workers are more likely than younger workers to experience gaps where their current skills do not meet job requirements; the risk is higher for those who are older, less educated, or in lower skilled/manual~~

~~jobs (Burke & Condon, 2020). 69% of older Irish workers perceive a need for moderate/advanced ICT skills, versus 60% across the EU for the same age group (Burke & Condon, 2020).~~

Media Consumption Patterns

Media consumption among older adults in Ireland remains anchored in traditional outlets but shows a gradual shift toward digital. Of people aged 65 and over, 73% describe themselves as "extremely" or "very interested" in news, compared with just 30% of 18-24 year-olds (Coimisiún na Meán & FuJo, 2024). Older cohorts are more likely than younger ones to access news directly via trusted outlets, with 62% of those 65+ navigating directly to news websites or apps, compared with only 24% of 18-24s (Coimisiún na Meán & FuJo, 2024). While 37% of 18-24s cite social media as their main news source, only 3% of those 65+ do so. Older adults also remain heavier users of TV, radio, and print (Coimisiún na Meán & FuJo, 2024). With regard to awareness of AI, 61% of 18-24s report moderate or high knowledge compared with 37% of those 65+ (Coimisiún na Meán & FuJo, 2024).

Retirement Age and Policies

Ireland has taken a series of measures to extend working lives and reform retirement provision. The State Pension (Contributory) age is currently 66, but since January 2024 people may defer claiming up to age 70 in return for a higher rate (Citizens Information, 2025). In the public sector, the compulsory retirement age for most pre-2004 recruits was raised to 70 under the *Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018*, allowing longer public-service careers (Irish Statute Book, 2018). A new pension calculation system is also being phased in over ten years, basing payments on total years of work and contributions, alongside enhanced recognition for long-term carers who spent time out of the workforce (Government of Ireland, 2023a, 2023b). The government is additionally considering a targeted benefit for 65-year-olds with more than 40 years of contributions who cannot continue working, which would provide limited early-retirement support (Government of Ireland, 2023a). Automatic enrolment under the *My Future Fund* scheme will begin in January 2026, broadening retirement-savings coverage among employees without an occupational plan (Department of Social Protection, 2025a, 2025b).

- ~~The State Pension (Contributory) age is 66, and since January 2024 people may defer claiming up to age 70 for a higher rate (Citizens Information, 2025).~~

- In the public sector, the compulsory retirement age for most pre-2004 recruits was raised to 70 by the *Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Act 2018*, enabling longer public-service careers (Irish Statute Book, 2018).
- Ireland is phasing in a new pension calculation system over ten years, basing payments on total years of work and contributions to create a fairer system (Government of Ireland, 2023a, 2023b).
- Reforms also include enhanced pension provisions for long-term carers, recognising time spent out of the workforce caring for family members (Government of Ireland, 2023a).
- The government is exploring a revised benefit for 65-year-olds with 40+ years of contributions who cannot continue working, offering limited early retirement support (Government of Ireland, 2023a).

The new automatic-enrolment pension, *My Future Fund*, will start contributions on 1 January 2026, broadening retirement-saving coverage among employees without an occupational plan (Department of Social Protection, 2025a, 2025b).

Thematic Findings

Barriers to employment

Across news outlets, one of the most persistent ways the media portrays older workers is through stereotyped and deficit-based representations, which often depict them as less adaptable or technologically incompetent. Thus, the following paragraphs highlight a few examples of how these portrayals influence employer attitudes, workplace practices, and debates surrounding older workers in Ireland.

Media as a barrier to employment opportunities for older workers

As the population continues to age, workplaces are feeling the impact (O'Dea, 2024). According to a 2025 report by Age Action, 70% of employees believe media portrayals reinforce ageist stereotypes, including assumptions that older workers are "resistant to change" or "less adaptable to technology" (SNAW Project, 2024). This framing aligns with earlier findings by Fealy et al. (2012), who identified five distinct identity types assigned to older people in Irish media: the "victim," the "frail, infirm, and vulnerable," the "radicalised citizen," the "deserving old," and the "undeserving old." Eachb of these discursive constructions places older workers into narrow, limiting categories that restrict how they are perceived in the labour market. Additionally, framing them mainly as at-risk dependents reduces their visibility as active professionals, which reinforces the idea that older workers are liabilities rather than assets (Beasley & Timonen, 2023).

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic intensified these effects in Ireland (Ní Léime & O'Neill, 2021). A study of Irish public broadcaster news coverage found that older people are repeatedly portrayed as the

singular “face of COVID-19,” depicted as vulnerable, with the "cocooning" policy further reinforcing stereotypes of dependence and powerlessness. The framing often highlighted their frailty, burden, and isolation (Beasley & Timonen, 2023). During this period, many organisations retained older employees but seldom actively recruited them, often due to ageist assumptions about their competence, adaptability, technological skills, and capacity for upskilling (O’Sullivan et al., 2020). Nonetheless, a commentary from the University of Galway criticises the “homogenous” framing suggested by the term cocooning, emphasizing that many people aged 70 and above remain active, continue working, volunteering, caring for families, and can still be called back to professional roles (Schrage-Frueh & Tracy, 2020).

Biases and stereotypes in media

The next sections illustrate how media narratives frequently depict older workers as either obstacles to younger colleagues’ advancement or as digitally inept in a technologically advanced workplace. While these portrayals reflect underlying demographic changes, they also reinforce ageist stereotypes that construct age itself as a disadvantage.

Media Narratives of Older Workers' ‘Blocking’ Opportunities of Younger Employees

Media commentary and survey data in Ireland often convey the perception that older workers’ entrenched positions may inadvertently restrict career progression for younger colleagues. For example, the Irish Times has noted that the extended tenure of senior employees can be viewed by younger staff as a barrier to advancement, unless supported by more flexible career pathways (Flynn, 2025) copied from O’Connell (2025). Similar concerns are evident in Matrix Recruitment’s 2022 and 2023 Workplace Equality Surveys, where ageism consistently emerged as a major workplace issue. Notably, nearly half (48%) of respondents believed that workers aged 50 and above would struggle to secure new employment, highlighting widespread perceptions of limited mobility among older employees (ThinkBusiness, 2023).

These findings correspond with broader media and policy discussions that increasingly frame the growing presence of older workers as contributing to generational competition in the labour market, particularly in relation to mentorship, promotion, and innovation. Labour force statistics underscore this trend: according to Business Plus, employment among people aged 65 and over rose by 9.4% in the year to October 2023, while employment for those aged 15–19 declined by 3%. Complementing this, the Department of Enterprise has documented that the workforce share of employees aged 55 and above nearly doubled between 1998 and 2018, rising from 10% to almost 20% (Quann, 2019). Together, these dynamics illustrate both the persistence of age-related bias in perceptions of workplace mobility and the structural reality of Ireland’s ageing labour force.

Ageist Media Representations of Older Workers During COVID-19

Stereotyping of older workers significantly hinders their career trajectories by restricting their access to recruitment and promotional opportunities (Matrix Recruitment, 2023). Such behaviours and attitudes not only marginalise older employees but also serve to reinforce and perpetuate ageism within the workplace (Corrigan, 2022). In most cases, Irish media frequently employed terms such as "elderly," "aged," and "OAPs" to describe older people (Fealy, 2012). While often intended as neutral descriptors, such language has been criticised for reinforcing reductive stereotypes that frame older people as a homogeneous, frail, and dependent group (McCarthaigh, 2020).

In retrospect, the reports framing older workers as weak or unproductive (Corrigan, 2022 p. 13) extended well beyond the pandemic period. A particularly striking example of age-related hiring bias comes from 2007, when George Reynolds submitted 200 job applications using identical CVs, varying only the candidate's age. The "30-year-old" CV received 50 callbacks, while the "50-year-old" version generated just two responses. This stark disparity exposed real-world age discrimination. However, the RTÉ-aired exposé also reinforced a dominant cultural script: that age itself constitutes a significant disadvantage in recruitment (Kelly, 2007).

Disproportionate framing of digital ineptitude among older workers

Irish media often depict older people as being 'left behind' by technology, often highlighting anxieties around online payments and device use in ways that reinforce generational narratives of digital incompetence (O'Brien, 2022). Although some media outlets have explicitly challenged ageism in relation to technology, public commentary still tends to attribute older workers' labour-market marginalisation to individual deficits in digital skills rather than to broader structural factors. Framing them as "digital laggards" not only risks discouraging employer investment in training but also undermines opportunities for reskilling and progression. Over time, such portrayals can generate cumulative disadvantage, as negative narratives intersect with and reinforce existing structural barriers (Dannefer, 2003).

SHOWCASING OLDER WORKERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

While Irish media outlets have reported on age discrimination within Irish workplaces (for example Butler & Corrigan, 2025; Gittens, 2017; O'Regan, 2023), recent efforts demonstrate a push to break stereotypes and rebrand older workers in a positive manner.

- **News articles:** In recent years, Irish media outlets, such as RTÉ, Irish Independent, and The Irish Times, have reported on the positive aspects of hiring and retaining older workers in the workplace, while encouraging employers to revise and update their retirement policies. For example, one article

in The Irish Times (O'Regan, 2023) highlights that businesses are "missing opportunities" to retain experience and knowledge from older workers.

- **Special reports:** In addition to news articles, special reports have been published, with the aim to dispel older worker stereotypes by highlighting the benefits and strengths that older people bring to the workplace (McCall, 2018; McGuire, 2024). While these reports also highlight challenges, such as multigenerational conflict and communication differences, they largely argue that benefits outweigh challenges.
- **Private sector initiatives:** Media stories promote private sector business initiatives, such as BDO Ireland's 'returners programme', that seeks to attract older workers who have retired but are interested in returning to the workforce (Stedman, 2023). These initiatives portray older workers as "an untapped talent pool", while also highlighting that older people may want to return to the workforce due to the rising cost of living.
- **Equality campaigns:** The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, together with ALONE Ireland, launched the 'For Equality in Ageing' campaign, promoting rights for older people, including workers rights such as a voluntary retirement age.

This media coverage demonstrates the positives of retaining and supporting older workers in the workforce, including competitive advantages for businesses, an increased talent pool, retained knowledge and expertise, as well as wider economic benefits. Meanwhile, positives for individuals are highlighted as less financial burden and better quality of life.

CASE STUDIES (MEDIA AND POLICY EXAMPLES)

The Irish Times: Tapping into opportunities presented by the multigenerational workplace (2025)

Based on a recent report from Eurofound, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, *The Irish Times* published a special report, *"Tapping into opportunities presented by the multigenerational workplace"* (O'Connell, 2025), which highlights the benefits of supporting multigenerational workplaces, including promoting cognitive diversity and knowledge sharing across workers of all ages. With the introduction of new retirement legislation in Ireland, this report encourages employers to see the positives of maintaining a multigenerational workforce, while also acknowledging the need for flexibility of job design and career pathways across organisations.

RTÉ Business: One in five low-paid workers aged over 50 (2022)

RTÉ Business published findings from a research study, *"One in five low-paid workers aged over 50 - Report"* (O'Donovan, 2022), showing that one in every five low-paid workers in Ireland is aged over 50. The news story details the demographics and employment circumstances of this age group, noting that older low-paid

workers are more prevalent in administrative and healthcare roles, and often face financial pressures despite owning their homes mortgage-free. Another insight highlights a prevalent gender pay gap, which demonstrates that older women are consistently earning less than older men. This media reporting argues for the need to understand the economic realities of older workers in low-paid jobs, especially as the government continues to frame policies around the message of "active ageing".

Alliance of Age Sector NGOs: **Telling It Like It Is – Combatting Ageism (2023)**

The *Alliance of Age Sector NGOs*, including Active Retirement Ireland and Age Action, launched a report titled *Telling It Like It Is – Combatting Ageism* (The Alliance of Age Sector NGOs, 2023), challenging negative stereotypes surrounding older people in society and the workplace. The report highlights both how older adults continue to contribute skills, experience, and stability, while also addressing damaging stereotypes. Through the report, the Alliance campaigns for specific initiatives, including developing a joint Government-Alliance led awareness campaign, to shift public perception and reframe ageing with a positive mindset, benefitting both communities and the labour market.

IMPACT OF POLICIES AND INITIATIVES

In Ireland, the government, regulatory bodies, NGOs and media outlets have launched a range of initiatives to improve the rights of older workers, promote positive media representations, and combat ageism.

- **Government of Ireland's *National Positive Ageing Strategy*:** In 2013, the Department of Health launched a whole-of-government strategy focused on supporting ageing and older people, with commitments to participation, health, and tackling ageism. The strategy also included explicit recommendations for the media such as, to 'combat ageism through awareness campaigns and by encouraging the media and other opinion-making actors to give an age-balanced image of society' (Government of Ireland, 2013, p. 22).
- **Government of Ireland's *Pathways to Work Strategy (2021-2025)*:** Following economic shocks from COVID-19, the Department of Social Protection released an employment strategy, addressing key employment concerns, including older workers and 'returners'. Strategic commitments included working with employers and training providers to develop unique opportunities for older workers (Government of Ireland, 2021).
- **Employment (Contractual Retirement Ages) Bill 20235:** Under this new legislation older workers will have rights to stay in employment up until the State Pension Age of 66, meaning employers will not be able to legally enforce a contractual retirement age (Government of Ireland, 2025).

- **Code of Programme Standards for Radio and Television Broadcasters:** Issued by Coimisiún na Meán, Ireland's statutory media regulator, this legally binding code sets out standards for broadcasters, including the obligation to respect all individuals and social groups and to avoid inciting violence or unfair treatment on various grounds such as age, race or gender (Coimisiún na Meán, 2024).
- **Advertising Standards Authority Code:** The self-regulatory Code seeks to ensure that all commercial advertising in Ireland is legal, appropriate, honest and not harmful to any persons. The guidelines include rules against harmful stereotyping, including for minority groups or vulnerable people (Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland, 2016).
- **A New Direction: RTÉ Statement of Strategy (2025-2029):** As part of RTÉ's new strategy, they promised to embed "good practice on diversity and inclusion" into their leadership team, organisation and network, including developing guidelines for diversity, inclusion and accessibility (RTÉ, 2024).
- **The Alliance of Age Sector NGOs:** The Alliance consists of a coalition of seven leading NGOs in the Irish age sector, who advocate for stronger actions against ageism. In January 2023, the Alliance published a second edition of their policy series, *Telling It Like It Is*, highlighting the lack of meaningful implementation of the *National Positive Ageing Strategy* and calling out government and media to challenge ageist stereotypes and recognise the contributions of older people in work and public life (The Alliance of Age Sector NGOs, 2023).

While public intention to improve media representations of older workers may be evident across government, regulatory bodies and media, the *Telling It Like It Is* (2023) report highlights that, while media portrayals of older people has improved, there is still a long way to go for best practice (The Alliance of Age Sector NGOs, 2023). The report also argues that there is continued discrimination of older workers both at work, and more consistently, when looking for work. Ultimately, it is suggested that there has been weak implementation of recommendations from the *National Positive Ageing Strategy,* with multiple new actions recommended, including to "develop a joint Government-Alliance led awareness campaign, in order to promote an age-balanced image of society" and "develop a guide for media and other opinion making actors" to improve the media representation of older people (The Alliance of Age Sector NGOs, 2023, pp. 41-42).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategies for media platforms to reduce stereotypes about older workers.

- Ensure that diverse (positive as well as negative) images of older workers are used on media platforms.
- Ensure a balanced representation of accounts of older workers including positive accounts highlighting their strengths and skills.

- Set up an advisory board including older workers and older worker representatives to review online content.
- Conduct research to analyse media content and review government legislation.

Initiatives for highlighting the cumulative knowledge of older workers in media campaigns.

- Highlight the benefits of a multi-generational workforce including mentoring, transmission of corporate knowledge and exchange of knowledge /skills
- Development recruitment campaigns that specifically target older workers
- Ensure images of older workers are represented on recruitment websites in a diverse, intergenerational context.

Recommendations to integrate positive media representation into national and organizational policies.

- Provide training to relevant national policy-makers in awareness of age representation.
- Work with national employer organisations to heighten awareness of the need to mainstream age awareness.
- Provide age awareness training workshops and tool-kits to enhance traditional and social media content.

CONCLUSION

This report has explored the intersection of digitalisation, age and media portrayal of older workers in Ireland. Our findings show that while Ireland is recognised as a leader in digitalisation in the European Union, there has been little focus on the impact of digitalisation for older workers. The proportion of older workers in Ireland is increasing, albeit at a slower pace than many other European countries.

The main challenges identified relate to the need to develop skills and training for workers to match the pace of digitalisation, to avoid job losses, the need to avoid potential problems associated with remote working such as poor work-life balance, the encroachment of work into personal life, the need for SMEs to be strategic in relation to digitalisation.

Media representation has tended to portray older workers as “digital laggards”. This representation has the dual effect of potentially discouraging employer investment in training in addition to questioning the opportunities for reskilling and progression. Recommendations have been proposed at micro, meso and macto levels to combat negative stereotypes of older workers in a digital era. These include a recommendation to work with employer organisations to provide age awareness programmes and tool-kits to combat negative perceptions of older workers through social media which, along with traditional media, plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of older workers. Our findings show that Ireland is well-placed to challenge ageism in relation to technology but must move with a sense of urgency!

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Country Report: Digitalization and Media (WG5): Latvia

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Executive summary

Latvia faces one of the most rapid demographic aging processes in Europe, with over 21% of its population aged 65 or older and an old-age dependency ratio exceeding 33%. This demographic shift poses social and economic challenges, particularly within a labour market increasingly shaped by digital transformation. While strategies promote digital inclusion and lifelong learning, only half of the population has basic digital skills, highlighting the persistent digital divide that disproportionately affects older adults.

Older Latvians' engagement with digital technologies is growing, yet confidence remains low. Despite 81% of those aged 65–74 having used the internet, few feel proficient, and cybersecurity awareness is limited. Media consumption among seniors still centers on television and radio, though digital engagement is rising, driven by changing habits and public policy efforts to expand accessible digital media content.

Media representation plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions of aging. Studies show that older adults are often depicted as passive or technologically incapable, perpetuating stereotypes that hinder their inclusion in the workforce and society. However, positive examples—such as public broadcasting initiatives and life story projects—demonstrate how inclusive storytelling can challenge biases and affirm seniors' contributions.

Latvia's key policy focus lies in aligning digital transformation, labour participation, and media representation to foster active ageing. Strengthening intergenerational learning, promoting digital literacy, and ensuring balanced media portrayals are vital steps toward a more inclusive and age-sensitive information society.

Introduction

As early as a decade ago, World Bank research indicated that Central and Eastern European and Baltic countries, including Latvia, were experiencing demographic ageing at a faster pace than other regions of Europe (World Bank, 2015). This demographic shift has significant implications for Latvia's economy and society. As of 2024, 21.3% of the population is aged 65 or older, and the old-age dependency ratio has reached 33.9%, reflecting increased pressure on the labour market and social systems (Eurostat, 2024).

Latvia's digital transformation strategy, as outlined in the Digital Decade Country Report 2023 (European Commission, 2023) and further elaborated in the Digital Decade Strategic Roadmap 2030 (**Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia,** 2024), indirectly addresses the needs of its aging population by emphasizing inclusive access to digital skills, public services,

and healthcare. With only 51% of the population possessing at least basic digital skills—below the European Union average—there is a clear need to promote lifelong learning and digital inclusion. This is particularly urgent for older adults, who are disproportionately at risk of digital exclusion. The expansion of digital public services, including the e-signature mobile electronic identification system and improved access to electronic health records, contributes to greater accessibility and integrates the needs of older individuals into broader digitalization efforts.

These demographic trends present specific challenges for the labour market, especially in integrating older workers into a rapidly digitalising economy. While digitalisation creates opportunities for innovation and economic growth, older individuals often encounter barriers such as limited digital skills and restricted access to new technologies, which can undermine their employment prospects. These barriers are exacerbated by societal attitudes and age-related biases, with widespread stereotypes framing older workers as less adaptable to technological change. Media plays a critical role in shaping these perceptions and holds the potential to either reinforce negative stereotypes or challenge them by highlighting the experience, reliability, and value that older workers bring (OECD, 2024).

Basic Statistics

Table 1 - Population in Latvia by Gender and Age Groups, 2024

(Official Statistics Portal, 2025a)

Age Group	Gender	Count	Percentage*
55–64	Men	116,749	3,83 %
	Women	142,115	
	Total	258,864	
65–74	Men	84,132	11,50 %
	Women	131,015	
	Total	215,147	
75–84	Men	39,921	7,09 %
	Women	92,711	
	Total	132,632	
85+	Men	11,558	2,76 %
	Women	40,114	
	Total	51,672	

*The percentage indicates the proportion of each age group relative to the total population

Table 2 - Employed Persons in Latvia by Gender and Age Groups, 2024

(Official Statistics Portal, 2025b)

Age Group	Gender	Count (thousands)	Percentage*
55–64	Men	80.7	20.8%
	Women	102.0	
	Total	182.8	
65–74	Men	21.8	6.0%
	Women	31.0	
	Total	52.8	
75–89	Men	2.9	…
	Women	3.3	
	Total	6.2	

*Percentage indicates the share of employed persons in the respective age group relative to all employed persons aged 15–89 years.

Table 3 - Retirement Age and Policy Frameworks (European Commission, 2024)

Category	Details
Statutory Retirement Age (2024)	64 years and 6 months for both men and women
Planned Retirement Age (2025)	65 years
Flexible Retirement Options	Deferred retirement, combining pension with work
Partial Pension/Work Combination	Legally permitted, moderate uptake
Deferred Retirement Uptake (2022)	2.0 %
Combining Pension with Work (2023)	19.7 %
Early Retirement Uptake (2022)	14.0 %

Media Consumption Patterns among Older Adults

A media-literacy study published in 2024 revealed a shift in usage habits: nearly 28% of Latvians aged 65 and older reported using TikTok in the previous three months, a notable rise from just 1% at the beginning of 2023. While this indicates that social media's reach is broadening, it also underscores the importance of fostering digital literacy—particularly the critical evaluation of algorithm-driven content—to help seniors navigate these platforms safely. At the same time, the findings show that although most Latvians use the internet, older adults feel considerably less confident in their digital skills. Only 16% rate their abilities as good, while nearly half describe them as poor. Around 70% of respondents report low familiarity with AI tools, with seniors the least confident. The study also highlights notable cybersecurity gaps, as many users fail to perform regular

updates and security checks. Collectively, these results illustrate seniors' digital insecurity and emphasize the need for targeted media and technology education initiatives (NEPLP, 2024).

Table 4 - Internet Users in Latvia by Age Group (Percentage of Total Population in the Group), 2024 (Official Statistics Portal, 2025c)

Age Group	Ever Used the Internet (%)	Use Regularly (at least once a week) (%)
55–64	92.5	88.7
65–74	81.2	72.6

Table 5 - Media Consumption Patterns by Age Group, 2024 (NEPLP, 2024a)

Media	**55–64 years (%)**	**65–74 years (%)**	**75+ years (%)**
Watch TV daily	85	91	95
Use the internet daily or almost daily	72	55	35
Read online news at least once a week	56	40	28
Use Facebook regularly	49	31	18
Listen to the radio daily	43	50	59
Read print media daily	14	20	31
Use YouTube at least once a week	25	12	6
Use a smartphone for media consumption	39	27	15
Trust public media	68	73	79
Use Netflix or similar platforms at least once a week	16	7	2

The 2025 information report on the creation of a unified Latvian Public Media highlights not only the changing media consumption habits across society but also the implications for an ageing population. Traditional television and radio—long the primary sources of information for older adults—have experienced steady audience declines, while digital platforms such as LSM.lv and social media are rapidly expanding. This shift creates both challenges and opportunities: seniors remain more reliant on traditional channels, yet they increasingly require accessible and trustworthy digital content as the information environment moves online. It sets goals: by 2027, the total weekly public media audience is expected to reach 80% of Latvia's population, up from 73% in 2024, and investment in new content formats—including cultural, educational, and regional programming—that are especially relevant for older audiences, alongside the creation of user-friendly platforms that ensure accessibility (Ministry of Culture, 2025).

The Role of Media in Representing Older Adults

A study published in 2024 explores how different age groups in Latvia interact with media, with particular attention to the ageing population (Zelče, 2024). According to a representative survey, the research reveals

significant generational differences in media consumption habits. Older adults (65 and older)—often referred to as the "television generation"—continue to rely primarily on TV for news, a habit rooted in their formative years during the rise of mass television in the mid-20th century. In contrast, younger people increasingly use digital platforms and social media. The study highlights that older adults prioritize information about Latvia, local news, and environmental topics more than younger groups. It also points to barriers related to education and geography, showing that individuals with lower education levels or those living in rural areas are more dependent on traditional media and may face challenges engaging with digital tools. The study emphasizes that ageing should be understood not only as a demographic trend but also as a media-related experience shaped by access, technological change, and personal history. Older people are not passive consumers but possess unique media biographies that reflect broader social transformations, thus qualitative research—such as interviews—capture the deeper, lived experiences of older generations in the media environment.

Another study, published in 2020, explores how middle-aged and older adults in Latvia—particularly those aged 55 to 75—relate to media and information literacy (Rožukalne, 2020). Individuals in this age group may perceive their media skills as weak and express little interest in media education. However, the study reveals that, in practice, their abilities to use digital platforms, access information, and evaluate its reliability often match those of younger users. This contradiction highlights how internalized stereotypes and broader societal narratives contribute to the underestimation of older adults' actual competencies. The research identifies several key challenges that shape older adults' media experiences. These include limited access to digital tools, a lack of targeted educational opportunities, and feelings of social exclusion in the digital space. Moreover, media content itself often portrays older people as digitally inept, reinforcing age-based biases and discouraging engagement. The study argues that such portrayals contribute to a cycle of disengagement and marginalization. To counter these trends, the article advocates for inclusive, age-sensitive approaches to media and information literacy. These include intergenerational learning programs, policy initiatives that address digital inequality, and communication strategies that recognize the diverse needs and strengths of older adults. The study emphasizes the importance of moving away from deficit-based views and acknowledging the potential of older individuals as active, capable participants in today's media environment.

A 2019 study on Latvian seniors' understanding of life quality highlights the role of media as both a practical resource and a symbolic influence on ageing (Veide, 2019). While older adults seldom mention lifelong learning or formal self-development as contributors to a good life, many emphasize the importance of access to information through television, radio, and newspapers. This reliance on traditional mass media reflects generational habits and shows how staying informed about public events and society helps sustain a sense of connection and relevance. At the same time, seniors' responses suggest a tension between valuing this flow of information and feeling overlooked or underrepresented in broader public discourse. Media, therefore, emerges not only as a means of providing news but also as a factor that can affirm or marginalize older adults' role in society, shaping how they perceive their place in the social fabric.

A study published in 2018 investigates technophobia among middle-aged and older adults in Latvia, highlighting how attitudes and anxieties toward computers shape their ability to adapt to technological change (Zariņa, Circenis & Erts, 2018). Using a translated and adapted "Technophobia Test" with participants aged 45 to 87, the research found that although overall levels of technophobia were low, many respondents reported limited confidence in their computer skills, with differences linked to education and previous experience. The study emphasizes that older adults are not passive technology rejecters but bring unique biographical and social backgrounds that influence their engagement with digital tools, underscoring that ageing in Latvia should also be understood as a technological experience shaped by access, skills, and personal history.

Selected Best Practice Examples Promoting Positive Media Representation of Older Adults in Latvia

No.	Initiative	Description	Link
1.	Digital Transformation Guidelines 2021–2027	A national strategy to enhance digital skills, reduce the digital divide, and promote seniors' inclusion through lifelong learning and digital literacy.	https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en/actions/national-initiatives/national-strategies/latvia-digital-transformation-guidelines-2021-2027
2.	Digital Decade strategic Roadmap for Latvia 2030	A policy for accelerating digital transformation, with a strong emphasis on developing digital skills, ensuring inclusive access to digital services, and addressing digital gaps across all age and social groups.	https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en/actions/national-initiatives/national-strategies/latvia-digital-decade-strategic-roadmap-2030
3.	National Electronic Media Council Support for Public Media Content	Encourages diverse, inclusive content in public media, including portrayals of older people as active and engaged.	https://www.neplp.lv/en
4.	National public broadcasting television network(e.g., LTV 'Īstās Latvju saimnieces')	Features older adults in active roles, such as entrepreneurs or community leaders, promoting intergenerational respect.	https://ltv.lsm.lv/
5.	Society Integration Fund Media Projects	Funds media projects with socially significant content that often highlights diverse experiences, including those of seniors.	www.sif.gov.lv
6.	Latvian National Library Life Story Projects	Collects and publishes life stories of older people, showcasing their experiences and contributions to society.	https://mutvarduvesture.lv/en/publication/2012-lifestory-and-self-awareness/2012-dzivesstasts-un-pasapzina.pdf
7.	Cultural and Human-Interest Stories	The public broadcasting portal often features personal stories of elderly individuals contributing to cultural or civic life.	www.lsm.lv

Findings

Barriers to Employment

Older workers in Latvia encounter challenges shaped also by digital inequalities and societal attitudes influenced by media. As digital competence becomes increasingly important in the labour market, many older

adults face obstacles related to limited access and lower self-assurance in using new technologies, which can hinder their professional competitiveness. Media often overlooks older individuals in representations of technological progress, reinforcing assumptions about their adaptability. Such portrayals can influence how employers perceive older workers, potentially narrowing their career opportunities and underlining the importance of inclusive messaging and supportive measures.

Biases and Stereotypes in Media

Older adults in Latvia are often portrayed in the media as passive, less capable, or digitally incompetent. These portrayals contribute to widespread stereotypes that frame ageing as a decline in ability, particularly in relation to technology and innovation. Such representations can influence societal attitudes, reinforcing age-based biases that affect how older individuals are perceived in both public and professional settings. While there are growing efforts to promote more balanced representations, ageist stereotypes remain prevalent and continue to shape public perceptions

Showcasing Older Workers' Contributions

The media play a vital role in highlighting the knowledge, experience, and social contributions of older adults. When older individuals are portrayed as active participants in their communities—such as leaders, mentors, or professionals—it helps challenge age-based stereotypes and reinforces their continued relevance in society. Stories that reflect their lived experiences, resilience, and long-term achievements contribute to a more respectful and inclusive public narrative.

Impact of Policies and Initiatives

National strategies have increasingly emphasized digital inclusion and lifelong learning, including efforts to support older adults in adapting to the digital environment. These approaches include training programs, awareness campaigns, and support for inclusive media content that reflects the experiences of different age groups. Some initiatives aim to strengthen intergenerational understanding and promote social cohesion through media representation.

Conclusion

Latvia is taking meaningful steps toward digital inclusion of older adults, but challenges persist in aligning digital policy, labour market integration, and media representation. Older workers remain underrepresented in professional narratives and face barriers rooted in digital inequality and media bias.

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Romania Country Report on the impact of digitalisation and media on older workers

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Executive summary

Romania, like many European countries, is facing the challenges of an ageing population alongside rapid digitalisation. While older workers are increasingly active in the labour market, their representation in the media remains inconsistent and often shaped by negative stereotypes. Older workers are frequently depicted as dependent, technologically resistant, or economically burdensome, which reinforces societal prejudices and creates barriers to their full participation in employment. Positive portrayals exist, particularly in isolated campaigns and public television projects, but they are fragmented, sporadic, and lack the visibility needed to counterbalance dominant narratives.

Evidence shows that Romanian media have a significant influence on public attitudes toward older people, reinforcing ageist assumptions that undermine their employability. Research highlights that older adults themselves prefer empowering, realistic portrayals that reflect their capabilities and contributions, yet these depictions are underrepresented. While legislative frameworks such as Law no. 504/2002 and the Code for Audiovisual Content Regulation prohibit age-based discrimination in media, enforcement and awareness remain limited.

Despite gaps in research on the intersection of media and employment for older workers, best practice examples demonstrate that inclusive media narratives can play a powerful role in challenging stereotypes, promoting intergenerational collaboration, and enhancing perceptions of older workers as adaptable, skilled, and valuable. However, these examples remain isolated rather than integrated into broader media strategies.

To address these challenges, Romania requires coordinated, long-term efforts that combine policy, awareness, and practice. This includes:

- **National awareness campaigns** to challenge stereotypes and promote positive images of older workers.
- **Training for journalists and content creators** on age-inclusive representation.
- **Incentives for age-diverse media projects**, including support for regional initiatives that highlight older workers' voices and experiences.

Ultimately, advancing a more balanced and inclusive portrayal of older workers is critical not only for reducing discrimination but also for fostering social cohesion and recognising the economic and cultural contributions of an ageing workforce. By embedding these efforts within a socio-cultural framework, Romania can ensure that solutions are both contextually relevant and sustainable.

Introduction

Romania, like many other European countries, is undergoing significant demographic transformations, marked by a steadily ageing population and declining birth rates. According to Eurostat (2024), the share of the population aged 55–74 has dropped by 4.1 percentage points between 2000 and 2024, illustrating this ongoing demographic shift. Despite this decline, the employment rate for individuals aged 55–64 has seen a modest increase of 3.1 percentage points over the same period (Eurostat, 2024), reflecting gradual improvements in labour market participation among older adults.

Digital skills, however, remain a critical area of concern. In 2021, Romania recorded the lowest proportion in the EU of individuals aged 16 to 74 possessing at least basic digital skills—just 28%—with older people being among the most digitally excluded groups (Eurostat, 2022). In terms of media consumption, older individuals continue to rely primarily on traditional media, especially television, as their main source of information. Nevertheless, they also report engaging with social media platforms to access news content, albeit cautiously. These users often identify themselves as occasional rather than regular users of such platforms, a pattern that may be explained by the "third-person effect"—the tendency to believe that media messages have a greater influence on others, particularly those from different demographic groups, than on oneself (Brodhub, 2025).

Regarding retirement policy, Romania currently sets the retirement age at 65 for men and 62 for women (2025). However, in response to demographic pressures, plans are underway to gradually equalize and potentially raise the retirement age for both genders.

Age discrimination remains a persistent issue in the Romanian labour market. Between 2002 and 2021, the National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD) recorded 394 petitions specifically concerning age-based discrimination in employment (CNCD, Raport de activitate 2021). The perception of age as a barrier to employment is also deeply rooted. According to Special Eurobarometer 437 (2015), 52% of Romanian respondents believed that being over the age of 55 puts candidates at a disadvantage when applying for jobs, even when their qualifications and skills are equal to those of younger applicants.

In terms of media representation, the portrayal of older workers in Romania is inconsistent. While public broadcasters such as TVR occasionally highlight positive narratives and contributions of older individuals, private media outlets more frequently overlook or misrepresent this demographic. This discrepancy underscores the need for a more balanced and inclusive media discourse surrounding older workers in the country.

Romanians' current situation regarding the media's elderly workers

Romanian newspapers' demographic coverage frequently portrays the ageing population as an economic disaster. There is almost no week without articles and news regarding the constant and alarming decreasing of birth rate in Romania, many of them drawing sceptical scenarios regarding the near future, with a special focus on the state's incapacity to provide care for its numerous elders and even the collapse of the pension system (Matei, 2024). Elderly people are portrayed in this narrative as burdens rather than potential contributors to the economy.

Audiovisual media, such as television advertising and documentaries, often portray older people as sedentary, dependent, or only engaged in health-related activities, perpetuating unfavorable preconceptions about their employability and societal contribution (Duduciuc, 2017). This image hinders older people's inclusion and involvement in the workforce by cultivating a societal mindset that sees older people as less capable.

According to the study conducted by Duduciuc (2017), there are two contrasting views of ageing depicted in ads: one portraying older people as "heroes of ageing," maintaining youthfulness, and another showing frailty and physical decline. Younger seniors generally see themselves as cognitively young and prefer representations that reflect this, while older seniors (over 75) accept images aligned with their real age and social status. Overall, older people wish to see realistic, empowering images that affirm their identity, avoiding stereotypical or prejudiced depictions to promote acceptance and confidence within the ageing process. However, more research is necessary to fully understand how various forms of media, including print, audiovisual, and digital platforms, specifically shape societal attitudes toward older workers in Romania, as few studies have directly addressed this intersection.

Barriers to employment

According to a study, an alarming number of participants - 70% - think that ageist preconceptions are reinforced by media portrayals, such as the idea that older workers are less tech-savvy or reluctant to change. This strong feeling among Romanian workers highlights how important the media is seen to be in sustaining unfavorable perceptions of older workers, which can then result in hurdles to employment (Snaw, 2024). The "extreme polarization" of Romanian public narratives on ageing is one of its distinguishing features (Teodorescu & Chiribuca, 2018). Although there are some positive representations, they are typically nostalgic rather than modern, highlighting traditional duties such as dispensing wisdom and being a grandmother. However, "negative narratives prevail over the others", as several Romanian researchers have pointed out (CNPV, 2017; Gherman, 2014; Craciun, 2012). Positive representations of older people largely reflect how they "should be" rather than acknowledging their true abilities and contributions to the workforce, which leads to a difficult employment landscape.

Notably, there is still a lack of particular studies on the impact of media on the employment of older workers in Romania. Although there are studies on gender discrimination in Romanian workplaces (Voina, Pavelea & Vacariu, 2022; Faragalla et al., 2023), there is a deficit in the thorough media analysis that focuses on how older workers are portrayed in the workplace. This implies that more research is necessary to determine how Romanian media affects older workers' labour market outcomes.

Biases and stereotypes in the media

There is currently a lack of research on the media representation of older workers in Romania, highlighting a significant gap that requires further investigation. While some studies have examined how older people are depicted in advertising, most of them are somewhat outdated. Additionally, more than 80% of Romanians have reported being disturbed by media stereotypes related to age or gender (Zitec, 2022). Elderly Romanians were portrayed differently in the media, depending on the context. For example, during the 2017 protests against OUG 13/2017, older people were framed in public discourse (especially online media) as morally responsible for the political crisis. They were portrayed as the group that consistently supports a party many perceive as corrupt and authoritarian (Teodorescu & Chiribucă, 2018). Other studies show that older people are either absent or underrepresented in advertising. When older people are shown, they are idealized as "young-old." By associating products with rejuvenation or vitality, the media strengthens the "eternal youth myth", which not only sells but also stigmatizes natural ageing. This contributes to a cultural environment where ageing is to be resisted, corrected, or hidden, rather than embraced as a natural part of life. (Duduciuc et al, 2018) Particularly, a study researched the representation of older women in Romanian advertising, which showed a mix of stereotypical, emerging, and counter-stereotypical portrayals of older women in the media, reflected through both traditional and modern imagery. For example, the research revealed eight patterns: "the older woman who is like everyone else; the older woman who is as strong as the young men; the money saver; the tradition preserver; the hardworking and loving grandmother; the older woman who is still beautiful; the older woman who knows better than the young ones who should listen to her advice; and the high-tech grandmother." (Pană, 2022)

Showcasing older workers' contributions - Best practices examples

Scholarly contributions have highlighted the complexities of media narratives that incorporate older workers' perspectives, suggesting that positive portrayals help normalize their presence in workplaces where they can be seen as equal contributors to intergenerational collaboration (Boțan, 2024). The Romanian media has progressively taken small steps in advocating for older workers by emphasizing their continuous potential for

impactful contributions, trying to align with broader global trends that recognize the importance of inclusivity in employment practices.

Ivan and Fernández-Ardèvol (2017) reported that Romanian media's techno-optimistic discourse, reinforced by social pressure, contributed to positive attitudes toward technology among older adults. The investigation found that a techno-optimistic discourse in general media reinforced positive attitudes toward technology use among older Romanians, reflecting cultural dispositions that favor innovative portrayals. Romanian seniors were more concerned about risks to younger family members than themselves, reflecting unique cultural and societal contexts. In one study of 881 retired Romanians aged 55–94 during the COVID-19 pandemic, television emerged as the most trusted medium and enhanced awareness of protective measures (Șargu et al., 2023).

Concordant with views of researchers that consider that portrayal of older people in mass-media could mitigate stereotypes, ageist behaviors and increase perceived social capabilities of older workers (Kroon et al., 2016; Selm & Heijden, 2023; Selm & Heijden, 2014), Romanian organizations have used media to influence perception of older workers. Particularly, the evolution of media strategies that highlight adaptability and technological engagement of older individuals further enhances their role as active participants in the workforce. Răducu`s research (2023) illustrates how, contrary to the technophobia stereotype, older adults use technology to enhance their connectivity and capabilities. The framing of older people as adaptable and competent in digital environments can significantly reshape workplace expectations and inclusivity, as evidenced by initiatives that showcase their involvement in the technology and innovation sector.

Examples

Title	**Details**
Social Campaigns *Niciodată Singur – Prietenii Vârstnicilor* (Never Alone – Friends of the Elderly)	The NGO *Niciodată Singur – Prietenii Vârstnicilor* (Never Alone – Friends of the Elderly) conducts various campaigns to combat loneliness among seniors in Romania. Their initiatives include sharing stories of older individuals who remain active through volunteering, mentoring, and engaging in creative pursuits. By highlighting these narratives, the organization promotes a positive image of ageing and underscores the ongoing contributions of older adults to society.
Documentary: *România neîmblânzită* (*Untamed Romania)*	The 2018 nature documentary *România neîmblânzită* features narration by esteemed actor Victor Rebengiuc, who was in his mid-80s at the time. His involvement lends credibility and gravitas to the film, highlighting the value of experience and wisdom that comes with age. Rebengiuc's role exemplifies how older professionals continue to contribute meaningfully to cultural projects, thereby enhancing public perception of older workers' capabilities.

Television Series: *Las Fierbinți*	The popular Romanian sitcom *Las Fierbinți*, which debuted in 2012, features a range of characters that reflect rural community life. Among them is Vasile, the village mayor, portrayed by Gheorghe Ifrim. While Vasile's age is not explicitly stated, the series often includes older characters in active community roles, depicting them as competent and integral to village affairs. This representation challenges ageist stereotypes by showcasing older individuals as dynamic participants in societal functions
Television program: *Tableta de Sănătate – Singurătatea seniorilor* (*The Health Tablet - The Seniors Loneliness*)	Capturing their life stories, professional journeys, and social contributions, the program focuses on the emotional and social challenges faced by older adults, while giving them a voice and visibility (TVR, 2025).
TVR (Romanian National Television) 65th anniversary in 2021	TVR launched a special project that included interviews with employees past and present, regardless of age. This initiative provided a platform for seasoned professionals to reflect on their careers, share behind-the-scenes stories, and highlight the evolution of public television in Romania (Radar de media, 2021).

However, these remain rather isolated examples. Most private Romanian TV channels do not develop dedicated projects aimed at actively preserving and highlighting the experience and cumulative knowledge of older workers. This indicates a clear opportunity for new initiatives focused on this purpose.

Impact of policies and initiatives

Policies addressing stereotypes and biases in media representation consist mainly of Law no. 504/2002 regarding media and Decision No. 220/2011 regarding the Code for Audiovisual Content Regulation, last updated in 2023.

According to Law no. 504/2002 (Romanian Parliament, 2002) regarding media, commercials provided by media must comply with to several conditions among which not to include or promote acts of discrimination based on criteria such as age (art. 29). Moreover, media is prohibited from incitement to violence or hatred against a group of people or a member of a group, based on considerations such as age (art. 40). Regulations apply for video sharing platform providers also, that must take appropriate measures to protect the public from programs, user-generated video materials and audiovisual commercial communications that contain incitement to violence or hatred against a group of people or a member of a group, based on reasons such as age (art. 42^7). If a media service provider under the jurisdiction of another member state incites violence or hatred against people based on criteria such as age, Romania is entitled to restrict that provider (art. 75).

According to Decision No. 220/2011 (National Audiovisual Council of Romania, 2011) states that any pejorative reference to elderly or disabled people, such as and putting them in ridiculous or humiliating

situations are prohibited within the programs audiovisual, even if there is their consent (art. 40). Moreover, generalizing defamatory statements addressing a group/community(s) or individual based on criteria such as age are prohibited in audiovisual programs (art. 47).

The National Audiovisual Council of Romania is the institution that ensures that the media in Romania operates according to the above-mentioned policies.

Recommendations

Based on the research we conducted on Romania's situation concerning the media representations of older workers, we propose the following recommendations:

1. **National media awareness campaigns**
   NGOs or other entities should launch a state-supported public awareness campaign to challenge age-related stereotypes and promote positive, diverse representations of older workers in all forms of media.
2. **Journalist training programs on ageism**
   NGOs, media outlets should provide training modules and resources for journalists, editors, and content creators focusing on age diversity, avoiding stereotypical narratives, and using inclusive language when portraying older individuals.
3. **Incentivize age-inclusive content creation**
   Offer grants, awards, or tax incentives for media projects that focus on intergenerational dialogue, older workers' skills, or stories of late-career innovation and impact. Sponsors, foundations or even EU programs should implement this kind of grant. These should also support regional or community media projects that promote older voices, especially in rural areas, by funding local storytelling, podcasts, or radio programs run or co-created by older individuals.

Conclusions

Romania is at an early stage in addressing age-related stereotypes in the media and in promoting the image of older workers. While some legislative frameworks, such as the Labour Code, the National Strategy for Ageing and Active Ageing, and the National Strategy on Digital Agenda, provide a foundation for supporting older individuals, they do not directly target media representation or the employment image of people aged 55+.

There are a few isolated best practices, including limited media campaigns and programs showcasing intergenerational dialogue and digital inclusion among older adults. However, these initiatives remain fragmented and lack continuity, coordination, or widespread visibility.

There is also a significant research gap regarding older workers in Romania. Most existing studies focus more generally on older individuals, without a specific lens on employment or media representation. Targeted research on how the media portrays older workers and how these portrayals impact their employment opportunities is currently lacking and urgently needed.

To advance in this area, Romania would benefit from the development and implementation of an integrated national program specifically aimed at improving the media portrayal of older workers. This program should include public awareness campaigns, partnerships with media outlets, training for journalists on ageism and diversity, and support for storytelling projects that capture the cumulative knowledge and value older workers bring to society and the economy.

In summary, while the legislative basis exists and there are a few positive examples, sustained, strategic, and multi-level efforts are necessary to overcome the societal biases and media invisibility that still affect older workers in Romania.

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Türkiye Country Report:

Digitalisation and Media (WG5)

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Executive summary

Introduction

Nowadays, several everyday tasks require digital skills, from online banking, shopping to communication. Utilization of email, social media, and additional digital tools and activities are primary channels and inevitable for many of our actions. On the other hand, *digital divide*, which is one of the words used commonly in this digital world, is defined as the divergence between those who use information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as the internet, email, and mobile technologies, and those who do not (Abbey & Hyde, 2009). Although many other factors, such as access to technology, socioeconomic status, and gender, are among the distinctive factors for the digital divide, age is also reported among the important factors for the digital divide by Abbey and Hyde (2009). According to TURKSTAT (Turkish Statistical

Institute) (2024a), the rate of individuals who used official websites and applications, benefited from public services over the Internet was 73.7 % of the total population in Türkiye, while this rate was 49.5 % for the individuals in the 55-64 age group and 25.6% in the 65-74 age group (being the lowest). Even if it is a possibility that this situation of using ICT less by age might change in the near future, since new generations grow up more digitally literate, the digital divide still exists. On the other hand, 73 % of the enterprises declared that their employees had remote access to the e-mail system, documents, and business applications in 2024, while this rate was 68.4% in 2022 in Türkiye (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2024b). Thus, it is also important to project the digital literacy situation of this generation because of their existence in the workforce of Türkiye. Based on the 2023 data, the average remaining life expectancy of a 50-year-old person is 30.1 years in Türkiye (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2024c). Also, Kalayci and Ozkul (2020) report that the older population in Türkiye experiences social problems such as a lack of education and labor market exclusion. The authors argue that formal education would not comply with the requirements of contemporary developments, and the most senior citizens continue to be aloof from new technologies.

According to the information related to elderly people from Türkiye, it was seen that, in 2024, the elderly population aged 65 and over in Türkiye was 9 million 112 thousand 298 people, comprising 44.6% men and 55.4% women. On the other hand, in 2023, the labor force participation rate among elderly people reached 12.2%. When analyzing this rate by gender, it was found to be 20.0% for elderly males and 6.1% for elderly females. Also, the unemployment rate for the elderly population stood at 3.1% in 2019, decreasing to 2.7% by 2023 (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2025).

Barriers to employment

In 2023, the labor force participation rate among the older population in Türkiye was 12.2%, up from 11.3% in 2021 (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2025). Despite this modest increase, the rate remains significantly low compared to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average. Notably, OECD countries have witnessed a sharp rise in the labor force participation of older workers in recent years, with the employment rate for individuals aged 55–64 reaching 64% in the second quarter of 2023 (OECD, 2023). When the literature is examined, it becomes evident that this situation is even more unfavorable for older females. In Türkiye's media sector, for instance, women over a certain age face growing challenges in maintaining their presence, as youth and physical appearance are often prioritized (Ozen Col & Ozbek, 2017). Similarly, in a study conducted within the Turkish banking sector, young female employees emphasized working conditions and salary expectations, whereas older women highlighted issues such as burnout and early retirement (Donmez & Tuncay Celikel, 2024). These findings illustrate the compounded difficulties faced by older women in the labor market.

Aging is a universal human experience accompanied by both advantages and disadvantages. One significant challenge is ageism, which affects not only older workers but all of society, both directly and

indirectly (Solak et al., 2025). Celik (2023) found that no older characters appeared in leading roles within Turkish media environments such as television and Netflix. Particularly in terms of their professions, older women were portrayed more negatively, indicating a form of double disadvantage. Other media portrayals support this trend. Kaya and Ozdemir (2023) revealed that only 9.1% of older adults held major roles in commercials in Türkiye. Also, Zengin (2014) found that while men tend to receive awards at older ages, women are awarded at younger ages, and overall, the mean age of award-winning male actors is higher than that of their female counterparts. This suggests that sexist attitudes create a dual burden for older actresses, restricting their career trajectories over time. Additionally, Sivritepe (2021) observed that portrayals of older individuals in news images often convey a negative perspective. These visuals commonly depict older adults as isolated, casually dressed, situated in domestic settings, and lacking physical attractiveness. Such imagery contributes to the broader societal perception that marginalizes older individuals and potentially undermines their employment opportunities in an aging Türkiye.

In addition to these cultural and structural issues, media representations play a crucial role in shaping public attitudes toward older workers. According to data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (2024b), while there has been some improvement in elderly employment, the persistent negative imagery in various forms of media continues to hinder further progress. In print, audiovisual, and digital media in Türkiye, older individuals are frequently depicted as dependent, vulnerable, and detached from productive life. A semiotic analysis by Coskun and Kaymak (2022) showed that print media often associate older adults with themes of poverty, neediness, and passivity. While television programs occasionally portray older individuals as experienced and productive, such depictions are sporadic and lack systemic representation.

Based on this, it can be said that the digital media landscape presents a complex duality. On the one hand, it offers opportunities for visibility and participation; on the other hand, it also amplifies discriminatory narratives. Aktas and Ozgur (2023) found that older individuals are often subjected to derogatory comments and exclusionary language on social media, referred to as “grey digital violence.” Consequently, many older adults withdraw from online spaces, resulting in what Akbuga (2023) terms “digital silence,” thereby limiting their ability to express themselves and engage in digital platforms.

Biases and stereotypes in media

Neary and Ringrow (2018) warn about the media institutions/ media coverage to construct and retain norms and values of a society. They highlight the increasing power of media through the rapid technological changes, especially emphasizing the importance of understanding the representation of media and how it conveys its messages because of its influence on people. Mass communication is a form of communication that creates a target audience and communicates to it as a mass (Scannell, 1991), so it has been highly influential on societies.

Kaya and Ozdemir (2023) put forth the marginal representation of older individuals in the media and argue that society's perception of aging and older adults can be influenced by the quantity and nature of media representation. Celik (2023) investigated the first seasons of the eight most popular Turkish TV series, and the results showed that older persons were considerably underrepresented in prime-time series relative to the Turkish population; they were subjected to age discrimination and symbolically removed. Additionally, data presented that no older character was portrayed as the main character, and older people, particularly older women, were depicted more negatively on both platforms, particularly when it came to having a profession. The study also compared eight "original" Turkish series on Netflix with the ones on prime-time series, and the results revealed that older people were portrayed more fairly on Netflix than on TV, while neither platform consistently depicts older adults in major, active, or professional roles. Celik (2023) posited that older women faced a double jeopardy in terms of negative coverage of older characters in media content. In summary, older women are perceived more unfavorably than older men in Türkiye (Marcus & Sabuncu, 2016).

On the other hand, in the study of Solak et al. (2025), it was found that while there is a favorable perspective on the elderly, rooted in Turkish cultural respect for them, there are also worries about biased attitudes and perceptions towards older employees. It supports the idea that the representation of the elderly in the media has changed regularly from 1930 to 2017 in a negative direction in Türkiye (Apak & Aka, 2020). This trend indicates that media portrayals often reflect a negative image, diverging from traditional Turkish cultural values (Ozmen, 2013). For instance, Birsen (2017) also highlights the low visibility of the elderly on the radio, like in other media tools given above.

The research of Isbilen and Salman (2024) indicates that advertisements feature both negative and positive portrayals of older people in Türkiye. In the advertisement showcasing positive representations of older individuals, there is an effort to challenge and reverse the stereotype of negative portrayals of older adults. Nevertheless, in the majority of commercials, the negative stereotype of older individuals continues to be reinforced. On the contrary, in the study of Aydogan (2021), in Türkiye, public service advertisements portray seniors using positive stereotypes more frequently compared to other countries; however, it's notable that the number of public service ads featuring seniors is lower. Additionally, female seniors are depicted less often than their male counterparts. Regarding stereotypes in Türkiye, Kaya and Ozdemir (2022) found that although there are positive categories with higher representation rates, as given in the next section, there are still negative categories, such as the "hopeless" (around 3%) and "seriously disabled" (around 2%). In the study conducted by Course et al. (2024), which investigates the representation of older adults in Turkish newspaper reports during the COVID-19 pandemic in Türkiye, the same results were found. It was revealed that elderly individuals were primarily assessed in a negative light as vulnerable, passive, and at-risk, lacking honesty, and displaying atypical behavior.

Showcasing older workers' contributions

In Türkiye, media portrayals of older workers reflect both negative stereotypes and emerging positive representations. While several studies argue that older adults are underrepresented in media or are commonly depicted in negative contexts (Celik, 2023), constructive portrayals that emphasize their value and capacity do exist. For instance, Kaya and Ozdemir (2023) analyzed 444 Turkish television commercials and found that 46 of them (around 10%) featured older characters—defined as individuals aged 60 and over. Of the 2002 total people shown in these commercials, 121 (6%) were older adults. Although only about 9% of these older individuals played major roles, the study identified some positive stereotypes, including the "golden ager" (67 instances, approximately 55%) and the "perfect grandparent" (48 instances, around 40%). However, these portrayals are predominantly male, and older women are less frequently shown in active or professional roles.

In a comparative international study, Aydogan (2021) examined social advertisements from Türkiye and five other countries with high elderly populations (Japan, Finland, Portugal, Italy, and Greece), using data from the 2019 World Bank report. The study revealed that Turkish social advertisements represent elderly individuals through more positive stereotypes than those from the comparison countries. Nevertheless, the number of such advertisements remains low across all contexts. Gender disparity persists; older women are represented less frequently than older men. On a more promising note, older people in Turkish ads are often shown engaging with other age groups and appearing in dynamic, outdoor environments, which helps to normalize intergenerational interaction and vitality in older age. In Türkiye, mainstream and digital media have occasionally featured the productive roles of older individuals. However, these portrayals are often anecdotal rather than part of a systematic effort to reframe aging. Such representations usually emerge as “human interest stories” rather than being embedded within broader narratives of productivity and inclusion.

Traditional crafts and cultural heritage have become important themes through which older individuals are positively represented. Media reports frequently feature elderly individuals over the age of 60 who continue to work in areas such as wood carving, copperwork, and baking. These portrayals highlight the preservation of cultural heritage as well as the continued expertise of older workers (TRT Haber, 2021; Haberton, 2022). For example, the TRT Belgesel series *Usta Eller Masalı* profiles elderly master artisans who have dedicated their lives to preserving traditional Turkish crafts. These individuals are portrayed as vital bearers of cultural memory and skilled mentors for future generations (TRT Belgesel, 2023b). Likewise, the *Anadolu İnsanı* series presents older individuals as resilient, community-rooted figures, emphasizing their role in sustaining rural life and traditional knowledge (TRT Belgesel, 2023a). Furthermore, the publication *Kaybolan Meslekler ve Son Ustalar*, issued by the Esenler Municipality, draws attention to elderly artisans as key transmitters of intangible cultural heritage (Esenler Belediyesi, 2021). This local initiative reflects a growing recognition of the value that older individuals offer—not only in terms of labor, but also in preserving and transmitting identity, tradition, and community values.

In the international media context, a film called ‘The Intern’ (2015), starring Robert De Niro, can be given as a great example of media showing older workers as capable, valuable, and adaptable in a tech-driven

and youthful workplace. This film portrays a 70-year-old widower who becomes a senior intern at a fashion company. In her sociological analysis of the film, Ozkan-Bardakci (2024) claims that older people can overcome their bias on technology through this type of media coverage, especially on TV. Older people can be discriminated against in many ways, such as being slow to understand, slow to learn, and technology is also one of the discrimination that they face. It is also conveyed in the film, the elderly, who are particularly eager to learn, can grasp and learn technology well, and they can live an easier life with technology learning. The messages given with mass media will also raise awareness of individuals and support older people in developing self-confidence. In a world where communication technologies are constantly evolving, being able to keep up with technological developments will undoubtedly make the lives of the elderly easier.

Impact of policies and initiatives

In Türkiye, the statutory retirement age is differentiated based on gender and the year individuals first entered the social security system. As of recent reforms:

- For men, the retirement age is 60, provided they have completed 7,200 to 9,000 premium days, depending on their entrance year into the labor market.
- For women, the retirement age is 58, under similar conditions.
- However, with the gradual implementation of the Social Security and General Health Insurance Law No. 5510, the retirement age is increasing progressively for both men and women, aiming to reach 65 for both genders by 2048.

The Relevant Policy Frameworks in Türkiye are as follows:

1. **Law No. 5510** (2006): This law integrated Türkiye's fragmented social security institutions into a unified system and introduced gradual increases in retirement age. It also aimed to ensure the long-term sustainability of the pension system in the face of demographic changes, such as population aging.
2. **Early Retirement (EYT)**: Türkiye historically had generous early retirement schemes. However, these were significantly restricted with reforms post-1999 and 2008. In 2023, the government implemented a special regulation (commonly referred to as "EYT düzenlemesi") allowing those who entered the workforce before 1999 to retire without an age requirement, provided they fulfilled the required working days.
3. **Age Discrimination and Employment**: There is currently no specific legislation that protects older workers from age-based discrimination in Türkiye. This creates a policy gap affecting the inclusion of older workers in the labor market. Older adults often face challenges in re-employment, especially in rapidly digitalizing sectors.

4. **Social Assistance for Older People**: The 65+ old-age pension, provided to elderly citizens who do not qualify for a contributory pension and have no sufficient income, represents another pillar of Türkiye's approach to old age welfare (Hurriyet, 2025).

Also, the Radio and Television Supreme Council, which is known as RTÜK in Türkiye, is one of the regulators of the media in Türkiye and provides a range of oversight and guidance to ensure that media content fairly reflects gender, age, and other sensitivities. Besides the aim to encourage taking the essential precautions for facilitating the access of the elderly and the disadvantaged people to the media services and new technologies (RTÜK Audiovisual Media Law, 2011), RTÜK focuses on the representation of elderly people in media by organizing a concept on programs for the elderly (RTÜK Audiovisual Media Law, 2011).

The Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Family and Social Services, aims to develop and implement holistic and fair social service models for the protection, strengthening, and development of the individual, family, and social values. Besides its work on children and family-related issues, gender equality, the elderly, and disabled people are some of the main working areas of this ministry. According to the Directive on the Organization and Duties of the Ministry of Family and Social Services General Directorate of Disabled and Elderly Services (25.11.24), the Directorate General is responsible for carrying out and coordinating protective, preventive, educational, developmental, guidance, and rehabilitative social service activities for the disabled and the elderly. The Ministry keeps up its efforts to defend and advance elderly citizens' human rights and prepared a guide for elderly people in 2020, which aims to explain the policies for the elderly in Türkiye, mainly Old-Age Pension Within the Context of Law No. 2022 (The Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2024).

Recommendations

Based on the analysis, some of the recommendations given below are to reduce stereotypes about older workers, to suggest initiatives, and to promote positive media representations for Türkiye:

1. To increase visual representation and reduce stereotypes about older workers, television series, advertisements, and other media content would promote elderly persons being seen as professionals and productive individuals, in addition to in "traditional roles". Narratives should be created in which older workers' knowledge, experience, and contributions are highlighted.

2. Documentary series or short films on the success stories of older workers could be prepared by public broadcasters and private media outlets such as TRT. Inspired by international examples such as "The Intern", scenarios suitable for the Turkish context can be developed.

3. Inclusive Media Policies could be set by the relevant public institutions, like RTÜK, to combat age-based discrimination. Awareness training for media producers can be conducted.

4. Non-governmental and civil organizations would carry out projects to recognize the contribution of older workers to increase the visibility of elderly individuals

5. Periodic reports on the representation of elderly individuals in the media in Türkiye should be prepared, and these indicators should be shared with the public.

Conclusion

In Türkiye, although the labor force participation rate among older adults has shown a slight increase, it remains well below the OECD average. Older women face deeper structural and cultural barriers in the labor market. In the media, older individuals are often portrayed as passive, vulnerable, or disconnected from productivity, with older women being even less visible and more negatively represented. Constructive portrayals that highlight the contributions and experiences of older adults are mostly limited to anecdotal success stories. On the other hand, in the context of digitalization, access to and effective use of digital technologies remain limited for older individuals. Only 25.6% of people aged 65 and over in Türkiye reported using public services via the internet. This digital divide restricts both social participation and employment opportunities. Phenomena such as “grey digital violence” and “digital silence” contribute to the exclusion of older people from the online environment as well.

From a political view, although some media policies and social service frameworks have included positive steps regarding the representation of older adults, a systematic and sustainable policy approach is still lacking. For instance, the absence of specific legal protections against age-based discrimination also creates a significant gap in the reemployment and inclusion of older workers. Hence, given Türkiye’s aging population, it is crucial to strengthen digital inclusion, promote diverse and empowering media representations, and develop age-friendly policies. Moving forward, more research and action are needed to make the knowledge and experience of older adults visible and valued across media and working life.

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UK Country Report: Digitalization and Media (WG5)

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Executive Summary

This country report examines the intersection of ageing, digitalisation, and media representation in the United Kingdom. With over 67 million people, the UK is experiencing a demographic shift where older adults (55+) now account for over 31% of the working-age population. Employment rates for older adults remain high, yet a persistent digital skills gap and widespread media stereotypes limit their participation in the digital economy. The report explores barriers to employment, biases and stereotypes, positive initiatives, and relevant policies. It highlights both challenges and opportunities in how the media can contribute to inclusive representation of older workers. Recommendations include targeted digital training, more balanced media portrayals, support for intergenerational mentoring, and stronger policy implementation to ensure that digital transformation benefits all generations.

1. Introduction

The United Kingdom, with a population exceeding 67 million, is characterised by a steadily ageing demographic. According to the Office for National Statistics, individuals aged 50 and over now comprise a growing share of the workforce, reflecting broader trends of increased life expectancy and later retirement. Economically, the UK continues to navigate challenges related to productivity, workforce participation, and the integration of digital technologies across sectors.

Digitalisation and media play a pivotal role in shaping both employment opportunities and societal perceptions of older adults. As workplaces become more digitally oriented, older workers often face unique challenges, including limited access to training, outdated skillsets, and age-related stereotypes. These barriers are further compounded by societal attitudes and biases that undervalue the capabilities of older individuals, frequently portraying them as resistant to change or less adaptable to modern technology.

Scholars emphasise that media portrayals and communication patterns strongly influence older adults' social inclusion and identity (Harwood & Roy, 2005; Moriarty & Popple, 2020), while digital communication studies show that technology can both empower and marginalise ageing populations (Rosales & Fernández-Ardèvol, 2020; Ng & Indran, 2021).

However, media and digital platforms also present a powerful opportunity to challenge these narratives. By highlighting the experience, reliability, and knowledge of older workers, media can reshape public perception and promote a more inclusive representation of ageing in the workforce.

This section sets the stage for the report's subsequent analysis, which focuses on the barriers older individuals face in the digital age, the societal attitudes that influence their employment prospects, and the potential of media to celebrate the vital contributions of older adults in a rapidly evolving economy.

Research Questions

This report addresses the following research questions, aligned with the WG5 template:

1. What barriers do media pose to employment opportunities for older workers?
2. Are there examples where media have positively influenced perceptions of older workers?
3. How do different forms of media (print, audiovisual, digital) shape societal attitudes?
4. What biases or stereotypes are prevalent in the media representation of older workers?
5. How can media platforms capture and showcase the cumulative knowledge of older workers?
6. What local, national, or institutional policies and initiatives aim to address stereotypes and biases in media representation?
7. Are there examples of best practices that promote positive media representation of older workers?

2. Basic Statistics: UK's Demographics, Employment & Digitalisation Trends

The demographic and labour market profile of older adults in the United Kingdom reflects both the opportunities and challenges of an ageing workforce in a rapidly digitalising economy. As of 2023, there are approximately 13.2 million people aged 50 and above, representing about 31% of the working-age population (16–64 years). This demographic is steadily growing due to increased life expectancy and later retirement ages. Employment rates among older individuals remain relatively high: 71% are employed, 27% inactive and 2% unemployed. The average age of labour market exit has risen in recent decades, from 63.3 years (men) and 61.2 years (women) in 2000, to 65.2 years and 64.3 years respectively in 2020.

Digital inclusion, however, remains a pressing issue. A 2023 Age UK analysis found that nearly 6 million people aged 65+ are either offline or unable to use the internet safely and successfully; 46% of over-65s cannot complete basic online tasks. In 2019, only 28% of adults aged 75+ had "foundation level" digital skills, compared to 97% of 16–24-year-olds. Additional surveys confirm this gap: HRreview (2023) reported that 60% of over-55s in the UK have received no digital upskilling, while Computer Weekly (2023) similarly found that almost 60% of UK workers overall lack structured digital skills training. Business in the Community (BITC, 2017) and the Centre for Ageing Better (2018, 2022a, 2022b) stress that older workers face structural barriers in accessing reskilling opportunities, which exacerbates inequalities.

Media consumption patterns show that older adults are increasingly engaged online, though with different habits than younger groups. A 2024 ONS survey found that individuals over 70 spend an average of 43 minutes daily online, primarily browsing websites and using email. Policy frameworks highlight persistent challenges. A report by the Women and Equalities Committee identified "pervasive ageism" in the workplace and called for renewed strategies to address digital exclusion among older adults. Other policy responses include the

Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP, 2017) "Fuller Working Lives" strategy and the proposed Employment Rights Bill (2025).

Table 1. Snapshot of Older Workers in the UK

Indicator	Statistics	Source
Population aged 55+	13.2 million (31% of working-age population)	ONS, 2023
Employment rate (55+)	71% employed; 27% inactive; 2% unemployed	ONS, 2023
Average retirement age	Men: 65.2 (2020), Women: 64.3 (2020)	TUC
Digital literacy (65+)	46% cannot complete basic online tasks; 6 million offline	Age UK, 2023
Media consumption	Over-70s average 43 mins/day online, mostly email/news	ONS, 2024
Policy frameworks	Women & Equalities Committee report, DWP Fuller Working Lives, Employment Rights Bill	UK Parliament, 2023–2025

3. Findings by Subsections

3.1 Barriers to Employment

The media significantly influences public perceptions and employer attitudes toward older workers, shaping the opportunities available to them. In the UK, several key barriers emerge:

a) **Reinforcement of Negative Stereotypes**

Media often portrays older people as less adaptable, technologically inept, and resistant to change. Such portrayals contribute to ageist attitudes among employers, who may assume that older workers are less productive or unwilling to learn new skills (Swift et al., 2017). This stereotype discourages both the hiring and retention of older employees, particularly in fast-paced, tech-driven industries.

b) **Underrepresentation and Lack of Positive Representation**

Older workers are consistently underrepresented in mainstream media, particularly in advertisements and television shows, which tend to favour younger demographics. When older individuals are portrayed, the emphasis is often on retirement, frailty, or dependency, rather than competence and vitality (Loos & Ivan, 2018). This lack of positive visibility reinforces perceptions that older workers are outside the productive workforce.

c) **Promotion of Youth-Oriented Workplace Cultures**

Media narratives often idealise youthful, fast-paced work environments, implicitly marginalising older workers. These depictions influence organisational branding and recruitment messaging, discouraging older applicants from applying and reinforcing discriminatory hiring practices (Duncan & Loretto, 2004).

d) **Sensationalism Around Ageing and Workforce Participation**

Sensationalist coverage of the "burden" of an ageing population can influence public policy and employer strategies in ways that disadvantage older workers. Instead of valuing experience and mentorship, media depictions may present older employees as obstacles to innovation and growth (Lain, 2016). Broader sociological research (Phillipson, 2019; Taylor, 2018) confirms that such framings reinforce structural inequalities, narrowing opportunities for extended working lives. Together, these narratives highlight how pervasive media framings create real barriers in employment for older individuals.

3.2 Biases and Stereotypes in Media

Media representations in the UK often reinforce ageist stereotypes and biases, contributing to discriminatory attitudes in workplaces and broader society. Key themes include:

1. **Depictions of Decline and Incompetence**

Older workers are frequently portrayed as less productive, resistant to change, and technologically inept, reinforcing the notion of ageing as inevitable decline (Loretto & White, 2006; Riach & Loretto, 2009).

2. **Burden on the Economy**

Some narratives depict older workers as blocking opportunities for younger people by delaying retirement, or as relying disproportionately on pensions and healthcare (Van Dalen et al., 2009). Life-course studies show that such discourses can intensify intergenerational divisions rather than fostering solidarity (Van der Horst & Vickerstaff, 2021).These framings fuel intergenerational tension. Life-course studies show that such discourses can intensify intergenerational divisions rather than fostering solidarity (Van der Horst & Vickerstaff, 2021).

3. **Reluctance to Retire**

Older workers are often presented as remaining in the workforce due to necessity rather than choice, with media focusing on "grey delay" as a social problem rather than a reflection of active engagement (Swift et al., 2017).

4. **Positive Stereotypes: Reliability and Experience**

While negative portrayals dominate, some positive traits (loyalty, experience, reliability) are occasionally emphasised (Flynn, 2010). Yet these positive attributes are often overshadowed by the dominant discourse of decline.

5. **Gendered Ageism**

Older women face compounded stereotypes, often portrayed as less employable or invisible compared to older men (Sappleton & Takruri-Rizk, 2008).

Despite some improvements in public discourse, these stereotypes continue to undermine older workers' visibility and perceived value. Scholars argue that organisational and cultural change is needed to shift these deeply embedded biases (Moen, Kojola & Schaefers, 2020; Parry & Urwin, 2021).

3.3 Showcasing Older Workers' Contributions

Although negative stereotypes are prevalent, examples exist where media positively portrays older workers:

- **Public awareness campaigns**: Age UK campaigns emphasise older people's skills and contributions, often using real-life stories to highlight their value in the workplace (Age UK, 2018).

- **BBC representation**: The inclusion of older presenters such as Angela Rippon and Gloria Hunniford challenges ageist stereotypes, demonstrating that older individuals remain relevant in professional life (BBC News, 2023).
- **Industry initiatives**: Aviva's "Mid-Life MOT" campaign highlights the value of retaining older employees, reinforcing the benefits of experience and reliability (CIPD, 2019).
- **Documentaries and social media**: Initiatives such as *The Age of No Retirement* and movements like #AgePositive presents older workers as thriving in second careers and contributing significantly to society.

These examples demonstrate that the media can act as a platform for challenging stereotypes and showcasing older adults as capable and valuable contributors. The Centre for Ageing Better (2022) provides additional evidence that well-designed campaigns can shift public attitudes and promote inclusive workplaces.

3.4 Impact of Policies and Initiatives

At local, national, and institutional levels, the UK has introduced initiatives to address stereotypes and promote fair representation:

- **Committees of Advertising Practice (CAP) Regulations (2019)**: prohibit advertisements containing harmful gender stereotypes.
- **Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) Guidance (2023)**: advises on avoiding racial and ethnic stereotypes in advertising.
- **Ofcom's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Guidance (2022)**: requires broadcasters to promote equality of opportunity and implement training.
- **BBC Diversity Initiatives (2016–2020)**: included leadership diversity targets and improved on-screen representation.
- **Unstereotype Alliance UK Chapter (2020)**: a coalition tackling harmful stereotypes in advertising and media content.
- **Employment Rights Bill (2025)**: proposed legislation requiring companies to strengthen DEI policies, including protections against age discrimination.

Earlier government strategies, such as the Department for Work and Pensions' *Age Positive* campaign (2010), remain important historical precedents in promoting older worker inclusion. However, consistent enforcement and stronger alignment between current policy and practice are needed to sustain progress (Centre for Ageing Better, 2018).

4. Case Studies (Media and Policy Examples)

To illustrate how media narratives in the United Kingdom shape perceptions of older workers, several case studies are presented. These examples highlight the dual role of media in reinforcing stereotypes while also providing opportunities to challenge ageism and promote inclusive representation.

BBC Panorama: *Too Old to Work?* (2022)

The BBC's flagship investigative programme Panorama aired an episode titled *Too Old to Work?*, which explored how the ageing UK workforce contributes across multiple sectors. The documentary profiled older employees in healthcare and skilled trades, countering the stereotype that age diminishes productivity. It demonstrated how older workers bring expertise, reliability, and commitment, while also highlighting the systemic challenges they face in an increasingly digitalised labour market.

The Guardian: Over-50s Returning to Work (2023)

The Guardian published a feature article, *"The over-50s returning to work: 'I've never felt so needed'"* (Booth, 2023), which profiled individuals who had resumed employment after retirement. Their testimonies revealed resilience and adaptability, showing how older workers make valuable contributions to education, healthcare, and customer service. By foregrounding real-life voices, this coverage challenged the assumption that older adults are unwilling or unable to participate in the modern workforce.

Financial Times: Employers Seeking Older Workers (2023)

The *Financial Times* ran several articles addressing labour shortages and the role of older workers. One report, *"UK firms turn to older workers to plug labour shortages"* (Thomas, 2023), documented how companies actively recruit retirees and older professionals to fill skills gaps. The coverage highlighted employers' recognition of older workers' reliability and experience, framing their return not as a liability but as an asset to business continuity and innovation.

ITV Tonight: *Britain's Ageing Workforce* (2021)

ITV's *Tonight* programme broadcast *Britain's Ageing Workforce*, which included interviews with older employees and their employers. The documentary emphasised older workers' loyalty, work ethic, and expertise, particularly in key sectors such as retail, care work, and manufacturing. The inclusion of employer perspectives reinforced the message that older employees are indispensable, directly countering negative stereotypes of decline.

Age UK Campaigns (2018–2022)

Age UK, one of the UK's leading charities, has consistently worked with media outlets to promote positive images of ageing and employment. Through campaigns covered in national media, Age UK presented case studies of individuals aged 60+ thriving in employment, taking on new challenges, and breaking stereotypes about later-life work. These campaigns have been influential in reshaping public narratives, linking older people with resilience, adaptability, and economic value. Initiatives such as *The Age of No Retirement* (2020) have further reinforced these positive narratives, using exhibitions, workshops, and storytelling platforms to reframe ageing as a period of innovation and contribution.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this report, the following recommendations are proposed to improve the representation and integration of older workers in the UK's digital economy:

5.1 Expand Tailored Up skilling Programmes

Older workers often prefer practical, applied learning rather than traditional classroom-based training. Employers and policymakers should invest in on-the-job digital skills training designed specifically for workers aged 55+, addressing their unique learning styles and reducing barriers to participation. This includes creating accessible training modules, mentoring schemes, and subsidised lifelong learning opportunities. Evidence from the Centre for Ageing Better (2018; 2022a; 2022b) and BITC (2017) highlights the urgency of embedding structured opportunities for lifelong reskilling into workplace policy.

5.2 Promote Age-Positive Media Campaigns

Media outlets and employers should collaborate with organisations such as Age UK and the Centre for Ageing Better to launch campaigns that portray older workers as competent, adaptable, and innovative. National campaigns should highlight success stories and showcase the valuable contributions of older adults to business, the economy, and society. As shown in initiatives like The Age of No Retirement (2020), media storytelling can shift cultural attitudes toward ageing by reframing later life as a period of innovation and contribution.

5.3 Support Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer

Policies and media campaigns should foster mentorship networks where older professionals share expertise with younger colleagues. Digital storytelling platforms, professional networking sites, and employer branding strategies can be used to document and showcase these exchanges, reinforcing the value of intergenerational

learning. Research emphasises that intergenerational collaboration strengthens both productivity and workplace cohesion (Moen, Kojola & Schaefers, 2020; Parry & Urwin, 2021).

5.4 Strengthen Policy Implementation

Existing policies, such as the CAP regulations (2019), Ofcom EDI guidance (2022), and the proposed Employment Rights Bill (2025), provide frameworks for equality and inclusion. However, enforcement remains inconsistent. Stronger monitoring mechanisms, independent reviews, and mandatory reporting on age-diversity metrics are needed to ensure compliance across media and employment sectors. Earlier initiatives, such as the Department for Work and Pensions' Age Positive campaign (2010), illustrate the importance of continuity in policy design.

5.5 Encourage Employer-Led Positive Branding

Employers should be encouraged to integrate older workers into their recruitment strategies, workplace branding, and media representations. Companies such as Aviva and B&Q demonstrate that inclusive branding can highlight older employees as reliable, skilled, and innovative. Wider adoption of these practices can reduce ageist biases across industries.

5.6 Enhance Accessibility of Digital Tools

Media and workplace technologies should be designed to be intuitive, age-friendly, and accessible. This includes simplified interfaces, embedded guidance functions, and employer-provided support. Accessibility is essential for empowering older adults to fully engage with digital transformation.

5.7 Areas for Further Research

Further investigation is needed to:

- Assess the effectiveness of different training modalities (on-the-job, hybrid, online) for older learners.
- Explore the impact of digital inclusion on older workers' economic participation and long-term career sustainability.
- Conduct longitudinal studies on the effects of age-inclusive workplace and media policies.

Additional scholarship suggests that sociological perspectives (Phillipson, 2019; Taylor, 2018), life-course approaches (Van der Horst & Vickerstaff, 2021), and organisational change frameworks (Moen et al., 2020; Parry & Urwin, 2021) should guide future research. These perspectives can ensure that digital and media interventions are not only short-term fixes but part of sustained, intergenerational strategies.

6. Conclusion

The United Kingdom stands at a pivotal juncture in integrating older workers into a rapidly digitalising economy. An ageing workforce, combined with persistent digital skill gaps, creates both challenges and opportunities for employers, policymakers, and society at large. While older adults account for nearly one-third of the working-age population, many remain disadvantaged by ageist stereotypes, limited digital up skilling, and underrepresentation in media.

The evidence presented in this report demonstrates that media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and employer attitudes. Negative portrayals — depicting older workers as resistant to change, technologically inept, or a burden — reinforce structural ageism in the labour market. At the same time, positive examples from BBC programming, Age UK campaigns, corporate initiatives like Aviva's *Mid-Life MOT*, and coverage in *The Guardian* and *Financial Times* show the potential of media to challenge stereotypes, highlight contributions, and promote inclusive narratives.

Policy frameworks such as the CAP regulations (2019)**,** Ofcom's EDI guidance (2022)**,** and the forthcoming Employment Rights Bill (2025) mark important steps in addressing these issues. However, their effectiveness depends on consistent enforcement, cultural change within organisations, and stronger alignment between policy, media, and practice.

As Phillipson (2019) and Taylor (2018) argue, such shifts require a reframing of ageing not as a liability but as part of intergenerational fairness. Organisational research further highlights that sustaining extended working lives demands structural adaptation and flexibility (Moen, Kojola & Schaefers, 2020; Parry & Urwin, 2021), while life-course perspectives emphasise the importance of linking ageing policies to broader intergenerational transitions (Van der Horst & Vickerstaff, 2021).

Key areas for improvement include:

- Expanding tailored digital training for workers aged 55+.
- Promoting balanced and empowering portrayals of older workers in mainstream and digital media.
- Embedding age-diversity indicators into national and organisational strategies.
- Supporting intergenerational knowledge transfer through mentorship and media storytelling.
- Conducting longitudinal research on the impacts of inclusive policies.

By explicitly addressing the research questions, this report concludes that the UK's media and digital landscape has the power to either reinforce ageism or dismantle it. Moving forward, collaborative efforts between policymakers, employers, media organisations, and advocacy groups will be essential to ensure that digital transformation benefits all generations, and that older workers are recognised as vital contributors to the economy and society.

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