

## Combating ageism in the world of work

UNECE Policy Brief on Ageing No. 21  
February 2019

### Contents

Introduction.....	2
Defining ageism.....	3
Strategies to tackle ageism in the labour market.....	6
Removing ageist provisions in the legal and regulatory framework.....	7
Addressing prejudice and negative stereotype about older workers.....	8
Encouraging age-inclusive and age-diverse workplaces.....	11
Conclusion.....	13
References.....	14
Checklist.....	16

### Challenging context

Ageism - the stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination against people based on their age - is pervasive and experienced by both younger and older participants in the labour market. Many older workers face ageism when looking for new jobs, training opportunities and career development or are pushed to leave into early retirement in times of economic recession. Ageism in the labour market is prevalent and costly to businesses who do not make the most of the potential of their ageing workforce. At the individual level, ageism has been shown to negatively affect health and well-being and can reduce life expectancy by up to 7.5 years. This calls for comprehensive policy actions at all levels and collaboration between various groups of stakeholders. The complexity and intersectionality of the phenomenon needs to be addressed now, as deeply rooted stereotypes, prejudices and discriminatory practices take time to change.

### Suggested strategies

Combating ageism in the labour market requires:

- **Removing ageist provisions in the legal and regulatory framework** and enforcing implementation of equality acts while promoting awareness about employee rights and support available to victims of age discrimination
- **Addressing prejudice and negative stereotypes about older workers** through research on ageism and awareness-raising campaigns that dispel the myths about older workers, improve their image, highlight their positive contributions to the labour market and promote the benefits of age diversity and inclusiveness; promoting intergenerational contact through mentoring and job-sharing schemes; addressing internalized ageism by boosting confidence and self-esteem, and enhancing skills and employability of older workers
- **Encouraging age-inclusive and age-diverse workplaces** by providing financial incentives to employers, developing capacity for age management and fostering partnerships with relevant stakeholders to facilitate more far-reaching and long-lasting change.

### Expected results

Tackling ageism in the labour market will help to form age-inclusive and age-diverse workplaces that offer equal opportunities for all generations. This will contribute to enabling longer working lives and ability to work in the region's ageing societies to make the most of the potential of longevity.

### With good practice examples from:

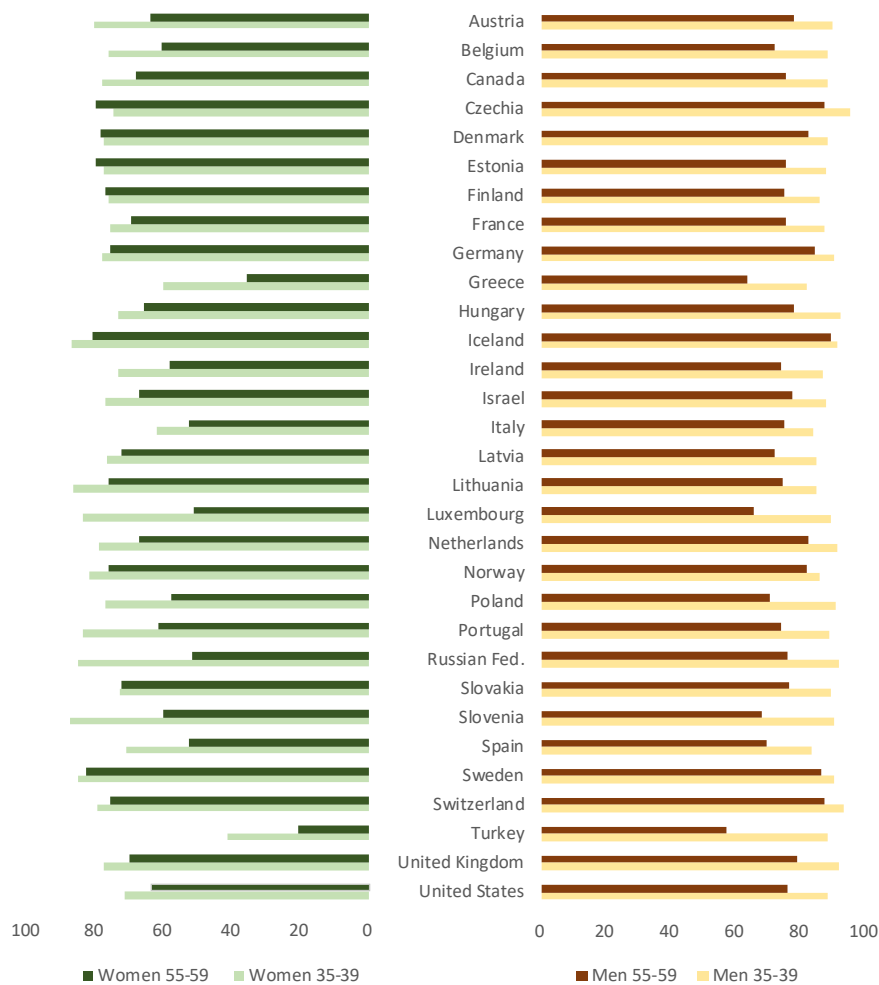
Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Netherlands, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Slovakia, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

This policy brief addresses **Commitments 1, 2, 5, 6, 8 and 10** of the **Regional Implementation Strategy of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, Goals 1 and 2** of the **2017 Lisbon Ministerial Declaration**, and **SDGs 8 and 10**.



United Nations

**Figure 1**  
**Age gap in employment rate in 35–39 and 55–59 age groups\* (percentage of the age group)**



Source: OECD Stat, data for 2017, selected countries.

\* The employment rate for a given age group is measured as the number of employed people of a given age as a percentage of the total number of people in that same age group. Employed people are defined as those who report that they have worked in gainful employment for at least one hour in the previous week or who had a job but were absent from work during the reference week while having a formal job attachment.

## Introduction

Extending working life and increasing employment rates among older age cohorts (50+) has been a key objective of policymakers working to adapt national economies and welfare systems to the consequences of population ageing.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, many older workers face difficulties compared to those of “prime working age” when it comes to recruitment, access to training opportunities, age-adapted working conditions and flexibility. As a result, their capacity and potential are often prematurely lost due to lower participation in the labour market as illustrated by the age gaps in employment rates in Figure 1. Ageism is one of the barriers to longer working lives and is the focus of this policy brief.

Ageism is costly for both employers and employees, and for societies at large. Recently PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) estimated that if member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) increased the employment rate of those aged over 55 to match that of New Zealand (where it is highest), this could boost total OECD GDP by around USD 3.5 trillion in the long run.<sup>2</sup> Ageism not only shortens work longevity but holding negative stereotypes about later life has also been found to shorten life expectancy by about 7.5 years.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Goal 2 of the 2017 Lisbon Ministerial Declaration is to encourage a longer working life and ability to work.

<sup>2</sup> PwC 2018, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Levy et al. 2002; Garstka et al. 2004.

To combat ageism, there is a need to tackle individual and social attitudes, stereotypes and behaviours towards people on the basis of chronological age, as well as laws, policies, and institutions that either perpetuate ageism or fail to stop it.<sup>4</sup> Cooperation among various stakeholders as well as the engagement of older persons themselves is needed to achieve change.

## Defining ageism

Ageism can be defined as the stereotyping, prejudice about and discrimination against people on the basis of their age. It is largely implicit, subconscious and unchallenged in our societies, cuts across the life course and stems from the perception that a person might be too old or too young to be or do something. It can have both positive and negative forms and it can be found at individual (interpersonal) and institutional or cultural level.<sup>5</sup> While ageism can affect people of any chronological age, more attention is usually paid to the higher ages, as older people suffer a greater share of ageism and once encountering it, face more serious consequences than younger persons.<sup>6</sup>

## Ageism in the labour market

Ageism can be found across various dimensions of the labour market, employment relationships and organizational structures. This starts with job advertisements, selection processes, placements, job duties, performance evaluations, career development, pay and other employee benefits. It is also present in the selection of individuals for trainings and decisions on transfers to other jobs, promotions, termination of employment and pension provisions.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 2**  
**Ageism in the labour market**

<p><b>in recruitment</b> entering the labour market</p>	<p><b>in employment</b> behaviour, attitude, tasks, duties, career</p>	<p><b>in retirement decision</b> leaving the labour market: must or will</p>	<p><b>in relations</b> between co-workers/ employers/ employees cooperation versus competition</p>
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Source: Presentation by Abuladze and Perek-Bialas, 2018.

Perceptions of chronological age play an important role in the labour market. A survey among Czech adults aged 18–80 in 2012 showed that among those who feel that their age is important during their working life (79 per cent of the sample in 2012) the vast majority feels that their age is a critical factor in being hired or dismissed, offered training, a promotion or when salary levels are being decided upon (Figure 3).

There is a large body of research examining bias at the application screening stage<sup>8</sup> or effect of an applicant's age on employment interview processes and outcomes<sup>9</sup> indicating that age discrimination in the hiring process is prevalent. The impact of chronological age often intersects with other characteristics, such as sex and gender identities, socio-economic status or class, poverty, educational, ethnic or racial background, health status, disabilities and care responsibilities. Older women have been found to experience age discrimination more frequently than older men, in addition to being disadvantaged on the basis of their gender.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Officer, de la Fuente-Núñez 2018. See also <https://www.who.int/ageing/ageism/campaign/en/> for more information.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Vidovičová, 2008; Meta-analysis by Meisner (2012) shows that negative attitudes are a more powerful predictor of behavioural outcomes than positive attitudes.

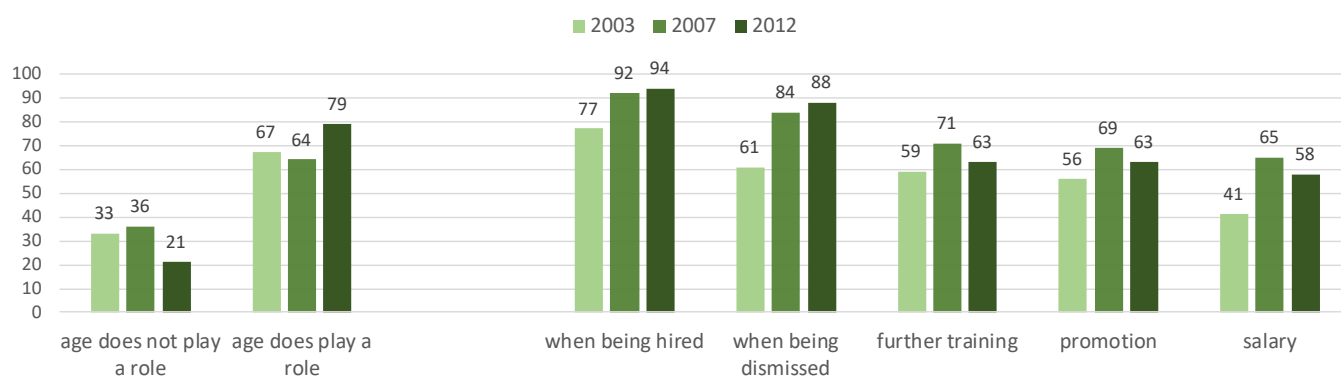
<sup>7</sup> Glover, Braine 2002, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Neumark et al. 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Morgeson et al. 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Duncan, Loretto 2004; Neumark, Burn, Button 2017.

**Figure 3**  
Perceptions of age salience in the labour market, Czech Republic



Source: Vidovičová 2008: 169 (for 2003 & 2007); Survey Ageismus 2012 for data for 2012. Representative sample of the population in the Czech Republic, aged 18–80 years.

### *The way we think and feel – age stereotyping and prejudice*

How we think and feel about older workers plays an important part in the way older persons are treated in the labour market and workplace. Stereotyping refers to widely held and fixed and oversimplified images or ideas. Prejudice refers to preconceived opinions that are not based on reason or actual experience. According to the 2009 Eurobarometer survey, 56 per cent of respondents from 27 countries of the European Union (EU) either strongly agreed (26 per cent) or somewhat agreed (30 per cent) with the statement “As older people work until a later age, fewer jobs will be available for younger people”. Less than one in five (17 per cent) strongly disagreed.<sup>11</sup> Box 1 presents some of the generalized views about older workers’ skills and abilities, in both positive and negative terms.

Many stereotypes related to later life are expressed by older persons themselves, they become internalized, unconsciously expected and often become reality, a phenomenon also known as “self-fulfilling prophecy”.<sup>12</sup>

Older adults themselves also hold age stereotypes that affect their interpretation of other people’s behaviour towards them and of their own behaviour. Researchers have observed various age-related barriers reported by older workers re-entering the labour market, including feelings of being overqualified, lack of empathy, or perceived age difference between the applicant and the interviewer.<sup>13</sup> This is described in the

### **Box 1: A catalogue of stereotypes about older workers**

Negative stereotypes about older workers:

- have lower ability, are less motivated and are less productive than younger workers;
- are resistant to change, harder to train, less adaptable and less flexible;
- have a lower ability to learn and therefore have less potential for development;
- have shorter job tenure and therefore will provide fewer years in which the employer can reap the benefits of training investments;
- cost more because they have higher wages, use benefits more, and are closer to retirement;
- have deteriorating health and/or cognitive ability and take more sick days.

Positive stereotypes about older workers:

- have higher retention rates and lower absenteeism;
- are reliable, committed and dedicated;
- have people-oriented and people-development skills, make good mentors;
- are good leaders;
- are able to deal with change and have generic knowledge of other industries or sectors.

Source: Smeaton, Parry 2018; Age positive 2001.

<sup>11</sup> European Commission 2009 Flash Eurobarometer No. 269; Bösch-Supan 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Radović Marković, Silver Kyaruzi 2010; Vaclair et al. 2016; Grima 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Shacklock et al. 2007, p. 160.

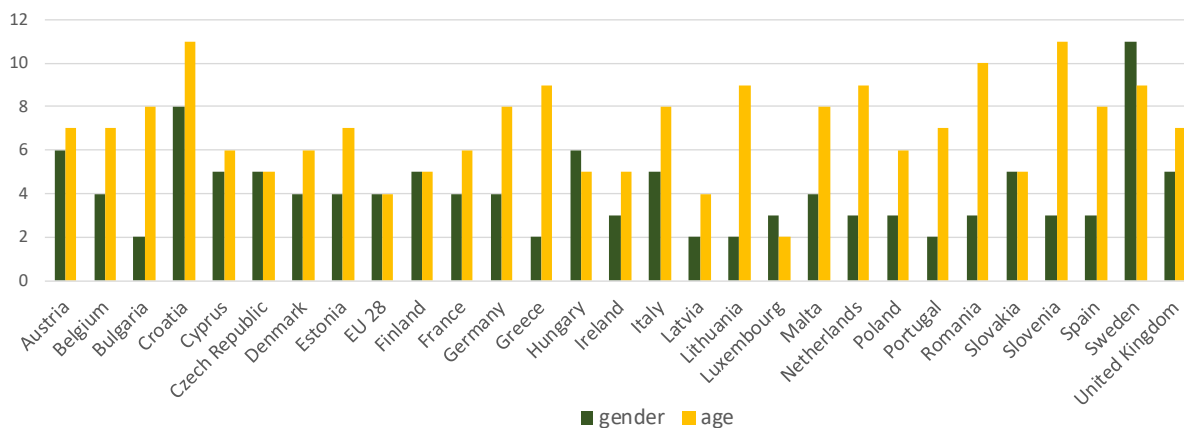
literature as “stereotype threat”.<sup>14</sup> It describes a situation-based fear that one’s behaviour is going to be judged based on stereotypes or that one might act in a way that confirms a stereotype.<sup>15</sup> Such a situation can occur during a job interview with a younger interviewer.<sup>16</sup>

The perception that employers will not be interested in older job applicants can act as a powerful deterrent, preventing people from actively searching for work or from attempting to change jobs to better meet their preferences or changing needs.<sup>17</sup> Perceived and internalized ageism may keep older workers in the “golden cage” of jobs that they are afraid to leave because of the anticipated difficulties in finding a new job (see Figure 3).

### *The way we act — age discrimination*

Age discrimination is a behavioural component of ageism and refers to a situation when a person is treated less favourably than another in a comparable situation because of their age (direct discrimination), or when the effects of apparently neutral action disadvantage people on the grounds of age (indirect discrimination). In the labour market context, age discrimination can be defined as using age proxies in personnel decisions.<sup>18</sup> Discrimination based on age is the form of discrimination most frequently encountered (for example compared to gender discrimination — see Figure 4) and especially, but not only, by people over the age of 55 (see Figure 5).

**Figure 4**  
**Experienced discrimination on the basis of gender or age (percentage\*)**



Source: Eurobarometer 2015 (No. 437).

\*Percentage of responses to the question “In the past 12 months have you personally felt discriminated against or harassed on one or more of the following grounds?” (Multiple answers possible).

Age discrimination is a life-long phenomenon with only a short “time window” between the ages of about 30 and 50 when the risk of being discriminated against is higher based gender then on age as data by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions shows (see Figure 6).<sup>19</sup>

Cultural and policy contexts can make a difference in the levels of perceived and experienced ageism as illustrated by the diversity among UNECE member States in Figure 4 and Figure 5. As the determinants of ageism are multiple, so are the tools available to address them.

<sup>14</sup> Hess et al. 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Steele, Spencer, Aronson 2002.

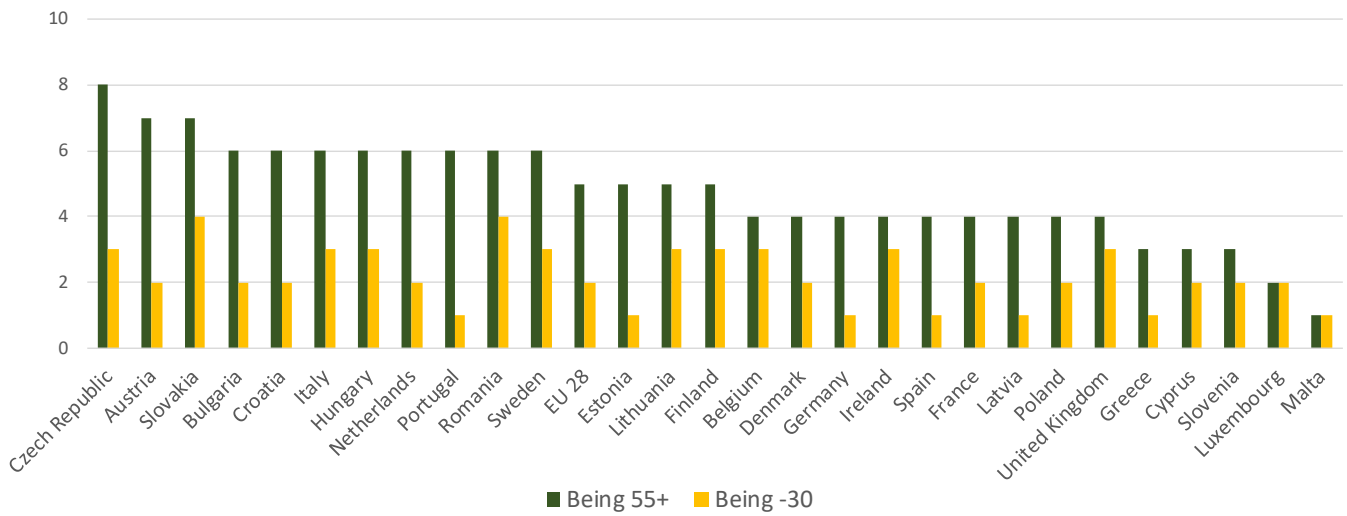
<sup>16</sup> Voss, Bodner, Rothermund 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Smeaton, Parry 2018, p.17.

<sup>18</sup> Stypińska, Turek 2017; Macnicol 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Bratt et al. 2018; Gordon 2018.

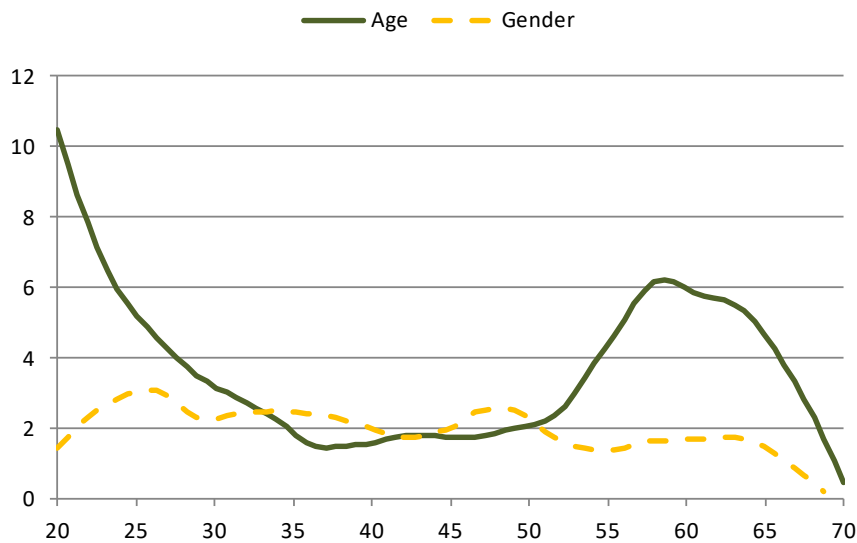
**Figure 5**  
**Experienced age discrimination by selected age groups (percentage\*)**



Source: Eurobarometer 2015 (No. 437).

\*Percentage of responses to the question “In the past 12 months have you personally felt discriminated against or harassed on one or more of the following grounds?” (Multiple answers possible).

**Figure 6**  
**Share of employees experiencing age and gender discrimination in the past 12 months by age (percentage)**



Source: Eurofound European Working Conditions Survey 2015.

Note: The sample covers only people aged 15 and over and in employment for at least one hour in the week preceding the interview in the following countries: the 28 EU Member States, Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland and Turkey.

## Strategies to tackle ageism in the labour market

Policies must be sensitive to the contexts where ageism may take place and to the specificities of a given culture, economic cycle or level of political will, but also take into account the structure of the national economies, sectors and companies.<sup>20</sup> The tools available to policymakers in tackling ageism include legal reforms, measures addressing prejudice and negative stereotypes about and by older workers, and incentives to employers to remove ageism from management practices and workplace cultures. These will be reviewed in the following sections.

<sup>20</sup> Naegle et al. 2018; Hofäcker, Hess, König 2016.

## Removing ageist provisions in the legal and regulatory framework

### *Ruling out ageism*

Legislation is important not only as a way of protecting workers and giving them the possibility to defend their rights, but it is also an important symbolic act signalling the social unacceptability of age discrimination. Anti-discrimination or equality acts usually cover different possible grounds for discrimination and define direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and mistreatment.<sup>21</sup>

Many UNECE countries have legislation in place that has made it illegal to discriminate against someone on the basis of their age.<sup>22</sup> An important impetus for reform in member countries of the European Union was given by EU Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 which established a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation, and included age as a ground for discrimination.

Some countries have gone further to advance active prevention and the promotion of equal rights and opportunities, which is an important step towards achieving change in practice. In Sweden, for example, the Discrimination Act was amended in 2017 to require employers and education providers to (1) investigate the existence of any risks of discrimination or reprisals or any other obstacles to individuals' equal rights and opportunities in the establishment in question; (2) analyse the causes of any risks and obstacles discovered; (3) take the prevention and promotion measures that can reasonably be expected and (4) monitor and evaluate the implementation of measures mentioned above. The Equality Ombudsperson supervises compliance with the Act.<sup>23</sup>

Mandatory retirement ages are an example of regulation that excludes older persons from the labour market. The United Kingdom, where a default retirement age of 65 had been introduced in 2006, allowing employers to terminate or deny employment to workers over the age of 65, revised this regulation in 2011. Mandatory retirement ages are, however, still in place for certain professions.

Removing ageist provisions from legal and regulatory frameworks is insufficient to effectively tackle internalized ageist attitudes and practices in the labour market. The following section will review a number of additional tools available to policymakers to address the different dimensions of ageism.

### *Ensuring compliance*

The ombudsperson (public defender of rights and/or an equality body) has an important role in monitoring compliance with equality acts and laws. Their tasks include raising awareness, disseminating knowledge and information about discrimination, and legislation prohibiting it, among those who could potentially discriminate against others and those who risk being subjected to discrimination. In many member States, the ombudsperson helps the victims to assess their case, points them to responsible overseeing bodies and engages in mediation, if appropriate.

Research has shown that knowledge of victims' rights in the event of discrimination is still rather poor. Less than half (45 per cent) of respondents in EU countries (ranging from 34 per cent in Belgium or Austria to 78 per cent in Finland) indicated that they would know their rights should they become a victim of discrimination.<sup>24</sup>

Reports by ombudspersons give an indication on the extent to which age-based discrimination is brought to their attention, compared to other grounds for discrimination. In Austria, for example, age-based discrimination represented about 18 per cent of all cases of discrimination in 2012 and 14 per cent of cases in 2013.<sup>25</sup> In Croatia, the ombudsperson reported in 2017 on a study conducted by the MojPosao portal, in which 56 per cent of respondents stated that they were often faced with job vacancies which included age limits. Two thirds suspected their age to be the cause for rejection, 31 per cent for being too young, and 35 per cent for being too old, and some were explicitly told so during the job interview.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.equalitylaw.eu/>.

<sup>22</sup> UNECE 2017a.

<sup>23</sup> Information on the Swedish Discrimination Act was provided by the Swedish Ministry of Culture.

<sup>24</sup> Special Eurobarometer 2015 (No. 437).

<sup>25</sup> Information provided by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection. See also <https://www.gleichbehandlungsanwaltschaft.gv.at/ombud-for-equal-treatment> for more information.

<sup>26</sup> <http://ombudsman.hr/en/reports/send/66-ombudsman-s-reports/1468-annual-ombudsman-report-for-2017>, p. 105.

## Vacancies for all — Netherlands

With funding from the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, the Age and Society Expertise Centre and the Equal Treatment Commission created a “checklist” to provide employers with a tool to clarify what is allowed and what is prohibited in the text of a vacancy notice. Through a project entitled “Vacancies for all ages”, classified ads for job vacancies placed in newspapers and on the Internet are screened for age discrimination. Employers responsible for placing offending classifieds receive a letter explaining why that particular notice is discriminatory, as well as information on equal treatment legislation. This project, first launched in 2005, has been in operation ever since. According to the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights, the number of unlawful ads has declined over the past decade.

Source: OECD 2018f.  
<http://www.oecd.org/employment/ageingandemploymentpolicies.htm>.

In Ireland, the Equality Mainstreaming Approach Initiative, managed by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and involving the social partners, works with organizations to strengthen their capacity to combat discrimination, promote equality, and accommodate diversity. The project is supported by the European Social Fund Programme for Employment, Inclusion and Learning 2014–2020.<sup>27</sup>

## Addressing prejudice and negative stereotypes about older workers

*Raising knowledge and awareness*

Research and information campaigns that raise awareness about prevailing age stereotypes and their effects on individuals, businesses and labour markets more broadly provide an important tool for changing attitudes towards older workers. However, available empirical evidence on prevalence, causes, determinants, expressions, and individual and societal consequences of ageism, and knowledge of “what works” in addressing them are still limited in scope and depth.

More research on the prevalence and effects of ageism on businesses and individuals is needed to build the evidence base, substantiate the business case for more age-diverse workforces and inform policymaking in this area. To address this gap, the World Health Organization, in preparing for a Global Campaign to Combat Ageism, commissioned systematic reviews and the findings will provide an important knowledge base for the way forward.<sup>28</sup> Another notable effort to enhance our understanding on ageism is the EU-funded European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) action on “Ageism: A Multinational, Interdisciplinary Perspective” (Action IS 1402) which enabled the establishment of a four-year research network on the topic of ageism.

## International research cooperation on ageism

Established with European Union funding under the COST programme, the interdisciplinary research network on ageism has brought together researchers and policymakers from 35 countries bridging diverse disciplines in the fields of psychology, sociology, social work, health, nursing, law, policy, economy, demography, pharmacy, occupational therapy, communication, gender and labour studies.

One of the collaborative outputs of the network is the open-access book “Contemporary Perspectives on Ageism” published by Springer Open as part of the International Perspectives on Aging series in 2018. It is available for download at <https://rd.springer.com/book/10.1007%2F978-3-319-73820-8>.

More information on the network is available at <http://notoageism.com/>.

The recent review on Ageing and Employment Policies conducted by OECD<sup>29</sup> also provides a valuable repository for national policies that promote longer working lives in European Union countries over the past decade. Country notes report on measures taken to address age-based discrimination, public awareness campaigns and good practices in managing age-diverse workplaces.

At the national level, governments can build the evidence base by funding research in both public and private sector organizations and disseminating the findings to enhance public understanding of the prevalence and implications of ageism in the world of work and society in general.

<sup>27</sup> OECD 2018e, p.5.

<sup>28</sup> Officer, de la Fuente-Núñez 2018.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/employment/ageingandemploymentpolicies.htm>.



Several countries in the UNECE region have developed information and awareness-raising campaigns including conferences, seminars and events engaging the public, as well as the development of handbooks for employers aimed at improving the image of older workers. These campaigns and handbooks highlight the positive contributions of older workers to the labour market and the benefits of age diversity in the workplace. They are part of broader policy efforts to increase employment rates among older persons and enable longer working lives.<sup>30</sup> UNECE Policy Brief #19 featured two such campaigns in Austria and the Netherlands.<sup>31</sup> Another example from Belgium is the campaign “Still young or already old at work?”, including TV slots, whole-page newspaper ads, and a website, with the aim of changing attitudes about the employment of workers aged 50 and over.<sup>32</sup> It was launched in 2012 by the Belgian Federal Public Service, Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue.

### *Mixing ages*

The decreasing frequency and quality of intergenerational contacts and limited opportunities for people of different ages to meet, work and learn together are among the sources of ageism.<sup>33</sup> Programmes that nurture intergenerational contact and exchange can provide an important step towards more age-friendly attitudes within the workforce. Examples include mentoring and job-sharing programmes. In Bulgaria, for example, amendments to the Civil Servants Act in 2016 included job-sharing options for key positions in the administration where inexperienced civil servants perform functions of a position simultaneously with retired colleagues.<sup>34</sup> In Poland, the Civil Service Department ran an “intermentoring” project in the public administration which encourages knowledge exchange between persons from different age groups. Workshops were conducted in 71 public offices in 2014 and were very positively received by participants.<sup>35</sup>

### **Age-friendly workplace — Republic of Moldova**

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Moldova developed the Concept on age-friendly workplaces within the framework of the Action Plan on the implementation of the Road Map for mainstreaming ageing in policies for the period 2018–2021.

The Concept on age-friendly workplaces aims at developing tools for knowledge transfer by senior specialists to younger employees through mentoring and coaching programmes and job rotations. Knowledge transfer for and mentoring of younger employees build on the professional potential of senior qualified staff (especially 65+) as well as help organizations to retain the valuable experience and expertise accumulated by older workers and to invest in younger workers, ensuring sustainability and institutional memory. The Concept also provides a series of measures to prevent ageism such as public information and education campaign in the field of labour law, including clarification of rules for the creation of age-friendly workplaces. In addition, businesses are encouraged to set their own average age growth targets for companies and to support measures for active ageing such as access for the older persons to the labour market. Five companies were selected for testing age-friendly procedures. Ongoing support is provided to companies in testing and applying age-friendly policies.

Source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection, Republic of Moldova.

### *Fighting the ageist within*

Other measures are aimed at preventing or addressing the consequences of internalized ageism that affect the confidence, self-esteem and behaviour of older workers who might be at risk of exiting the labour market early. Programmes can empower older workers by boosting their self-esteem and confidence for example by offering training in skills needed for job applications and interviews. Public information campaigns and support networks can also help reduce internalized age-related stereotypes.

In Belgium, the campaign “There is no age for talent”, launched in 2017 by the Public Employment Service in Flanders, included events organized by unemployed people aged 55 and above to motivate their peers and employers to address self-stereotypes and ageist attitudes.<sup>36</sup> An Austrian campaign on changing attitudes towards the

<sup>30</sup> See UNECE 2017a for more information.

<sup>31</sup> UNECE 2017, Box “Promoting the employment of workers 50+ in Austria and the Netherlands”, p.7.

<sup>32</sup> Cited in OECD 2018a, p.5; <http://www.encorejeunedejavieauxtravail.be/fr/>, accessed 15 February 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Dannefer, Feldman 2017; Bertrand, Duflo 2016.

<sup>34</sup> OECD 2018c.

<sup>35</sup> OECD 2018g.

<sup>36</sup> OECD 2018b. Op talent staat geen leeftijd; <https://www.vdab.be/netwerkevent/55plus>.

recruitment of persons over the age of 50 (*Einstellungssache50plus*) featured testimonials of successful persons of this age group to tackle stereotypes.<sup>37</sup> In addition to positive representation of older workers, hands-on support to overcome barriers in employment helps to enhance self-esteem as an example from Poland shows.

### Active Together 45+ — Poland

In the Polish city of Łódź, a programme called “Active Together 45+” was put in place to help 120 socially excluded persons to return to the labour market. The project provided the group with financial resources which they needed for creating their own “employment agency”. An “Activation Studio” that was open five days per week from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. provided participants with access to the Internet, telephone, fax, and other technologies.

The main strength of the project was to support teamwork. The project offered workshops to help participants develop their soft skills in areas such as communication, self-development, and stress management. Jobseekers could also improve their computer skills.

29 participants managed to secure employment contracts, nine participants enrolled in internships and two became self-employed.

One project participant, Zofia (51), summed up the experience by saying: “*Attending the Studio gave me a new desire to live. It pulled me out of stagnation, discouragement and apathy, and forced me to leave the house. Comprehensive and varied training improved our skills and allow us to think more broadly about future work.*”

Source: European Social Fund Project.

<http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=46&langId=en&projectId=1800>.

### Staying relevant in the labour market

Lifelong learning and continuous training to maintain skills up-to-date and relevant to labour market needs are imperative to achieving fulfilling longer working lives. Ensuring equal access to training opportunities and encouraging their uptake by older employees and jobseekers is important to prevent skills from becoming obsolete. Programmes aimed at enhancing the employability of older workers are especially important to enable disadvantaged groups of (long-term) jobseekers to regain confidence and re-enter the labour market.

Both ageist management practices where older workers are less frequently selected for trainings and internalized ageism that prevents older workers from retraining or gaining new skills towards the end of their careers can lead to older workers “falling behind” in the job market. This can reinforce generalized perceptions that they are resistant to change, harder to train, have a lower ability to learn and have less potential for development (see Box 1).

Programmes devoted to enhancing and protecting the employability of older workers, especially if further disadvantaged such as in case of (long-term) unemployment, are relevant to eradicating ageist prejudices and stereotypes.<sup>38</sup>

### The Sixty-plus centre — Israel

The municipality of Jerusalem together with the National Insurance Institute, the Joint Distribution Committee, and Shipur organization, established an employment-assistance centre for persons aged 60 and over to provide job-training workshops, job-search assistance after retirement, and new technology-skills workshops. These workshops provide seniors with individual as well as group-based assistance and guidance. The centre aims to offer employment solutions to those who depend on small pensions and need to re-enter the labour force in order to supplement their income, as well as to those who are interested in developing new careers.

The centre is located in the city’s community centre and since March 2015 has accepted over 840 applicants. Over 250 people have participated in the centre’s workshops on topics such as how to write a CV, learning about retirees’ rights, how and where to search for a job, including in social networks, computer courses, financial consulting and English courses. 71 per cent of participants found employment.

Another objective is to increase awareness among employers about the advantages of employees aged 60 and over and their contributions as experienced and skilled workers. Additionally, employment of older persons promotes healthy and active ageing, helps prevent and/or eradicate poverty and reduce ageism to better integrate and nurture older persons in a productive and meaningful life.

Source: WHO Global Database of Age-friendly Practices.

<https://extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/afp/the-sixty-plus-center-an-employment-center-to-jerusalem-residents-aged-60-and-over/>.

<sup>37</sup> OECD 2018a.

<sup>38</sup> UNECE 2017.

## Encouraging age-inclusive and age-diverse workplaces

### *Providing financial incentives to employers*

Governments have a limited influence on organizational practice within the private sector. There are however a number of tools, including financial incentives and information and guidance on age-management that can be used to promote change in workplace culture and practice over time.

A frequently used strategy to tackle the age gap in employment rates and promote the hiring of older jobseekers is to provide financial incentives to employers who agree to hire them. In Slovakia, for example, the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family and its 43 local offices provide financial subsidies to companies that create job vacancies for disadvantaged jobseekers over the age of 50. The financial contribution is provided for up to one year if the employment contract is agreed for a minimum duration of 12 months.<sup>39</sup>

While this can temporarily alleviate the hiring bias against older workers by making it financially more attractive for businesses to recruit them, it often does not provide longer-term job security for those benefiting from the measures and might not have a lasting impact on recruiting practices once the financial subsidies stop.

Another approach is for governments to financially support the implementation of age-management projects. In the Czech Republic, for example, companies, NGOs and other organizations can apply for funding to develop their own age-management projects that take into account the needs of individual older workers and make use of their potential. The programme aims to increase the qualifications, skills and competencies of older workers, and to adapt the skill level of the workforce to labour market requirements. It is co-financed by the European Social Fund.<sup>40</sup>

## Financial support for people-centred and age-inclusive management — Germany

The programme “Corporate Value People” (UnternehmensWert Mensch) has helped small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to develop holistic, future-oriented and employee-centred human resource management strategies in order to successfully adapt to the changing world of work in the face of demographic change and other changes such as, for example, digitalization. The programme subsidizes up to 50 per cent or 80 per cent of the costs of consultancy services for SMEs in the fields of staff development, equal opportunities and diversity, health and knowledge, and competence. On-site consultancies in a company can last about 10 days. During the first two years, about 3,000 companies benefited from the programme.

The programme was initiated in 2014 and funded by the European Social Fund and the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Following a successful pilot stage, the support programme was nationally launched in 2015. There are about 109 agencies serving as a first contact point for human resource management guidance and consulting services, and about 1,500 process consultants all over the country.

Source: OECD 2018d. For more information visit: [www.unternehmens-wert-mensch.de/startseite/](http://www.unternehmens-wert-mensch.de/startseite/).

### *Fighting ageism through age management*

Age management is an approach to human resources management that focuses on the requirements of an ageing workforce. It is holistic, life-course oriented and takes into account all age groups and intergenerational relations.<sup>41</sup> As such, it can provide a useful framework for tackling ageism in the workplace if designed in a way that addresses stereotypes and prejudice, enhances age diversity and prevents discrimination.

Studies quantifying the effects of age diversity are not numerous, but company-based surveys indicate that a mix of ages is preferred by the majority of customers (84 per cent) who as a result experience better service and show statistically significantly higher levels of satisfaction. Such result can be at least partially attributed to increased levels of happiness (+10 per cent) in those employees who work with a cross section of ages rather than only with their peer group.<sup>42</sup> Another study has found a positive effect of increased age diversity on productivity in innovative companies.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> [https://www.upsvr.gov.sk/europsky-socialny-fond/narodne-projekty-v-programovom-obdobi-2014-2020/narodny-projekt-chceme-byt-aktivni-na-trhu-prace-50.html?page\\_id=580840](https://www.upsvr.gov.sk/europsky-socialny-fond/narodne-projekty-v-programovom-obdobi-2014-2020/narodny-projekt-chceme-byt-aktivni-na-trhu-prace-50.html?page_id=580840).

<sup>40</sup> Information provided by the Czech Government. <https://www.esfcr.cz/vyzva-079-opz> (In Czech language).

<sup>41</sup> [https://eguides.osha.europa.eu/all-ages/UK\\_en/what-is-age-management-o](https://eguides.osha.europa.eu/all-ages/UK_en/what-is-age-management-o).

<sup>42</sup> Owain 2016; Kunze, Boehm, Bruch 2013.

<sup>43</sup> Backes-Gellner, Veen 2013, p. 290.

## Box 2: Eight dimensions of age management

- Job recruitment
- Learning, training and lifelong learning
- Career development
- Flexible working time practices
- Health protection and promotion, workplace design
- Redeployment
- Employment exit and transition to retirement
- Comprehensive approaches

Source: OECD 2018f.

A number of governments across the region have developed employer guidebooks and toolkits that promote good practices in recruiting and retaining older workers and developing their skills. The “WorkBC Employer’s Tool Kit: A Resource for British Columbia Businesses”, for example, is comprised of a series of booklets aimed at assisting businesses to hire, retain and engage older workers. These strategies include educating employers about the strengths and benefits of different generations of workers, as well as tips for their engagement and retention. It also includes techniques to identify and utilize the strengths and competencies of older workers and use them to support a multigenerational workplace.<sup>44</sup>

### Business Champion for Older Workers — United Kingdom

In 2016, the United Kingdom Government appointed a “Business Champion for Older Workers” to engage and influence employers both strategically and in terms of practical advice. Since accepting the role, Business in the Community’s Age at Work leadership team led by Andy Briggs, of Aviva, has raised awareness through a series of engagement events and challenged employers to increase their older workforce by 12 per cent by 2020. Their “Commit & Publish” initiative urges employers to age-audit their workforce and publish the data while the “Look, Listen, Act” toolkit, one of a number of new products, provides practical advice.

In February 2017, the United Kingdom Government published “Fuller Working Lives: a partnership approach” to set out the role employers, individuals and Government can play in supporting fuller working lives.

Source: Information provided by the United Kingdom Department of Work and Pensions.

<https://age.bitc.org.uk/all-resources/toolkits/getting-started-age-look-listen-act>.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/587654/fuller-working-lives-a-partnership-approach.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/587654/fuller-working-lives-a-partnership-approach.pdf).

Certification schemes such as the Austrian NESTOR<sup>GOLD</sup> programme also provide companies with guidance and support in developing age-inclusive and diverse work environments.<sup>45</sup>

### *Fostering partnerships for change*

Tackling ageism requires the cooperation of all stakeholders involved. Governments can facilitate the process by opening and nurturing platforms where partnerships between representatives of employers, employees and other stakeholders can be negotiated for easier policy implementation and knowledge sharing. Such platforms set a common goal for parties that may have to some extent opposing interests and may help to promote the business case for non-discrimination. Businesses benefit from non-discrimination not only in terms of increased productivity,<sup>46</sup> but also in terms of the quality and longevity of the appointments they can make, for their reputation as an employer and in terms of client satisfaction.<sup>47</sup>

To help drive change, the United Kingdom Government, for example, has developed partnerships with a range of organizations including Business in the Community — the Prince’s Responsible Business Network, ACAS, the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, the Recruitment and Employment Confederation and employer

<sup>44</sup> [https://www.workbc.ca/WorkBC/media/WorkBC/Documents/Docs/toolKit\\_Book2.pdf](https://www.workbc.ca/WorkBC/media/WorkBC/Documents/Docs/toolKit_Book2.pdf).

<sup>45</sup> UNECE 2011.

<sup>46</sup> Wegge et al. 2012.

<sup>47</sup> Smeaton, Parry 2018, p. 21.

organizations, such as the British Chamber of Commerce and Confederation of British Industry. Working together, Government and these organizations have been raising awareness and encouraging good practice through a range of events and products, including an informative video, to promote the benefits of employing older workers.<sup>48</sup>

In Germany, collective agreements addressing age-management issues have been concluded in several sectors, and since 2006, the “Demography Network”, set up by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, promotes good practices across companies.<sup>49</sup>

At the international level, there are several examples of initiatives to join forces against ageism. In 2017, the European Social Partners signed a framework agreement on active ageing and an intergenerational approach to ensure a healthy, safe and productive working environment and work organization to enable workers of all ages to remain in employment until retirement age. The framework agreement further aims to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and experience between generations at the workplace and takes into account the changing national demographic and labour market realities.<sup>50</sup> The World Health Organization has been leading on developing a Global Campaign to Combat Ageism.<sup>51</sup> AGE Platform Europe ran a 70-day awareness-raising campaign against ageism in 2018 with the slogan “Ageing Equal”.<sup>52</sup>

## Conclusion

Ageism in the world of work is a complex issue. Many member States have formally out-ruled discrimination on the grounds of age and have removed many barriers to longer working lives. Longer-term efforts are needed to change the way people feel, think and act towards age and ageing. These “soft” forms of ageism, reflected in attitudes, discourse and workplace cultures, are more difficult to influence. They need to be addressed in order to create truly age-inclusive and age-diverse labour markets where everyone can fully realize their potential throughout their working lives.<sup>53</sup>

This policy brief suggests a number of policy strategies that contribute to combating ageism in the labour market. To achieve lasting change, it is important to remove any remaining ageist provisions in legal and regulatory frameworks and to support the implementation of equality legislation through supportive measures. Research on ageism and awareness-raising campaigns that dispel the myths about older workers, improve their image and highlight their positive contributions to the labour market are among the recommended measures to tackle prejudice and negative stereotypes about older workers. Efforts are needed to promote the benefits of age diversity and inclusiveness in the workplace. This can be supported by encouraging intergenerational contacts through mentoring and job-sharing schemes. Internalized ageism can be addressed by boosting confidence and self-esteem of older workers and jobseekers and by enhancing their skills and employability. Age-inclusive and age-diverse workplaces can be advanced through the implementation of age-management strategies that are holistic, life-course oriented and employee-centred. Financial support and capacity-building measures for employers can help accelerate change. A partnership approach to fighting ageism in the world of work that engages the social partners and a wide range of labour market stakeholders can build a more solid foundation for change than actions by individual employers. Ageism is a pervasive societal challenge and demands actions by all actors and across all sectors.

<sup>48</sup> Information provided by the United Kingdom Department of Work and Pensions.

<sup>49</sup> OECD 2018d; <https://www.demographie-netzwerk.de/>, accessed 18 February 2019.

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.etuc.org/en/pressrelease/eu-social-partners-sign-agreement-active-ageing>, accessed 18 February 2019.

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.who.int/ageing/ageism/campaign/en/>.

<sup>52</sup> <https://ageing-equal.org/>.

<sup>53</sup> UNECE 2012; Stypińska, Turek 2017.

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## Acknowledgement

UNECE is grateful for the expert contribution received from Lucie Vidovičová in preparing this policy brief.

**Checklist: Combating ageism in the world of work**

Main areas	Areas of implementation	Key elements
<b>Removing ageist provisions in the legal and regulatory frameworks</b>	Ruling out ageism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Antidiscrimination legislation</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active / preventive measures</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retirement age regulations</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addressing multiple discrimination</li> </ul>
	Ensuring compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ombudsperson</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raising awareness on rights</li> </ul>		
<b>Addressing prejudice and negative stereotypes</b>	Raising knowledge and awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research and evidence base building</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dissemination of inspirational practices</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information campaigns</li> </ul>
	Mixing ages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentoring and job-sharing programmes</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age-friendly workplaces programmes</li> </ul>
	Fighting the ageist within	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boosting confidence and self-esteem</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public information campaigns</li> </ul>
	Staying relevant in the labour market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lifelong learning</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employability support</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer to peer programmes</li> </ul>
<b>Encouraging age-inclusive and age-diverse workplaces</b>	Age management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life-course orientation</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age-diverse teams</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guidance on age-sensitive policies</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Certification schemes</li> </ul>
	Financial incentives to employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial incentives to hire older workers</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial incentives for age management</li> </ul>
	Fostering partnership for change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage social partners</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International cooperation</li> </ul>