

FORUM: Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

QUESTION OF: Addressing the phenomenon of ageism in the workplace

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INTRODUCTION

Ageism is defined as prejudice and discrimination against individuals based on their age, significantly impacting both the older and younger populations¹. The phenomenon leads to negative stereotypes and unfair treatment. While ageism directed at younger individuals is more prevalent in Europe, globally, 50%² of the population holds ageist attitudes toward the elderly. An article on Women of Influence in Toronto, published in 2024, shows how ageism in the workplace impacts women to a large extent, as they often face "discriminatory hiring practices, biased promotions, and a lack of respect from colleagues"³ as they age. This age and gender bias often results in women facing more challenges than their male counterparts in securing and maintaining fair treatment in their careers. According to a report by the United Nations, a 2020 study in the United States revealed that negative age stereotypes and self-perceptions among those over 60 resulted in excess annual healthcare costs of \$63 billion for the eight most expensive health conditions. This discrimination begins from societal beliefs that prioritize youth and overlook the experience and wisdom older individuals possess.⁴ Technological advancements and artificial intelligence also reinforce ageism by favoring younger, more tech-involved workers, leaving older individuals vulnerable to job displacement.

The consequences are profound: psychologically, ageism can destroy self-esteem and increase anxiety among older adults; economically, it leads to job insecurity and barriers to advancement for both age groups; and culturally, it forms a segregated system that overlooks

¹ Weir, Kirsten. "Ageism Is One of the Last Socially Acceptable Prejudices. Psychologists Are Working to Change That." *American Psychological Association*, 1 Mar. 2023, www.apa.org/monitor/2023/03/cover-new-concept-of-aging.

² "APA PsycNet." *Psycnet.apa.org*, psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2017-47508-001.html.

³ Alexander, Khera. *Almost 80 per Cent of Women Face Ageism in the Workplace – Women of Influence*. www.womenofinfluence.ca/2024/02/26/ageism-in-the-workplace/.

⁴ Nations, United. "World Losing Billions Annually to Age-Based Prejudice and Discrimination | United Nations." *United Nations*, 23 Sept. 2024, www.un.org/en/desa/world-losing-billions-annually-age-based-prejudice-and-discrimination. Accessed 6 Nov. 2024.

older or younger generations. Responding to ageism requires raising awareness, implementing effective policies, and changing the stereotypes that enhance this discrimination.⁵ Addressing ageism is crucial not only for a more inclusive society but also for growing a balance between the ethos of valuing experience and the progress driven by innovation and youth. The theme of ‘ethos vs. progress’ shows the need to reconcile traditional values and respect and wisdom associated with older generations with the advancements brought by the younger generation.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Age diversity

The acceptance of employees of different ages in the workplace⁶.

Ageism

Ageism is the stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination against people based on their age. It can affect individuals of any age, but it is often directed at older workers, limiting their opportunities in the workplace.⁷

Age-related stereotypes

Age stereotypes include misconceptions and presumptions made by individuals about various age groups and the aging process.⁸

⁵ Diehl, Amy, et al. “Women in Leadership Face Ageism at Every Age.” *Harvard Business Review*, 16 June 2023, hbr.org/2023/06/women-in-leadership-face-ageism-at-every-age.

⁶ Martin, Susan Taylor. “Why Age Diversity Will Define the Workforce of the Future.” *World Economic Forum*, 8 May 2024, www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/05/age-diversity-workforce-future. Accessed 6 Nov. 2024.

⁷ World Health Organisation. “Global Report on Ageism.” *Www.who.int*, 2021, www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/demographic-change-and-healthy-ageing/combating-ageism/global-report-on-ageism.

⁸ De Paula Couto, Clara, et al. “Age Differences in Age Stereotypes.” *GeroPsych*, vol. 35, no. 4, 13 Aug. 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1024/1662-9647/a000272>

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The term artificial intelligence describes computer programs that can perform complex tasks that were previously limited to human performance, such as problem-solving, thinking, and decision-making⁹.

Biased hiring practices

“Hiring bias occurs when personal preferences or stereotypes influence hiring decisions, potentially leading to unfair outcomes and a lack of diversity”.¹⁰

Inclusive hiring

The purpose of inclusive hiring is to minimize discrimination and establish fair application, interview, selection, and offer systems for applicants from a wide range of backgrounds¹¹.

Workplace discrimination

“Discrimination in the workplace is unjust treatment of people, based on certain prejudices. Discrimination can occur when an employee is treated unfavorably due to their gender, sexuality, race, religion, pregnancy and maternity or disability.”¹²

⁹ Ricart, Judit Ruiz. “Artificial Intelligence (AI).” wix-encyclopedia, 26 Mar. 2024, www.wix.com/encyclopedia/definition/artificial-intelligence?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=21361713794%5E163727006776%5Esearch%20-%20dsa&experiment_id=%5E%5E701617977759%5E&gad_source=1&gbraid=0AAAAADwEfwVNqbZa-emnpg2EtFSa3LFt-&gclid=Cj0KCQjwzva1BhD3ARIsADQuPnUvO8QBA1bPegb4CI44HvHSg46payYwUkl-mDMMLLZ3bkb3YrJkpn0aAsgcEALw_wcB

¹⁰ “Making Too Many Wrong Hires? Hiring Bias May Be to Blame.” *VidCruiter*, vidcruiter.com/video-interviewing/hiring-biases/.

¹¹ “What Is Inclusive Hiring?” *Greenhouse*, www.greenhouse.com/uk/resources/glossary/what-is-inclusive-hiring

¹² Benstead, Sarah. “What Is Discrimination in the Workplace?” *Www.breathehr.com*, 19 June 2018, www.breathehr.com/en-gb/blog/topic/business-process/what-is-discrimination-in-the-workplace

Equal Employment Opportunity

“Equal Employment Opportunity, ensures that everyone is treated fairly in employment decisions, including hiring, promotion, and compensation. It prohibits discrimination based on characteristics like race, gender, age, religion, and disability, ensuring that all individuals have an equal chance for employment.”¹³

Implicit Bias

“Implicit bias, also known as implicit prejudice or implicit attitude, is a negative attitude, of which one is not consciously aware, against a specific social group.”¹⁴

Global labor market

“An informal employment market that exists globally to meet the supply and demand of talent for multinational corporations.”¹⁵

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Historical context

Ageism began in preindustrial times, 1750–1850, when older individuals held respected roles in agrarian societies due to their experience and wisdom. This social structure valued elders as key sources of information and decision-makers within families. However, the onset of the Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries changed the social structure and shifted to a younger and more physically inclined system. The period saw a decline in societal value placed on older individuals, marking an important change in age-

¹³Workable. “What Is Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)? [Definition and More].” *Recruiting Resources: How to Recruit and Hire Better*, 15 May 2019, resources.workable.com/hr-terms/what-is-eeo.

¹⁴American Psychological Association. “Implicit Bias.” *Apa.org*, 2022, www.apa.org/topics/implicit-bias.

¹⁵ “What Is International Labour Market | IGI Global.” *Igi-Global.com*, 2024, www.igi-global.com/dictionary/international-labour-market/44766#google_vignette . Accessed 8 Nov. 2024.

based discrimination.¹⁶ This shift negatively affected younger individuals by limiting their access to mentorship and wisdom from older generations.

The concept of ageism itself was only formally identified in 1969 by the 42-year-old psychiatrist Robert Butler, who emphasized the prejudice rooted in social structures. Despite social progress, ageism persists today, especially in workplace media and healthcare, often reinforced by stereotypes.¹⁷

Current situation

The current situation around ageism is shaped by several significant trends, such as demographic changes, including a global aging workforce. This means that older individuals remain or reenter the workforce in greater numbers. Advances in technology are reshaping the workplace and often act as a challenge for older workers who may lack familiarity. Lastly, legal and institutional barriers, such as lack of protection against age discrimination laws, persist in many regions and pose a challenge to efforts aiming to reduce ageism.

Causes of ageism

Societal Expectations

Ageism is traced back to long-standing societal expectations and behaviors toward older populations. These attitudes are often shaped by negative stereotypes that describe older individuals as less competent, less adaptable, or unhealthy, even though evidence does not consistently support such assumptions. Although ageist views sometimes include positive aspects, such as valuing experience, they still play a significant role in shaping how older workers are perceived and treated in the workplace.¹⁸

¹⁶ Admin. "AGEISM: UNDERSTANDING ITS HISTORICAL ROOTS." *Ageism Is Real*, 12 Oct. 2023, ageismisreal.com/combating-ageism-understand-historical-roots/.

¹⁷ Achenbaum, W. Andrew. "A History of Ageism since 1969." *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging*, vol. 39, no. 3, 2015, pp. 10–16, www.jstor.org/stable/26556123?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents, <https://doi.org/10.2307/26556123>.

¹⁸ Becker, Tara, and Susan T. Fiske. *Age Discrimination, One Source of Inequality*. *Www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov*, National Academies Press (US), 5 May 2022, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK588538/.

Ageism in the workplace affects not only older workers but also younger employees, who often face stereotypes that can limit their opportunities and well-being.¹⁹ Common stereotypes create the image that younger workers are inexperienced or unreliable - leading to assumptions about their abilities. Age bias can limit career growth and lead to lower job satisfaction. Moreover, in certain fields, younger workers encounter more challenges due to a “pay your dues”²⁰ mindset, which dictates that younger employees must start at the bottom of the hierarchy. Where they may be given fewer responsibilities or less pay, which can be discouraging and push them to leave their jobs or even switch career paths. Some industries such as technology, finance, healthcare etc, also have a harder time integrating different age groups, which can make them feel isolated or unfairly treated by limiting their opportunities and creating exclusion based on age rather than skill or potential.

Aging Workforce

In recent years, there has been an increase in demographic changes regarding ageism. Life expectancy has increased, and fertility rates have declined. Therefore, people tend to live longer and healthier lives. This demographic change is especially located in More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs) where the proportion of older individuals in the workforce continues to rise. This is due to extended working factors such as economic prosperity, improved health, and policy changes, which prompt more individuals to stay in or re-enter the labor market beyond traditional retirement ages. This shows that the global workforce is also aging. As a result, older employees remain active in the workforce for extended periods, which creates an opposition to the societal expectations around retirement and increases the potential for ageism, especially in industries where youth is highly valued because it leads to stereotypes that older individuals are less capable or technologically behind, which marginalize older workers and foster a culture where youth is prioritized.

¹⁹ “How Does Ageism Impact Young People Too? | Ageism.org.” *Www.ageism.org*, www.ageism.org/how-does-ageism-impact-young-people-too/.

²⁰ People, People Managing, and David Rice. “Ageism in the Workplace: Is It a Bigger Problem than You Think?” *People Managing People*, 10 Jan.2024, peoplemanagingpeople.com/culture/ageism-in-the-workplace/ . Accessed 7 Nov. 2024.

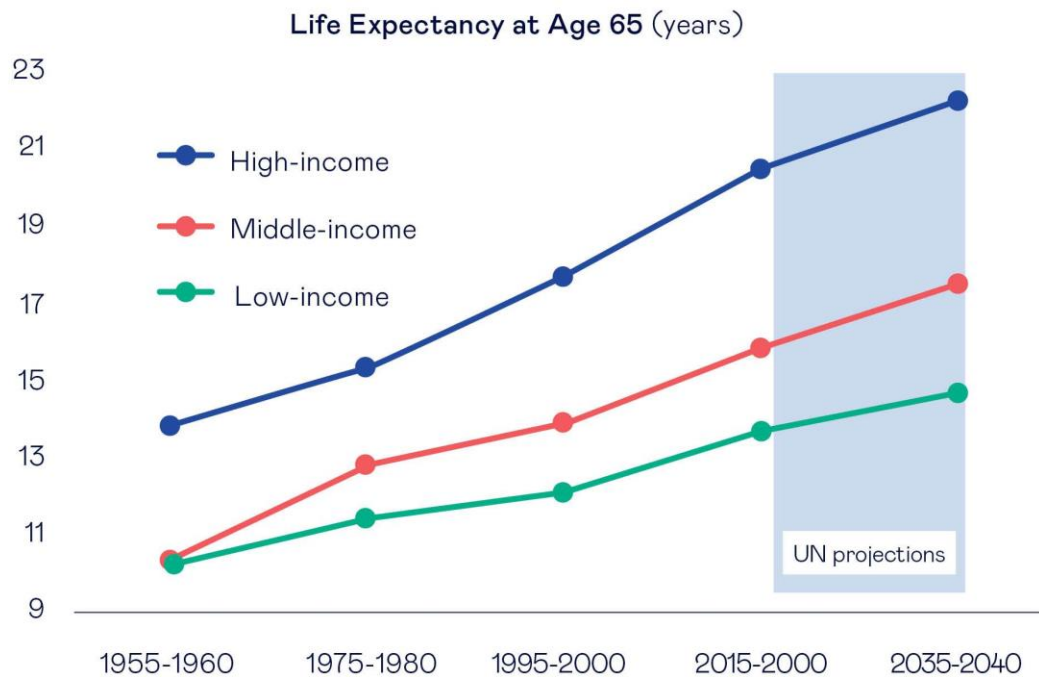


Figure 1: Impact of higher income and development on life expectancy ²¹

In MEDCs, as seen from the graph, life expectancy continues to reinforce the significant role of older workers in the global labor market. Moreover, there also seems to be a decline in birth rates over the past few decades due to factors like higher education levels, increased career focus, greater access to contraception, etc. This has led to a reduced number of young people entering the labor market. This shortage of younger workers means that businesses are becoming increasingly reliant on older employees to meet their staffing needs, which emphasizes the need to prevent further discrimination older employees face. This has led to a more open and diverse multigenerational workforce, through a shift in trend of encouraging companies to rethink traditional practices; more employees staying has allowed companies today to often consist of multiple generations working side by side. This can range from Boomers to Generation Z, each generation bringing with different work styles and experiences. Boomers often offer deep industry knowledge and experience, while Gen Z offers digital fluency and adaptability. While this diversity is very important, especially in today's age,

²¹ Rueda-Sabater, E. (2021, July 12). Longevity: trends and challenges. Esade - Do Better. <https://dobetter.esade.edu/en/longevity-trends>

it can also lead to tensions and stereotypes about older employees being less adaptable or younger employees being less experienced.

Social factors

Ageism is influenced by many factors. A very prominent one that causes worldwide recognition of age discrimination is social factors. Primarily, media representation often portrays the older generation in ways that reinforce negative stereotypes, depicting them as frail, out of touch, or incompetent. Such portrayals—common in movies and other platforms— can perpetuate ageist biases, limiting society's view of older adults' abilities in the workforce. In fact, a 2021 study published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* discovered that negative portrayals of older adults in a media database consisting of 1.1 billion words from the U.S. and U.K. outnumber positive descriptions by a factor of six.²² Ageism in films reveals a complicated situation. In a 2022 article, the executive director of Age Inclusion in Media expressed that Hollywood's ageism has reached an all-high level, with more than 100 British actors and public figures signing an open letter demanding an end to the industry's deep-rooted biases against women over 45²³.

Furthermore, a report found that characters aged 50 and over constituted less than 25% of all characters in top-grossing films between 2010 and 2020, with women representing only 20% of those roles. Overall, the representation of older adults²⁴, especially women, in film and television continues to be insufficient. However, the 2023 Academy Awards recognized several winners aged 50 and older, including Brendan Fraser, Michelle Yeoh, Ke Huy Quan, and Jamie Lee Curtis, which suggests society is hopefully slowly heading toward a more age-inclusive system²⁵.

Moreover, another prevalent social factor affecting ageism today is the way it has been ingrained in today's culture as normative. our society has come to associate youth with

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Eisenberg, Richard. "Ageism in the Media: An Insider's Perspective." *Generations.asaging.org*, 20 Sept. 2023, generations.asaging.org/ageism-media-insiders-perspective.

²³ Eisenberg, Richard. "Ageism in the Media: An Insider's Perspective." *Generations.asaging.org*, 20 Sept. 2023, generations.asaging.org/ageism-media-insiders-perspective.

²⁴ Weintrob, Grace. "Age and Media Representation." *Center for Healthy Aging*, 29 July 2022, www.research.colostate.edu/healthyagingcenter/2022/07/29/age-and-media-representation/.

²⁵ Barnes, Brooks. "Oscars 2023 Highlights: "Everything Everywhere All at Once" Wins Seven Academy Awards, Including Best Picture." *The New York Times*, 12 Mar. 2023, www.nytimes.com/live/2023/03/12/movies/oscars-academy-awards.

the ideals of beauty, vitality and longevity, setting high expectations for physical appearance. In contrast, older individuals are often depicted as failures or as having “let themselves go” reinforcing negative stereotypes of aging. The new generation has formed an unjust notion that so-called ‘aging’ is seen as something disgusting and should be avoided by any means necessary. Moreover, ageism is further reinforced through commercial promotions such as birthday messages, “over the hill”, or categorizing a person's behavior as having a “senior moment”. Overall, all of these have created a very hostile view towards the older generation, viewing the theme as an inconvenience rather than a potential aid in our lives, which becomes especially prominent in the workforce.

Interpersonal factors

Interpersonal factors such as social circles, including families, neighborhoods, and workplaces - play a significant role in shaping the stereotypes surrounding ageism, particularly in the workforce. Within families, younger members often unconsciously refer to negative stereotypes, viewing older relatives as dependent and technologically out-of-touch.²⁶ This attitude can deeply affect the older generations' self-perception, as well as lowering their confidence and willingness to go after new professional opportunities, which is vital in today's rapidly evolving labor market.

In neighborhoods, social excursions can further reinforce the notion of ageism. If communities are not open to engaging in inclusive events, older adults may feel alienated from social and professional circles, reducing their active participation in society as a whole. This exclusion has a larger holistic effect where older adults may struggle to reintegrate themselves back into workspaces or community activities again after facing such discrimination. These attitudes further contribute to a professional system where older workers may be passed over for training, reskilling opportunities, or leadership roles.²⁷ This can have broad economic impacts as experienced professionals are pushed into early retirement, depriving organizations of valuable institutional knowledge and skills.

²⁶“The State of Ageing 2023-24 | Centre for Ageing Better.” *Ageing-Better.org.uk*, ageing-better.org.uk/the-state-of-ageing-2023-4.

²⁷ Machell, Millicent. “Ageism Most Commonly Experienced at Work, Study Finds.” *HR Magazine*, 16 Jan. 2024, www.hrmagazine.co.uk/content/news/ageism-most-commonly-experienced-at-work-study-finds.

Technology

A primary cause for ageism's evolution in society is its relation to technological advancement. Technology has created and distinguished a clear digital division between older and younger workers. As industries have increasingly shifted towards digitization and the use of advanced technologies like artificial intelligence, older workers are often perceived as less adaptable.

The debut of this digital revolution began in the late 20th century, welcoming the use of personal computers in the 1970s and 1980s, followed by the spread of the internet in the 1990s, reshaping workplaces. Jobs required new skills in computing and information technology (IT), which disadvantaged older workers who did not grow up with these technologies.²⁸

More recently, the rise of automation and AI in the 2010s has led to the creation of a new and more efficient system that requires the need for more critical and scarce skills that are used for many important workforce positions. Older workers, particularly those nearing retirement, often struggle to access training to learn this new system with the use of AI, reinforcing stereotypes that they are not adaptable. This development is reinforced in the OECD reports on the impact of digital transformation on older workers²⁹. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 expanded the plethora of implementation and accessibility to online collaboration tools and digital platforms. This shift left many older workers at risk of being excluded, as they were less likely to be proficient in these tools, thus facing greater challenges in job retention.³⁰

Legal and institutional barriers

Legal barriers responding to ageism often arise from inconsistent enforcement of anti-age discrimination laws. In many countries, while laws exist to prevent age discrimination, there are gaps in their application, or the protections may be limited to certain age groups or industries. Some important legislative barriers include the Age Discrimination in Employment

²⁸ "Redirecting." *Google.com*, 2024, www.google.com/url?q=www.ilo.org/media/307711/download&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1731009349700695&usg=AOvVaw28HE22kin4Pg56jn8naGkZ. Accessed 7 Nov. 2024.

²⁹ "OECD Skills Outlook 2023." *OECD*, 2023, www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-skills-outlook-2023_27452f29-en.html.

³⁰ World Economic Forum. "The Future of Jobs Report 2023." *World Economic Forum*, 30 Apr. 2023, www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2023/.

Act (ADEA) in the United States of America. This was enacted in 1967, aiming to protect workers over the age of 40 from age-based discrimination in hiring, promotions, compensation, and other employment terms.³¹ However, many argue that the law is ineffective because it does not prohibit mandatory retirement in all sectors, and age discrimination cases are often difficult to win in court due to weak enforcement mechanisms. Another example includes the European Union Employment Equality Directive (2000/78/EC³²). This directive provides a legal framework to attempt to resolve discrimination based on age in the workplace across the EU. However, there are multiple interpretations of enforcing the directive across Member States, which lead to differing levels of protection for older workers. Additionally, some exceptions allow for "justifiable" differences in treatment based on age, particularly concerning pension systems or retirement policies.³³

Another institutional barrier comes from the unjust access to training and lifelong learning opportunities, which is often fueled by companies' reluctance to invest in employee development, especially for older workers. Many companies prioritize short-term profits and see training as a cost rather than a long-term investment. Therefore, older workers are often excluded from professional skill programs, making it difficult for them to keep up with technological and industry advancements. Therefore, the EU has introduced policies to promote lifelong learning, but older workers are often underrepresented in training programs. This inequality is sometimes due to employer bias, where older employees are viewed as less worth investing in, or because training initiatives are not designed with their needs in mind. Moreover, the International Labor Organization (ILO) R195³⁴ advocates for inclusive lifelong learning policies that target all age groups, emphasizing the need for reskilling opportunities for older workers. However, implementation remains a challenge in many countries due to institutional resistance or a lack of incentives for employers.

³¹ U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. "The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 | U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission." *Www.eeoc.gov*, www.eeoc.gov/statutes/age-discrimination-employment-act-1967.

³² "EUR-Lex - 32000L0078 - EN - EUR-Lex." *Europa.eu*, 2020, eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32000L0078.

³³ European Commission. "Legislation - Directive 2000/78/EC - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission." *Ec.europa.eu*, 2000, ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=166&langId=en.

³⁴ *The NEW ILO RECOMMENDATION 195 Human Resources Development: Education, Training and Lifelong Learning International Labour Office*. https://www.oitcenterfor.org/sites/default/files/file_evento/recom195_en.pdf

Consequences of ageism

Ageism has significant financial and economic consequences, with income and career opportunities being some of the areas most affected. In regards to income, older workers often face reduced earnings or income as a direct influence of age discrimination. A report from the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) found that age discrimination costs about \$850 billion in lost economic output per year.³⁵

Additionally, ageism reduces job security and reinforces wage gaps between age groups. Furthermore, there are fewer career opportunities and developments for older employees. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), ageism can lead to the marginalization of older employees who are often overlooked for promotions, new skill training or professional development opportunities. This has a massive impact on the economy as it doesn't allow their ability to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving workforce, therefore stunting economic growth and innovation potential.³⁶ This is further reinforced by the impacts on the broader economy; when older workers experience limited opportunities, it has an impact on national economies. A study published by the Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reveals that increased inclusion of older adults in workplaces could potentially boost Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, which is the measure of value added created by the production of goods and services within a country over a period of time. By leveraging their experience and skills, reducing labor shortages and increasing overall productivity in the workforce. Ageism reduces the productivity of a workforce, which could otherwise be used as an asset if fully utilized.³⁷

Ageism in a workforce can create significant psychological problems for employees, leading to stress, anxiety and in severe cases, depression. The journal generation has shown that negative stereotypes like assumptions that older workers are disconnected can damage self-esteem and increase feelings of isolation.³⁸ Additionally, a report from mental health and aging states that age-based discrimination creates chronic stress, which can accumulate over time, increasing anxiety and sometimes leading to depression. WHO further emphasizes that

³⁵ "Age Discrimination Costs U.S. Economy \$850 Billion a Year, AARP Report Finds." *MediaRoom*, press.aarp.org/2020-1-30-Age-Bias-Costs-800-Billion.

³⁶ WHO. "Ageism Is a Global Challenge: UN." *Www.who.int*, 18 Mar. 2021, www.who.int/news/item/18-03-2021-ageism-is-a-global-challenge-un.

³⁷ "Working Better with Age." *Www.oecd-ilibrary.org*, www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/working-better-with-age_c4d4f66a-en.

³⁸ "The Impact of Ageism on Elders' Mental Health." *Generations.asaging.org*, 24 Apr. 2024, generations.asaging.org/impact-ageism-elders-mental-health.

internalized ageism, where individuals use negative beliefs about aging, can worsen self-worth and discourage older adults from seeking personal and professional growth. Overall, these effects can influence the impact of their own family dynamic as well as emotional distress at the workplace, as older individuals may withdraw from family activities or avoid offering valuable insights, feeling less capable or relevant.³⁹

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

United States of America (USA)

In the USA, the participation of older workers in the labor force has steadily risen, with people aged 55 and older resulting in this increase. By 2022, they made up about 23%⁴⁰ of the workforce, and this number is expected to increase as the population ages. The increase of older workers directly connects to the topic of ageism as it emphasizes the importance of addressing biases that may arise in hiring, promotion and workplace environments— ensuring that older employees are treated equally. Specifically, the participation rate for those aged 55 and older reached 40.3% in 2013⁴¹, and while it has slightly declined to 38.6%⁴² by 2023, it remains significantly higher compared to previous decades. Due to this, the U.S. has strong anti-ageism legislation, most notably the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) of 1967, which protects workers over 40 from age-based discrimination in hiring, pay, and promotions. However, gaps remain, as ADEA enforcement is often weak and certain sectors, like public safety, are excluded from mandatory retirement bans.

³⁹ World Health Organization. "Ageism." *Www.who.int*, 2023, www.who.int/health-topics/ageism#tab=tab_1.

⁴⁰

"Civilian Labor Force, by Age, Sex, Race, and Ethnicity : U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics." *Www.bls.gov*, www.bls.gov/emp/tables/civilian-labor-force-summary.htm.

⁴¹Ibid

⁴² "Civilian Labor Force Participation Rate by Age, Sex, Race, and Ethnicity : U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics." *Bls.gov*, 4 Sept. 2019, www.bls.gov/emp/tables/civilian-labor-force-participation-rate.htm.

Japan

Japan faces significant challenges with ageism due to its rapidly aging population and shrinking labor force, with over 30% of its citizens aged 65 or older⁴³. To address the workforce shortage, Japan has raised the mandatory retirement age to 65 and introduced policies encouraging companies to rehire older workers until 70. Despite these efforts, stereotypes about older workers being less adaptable remain, limiting their access to reskilling opportunities and leadership roles. Government initiatives like the 70-Year Employment Law⁴⁴ aim to combat these barriers, but challenges remain, such as persistent biases among employers, a lack of target programs made for older workers, and insufficient workplace accommodations that support older workers' physical and cognitive needs.

United Kingdom (UK)

In the UK, ageism in the workforce remains a significant issue, with about 50% of adults over 50 experiencing age discrimination, particularly at work.⁴⁵ Approximately 460,000⁴⁶ individuals aged 50 to 64 are unemployed but want to work, emphasizing the challenges older workers face. To address these challenges, the UK government and organizations are implementing various initiatives. The Centre for Ageing Better⁴⁷ promotes age-friendly employment practices, encouraging businesses to use flexible work arrangements and offering development opportunities for older workers. Additionally, the Age Action Alliance⁴⁸ focuses on forming partnerships to improve age inclusivity in the workplace, while government campaigns aim to raise awareness about the benefits of a diverse workforce

⁴³ Globalen LLC. "Japan Population Ages 65 and above - Data, Chart | TheGlobalEconomy.com." *TheGlobalEconomy.com*, 2023, www.theglobaleconomy.com/Japan/elderly_population/.

⁴⁴ Act on Stabilization of Employment of Elderly Persons - English - Japanese Law Translation." *Japaneselawtranslation.go.jp*, 2022, www.japaneselawtranslation.go.jp/en/laws/view/4516/en.

⁴⁵ Centre for Ageing Better. "Our Ageing Population | the State of Ageing 2023-24 ." *Ageing-Better.org.uk*, 2023, ageing-better.org.uk/our-ageing-population-state-ageing-2023-4

⁴⁶ Machell, Millicent. "Ageism Most Commonly Experienced at Work, Study Finds." *HR Magazine*, 16 Jan. 2024, www.hrmagazine.co.uk/content/news/ageism-most-commonly-experienced-at-work-study-finds.

⁴⁷ "Centre for Ageing Better | Action Today for All Our Tomorrows." www.ageing-Better.org.uk, ageing-better.org.uk .

⁴⁸ "The Age Action Alliance." *Theageactionalliance.org*, 23 Oct. 2024, <https://theageactionalliance.org>

European Union (EU)

The EU has taken significant steps to address ageism. One in three people across Europe have experienced age-based discrimination, with Eastern European countries like Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania reporting high rates. Recognizing this, the organization has promoted efforts to protect older individuals and integrate them into society. During COVID 19, initiatives to support older adults digitally and improve their mental health resources became accessible. Additionally, the EU has emphasized the importance of policies that foster intergenerational connections by recognizing that creating relationships between younger and older generations can help combat social isolation, improve mental well being and create a more inclusive society.⁴⁹

International Federation on Ageing

The International Federation on Aging (IFA) has clearly opposed ageism, emphasizing a global effort involving citizens, governments and organizations to change perceptions around aging. It has approached this issue through partnerships with agencies like the UN and WHO, focusing their policies on promoting equity, rights and inclusive attitudes towards older adults. They also participate in initiatives such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and WHO’s “Decade of Healthy Aging”, aiming to break down stereotypes and ensure a respectful perspective on aging.⁵⁰

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of Event
1958	The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) advocates for the rights of the well-being of people ages 50 and older by providing resources and challenging ageism through educational programs and initiatives.

⁴⁹ “Pervasive Ageism Is a Major Challenge in Europe: UN.” *UNFPA EECA*, 27 Sept. 2021, <https://eeca.unfpa.org/en/news/pervasive-ageism-major-challenge-europe-un>

⁵⁰ “Combating Ageism | International Federation on Ageing.” *International Federation on Ageing*, 20 Sept. 2019, <https://ifa.ngo/positions/combating-ageism/>

December 15, 1967	The Age, Discrimination and Employment Act, prohibits employment discrimination against individuals, aged 40 and older and hiring, firing, promotions, and other employment practices ⁵¹
1969	Robert Butler described ageism as a process of systematic stereotyping and discrimination against people because they are old, forming the term ageism.
2015	The Center for Aging Better aims to tackle ageism by promoting inclusive work, housing and community environments to improve the lives of older adults in the UK.
2020	The International Federation on Aging (IFA) began addressing ageism in alignment with global initiatives through partnerships with the WHO and the UN.
March 18, 2021	The World Health Organization's global report on ageism outlines the framework for action to reduce ageism, including specific recommendations for different actors,
August 5 ,2021	The A/HRC/48/53 Report is submitted to the Human Rights Council to raise awareness of the prevalence of ageism and age discrimination.
August 13, 2024	The 2024A/RES/78/324 resolution is signed to protect the human rights of older adult adults and recommends in 2025 to be held regarding the rights and well-being of older individuals

⁵¹ U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. "The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 | U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission." *Www.eeoc.gov*, www.eeoc.gov/statutes/age-discrimination-employment-act-1967.

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

A/RES/78/324: "Consideration of decision 14/1 of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing, entitled 'Recommendations regarding the identification of possible gaps in the protection of the human rights of older persons and how best to address them'"

On August 13, 2024, the General Assembly (GA) of the United Nations (UN) adopted resolution A/RES/78/324⁵² which represents a key achievement in the 14-year collaborative effort to protect the human rights of older adults. This also reflects recommendations from decision 14/1 by the open-ended working group on aging, which identified gaps in current human rights protections and provided options. Additionally, the General Assembly (GA) calls for a meeting to be held in 2025 that focuses on the rights and well-being of older individuals.⁵³

A/HRC/48/53: Ageism and age discrimination: report to the Human Rights Council

Resolution A/HRC/48/53 has raised awareness about age discrimination through reports and discussions at the HRC particularly under Resolution 42/12⁵⁴ which emphasizes the need for legal protections. This resolution calls for comprehensive measures to ensure older individuals are not subjected to unfair treatment in areas such as employment, health care etc. It further advocates for the creation and enforcement of policies that promote equal opportunities for people of all ages. The independent expert on the human rights of older workers shows how ageism has affected individuals and has analyzed existing laws. Their

⁵² "A/RES/78/324." *Undocs.org*, 2024, www.undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FRES%2F78%2F324&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False. Accessed 8 Nov. 2024.

⁵³ GAROP. "UN General Assembly Adopts Resolution on the Human Rights of Older Persons." *The Global Alliance*, 23 Aug. 2024, <https://rightsofolderpeople.org/un-general-assembly-adopts-resolution-on-the-human-rights-of-older-persons/#:~:text=On%20August%2013%2C%202024%2C%20the,rights%20of%20older%20persons%20and>

⁵⁴ *Resolution Adopted by the Human Rights Council on 26 September 2019 42/12. The Human Rights of Older Persons*. 2012. <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g19/296/55/pdf/g1929655.pdf>

recommendations help countries develop starters to address age discrimination and promote inclusion in society.⁵⁵

World Health Organization (WHO) Global Report

WHO's Global Report on Ageism: the Global Report on Ageism provides an action-oriented system aimed to challenge the notion of ageism by recommending strategies for governments, UN agencies, civil society organizations and the private sector. It compiles data on the issue regarding causes and effects and reviews effective strategies for prevention of these problems.⁵⁶

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Age discrimination and employment act (ADEA)

A previous attempt was in the United States with the Age, Discrimination and Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA), which was enforced to prohibit employment discrimination against individuals 40 years of age and older. This was a good solution as it increased awareness by creating public discussions about the value of older employees and encouraging employees to focus on skills rather than in hiring and promotion decisions, as well as, the establishment of laws about age discrimination, prompting organizations to evaluate their practices as well as the encouragement of anti-ageism laws to adopt a fair hiring and employment system. On the other hand, a major issue is that the ADEA applies primarily to employers with 20 or more employees, leaving many workers and smaller companies without legal protection. Furthermore, despite ADEAs protection, enforcement remains a challenge. For example, the 2019 report by EEOC revealed that age-related complaints accounted for

⁵⁵United Nations. "Ukraine: Behind the Numbers." *OHCHR*, 2024, www.ohchr.org/en/ohchr_homepage.

⁵⁶ World Health Organisation. "Global Report on Ageism." *Www.who.int*, 2021, www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/demographic-change-and-healthy-ageing/combating-ageism/global-report-on-ageism.

only 20% of all discrimination claims, suggesting that many incidents go unreported or unresolved due to fear of retaliation from employers⁵⁷.

Furthermore, societal stigma surrounding older workers persists despite legal protections, leading to a culture where ageist attitudes are prevalent in many workplaces. This can diminish the concept of ADEA's impact as organizations may continue to favor younger employees for hiring and promotions - often based on misconceptions about older workers' abilities

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)

The American Association of Retired Persons⁵⁸ launched a series of initiatives aimed at addressing age discrimination in the workplace, particularly through its workplace ageism initiative. This program focuses on raising awareness of ageism, advocating for policy changes, and providing resources to both older workers and employers. It includes a variety of efforts such as education, educational campaigns, research reports⁵⁹, and partnerships with businesses. It was quite successful in widespread advocacy as it significantly raised public awareness about ageism and influenced policy discussions. Furthermore, it provided numerous resources with easy access for better understanding and practices related to age diversity. On the other hand, a major issue is that although it reaches many individuals, the actual implementation can vary significantly between organizations, leading to inconsistent outcomes. This inconsistency could lead to unequal outcomes for older workers as not all employers prioritize or effectively apply the resources and policies advocated by the AARP. Additionally, despite AARPs logging efforts to promote understanding and acceptance, some employers may still resist changing long-standing perceptions - resulting in a culture that continues to undervalue their contributions.

⁵⁷ "EEOC Issues Federal Workforce Report for 2019." *US EEOC*, www.eeoc.gov/newsroom/eeoc-issues-federal-workforce-report-2019.

⁵⁸AARP. "AARP® Official Site - Join & Explore the Benefits." *AARP*, 2016, www.aarp.org.

⁵⁹Schramm, Jennifer. "The Workforce's Missing Millions." *Blogs*, 13 Sept. 2023, blog.aarp.org/thinking-policy/the-workforces-missing-millions.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

International Policies

International policies addressing ageism are essential for fostering inclusive societies that value individuals of all ages. The United Nations has emphasized the need for comprehensive strategies to combat age discrimination through initiatives, like the Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging⁶⁰, which emphasizes the need for age-sensitive policies that promote the participation and dignity of older adults in society. Countries are encouraged to implement policies that include various sectors, including healthcare, employment, and social services. These policies should be backed by data collection on age-related issues to evaluate and create strategies to combat them. By collaborating internationally, nations can share the best working policies and create a united approach to ageism.

On the other hand, international policies addressing ageism, such as the UN's Madrid international plan of action, can be inefficient as the effectiveness can be hindered by the varying levels of commitment and resources among countries which can lead to inconsistent implementation of ageism policies. Additionally, without sufficient data collection and analysis, it can be difficult to accurately assess the impact of these policies and adjust strategies to effectively combat age discrimination.

Support from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Collaboration between the UN and non-governmental organizations is vital for increasing efforts against ageism. NGOs can engage in advocacy and raise awareness about age-related discrimination while providing crucial support services to older adults. Organizations like Help Age international⁶¹, work alongside the UN to ensure that the needs and rights of older individuals are represented and global discussions. These collaborations can lead to community-based initiatives that challenge stereotypes and provide resources for older individuals while also promoting generational understanding. By using both the UN and NGO activism, a more inclusive society for all age groups can be created.

⁶⁰ "Madrid Plan of Action and Its Implementation | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD)." *Social.desa.un.org*, social.desa.un.org/issues/ageing/madrid-plan-of-action-and-its-implementation-main/madrid-plan-of-action-and-its.

⁶¹

"New Homepage." *HelpAge International*, www.helpage.org.

However, the effectiveness of UN - NGO collaborations may be limited because different NGOs have different levels of resources and reach which means the programs aren't always implemented equally in all areas. Also because local groups often need to adapt to fit specific regional needs the overall message and impact can vary making it harder to achieve a consistent global approach.

Skill growth and intergenerational approaches

Promoting skill growth initiatives and intragenerational programs can effectively combat ageism by showing the value of older adults in the workforce. Upskilling programs, such as those offered by AARP⁶² encourage lifelong learning and help all the workers adopt new technologies, proving that age does not prove that there is a diminished capacity for improvement. Additionally, intragenerational initiatives can facilitate collaboration between younger and older individuals, fostering mutual respect and understanding. Programs that encourage mentorship include older adults sharing their expertise and experience with younger generations, who are less experienced, breaking stereotypes and creating an interconnected need for each other.

While this method can help demonstrate the value of older adults, they face some inefficiencies. Older workers might not always feel comfortable with new technology or might lack enough support to use these programs fully. Also, intergenerational programs rely on both younger and older workers wanting to work together, which doesn't always happen. Without strong engagement or proper support, these programs may not completely break down stereotypes across age groups.

Financial Incentives

Implementing financial incentives can motivate employers to adopt age-inclusive practices that support older workers. Creating such policies can introduce tax breaks or subsidies for companies that hire and retain older employees, urging the creation of inclusive workplaces. For instance, the OECD⁶³ suggests that financial incentives, such as funding for training programs aimed at older individuals, can encourage businesses to value age diversity

⁶² "Join AARP Today for Instant Benefits." AARP, www.aarp.org/membership/.

⁶³ OECD. "Employment." OECD, 2024, www.oecd.org/en/topics/employment.html.

and their workforce. Providing financial support for older individuals pursuing entrepreneurship can empower them economically and challenge agents and stereotypes.

Although financial incentives encourage employers to have a more age-inclusive system they may not guarantee lasting change. Some businesses may apply these policies temporarily to gain benefits without making long-term changes to hiring or retention practices. Additionally, smaller companies may lack the replacements to implement and sustain programs effectively even with financial support.

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