

IntegrAGE

Curriculum



MODULE 5

Age-friendly work environment

**Interreg
Danube Region**



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Summary

The Module focuses on fostering age-friendly workplaces that support older employees through flexible work arrangements and the implementation of an adaptable culture. Flexible options such as phased retirement and partial pensions allow employees to transition smoothly into retirement while remaining engaged and financially secure, which benefits both employees and employers.

Effective age management also requires assessing the individual needs of older employees. This can be achieved through practices that enable companies to identify areas for improvement, from offering flexible hours to adjusting job roles and responsibilities. By implementing these measures, companies can create a work environment that values all age groups, supporting employees' long-term health, job satisfaction, and continued contributions.

Glossary

- 1. Flexible Work Arrangements:** Employment practices allow modifications in work schedules, locations, or tasks to support employees' personal needs. This includes part-time work, telework, and phased retirement options for older workers.
- 2. Active Ageing:** A policy framework encouraging older workers to remain in employment through adaptable job roles, health programs, and opportunities for lifelong learning, contributing to longer, healthier careers.
- 3. Workplace Adaptation:** Modifications to the work environment or job tasks that support older employees in performing their duties effectively, ensuring safety and job satisfaction as physical capabilities change.
- 4. Phased Retirement:** A gradual reduction in work hours and responsibilities before full retirement. It helps older employees transition out of the workforce while maintaining productivity and contributing to knowledge transfer.
- 5. Partial Pension:** A financial arrangement allowing older employees to draw a portion of their pension benefits while continuing to work part-time, aiding in gradual workforce disengagement.

The concept of “Age-friendly”

In Europe, age-friendly workplace initiatives are increasingly recognised as essential due to demographic shifts, longer working lives, and the importance of leveraging older employees’ experience.

Reports from the European Commission, the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the European Network of Age-Friendly Employment outline the benefits of age-friendly workplaces, including enhanced employee well-being, productivity, and reduced turnover rates.

Age-friendly generally refers to policies, practices, and environments designed to support the needs, preferences, and contributions of people as they age.

In the workplace, an age-friendly approach promotes inclusivity and accommodates older employees’ needs by implementing flexible work conditions, health and wellness programs, ergonomic adjustments, and opportunities for continuous learning and career progression.

An **age-friendly environment** is one that recognizes, respects, and actively accommodates the needs of older workers. This type of approach enables older employees to continue to contribute productively while feeling valued.

By fostering an age-friendly workplace, companies can benefit from the experience, dedication, and unique perspectives of older employees, positively impacting team dynamics and overall productivity (Office for Seniors, 2020).

However, age-friendly is not a rigid concept, neither there are fixed strategies that can be transferred into the company culture. Each company is different, and the corresponding age-friendly strategy needs to be based on the specific context and needs of the company and its employees.

In this module, we will mainly focus on the age-friendly workplace, with a strong emphasis on the challenges and opportunities of fostering a flexible work environment.

Assessment of individual needs of older employees

Reports from the European Commission and the International Labour Organization (ILO) also highlight best practices for assessing the needs of older employees, which can be summarised in the following ones:

Surveys and Feedback Sessions

According to the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) (2017), engaging employees in open dialogues and anonymous surveys is essential to identifying age-related needs and preferences without the risk of bias. Focus groups or confidential interviews allow older employees to discuss their experiences regarding workplace adjustments, training, and flexibility. EU reports suggest tailoring these surveys to cover aspects like mental and physical health needs, digital skills, and perceived support, which can foster inclusivity and highlight potential improvements.

One-on-One Meetings

ILO (2024) emphasises the importance of one-on-one meetings, particularly with older employees, to build a deeper understanding of their work-life balance and health preferences. These private sessions help employers identify specific needs, such as flexible hours, gradual retirement options, or ergonomic accommodations. The ILO suggests that regular check-ins can help prevent issues related to workplace strain and enhance satisfaction by addressing employees' unique circumstances.

Self-assessment Tools

The European Commission advocates for empowering employees with self-assessment tools to gauge their comfort and satisfaction with workplace accessibility and ergonomics. Self-assessments allow employees to reflect on factors such as lighting, seating comfort, and workstation setup, which can be especially beneficial for older employees managing age-related physical challenges. The ILO encourages the use of standardised checklists or digital assessments to help identify areas where additional support may be required (European Commission, 2016).

Health and Safety Audits

Health and safety audits tailored to the needs of an ageing workforce are critical for ensuring that workspaces are safe, accessible, and conducive to long-term employee health (ILO, 2024). The ILO recommends regular assessments to evaluate workstations, work environments and working schedules from both physical and psychological perspectives.

Flexible working conditions

Flexible working arrangements are policies that allow employees greater control over when, where, and how they work. These arrangements are particularly beneficial for older employees, supporting work-life balance and accommodating personal responsibilities or health needs. Flexibility in work arrangements not only improves job satisfaction and well-being but also enables older workers to stay productive and engaged (EU-OSHA, 2017; ILO, 2024).

Pension benefits are crucial for senior employees, as they have worked all their lives to ensure a livelihood after a productive life. The final years of employment significantly influence the value of these benefits. This is why a company cannot aim to be age-friendly without taking into consideration this important milestone in senior’s employees’ careers.

In this sense, offering flexibility in pension systems is essential for the well-being of senior employees. This is why pension issues are marked as Priority 1:

PRIORITY 1 - Flexible Pension System	
Flexible Retirement Planning	It is a fundamental aspect of an age-friendly workplace, allowing older employees to transition out of their roles gradually rather than facing a sudden retirement. Phased retirement, a strategy advocated by both EU and ILO frameworks, enables older employees to reduce their working hours gradually. This flexibility not only benefits the employees by easing the transition but also ensures that the organization retains valuable experience and institutional knowledge, which can be transferred to younger employees (ILO, 2024).
Phased Retirement	It allows older employees to progressively reduce their workload and hours. It offers a smoother transition into retirement, promoting a balanced approach where employees continue to contribute productively while planning their exit. According to Walker (2020), phased retirement also facilitates knowledge transfer

	<p>within the company, as seasoned employees can mentor and train successors during their final years of employment, thus fostering continuity and team cohesion.</p>
<p>Partial Pension</p>	<p>It is another effective approach to support a gradual transition into retirement. This arrangement allows older employees to draw a portion of their pension benefits while still working part-time, which can alleviate financial concerns and allow for a gradual workforce disengagement (European Commission, 2016). By adopting such schemes, companies can help employees maintain financial stability and reduce the potential stress associated with retirement.</p>

The second priority refers to the Job position itself, as it is well-known that senior employees usually face skill gaps and have increasing needs in relation to the working conditions. In order to do this, it is highly advised to:

PRIORITY 2 – Job position flexibility	
<p>Tailoring individual Demands</p>	<p>The first step is to know your employees’ needs and to see where is possible to reassign physical tasks or adjust workloads to accommodate employees’ abilities as they age. For instance, shifting physically demanding tasks to younger team members or investing in ergonomic equipment can prevent strain and reduce injury risks among older employees.</p>
<p>Adapting Job Positions</p>	<p>Adapting job roles and responsibilities to suit the needs and capacities of older employees is another crucial strategy. The ILO emphasises that job redesign efforts can involve adjusting workloads and redistributing tasks.</p>
<p>Flexible Working Hours</p>	<p>Flexible working hours and the ability to work remotely are critical components of age-friendly work conditions. Allowing older employees to manage their schedules and work remotely, if necessary, can enhance their job satisfaction and work-life balance, particularly for those with health-related or caregiving responsibilities. However, it is important to take other aspects into account and not neglect the social cohesion and team work at the company level. There should be some balance between the flexibility of individual remote work and in-person attendance at workplace, which also fosters team cohesion.</p>

Mentorship initiatives, as shown in Module 4, encourage knowledge sharing and cross-generational collaboration, which can positively impact the adaptation of role positions and the overall flexibility of the company, when it comes to covering skill gaps.

Implementation of a more flexible working environment

This timeline provides a structured approach for CEOs, management boards, HR, and project managers to develop an action plan for creating an age-friendly and more flexible workplace. The goal is to establish flexible and inclusive practices that support older employees and align with the company's broader objectives.

Phase 1: Initial Assessment and Vision Setting

1. **Objective:** Introduce the concept of an age-friendly workplace and align it with the company's goals.
2. **Activities:** Present the benefits of age-inclusive policies, review current practices, and identify broad goals for the action plan.
3. **Outcome:** Agreement on the vision for an age-friendly workplace and commitment to developing a concrete action plan.

Phase 2: Data Collection & Review

1. **Objective:** Develop a plan for gathering employee feedback to assess the needs of older employees.
2. **Activities:** Outline tools like surveys or focus groups, assign roles, and decide on the specific data to be collected (e.g., retirement plans, work satisfaction, health needs). Identify common themes and decide on key focus areas, such as flexible work options, health initiatives, and retirement support.
3. **Outcome:** Clear data collection plan with designated responsibilities and a Consensus on priority areas and initial strategies for an age-friendly workplace.

Phase 3: Strategy Development

1. **Objective:** Develop actionable strategies and allocate resources for each priority area.
2. **Activities:** Define specific initiatives (e.g., phased retirement, wellness programs), identify necessary resources (budget, staffing), and assign leadership for each initiative.
3. **Outcome:** Draft an action plan with strategies for each priority area and a preliminary resource allocation.

Phase 4: Final Feedback, Approval and Implementation Roadmap

1. **Objective:** Secure final approval and set a roadmap with clear milestones for implementing the plan.
2. **Activities:** Review the finalised plan with executives, outline a timeline, assign accountability, and establish a tracking system for progress.
3. **Outcome:** Approved action plan and an implementation roadmap with defined milestones and responsibilities.

Case study

A1 Telekom Austria AG



Country and Region: Austria, Vienna

Sector: IT, Telecommunications

Size and scope: Large enterprise with over 10,000 employees, operating nationwide

Website link: <https://www.a1.net/>

About the company:

A1 Telekom Austria AG is Austria's leading telecommunications provider, offering a comprehensive range of services including mobile and fixed-line telephony, internet, and digital television. A1 serves millions of customers across Austria and is part of the A1 Telekom Austria Group, which operates in multiple countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

The challenge:

A1 recognised the importance of supporting its ageing workforce, particularly employees over 55, to maintain high levels of engagement and productivity. The challenge was to create a flexible work environment that accommodates the unique needs of older employees, addressing factors such as work-life balance, health, and continuous professional development, specifically in IT skills.

The solution:

A1 implemented several initiatives to support employees over 55:

- **Flexible Working Hours:** Introduced adaptable work schedules, allowing older employees to adjust their working hours to better align with personal commitments and energy levels.
- **Part-Time Opportunities:** Offered part-time positions and job-sharing arrangements to those seeking reduced workloads as they approach retirement.
- **Remote Work:** Enabled telecommuting to reduce stress and provide a comfortable work environment.
- **Health and Wellness Programs:** Launched targeted health initiatives, including regular medical check-ups, ergonomic assessments, and wellness workshops, to promote physical and mental well-being.
- **Continuous Learning and Development:** Provided training programs focused on digital skills and new technologies, ensuring that senior staff remain competitive and confident in their roles. The company has a specific senior academy, in which they offer courses for people over 60 years of age, although the target group profiting from it can be younger: <https://a1seniorenakademie.at/>. This initiative is open to employed and non-employed and it is also used as part of the company training strategy.

The impact:

These initiatives have led to several positive outcomes:

- **Employee Satisfaction:** Older employees reported higher job satisfaction due to the supportive and flexible work environment.
- **Increased Productivity:** This is attributed to the effective utilisation of the diverse skills and experiences of its workforce.
- **Positive Organizational Culture:** The flexible work arrangements and continuous learning opportunities strengthened intergenerational relationships, contributing to a cohesive company culture.

Content Evaluation

1. Which of the following best describes an age-friendly workplace?

- a) A workplace that focuses only on the needs of younger employees.
- b) A workplace that promotes inclusivity and supports older employees' needs.
- c) A workplace that limits older employees' responsibilities.
- d) A workplace with no flexible working options.

2. Which policy allows older employees to reduce their hours gradually before full retirement?

- a) Standard retirement.
- b) Paid sabbatical.
- c) Phased retirement.
- d) Sick leave.

3. True or False: Flexible work arrangements can improve job satisfaction for older employees.

- a) True.
- b) False.

4. The term "partial pension" refers to:

- a) A pension plan where employees receive full benefits.
- b) A plan that allows employees to access a portion of their pension benefits while working part-time.
- c) A reduced pension for employees under 50.
- d) A pension without health benefits.

5. Which of the following is NOT a flexible working condition mentioned in the curriculum?

- a) Part-time work.
- b) Phased retirement.
- c) Half-fixed schedules.
- d) Telework.

6. Why are job position adjustments recommended for older employees?

- a) To increase physical demands on older employees
- b) To align tasks with their physical capabilities and prevent strain.
- c) To reduce productivity among older employees.
- d) To limit their work responsibilities.

7. What is one method for assessing the needs of older employees?

- a) Randomly assigning tasks.
- b) Anonymous surveys and feedback sessions.
- c) Increasing workload periodically.
- d) Changing workplace accommodations regularly.

8. True or False: Offering flexible retirement options can help with knowledge transfer within the company.

- a) True
- b) False

9. Which of the following best describes "workplace adaptation"?

- a) Addressing age-related needs in the work environment once a year.
- b) Modifications that allow older employees to perform their duties effectively.
- c) Assigning same type of tasks to all employees, so there is fairness.
- d) Restricting flexibility in work conditions.

10. What is the main objective of the "My Ideal Flexible Company" method?

- a) To discuss only financial resources and concerns.
- b) To envision an age-friendly workplace and identify steps to achieve it.
- c) To evaluate job applicants' skills.
- d) To reduce working hours for younger employees.

References

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