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Age Discrimination in Working Life

– How Age Shapes Opportunities in Society and
the Labor Market



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Ikäsyrrjintä työelämässä

- miten ikä määrittää mahdollisuuksia yhteiskunnassa ja työmarkkinoilla

Ikäsyrrjintä on edelleen merkittävä haaste nykyaikaisessa työelämässä huolimatta lisääntyneestä keskustelusta tasa-arvosta, monimuotoisuudesta ja työurien pidentämisestä. Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkasteltiin ikäsyrrjintää työelämässä erityisesti yli 50-vuotiaiden työntekijöiden näkökulmasta Suomessa ja Euroopassa.

Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli selvittää, miten ikäsyrrjintä ilmenee rekrytoinnissa, organisaatiokulttuurissa ja työmarkkinoiden rakenteissa sekä miten se vaikuttaa työllistymismahdollisuuksiin ja urakehitykseen. Lisäksi tutkimuksessa tarkasteltiin digitalisaation, tekoälyn ja jatkuvan oppimisen merkitystä ikääntyvien työntekijöiden näkökulmasta.

Tutkimus toteutettiin laadullisena monimenetelmätutkimuksena, jossa hyödynnettiin kyselyaineistoa, puolistrukturoituja haastatteluja ja dokumenttianalyysiä. Haastatteluaineistoon sisältyi näkökulmia muun muassa entiseltä työministeriltä Jari Lindströmiltä, tutkija Keijo Varikselta sekä Ira Hammermannilta, joka on edistänyt ikäystävällistä työelämää ja Ikäsertifikaatti-aloitetta Suomessa. Tulokset osoittivat, että ikäsyrrjintä vaikuttaa edelleen rekrytointiin, työelämän asenteisiin ja käsityksiin työntekijöiden osaamisesta ja muutoskyvykkyydestä. Samalla tutkimus toi esiin kokeneiden työntekijöiden

vahvuuksia, kuten luotettavuuden, ammattitaidon, strategisen ymmärryksen ja mentorointikyvyn. Tutkimus haastoi myös stereotypioita, joiden mukaan teknologinen osaaminen olisi ensisijaisesti sidoksissa ikään.

Tutkimuksen perusteella ikäsyrrjinnän vähentäminen edellyttää sekä rakenteellisia että kulttuurisia muutoksia työelämässä. Organisaatioiden tulisi kehittää ikäystävällisiä rekrytointikäytäntöjä, tukea jatkuvaa oppimista ja hyödyntää paremmin kokeneiden työntekijöiden osaamista.

Rekrytointikäytännöt, organisaatiokulttuurit ja piilevät asenteet ylläpitävät syrjiviä käytäntöjä, mutta ikäpositiiviset ratkaisut ja

kokemuksen arvostaminen tarjoavat mahdollisuuksia edistää

yhdenvertaisempaa työelämää.

Asiasanat:

ikäsyrrjintä, työelämä, ikääntyvät työntekijät, rekrytointi, digitalisaatio, jatkuva oppiminen, tekoäly.

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Age discrimination in working life

- how age shapes opportunities in society and the labour market

Age discrimination remains a significant challenge in modern working life despite increasing attention to equality, diversity and extended working careers. Demographic ageing, digitalisation and labour market transformation have increased the importance of understanding how age affects employment opportunities, recruitment practices and workplace inclusion. This study examines age discrimination in working life, focusing particularly on the labour market position of workers over the age of 50 in Finland and Europe.

The aim of the study was to examine how age discrimination manifests in recruitment, organisational culture and labour market structures, and how it affects employment opportunities and career development among older workers. The study also explored the relationship between ageing, lifelong learning, digitalisation and artificial intelligence in contemporary working life.

The research was conducted using a qualitative multi-method approach. The material consisted of survey responses, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The survey was conducted using Microsoft Forms and included both structured and open-ended questions related to recruitment, workplace attitudes, technological competence and experiences of age discrimination. Interview material included perspectives from experienced professionals, including former Finnish Minister of Labour Jari Lindström and

researcher Keijo Varis. In addition, the study utilised Finnish and European legislation, labour market reports, media material and seminar discussions from Estonia.

The findings indicate that age discrimination continues to affect recruitment opportunities, workplace attitudes and perceptions concerning competence and adaptability. Many respondents reported experiences of not being selected for positions because of age despite extensive professional experience and qualifications. Stereotypes concerning older workers were commonly associated with assumptions related to technological competence, flexibility and higher labour costs.

At the same time, the findings highlighted the strengths of experienced employees. Respondents associated older workers with reliability, professional competence, strategic understanding, responsibility and mentoring ability. The study also challenged stereotypes related to ageing and technological adaptation. The findings suggest that learning ability and digital competence are influenced more by organisational support, learning opportunities and workplace attitudes than by chronological age itself.

The Estonian seminar material introduced important perspectives concerning intergenerational cooperation, active ageing and artificial intelligence. The material emphasised that older employees can contribute significantly to modern working life through communication skills, contextual understanding and professional experience.

The study concludes that reducing age discrimination requires both structural and cultural change. Legal protection alone is insufficient if organisational culture and recruitment practices continue to reproduce age-related stereotypes. Organisations should promote inclusive recruitment, lifelong learning and age-diverse workplaces to better utilise the competence and experience of older employees.

Keywords: age discrimination, working life, older workers, recruitment, digitalisation, lifelong learning, artificial intelligence

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Abbreviations and Symbols

EU	European Union
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SAFE Project	Solutions for Age-Friendly Employers
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ECJ	European Court of Justice
URL	Uniform Resource Locator
Statistics Finland	Official statistical authority in Finland
Kuldne Liiga	Estonian organisation promoting active ageing and intergenerational cooperation
Ageism	Prejudice or discrimination based on age
Structural discrimination	Organisational or societal practices that indirectly disadvantage certain groups
Directive 2000/78/EC	European Union Employment Equality Directive

Introduction

Working life has undergone significant transformation during recent decades due to demographic ageing, digitalisation, globalisation and rapid technological development (OECD, 2020; European Commission, 2021). At the same time, extending working careers has become an important political and economic objective across Europe. Governments and labour market institutions increasingly emphasise the need to utilise the competence and experience of older employees in order to maintain productivity, economic sustainability and labour market participation. (OECD, 2020; European Commission, 2021).

Despite these objectives, age discrimination remains a persistent issue in working life. Older employees and jobseekers may face barriers related to recruitment, career advancement, training opportunities and workplace attitudes. Individuals over the age of 50 often report difficulties in obtaining employment despite extensive work experience, professional competence and motivation.

Age discrimination refers to unequal treatment based on age. In working life, discrimination may occur directly, indirectly or structurally. Direct discrimination includes explicit unequal treatment based on age, whereas indirect discrimination occurs through seemingly neutral practices that disadvantage certain age groups. Structural discrimination may appear through organisational cultures, recruitment systems or workplace practices that systematically favour younger employees.

The phenomenon is socially significant because demographic ageing is increasing throughout Europe (OECD, 2020; European Commission, 2021). At the same time, labour markets continue to value flexibility, technological competence and rapid adaptability, characteristics that are often stereotypically associated with younger workers. Such assumptions may lead to situations where the competence and experience of older employees remain underutilised.

This study examines age discrimination in working life, focusing particularly on the experiences and labour market position of workers over the age of 50 in Finland and Estonia. The research combines qualitative interviews, survey data and document analysis to create a multidimensional understanding of how age discrimination manifests in recruitment, organisational culture and labour market practices.

The study also examines the relationship between digitalisation and age discrimination. Rapid technological change and the increasing use of artificial intelligence have transformed competence requirements in working life. Public discussion often associates older workers with weaker technological skills, although previous research suggests that learning ability and adaptability are influenced more by opportunities, organisational support and attitudes than by age itself.

In addition to Finland, the study includes perspectives from Estonia. Estonia provides an interesting comparative context because of its highly digitalised society and rapidly changing labour market structures. Seminar material and organisational discussions from Estonia offer additional insight into intergenerational learning, artificial intelligence and the role of older employees in digital transformation.

The study integrates legal, organisational and experiential perspectives. Finnish and European legislation prohibit discrimination based on age, yet experiences and research suggest that age-related inequality continues to exist in working life. By combining multiple forms of research material, the study aims to identify both visible and hidden forms of age discrimination.

The objective of the study is to increase understanding of how age affects opportunities in working life and to explore ways in which organisations and societies could better utilise the competence of experienced employees.

Research Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this study is to examine how age discrimination manifests in working life and how it affects the labour market position of workers over the age of 50 in Finland and Europe.

The central research problem of this study is to understand how age discrimination manifests in working life and how it affects employment opportunities, career development and workplace inclusion among older workers.

The research questions are:

1. What forms—direct, indirect and structural—does age discrimination take in working life?
2. How does age discrimination affect the employment opportunities and career development of workers over 50 in Finland and Europe?
3. What practices, attitudes and structural factors could strengthen equality and age-positivity in working life?

In this study, the chosen methods—interviews, a survey, and document analysis—together create a three-dimensional view of the phenomenon of age discrimination. Interviews highlight individuals' experiences, emotions, and stories about how age is encountered in everyday working life. The survey broadens the perspective and reaches voices that do not always enter public discussion. Document analysis, in turn, examines the rules, guidelines, and official texts that shape working life: what they say about age discrimination and what kinds of meanings are embedded within them.

Qualitative methods are well suited to this research because they make it possible to explore the multidimensional nature of the phenomenon—how age

is intertwined with experiences, interactions, and the structures of working life (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2015).

2 Literature Review

Age Discrimination in Working Life

Age discrimination refers to unequal treatment based on age. In working life, discrimination may occur in recruitment, career advancement, training opportunities, workplace practices and dismissal situations. According to the Finnish Non-Discrimination Act (1325/2014), discrimination based on age is prohibited in employment and recruitment (Finlex, 2014).

Research shows that age discrimination often affects workers over the age of 50. Older jobseekers may experience difficulties obtaining interviews or employment despite extensive qualifications and experience (OECD, 2020; Eurofound, 2018). Previous studies suggest that employers may associate older workers with stereotypes related to lower adaptability, weaker technological competence or higher labour costs (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020).

At the same time, older employees are also associated with positive characteristics such as reliability, commitment, professional competence and strategic understanding. This creates a contradiction in working life: experience is publicly valued, yet older workers may still face disadvantages in recruitment and career development.

Age discrimination is not always explicit. In many cases, it appears indirectly through organisational practices and assumptions. Recruitment advertisements may emphasise flexibility, energy or cultural fit in ways that implicitly favour younger applicants. Structural discrimination may also occur through unequal access to training and development opportunities.

According to Butler (1969), ageism functions similarly to other forms of prejudice by creating stereotypes and assumptions that shape how individuals are evaluated. In working life, these assumptions may affect recruitment decisions, organisational culture and workplace relationships.

2.2 Ageing Workforce and Labour Market Changes

European societies are experiencing significant demographic change. Increasing life expectancy and declining birth rates have led to ageing populations and a growing proportion of older employees in the labour market (European Commission, 2021).

As a result, extending working careers has become a central labour market objective in many countries. Organisations and governments increasingly encourage longer participation in working life to maintain economic sustainability and labour force availability (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020; Eurofound, 2018).

Despite these objectives, older workers continue to face challenges in employment. Research indicates that unemployment periods among individuals over 50 are often longer than among younger jobseekers. Re-employment may also become more difficult after job loss.

In Finland, employment rates among older age groups have improved during recent years, but structural barriers remain. Recruitment practices, stereotypes and organisational attitudes may reduce opportunities for older workers even when labour shortages exist in several sectors.

The contradiction between extending working careers and age-based exclusion forms a central issue in discussions concerning age discrimination.

2.3 Recruitment, Stereotypes and Workplace Attitudes

Recruitment represents one of the most significant areas where age discrimination may occur. Studies suggest that older applicants are less likely to receive interview invitations even when their qualifications match job requirements.

Stereotypes concerning older employees often relate to adaptability, technological competence, flexibility and learning ability. Older workers may be viewed as resistant to change or less capable of adapting to digital transformation. At the same time, younger employees are often associated with innovation, flexibility and technological competence.

These assumptions are not always based on evidence. Research indicates that learning ability does not disappear with age. Instead, differences in learning may relate more to individual factors, organisational support and previous opportunities than chronological age.

Recruitment discrimination may occur explicitly or implicitly. Explicit discrimination includes direct age limits or age-related comments. Implicit discrimination appears through organisational culture, recruiter assumptions and selection criteria.

Several public examples illustrate how age discrimination may appear in recruitment. Media reports in Finland have described situations where experienced applicants were rejected despite extensive qualifications. In some cases, applicants were directly informed that they were considered too old for the position (Duunitori, 2024a; Duunitori, 2024b).

Recent public discussion in Finland has increasingly highlighted the challenges older workers face in recruitment and working life. Finnish media personality Ira Hammermann has publicly discussed how age-related assumptions influence labour market opportunities and organisational attitudes. After her long-running television programme ended, Hammermann began to reflect critically on how age affects visibility, employability and perceived relevance in working life.

(Hammermann, 2026).

Hammermann argued that large numbers of experienced and competent individuals remain excluded from labour markets primarily because they are considered “the wrong age.” According to her perspective, employers should

evaluate applicants based on competence, motivation and potential rather than chronological age.

As a response to these concerns, Hammermann became involved in developing an age certificate initiative in Finland. The purpose of the certification is to encourage organisations to promote age equality and age-diverse working environments. The initiative emphasises that age diversity may strengthen organisational creativity, productivity and employee wellbeing.

(Hammermann, 2026).

Public discussions surrounding age discrimination have also revealed examples of indirect discriminatory attitudes in recruitment and employment services. Some older jobseekers have reported experiences where they were labelled as “senior applicants” in employment services or asked during recruitment interviews when they intended to retire. Such questions may reinforce stereotypes concerning ageing, reduced long-term value and assumptions about declining work ability.

These examples demonstrate how age discrimination may appear subtly through language, assumptions and organisational culture even when explicit discrimination is prohibited by legislation. They also support previous research suggesting that stereotypes concerning ageing continue to influence recruitment practices and workplace attitudes (Butler, 1969; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020).

2.4 Organisational Culture and Structural Discrimination

Age discrimination is often embedded within organisational structures and workplace culture. Structural discrimination refers to practices that systematically disadvantage certain age groups even when discrimination is not openly acknowledged.

Examples include unequal access to training, assumptions concerning retirement or reduced investment in older employees' professional development. Organisations may focus training resources primarily on younger workers because older employees are perceived as approaching retirement.

Such practices may reinforce stereotypes concerning ageing and competence. When older workers are excluded from development opportunities, their skills may become outdated, which then strengthens assumptions regarding declining competence.

Research suggests that age-diverse organisations benefit from combining different perspectives, experiences and competencies. Intergenerational collaboration may strengthen innovation, mentoring and knowledge transfer within organisations (Hammerman, 2020; Ilmarinen, 2019).

2.5 Lifelong Learning, Digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence

Digitalisation and artificial intelligence have transformed working life rapidly (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2022).

Technological competence and continuous learning are increasingly important in many professions.

Public discussion often associates technological adaptation with younger generations. However, research suggests that older workers are fully capable of learning new technologies when provided with sufficient support and opportunities.

The concept of lifelong learning has become central in labour market policy and organisational development. Lifelong learning refers to continuous competence development throughout an individual's career (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2022).

The seminar material from the Kuldne Liiga conference held in Tallinn, Estonia, in 2026 highlighted the importance of intergenerational learning and communication skills in the use of artificial intelligence. According to the seminar discussions, the effective use of artificial intelligence depends not only on technical competence but also on critical thinking, contextual understanding and communication skills.

The seminar material also challenged assumptions regarding generational learning differences. Learning capacity was presented as an individual rather than age-dependent characteristic.

Digital transformation may therefore function both as a challenge and an opportunity for older workers. Exclusion may occur when access to digital learning opportunities is limited, whereas inclusion may strengthen when organisations recognise the value of experience and contextual understanding.

2.6 The Position of Workers Over 50 in Finland and Estonia

In Finland, discussions concerning ageing and employment have focused particularly on extending working careers and improving labour market participation among older individuals.

Research and public discussion suggest that workers over 50 often face barriers in recruitment despite strong professional competence. Older employees may be viewed as expensive, less adaptable or technologically weaker compared to younger applicants. (OECD, 2020; European Commission, 2021).

At the same time, experienced employees contribute important strengths to working life, including reliability, strategic understanding, mentoring ability and professional expertise.

The Estonian context provides an interesting comparison because Estonia has developed rapidly into a highly digitalised society. Estonian seminar materials emphasised the importance of intergenerational cooperation, digital competence and flexible learning environments.

The Estonian seminar material also highlighted changing attitudes towards ageing, work and active participation in society. During the conference discussions, one participant explained that continuing employment was not only connected to economic necessity, but also to maintaining activity, wellbeing and social participation. The participant described the issue by stating:

“I do not want to work because I have to. I want to continue working as long as possible because I want to remain active and continue playing golf.”

This statement reflected a broader perspective presented in the seminar discussions: older employees increasingly view work as part of active ageing, meaningful participation and personal wellbeing rather than solely as a financial obligation. The conference material emphasised that remaining active in working life may support both mental and physical wellbeing while also strengthening social inclusion among older individuals.

The Estonian discussions also challenged stereotypes concerning ageing and technological competence. According to the seminar material, artificial intelligence and digitalisation should not be viewed as barriers for older employees, but rather as opportunities for intergenerational learning and cooperation. The discussions highlighted that communication skills, professional judgement and contextual understanding remain essential competencies in modern working life regardless of age.

Both Finland and Estonia prohibit discrimination based on age through national legislation and European Union directives(Directive 2000/78/EC;Finlex;2014). However, practical challenges related to recruitment practices and workplace culture continue to exist.

2.7 Legal Framework

The legal framework concerning age discrimination is based on both Finnish and European legislation.

At the European level, Council Directive 2000/78/EC establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation establishes a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation. The directive prohibits discrimination based on age, religion, disability and sexual orientation in working life (Council Directive 2000/78/EC establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation, 2000).

In Finland, the Finnish Non-Discrimination Act (1325/2014) prohibits direct and indirect discrimination based on age. Employers are required to promote equality and prevent discriminatory practices (Finlex, 2014; Yhdenvertaisuusvaltuutettu, n.d.).

Despite these legal protections, proving discrimination in practice may be difficult. Recruitment decisions are rarely justified explicitly through age, and discrimination may remain hidden behind general references to organisational fit or other selection criteria.

Legal protection therefore forms an important but insufficient mechanism alone. Preventing age discrimination also requires organisational awareness, structural reforms and cultural change.

2.8 Research Gap and Contribution of the Study

Although age discrimination has been widely studied, several research gaps remain.

First, relatively few studies combine experiential interview material, survey responses, document analysis and legal perspectives within a single qualitative study.

Second, the relationship between digitalisation, artificial intelligence and age discrimination remains underexplored. Rapid technological change may create new forms of exclusion while also offering opportunities for intergenerational cooperation.

Third, comparative perspectives between Finland and Estonia remain limited in previous research concerning age discrimination.

This study contributes to existing research by combining multiple qualitative methods and integrating organisational, legal and experiential perspectives. The study also highlights the relationship between ageing, digital transformation and labour market equality.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Qualitative Research Approach

The study applies a qualitative multi-method approach. Qualitative research is suitable because the purpose of the study is to understand experiences, perceptions and meanings related to age discrimination.

The research combines interviews, survey responses and document analysis. Using multiple forms of data enables a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

3.2 Survey Data

The survey was conducted using Microsoft Forms and distributed through social media channels. Participation was voluntary and anonymous.

The questionnaire included both structured and open-ended questions. Structured questions focused on employment, recruitment, workplace attitudes, technological competence and experiences of age discrimination. Open-ended questions enabled respondents to describe personal experiences and opinions in their own words.

The survey questionnaire is included in Appendix 1.

3.3 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted as part of the study. The interviews focused on work experience, recruitment, retraining, technological competence, rehabilitation and workplace attitudes.

The interview framework enabled respondents to discuss their experiences freely while ensuring that the same themes were addressed consistently.

One of the interview participants was former Finnish Minister of Labour Jari Lindström, who had previously worked for 22 years in the paper industry. Lindström gave permission for his name to be used in the study. His interview provided an important perspective combining labour market policy, industrial working life and personal experience.

The study also includes interview material from Keijo Varis, whose experiences and observations contributed to the understanding of age discrimination, recruitment practices and the position of experienced employees in working life. The interview material highlighted the importance of recognising long work experience, professional competence and the challenges older workers may face in rapidly changing labour markets. Varis emphasised that experienced employees often possess strong professional judgement, responsibility and practical knowledge that organisations may undervalue during recruitment processes (Varis, personal interview, 2026).

The participants of the survey and interviews were selected through voluntary participation and professional networks. The study therefore utilised a non-probability convenience sample rather than a statistically representative sample of all workers over the age of 50.

As a result, the findings cannot be generalised statistically to the entire population. Instead, the study focuses on understanding how age discrimination appears within the experiences of the participants and what kinds of meanings, challenges and solutions emerged from the material.

The interview framework is included in Appendix 3.

3.3.1 Selection of Interview Participants

The study material consisted of 24 participants, including semi-structured interview participants and survey respondents. The study utilised a qualitative and experience-based sample consisting of individuals who were available and willing to participate in discussions concerning age discrimination in working life.

The participants were selected primarily through professional networks, the age discrimination seminar organised on 24 November 2025, social media contacts and individuals who had publicly discussed experiences related to age discrimination.

This means that the research material does not represent a statistically generalisable sample of all individuals over 50 years old in Finland. Therefore, the results cannot be interpreted quantitatively in a way that would allow direct conclusions about the prevalence of age discrimination in the entire population. For example, if a large proportion of interview participants reported experiences of age discrimination, this does not automatically mean that the same proportion applies to all older jobseekers in Finland.

However, the material provides valuable qualitative insight into how age discrimination is experienced, interpreted and understood among the interview participants. The recurring nature of similar experiences across different interviews suggests that age discrimination is not an isolated phenomenon but appears to be a common and recognisable issue in Finnish working life.

The purpose of the interviews was not statistical representation but rather to understand the lived experiences, perceptions and interpretations of individuals who have encountered age-related challenges in recruitment processes, career transitions and working-life practices.

The interview participants represented different educational backgrounds, professions and sectors, including private-sector experts, public-sector professionals, organisational representatives, consultants and academic specialists. This diversity strengthened the material by providing multiple

perspectives on how age discrimination manifests in different working-life contexts.

The interviews were conducted as semi-structured thematic interviews. This approach allowed participants to describe their experiences in their own words while ensuring that all interviews addressed central themes related to age discrimination, recruitment practices, stereotypes, working-life structures and possible solutions (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2022).

3.4 Document Analysis

Document analysis was used to examine legislation, reports, seminar materials and public discussions related to age discrimination.

The analysed material included Finnish and European legislation, labour market reports, seminar materials from Estonia and media articles discussing experiences of age discrimination.

The study utilised observations from the MTÜ Kuldne Liiga seminar *Allergiast sünergiani – põlvkondade vaheline dialoog tööjõuturul*, held in Tallinn on 29 April 2026. The seminar examined changes in working life particularly from the perspectives of intergenerational cooperation, age-friendly working life, digitalisation and artificial intelligence. Discussions and presentations highlighted the importance of lifelong learning, digital competence, critical thinking and intergenerational interaction in rapidly changing working life. Presentations by Linnar Viik and Tiina Tambaum emphasised the idea that technological change is not dependent on age, but rather on opportunities to learn, participate and cooperate across generations (MTÜ Kuldne Liiga, 2026).

Document analysis complemented interview and survey material by providing organisational, legal and societal perspectives.

3.5 Ethical Considerations, Reliability and Limitations

As a qualitative study, the purpose of this research is not to produce statistically generalizable results but to deepen understanding of the phenomenon of age discrimination through experiences, narratives, and interpretations.

The reliability of the study is strengthened by the use of multiple data collection methods. Interviews, survey material, seminar observations, and document analysis complement one another and create methodological triangulation (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). Similar themes emerged repeatedly across different forms of material, increasing the credibility of the findings (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2022).

At the same time, certain limitations must be acknowledged. Many participants had personally experienced challenges related to age and employment, which may have influenced the perspectives emphasized in the material. Individuals who have encountered discrimination may also be more motivated to participate in research concerning the topic. Consequently, the material may particularly highlight experiences of inequality and exclusion.

Nevertheless, the consistency of the experiences described by different participants, together with similarities found in media materials, public discussions, and previous research literature, suggests that the phenomenon has broader societal relevance.

The study therefore focuses primarily on examining:

- how age discrimination appears in the experiences of interview participants
- where participants perceive age discrimination to occur
- what kinds of stereotypes and structural practices are associated with age
- how participants believe age discrimination could be reduced in working life

The study should thus be interpreted as an experience-based and exploratory qualitative examination of age discrimination rather than as a statistically representative population study.

3.6 Data Analysis

The material was analysed using thematic content analysis.

Responses and interview material were organised into themes related to:

- recruitment discrimination
- workplace attitudes
- stereotypes
- digitalisation and learning
- structural barriers
- strengths of experienced employees
- suggested solutions

Thematic analysis enabled comparison between interviews, survey responses and document material.

4 Findings

4.1 Long-Term Unemployment, Burnout and Labour Market Exclusion

One anonymous respondent described a long and demanding working career that eventually resulted in severe burnout and long-term exclusion from working life. The respondent had worked for more than 25 years in sales, marketing, logistics and after-sales services within the industrial and machinery sector. The work included extensive responsibility, continuous customer interaction and multilingual communication in Finnish, English, Swedish, German and Russian. According to the respondent, the career was strongly connected to one family-owned industrial company that operated for decades in the Finnish agricultural and forestry machinery sector.

During the later years of employment, the organisation underwent significant economic difficulties, restructuring processes and eventually bankruptcy. Within a relatively short period, the respondent experienced repeated organisational uncertainty, loss of employment and major changes in working life circumstances. At the same time, prolonged work-related stress gradually developed into severe burnout. The respondent explained that recovery required several years away from working life and that the first stages of recovery consisted primarily of rest, medical examinations and psychological exhaustion. The respondent described how repeated experiences of organisational instability, health-related exhaustion and labour market uncertainty created feelings of vulnerability and exclusion.

Attempts to return to employment after a short recovery period proved unsuccessful because work ability remained limited and the available positions did not provide sufficient flexibility, remote working opportunities or possibilities for gradual reintegration into working life. Despite extensive professional experience and strong competence, returning to working life became increasingly difficult because physical and psychological recovery remained incomplete. The experience demonstrates how burnout, organisational

restructuring, health problems and labour market insecurity may become interconnected (Ilmarinen, 2019; OECD, 2020). The material also suggests that ageing employees and individuals recovering from burnout may require more flexible work arrangements, supportive organisational practices and gradual pathways back into employment.

At the same time, the respondent explained that social interaction and professional networking through online communities gradually helped restore motivation, hope and social connection. Participation in online discussions and professional networks created feelings of inclusion during a period when traditional participation in working life was no longer possible. The respondent's experience further illustrates that long-term exclusion from working life may have significant psychological and social consequences even for highly experienced professionals (OECD, 2020). Feelings of uncertainty, reduced work ability and weakened professional identity may develop gradually when individuals remain outside working life for extended periods.

The material therefore highlights the importance of recognising mental wellbeing, organisational responsibility and flexible labour market practices as part of discussions concerning age discrimination and sustainable working careers (Eurofound, 2018; OECD, 2020). Some respondents also criticised employment services and felt that practical support for older jobseekers remained insufficient. According to the material, some participants experienced that employment services focused more on administrative processes than on personalised support, rehabilitation or long-term career planning. The findings suggest that ageing jobseekers may require more individual guidance, flexible employment pathways and stronger support for retraining and work ability.

4.2 Experiences of Age Discrimination

The findings of this study indicate that age discrimination remains a significant issue in working life, particularly among workers and jobseekers over the age of

50. Experiences collected through survey responses, interviews and document analysis suggest that age affects recruitment opportunities, workplace attitudes and perceptions concerning competence and adaptability.

Many respondents described situations in which they believed age negatively influenced recruitment processes. Several participants reported that they were not invited to job interviews despite extensive work experience and professional qualifications. These findings support previous research indicating that older jobseekers often experience longer unemployment periods and lower re-employment rates compared to younger applicants (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020; Eurofound, 2018).

Interview material highlighted that age discrimination often appears indirectly rather than through explicit statements. Respondents described situations where recruitment decisions were justified through references to organisational fit, flexibility or changing competence requirements rather than age itself. However, repeated experiences created a strong perception that age influenced opportunities in working life.

Keijo Varis described how long work experience may gradually transform from an advantage into a barrier during recruitment processes. According to Varis, professional competence and extensive experience were not always recognised positively after a certain age. Instead, employers sometimes associated older applicants with assumptions concerning reduced flexibility or difficulties adapting to organisational change.

“After a certain age, experience no longer increases employability in the same way. Employers may begin to view experienced applicants as too established, expensive or difficult to adapt to organisational culture.” (Varis, personal interview, 2026)

The interview material also suggested that age discrimination is closely connected to stereotypes regarding learning ability and technological competence. Several respondents explained that they had encountered assumptions suggesting that older workers are slower to learn new

technologies or less capable of adapting to digital transformation. These assumptions correspond with previous research concerning workplace stereotypes and ageism (Butler, 1969).

The findings further indicate that age discrimination may affect individuals regardless of educational level or professional background. Experienced professionals, specialists and individuals with extensive managerial or political careers described similar experiences concerning recruitment difficulties and labour market insecurity.

A summary of the survey results is presented in Appendix 4.

4.2.1 Keijo's Interview: Experiences of Age Discrimination in Working Life

Based on the interview material, age discrimination in working life emerged as a multidimensional and often difficult-to-prove phenomenon, while at the same time appearing concretely in recruitment processes, career transitions and labour market opportunities. The interviewee's long and diverse career in the private sector, public administration studies and higher education provided a broad perspective on how age may influence employment opportunities in different labour market contexts (Varis, personal interview, 2026).

According to the interview material, work experience appeared as a double-edged phenomenon in labour markets. At a younger age, extensive work experience may be viewed as an advantage, but after a certain age the same experience may gradually become a disadvantage during recruitment processes. Varis explained that after approximately the age of 45, long work experience no longer automatically increases employability. Instead, employers may begin associating older applicants with assumptions concerning reduced flexibility, weaker adaptability or difficulties integrating into new organisational environments (Varis, personal interview, 2026).

The findings suggest that age is not viewed merely as a biological or chronological factor. Instead, age becomes connected to assumptions regarding personality, learning ability, adaptability and manageability. Similar observations concerning stereotypes and age-related assumptions have also been identified in previous research on workplace ageism (Butler, 1969).

The interview further indicated that organisational context strongly influences how experience is valued. In universities of applied sciences and knowledge-intensive expert organisations, extensive professional experience may still be viewed positively. However, when attempting career transitions between sectors, such as from the private sector to public administration, experience may not necessarily function as an advantage. According to the interviewee, some employers appeared to perceive extensive private-sector experience as incompatible with public-sector organisational culture despite additional education and updated qualifications (Varis, personal interview, 2026).

The interviewee also described situations in which younger and less experienced applicants were selected despite the interviewee possessing significantly broader competence and professional expertise. According to the interview material, employers may prefer younger applicants because they are perceived as easier to manage, less demanding regarding salary expectations and more willing to adapt to organisational practices without strong independent views.

The material further highlighted stereotypes connected to workers over the age of 50. Older employees may be perceived as rigid, difficult to manage, slower to learn or resistant to change despite no objective evidence supporting these assumptions. These findings correspond with previous research suggesting that older workers are frequently associated with stereotypical assumptions concerning adaptability and technological competence (Ilmarinen, 2019; OECD, 2020).

At the same time, the interview challenged such stereotypes. The interviewee described extensive retraining, doctoral-level education and significant

academic achievements later in life, demonstrating that older individuals remain capable of learning, career change and professional development. The findings therefore suggest that chronological age alone does not determine learning ability or adaptability in working life.

The interview material also introduced potential legislative approaches for reducing structural age discrimination in working life. According to Varis, collective redundancy situations and organisational restructuring processes should be evaluated more carefully from the perspective of age equality. One proposed approach suggested that the age distribution of dismissed employees should correspond as closely as possible to the overall age structure of the organisation rather than disproportionately affecting older employees. According to the interview material, such measures could reduce structural age discrimination and strengthen fairness in organisational restructuring processes (Varis, personal interview, 2026).

The interview also highlighted the importance of retraining and lifelong learning. Additional education and qualifications were described as important pathways for returning to working life and adapting to changing labour market conditions. Furthermore, the findings suggested that labour markets may fail to utilise the competence and experience of older workers effectively even when these individuals actively update their skills and education (Varis, personal interview, 2026).

The interview additionally introduced perspectives concerning physical appearance, health and work ability. According to the interviewee, external appearance and assumptions concerning health may influence recruitment decisions even when these issues are not openly discussed. The findings suggest that recruitment processes may involve implicit assumptions concerning work ability, energy levels and health among older applicants.

Overall, the interview material demonstrates that age discrimination often functions as a structural and cultural phenomenon embedded within recruitment

practices, organisational assumptions and labour market expectations rather than only through direct discriminatory acts.

4.2.2 Ira Hammermann's Interview: Age Diversity, Certification, and the Future of Working Life

One of the central expert interviews conducted for this study was with Ira Hammermann, who discussed age diversity, age-friendly organizations, and the development of the Finnish age certificate model. The interview introduced a broader organizational and societal perspective on age discrimination and highlighted how age diversity can also be understood as a strategic strength instead of merely a legal or ethical issue.

Hammermann emphasized that age diversity in workplaces promotes organizational well-being, productivity, and sustainability (Hammermann, personal interview, 2026). According to her, organizations that genuinely value employees of different ages are often stronger in terms of organizational culture, resilience, and long-term success (Hammermann, personal interview, 2026). The interview highlighted the importance of understanding age diversity not only as a question of fairness but also as a competitive advantage.

A significant theme in the interview was the increasing importance of social responsibility and ESG-related responsibility reporting (European Commission, 2026). Hammermann explained that future responsibility reporting will focus increasingly on social responsibility issues, including equality, inclusion, and age diversity.

According to Hammermann, organizations that can demonstrate age-friendly practices send an important message externally:

- to jobseekers
- to customers

- to partners and stakeholders
- to investors

Thus, age-friendly practices are not only internal HR policies but also part of an organization's public identity and reputation ((Hammermann, personal interview, 2026).

The interview introduced the Finnish "age certificate" (ikäsertifikaatti), which functions as a practical tool for evaluating organizational age-friendliness. Hammermann explained that the certification process requires organizations to evaluate their practices comprehensively and identify areas where age diversity and equality are either functioning well or require improvement (Hammermann, personal interview, 2026).

Importantly, the certification process is not permanent. Organizations must renew the certificate every three years, which creates continuous monitoring and development of age-related practices. According to Hammermann, this process encourages organizations to continuously evaluate recruitment practices, workplace culture, management practices, career development opportunities, and age-related equality throughout the employee life cycle (Hammermann, personal interview, 2026).

Hammermann stressed that age-friendliness should not focus solely on recruitment. Instead, it must continue throughout the entire working career (Hammermann, personal interview, 2026). This perspective broadens the understanding of age equality beyond hiring practices alone.

Emphasis was placed on age management (ikäjohtaminen), especially during the later stages of working careers. Hammermann argued that organizations should actively consider how employees can be supported in remaining in working life longer, even after reaching the minimum retirement age.

This perspective is strongly connected to demographic change. According to Hammermann, Finland is approaching a situation in which labor shortages may become severe within only a few years. Although unemployment is currently

high, demographic trends indicate that competition for skilled workers will intensify rapidly (OECD, 2020; European Commission, 2021).

Hammermann argued that organizations should therefore act proactively instead of reactively. Companies that already invest in age diversity and experienced workers may have a strategic advantage in future labor markets.

The interview also addressed stereotypes concerning older employees. Hammermann argued that many assumptions regarding older workers are based on outdated and often unconscious stereotypes. According to her, organizations still frequently associate age with reduced flexibility, lower adaptability, or weaker technological skills (Hammermann, personal interview, 2026; Butler, 1969; OECD, 2020).

She criticized such assumptions directly, emphasizing that many stereotypes are disconnected from reality. Hammermann argued that organizations should move away from traditional assumptions about what people are supposedly like at certain ages.

This observation supports findings from other interviews and documents included in this study. Across the material, older workers are frequently associated with stereotypes such as:

- resistance to change
- poor digital skills
- lower productivity
- weaker adaptability
- reduced learning ability

At the same time, the interview emphasized that these stereotypes often ignore the strengths associated with experience, including:

- strategic understanding

- emotional stability
- long-term thinking
- organizational knowledge
- interpersonal skills
- crisis management capability

Hammermann's interview also connected Finnish discussions on age discrimination to broader international developments. She explained that age certification systems currently exist primarily in Finland and are not yet widely implemented in Sweden or Estonia (Hammermann, personal interview, 2026).

The interview revealed that international actors have shown growing interest in Finnish approaches to age diversity and age certification (Hammermann, personal interview, 2026). According to Hammermann, Finland is currently functioning as an important reference point in Nordic discussions concerning age-friendly working life practices (Hammermann, personal interview, 2026).

This international dimension strengthens the significance of the topic. Age discrimination is not merely an individual or national issue but a broader challenge connected to demographic change, labor market sustainability, and organizational responsibility (OECD, 2020; European Commission, 2021).

The interview additionally highlighted the importance of international cooperation and knowledge exchange (Hammermann, personal interview, 2026). Hammermann encouraged the development of wider Nordic cooperation concerning age diversity and suggested that the Finnish age certification model could potentially function as an example for other countries (Hammermann, personal interview, 2026).

Overall, Hammermann's interview broadened the study's perspective significantly. While many interviews focused on personal experiences of discrimination, this interview emphasized:

- organizational responsibility
- strategic management
- demographic sustainability
- social responsibility
- proactive workforce planning
- age-friendly organizational development

The interview demonstrates that age diversity can also be understood as an organizational resource and competitive advantage instead of merely a social problem.

4.3 Recruitment and Labour Market Barriers

Recruitment emerged as one of the most significant areas where age discrimination manifests in working life (OECD, 2020; Eurofound, 2018).

Survey responses, interviews and document material consistently highlighted recruitment as a critical stage in which older applicants may face disadvantages.

Respondents frequently described situations where younger and less experienced applicants were selected despite older candidates possessing stronger professional backgrounds and longer work experience. Several participants believed that employers preferred younger workers because they were perceived as more flexible, technologically skilled or less expensive.

Former Finnish Minister of Labour Jari Lindström participated in the interview material and provided an important perspective combining industrial working life, labour market policy and personal experience. Before entering politics, Lindström had worked for 22 years in the paper industry. His interview highlighted how labour market insecurity and structural changes may also affect experienced industrial workers and individuals with extensive professional backgrounds.

According to Lindström, modern labour markets increasingly emphasise flexibility, rapid adaptation and technological competence (Lindström, personal interview, 2026). These expectations may unintentionally favour younger applicants while undervaluing the experience and strategic understanding of older employees (Lindström, personal interview, 2026).

“Long work experience and professional competence do not always protect individuals from unemployment or labour market uncertainty. Structural changes in working life affect experienced workers as well.” (Lindström, personal interview, 2026)

Employers seldom justify decisions explicitly through age, even when applicants suspect that age has influenced the recruitment outcome. Instead, discrimination may remain hidden behind general concepts such as organisational culture, team suitability or flexibility (Butler, 1969; OECD, 2020).

Document analysis supported these observations. Finnish media reports described situations where experienced applicants were rejected despite extensive qualifications. In one reported case, an applicant was directly informed that she was considered too old for a position despite strong professional competence (Duunitori, 2024a; Duunitori, 2024b).

The material therefore indicates that recruitment discrimination may occur both explicitly and implicitly. Structural labour market practices and stereotypes continue to influence how older workers are evaluated in recruitment situations.

4.4. Stereotypes and Workplace Attitudes

The findings indicate that stereotypes concerning ageing continue to shape workplace attitudes and organizational culture. Respondents frequently reported assumptions related to technological competence, learning ability, flexibility and productivity.

Several survey participants explained that older workers are often perceived as:

- less technologically competent
- resistant to organisational change
- slower learners
- more expensive employees
- less flexible than younger workers

These stereotypes appeared repeatedly in both interviews and survey responses. Participants emphasised that such assumptions rarely reflected actual competence or performance. Instead, they were often based on generalised beliefs concerning ageing.

Keijo Varis described how stereotypes concerning age may influence recruitment decisions before employers have evaluated actual competence or work performance.

“Employers may assume that older applicants are more difficult to manage or less willing to adapt, even when the person has continuously developed skills throughout their career.” (Varis, personal interview, 2026)

The findings suggest that workplace attitudes may significantly influence older workers' confidence, motivation and opportunities for career development. Some respondents explained that repeated rejection experiences created feelings of exclusion and reduced trust in labour market equality.

At the same time, respondents also identified positive attitudes concerning experienced employees. Older workers were associated with responsibility, reliability, professional judgement and strong workplace skills. Several

participants emphasised that experienced employees contribute stability and practical understanding to organisations.

These findings support previous research suggesting that ageing in working life is often viewed through contradictory perspectives. Older workers may simultaneously be viewed as highly experienced and as less adaptable to organisational change (Ilmarinen, 2019; Hammerman, 2020).

4.5 Lifelong Learning and Digitalisation

Digitalisation and technological transformation emerged as important themes throughout the research material. Many respondents recognised that continuous learning and technological competence have become increasingly important in working life (OECD, 2020).

At the same time, the findings challenged stereotypes suggesting that older workers are unable or unwilling to learn new technologies (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2022). Several participants described experiences of retraining, continuous education and adapting successfully to technological change.

The Estonian seminar material provided an especially important perspective regarding digitalisation and ageing (MTÜ Kuldne Liiga, 2026). Discussions emphasised that artificial intelligence and technological transformation should not be viewed solely as technical issues but also as questions concerning communication, critical thinking and intergenerational learning.

One participant at the Estonian conference described the meaning of work and active ageing through the following statement:

“I do not want to work because I must. I want to continue working as long as possible because I want to remain active and continue playing golf.” (MTÜ Kuldne Liiga, 2026). This statement reflected a broader perspective presented

during the conference discussions. Employment was not viewed only as an economic necessity but also as a source of wellbeing, activity, social participation and meaningful daily life.

The seminar material also challenged assumptions concerning technological competence and age (MTÜ Kuldne Liiga, 2026). According to the discussions, effective use of artificial intelligence depends heavily on communication skills, contextual understanding and critical thinking rather than age itself.

Respondents further emphasised that learning opportunities and organisational support are more important than chronological age in technological adaptation. Several participants explained that older workers are fully capable of learning new systems when sufficient support and training opportunities are provided.

These findings support previous research concerning lifelong learning and ageing (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2022).

4.6 Strengths of Experienced Employees

One of the clearest findings of the study concerned the strengths and value of experienced employees. Both interviews and survey responses highlighted numerous positive characteristics associated with older workers.

Respondents described experienced employees as:

- responsible
- committed
- reliable
- professionally competent
- capable of strategic thinking
- valuable mentors for younger workers

Many participants emphasised the importance of tacit knowledge developed through long careers and practical experience. Respondents explained that

experienced workers often possess strong problem-solving abilities and the capacity to manage challenging workplace situations calmly.

Keijo Varis highlighted that organisations may underestimate the long-term value of practical experience and professional judgement.

“Experience creates understanding that cannot always be learned quickly through formal education alone.” (Varis, personal interview, 2026)

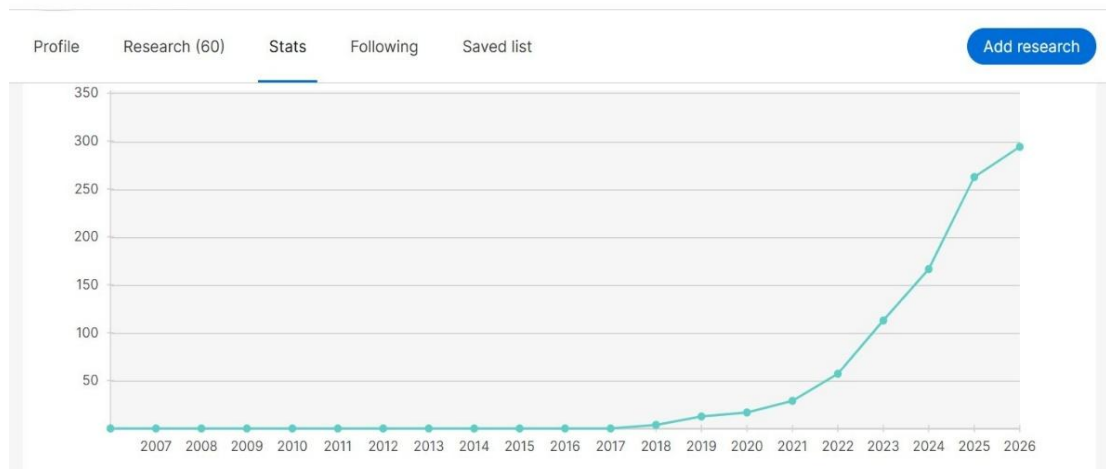


Figure 1. Development of Keijo Varis's research interest index after the age of 54. Source: Varis (2026)

The findings further suggest that age-diverse workplaces may benefit from combining the technological strengths of younger workers with the strategic understanding and practical knowledge of experienced employees.

Several participants viewed mentoring and intergenerational cooperation as important organisational strengths. Experienced workers were often seen as individuals capable of supporting younger employees, transferring tacit knowledge and strengthening workplace stability.

These findings correspond with previous research emphasising the value of age-diverse organisations and intergenerational learning (Hammerman, 2020; Ilmarinen, 2019).

4.7 Statistical Perspective on Unemployment and Age

The statistical material included in the study supports the qualitative findings concerning labour market inequality among older workers.

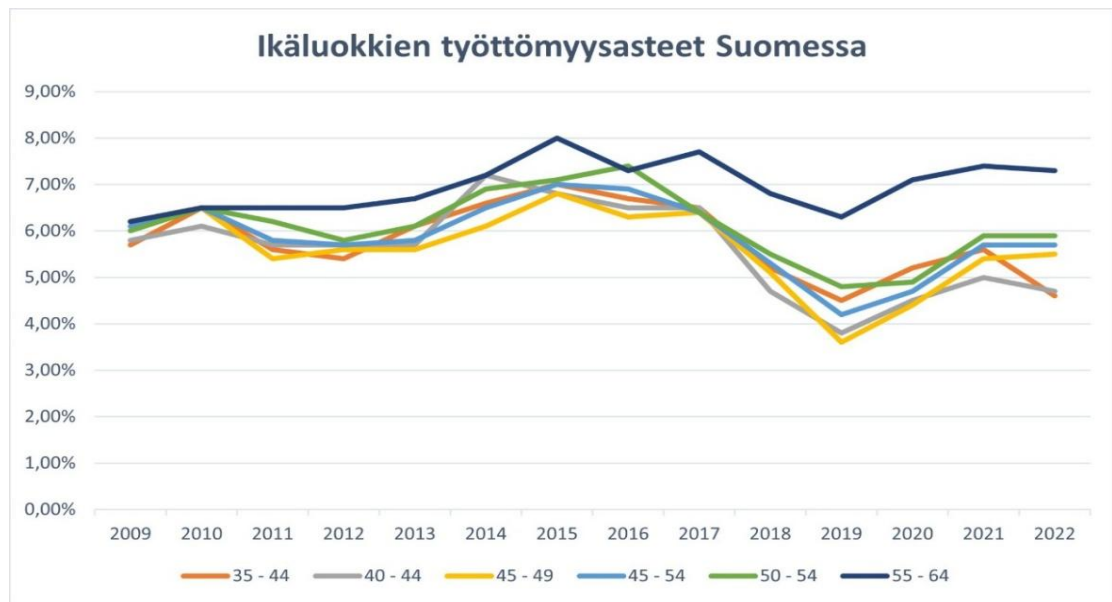


Figure 2. Unemployment rates among different age groups in Finland. Source: Statistics Finland (2024).

The statistical comparison demonstrates that unemployment among individuals aged 55–64 remained consistently higher compared to several younger age groups during the examined period. The figure illustrates that older workers may face greater labour market insecurity and longer unemployment periods.

The data support previous research suggesting that re-employment becomes increasingly difficult with age despite long work experience and professional competence (OECD, 2020).

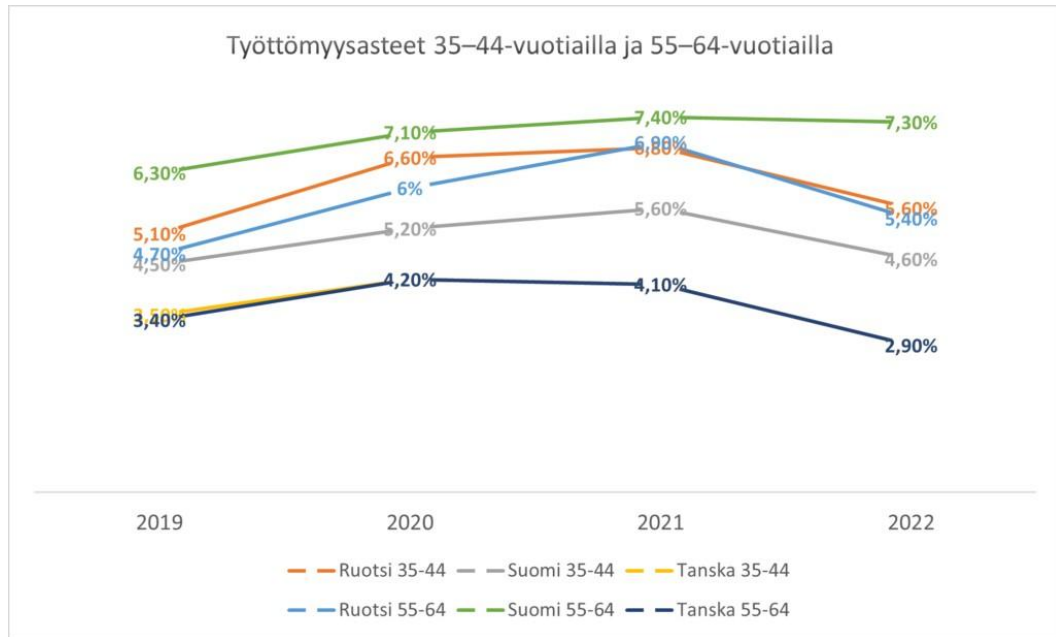


Figure 3. Unemployment rates among individuals aged 35-44 and 55-64.
Source: Statistics Finland (2024).

The Nordic comparison indicates differences between countries regarding labour market participation among older workers (OECD, 2020, Nordic Statistic 2024). Finland displayed higher unemployment rates among individuals aged 55–64 compared to Denmark during several examined years (OECD, 2020).

The comparison suggests that labour market structures, recruitment practices and organisational culture may influence the employment opportunities of older workers differently across Nordic countries (Eurofund, 2018). The findings also indicate that legal protection alone may not fully prevent age-related labour market inequality (European Commission, 2021).

4.7.1 Tiina Parikka: Stereotypes, Structural Discrimination, and the Waste of Experience

This section is based on public commentary and media interviews given by leadership coach and career consultant Tiina Parikka concerning age discrimination in Finnish working life (Parikka, 2025).

Parikka argues that age discrimination particularly affects highly educated professionals and specialists who become unemployed after long careers (Parikka, 2025). According to her, extensive work experience and strong educational backgrounds do not necessarily function as advantages once applicants reach their fifties (Parikka, 2025).

Parikka described a case in which a 55-year-old applicant with broader experience was not invited to an interview, while a significantly younger applicant with similar qualifications was selected for the recruitment process instead (Parikka, 2025). According to Parikka, such situations strongly suggest that age itself may function as an implicit selection criterion.

Her observations support a central finding of this study: age discrimination often operates indirectly rather than explicitly. Recruitment decisions are rarely openly justified through age, but assumptions connected to age may still strongly influence hiring decisions.

Parikka emphasized that many organizations continue to hold unrealistic stereotypes about older workers (Parikka, 2025). She criticized assumptions that older employees might lack digital competence or adaptability, despite often having extensive international experience and long careers in demanding expert roles.

One of the most striking statements in the material concerns the stereotype that employers may question whether older applicants are even capable of basic digital communication, despite decades of professional experience.

According to Parikka (2025), this represents a serious waste of competence and expertise in society.

Parikka (2025) also highlighted structural problems in Finnish working life. She argued that solutions are too often focused on individual jobseekers instead of examining organizational practices and employer attitudes.

In her work as a career coach, she helps unemployed individuals improve applications, clarify competencies, and expand professional networks. However,

she emphasized that individual adaptation alone cannot solve structural age discrimination.

Parikka (2025) proposed several structural solutions, including:

- reducing age-related pension cost barriers for employers
- introducing financial incentives for hiring older employees
- strengthening age diversity in organizational strategies
- improving awareness of age-related stereotypes
- increasing age diversity in recruitment practices

Importantly, Parikka also challenged assumptions regarding sickness absence and physical ability. Parikka (2025) referred to research suggesting that employees over 50 may have fewer absences than younger employees.

This observation directly challenges stereotypes portraying older workers as physically weaker or less reliable.

Parikka additionally emphasized the importance of organizational leadership. According to her, age diversity should be addressed strategically at leadership level rather than being left solely to individual recruiters or HR personnel.

This connects age discrimination to broader organizational culture and management practices.

The material further highlights emotional dimensions of unemployment and exclusion. Older jobseekers may repeatedly encounter silence, rejection, or exclusion from recruitment processes, which can weaken self-confidence and increase feelings of invisibility.

Parikka's observations strongly support the findings emerging throughout this study:

- age discrimination is often implicit and structural
- stereotypes strongly influence recruitment decisions

- highly experienced professionals may become excluded from working life
- organizations often fail to recognize the value of experience
- demographic change increases the importance of utilizing experienced workers

Overall, the material strengthens the argument that age discrimination is not merely an individual experience but a broader structural and cultural phenomenon within working life.

5 Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that age discrimination continues to represent a significant challenge in working life despite legal protection and increasing societal discussion concerning equality and extended working careers. The results indicate that discrimination manifests not only through direct exclusion but also through structural practices, organizational culture and stereotypes that shape recruitment and workplace attitudes.

One of the central findings of the study concerns the contradiction between societal goals and labour market realities. European societies increasingly emphasise the importance of extending working careers because of demographic ageing and labour shortages. At the same time, however, older workers continue to experience barriers related to recruitment, career development and organisational inclusion. This contradiction appeared consistently throughout the interview material, survey responses and document analysis.

The findings support previous research suggesting that recruitment represents one of the most important contexts in which age discrimination occurs (OECD, 2020; Eurofound, 2018). Respondents repeatedly described situations in which extensive work experience and competence did not improve employment opportunities after the age of 50. Instead, long careers and professional expertise could even become disadvantages during recruitment processes.

The findings suggest that age discrimination in recruitment often operates indirectly rather than through explicit exclusion. Recruitment decisions may be justified through concepts such as organisational culture, flexibility or team suitability, even when age-related assumptions influence the outcome. The findings of this study further indicate that age discrimination is not limited to individual experiences but is connected to broader organisational structures, workplace culture and labour market practices. These observations support

previous research concerning ageism and structural discrimination in working life (Butler, 1969; Ilmarinen, 2019; OECD, 2020).

The study also confirms earlier observations concerning stereotypes associated with ageing in working life. Older employees were frequently associated with assumptions concerning reduced adaptability, weaker technological competence and lower flexibility. These findings correspond with previous research on workplace stereotypes and ageism (Butler, 1969). At the same time, respondents strongly emphasised the positive qualities associated with experienced employees, including reliability, responsibility, professional judgement and tacit knowledge.

This contradiction reveals an important feature of age discrimination: although experience is publicly valued, organisational practices do not always reflect this appreciation in recruitment or career development. Older workers may therefore experience exclusion despite possessing valuable professional competence and strategic understanding.

Digitalisation and artificial intelligence formed another important theme throughout the study. Public discussion often presents technological transformation as a challenge particularly for older workers. However, the findings of this research suggest that learning ability and technological adaptation are influenced more by opportunities, organisational support and workplace attitudes than by age itself.

The Estonian seminar material provided an especially important perspective regarding digitalisation and intergenerational learning (MTÜ Kuldne Liiga, 2026). The conference discussions highlighted that artificial intelligence requires not only technical competence but also communication skills, contextual understanding and critical thinking. These competencies are often strengthened through professional experience and long careers. The findings therefore challenge stereotypes suggesting that technological competence belongs primarily to younger generations.

The Estonian perspective also introduced broader discussions concerning active ageing and meaningful participation in working life. The conference statement concerning work, activity and golf illustrated that employment among older individuals is not always motivated only by economic necessity (MTÜ Kuldne Liiga, 2026). Instead, work may function as an important source of social participation, wellbeing and identity. This observation broadens the discussion concerning ageing beyond labour market productivity alone.

The interview material from Jari Lindström and Keijo Varis further strengthened the understanding that age discrimination affects individuals from diverse professional backgrounds. The findings demonstrated that labour market insecurity may affect both industrial workers and highly educated professionals. Long careers, extensive competence and public visibility do not necessarily protect individuals from recruitment barriers or organisational exclusion (Lindström, personal interview, 2026; Varis, personal interview, 2026).

The interview material from Ira Hammermann introduced an important organisational and strategic perspective concerning age diversity. The findings suggest that age-positive organisational practices may function not only as equality measures but also as competitive advantages in labour markets characterised by demographic ageing and labour shortages. Hammermann emphasised that age diversity should be understood as part of organisational responsibility, workplace wellbeing and long-term sustainability (Hammermann, personal interview, 2026).

The age certification initiative discussed in the interview demonstrates how organisations may systematically evaluate recruitment, leadership and workplace inclusion from the perspective of age diversity. The findings therefore indicate that reducing age discrimination requires continuous organisational assessment rather than isolated recruitment measures alone. Age-friendly certification models may also strengthen employer reputation and communicate organisational values to employees, customers, investors and broader

stakeholder groups (Hammermann, personal interview, 2026; European Commission, 2021).

The study also highlights the importance of organisational culture in either reinforcing or reducing age discrimination. Structural discrimination often appears indirectly through unequal access to training, assumptions concerning retirement or reduced investment in older employees' competence development (Butler, 1969; OECD, 2020). Such practices may unintentionally reinforce exclusion and strengthen stereotypes regarding ageing and competence.

The findings suggest that reducing age discrimination requires both structural and cultural change. Legal protection alone is insufficient if organisational attitudes and recruitment practices continue to reproduce age-related stereotypes (European Commission, 2021; Eurofound 2018). Organisations should therefore recognise age diversity as a resource rather than a challenge.

The findings suggest that age discrimination is not only an individual problem but also a broader structural labour market issue. Excluding experienced employees from working life may weaken economic sustainability, reduce workforce availability and increase social inequality in ageing societies. As populations continue to age across Europe, underutilising the competence and experience of older workers may create long-term challenges for labour markets, organisations and welfare systems (OECD, 2020; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2022).

Several practical measures emerged from the research material:

- increasing awareness concerning age discrimination
- improving inclusive recruitment practices
- strengthening lifelong learning opportunities
- supporting intergenerational cooperation
- recognising tacit knowledge and mentoring
- increasing organisational flexibility across different career stages

The study also demonstrates the importance of combining qualitative methods in research concerning discrimination. Interviews, survey responses and document analysis complemented one another and created a multidimensional understanding of the phenomenon. The combination of experiential, organisational and legal perspectives strengthened the reliability and depth of the findings (Bowen, 2009; Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2022).

Certain limitations should nevertheless be acknowledged. The study is qualitative and based on relatively limited material. The findings therefore cannot be generalised statistically in all workplaces or labour markets. In addition, some experiences of discrimination are subjective and difficult to verify objectively. However, the consistency of the material and similarities between interviews, survey responses and previous research strengthen the credibility of the findings.

Future research could examine age discrimination in different professional sectors more extensively and explore how artificial intelligence and digital transformation may reshape labour market equality in the future. Comparative studies between different European countries could also provide further understanding of how organisational culture, labour market structures and policy influence the position of older workers.

Overall, the findings suggest that age discrimination remains a multidimensional and socially significant issue in contemporary working life. Addressing the phenomenon requires not only legal regulation but also broader changes in organisational culture, recruitment practices and societal attitudes concerning ageing, competence and work.

6 Conclusions

This study examined age discrimination in working life, focusing particularly on the position of workers over the age of 50 in Finland and Europe. The research combined interviews, survey responses and document analysis to understand how age discrimination manifests in recruitment, workplace culture and labour market structures (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2022).

The findings demonstrate that age discrimination continues to affect employment opportunities and career development among older workers despite legal protection and increasing awareness concerning equality (OECD, 2020; European Commission 2021). Discrimination often appears indirectly through recruitment practices, organisational attitudes and stereotypes rather than through explicit exclusion (Butler, 1969; Eurofound 2018).

The study identified several forms of age discrimination:

direct discrimination in recruitment situations

indirect discrimination through organisational practices

structural discrimination related to training, career development and workplace culture

The results indicate that stereotypes concerning ageing continue to influence perceptions regarding technological competence, adaptability and flexibility. Older workers were often viewed as expensive, resistant to change or less technologically capable despite extensive professional competence and experience. These findings correspond with previous research concerning workplace ageism and labour market inequality (Butler, 1969; Ilmarinen, 2019; OECD, 2020).

At the same time, the study highlighted significant strengths associated with experienced employees. Respondents emphasised responsibility, reliability, tacit knowledge, mentoring ability and strategic understanding as important organisational resources. The findings therefore demonstrate a contradiction

between the public appreciation of experience and actual recruitment practices in working life.

Digitalisation and artificial intelligence emerged as important themes throughout the study. The findings challenge assumptions suggesting that technological competence depends primarily on age. Instead, learning opportunities, organisational support and workplace culture appear more important in shaping technological adaptation and lifelong learning (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2022).

The Estonian seminar material contributed an important international perspective concerning active ageing, intergenerational learning and digital transformation (MTÜ Kuldne Liiga, 2026). The material highlighted that older employees increasingly view work as a source of activity, wellbeing and social participation rather than solely as economic necessity.

The study suggests that reducing age discrimination requires both structural and attitudinal change. Legal protection alone is insufficient if organisational culture and recruitment systems continue to reproduce age-related stereotypes (OECD 2020; European Commission, 2021).

Based on the findings of this study, the author suggests several practical measures for reducing age discrimination in working life. Organisations should strengthen anonymous and competence-based recruitment practices, increase lifelong learning opportunities for employees of all ages and promote intergenerational cooperation within workplaces.

In addition, organisations should develop more systematic age-diversity strategies and regularly evaluate workplace equality through measurable practices such as age-friendly certification models. Public discussion concerning ageing should also move away from deficit-oriented stereotypes towards recognising the competence, adaptability and societal value of experienced employees (Butler, 1969; OECD, 2020).

Based on the findings, organisations should:

- promote age-diverse recruitment practices
- strengthen lifelong learning opportunities
- recognise the value of professional experience
- support intergenerational cooperation
- reduce stereotypes related to ageing and technological competence

The findings of this study also suggest that financial incentives for employers could support the recruitment of older employees. Reducing employer-related employment costs or introducing targeted incentives for hiring workers over the age of 50 may encourage organisations to utilise the competence and experience of older jobseekers more actively (OECD, 2020; European Commission 2021). Such measures could also support longer working careers and reduce labour market exclusion among ageing populations.

In addition to existing equality measures, this study suggests several new practical approaches for reducing age discrimination in working life. Organisations should implement regular age-diversity audits to identify hidden structural discrimination in recruitment, promotion and redundancy processes (Eurofound, 2018).

Furthermore, managers and recruitment professionals should receive training concerning unconscious age-related stereotypes and bias, as many discriminatory attitudes appear to operate indirectly through organisational culture rather than openly expressed exclusion (Butler, 1969; OECD 2020).

The findings also support the development of broader age-friendly certification systems based on the Finnish age certification model discussed in Ira Hammermann's interview (Hammermann, personal interview, 2026). Such practices could potentially be expanded internationally to promote age-positive working life policies across Europe.

Finally, organisations should strengthen intergenerational mentoring systems in which experienced employees transfer tacit knowledge, strategic understanding and practical expertise to younger workers while simultaneously supporting mutual learning concerning digitalisation and technological change.

The study also highlights the societal importance of utilising the competence of older workers in ageing labour markets. As demographic ageing continues across Europe, excluding experienced employees from working life may weaken both economic sustainability and social equality (European Commission, 2021; OECD, 2020).

In conclusion, age discrimination remains an important labour market and social issue that requires continuous attention from organisations, policymakers and society. Recognising the strengths of experienced employees and creating inclusive working environments are essential for building sustainable and equal working life in the future.

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Survey Questionnaire

Appendix 1.

Survey Questionnaire

Background Information

1. Your age group

- under 30
- 30–39
- 40–49
- 50–59
- 60 or over

2. Your current employment situation

- permanently employed
- temporarily employed
- unemployed jobseeker
- entrepreneur
- student
- retired
- other



Age and Employment

3. Do you believe that age affects employment opportunities?

- very much
- quite a lot
- somewhat
- a little
- not at all

4. Have you personally experienced age discrimination in working life or during job seeking?

- yes
- no
- not sure

5. If you have not personally experienced age discrimination, what is your view: does it occur in working life?

- yes, a lot
- somewhat
- a little
- not at all
- cannot say

6. In which situations have you experienced age discrimination?

- recruitment
- workplace
- career development
- training opportunities
- dismissal/redundancy
- I have not experienced discrimination

7. How often do you feel that age affects your position in working life?

- very often
- quite often
- rarely
- never

8. Have you experienced not being selected for a position because of your age?

- yes
- no
- cannot say

9. Have you noticed indications in job advertisements that younger applicants are preferred?

- yes, often
- sometimes
- no
- not sure

10. Have you encountered the following assumptions?

- I do not learn new things as quickly
- I am not technologically competent
- I am too experienced / too expensive
- I am not flexible
- I have not encountered these assumptions

11. How well do you feel your competence and skills are valued?

- very poorly
- poorly
- fairly well
- very well

12. How comfortable do you feel using new technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI)?

- very comfortable
- fairly comfortable
- difficult
- very difficult

Appearance and Physical Condition**13. Do you believe that appearance or physical condition can affect employment opportunities?**

- yes, significantly
- somewhat
- a little
- not at all

Health and Work Ability**14. In your opinion, how can health or illness affect working life?**

- affects greatly
- affects somewhat
- affects only a little
- does not affect

15. Do you believe rehabilitation can help people return to working life?

- yes, significantly
- somewhat
- only a little
- not at all

Attitudes in Working Life

16. How would you describe working life attitudes towards employees over 50 years old?

- very positive
- fairly positive
- neutral
- fairly negative
- very negative

17. Do you believe that financial incentives for employers (for example, reducing employer contributions when hiring people over 50) would improve their employment opportunities?

- yes, significantly
- yes, somewhat
- would have little effect
- would have no effect
- cannot say

Future and Solutions

18. In your opinion, what should be changed to improve the labour market position of people over 50?

Open-ended response.

19. What strengths do experienced employees bring to the workplace?

Open-ended response.

20. Please briefly describe your own experience or views regarding age discrimination.

Open-ended response.

Interview Invitation

Cover Letter

Dear Participant,

I am conducting a Master's thesis at Turku University of Applied Sciences on age discrimination in working life and how age affects opportunities in the labour market.

The purpose of this study is to collect experiences and perspectives related to working life, recruitment, ageing, and equality in employment. The research focuses particularly on the position of employees and jobseekers over the age of 50.

The data will be collected through a survey and interviews. Participation is completely voluntary and anonymous. The survey takes approximately 5–10 minutes to complete.

All responses will be treated confidentially and used only for research purposes. Individual respondents cannot be identified from the final thesis.

All perspectives are valuable, regardless of whether you have personally experienced age discrimination or not.

Thank you very much for your time and participation. You are also welcome to share the survey with others.

Kind regards,

Terje Dahlstedt

Turku University of Applied Sciences

Master's Thesis Research

Interview Framework

Theme Interview Questions

1. Background Questions

1. Could you briefly describe your work background and education?
2. What is your current employment situation (employed, unemployed, entrepreneur, student, retired, etc.)?
3. How long have you been part of working life?

2. The Importance of Experience

4. How do you feel long work experience affects opportunities in the labour market?
5. Do you think employers value experience sufficiently? Why or why not?
6. If you have not personally experienced this, what is your view on how work experience affects employment opportunities?

3. Age and Recruitment

7. Have you experienced that age has affected job seeking or recruitment?
8. If you have not personally experienced this, what is your perception of whether age affects employment opportunities?
9. What kinds of attitudes have you observed towards employees over the age of 50?

4. Retraining and Lifelong Learning

10. Have you considered or completed retraining during your career?
11. Do you think retraining improves employment opportunities?
12. If you have not personally retrained, what is your view on whether it helps employment?

5. Appearance and Physical Condition

13. Do you think appearance or physical condition can affect employment opportunities?
14. If you have not personally experienced this, what is your view on whether appearance or good physical condition affects a job applicant's opportunities?

6. Health and Rehabilitation

15. In your opinion, how can health or illnesses affect employment opportunities or staying in working life?
16. Do you think rehabilitation can help people return to working life?
17. If you have not personally experienced rehabilitation, what is your view on its importance in supporting work ability?

7. Solutions and the Future

18. In your opinion, what should be changed to improve the labour market position of people over 50?
19. How could employers make better use of the competence and experience of older employees?
20. Is there anything else you would like to share about age discrimination or changes in working life?

Summary of Survey Results

Table 1. Main survey results concerning age discrimination in working life

Survey question / theme	Main result
Respondents aged 50–59	75%
Respondents who believed that age affects employment opportunities	75%
Respondents who had personally experienced age discrimination	75%
Respondents who believed that age discrimination occurs in working life or job seeking	75%
Respondents who felt that age affects their position in working life very often	75%
Respondents who had experienced not being selected for a position because of age	75%
Respondents who had noticed job advertisements favouring younger applicants often	50%
Respondents who had noticed job advertisements favouring younger applicants sometimes	25%
Respondents who had encountered the assumption of being too experienced or too expensive	75%
Respondents who felt their competence was valued weakly	50%
Respondents who felt their competence was valued very weakly	25%
Respondents who felt very comfortable using new technologies, such as artificial intelligence	50%
Respondents who felt fairly comfortable using new technologies, such as artificial intelligence	50%
Respondents who believed appearance or physical condition can strongly affect employment	50%
Respondents who believed appearance or physical condition can somewhat affect employment	50%
Respondents who believed health or illness affects working life significantly	75%
Respondents who believed rehabilitation can significantly support return to work	75%
Respondents who described attitudes towards employees over 50 as fairly negative	50%
Respondents who described attitudes towards employees over 50 as very negative	25%
Respondents who believed financial incentives for employers would somewhat improve employment opportunities for workers over 50	75%