




Empowering  
young people

A stylized map of Europe is shown in light blue, with a dark blue arc representing the horizon of a globe. A yellow line highlights the borders of the European Union member states. The map is positioned in the upper right and middle sections of the page.

**GUIDELINES –  
Improving Intergenerational  
Dialogue At Work**

Editor: YES Forum

Author(s): Çağla Ezgi Yıldız

Contributions: Thais Dutra Fernández, Christine Schubart

Proofreading: Maggie Nazer

Design: Ralf Schnarrenberger

December 2022



**Co-funded by  
the European Union**

This publication has been funded by the European Commission's ESF+ Social Inclusion operating grant (EuroPower-101059198).

Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

## **About the YES Forum**

Founded in 2002, YES Forum is a European network of organisations working with and for young people facing challenging situations. By promoting their social inclusion and developing their professional skills, we act to improve the life chances of vulnerable young people. YES Forum aims to create an environment where young people and youth professionals have equally accessible learning and work-related opportunities in Europe and beyond.

# Content

- Introduction ..... 4**
  - Generational Gap and Intergenerational Dialogue in the Workforce in Europe..... 4
  - Skills Gap and Youth and Social Work ..... 5
  - YES Forum Experience..... 6
  
- Guidelines..... 7**
  - Level of Organisations ..... 7
  - Level of Policy-makers ..... 12
  
- Conclusions ..... 17**
  
- Bibliography ..... 19**

## Introduction

The way we work is changing due to globalisation, technological progress, and demographic changes. These developments have an impact on the number, quality and availability of jobs, how they are carried out, and the required skills for the jobs (OECD, 2018). A shift in who is entering and leaving the workforce constitutes a mega-trend driving the ongoing transformation of work (Deloitte, 2018). While the baby boomer generation<sup>1</sup> is coming to an age of retirement, other developments are happening simultaneously: the rise in the general population's life expectancy, and the willingness of older-aged individuals to remain professionally active for more years, to name a few. At the same time, due to low birth rates over the past decades fewer young people are set to enter the workforce in the near future – particularly in European countries.

In this paper, we will focus on the demographic change at the workplace, its implications for the work of youth and social work organisations, and some possible pathways to improve intergenerational dialogue between younger and senior workers in order to create a more inclusive and productive work environment for all. We identify the strengths and potential of senior and junior workers, and provide general guidelines to improve intergenerational dialogue at the workplace in order to amplify knowledge and skill exchange and transfer between the different generations.

### Generational Gap and Intergenerational Dialogue in the Workforce in Europe

The ageing of populations is profoundly changing the workplace. Significant demographic changes will mark the coming decades. According to the latest UN population projections, by 2050 the number of individuals aged 15 to 29 will shrink by seven per cent in Western Europe (UN, 2022). Young people are also entering the labour market at a later age, often studying longer by pursuing post-secondary education, thereby further reducing the pool of young people for hire. This trend could partly be explained with the increasing qualifications required by the labour market. Meanwhile, a significant part of the workforce is approaching retirement age. Since 2010 the large baby boomer cohorts have been reaching older age, while the successive generations are smaller, or growing at a slower pace. By 2050 the share of the population aged 50 and older will increase from 37% in 2020 to 45% on average in the OECD (UN, 2022). These demographic trends call for multigenerational workplaces with a greater mix of age and experience diversity.

Any organisation paying attention to these transformations should make it a priority to develop appropriate tools and practices to benefit from the potential of the resulting diversity of experience, generations and skills (OECD, 2020). Therefore, it is [essential to improve intergenerational dialogue between colleagues with different experiences](#).

The mix of various [experiences, generations and skills brings many benefits to the workplace](#). As multigenerational integration enhances within the workplace, employees can expect an expansion of intergenerational knowledge and experience sharing leading to increase in their productivity and

---

<sup>1</sup> Usually those born between 1946 and 1964.

performance. Also, collaboration between people from different generations is likely to prevent segregation, discrimination, and social exclusion. In the face of demographic transformation, organisations can utilise intergenerational dialogue to create a work environment that is more agile, more inclusive and more productive.

Our guidelines to improve intergenerational dialogue at the workplace are based on secondary research on the topic, as well as our continuous exchanges with the members of the YES Forum network, and workshops that the YES Forum Secretariat and its members participated in. As the YES Forum is a youth and social work network, we will mainly consider this sector in the current report, even though most of the guidelines developed can also be implemented in other work fields.

The guidelines are targeted at two levels: (1) organisations, and (2) policy-makers. This is because in many instances there is a need to complement top-down processes (for this report specifically at the EU level) with bottom-up approaches from within organisations and amongst workers in order to create appropriate conditions for intergenerational dialogue.

### **Skills Gap and Youth and Social Work**

Raising awareness on the topic of demographic change, and the need to improve intergenerational dialogue at the workplace are especially important for the youth and social work sectors. [Employees from different generations and experience levels have different skill sets crucial for youth and social work](#). Both younger/junior workers and older/senior staff have different aspects to teach to and learn from the other generation.

Improving intergenerational dialogue is only possible when there are multigenerational workplaces with employees representing diverse age cohorts. In September 2022 the youth unemployment rate was 14.6% both in the EU and in the euro area (Eurostat, 2022). [One of the main reasons why the youth unemployment rate in Europe remains high is the misalignment between the skills required by employers and those possessed by job-seekers](#) (OECD, 2022). Skills misalignment can emerge in the form of skill shortages, surpluses and mismatches.

Based on the latest OECD data, skill shortages are particularly prevalent for training and education skills (OECD, 2022). Additionally, these shortages have continued to increase for the past eight years, indicating a structural problem of under-supply. Considering that education and training skills are among the most important skills for youth and social work, there is a lack of skilled/qualified young staff in the sector. Therefore, the younger generation needs to be supported with their integration into the employment market better.

Furthermore, the younger generation has a unique value in the youth and social work sector as they are closer to the target group in terms of their age and perspectives. Evidently, [promoting and initiating intergenerational dialogue constitute topics of particular importance for youth and social work organisations to successfully promote inclusion and participation of young people in society](#).

To this end, we should create work environments where older and younger generations are empowered to communicate, cooperate, and learn from each other. This report will present several guidelines on doing so.

### **YES Forum Experience**

Since March 2021, YES Forum has been involved in BRIDGE (Breaching Reservation and Improving Dialogue through Generational Exchange), an Erasmus+ funded project to promote and strengthen intergenerational dialogue in youth and social work organisations. The project focuses on the importance of improving intergenerational dialogue between junior and senior youth workers by identifying their strengths, knowledge and competencies. It also investigates effective formal and informal methods and techniques to transfer knowledge from Seniors to Juniors and vice versa.

Partner organisations of the BRIDGE project come from Austria, Germany, France, Italy and Sweden. Although this composition already provides a good mix to reflect the European situation, the topics of demographic change and intergenerational dialogue require further research and expansion with data from other EU countries. The following guidelines are based on the knowledge and experience gathered in the project and further expanded to the European level as the YES Forum is a European network of organisations. While the BRIDGE Project is mainly focused on youth and social work, this report will also present general guidelines that can be applied to other work fields.

YES Forum Secretariat and members participated in two workshops in the context of improving intergenerational dialogue. These workshops were dedicated to

- raising awareness on intergenerational dialogue;
- identifying strengths and potentials of junior and senior workers, and
- developing knowledge management and transfer methods to improve intergenerational dialogue among colleagues.

We developed our guidelines by drawing on the results of the projects and workshops we took part in, in addition to conducting secondary research and summarising the insights that we gathered from our exchanges with the members of the YES Forum network.

## Guidelines

### Level of Organisations

In a new type of society with fewer young people and young adults, more older workers, pensioners, and elderly people, our organisations need to discover new ways of using the potential of both junior and senior workers. Dealing with these changes will require contributions from all involved: new forms of solidarity must be developed between the generations, based on mutual support and transfer of skills and experience (European Commission, 2005).

To ensure that demographic change is not viewed as a conflict between youth and the elderly but rather as a field of new opportunities, there must be more dialogue and solidarity between the generations. While it also depends on employees to strengthen dialogue and solidarity between each other, organisations and employers have a big role in creating an environment for more intergenerational dialogue and solidarity.

### Strengthening intergenerational dialogue and solidarity at the workplace

Younger and older workers may sometimes face different challenges at the workplace, yet often have shared struggles and aspirations (Jeffery et al., 2022). To this end, workers should be empowered to collaborate in order to improve both their work conditions and the quality of their work. Therefore, the interactional distance between older and younger workers should be minimised for intergenerational solidarity to strengthen. [One of the most effective methods for organisations to achieve this is by implementing intergenerational learning initiatives at the workplace.](#)

#### Intergenerational learning (IL)

Communication and cooperation between junior and senior workers can be optimised by implementing intergenerational learning at the workplace. [Intergenerational learning is defined as the process in which people of all ages learn together and from each other.](#) When different generations work together to gain and transfer skills, values, and knowledge through their interactions, intergenerational learning integrates into lifelong learning which provides benefits to individuals regardless of their age. Through intergenerational learning employees can develop mutual understanding and appreciation, as well as develop satisfying and educational relationships, while organisations can reduce the generational gap phenomenon, and create a workplace learning culture that fuels individual and organisational resilience and adaptation.

Intergenerational learning occurs when projects or activities are purposefully planned to include one, or several, learning aims and outcomes across the generations. This type of learning could take place in a formal, non-formal or informal setting, and one or more of its primary aims would include an intergenerational learning outcome. An important feature for success of intergenerational learning is the availability of deliberate and systematic guidance to facilitate the process.

### Mentorship

Most of us are familiar with the concept of a mentor at work who is usually a more experienced, frequently older person who empowers a less experienced, often young person by sharing their knowledge and experience. When organisations [dedicate employee hours to mentoring junior staff](#), [young people get to benefit from senior employees' experience](#). At the same time, [enabling seniors to act as mentors can improve employee engagement](#).

Organisations can approach mentorship by designing organisation-wide programs building on contributions from across the range of age cohorts present in the organisations, and inviting senior employees to mentor the youth. [Mentoring can be done through coaching, teaching, befriending, role-modelling, counselling and advocacy](#) (Generations Working Together, 2008). Successful mentors have good listening skills, a supportive and non-judgmental approach, an ability to form and sustain positive, supportive relationships, and an interest in the personal development of other people. They tend to have a style of communication that can be characterised as ['person centred'](#).

### Reverse mentoring

Young people also have a lot to teach respectively, mainly digital skills, and literacy on social media. Reverse mentoring, [whereby a younger employee mentors an older, more senior employee](#), is another possible way to bridge the age and generational gap within the workforce. Reverse and reciprocal mentoring have been used to introduce new technology to senior managers. Reverse mentoring is a bridge-building exercise between the generations where the conversation can range from integrating new digital communications tools to discussing what younger people believe the world of work should look like. [For the reverse mentoring relationship to work, it must have clear objectives](#); although the arrangement does not need to be formal or rigid. [Mentors and mentees should feel at ease with the set up in order to receive the most value from it](#). Like any form of mentoring, reverse mentoring should be based on trust, confidentiality, mutual respect and sensitivity.

Some of the most effective [formal methods](#) to transfer knowledge between juniors and seniors are mentoring and tutoring, trainings and workshops, and periodic supervision. Some of the most effective [informal methods](#) to transfer knowledge between juniors and seniors are job-shadowing, role-playing and informal exchanges.

For intergenerational learning to take place through the methods presented, organisations have to first [build diverse, multigenerational teams](#). Employees themselves may tend to team up in age-based groups. Thus, it can be helpful to use team-building activities or develop collaborative projects that pair younger employees with older ones to break the ice and start building the foundations for intergenerational dialogue and learning.



## Provide more and better opportunities to young people and junior staff

As organisations struggle to find workers with adequate competencies, workers have a hard time finding jobs that are a good match for their skills. As stated in the introduction, this problem often stems from skills surplus, shortage or mismatch. The result of skills misalignment is that workers lack the proper qualifications for the job they are applying for, either because they are under-qualified or overqualified. For example, the OECD suggests that this is the case for 42% of workers in Greece, 41% in Portugal and 37% in Germany (OECD, 2018).

This is especially applicable to [young people who are often overqualified because of their longer studies, yet unexperienced](#). Organisations can support their junior staff by offering more and better opportunities for their integration in the job market, and utilise their skills to improve intergenerational dialogue at the workplace.

Employing and integrating young people in the job market is especially important considering the recent changes in the labour market following the COVID-19 impact, digital transformation, green transition and demographic change. Organisations need workers that can work with new technologies in a sustainable way.

### [Lower barriers for entry-level jobs in recruitment](#)

One way of making entry-level jobs easier for young people and junior workers to secure is lowering the barriers in the recruitment process. Job advertisements often discourage potential applicants or eliminate them in the selection process due to unrealistic expectations. [Organisations should lower the barriers to entry, and rethink requirements for these positions. They should focus on potential and soft skills instead of years of experience.](#)

In today's competitive labour market most of the time entry level-jobs require at least 1-3 years of workplace experience. However, for young graduates this is often impossible to satisfy. Some employers do not even consider internships as work-related experience. [To integrate young people and junior staff in the labour market, employers should consider any type of skills and task-related practice as experience.](#) This can include experience gained through student clubs, volunteering, training, internships, and part-time jobs. Furthermore, organisations should specify this in the job descriptions to not exclude any applicants.

Job advertisements can also exclude potential applicants through requesting "essential qualifications". This is usually well-intended, and makes the hiring process more efficient. However, focusing as much as possible on transferable skills and experience, and specifying that equivalent qualifications are also acceptable, avoids losing qualified applicants unnecessarily (OECD, 2020).

"Age-blind" hiring processes, whereby for instance resumes omit the applicant's date of birth and ask for relevant experience against competencies rather than chronologically, can avoid conscious and unconscious biases in the early stages of the hiring process.

### Offering quality and paid internships

To meet the requirements of job positions, young graduates often do internships to gain experience before their first full-time job or even between jobs. However, sometimes even internships require students and young graduates to have some working experience while offering no payment or not enough to sustain their lives. This widespread practice creates unfair conditions and deepens the existing social divide.

Internship providers should offer quality internship placements that are also fairly paid, and should aim to provide interns with on-the-job training instead of giving them tasks that are not in line with their qualifications and prior education. By doing so, organisations would also benefit from attracting more motivated and productive interns who produce quality work.

While internships are often the first step to professional life for students and young graduates, they can also provide workers to remain within the organisation in the long term. To this end, the internship period should be organised by the employer with the aim of getting to know the interns, and assigning meaningful tasks for the job, so that the interns benefit from the experience and learn more about the organisation.

Organisations' mission should be to work towards an inclusive society where young people are given an equal chance to be selected for internship openings, and receive fair treatment before, during and after their internships.

### Investing in entry-level skilling

Challenges that young people and junior staff face are not only limited to the hiring process. After being hired, they frequently struggle with lack of supervision to help them acquire the knowledge and skills they need to fulfil their tasks. Due to being inadequately supported, workers might not have the opportunities to reach and show their full potential.

Organisations should invest in upskilling and reskilling their employees by providing training that enhances their existing skill set, allowing them to grow in their current role and bring added value to the organisation. There is a need to understand that skilling isn't meant to happen only at school but should constitute continuous training. Lifelong learning is crucial for employees of all ages and with diverse levels of experience. When organisations invest in upskilling and supporting their employees' development, they strengthen their employee loyalty and long-term retention.

Upskilling can include providing their entry-level employees with training in technical skills, soft-skills, diversity and inclusion, as well as on-the-job training (such as mentoring, coaching and job-shadowing), and giving free access to job-specific skills content.

## **Structured onboarding and offboarding processes**

The retirement of baby boomers and increase in job-switching especially in the post-COVID-19 period are among the labour market changes that drive increased attention to onboarding and offboarding processes. Even if most organisations have some kind of onboarding and offboarding systems, it is

important to take these processes seriously and make them as structured as possible. Only by doing so organisations can ensure that both new and leaving employees feel safe and comfortable, and necessary knowledge gets transferred and not lost in the process.

### *Onboarding processes*

Onboarding begins once a job candidate agrees to accept a job. *It involves all the steps needed to successfully integrate a new employee into an organisation and get them settled and productive.* In every kind of organisation, there is a need for structured onboarding processes so that new employees easily find their way into their tasks and within organisations. In this sense, onboarding should be considered more than handing over the keys, technical equipment, email and passwords. Rather, onboarding is a process of making a new employee comfortable at the workplace, and getting them informed about the organisation and their tasks in order for them to start their work independently with confidence.

Ideally, organisations have a quality management system in which important processes are recorded and regularly reviewed. *A good onboarding process also involves familiarising new employees with the organisations' values, vision and mission.* This includes getting to know the organisation with its different fields of work, co-workers and contact persons. Moreover, in this process employees should get to know the working methods and tools used for the work and where to find them. *A systematic onboarding process is more than a checklist, it requires some kind of initial mentoring, a structured knowledge transfer, and informal ways for new workers to obtain any necessary information.*

Once new employees get used to the workplace and their respective roles, they can become more deeply engaged. Engaged employees are more productive, and have a higher likelihood of staying in the organisation.

Today's job market is not as static as before, and there is a higher rate of job turnover. Therefore, in addition to a good arrival and onboarding, it is important to have regular check-ins on the needs of employees to measure their satisfaction with their job and working conditions. A safe space for discussion is crucial for a healthy environment where both employers and employees have high work satisfaction.

### *Offboarding processes*

Offboarding is the reverse of onboarding, and *involves the process of separation of an employee from an organisation through resignation, termination or retirement.* This can include a process for knowledge-sharing with other employees and the transfer of job responsibilities. Offboarding is as important as the onboarding processes for everyone involved, including the organisation, the leaving employee, as well as those remaining.

With the retirement of the baby boomer generation a lot of institutional knowledge and skills are leaving the workforce. Whenever a well-experienced staff member leaves an organisation, a structured offboarding is necessary. The question is: "how can organisations keep the knowledge and skills with them after an employee leaves?"

An offboarding process may begin long before an employee has submitted a leave or retirement request. Older employees may be asked to mentor and help train new workers to ensure a successful transition.

A successful structured offboarding process does not merely focus on the person leaving, but takes the needs of the remaining colleagues into account, as well. Offboarding may need different amounts of time, depending on how long the person leaving has been working for the organisation. Offboarding processes can be an invaluable time for knowledge transfer.

Both on- and offboarding require time and personal resources, and these tasks are often done by the leaders or management of an organisation.

#### *Returnee or re-entry programs*

A topic to discuss during the offboarding process is how to stay in contact with the departing employees. Importantly, there is a growing number of retirees looking to re-join the workforce as a way to stay engaged and remain fulfilled after retirement. Organisations that maintain contact with their former employees can build an alumni pool of potential recruits to meet short-term, flexible, as well as longer-term resource needs. Maintaining these connections can benefit both employers and individuals. Returnee programs build on the concept of external experts, and make it relevant to people who are looking to return to work. Typical programs help the individual transition back into the workplace through a structured and tailored approach. Programs can vary in terms of duration as participants re-enter the organisation by undertaking a project or stepping into an available role, thus benefiting from a flexible working arrangement. An alumni pool of contacts can include junior, senior, and retired employees of an organisation, along with their areas of expertise and interests. While organising events and planning projects, whenever a manager needs extra help, they can easily find the contact of someone who has the interest and expertise to support them.

#### **Level of Policy-makers**

Organisations have a significant role in creating a work environment to facilitate intergenerational dialogue and provide necessary tools and methods for their employees to strengthen their solidarity and collaboration. Yet, organisations remain restricted by laws and policies, and action at a higher policy level is required. This section presents general recommendations to policy makers to aid the creation of a more inclusive labour market for all age cohorts.

#### **Raise awareness on the value of intergenerational dialogue**

In today's world, a priority of policy-makers should be to raise awareness of the value of multigenerational workplaces and intergenerational dialogue. They should ensure its high position on political agendas, promote solidarity between generations, and mobilise the potential of younger and older persons alike. Even though evidence supports the need for improving intergenerational dialogue at the workplace, the general population remains unaware of its importance and urgency, as most organisations do not prioritise it yet.

By pointing out the [reasons why intergenerational dialogue needs to be deepened and become more widespread](#), policy-makers can influence organisations, as well as the general population. Throughout this report we have identified many drivers of the need for multigenerational work places and improved intergenerational dialogue. These include:

- demographic change
- EU-wide digitalisation efforts
- green transition
- high level of youth unemployment
- skills shortages, surpluses and mismatch
- COVID-19 impact

Focusing on the [benefits of intergenerational dialogue](#) to raise awareness can be another effective strategy. As already mentioned, some important benefits of improving intergenerational dialogue are:

- creating a more inclusive and non-discriminatory work environment;
- enhancing learning and skill sharing across all age groups;
- increasing productivity of all workers;
- improving workers' satisfaction and motivation at the workplace.

To this end, the most crucial target group for policy-makers is employers as they are the most powerful actors when it comes to creating inclusive environment for intergenerational dialogue in the workspace, and they can further draw the attention of their employees to the topic and raise awareness among them.

### **Better integration of young people into the labour market**

The level of education and training of younger generations is markedly higher than that of their older colleagues'. At the same time, the labour market is ever more competitive and the expectations of employers are higher than before. In this system young people are becoming an undervalued resource as they struggle to find jobs and keep them. The younger generation must be given appropriate education to gain the necessary skills, and must be better integrated into the employment market.

#### [Promoting youth employment](#)

The skills mismatch which underlies the high youth unemployment rate is based on the conundrum of young people's simultaneous perception as being overeducated and under-skilled. Whereas this viewpoint does not match the reality for all young people, the misalignment between formal education and employers' requirements plays a significant role in how prepared young people are to enter the job market, and to remain there long-term.

In 2021, 13% of the young people in the EU were Neither in Employment nor in Education and Training (NEETs) (Eurostat, 2022). There are variations across the member states, with the proportion of NEETs

ranging from 6% in the Netherlands to 23% in Italy. It is important to make sure that the transition from education to work goes smoothly, and to highlight the risks of being neither in employment nor in education or training. When young adults find themselves disengaged from both education and the labour market, this poses risks at both individual and social level.

On another hand, it has also become more common for young people who are in employment to return to education or training in order to improve their qualifications. As a result of this, [the transition from education to work has become less clear with a growing share of students also working, and a rising proportion of people in employment also studying.](#)

Young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, find themselves vulnerable amidst the labour market, many of them lacking the skills, work experience, job-search abilities, and financial resources to find employment. Furthermore, they often face discrimination on the grounds of their age and lack of occupational experience, accentuated by other factors such as gender and social origin, all of which make it more difficult for them to integrate into economic life and society.

#### [\*Better education and flexible pathways for young people\*](#)

Promoting young people's employment and integration in the labour market starts with providing them with appropriate educational systems and alternative pathways. The educational system needs to overcome the challenge to at once raise the level of initial training being offered to young people, as well as to offer flexible pathways. For example, young people would benefit from flexibility in order to alternate between their studies, work and work-related training to meet the needs of the labour market. [Policy-makers should promote equitable access to high-quality formal, non-formal and informal learning to equip young people with key competencies for life-long learning and active participation in society and the economy.](#)

Young people's engagement and retention in education and training should be eased by diversifying the continued education offerings (for example through work-based learning, bridging programmes and second-chance programmes), ensuring, where appropriate, the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Even though the university system across the EU is well-established, not all young people want to study in general education programs to prepare for further academic education. [Vocational and Educational Training \(VET\) programs](#) combine practical training with occupation-specific theory and some general education. School-based and dual VET programmes teach skills by conducting learning activities both at school and in the workplace. In this regard, VET programs provide a good balance between theory and practice which makes young people's transition into the labour market easier. The VET programs are not equally well-established and valued in all EU Member States. In comparison to the general education pathways, VET still has a poor image in the eyes of young people, their families and some companies. For this reason, we need a holistic approach in the EU to improve the perceptions of VET by improving the quality and understanding of its relevance. Policy-makers should promote VET and attract more young people to participate in such programs.

The European Education Area initiative for the period 2021–2030 has identified VET as a focus area for cooperation. Furthermore, through the Council of the EU, Member States have set the target to increase the number of recent graduates of VET benefiting from work-based learning to at least 60% by 2025.

Another way to make young people's transition and engagement in the labour market smoother is through making available work-based training approaches such as quality [apprenticeship and traineeship](#) opportunities. Traineeships provide a limited period of work practice, whether paid or not, which includes a learning and/or a training component. In an apprenticeship, the time is divided between learning at school and training in a company. Apprenticeships are usually paid and based on formal contracts. When the apprenticeship period is over, successful apprentices receive a fully recognised diploma or certification. Organisations can employ apprentices coming from various life paths, from school leavers and university graduates, to people who want to further their careers or change their career direction altogether. Policy-makers should take action to improve the quality and supply of apprenticeships and traineeships.

#### [Decent working conditions for young people](#)

[Career planning is essential for enabling youth to understand the variety of occupations available and discover the ones suitable to their talents and interests.](#) Effective career guidance helps individuals to reach their potential, economies to become more efficient, and societies to become fairer. Whether before, during or after their education and training career guidance can help young people to find their place in the labour market and obtain decent working conditions. Tailor-made, personalised, and ongoing support from an informed and objective person is invaluable, especially for disadvantaged youth.

Career guidance is as important for adults as it is for young people. Employers should develop a learner-centred approach to career guidance, creating opportunities for engagement with young people through workplace visits, career talks and job shadowing, as well as provision of information on skills in demand. Strengthening career guidance and building robust information systems for students can help reduce the extent of skills mismatches, and support individuals to make informed education and career choices.

To achieve the extensive benefits of an effective and efficient career guidance system, a national vision and strategy should be developed collaboratively between responsible government bodies, in areas such as education, training, social protection and employment, together with civil society organisations.

In addition to the challenges that young people face before entering the labour market, there is also a need to consider [the conditions, quality and nature of jobs once they are employed](#). Young people "are more likely than prime-age workers to have jobs that are low paid and offer limited labour market stability, social protection and opportunities for training and career progression" (OECD, 2014, p. 6). Moreover, young people are more likely to have temporary jobs and contracts, therefore facing uncertainty and instability for their future prospects.

Policy-makers must promote decent working conditions for all young workers. These conditions "include ensuring that they enjoy fundamental rights and protections including freedom of association, the right

to collective bargaining, equal pay for work of equal value, and freedom from violence and harassment at work” (ILO, 2022).

### **Better benefits for older generation and seniors**

Rapid population ageing requires a continuous and comprehensive policy response to ensure that the benefits of longer and healthier lives are fully realised, while delivering continued improvements in living standards. To address the challenges of ageing, while also embracing its opportunities, policy-makers across the EU should provide people with better incentives and choices to work at an older age. With better policies, population ageing can go hand in hand with longer, more fulfilling and prosperous lives, whereby working at an older age in good quality jobs is both promoted and valued.

#### *Promoting and investing in life-long learning*

To be able to align with evolving job requirements over a longer time frame, people need to keep learning throughout their entire life – to acquire and update not only technical skills, but also soft skills, such as communication, teamwork and problem-solving. Policy-makers should improve access to lifelong learning, especially for older workers, and provide recognition of skills acquired throughout the work lifespan.

The digital transformation is generating deep and rapid changes in the labour market. Adaptation demands massive efforts to upskill and reskill workers, which in turn requires well-adapted and well-funded adult learning systems. Older workers may be more exposed to the risk of skills obsolescence, and maintaining their employability requires a special focus to help them navigate a labour market that will increasingly require adaptation of skills and job changes.

Unfortunately, many older people exhibit lower levels of digital readiness, and participation in job-related training than younger workers. The large training gap between older and younger people continues to persist even in some of the top performing EU countries, including Germany and France where the gap exceeds 25 percentage points (OECD, 2019).

Countries in the EU are increasingly doing more to increase the interest and motivation of older adults to invest in their own skills. To encourage employers to invest in training for older employees, some countries have embarked on initiatives to reduce the cost of training older workers compared to the cost of training other groups of employees. In this regard, policy-makers can use their platforms to raise awareness on the importance of life-long learning and skill development, as well as work to mainstream career guidance services. Finally, they can deploy programs that recognise existing skills through validation and certification to boost participation of older workers in training.

#### *Active engagement of seniors after retirement*

More possibilities should be opened up for senior citizens who are no longer in employment to maintain their position in society. Active social participation is not only beneficial for senior workers and retirees to stay engaged, but also for organisations to utilise seniors’ knowledge and experience when needed.



Given the lack of skilled workers, knowledge and experience of senior workers could be of great value even in reduced roles.

Retaining employees as consultants or part-time workers after their retirement enables organisations to transfer critical knowledge to new or less experienced employees and to keep running smoothly. Employers can offer retirees to work on expert assignments and time-limited projects.

In this regard, policy-makers should support both employers and senior workers by promoting flexible or partial retirement schemes. These schemes would ease the transition between full-time employment and full retirement, and extend the working lives of senior workers (Eurofund, 2016).

### **Provide more support to organisations**

According to the latest OECD data, [training and education skills are the most difficult to find on average in the European Union](#) (OECD, 2022). For this reason, especially in the youth and social work sector, action is needed to educate the younger generation, and provide them with the necessary skills to better integrate into the sector. Promoting and initiating intergenerational dialogue is particularly important for youth and social work organisations to promote inclusion and participation of young people in society.

To this end, policy-makers should promote the importance of youth and social work, and enhance its attractiveness in order to increase the interest towards the field. In this regard, the value of youth and social work professionals should be recognized through higher remuneration. Moreover, for youth and social work organisations to provide tailored support to diverse groups of young people, they need more support and funding from the policy level.

Organisations and policy-makers need to complement their respective efforts in order to improve the working conditions which inevitably influence workers' learning, productivity and solidarity.

## **Conclusions**

In this report we aimed to provide evidence and examples demonstrating the need to enhance intergenerational dialogue at the workplace following the ongoing mega trends such as demographic change, digitalisation, green transition and the impact of COVID-19. We provided general guidelines to organisations and policy-makers to foster more inclusive workplaces and an accessible labour market for all age cohorts.

Building on the experience of its members, working directly with young people, the YES Forum seeks to influence policies and perceptions in order to create better life opportunities for young people. We contribute to the debate and the advancement of policy issues affecting young people and youth service providers at European, national, regional and local levels. To this end, breaking the intergenerational gap is a priority for the network. The YES Forum is aware of the importance and relevance of demographic change and is dedicated to engaging in activities to promote intergenerational dialogue at the workplace.

With the guidelines and recommendations provided in this report we advocate for a smooth transition into adulthood and quality opportunities for young people in between education and employment so that they are not undervalued and are adequately rewarded for their work. Furthermore, we are aware that breaking the intergenerational gap and improving intergenerational dialogue is only possible when both older and younger generations have opportunities and an appropriate environment to reach their full potential. To this end, we have also provided guidelines and recommendations for better integration of seniors in the labour market.

The European Commission has proclaimed 2023 [European Year of Skills](#). We expect from this year to raise awareness on the importance of upskilling, reskilling, and life-long learning for all.

## Bibliography

- Deloitte (2018), Voice of the workforce in Europe, Available online: <https://bit.ly/3iJhGlt>, accessed on 23 November 2022
- Eurofund (2016), Extending working lives through flexible retirement schemes: Partial retirement, Available online: <https://bit.ly/3Bt2srq>, accessed on 23 November 2022.
- European Commission (2005), Communication from the Commission - Green Paper "Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations" /\* COM/2005/0094 final \*/ , Available online: <https://bit.ly/3Wd1gQG>, accessed on 23 November 2022.
- Eurostat (2022), Education and training in the EU - facts and figures, Available online: <https://bit.ly/30SvllH>, accessed on 23 November 2022.
- Generations Working Together (2008), A Guide to Mentoring Across Generations, Available online: <https://bit.ly/3PhXUK6>, accessed on 23 November 2022.
- ILO (2022), Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022: Investing in transforming futures for young people, Available online: <https://bit.ly/3VP9oY9>, accessed on 23 November 2022.
- Jeffery B., Khan F., Pandey A., & Whitaker T. (2022). Overcoming intergenerational divides to build better workplaces, Available online: <https://bit.ly/3VO2h1T>, accessed on 23 November 2022.
- OECD (2014), Promoting better labour market outcomes for youth, Available online: <https://bit.ly/3PqICD2>, accessed on 23 November 2022.
- OECD (2018), Skills for Jobs, Available online: <https://bit.ly/3FH8W8u>, accessed on 23 November 2022.
- OECD (2019), Working Better with Age, Available online: <https://bit.ly/3Hu0V8q>, accessed on 23 November 2022.
- OECD (2020), Promoting an Age-Inclusive Workforce: Living, Learning and Earning Longer, <https://doi.org/10.1787/59752153-en>, accessed on 23 November 2022.
- OECD (2022), Skills for Jobs 2022, Available online: <https://bit.ly/3iTZaqS>, accessed on 23 November 2022.
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). World Population Prospects 2022: Summary of Results., Available online: <https://bit.ly/3YimzT5>, accessed on 23 November 2022.