

Managing an ageing public service through tailored policies for older workers



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Executive summary

All OECD member countries face mounting challenges linked to the ageing of their populations and workforces. The public service, one of the largest employers worldwide, is particularly affected by this trend. An ageing workforce brings major challenges linked to the loss of critical knowledge, increasingly limited career progression opportunities within hierarchical structures and a significant share of staff facing age-related difficulties. For example, employment rates among older workers decline after the age of 50; they may face age-based discrimination and have fewer opportunities for training and career advancement. These challenges represent key issues for public administrations seeking to maximise the engagement and productivity of employees aged 50 and over.

Addressing these challenges requires a proactive human resource management strategy targeting older workers in the public sector. This strategy should be built on three main pillars: ensuring meaningful career pathways, strengthening and transferring skills, and providing better individual support. Ensuring relevant career paths to meet diverse expectations means creating opportunities for promotion, encouraging horizontal mobility and organising structured discussions on career development. Skills development and knowledge transfer rely on increased participation of older workers in training, formal recognition of their skills and the sharing of both expertise and soft skills to help preserve institutional knowledge. Lastly, individual support includes tackling stereotypes, preparing for retirement, strengthening social support and improving working conditions for older workers.

However, relatively few public administrations have formalised such an approach. This report presents case studies from the public and private sectors in EU and OECD member countries; they offer concrete examples of practices that support a more strategic approach to managing older workers and, more broadly, a multigenerational workforce. By creating age-inclusive working environments, these strategies help maintain engagement and performance while meeting both current and future organisational needs.

Introduction

Member countries of the European Union (EU) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) face a significant challenge with the ageing of the working population. This trend is the result of both overall population ageing and longer working lives. As a result, the median age in many public administrations across OECD countries continues to rise, reaching over 50 in some cases. Yet relatively few public administrations in EU and OECD countries have identified this challenge as a major priority for public service transformation.

This ageing trend has direct implications for strategic workforce management. The ageing of the public service raises important questions about career development prospects for all public employees, while the management of older workers is still too often shaped by stereotypes and generalisations. In the longer term, this also presents a major challenge in terms of knowledge transfer and the preservation of expertise, as a significant cohort of public employees is expected to retire over the next 15 years. This trend calls for enhanced support measures to ensure suitable working environments and conditions.

Efforts to address this issue are further complicated by the fact that older workers in the public service, defined in this report as those aged 50 and over, do not form a homogeneous group. There are real disparities between an employee who has just turned 50 and one nearing retirement, just as two individuals of the same age may have very different concerns. These disparities are further amplified by the wide range of professions, job categories and career paths within the public service. Despite these variations, there are some salient common concerns, particularly with respect to career opportunities, the development and transfer of skills, and available support. As a result, policies to better support older workers can range from measures specifically targeting these issues to broader initiatives aimed at all public employees that may also have a direct or indirect impact on older workers.

This report was produced as part of the project on “Maximising the engagement and performance of older workers through targeted human resource policies”, which aims to support the French Ministry of the Economy, Finance and Industrial and Digital Sovereignty (MEF) in dealing with the challenges and opportunities associated with an ageing workforce. The report presents the analysis and key findings from this work, including a methodological framework outlined in Chapter 2 to help structure HR policies targeting older workers.

1 An ageing workforce facing specific challenges

1.1. An ageing workforce

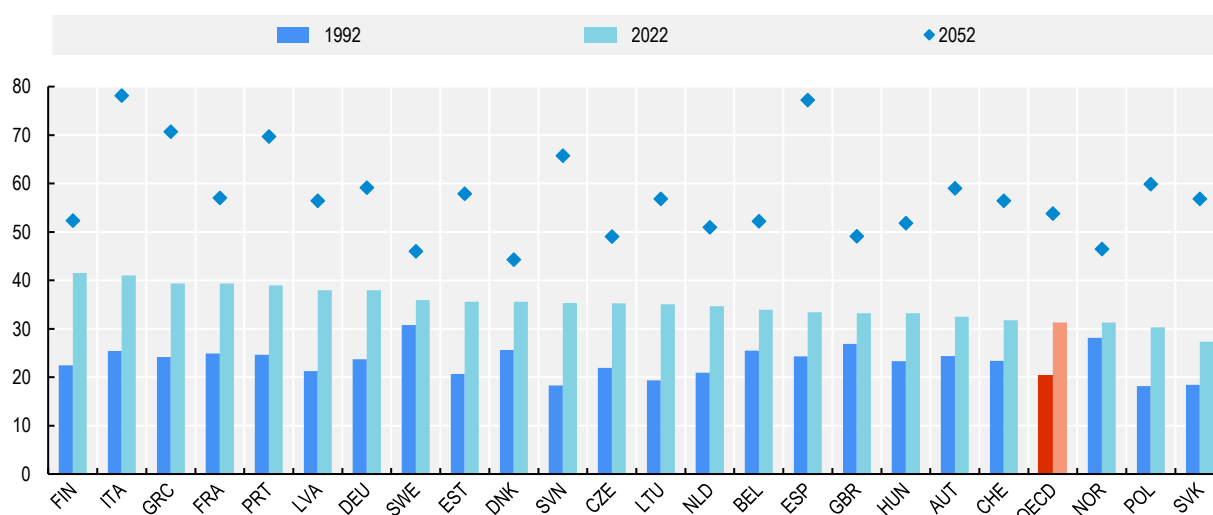
All European Union (EU) countries have ageing populations. This trend, largely a result of increased life expectancy, presents substantial socio-economic challenges. One of these challenges relates to managing a growing share of older workers within a multigenerational workforce. This issue is particularly relevant to the public service, which is often the largest employer in EU and OECD member countries. It also raises important questions about how employers can boost the engagement and performance of their older employees.

1.1.1. An ageing workforce in ageing countries

While the median age across OECD member countries was 39.8 years in 2018, it is projected to reach 44.5 years by 2050 (OECD, 2019^[1]). This trend affects all OECD countries, but to different extents. For example, the median age in Israel is expected to increase only slightly, from 29.8 to 30 years, whereas in South Korea it is projected to rise from 42.6 to 56.4 years. Within the European Union, the share of the population aged 65 and over is expected to reach around 30% by 2050, compared with approximately 20% in 2021 (Commission européenne, 2023^[2]).

Figure 1. Demographic old-age to working-age ratio

Selected European countries, 1992, 2022 and 2052



Note: The demographic old age to working age ratio is defined as the number of individuals aged 65 and over per 100 people of working age defined as those aged between 20 and 64.

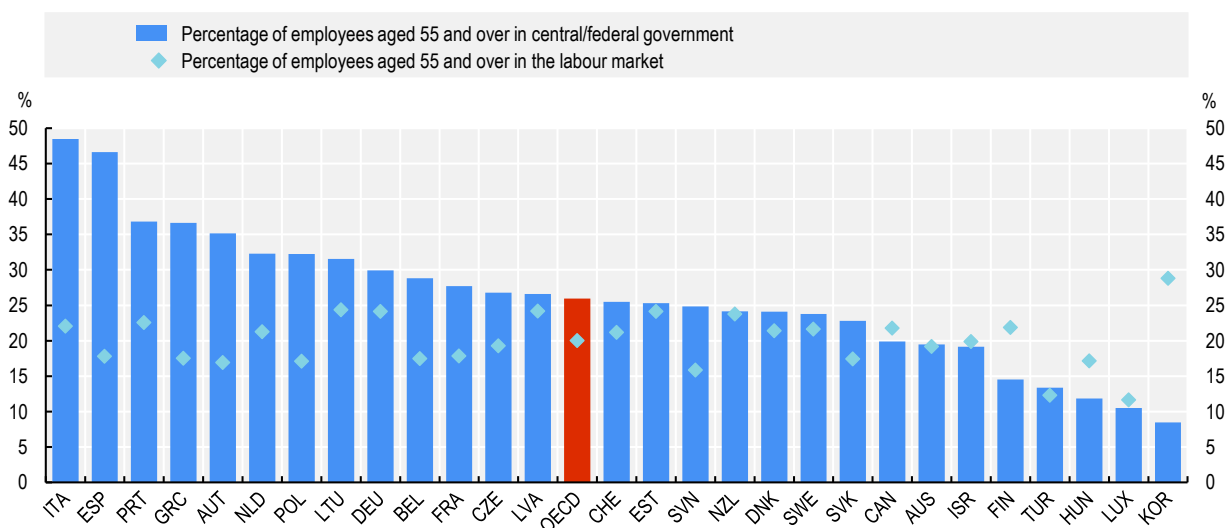
Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2022), World Population Prospects 2022, Online Edition (for future periods: medium-variant forecast).

Population ageing has direct implications for the labour market. Across all European OECD member countries, the demographic old-age to working-age ratio has continued to rise in recent years. In practical terms, this means that for each person aged 65 and over, there are fewer and fewer people of working age (between 20 and 64 years old).

1.1.2. An ageing public service

These demographic trends are even more pronounced in the public service, particularly within central and federal administrations. In nearly all OECD member countries, the share of employees aged 55 and over is higher in central and federal administrations than in the overall labour market (Figure 2). Across OECD countries, the proportion of older workers in central and federal administrations has steadily increased over recent decades (OECD, 2020^[3]). Between 2015 and 2020, the share of employees aged 55 and over rose by 1.2 percentage points, reaching 26% of the central and federal government workforce in OECD member countries.

Figure 2. Central government workforces are older than the labour market as a whole, 2019



Note: Data for France refer to 31 December 2018. Data for Hungary refer to 2018. Data for Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Poland refer to December 2019. Data for Denmark and Finland refer to February 2020. For Poland, figures cover public employees aged 50 and over.

Source: OECD (2020), Survey on the Composition of Central/Federal Government Workforce; [OECD Data Explorer • Employment and unemployment by five-year age group and sex - levels](#).

However, a closer analysis of public administration workforces reveals significant age differences between ministries and departments. These disparities reflect the diversity of career paths and opportunities within the public service, even within the same administration, as well as budgetary constraints linked to staffing caps, which vary for different bodies. Taken together, these figures highlight the importance of analysing both the actual and potential impacts of ageing across the labour market, the public service and public administrations.

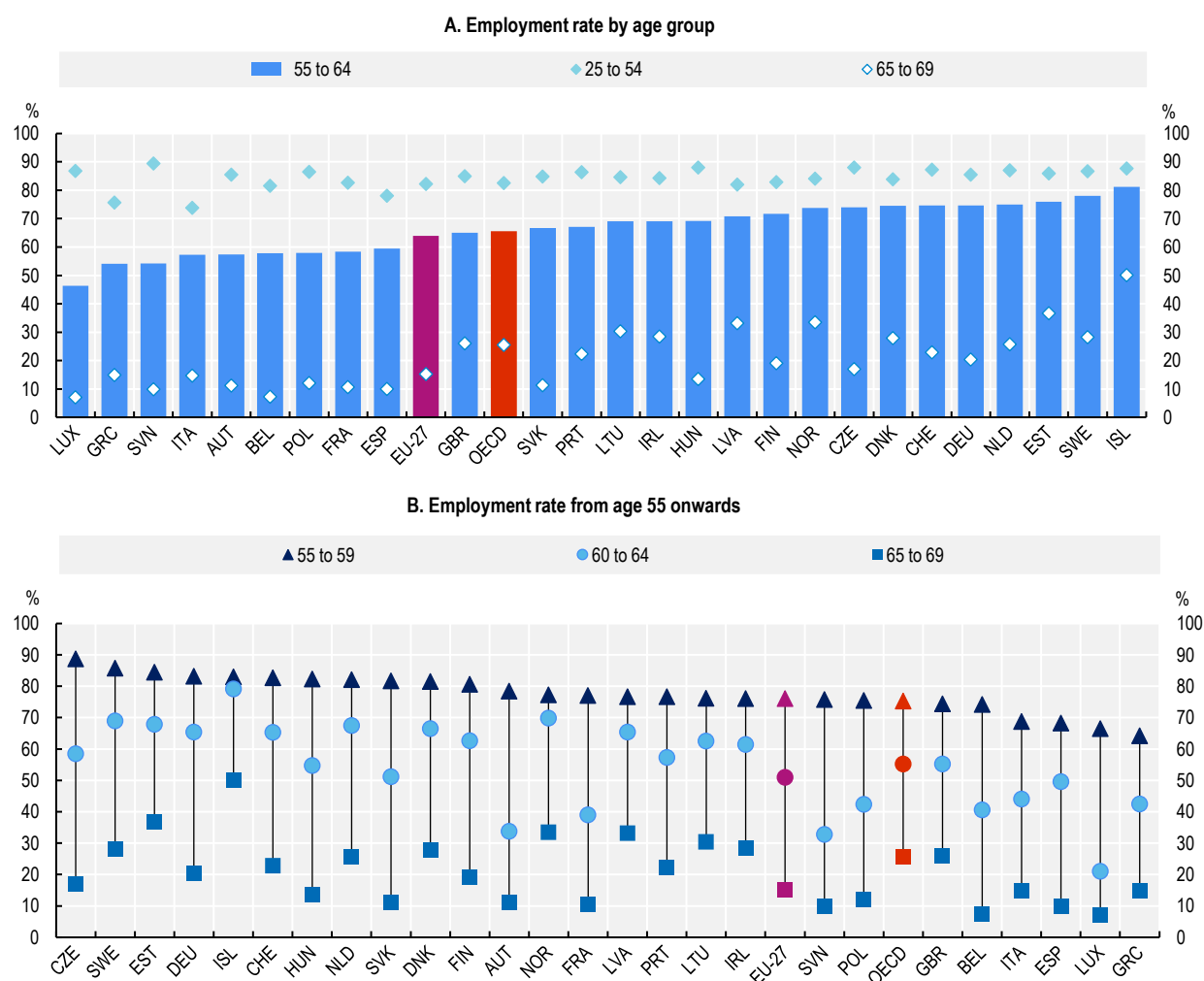
Ageing in central administrations presents an array of current and future challenges in terms of human resource management and meeting the expectations of citizens. The high proportion of older workers means a large proportion of the workforce will leave the public service within the next 10 to 15 years, raising questions about workforce renewal, the development and transfer of skills and knowledge, and the need to improve strategic workforce planning to better anticipate and adapt to major employment trends. In a public service where older employees make up a significant share of the workforce, vertical advancement opportunities for younger cohorts may be limited, requiring a strategic approach to the management and recognition of this group.

1.2. Challenges faced by older workers in the labour market

1.2.1. Lower employment rates among older workers

Population ageing has gone hand in hand with a gradual rise in the effective retirement age over recent decades and is set to increase further in more than half of OECD member countries (OECD, 2023^[41]). However, longer working lives do not always translate into longer periods of employment. Across all EU and OECD member countries, employment rates decline steadily with age among people aged 55 and over. On average across the EU in 2023, the employment rate was 76.1% among those aged 55 to 59, 51% among those aged 60 to 64, and 15.2% among those aged 65 to 69 (Figure 3). These figures must of course be considered in light of the effective retirement age, which varies between different EU and OECD countries.

Figure 3. Employment rates decline with age across all OECD countries, 2023

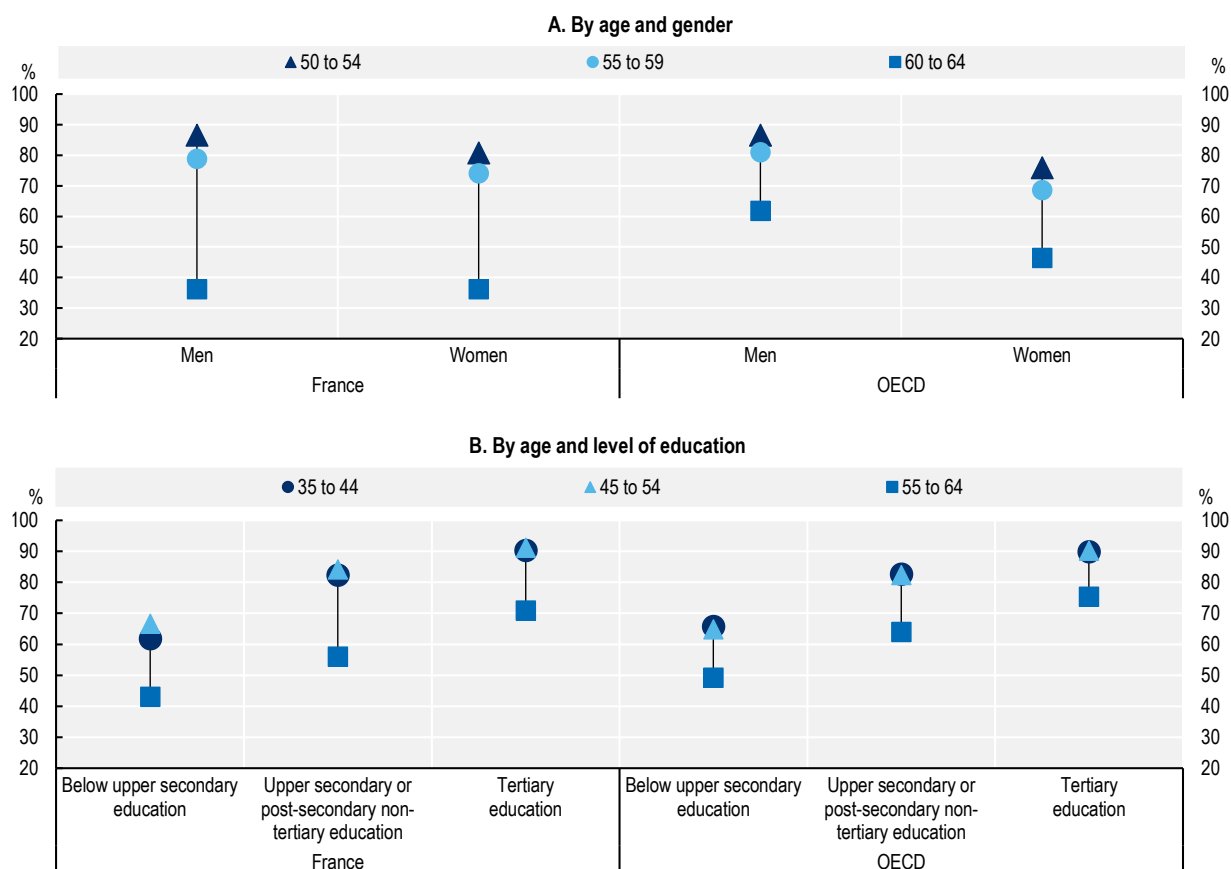


Note: OECD and EU-27 figures are weighted averages.

Source: [OECD Data Explorer • Employment and unemployment by five-year age group and sex - indicators \(oecd.org\)](#).

These disparities are also accentuated by factors such as gender and level of education. Employment rate differences between men and women vary significantly by age, and rates are lower for individuals with lower levels of education (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Employment rate by age, sex and educational attainment, OECD, 2022



Note: OECD figures are weighted averages.

Source: [OECD Data Explorer • Employment and unemployment by five-year age group and sex - indicators \(oecd.org\)](#) (Chart A) and [OECD Data Explorer - Archives • Educational attainment and labour-force status \(oecd.org\)](#) (Chart B).

1.2.2. Ageism as a source of discrimination

Like other demographic groups, older private sector employees and public servants may face discriminatory behaviour or practices. Ageism, discrimination based on age, can affect employees of all ages. However, it is most commonly associated with older workers. The OECD Council Recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability underscores the importance of “ensuring an inclusive and safe public service that reflects the diversity of the society it represents, in particular through [publicly committing] to an inclusive and respectful working environment” (OECD, 2019^[5]). Tackling all forms of discrimination, including ageism, demands the development of awareness-raising initiatives for both employers and employees to challenge age-related biases.

In the workplace, ageism can take many different forms. It may involve negative stereotypes, such as assumptions about a lack of digital skills or resistance to change. It can also manifest as discrimination in recruitment or promotion, where managerial decisions are influenced by prejudice or solely by age. In some cases, it may involve harassment that creates a hostile work environment. Older age is often associated with negative representations linked to illness or disability, which have consequences not only in the labour market but also in public spaces, shops and healthcare settings (Ayalon and Tesch-Römer, 2018^[6]).

Age remains a key concern for the workforce in OECD member countries. In France, for instance, 43% of people cited age as their biggest fear with regard to potential discrimination in the labour market (Mouvement des Entreprises de France, 2023^[7]). This is partly explained by the fact that age-based discrimination has the potential to affect everyone at some point in their lives. Moreover, both implicit and explicit biases affect the situation to varying degrees in different countries (Ackerman and Chopik, 2020^[8]). Implicit bias refers to unconscious and unintentional prejudice against older people, whereas explicit bias refers to conscious and deliberate prejudice.

1.2.3. Older workers report lower perceived job quality

Perceived job quality plays a key role in supporting the productivity, participation and engagement of older workers. It encompasses aspects such as autonomy, empowerment and the resources available to carry out work tasks. Like other age groups, older public servants attach great importance to different aspects of their job, including scope, recognition, autonomy, skills development and workplace relationships (OECD/Generation, 2023^[9]). However, older workers tend to report lower perceived job quality due to factors such as high pressure and workload, limited job security and career prospects, and physically demanding tasks. These issues can be particularly challenging as health declines with age, potentially leading workers to consider early retirement (OECD, 2020^[10]).

European public administration employees report specific challenges related to their working conditions (Figure 5). While 94% express overall satisfaction, a significant share report workload pressures (44%), and 26% feel they lack the freedom to decide how their work is carried out. There are also differences between the public and private sectors, particularly with regard to physical demands, job security and the perception of adequate pay.

Another key indicator is job satisfaction, which reflects the degree to which employees feel content with their work (Bryson, Forth and Stokes, 2015^[11]). A 2023 OECD-Generation survey conducted in Germany, Spain, the United States, France, the Czech Republic, Romania, the United Kingdom and Sweden found that job satisfaction tends to decline with age (OECD/Generation, 2023^[9]). Satisfaction with job security, professional recognition and workplace location dwindles as workers grow older, highlighting a mismatch between employee needs and job offerings over the course of their careers.

Figure 5. Job quality in the EU – Public administration employees

Share of employees aged 45 and over expressing their views on the following job characteristics



Note: The public administration category includes public administration and defence; compulsory social security.

Source: OECD calculations based on the SHARE survey on health, ageing and retirement in Europe, Wave 8.

1.2.4. Technological change creates additional training challenges for older workers

Technological progress affects jobs in different ways, depending on employer policies and social security systems. Automation can accelerate retirement by changing job requirements. However, this effect is less significant than other determinants such as income, pensions and access to social security (Lee, 2023^[12]). Meanwhile, technological advances can boost productivity, leading to wage increases that encourage older people to stay in employment. These gains also help balance the demands of acquiring new skills with the benefits that technology offers (Burlon and Vilalta-Bufí, 2016^[13]; Ahituv and Zeira, 2011^[14]; Milanez, 2023^[15]).

New technologies present both an opportunity and a challenge for older workers. Although older workers bring a wealth of experience accumulated over the years, their skills are often at greater risk of becoming obsolete (Yashiro et al., 2020^[16]; OECD, 2024^[17]). This highlights the importance of offering opportunities for upskilling, or, in some specific cases, reskilling. However, older workers are less likely than their younger peers to participate in job-related training. On average, only 24% of adults aged 55 to 65 take part in such training across OECD countries, compared with 41% of those aged 45 to 54. At the same time, employers are less likely to invest in the training of late-career workers (OECD, 2019^[11]).

Digital skills play an increasingly important part in adapting to technological change. While essential, these skills are not always evenly distributed: across the European Union, 44% of adults aged 55-64 have at least basic digital skills, compared to 64% of those aged 25-54 (Eurostat, 2024^[18]). A lower level of digital proficiency can be a hurdle in accessing training opportunities (OECD, 2019^[11]). Enhancing digital skills is therefore crucial to help older workers continue to thrive professionally and fully engage in digital work environments. This also helps boost their confidence and interest in further training (Hecker, Spaulding and Kuehn, 2021^[19]; OECD, 2021^[20]).

1.2.5. Greater challenges for older women

Many of these challenges are more acute for older women than for men of the same age. In 2022, the average employment rate across OECD countries for women aged 50–54 was 10.7% lower than for men in the same age group, 12.4% lower for those aged 55–59 and 15.4% lower for those aged 60–64 (OECD, 2024^[17]). In addition to a historically lower level of female labour market participation, several other factors explain these differences. Notably, while 13% of people aged 50 and over provide regular informal care, 62% of them are women. These care responsibilities contribute to lower employment and income levels, especially among women and older workers (Maestas, Messel and Truskinovsky, 2023^[21]). The effects also tend to linger, with carers continuing to experience lower employment rates and earnings even after their care responsibilities have ended (Vangen, 2020^[22]). These challenges are compounded by the “motherhood penalty”, which refers to the widening wage gap between men and women after childbirth (Goldin, Pekkala Kerr and Olivetti, 2022^[23]), and the higher incidence of part-time work among women, which can limit opportunities for career advancement.

The employment challenges faced by older workers are therefore amplified for women. In France, for instance, women are more likely than men to believe that ageing hinders career progression (66% of women compared with 58% of men) (Kantar Public, 2023^[24]). This highlights the need for concerted efforts to ensure genuine gender equality in the workplace.

1.2.6. Limited career development opportunities due to career plateaus

Career advancement opportunities, especially for highly skilled workers, play a crucial role in maintaining engagement and reflecting accumulated experience and expertise (OECD, 2024^[17]). However, as workers age, the proportion who receive promotions declines significantly and tends to level off around age 50. This downward trend reflects the fact that older workers often experience a career plateau, with fewer opportunities for progression within their organisation. This is partly due to the traditional hierarchical structure of both public and private organisations, which limits the number of late-career positions. Since older workers place significant emphasis on aspects of career advancement such as compensation, recognition and impact, their limited prospects for higher pay or additional responsibilities can lead to lower levels of engagement (OECD/Generation, 2023^[9]).

In the public service, career plateaus stem from both structural and individual factors. While the underlying dynamics differ, they each contribute to limiting career development opportunities. Addressing these challenges requires a focus on removing structural barriers that hinder the progress of employees who are interested in vertical advancement. These structural factors come in different guises. First, in public administrations where the number of senior-level positions is limited, employees may reach a point where further progression is blocked by a lack of available opportunities, even for qualified staff. Second, promotions may be contingent on passing internal competitive examinations or acquiring new skills, both of which may be discouraging depending on how they are implemented. Third, organisational needs may change over time, rendering some positions obsolete or less in demand, which can reduce promotion prospects for staff in those roles. In this context, it may be appropriate to introduce more flexible career paths, such as parallel technical and managerial tracks, or rethink the design of internal competitions (cf. *Managing older workers: case studies from the public and private sectors*).

In public administrations where there are limited opportunities for vertical advancement, horizontal mobility offers a valuable alternative to diversify career paths. It enables employees to explore new areas, expand their skill sets and long-term engagement. However, such mobility should be embedded in a strategic approach. Strategic mobility should align employees' career transitions with organisational priorities and future skills needs (OECD, 2023^[25]). It relies on proactive planning, supporting optimal talent management while enhancing organisational agility. By incorporating non-linear career paths, public organisations can better meet the aspirations of their workforce, particularly older workers, while strengthening their employability and overall job satisfaction.

2 Managing older workers strategically

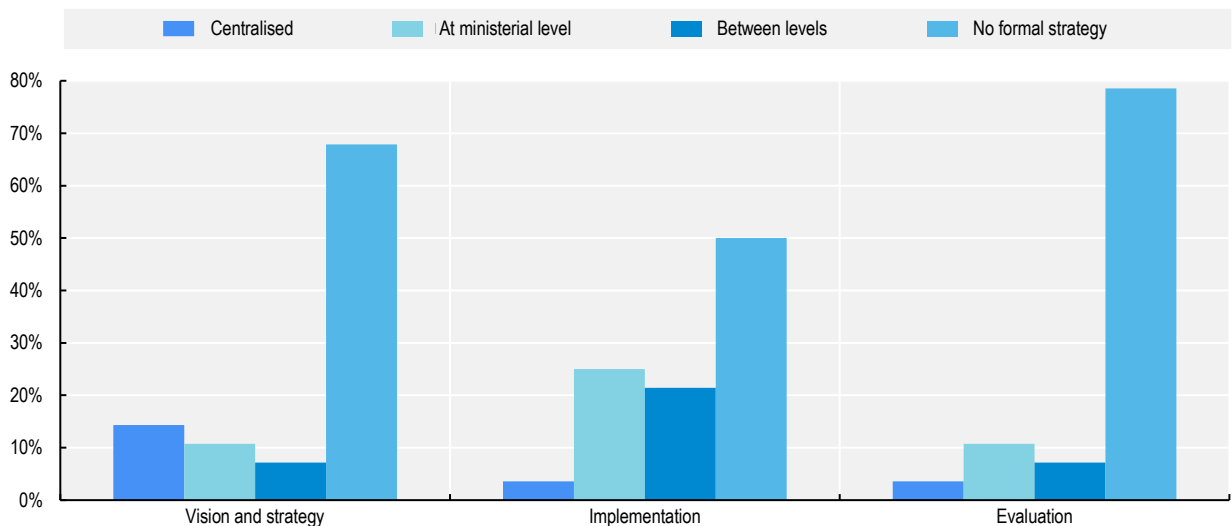
2.1. Managing older workers as a human resources challenge

Although older workers make up a significant share of the public workforce and face distinct challenges, management of these workers is still too rarely viewed as a priority by leadership in public administrations (OECD, 2021^[26]). Only a handful of EU and OECD countries (32%) have developed a vision and strategy to address workforce ageing in public administrations (Figure 6). This limited engagement is reflected across OECD and EU countries in the number, type and ambition of HR policies for older workers and multigenerational workforce management.

Any such strategies are generally developed, implemented and assessed at the ministerial level. While this allows HR policies to be closely aligned with the realities faced by staff, it rarely supports the development of a “holistic” approach to population and workforce ageing. As a result, it is hard to identify good practices linked to a nationwide or public-sector-wide ageing strategy.

Figure 6. A limited strategic approach to workforce ageing in public administrations

% of countries responding



Note: n=28.

Source: OECD (2020), Survey on Ageing and Talent Management Practices in European Public Administrations.

Several factors help explain this lack of prioritisation when it comes to managing older workers. First, although 90% of OECD countries collect standardised age-related data, generally centralised for most of the central or federal public service (OECD, forthcoming^[27]), the repercussions related to managing older workers are often poorly measured. For instance, insufficient data are collected on aspects such as career plateaus and the engagement or performance of older workers, which hampers the development of tailored, evidence-based HR policies.

Second, HR managers face structural challenges that limit their ability to prioritise new initiatives. Among these obstacles, 46% of OECD countries cite diverging interests between administrations, staff shortages and insufficient inter-ministerial coordination, while 43% point to budget constraints, which directly affect the resources available to design and implement HR policies and reforms at the central or federal level (OECD, forthcoming^[28]). Moreover, the persistent pressure of transactional tasks and operational demands leaves HR functions with limited scope to step back and develop strategies to address issues such as the management of older workers.

Lastly, public administrations may at times struggle to take a targeted approach to managing older workers due to the emphasis on transparency and fairness that underpins the public service. The introduction of policies aimed at a specific cohort, such as older workers, can be perceived as differential treatment, potentially conflicting with the fundamental principles of equality. Yet addressing the specific needs of older workers does not imply neglecting other public employees. Strategic management of this cohort is mainly about identifying and responding to the specific challenges they are more likely to encounter, such as career plateaus, reskilling needs and pursuit of meaningful late-career opportunities. Some HR practices, such as onboarding programmes tailored to younger employees or mid-career development initiatives, already respond to the distinct needs of different generations. Incorporating these approaches into a coherent and inclusive framework can help meet the expectations of diverse groups across the workforce while also enhancing overall equity and cohesion across the public sector.

To address this final point, and as part of this project funded by the European Commission to enhance the engagement and performance of older workers in the French Ministry of the Economy and Finance, the OECD developed an analytical framework to assess policies related to the management of older workers in public administrations (Figure 7). The findings were shared with the General Secretariat of the Ministry of the Economy and Finance and informed two support activities to help implement recommendations on managing a multigenerational workforce. These recommendations have been adapted in the Annex to support administrations looking to develop HRM policies targeting older workers (cf. A guide for public administrations to develop HR policies targeting older employees). The activities focused on developing a data-driven approach to address extended career plateaus and on drafting guidance for implementing mentoring initiatives within the ministries. Although developed in the context of the French Ministry of the Economy and Finance, this analytical framework can be applied more broadly across public administrations seeking to manage older workers more strategically.

Figure 7. Analytical framework for the French Ministry of the Economy and Finance and high-level recommendations

I.	Ensuring meaningful career paths to meet diverse expectations	II.	Developing and sharing the skills of older workers	III.	Supporting and accompanying older workers
<p>Continuing to offer meaningful career opportunities</p> <p>Encouraging and incorporating mobility in career paths</p> <p>Supporting staff and structuring career development discussions</p>		<p>Encouraging older workers to participate in training</p> <p>Valuing the skills and expertise of older workers</p> <p>Transmitting soft skills by valuing the experience of older workers</p> <p>Highlighting the role of skills in enabling flexible working arrangements</p>		<p>Tackling stereotypes effectively</p> <p>Supporting staff who are approaching retirement</p> <p>Improving social support and awareness measures</p> <p>Improving working conditions for through workplace adjustments and new arrangements</p>	

Note: This analytical framework was developed in the context of the Technical Support Instrument project on “Maximising the engagement and performance of older workers through targeted HR policies”. It was built around the priorities and challenges identified within the French Ministry of the Economy and Finance.

Source: Author’s own work.

This framework examines three broad categories of public workforce management policies: career management, skills development and employee support.

- Career management is a key issue for older workers, who, as noted above, may face comparatively fewer opportunities for advancement or mobility.
- Skills development is equally important, both to enable older workers to continue strengthening their own capabilities and to share their expertise and soft skills with other cohorts.
- Employee support should help older public servants to improve their working environment and conditions, thereby boosting their engagement and performance. Social support schemes, efforts to tackle stereotypes and flexible working arrangements are among the tools available to support the effective management of older workers.

The following sections highlight the key areas explored as part of the project carried out with the French Ministry of the Economy and Finance.

2.2. Ensuring meaningful career paths to meet diverse expectations

The public service offers a wide variety of professions and careers. As working lives lengthen, it becomes increasingly important to provide meaningful opportunities, particularly by addressing career plateaus and promoting flexible career paths, including for older workers (see Danish example in Section 3.1.1).

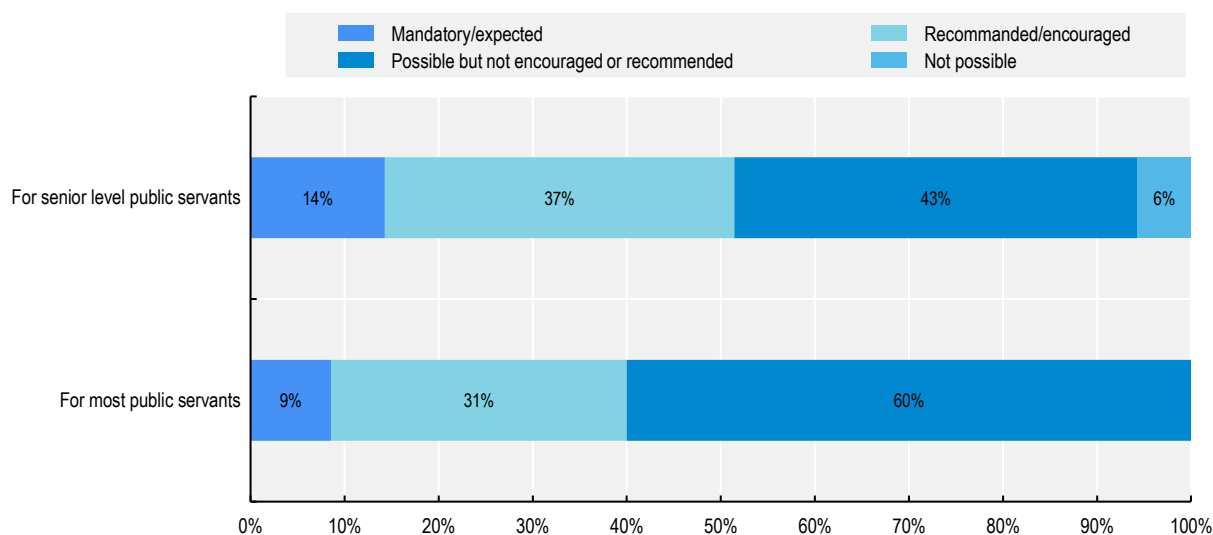
Career stagnation, or the “career plateau”, is a recurring challenge in different areas of the public service. This happens when employees feel they are unable to progress and face a lack of mobility, whether horizontal or vertical. This stagnation can have a detrimental effect on engagement and performance, especially among older workers, who are more likely to encounter the problem. Several factors contribute: a limited number of late-career positions due to the hierarchical structure of the public sector; promotion systems based on complex procedures or the development of specific skills; and evolving organisational needs that may render certain roles obsolete (cf. Limited career development opportunities due to career plateaus).

Possible ways to address this include strategies such as introducing “Y-shaped” career paths, which allow staff to choose between a managerial or technical route, or creating more flexible pathways alternating between leadership, advisory and expert roles. Reviewing internal promotion criteria or recognising prior work experience can also broaden advancement opportunities.

Horizontal mobility can also help overcome career plateaus, particularly those involving prolonged immobility. This can serve both organisational needs and individual aspirations. However, in most OECD countries, mobility is neither encouraged nor actively promoted (Figure 8). To support consistent career paths, such opportunities should be tailored to the skills and experience of older workers and integrated into transparent frameworks (see the Michelin example in subsection 3.1.2). Horizontal mobility can take various forms and span different durations. For example, project-based secondments offer opportunities to contribute to transformation, research or advisory assignments where the experience of public servants, particularly older ones, can be put to good use. However, implementation remains uneven across professions and age groups, highlighting the diversity of career paths and the specific context of each administration. This is especially true for network-based organisations, which often require greater geographical mobility.

Figure 8. Guidance on internal lateral mobility in the public service

Percentage of OECD countries



Note: n=35. Data for Germany, Denmark and the United States are not available. Initial question: Is internal lateral mobility in the public service. [Select relevant answer]?

Source: OECD (2022), OECD Survey on Public Service Leadership and Capability.

Developing such mobility opportunities requires structured mechanisms for career development discussions. These include regular career interviews that allow staff to learn about available promotion and mobility options (see the Aviva example, subsection 3.1.3). These discussions should involve both line managers and HR professionals responsible for mobility and career management. Within the HR ecosystem, their role is to support skills development and promote both functional and geographical mobility. These processes contribute to more strategic workforce management, particularly for staff in lower-skilled roles, who often face greater barriers to progression than other groups. Introducing mobility and career support strategies, including those at the interministerial level, can help ensure these opportunities are available to everyone.

2.3. Developing and sharing the skills of older workers

Skills development among older workers is closely linked to career management and is central to designing effective human resource management practices. A prerequisite for implementing skills-based career management, an approach increasingly adopted in OECD member countries, is the continual updating of employees' knowledge and capabilities (see the example of Allianz, subsection 3.2.2). This need for ongoing learning will become even more pressing in the coming years, particularly in response to major trends such as the digital transition, which demand faster and more continuous development of new skills.

Across OECD countries, older workers often fear their skills are not suited to new career opportunities, while remaining reluctant to invest in training programmes (OECD, 2024^[17]). In fact, workers aged 45 and over are among the least likely to have participated in job-related training in the past five years. Yet developing new skills can help them perform better in their current role or even open the door to new career opportunities. Meeting this challenge means encouraging older public servants to engage in continuous learning in order to boost their employability and ensure their skills evolve in line with the changing needs of the public sector. Achieving this requires training opportunities to be tailored to the specific needs of late-career staff, based on the outcomes of professional appraisal interviews (see the example of BNP Paribas Portugal, subsection 3.2.3). Promoting such opportunities, through both top-down (manager-led) initiatives and bottom-up (employee-initiated) approaches, can help increase engagement and participation by overcoming barriers such as self-censorship and the lack of targeted communication.

The skills acquired by older public servants over the course of their careers, including those developed outside of formal training programmes, are often undervalued or insufficiently recognised. This is largely due to the challenge of identifying and assessing informally acquired skills gained on the job. In France, two mechanisms help address this issue: recognition of prior professional experience (*Reconnaissance des Acquis de l'Expérience Professionnelle, RAEP*) and validation of prior learning (*Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience, VAE*). RAEP allows candidates in some public service competitive examinations to have their past professional experience taken into account when reviewing their skills and suitability for a given role. VAE, meanwhile, enables individuals to obtain a professional qualification based on work experience, without having to complete a traditional training programme.

Beyond these mechanisms, integrating digital tools into HR information systems can help identify and map skills across public administrations. Such tools would help older public servants obtain better recognition of their skills and open up access to mobility opportunities, while also giving recruiters a clearer picture of the available talent pool. More effective use of these technologies could strengthen strategic skills management and enhance the allocation of human resources.

At the same time, an ageing workforce makes the issue of knowledge transfer increasingly important (see the German example, subsection 3.2.1). Mentoring, in particular, is a valuable tool for recognising the expertise of older public servants while enabling them to pass on expertise to younger colleagues. Such tools and programmes can help ensure that the skills of older staff are systematically incorporated into workforce management, supporting the development of skills-based career planning.

Knowledge transfer involves not only technical expertise but also soft skills. These encompass specific managerial and cultural values that play a key role in staff performance and job stability (Sheridan, 1992^[29]). Intergenerational mentoring programmes help pass on these values as well as technical capabilities. They encourage exchanges between more experienced and younger staff, creating opportunities for mutual development. By valuing the experience of older workers, such initiatives also support the integration of new recruits and facilitate smoother cultural transitions within public organisations.

These joint efforts are all the more important given that the COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly changed working practices, particularly in relation to teleworking, and has led many public bodies to adopt more flexible arrangements. While such practices were already in place before the crisis, lockdowns accelerated their widespread adoption and they continue to evolve. This shift raises questions about how expertise and interpersonal skills are passed on, as these processes have traditionally taken place in person. In addition, older workers often face a work environment that differs significantly from what they have previously experienced, making the targeted development of digital skills especially important. Ensuring a smooth transition requires tailored training strategies, active dialogue with managers and strong support for staff as they adapt to these new ways of working.

2.4. Supporting and accompanying older workers

Like all public employees, older public servants face personal as well as professional challenges, both at home and in the workplace. As employers, public administrations can play an important role in providing appropriate support throughout the different stages of life. Areas for further development include tackling discrimination and stereotypes, preparing for retirement, offering social support and broadening access to flexible working arrangements.

Discrimination in the workplace, particularly against older workers, remains a key issue for human resource management. Stereotypes linked to age, health or gender can limit career prospects and undermine the well-being of those concerned. Addressing these challenges means fostering an inclusive organisational culture that respects workforce diversity. This involves implementing anti-discrimination policies, awareness-raising initiatives and specialised training, especially for managers. Communication campaigns and structured action plans can help combat stereotypes and embed these principles more deeply into the organisational culture.

Beyond awareness-raising initiatives, statistical monitoring using both quantitative and qualitative data helps assess the extent of discrimination, identify potential disparities in career paths and better target specific interventions. Analysing administrative data, such as access to internal mobility opportunities or career progression, can reveal whether certain groups of public servants face particular barriers. At the same time, staff surveys offer qualitative insights into how each cohort perceives and experiences workplace equality (see the Portuguese example, subsection 3.3.3).

Supporting public servants who are approaching retirement can both improve strategic workforce planning and help ensure a smooth transition for those concerned. Certain legislative provisions or collective agreements may provide older staff with more options in terms of managing the end of their careers (see the Danish example, subsection 3.1.1). Phased retirement, redeployment or adjustments to rules on combining work and retirement can offer flexible arrangements for those who wish to plan the end of their career.

These measures may go hand in hand with practical adjustments to working conditions to ensure an environment suited to the challenges of longer working lives. Workplace adjustments, often recommended by occupational health services and implemented by managers, may include remote working, flexible hours or task reallocation (see the UK example, subsection 3.3.1). While such measures are often seen as tools

to attract new talent, they are equally vital in maintaining the engagement and performance of older employees. By combining targeted social support with adapted working conditions, public administrations can both meet the needs of their older workers and support their continued employment in the best possible environment.

Lastly, social support services, with their networks of guidance and assistance, play a key role in helping older staff manage their careers while addressing their specific needs (see the Siemens example, subsection 3.3.2). These services can support older public servants who are nearing retirement by ensuring access to information on their pension entitlements, as well as training or seminars to help them prepare for this new stage of life. These initiatives should cover both technical aspects and more personal issues related to managing the transition from working life to retirement.

2.5. From policies targeting older staff to multigenerational workforce strategies

Demographic trends, combined with the challenge of making the public sector more attractive, call for a strategic approach to human resource management grounded in a multigenerational perspective. While some measures, such as support for the transition to retirement, apply specifically to older workers, many initiatives, such as the creation of career development opportunities, are relevant to all public employees. As such, policies targeting older staff should form part of a broader multigenerational workforce strategy. This approach aims to address the needs and characteristics of each cohort while ensuring consistency across HR policies. For instance, while career management is a universal concern, it may take different forms across generations: for older staff, it may mean making the later stages of a career more stimulating or better recognising experience; for others, it may focus more on vertical advancement. A multigenerational approach thus offers a balanced response, acknowledging specific generational considerations while promoting age-inclusive opportunities.

Collecting and analysing data on career paths and employee expectations is crucial to strike this balance. By tracking trends across generational cohorts, such as internal mobility, access to promotions and job satisfaction, public administrations can identify challenges that limit employee engagement and performance at different career stages. These data should guide strategic workforce planning to tailor HR policies to the actual needs of staff, while maintaining a fair, merit-based approach.

The challenge lies in personalising this approach to meet the specific needs of each cohort while ensuring consistency across HR policies. It is essential to continue offering merit-based opportunities while avoiding any differences in treatment that may be seen as unfair. Going forward, striking this balance will be key to attracting talent and maintaining the engagement and satisfaction of existing staff.

3

Managing older workers: case studies from the public and private sectors

This section of the report aims to present relevant practices implemented by public administrations and the private sector in EU and OECD member countries. While each practice reflects a separate context, they all respond to the common challenge of a markedly ageing workforce. The section is built around the three main themes identified during the OECD's work with the French Ministry of the Economy and Finance, funded by the European Commission (cf. *Managing older workers strategically*).

The objective is to better understand the measures being implemented to tackle demographic challenges, and identify innovative strategies that may prove effective. Analysing these initiatives can provide valuable lessons and best practices to improve human resource management in the context of an ageing workforce. The examples below show how different administrations and companies are adapting their policies and practices to ensure the ongoing employment, engagement and productivity of older workers, while transferring skills and knowledge to younger generations.

3.1. Reducing barriers to mobility for older workers

Older workers may face fewer opportunities for career advancement. Many public administrations and private companies are developing various practices to ensure that older workers continue to have access to stimulating and meaningful career opportunities. At the same time, these measures should empower employers to make the most of the skills and experience of older workers against the backdrop of population ageing and a growing focus on policies to attract talent.

3.1.1. Denmark: mechanisms to support longer careers for older workers in the public sector

One such approach aims to encourage longer careers by reducing the impact of factors that may strongly influence the decision to retire. For example, full-time work requirements and concerns about pension entitlements can be decisive in prompting public servants and private-sector employees to retire as soon as possible. It is therefore important to introduce measures aligned with individual aspirations and circumstances, in close coordination with social partners.

In Denmark, where the retirement age is 69 for those born after 31 December 1966, retaining older employees and extending working lives have been identified as key priorities by social partners and public-sector employers. Since 1993, a collective public-sector agreement on arrangements for older workers has provided public employers with a framework setting out various options for older employees in the state administration (Retsinformation.dk, 2021^[30]). The most recent negotiations on this agreement took place during the 2024 round of collective bargaining.

The collective agreement on arrangements for older workers allows employers and older employees to conclude agreements relating to:

- Reducing hours (part-time) while maintaining pension rights based on the previous level of activity, provided that the employee is at least 60 years old when the arrangement comes into effect and has worked in the public sector for 10 years or more. The reduced working hours must total at least 15 hours per week.
- The option to move to a lower-level position while retaining pension rights associated with the previous role, provided the employee is at least 58 years old when the arrangement takes effect and, upon request, is transferred to a lower-level post after having worked full time for the past 10 years in a role involving supervisory or managerial responsibilities, or in a similarly demanding position in the public sector. This transfer may also be accompanied by temporary supplemental pay (not included in pension calculations), which may correspond to the difference between the previous salary excluding pension contributions and the new salary (excluding pension contributions) at the time of transition.
- Up to 12 days of additional paid leave for older workers per year, provided the employee is at least 62 years old when the scheme takes effect. Since 2023, an additional collective agreement has granted older employees the right to a senior bonus and two unpaid days off per year from the age of 62. The option to take two days of additional paid leave for older workers with a corresponding cut in pay does not affect the possibility of concluding an agreement for up to 12 days of additional paid leave for older workers per year under the agreement.
- A retention bonus, which is paid if the individual postpones their retirement to an agreed later date. The employee must be 62 years old when the scheme for older workers takes effect. The amount of the special retention bonus must be agreed between the employer and the employee.

These arrangements may originate from either management or the employee, once the employee reaches the age required to benefit from the relevant scheme for older workers. The individual employer is responsible for funding these schemes.

In addition to this collective agreement, there is a separate arrangement concerning the re-employment of former public servants who have retired (Retsinformation.dk, 2022^[31]). This provides a framework for public-sector employers to hire retired employees who wish to return to work. Upon returning to work, the former retiree continues to receive their pension while also earning a salary that contributes to their future pension rights accumulated in the new job.

Negotiations between the Danish Employee and Competence Agency and trade unions have led to the introduction of various mechanisms to support longer careers for older workers nearing retirement. As no centralised data are yet available on the use of these different arrangements in the public sector, no assessment has been made relating to the relevance of these practices. These developments have reinforced the role of HR departments in both negotiations and the strategic use of human resource management tools. Older employees can help to better meet the needs of the organisation, whether by contributing key skills over the long term, responding to short-term needs or helping to train the next generation of public servants.

3.1.2. Michelin: initiatives to improve workforce and career planning for older workers in the private sector

In the French private sector, strategic workforce planning primarily focuses on managing jobs and career paths to meet organisational needs while taking account of employees' professional aspirations. The changing nature of jobs and increased life expectancy are reshaping careers, leading to more fluid, fragmented and diversified career paths extending over longer lifespans. Many workers are re-evaluating their career goals and exploring new opportunities, with career changes becoming more common,

particularly in mid or late career. For older workers, this mobility can bring meaningful benefits, including the chance to advance or to move into roles better suited to their needs, thereby enhancing job quality. However, evidence shows that the likelihood of transitioning into new occupations decreases significantly with age (OECD, 2024^[17]). As a result, older workers often require more support to manage career transitions and maintain both engagement and skills as their preferences, needs and capabilities evolve.

In response to shifts in the labour market and longer careers resulting from pension reforms, Michelin, the world's leading tyre manufacturer, with 132,000 employees worldwide, signed a strategic workforce and career development agreement (*Gestion des Emplois et des Parcours Professionnels, GEPP*) in France in 2023. It is designed to anticipate changes in jobs and skills while boosting employee engagement, particularly among those in mid or late career. The agreement is built on three main pillars, with the first two open to all employees but especially relevant for older workers, who often face multiple hurdles: (i) improving internal mobility within the company; (ii) introducing personalised support for critical roles; and (iii) overhauling end-of-career management.

The first pillar of the agreement focuses on improving internal mobility. Michelin aims to promote more flexible career paths by making it easier for employees to access a wide range of opportunities within the company. The firm publishes internal job postings on an in-house platform, making vacancies visible to all staff. At the same time, regular skills assessments, carried out with input from various stakeholders, help explore potential career paths for each employee. Local career development partners provide guidance on advancement opportunities, while a specialised career guidance team assists employees in considering retraining options through in-depth analysis of their skills.

The second pillar of the agreement targets employees in critical roles, those who need to adapt to technological, economic or strategic developments. Michelin offers these employees enhanced support, working with specialised partners to assess their skills and identify tailored solutions aimed at ensuring stable redeployment within the company. This personalised assistance helps the firm anticipate changes in the labour market while reducing the risk of disengagement or skills obsolescence.

The third pillar introduces an innovative, personalised approach to end-of-career management, tailored to the aspirations of older workers in their final five years of employment. The aim is to sustain their engagement while recognising and leveraging their experience. Michelin offers customised pathways based on individual preferences: employees interested in pursuing an active career can continue in a dynamic role, while those seeking a gradual transition to retirement can explore measures such as phased retirement, end-of-career benefits and job-sharing arrangements. For production-site employees with more than 15 years in rotating shift work, the company has also created a special system to fund time savings accounts. Intergenerational initiatives, including mentoring and skills-based volunteering, also support these measures by valuing the experience of older workers and facilitating the transfer of knowledge.

The success of this agreement hinges on close collaboration between management and social partners. During negotiations, the parties identified two key challenges: encouraging employees to use career management tools and ensuring access to training. To tackle these issues, Michelin launched a parallel initiative, the Personal Exploratory Initiative (*Initiative Exploratoire Personnel, IEP*), to develop concrete solutions. This promotes ongoing reflection and helps ensure effective implementation of the agreement, while also fostering innovation and cooperation among stakeholders.

3.1.3. Aviva: mid-career reviews to support workforce planning for older workers in the private sector

Career opportunities for older workers must be based on individual choices, backed by comprehensive, transparent and reliable information. The United Kingdom's initiative to extend working lives reflects this approach by promoting mid-career reviews (dubbed "MOTs"¹) in the private sector. These reviews give individuals a chance to assess their career aspirations and needs while they still have scope to make changes, helping them move into roles that better match their goals. A pilot scheme funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills found that MOTs are effective in supporting mid- and late-career decision-making, improving access to tailored training and enhancing health and well-being (NIACE, 2015^[32]).

Aviva, one of the UK's leading providers of savings and retirement products, introduced mid-career reviews to better support its older employees (Aviva, 2019^[33]; Phoenix Insights, 2023^[34]; Butler, 2020^[35]; Centre for Ageing Better, 2018^[36]). With a workforce of 15,000 people, one-third aged over 45, the company launched its pilot programme in 2018, which was subsequently rolled out to all eligible employees. These MOTs provide participants with tools to plan their professional and personal futures. Built on three pillars, work, wealth and well-being, they combine expert-led workshops, online resources and a free app to help individuals assess their situation.

The Work aspect focuses on training and personal development, flexible working, work-life balance, the impact of an ageing society on employment, the sense of purpose that work can provide, employee rights and support for carers, delivered through the National Careers Service and skills assessments. Wealth covers topics such as budgeting, retirement planning, debt, financial advice and funding for long-term care. Well-being features health screenings and check-ups, guidance on healthy lifestyles, menopause, mental health and social well-being.

During group sessions, participants benefit from peer interaction and can request additional one-on-one support if needed. To complement these services, Aviva launched a free Mid-Life MOT app for its employees and the general public aged 45 and over, allowing users to assess their current situation in relation to the three key areas.

The programme generated strong engagement, with 94% participation in the pilot scheme and full attendance in subsequent sessions. Participants reported higher satisfaction with Aviva, with positive perceptions of the company rising by 10%. They also gained confidence, there was a 34% increase in the proportion of employees who felt able to extend their careers thanks to flexible working policies. Beyond talent retention, the MOTs helped reduce absenteeism and challenge age-related stereotypes. By valuing its experienced staff, Aviva strengthened their sense of belonging and improved overall productivity.

The programme's success stems from an integrated, cross-cutting approach and tailored sessions that address the specific needs of employees. Support from senior management and collaboration with external experts, such as the National Careers Service, have also been key. This initiative shows how private and public employers alike can address the challenges of an ageing workforce by investing in the development of older employees and honing their competitive edge while supporting workforce well-being. The model could inspire other organisations looking to adapt to professional and personal transitions in an ever-changing environment.

¹The term "MOT" comes from the former Ministry of Transport test used in the UK to ensure that vehicles are roadworthy.

3.2. Enhancing and valuing the skills of older workers

Enhancing and valuing the skills of older workers is essential for effective, age-diverse human resource management. With their unique experience and expertise, older employees help organisations preserve and build key knowledge and skills. Providing ongoing training and recognising their expertise not only supports their engagement and motivation, but also facilitates the flow of knowledge to future generations of public servants. Valuing the skills of older workers can contribute to cutting-edge human resource management and help create an inclusive work environment that respects and draws on the experience of all employees.

3.2.1. Germany: intergenerational knowledge transfer in the public sector

Population ageing is prompting public administrations in OECD countries to develop age-inclusive workforce strategies. These strategies can help limit the loss of skills and knowledge by developing intergenerational knowledge transfer mechanisms.

In 2011, Germany launched the “Every Age Counts” strategy to address the country’s demographic challenges. The share of people aged 65 and over relative to the working-age population, 38 per 100 in 2022, is projected to reach nearly 65 by 2082 (OECD, 2023^[37]). One of the initiative’s key recommendations was the introduction of structured knowledge transfer systems in public bodies to preserve institutional expertise as staff retire.

The knowledge transfer process is based on collaboration between a retiring employee and their successor over a limited period. This partnership ensures the effective transmission of role-specific expertise while helping the incoming employee to settle in. These “demographic posts” target critical roles facing shortages of qualified staff, such as IT specialists, engineers, healthcare professionals and highly specialised administrative positions. To maximise their impact, the number of such posts within the federal administration is capped at 500, with priority given to the most essential areas.

Requests for demographic posts are submitted via an online platform. Authorities must first complete a form confirming eligibility criteria, before submitting it to the Ministry of the Interior for publication. The Ministry of Finance grants final approval. This step-by-step process ensures transparency and accountability while helping meet critical staffing needs.

Several complementary measures make this approach more effective. Six months before an older worker leaves, the employee and their manager conduct a needs assessment to plan the knowledge transfer process. The employee prepares a handover document detailing their skills, practices and advice. They hold a succession meeting to review the document and answer any questions from the successor. A final handover meeting is scheduled to formally transfer ongoing projects. If the successor is unavailable at any stage, the manager may organise an induction session based on the handover document. Once the process is complete, the manager notifies human resources that the knowledge transfer is complete.

To support these steps, the administration has developed dedicated tools, including checklists and templates to guide the meetings. These resources provide sample questions, highlight technical issues to address and offer guidance on drafting the handover document. The document focuses on key aspects such as achievements, challenges, success factors, potential conflicts and informal rules, helping ensure the thorough transfer of both explicit and tacit knowledge.

This type of initiative provides practical tools to mitigate the loss of expertise linked to retirement while improving service continuity. By structuring the process and targeting critical roles, these approaches provide a transferable model for other administrations facing similar workforce ageing challenges.

3.2.2. Allianz: workforce planning based on projected demand for skills in the French private sector

The growing focus on skills in human resource management, particularly in the private sector, is helping to strengthen strategic planning with respect to the workforce, jobs and skills, as well as career and workforce development within companies. Rapid labour market changes, marked by mass retirements and shorter job tenures, underscore the urgency of long-term strategic planning. Between 2012 and 2019, the average job tenure in OECD countries shrank by 8%, equivalent to roughly nine months, and fewer than 50% of workers aged 55 to 59 were still in the same role five years later (OECD, 2023^[38]). These trends are pushing employers to anticipate the risks of critical knowledge loss and better align workforce skills with future needs.

Allianz, a multinational specialising in insurance and asset management, has adopted a specific strategic workforce planning (SWP) process to proactively manage future workforce developments and improve organisational resilience (Allianz Group, 2023^[39]; OECD, 2020^[10]; Villalobos Baum et al., 2022^[40]). The process is skills-driven: each year, the company assesses labour supply and demand, and anticipates future needs. A catalogue split into 10 groups and around 100 talent segments classifies job functions and determines the core skills required. This approach also helps to mitigate the risk of age-related discrimination and challenge enduring stereotypes.

The SWP process begins by mapping the current workforce, projected over a five-year horizon. This analysis identifies talent segments in decline and assesses the pace of that decline. At the same time, Allianz estimates future workforce demand based on four factors: quantitative growth, productivity gains, changes in required skills, and the emergence of new talent segments, such as those linked to technology. To offset the uncertainty inherent in forecasting, the company also uses scenario modelling to simulate economic and technological developments.

Based on these results, Allianz develops tailored responses to both qualitative and quantitative needs, adapting them to regional and local contexts. Measures include recruitment, upskilling and reskilling initiatives, and phased retirement programmes. These initiatives empower older workers to adapt their skills in time, support effective succession planning and help retain critical knowledge within the organisation.

According to Allianz's 2023 sustainability report, the SWP process currently covers 85% of the company's 155,000 employees. It has shown that 50% of the workforce will need to engage in upskilling or reskilling initiatives over the next five years. Going forward, Allianz plans to use this tool for predictive analytics, such as tracking attrition rates and assessing the impact of training. As an integral part of career development platforms, SWP could also help employees, particularly older workers, align their skills with roles that match their aspirations.

Implementing SWP at scale required international coordination and posed two major challenges: convincing entities in different countries to participate and designing talent segments that apply across all subsidiaries despite specific local considerations. To address these challenges, Allianz focused on leadership engagement, clear communication and a unified methodology. The talent segment catalogue is designed as a living document, which is regularly updated to reflect emerging trends and evolving sector needs.

Skills-based human resource management, as illustrated by Allianz's SWP approach, is emerging as a strategic response to demographic and technological challenges. This approach helps anticipate skills shortages and offset the risk of knowledge loss, while tailoring the workforce to future demands. Such initiatives offer valuable insights on improving talent management and addressing evolving skills needs. These insights can also benefit the public sector.

3.2.3. BNP Paribas Portugal: future-focused training opportunities for older workers in the private sector

Older workers often express concerns about whether their skills remain relevant for new career opportunities. Paradoxically, they are sometimes reluctant to invest in training programmes (cf. Technological change creates additional training challenges for older workers). Yet continuing education can not only enhance performance in current roles but also open up new career paths. Reinforcing these initiatives is essential to improve the employability of older workers and ensure that public administrations enable older employees to develop new skills and respond to changes in professions and working methods. This requires closer alignment between training opportunities and the needs of workers approaching the end of their careers. These training needs should be identified through appraisals and dedicated HR discussions.

BNP Paribas Portugal, the Portuguese subsidiary of the multinational bank BNP Paribas, which employs 183,000 people across 63 countries and territories, including 8,800 in Portugal, has implemented an innovative programme to enhance the skills of experienced employees, promote intergenerational knowledge-sharing and strengthen their resilience to changes in the banking sector.

The programme targets employees with at least 10 years of experience and is built on three core pillars. The first focuses on emerging trends, such as artificial intelligence and sustainable financial products (including green and social bonds), which are often less well known among workers who joined the sector decades ago. The second pillar offers practical training in essential digital tools tailored to current workplace requirements. The third develops soft skills, including critical thinking, adaptability, empathy, and effective intergenerational communication. Together, these three pillars reflect the banking sector's strategic priorities while responding to the specific needs of experienced employees.

The training courses are designed to be accessible and adapted to participants' needs. Each nine-week cycle includes 32 hours of instruction and brings together around 30 participants per session. The format combines lectures, practical workshops and group activities, fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing. Networking lunches provide informal opportunities for participants, trainers and guest speakers to connect.

To ensure the programme's effectiveness, BNP Paribas Portugal conducted in-depth interviews to identify participants' needs and potential learning hurdles. Digital tools, including a SharePoint site and a Teams group, were introduced to support interaction between sessions and strengthen group cohesion. Managers also played a key role by identifying and encouraging colleagues to participate, helping to foster active and motivated engagement.

The programme's outcomes were assessed using surveys conducted at the end of the sessions and again three months later. Participants reported high levels of satisfaction: 90% said the programme had helped them take greater ownership of their learning journey, and 92% emphasised the importance of feeling part of a community. Managers observed a notable increase in participants' initiative and drive. This feedback informed the next edition of the programme, which featured longer sessions and included more opportunities for in-person interaction and networking.

The impact of this initiative stretches beyond individual development. It also promotes intergenerational collaboration, knowledge-sharing and organisational adaptability. By focusing on the specific needs of older workers, the programme helps counter career stagnation and retain expertise within the company. The regular adjustments based on participant feedback highlight the value of a user-focused approach in ensuring effective training.

3.3. Enhancing personalised support for older workers

Like all public employees, older staff face both professional and personal challenges, at home and in the workplace. Employers, whether public or private, can play a key role in supporting staff through different life situations by improving working conditions and the overall work environment. Areas for further development include tackling discrimination and stereotypes, preparing for retirement, offering social support and expanding access to flexible working arrangements.

3.3.1. UK public sector: expanding flexible working arrangements for staff aged 50 and over

Flexible working arrangements can play a key role in enabling older public employees to extend their careers in the right conditions. These arrangements help align working life with individual aspirations and realities, particularly for older workers, and support an inclusive work environment where personal needs are recognised and respected. As a result, motivation and engagement are likely to increase. Administrations in OECD countries widely recognise the importance of this issue: 72% of member countries identify improved employee well-being as a primary driver in developing flexible working policies, while 22% see it as a secondary factor (OECD, 2023^[25]).

In the United Kingdom, the Centre for Ageing Better developed a toolkit in partnership with a specialist consultancy to promote flexible working arrangements for employees aged 50 and over (Centre for Ageing Better, 2020^[41]). The guide targets the entire workforce to prevent discrimination, while also incorporating specific policies for older staff. It comprises three sections providing recommendations for employers, guidelines for managers and advice for employees.

The recommendations for employers focus on three key steps. First, they should develop a clear rationale outlining the importance of flexible working opportunities for the organisation, based on current and future workforce and skills needs. Second, they should assess the level of flexibility already in place by analysing existing arrangements, their accessibility and their use across teams. Third, they should establish a clear policy defining the scope of flexible options and communicate its purpose. Employers are also encouraged to provide targeted information for older workers, particularly regarding the potential impact on pensions and retirement planning.

The guidelines for managers highlight their central role in implementing flexible work policies. They encourage managers to assess the feasibility of flexible arrangements within their teams and roles, to initiate both group and one-on-one discussions on the topic, and to experiment with different flexible working models. These efforts involve planning, communication and performance management to ensure these practices are baked into team routines.

Finally, the toolkit encourages employees to frame their flexible working requests in a structured way. They are invited to reflect on their needs, responsibilities, the rationale for their request, the type of flexibility sought (e.g. adjusted hours, remote work) and the potential impact on their team. These prompts help employees prepare for discussions with their managers and clarify their expectations.

The guide takes an inclusive approach that benefits all employees while addressing the specific needs of older workers. For this group, flexible working arrangements can be especially valuable for health-related reasons, with regard to caring responsibilities or as part of a gradual transition to retirement. By improving access to such arrangements, the toolkit aims to enhance employee engagement and performance, while supporting well-being and workplace inclusion.

3.3.2. Siemens: implementing comprehensive policies to support the health of older workers in the private sector

Poor physical and mental health is the leading factor causing older workers to leave the labour market (OECD, 2023^[38]). Health issues are also a major cause of sickness-related absenteeism and working while ill (presenteeism) among older employees. When workers experience poor health, it reduces not only their own productivity but also that of colleagues who must “fill the gaps”. Employers therefore have a responsibility to ensure working conditions do not themselves become a source of illness (Saint-Martin, Inanc and Prinz, 2018^[42]). Many employers have introduced measures to support job quality, security, well-being and flexibility. Workplace health promotion and preventive initiatives, such as quit-smoking programmes, exercise classes, healthy food options in staff canteens and other lifestyle support schemes, have become increasingly widespread. However, while such initiatives are expected to improve attendance, attractiveness, motivation and retention among older staff, they are often less effective when implemented in isolation (OECD, 2020^[10]). A holistic approach to well-being is essential, one that supports employees’ physical and mental health as well as their social well-being.

Siemens UK, which employs 15,000 people, illustrates an example of a comprehensive approach to workplace health and well-being. The company’s strategy is built on five main pillars: physical activity, nutrition, emotional well-being, a healthy working environment and access to medical care. These pillars aim to address the full range of employee needs, whether work-related or personal.

In response to internal surveys highlighting the need to pay more attention to emotional well-being, Siemens UK made mental health a cornerstone of its strategy. The company launched a training programme on stress management and resilience (SMART), available to all employees through its learning campus. The course covers the biology and psychology of stress and provides tools for monitoring stress levels, building self-awareness and developing coping strategies. Siemens also offers an Employee Assistance Programme, which provides tailored services including face-to-face counselling sessions.

More than 1,500 employees participated in SMART workshops in 2017, and feedback was overwhelmingly positive: 97% of participants said they would recommend the sessions and 90% felt better equipped to manage stress and maintain resilience. Around 10%-12% of employees use the Employee Assistance Programme, a participation rate higher than that of many other employers. Overall, Siemens UK has made significant progress in reducing the stigma of mental illness, encouraging disclosure and promoting engagement with emotional well-being initiatives.

At the same time, the company has recognised the key role line managers can play in supporting employees with common mental health conditions and in arranging the measures needed to help them remain in or return to work. Siemens offers managers training modules on team leadership to prevent workplace stress, as well as mental health first aid training. As part of its stress and mental health policy, Siemens is currently developing a mental health toolkit for managers, which will include a tool to assess emotional well-being.

By combining prevention, tailored support and manager training, this model demonstrates the value of a comprehensive strategy in maintaining employee engagement and effectively addressing well-being challenges, while offering a framework that can be adapted by other organisations facing similar issues.

3.3.3. Portugal: targeted staff surveys to better understand the needs of older workers in the public sector

The growing share of older employees in the public sector is prompting administrations to better understand their specific needs. One key approach involves conducting qualitative surveys targeting these staff members.

In 2022, the Directorate-General for Public Administration and Employment (*Direção-Geral da Administração e do Emprego Público, DGAEP*) participated in the Later Life Workplace Index (LLWI), a tool designed to assess age-sensitive organisational practices and working conditions. The self-assessment survey is aimed at employees aged 50 and over, and seeks to identify the specific challenges faced by this age group. The LLWI comprises 80 questions spanning nine “domains”: organisational climate, leadership, work design, health management, individual development, knowledge management, transition to retirement, continued employment, and health and retirement coverage. Of the DGAEP’s 68 senior staff members, 41 responded to the survey.

The results highlight several strengths in the organisation’s approach to supporting older workers. Respondents perceived the organisation as valuing the skills and adaptability of older workers and offering equal opportunities for training and career development. Leadership was praised for its performance management and focus on staff well-being. Flexible working hours and locations, particularly teleworking, were seen as assets. Lastly, older workers were viewed positively in terms of (re)hiring, with options available to continue working beyond retirement and up to age 70.

However, the survey also identified areas for improvement. “Health Management”, “Transition to Retirement”, and “Health and Retirement Coverage” received relatively low ratings, with overall averages below 2 out of 5. These scores point to a lack of adequate (or only ad hoc) practices in these areas. For example, responses related to health management highlighted a lack of initiatives promoting a balanced diet, opportunities for physical activity, on-site medical consultations and related training or workshops. The low scores in the transition to retirement category revealed the absence of structured procedures to support dialogue between managers and employees approaching retirement, aimed at planning their final working years and adapting schedules or duties to individual needs.

The survey also revealed disparities based on gender and hierarchy. Men tended to give more positive ratings on certain aspects, likely reflecting differences in how they perceive the role of managers or access to flexible working arrangements.

The LLWI highlights the value of such tools in guiding reforms to HR practices that better support older workers. In 2023, the DGAEP built on this initiative with a study on the impact of ageing on human resources, offering both an organisational and individual perspective on the challenges of an ageing workforce (*Direção-Geral da Administração e do Emprego Público, 2023*^[43]). These efforts help align HR policies with the needs of older employees while supporting their continued employment.

Conclusion

Strengthening support for older public servants is a strategic priority to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of public administrations in the context of population ageing. Effectively addressing the specific challenges faced by older employees, including lower employment rates, ageism, technological change and career stagnation, requires a comprehensive and integrated approach.

Throughout EU and OECD member countries, employers in the public and private sectors are seeking to improve the way they manage older employees. By offering meaningful career paths, developing and transferring skills, and strengthening personal support and guidance, these employers are laying the groundwork for effective and inclusive workforce management. These initiatives show that it is possible to create a dynamic working environment that caters to all age groups, an environment in which the experience and expertise of older employees are recognised and leveraged to everyone's benefit.

The various practices highlighted throughout this report offer avenues for structuring a human resource management policy targeting older workers. The OECD has developed a dedicated guide to support public administrations in this process. These recommendations, detailed in the Annex: A guide for public administrations to develop HR policies targeting older employees, provide a framework for adapting and improving existing strategies. To promote diverse career paths and professions, it is essential to maintain meaningful opportunities for promotion that support vertical advancement, fully integrate horizontal mobility into career development, and encourage structured dialogue on career prospects. The skills component relies on two complementary dynamics: the first is the development of skills throughout employees' careers by improving access to training and recognising acquired knowledge; the second is skills transfer, which involves valuing the experience and soft skills of older workers. A third strand focuses on personal support and guidance. Tackling stereotypes, supporting retirement transitions, enhancing personal support for older employees and improving working conditions through workplace adjustments and flexible work arrangements are all promising ways to promote the engagement and well-being of older public employees.

However, while most of the policies highlighted in this report are primarily aimed at older employees, a broader underlying challenge lies in managing a multigenerational workforce in the public service. Efforts to develop policies targeting older staff must be embedded within a wider framework that addresses the diversity of public employees at every stage of their lives and careers. The goal is to create an inclusive and equitable work environment where every employee, regardless of age, can contribute to the full in their role as a public servant. This vision not only helps tackle the challenge of attracting younger generations but also strengthens the engagement of the entire public workforce. Ultimately, this vision can help public administrations respond to the challenge of population ageing while also creating inclusive and fair workplaces for all.

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Annex A. A guide for public administrations to develop HR policies targeting older employees

This annex is a practical resource for public administrations looking to develop more targeted HR policies for older workers. It draws in part on the recommendations made by the project on “Maximising the engagement and performance of older workers through targeted HR policies”, funded by the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (SG REFORM), following a request for technical support from the French Ministry of the Economy and Finance. These guidelines can inform work on this issue across public administrations.

Promoting diverse career paths and job opportunities

Ensuring diverse career paths and meaningful promotion opportunities

- Provide staff with sufficient information on opportunities for vertical advancement to help them plan career transitions.
- Identify employees facing career plateaus² and analyse the underlying causes.
- Identify and reduce financial disincentives (linked to pay scales, pension calculations, etc.) that may hinder late-career development or mobility.
- Recognise the value of experience gained in the field by integrating these skills into promotion opportunities.
- Where appropriate, consider Y-shaped career paths that allow employees to alternate between managerial and expert roles.
- Where relevant, analyse barriers to mobility between different public service categories to facilitate career advancement.

Encouraging and incorporating mobility in career paths

- Provide staff with sufficient information on available horizontal mobility opportunities to help them plan their career transitions.
- Collect data on the specific nature of mobility experiences to better understand individual career paths and adapt them accordingly.
- Recognise the value of horizontal mobility by acknowledging the skills acquired and offering roles or assignments that build on those skills.
- Introduce “mission marketplace” programmes that enable staff to showcase and develop their skills through temporary, targeted projects.

² The definition of a career plateau may vary from one administration to another, depending on the emphasis placed on career management within different public employment models and administrative structures. Within the French Ministry of the Economy and Finance (MEF), a career plateau has been defined as a situation marked by a lack of professional mobility—whether horizontal or vertical—after a period of seven years.

Supporting staff and structuring career development discussions

- Include a component on career development prospects in annual performance reviews to make this a regular and proactive process.
- Establish formal one-to-one discussions between staff and HR departments about career and mobility opportunities every five years, e.g. through mid-career reviews.
- Offer staff tailored support from well-trained and accessible HR advisors specialising in mobility and career planning.
- Run internal communication campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of planning career paths and promote available tools and resources.

Developing and sharing skills

Encouraging participation in training

- Design training content tailored to staff needs and expectations, ensuring it is seen as useful, motivating and directly applicable to their roles.
- Expand the use of HR information systems to suggest the right training opportunities based on employees' skills.
- Develop individual learning plans based on performance evaluations.
- Run communication campaigns to highlight the importance of training and its benefits for career development, including examples featuring older workers.
- Factor training participation into career development processes.
- Consolidate training opportunities on a single platform while improving related awareness and use.
- Collect and analyse training participation data by training type and participant age.

Valuing the skills and expertise of older workers

- Promote recognition of prior learning programmes to highlight informal skills developed throughout an employee's career.
- Develop intergenerational mentoring schemes based on employees' skills, interests and professional goals.

Transmitting soft skills by valuing the experience of older workers

- Develop mentoring programmes focused on soft skills.
- Organise collaborative workshops where older staff can share insights on management values, particularly from an intergenerational standpoint, and best practices.

Highlighting the role of skills in enabling flexible working arrangements

- Expand digital skills training to include a module on the use of remote working tools.
- Offer targeted training on the skills required for new ways of working, such as managing projects in hybrid or remote settings.

Reinforcing individual support

Tackling stereotypes effectively

- Establish mechanisms to gauge cases of discrimination, particularly age-related, wherever possible (e.g. staff surveys, demographic analysis of internal recruitment).
- Promote intergenerational teamwork and encourage the exchange of experience between age groups.
- Highlight age diversity in communication campaigns and employer branding tools, emphasising the value of experienced profiles and encouraging applications from all generations.
- Raise awareness among managers and HR officers with respect to age-related stereotypes, particularly through dedicated training and careful attention to the language used in recruitment, evaluation and career management processes.
- Run communication campaigns to challenge various stereotypes, particularly those linked to ageism.

Supporting staff who are approaching retirement

- Offer training opportunities covering the legal aspects of retirement.
- Improve financial literacy and encourage long-term financial planning by incorporating training modules on personal finance management and retirement preparation well in advance.
- Provide both individual and group support for public servants nearing retirement, including phased transition arrangements (such as part-time work, mentoring, or adjusted assignments) and psychological support, to help anticipate and mitigate the negative effects of an abrupt end to working life.

Strengthening personal support for older public servants

- Establish HR networks focused on social support, aimed at improving public servants' living conditions and increasing awareness of the full range of assistance measures available, especially for older staff.
- Organise regular information sessions for older staff led by HR representatives, covering available support services, including options for redeployment or career transitions.
- Introduce specific indicators to monitor and assess the impact of support policies targeting older public servants.

Improving working conditions for older public servants through workplace adjustments and new working arrangements

- Make strategic use of flexible working arrangements to cultivate the continued employment of older public servants.
- Promote proactive dialogue with interested parties between employees, line managers, occupational health professionals and HR departments to identify, anticipate and implement adjustments to working conditions.
- Provide specific training for managers on how to manage workplace adjustments and support staff dealing with physical or psychological limitations.