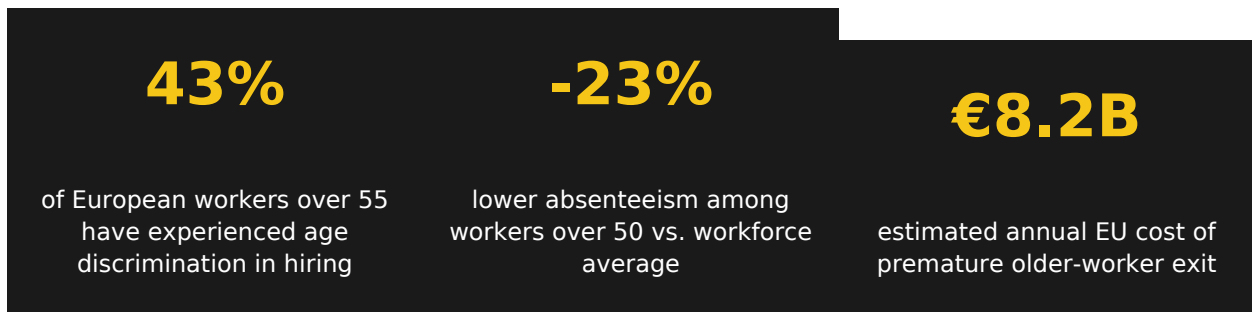


HR RESEARCH SERIES 2026 - REPORT R31 OF 10 (EXTENDED)

Age Diversity and Older Worker Hiring 2026

How to attract, hire and retain experienced talent, and why age discrimination is Europe's most overlooked hiring problem.

Age discrimination is simultaneously the most prevalent form of hiring discrimination in Europe and the least discussed. As Europe's working-age population declines, systematically excluding experienced workers is a luxury no economy can afford.



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The business case is strong: lower absenteeism, higher reliability, deep domain expertise and significantly better retention. Yet ageist screening, age-coded language and hiring-manager bias continue to disadvantage candidates over 50.

The legal framework for age discrimination

Country	Legislation	Enforcement	Key feature
Germany	AGG (Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz)	Active	Strong; age in anti-discrimination framework
UK	Equality Act 2010	EHRC enforcement	Direct and indirect age discrimination covered
France	Code du travail + Penal Code	Growing	Criminal penalties possible for systematic discrimination
Netherlands	WGBL (Wet gelijke behandeling op grond van leeftijd)	Active AP monitoring	First AI age bias case expected 2026
EU27	Directive 2000/78/EC	National enforcement	Baseline; national implementation varies

Where age bias enters the hiring process

Stage	Mechanism	Prevalence	Structural fix
Job ad language	'Digital native', 'fast-paced', 'recent graduate'	54% of EU job ads	Inclusive terminology audit
Year-based experience	'3-5 years experience' implies age range	62% of EU job ads	Skills-based criteria, remove year requirements
Application form data	Graduation year, date of birth	41% still ask	Remove, DOB not needed for screening
CV photo	Visual age signal	28% of European roles	Remove all photo requirements
AI screening	Historical patterns may disadvantage long careers	Unknown	Demographic parity testing across age groups
Interview	Similarity bias toward younger candidates	Documented	Structured interview, blind scoring, diverse panels

The business case, performance data on older workers

- **Retention:** workers over 50 have 31% lower voluntary turnover than under-35.
- **Reliability:** 3.8 absence days/year vs. 5.2 for under-35, 27% lower.
- **Experience value:** 20+ years of domain expertise that no training programme replicates.
- **Client relationships:** B2B retention measurably higher with experienced relationship owners.
- **Team stability:** mixed-age teams outperform homogeneous teams on complex problem-solving by 23% (Deloitte 2024).

Making job ads age-inclusive

Remove / change	Replace with	Why
'Digital native'	'Strong digital skills' or specific tools	Age cohort signal, skills are what matter
'Fast-paced environment'	Describe actual pace requirements	Codes for youth culture; specifics do not
'Recent graduate preferred'	'Entry-level position'	Direct age preference is unlawful
Graduation year in form	Remove field entirely	No job-relevant purpose, age signal
'Years experience' minimums	Skills-based requirements	2-3 years experience does not equal a skill level
'Young, dynamic team'	'High-performing, supportive team'	Age descriptor in team description is age preference

Structured onboarding for experienced hires

Respect what they bring while providing full orientation to what's new. Don't make an experienced finance professional sit through basic Excel training, but do ensure they understand your specific systems, approval workflows and team norms. The ratio of respecting expertise to providing orientation determines whether onboarding feels welcoming or patronising.

The age-inclusive screening framework

Screening method	Age bias risk	Age-inclusive alternative
CV screening for recency	High	Skills assessment, year-neutral experience
AI screening on career history	Unknown, test required	Semantic skills matching with parity check
Unstructured interview	High (similarity bias)	Structured competency interview, blind scoring
Technical test (outdated platform)	Medium	Modern platform with briefing time, focus on approach
Assessment centre (high-energy format)	Low-medium	Standard assessment, no artificial time pressure

Forward outlook 2026-2030

EU AI Act bias-testing requirements include age as a monitored dimension in 2026, with first AI screening age cases expected. State pension age increases across the EU accelerate older-worker participation by 2027. Intergenerational team design becomes evidence-based HR practice by 2028, with age-diversity benchmarks appearing in CSRD reporting. By 2030, structural fixes meaningfully reduce age discrimination in Netherlands, Sweden and Germany.

Built for what's next.

tenperzent.com is the AI-native ATS designed for European hiring in 2026 - GDPR by default, EU AI Act compliant, free to start, €79/month to scale.

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