Event Report

Age management in manufacturing: trade union strategies across Europe and beyond

Date: 22 October 2026, 11:00 – 15:00 CET
Venue: Mundo Madou, Av. des Arts 7/8, 1210 Bruxelles and online
Agenda



Executive Summary

On 22 October 2026, the PROMISE project brought together approximately 100 participants, including representatives of trade unions, employers, researchers, policymakers and practitioners, from 38 countries to discuss how Europe can better address demographic change and support sustainable working lives in an ageing workforce.

The event highlighted a growing consensus that age management should not be viewed solely as a response to population ageing or retirement transitions. Rather, it requires a life-course approach that supports workers throughout their careers through healthy working conditions, lifelong learning opportunities, inclusive workplace practices and effective social dialogue. Speakers stressed that measures introduced late in working life are often less effective than preventive strategies implemented from the beginning of a worker's career.

Co-funded by the European Union

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. **Project Number**: 101192159

Across the discussions, participants emphasised the central role of social partners in developing and implementing age-management measures tailored to sectoral and workplace realities. Collective bargaining, workplace agreements and social dialogue were repeatedly identified as key mechanisms for addressing workforce ageing while balancing the needs of workers and employers.

A recurring theme was the importance of lifelong learning and continuous skills development. Speakers noted that rapid technological change, digitalisation and evolving labour market demands require workers of all ages to have access to training opportunities throughout their working lives. Particular attention was given to ensuring that older workers are not excluded from upskilling and reskilling initiatives.

The event also showcased practical examples from workplaces and sectors across Europe. Presentations highlighted measures such as flexible working arrangements, mentoring and knowledge-transfer programmes, support for workers with caring responsibilities, health and wellbeing initiatives, and gradual retirement pathways. These experiences demonstrated that successful age management can improve both worker wellbeing and organisational resilience.

The PROMISE project presented key outputs developed during the project, including the PROMISE Dashboard aiming to support informed decision-making and promote effective age-management strategies across different sectors and national contexts.

A central conclusion of the event was that social dialogue and collective bargaining are indispensable for translating age-management principles into workplace realities. The PROMISE project demonstrated how evidence, capacity building and cooperation between social partners can support more inclusive and sustainable working lives.

Co-funded by the European Union

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. **Project Number**: 101192159

Event proceedings

On 22 October 2026, AGE Platform Europe and partners of the PROMISE project brought together about 100 policymakers, social partners, researchers and trade union representatives from 38 countries in Brussels and online to discuss how Europe can better respond to workforce ageing in the manufacturing sector. The event, *Age Management in Manufacturing: Trade Union Strategies across Europe and Beyond*, highlighted both the challenges posed by demographic change and the opportunities to create more sustainable, age-inclusive workplaces through social dialogue and collective bargaining.

Opening session

Sarah Loriato, Policy Manager on Employment, Pensions and Social Inclusion at AGE Platform Europe, welcomed participants and introduced the event by highlighting the major demographic, technological and labour-market transformations currently affecting Europe. Drawing on findings from the AGE Barometers on Employment (2023 and 2025), she stressed that population ageing, labour shortages, digitalisation and the green transition are reshaping workplaces and increasing the need for age-inclusive employment policies.

Key messages from the AGE Barometers included:

- Persistent employment barriers for older workers, with approximately two out of five people aged 55-64 remaining outside employment.
- Continuing prevalence of age discrimination in recruitment, training, career progression and retention.
- The importance of age-friendly workplaces through flexible working arrangements, lifelong learning, healthy working conditions and accessible technologies.
- The need for a life-course approach to employment, skills development and workplace health.

"If Europe wants to respond effectively to demographic change, we need employment policies that adopt a life-course approach, tackle ageism, invest in skills throughout life, support healthy working environments, and create opportunities for workers of all ages."

Co-funded by the European Union

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. **Project Number**: 101192159

Sarah's introduction also highlighted AGE Platform Europe's ongoing work on older persons' rights, including the relevance of current discussions on the upcoming United Nations Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.

Presentation of the PROMISE Project

Speaker: Margherita Roiatti, Fondazione ADAPT

Ms Roiatti, director of Fondazione ADAPT and project scientific coordinator, presented the European PROMISE project (Promoting Age Management Policies in Eastern European Countries Through Industrial Relations), aimed at strengthening the capacity of trade unions and workers' representatives to address workforce ageing through social dialogue and collective bargaining.

"PROMISE […] central concern is how workers' organisations can help shape the conditions for longer, sustainable working lives, through informed participation in social dialogue and collective bargaining."

She emphasised that age management should be understood as a life-course approach to employment practices, encompassing working conditions, skills development, work organisation and retirement transitions. The project focuses particularly on the manufacturing and metalworking sectors across Albania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Italy and Türkiye, while also drawing comparative lessons from France and Germany.

Key aspects of the project include:

- Comparative research on age management policies and social protection systems.
- Development of a data dashboard supporting evidence-based policy making.
- National training activities for trade union representatives.
- Preparation of guidelines for lobbying and collective bargaining on age management.

Ms Roiatti underlined that sustainable longer working lives require both supportive public policies and meaningful worker participation in workplace decision-making.

Co-funded by the European Union

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. **Project Number**: 101192159

Session 1: Mainstreaming Age into EU Employment Policies

Panel Discussion

Moderator: Margherita Roiatti, Fondazione ADAPT

Michał Wiktorowicz, DG JUST

Asked for insights on the EU Commission's work for age equality, Mr Wiktorowicz discussed the European Commission's work on age equality and referred to findings from the 2025 study on age discrimination. He noted that age discrimination remains widespread in employment, with workers aged 55-64 reporting particularly high levels of discrimination. *"The discrimination in employment is actually much more prevalent than discrimination in any other area."*

He highlighted ongoing European Commission efforts to facilitate the exchange of best practices among Member States and announced the preparation of a living compendium of equality practices expected in early 2027.

Klara Perenyi, DG EMPL

Asked about lifelong learning across the life-course, Ms Perenyi focused on the need to ensure access throughout working life. Key points included:

- Skills shortages and demographic ageing make continuous learning increasingly important.
- Older workers participate significantly less in training than younger workers. *"Access to learning cannot be left to the individual alone. People need support to be able to learn."*
- The EU's "Union of Skills" agenda seeks to strengthen upskilling and reskilling opportunities regardless of age.
- Individual Learning Accounts represent a promising instrument for supporting lifelong learning while providing guidance on skills needs and career development.

She also referred to a future Skills Guarantee designed to support workers facing job displacement due to technological change.

Co-funded by the European Union

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. **Project Number**: 101192159

Marina Monaco, European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)

Asked about policy gaps from the unions' perspectives, Ms Monaco stressed the need for integrated policy responses addressing ageing throughout the entire life course. She argued that:

- Preventive approaches to health and safety are essential.
- Training should extend beyond upskilling and reskilling and become a lifelong right.
- Social dialogue and solidarity between generations are central to age-inclusive workplaces. *"We have to build solidarity in the workplace, to base a solid root of solidarity in tutorship, mentorship, in exchange and passing on of competencies."*
- The European social partners' agreement on active ageing provides an important framework for workplace action.

Maciej Lis, OECD

Asked about the financial sustainability of pension schemes across countries, Mr Lis discussed demographic ageing and pension sustainability across countries.

He highlighted:

- Significant differences in how countries define hazardous work and disability.
- Growing evidence linking irregular working hours to negative health outcomes.
- The importance of preventive approaches supporting longer and healthier working lives. *"The priority should be prevention and career transition over retirement."*
- Innovative national examples that combine pension systems, working-condition measures and health protection.

Franz Eiffe, Eurofound

Asked about age-sensitive policy design and knowledge transfer between generations, Mr Eiffe emphasised that sustainable employment depends on cumulative experiences across an individual's entire career. Key observations included:

- Health trajectories and skills development significantly influence employability at older ages.

Co-funded by the European Union

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. **Project Number**: 101192159

- Sustainable work requires more than good job quality; it also requires workplace adaptations reflecting individual circumstances. *"The issue is not that workers are ageing; the issue is that many workplaces have not yet adapted to an ageing workforce."*
- Older workers should be actively supported in technological transitions.
- Age-inclusive policies should be embedded within broader workplace strategies rather than treated as separate initiatives.

Discussion

Participants discussed the relationship between prevention and compensation measures, particularly in relation to hazardous work, psychosocial risks and irregular working hours.

Several panelists stressed that:

- Definitions of hazardous work may need updating to better reflect psychosocial risks.
- Collective bargaining remains an important instrument for prevention.
- Responsibility for change must be shared among governments, employers, employees and social partners.
- Early intervention throughout workers' careers is more effective than measures introduced only near retirement age.
- Cultural change remains necessary to combat ageism and improve labour-market opportunities for older workers.

Ms Porcheddu, PROMISE co-coordinator, concluded by noting that effective age management ultimately requires coordinated action by all stakeholders.

Session 2: From Policy Framework to Implementation Through Social Dialogue

PROMISE Dashboard Presentation

Speaker: Sem Vandekerckhove, HIVA-KU Leuven

Co-funded by the European Union

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. **Project Number**: 101192159

Mr Vandekerckhove, sociologist and economist at HIVA-KU Leuven (scientific partner of the PROMISE project) introduced the PROMISE Dashboard, an online tool based on ILOStat data covering employment trends by sector, age group and gender across the seven participating countries between 2014 and 2024. *"Data-driven claims and strategies make better politics and policies."*

The dashboard reveals several important trends:

- Declining shares of young workers in manufacturing in countries such as Bulgaria and Italy.
- Growth in older age groups across all countries.
- Significant national differences in workforce age structures.
- Persistent gender segmentation across sectors.

He emphasised two complementary policy approaches:

1. **Escalating** issues to higher policy levels when common challenges appear across sectors and countries.
2. **Localising** responses when data show specific sectoral or workplace needs.

Panel Discussion

Moderator: Sem Vandekerckhove

Judith Kirton-Darling, industriAll Europe

Asked about the broadening of the policy debate covering retirement issue, health and prevention, Ms Kirton-Darling argued that ageing should be understood as a workforce sustainability issue rather than solely a retirement issue.

She highlighted:

- The need for age-management strategies covering the entire career life cycle. *"You can't start talking about active ageing when somebody hits 55. You have to have an agenda which covers the whole of a working life."*

Co-funded by the European Union

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. **Project Number**: 101192159

- The importance of training and reskilling as core elements of collective bargaining.
- The growing relevance of just transition policies within manufacturing sectors.
- Positive examples from collective bargaining agreements that encourage workers to remain active longer under appropriate conditions.

Delphine Rudelli, Ceemet

On the question about business case for ageing policies, Ms Rudelli presented the employer perspective, emphasising the business case for age-management policies. *"You do not wait until the person is getting older. You need to anticipate the way you can retain your workers and make sure that they remain employable in a healthy environment."*

She noted:

- The gap between legal and effective retirement ages.
- The importance of early workforce planning.
- The need for continuous upskilling and reskilling throughout working life.
- The value of intergenerational knowledge transfer to maintain critical competences within companies.

Isabella Mica, FIM CISL Monza Brianza Lecco

Asked to bring an example of successful local practices, Ms Mica shared practical examples from the semiconductor sector.

Measures negotiated through collective bargaining include:

- Reduced working hours for shift workers while maintaining favourable wage conditions.
- Additional leave entitlements for long-serving shift workers and older employees.
- Opportunities for part-time work, particularly valued by older workers and carers.
- Hybrid working arrangements.

Co-funded by the European Union

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. **Project Number**: 101192159

- Solidarity leave schemes allowing colleagues to donate leave for workers experiencing family health emergencies.

Giorgio Sabba, FIM CISL Liguria

Drawing on the experience of Fincantieri, Mr Sabba described a comprehensive approach combining welfare, work organisation and family support.

Examples include:

- Extended protections during illness.
- Family-care leave arrangements.
- Medical and preventive health leave.
- Remote working provisions.
- A right to disconnect.
- Joint employer-union committees on training and company welfare.

Future negotiations will focus increasingly on seniority management, mentoring roles and gradual working-time reductions for older workers.

Dursun Alhan, Türk Metal Sendikası

Mr Alhan reported growing awareness of workforce ageing in Türkiye. He noted that companies and policymakers are increasingly recognising the importance of ageing-related issues and introducing training initiatives supporting workplace wellbeing.

Discussion

Participants discussed:

- Cultural perceptions of retirement and how to promote longer working lives while respecting individual choices.
- Challenges in institutionalising age-management measures in countries with lower levels of collective bargaining coverage.
- The role of social dialogue as a mechanism for identifying workplace needs and developing tailored solutions.

Co-funded by the European Union

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. **Project Number**: 101192159

- The importance of representation from both employers and workers in designing effective measures.

Several speakers agreed that successful implementation depends on strong social dialogue structures, trust between the parties and a thorough understanding of workplace realities.

Closing Session

Speaker: Barbara Arsieni, FIM CISL Nazionale

Bringing the apologies of Mr. Massimiliano Nobis, National Secretary of the Italian FIM CISL, Ms Arsieni thanked all speakers, participants and organisers for the quality of the discussions.

In her concluding remarks, she emphasised that:

- Demographic ageing presents significant challenges for labour markets and social protection systems.
- Labour migration and workforce shortages further increase the urgency of action.
- Active ageing requires coordinated reforms in employment, health and social protection policies.
- Effective collective bargaining must be grounded in solid evidence and workplace realities.
- Trade unions have a critical role in developing solutions to long-term workforce challenges.

She underlined that the PROMISE project demonstrates the importance of combining research, social dialogue and practical workplace solutions.

The event concluded with a call for a renewed social contract capable of ensuring that older workers remain valued, protected and empowered throughout their working lives.

Co-funded by the European Union

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. **Project Number**: 101192159

Event Conclusions

The event highlighted that demographic ageing, labour shortages, digitalisation and the green transition are transforming European labour markets and increasing the need for age-inclusive employment policies.

A central conclusion was that social dialogue and collective bargaining are key to addressing workforce ageing. Governments, employers, trade unions and workers all have a shared responsibility to develop solutions that support longer, healthier and more sustainable working lives.

Participants emphasised the need for a life-course approach to age management, with investment in skills, health, good working conditions and career development throughout working life. Lifelong learning, prevention and the fight against age discrimination were identified as essential priorities.

The event also demonstrated how collective bargaining can translate these objectives into practical workplace measures, including flexible working arrangements, training opportunities, health and wellbeing initiatives, mentoring schemes and support for carers.

Overall, participants agreed that responding successfully to demographic change requires coordinated action, evidence-based policies and strong social dialogue.

Co-funded by the European Union

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. **Project Number**: 101192159

Photos



Figure 1 Sarah Loriato, AGE Platform Europe



Figure 2 Margherita Roiatti, Fondazione ADAPT



Figure 3 Panel Session 1



Figure 4 Sem Vandekerckhove, HIVA-KU Leuven



Figure 5 Panel Session 2



Figure 6 Barbara Arsieni, FIM CISL



Figure 7 Audience

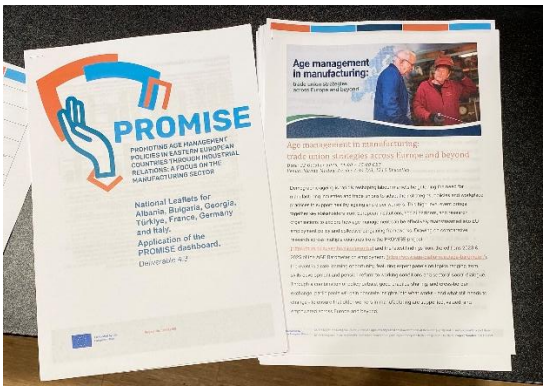


Figure 8 Leaflets and agenda

Co-funded by the European Union

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. **Project Number**: 101192159