

Brussels, 27 May 2022

COST 021/22

DECISION

Subject: Memorandum of Understanding for the implementation of the COST Action “Work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalization” (DIGI-net) CA21107

The COST Member Countries will find attached the Memorandum of Understanding for the COST Action Work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalization approved by the Committee of Senior Officials through written procedure on 27 May 2022.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

For the implementation of a COST Action designated as

COST Action CA21107 WORK INEQUALITIES IN LATER LIFE REDEFINED BY DIGITALIZATION (DIGI-net)

The COST Members through the present Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) wish to undertake joint activities of mutual interest and declare their common intention to participate in the COST Action, referred to above and described in the Technical Annex of this MoU.

The Action will be carried out in accordance with the set of COST Implementation Rules approved by the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO), or any document amending or replacing them.

The main aim and objective of the Action is to overcome critical gaps in conceptual innovation on the influence of digitalisation on work inequalities in later life, in order to address the research-policy disconnect and tackle work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation in Europe. This will be achieved through the specific objectives detailed in the Technical Annex.

The present MoU enters into force on the date of the approval of the COST Action by the CSO.

OVERVIEW

Summary

The aim of this Action is to overcome critical gaps in conceptual innovation on the influence of digitalisation on work inequalities in later life, in order to address the research-policy disconnect and tackle work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation. The Action will enhance scientific knowledge by integrating the different disciplines and schools of thought, by developing collaborations with public policy officials, international policy bodies, non-academic professionals, civil society NGOs, trade unions, management of organisations and older workers themselves. Expected deliverables include: a) the creation of a web-site; that will act as a platform for the Action and become an international ‘hub’ for the study of ageing at work in the era of digitalization, by sharing and publishing knowledge, connecting researchers, stakeholders and activists in the field; b) the creation of a depository database of scientific measures and tools for the assessment of inequalities and challenges of aging and digitalization, as well as for good practices. Policy reports will be posted in order to make links outside the research community to address policy makers and stakeholders; c) the facilitation of research and dissemination events, including Short Term Scientific Missions (STSMs) and scientific Training Schools (TS) for Young Researchers and Innovators (YRIs) and established researchers, public conferences and policy workshops hosting experts and relevant stakeholders; and d) a series of publications including scientific reports, conference proceedings, academic publications, collaborative recommendation papers derived from Action Working Groups, and an edited book.

Areas of Expertise Relevant for the Action

- Sociology: Ageing
- Sociology: Work and professions
- Political Science: Social policies, welfare state

Keywords

- inequalities
- later life
- digitalisation
- gender

Specific Objectives

To achieve the main objective described in this MoU, the following specific objectives shall be accomplished:

Research Coordination

- To synthesise existing knowledge from regional, disciplinary and sectoral disparate dialogues, forming a coherent scientific discourse on how work inequalities in later life are redefined by digitalisation.
- To critically investigate the construction of work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation.
- To assess the implications of work inequalities in later life as redefined by digitalisation as potential

ageism affecting older workers' health, access to training and opportunities to work at an old age.

- To develop new conceptual and theoretical frameworks that can be practically applied in understanding and combating the work inequalities in later life as redefined by digitalisation in European societies.
- To identify, from a bottom-up perspective, innovative and implementable policy and practice for reducing work inequalities in later life in relation to the digitalisation of work.
- To disseminate the results of the Action through conferences, scientific and public gatherings to ensure substantial impact in the participating countries and beyond.

Capacity Building

- To establish an innovative, interdisciplinary and participatory European collaboration, involving researchers, policy stakeholders and older people, to address the disconnect between research and policy on multi-dimensional work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation.
- To build cross-European interdisciplinary research capacity, enhancing Young researchers and innovators' development, and actively ensuring a gender balance across investigators to nurture and sustain the study of work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation and to create competitive advantage.
- To institute collaborative research relationships with COST NNCs and IPCs to strengthen Europe's leadership role and establish the European Research Area as a hub of interdisciplinary excellence in innovation for the study of work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation.
- To drive a collaborative cross-European programme that cements the participation and leadership of COST ITCs in the study of inequalities of older workers in the era of digitalisation.
- To facilitate international collaboration, networking, interdisciplinary community building and create synergies among participants via joint publications in books, journals and conferences.
- To create a virtual collaboration-open space to foster teamwork and support rapid communications of knowledge among participants to encourage transfer and exploitation of new insights arising from the network.

TECHNICAL ANNEX

1. S&T EXCELLENCE

1.1. SOUNDNESS OF THE CHALLENGE

1.1.1. DESCRIPTION OF THE STATE OF THE ART

European societies are strongly influenced by the ongoing 'digital revolution'. Our labour markets are reshaped by new and more powerful IT systems, robotics, sensor technology, apps, 3D printers, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and machine learning. Digitalisation is not confined to offices or IT firms, however. Statistics Germany shows that more than half of German workers use computers with internet for their work, and that almost a quarter of European production is highly or fully automated. Still, the EU's Digital Economy & Society Index shows large differences in digitalisation, in terms of both general digitalisation speed (Sweden scores twice as high as Italy) and patterns (Estonia ranks first in Digital government and below average in Digital integration). Digitalisation provides both opportunities and challenges as work could become more efficient, healthy and creative, but also more insecure, stressful, and difficult. Simultaneously, European labour markets experience a 'demographic revolution' since the share of 50+ workers (born in 1972 or earlier) is larger than ever. Additionally, this 50+ cohort will retire later than previous cohorts because of increasing pension ages in many countries (OECD, 2021). These older workers are often regarded by corporate and news media as having less technological skills (Kroon et al., 2018) as well as by managers (Conen et al., 2011). There is still academic debate on whether digitalisation primarily hurts or helps the position of older workers. This uncertainty makes it vital to understand the interplay between ageing and digitalisation. This Action refers to five central areas in which contemporary understanding of this interplay is more or less non-existent.

The first area concerns **social inequalities** in cases where some groups are privileged, and other groups are marginalised (Fang et al., 2019; Wikström et al., 2018). Digitalisation can bring new inequalities between younger and older workers, for example, and also within these groups, depending on factors such as gender, education, sector of employment or technical literacy. Yet, it can also reduce existing inequalities. A disability may be overcome thanks to assistive technology, for instance. Among other things, inequalities concern having a job, wages and job conditions. These areas draw attention to age-based inequalities, involving older workers who find it hard to work with new technologies that are made for and by younger workers (Tams et al., 2014), or experience more time pressure (Mullan & Wajcman, 2019), and thus feeling more stressed. It has been argued that digitalisation potentially hurts older workers' careers (Behaghel et al., 2014). These conditions, however, need to be studied further, as assistive technology, for example, might compensate for age-related health issues. Digitalisation creates inequalities among older workers: particularly male and middle-skilled workers are at risk of losing their jobs due to automation (Frey & Osborne, 2013). The patterns of inequality and digitalisation differ between countries and require cross-country collaboration in studying.

The second knowledge gap concerns **organisational age culture** in which stereotypes and discrimination are known to strongly shape organisational life for older workers in terms of hiring, training and retirement (Brooke & Taylor, 2005). Given the stereotypes about age and digitalisation, it is reasonable to expect age culture to be increasingly important in a digitalised economy. Studies show that the age climate is an important factor in the implementation of personnel policies for older workers, regarding their training participation, opportunities to find a job, and retirement behaviour. They also show that ageist stereotypes are particularly negative when related to technology (Conen et al., 2011) and that age discrimination is particularly notable in the recruitment to highly computerised jobs (Turek & Henkens, 2020).

Access to training is a core dimension of organisational age climate and an essential factor in combatting digital inequality. It has the potential to offset the negative impact that workplace digitalisation can have on older workers (Schleife, 2009). However, empirical studies consistently show that older employees are less likely to participate in any kind of training than younger employees (Armstrong-Stassen & Cattaneo, 2010; Fleischmann et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2014). This specifically applies to technological training. Although employers are explicitly called upon to give older workers more time to learn new technology (Behaghel et al., 2014), older workers reported that they did not get enough training opportunities and/or time to learn new technology (Lee et al., 2009). It is sometimes suggested that this decline in training among age groups is mainly the fault of older workers themselves as they are less eager to participate, which understandably leads to lower participation. However, contrary to such ageist stereotypes, it is shown that most older workers enjoy learning new things (Lee et al., 2009).

Studies further indicate that ageism affects various groups differently. Older women, for instance, are hurt more strongly than older men (Lösslbroek & Radl, 2019), which indicates the need to consistently emphasise the consequences of digitalisation to the older workforce from a gender perspective. Also, age discrimination, age norms and digitalisation patterns differ strongly between different European countries, which necessitates cross-country collaboration in studying the role of age climates in the impact of digitalisation on older workers.

A third largely unexplored central area concerns the complex interplay and connection between digitalisation of work and **older workers' health**, which is a vital condition for extending working life. Automation can make physical work lighter for older workers. If digitalisation enables teleworking, this can remove commuting time from the workday and add better breaks to it, particularly benefitting those who find the work day exhausting (ILO, 2021). Also, 'assistive technology' has been found to increase workforce participation for older workers struggling with a disability (Johnson et al., 2010). Plausibly, this also extends to other age-related health conditions. At the same time, digitalisation may hurt older workers' mental health through increasing technostress, that is, the influence of technology on the strain workers experience. The so far limited knowledge of the significance of technostress to older workers shows that it affects employees in the form of lower job satisfaction and wellbeing (Jena, 2015), and lower performance and increased turnover (Brooks & Califf, 2017; Maier et al., 2015). This indicates the need to understand the intricate interplay between digitalisation and older employees' health as well as the variations between occupational sectors and countries.

In addition to the three areas mentioned above – how digitalisation relates to social inequalities, organisational differences between occupational sectors and countries, and older people's health and opportunities to extend working life – there are two more overriding knowledge areas involving older workers' situation at work in the era of digitalisation, namely the effects of policies and how the combination of older workers and digitalisation is reflected in the media.

Policy and practice to deal with digitalisation are implemented by national governments as well as by European institutions and organisations. The disparate and scattered knowledge about the significances of digitalisation to older employees means that the design of policy and practice in relation to labour market conditions for older people in the era of digitalisation loses focus and the potential to frame effects and appropriate outcome targets (see also European Commission, Shaping Europe's digital future, 2021). A successful policy development needs to be based on knowledge and a comprehensive conceptual framework in line with the conclusions of this Action. A sound policy development also depends on a shared understanding among researchers and stakeholders, ensuring that knowledge can be transformed into meaningful interventions. To this end, a forum for close and continuous development of knowledge and implementation needs to be established for researchers and stakeholders.

Social, corporate and news media all reflect and propel stereotypes of older workers and digitalisation. Studies show that media representations add to the entrenchment of these stereotypes (Kroon et al., 2018). They also suggest that older people are predominantly represented as a disempowered,

vulnerable and homogeneous group on social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter. Because local authorities in many countries have begun using Facebook to reach out to and interact with citizens, social media are significant producers of media content about older people and later life (Xu, 2020). This makes media both a central point of study and a potential opportunity for interventions aiming to strengthen the position of older people in a digitalised labour market.

The following questions frame the scientific focus addressed by this Action:

1. What knowledge is available regarding work inequalities in later life related to digitalisation?
2. What is the best conceptual approach for understanding and analysing work inequalities in later life in the era of digitalisation?
3. How are work inequalities in later life constructed and discussed in media, social debate and policies at national and European levels?
4. What are the health and social implications of digitalisation for older workers?
5. What policy tools, measures and interventions in the labour market and in organisations could reduce the work inequalities in public and private sectors in later life related to digitalisation?

These questions will be addressed through a comparative approach involving knowledge sharing and, whenever needed, collection of data from participating countries.

All in all, the challenges to older people's labour market participation in the era of digitalisation concern central areas of knowledge and include research, policy development and the social processes in which notions of older people's digital skills are shaped in social media. This Action aims to contribute new adequate knowledge of how inequalities at work in later life are redefined by digitalisation, with a view to produce well-informed policies that can successfully counteract such inequalities. The Action constitutes a forum in which researchers and policy stakeholders can create a shared understanding of the processes in question and thus from a bottom-up perspective contribute to new policy and practice interventions, designed to effectively challenge digital inequalities at work in ageing societies.

1.1.2. DESCRIPTION OF THE CHALLENGE (MAIN AIM)

Despite the technological and scientific advances over the last two decades (2000-2020) in the field of digitalisation, knowledge on inequalities of older workers is disparate and scattered with a disjointed evidence base, a focus on Western Europe, and a narrow disciplinary approach. As a consequence, no coherent understanding exists of inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation. A number of unmet needs are still present:

1. Limited knowledge and conceptual approach are available regarding work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation.
2. Poor understanding of how work inequalities in later life are redefined by digitalisation.
3. Not adequate interdisciplinary and intersectoral collaboration.
4. Not adequate strategies to sustain continuous and successful digitalisation of labour market and reducing the work inequalities in later life.
5. Limited knowledge translation from research to organisational and policy practice.
6. Poor understanding of media influence on work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation.
7. Limited knowledge on influence of digitalisation on the health of older workers.

The aim of this Action is to overcome critical gaps in conceptual innovation on the influence of digitalisation on work inequalities in later life, in order to address the research-policy disconnect and tackle work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation in Europe. The Action will engage researchers and policy stakeholders in creating shared understandings and directing the development of new policy and practice interventions, that can be practically and effectively implemented, to reduce work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation in diverse European ageing societies.

To address its main challenge, as well as the related research and practical limitations, this Action entails a 4-year work plan bringing youths, researchers from diverse scientific areas, local/regional/national NGOs, public service representatives, senior advisors from international bodies, youth advocacy organizations and decision makers into the DIGI-net COST Action around three operative Specific Goals (SG): (SG1) to build up future research capacity around the topic, especially in COST ITC most affected by accelerated digitalisation which increases the work inequalities in later life; (SG2) to establish an online platform that will serve as a synthesizer and clearing house for research data, methodological tools and best-practices concerning topic of work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation; (SG3) to foster knowledge use by policy makers and practitioners at local, regional, national and/or international levels.

1.2. PROGRESS BEYOND THE STATE OF THE ART

1.2.1. APPROACH TO THE CHALLENGE AND PROGRESS BEYOND THE STATE OF THE ART

In compliance with the actual United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (namely goals #3 Good Health and Well-being, #5 Gender Equality, #8 Decent Work and Economic Growth and #10 Reduced Inequality), EC Europe's Digital Decade strategy and the European Pillar for Social Rights, DIGI-net is a much needed European-led research network to advance coordinated interdisciplinary research at the highest level. Its general and specific goals uphold progress beyond the current state-of-the-art. The DIGI-net general aim is to contribute new adequate knowledge of how inequalities at work in later life are redefined by digitalisation, with a view to produce well-informed policies applying bottom-up perspective that can successfully counteract such inequalities.

Through networking, knowledge exchange and the involvement of Young Researchers and Innovators (YRI), this Action will facilitate interdisciplinary research focused on mapping the mechanisms (risks and protective factors) underlying work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation, leading to a theoretically-grounded whole model of comprehension. By encouraging a diverse and collaborative environment, this model will pave the way for projects covering potential topics high in the policy agenda (e.g. health of older workers redefined by digitalisation; age culture in organisations redefined by digitalisation; influence of media on work inequalities of older workers etc.). Through SG1, DIGI-net will bring together young and senior researchers from multiple disciplinary areas and nurture the involvement of countries struggling with higher rates of social and work inequalities in older age due to uneven digitalisation. This strategy will create a solid ground for much needed research (especially longitudinal studies) in the framework of upcoming national and international funding schemes. Through SG2, this Action will make share valuable data, methodological tools and intervention best-practices through the Action web-site to promote the topic on work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation. The web-site would fill the gap of non-existent collaborative online platforms on this topic to support researchers and key stakeholders at the service delivery and decision-making levels. Through networking, best-practices exchanges, training schools and data and knowledge made available in the Action web-site, DIGI-net SG3 will address the most prevalent challenges to public services and private interventions in delivering formal support to these older workers. This will provide warranted insights on sectoral topics with the potential to inform policymaking in addition to NGO project development. Below, research coordination and capacity building objectives are presented in connection with SG of this Action.

1.2.2. OBJECTIVES

1.2.2.1 Research Coordination Objectives

1. To synthesise existing knowledge from regional, disciplinary and sectoral disparate dialogues, forming a coherent scientific discourse on how work inequalities in later life are redefined by digitalisation.
2. To critically investigate the construction of work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation.
3. To assess the implications of work inequalities in later life as redefined by digitalisation as potential ageism affecting older workers' health, access to training and opportunities to work at an old age.
4. To develop new conceptual and theoretical frameworks that can be practically applied in understanding and combating the work inequalities in later life as redefined by digitalisation in European societies.
5. To identify, from a bottom-up perspective, innovative and implementable policy and practice for reducing work inequalities in later life in relation to the digitalisation of work.
6. To disseminate the results of the Action through conferences, scientific and public gatherings to ensure substantial impact in the participating countries and beyond.

1.2.2.2 Capacity-building Objectives

1. To establish an innovative, interdisciplinary and participatory European collaboration, involving researchers, policy stakeholders and older people, to address the disconnect between research and policy on multi-dimensional work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation.
2. To build cross-European interdisciplinary research capacity, enhancing Young Researchers and Innovators' development, and actively ensuring a gender balance across investigators to nurture and sustain the study of work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation and to create competitive advantage.
3. To institute collaborative research relationships with COST NNCs and IPCs to strengthen Europe's leadership role and establish the European Research Area as a hub of interdisciplinary excellence in innovation for the study of work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation.
4. To drive a collaborative cross-European programme that cements the participation and leadership of COST ITCs in the study of inequalities of older workers in the era of digitalisation.
5. To facilitate international collaboration, networking, interdisciplinary community building and create synergies among participants via joint publications in books, journals and conferences.
6. To create a virtual collaboration-open space to foster teamwork and support rapid communications of knowledge among participants to encourage transfer and exploitation of new insights arising from the network.

2. NETWORKING EXCELLENCE

2.1. ADDED VALUE OF NETWORKING IN S&T EXCELLENCE

2.1.1. ADDED VALUE IN RELATION TO EXISTING EFFORTS AT EUROPEAN AND/OR INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

This Action complements and goes beyond existing and past programs by combining two fields that previously have only been studied separately: older workers and digital inclusion. Other COST Actions

delved into gender differences among older workers (IS1409 Extended Working Life, Health and Gender), and more broadly into ageism (IS1402 Ageism), social exclusion (CA15122 ROSEnet) and age-friendly environments (CA19136). The DIGI-net Action builds on those programs by studying how these factors are influenced by digitalisation, specifically in WG 1, 2 and 5. Policies related to digitalisation and the labour market were studied between 2012-2016 (IS10202 Dynamics of virtual work), and another Action focuses on how digitalisation can support inclusion of people with certain disabilities (CA19104 STEP). However, (digitalisation) policies are often focused on younger workers (De Vries et al., 2001) and older workers would benefit from different assistive technology than people with disabilities. Therefore, this Action studies the extent to which this digitalisation research also applies to older workers, in WG4 and 3 respectively,

Likewise, the Action will complement, and use data from, other European and national projects on ageing (e.g. SHARE – survey of health, ageing and retirement in Europe; TILDA – The Irish Longitudinal Study of Ageing; Belgium Ageing Studies; Maastricht Ageing Study). Finally, with its multidisciplinary approach and broad international participation the Action will complement the research project Ageing, Communication, Technologies (ACT). This Action therefore presents an excellent opportunity to collaborate on the issues of digital divide and digital inclusion.

2.2. ADDED VALUE OF NETWORKING IN IMPACT

2.2.1. SECURING THE CRITICAL MASS AND EXPERTISE

The Action employs a range of networking mechanisms including electronic media, web-based intra-network dissemination, conferences, workshop-policy events (WPEs), working groups (WGs) meetings, short-term scientific missions (STSMs), a YRI forum, Training Schools (TSs), and an Older Workers Reference Group (an external advisory body, with stakeholder participants being its representatives, see also section 4.1.1). To secure added value. Networking is the best approach to tackle the challenge of reducing inequalities of older workers in the era of digitalisation for five reasons. (1) Gathering European and international experts as members of the Action, and providing the opportunity for information sharing, debate and the presentation of new findings, is required to synthesise existing state-of-the-art knowledge. (2) Bringing together experts from different nationalities (COST countries, NNCs, and IPCs), with different policy, economic, and socio-cultural contexts, and a range of different disciplines, is required to disentangle the construction of work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation, and to assess implications, across older workers and inequalities areas. The Action will have the capacity to bridge separate fields of study and distinct or disparate geographical perspectives to form a coherent scientific discourse on work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation. (3) Facilitating a network of active and committed researchers, who are guided by an underlying conceptual framework, will provide the academic space and intellectual resources to develop new and innovative conceptual but applicable frameworks on work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation. The Action will not only accumulate new knowledge, but through facilitating interdisciplinary analysis of existing work also produce new perspectives on work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation. (4) Networking facilitates the establishment of an innovative, interdisciplinary and participatory European collaboration, to address the disconnect between research and policy on multi-dimensional work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation. Researchers and policy stakeholders will come together as equal members of the Action, raising European and international awareness of inequalities of older workers in the era of digitalisation. This unique collaboration will forge new connections between research and policy in order to identify from a bottom-up perspective innovative and implementable policy and practice for reducing work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation. (5) The Action's networking will provide a mechanism for capacity building, generating an environment for learning and mentorship between young researchers and research leaders. It will also serve as a means of embedding a gender balance within the study of work inequalities by later life redefined by digitalisation, and the various levels of the Action's structures.

2.2.2. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS

The Action strategy seeks to address the needs of these three groups of stakeholders, namely researchers in academia, policy makers and older workers, through a strategy that is both horizontal and vertical. Along the horizontal dimension, our strategy emphasises synergies among representatives working within the main themes of the Action, enabling transfer and knowledge gap filling through direct interactions between academics and policy makers. At the same time, the Action is structured along principal thematic axes that will inculcate a deeper (“vertical”) understanding of current trends, requirements and future directions within each working group. Along these two dimensions, the Action will maximise the involvement of stakeholders in the following ways:

- Through regular meetings and Short-Term Scientific Missions, it will enable researchers, especially those in the early stages of their careers, to acquire knowledge and develop skills and networking capabilities by interacting with both academic and policy makers, thus providing formation opportunities for the next generation in this burgeoning field;
- By developing tools for dissemination and collaboration, through online, face-to-face and publication dissemination channels (see 3.2.2), the Action will enable participants and stakeholders to converge on standards and goals that will facilitate cross-fertilisation;
- By enhancing interaction via conferences and Training Schools, as well as encouraging scientific dissemination, it will foster stronger collaborations that will result in solid scientific contributions in the field of work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation.

By involving stakeholders from academia, European representative organisations, NGOs, policy units, advisory agencies, leaders from organisations and people from Older Workers Reference Group progress in this field will directly translate into better policies and practices for reducing work inequalities in later life redefined by digitalisation, boosting economic impact. Through its flexible membership structure, the Action will be open to all interested parties. The Action will actively seek participation of other academic and organisational partners, as well as members of NGOs, public bodies and policy makers for whom there are clear benefits.

2.2.3. MUTUAL BENEFITS OF THE INVOLVEMENT OF SECONDARY PROPOSERS FROM NEAR NEIGHBOUR OR INTERNATIONAL PARTNER COUNTRIES OR INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

This Action brings together academic institutions, industrial partner, business enterprise, government organisations and NGO’s with a strong research mandate and previous track record. The Action will secure a strong geographical representation from COST countries, with emphasis on COST ITC participation, as well as from COST NNCs and IPCs.

All stakeholders will be engaged in hosting researchers, as well as in sending some of their own representatives for STSMs in European academic institutions. Industrial partners, government organisations, as well as NGOs will be motivated to share good practice, knowledge, and expertise during Action activities, especially WPE’s and conferences by collaborating on policy briefs, policy presentations, short videos, podcasts, webinars etc.

The Action’s goal of building knowledge exchange with policy makers and involved stakeholders can only be achieved through collaboration in a broad network capable of mobilizing the local knowledge, discourses, and contacts necessary to build such exchanges across Europe.

3. IMPACT

3.1. IMPACT TO SCIENCE, SOCIETY AND COMPETITIVENESS, AND POTENTIAL FOR INNOVATION/BREAKTHROUGHS

3.1.1. SCIENTIFIC, TECHNOLOGICAL, AND/OR SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACTS (INCLUDING POTENTIAL INNOVATIONS AND/OR BREAKTHROUGHS)

Societal impact, short-term (<4 years, during DIGI-net):

- More **informed policy makers** at national and international level thanks to workshop-policy events [T3.4] and policy briefs [D8]. The latter will be written in English, and then translated into the languages of the participating countries to increase their contribution to national policy.
- **Participatory collaboration** that brings older workers, policy stakeholders and civil society into a co-produced process. This supports future scientific studies and informs all involved.
- A **public debate** that is more focused and informed on this topic thanks to diverse media outreach such as letters to newspapers [D9], podcasts, short video clips and webinars [D10].

Scientific impact, short-term (<4 years, during DIGI-net):

- A **strong network** on work in later life and digitalisation including researchers from many COST countries (especially ITC), disciplines and involving many YRIs. While the Action members from the start reflect a wide variety of backgrounds, continuous recruitment during the Action further increases the width of the network. The depth of the network is strengthened by both meetings and the numerous projects that members can collaborate on.
- A **shared understanding** among researchers and policy makers on the state-of-the art, conceptual framework and future research on older workers in the era of digitalisation.
- Joint **funding applications** by Action members for future collaboration. These will particularly also include YRIs and scholars from ITC.

Societal impact, long-term (>4 years, beyond DIGI-net):

- Greater **visibility** for Action members in their respective countries.
- Greater **political commitment** to tackle inequalities among older workers in the era of digitalisation.
- Greater **public awareness** of the need for effective policies for older workers in the era of digitalisation.
- **Practical** recommendations, publicly available in lay terms, to reduce digital-related inequalities among older workers. These are aimed at both governments and organisations.

3.2. MEASURES TO MAXIMISE IMPACT

3.2.1. KNOWLEDGE CREATION, TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Knowledge creation: At the start of the Action, all WGs work towards a synthesis covering research on work in later life and digitalisation [D3]. Together with the Conceptual Framework [D4], these deliverables support all researchers into this topic. Also, Older Worker Reference Groups give older workers themselves a central position: knowledge about them should not be without them. The cross-national network enables different studies that are unfeasible for researchers without such network.

These projects generate both answers and new questions and identify new experts to be invited to the Action.

Transfer of knowledge: The synthesis will be publicly available and open up research in national languages to the English-speaking world. Recruitment of new members will be ongoing throughout the Action via all Action's activities, member networks and COST National Coordinators (CNCs). The involvement of stakeholders in the Action and the outreach via dissemination events continuously brings the Action's expertise to societal actors. Outreach events such as Workshop-policy events are spread geographically and take into account different interests of older workers, organisations, and policy makers. Early in the process, these stakeholders will be involved in the process to enable them ask questions that they want to be answered. Finally, transfer of knowledge towards YRI is covered below.

Career development: Action participation can accelerate YRI careers in multiple ways: a) it becomes easier to identify innovative research questions thanks to the synthesis and conceptual framework; b) their personal experience in the field benefits from both collaborating with senior researchers in WG activities and specific YRI instruments (e.g. Training Schools and STSMs); c) they develop valuable international interdisciplinary networks, particularly via the biannual YRI forum and their 'mentor'; d) their contribution to deliverables improves their dissemination skills and raises their profile on a national and international level.

3.2.2. PLAN FOR DISSEMINATION AND/OR EXPLOITATION AND DIALOGUE WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC OR POLICY

A multi-strand and multi-level dissemination plan will be employed in the Action. **Online dissemination channels:** An Action website will act as the principal online communication and dissemination tool, publicising the Action's activities and its outputs, including conference proceedings, briefing papers, knowledge syntheses, Training Schools (TS) and YRI forum materials. A repository of innovative practice and policy for tackling inequalities among older workers in the era of digitalisation will be accessible from the website (see 4.1.1). The website's password-protected space will give Action members access to working documents and other work-in-progress activities. Electronic mailing-lists, podcasts and other online tools will publicise and present Action seminars, events and outputs. Electronic press releases will generate media attention. The outputs of the project will be published across numerous channels, including social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube) and via dissemination videos, podcasts, webinars and infographics. **Face-to-face dissemination channels:** two academic conferences (see 4.1.1) will be organised. Six two-day workshop policy events (WPE) (see 4.1.1) to raise scientific, public and political awareness of inequalities among older workers in the era of digitalisation, and to disseminate the Action's activities and outputs will be organised in different geographical areas; Action members will participate in other research and academic conferences and seminars, and policy events, raising awareness of the Action and publicising its findings and outputs. **Publication dissemination channels** include: two-sets of conference proceedings for the two conferences; six briefing papers, one on each WG topic of inequalities among older workers in the era of digitalisation and one on multidimensional inequalities, will summarise the Workshop-policy events discussion, showcasing WG findings and identifying key 'take-home' messages for policy makers and practitioners; knowledge synthesis position papers on five topics; jointly authored peer-review articles in Open Access journals. Other publications will include conference papers, policy analyses, training materials, and, where appropriate, key-message bulletins (one-page summaries of findings, informed/created by the Older Workers Reference Group members).

An Action **Dissemination Board** (DB) will develop and execute the dissemination plan. The DB will comprise of: an elected Science Communication coordinator (responsible for leading the DB); a research dissemination member (responsible for disseminating peer-review publications); a policy dissemination member (most likely a policy stakeholder, responsible for coordinating the production and dissemination of policy analysis); a public dissemination member (responsible for media liaison); a website dissemination member (responsible for website maintenance); and a representative from each WG. The DB will work closely with other Action organisational structures to coordinate key dissemination events.

4. IMPLEMENTATION

4.1. COHERENCE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE WORKPLAN

4.1.1. DESCRIPTION OF WORKING GROUPS, TASKS AND ACTIVITIES

DIGI-net will be managed using the structure that has proved successful and efficient in other Actions. The meetings will ideally be face to face in combination with Action events such as conferences of Training Schools. Otherwise, they either meet at rotating locations or online.

- The **Management Committee** (MC), led by the Chair, consists of one or two representatives for each COST country that participates in the Action. The MC meets twice a year to oversee the progress of the Action, and decide on the activities and budget allocation, among others.
- The **Dissemination Board** (DB), led by the Science Communication Coordinator (see 3.2.2.), implements the dissemination plan in close collaboration with Action MC and Working Groups.
- **The Core Group** (CG), led by the Chair, consists of the Vice-Chair, Science Communication Coordinator, Grant Awarding Coordinator, Training School Coordinator, and five WG leaders. The CG reflects the diversity in Action members (geography, gender, disciplines), incl. YRI leaders. It meets four times a year to deal with day-to-day management, prepares MC meetings and coordinate the Action's objectives and deliverables.

The five interdisciplinary Working Groups (WGs) are the Action's key component to implement the tasks leading to the achievement of the research coordination and capacity building objectives. Each WG focuses on a different knowledge area concerning older workers and digitalisation: WG1 Inequalities, WG2 Age culture, WG3 Health, WG4 Policies and WG5 Media. Each WG includes researchers and policy stakeholders to ensure an academic and applied focus in its activities. WGs meet biannually and will be coordinated by a WG leader with an YRI-Vice-leader. While WGs share the same general objectives, each addresses these objectives specifically for their WG theme. WG objectives are derived directly from both the crucial research questions of the challenge (see 1.1.2), and the Action's research coordination objectives (see 1.2.2.1), and also represent the core tasks of the WGs.

Table 1. WG Interdisciplinarity

WG 1	WG 2	WG 3	WG 4	WG 5
DIGITALISATION AND SOCIAL INEQUALITIES	DIGITALISATION AND AGE CULTURE IN ORGANISATIONS	DIGITALISATION AND HEALTH OF OLDER WORKERS	DIGITALISATION AND POLICIES	DIGITALISATION AND MEDIA
Sociology	Sociology	Sociology	Sociology	Sociology

Economics	Lifelong learning	Lifelong learning	Lifelong learning	Lifelong learning
Social gerontology	Social gerontology	Communication sciences	Law	Communication sciences
Social work and social policy	Demography	Social work and social policy	Social policy	Social work and social policy
Work medicine	Psychology	Public health	Social work	Psychology
Management and organisation	Management and organisation	Management and organisation	Management and organisation	Management and organisation
ICT and digital skills	ICT and digital skills	ICT and digital skills	ICT and digital skills	Regional studies

The WG Pillars and Tasks in each WG (with Deliverables between brackets) include:

WG Pillar 1 (P1). Move forward the research agenda on ageing in an era of digitalisation for this WG's topic.

T1.1	Writing a synthesis on this topic that draws on research undertaken by Action members, international literature, and national literature. Through brief summaries on the website, this opens up relevant information in national languages to those from other countries [D3].
T1.2	Developing new conceptual and theoretical frameworks related to this topic and its connections with other topics. Derives and expands conceptual thinking on the causes and consequences of older workers' inequalities related to individual-, meso-, and macro- level factors that emerge from the personal, residential and national contexts of older workers. This also provides recommendations on innovative (participatory) research methods [D4].
T1.3	Coordinating interdisciplinary research, both through innovative cross-country collecting data and using existing data (see 2.1.1.). This research builds on the previous activities and results in journal articles [D5] a joint edited volume, and numerous book chapters [D6].

WG Pillar 2 (P2). Create a strong research network to study older workers in the era of digitalisation

T2.1	Actively recruit new Action members in each year of the Action, to make the network both larger and more diverse.
T2.2	Introduce cross-WG presentations and updates to strengthen the network between topics.
T2.3	Organise 2 academic Action conferences (in total rather than per WG) for both Action members and external researchers to identify external scholars that may be recruited into the network. This also serves as a platform for peer discussion of the research deliverables of P1. A medium-sized opening conference will launch the Action, promoting its activities and recruiting new members. A large closing conference will disseminate findings, highlight best-practice in relation to evidence-based intervention, and chart a roadmap for future research-policy collaboration. Conference delegates will include other researchers, European policy makers, and key advisory agencies. Both conferences will aim to secure public and political commitment to tackle inequalities of older workers in the era of digitalisation [D7].
T2.4	Organise a Training School per year to boost YRI experience in this field and to attract potentially interested new YRI. One TS will be held per year, targeting both young and experienced researchers. TSs will focus on methodological aspects related to the Action's

	research tasks. TS1 considers methods of knowledge synthesis and systematic literature reviews. TS2 focuses on methods for conducting media and policy analyses TS3 provides training on the challenges in the study older workers from an inside-perspective. TS4 explores ways of ensuring research impact on policy and practice in the area of older workers' inequalities.
T2.5	Organise Short-Term Scientific Missions, particularly for YRI, to boost their experience in this field and to increase their personal networks. This also facilitates international research collaborations of P1.
T2.6	Create an YRI forum, both online and at Action events, to increase YRI network building.
T2.7	Create mentorship system between YRI and senior researchers.
T2.8	Explore the opportunities for collaboration beyond the duration of this Action.

WG Pillar 3 (P3). Inform policymakers and the general public on supporting older workers in the digital era.

T3.1	Launch the Action website as a hub for informing the Action members, external scholars, policy makers and the general public [D1].
T3.2	Summarise the literature on different organisation-level and country-level policies introduced to deal with this. Assess the evidence on their effectiveness, and the extent to which they are innovative and implementable. Use this to establish current international best-practice. This also relies on the research objectives at P1.
T3.3	Establish Older Workers Reference Group and discuss the Action results with older workers themselves [D8].
T3.4	Discuss Action results with policymakers, stakeholders and fellow scholars at workshop-policy events. These also contribute to network building of P2. Six of these two-day events will be held in six different host countries, during and between the opening and closing conferences. Five events will focus on different older workers' inequalities areas, with the sixth focusing on multidimensional inequalities. The workshop element, involving Action researchers, policy stakeholders and external expert speakers, addresses research questions, innovative policy and practice, knowledge synthesis, and future directions, and will function as a means of cross-fertilisation across the five WGs. Particular consideration will be given to the Action objectives in relation to the host nation region (e.g. Eastern Europe). The policy element, aimed at generating policy impact for the Action, involves a seminar for external researchers, policy makers and practitioners from the host region, and focuses on dissemination and innovative responses from the bottom-up perspective [D8].
T3.5	Produce policy briefing papers to tailor the findings in the language of the target audience [D9].
T3.6	Jointly produce newspaper pitches for newspapers in all involved countries [D9].
T3.7	Produce audio-visual messages to the general public, incl. podcasts, dissemination videos, webinars. The DB is supported by dissemination teams of involved universities for these projects [D10].
T.38	Prepare and up-date a repository of best innovative practice and policy strategies, from COST countries, NNC and IPC, for combating inequalities of older workers in the era of digitalisation [D11].

In addition to Working Groups, the Action will establish during the first year an **Older Worker Reference Group (OWRG)**. The OWRG will feature 5 to 10 representatives from across COST countries and advise on the Action's strategic focus and participate in its events. Inclusion of older workers represents an innovation that is core to the Action's approach and its success. Each WG appoints a liaison person

for the OWRG. This person is likely to have a strong interest in participatory methodologies and will have a role in keeping the OWRG informed of the progress in their WG. The group's programme of activity will be agreed with its members, but is likely to follow a deliberative participatory structure, include the position of Chair, and feed into WG activities concerning how to capture older worker's perspectives.

4.1.2. DESCRIPTION OF DELIVERABLES AND TIMEFRAME

[D1] Website: In year 1, the DB launches a website to serve as the principal communication and dissemination tool for all WGs. It will publicise the Action objectives, and work plan events and outputs. It will function as an important source of state-of-the-art information for other stakeholders, and will serve as a hub for the interdisciplinary study of inequalities of older workers in the era of digitalisation.

[D2] Science Communication Plan: detailed strategy for the Action communication, dissemination and valorisation of Action results, to be developed within the first 6 months from the launch of the Action.

[D3] Action report including a synthesis of existing knowledge in all WG areas in year 2, all WGs produce a synthesis report on the existing scientific knowledge for their topic and publish these on the website.

[D4] Conceptual framework: in year 3, a conceptual framework will be delivered with contribution from each WG, building on the findings of the synthesis.

[D5] Peer-review journal articles (10): at least 10 cross-country jointly written peer-reviewed Open Access articles on each work group topic, will be produced over the Action's lifetime.

[D6] Scientific book (1) and chapters (4): the Action will produce one edited volume based on the results of the Action, and make this book available via Open Access. Additionally, Action members will contribute to other edited volumes to publish their research.

[D7] Action Conference Proceedings (2): two sets of conference proceedings will be published from the two planned Action conferences; one each for the opening and closing conferences. The closing proceedings will be supplemented by a roadmap for future research-policy collaboration on inequalities of older workers in the era of digitalisation.

[D8] Briefing Papers (6): Six briefing papers on workshop-policy events will be published. Briefing papers will be coproduced between researchers, policy stakeholders and the Older Workers Reference Group and will summarise analyses, key innovations, and recommendations for each area of older workers' inequalities. Briefing papers will also draw heavily on the work of the WGs. The sixth briefing paper, on multidimensional inequalities, will integrate findings across WGs.

[D9] Newspaper letters (2): In year 2, WG's use their findings from the synthesis for newspaper pitches, then translate these into local languages and contact to local newspapers to reach out to the general public. In year 4, WG's do this again, now based on the new research and policy findings.

[D10]: Podcasts, webinars, infographics, short video clips: In year 2 a dissemination podcast focused on the outcomes of WG 1, WG 2 and WG 3 will be produced, in year 4 a dissemination podcast focused on the outcomes of WG 4 and WG 5 will be produced. Webinars (4) will be part of each Training schools following the particular topics of each TS. Infographics will be part of two short video clips which will map the outcomes of five working groups, one will be produced in year 3, the second in year 4.

[D11]: Policy and Practice Repository: An online repository of best innovative practice and policy strategies in participating countries, for combating inequalities of older workers in the era of digitalisation will be integrated in the Action web-site. This repository will be up-dated over the Action’s duration and will include evidence-based interventions identified by each WG, and during workshop-policy events. It will also include strategies that emerged from new research completed by Action members.

[D12]: Action final report including a synthesis of updated existing knowledge in all WG areas in year 4.

Table 2. Deliverables	
Scientific deliverables	Societal deliverables
[D1] Website	
[D2] Science Communication Plan	
[D3] Research synthesis	[D8] Briefing papers
[D4] Conceptual framework	[D9] Newspaper letters
[D5] Joint Open Access publications in international journals	[D10] Podcasts, short video clips, webinars
[D6] Scientific book & book chapters	[D11]: Policy and Practice Repository
[D7] Action conference proceedings	
[D12] Action final report	

4.1.3. RISK ANALYSIS AND CONTINGENCY PLANS

As the Consortium contains and is led by many researchers with strong experience in Actions, we are confident that the risks will be mitigated properly.

Table 3. Risks and mitigation measures		
Issue	Risk	Mitigation measure
Covid-19 restrictions	High	Shift meetings and TSs to digital; push back activities relying on travel (STSM's) or large groups (conferences) and bring forward activities that do not (joint papers, publications, podcasts, webinars, newspaper articles etc.)
Limited experience of YRIs	High	Training Schools & STSMS increase their expertise; for projects, they will collaborate with more senior members.
Low involvement of Action members	Medium	Given the variety of tasks and deliverables, members can choose which elements they find most interesting. New members will be recruited during the Action; responsibilities will be delegated to enhance commitment.
Low interest in the Older Workers' Reference Group	Medium	Target extra older workers via NGO's, unions and partner institutions; rotate members to reduce time load for participants.
Delayed deliverables	Medium	Core Group will periodically meet and review deliverables progress, offering support to WG leaders in maintaining the conceptual approach, social policy emphasis and progress towards deliverables.

Low visibility	Medium	The Dissemination Board receives support from dissemination experts at participating universities and our non-academic partners. Combining our events and meetings with academic or non-academic conferences and events increases visibility.
Ethical issues	Medium	Discuss with Action Management Committee the plans beforehand and if any issue arises.
Lack of interdisciplinarity	Low	Each WG contains members from a balanced mix of disciplines, national backgrounds, who believe strongly in interdisciplinarity. Each WG focuses on a topic that is studied in numerous disciplines and collaboration is fostered by many deliverables that cut across disciplines.
Lack of diversity in leading positions in Action management	Low	The positions in Action Management will be distributed among Action members respecting the equal representation of gender, nationality and expertise of the members. Also, the YRI members will be encouraged to participate in leading positions as vice-leaders or vice-coordinators.
Lack of collaboration between WG's	Low	Across-WG collaboration in deliverables; all Action meetings and workshop policy events include presentations for mutual updates. All activities (TS, academic conferences, WPEs, YRI forums etc.) will be based on participation of members from all WGs.
Different expectations among members	Low	A clear Memorandum of Understanding explains the global goals and structure; this is reinforced by regular updates from WG leaders to WG members, and from Chair to the Action MC and Action participants.
Lack of funding for research	Low	Action research will be done by collaboration between existing research projects, focusing on synthesising existing research, and low-cost new projects.
Conflicts	Low	In case of conflict, MC members will notify Chair, who mediates.

4.1.4. GANTT DIAGRAM

ACTIVITY/EVENT	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16
Management in Action																
1st MC meeting/Kick off																
MC Meeting																
WG Meeting																
Website Launch and update																
Final Conference																
WGs Pillars of WG1, WG2, WG3, WG4, WG5																
P.1 research agenda																
T1.1 Write syntheses																
T1.2 Developing new conceptual and theoretical frameworks																
T1.3 Conducting interdisciplinary research																
P.2 creating a research network																
T2.1 Actively recruit new Action members																
T2.2 Introduce cross-WG presentations																
T2.4 Organise a Training School																
T2.5 Organise Short-Term Scientific Missions																
T2.6 Create and maintain an YRI forum																
T2.7 Create mentor-mentee dyads between YRI and senior researchers																
T2.8 Explore new opportunities for collaboration																
P.3 Inform policymakers and the general public																
T3.2 Establish current international best-practice																
T3.3 Establish Older Workers Reference Group																
T3.4 Organise workshop-policy events																
T3.5 Write policy briefing papers																
T3.6 Jointly produce newspaper pitches																
T3.7 Produce audiovisual, incl. podcasts and short videos																
T3.8 Prepare and up-date policy and practice repository																

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