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## **A Review of the AGE Barometer 2023: EU Good Practices and Barriers in the Empowerment of Elderly in the Labour Market The Case of Hungary**

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### **Abstract**

The 2023 edition of the AGE Barometer was released by the Age Platform Europe, aimed at consolidating data from European statistics and national-level sources and enriched by feedback from 19 European countries, including Hungary. The publication aimed at empowering older people in the labour market and promoting sustainable and high-quality working lives for them. The Barometer revealed that the European Union (EU) is far from reaching its 78% employment target for adults aged 20 to 64 with its current state of just 62.3%. This could be due to various barriers to the integration of older people in the labour market, which include inadequate supportive policies, ageism, and unfavourable workplace conditions. Conversely, these are broadly stated in the context of the EU; hence, a deeper analysis of these results, with a special focus on the case of a single country, such as Hungary, is relevant to establish a clearer understanding of the national and local framework of these findings and in

determining facilitating policies and programmes as well as gaps in promoting elderly inclusion in the labour sector.

Using various methods such as critical analysis, desk and literature review, and thematic analysis, this article examined the Barometer report and other relevant publications.

The Barometer 2023 effectively provided general issues and actionable areas in supporting older people in the labour market, combating ageism, and ensuring an age-friendly work environment in the EU landscape. Moreover, it revealed that Hungary performed better in employing older persons compared to the EU average, likely associated with a favourable environment for older workers through its legal protection systems, financial incentives, equal treatment policy, and initiatives such as pensioner cooperatives and information technology education. However, this still falls below the target, and based on the analysis and review of existing relevant publications, this could be associated with some unfavourable policies, gender disparities, a continuous rise in the ageing population, an increased number of migrant workers, technology challenges, ageism, political mayhems, cultural and traditional constraints, and other challenges that continue to threaten the marketability of older people, thereby resulting in consequences for their financial, physical, social, psychological, and environmental wellbeing. Moreover, the report also stated few good practices in promoting elderly employment in the county, contrary to numerous efforts implemented by both the Hungarian government, non-government organisations, and other institutions, which remained unrecognised, perhaps due to limited data availability and gaps in the reporting schemes. Finally, the Barometer 2023 report was realized to be included and used as a part of the technical working papers of the European Economic and Social Committee, being the EU advisory body that deals on the issues and opinions regarding this matter.

The latest edition of the Barometer has the potential to spark positive changes among policymakers and decision-makers in acknowledging the economic potential of the elderly and in eliminating barriers that hinder elderly integration in the labour market. In the case of Hungary, substantial policies, programmes, and welfare services exist that facilitate elderly employment; however, challenges were also identified, hence the precise recommendations provided in the Barometer report must transform into reality, taking into consideration the unique national, local, and cultural peculiarities of Hungary and its local communities. It is also suggested that systematic data collection and good practice documentation must be facilitated

in Hungary, and feedback from the other 18 countries in the Barometer report must be thoroughly reviewed or benchmarked for possible inspiration and replication. Lastly, the potentials of the Barometer 2023 to be used at all levels of decision-making must be maximized.

**Az AGE Barometer 2023 áttekintése: Az idősebbek munkaerő-piaci helyzete, kritikák  
és az EU tagállamok jó gyakorlatai  
Magyarország esete**

**Kulcsszavak:** ageizmus, idősek, Magyarország, idősek, munkaerőpiac, AGE Barometer

**Absztrakt**

Az AGE Barometer 2023-as kiadását az Age Platform Europe jegyzi, melynek célja az európai statisztikákból és nemzeti szintű forrásokból származó adatok szintézise, és 19 európai ország, köztük Magyarország országszintű részletes adatainak elemzésén alapuló kritikák megfogalmazása és a tagországok jó gyakorlatainak bemutatása.

A kiadvány legfontosabb célja az idősebbek munkaerő-piaci szerepvállalásának erősítése, valamint a fenntartható és minőségi munkával töltött élet elősegítése.

A Barométerből kiderül, hogy az Európai Unió (EU) messze van attól, hogy elérje a 20 és 64 év közötti felnőttek 78%-os foglalkoztatottsági célját, a jelenlegi állapot 62,3%. Ennek okai az idősebbek munkaerő-piaci integrációjának különböző akadályai lehetnek, amelyek közé tartoznak a nem megfelelő támogató politikák, az ageizmus és a kedvezőtlen munkahelyi feltételek. Az eredmények mélyebb elemzése, különös tekintettel egy-egy ország, például a Magyarország-I adatok elemzése fontos lehet abban, hogy jobban megértsük az eredmények nemzeti és helyi kereteit, és hogy meghatározzuk az idősek munkaerő-piaci integrációját elősegítő politikákat és programokat, és azonosíthassuk a hiányosságokat.

Jelen írás különböző módszerek - kritikai elemzés, irodalmi és szakirodalmi áttekintés, valamint tematikus elemzés - alkalmazásával vizsgálta a Barométert és más releváns forrásokat.

**Introduction**

The Age Platform Europe has published the Barometer 2023, a specialised report aimed at improving and comprehending older people's socioeconomic conditions. The main goal of this year's publication is to encourage sustainable and excellent working lives for older individuals by empowering them in the workforce. The three main areas of concern addressed in the paper are age discrimination in the workplace, workplace accommodations for all age groups, and assistance for older workers in the labour market.

In addition to the relevance of the Barometer report, this article aimed to analyse the publication and review related literature to better understand the findings in the context of a specific country, in this case Hungary. Specifically, it aimed to:

1. Examine the general findings of Barometer 2023.
2. Scrutinise the findings of Barometer 2023 in the context of Hungary.
3. Determine good practices, such as existing policies, welfare programmes, and employment services, that contribute to the empowerment of older persons in the labour market in Hungary.
4. Identify challenges and barriers to the integration of older people into the labour market in Hungary.
5. Provide recommendations to address identified barriers and challenges.

Overall, this article serves as review material and a supplemental report, with special attention to the case of Hungary as a nation, providing local context on the existing best practices and local challenges in ensuring the employment of older persons.

## **Methodology**

Critical analysis was used to examine the findings of the Barometer 2023 while desk and literature review were used to determine existing policies, welfare programs, and employment services including identification of barriers and challenges in the empowerment of elderly in the labour market. Thematic analysis was also used to comprehensively present the findings of this study.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***The Barometer 2023 Report***

The Barometer 2023 edition, released by AGE Platform Europe, a network of non-profit organisations based in Brussels and co-funded by the EU, featured the economic empowerment of the elderly in accessing sustainable and quality status in the labour market in its latest publication. In its 2023 report, it revealed that the European Union is far from reaching its 2030 goal of having at least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 employed, based on the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, wherein only 62.3% of people aged 55 to 64 are employed. This means that there is an evident gap; hence, there is a need to eliminate the barriers that are blocking the elderly's employment opportunities and offer solutions that are tailored for them to have a quality life at work.

Featured also in the Barometer report are key findings in three main themes, such as (1) support in the labour market, (2) age discrimination, and (3) workplace conditions for older persons. To elaborate, the labour market support of older persons in terms of policies indicates exclusion, as almost half of older people aged 55 to 64 are unemployed. Moreover, the report highlighted the exclusion of older people from long-term employment opportunities, and more importantly, current policies focus on the "working age," thereby ignoring the potential economic contribution of elderlies ageing 65 and beyond. Ageism was also found to be one of the major barriers to employing older people. Unfavourable legislation such as setting age limits, ageist and homogenous views, and the absence of diversity of ages in the workplace contribute to the problem. Another challenge identified in the report is the unfavourable workplace setting, wherein most do not recognise age diversity, lack of mental health and well-being support, and the exclusion of some due to digitalization.

To ensure support in the labour market, the report recommended flexible life-course solutions, recognising the need to diversify people's experiences as they age by learning new skills or acquiring new degrees even at the later stages of life. Also, in the case of retired elderlies, better representation was advised to advance their social rights, and to support ageing jobseekers, a person-centred approach is suggested to allow individualised career plans and address employability gaps.

To end age discrimination, the unacceptability of age limits in the hiring process and the removal of mandatory retirement age must be observed with the adoption of the Employment

Equality Directive of the EU. Intersectionality and gender-inclusive strategies were also strongly recommended.

Finally, to promote health and safety at work, recognition and adaptation of workplace-specific needs, provision of mental and psychosocial support, observance of work-life balance, and proposed use of technology to support elderly workers are advocated.

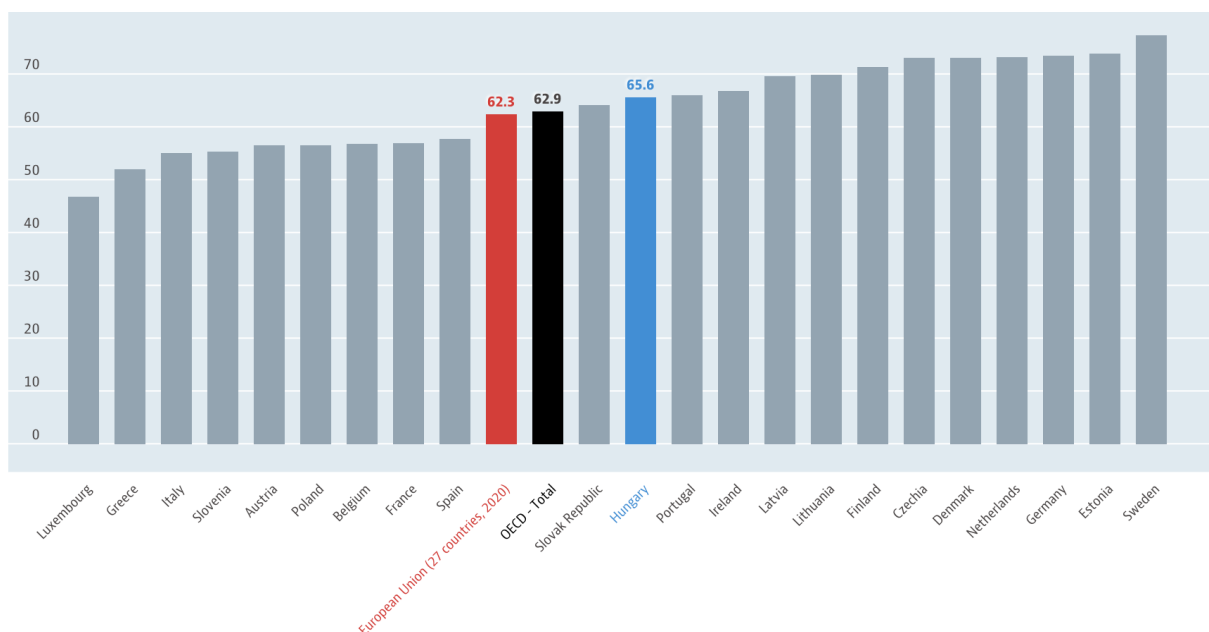
In summary, the Barometer 2023 edition highlighted the critical need to close the economic empowerment gap for older workers and to address the various obstacles that stand in the way of their ability to find work and improve their general well-being.

### ***The Barometer 2023 Report – The Case of Hungary: Best Practices and Initiatives***

In the case of Hungary, the Gerontology Science Coordination Centre, through desk research, provided insights into support mechanisms within the Hungarian labour market for older adults.

Based on the data, the country exhibited a notable employment rate among the elderly workforce aged 55 to 64, with a reported figure of 65.58% as shown in Figure 1 (OECD, 2022). This percentage surpasses the corresponding European Union average; however, this is also far from the target stipulated under the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Figure 1: Employment Rate of Older People Aging from 55–64-year-olds in the European Union in 2022.



Based on the same report, Hungary provided a favourable environment for older workers, as revealed by the recent Barometer. This positive atmosphere is characterized by legal protections against dismissal close to retirement age, financial incentives for individuals with extended service, and initiatives such as pensioner cooperatives that encourage the sustained employment of older individuals. Moreover, initiatives like the HelloIT program aim to address such disparities by training older women, particularly those in rural areas, in digital skills to enhance their employability. However, disparities exist due to schemes like “Women 40”, an opportunity for women to retire at an early age, after completion of 40 years of work experiences with full benefits, though this put premium in the recognition of caregiving burdens experienced mostly by women, this strategy may lead to lower women employment rates, which also may lead to possible financial loss and premature career growth.

To counteract age discrimination, Hungary has established effective mechanisms. The Equal Treatment Authority plays a crucial role in addressing discrimination complaints, while the nation's commitment to the European Diversity Charter underscores its dedication to promoting equal treatment in the workplace. Moreover, Hungary's occupational safety laws specifically target psychosocial risks, emphasizing the need for a secure and inclusive work environment suitable for all age groups.

### ***Challenges in the Employment of Elderly in Hungary***

Based on thematic analysis of various published articles and the Barometer 2023, the following were perceived as barriers in the elderly integration in the labour market.

- 1.1 Unfavourable Policies
- 1.2 Gender Disparities
- 1.3 Rise in Ageing Population
- 1.4 Migration Practices and Policies
- 1.5 Technology Constraints
- 1.6 Ageism
- 1.7 Political Interests
- 1.8 Traditional and Cultural Views

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The most recent Barometer edition has the potential to significantly influence policymakers and decision-makers in a favourable way, especially when it comes to acknowledging the economic contributions of the elderly and removing obstacles that prevent them from fully participating in the labour market. While there are noteworthy social services, laws, and programmes in Hungary that support older workers, there are also issues that highlight how important it is to turn the specific suggestions made in the Barometer study into workable projects. Hungary's distinctive national, local, and cultural landscapes, as well as the distinctive qualities of its communities, must be taken into consideration when interpreting this transition.

Furthermore, it is vital to advocate for systematic data collection and the documentation of best practices within Hungary. By doing so, a foundation can be laid for evidence-based decision-making and the replication of successful models. Additionally, leveraging insights and experiences from the other 18 countries featured in the Barometer report offers a valuable opportunity for cross-national learning and inspiration. By thoroughly reviewing and benchmarking these insights, Hungary can gather valuable lessons and potentially adapt effective strategies to its own context.

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