

## **Digital inequalities among managers over 50: The importance of age, education, and additional qualifications\***

**Katerina Katsarska**

**Abstract.** The article analyses digital inequalities among managers and entrepreneurs over the age of 50 in the city of Sofia. The study aims to present exclusionary and discriminatory practices based on age, educational attainment, and professional qualifications among business managers over 50.

The analysis is grounded on qualitative methods. Using an intersectional approach, it explores the strategies for coping with exclusion and discrimination, with attention to differences related to gender, age, and education. In conclusion, public policies regarding digitalization are discussed.

**Keywords:** digital inequalities, age, discrimination, gender

### **Introduction**

Research from the last five years related to workers over 50 primarily focuses on policies aimed at extending working life, integrating older individuals into the labour market (OECD 2020a), employment, and job opportunities for people over 50 (European Commission 2018). A significant portion of the studies on workers over 50 emphasize the importance of access to training and additional qualifications for older workers.

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training published a report stating that many older employees in Europe need new skills to keep their jobs, especially in the context of digitalization and automation (Cedefop 2021).

The importance of the participation of older employees in training and qualification programmes is highlighted by most studies on employees over 50

---

\* This paper was developed within the framework of the project “Digital Divide and Social Inequalities: Levels, Actors, and Interplay”, funded by the National Science Fund at the Ministry of Education and Science, under contract KII-06 ПН55/7 (2021-2024).

in Europe. A 2020 OECD study analyses the participation of workers over 50 in continuing education and training programmes, showing that older employees are less likely to participate in training and reskilling programmes compared to younger employees (OECD 2020b).

An important conclusion from the study is that when older employees have access to programmes for further training and improving computer literacy, they significantly enhance their skills and employment prospects. A report by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) highlights the importance of individualized training programmes that take into account the specific needs of working employees (Eurofound 2022).

A 2023 study by the European Commission shows that participation of workers over 50 in lifelong learning programmes significantly increases the chances of older employees remaining in the labour market being active workers (European Commission 2023).

A study by the International Labour Organization (ILO) examines the digital skills of older employees and concludes that employees over 50 face difficulties in learning new technologies. However, tailored training programmes can significantly facilitate the educational process and help them acquire and improve their computer skills (ILO 2021).

These studies demonstrate the importance of training to maintain the competitiveness of older workers in the labour market, as well as the need for tailored programmes that address their specific needs. A 2021 study by the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce<sup>1</sup> shows that in Bulgaria, older employees are eager to learn and improve their digital skills, but often there are not enough opportunities and resources to provide such training.

This study focuses on the group of managers over the age of 50 in Sofia. It analyses workplace exclusion practices based on age and educational factors. The study pays attention to digital inequalities within the examined group and determines the importance of education for older employees.

The analysis employs qualitative methods (focus group discussions with male and female managers over 50 in Sofia, as well as ten in-depth interviews) and is viewed through an intersectional approach. It interprets age and educational discrimination and the public policies applied to the over-50 age group in relation to discrimination.

The study seeks to answer three main questions: First, what exclusionary and discriminatory practices are applied in the workplace towards people over 50? Second, what role do education and additional qualifications play in their active participation in the labour market? And third, how do digital inequalities manifest among the older age group?

---

<sup>1</sup> Results from the BCC Project “Inspired by Experience: Staying Together Longer - Path to Success”, funded by the European Social Fund through the Human Resources Development Operational Programme, 2019-2021.

## **Theoretical framework**

The analysis of the results in this article is based on intersectional theory. According to researchers who deeply investigate issues related to inequalities, stratification, and discrimination, the intersectional approach is the most suitable tool for interpreting a complex and multidimensional subject, such as the group of employees over 50 years old (McCall 2001; Stoilova 2022). The intersectional approach encompasses many and diverse factors of inequality, such as gender, age, education, ethnicity, and others. This approach is suitable for analysing various social situations - both in the workplace and in different life cases (Stoilova 2022).

With the help of the intersectional approach, a deep understanding of the interactions between identity, inequalities, and contextuality can be achieved (McCall 2005). This tool allows for the examination of complex social situations and the exploration of various degrees of social inequalities in society. Intersectionality enables the analysis of how factors of social stratification (such as gender, ethnicity, age, education, etc.) are interrelated and the extent of their impact. It allows for tracing how and in what situations these factors intersect, the nature of their relationships, and whether some factors are in a privileged position relative to others (McCall 2005).

The intersectional approach is crucial for understanding social phenomena in their entirety, exploration of societal inequalities, and comprehension of the totality of social identity. This approach enables the study of exclusion and marginalization by examining how different identity categories influence each other, intersect, and are involved in complex relationships. It allows for understanding of the impact and action of each factor individually, as well as collectively and holistically.

The tool enables the separate study of different factors (such as gender, ethnicity, age, education, etc.) and the relationships between them (McCall 2005). The approach helps to identify which factors work together to explain situations of marginalization or exclusion (Hancock 2007). It is important to note that no category is inherently in a better position than another; all categories are initially situated on equal footing and no category holds a privileged position. The approach allows for the examination of the influence and interaction of multiple categories simultaneously and in their interconnectedness.

In this study, the relationship and interaction between the factors of age, gender, and education will be explored. The analysis will investigate the position of each factor relative to the others, whether one factor has a stronger influence compared to another, and the outcomes of the combination of these factors.

## **Discrimination**

Studies on inequalities often link the intersectional approach with discrimination. This tool is used as one of the most suitable for examining situations where there is unequal treatment between groups and for resolving conflicts. The approach allows for understanding how different forms of discrimination exist in complex relationships and influence each other.

Kimberlé Crenshaw concludes in her research that discrimination, as a process, is experienced as intersecting lines of oppression (Crenshaw 1991). This approach helps to understand the complex connections, dependencies, and intersections of discrimination. Categories of stratification often do not operate in isolation but are combined, related, and intersect. Depending on the situation and context, different types of discrimination are usually combined and interconnected (McCall 2005).

When studying inequalities, marginalization, and discrimination in the workplace, it typically involves institutional or corporate discrimination, which can manifest either directly or indirectly.

In corporate discrimination, a specific group of people or an individual has less access to opportunities, resources, or benefits compared to other groups.

Direct discrimination involves overt and explicit unequal treatment of one individual or group toward another group. Indirect discrimination in a corporate environment involves rules and policies that, when applied, place certain groups in a disadvantaged and unequal position relative to other groups.

By applying the intersectional approach, the connections between different forms of inequality, their relationships, and whether any of the factors of stratification have a stronger influence on the manifestation of discrimination compared to other components of stratification can be revealed. The approach encompasses many and diverse lines of identity, meaning that individuals can be excluded and marginalized across more than one category simultaneously (Crenshaw 1991). Forms of discrimination typically do not act in isolation but are interconnected.

The intersectional approach examines how different forms of social identity - such as gender, ethnicity, education, and others - interact, overlap, and create situations with power dynamics of oppression and privilege among different groups of individuals. The core concept of intersectionality is that social dynamics and phenomena cannot be fully understood if identity categories are considered in isolation rather than in their wholeness. It is necessary to analyse the intersections of identity factors to understand the complete picture of social inequalities.

## **Age**

To understand how and to what extent age interacts with other categories of social identity (such as gender, education, etc.), research on inequalities and stratification often analyses age and intersectionality in their connection and unity. This is particularly important in cases where work-related issues and situations are examined (such as entering the labour market or retirement). Applying the intersectional approach is crucial to understand the extent to which age is a factor in processes of discrimination and exclusion. The study explores how life processes relate to social categories, leading to situations where power is unevenly distributed, with some individuals in subordinate positions to others.

In the article, age is considered a social construct. The significance of certain actions is created and maintained through shared common understandings and

social practices within groups in society (Berger, Luckmann 1966). I operate under the understanding that age is a product of social interaction and socially shared perception of the category. I base this on the idea that age is not merely a biological characteristic but a social construct, created and sustained through everyday practices and repeated actions in various situations. Age is an “action” performed by individuals, based on social expectations, norms, and constructs. I accept that the perception of age results from complex and uneven power relations and practices that are persistent and maintained over time. Social expectations and attitudes regarding age are multidimensional and are related to and interact with other phenomena and social factors (Cruikshank 2013).

For women, multiple discrimination is often present, as exclusion is observed not only due to age but also due to other factors - such as gender, education, ethnicity, and others - which usually act together. My hypothesis in the study is that women over 50 will be subject to much greater discrimination and exclusion compared to men.

### **Gender**

Similar to the category of age, the category of gender is also analysed through the lens of the intersectional approach to determine and understand the significance of the factor both individually and in interaction with other categories in the manifestation of discrimination. Gender is a category that has a strong influence on processes of discrimination and exclusion and plays a significant role in social phenomena (Crenshaw 1991).

Like age, I view gender as a social construct. I adopt Judith Butler’s perspective on gender, which posits that gender is a social construct maintained through everyday actions and practices (Butler 1990). The core of this concept is that evaluations of individuals and their actions are framed by social norms and expectations related to gender.

### **Education**

The present study examines the role of education in creating inequalities among the group of working managers in the business sector. Education is considered a factor, similar to gender and age, that contributes to processes of exclusion and marginalization among working older adults. The study will investigate the factor of education both on its own and in combination with other categories to determine whether it leads to processes of discrimination.

### **Data and method**

The study highlights working practices of exclusion in the workplace. It explores how discrimination and marginalization of managers over 50 can occur based on education, gender, and age.

Using qualitative methods (focus group discussions with male and female managers over 50 in the business sector and ten in-depth interviews - five with female managers and five with male managers), the study analyses and interprets

the role of education, age, and gender in exclusion and discrimination in the workplace for both male and female managers.

The subject of the study is individuals in managerial positions, and since it addresses sensitive questions related to respondents' opinions, attitudes, and evaluations regarding the influence of gender and age on their career development and job tasks, a qualitative analysis method has been chosen. The strengths of this method lie in its ability to deeply examine the posed problem, provide an opportunity to share personal experiences and stories, analyse cause-and-effect relationships, and adapt questions flexibly depending on respondents' answers. The method is suitable for complex questions and topics requiring personal experiences and sharing, offering highly informative data (including verbal and non-verbal information) that aid subsequent interpretation and analysis.

For the analysis in this study, one group discussion and ten in-depth interviews were conducted with managers (men and women over 50 years old) working in the business sector (see Tables 1 and 2). Key industries were purposefully selected based on their high dynamism and significant impact on the labour market. These industries employ a large number of people and are critical for business and economic development, including the banking sector, telecommunications, IT companies, PR agencies, media agencies, transportation companies, large food retail chains, and bookstores. All companies employing the studied managers are foreign firms operating in Bulgaria, and all respondents are ethnically Bulgarian, living and working in Bulgaria.

**Table 1.** Information for participants Group discussion

Gender	Educa- tion	Age	Position	Industry	Com- pany category	Company location	Ethnicity
Male	higher	54	marketing manager	IT com- pany	foreign company	Germany	Bulgarian
Female	higher	53	marketing manager	bank	foreign company	Belgium	Bulgarian
Female	higher	56	manager operation	financial company for quick loans	foreign company	Italy	Bulgarian
Male	higher	54	warehouse manager	logistics company	foreign company	France	Bulgarian
Female	higher	57	manager	cosmetics	foreign company	Bulgaria	Bulgarian
Male	higher	58	manager	food	foreign company	Bulgaria	Bulgarian

**Table 2.** Information for participants In-depth interviews

Gender	Education	Age	Position	Industry	Company category	Company location	Ethnicity
Female	higher	57	marketing manager	PR agency	foreign company	Bulgaria	Bulgarian
Female	higher	59	manager	sportswear company	foreign company	Bulgaria	Bulgarian
Female	higher	58	process manager	food industry	foreign company	Greece	Bulgarian
Female	higher	57	marketing department	mobile operator	foreign company	Austria	Bulgarian
Female	higher	58	IT manager	bank	foreign company	Belgium	Bulgarian
Male	higher	53	media agency	media	foreign company	Austria	Bulgarian
Male	higher	51	research manager	media	foreign company	Italy	Bulgarian
Male	higher	59	logistic manager	food chain	foreign company	Greece	Bulgarian
Male	higher	55	shop manager	large bookstore chain	foreign company	Netherlands	Bulgarian
Male	higher	60	transport manager	transport company	foreign company	Belgium	Bulgarian

The main selection criteria for respondents were: holding a managerial position, being over 50 years old, and having at least three years of managerial experience. The respondents do not know each other, represent various industries and companies, and were chosen to achieve maximally objective information while minimizing individual biases.

The limitations of the method are that the results pertain only to the studied individuals and are not representative of the industries or companies in which the respondents work. However, the data provide a good orientation and can serve as a basis for a representative quantitative study on prejudices and attitudes related to age and gender in the workplace.

## Analysis of results

### Importance of age

The results indicate that age is perceived by respondents as one of the most significant barriers to career development for individuals over 50. Age is associated with slow task performance, difficulties in work and an inability to adapt to new work.

*“Once someone passes 50, they become slower, find it harder to grasp things, and it’s more difficult to teach them at this age”* (male, 54 years old, higher education, marketing manager at an IT company for the external market).

Experience among employees over 50 is considered their asset (Taylor 2018), but the study records it is often associated with higher financial demands and expectations for higher positions. Taylor’s research also emphasizes the importance of experience and the application of leadership skills in older managers (Taylor 2018). The study revealed that some managers were appointed to leadership roles primarily due to their extensive experience. Their deep understanding of the company’s processes positioned them as ideal for managerial roles.

*“I had been with the company for 12 years before being promoted to manager. A new department was formed, and I was made the head of the department. No one knows the processes better than I do”* (male, 60 years old, higher education, Transport manager).

The importance of flexibility in working conditions is emphasized by Naegele (Naegele, Walker 1997), who highlights the role of lifelong learning in ensuring that managers remain adaptable, flexible, and competitive. By fostering continuous development, older workers can enhance their skills and remain effective in the workplace despite the challenges posed by an aging workforce. This flexibility helps managers stay relevant in rapidly changing work environments, ensuring their competitiveness.

The lack of career development is linked to age and the associated attitudes, stereotypes, and prejudices. The factor of age has a strong influence on the manifestation of discriminatory practices related to work tasks, training, and especially career development, which is more pronounced for women.

*“In our company, for all important trainings or events, we send the younger members of our team. A girl joined the department who asked me about everything - she has half of my experience. I explained all the processes and after a few months, she became my boss”* (female, 53 years old, higher education, marketing manager at a bank).

Career stagnation is explained by respondents as age discrimination. The study observes (similarly to Taylor 2018) that older managers are perceived as less adaptable.

*“We updated our company’s website to a modern version. Older employees found it more challenging to navigate, struggling to figure out where to click”* (female, 56 years old, higher education, manager operations).

The category of age has a very strong influence, although in some cases, the combination of gender and age also leads to exclusion.

*“In our agency, high-level managerial positions are occupied by men. Gender discrimination, particularly when combined with age, significantly impacts the career development of women...”* (female, 57 years old, higher education, marketing manager at a PR agency).

The narratives of the respondents clearly reveal the asymmetry in task assignments and professional development for employees. Generally, women over 50 are assigned less important tasks compared to their younger female colleagues and male peers of the same age. We observe discrimination against female managers over 50 in relation to two groups: younger women with whom they work and men of their age group. In both cases, these women are in a disadvantaged position and lower professional positions in the hierarchy.

The generally shared social-constructed understanding of age in the corporate world places women in a marginalized position and assigns them a “supporting” role regarding the importance of work tasks.

*“I handle less important tasks - the more responsible projects are assigned to colleagues who have less of my experience and skills”* (female, 59 years old, higher education, manager at a sportswear company).

The results make it clear that age alone is a very strong excluding and discriminatory factor. The social construction of age and the implicitly accepted attitudes of corporations towards employees over 50 place them in a situation of discrimination and act as a barrier to their career development.

The study found that achieving work-life balance is crucial for managers over 50 years old.

*“Work is very important to me, but so is having time for my family. I can’t work 12 hours a day and have no time for my family”* (female, 58 years old, higher education, IT manager).

This highlights a preference for structured work hours and prioritizing personal well-being alongside professional responsibilities.

Anne Hilsen (Midtsundstad, Hilsen 2019) reaches similar conclusions, emphasizing that flexible working conditions and a good balance between work and personal life enable many managers to achieve high performance, extend their professional careers, and become more motivated and productive.

### **Importance of gender**

Hill and Brown (Hill, Brown 2011) emphasize the critical role of flexible working practices and their direct connection to improving productivity and

retaining managers over 50 in organizations. This conclusion was also confirmed in the conducted research:

*“If there is an option for flexible working hours and flexibility in the workplace location, it would definitely attract me, even more than a salary increase...”* (female, 59 years old, higher education, manager at a sportswear company).

Flexible working hours and workplace flexibility are preferred over salary increases or monetary bonuses by women managers over the age of 50.

In his research, Northouse underlines that stereotypes and prejudices remain a significant barrier to the career advancement of women leaders (Northouse 2021).

Stereotypes about women in high-level positions have a significant impact, as concluded by the study.

*“In our company, women in leadership positions are few and far between...”* (female, 57 years old, higher education, marketing manager at a PR agency).

Gender is also an important factor that plays a major role in excluding women from significant work processes and acts as a barrier to their career development. For women over 50, discrimination in the workplace is much more apparent than it is for men. According to the respondents, career advancement for women is much slower and more difficult compared to men.

*“In our female-only department, career advancement is much slower and much more difficult”* (female, 58 years old, higher education, manager at a foreign company).

Women are excluded from educational and computer courses and training, often without being given an explanation. Instead, younger women or male colleagues are sent.

*“The department head decides who to send”* (female, 57 years old, higher education, manager in the marketing department of a mobile operator).

Gender is the criterion used for task distribution. This is especially true in IT companies, where it is difficult to find women in high managerial positions. Women are perceived as not being technologically proficient enough.

*“I feel discrimination as a woman - I was given more basic tasks, as they thought I wasn't technically proficient enough. It takes a lot more time to prove yourself, much more than if you were a man...”* (female, 58 years old, higher education, IT manager at a foreign company).

Just like with age, the social construct of gender plays a decisive role in the treatment of women in the workplace and their career development. Social norms and expectations do not associate women with certain professions and

work activities. In this regard, teaching, administrative, and similar professions are often categorized as 'female', while IT professions and others are considered 'male'. Women are not associated with more technological professions and activities. For this reason, almost all positions in the IT sector are seen as 'male', and the field is generally considered 'more male'. Women are not sent to computer training, as it is believed that men are quicker to grasp. The combination of gender and age leads to multiple discrimination and exclusion of women from work processes, training, and career development opportunities. Both factors have a strong influence individually, but their combination leads to the marginalization of women.

### **Importance of education and further qualification**

In his research, Northouse summarizes that successful leaders continue to learn throughout their careers in order to meet the labour market demands and remain adaptable to the changing environment (Northouse 2021).

Lifelong learning are mentioned by all respondents as tools for overcoming the effects of marginalization and discrimination of employees over 50 years old.

*“Our field is such that continuous learning is essential. You have to keep learning if you want to excel in your job”* (male, 54 years old, higher education, marketing manager at an IT company for the external market).

Competitiveness, job relevance, and career development opportunities are the driving forces behind ongoing education throughout one's career. Training is seen as a mandatory requirement, necessary for employees to perform their duties and remain relevant in the job market.

*“In my department, there are employees over 50 years old who pay for their own training, take courses, and earn certificates to remain capable and competitive in their roles...”* (female, 58 years old, higher education, manager at a foreign company).

Training and experience are elements that employees often highlight to justify their financial claims or to attain a higher position within the hierarchy.

*“I have extensive professional experience and constantly upgrade my skills. It is normal for me to seek a higher position and higher pay...”* (female, 58 years old, higher education, manager at a foreign company).

On the other hand, updated knowledge leads to higher efficiency and better productivity.

*“Training is very useful for me; after completing a course, I can work faster and do not need to ask colleagues for help”* (female, 57 years old, higher education, manager in the marketing department of a mobile operator).

Not least, employee training and qualifications increase job satisfaction and motivation. Employees feel valued by the company and supported in their professional development. Through training, employees feel competent and involved in the work process, which makes them more committed to the company. Educational courses help employees feel confident, enabling them to adapt more quickly and easily to the changing work processes.

*“I am satisfied with my job. I am constantly learning, I enjoy it, and I like my colleagues. I am happy where I am...”* (female, 57 years old, higher education, manager in the marketing department of a mobile operator).

Education for employees over 50 is of great importance in maintaining their professional competence, relevance, motivation, and job satisfaction. Training courses are essential for the professional adaptability of employees and contribute to increasing their productivity. In our dynamic society, it is very important to cultivate and instill a culture of lifelong learning in the older generation, so that employees can remain competitive in the labour market.

### **Digital inequalities**

Recent research on gender has shown that women have more limited opportunities to develop digital skills compared to men (James 2020). The study by Deursen highlights how women have less access and more restricted opportunities to use digital technologies (Van Deursen, Van Dijk 2019). These findings were also confirmed by the conducted research.

The data from the study indicate that there are digital inequalities between younger and older employees. For employees over 50, the introduction of new technologies and work models is associated with the need to update and refresh their digital knowledge and skills. The work environment is dynamic, which requires employees to stay up-to-date with current digital and computer trends in order to remain competitive in the labour market.

*“New versions of programs and various updates are constantly being released. It’s challenging for me. With new technologies, there should be training”* (male, 53 years old, higher education, manager at a media agency).

Courses in computer and digital literacy, training in new software platforms and projects lead to an enhancement of professional qualifications and competencies. They are essential for employees over 50 to remain relevant in the labour market, feel valued, and actively contribute to the company’s competitiveness.

*“No matter how difficult it is for me, I will need to take a computer course, because otherwise, I won’t have the necessary knowledge and skills for the job, and I might have to retire earlier...”* (female, 58 years old, higher education, manager at a foreign company).

The results indicate that digital inequalities are also associated with the fear of job cuts and the potential for employees over 50 to lose their jobs. While Bulgarian employers struggle to find qualified personnel with digital skills, they often do not invest in employee training or qualification, highlighting that digitalization poses significant challenges, particularly for micro and small enterprises, which require targeted state policies and financial incentives to support the adoption of digital technologies (Petkova 2023).

### **Public policies**

Public policies targeting older employees are crucial for enhancing their competitiveness in the labour market, improving the quality of their work and their overall quality of life.

Retraining and education programmes are vital tools for professional development and play a significant role in retaining older managers in the workforce. In this context, providing free or subsidized qualification courses is essential for integrating older employees into new technologies and professional challenges.

Introducing “quotas” for hiring older employees would significantly reduce discrimination against those over 50 and provide them with legal protection.

Flexible working hours in companies would also help older employees better balance work and personal life, facilitating the combination of work with health-related responsibilities.

An important finding from the conducted research is that digital and computer skills are more important for older managers than for younger managers under 35 years of age.

Mentorship programmes, where older managers can share and transfer their experience to younger generations, would significantly contribute to reducing the exclusion and marginalization of older workers in the workplace. Such programmes would make them feel valued and boost their self-esteem.

These are just a few examples of public policies that, if implemented, would significantly improve the quality of life for older employees and encourage their active participation in economic and social life.

### **Conclusions and discussion**

In summary, it can be concluded that the factor of age alone, as a separate variable, and the combination of age and gender factors have a significant impact on the exclusion and discrimination of managers over 50 from work tasks and processes. The interaction of age and gender factors is crucial for the multiple discrimination faced by women over 50 in managerial positions in Bulgaria and it largely constitutes a serious barrier to their career development.

Stereotypes about men and women over 50 in society and the entrenched corporate attitudes towards their roles in the workplace play a central role in the exclusion of older employees. The study identifies that women over 50 are discriminated against to a greater extent compared to men - women are assigned lighter and more elementary tasks, have less access to training and professional qualification courses, and their career development is often stagnant.

The current study aimed to understand the practices of exclusion in the workplace for managers over 50 years old in Bulgaria. The data from the study reveal that, in the work environment, employees over 50 are most frequently excluded from important company projects and tasks, being assigned less significant ones instead. This mechanism of discrimination is applied more forcefully to women, who are given easier and more elementary projects and tasks. Another mechanism of exclusion observed is career stagnation and lack of professional development.

The second research question concerns the role of educational courses and additional qualifications for older employees. The results indicate that the most important and effective tool for overcoming discrimination and inequalities in the workplace is training. All interviewed respondents stated that they participate in or plan to participate in training and courses in the near future to remain competitive in the labour market. This way, they advance their careers and minimize the chances of career stagnation. Educational qualifications play a crucial role in ensuring that employees remain relevant in a changing and dynamic world, providing them with confidence and motivating them to work and develop professionally.

And in response to the last research question - digital inequalities arise because many older employees have not received training. Companies either lack the resources to allocate for employee training or, when resources are available, younger colleagues are most often selected for training.

In conclusion, the study presents the discrimination of managers over 50 in Bulgaria as a result of the combination and interaction of gender and age factors. The research highlights the strong influence of these two factors individually, as well as their combination, on the professional development of employees and their significant role in career stagnation. The results of the study and subsequent analysis through the lens of an intersectional approach further emphasize the importance of a deep understanding of cases of inequality and discrimination in society.

## References

- Berger, Luckmann 1966:** P. Berger, T. Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966.
- Butler 1990:** J. Butler. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Cedefop 2021:** Cedefop. *Upskilling and Reskilling in Europe: Responding to the Challenges of an Ageing Workforce, 2021*. Available at: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en> [Accessed: 5 May 2025].
- Crenshaw 1991:** K. Crenshaw. Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. - *Stanford Law Review*, 43, 1991, 6, 1241-1299.
- Cruikshank 2013:** M. Cruikshank. *Learning to Be Old: Gender, Culture, and Aging*. 3rd ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013.
- Eurofound 2022:** Adapting Training Programmes for Older Workers: A Review of Good Practices in Europe. Eurofound, 2022. Available at: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2022/adapting-training-programmes-for-older-workers-review-good-practices-in-europe> [Accessed: 5 May 2025].

- European Commission 2018:** The Employment of Older Workers: Some Socio-Economic Policy Perspectives from the European Union. European Commission, 2018. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8111&type=2&furtherPubs=yes> [Accessed: 5 May 2025].
- European Commission 2023:** Lifelong Learning and the Labour Market Integration of Older Workers in the EU. European Commission, 2023.
- Hancock 2007:** A. M. Hancock, When multiplication doesn't equal quick addition: Examining intersectionality as a research paradigm. - *Perspectives on Politics*, 5, 2007, 1, 63-79.
- Hill, Brown 2011:** E. J. Hill, S. M. Brown. Workplace flexibility and aging workforce: A gender perspective. - *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 26, 2011, 4, 315-330.
- ILO 2021:** Digital Skills Training for Older Workers: Challenges and Opportunities. ILO, 2021. Available at: <https://www.ilo.org/research-and-publications> [Accessed: 5 May 2025].
- James 2020:** J. James. Inequalities in the Digital Economy: The Internet and Beyond. Taylor & Francis, 2020.
- McCall 2001:** L. McCall. Complex Inequality: Gender, Class, and Race in the New Economy. Routledge, 2001.
- McCall 2005:** L. McCall. The complexity of intersectionality. - *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30, 2005, 3, 1771-1800.
- Midtsundstad, Hilsen 2019:** T. Midtsundstad, I. A. Hilsen. Engagement - including the elderly's participation in work and working life. Fafo, 2019.
- Naegele, Walker 1997:** G. Naegele, A. Walker. Measures to Combat Age Barriers in Employment: A European Research Report. European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 1997.
- Northouse 2021:** P. G. Northouse. Leadership: Theory and Practice. 9th ed. Sage, 2021.
- OECD 2020a:** Working Better with Age. Ageing and Employment Policies. OECD Publishing, Paris, 2020. Available at: [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/working-better-with-age\\_c4d4f66a-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/working-better-with-age_c4d4f66a-en.html) [Accessed: 5 May 2025].
- OECD 2020b:** Training and Work: Older Workers' Experience in Lifelong Learning and Continuing Vocational Education and Training. OECD, 2020.
- Petkova 2023:** К. Петкова. Дигитализацията: Новото предизвикателство пред работодателите. - В: Сборник доклади от Годишна университетска научна конференция на НВУ „Васил Левски“, 8-9 юни 2023. Т. 10. Велико Търново: НВУ „Васил Левски“, 2023, 31-40. (K. Petkova. Digitalizatsiyata: Novoto predizvikatelstvo pred rabotodatelite. - V: Sbornik dokladi ot Godishna universitetska nauchna konferentsiya na NVU „Vasil Levski“, 8-9 yuni 2023. T. 10. Veliko Tarnovo: NVU „Vasil Levski“, 2023, 31-40.)
- Stoilova 2022:** R. Stoilova. An Intersectional Approach to Educational Inequalities. - *Critique & Humanism*, 57, 2022, 2, 119-133.
- Taylor 2018:** P. Taylor. Directing advocacy on older workers' employment: What value are efforts targeting workplace ageism? - *Innovation in Aging*, 2, 2018, Suppl\_1, 442. Available at: [https://academic.oup.com/innovateage/article/2/suppl\\_1/442/5170236](https://academic.oup.com/innovateage/article/2/suppl_1/442/5170236) [Accessed: 5 May 2025].
- Van Deursen, Van Dijk 2019:** A. J. A. M. van Deursen, J. A. G. M. van Dijk. The first-level digital divide shifts from inequalities in physical access to inequalities in material access. - *New Media & Society*, 21, 2019, 2, 354-375.

**Senior Assist. Prof. Dr. Katerina Katsarska**  
 Institute of Philosophy and Sociology  
 Bulgarian Academy of Sciences  
 13A Moskovska Str.  
 1000 Sofia, Bulgaria  
 Email: katerina.katsarska@ips.bas.bg