



BRIDGING THE AGE GAP – DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL PARTNERS’ INITIATIVES FOR MANAGING AGE RELATED CHALLENGES

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY OF THE “AGEGAP” PROJECT



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THE SURVEY WAS TAKEN IN FRAME OF THE AGE GAP PROJECT, IN THE
COOPERATION OF MGYOSZ-BUSINESS HUNGARY AND KOPINT-TARKI
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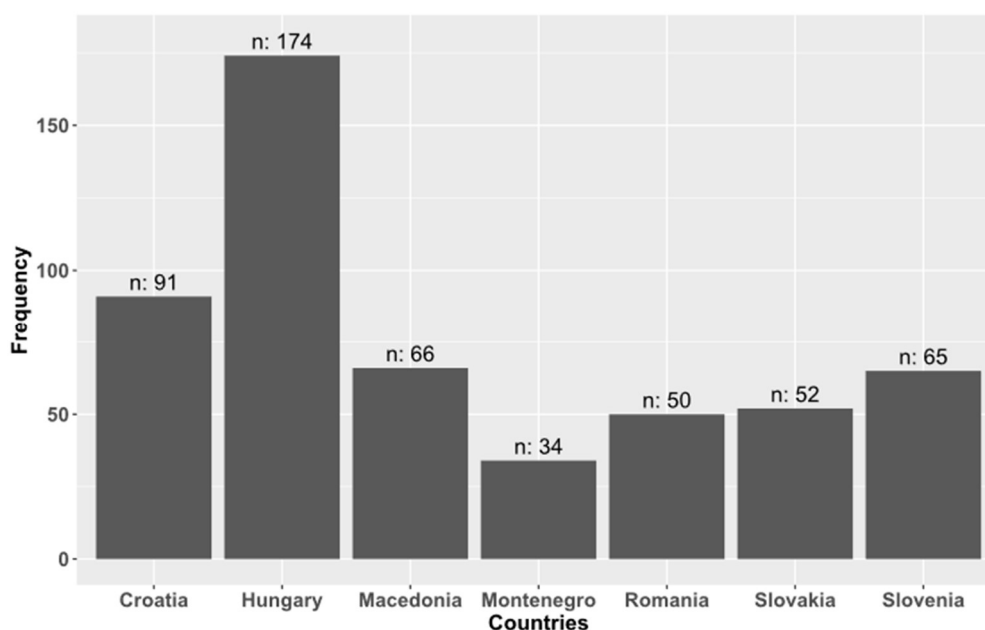
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Analysis of collected surveys

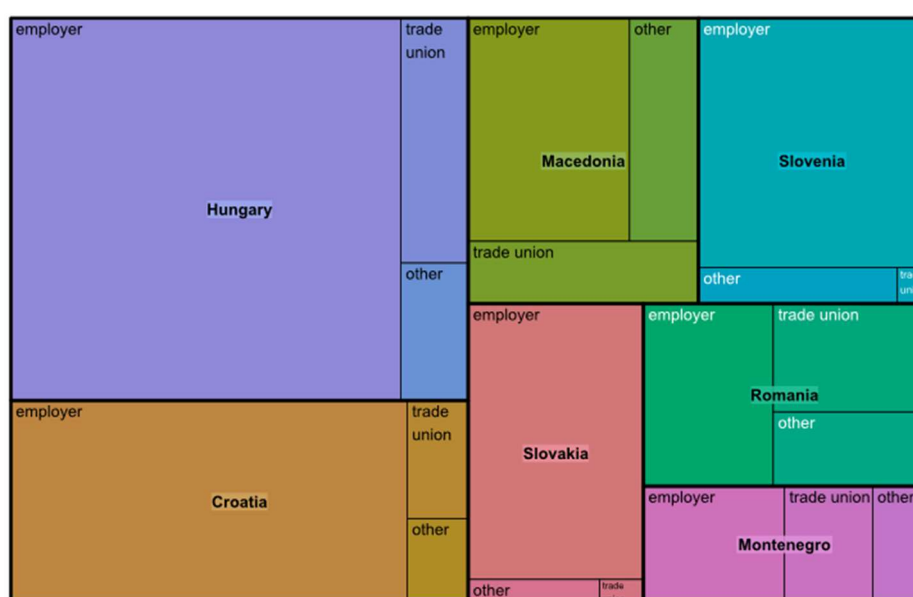
A multi-lingual survey was conducted between October 2019 and April 2020 in the 7 countries participating in the study. Altogether 532 surveys were collected by the national partners. 70% of the questions were answered and no imputations were made concerning the nature of the study.

1. Figure: Number of surveys returned by the national partners



Respondents were chosen randomly ensuring the representativeness of the survey. Most of them were employers (77%) as they are the most affected actor struggling with aging labour force. Trade unions (13%) are also represented in the sample just as other organisations (10%) like associations, NGOs etc.

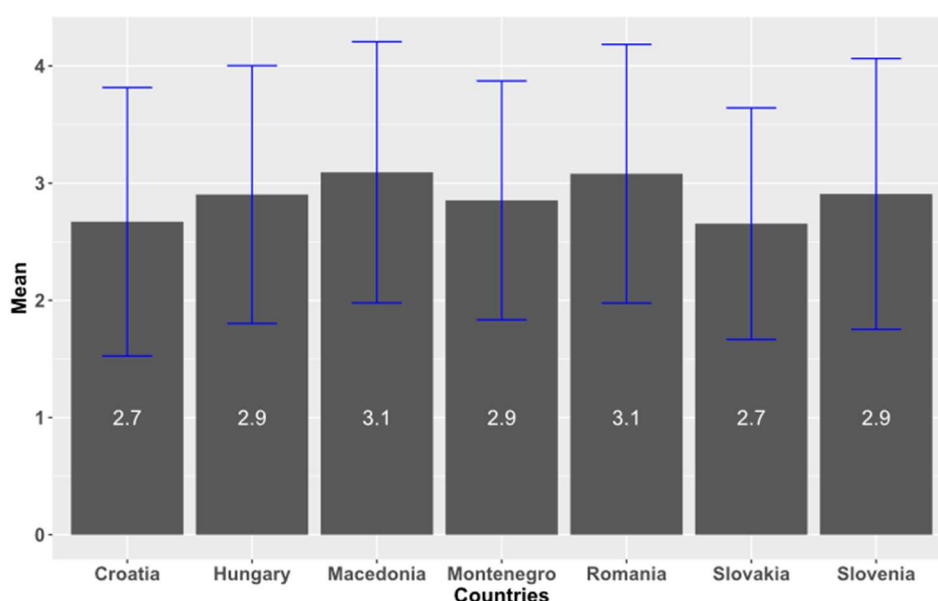
2. Figure: Distribution of respondents by type of organisation



Evaluation of survey questions

Respondents were asked to assess the current intergenerational issues at their organisation. Younger age group was criticised for not being loyal to their employers for their lack of motivation in their job. However, the overall average evaluation is not explicitly poor (2.9 out of 5, where 1 is the best and 5 is the worst), although 22% of the respondents graded the statement to 4 which means that a bit more than a fifth of the organisations experienced serious problems with the younger generation. Countries do not differ significantly in that aspect, the national averages vary around 3.

3. Figure: Evaluation of younger generation's loyalty and motivation (1: no problem at all, 5: serious problems)



Countries rather disagree that fluctuation would be strong among the young employees. Slovakia and Croatia reported that the variation of the number of the younger co-workers cause no or minor problems only. Other nations have manageable issues, thus this is definitely not a serious matter in the region.

1. Table: Evaluation of fluctuation among young employees (1: no problem at all, 5: serious problems)

Country	Mean	Median	Standard deviation
Croatia	2.53	2	1.19
Hungary	3.03	3	1.17
North-Macedonia	3.03	3	1.32
Montenegro	2.97	3	1
Romania	3.04	3	1.16
Slovakia	2.63	2	1.24
Slovenia	2.77	3	1.26
TOTAL	2.87	3	1.21

ANOVA test of cross-country variances					
	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	Pr(>F)
Country	6	22.4	3.727	2.591	0.0175 *
Residuals	522	750.9	1.439		

Respondents in the region agree that the knowledge of the older generation is not a concern. Although in Montenegro and North-Macedonia medians are somewhat higher, averages do not differ significantly from other countries. The regional mean is 2.4 which indicates on 1-5 scale (where 1 is the best evaluation) that older generation is in the possession of sufficient knowledge or it does not cause serious problems if not.

2. Table: Evaluation of the knowledge of the older generation (1: no problem at all, 5: serious problems)

Country	Mean	Median	Standard deviation
Croatia	2.3	2	0.953
Hungary	2.41	2	0.99
North-Macedonia	2.66	3	1
Montenegro	2.68	3	1.09
Romania	2.3	2	1.09
Slovakia	2.46	2	0.917
Slovenia	2.46	2	0.969
TOTAL	2.44	2	0.995

ANOVA test of cross-country variances					
	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	Pr(>F)
Country	6	8.1	1.3462	1.365	0.227
Residuals	521	514.0	0.9865		

Older generation is often criticised for being reluctant to learn new IT solutions and that hinders co-operation with younger colleagues. According to the survey, this assumption is not valid in the region as almost all countries have a median grade of 3 except Croatia where the same index is 2. According to statistical tests, the investigated nations' evaluation does not

differ significantly, thus it must be concluded that although older generation has some problems with new IT solutions, this is manageable by the organisation.

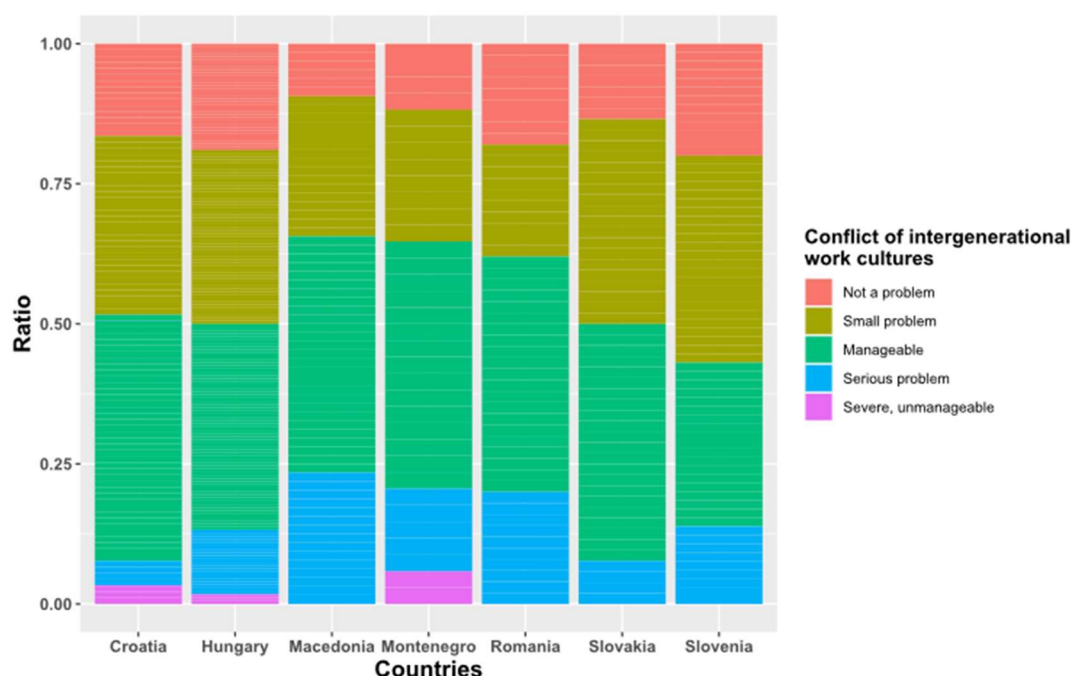
3. Table: Modern IT solutions challenge older generation (1: no problem at all, 5: serious problems)

Country	Mean	Median	Standard deviation
Croatia	2.37	2	1.08
Hungary	2.58	3	1.03
North-Macedonia	2.8	3	1.18
Montenegro	2.79	3	1.34
Romania	2.72	3	1.13
Slovakia	2.6	2.5	0.934
Slovenia	2.68	3	1.09
TOTAL	2.61	3.0	1.09

ANOVA test of cross-country variances					
	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	Pr(>F)
Country	6	9.6	1.607	1.357	0.23
Residuals	524	620.4	1.184		

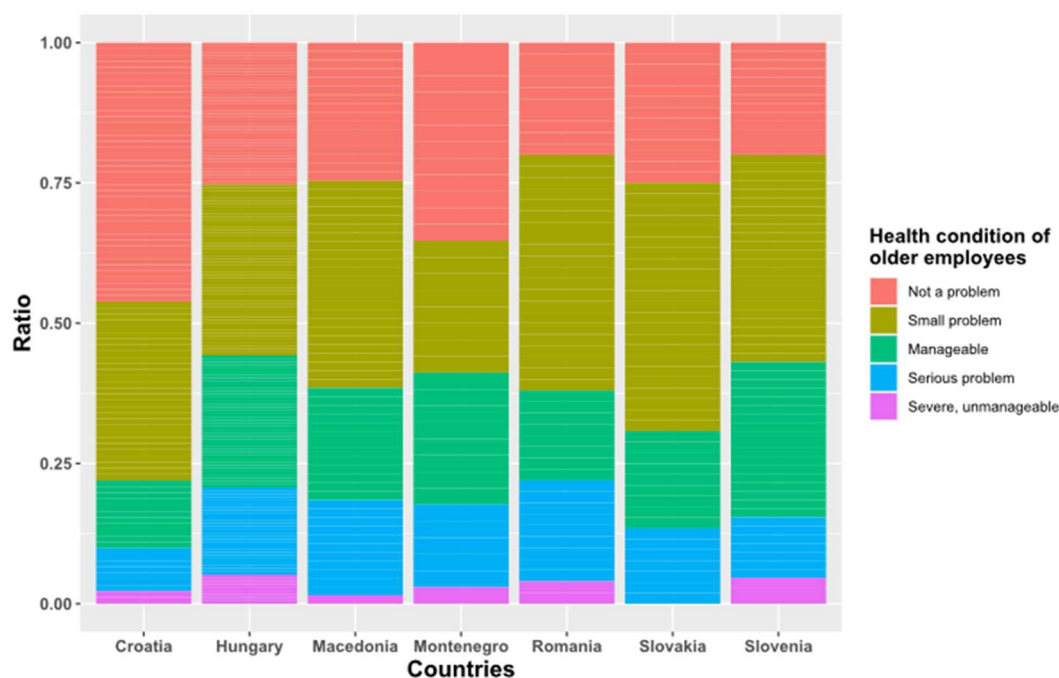
Respondents were also asked about the conflict of intergenerational work cultures and results indicate slight difference among the countries. On average the problem is existing but manageable, although it is less serious in Slovakia and Slovenia and more severe in North-Macedonia and Montenegro. That emphasises the emerging issue of communication mismatch between younger and older employees.

4. Figure: Conflict of inter-generational work cultures



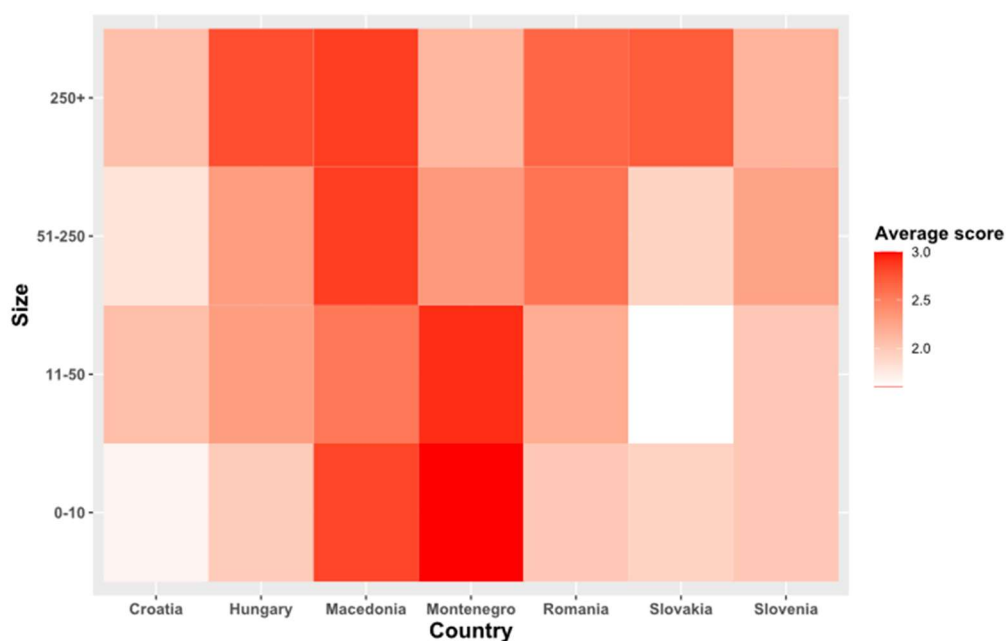
Health condition of older employees is usually a concern in the region. Respondents were asked to evaluate the general health status of elderly co-workers and the results show that it generally causes small problems only. Croatian respondents graded the issue much favourably indicating that older employees are not affected by health problems.

5. Figure: Evaluation of health status of older employees



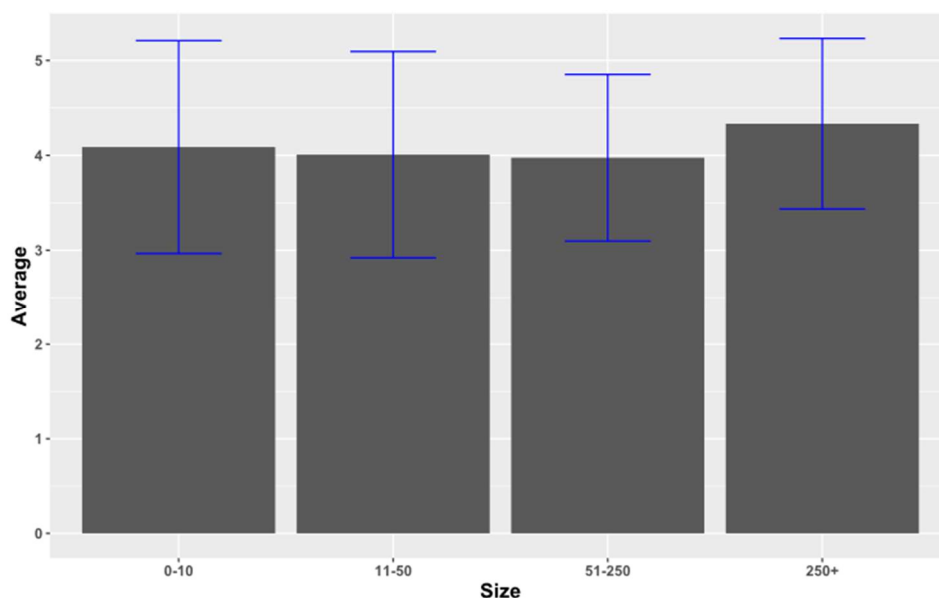
According to the respondents the management is aware of the Agegap situation and handles it with care. At the same time the variation of quite high among the countries in the sample; North-Macedonia reported that in general the management is able to cope with the intergenerational problems, while respondents in Slovakia were confident that the leading bodies of local organisations are dealing with the situation successfully. Results also differ by size of the organisation.

6. Figure: Management willingness to cope with intergenerational problems (1: no problem at all, 5: serious problems)



Respondents were asked to evaluate the potential importance of the co-operation between different generations in a workplace. The results show that the assessment of inter-generational competencies is not uniform. All countries except Slovakia agree that skills are amplifying each other along different generations. Surveyed organisations also differ in the question by size.

7. Figure: The competencies of the different generations complement each other (1: strongly disagree, 5: strongly agree)



4. Table: The competencies of the different generations complement each other (1: strongly disagree, 5: strongly agree)

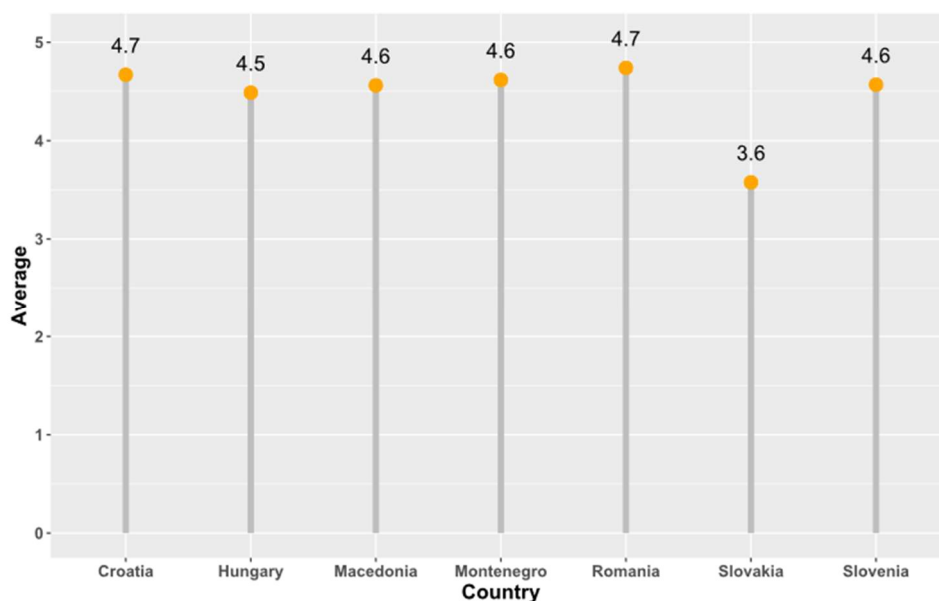
Country	Mean	Median	Standard deviation
Croatia	4.37	5	0.877
Hungary	4.04	4	0.946
North-Macedonia	4.11	4	1.04
Montenegro	4.32	5	1.01
Romania	4.48	5	0.839
Slovakia	3.29	3.5	1.19
Slovenia	4.32	4	0.812
TOTAL	4.17	4	1.00

ANOVA test of cross-country variances

	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	Pr(>F)
Country	6	53.5	8.912	9.811	2.92e-10 ***
Residuals	523	475.1	0.908		

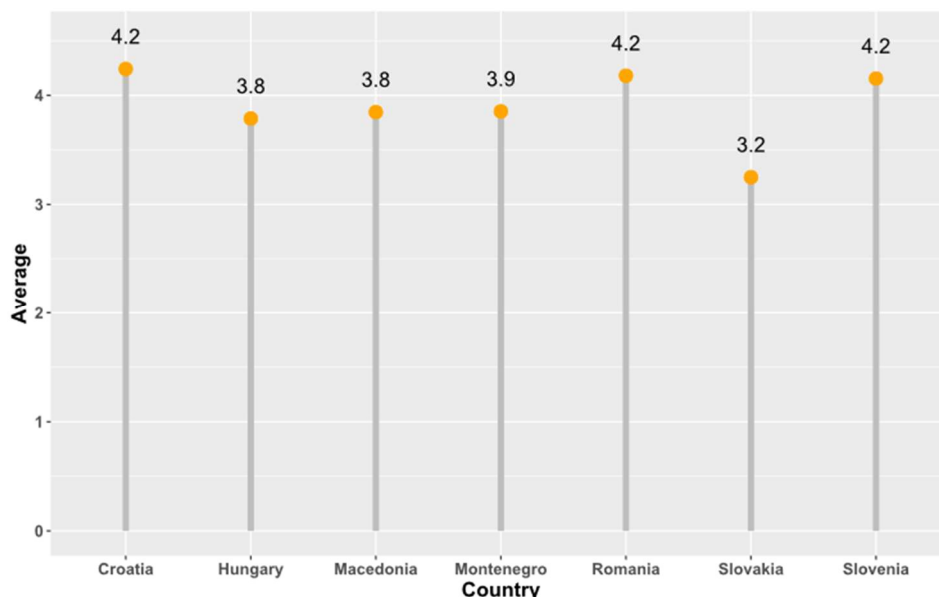
Respondents in Slovakia significantly differ from all other surveyed organisations in the question concerning inter-generational knowledge transfer. While all countries strongly believe in knowledge share between young and old generation, Slovakian companies and associations have much weaker acceptance of the statement.

8. Figure: Transfer of knowledge among the generations is important (1: strongly disagree, 5: strongly agree)



The next question reviews the acceptance of different work cultures in the organisations. Results are somewhat different from the previous question. Most respondents consider that topic moderately important (the average score is 3.9), although Slovakia (3.25), Hungary (3.79) and Nord-Macedonia (3.8) are a bit outliers as their results are lower than the mean evaluation, which reflect the fear of hardly manageable workforce.

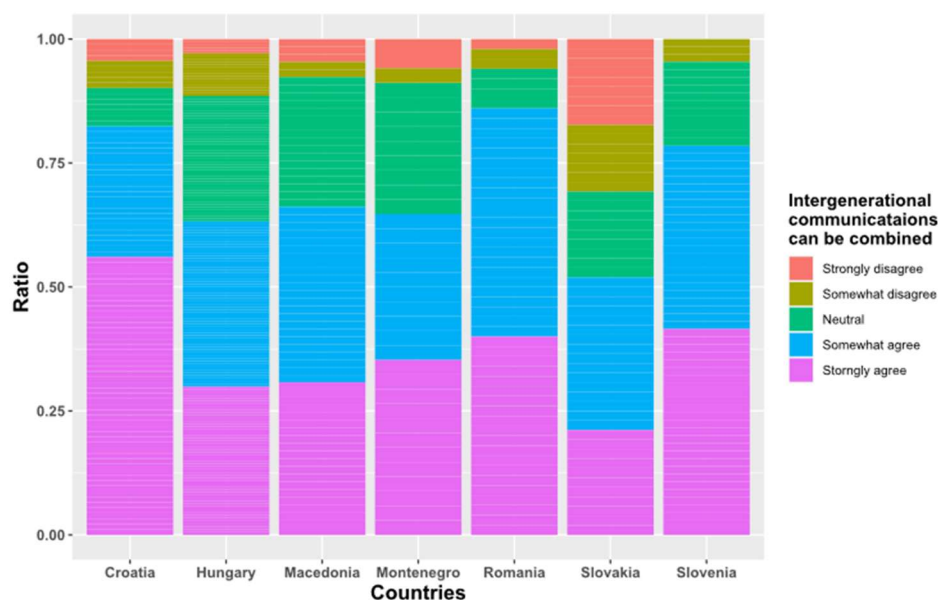
9. Figure: The presence of different work cultures strengthens the organisation (1: strongly disagree, 5: strongly agree)



Results are concordant with next question in which respondents were asked about the communication practices between the young and older generation. The answers reflect that organisations in the 7 countries are rather agreeing with the statement that inter-generational communications can be well combined, although the variation in the answers are high. It is

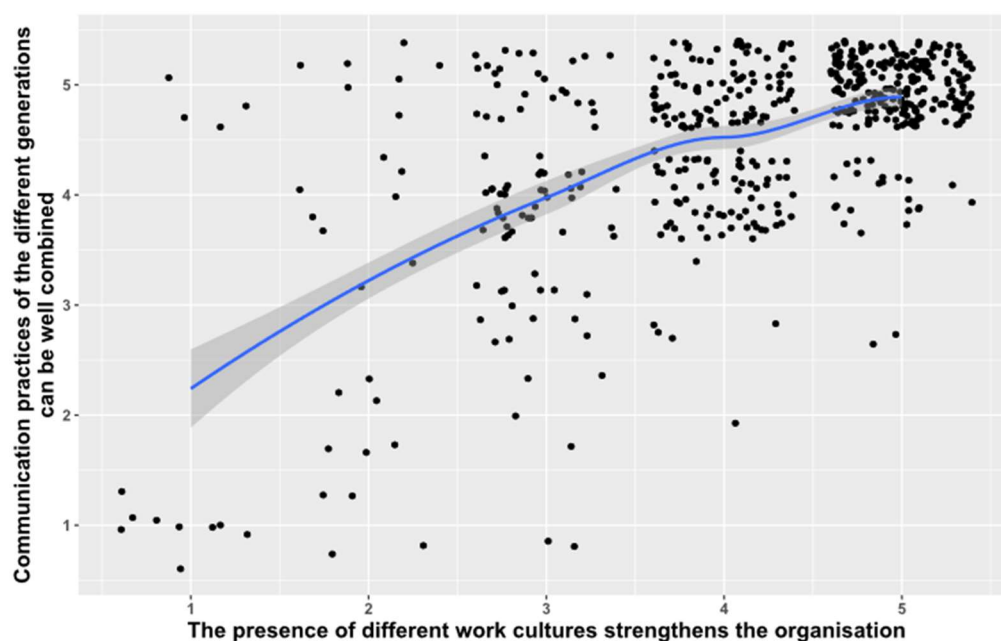
Croatia where the surveyed organisations rather agree, while at the same time Slovakian respondents rather believe that there is a communication gap between the two generations. Low scores of Hungary, Slovenia and North-Macedonia reflect that there are problems with that in other countries as well.

10. Figure: Communication practices of the different generations can be well combined (1: strongly disagree, 5: strongly agree)



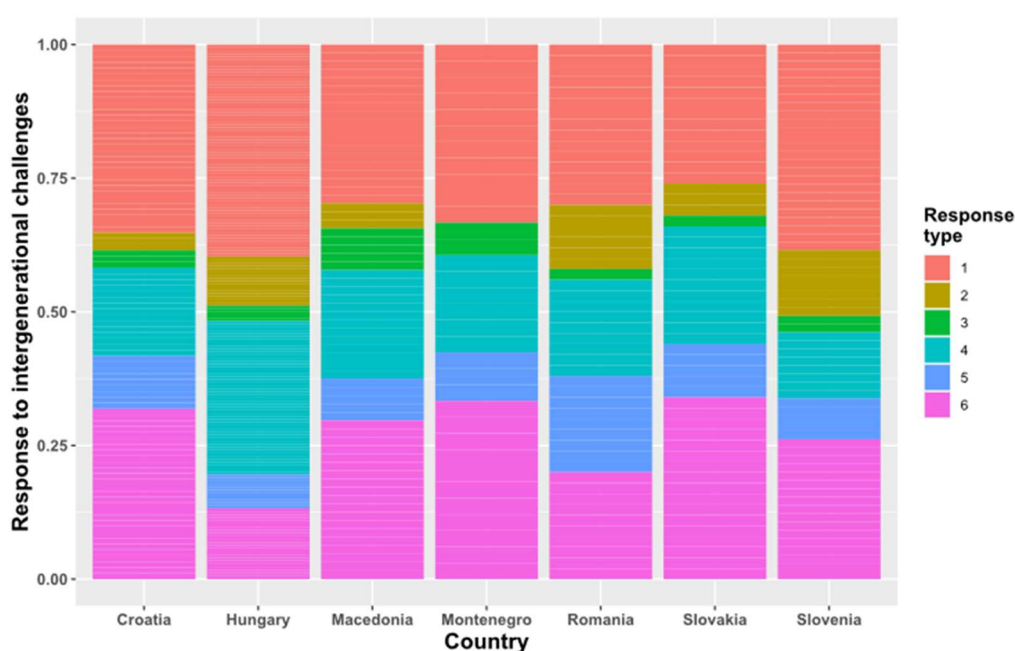
There are no significant observable associations between the evaluations. There is only one exception: those who favoured the presence of different work cultures tend to agree that communication practices of the different generations can be well combined.

11. Figure: Scatter plot of different work culture vs. combination of communication practices (jittered plot, 1: strongly disagree, 5: strongly agree)



Among the investigated countries it is Hungary in which the operating organisations face inter-generational challenges the most. More than 86% of the Hungarian respondents already experienced problems due to aging workforce, although not much has been than as 28% of the respondents reported that older generation do not solicit for any help from any associations. Most organisations in the surveyed countries told that the aging problem exists but owing to permanent operation and high capacity utilisation it does not observable. Some respondents, particularly in Romania cope with the situation by employing mainly from the middle age class. Out of the total sample only 3% reported that some measurements have already been taken at managerial level.

12. Figure: Response to inter-generational challenges (ratio of answers)

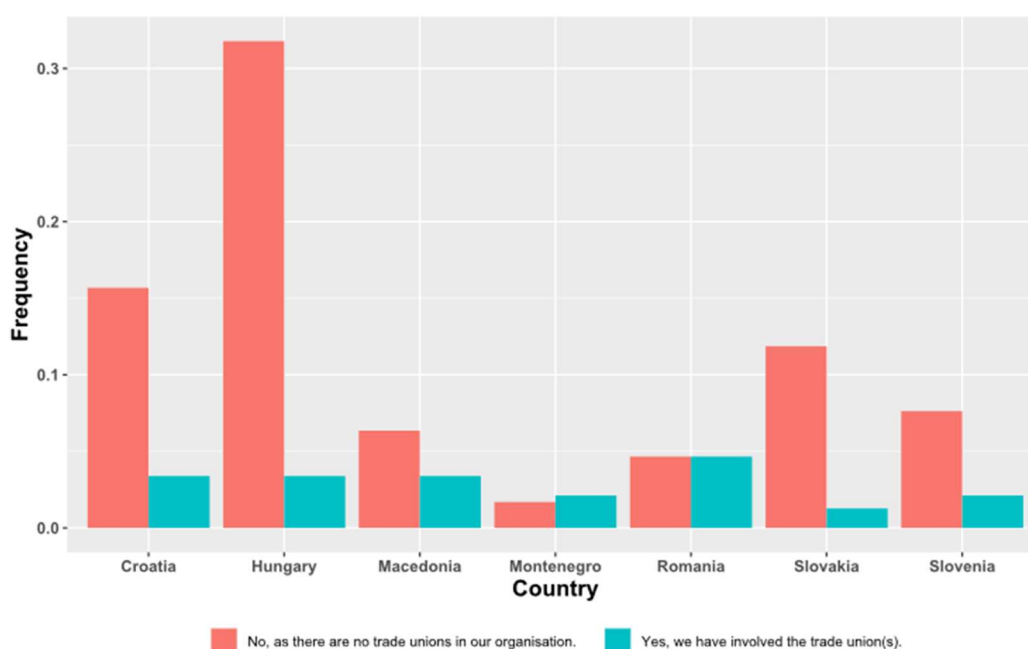


Notes:

1. "Ensuring workforce for continuous operation has marginalized the challenges relating to inter-generational issues."
2. "Our organisation has already had a programme for elaborating its inter-generational strategy."
3. "The criteria of age management are already included in the collective agreement of our organisation."
4. "The employers do not request help from any associations, they prefer to solve their inter-generational problems on their own."
5. "The goal of the employers is to hire workforce mainly from the middle generation, they tend to avoid the generations both younger than 25 and older than 55."
6. "This challenge has not appeared yet."

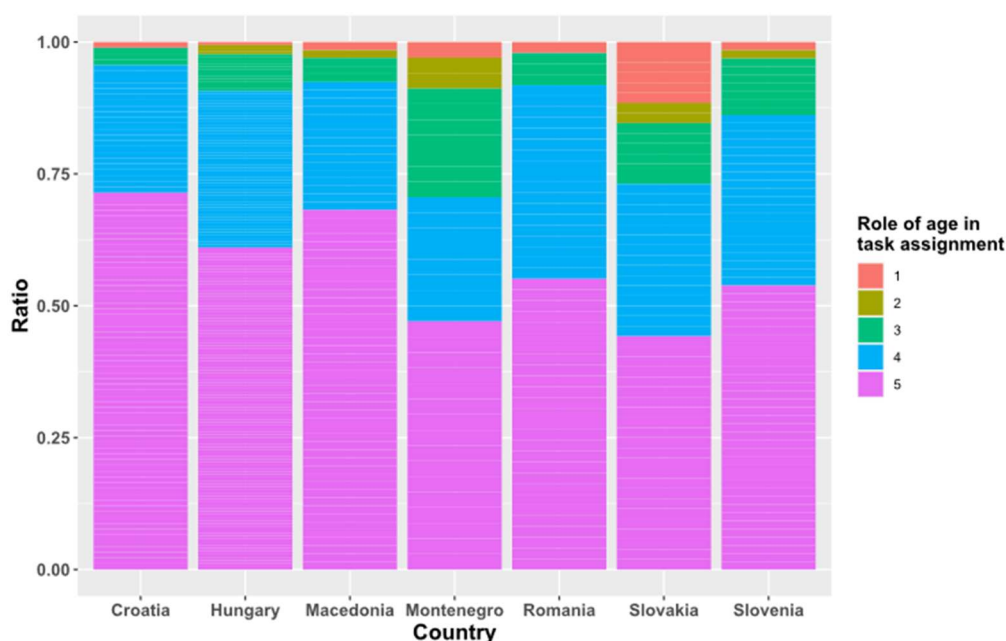
Only 10% of the surveyed organisations have begun consultation with trade unions concerning aging workforce matters. Most respondents (40%) have no age management activities within the organisation at all. Another 36% reported that they cannot involve trade unions because there is not any or those that do exist are practically not compatible with that issue. That calls the attention to the low-profile trade unions. In 22% of the Romanian cases trade unions are engaged in coping with the problem and this is the highest ratio in the region. The lowest is in Hungary, only 5% of the respondents told that the organisation co-operates with trade union on this issue, while 43% reported that trade unions do not exist in the industry, which is the second highest level after Slovakia (54%).

13. Figure: The involvement of trade unions supporting age management issues



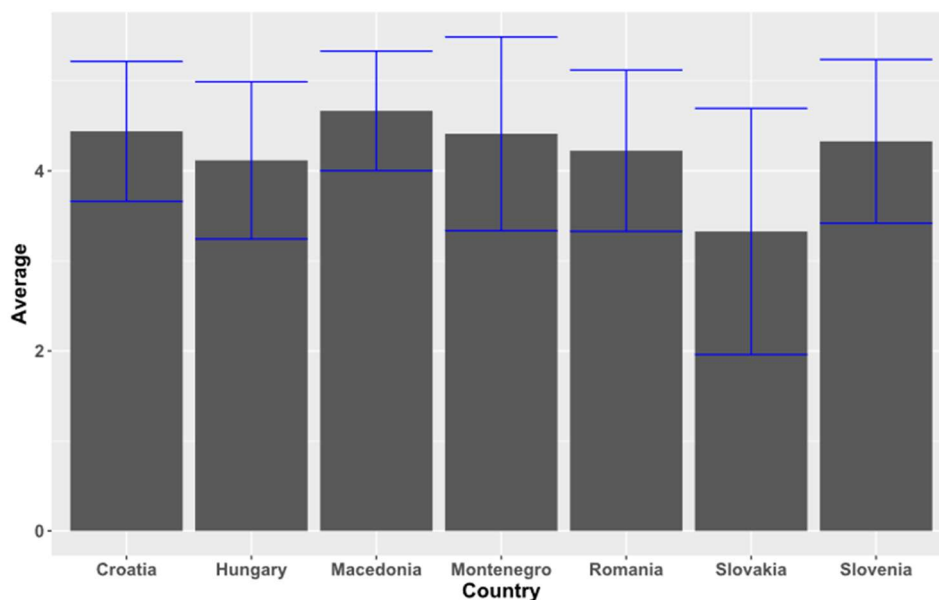
Respondents were asked to grade statements concerning age management. At first, they had to evaluate if age should matter when tasks are allocated among the workforce. Most countries agreed that only skills and knowledge should count (the overall mean grade was 4.4, the median was 5.0 on 1-5 scale where 1 means that the respondent strongly disagrees). The answers do not differ in terms of the size of the organisation, but they do differ along the countries. The lowest mean value belongs to Slovakia (3.9), although the standard deviation is the highest (1.33).

14. Figure: The importance of skill and knowledge in task assignment against the age of the employee (1: age is determinant, 5: age does not count at all)



The second statement draws to possibility the older, experienced colleagues shall be promoted to mentors or coaches when a new, younger co-worker is hired by the company. All countries graded this statement to 4.2 on average, which reflects that they moderately agree with that. Country-wide averages all above 4, Slovakia is the only exception, where it is 3.3.

15. Figure: Older and experienced colleagues shall be mentors to younger co-workers
(1: strongly disagree, 5: strongly agree)



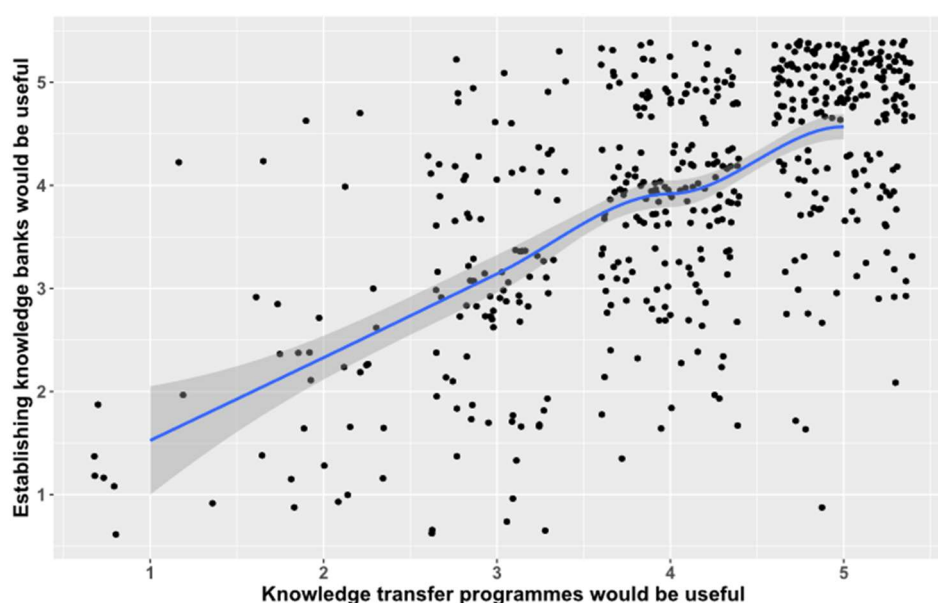
One possible solution to bridge the gap between the older and younger generations of co-workers is to apply knowledge transfer programmes in which the colleagues can exchange their experience in different tasks of work. These programmes are effective in certain jobs where to employees must rely on each other's skills. Not all respondents are not convinced about this, the statement was graded on average to 3.6 in Slovakia and 3.8 in Hungary, while it could be more popular in other countries particularly in Romania (mean score 4.5) and Croatia (mean score 4.4), but other countries are also in favour of the possibility. Results show that this option is could work mainly in large companies (above 250 employees), while it is less feasible at small firms (11-50). One reason behind this could be that in micro firms no special prerequisites are needed, but in case of small companies this could induce some costs that are almost negligible for large corporations.

5. Table: Knowledge transfer programmes are necessary among the workers (1: strongly disagree, 5: strongly agree)

Country	Size	Mean	Country	Size	Mean
Croatia	0-10	4.44	Romania	0-10	4.33
Croatia	11-50	4.41	Romania	11-50	3.6
Croatia	51-250	4.07	Romania	51-250	4.43
Croatia	250+	4.38	Romania	250+	4.65
Hungary	0-10	3.82	Slovakia	0-10	3.54
Hungary	11-50	3.65	Slovakia	11-50	3.25
Hungary	51-250	3.82	Slovakia	51-250	4.08
Hungary	250+	3.9	Slovakia	250+	4.14
Macedonia	0-10	4.71	Slovenia	0-10	4.71
Macedonia	11-50	4.42	Slovenia	11-50	3.95
Macedonia	51-250	3.87	Slovenia	51-250	3.89
Macedonia	250+	4.23	Slovenia	250+	4.32
Montenegro	0-10	4.71			
Montenegro	11-50	4.54			
Montenegro	51-250	3.83			
Montenegro	250+	3.75			

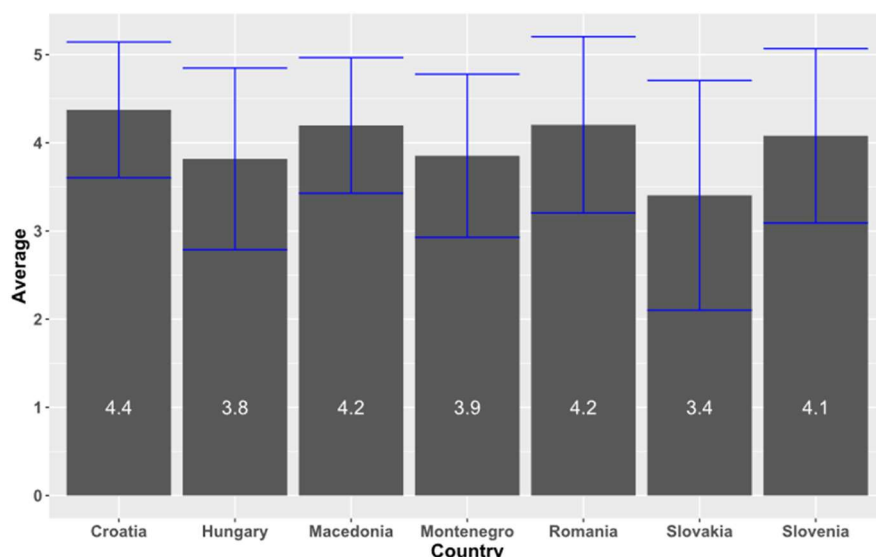
The consecutive question defines one option to realise the process of knowledge transfer. The foundation of knowledge banks is evaluated as a useful possibility to transmit valuable information to young newcomers in the company. The following plot demonstrates the association between the necessity of knowledge transfer and the evaluation of knowledge bank foundation. Those who found knowledge transfer as a useful option to bridge the age gap, they also found the establishment of knowledge banks a convenient solution.

16. Figure: The association between knowledge transfer and knowledge banks (jittered plot, 1: strongly disagree, 5: strongly agree)



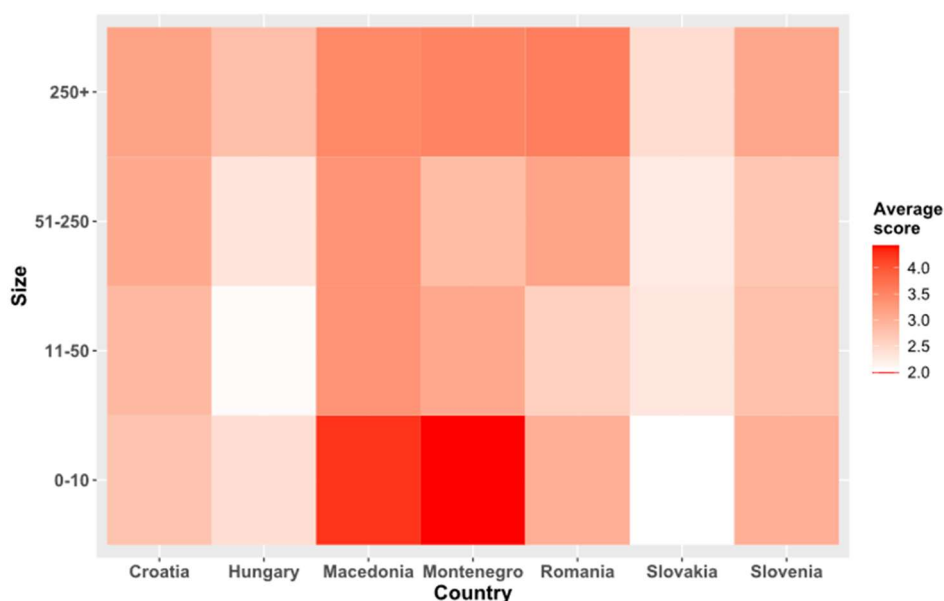
Respondents were asked to evaluate the statement that promotion of age-diversity and being age positive is important to balance ages within working teams. Not all countries agree without any doubt with the statement. The overall country-wide average score is 3.99, however the variation (measured by standard deviation) is high. This is caused by the low averages in Slovakia, Hungary, and Montenegro. That calls one's attention to the difference of public awareness if aging society across the countries.

17. Figure: Importance of age positivity and promotion of age diversity
(1: strongly disagree, 5: strongly agree)



Although respondents in most countries are confident that being age-positive yields favourable effects, they are reluctant to bring the topic within the organisation and establish an advisory board. The main task of such a group in a company would be to collect and share best practices in management. Large companies are rather positive in the that matter (except North-Macedonia and Montenegro), while micro organisations are the most hesitant.

18. Figure: The importance to establish an advisory board on age management at the company
(1: strongly disagree, 5: strongly agree)



The last statement in that section investigates the necessity of collaboration with educational institutes or recruiting agencies in order to encourage them to accept an age management approach. Countries are also divided here, most of them are indifferent in the question, while Hungarian and Slovakian respondents consider it rather unnecessary.

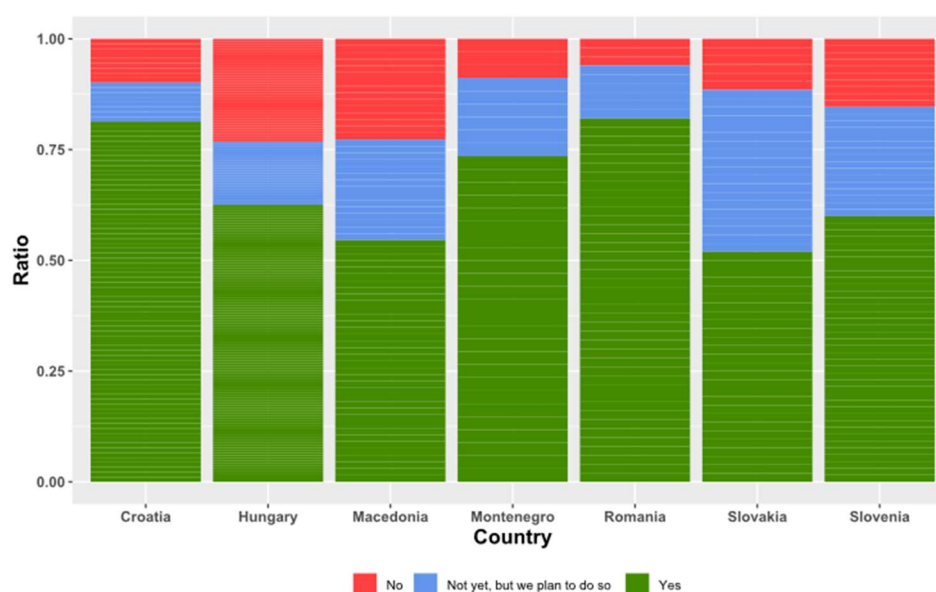
6. Table: The importance of university – business sector co-operation in age management issues
(1: strongly disagree, 5: strongly agree)

Country	Mean	Median	Standard deviation
Croatia	3.43	3	1.16
Hungary	2.68	3	1.35
North-Macedonia	3.66	4	1.12
Montenegro	3.36	4	1.29
Romania	3.74	4	1.05
Slovakia	2.67	3	1.2
Slovenia	3.19	3	1.13
TOTAL	3.13	3	1.28

ANOVA test of cross-country variances					
	Df	Sum Sq	Mean Sq	F value	Pr(>F)
Country	6	91.0	15.168	10.19	1.17e-10 ***
Residuals	511	760.8	1.489		

Almost 2/3 of the respondents believe that they appropriately engage to lifelong learning and they adequately support the employees to develop their skills. They also presume that they are maximising the human capacity in terms of competences and know how. Only 16% consider that they do not support lifelong learning adequately, and 18% told that they planned to boost measurements to incentivise employees.

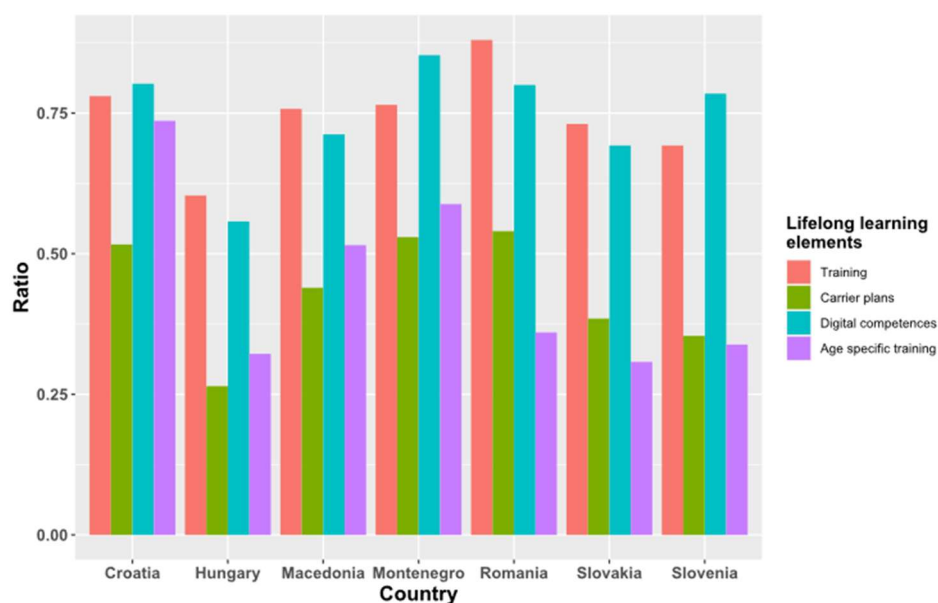
19. Figure: Measurements to incentivise lifelong learning for employees



Respondents were asked if the implemented lifelong learning elements in their organisation. As the following chart summarises it more than half of the respondents provide training for

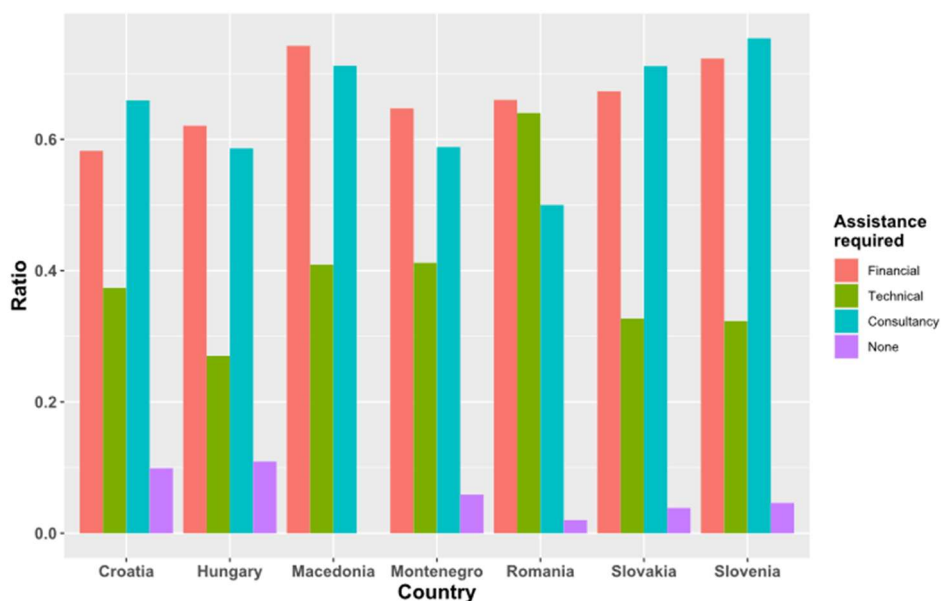
their employees regardless of their age. Also more than 50% of the respondents motivate their staff to improve their digital skill, although no specific training is provided for that. Age specific training is common in Croatia and Montenegro and rare in Hungary, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Surveyed organisations in Hungary do not promote personalised carrier plans for their employees, and at the same time it is very common in Romania and Croatia.

20. Figure: Already introduced lifelong learning elements
(ratio of total responds per country)



The EU and the national authorities provide various forms assistance and support to organisations (companies, trade unions, associations etc.) to tackle problems arising from aging society, particularly to cope with aging workforce. Respondents were asked about what sort of assistances they would need to deal with the phenomena. Financial support and consultancy were the most frequent answers, but technical assistance would also be needed in a moderate amount.

21. Figure: Assistance need to cope with aging population at employment level
(ratio of total responds per country)



Conclusion

The survey showed that the organisations in the investigated Central and Eastern European countries are aware of the aging workforce phenomenon and the problems it might have caused. However, the issues that arise from the maturing labour force are not yet severe enough to induce mass measurements from companies, trade unions and industry associations.

The evaluation of ageing is similar in the investigated countries. The problem is recognised, and the steps to be taken should be fair for all generations. Most respondents agreed that there is an intergenerational gap in knowledge and skills but both sides have the advantage and disadvantage. The older generation has those skills and knowledge that develop by experience, while the younger age group is in the possession of the state-of-the-art knowledge of technology and science (in particular the IT skills). Thus, the two generations are interdependent.

Knowledge should be flowing between the two groups, but the transmitting channel is still vague. Establishing knowledge banks and a committee to control and document the knowledge accumulated in the organisation seem to be a costly solution, therefore it was not favoured by the respondents. It calls the attention that aging employment needs a differentiated approach according to the size of the company. Results reflects that the complexity of age management has a concave shaped curve (letter “U” up-side-down) by company size. The matter is manageable in case of micro (1-10 employees) enterprises owing to the small size of the staff. As the number of employees grow the problem becomes more complex, because small and medium size enterprises do not have the necessary institutional capacity (for example a responsible department) to cope with the issue. However, large companies, although they handle a much greater volume of employees, they may have the appropriate capacity and knowledge to handle the problem. Thus, it is mainly the SMEs, that are affected by the aging workforce problem and might need help to overcome it.

The promotion of lifelong learning is one option to ease this predicament. By that, younger generation would keep up with the developments and could avoid the have their knowledge become outdated. Respondents found this choice attractive, although they agreed that besides the motivation of their employees it is not their job to provide lifelong learning possibilities to their employees. Despite younger co-workers are considered to be loyal to their employers in all countries, companies still have the fear of loosing an employee who took advantage of the lifelong learning programmes provided by the firm. Respondent organisations might hesitate to introduce elective trainings not closely related to the job (like foreign language education, computer skills etc.), because they might think it is not their responsibility, but more belong to the state as it can more effectively organise any education compared to most companies. Therefore, more than half of the respondents would need external support from the European Union or from the state. Mostly financial grants would be requested followed by consultancy and technical support.

The main lesson of the survey that aging workforce has different perceptions in the investigated countries. Although the share of elderly society is almost the same in all countries, Hungary and Slovakia is more reluctant to face with it, while it is a known and already managed problem in Croatia or North-Macedonia. Nationwide recognition is a prerequisite to handle the issue properly and it must happen on every levels of the economy and the society including the citizens, the business sector, the NGOs, and the state. The latter should be supported by the European Union whether by financial assets or by consultancy.