

O1: National Report – France

Fédération des Centres d'Insertion

„Being able to use technology is as important as writing or basic mathematics. You can do without them, but it will be far more complicated.” – Cristian Stoicescu

Introduction

The employment of seniors has been the focus of an important political debate in the past years in France, concretised, among others, in the creation of a “generation contract”, allowing companies to access a governmental fund if they hire persons from this age group. Persons over 50 years old, who represent 36,8% of the French population, are an important asset due to their expertise, their patience, responsibility, management skills who can only come with age. On the other hand, they tend to come at a greater cost than young persons given these precise elements. Employers sometimes judge them to be less flexible, to have a smaller learning capacity and, not in the latest, to lack digital skills.

Our study will try to show that some elements in the French situation can be used as starting points for a more integrated approach for those over 50 and that the situation regarding digital and computer skills can be balanced with a minimum effort.

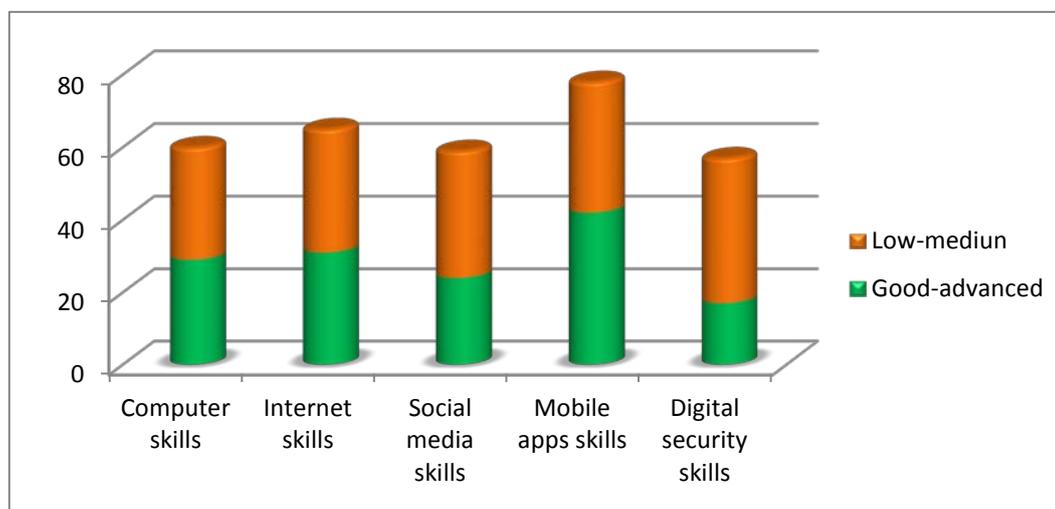
1. Analyses of the survey of adult learners 50+

The survey on adults’ digital competencies and attitudes was filled in by 85 respondents, which allowed a mapping of their opinions and a glimpse in the national situation. Out of these questionnaires, 66 were filled in using the Google form, and 19 using printed documents.

The respondents belonged to several socio-professional groups: employees, persons in training, jobseekers, between the ages of 47 and 64, with a job experience ranging between 1 and 35 years. In the target group, 26,7% were jobseekers at the moment, and 35% had attended various training courses in the past 12 months (English, ITC, technical training related to their jobs or professional trainings, in fields such as child care, cleaning, etc.).

When it comes to their general digital and computer skills, most advanced levels corresponded to digital and internet competencies, while good and medium levels were most numerous in the social networking and mobile app usage categories. The poorest level of expertise corresponds to online and digital security skills.

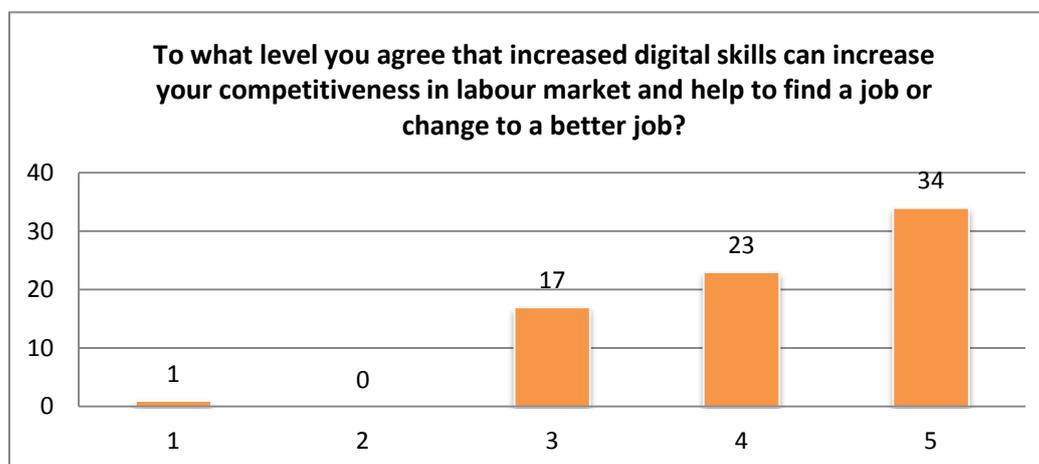
The proportion between “none-medium” answers and “good-advanced” answers is shown in the graph below:



The online presence shown by having an account on communication networks showed that most of the respondents (70%) have an e-mail address, 65% have a Facebook account, while only 8% use Instagram and 7% use Twitter. Equally, Facebook and e-mail are the two elements mostly used every day, while apps such as Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and Viber are on the other side of the ranking.

Regarding their job-searching habits, most of the respondents would trust the non-digital systems: public institutions (76,7%) or their personal network (75%). However, employment websites are also in the top, with 73,3%. Social media platforms are only used by 31,7 of the respondents.

When asked if increased digital skills can increase their competitiveness in labour market and help to find a job or change to a better job, the target-group mostly answered Yes, to a great extent (almost 50%).



Question 7, regarding what digital competencies are most important for the job market and for employment, received rather balanced answers, each line being chosen by at least 40% of the target group. The most important competencies were “Using job search engines” (71,7%) and “Sending and receiving e-mails” (66,7%), while the least important were “Video and audio calls” and “Creating and maintaining a social media profile” (both 40%). Consequently, most of the respondents consider themselves to be “advanced” in “Sending and receiving e-mails”, while most of the “low level” responses were related to “Solving technical problems” and “Using internet creatively”.

An interesting comment has been made to this question: “I have a very good digital and computer skills level, but I don’t have time for social networks. They are useless and a waste of time”.

When asked about their overall opinion on using digital tools for employability and social participation, most respondents said it was indispensable. Some of the answers:

- “It is no longer conceivable today to hire someone who does not master digital skills”
- “We cannot do without it!”
- “Digital tools have become indispensable and more and more accessible to all”
- “Everything is done via internet”
- “*Il faut vivre avec son temps*: We must adapt to today”

Some other answers show parallel opinions on the issue:

- “Unfortunately, we cannot do without”
- “They are invasive”
- “Fewer meetings and real sharing can harm social life”

Finally, most of the respondents agreed that digital skills, computer, internet and social media skills are an asset for performing or finding a job.

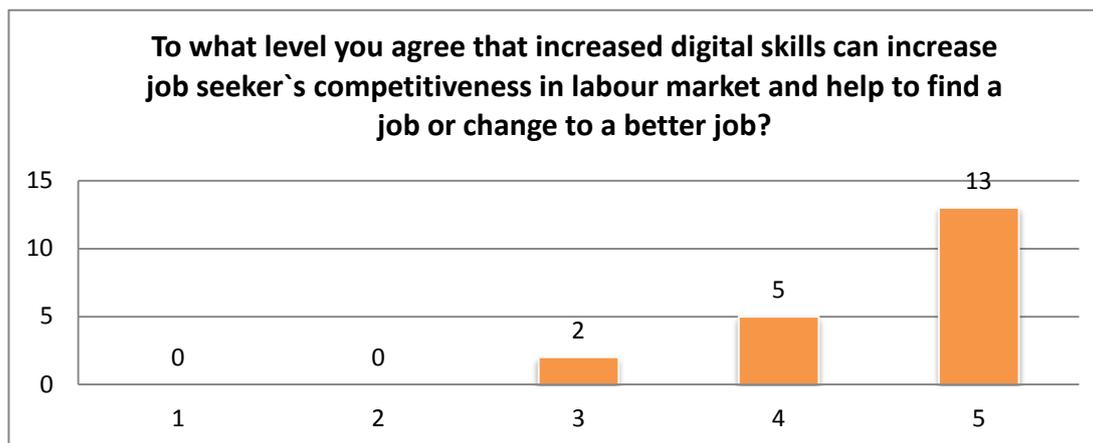
As a secondary remark, the FCI was able to use the questionnaire designed for over 50 year olds for some of their young trainees, in order to quantify and analyse their digital competencies, therefore we recommend it to trainers as an interesting and adaptable tool.

2. Analyses of the survey of companies

The FCI managed to gather 22 questionnaire answers, from a various array of companies, all of them filled in via the online Google form. In terms of size, the companies were quite different: between 3 and 95 employees, out of which 0 to 80% are over 50. Over 60% of the companies offer training programmes, in areas such as management, communication, technical training, TIC, digital skills, internal software, etc.

The answers were as follows:

If they had to find a new employee, most of them would use their personal network (54,5%), employment websites (50%), employment institutions (50%) or companies' websites (45,5%). The least used means would be employment clubs (9,1%) and newspaper adds (13,6%). Some of the companies also use interns which are employed later or the internal company network. Some 70% of the respondents use social networks in the process of recruiting. The main choices were Email (75%), Facebook (68,8%) and LinkedIn (62,5%), and the least used were Instagram, Google +, YouTube and Viber (0%). Digital skills can be useful when looking for a job for 68,2% of the respondents.



In their companies, they consider digital and internet skills as very important, whereas social media and mobile apps are regarded as least important. On the other hand, some of the specific digital skills which are relevant for them would be „using information search engines” and „sending and receiving e-mails”, while the least relevant is „using online banking”. Answers to this question have been quite balanced.

When it comes to their opinion on hiring persons over 50 years old, these are the main points:

For: Experienced, Trustworthy, Capable of transmitting know-how, Having life experience and therefore adaptable, Their sense of detail, They have another point of view on clients, companies, they have useful skills, Maturity, More available than young persons having family obligations, They can help, indirectly, to teams management, They are wise, They are “maternal/paternal”, They are just, Same as for young persons, “Companies are looking for experienced persons while preferring to hire young persons. It is uncoherent”.

Against: None, It is more difficult for them to learn, Important financial cost for the company, They find it hard to integrate a younger team, Sometimes less flexible, Difficulties with the digital domain, They are less adaptable, They are less easy to find than young persons.

As for the respondents' opinion on the importance of digital competencies, here are some answers:

- We are at a time when everything goes through the digital world (professional and everyday life). The more than 50 years have not necessarily had or do not necessarily use the computer tool. Digital training is essential to manage their professional and private lives.
- Currently it is essential to have basic digital skills. We no longer work with paper files, everything is done on the computer.
- This may be important, depending on the position; Basic digital skills are important for all.
- Today's society imposes the digital world.
- This is important, but as part of a multi-age team, responsibilities can be shared and digital elements can be carried out by those who are comfortable with them.
- Not that useful.

To conclude, the respondents are generally aware of the importance and benefits of hiring persons over 50. They mostly offer training programmes, including for digital competencies and software use. The issue of intergeneration teams has been mentioned.

3. Main conclusions of the focus group

FCI conducted 2 focus groups within the +50 year old persons participating in their training activities. This choice was based on practical reasons, and it allowed to compare answers between the 2 groups.

The first focus group gathered together **12** persons who are unemployed and currently in training in one of FCI's training programs.

After the discussion, the participants filled in the questionnaire, showing that their general level in computer and digital skills was rather low. We found, therefore, their opinions extremely interesting and important for our research, as they constitute a very specific part of the target group of our project.

The general feeling was that digital and computer skills can be helpful in finding a job, but they are not paramount. Most of the participants use non-digital means for searching for a job, such as public institutions (French employment office) or personal network. They are following the French institutional pathway for jobseekers, which means they are in contact with representatives from the employment office who offer them the possibility to train and who help them get job interviews.

When it comes to their personal digital skills, most of the participants declared that they do not have the habit of using computers. However, after analysing their answers, most of them use mobile applications such as WhatsApp, for communicating with their family and friends. We believe that this openness towards mobile communication apps could constitute *an*

interesting departure point for further developing their competencies. This app enables its users to develop several skills, such as communicating, typing, sending and receiving images, changing basic settings, etc.

On the other hand, most of the participants, who are, again, jobseekers, have low or medium internet and digital skills. It would be interesting to see if these two elements are connected.

FCI's second focus group consisted of 7 job seekers who are currently in training. This focus group had, therefore, a similar attendance and public specificity as the first, which allowed us to compare answers and results.

The participants generally believed that digital and internet skills are very important for finding and performing a job. However, only some of them thought that social media is relevant to this, as they considered it to be more of a “leisure activity” than a job-related tool.

The participants mostly agreed on the fact that companies are interested in persons with some digital skills, but that their importance depends on the job itself.

When it comes to their personal digital skills, the group was not homogenous: some of the participants lacked basic computer skills, but had good mobile application skills (namely communication and networking apps), while others were quite computer literate and had therefore a more sound understanding of computer skills' importance in a job or for finding a job. We therefore draw the conclusion *that the more computer-skilled a person is, the more they will be aware of the importance of these skills in finding and performing a job*. It is therefore important to create a contact between +50 year olds and tools, tasks, actions requiring digital skills in order to make them aware of their role and importance.

4. Main conclusions and outcomes of the in-depth interview

The FCI conducted 3 in-depth interviews. The first respondent is a blogger and manages an online magazine, the second one works online, his business have a strong social media presence, and some of his products are 100% dedicated to businesses involved in social media marketing, while the third one works for a French IT services platform that offers both start-ups and larger established companies a wide array of services, especially focusing on the offshoring and nearshoring of IT operations and has daily experience working with the social media networks, but not particularly as a Community Manager or a Digital Marketer, located in Romania where the Internet penetration is 56.3%.

When it comes to their *General opinion of expert about people of age 50+ attitudes and activities online, particularly on social networks online*, the opinions are not always similar.

„First of all, online social networks are quite a new thing for all of us and are in a constant change. The main trend is to have them moved from a niche tool used by a small number of geeks, to something mainstream, used by virtually everyone with internet access. In this respect, people of age 50+ are not such a special segment. They use social networks to connect to their friends and family, to discover new things, for entertainment. Surprisingly to some, they also use them for online shopping. I don't think that the overall use of social network is so much different in respect with one's age. There are of course distinctions, and some networks are more likely to be used by a certain age group. While I expect to find a considerable amount of 50+ people on Facebook, I guess their number is quite low on Snapchat.

I want to add something else here: I don't think that the difference comes over the age of 50, but somewhere at 70-75. In my view, this is where things start to get more complicated, and individuals in this age group found it really hard to adapt to digital technologies. While this might not have a significant impact on the labor market, it does tend to create a sort of invisible wall on an information level.” (Interviewee 2)

“My opinion on +50s people on the online world can be best illustrated by two films. Firstly, a Romanian short film showing the fearful attempts of a young man's parents to connect with him via Messenger (which is now practically obsolete, although it was THE communication network when I was younger). The film is called Yellow smiley face. You understand why. And you understand the attitude it describes. Is it based on a stereotype? Is it real? This is probably one of the questions you will be answering with your research and your project.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8HDM6ERbBKA>

The second one, which presents a more optimistic scenario, or maybe the same one, but some time later, is the story of Judi Dench's character in The best exotic Marigold Hotel. An elder woman who embraces the online world and today's technologies so tightly that she starts making a living out of it. It talks about adaptation, but also about discovering new passions and a brave new world, which is entirely accessible, wherever we may find ourselves.

The commercial use of internet really began in the 1990, which means that today's 50 year olds have known it in their 30s. Could we compare this situation to today's 30 year olds' attitude towards today's innovations?” (I.1)

“People with age over 50+ are starting to use the Internet more and more, in general to search information about health (medical services, treatments, drugs), construction and how to do different things (on Youtube), legislation, and to connect with different people (on Facebook mostly).

This will further develop and almost all people (with access to the Internet of course) will be using social networks especially for looking up different information.” (I.3)

When it comes to *Social pressure upon people 50+ and how much of their activity in using social networks is self-driven by awareness of its importance today and how much it is the pressure of current circumstances and lack of alternatives*, the answers were as follows.

I.3: “Maybe 5% - 95% for the awareness of its importance today versus the pressure of current circumstances and lack of alternatives. **Most of the people 50+ started using social networks just by observing the people around them or at work and at least at first they are not aware about the impact of social networks in the real world** (see for example the fake news phenomenon and how much can affect our decision making process).

Check out: <https://techcrunch.com/2017/05/07/emmanuel-macron-and-how-political-campaigns-will-never-be-the-same/>”

I.2: „I don't think that people over 50 are such a special case. The number of early adopters, self-driven by their tech curiosity and openness to new technologies is always relatively small. For the most of us, the social pressure is the main reason we tend to adopt almost all new forms of communication. You will create a LinkedIn account not because you are so eager to have yet another social network to express yourself, but because you will probably need it to increase your chances to advance in your career.

I guess that most of the 50+ social network users were introduced to this world by their children and grandchildren. That's the most convenient way to keep in touch with your family, but I also suspect that the majority of them started to use social networks in more complex forms.”

I.1: „I wouldn't dare to assume how +50 year olds feel about social networks. Some of my friends' parents have active Facebook and WhatsApp accounts, but then again, I know people in their 60s whose lives have nothing to do with social media. They don't use it and they don't care about it. I believe that it depends on each person's life, their social network, their opportunities: a person who is surrounded by active “social networkers” (their children, their colleagues or friends) is probably more likely to have an online presence.”

The *minimal digital skills necessary for people aged 50+ to be considered socially active online* are, „firstly, basic use of a computer or similar tool. Yes, it is obvious, but important. They need to understand, even at a basic level, how the Internet works, how to use a search engine and how to be safe online.” (I.1). “The best thing about social networks is that they are not hard to use. You just need a smartphone or an internet connected computer and some basic knowledge on how to use them. If you can click on a picture, write a message and post a comment, you can be considered socially active online.

As for the labor market, I think that any digital skill can help, regardless if it's related to social networks or not. Being able to use technology is as important as writing or basic mathematics. You can do without them, but it will be far more complicated.” (I.2).

- “General IT knowledge like: working with Windows OS (documents, folders, and browsing the Internet)
- MS Office tools like MS Word and MS Excel, or another office suite like OpenOffice.
- Using a smartphone.” (I.3)

Are there any online social networks designed in particular for target audience of age 50+?

I.2: “I don't know of any, but I do think that the mainstream ones are more likely to be used by older generations. I think Facebook has a considerable number of 50+ users.”

I.1: “I have never heard of one. There are social networks which are more open to this group, such as LinkedIn, in the sense that they generally target professionals, and in some domains, you get to become a professional quite late in the working experience.”

I.3: “I have no knowledge of a social networks that specifically targets 50+ people. Facebook I estimate to be the most popular social network among 50+ people.

Check out: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/goodlife/11751851/Facebook-is-the-most-popular-social-network-for-the-over-50s.html>”

Concerning the possibility of *digitizing the working experience for 50+ people*, I.1 responded: „I am not sure this sounds futuristic at all. Learning is learning, no matter the age. We learn to do something by being exposed to it, by repeating it. When I was in early school, they first thought us what a computer was and did by explaining the utility of the mouse and a keyboard, and then by writing 2 basic HTML lines in notepad. Nowadays, the understanding of the concept is way past explaining what a computer is: the “digital” is no longer some abstract notion, it is a major part of our reality and it requires, for the general user, not necessarily “hard” knowledge, but rather a certain way of thinking and of reporting oneself to the surrounding world. An adapted internal software. Today’s youth have had it embedded in their lives since they were kids: computer and videogames, chatrooms, social networks, online homework. Those who are now of a certain age had a different exposure to it, therefore their digital skills are not so developed. But obtaining these skills is a matter of perception.”

I.2: “While this sounds like an exciting topic, I must say I don't think I fully understand the question. I think the idea of "digitizing the working experience" is powerful, but I am not sure what it really means. The job market is in constant change and we can definitely see that is providing more opportunities for the tech savvy (at least in developed economies). Some jobs require extensive experience (I will always trust a seasoned surgeon over a novice one, regardless of their use of social media), while for some positions, a high degree of digital skills is a must. Think of novelty jobs like "video-game tester", or "social media manager". I suppose that in time, the so-called "digital skills" will become the norm, in the same way, that literacy became a common thing in the last century or so. If I go to a hairdresser, I simply want to get a decent haircut. I don't care if he or she is competent in using any social networks. On the other hand, being social media savvy can boost one imagination, helping to deliver a more "up to date" haircut.”

I.3: “Moving the 2 generations closer to another has to happen more the traditional way first:
- people with 50+ has to be more included in the digital world by: awareness raising (why are there important these skills, you have to give them first the "why" for them to be able to learn

a new skill), training, and of course encourage career conversion; check out: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sioZd3AxmNE>

- the young generation or millennials have to learn more about responsibility if you will, check out: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hER0Qp6QJNU>”

Good examples: “I think that there are several fields where social networks and 50+ people can interact with great success:

Messaging - keeping in touch with old friends and family is easier this way

Travel booking and experience sharing- a lot easier to find great deals and communicate your experiences.

Local communities - can benefit a lot from an active social network presence” (I.2)

“Facebook is the most popular social networks among people 50+ for sure. I heard people creating an account on this social network just because there was no another way to find your long lost friend. She tried everything, going to the school they both attend, questioning a public institution she knew her friend lived in, but without success. Just after joining Facebook and looking for her friend like this, she managed to found her Facebook can thus be the most used search engine can be more used than Google itself. As for sites of public institutions, I don’t know exactly how much they are being used. It depends very much about the e-government is developed in that particular country.” (I.3)

To conclude, the experts believe that digital competencies should not represent a difficulty for persons over 50 years old: there are many 50+ who have at least a basic level of digital competencies. Each person, irrespective of their age, uses (or not) social media, internet as a source of information according to their personal life, choices, possibilities, this is a reality for all ages. It is true that young persons are living highly digital lives, but the digital is not “hidden” or forbidden for any age group, especially as it learning to use it only requires a small investment. Companies managing senior adults should take this into account, as well as the fact that while persons over 50 can easily learn how to become more digital, their life experience, their expertise and personal management skills that come with age cannot be learnt by young employees.

5. Case study: O2 – Care services

O2 is a care services business, based on house cleaning, childcare, elderly care, special needs care and gardening. It is a rather large network in France, but we have decided to choose it because its good practices regarding the employment of senior adults is declinable to each local agency and can be easily adapted to any company size or type.

The main solution – as well as purpose – was to start hiring based on competencies. Therefore, it was the human relation policy which changed, which allowed that every 1 in 5 persons working for O2 be a senior.

First of all, they became *more open* towards this age category: they started participating to senior employment forums, meeting associations for seniors, having an online presence on websites dedicated to seniors, etc. Moreover, they created a “senior” section on their website, explaining specific and concrete elements, such as what steps must be taken in order to work while retired.

Secondly, O2 does not discriminate when it comes to access to *trainings*. Training sessions are open to all, and special senior training sessions have been added to the curricula. Professional evolution is open equally to all employees.

Thirdly, seniors *manage their schedule* in a flexible way. They can decide whether they accept certain missions, they have a *flexible timetable* and they are offered mostly missions close to their homes (as the company offers care services, this is doable).

O2 believes that senior employees and collaborators bring an important added value, therefore their approach is to allow the development of a win-win situation by adapting to seniors’ requirements, knowing that the results will benefit everyone.

6. Overall national conclusions and recommendations

The present study shows that the problematic of digital skills of people over 50 has several angles. Firstly, from the target group’s perspective, it is highly dependent on their background. Generally, persons who are working have better digital and computer skills than jobseekers. This may be explained by the fact that they had the possibility to acquire these skills during their professional activity. The jobseekers from our target group are often better at using mobile apps and social networks than at using computers, for example.

When it comes to the relevance of having digital and computer skills, both persons over 50 and companies’ representatives agreed that this would increase the potential employee’s chances of obtaining a job. However, the importance of specific skills is different.

One of the issues with a potential for change derives from job searching/job offering habits. Concretely, over 76% of the persons over 50 responding to the survey would look for a job via public institutions, 75% by using their personal network and 73% through employment websites. Companies also advertise for available jobs through these channels, which means that the communication is happening. However, companies also look through their personal network (54,5%), which means that in these cases, the job offers are hidden. In terms of social networking, 70% of the companies use them in the recruitment process, mostly email, Facebook and LinkedIn. While Facebook and email services are broadly used by persons over

50, LinkedIn is not. Also, social media are often considered as a « leisure activity » more than a skill developing source, therefore job seekers are less likely to use them in their job hunt.

Some of our recommendations based on these results are:

- Companies should be more openly eager to employ persons over 50, as they bring a lot of positive elements which can prove to be essential for the professional environment;
- Some companies use social networks for advertising for available positions, but, first of all, they use Linked In, which is not used by the target group, and, secondly, the target group tends to regard social media as a leisure activity: therefore a coherence must be found between the two parties; this should also be connected with the fact that social media are not generally targeting persons over 50, but often a younger audience;
- Good practices for including persons over 50 in working teams are quite simple: adapting the HR policies (for example, covering the birth date on the CVs or using an alternative recruiting algorithm, based on competencies), creating flexibility and opportunities for persons over 50, creating intergenerational teams in order to have persons learn from each other and also share activities, etc.;
- Digital skills are not hard to get: using a tablet or a PC, at a medium level, can be learnt through exercise, therefore the target group should use these objects at a daily basis;
- Persons over 50 are aware of the role of the “digital domain” in today’s reality: this is something which can be exploited both by companies and training centers.