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CHALLENGES OF ACCESSING THE LABOUR MARKET

Middle-aged women in Kosovo

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ANALYSIS

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1. INTRODUCTION

The project aims to investigate and analyse gendered ageism discrimination within the Kosovar Labour Market. This study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by individuals in various age groups and genders, focusing on developing policy recommendations for addressing these issues. The objectives of this assignment are: i) identify and analyse instances of gendered ageism in the labour market in Kosovo; ii) examine the impact of gendered ageism on employment opportunities, career advancement, and overall workplace experiences; iii) provide evidence-based recommendations for policy interventions to mitigate gendered ageism in the labour market. The researcher will undertake the following set of tasks and produce the following outputs:

- A comprehensive literature on gendered ageism in employment. This literature review will help the researcher understand the topic from other contexts, and the challenges encountered in other contexts and provide a holistic overview of the topic.
- Qualitative research includes organizing and moderating one (1) focus group discussion (FGD), to validate the results from face-to-face interviews. Specific information related to the organization of FGDs and other details is provided later in this proposal under the heading "Proposed methodology for the focus groups".
- The final stage of the project is drafting the report summarising the data. Based on the data analysis, the research team will provide policy recommendations.

The research and analysis of gendered ageism in the Kosovo labour market will rely on collecting and analysing primary qualitative data supplemented by secondary quantitative and qualitative data. By focusing on women in their 40s and 50s, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the extent and nature of ageism in Kosovo's labour market and inform policies and interventions to address this issue.

The findings of the research will be divided into two main parts. Firstly, the data analysis will reveal persistent differences in labour market outcomes by sex and age, particularly at the intersection of both, supported by existing research in the field. Secondly, solutions proposed by interviewees, both at the policy and attitude change levels among businesses, will be presented. Initially, a literature review encompassing both international and local sources will serve as the foundation for identifying key thematic approaches to the research, gaining a better understanding of the issue, and identifying any knowledge gaps. Given the limited research conducted on ageism and gender in Kosovo and globally, this section will utilise research on ageism and gender separately as well as in conjunction.

The qualitative data collection method will involve key informants and in-depth interviews with representatives of

the private sector, experts, and stakeholders relevant to the study, addressing both the labour demand and labour supply sides. The in-depth interviews will follow a semi-structured approach, with guidelines developed separately for different groups while adhering to the thematic orientation of the study. A key challenge in exploring gendered ageism in Kosovo's labour market may arise because the concept of 'gendered ageism' is almost unknown to government officials and business representatives. This challenge will be addressed by deconstructing the concept for the interviewees, using examples that manifest in the local context.

The structure of this document is as follows: first section explains the methodology that this study report has employed, the data analysis process on semi-structured interviews and two focus groups. The second section provides a brief literature review on ageism in general and from a gender perspective in particular. The third section provides an overview of the labour market in Kosovo, and the last section comprises the conclusion and recommendations of this study.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods research approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to examine gender ageism in Kosovo. For the qualitative aspect, focus groups were conducted with unemployed and employed women aged 40 and above, supplemented by semi-structured interviews with representatives from the private sector and experts. Qualitative data are presented and integrated based on categories and themes derived from the data analysis. In addition to qualitative methods, the study utilizes quantitative data analysis, primarily sourced from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS) and the Tax Administration of Kosovo (TAK). Drawing on the Labour Force Survey data from KAS, the study aims to offer insights into trends of gendered ageism in Kosovo's labour market, with a particular emphasis on sectors characterized by volatility in employment and those facing persistent labour shortages. Furthermore, leveraging administrative data on the labour market from TAK, the study seeks to analyse potential links between informality and gendered ageism in Kosovo's labour market.

A significant challenge in terms of quantitative data collection regarding women's discrimination in the labour market, particularly for the targeted age group, might be the lack of accurate data in the institutions mentioned above. The lack of data might be seen as both a problem at the state level and a lack of knowledge about this form of labour market discrimination. An analysis of qualitative data gathered through interviews and a literature review will be used to respond to the challenge in question.

Collecting quantitative data on women's discrimination in the labour market, especially for the targeted age group, is a significant challenge due to the potential lack of accurate data in the mentioned institutions. This absence of data can be perceived as both a state-level issue and a lack of awareness about this form of labour market discrimination. To address this challenge, an analysis of qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews and two focus groups and desk research will be employed.

2.1. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY FOR THE FOCUS GROUP

To provide clearer and more in-depth evidence on gender ageism in Kosovo, we conducted two focus groups. In this vein, to provide heterogeneity among participants, focus groups were divided into two focus groups: for women aged 40+ who are currently not working and women who already have a job and have built careers. The reason for conducting two separate focus groups was to analyse the challenges of women who are not currently working and women who are actively working and provide a comprehensive overview of gender ageism in Kosovo.

The focus group method is a group process that can help people explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible by opinion-based public surveys or one-to-one interviews. Group discussion is particularly appropriate when the interviewer has a series of open-ended questions and wishes to encourage research participants to explore the issues of importance to them, in their vocabulary, generating their questions, and pursuing their priorities. Also, focus groups are a useful method mainly to: (i) understand how and why different groups of people think and feel about a specific topic or issue, in our case gendered ageism in employment, (ii) investigate complex behaviours and the challenges regarding employment opportunities, career development and overall, the experience in the workplace, and (iii) yield a large amount of information over a relatively short period.

a. Designing a focus group questionnaire

One of the main parts of the focus group is the design of a guide that addresses the purpose of the study. The research team will develop a semi-structured questionnaire. The draft guide will be discussed with the KDWW-OEGJK project team to check if the information provided is appropriate. The focus group guide will detail:

b. Preparatory phase (greeting, signing in, filling profile/response sheet)

- Introduction phase (introduction of evaluators, explain the purpose of the focus group, confirming consent forms, describe focus group moderator role, describe participants, role, explain the logic and format of discussion, explain ground rules, introduce assistant or notetaker, answer any raised questions)
- Focus Group Discussion (Questions and Probes)
- Summary and Closing (taking final questions and comments and thanking participants)

c. Selecting the Participants

The focus group participants will be agreed jointly with the KDWW-OEGJK. Participants must include male and female participants with special emphasis to women as it is encountered that there is a gender discrimination in terms of employment opportunities, career advancement and workplace experiences. The project team aims to include participants from various regions within the country as well as with different ethnic backgrounds. The ethnic composition of the focus group will be defined based on the recommendation of the KDWW-OEGJK project team. In addition, the language barrier must be considered when designing the focus group, in terms of ethnicity or appropriate measures will be taken to ensure the necessary environment for a focus group. It is suggested to include 10 to 12 participants for the focus group.

Participant recruitment will be done through phone, email, and project staff. They will be provided with the following information: the purpose of the study, the topic of the focus group, recording method, level of confidentiality, place, and date of interview and incentive.

d. Recording the Focus Group

For a focus group to be successful, you must have a way of capturing the information. Before starting the focus group, the researchers will ask permission to record the session. All sessions will be recorded to ensure that all necessary information is obtained. Additionally, the note-taker will take notes to reflect the content of the discussion and any salient observations of nonverbal behaviour, such as facial expressions, hand movements, group dynamics, etc.

e. Transcription of the Focus group

A Focus group that has been recorded, either on audio or videotape, must be transcribed. The recorded data are transcribed and typed into standardised forms (focus group transcripts). Once the verbatim transcription is finished, the assistant's handwritten notes are taken into consideration. Handwritten notes are mostly focused on non-verbal communication, such as body language, facial expressions, proxemics, silence length during the discussions, group dynamics, etc. The research team will transcribe the focus group, based on international transcription standards.

f. Analysing the Focus group

Data Analysis of Focus group consists of considering responses in each topic as a group and drawing interpretive conclusions about commonly held beliefs, attitudes, or opinions. The first task is to familiarize yourself fully with the material, reading through your expanded notes, transcribed taped recordings, or edited accounts. Focus Group Data will be coded into Participant CASES with assigned attributes and FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS. Data is analysed into five phases: 1) Open Coding; 2) Categorizing; 3) Axial Coding; 4) Validation and 5) Interpretation. The research will analyse FGDs using NVIVO software.

2.2. METHODOLOGY FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

The idea behind the in-depth interview method is particularly useful and can help people research and clarify their views. They are flexible, allowing in-depth analysis from relatively small sample size and place the focus of research on the views of participants. For more, several types of interviews are widely used. Structured interviews are based on a fixed set of pre-determined questions. The same interview script is used in each separate interview, which allows close comparison between different transcripts, but does not allow interviewees to shape the discussion. Conversely, unstructured interviews are not based on an interview script. In this style of interview, the course of the conversation depends

on the responses of the interviewee themselves and questions are asked spontaneously based on these answers. Such interviews offer little assurance that all relevant issues will be covered and present a problem for comparative data analysis. Since there are disadvantages of both structured and unstructured interviews, researchers generally prefer to adopt a middle-ground using a semi-structured approach. Semi-structured interviews contain the components of both, structured and unstructured interviews. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer prepares a set of the same questions to be answered by all interviewees. At the same time, additional questions might be asked during interviews to clarify and/or further expand certain issues. The advantages of interviews include the possibility of collecting detailed information about research questions. Moreover, in this type of primary data collection researcher has direct control over the flow of the process and she has a chance to clarify certain issues during the process if needed.

The aforementioned methodology for data analysis has also been applied to the processing of recorded and transcribed semi-structured interviews, based on the approach utilized for focus groups. 14 interviews have been conducted. 10 interviews with businesses that operate in Kosovo. All the businesses interviewed are partners of the German-Kosovar Businesses Association (OEGJK-KDWV). Two interviews were conducted with gender experts, one with a representative of an organization that addresses labour rights, and one with the Deputy Director of the Kosovo Employment Agency. The data and insights gathered from the interviews will be elaborated under 'Main findings.

Ten semi-structured interviews with business representatives have been conducted. These businesses operate in various sectors in Kosovo. The questions addressed to the representatives of private sector were related to the ageism in Kosovo with a special emphasis on gender and the challenges that women over 40 faced in the labour market. Providing more comprehensive overview on gender ageism, we conducted to semi structured interviews with gender experts. Furthermore, one interview has been conducted with labour right expert, two interviews with the representatives of institutions and one interview with one of stakeholders. Each interview lasted one hour and was transcribed. The details on the data analysis of semi-structured interviews have been elaborated in detail below.

a. Objectives and content

The interviews has been conducted with gender experts, business representatives, and representatives of institutions to identify gendered age in the labour market, and the impact of ageism on employment opportunities and career advances including the work place experience.

The aim of these semi-structured interviews was to understand the concept of ageism in the case of Kosovo and provide evidence-based policy recommendations to mitigate gendered ageism in the labour market.

b. Analysing Interviews

The analysis of the Interviews is essentially the same as the analysis of other qualitative self-reporting data. At the very least, the researcher draws together and compares discussions of similar themes and examines how these relate to variables within the sample population. In general, it is not appropriate to give percentages to centralize data reports, and it is important to try to distinguish between individual opinions. All Interviews will be recorded to ensure that all necessary information has been obtained. The Riinvest team will be transcribing the interviews, based on international transcription standards. All information will be presented in the final report.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW ON AGEISM IN THE LABOUR MARKET

3.1. CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION OF AGEISM

Industrialized countries are facing a demographic change, which includes also the decrease of young population and increasing the older population (de Paula Couto and Rothermund, 2019). As a result, these demographic changes reflect on the labour market. These demographic changes in industrialized world has increased the concerns for labour market of ageing population. The characteristic of this change in the labour market is characterized by a dynamic and the pressure has led to the decrease in occupations and industries at different period of times (Taylor, 2011). The concept of 'Ageism' can be defined as "the subjective encounter embedded in the widely accepted concept of the generation gap. The bias exhibited by the middle-aged towards the elderly in this context, and towards the youth in other situations. Ageism mirrors a profound discomfort experienced by the young and middle-aged—a personal aversion and distaste for aging, illness, disability, and a fear of powerlessness, perceived "uselessness," and mortality. Therefore, the term constitutes a significant societal issue (Butler, 1969). Ageism also includes the practices and behaviour in relation to older people by excluding and rejecting them to participate in social activities as well as it may be relation to rules and regulations and conditions that play as barrier for older adults to get access to social activities (de Paula Couto and Rothermund, 2019).

In the context of the workplace, ageism occurs when older adults perceived age-based discrimination (de Paula Couto and Rothermund, 2019; Abrams and Swift, 2007). The topic of ageism is not explored in economics (Ahmed et al., 2012) including in the case of Kosovo. Ageism is a prejudice that weakens individuals based on their perceived affiliation with a particular age group (Abrams and Swift, 2007). Age-based bias has a significant impact on the labour market, where older and younger employees might face obstacles in securing employment or advancing in their careers due to discriminatory policies and practices related to age. These practices may stem from ageist attitudes and assumptions concerning an individual's motivation, experience, capabilities, skills, or knowledge (Taylor, 2011). Among other factors on why older workers may be discriminated is the perception that older workers do not have the same ability to learn new tasks, or they do not have the ability to adopt the changes in the workplace (Carlsson and Eriksson, 2019). Furthermore, according to Harris et al., (2018) review study, main themes derived from previous studies were grouped into the following categories: stereotypes and perceptions of older workers; intended behaviour toward older workers; reported behaviour toward older workers; and older workers' negotiation of ageism. This study maintains that ageism has implications in relation to intended behaviour to a lesser extent on the negative stereotypes and perceptions where negative perceptions were

evident during the process of hiring, training, and retirement decisions (Harris et al., 2018)

The European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (EY2012) initiative, established in response to the growing concern over ageism in European societies, particularly in the UK, aimed to address age-related prejudices and promote intergenerational solidarity. This initiative recognized the need to create opportunities for individuals of all ages to remain engaged with the labour market, participate in society, and maintaining independent living. Studies, such as the one conducted by Abrams and Swift in 2007, have highlighted the prevalence of ageist attitudes, particularly targeting individuals aged 35 and above. These attitudes can vary depending on the respondent's age, with older individuals being more likely to experience and recognize ageism directed towards their age group. This recognition may stem from the internalization of negative stereotypes and societal attitudes associated with aging.

By raising awareness about ageism and fostering solidarity between generations, initiatives like EY2012 aimed to combat age-related prejudices and create inclusive environments where individuals of all ages can thrive. Such efforts are crucial for promoting social cohesion and ensuring that people of different age groups have equal access to opportunities and resources. (Abrams and Swift, 2007).

3.2. AGEISM IN THE LABOUR MARKET

There is a growing body of literature on ageism in the labour market. Studies have been focused on ageism not only in terms of the elderly but also in terms of youth and gender differences. Studies show that older workers face considerable age discrimination from employers (McVittie et al., 2008; Leeson and Harper, 2005; Riach and Rich, 2010). Ageism is related to attitudes and stereotypes in relation to older workers, leading to age discrimination. The ageism or age discrimination in the study is not clearly defined, whether these studies refer to objective or subjective measures. The objective measures mainly rely on variables such as the differences between old and young people in terms of employment rates, income, time to find a job, and salaries. While the subjective studies are related to the interpretation of statistical data on ageism in terms of group differences, In addition, despite the fact that attitudes and stereotypes are related to the source of age discrimination, the policy interventions and programs did not fully tackle age stereotypes, which are embedded in beliefs, evaluations, and attitudes that are challenging to change (de Paula Couto and Rothermund, 2019). Therefore, scholars call for more evidence-based interventions to reduce ageism in the workplace by focusing not only on the policy level but

also at the firm level, namely improving human resource policies (de Paula Couto and Rothermund, 2019). Another study by Drydakis et al. (2018) maintains that for older workers to be welcomed in the labour market, it is important that governments encourage people to work longer, as older people are penalized in the market due to a lack of access to job vacancies and lower-paid jobs.

Older job seekers face the challenge of entering the labour market, which is an important indication that their previous experience accumulated over the years is not being appreciated. This is due to the perception of employers that mental and physical abilities are more important than experience. However, this perception may be accurate for a particular occupation, which cannot be generalized to all occupations. Furthermore, there is a distinction between fluid knowledge, which demands a consistent update of knowledge, and formed knowledge, which is based on the previous experience accumulated over the years. The ability of older job seekers may have been weakened by the time to require flexible information, but the ability to form knowledge remains for a long period of time (Ahmed et al., 2012b). In addition, employer's perceptions that older workers do not have the ability to learn new tasks and skills, their ambition, and their inability to adapt to the working environment play a determining role in age discrimination (Carlsson and Eriksson, 2019).

Studies maintain that ageism is not only common among older people but also affects younger people. Abrams and Swift (2007) provide mixed results in the case of the UK and suggest that ageism is the most experienced form of discrimination that influences younger and older people, and the most common form of ageism is a lack of respect due to someone's age. Ageism has a more profound impact on the attitudes and beliefs of people over 60 compared to those under 35. Ageism in the labour market plays a significant role in the case of the UK, where older people must apply for more job vacancies to get an interview compared to young people. Older workers are invited to interviews in jobs characterized by lower-paid jobs, which directly influence their standard of living (Drydakis et al., 2018). The de Paula Couto and Rothermund (2019) study shows that in the case of Germany, 73 percent of those aged 55–64 and 23 percent of those over 65 experienced discriminations in the workplace. This is an interesting finding considering that in Germany, when considering the statistics from 2014, one in four individuals was aged over 60 years, and over 25 percent of the population shows that the labour laws do not adequately address equal rights and treatment in terms of equal job opportunities. In addition, older workers are more vulnerable in the labour market, and the stereotypical attitudes of the private sector suggest that these workers may not be productive. As a result, employers assume that older workers will accept working for a lower salary because they perceive that these older workers will find it challenging to find a suitable and alternative job in the labour market (Wanner and McDonald, 1983).

The discrimination based on age has direct consequences for their well-being. Abrams and Swift's (2007) study show that the experiences of ageism are correlated with satisfac-

tion and happiness, hence well-being. This study shows that individuals who face ageism have lower life satisfaction (16 percent) and are less happy (14 percent) compared to people who have not experienced ageism. Furthermore, another study from Warner and McDonald (1983) found that older workers are more likely to accept lower salary incomes, where the earnings of older workers experience a decrease when they experience ageism. As a result, their well-being is negatively impacted, leading to lower life satisfaction.

In addition, although ageism cannot be directly related to gender, women are more likely to face it than men. Ageism is a pervasive phenomenon that spans various age groups and impacts both men and women equally. It surpasses gender or ethnic prejudice in terms of prevalence. The defining feature of ageism lies more in the absence of respect than in outright mistreatment. Notably, women tend to experience a more pronounced lack of respect based on age compared to men, as indicated by Abrams and Swift (2007). The research findings affirm the concept of a 'double jeopardy' situation for women, involving age and gender discrimination perceptions, particularly in anticipating an early decline in job performance (Loretto et al., 2000). The circumstances faced by older women in relation to retirement and age discrimination policies differ significantly. Acknowledging this intersectionality is crucial for policymakers, as age and sex discrimination intersect in shaping the experiences of older women. It is noteworthy that older women, especially those who are single or widowed, are at a higher risk of living in poverty compared to their male counterparts, as highlighted by Burn et al. (2020). Therefore, policymakers should carefully consider the unique challenges faced by older women in the development of policies addressing aging and discrimination.

4. AN OVERVIEW OF LABOUR MARKET IN KOSOVO

Law No. 05/L-021 on Protection against Discrimination has laid down a comprehensive framework for preventing and combating discrimination, encompassing not only gender and age but also various other grounds. Despite the existence of a legal framework aimed at preventing discrimination based on gender, age, and other forms, the landscape in the labour market does not appear promising, particularly for women.

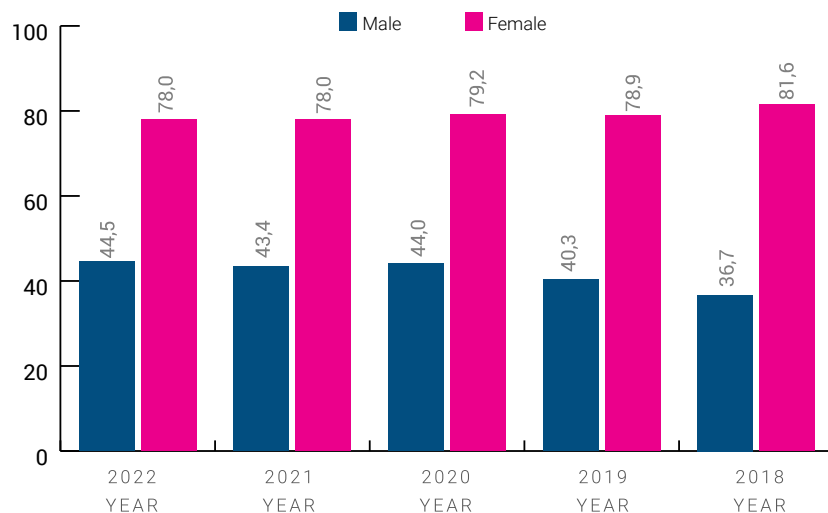
The labour market in Kosovo exhibits a noticeable gender imbalance, with women facing numerous challenges in the economy. Approximately 78 percent of women in the workforce are inactive, in contrast to around 44.50 percent of men. Among active women, the unemployment rate stands at approximately 16.5 percent, while for men, it is 11 percent (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2022). In addition to the low level of activity in the job market, active women encounter obstacles in securing and retaining employment. Generally, women are more likely to be employed in informal economy. Consequently, there is an increased likelihood of their involvement in the informal economy, undertaking jobs that do not fully comply with labour legislation practices, or engaging in sensitive employment positions.

Undoubtedly, the challenges faced by middle-aged and elderly women are intricately linked to the historical context of the establishment of our Republic. The unstable situation during the pre-war period in Kosovo, difficulties in education, finding employment, and displacement from workplaces have contributed to the current conditions we confront. Additionally, other barriers, such as childcare responsibilities, lack of flexible schedules, transportation issues, workplace discrimination, and prejudices, along with the lack of skills resulting from interrupted education during the 1990s due to the political situation, further exacerbate the challenges faced by this demographic. Certainly, technological advancements for this age group are challenging to attain, and extensive training is required to bridge this gap.

4.1. ANALYSIS OF LABOUR MARKET IN KOSOVO

The participation of women in the labour market in Kosovo is undeniably entwined with the historical development of statehood and the patriarchal nature of society. Even two

Figure 1: The Rate of The Economically Inactive Population as a Share of the Working Age Population (%)15-64



Source: The annual employment market statistics for the year 2022, Kosovo Statistics Agency 2023

Despite a higher level of commitment in addressing youth employment, there appears to be a neglect in government policies and private sector initiatives regarding the economic empowerment of women in the middle and senior age groups. State employment policies are predominantly oriented towards the youth, leaving a gap in support for older women. Discrimination becomes evident in various announcements for start-ups or donations for women's business ventures, where age limits, typically ranging from 25 to 35 years old, discriminate against and exclude middle-aged women.

decades after the war, approximately 78 percent of women in the working age group remain inactive outside the labour market, primarily due to the absence of favourable policies. The challenges within the labour market are myriad, particularly impacting women and young people. These challenges include high unemployment rates, low participation rates, a shortage of qualified skills, and an inevitable reduction in the workforce due to significant emigration (Rinvest, 2023).

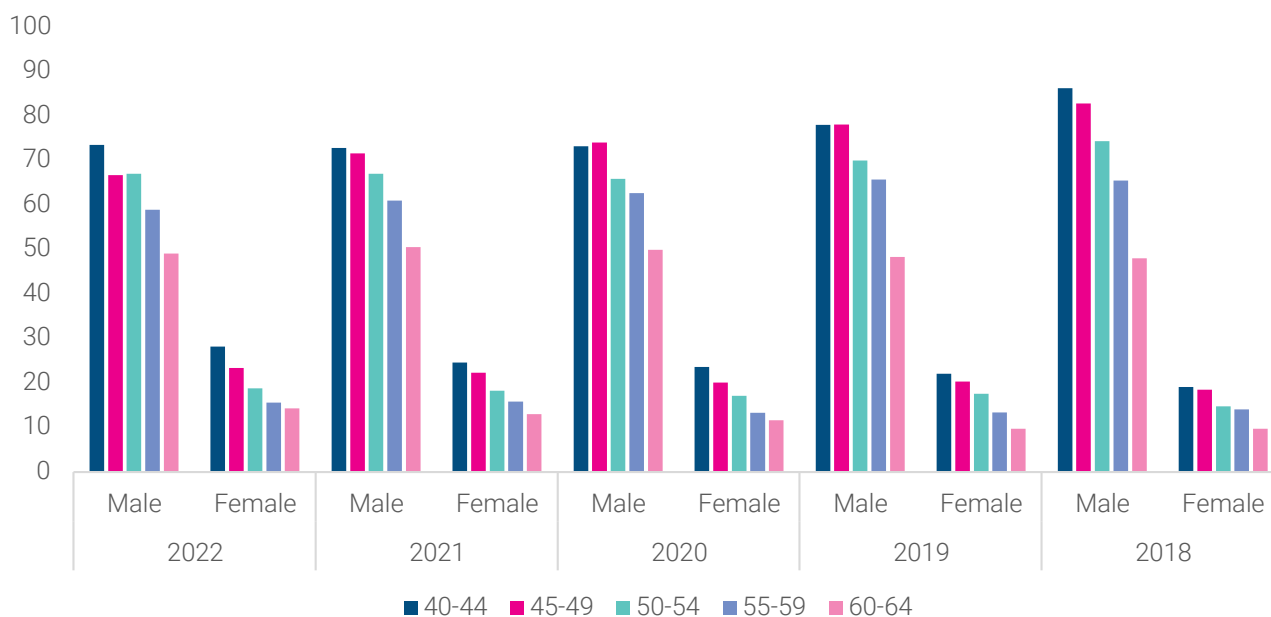
According to the Statistics Agency (2022), women's participation in employment remains low, standing at only 18.4 percent, in stark contrast to the 49.4 percent participation rate for men.

The disparity becomes even more pronounced when examining employment participation by age groups. For instance, in the age group 35-44, women’s employment participation is 24.5 percent, significantly lower than the 67 percent rate for men. In the age group 45-55, women’s employment participation is 18.6 percent, compared to 62.1 percent for men, and in the age group 55-64, employed women account for only 13.7 percent, while men’s participation is at 52.2 percent.

percentage of inactive women. According to the Employment Agency of Kosovo (EAK) 2022, intermediation in employment for the age groups 40-54 and 55+ is at 4.4 percent and 1.9 percent, respectively.

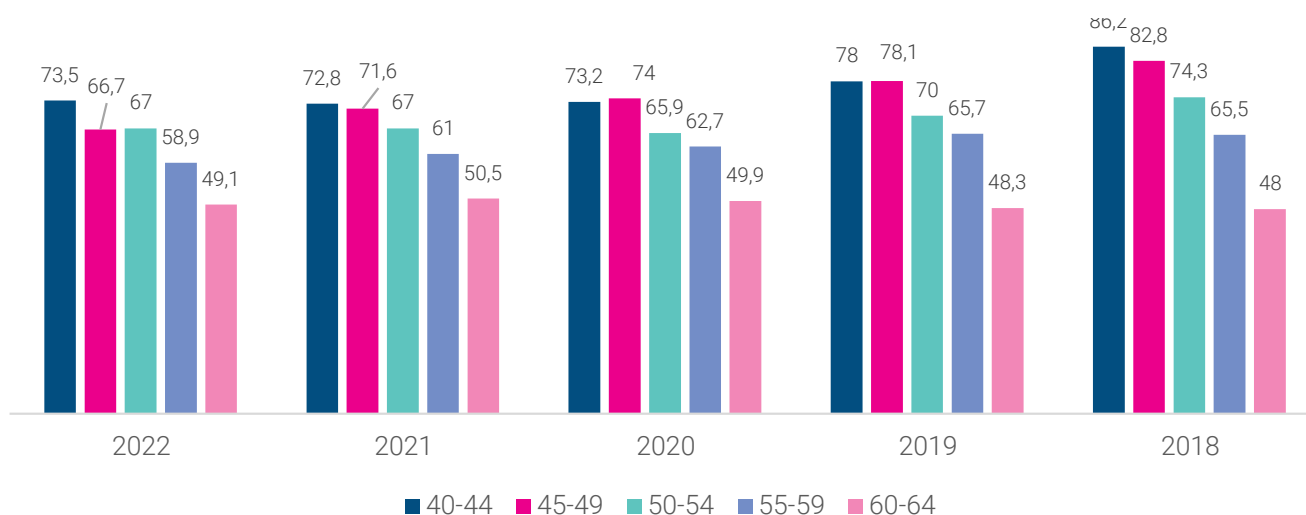
Regarding the search for employment, it is crucial to highlight that younger age groups are more likely to secure employment compared to older groups. This discrepancy can be attribut-

Figure 2: Labor Force and Labor Force Participation Rate by Gender and Age Group by Variable, Kosovo, Year and Gender



Source: The annual employment market statistics for the year 2022, Kosovo Statistics Agency 2023.

Figure 2.1: Male - Labor Force and Labor Force Participation

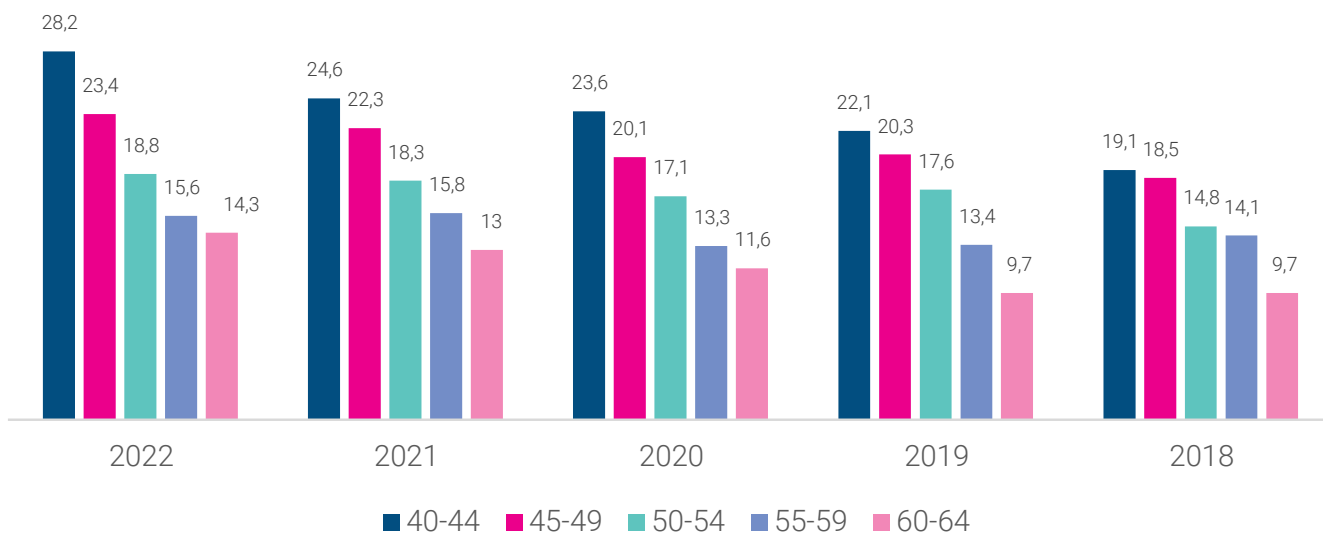


Source: The annual employment market statistics for the year 2022, Kosovo Statistics Agency 2023

The registration of the middle age group plus in the year 2022 has shown a slight increase, with a growth of 3.2 percent for the age group 40-54 and 7.1 percent for the age group 55+. Out of the total of 23,400 registrations or 29.0 percent registered in the age group 40-54, 11,347 are females. For the age group 50 plus, out of 11,393 registered, 5,417 are females. However, this is deemed insufficient when compared to the

ed to various factors, such as professional skills, computer literacy, and proficiency in foreign languages. Consequently, a young person who is unemployed and registered with Employment Offices is more likely to find a job faster compared to older individuals (Employment Agency of Kosovo (2022).

Figure 2.2: Female - Labor Force and Labor Force Participation



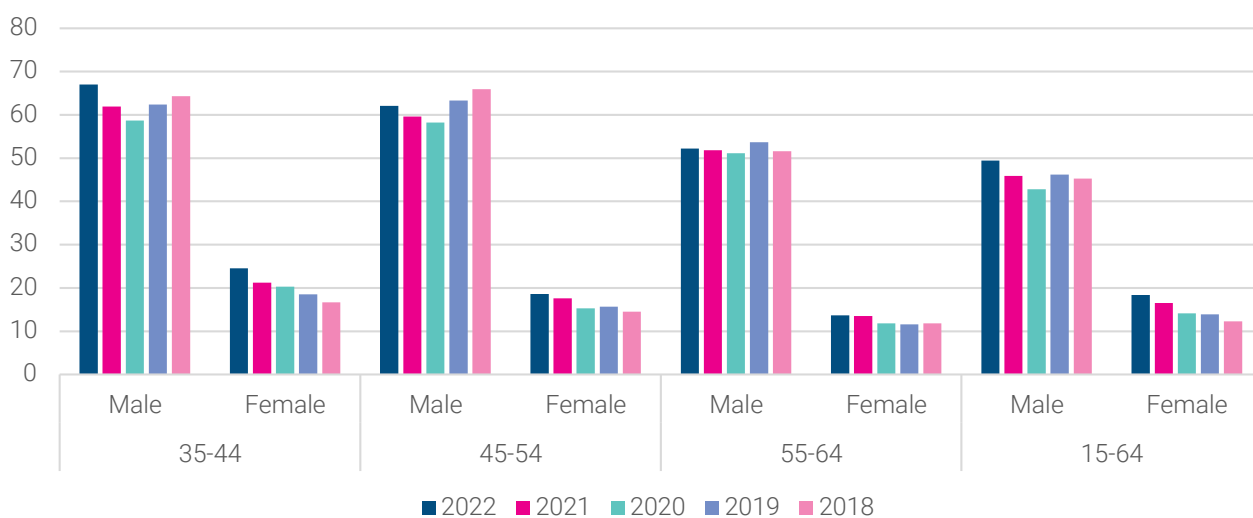
Source: The annual employment market statistics for the year 2022, Kosovo Statistics Agency 2023.

In Kosovo, women in the labour market encounter various challenges, including a mismatch of skills and a limited availability of training from Vocational Training Centres (VTCP) and professional development from Schools of Education and Professional Development (EPD). The scarcity of professional development opportunities in sectors and professions often perceived as “masculine” diminishes the attractiveness of these opportunities for women who aspire to develop skills in other fields with higher employment potential, as highlighted by the Riinvest Institute (2021).

lower participation rate in vocational qualification, they exhibit a slightly higher certification rate than men. The recognition rate for women is 81.4 percent, compared with 77.2 percent for men (Employment Agency of Kosovo (2022)).

Currently, only about 15% of companies from the private sector are collaborating with the employment agency. It is evident that this situation needs to change, and the level of collaboration between these two institutions must be increased. Deeper collaboration will bring significant benefits by opti-

Figure 3: Employment rate and the ratio of the employed in relation to the population - Employment rate, by age and gender



Source: The annual employment market statistics for the year 2022, Kosovo Statistics Agency 2023.

In terms of the level of certification (professional skills), the highest rate of 79.6 percent is achieved by people in the older age group, particularly those aged 55 and above. Regarding gender, the data on the referral of jobseekers for professional qualification in 2022 indicates an under-representation of women, with their participation rate significantly lower than that of men. Women account for 35 percent of placements, compared to 64.6 percent for men. Although women have a

minizing the possibility of securing employees more efficiently. Furthermore, enhancing cooperation in identifying the needs for qualified workers would lead to an increase, especially through training programs offered by the agency. Thus, the benefits from this collaboration would be twofold, highlighted by Riinvest (2020).

Similarly, long-term unemployment has experienced a modest decrease, although it remains notably high. The number of job seekers during the first three quarters of 2023 has increased compared to 2022, with the highest percentage of job seekers being among women compared to men. For both genders, most job seekers fall in the age group of 25-39 years. It is worth noting that long-term unemployment may not only result from a lack of available job opportunities but may also be linked to the significant presence of informal employment in Kosovo, partly caused by distortions in social protection schemes (Riinvest, 2023). According to the Kosovo Statistics Agency (2022), the economic sectors with the largest share of employment over the years are trade, construction, accommodation, production, and education services, etc. Women are mostly employed in the education, trade, and healthcare sectors, accounting for 49.7 percent, while men are primarily employed in production, construction, and trade, constituting 46.5 percent.

The combination of high unemployment rates and the continuous focus on sectors that do not experience employment growth are significant indicators pointing to an unfavourable situation for women in Kosovo's economy. The labour imbalance creates a job matching gap, which is a significant barrier when comparing the educational and professional skills of workers, especially for middle-aged women in Kosovo. Migration after visa liberalization in Kosovo has led the private sector to consider better work conditions, higher wages, digitalization, etc. More than two-thirds of companies (37 percent) plan to further increase wages. Almost a quarter of companies (24.5 percent) plan to improve working conditions, 20.6 percent plan to hire women, and 10.4 percent plan to invest in new technology to automate work, as reported by the Riinvest Institute (2023). These findings are confirmed in semi-structured interviews and two focus groups where the participants emphasize that the shortage in the labour market may present a crucial opportunity for middle-aged women to enter the labour market.

5. FINDINGS

5.1. AGEISM AND GENDER

Semi-structured interviews on ageism provide nuanced insights into cultural dynamics, particularly in the context of women's aging experiences. Respondents underscored age-related biases, shedding light on societal expectations tied to gender roles, family dynamics, and the evolving value of women across life stages. Ageism, pervasive at all ages, takes on a complex nature when intertwined with gender. The intersection of gender and ageism is evident, as captured in the quote, *"Women are not conceptualized as workers in the job market but as women at home. Women work at home, but their work is not valued,"* emphasizing the persistence of traditional perceptions of women primarily as homemakers.

One participant noted "the diverse trajectory of cultural ageism, emphasizing its dynamic nature over time," pointing to the evolving norms surrounding aging. In discussing the symbolic power of women in the private sphere, a respondent remarked, *"Let's say the women who have created more life experience gather more power within a sphere that has mainly been private."* This emphasizes the increased influence of women with significant life experience within the household. Observations about gender roles within families revealed, *"For example, when we see what family is, what kinship is, and what the customary codes are, that always implies old age, which implies life experience, and we see how, with age, there is more respect based on experience."* This reflects the growing respect for elders within the family context.

A participant pointed out the role of visual interventions as a response to ageism, stating that such industries exist *"as a form of resistance or strategy to confront ageism by directly intervening in the body to mask the true age because rewards from a younger age are greater."* In patriarchal cultures, the diminished relevance and visibility of older women were highlighted, with the quote, *"Women in old age do not have the same relevance, they do not have the same position, and they become less important and are not considered worthy of attention."*

5.2. GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN THE LABOUR MARKET

One of the business representatives highlighted that *"the complete elimination of discrimination based on gender, age, or any combination thereof by any company in Kosovo would make that company much more attractive for employment."* Thereby, this highlights the positive impact of eradicating discrimination in the workplace. By doing so, a company becomes more appealing to potential employees. The emphasis on gender, age, and their combinations suggests a commitment to inclusivity and equal opportunities for all individuals. Furthermore, the active involvement of women in the labour

market was crucial, as one of the representatives said, *"We strongly believe that women in Kosovo, of any age, bring skills and ideas and contribute in various ways to the growth of productivity in the company, the development of a positive atmosphere, and motivation in the workplace, making the work environment more accommodating for individuals with families."*

In terms of ageism and gender, one of the business representatives stated that *"older women may limit themselves from work that is outside regular hours or in the afternoons due to expectations or obligations."* In this vein, women 40+ perceive that it is too late to choose a new career path. This is due to their responsibilities within the family, and hence, those that are in the labour market generally try to work close to their homes. *"Women in the older age group, aside from certain professions, do not have the opportunity to start specializing in something new in the job market. They can only adapt to the job market. They may engage in work for survival or at least to move away slightly from family life."* Thereby, ageism and gender combined comprise a potential constraint faced by older women in terms of work flexibility. It suggests that, because of certain expectations or obligations, women of advanced age might choose to avoid or limit their engagement in work that extends beyond regular hours or occurs in the afternoons. This limitation may be influenced by societal norms, family responsibilities, or personal preferences that could affect their availability for work during specific times. In addition, businesses use the argument that *"we use the young population as a sales argument because it represents energy, motivation, and willingness to learn and move on."* There are also age stereotypes, implicit bias, and ageism. Despite stating that they do not select based on age, the interviewee initially positions the young population as a sales argument. This could perpetuate stereotypes about older individuals lacking energy or motivation. The emphasis on youth as a sales argument may inadvertently signal a preference for younger individuals, even if not explicitly stated. The interviewee's emphasis on the positive attributes of youth may contribute to an environment that inadvertently fosters ageism, consciously or unconsciously.

The findings from the focus groups suggest that ageism is indeed prevalent, particularly in the context of employment opportunities. Some women in these focus groups have reported facing unrealistic expectations from businesses, especially concerning experience requirements. Businesses often prioritize candidates with extensive experience, and they may dismiss candidates without such experience, even if they possess relevant education or training. Furthermore, women face challenges entering the labour market due to the barriers and resistance they face within the family. For women, particularly in decision-making regarding work, challenges persist, with many not having the autonomy to decide. *"Men are reluctant to disrupt their comfort zone, giving priority to their daugh-*

ters rather than their wives. Males have the final say, and in most cases, they are the ones making significant decisions for the family. For women, men are not willing to disrupt the comfort zone." Men are reluctant to disrupt their comfort zone, giving priority to their daughters rather than their wives. Males have the final say, and in most cases, they are the ones making significant decisions for the family. "In the case of young girls, it's no longer a problem as things have changed, but for women, it remains an issue, and in most cases, they do not decide. Some women can work, but their husbands do not allow them to."

BOX 1: GENDER DISCRIMINATION: MATERNITY LEAVE

"I encourage them [women], but I avoid promoting pregnant women due to budget constraints in our 18-month contracts. Our field personnel don't get paid for leave, making it a discriminatory practice. For instance, if an employee [woman], becomes pregnant, they might leave the job, and it's not preferable for me initially to hire pregnant women. It's not discrimination, just not convenient for the business."

"We faced an issue that we haven't been able to resolve in a nice matter: maternity leave. Our financial stability is tied to our clients; we can only compensate our employees if we receive payment from our clients. If a client opts to terminate a team member, we typically continue paying for one, two, or three months, making efforts to secure the individual a different position or a new job."

"We wouldn't limit ourselves only to women over 40 years old because discrimination is more prevalent even in younger age groups, especially among women who give birth to children, where women face numerous issues with their employers."

"There are cases when a woman is notified that she is pregnant and is dismissed from her job."

5.3. WORKING CONDITIONS AS BARRIER FOR WOMEN TO ENTER THE LABOUR MARKET

The labour market conditions have not improved, and the current working conditions in the labour market present an important barrier that discourages women from entering the labour market. The focus group discussions of women who currently do not work mainly stated the working conditions in the private sector that not only discourage women from working but also the source of the lack of family support that derives from it. The findings presented reveal a disconcerting situation within a private firm, where the absence of a formal contract and uncertainty surrounding compensation have become pronounced issues. The individual in question expresses a sense of demotivation resulting from performing

work without clear contractual terms. This emphasizes the detrimental impact that a lack of transparency in employment agreements can have on an individual's professional well-being. This concerning revelation pertains to business practices where individuals, despite signing contracts, are not provided with a copy. This lack of transparency raises questions about the adherence to professional standards and ethical business practices. Furthermore, women exhibit reluctance to apply for a job, which is potentially influenced by the demanding nature of the work environment. Additionally, a shift in criteria related to experience and age is suggested, indicating a potential reevaluation of traditional norms. Lastly, the findings highlight the discouragement experienced when workplaces are situated in rural zones due to transportation constraints, particularly when coupled with unfavourable working conditions. This underscores the significance of considering both geographical accessibility and working conditions to enhance overall job satisfaction and promote the well-being of employees. The factors that discourage women from working are a low salary, long working hours, and a lack of transportation.

BOX 2: WORKING CONDITIONS AS BARRIER FOR WOMEN TO WORK.

"...the private firm has encountered issues; I have been performing work without a formal contract, and I am uncertain about the nature of my compensation. These factors have significantly demotivated me in my professional careers."

"there are instances where women exhibit reluctance to participate in engineering competitions, potentially influenced by the demanding work environment. Moreover, the criteria for experience and age seem to have undergone alterations in such cases."

"...they [businesses] do not give you the contract, even though you have signed it; they do not provide you with a copy of the contract."

"If a workplace is not in urban areas and has been situated in rural zones due to transportation reasons, I feel discouraged, especially when the working conditions are unfavorable."

"Businesses should consider enabling a flexible half-time schedule, ensuring reliable transportation, and compensating employees for work conducted outside regular hours."

5.4. JOB ALLOCATION AND STEREOTYPES IN THE WORKPLACE

In the workplace, there is a notable emphasis on on-the-job training for operators, suggesting a departure from the traditional requirement of prior skills. One of the business representatives "underscores a commitment to inclusivity by providing opportunities for individuals to acquire skills directly

within the job environment. *“At the operator level, no prerequisite skills are required.”* In this context, 40+ women are engaged in jobs that are physically easy to do; some businesses place women in jobs that, according to them, could be easily done by women. *“The packaging job is physically easier, with a schedule that suits them better.”* Consequently, businesses tend to assign positions requiring delicacy to women. Although some business representatives maintain that in some job’s women are better in the workplace, there are still gender stereotypes within the workplace, in particular in task allocation. This also highlights the contradiction among female managers in their views on tasks suitable for women, indicating the need for a paradigm shift to challenge ingrained perceptions. In addition, jobs that require women to go out into the field make women hesitate due to stereotypes within the family. In this vein, the feeling of stability is another factor that pushes women to choose either jobs or occupations as they struggle to balance their professional and personal lives. As a result, these women choose occupations that require a lower salary but provide them with a feeling of stability.

This commitment to inclusive training becomes even more apparent when considering the physical fitness aspect mentioned by one of the business representatives: *“To be physically fit is essential, as the skills for the job are intensively learned on-site in the first three months.”* The business recognizes the importance of physical readiness, further emphasizing the dedication to equipping employees with the necessary skills during the initial training period. However, when examining the educational requirements for certain roles in production, a different perspective emerges. The interviewer suggested that *“for the production part, a degree in electrical engineering, machinery, or renewable energy is required... at other levels, jobs are performed even with technical high school education”*, which highlights a tiered approach to educational requirements. While some positions demand higher education, the company recognizes the value of technical high school education for other roles. In essence, the workplace exhibits a multifaceted strategy in its approach to skill acquisition and educational qualifications, aiming to be inclusive by providing on-the-job training opportunities and acknowledging diverse educational pathways for different job levels.

5.5. DISCRIMINATION ON JOB VACANCIES

There are gender-related stereotypes as well as ageism in the job openings. Although the phenomenon has changed in the last few years, and this is due to the challenges businesses face in finding employees, stereotypes are still evident. The gendered expectation of having more women in administrative roles raises concerns about stereotyping and the perpetuation of traditional gender norms within certain departments. One of the interviewees stated that *“some companies are developing various application methods. For the older age group, they still provide a phone number, but most companies no longer do that.”* The evolving application methods are positive, but the reference to older individuals still providing phone numbers suggests a potential bias against those less familiar

with digital platforms. This raises concerns about age-related discrimination and the need for companies to adapt inclusively. The introduction of a software tool to simplify the application process is positive, indicating efforts towards inclusivity. However, the interviewer emphasized that *“we have software that makes the application process easy. For example, name or surname, education, expected salary, and just apply... because we need this data, especially for the older age groups,”* whose emphasis on specific data needs, especially for the older age groups, might unintentionally reinforce age-related assumptions. The persistence of gender-related stereotypes and ageism in job openings, despite positive developments in application methods, suggests ongoing challenges. While the adoption of digital platforms is encouraging, the reliance on phone numbers for older applicants hints at potential biases, emphasizing the importance of fostering inclusive practices and addressing age-related assumptions in hiring processes.

Findings from focus groups of women that are active in the labour market and those that are either unemployed or do not work show that job vacancies are discriminatory and *“defining specific job vacancies is against EU regulations.”* Furthermore, ageism is evident, as *“job vacancies define the age required by those that apply,”* and the criteria added to job vacancies according to focus groups are discriminatory and directly influence women over 40. However, one of the interviewees in the focus groups maintained that “in many job vacancies, age is defined, and efforts are being made to eliminate this practice as it constitutes discrimination. In some competitions, there has been a shift towards actively encouraging women to apply. This has led to an increase of around 20% in the number of female applicants. For the first time in some cases, there have been women in certain professions where it was previously considered impossible for them to work.” Focus groups highlight the prevalence of age-related criteria in job postings, particularly affecting women over 40. The discussion narrative introduced a compelling counterpoint from one interviewee, suggesting ongoing efforts to eliminate age-related discrimination in job openings. The mention of a shift towards actively encouraging women to apply, resulting in a notable increase in female applicants, adds a positive dimension to the overall discussion.

5.6. SKILLS REQUIRED IN THE LABOUR MARKET

The private sector has raised concern that the lack of skilled labour force has become one of the major barriers for businesses. The demand for skills depends on business characteristics as well as the demand for occupations. The respondents maintained that *“the skills don’t differ gender wise”* and in some occupations is of crucial importance the experience of employees. The awareness of businesses of skill gaps in the labour market forced them to react by training them, where one of the respondents maintained that we prefer to train our employees; this is due to the expectations and high demands of those that already have the skills.” The importance of skills in the labour market has overcome some gender stereotypes, and in some occupations, women may have

an advantage, as one of the respondents maintained in software testing. Whereas, on the other hand, some respondents maintain that employees need to be equipped with a variety of skills, educational level, and expertise." *Besides technical expertise, whether from college or certifications, what matters most is knowledge and experience. In conversations, I assess stability, interest, communication, and teamwork. We offer tailored training. Certification in cybersecurity and data centres is vital for developers due to manufacturers' requirements for successful partnerships."*

These findings are confirmed by the focus groups, where one of the interviewees maintained that *"there are no female applicants in technical positions, even though in recent years, there has been a change because the mentality in institutions has shifted, positively influencing the increase in applicants."*

In this vein, another concern raised in the focus groups is that women do not work in the professions for which they received education. This compels women to undergo transitions or receive additional training to secure employment. *"I am a professional organizational psychologist. My hindrance has been my desire to work in the profession, and this has been a self-imposed barrier. I have completed training in HR and realized that some tricks are being used, indirectly hinting at age limits, particularly up to 35 years, where candidates are not accepted for jobs. After completing HR training, I also finished training in digital marketing. I worked in the gastronomy sector as a quality manager for local establishments. There, I added responsibilities to myself and received positive feedback from the company. I had to interrupt it because I was constantly in the field. I have been a social psychologist and a trainer (in my profession as they have been), and they are invaluable experiences."* The self-identified barrier stemming from a strong professional desire demonstrates a high level of self-awareness. The acknowledgement of encountering subtle age-related challenges in the job market reveals a keen understanding of industry dynamics.

After COVID-19, the focus of the private sector is on the digitalization of services; thereby, the focus is on a skilled labour force that has skills in technology. These new demands in the labour market have become a barrier for older women who may not possess these skills. Therefore, as shown above, when women apply to certain jobs, due to a lack of skills (digital skills), they are employed in jobs that do not demand these skills and are jobs that are less paid, including the working conditions. Despite the current situation in the labour market, the current migration propensity of the population, particularly the youth, has drawn attention towards women, particularly those over 40.

The advantages of hiring women over 40 (BOX 3) are related to productivity compared to younger adults; however, in general, women have an advantage in identifying issues, time management, achieving objectives on time, being more communicative and collaborative, and having practical skills. Even though women lack IT skills, those they possess have practical skills. Furthermore, the advantage of work ethics and

being detail-oriented is an important advantage that women bring to businesses.

BOX 3: LEVERAGING EXPERTISE OF WOMEN AGED 40+

"No, on the contrary. For packaging, our focus is more on this age group. Productivity is much higher compared to younger age groups."

"Identifying issues, time management, achieving objectives in record time—especially among the packaging team, where women have consistently excelled. Collaboration and communication are strengths, which are also present in men, but more pronounced in women."

"The market loses because women aged 40 and above have higher productivity and don't limit themselves to age or appearance. More space and opportunities should be given to women of all ages."

"40+, male and female both, and the discussions are interesting because they had a very good life and business experience but sometimes the practical, work skills were missing. So, the job they had in the Post Office of Kosovo for 30 years, this is very good experience but it doesn't help much for the IT industry because the knowledge is just too far away from it."

"Women are more detail-oriented, place greater importance on their work, and don't treat their job as unfinished business that can be left at the office. Personally, I lean towards feminism, observing that women are more committed to their work. In finance, knowing the software we use, like QuickBooks, and having certain skills is essential. However, what we primarily seek is someone who not only possesses design skills but also adapts well to the job. If a person is ambitious and has a strong work ethic, other skills tend to develop."

"Benefits arising from the expertise of women aged 40+ in the energy sector include: Structuring, planning, and managing tasks: Due to their experiences, primarily in corporations, they inherently understand the chain of responsibilities; Communication and accurate judgment; Thanks to their adept handling of situations in a non-personal manner; Planning and executing tasks according to a well-thought-out plan."

"Women are not corrupt; they are sensitive and more humane, thus caring more about the well-being of employees. They are more dedicated, precise in their schedules, and carry out their work with utmost commitment."

Due to the current trends as shown above, older women (over 40+) are seen as an important target from private sector.

The findings consistently underscore (Box 4) the perceived advantages of prioritizing long-term stability in the workforce, particularly evident in the preference for hiring women aged 40 and above. Employers express a strong inclination towards this age group, citing stability in work, lower turnover rates, and a shared commitment to enduring employment. Clients actively seek women in their 50s, valuing their long-term interest in the job, aligning with the belief that older individuals, around the age of 50, are more likely to seek stability. This preference extends beyond age, acknowledging that women, especially those over 40, exhibit enhanced social and technical skills, viewing challenges in expression rather than self-confidence. The private sector, particularly in fields like textiles, strategically targets women aged 40 and above, emphasizing their stability and security as workers. In certain industries, such as information technology, a preference for a slightly older age group is driven by the belief that it brings increased job stability and flexibility while acknowledging the high mobility of younger professionals. These collective insights reflect a recognition of the value and contributions of individuals aged 40 and above, emphasizing a commitment to long-term success in various professional settings.

Examining the dynamics of the market in Kosovo, especially in the context of the challenges faced by women, particularly those in the age group of 40-50 years. The efforts and challenges that these women had to build a family and consequences that has arisen in terms on their career goal is has reflected on their current situation. However, in this age group, many women have completed the phase of raising children, focusing more on contributing to society. Thereby, it has been recommended to examining specific issues that impact this situation, such as economic policies, employment opportunities, and cultural factors.

BOX 4: BENEFITS-LONG TERM STABILITY

“Personally, I prefer hiring a woman over 40 because I know she is stable in her work, less likely to leave, and seeks a stable job.”

“There have been cases where clients themselves have sought women in their 50s to apply because women show a long-term interest in the job. Today’s younger generation is more inclined to work for the sake of employment rather than a career, more experimental. Someone who is 50 years old seeks stability, and that aligns better with their preferences.”

“Social skills, I believe, are more developed in women, especially in the office where communication and planning stand out. They don’t perceive expressing thoughts as a threat to their ego; instead, they find it normal to articulate what they are thinking. I observe that they find it easier to discuss and plan tasks with each other. The main issues we encounter are communication-related. I think men often lack this, suggesting a deficiency in accountability or something similar. In this social aspect, women noticeably have better-developed skills. This applies to the technical side as well;

they approach problems in an engineering manner. The problem, I believe, lies not in a lack of self-confidence but simply in how they express themselves. This is where they seem to struggle.”

“The private sector has begun to consider married women with children, especially those aged 40 and above, as the majority of young people are leaving due to migration. The remaining group, with more time for private sector jobs, is now exploring the potential of women aged 40 and above... Many businesses, especially in the textile sector, claim that their best target is family women with grown children. They come, work all day, receive a salary of 200-300, 400 at most, which is considered excellent. Businesses view these workers as the most secure; they don’t change jobs often. Now, everyone is trying to exploit this potential, but it remains a form of exploitation, whether with a new age group or these women.”

“In our case, younger age groups compete. I prioritize a slightly older age because of increased job stability and flexibility compared to younger counterparts. Our market faces significant staff turnover, making it challenging. So, when we hire staff, they often leave after 3 or 6 months. The job market demands substantial mobility, mainly seen in younger professionals below the age of 30. People above 30 may apply, but in most of the job openings, younger individuals are the main competitors. Older age doesn’t compete much in the information technology market. Instead, we tend to hire someone familiar or recommended.”

5.7. TARGETED GOVERNMENT POLICIES IN THE LABOUR MARKET

Despite the challenges that women, particularly those over 40, face in the labour market, government policies predominantly focus on the youth. As demonstrated earlier, women over 40 often lack the requisite skill sets. This deficiency is noteworthy despite the advantages that women over 40 bring to private businesses, such as stability resulting from experience, albeit without the additional skills acquired in the workplace. The government’s primary emphasis is on the youth, driven by the concern over the “*high unemployment rate among unqualified youth*.” The employment agency maintains a database of targeted youth aged 18-29 under the guaranteed scheme. According to respondents, this approach “*automatically excludes women over 40*” from active labour market measures. The government has also introduced the ‘Super Puna’ platform, a Guaranteed Employment for Youth initiative designed to ease youth access to the labour market and support the private sector in hiring young workers. However, these active labour market measures explicitly target the youth, inadvertently excluding women and individuals over 40. Consequently, the government’s policies not only centre on youth but also discriminate against women over 40.

Moreover, in cases where the employment agency recommends businesses consider this demographic, women in this category often face rejection from the private sector. One respondent pointed out, *"We sent targeted candidates aged from their 40s to 50s to private sector employers; however, businesses decline to hire them either because they are deemed overqualified or lack the specific skills required."* In response to this challenge, the employment agency has developed several training profiles exclusively tailored for women, focusing on areas such as dressmaking, hairdressing, makeup, manicure, and pedicure. This marks a shift from previous years when the agency primarily concentrated on profiles related to traditionally male-dominated fields like construction, carpentry, and metalwork. This shift in focus has played a role in discouraging women from applying for training programs.

Recently, the government has directed attention towards women who have been victims of domestic violence. Under Measure 1.8, initiated by the Prime Minister's office, the government aims to support these women by encouraging their employment in the private sector. This measure includes incentives for businesses, such as partial salary support, to motivate them to hire these women. The employment agency serves as an intermediary between these women and businesses, ensuring the confidentiality of the information. This confidentiality is crucial because businesses, upon learning about a candidate's history of domestic violence, might express hesitancy. As one respondent noted, *"Businesses may hesitate when they understand that they have been prone to domestic violence and may say 'I don't want trouble.'" Therefore, maintaining confidentiality becomes a pivotal aspect of facilitating the employment of women who have experienced domestic violence.*

BOX 5: SOLUTIONS TO THE CHALLENGE AND SUPPORT WOMEN IN LABOUR MARKET

"The registration of women in professional employment centers, particularly for training, would be very welcome. Perhaps it could have provided significant assistance."

"Women should register at employment centers, and these agencies should be strengthened further. Through this, awareness campaigns for women can be conducted, as they often do not receive information about these training sessions and competitions. Subsequently, women would be notified, providing significant support to them."

"More grants and scholarships are being provided for young girls rather than women aged 40 and above. Grants dedicated to supporting these older women should be established, facilitating training opportunities and providing them with chances for advancement."

"Women in rural areas face greater challenges in terms of integration, primarily due to a lack of information."

"Trainings are essential to organize, especially for the middle age group, as they may not have had the opportunity to pursue a profession or complete their education."

"I have worked at [...] for 21 years. The issue in job competitions is the specified age limit, which has discouraged me from applying for jobs. The tasks I have performed at the airport are highly specific and not easily transferable to other professions. Therefore, it would be beneficial to provide free training to enhance skills."

6. CONCLUSIONS

Ageism in general and gendered ageism in particular is evident in developed and developing economies, and Kosovo as transition economy is no exception. This topic has become an important social issue in European countries, raising attention to policy makers and academia to tackle this issue. However, the nature of ageism and gender ageism depends on country characteristics as well as cultural settings of country. The aim of this position paper was to examine gendered ageism in the labour market in Kosovo as well as on employment opportunities, career advancement, and overall workplace experiences. This paper also aimed to provide evidence-based policy interventions to tackle gendered ageism in the labour market.

Gender discrimination in the labour market serves as a formidable barrier to achieving a workforce characterized by diversity and enriched talent. This discussion delves deeply into the imperative of dismantling ageism and gender bias, placing a nuanced spotlight on the often-overlooked segment of women aged 40 and above. The challenges faced by these women are multifaceted, starting from societal expectations from the family, perpetuated stereotypes, and biases that systematically favour a younger demographic. The clash between societal expectations and the professional aspirations of women aged 40 and above constitutes a significant challenge. Traditional gender norms tend to confine these women to the role of homemakers, often overshadowing their vast potential contributions in professional spheres. The prevailing societal narrative often dictates that women in this age group should prioritize familial responsibilities over career advancements, thereby complicating their pursuit of diverse and fulfilling professional opportunities. Age-related stereotypes cast a pervasive shadow over the prospects of older women in the labour market. These stereotypes perpetuate the notion that individuals aged 40 and above lack the adaptability, technological prowess, or the innate enthusiasm associated with their younger counterparts.

Inclusive training initiatives are observed, but stereotypes persist in job allocation based on perceived ease or sensitivity. Family stereotypes influence women's career choices, leading to potential limitations and lower-paying jobs for stability. Despite the presence of inclusive training initiatives—even though very limited, persistent stereotypes significantly influence job allocation in the workplace, often determining roles based on perceived ease or delicacy. These ingrained biases contribute to a weighted distribution of responsibilities, restricting women's career choices. Family stereotypes further compound these challenges, compelling women to opt for roles perceived as stable, albeit lower paying, potentially limiting their professional growth and perpetuating gender disparities within the workforce.

While advancements in evolving application methods signify progress in addressing discrimination on job vacancies, concerns linger regarding persistent age-related requirements

that may hinder inclusivity. The need for careful consideration extends to the design of software tools used in application processes, emphasizing the importance of creating systems that foster inclusivity and mitigate potential biases against older applicants. Striking a balance between technological innovation and age-neutral accessibility becomes paramount to ensure fair and unbiased recruitment practices in the evolving landscape of job vacancies.

The private sector's acknowledgment of the significance of skills, irrespective of gender, marks a progressive stance in challenging traditional gender stereotypes associated with certain occupations. However, the current emphasis on digitalization in the workforce presents a unique set of challenges for older women who may lack these specific technological skills. This digital divide not only impacts their job opportunities but also influences the working conditions they encounter. Bridging this gap and providing avenues for skill development tailored to both genders, including older women, is essential for fostering an inclusive and equitable work environment in the evolving landscape of the private sector.

The heightened propensity for youth migration has prompted a shift in focus towards women aged 40 and above in the labour market. In response, the private sector not only acknowledges but actively embraces the unique benefits that women in this age group bring to the workforce. Recognizing the advantages of stability, lower turnover rates, and enduring commitment, businesses across various industries exhibit a preference for women aged 40 and above. This attitudinal shift underscores the appreciation for their valuable contributions and positions them as pivotal assets contributing to the long-term success of organizations.

Government policies predominantly favour youth, potentially excluding the valuable contributions of women aged 40 and above. Training initiatives face challenges in integration, with businesses hesitating due to perceived overqualification or lack of specific skills. The focus towards youth-centric policies within government active labour measures further exacerbates the challenges faced by older women. While these policies may address concerns related to youth unemployment, they inadvertently sideline the needs and potentials of women aged 40 and above. The emphasis on targeted initiatives for the youth, without a corresponding focus on older demographics, reflects a systemic oversight that perpetuates gender disparities and fails to harness the full spectrum of talent within the workforce.

Moreover, women are discouraged from entering the labour market due to unfavourable working conditions, including low salaries, transportation issues, the absence of contracts, lack of flexibility, and long working hours. These barriers are significant and directly influence family decisions regarding supporting women in pursuing.

7. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from this position paper from semi-structured interviews and two focus groups the following are policy recommendations.

- The collaboration of stakeholders from institutions and civil society is passive in terms of targeting middle-aged groups and encouraging them to enter in labour market. Therefore, we recommend that stakeholders increase collaboration based on a clear strategy for effective partnership.
- The second recommendation revolves around enhancing training opportunities and providing targeted career guidance for women over 40. The research findings highlight a significant gap in clear career guidance for this demographic, contributing to challenges in securing stable employment. To address this issue, it is crucial to design and implement tailored training programs that not only enhance their skill sets but also offer comprehensive career counselling. This recommendation emphasizes the need for structured guidance to empower women over 40 in making informed career decisions, ultimately improving their prospects for sustainable and fulfilling employment.
- It is recommended that government policies be revised and augmented to proactively address the unique needs of women over 40 in the labour market. Recognizing the stability that this demographic brings, active labour market measures should be strategically tailored to target and uplift women in this age group. Policymakers should consider implementing targeted training programs, mentorship initiatives, and incentives for businesses to hire women over 40. This approach not only aligns with the shifting dynamics of the labour force but also fosters inclusivity, harnessing the valuable contributions of experienced women. Therefore, there is a need for concrete steps that actively targets this category. In this vein, active labour market measures are used as broad terms by institutions, and they lack on details on the nature and scope of this measures. As a result, a more comprehensive and detailed proposal with specific policy adjustments and actionable steps would strengthen the effectiveness of government policies in relation of women over 40.
- women regarding training sessions and competitions. Reinforce these agencies to serve as effective communication channels, notifying and supporting women effectively.
- Develop policies to address the challenges faced by women in rural areas, primarily related to integration issues arising from a lack of information. Implement outreach programs and initiatives to disseminate information and create opportunities for rural women.
- Implement policies to address the disparity in grant distribution by establishing dedicated grants for women aged 40 and above for start-ups. Facilitate training opportunities to empower older women, providing them with fair chances for professional advancement.
- Launch training programs specifically tailored for the middle-aged group, recognizing their unique needs and constraints. Provide opportunities for skill development to enhance their professional capabilities, especially for those who may not have had the chance to pursue a profession or complete their education.
- Increase the capacities of Labour Inspectorate to monitor the working conditions (e.g., the lack of contract among employees, long working hours etc.).

Some specific recommendations regarding to middle aged women are:

- Establish and promote registration initiatives for women at professional employment centres, focusing on training opportunities.
- Ensure accessibility and inclusivity in these programs to provide significant assistance and support to women seeking skill development.
- Strengthen employment centres, specifically focusing on women's registration and information dissemination. Conduct awareness campaigns to bridge the information gap for

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Vjollca Krasniqi, university professor, gender expert, 26.04.2023
 Milaim Morina, Center for Policies and Advocacy, 15.05.2023
 Erblina Idrizi, Imbus Peja, 17.05.2023
 Shkamb Kërleshi, KosovaJob, 01.06.2023
 Liridona Nikci, Devolli Cooperation, 03.06.2023
 Zanfina Kabashi, Jaha Solar, 06.06.2022
 Mirishahe Sylja, gender expert, activist, 06.06.2023
 Albina Metaj-Ajvazi, Procredit Bank, 20.06.2023
 Ariel Shaban, Kivo LLC, 29.06.2023
 Eta Morina, Hidroing Dk, 04.07.2023
 Leonora Mehmetaj, Novus Consulting, 04.07.2023
 Paul Schmieder, Borek Solutions, transcript, 07.06.2023
 Anton Gojani, Aligning Education and Training with Labour Market Needs, 19.12.2023
 Jehona Rexha, Deputy Director of the Kosovo Employment Agency (KEA), 13.12.2023

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