

RESEARCH REPORT — 06 OF 06

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14 SOURCES CITED

AI Doesn't Have an Age Limit: Why the Future of Work Must Include Older Workers

The workforce is aging into its largest-ever share of workers over 55. The data says this group is being underestimated twice — once on willingness to learn, and once on how exposed their jobs actually are to AI.

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THE NUMBER THAT MATTERS

49.4% vs 42.2%

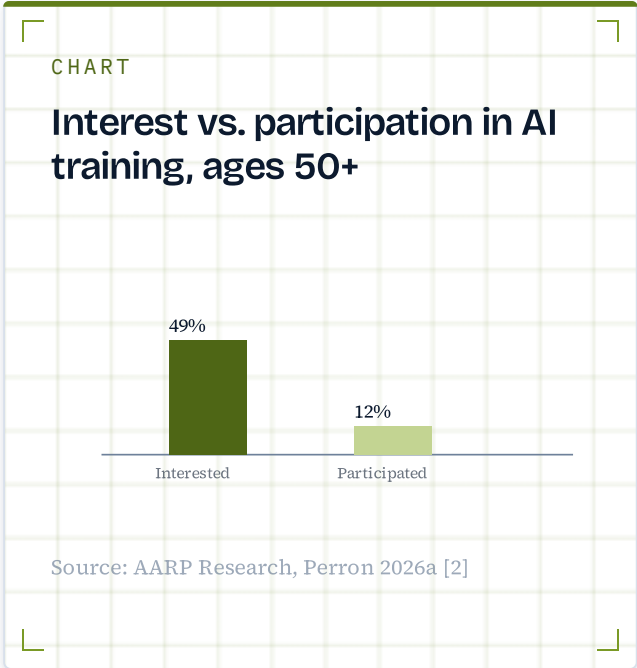
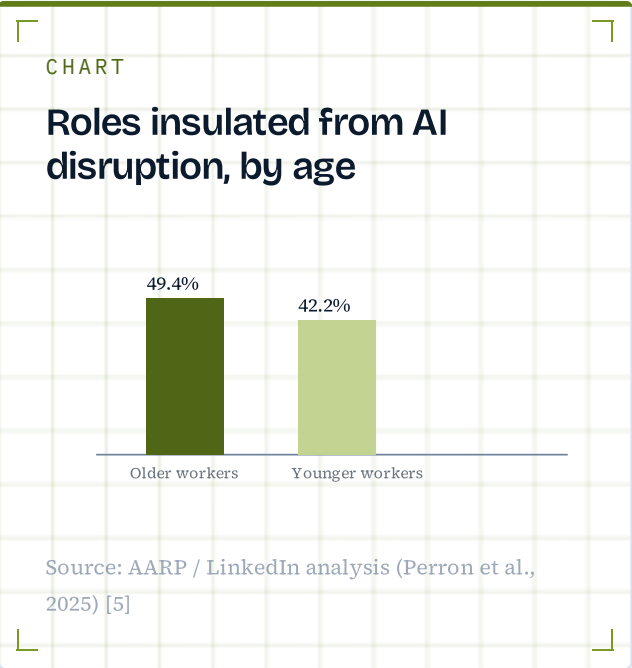
Share of older workers, versus younger workers, holding positions that analysis finds insulated from AI disruption — the opposite of the assumption most workplace planning still makes.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Workers 55+ are the fastest-growing segment of the labour force for two decades running, and those 65+ are now the fastest-growing cohort of all. ^[4]
- Older workers use AI far less than the workforce average (23% vs. broader adoption trends) but are more interested in training than they are given credit for — 49% want it, only 12% have received it. ^[2]
- South Korean and U.S. payroll data both show the same pattern: junior, AI-exposed roles are shrinking while employment for workers in their 50s in the same high-exposure industries is growing. ^[6]
- Age discrimination remains stubbornly common — roughly two-thirds of workers 50+ report seeing or experiencing it — even as ageism complaints rise sharply in job-seeker sentiment data. ^[3]
- A handful of U.S. states have begun banning age-related questions on initial job applications — a narrow but concrete policy lever other jurisdictions can adopt quickly. ^[7]

DATA DASHBOARD



The workforce is aging, structurally and permanently

Workers aged 55 and older have been the fastest-growing segment of the labour force for more than two decades, and workers 65 and older are now the fastest-growing cohort of all, with 61.8% of them continuing to work full time. ^[4] This is not a temporary post-pandemic blip — it is a structural change in who is available to work, how long careers now last, and what workforce participation looks like across a lifetime. Despite that, most AI-transition planning, media coverage and training investment still centres implicitly on younger workers, treating the workforce's fastest-growing group as an afterthought rather than its center of gravity. ^[4]

The American Psychological Association's Work in America survey found that 47% of workers across all sectors used AI tools at least monthly by spring 2025, up sharply from 34% the year before — and roughly a quarter of workers now use AI weekly, moving fast from experiment to habit. ^[1] But that average masks a real generational skew: only 23% of workers aged 50 and older say they use AI to a great or some extent in their own work, with 73% saying they use it not too much or not at all. ^[2]

02 — THE WILLINGNESS GAP IS SMALLER THAN ASSUMED

Older workers want the training. They are mostly not getting it.

The common assumption — that older workers are reluctant to reskill — does not hold up against the data. 86% of older workers say they would not accept a new job unless it offered an opportunity to learn something new, 79% of workers 50 and older actively seek out learning opportunities, and 60% say they are willing to learn new skills specifically if their employer requests it. ^[2] Interest in AI specifically follows the same pattern: 49% of workers 50 and older say they are interested in training or classes to learn more about using AI at work — yet only 12% report

having actually participated in any. ^[2] That 37-point gap between interest and access is a supply problem, not a demand problem.

Where older workers do use AI, the pattern is instructive: the most common uses are finding information (67%), analyzing data (40%) and creating content (37%) — augmentation of existing expertise, not wholesale task replacement. ^[2] That fits a broader research finding that older learners can perform as well as younger ones in self-directed learning contexts, even though fluid reasoning and processing speed do tend to decline somewhat with age — older learners simply need more structured time and support to get there, which is a design problem for training programs, not a capability ceiling. ^[1]

03 — THE UNEXPECTED DIRECTION OF AI'S IMPACT

So far, generative AI has been kinder to older workers than to younger ones

Contrary to the instinctive fear that AI would hit older, less tech-fluent workers hardest, the emerging evidence points the other way. AARP and LinkedIn analysis found that 49.4% of older workers hold positions insulated from AI disruption, compared with 42.2% of younger workers — largely because older workers are more concentrated in complex, decision-making and management roles, where they average ten more years of leadership experience than their younger peers. ^[5] South Korea's central bank found the same pattern in its labour data: while youth employment fell sharply in AI-exposed industries, employment for workers in their 50s in those same high-exposure sectors actually grew by 173,000 jobs over the same period — a result the Bank of Korea explicitly labeled a shift toward a more seniority-biased labour market. ^[6] A parallel analysis of U.S. software-development payrolls found employment for developers aged 22–25 down nearly 20% since late 2022 in firms where employment for older developers grew 6–12% over the same window. ^[6]

This is not a reason for complacency about older workers — it is a reason to be precise about where the real risk sits. The risk to older workers is concentrated less in task automation and more in retention and hiring bias once they are between roles: nearly a quarter of Americans 50 and older planned a job switch in 2025, a 10-point jump from the year before, and their top-cited fear going into that search was age discrimination, not AI itself. ^[8]

04 — THE DISCRIMINATION THAT HASN'T GONE AWAY

Ageism is the persistent risk, not obsolescence

Roughly 64–65% of workers 50 and older report having seen or experienced age discrimination at work, a figure that has held essentially steady across AARP's 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025 surveys — meaning none of the recent AI-adoption acceleration has moved this number in either direction yet. ^[3] A separate signal suggests the pressure may be building regardless: Glassdoor recorded a 133% year-over-year jump in mentions of ageism in job-seeker reviews in the first quarter of 2025, one of the platform's largest sentiment spikes on record, arriving alongside more than 1.7 million layoffs and discharges in a single month and over 1 million planned job-cut announcements through the following months. ^[3]

Retention economics argue strongly against writing off experienced workers under this pressure: SHRM research finds experienced workers show higher engagement and organizational commitment, and turnover replacement costs run from 50% to 200% of annual salary — a direct financial argument for reskilling in place rather than churn. ^[9] A handful of U.S. states — Connecticut, Colorado, Delaware and Oregon — have begun addressing the hiring side of the problem directly, passing laws that bar employers from requesting age-related information on initial job applications unless it is a genuine, bona fide job requirement. ^[7]

AT A GLANCE

INDICATOR	OLDER WORKERS (50+)	COMPARISON	SOURCE
Currently using AI at work (great/some extent)	23%	47% of all workers use AI ≥monthly	AARP; APA
Interested in AI training	49%	Only 12% have received any	AARP / Perron 2026a
Roles insulated from AI disruption	49.4%	42.2% for younger workers	AARP / LinkedIn
Experienced age discrimination	64%	Stable since 2022	AARP Research
Planning a 2025 job switch	~24%	+10pp vs. prior year	AARP, Jan 2025

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR POLICYMAKERS

- Extend age-blind initial-application laws (as passed in Connecticut, Colorado, Delaware and Oregon) more broadly — it is a low-cost, high-leverage policy lever.
- Fund AI-literacy training explicitly for the 50+ cohort, closing the gap between the 49% who want it and the 12% who've received it.
- Track ageism complaint trends (like Glassdoor's sentiment spike) as an early-warning labour-market indicator, not an HR footnote.

FOR EDUCATORS & WORKFORCE BOARDS

- Design AI training with more structured time and support for older learners — capability isn't the barrier, format and pacing often are.
- Lead with augmentation use cases (finding information, analyzing data) that map to how older workers already use AI, rather than generic tool tutorials.
- Position experienced workers as AI-literacy mentors to younger colleagues where their domain judgment is the scarce resource, not the AI skill itself.

FOR BUSINESS & HR LEADERS

- Audit hiring and layoff decisions for age bias explicitly — the discrimination rate hasn't moved in years without deliberate intervention.
- Offer AI training proactively to workers 50+ rather than waiting for requests; interest already exceeds access by a wide margin.
- Weigh retention economics (50–200% of salary in turnover cost) against any instinct to manage out experienced staff during AI-driven restructuring.

SOURCES

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