

A photograph of a woman with short blonde hair and glasses, wearing a light blue button-down shirt, and a man with dark hair, a beard, and glasses, wearing a dark suit jacket over a light blue shirt. They are both looking intently at a laptop screen. The woman is on the left, and the man is on the right, pointing at the screen. The background is slightly blurred, showing green foliage.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**INTERGENERATIONALITY:
AN INNOVATION OPPORTUNITY
FOR BUSINESS AND SOCIETY**

Coordinated by [Concepción Galdón](#)

INTERGENERATIONALITY: AN INNOVATION OPPORTUNITY FOR BUSINESS AND SOCIETY

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*Observatory of Demography and
Generational Diversity*



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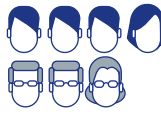


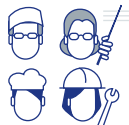







GENERATIONAL DIVERSITY IN THE LABOR MARKET:

Innovation and Collaboration

Demographic transformation implies a socio-cultural change that affects companies in their relationship with employees, customers, and the conceptualization of their products. This report proposes an approach to this phenomenon **from the perspective of intergenerationality.**

Sociodemographic Study

-  **Young people experience a setback and seniors experience growth** in activity and participation in the workforce.
-  **More juniors than seniors**, and in both groups more men than women.
-  **The two main age groups:**
 - 30 to 34 years old
 - 55 to 59 years old
-  **The educational levels of the young people are higher** than those of the older people.
-  **Young and old participate more in:**
 - Sales
 - Manufacturing industries
 - Education
- 

Men:	Women:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Manufacturing industries• Construction• Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Education• Health care
-  **Part time work is not widespread** among seniors as a strategy for gradually leaving the workforce.
-  **Professionals and sales people are the main occupations** of young people and seniors.
-  **There is a higher presence of seniors in elementary occupations** due to more women occupying these positions.
-  There are **more unemployed young people** than older people and **more unemployed men than women.**



Intergenerational Collaboration Study from the Perspective of Social Innovation

Mapping of social innovators in
Europe and Latin America



Language analysis of
interviews

New Paradigms



► **Healthy aging**
understood as the
absence of disease.

A focus on
functional capacity
and well-being.



► **Older professionals**
are understood as a
generation.

An open, values-
based approach that
does **not assign**
labels to subjects.



► **Intergenerational
collaboration**
understood as
connecting the
«young» and the «old».

Interaction
**between several
generations** at the
same time.



► **Intergenerational
collaboration** in
which one person
helps the other.

Projects in which
all generations gain
something through
collaboration.



Ingredients for Success

- The users are the protagonists, **considered fundamentally to be people, and not «old people».**
- **Reinventing the later stages of life** in terms of pressing interests, curiosities, and projects.
- **Intergenerational collaboration to promote a good life,** in which employment is a means to this end.



• **Community, a key element** for intergenerational collaboration..

• Aging, an **opportunity for innovation.**

• Networking and **collaboration between companies and social innovation organizations:**

- Sponsorships and donations
- Corporate volunteering
- Communication and visibility
- Business consultants
- Executing projects together
- Suppliers for companies
- Companies as a sales channel of their services

Impact

Constructing new social
**strategies for the new
demographic reality**

Promoting **life goals and
happiness for the older population**

**Generating value for all
generations**

Demographic transformation involves a profound sociocultural change that affects companies very directly both in their relationship with employees and customers and in the conceptualization of their products, services, and business models. The higher average quality of life for people as they age leads logically to a search for new goals and dreams at stages in which it was previously accepted that life was coming to a close. This coincides with an evolution of functional diversity at a time when there is still plenty left to live and to contribute. Furthermore, the advance in the use of new technologies is prompting demographic changes to configure a new social, cultural, and economic environment.

All of this paints a complex scenario in which an encounter between six generations takes place; each one with its particularities, needs, and contributions. This report proposes a mixed approach to the phenomenon of demographic transformation, combining an in-depth quantitative analysis of secondary data with a qualitative analysis of data from primary sources analyzed for this study. This allows us to complement the essential figures that explain the current scenario with a deeper meaning of these figures, with respect to the object of analysis of the second section of the report: intergenerational cooperation.

The analysis that we present runs up against a problem in that at the moment we do not have a widely accepted language that reflects this new demographic reality. The following pages demonstrate this and sometimes make use of labels that may not accurately reflect the people represented in that particular category. We will refer to personas de edad madura (“people of mature age”) or seniors (“seniors”) in order to avoid the term mayor (“older”) or the expression tercera edad (“elderly”), which for many denotes people with limitations in terms of their ability to contribute, as in people who are already in the final stages of their life; something that is paradoxical in a report like this, which tries to show that they are people who reinvent themselves, who restart their existence from a place of greater maturity and clarity. However, many of the sources consulted, as well as the social innovators interviewed, use the word “older,” which is why this term also appears frequently in the study.

Components of the labor market

This part of the study aims to elaborate on the volume and some of the characteristics of both the working population that we refer to as junior (16-34 years old) and that which we call senior (55 years old and up). In both groups, the study has been carried out according to sex and age groups, and activity; occupation; and unemployment status have been studied. We have devoted special attention to employed individuals by approximating their volume, their rates, their nationality, their degree of training, the type of work they do, their job sector, and their specific occupation. In terms of activity and occupation, we have compared the 2008 situation with that of 2019 in order to verify the evolution of these variables in the recent past. The numerical precision of their values are displayed in 24 tables, and the visual aids in 56 graphs.

To contextualize the report, the demographic components of the labor market are presented, which consists of identifying the general composition of the Spanish population by age and sex in 2008 and 2019, and analyzing its components: birth rate, immigration, and aging.

Juniors and seniors are people belonging to different generations: young people, especially generation Y, or millennials, were born in the eighties and nineties; older people, especially including baby boomers, were born between 1955 and 1975. Consequently, they are individuals with different education levels, and habits, tastes, ambitions, capacities, and attitudes that complement each other. And this is what this analysis entails: combining their conditions so that, within the framework of intergenerational work, each one can contribute their own comparative advantages.

Below we present the main conclusions of the sociodemographic analysis; referring first to young people, then to seniors, and finally to the comparison between both groups.

Young people

The fall in the birth rate has led to a decline in the number of young people. Between 2008 and 2019 this group decreased by more than three million people, a decline that would be even greater were it not for foreign immigration. The number of working people in this age bracket went from 9.1 million to 6.1 million and their relative proportion, from 40% to 26.5%. Despite this, they exceed the seniors in terms of workforce membership (6.1 million compared to 4 million). In this context of workforce decline, the gap between male and female workers is diminishing.

A similar development can be observed in terms of occupation. Between 2008 and 2019, the number of employed young people decreased from 7.8 million to 4.8 million and their presence in the employed population as a whole decreased from 38% to 25%, although there were still more young people employed (4.8 million) than older people (3.5 million). Also in terms of occupation, the differences between men and women were reduced. In general, employed young people had a higher educational level than older people. This difference is especially reflected in the percentage of employed people with tertiary education, where the strong growth in number of women stands out. The main sectors of activity were commerce, manufacturing, hospitality, social services, and education. Men stood out in manufacturing, construction, and transportation, while females did so in health and education. The full-time working day was on the rise in the 30-34 age group, where it was already predominant (85%). At any rate, part-time work was more common among women than among men. By occupation category, salespeople (commercial) and maintenance stood out, as well as professionals. The remainder of the top five categories were (1) technicians and associated professionals, (2) clerical workers, and (3) artisans and the like. By sex, women outnumbered men in the professional and administrative group, while men outnumbered women in the artisans and related workers group and in that of workers and assemblers. There were 1.2 million unemployed young people, who represented 40% of the unemployed people in the country, and among them men had higher rates than women.

Seniors

The significant aging between 2008 and 2019 meant that the population aged 55 and over grew by 2.5 million, with a small predominance of women (1.3 million versus 1.2 million men). In 2019, seniors accounted for 38% (40% women and 36% men) of the population aged 16 years and over. This increase in seniors translated to a growth in workforce volume, which went from 2.5 million in 2008 to more than 4 million in 2019, and in their participation in the total workforce, which grew from 11% to a 17%. Despite this, young people outnumbered them in their participation in the total workforce (26% and 17%, respectively). In this context of workforce gains, the difference between men and women decreased, although men still outnumbered women in absolute numbers and in activity rates. Regarding employed workers, they went from 2.3 million to 3.5 million (from 11.6% to 17.8% of the entire workforce), although young people still outnumbered older people. Employed seniors represented a significant number only in the 55-59 age group, with an employment rate of 60%. Upwards of that, numbers fell sharply, confirming the prevalence of a culture of leaving the workforce early. We reiterate the lower educational level of seniors, especially in tertiary education. Regarding their main sectors of activity, what stood out was: trade, manufacturing industries, public administration and defense, recreational and entertainment activities, and education. Men stood out in manufacturing activities, while women stood out in health and education. Until an advanced age (70 years or more), the vast majority of seniors who work did so full time. Part-time work was more common among women than men. Professionals and salespeople were the

main occupation categories. Also making up the top five were administrative, technical and associated professionals, and elementary occupations. There were almost half a million unemployed seniors, representing 15% of the total unemployed population of the country. They had lower rates than the juniors, but like them, men had higher rates than women.

Comparative summary

In a quintessential comparative summary without numbers, the following were the main similarities and differences between the two groups: The first comparison refers to the trajectory followed by each group between 2008 and 2019. Both in terms of the total numbers of each group and their participation in the workforce, young people experienced a clear setback and seniors a notable growth. This reduced the differences with respect to the relative weight of each group in the total active and employed population in the country. Despite this, there were still more juniors than seniors in the Spanish labor market, and in both groups there were more men than women, although the differences were reduced due to the increase in the number of women. In each group there were two age groups that made up most of the workforce: In the group of young people it was the 30-34 age bracket. In the older group, it was the 55-59 age bracket. Before the age of 30, the educational system was absorbing a significant number of young people and after the age of 60, early retirements began to multiply. Foreign immigration affected employment for juniors much more than for seniors. The educational levels of the young were higher than those of the older people. The difference in the percentages of those with a university education exemplified this inequality. By sector, young and old coincided in their high participation in sales, manufacturing industries, and education. But among the first five sectors they differed in two others: Young people were working more so in hospitality and health care and older people more in public administration and defense, and in artistic, recreational, and entertainment activities. By sex in both groups, men were working more in manufacturing industries; construction; and transport, while women did so in education and health. Part-time work was more widespread among young people than among older people, especially in the younger age groups, due to their participation in the educational system. Working part time as a strategy for gradually leaving the workforce did not seem very widespread among seniors. In any case, it was a more widespread option among women than men.

Professionals and salespeople (commercial) are the main occupations for young people and seniors. The difference lies in the greater presence of seniors in elementary occupations, which is attributed to the high incidence of women working in them. It is also noteworthy that there were more seniors than juniors and more men than women in the category of directors and managers. Unemployment affected the young more than the old, and in both groups it was higher in men than in women.

The intergenerational collaboration study from the perspective of social innovation

Beyond its direct impact on companies, healthy aging is an increasingly urgent global challenge. While people do live longer, unfortunately they don't always have an adequate quality of life during that extra time. Healthy aging requires a paradigm shift: from a disease-centered approach to a more holistic one that affects functional capacity and well-being. Older people who are active and feel they have fulfilling lives are an important asset for our societies. Indeed, in light of new societal trends, we can (and must) promote talent and harness the energy of older people, while reducing the likelihood of dependence due to premature aging, as well as morbidity and mortality.

By interacting with older populations, creating employment opportunities that adapt to their needs and accompanying them in their life goals, companies are not only serving their own interests, but also contributing to this paradigm shift that our society needs and that older people deserve. And this can be achieved through intergenerational collaboration.

About intergenerational collaboration in companies

In our review of the literature, we identified trends in how large companies engage with their older employees. Right off the bat, many companies, opinion leaders, and consultants speak about the importance of managing an intergenerational workforce. To that end, we identified a predominant approach that frames older professionals as subjects of diversity and uses generation as a segmentation tool. The advantage of this approach wherein demographic groups are defined is that the metrics are easy to evaluate, which is useful for identifying and resolving possible cases of discrimination in one way or another (i.e., gray ceiling vs. ageism). However, grouping workers by age involves making assumptions about their drivers and values, which may not be entirely accurate. One clear example is the assumption that certain generations have more of a "growth mindset," while others maintain a "fixed mindset."

Companies must design environments that allow employees to learn from each other and avoid self-segmentation by demographics. In the absence of targeted interventions, companies may find that their employees associate only with colleagues who have a similar status or career path within the organization. This common trend limits intergenerational collaboration and skill development within an organization.

Mentoring is the main approach companies are taking to foster cross-generational skill sharing. Mentoring allows workers of different profiles and levels to interact in a constructive environment. However, there are other business strategies of interest that leverage senior talent. For example, in other cases we see that companies value the wisdom of the most senior professionals, leading the companies to outsource key elements of their value chain and hiring senior professionals. Therefore, mentoring is far from the only solution for an intergenerational strategy. In fact, there are many more opportunities that are left virtually unexplored, but that could add significant value to companies and society.

Intergenerational collaboration from the perspective of social innovation

A mapping of intergenerational social innovation projects has been carried out in order to find more diverse examples of intergenerational strategies that can inspire companies. Social innovation projects serve as a radar for what innovators, who are at the forefront in detecting and solving social needs, identify as problems and their possible solutions.

A preliminary identification of projects that address this area has been carried out and, among them, some specific cases have been highlighted that are analyzed below. Regarding the projects analyzed in greater depth, their main qualities have been systematized and, finally, the lessons learned that could be relevant in the business context have been presented. We are not suggesting that corporations adopt an exact copy of functioning social innovation models. We take the relevant elements of these models and offer them up as inspiration for companies.

Social innovation organizations that promote intergenerational collaboration focus on different strategies. Based on the mapping carried out, we can categorize them into three main groups:

- Inclusive lifestyle, which includes leisure, well-being, and housing.
- Work and training, which includes employment, senior talent or leadership, among others.
- Research and education, which generates knowledge and raises awareness on this matter.

There is a trend among social innovators for creating environments (physical, social and digital) in which older people can develop life goals, including leisure activities and hobbies, in collaboration with younger generations. These scenarios promote knowledge sharing, which occurs organically. As we can see, there is still a considerable opportunity for companies to explore other topics, such as education, entrepreneurship, and intergenerational coexistence; all of them creating spaces for joint projects.

Aging as an opportunity

Through the general analysis of the social innovation projects in intergenerational collaboration that were identified and that we have already explained, we proceeded to deepen the understanding through written interviews with the promoters of eleven of them. Of the projects for which we were able to develop more detailed cases, eight were based in Spain (main focus of the report), two in Colombia, and one in Ireland.

In this part of the study we use qualitative analysis methods to understand the vision that these social innovators have for intergenerational collaboration. To do this, we developed a text/language analysis of the responses given by social innovators through interviews. The most notable conclusions of the analysis are the following:

- **For social innovators, their users are, above all, “people,” far beyond their status as “older.”** “People are the protagonists” is perhaps the statement that best summarizes the way in which social innovators understand intergenerational collaboration. We observed in the language they use to refer to the beneficiaries of their projects that for many of these innovators, all generations are users of their services; instead of reflecting a care approach in which one generation gives and the other receives. Furthermore, when referring to elderly beneficiaries, they did not often use “old” in place of “older people,” but they did use “people” without the adjective “older.” Again, approaching the “person” as such—not only in his/her condition as “older” or in need of care—was notable.

- **Intergenerational collaboration is understood as a tool for life and not just for work/employment.** Social innovators, when discussing intergenerational collaboration, mentioned the word “life” more than “work” or “employment.” In doing so, it usually referred to the quality of life during aging. Everyone agreed that it is necessary to reinvent the later stages of life, in which people have pressing interests, curiosities, and projects that they should be able to explore. In short, quality of life at this age entailed having meaningful life goals, a project of shared happiness.

- **Innovate from a community perspective: aging as an opportunity.** Other concepts that promoters of social innovation projects focusing on intergenerational collaboration often mentioned in interviews were: “community” (mentioned more frequently than “work” or “life”), “aging,” “innovation,” and “opportunity.” It is clear that for innovators, intergenerational collaboration is a community initiative—a way to recover key elements of union between people. Social innovators understand aging as a challenge and an opportunity for innovation. As a challenge, it is a multi-faceted reality whose impact is not limited to the sphere of age and health, but also invites a reinvention of spaces and social relationships. Aging is also an opportunity for multidimensional innovation, as it requires collaboration between areas of knowledge, sectors, and ways of dealing with challenges. On the other hand, it is the absence of innovation that turns the opportunity generated by the great benefit of increasing life expectancy into a problem.

Typologies of intergenerational collaboration

In the social innovation projects analyzed, collaboration with other actors, in general, and with companies, in particular, emerges as a matter of great importance. The organizations interviewed described broad collaboration frameworks as well as elaborate networking strategies. Among the forms of collaboration that they described, those that stood out were: sponsorships and donations, corporate volunteering, communication and visibility, advising companies, the execution of joint projects, activation as suppliers of companies, the incorporation of companies in sales channel for its services, etc.

Impact: new strategies for the future of all generations

Social innovators working in intergenerational collaboration understand their impact as it revolves around three main axes:

- **Construction of new social strategies for the new demographic reality.** The rigorous design and execution of intergenerational collaboration projects has a large-scale impact on society, since it creates new spaces in which all generations can contribute and find value. The social innovator projects that we have identified are providing experiences and information by way of pilot tests that allow for possible strategies to be offered up in the future.
- **Promote life goals and passion projects for the older population.** Another important aspect of their contribution is the concrete value they produce for the older generations that participate in their projects. In this sense, the main focus is on empowerment, autonomy and the creation of new opportunities.
- **Create value for all generations.** Social innovators do not view older people as subjects needing assistance. That is why they structure intergenerational collaboration projects as win-win models, in which all participants obtain value from experiences shared with others. That is what the value they generate for the other generations involved boils down to.

Lessons learned and future lines of investigation

The conceptualization of intergenerational strategies generates opportunities for active aging, enhancing the value of all professionals in a social context wherein six different generations already coexist. Although companies are already aware of the importance that intergenerational collaboration can have in the management of their workforce, the examples that we found of its application are limited and, for the most part, refer to mentoring. Many of these strategies are also based on a very closed analysis of the generations involved (older vs. younger) and from an aid perspective (young people have shortcomings and are subject to assistance from older people, or vice versa). This way of looking at intergenerational collaboration inherits previous paradigms.

When analyzing the vision of social innovators on intergenerational collaboration, we found a different focus.

- First off, a difference is that many of these initiatives were **not limited to connecting the oldest with the youngest, but rather broadly promoted contact and interaction with more than one generation at a time**, each one with their particularities, their needs, and their contributions. This approach to intergenerationality abounded in the fact that collaboration between generations consisted of creating spaces in which all those who coexist can add value to each other in different combinations.

- Successful intergenerational collaboration **did not arise in an assistance-centered way—neither in one direction nor the other—but rather was approached as a balanced endeavor in which all the generations involved gained from the collaboration**. There was a trend among social innovators to create environments (physical, social, and digital) in which older people could develop life goals, including leisure activities and hobbies, in collaboration with other generations. Such environments promoted knowledge sharing, which occurred organically. Intergenerational collaboration initiatives were designed around common objectives for the different generations that participated in them (leisure, learning, cohabitation, entrepreneurship, etc.).

● Accordingly, social innovators **understood that in intergenerational collaboration initiatives, people are the protagonists**. Because its users are for them fundamentally people, not fundamentally “older.”

● **It is necessary to reinvent the later stages of life, in which people have pressing interests, curiosities, and projects that they should be able to explore**. Social innovators, even those working in the field of employment and training, mainly referred to the quality of life in later stages as a value that they generate for their protagonists. They thought of employment as a tool for productive participation in society; as a means to be happy. In short, quality of life at this age entailed having meaningful life goals, a project of shared happiness. These are projects that can start before retirement and continue after it.

● **The community, then, is a key element for the conceptualization of intergenerational collaboration initiatives**. So much so that the word “community” appeared in interviews more frequently than “work/employment” and even “life.” By daring to be innovated from a community perspective, aging can become an opportunity for society, for aging people, and for companies that are part of these communities (employers, former employers, or other forms of connection).

● **The successful execution of initiatives of this type of intergenerational collaboration requires networking, with collaboration between companies and social innovation organizations**. This collaboration can have multiple and different materializations that change even throughout the life cycle of the participating people, who can start their participation as part of the workforce of a company and continue to participate in a different way during the transition to retirement, and even beyond.

This study aims to advance the necessary reflection on how we will manage the future with an increasingly aging society, with different qualities of life for people of the same biological age, and in which more generations coexist every day. However, as we advance in our knowledge of a subject, we are finding new questions that need to be resolved. Some possible lines of future research are:

● Developing pilot tests on how to adapt these findings to the context of the company and make an academic follow-up of their results.

● Developing research efforts in collaboration with companies in order to understand the impact of language on the possibility of developing intergenerational human resource management policies

that are truly useful. And from there the need to use some terms or others can be assessed, depending on their possible effect.

● Knowing how the approach of intergenerationality as diversity is related to the possibility of developing intergenerational initiatives from a values approach that avoids pigeonholing people in generational categories. Measuring is very important and to measure you have to establish categories. If companies do not take these measurements, they will never know if they are losing opportunities from within, to place value on certain generations or others that could be experiencing discrimination. However, we have already commented that the categories that we measure, when applied directly to the design of intergenerational interventions, may come with limitations. Companies would benefit greatly from deepening their understanding of this interaction between the tools at their disposal.

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