

AAV - Active Age Volunteering



Netherlands Needs Assessment Report

Prepared by: Stichting Present Den Haag

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1. Introduction and Methodology

1.1 Introduction

This Needs Assessment Report has been developed within the framework of the European project AAV – Active Age Volunteering, a Small-Scale Partnership under the Erasmus+ Programme funded by the European Commission through the Luxembourg National Agency, Anefore.

AAV aims to strengthen the capacity of volunteering organisations to design, manage and sustain long-term programmes that engage older people as active volunteers, while reducing the digital divide and promoting lifelong learning, intergenerational solidarity and active ageing.

With this objective, and within the framework of Activity 2 of the AAV project, the three partner organisations have carried out needs assessment activities in Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, collecting and analysing reliable first-hand information in order to identify existing capacities, challenges, specific needs and examples of good practice related to senior volunteering and digital inclusion.

This national report, together with those produced by the other project partners, will serve as the basis for the main outcome of Activity 2: the Benelux Needs Assessment Report, which will subsequently be translated into the main languages of the consortium: French and Dutch.

Additionally, the findings aim to support the design of the project's Capacity Building Programme and the implementation of the pilot senior volunteering initiatives foreseen in the next stages of the AAV project.

1.2 Methodology

This report combines different sources of information to provide an overview of the current situation regarding senior volunteering and digital inclusion in the Netherlands and an additional reference at European level. The methodology is based on:

- Desk research on the national context, *including demographic trends, senior volunteering and digital inclusion.*
- A consultation carried out through an online questionnaire completed by seven organisations based in Belgium working with volunteers and older adults. The consultation gathered both quantitative and qualitative information on existing

challenges, training needs, motivations for volunteering and examples of good practice.

- A European perspective in the fields of volunteering, active ageing, lifelong learning and citizen participation.

2. National Context

Current Situation: The Netherlands is experiencing significant demographic ageing. Approximately 28% of the Dutch population is aged 60 or older, reflecting the country's ongoing demographic ageing. In 2025, the number of people aged 65 and over surpassed the number of people under 20 for the first time, highlighting the growing importance of initiatives that promote active ageing, social participation, and volunteering among older adults. This presents an opportunity to support older adults in remaining active, connected, and engaged in their communities through meaningful volunteer participation.

Demographic Trends

- **% Population Aged 60+**

Approximately **28% of the Dutch population is aged 60 or older**, and this proportion is expected to continue increasing over the coming decades as the large post-war generations reach older age. According to Statistics Netherlands (CBS), people aged 65 and over currently represent around **20% of the population**, while those aged 60+ account for roughly one quarter of all residents.

- **Ageing Tendency**

The Netherlands is experiencing a clear demographic ageing trend. Increased life expectancy combined with lower birth rates has resulted in a growing proportion of older adults relative to the working-age population. CBS projects that the number of people aged 65 and older will continue to rise through the 2040s, placing greater importance on active ageing, social participation, and volunteer engagement among older adults.

- **Retirement Dynamics**

The Dutch retirement age is gradually increasing and is linked to life expectancy. In 2025, the state pension age (AOW) is **67 years**, with further increases expected in the future. Many older adults remain active after retirement through part-time work, caregiving, community involvement, and volunteering. Research suggests that retirement often creates new opportunities for civic engagement, as individuals gain greater flexibility and seek meaningful ways to contribute, maintain social connections, and remain active in their communities.

- **Local context of The Hague**

The Hague reflects the broader Dutch demographic ageing trend, with a steadily increasing share of older residents driven by rising life expectancy and low fertility rates. However, unlike the national average, The Hague maintains a relatively younger overall age profile due to its strong international character. The presence of diplomatic institutions, international organisations, and a highly mobile expatriate population contributes to continuous inflows of younger adults, which partially

offsets the visible effects of ageing at the city level. At the intra-urban level, ageing is unevenly distributed across neighbourhoods, with older populations concentrated in established areas such as Loosduinen, Mariahoeve, and Scheveningen, while districts like Laak and Ypenburg are comparatively younger. Retirement patterns follow national dynamics, with continued post-retirement engagement in volunteering and part-time work, making ageing in The Hague a spatially differentiated policy issue that requires neighbourhood-sensitive planning approaches.

Senior Volunteering

Volunteering culture

The Netherlands has one of the strongest volunteering cultures in Europe. According to Statistics Netherlands (CBS), approximately **49% of people aged 15 and older** participated in volunteer work in 2024. Volunteering is deeply embedded in Dutch society and takes place across sports clubs, community organizations, religious institutions, healthcare settings, and social initiatives. Older adults play a particularly important role in sustaining many of these activities.

Source: CBS – Volunteer Work 2024

Participation of older adults

Older adults are among the most active volunteers in the Netherlands. In 2024, **52.9% of people aged 65–74** reported participating in volunteer work, making this age group one of the most engaged volunteer populations in the country. Research suggests that older adults are motivated by social connection, staying active, contributing to society, sharing their skills and experience, and maintaining a sense of purpose after retirement. However, participation may be affected by health limitations, mobility issues, and digital barriers.

Sources: CBS; Leyden Academy on Vitality and Ageing

Relevant support structures

The Netherlands has a well-developed infrastructure supporting volunteer engagement. Key support structures include:

- **Vrijwilligerscentrales (Volunteer Centers):** Local volunteer centers that recruit, train, and match volunteers with organizations.
- **NLvoorelkaar / NL voor Elkaar:** One of the country's largest volunteer-matching platforms, connecting volunteers with opportunities in their communities.
- **Movisie:** National knowledge institute providing research, tools, and best practices for volunteering, social participation, and inclusion.

- **Present Nederland and local Present foundations:** Organizations that connect volunteers with individuals and community organizations in need of practical or social support.
- **Municipal programs and community initiatives:** Many Dutch municipalities actively promote active ageing, social participation, and volunteer engagement among older residents.
- **Leyden Academy on Vitality and Ageing:** Research institution focused on healthy ageing, social participation, and the role of older adults in society.

Together, these structures create a strong ecosystem that supports senior volunteering and active ageing while helping organizations recruit, train, and retain older volunteers.

Digital Inclusion

Internet use among seniors

The Netherlands has one of the highest levels of internet use in Europe, including among older adults. According to Statistics Netherlands (CBS), approximately **94% of people aged 65–75** use the internet regularly, while usage among those aged 75 and older continues to increase each year. Older adults most commonly use the internet for communication, online banking, health information, shopping, and accessing government services. Despite these high participation rates, significant differences remain in digital confidence and skills among older age groups.

Common barriers

While access to the internet is widespread, many older adults still face challenges related to digital participation. Common barriers include:

- Limited digital skills and confidence
- Difficulty keeping up with rapidly changing technologies
- Concerns about privacy, online fraud, and cybersecurity
- Physical limitations such as reduced vision or dexterity
- Lack of personalized support when learning new technologies

These barriers can contribute to digital exclusion, particularly among the oldest age groups and those with lower educational attainment.

E-government challenges

The Dutch government increasingly relies on digital platforms for public services, including healthcare, taxation, pensions, and municipal services. Systems such as **DigiD**, the national digital identity platform, have become essential for accessing many government services. While these developments improve efficiency, they can create

challenges for older adults who have limited digital skills or require additional support. Difficulties navigating online forms, managing digital identities, and understanding digital communications can reduce access to important services and increase dependence on family members or support organizations.

As a result, digital inclusion remains a key priority in the Netherlands, with municipalities, libraries, volunteer organizations, and national initiatives providing training and support to help older adults participate fully in an increasingly digital society.

(3. European Context - for CESES)

3. Survey Results

Main Findings from the Consultations

The 7 Dutch respondents consistently identified health limitations, mobility challenges, and lack of awareness of opportunities as key barriers. Social connection, staying active, contributing to society, and a sense of purpose were the strongest motivations for volunteering. Training needs focused on smartphone use, online communication tools, cybersecurity, volunteering platforms, and AI tools.

Brief Description of Responders

The Dutch consultation responses were received from 7 organisations working directly in community engagement, active ageing, and volunteering, including Stichting Present Den Haag, Stichting Present Rotterdam, Stichting Present Culemborg, Present Nederland, LVvoorElkaar, Stichting Quiet Den Haag, and Koepel Gepensioneerden. Together, these organisations bring extensive experience in mobilising volunteers, supporting vulnerable residents, reducing social isolation, and creating opportunities for meaningful social participation among people of all ages.

NLvoorElkaar is one of the largest volunteer-matching platforms in the Netherlands, connecting people who want to volunteer with organizations and community members seeking support. The platform helps make volunteering more accessible by offering a wide range of opportunities, from one-time activities to long-term roles, and places a strong emphasis on flexible and meaningful participation. NLvoorElkaar also supports organizations with volunteer recruitment, engagement, and community building, helping to strengthen local social networks and civic participation. LVvoorElkaar is a local branch of the organization, supporting Leidschendam-Voorburg, a nearby municipality of The Hague.

Stichting Quiet Den Haag works with people experiencing financial hardship and social exclusion. Through a network of local partners, volunteers, and businesses, Quiet creates opportunities for participation, connection, and access to experiences that would otherwise be out of reach. The organisation has valuable insights into the barriers and motivations of people facing financial vulnerability, including older adults.

Haags Ontmoeten is a local network of meeting places in The Hague that focuses on reducing loneliness and strengthening social connections, particularly among older adults and other residents at risk of social isolation. It offers accessible, informal spaces where people can meet others, take part in activities, and build supportive relationships within their neighbourhoods. Through its community-based approach, it contributes practical

insight into how regular social contact and low-threshold activities can support wellbeing and active ageing.

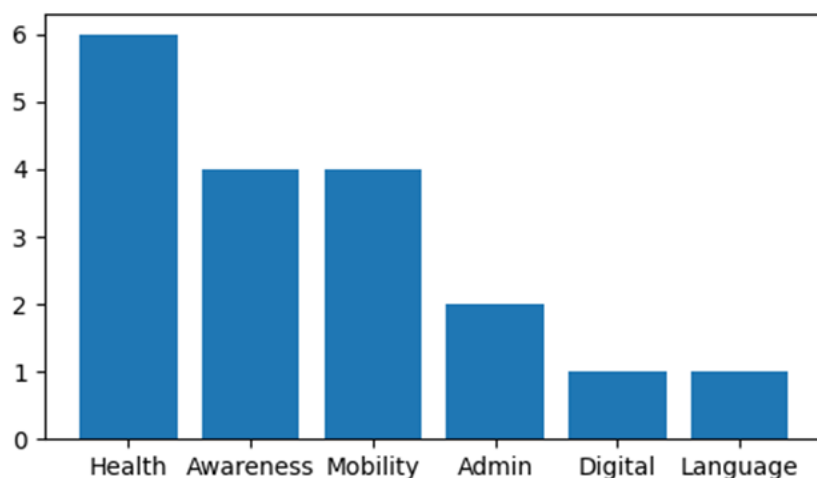
Koepel Gepensioneerden is a national umbrella organisation representing the interests of retired people in the Netherlands. It advocates for active ageing, social participation, and the wellbeing of older adults. Through its broad network of senior organisations, Koepel Gepensioneerden has extensive knowledge of the needs, interests, and engagement of people in and around retirement.

Stichting Present operates through a unique model that connects people who want to help with individuals and organisations facing practical or social challenges. Rather than asking volunteers to fit into existing opportunities, Present works with local social service providers, care organisations, and community partners to identify needs and then matches volunteer groups to projects where they can make a meaningful impact. These projects range from practical support, such as home clean-ups and gardening, to social activities that reduce loneliness and strengthen community connections.

While each local Present foundation serves its own city or region, they are connected through Present Nederland, the national organisation that provides support, training, and coordination. The participating organisations shared valuable insights based on their experience engaging volunteers of all ages, including older adults, and highlighted both the opportunities and challenges involved in promoting active ageing through volunteering.

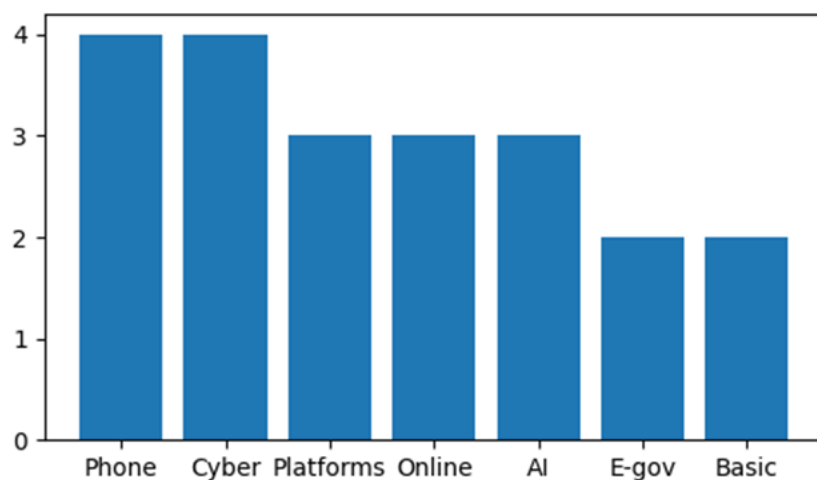
3.1 Main challenges: Main Barriers obtained, including the digital divide

Health limitations (6/7 responses) were the most significant barrier, followed by lack of awareness of opportunities (4/7) and mobility/transport issues (4/7). Administrative complexity (2/7), digital skills gaps (1/7), and language barriers (1/7) were reported less frequently. These findings suggest that accessibility and outreach remain the primary obstacles to participation.



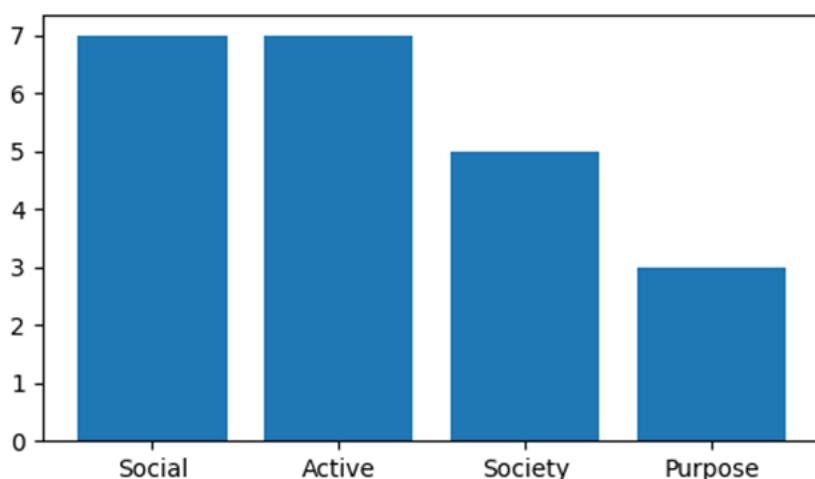
3.2 Main needs - Training Priorities

The highest training priorities identified were smartphone and app use (4/7), cybersecurity and fraud prevention (4/7), volunteering platforms (3/7), online communication tools (3/7), and AI tools (3/7).



3.3 Main Motivations for Volunteering

Social connection and staying active were identified by all respondents (7/7). Contributing to society (5/7) and maintaining a sense of purpose (3/7) were also important motivations.



4. Analysis & Key Needs

The survey confirms that older adults are highly motivated to volunteer when opportunities provide social connection, meaningful contribution, and opportunities to remain active. The primary barriers are health limitations, mobility challenges, and lack of awareness of opportunities. Digital inclusion emerged as an important theme, particularly around smartphone use, cybersecurity, online communication, and volunteering platforms. Flexible and accessible volunteer opportunities are therefore essential.

Digital inclusion is both a barrier and an opportunity. Organisations need digital skills themselves to communicate effectively, while also supporting older adults in navigating digital tools.

4.1 Interpretation of Results

The results show that older adults in the Netherlands are motivated to volunteer by opportunities for social connection, purpose, and community contribution. However, participation can be limited by health concerns, mobility challenges, lack of awareness, and digital barriers.

The findings suggest that organisations can increase senior engagement by offering flexible, accessible volunteer opportunities while providing support for digital participation and fostering meaningful social connections.

The findings indicate that older adults in the Netherlands already demonstrate a strong willingness to engage in volunteer work, particularly among the 55+ and 60+ age groups, who represent some of the most active volunteers in society. Rather than motivating participation itself, the primary challenge for organisations is to create conditions that enable and sustain engagement. Social connection, staying active, contributing to society, and maintaining a sense of purpose emerged as the most important drivers of participation, although motivations vary considerably between individuals.

The results further suggest that successful volunteer recruitment and retention require flexible and diverse volunteering opportunities that accommodate different interests, capacities, and life circumstances. Particular attention should be given to key transition moments, such as retirement, which represents an important opportunity to engage new volunteers. At the same time, barriers related to health, mobility, awareness of opportunities, and digital accessibility can limit participation. The findings therefore highlight the importance of targeted outreach, neighbourhood-sensitive approaches, and adequate digital support to ensure that older adults can continue to participate meaningfully in volunteer activities.

4.2. Good Practices Identified

Respondents highlighted community-based volunteering, personal outreach, and flexible participation models as effective approaches.

Good Practice 1. Flexible, Project-Based Volunteering (Present Rotterdam)

Present's model allows volunteers to choose incidental projects (one-time or irregular) rather than fixed weekly commitments. 42% of 55+ volunteers prefer this mode, states the research of Present Rotterdam. This directly addresses the top barrier of perceived time constraints and loss of freedom. Key lesson: Present's flexibility should be communicated more proactively in recruitment. **Source:** Stichting Present Rotterdam. (2024). *Onderzoek Waardevol Present*

Good Practice 2. Digital Skills Training with Device Donation (Stichting Quiet)

A digital skills training programme was organized by Stichting Quiet Den Haag in small groups (maximum 20 participants), where participants learned how to use digital devices and online services. At the end of the training, each participant received a refurbished device to keep. This combination of learning and receiving a personal device was highly motivating, helping participants build confidence, continue practicing at home, and become more digitally included.

4.3 Organisational challenges for SPDH

Stichting Present Den Haag faces several challenges in engaging older volunteers effectively. Recruitment can be difficult, as many seniors are not reached through traditional or digital outreach channels. Retaining volunteers also requires flexibility, as health, caregiving responsibilities, and changing life circumstances can affect long-term participation.

Digital inclusion remains an important challenge, as some older adults face barriers related to technology, online communication, and volunteer registration systems. Accessibility is another key consideration, with mobility, transportation, and physical limitations influencing participation.

Finally, SPDH must continue creating meaningful and socially connected volunteer opportunities that match older adults' skills, interests, and availability. Addressing these challenges will be essential to ensuring that older adults can continue to contribute actively to their communities while benefiting from the social and personal value of volunteering.

Conclusions

5.1 Recommendations drawn from the needs assessment

- **For the Capacity Building:**
 - Provide volunteer leadership training and support for organisations.
 - Develop recruitment and retention toolkits
- **For the Digital Inclusion:**
 - Provide practical digital skills training focused on everyday tools: smartphones, video calls, messaging apps, and volunteer platforms.
 - Ensure that all volunteer registration and communication processes have accessible non-digital alternatives.
- **For the Pilot Actions:**

- Develop flexible, local volunteering opportunities with strong social components.
- Personalise all initial contact: a personal approach. A direct call, a (group)conversation, a recommendation from a trusted friend is an effective recruitment method for this age group.

5.2 Conclusions

The findings from the Dutch consultation highlight both the strong potential and the ongoing challenges of senior volunteering in the Netherlands. Older adults are motivated by a desire to stay active, maintain social connections, contribute to their communities, and find purpose through meaningful engagement. Retirement acts as a significant catalyst for increased volunteering.

At the same time, barriers related to health, mobility, digital skills, and awareness of opportunities can limit participation.

The results suggest that organisations such as Stichting Present Den Haag can strengthen senior engagement by offering flexible, accessible, and socially connected volunteer opportunities while investing in digital inclusion and volunteer support. The gap between latent willingness and actual volunteering is real but bridgeable – with the right approaches, the right channels and the right offer. By building on existing good practices and responding to the evolving needs of older adults, the AAV project has an opportunity to promote active ageing, reduce social isolation, and empower more seniors to remain active contributors within their communities.

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