

# AAV – Active Age Volunteering



## Benelux Needs Assessment Report

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## Executive Summary

- **Purpose of the report**

The "Benelux Needs Assessment Report" for the AAV (Active Age Volunteering) project evaluates the landscape of senior volunteering in Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. Funded by the European Union, this project aims to enhance volunteering opportunities for older adults, focusing on addressing the digital divide and promoting social participation.

- **Main findings**

The report synthesizes findings from national assessments across the Benelux region, identifying key challenges and opportunities. Main challenges include barriers to digital inclusion and varying levels of awareness regarding volunteering opportunities. Each country presents a unique profile:

1. Belgium: Despite having a good tradition of civil society involvement, there are issues of fragmented policies and varying access to volunteer programs. The report noted a significant presence of older volunteers but highlighted that administrative complexities, health limitations, and a lack of digital skills hinder broader participation.
2. Luxembourg: The country shows a strong support framework for senior volunteering, with high participation rates attributed to good health and social services. However, barriers remain in digital competence and confidence, particularly affecting older volunteers.
3. The Netherlands: With a culture deeply rooted in volunteering, a significant percentage of older adults engage in various initiatives. Nonetheless, the report points out that demographic changes pose challenges in recruitment and retention of long-term volunteers, compounded by health and mobility issues among seniors.

- **Key recommendations**

Across all three countries, the report emphasizes the need for improved coordination among stakeholders and the creation of flexible, inclusive volunteering opportunities. It sets the groundwork for future initiatives aimed at equipping older volunteers with necessary digital skills to foster active ageing and meaningful civic engagement in an evolving societal landscape. The assessment reaffirms the value of older adults as vital contributors to community and social cohesion in Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands.

- **Implications for the next project phases**

The next steps in the AAV project center on implementing capacity-building activities and pilot volunteering initiatives to effectively translate identified good practices into action. Key areas of focus include testing adaptable training formats, enhancing digital competencies, and improving older adults' access to volunteering opportunities. Continuous monitoring, feedback collection, and transnational exchanges will facilitate the refinement and scaling of successful approaches. The project's ultimate aim is to enhance active ageing, digital inclusion, and social participation among partner countries, thereby generating sustainable European added value.

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 About the AAV Project**

AAV – Active Age Volunteering is a Small-Scale Partnership under the Erasmus+ Programme, co-funded by the European Union through the Luxembourg National Agency, Anefore. The project is implemented by a consortium composed of three organisations from Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands: CESES – Confederation of European Senior Expert Services, LSC – Luxembourg Senior Consultants and SPDH – Stitching Present Den Haag.

The project aims to strengthen the capacity of volunteering organisations to design, manage and sustain long-term programmes that engage older people as active volunteers. At the same time, AAV seeks to address one of the key challenges affecting older generations today: the digital divide. Through a combination of research, capacity building and pilot actions, the project promotes lifelong learning, intergenerational solidarity, social participation and active ageing.

To achieve these objectives, the project is structured around five main activities: kick-off event, needs assessment, capacity building, pilot senior volunteering initiatives, and communication and dissemination efforts. Together, these activities contribute to creating more inclusive volunteering opportunities for older people and to supporting organisations in adapting their programmes to the evolving needs of ageing societies.

### **1.2 Purpose of the Benelux Needs Assessment Report**

This Benelux Needs Assessment Report has been developed within the framework of Activity 2 of the AAV project. It brings together the findings of the national needs assessments carried out in Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, complementing them with a broader European perspective on active ageing, senior volunteering and digital inclusion.

The report aims to identify the main challenges, needs, opportunities and existing best practices related to the participation of older people in volunteering activities across the Benelux region. Particular attention is given to the barriers faced by older adults and volunteering organisations, including those linked to digital inclusion and the acquisition of digital competences.

By providing a comparative overview of the situation in the three participating countries, this report serves as a key reference document for the next phases of the project. Its findings will inform the design of the AAV Capacity Building Programme and

support the implementation of the pilot senior volunteering initiatives, ensuring that these activities respond effectively to the needs identified by stakeholders throughout the consultation process.

## **1.3 Methodology**

### **1.3.1 Research methodology**

The national research used a mixed-method approach, with both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The aim was to identify challenges, needs, motivations and good practices related to senior volunteering and the digital divide in older adults.

### **1.3.2. Design of Survey**

Within the AAV project consortium a structured questionnaire was developed and adapted to the national context. The questionnaire was made up of closed- and open-ended questions covering the following themes:

- Demographic profile of the respondents
- Volunteering currently
- Reasons for and obstacles to volunteerism
- Access to digital technology and digital skills
- Problems related to the digital divide
- Training and support requirements
- Examples of best practices and initiatives;
- Recommendations for enhancing senior volunteering opportunities

The questionnaire was reviewed by the project partners to ensure clarity, relevance and consistency across participating countries.

### **1.3.3. Sampling and Target Groups**

The survey was directed at:

- 55+ Senior Citizens
- Potential and active senior volunteers
- Providers of adult education
- Volunteer agencies
- Community associations and NGOs

- Stakeholders working on active ageing and digital inclusion

Participants were recruited through partner networks, social media channels, newsletters, community organisations, senior associations and local stakeholder contacts.

The sampling approach used was mainly convenience and stakeholder-based sampling targeting individuals and organizations with relevant experience and knowledge.

#### **1.3.4. Collection of Data**

May-2026-June-2026 was the period for data collection.

The questionnaire was administered online via a digital survey platform. Specific organizations had paper-based or assisted completion options where necessary to accommodate older adults with limited digital skills.

A total of 13 valid responses were obtained and were used in the analysis.

#### **1.3.5. Analysis of data**

Quantitative data from closed-ended questions were analysed using descriptive statistical methods, such as frequencies, percentages and cross-tabulations where appropriate.

Qualitative responses to open-ended questions were analysed using thematic analysis. Responses were coded and grouped into key themes to identify common challenges, needs, opportunities and examples of good practice.

The analysis was based on:

- Obstacles to seniors' volunteering
- Digital inclusion challenges
- Training and support requirements
- Motivating factors
- Successful models and practices of volunteering
- Organisational and policy recommendations

### **1.3.6. Limitations and Confidence**

The survey gives important views into the experiences and perception of respondents, but some limitations need to be acknowledged.

The sample was not statistically representative of the national population of older adults as a whole. Participation was voluntary and therefore could reflect the views of people already interested in the issues of volunteering or digital inclusion.

However, despite these limitations, the survey provides important evidence about current trends, needs and opportunities regarding active ageing, volunteering and digital participation.

### **1.3.7. Ethics**

Participation in the survey was voluntary. The respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and how the data collected will be used. All responses were processed confidentially and analysed in aggregate form in line with applicable data protection regulations including GDPR requirements.

## **1.4. European Perspective from CESES**

Population ageing is one of the most significant demographic trends currently affecting Europe. According to a research report by Eurofound, the number of people aged 65–79 is expected to increase by more than 30% between 2010 and 2030<sup>1</sup>, while Eurostat estimates that the population aged 80 and over will grow by 57.1% during the same period<sup>2</sup>. By 2050, the median age in the European Union is projected to reach 48.2 years, an increase of 4.5 years compared to 2019, and the number of centenarians is expected to approach half a million. The 2024 Ageing Report further highlights that population ageing will continue to have major economic and social implications across the EU until at least 2070<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.janwillemvandemaat.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Social-inclusion-Elderly-Eurofound.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/SEPDF/cache/80393.pdf>

<sup>3</sup>[https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/publications/2024-ageing-report-economic-and-budgetary-projections-eu-member-states-2022-2070\\_en](https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/publications/2024-ageing-report-economic-and-budgetary-projections-eu-member-states-2022-2070_en)

In this context, European societies must adapt to these demographic changes by promoting active ageing and supporting the contribution of older people to civic life. As highlighted by the EU Red Cross Office in its publication *Volunteering and Intergenerational Connections to Promote Active Ageing*<sup>4</sup>, creating inclusive societies for older people requires encouraging active ageing from an early stage, including through volunteering and intergenerational learning opportunities.

Senior volunteering already plays an important role across Europe. According to Eurostat, around 40% of European adults participate in volunteering activities, with participation rates of 19.9% among people aged 50–64 and 17.8% among those aged 65 and over. European institutions also support civic engagement through initiatives such as the European Solidarity Corps and policy developments aimed at promoting the rights and participation of older people, including the 2023 opinion *European Strategy on Older Persons* adopted by the European Economic and Social Committee<sup>5</sup> and the 2020 Council Conclusions on *Human Rights, Participation and Well-Being of Older Persons in the Era of Digitalisation*<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, there remains a shortage of well-structured and sustainable volunteering opportunities specifically designed for older adults.

At the same time, the digital divide continues to represent a major barrier to the participation of older people, including their access to volunteering opportunities. According to Eurostat's 2023 survey on ICT use, only 28% of people aged 65–74 possessed at least basic digital skills, compared to around 70% of those aged 16–34<sup>7</sup>. The data also reveal a gender dimension, with digital skill gaps becoming more pronounced among older age groups, where men tend to report higher levels of digital competence than women.

To address this challenge, the European Union has established ambitious objectives through the Digital Decade Policy Programme, aiming for at least 80% of adults to possess basic digital skills by 2030. However, progress remains limited, as only 55.6% of the EU population currently meets this threshold<sup>8</sup>.

Beyond technological barriers, societal attitudes towards ageing can also affect the participation of older people. The World Health Organisation defines ageism as the

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<sup>4</sup><https://redcross.eu/latest-news/volunteering-and-intergenerational-connections-to-promote-active-ageing>

<sup>5</sup><https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/european-strategy-older-persons>

<sup>6</sup> <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11717-2020-INIT/en/pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20240222-1>

<sup>8</sup>[https://commission.europa.eu/news-and-media/news/digital-decade-2024-report-calls-strengthened-collective-action-2024-07-03\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/news-and-media/news/digital-decade-2024-report-calls-strengthened-collective-action-2024-07-03_en)

stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination directed towards individuals based on age. A research<sup>9</sup> has shown that ageism can reduce older adults' sense of belonging and willingness to engage in civic and community activities, highlighting the importance of creating inclusive environments that recognise and value their contribution to society.

### 1.5. Internal perspective of CESES - Belgium

Belgium is a favourable environment for active ageing and senior volunteering, backed by a well-established network of civil society organisations, local authorities and public institutions. Volunteering is widely understood to be an important force for social cohesion and community well-being. Many older people are actively engaged in cultural, social, educational, environmental and care-related activities. The country's broad social protection system and the good quality of life encourage further participation after retirement.

The senior volunteering is helped by the strong tradition of local associations and community-based organizations in Belgium. Many retirees have a wealth of professional experience, multilingual skills and valuable life knowledge that can be mobilized to support younger generations and vulnerable groups. Cities and non-profits are more and more aware of the contribution of older volunteers to build more resilient neighbourhoods and encourage intergenerational solidarity.

However, Belgium also faces several internal challenges. The institutional complexity of its federal structure and the division of responsibilities between regions and language communities can lead to policies that are fragmented and different levels of support for volunteering initiatives. Access to information and volunteer opportunities may differ significantly between regions, while administrative procedures can discourage participation for both volunteers and organisations.

Volunteers are increasingly needed in health, social care and community services because of demographic ageing and organisations often find it difficult to recruit and retain committed volunteers over the long term. Digitalisation can also be a challenge for older people who do not have the digital skills or confidence to access online volunteering platforms and public services. Social inequalities and language barriers may also hinder participation among some seniors, such as those from migrant backgrounds or those from economically disadvantaged communities.

There are substantial opportunities for Belgium to enhance active age volunteering, such as improved coordination among federal, regional and local stakeholders, expanding digital inclusion programmes and promoting flexible volunteering models

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<sup>9</sup> <https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2024.2348611>

that better accommodate the preferences of contemporary retirees. Additional promotion of volunteering can be achieved through greater acknowledgement of volunteer contributions with certification, awareness campaigns and lifelong learning opportunities. Intergenerational projects and partnerships between municipalities, educational institutions and civil society organisations also present great potential to boost social inclusion and community engagement.

Belgium has a solid base for active age volunteering with an engaged civil society and a rich tradition of community participation. By tackling structural fragmentation, easing participation barriers and investing in inclusive and innovative volunteering practices, the country can further tap into the skills, experience and commitment of its growing older population, while strengthening social cohesion and sustainable community development.

## **1.5. Internal perspective of LSC and SPDH**

### **1.5.1 LSC- Luxembourg**

Luxembourg offers a generally positive setting for active aging and senior volunteering. The country has a high standard of living, an advanced social protection system and a broad range of public institutions and civil society organisations fostering social inclusion and lifelong participation. Good health and life expectancy are fairly common among older adults, providing a promising potential for continued engagement in voluntary activities after retirement.

There are loads of associations, municipalities, cultural organisations and social service providers supporting senior volunteering. Many older adults have valuable professional knowledge and language skills that can be transferred to younger generations or applied in community-oriented projects. The tradition of civic engagement and the government's support for social cohesion are good bases for increasing opportunities for older citizens to volunteer.

But there are still some internal challenges. awareness of volunteering opportunities for seniors is uneven, and many organisations do not have structured programmes aimed at older volunteers. Poor administration and a lack of co-ordination between voluntary organisations can be a deterrent to participation. As more services go digital it is creating barriers for older people with limited digital skills or confidence using online platforms.

Luxembourg's population is multicultural, which presents both opportunities and challenges. The variety of languages is a plus in the volunteering activities, but communication across the different language groups may hinder the recruitment and

integration of volunteers. Moreover, cross-border workers who retire from outside of Luxembourg are often less integrated in local volunteering networks.

The country has a strong potential to foster active age volunteering by investing in digital inclusion, promoting intergenerational projects, increasing the visibility of volunteer contributions and enhancing cooperation between municipalities, NGOs and educational institutions. Training programmes that improve digital competences and make it easier to access volunteering platforms could significantly boost the participation rates of older adults.

Luxembourg has the institutional capacity, financial resources and social capital to further develop active age volunteering. By addressing existing barriers and creating more accessible and flexible volunteering pathways, the country can better leverage the experience, knowledge and motivation of its growing senior population while strengthening social cohesion and community resilience.

### **1.5.2 SPDH - Netherlands**

The Netherlands has a very supportive environment for active ageing and senior volunteering, underpinned by a strong culture of civic participation and community engagement. Dutch society has a strong volunteering tradition, with many older adults contributing their time and expertise to social, cultural, environmental and educational initiatives.

The country's well developed welfare system, high levels of education and strong civil society provide a positive framework for active ageing policies.

In the Netherlands, retirees are often socially active and are encouraged by local municipalities, community centres, NGOs and faith-based organizations to engage in volunteer work. Flexible volunteering opportunities and a high level of digital connectivity allow many seniors to continue to make meaningful contributions to their communities. Intergenerational initiatives and projects at neighbourhood level also foster social cohesion and the exchange of knowledge and experience between generations.

But some problems still exist, despite these advantages. The need for volunteers in health care and social support services is increasing with demographic ageing, whereas the supply of active volunteers may not meet future needs. Health limitations, mobility problems or digital exclusion may hinder participation for older adults, especially among lower-income or migrant groups. Moreover, volunteer organizations often

encounter problems in recruiting and retaining long-term volunteers within a more flexible and individualized society.

The Netherlands also needs to adapt volunteering structures to changing expectations of retirees who are increasingly opting for project or short-term commitments over permanent positions. Organisations therefore must be more flexible and responsive to the needs and lifestyles of modern seniors.

Significant opportunities exist to further strengthen active age volunteering by investing in digital literacy programmes, expanding intergenerational volunteering initiatives, and recognising volunteer contributions through formal certification or public acknowledgement. Enhanced cooperation between municipalities, educational institutions, healthcare providers, and civil society organisations can create more inclusive and accessible volunteering pathways for older adults.

Overall, the Netherlands possesses a mature and resilient volunteering ecosystem with substantial potential for further development. By addressing emerging demographic and societal challenges while promoting innovation and inclusiveness, the country is well positioned to maximise the social, economic, and personal benefits of active age volunteering for both seniors and society as a whole.

## 2. Demographic and Policy Context

### 2.1 Ageing Trends in the Benelux Region

#### 2.1.1. Belgium

Belgium is currently facing an increasingly ageing population. According to Statbel<sup>10</sup> the proportion of people aged 65 and over increased from 17.19% in 2011 to 19.35% in 2021. This trend is particularly visible in Flanders, where the share rose from 18.29% to 20.69%, and in Wallonia, where it increased from 16.36% to 19.01%. A notable exception is the Brussels-Capital Region, where the proportion of people aged 65 and over slightly decreased from 13.63% to 13.04%. This situation is largely explained by the region's particular demographic profile and the continuous arrival of younger international migrants.

The ageing trend affecting most of the Belgian territory is expected to continue in the coming decades, creating important challenges in areas such as employment, retirement and social participation. As highlighted by The Brussels Times<sup>11</sup> Belgium's elderly population is growing faster than its working-age population and according to demographic projections from the Federal Planning Bureau and Statbel<sup>12</sup>, the ratio of people aged 67 and over to the working-age population is expected to rise from 28 per 100 in 2024 to 37 per 100 in 2040 and 43 per 100 in 2070. In practical terms, while there are currently around three to four working-age people for every older person in Belgium, by 2070 there will be just over two, which will pose major social and economic challenges.

#### 2.1.2. Luxembourg

Luxembourg is experiencing a gradual ageing of its population, although the trend is partly offset by strong immigration of younger workers. The share of people aged 60+ is steadily increasing due to longer life expectancy and low fertility rates. Retirement

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<sup>10</sup> <https://statbel.fgov.be/en/themes/census/population/age>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.brusselstimes.com/1438721/belgiums-elderly-population-grows-faster-than-working-age-population>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.plan.be/en/publications/population-outlook-belgium-older-population>

often occurs before the statutory age of 65 because many workers qualify for early retirement after long contribution periods. These developments are creating growing challenges for the long-term sustainability of the pension system. (Statistiques Luxembourg)<sup>13</sup>

| Indicator                    | Luxembourg                                                                                                                                                                              | Possible reasons                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>% population aged 60+</b> | Approximately <b>22-25%</b> of the population is aged 60 or over.<br>( <a href="https://ageing-policies.unece.org">ageing-policies.unece.org</a> <sup>14</sup> )                        | Increasing life expectancy; low fertility rate; large baby-boom generation reaching retirement age; ageing of long-term residents.               |
| <b>Ageing tendency</b>       | <b>Moderate but increasing ageing trend</b> , slower than many EU countries due to immigration. ( <a href="https://statistiques.luxembourg">Statistiques Luxembourg</a> <sup>15</sup> ) | Strong immigration of working-age adults; declining birth rates; longer life expectancy; growing share of older citizens.                        |
| <b>Retirement dynamics</b>   | Many workers retire <b>before the statutory age of 65</b> , often between 57 and 64. ( <a href="https://www.luxembourgtimes.com">Luxembourg Times</a> <sup>16</sup> )                   | Attractive early-retirement provisions; long contribution careers; good pension benefits; pension system under pressure from demographic ageing. |

<sup>13</sup>

<https://statistiques.public.lu/en/publications/recensement/evolution-de-la-population.html>?

<sup>14</sup> [ageing-policies.unece.org](https://ageing-policies.unece.org)

<sup>15</sup> [Statistiques Luxembourg](https://statistiques.luxembourg)

<sup>16</sup> [Luxembourg Times](https://www.luxembourgtimes.com)

| Indicator | Luxembourg | Possible reasons                  |
|-----------|------------|-----------------------------------|
|           |            | pressure from demographic ageing. |

### **2.1.3. The Netherlands**

- % 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.

## 2.2 Comparative Overview

Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands are all experiencing demographic ageing, although the pace and characteristics differ. The Netherlands currently has the highest proportion of older residents, with approximately 28% of the population aged 60 and over, followed by Luxembourg with 22–25%, while Belgium's population aged 65 and over reached 19.35% in 2021 and continues to grow steadily.

In Belgium, ageing is particularly pronounced in Flanders and Wallonia, while the Brussels-Capital Region remains relatively younger due to migration and a more international population. Projections indicate a substantial increase in the old-age dependency ratio, creating growing pressure on pensions, healthcare services, and labour markets.

Luxembourg's ageing process is somewhat moderated by sustained immigration and strong population growth. Nevertheless, increasing life expectancy, low fertility rates, and the retirement of the baby-boom generation are gradually raising the share of older residents and generating concerns about the long-term sustainability of pension and social protection systems.

The Netherlands faces similar demographic challenges but has implemented adaptive measures such as linking the statutory retirement age to life expectancy. Dutch older adults also tend to remain active longer through volunteering, part-time work, and community engagement. Cities such as The Hague combine ageing trends with a relatively young international population, requiring neighbourhood-specific approaches to social inclusion and active ageing.

Across all three countries, common challenges include maintaining sustainable pension systems, addressing growing healthcare and long-term care demands, combating social isolation among older adults, and ensuring age-friendly communities. At the same time,

all three countries increasingly recognize older people as valuable contributors to society through volunteering, lifelong learning, civic participation, and intergenerational activities. Their relatively advanced welfare systems provide a strong foundation for developing innovative active and healthy ageing policies in the coming decades.

## **2.2 Senior Volunteering in the Benelux Countries**

### **2.2.1. Belgium**

This section is based mainly on the V-CALC project factsheet developed by CEV (Centre for European Volunteering), which provides an overview of volunteering in Belgium.

Volunteering plays an important role in Belgium's social fabric and is supported by a clear legal framework. Under Belgian law, it is defined as the free and unpaid contribution of time to a non-profit or public organisation, reflecting both civic engagement and structured solidarity.

Data show that volunteering is widespread, with 9.2% of the population having volunteered at least once. Older adults are strongly represented, with people aged 60 and over accounting for 27.4% of volunteers, making them the largest age group. This confirms that older people already play a significant role in the Belgian volunteering ecosystem.

The system is supported by the 2005 Volunteer Law, regional support organisations such as the Vlaams Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk and the Plateforme Francophone du Volontariat – both part of the consultation- and digital platforms connecting volunteers and organisations. Expense reimbursements under certain conditions also help reduce participation barriers.

However, volunteering is evolving towards more flexible and short-term engagement, alongside increasing administrative complexity. This highlights the need to adapt volunteering structures to ensure older adults can participate in an inclusive and sustainable way.

### **2.2.2. Luxembourg**

#### **Senior Volunteering**

| Indicator                            | Luxembourg                                                   | Possible reasons                                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Senior volunteering culture</b>   | Well-developed and growing                                   | Strong tradition of civic engagement; active senior associations; government and NGO support; high education and social participation levels.                    |
| <b>Participation of older adults</b> | Relatively high in social, cultural and community activities | Good health and life expectancy; extensive community networks; opportunities for lifelong learning; strong social protection system.                             |
| <b>Relevant support structures</b>   | Diverse and well-established support framework               | Active NGOs and volunteer organizations; municipal senior services; lifelong learning providers; national policies promoting active ageing and social inclusion. |

Luxembourg has a positive and developing culture of senior volunteering, supported by numerous associations, municipalities, and public initiatives. Older adults participate actively in community, cultural, educational, and volunteering activities, benefiting from

good health and social support. A broad range of support structures, including senior organizations, lifelong learning opportunities, and active ageing policies, helps foster social inclusion and civic engagement among older people.

### **2.2.3. The Netherlands**

#### **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.

## 2.3 Digital Inclusion and Active Ageing

### 2.3.1. Belgium

Digital inclusion remains a significant challenge in Belgium. According to Statbel,<sup>17</sup> in 2025 61% of people aged 16 to 74 had at least basic digital skills, while retired people were among the groups facing the greatest difficulties, with only 39% reaching this level. The same source also highlights a clear decline in digital skills after the age of 45, as well as among low-skilled groups.

Several initiatives have been developed to address this issue. One example is the Digital Appropriation Plan (DAP)<sup>18</sup>, approved in 2021, which aims to strengthen the digital skills of Brussels residents, with a particular focus on supporting older people as a vulnerable group in the context of digitalisation. The plan is structured around four priority areas, 17 projects and 66 actions, reflecting the importance given to this challenge at policy level in Belgium.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://statbel.fgov.be/en/news/two-out-five-belgians-lack-basic-digital-skills>

<sup>18</sup> <https://be.brussels/en/about-region/values-budget-and-strategy/strategy-and-policy-priorities/digital-inclusion-review-digital-brussels/2021-2024-digital-appropriation-plan>

### 2.3.2 Luxembourg

| <b>Indicator</b>                  | <b>Luxembourg</b>                                             | <b>Possible reasons</b>                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Digital Inclusion</b>          | Generally high, but disparities remain among older age groups | Strong digital infrastructure; government digitalisation efforts; access to training programmes; varying digital skills among seniors.               |
| <b>Internet use among seniors</b> | High and increasing, especially among younger seniors (60–74) | Widespread internet availability; growing use of smartphones and tablets; need for online services; communication with family and friends.           |
| <b>Common barriers</b>            | Skills, confidence and accessibility issues persist           | Limited digital literacy; fear of online fraud and privacy risks; lack of confidence with technology; age-related physical or cognitive limitations. |

| Indicator                      | Luxembourg                                                       | Possible reasons                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>E-government challenges</b> | Some seniors face difficulties accessing digital public services | Complex authentication procedures; limited digital skills; preference for face-to-face services; accessibility and usability concerns. |

### 2.3.3 The Netherlands

#### **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 Perspective on Active Ageing, Volunteering and Digital Inclusion

Population ageing is one of the most significant demographic trends currently affecting Europe. According to a research report by Eurofound, the number of people aged 65–79 is expected to increase by more than 30% between 2010 and 2030<sup>19</sup>, while Eurostat estimates that the population aged 80 and over will grow by 57.1% during the same period<sup>20</sup>. By 2050, the median age in the European Union is projected to reach 48.2 years, an increase of 4.5 years compared to 2019, and the number of centenarians is expected to approach half a million. The 2024 Ageing Report further highlights that population ageing will continue to have major economic and social implications across the EU until at least 2070<sup>21</sup>.

In this context, European societies must adapt to these demographic changes by promoting active ageing and supporting the contribution of older people to civic life. As highlighted by the EU Red Cross Office in its publication *Volunteering and Intergenerational Connections to Promote Active Ageing*<sup>22</sup>, creating inclusive societies for older people requires encouraging active ageing from an early stage, including through volunteering and intergenerational learning opportunities.

Senior volunteering already plays an important role across Europe. According to Eurostat, around 40% of European adults participate in volunteering activities, with participation rates of 19.9% among people aged 50–64 and 17.8% among those aged 65 and over. European institutions also support civic engagement through initiatives such as the European Solidarity Corps and policy developments aimed at promoting the rights and participation of older people, including the 2023 opinion *European Strategy on Older Persons* adopted by the European Economic and Social Committee<sup>23</sup> and the 2020 Council Conclusions on *Human Rights, Participation and Well-Being of Older*

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<sup>19</sup><http://www.janwillemvandemaat.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Social-inclusion-Elderly-Eurofound.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/SEPDF/cache/80393.pdf>

<sup>21</sup>[https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/publications/2024-ageing-report-economic-and-budgetary-projections-eu-member-states-2022-2070\\_en](https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/publications/2024-ageing-report-economic-and-budgetary-projections-eu-member-states-2022-2070_en)

<sup>22</sup><https://redcross.eu/latest-news/volunteering-and-intergenerational-connections-to-promote-active-ageing>

<sup>23</sup><https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/european-strategy-older-persons>

*Persons in the Era of Digitalisation*<sup>24</sup>. Nevertheless, there remains a shortage of well-structured and sustainable volunteering opportunities specifically designed for older adults.

At the same time, the digital divide continues to represent a major barrier to the participation of older people, including their access to volunteering opportunities. According to Eurostat's 2023 survey on ICT use, only 28% of people aged 65–74 possessed at least basic digital skills, compared to around 70% of those aged 16–34<sup>25</sup>. The data also reveal a gender dimension, with digital skill gaps becoming more pronounced among older age groups, where men tend to report higher levels of digital competence than women.

To address this challenge, the European Union has established ambitious objectives through the Digital Decade Policy Programme, aiming for at least 80% of adults to possess basic digital skills by 2030. However, progress remains limited, as only 55.6% of the EU population currently meets this threshold<sup>26</sup>.

Beyond technological barriers, societal attitudes towards ageing can also affect the participation of older people. The World Health Organisation defines ageism as the stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination directed towards individuals based on age. A research<sup>27</sup> has shown that ageism can reduce older adults' sense of belonging and willingness to engage in civic and community activities, highlighting the importance of creating inclusive environments that recognise and value their contribution to society.

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<sup>24</sup> <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11717-2020-INIT/en/pdf>

<sup>25</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20240222-1>

<sup>26</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/news-and-media/news/digital-decade-2024-report-calls-strengthened-collective-action-2024-07-03\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/news-and-media/news/digital-decade-2024-report-calls-strengthened-collective-action-2024-07-03_en)

<sup>27</sup> <https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2024.2348611>

## 4. Results of the Benelux Needs Assessment

### 4.1 Profile of Participating Organisations

- **Types of organisations**

#### **Belgium**

A total of 9 Belgian organisations participated in the consultation: 7 organisations providing perspectives grounded in the national context, and 2 organisations contributing a broader European dimension.

#### **Luxembourg**

Number of respondents from Luxembourg: 6

The surveyed organizations are 5 NGO's and 1 Societal impact company with a size between 1 to 20 volunteers.

All are mostly acting on local, national and regional level.

#### **The Netherlands**

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.

- **Areas of activity**

#### **Belgium**

Together, they cover areas such as volunteer management, senior engagement, older people's representation and support to volunteering organisations.

#### **Luxembourg**

The area of work in majority education, social inclusion, volunteering, digital inclusion, social inclusion, health care and youth coaching.

The involvement of seniors in activities varies between 2 to 2000 participants per year.

The profile of Senior volunteers is in most cases active retirees and one organization acts on coaching a target group of young people with the work done by senior volunteers.

Main languages used are Luxembourg, French and German, with 2 organizations offering in addition English.

### **The Netherlands**

Volunteer-matching platforms in the Netherlands, connecting people who want to volunteer with organizations and community members seeking support.

Organisations having valuable insights into the barriers and motivations of people facing financial vulnerability, including older adults.

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.

National umbrella organisations representing the interests of retired people in the Netherlands and advocating for active ageing, social participation, and the wellbeing of older adults.

Operating through a unique model that connects people who want to help with individuals and organisations facing practical or social challenges.

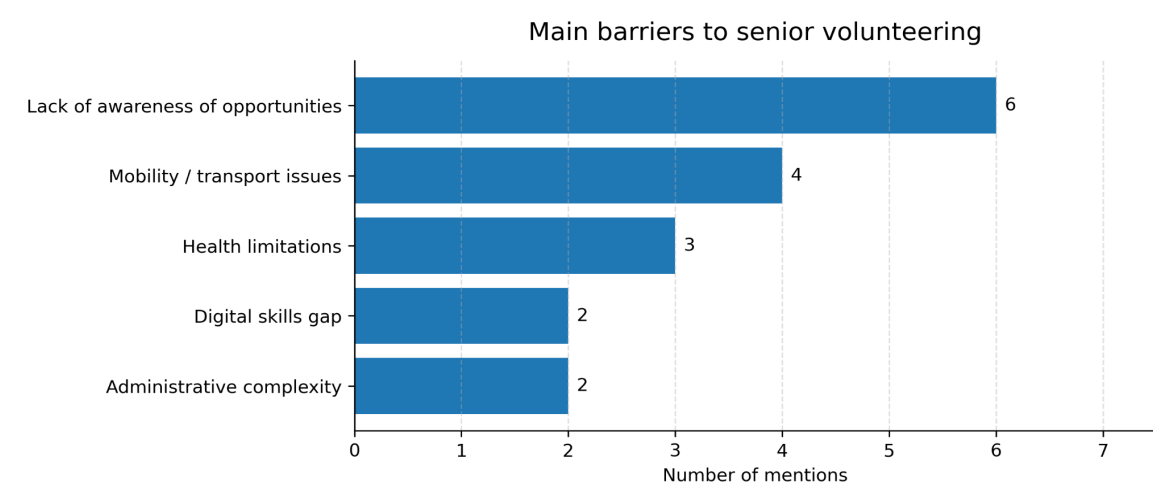
## **4.2 Main Challenges Identified**

### **Belgium**

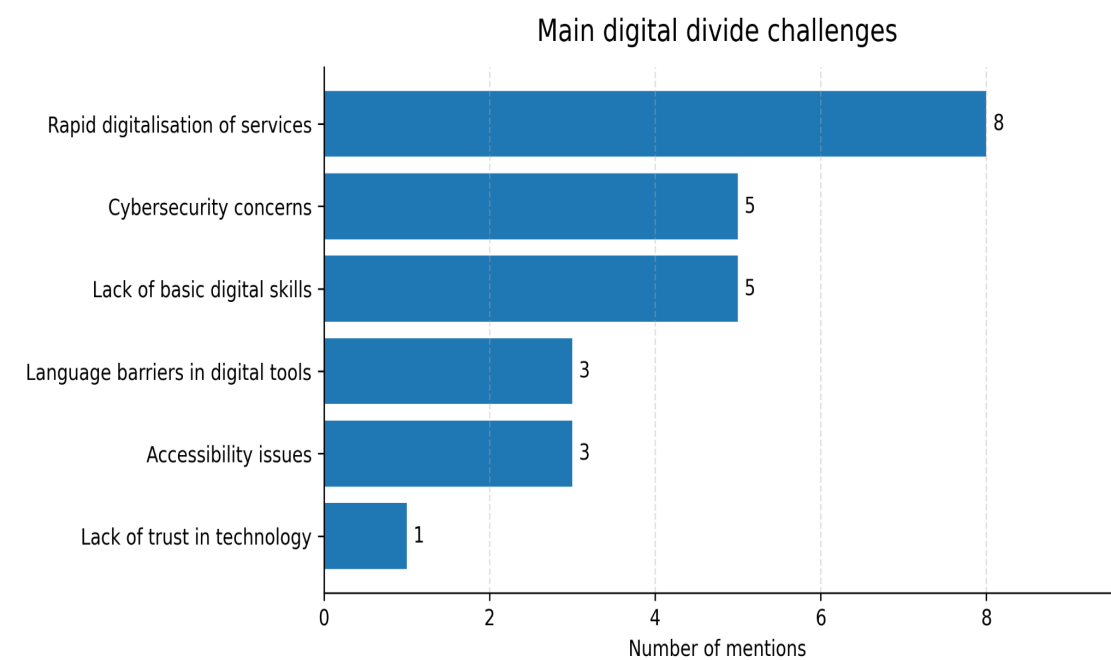
The consultation identified **lack of awareness of volunteering opportunities** (6 times) as the main barrier to older people's participation in volunteering, followed by mobility and transport difficulties (4), health-related limitations (3), administrative complexity (2) and digital skills gaps (2). In addition, organisations highlighted barriers not included in the predefined response options, such as lack of previous volunteering experience, uncertainty about how to contribute, volunteering opportunities not always adapted to older people's capacities, competing personal priorities and caregiving responsibilities, as well as the impact of longer working lives and economic pressures on seniors' availability to volunteer.

Regarding the digital divide, respondents identified the **rapid digitalisation of services** (8) as the main challenge, followed by lack of basic digital skills (5) and cybersecurity concerns (5). Accessibility issues (3), language barriers in digital tools (3) and lack of

trust in technology (1) were also mentioned as factors affecting older people’s digital participation.



Source: AAV Belgium consultation responses, 2026. Multiple-choice question; respondents could select up to three options.



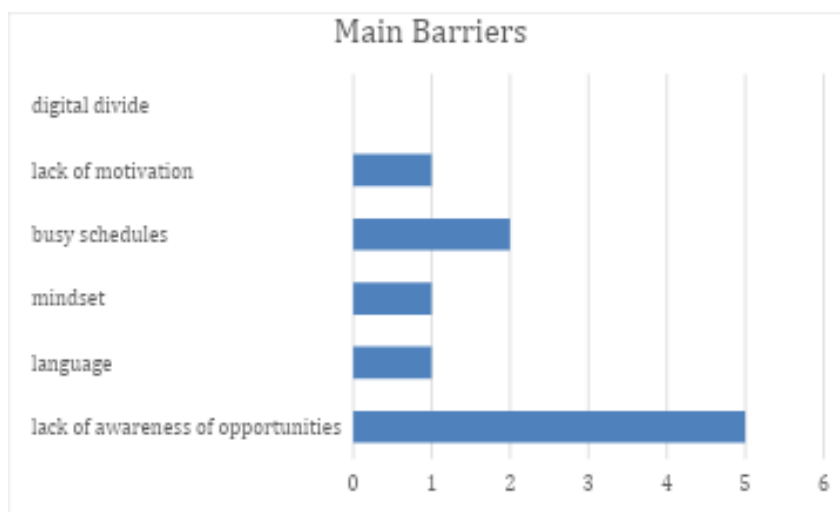
Source: AAV Belgium consultation responses, 2026. Multiple-choice question; respondents could select up to three options.

**Luxembourg**

Luxembourg is experiencing a gradual ageing of its population, although the trend is partly offset by strong immigration of younger workers. The share of people aged 60+ is steadily increasing due to longer life expectancy and low fertility rates. Retirement often occurs before the statutory age of 65 because many workers qualify for early

retirement after long contribution periods. These developments are creating growing challenges for the long-term sustainability of the pension system.

Luxembourg has achieved a high level of digital inclusion, supported by advanced digital infrastructure and widespread internet access. However, a digital divide remains among older adults, particularly among the oldest age groups and those with limited digital skills. Common barriers include lack of confidence, concerns about online security, and difficulties adapting to new technologies. While e-government services are widely available, some seniors continue to experience challenges related to digital literacy, authentication processes, and service accessibility.



### **The Netherlands**

Common barriers include:

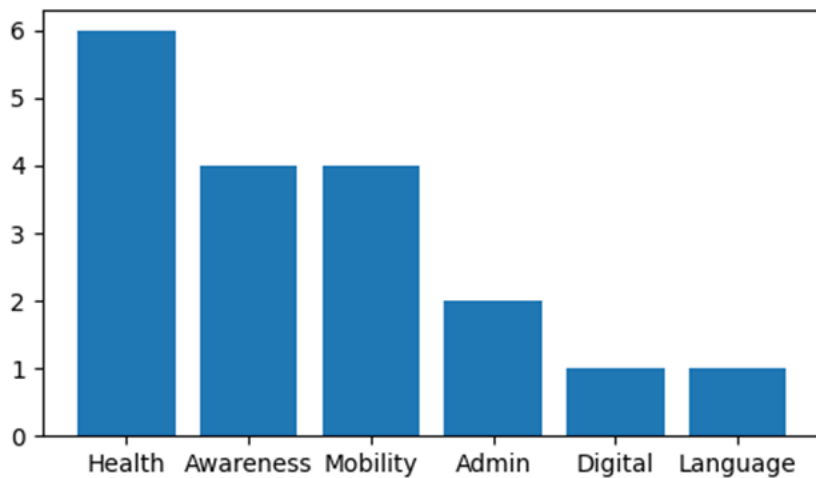
- Limited digital skills and confidence
- Difficulty keeping up with rapidly changing technologies
- Concerns about privacy, online fraud, and cybersecurity
- Physical limitations such as reduced vision or dexterity
- Lack of personalized support when learning new technologies

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

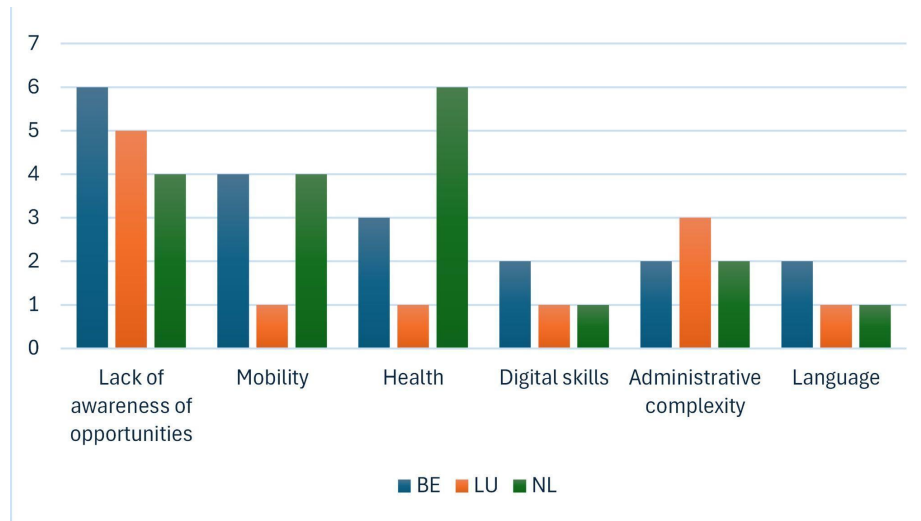
The Dutch government increasingly relies on digital platforms for public services, including healthcare, taxation, pensions, and municipal services. Systems such as **DigiD**, the national digital identity platform, have become essential for accessing many government services. While these developments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

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.



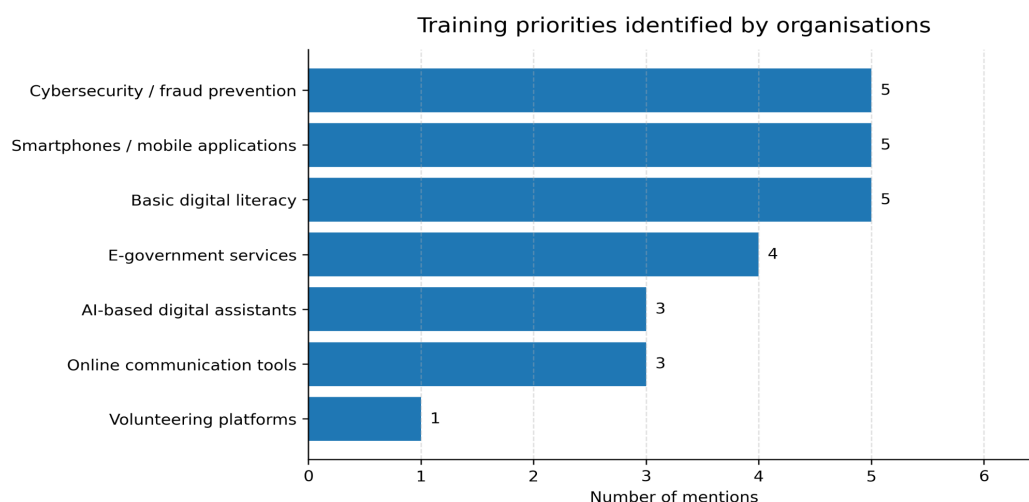
## Comparative chart



## 4.3 Main Training Needs and Capacity Gaps

### Belgium

Participating organisations identified digital competence development as the main training priority for older people. The most frequently mentioned needs include **basic digital literacy** (5), **the use of smartphones and mobile applications** (5), **cybersecurity and fraud prevention** (5), online communication tools (3) and access to e-government services (4). Several organisations also highlighted the importance of training on emerging technologies such as AI-powered digital assistants (3) and volunteering platforms (1). Regarding delivery methods, respondents showed a preference for face-to-face and small-group learning formats, complemented by peer-to-peer approaches and practical, hands-on exercises.



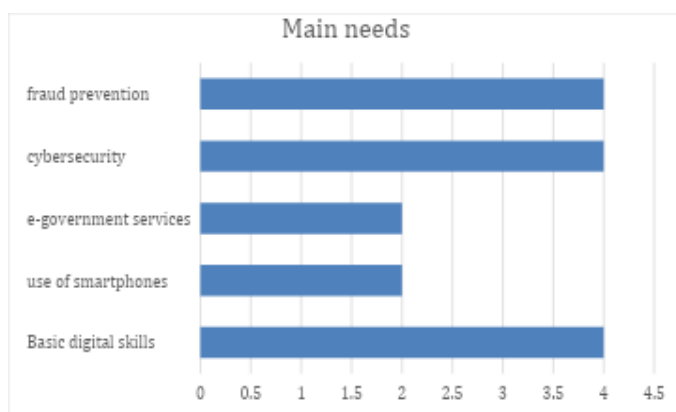
Source: AAV Belgium consultation responses, 2026. Multiple-choice question; respondents could select up to three options.

## Luxembourg

For all, training and capacity-building is an identified need. Actually, the majority of the organizations provide inhouse training and coaching to the volunteers.

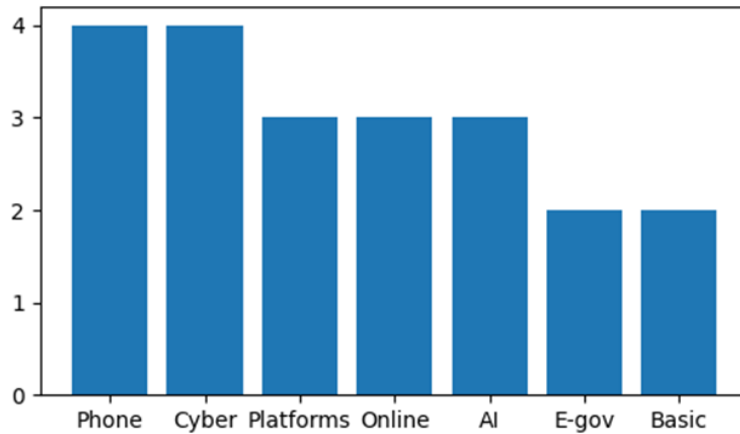
Training priorities identified by organizations reach from digital literacy use of smartphones, cybersecurity and fraud prevention, use of E-government and E-Banking services

As the preferred learning methods and formats 5 replied with Face to face and 1 with multilingual training.



## The Netherlands

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).



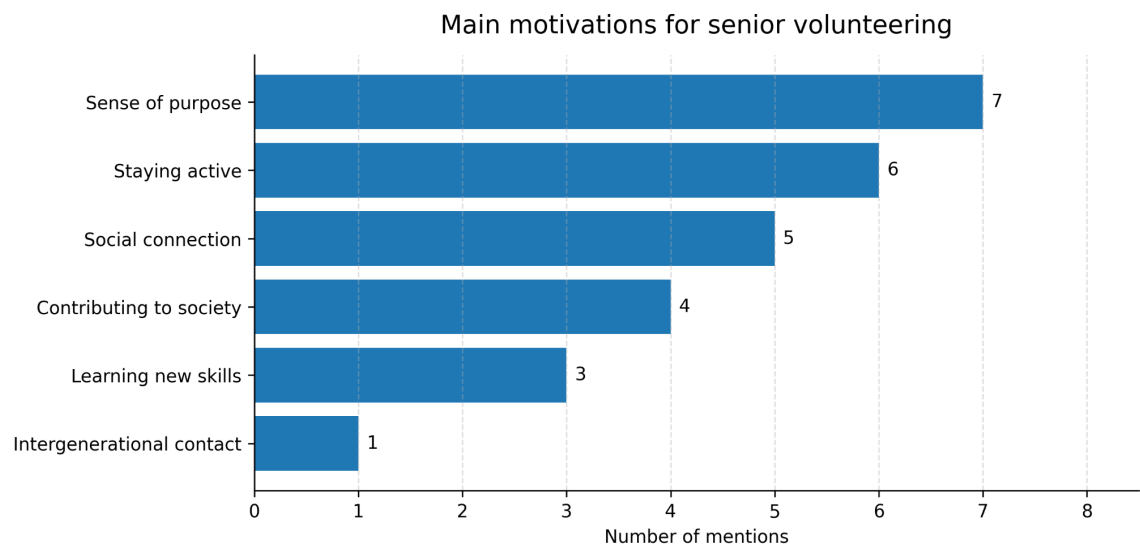
## Comparative chart



## 4.4 Motivations and Drivers for Senior Volunteering

### Belgium

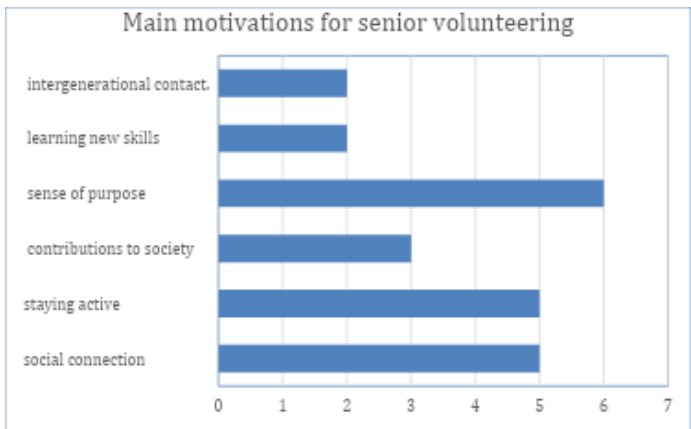
The consultation confirms that volunteering is perceived as an important means of promoting active ageing and social participation. The main motivations identified by organisations include a **sense of purpose** (7), staying active (6) and social connection (5). Respondents also highlighted the desire to contribute to society (4), continue learning and developing new skills (3), and foster intergenerational contact (1).



Source: AAV Belgium consultation responses, 2026. Multiple-choice question; respondents could select up to three options.

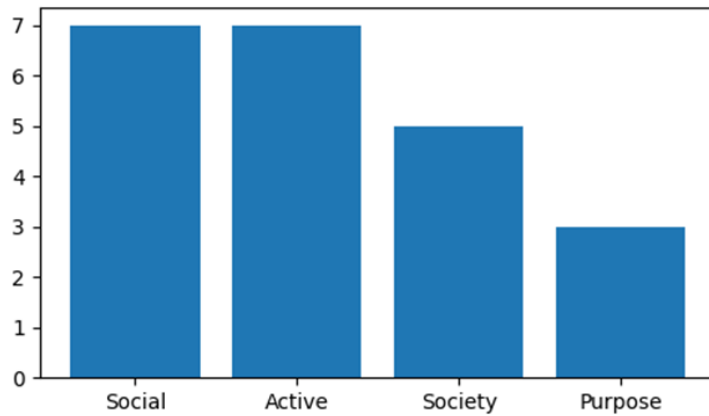
### Luxembourg

Social connection, staying active, contributions to society, sense of purpose, learning new skills, intergenerational contact.

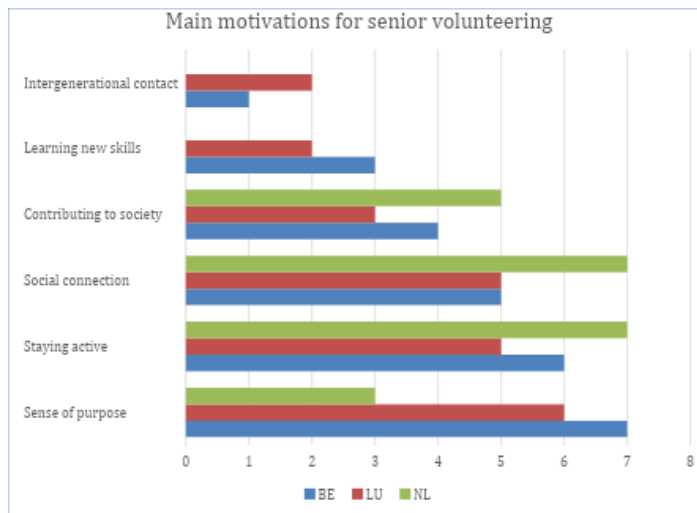


## The Netherlands

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.



## Comparative charts



## 5. Analysis of Findings

### 5.1 Common trends across the Benelux region and main differences

Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands share many demographic and societal challenges related to population ageing and the increasing digitalisation of everyday life. Although each country has developed its own policy approaches and support structures, the three countries display a number of common trends regarding senior participation, digital inclusion and volunteering. At the same time, important differences can be observed in the intensity of these challenges and in the responses adopted by organisations and public authorities.

A first common trend across the Benelux region is the ageing of the population. All three countries are experiencing an increasing proportion of older adults as a result of longer life expectancy and low fertility rates. This demographic transition raises concerns about the sustainability of pension systems, healthcare services and social participation. Luxembourg differs somewhat from Belgium and the Netherlands because strong immigration of younger workers partly offsets population ageing, slowing the demographic shift compared with its neighbours. Nevertheless, the proportion of people aged 60 and over continues to increase, creating similar long-term challenges.

Another major common trend concerns digital inclusion. In all three countries, rapid digitalisation is transforming access to services, communication and daily activities. Older adults often face difficulties adapting to new technologies, and digital exclusion remains a concern, particularly among the oldest age groups. Limited digital skills, lack of confidence, concerns about online security and fraud, and difficulties using e-government services are recurring themes throughout the region. Despite generally good digital infrastructure, older citizens still require support to participate fully in increasingly digital societies.

However, there are differences in the severity and nature of these digital challenges. Belgium places particular emphasis on the rapid digitalisation of services and identifies cybersecurity concerns and lack of basic digital skills as key obstacles. Luxembourg enjoys very high levels of connectivity and digital infrastructure, yet some seniors still encounter difficulties with digital literacy, authentication procedures and service accessibility. In the Netherlands, digitalisation of public administration is especially advanced, with systems such as DigiD becoming essential for accessing healthcare, taxation and pension services. Consequently, Dutch seniors often require additional

support to navigate online forms and digital identities, making digital inclusion a national priority.

Senior volunteering represents another area where strong similarities emerge. In all three countries, volunteering is recognised as an important tool for promoting active ageing, social participation and well-being. Older adults are motivated primarily by the desire to maintain social connections, remain active and contribute to society. A sense of purpose, opportunities for learning and intergenerational contacts are also important factors encouraging participation. These motivations demonstrate that volunteering is valued not only as a means of helping others, but also as a source of personal fulfilment and social engagement.

Nevertheless, barriers to volunteering vary somewhat between countries. In Belgium, lack of awareness of volunteering opportunities is the most frequently reported obstacle, followed by mobility difficulties and health limitations. Organisations also mention caregiving responsibilities, economic pressures and the extension of working lives as factors reducing seniors' availability. In the Netherlands, health limitations are considered the most significant barrier, together with lack of awareness and transport issues. Luxembourg, by contrast, benefits from strong support structures and widespread in-house training provided by organisations, although similar challenges related to ageing and accessibility remain present.

Training needs show remarkable consistency across the Benelux region. Digital literacy, smartphone and app use, cybersecurity awareness and access to e-government services are among the highest priorities everywhere. Emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence tools, are increasingly recognised as important areas for lifelong learning. Face-to-face learning methods are generally preferred, with practical exercises and small-group formats proving particularly effective. Luxembourg additionally highlights multilingual training, reflecting its diverse linguistic environment.

Overall, the Benelux countries share common demographic and digital challenges and recognise the important contribution of volunteering to active ageing. While differences exist in demographic dynamics, digital maturity and support mechanisms, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands all place increasing emphasis on digital inclusion, lifelong learning and senior participation as essential components of healthy and active ageing.

## 5.2 Country-specific challenges and needs

Despite sharing common trends related to population ageing and digital transformation, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands each face specific

challenges that influence the participation of older adults in society and volunteering. The consultations conducted in the three countries reveal differences in barriers, support needs and priorities for capacity-building, highlighting the importance of country-specific approaches.

### **Belgium**

In Belgium, one of the main challenges concerns the limited participation of older adults in volunteering due to a lack of awareness of available opportunities. Many seniors are not sufficiently informed about where and how they can contribute, while others lack previous volunteering experience or are uncertain about the roles they could perform. Mobility and transport difficulties represent additional obstacles, particularly for older people living in areas with limited accessibility. Health limitations also affect participation, while administrative complexity and insufficient digital skills further reduce engagement.

Belgian organisations underline the need to adapt volunteering opportunities to the capacities and expectations of older adults. Competing personal priorities, caregiving responsibilities and the extension of working lives also reduce the time available for voluntary activities. These factors indicate the necessity for more flexible and accessible forms of volunteering.

Digital inclusion constitutes another major challenge. Rapid digitalisation of services, combined with limited digital skills and concerns about cybersecurity, creates barriers for many older adults. Accessibility issues and language-related difficulties further complicate digital participation. Consequently, there is a strong need for digital literacy training, support in accessing e-government services, and awareness-raising on cybersecurity and fraud prevention.

Training needs identified by Belgian organisations focus primarily on practical digital skills. Priority areas include smartphone use, online communication tools, e-government services and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence. Face-to-face learning methods, peer support and practical exercises are considered particularly effective for senior learners.

### **Luxembourg**

Luxembourg faces a distinct demographic challenge. Although immigration of younger workers partly offsets the ageing process, the proportion of older adults continues to increase steadily. Combined with low fertility rates and early retirement patterns, this

trend raises concerns regarding the long-term sustainability of the pension system and the future availability of human resources.

The country benefits from excellent digital infrastructure and widespread internet access. Nevertheless, older adults, especially among the oldest age groups, continue to experience difficulties with digital technologies. Lack of confidence, concerns about online security and challenges in adapting to rapidly evolving digital tools remain significant barriers. Some seniors also encounter difficulties using authentication systems and accessing e-government services.

An important characteristic of Luxembourg is the strong involvement of organisations in training and coaching volunteers. Capacity-building is widely recognised as a necessity, and most organisations already provide internal training. The main needs concern digital literacy, smartphone use, cybersecurity awareness and access to e-banking and e-government services. Face-to-face learning remains the preferred training format, while multilingual training represents a specific requirement reflecting Luxembourg's multicultural and multilingual environment.

### **The Netherlands**

In the Netherlands, health-related limitations constitute the most important barrier to senior participation. Reduced mobility, vision problems and other age-related physical limitations affect access to volunteering and digital technologies. Lack of awareness of volunteering opportunities and transport difficulties also hinder participation.

The Netherlands is one of the most digitally advanced countries in Europe, and public services increasingly rely on online platforms. Systems such as DigiD have become essential for accessing healthcare, taxation, pensions and municipal services. Although these developments improve efficiency, they create difficulties for older adults who lack sufficient digital skills or confidence. Navigating online forms, managing digital identities and understanding digital communications often require external assistance, increasing dependence on family members and support organisations.

Consequently, digital inclusion remains a strategic priority. Municipalities, libraries and volunteer organisations play an important role in providing training and support. Capacity-building needs focus on smartphone and application use, cybersecurity, online communication tools, volunteering platforms and artificial intelligence applications.

Overall, while Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands share common concerns related to ageing and digitalisation, each country displays distinct needs. Belgium

requires greater outreach and flexible volunteering opportunities, Luxembourg must address demographic sustainability and multilingual support needs, and the Netherlands faces the challenge of ensuring accessibility within an increasingly digital society. These differences underline the importance of tailored strategies that respond to national contexts while promoting active ageing and social participation across the Benelux region.

## 6. Best Practices Identified

The national consultations conducted in Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands identified several examples of effective practices that support active ageing, digital inclusion and senior volunteering. Although implemented within different national contexts, these practices demonstrate common success factors and provide valuable insights for the further development and sustainability of the AAV project. Their transferability and scalability offer clear European added value and contribute to strengthening active citizenship and social inclusion among older adults.

### 6.1 Best Practices from Belgium

#### Best Practices Identified in Belgium

Belgian organisations have developed a learner-centred approach that places emphasis on accessibility and inclusion. Training activities are predominantly organised through face-to-face sessions, small groups and peer-to-peer learning methods, enabling older adults to acquire digital skills in a supportive environment. Practical and hands-on approaches have proven particularly effective in building confidence and reducing barriers to participation.

Belgian organisations also recognise the need to adapt volunteering opportunities to the capacities, interests and life circumstances of older adults. Flexible forms of engagement, personalised support and awareness-raising activities contribute to increasing participation and fostering active ageing. Furthermore, the integration of new themes, such as AI-based digital assistants and online volunteering platforms, demonstrates openness to innovation and lifelong learning.

### 6.2 Best Practices from Luxembourg

#### Best Practices Identified in Luxembourg

Luxembourg illustrates the importance of continuous capacity-building and organisational support. Most participating organisations provide internal training and coaching for volunteers, thereby strengthening volunteer competences and ensuring the sustainability of volunteer engagement. This approach contributes to organisational resilience and enhances the quality of volunteering experiences.

Another noteworthy practice concerns the adaptation of training to the country's multilingual and multicultural environment. Inclusive learning opportunities and personalised support ensure that language barriers do not prevent participation.

Combined with excellent digital infrastructure, these practices facilitate access to digital services and promote social inclusion among older adults.

Luxembourg demonstrates that technological readiness alone is not sufficient and that human support and tailored learning approaches remain essential for successful digital inclusion.

### 6.3 Best Practices from the Netherlands

#### **Best Practices Identified in the Netherlands**

The Netherlands provides examples of effective multi-stakeholder cooperation. Municipalities, libraries, volunteer organisations and public institutions collaborate to provide training, guidance and support to older adults. This ecosystem approach strengthens outreach capacities and creates sustainable support mechanisms for digital participation.

Training programmes focus on practical needs, including smartphone use, cybersecurity awareness, online communication and the use of emerging technologies. Support services also assist older adults in accessing e-government services and managing digital identities, thereby improving accessibility and reducing the risk of digital exclusion.

The Dutch experience highlights the importance of community-based support structures and cross-sector cooperation in promoting active citizenship and independent living.

### 6.4 Transferable lessons for the AAV Project

The experiences gathered across the Benelux region provide several transferable lessons that can be replicated in other European contexts.

First, successful digital inclusion strategies combine technological solutions with human-centred support. Face-to-face learning, mentoring and peer learning approaches remain highly relevant for older adults and should complement digital tools.

Second, flexibility and inclusiveness are essential conditions for increasing senior participation. Volunteering opportunities should be adapted to different levels of ability, motivation and availability, thereby enabling broader participation and ensuring equal opportunities.

Third, lifelong learning and continuous capacity-building represent key factors for sustainable engagement. Training programmes should address not only basic digital skills but also cybersecurity, e-government services and emerging technologies, thereby enhancing digital resilience and autonomy among older adults.

Fourth, multi-stakeholder cooperation strengthens local ecosystems and increases impact. Partnerships between civil society organisations, local authorities, libraries and volunteer networks create synergies, optimise resources and improve outreach to target groups.

Finally, communication and awareness-raising remain critical success factors. Accessible information and targeted outreach strategies are essential to overcoming barriers related to lack of awareness and to encouraging active participation.

Overall, the practices identified in Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands demonstrate a high degree of replicability and scalability. They provide a solid basis for the sustainability of the AAV project and contribute to the achievement of Erasmus+ priorities, notably inclusion and diversity, active participation, digital transformation and lifelong learning. By facilitating the exchange of experiences and good practices across countries, the AAV project generates clear European added value and contributes to strengthening active ageing and social cohesion throughout Europe.

## 7. Recommendations for the AAV Project

### 7.1 Recommendations for the Capacity Building Programme (Activity 3)

The findings from Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands highlight the importance of providing practical, accessible and learner-centred training opportunities for older adults and organisations working with senior volunteers. Capacity-building activities should prioritize basic digital literacy, smartphone and application use, cybersecurity awareness, online communication tools, and access to e-government and e-banking services. Training on emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence tools and digital assistants, should also be progressively integrated.

Face-to-face learning formats should remain the preferred delivery method, complemented by small-group sessions, peer-to-peer learning and mentoring approaches. Training materials should be practical and easy to understand, with sufficient opportunities for hands-on exercises. Particular attention should be paid to accessibility, multilingual support and the different learning paces of older adults. Capacity-building should target both senior volunteers and staff members of participating organisations to strengthen their ability to recruit, support and retain older volunteers.

### 7.2 Recommendations for the Pilot Senior Volunteering Initiatives (Activity 4)

Pilot initiatives should adopt flexible and inclusive approaches that accommodate the diverse capacities, interests and availability of older adults. Volunteering opportunities should be designed with different levels of commitment and should recognize health limitations, mobility issues and caregiving responsibilities that may affect participation.

Special emphasis should be placed on improving outreach and awareness raising, as lack of information about volunteering opportunities remains a major barrier across the Benelux countries. User-friendly communication channels and online volunteering platforms should be combined with local information campaigns and personal contacts.

Intergenerational activities should be encouraged to promote social cohesion and knowledge exchange between generations. Pilot initiatives should also foster a sense of purpose, social connection and opportunities for lifelong learning, as these motivations were consistently identified as key drivers for senior engagement. Regular monitoring

and feedback mechanisms should be established to evaluate participant satisfaction and facilitate continuous improvement.

### 7.3 Recommendations for Digital Inclusion

Digital inclusion should be addressed through a combination of technology, training and human support. Digital solutions should complement rather than replace traditional channels of communication and service delivery. Older adults who are less digitally confident should continue to have access to face-to-face support and alternative service options.

Training programmes should focus on practical everyday applications and include cybersecurity awareness, online safety, digital identities and access to e-government services. Support structures involving municipalities, libraries, community centres and volunteer organisations should be strengthened to ensure sustainable assistance for older adults.

Particular attention should be given to vulnerable groups, including the oldest age categories, persons with lower educational attainment and those experiencing social isolation. Digital tools and services should be designed according to accessibility principles and accompanied by clear and user-friendly guidance.

### 7.4 Other recommendations

Future actions should promote stronger cooperation among civil society organisations, local authorities, public institutions and volunteer networks. Multi-stakeholder partnerships can increase outreach capacities, improve resource sharing and enhance the sustainability of project outcomes.

Communication and awareness-raising campaigns should be intensified to improve the visibility of volunteering opportunities and reduce barriers to participation. In addition, lifelong learning should be promoted as a continuous process supporting active ageing, social inclusion and digital resilience.

Finally, the exchange of good practices and experiences between partner countries should continue beyond the project lifetime. Strengthening transnational cooperation and facilitating the transferability of successful approaches will contribute to the long-term impact and European added value of the AAV project while supporting the broader Erasmus+ priorities of inclusion, active participation, digital transformation and lifelong learning.

## 8. Conclusions

The analysis of Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands confirms that population ageing, and digital transformation are reshaping opportunities and challenges for senior participation in volunteering across the Benelux region. While contexts differ, common barriers such as limited digital skills, lack of awareness of volunteering opportunities, and accessibility constraints continue to affect older adults' engagement. At the same time, strong motivations related to social connection, active ageing and contributing to society represent a solid foundation for further development of inclusive volunteering models.

### 8.1 Key Messages

A key message emerging from the project is that successful senior engagement requires integrated approaches combining digital inclusion, flexible volunteering opportunities and strong human support systems. Face-to-face learning, peer support and local community engagement remain essential complements to digital solutions. Another important message is that cooperation between public authorities, civil society organisations and local actors significantly strengthens outreach, sustainability and impact.

### 8.2 Next Steps within the AAV Project

The next steps within the AAV project focus on the implementation of capacity-building activities and pilot volunteering initiatives, ensuring that identified good practices are effectively translated into action. Particular attention will be given to testing adaptable training formats, strengthening digital competencies and improving access to volunteering opportunities for older adults. Continuous monitoring, feedback collection and transnational exchange will support refinement and scaling of successful approaches. Ultimately, the project aims to enhance active ageing, digital inclusion and social participation across partner countries, generating sustainable European added value.