

THE STATE OF SENIOR VOLUNTEERING IN EUROPE

DESK RESEARCH REPORT

SENT 2023

“Senior Experts Nurturing Talent”



Confederation
of European
Senior Expert
Services



Co-funded by
the European Union

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ABOUT US:



The **Confederation of European Senior Expert Services**, known as CESES, is an international not-for-profit association of 18 organisations from the member states of the European Union and Switzerland. The first such legal entity of its kind in Europe, it encompasses the skills of over 25,000 volunteers. Combining the vast resources of these organisations, CESES offers professional, voluntary, short-term assistance and advice to enterprises, institutions, young people, entrepreneurs, chambers of commerce, ...

BACKGROUND

CESES was founded in 2000 and since then has grown to the most important European-wide grouping of experienced senior volunteers, encompassing the skills and expertise of over 25,000 experts, covering all sectors of the economy, and who make themselves available for our European and overseas, voluntary assignments.

CESES members each bring unique people, expertise and sector knowledge to the table, in this way combining resources and strengths of senior expert organisations, who for many years have successfully worked on advisory assignments in Europe and worldwide.



We believe intergenerational cooperation and sharing of expertise enriches our society and raises living standards in Europe and in the developing world, thereby also fostering international trade relations with Europe.

CESES assignments in Europe focus on intergenerational projects to share experiences, our assignments outside of Europe cover education, health, non-profit organisations, small and medium-size enterprises, industry and agricultural associations, and cooperatives in developing economies and economies in transition. As we concentrate specifically on these sectors and enterprises, CESES not only avoids overlapping with other aid organisations, but supports a clientele which to date has fallen between established commercial and humanitarian aid projects. We are proudly unique in our structure, motivation, and expertise



INTRODUCTION

This is a desk research report conducted by the Headquarters of the Confederation of European Senior Expert Services as part of the SENT 2023-2025 - Senior Experts Nurturing Talent Framework Partnership Agreement in the field of Education and Training of the Erasmus Plus programme. The report provides an overview of the state of senior volunteering in Europe according to the available data among and across European countries. It also focuses on the policies and programmes for senior volunteering in Europe, giving a short historical context that covers the lead up to the current Erasmus Plus & European Solidarity Corps Programmes. The importance of the recent Council Conclusions "*Human Rights, Participation and Well-Being of Older Persons in the Era of Digitalisation*" from October 2022 is highlighted, as well as the proposal to make 2025 the *European Year of Volunteers*. The important points raised in the *EESC Opinion on the European Strategy on Older Persons* are highlighted. The benefits to society of senior volunteering are described together with the motivations and barriers for Senior Volunteering. The impact of Senior Volunteering is illustrated and the final section covers how seniors can get involved in volunteering, the importance of Intergenerational Solidarity and the role and value of Skills Development in Senior volunteering.

For the purpose of this report, it is essential to start with the **definition of senior volunteering**. There is a lack of a specific, uniformly understood definition but there are some guiding principles in what it consists of. In "*The Palgrave Handbook of Volunteering, Civic Participation, and Nonprofit Associations*" (D. Horton et al.; 2016), **senior volunteering is defined as**



entailing all the volunteer activities that are undertaken by individuals that could be defined as seniors or older adults. There is no universally accepted definition of senior or a consensus of an age at which a person becomes "Old." According to Hopkins and Pain (2007), setting a certain age at which someone enters "older age" impairs the fluidity of transitions and fails to take into account the fact that a person's chronological age and biological age are frequently out of sync. However, it is important to have a general understanding of who qualifies as a "senior" in order to handle senior volunteering. In Europe this is generally **considered to refer to people of retirement age (65+)** but many policies and programmes related to this target group incorporate people from the age of 50 onwards.



1. SENIOR VOLUNTEERING- SOME FACTS AND FIGURES

Despite the best efforts from the sector to change the situation, there is a lack of recent, reliable or comparable data about volunteering in Europe. Most of the data available is from around the time of the European Year of Volunteering in 2011 when an additional effort was made on the part of policymakers and researchers in relation to this issue. Some limited more recent information and data has also been gathered, while it should be acknowledged that much of this data utilises differing definitions, conceptions, methodologies and covers differing periods, which does hinder its applicability to the national contexts and create differences in the results, there are still important trends and inferences which can be drawn particularly when considering these in the wider European context.

1.1 “SENIOR CITIZENS AND VOLUNTEERING IN THE EUROPEAN UNION” BY ANNETTE ANGERMAN (2011)²

The study highlights that around 22-23% of the population in Europe are volunteers, which is equivalent to around 92-94 million adults. The highest rates of volunteering at that time could be found in the United Kingdom, Austria, Sweden and the Netherlands. In addition to those, high rates could also be found in Luxembourg, Germany, Finland and Denmark. For other EU

Member States such as Estonia, France and Latvia, the rate was not so high (GHK 2010a). In Belgium, Ireland, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Spain as well as in the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, the percentage of volunteers was relatively low. The lowest rates were found in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, and Lithuania. It is evident that the **different cultural and political traditions in the individual Member States had (and continue to have) a strong impact on the overall number of volunteers.**

The study references the 2008 Eurobarometer that found that 44% of those who have previously retired, are involved in, or plan to get involved in, community or volunteer work, with 73% of older adults in Europe eager to do so after retirement.

The study also reported that the number of senior citizens volunteering was increasing. In this perspective, it is appropriate to note particular increases in countries like Belgium, Finland, France, Austria, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden (GHK 2010b:6). In 2011 the data showed that there were already a lot of senior volunteers in some EU countries, including the Netherlands, where 24% of people over 75 and 41% of people between the ages of 65 and 74 participated in volunteer work. (GHK 2010a: 70 et.). In Finland, 40% of people aged 65 to 79 volunteered (Eurofound 2011: 15); showing an increase over past periods (GHK 2010_FI). In Germany, the rate of volunteering was 37% for people between the ages of 60 and 69 and 25% for those beyond the age of 70 (BMFSFJ 2010: 32). According to one research looking at the UK, (Eurofound 2011: 14), 20% of people over 75 and 30% of people between the ages of 65 and 74 in the United Kingdom volunteered at that time. The study highlighted the existence of more senior volunteers than ever before. In Poland, the rate of volunteering was shown to be increasing gradually up until 2007 before sharply declining in 2008 (GHK 2010_PL), most likely as a result of the financial crisis. Data showed that since that time, older Poles have taken a greater interest in taking care of their own family members (Eurofound 2011:15).



1.2 “VOLUNTEERING FACT SHEETS” CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN VOLUNTEERING (CEV) 2010³

The Centre for European Volunteering (CEV) also published some desk research regarding volunteering and according to their “*Fact Sheets on Volunteering*” published in 2010, in the UK, 53% of those 65 and older had officially volunteered in 2007, up from 34% in 1991. There are nations however, particularly in central and eastern Europe, where senior volunteering is not as widespread. Only around 30% of the volunteers in Slovakia are not defined as young people and therefore it would be assumed that a reasonable percentage of that would fall into the older age group demographic.

1.3 “VOLUNTEERING BY OLDER PEOPLE IN THE EU” - EUROFOUND 2011⁴

The report of Eurofound published in 2011 “*Volunteering by older people in the EU*” found very interesting data from other European countries.

For instance, in 2005 in **The Netherlands**, amongst those 55 to 75, one in three volunteered, along with 25% of those 35 to 54 and 17.3% of those 15 to 34. Sports teams, religious or ideological organisations, neighbourhood support, assistance for those with disabilities, and charitable endeavours were among the main areas of action.





In **Germany** the range of opportunities for volunteer work was growing on the one hand, while project-based commitment was becoming more popular on the other. Between 1999 and 2009, the percentage of volunteers 65 and older increased from 23% to 28%.

In **Denmark**, in a similar way to Germany, they also considered the encouragement of older people to volunteer as a way of addressing the demographic change and ageing population. In comparison with other age groups, the number of older people who were active volunteers is relatively low; 25% of people aged 66 and above are involved.



In **Finland**, there is a very formalised system for volunteer labour. Older adults volunteered more frequently than the general population as a whole. Overall, 40% of Finns between the ages of 65 and 79 reported engaging in volunteer activity. Older persons devoted an average of 17 hours per month to their commitments (Kansalais Areena, 2010). Their motivations ranged from promoting their personal well-being, to helping others (Haarni, 2009; Rajaniemi, 2009). Not every organisation has yet acknowledged the abilities and capabilities of older age groups. This is especially true for organisations in the health and wellness industry, which concentrate their recruitment efforts on younger age demographics.



France is one of the nations where voluntary commitment participation percentages rise with age. People between the ages of 60 and 74 have the highest participation percentage, with a total of 36.9%, according to a separate analysis of the various age groups (INSEE, 2010). The cultural, recreational, and welfare industries are highly active with volunteers in this age group.



However, for another country like **Latvia**, older volunteers are the subject of very little information, not being a large part of the public conversations on volunteering, however the national background report on **Latvia** indicated that their involvement was not very significant.



As a last example identified from this paper, in **Hungary**, while 16.6% of individuals between the ages of 51 and 60 volunteer, this percentage drops to 9.5% for those between the ages of 61 and 70. People over 71 years old had the lowest reported engagement rate (6.6%). The majority of older people's volunteering activities are involved in the advancement of other's welfare.





1.4 “THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER EQUALITY ON VOLUNTEERING AMONG EUROPEAN SENIOR CITIZENS” VOLUNTAS 2022

According to data from the more recent Voluntas report “*The Influence of Gender Equality on Volunteering Among European Senior Citizens*” published in 2022, the percentage of elderly people in volunteering varies substantially among European countries, with high rates in the Netherlands (20%), and low rates in Greece (3%). Specifically, Boccacin and Lombi (2018) found that older women volunteer more in Poland, Ireland, and Spain, while older men in Belgium, France, and Germany.

1.5 THE “PALGRAVE HANDBOOK OF VOLUNTEERING, CIVIC PARTICIPATION, AND NONPROFIT ASSOCIATIONS” (D. HORTON ET AL.; 2016), - CHAPTER 29 “VOLUNTEERING IN THREE LIFE STAGES” (D. HASKI-LEVENTHAL ET AL.)

The chapter highlights that new social connections and meaning are usually found towards the end of an individual’s life cycle, when their personal and professional obligations are reduced. It references the comparative study between European countries by Haski-Leventhal (2009) based on the *Survey of Health Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE)*⁶ data, which showed



that around 10% of senior European citizens who participated in the study had previously volunteered. Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands had the highest rates with 17.5%, 17.8% and 20.7% respectively, this therefore demonstrates that Northern European countries held the highest rates. This is in contrast to Spain, with 2.2%, and Greece, with 3%, two Southern European countries holding the lowest rates. In addition, the 2007 Helping Out Survey (Low et al. 2007)⁷ in England shows us that formal volunteering was quite popular among 45-54 year olds, 55-64 year olds and over 65 year olds with 38%, 42% and 41% of participant rates respectively. However, another report published in 2010 - National Citizenship Survey (Drever 2010) reported that regular engagement in volunteering was lower, noting 28% for 50-64 year olds, 30% for 65-74 year olds and 20% for those over 75.

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2. POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES ABOUT SENIOR VOLUNTEERING

The focus on senior volunteering by European policy makers is not a new issue on the agenda. In order to minimise the social exclusion of older people by fostering their social inclusion, it is important to keep in mind that the Council of Europe advised that the Member States take policy actions as early as 1994 (Council of Europe, 1994), emphasising that volunteering can be viewed as a suitable tool to address the social exclusion of older people. However, when volunteering is addressed by policymakers today, there is mostly a focus on younger people and a lack of focus on the active engagement of senior and older people as volunteers.

2.1 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The study of Annette Angermann and Birgit Sitterman published in 2010 entitled "*Volunteering in the European Union - An⁸overview*", affirms that on a European level, volunteering has not been recognised as a legitimate area of policy. They point out that volunteering is at least a side issue in a number of different policy domains since the European Parliament's original effort to build a European volunteering strategy. Since 2006, the European Parliament has had an intergroup on volunteering (legislative period 2004-2010), volunteering has at least become a minor concern in a number of other policy areas. Youth, sports, older citizens, education, and active EU membership are the primary areas. As a result, volunteering is a horizontal issue that is

represented in many policy sectors, despite not being the primary focus. The European Parliament's "Volunteering Interest Group" was formally established on April 13, 2010. This group was established as an unofficial cross-party committee. The interest group monitored how the European Parliament was carrying out the 2011 European Year of Volunteering, and it is still active in 2023 overseeing ongoing EU volunteering policies.

As stated in the "*Volunteering by older people in the EU*" publication by Eurofund in 2011,⁹ one of the most **significant objectives on the political agenda of the EU was to encourage volunteering among older people in Europe, especially those at risk of marginalisation or social exclusion.** The emphasis of the European Years in 2010, 2011, and 2012 serves as an illustration of this. For example, the **European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion in 2010 specifically and inferentially addressed older people** with the following two main goals: "*to promote public support for social inclusion policies, emphasising collective and individual responsibility in combating poverty and social exclusion, by all public and private actors*".



2011 was officially declared the **European Year of Volunteering** by the European Commission. The European Council (2009) and European Commission (2010/37) both stated that its main goals were to "*encourage and support... the efforts of the Community, the Member States, local and regional authorities to create the conditions for civil society conducive to*



volunteering in the European Union (EU) and to increase the visibility of voluntary activities in the EU."

The goal was to raise awareness of volunteering among Member States as a fundamental component of democratic participation and the fact that **it was essential to the endeavour that older individuals volunteer their time, especially in a society that is getting older** was central to the proposal.

The European Union designated 2012 as the **European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations**. The main objective was to aid Member States, social partners, and civil society in their initiatives to support active ageing and mobilise the potential of Europe's rapidly ageing population. There was the hope and objective that this would **encourage older volunteers to contribute to society and strengthen and preserve intergenerational solidarity**. In order to overcome social exclusion and isolation, the emphasis was on promoting social participation in old age and healthy ageing, which has an explicit connection to volunteering.

While together these created a context for and facilitated the growth of volunteering and senior volunteering in Europe, as shown in the data discussed previously, there remains much to be done, and in many cases the benefits/growth provided by these years has manifested itself incredibly unevenly across European Member States.



2.2 ERASMUS PLUS & EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS PROGRAMMES



Prior to the current form of Erasmus plus and European Solidarity Corps, the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007 - 2013) consisted of a number of smaller programmes based on the specific life and educational circumstances. In this framework, "Grundtvig" fostered exchanges, learning collaborations and senior citizen volunteer programmes, and was centred on all facets of adult education. During this period, certain demographic groups were specifically targeted for the promotion of volunteering at the European level: the European Voluntary Service (the predecessor to the European Solidarity Corps) focussed on young people between the ages of 18 and 30 and people over 50 could participate in the Grundtvig programme. The new generation Erasmus Plus programmes being currently implemented, under the funding years 2021-2027, builds on previous possibilities for older volunteers under Grundtvig but in many ways miss the opportunity to fully address the potential of the programme to contribute to the active participation of senior and older people in the EU. This potential is better utilised when the activities take place directly in the context of Education and Youth, but presents more of a challenge when considering older people continuing their non-formal learning paths through volunteering in, for example, environmental, cultural heritage or social service focussed initiatives. In this respect more clear consideration should be given to how Erasmus Plus can develop a more holistic approach to true lifelong learning, with communication and access to all actions for people of all ages.

The European Pillar of Social rights highly supports intergenerational cooperation and inclusion of older people in democratic life. Linking to this, the Erasmus Plus Programme could be one of the main schemes allowing the participation and active citizenship of older people in European society. Even if the programme has some scope to include the older demographic, further action is needed in order to promote the opportunities and enhance the inclusivity by facilitating the accessibility and/or increasing the funding directed to them. In addition, an *Intergenerational aspect* can be introduced into the European Solidarity Corps, as currently there is little scope for involvement from those over the age of 30 which therefore excludes a large, skilled demographic. Intergenerationality could be introduced in an impactful way, grounded in collaboration, for example, with older volunteers acting alongside young Corps members in their activities or supporting Corps members as volunteer mentors. In all of these opportunities, the quality of impact and of the opportunity for both the younger ESC members, and older members, should be taken into account.

2.3 COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS "HUMAN RIGHTS, PARTICIPATION AND WELL-BEING OF OLDER PERSONS IN THE ERA OF DIGITALISATION" OCTOBER 2020

Article 46 of the Council Conclusions of October 2020 "Human Rights, Participation and Well-Being of Older Persons in the Era of Digitalisation" stated the need to **"EXAMINE SETTING UP a digital platform on 'Participation and volunteering after working life', which could be linked to existing projects geared towards European civic engagement. This platform could provide incentives and information for older persons to engage in cross border voluntary work using their acquired knowledge, skills and abilities. It could furthermore inform local authorities and other actors on**



strategies and projects to involve older persons in volunteer work and provide a space for interested people to receive further guidance on finding volunteering opportunities."

Older people's contribution as volunteers is also mentioned in the **Green Paper in section 4.1. "Staying active"** and on Page 26.

"Volunteering activities can promote intergenerational solidarity and cooperation, creating value and benefiting young and old alike in terms of knowledge, experience and self-esteem. At the same time, volunteering has an important economic value. Data show that about a fifth of 65-74 year-olds participate in formal volunteering while people aged 75+ also remain engaged when their health allows. During the COVID-19 pandemic, retirees have helped the community by returning as medical or nursing staff, or providing voluntary services to relieve others in their everyday lives."

"How could volunteering by older people and intergenerational learning be better supported, including across borders, to foster knowledge sharing and civic engagement? What role could a digital platform or other initiatives at EU level play and to whom should such initiatives be addressed? How could volunteering by young people together with and towards older people be combined into cross-generational initiatives?"



THE RELATED SYNOPSIS REPORT ALSO ADDRESSES THE ISSUE IN THE FOLLOWING INSTANCES:

4.6.3. VOLUNTEERING

"A number of stakeholders supported the development of a platform for intergenerational volunteering, which could help highlight best practices, facilitate networking, and provide tools, frameworks and information on, for example, funding for all stakeholders. It could also support e-volunteering, a new volunteering format involving virtual exchanges. Some stakeholders proposed an 'Erasmus for Seniors' to boost intergenerational learning across borders. The volunteering platform of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) was mentioned as an interesting example."

"Various local initiatives that stimulate intergenerational volunteering and mentoring already exist. For example: the 'Amsterdam Vertelt' initiative which pairs a senior citizen with a young resident to work together on a photography or literary project; 'La plateforme du volontariat', a volunteering platform in Belgium; and spaces for intergenerational activities (e.g. communal vegetable boxes, trekking routes, and chess sets in parks) in Oslo."

"Respondents highlighted various sector-specific volunteering needs, including cross-generational programmes in employment (companies) and in education. Some suggested launching a pilot programme replicating the concept of the 'super connectors' programme that helps school children teach their older relatives how to use technology. Another example is the 'oral



history' projects, which are based on using older people's experience in the teaching of history."

4.8. RECOMMENDATIONS

"To strengthen volunteerism, in particular intergenerational volunteering, stakeholders called on the EU to support national and local strategies to promote volunteering among older people. Before creating a platform, the EU should assess volunteering needs and benefits and consider the role of local and regional governments, as well as networking opportunities, including with youth volunteer organisations."

2.4 EUROPEAN YEAR OF VOLUNTEERS 2025

European programmes for volunteering and learning mobility provide very few options for Senior Volunteers. In their proposal to establish 2025 as the European Year of Volunteers the Centre for European Volunteering (CEV) proposes to use the occasion to: **"launch a pilot European Exchange programme for older volunteers"** as called for by the Conference on the Future of Europe - this would also respond to issues raised in the Council Conclusions from the German Presidency 2020 *"Human Rights, Participation and Well-Being of Older Persons in the Era of Digitalisation"*, such as the problem of an age divide in digital skills (20 % aged 75 and older in the Union uses the internet at least occasionally, in comparison with 98 % of 16-29 year olds) and the impact this can have on participation in an increasingly digital Europe, economically, socially, and politically.

2.5 EESC OPINION ON EUROPEAN STRATEGY ON OLDER PERSONS

In 2023 the opinion on the “European strategy on older persons” by the European Economic and Social Committee was adopted¹⁰ and it highlights several very important points:

- *“Propose measures to promote volunteering with added value for older people, setting up mentoring programmes where older people can share their work experience with younger generations;*
- *Encourage intergenerational mentoring through specific programmes;*
- *Foster entrepreneurship among older people by assessing existing barriers such as loss of pension rights, facilitate access to finance and promote incubators for intergenerational co-entrepreneurship and transfers of businesses from older business owners or entrepreneurs to younger entrepreneurs, and encourage initiatives within the social economy;*
- *Promote the social economy as a person-centred sector providing benefits for society as it can offer older people new employment and entrepreneurship opportunities;*
- *Promote and improve accessibility to Erasmus+ and educational technology programmes for older people, making full use of their intergenerational outreach, offering older people learning and academic mobility opportunities, including in places where it is difficult to access education, such as long-term care facilities. The opportunities offered by micro-credentials and digital learning tools, such as massive open online courses (MOOCs), should also be fully exploited.”*



3. BENEFITS TO SOCIETY OF SENIOR VOLUNTEERING

3.1 MOTIVATION & BARRIERS FOR SENIOR VOLUNTEERING

The “Palgrave Handbook of Volunteering, Civic Participation, and Nonprofit Associations” (D. Horton et al.; 2016), - Chapter 29 “Volunteering in Three Life Stages” (D. Haski-Leventhal et al) focuses on the motivations of and influences on elderly volunteering. It highlights the fact that elderly volunteers differ from younger volunteers in their motivations to volunteer, while Okun et al. (1998) found that the **social motive was stronger among older volunteers and that they were less motivated to volunteer by career concerns.**

The study also notes that volunteering can address the social needs and loneliness that sometimes characterise third age, that is, age following retirement and children leaving home, and can promote a sense of usefulness. It goes on to say that older volunteers are often motivated to volunteer out of affiliation, and are more likely to have high satisfaction and commitment, as long as there is sufficient institutional support (Kovacs and Black 1999). Low et al. (2007) showed that the motivational factors that were particularly significant for seniors were: having time to spare; wanting to meet people and make friends; and as a part of religious beliefs. Some motivations decline in importance for seniors, such as the needs and interests of family and friends and getting a paid career or learning new skills.



The Helping Out Survey from the United Kingdom (Low et al. 2007)¹¹ findings reveal that the two **perceived barriers to volunteering that become particularly significant in older age are an individual having an illness or disability and feeling too old to volunteer.** According to Ehlers et al. (2011)¹², some seniors in the United Kingdom may not be aware of volunteer possibilities because they lack social connections. They also point out that in the Netherlands, France, Germany, Denmark, and Finland, seniors frequently discover they have a variety of caring obligations within the family, which limits the time available for volunteering, even though seniors who have retired from paid employment may have more spare time. While results in Italy showed that, as a result of the increased age of retirement, there is less time for volunteering at an older age.

3.2 IMPACT OF SENIOR VOLUNTEERS ON THE ECONOMY

The European Commission published a report on "*The Silver Economy*" in 2018.¹³ Explaining that it is a well known and documented phenomena and can be defined as "*the economic opportunities arising from the public and consumer expenditure related to population ageing and the specific needs of the population over 50*". Thus the Silver Economy comprises a large part of the general consumer economy. The wants and demands of older people are regarded to be both a part of the general economy and the Silver Economy.

In line with the Oxford Economics definition, the paper describes the "Silver Economy" as the whole of all economic activity that support¹⁰ the requirements



of persons 50 and older, including the goods and services they directly purchase as well as the subsequent economic activity that their purchasing creates. The production, consumption, and trade of goods and services relevant to older people, both public and private, and including direct and indirect consequences, constitute a unique cross-section of economic activities known as the "Silver Economy". Thus, the phrase "Silver Economy" covers a wide variety of ideas and topics with regard to both the opportunities and challenges that Europe's ageing population brings. Growing the EU Silver Economy has both opportunities and difficulties that are interconnected.

For many years, European policymakers have sought to address the societal issue of an ageing population. At this time, the focus has expanded, and the opportunity presented by an ageing population is being addressed more completely. This involves utilising social and technological advancements as well as creating cross-cutting solutions to enhance the general health and wellbeing of older persons beyond only direct health and social services concerns. A fuller understanding of the Silver Economy's indirect and induced impacts has also emerged. While the Silver Economy reflects private and public consumption that meets the needs of older people, many of these effects also create new and innovative opportunities for both older and younger generations.

In 2023 the Policy Learning Platform hosted a webinar on the topic of Silver economy: Opportunities for SMEs and discovered some key findings.¹⁴ They expose that European society's ageing is a societal concern that calls for various answers from corporations, NGOs, researchers, and policymakers, and that it is impossible to ignore the realities of demographic shift. They point

out that, as with every obstacle, it also presents chances to innovate and capture fresh market prospects and opportunities.

It is yet to be realised how much real untapped potential there is in the ageing population. Many older and elderly adults want to contribute to society, not only as consumers but also through paid employment and volunteering, albeit at a slower pace, but find that their existing physical and legal environments prevent them from doing so. According to the available data, many people in the 50+ age bracket in Europe retire from their paid jobs before they are officially eligible to retire. In addition, there is a lack of highly skilled professionals from the younger generations in many fields. Older people, after reaching retirement age, can make a valuable contribution through volunteering, especially as regards mentoring younger people.

In *"The Interplay between Active Ageing and Silver Economy – a QCA Analysis"* by Igor Tkalec published in 2018,¹⁵ it was expressed that the **second policy domain relevant for implementing active ageing policies to take advantage of the silver economy, in line with the Commission's concept of active ageing, is citizenship/participation.** In this concept, political, social, cultural, and recreational activities are all included. Volunteering is one of the most well-known and widely practised actions in the citizenship field. Volunteering serves as a bridge between a healthy lifestyle and consuming tendencies making the elderly more engaged and active citizens. Therefore, participation in both the socioeconomic and volunteering activities improves the quality of life and wellbeing of elderly people.

"Ageing as a driver of progressive politics? What the European Silver Economy teaches us about the co-constitution of ageing and innovation" published in 2022 by the Cambridge University Press¹⁶ highlights how the burden on public spending on long-term health and care systems throughout the EU grows as the population ages. They also stress how the ageing population should be seen as a desirable social and economic asset as well as a societal expenditure. However, they also emphasise that this will necessitate the implementation of policies that permit strategic expenditures

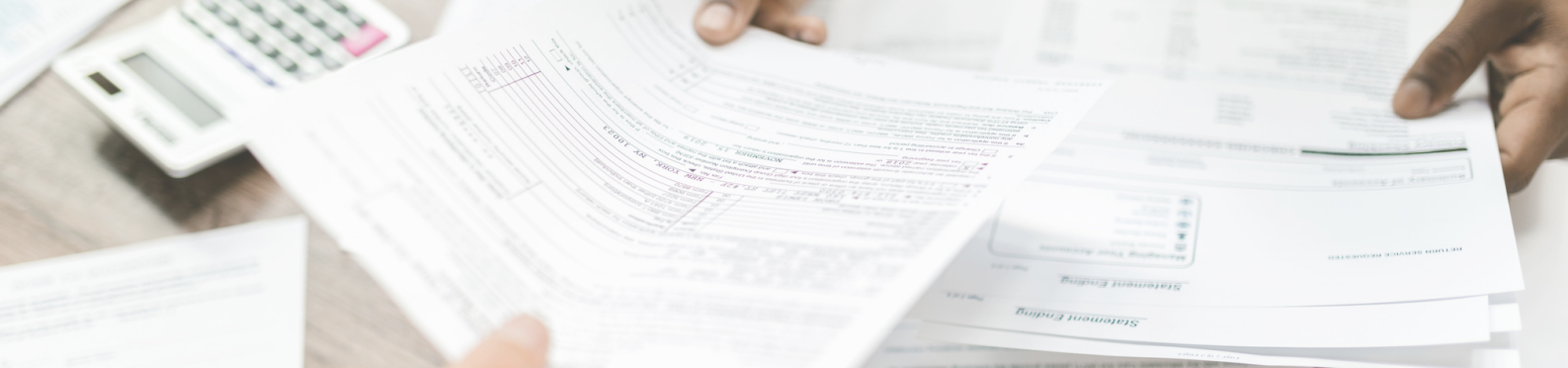


and new investments aimed at promoting independence and good health in later life (EC, 2015b:1), such as the promotion of senior citizen volunteering and active citizenship.

The study from “The Palgrave Handbook of Volunteering, Civic Participation, and Nonprofit Associations” (D. Horton et al.; 2016), - Chapter 29 “Volunteering in Three Life Stages” (D. Haski-Leventhal et al) concludes that **senior volunteering can have a positive impact on society**. This is in terms of directly on older volunteers themselves as well as the provision of services that otherwise would be unavailable or more expensive in addition to services that are more compatible to older clients, understanding their needs and situations (Haski-Leventhal 2009). **Volunteering by older people can help eliminate isolation, strengthen community participation, enhance self-esteem, change stereotypes, and promote social and political consciousness.**

3.3 IMPACT ON WELL BEING FOR INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

Senior volunteering has been highlighted to have an impact on the wellbeing of the various different groups involved, in varying ways, including the physical and mental wellbeing of the volunteer, the health of the local community, and the levels of openness, social inclusion, and active participation from citizens of all their diversity. These complimentary impacts have been highlighted throughout studies in Europe, and when taken together build a complete picture of the impact senior volunteering can have on this broader topic.



Particularly highlighting the impact in terms of health and wellbeing, Haski-Leventhal (2009) studied the relation between volunteering and wellbeing among 30,023 older Europeans in 12 countries, demonstrating an overall positive correlation between volunteering and perceived health, life satisfaction, and self-assessed life expectancy and a negative correlation to depression. Musick and Wilson (2003)¹⁷ also found a negative effect of volunteering on depression for people over 65. Van Willigen (2000)¹⁸ found a significant association between volunteering and life satisfaction, especially for those who volunteered more hours and for more than one organisation. Demura and Sato (2003)¹⁹ showed lower depression rates among elderly volunteers in Japan, and that volunteering was a means to social reintegration, especially for those living at home. Furthermore, research showed a positive relation between volunteering and physical health. Volunteering can help develop social networks that relieve stress and reduce disease risk (Haski-Leventhal 2009). Volunteers have access to more information about the benefits of exercise and preventive medical care (Wilson and Musick 1999)²⁰.

In the **article published by the Red Cross EU Office** "*Volunteering and intergenerational connections to promote active ageing*" in 2021²¹, they state that the origins and effects of the loneliness that many older persons experience needs to be better understood and combated. The COVID-19 pandemic has made people feel even more isolated and alone, and these feelings can have a severe impact on someone's health and happiness. The Centre for European Volunteering (CEV) had reported that many older people, prevented from volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic as a result of social distancing and isolation rules in Europe, have not returned to



volunteering post-pandemic and that more needs to be done to reverse this trend.

The UN Volunteers publication by Celina Menzel "*How volunteering strengthens social inclusion and well-being of senior citizens*"²² claims that **volunteering is an effective way to increase social inclusion and, consequently, the wellbeing of senior adults.** This encompasses both volunteering by elderly citizens, or so-called "silver volunteering," as well as volunteering for senior citizens. The publication continues by explaining how participating in volunteer activities can enhance levels of engagement and physical activity, as well as their sense of agency and self-worth and that it can also help them feel valuable, productive, and connected to the communities around them. It is noted that this immediately contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 3 (health and well-being) of the United Nations and the idea of leaving no one behind by having a beneficial impact on their welfare and social inclusion. The publication concludes that beyond retirement, seniors can still make a significant contribution to our societies and **senior volunteering helps seniors value their individual contributions to society. It helps to improve physical and mental health, happiness, self-esteem, and self-satisfaction for older people and prevents their isolation.**

The risk of social exclusion is increasing as a result of the demographic and sociological changes, especially for older persons who have left paid employment and the labour force. For many older and elderly Europeans, long-term unemployment and job uncertainty increase inequality and poverty concerns as suggested by the report published by Eurofound in 2011 "*Volunteering by older people in the EU*"²³.

There is empirical evidence (Institute for Volunteering Research, 2004)²⁴ that volunteering in old age and/or older people's civic engagement may be a tool to combat social exclusion and thereby promote social inclusion of the elderly population as well as social cohesion and quality of life for all generations. Social risks, particularly in old age, concentrate on issues like weak social networks, including family status (widowhood or divorce, for example), as well as poor economic and health status. Given the high degree of social, regional, cultural, and cohort-specific heterogeneity among Europe's older population, it can be assumed that the risk of social exclusion (not only among older people) is not equally distributed across the population. Volunteering benefits both the volunteers and others and can be viewed as a type of engagement in old age that, in many cases, might lead to a win-win outcome. The welfare system of the nation in question, the availability and calibre of social, health, and care services, as well as other services aimed at promoting older people's social integration, all have a significant impact on the social exclusion of older people in Europe (Hoff, 2008).

In a paper from 2011 entitled "Volunteering by older people in the EU," the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) conducted research to examine 30 case studies on senior individuals who volunteered to test the premise that ***"volunteering in old age may be a tool to promote social inclusion of the older population and to improve quality of life for all generations."*** The premise is that older people should actively be given the opportunity to volunteer and conduct socially engaged lives by governments, civil society organisations, the commercial sector, and communities. This necessitates tactics for recruitment and retention that are especially suited to older populations. This must be, in addition to addition to consistent funding and support at the legislative and practical levels, and most importantly, the we must increase appreciation for the value of silver volunteering must be increased.

Expanding and maintaining networks is also shown to be a key part for keeping the mental wellbeing of the older generations. Most case studies

included show how elder volunteers develop numerous new connections with both other volunteers and people who gain from their dedication and that volunteering relationships have even occasionally evolved into friendships. Demonstrating that the quantity of social connections one has can increase thanks to volunteering. The paper points out that this is especially important for senior citizens who experience loneliness and isolation and that additionally, due to their voluntary commitment, volunteers from intergenerational projects report developing closer relationships with younger individuals.

Other evidence gathered points to the fact that people are searching for reorientation, particularly after making the move from paid labour to retirement, but also after the era of caring for elderly parents or for children (the "empty nest phase"). Their lives are no longer governed by the tasks and commitments that have occupied them for years or even decades. Volunteering aids in regaining a purposeful occupation and, in some cases, even a much-needed new outlook on life. The development of self-esteem is especially important for elderly people who have spent their entire lives marginalised, for instance due to low educational attainment, a handicap, or ethnicity. Encouragement and empowerment are therefore essential prerequisites for their participation. Therefore, several programmes concentrate their recruitment efforts on those seniors who must first see their own life experiences and certain common skills as valuable prerequisites for volunteering.

Several initiatives featured place a strong emphasis on preparing their volunteers for new roles through training. Active volunteers discover that despite their age, ill health, or other personal challenges, they are still able to learn and may use their newly acquired skills for the good of others. The paper demonstrates that negative age preconceptions, even held by older individuals themselves, are challenged through volunteering. **Many senior citizens learn that by taking action through volunteering, they may enhance not only their own living conditions but also the social**



cohesiveness of their communities. Consequently, they start to "productively" age. In addition, many older volunteers learn how to combat social exclusion both personally and on behalf of others, which increases their awareness of social issues.

Numerous case studies demonstrate that volunteers who engage on projects for the initiative in question later become involved with other organisations as well. Therefore, recruiting senior citizens can start a process of raising societal engagement. Many volunteers gain a better understanding of their social rights and discover how to exercise them, such as from the local government or the healthcare system, leading to an improved state of health and well-being of volunteers. The case studies also show that older volunteers become more active, establish more social ties and feel useful and self-confident, in addition their volunteer activity directly contributes to health promotion because older people learn about diet, coping with impairments like diabetes, and the value of exercise in later life through their engagement in projects on topics such as these.



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4. GETTING INVOLVED, INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY & SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

According to the research conducted by Eurofound in 2011 "*Volunteering by older people in the EU*",²⁶ low educational attainment, poor health, and advanced age (75+) are often significant barriers to older people volunteering on a local level (Hank and Erlinghagen, 2005). They also highlight that the likelihood that someone will continue volunteering as they age is increased by prior volunteer experience.

The "*Future of senior citizens: protection, participation, promotion*" 1999 Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe,²⁷ states: "*It will be necessary to involve the media, intellectuals, public figures and a number of other "resources" in the activities, programmes and campaigns that aim to convince public opinion, as well as elderly persons themselves, that the "third age" is not what it has been portrayed as, and that it has a role to play.*"

It is even more important to establish opportunities for senior people to keep active and encourage intergenerational solidarity in our communities due to the demographic development and rising number of elderly people in Europe. Volunteering is a way to bridge generations and give senior citizens an opportunity to keep active, give back to the community, and share the information and expertise they have accumulated over a lifetime.



According to Hatton-Yeo and Ohsako (2005),²⁸ intergenerational programmes help achieve the goals of lifelong and intergenerational learning in four different ways: they establish a lifelong culture for both young and old, they foster positive attitudes among generations, they integrate benefits for children, young people, and older adults, schools, and communities, and they share learning activities for all age groups, which promote social inclusion, social cohesion, and solidarity.

In the Red Cross EU Office "*Volunteering and intergenerational connections to promote active ageing*" in 2021²⁹ article volunteering is described as a vital driver for participation and lifelong learning among all generations. For instance, the "Share Ami" programme of the French Red Cross fosters relationships between generations by setting up video chats between French language students and senior citizens who reside in France.

The "Agriweb" project implemented by the Penne branch of the Italian Red Cross in the Abruzzo region is also described, it uses digital platforms to bring generations together for mutually beneficial exchanges. "*Agriweb aims to reduce youth unemployment and fight the isolation of people over the age of 65. Older people are offered digital literacy courses and encouraged to share what they learned with other older people in the region, as a form of peer-to-peer education. In return, young people receive training in the agricultural sector from older people who are experienced in this field,*" describes Paola Salerno, Head of the Social Unit at the Italian Red Cross. In recognition of its outstanding contribution to the humanitarian cause, Agriweb received A "Development Award" at the General Assembly of the International Federation of Red Cross Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in 2019.



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The article stresses how it will be crucial to collaborate across generations to establish strategies and solutions and that volunteering is a significant tool to help create inclusive societies that aim to lessen vulnerabilities and promote the dignity of people of all ages, as well as serving as a type of lifelong learning. The benefits of volunteering for and with older persons include increased social inclusion, an active lifestyle, improved health, and more independence are also highlighted and that therefore, national and regional volunteer initiatives should be devised to encourage connections between people of different ages and to promote structured involvement among older people. The importance of the EU Green Paper on Ageing, serving as a catalyst for a crucial discussion on how Europe will respond to the demographic shifts that will have a significant impact on both people's individual lives and society as a whole as the number of older people in the EU continues to rise in the coming decades, is also pointed out.

In the publication by the AGE Platform and a coalition of NGOs "*Intergenerational Solidarity: The Way Forward*"³⁰ it is said that: "from a rights-based perspective, every individual has a unique contribution to make to society which evolves throughout the life-cycle and that education can be seen as an expression of intergenerational solidarity." This means that at the European level, education must be viewed broadly and not restricted to the demands of the labour market. Measures that encourage the development of language, reading, writing, and technology skills, as well as those that promote empowerment and capacity building, are equally vital and education should also be a means of ensuring greater contact, exchange and respect between the generations.

The publication highlights that comprehensive community services can be highly helpful at the local level in fostering intergenerational cooperation and solidarity. Local initiatives can offer assistance on three different levels: (a) informal, fostering new relationships between parents and their neighbours, families, and friends; (b) semi-formal, empowering parents' and children's associations and NGOs; and (c) formal, facilitating access to public services. A consultative and intergenerational dialogue-based strategy must be used in all situations.

An example of a Czech Republic experimental university for grandparents and their grandchildren is included in the paper. During the academic year 2004–2005, this intergenerational educational initiative was started in collaboration with Charles University's Mathematics and Physics Faculty. Grandparents and their grandchildren, ages 6 to 12, were allowed to study together under the direction of university teachers. Grandparents and grandkids collaborate as a team, supporting and guiding one another. The Czech Agricultural University's Faculty of Forestry and Charles University's Faculty of Natural Sciences also collaborated on the research.

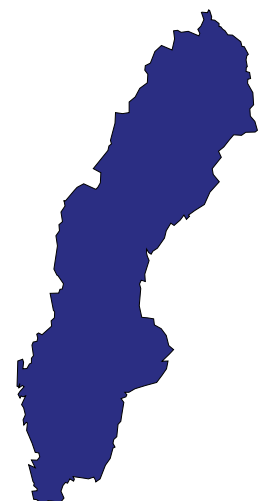
The Article by Stephen W. Elli & Gillian Granvill (1999) "*Intergenerational Solidarity: bridging the gap through mentoring programmes, Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*"³¹ covers the action-research study (for The

Beth Johnson Foundation, Stoke-on-Trent) which gathered the opinions and experiences of young mentors, seasoned mentors, and teachers who were a part of an intergenerational mentorship programme. The results of the study show that all parties involved in the intergenerational mentoring program - children, older mentors (those over 50), and teachers have benefited significantly.

Evidence reveals that the mentors have developed into knowledgeable counsellors and friends to particular students and groups of kids in the classroom, and that both young and old people like and value cooperating with one another in a learning atmosphere for their mutual benefit.

In the research paper conducted by Sally Newman on behalf of the University of Pittsburgh for the Oxford Institute of Ageing "*Intergenerational Learning and the Contributions of Older People*"³² several benefits for younger learners are underlined. For instance, a greater sense of self-worth and confidence, as well as a better comprehension of senior citizens. For both generations: a sense of worth, acceptance, and respect; increased knowledge and abilities; and the development of a deep, dependable intergenerational bond. Gratitude for their contributions to the community and a better understanding of the younger generation are two benefits for older students.

The paper gives the example of a situation in **Sweden** where Grandads volunteer in schools as part of the Grandad Programme in Stockholm County, Sweden, giving an intergenerational learning approach. The grandads, who range in age from 55 to 65, serve as male role models in a setting where adults are largely female. In addition to helping with social and recreational activities outside of the classroom, they support teachers in delivering educational activities to students. This Grandad Programme is an example of social capital in the



schools, where their activity contributes to the social capital between specific grandads and the reactions of the students to the granddads' presence (Bostrom, 2003). The primary benefits are that all of the students recognise the value of the granddad's intervention and develop trust via cooperation and communication. creates a learning atmosphere that is more productive and satisfying.

Another example from **Spain** aims to foster greater cross-generational contact, trust, comfort, and knowledge of each group as well as positive views and attitudes towards each generation. The NUGRAN programme at the University of Valencia develops learning experiences that involve older adults and younger students in intergenerational learning programmes. In 1999, there were 71 students in the programme; today, there are 1000. It makes it possible for senior citizens to register in higher education and collaborate with younger students on research, instruction, and facility use. It offers an exceptional chance to encourage connection and conversation between younger and older pupils. Some of the benefits included the fact that older people are co-learners who gain subject matter expertise and a sense of self-worth from intergenerational conversation. Younger children develop their social skills and improve their capacity for problem-solving. Reciprocity occurs when older and younger pupils connect and communicate as peers.



Another example from **Belgium** involves a senior housing facility that is adjacent to a preschool for young children. Senior citizens can volunteer to assist staff members working with small children.

The primary challenge of creating "a society for all ages"³³ was addressed at the "Second World Assembly on Ageing", which took place in Madrid in 2002. The rapid changes in the world and their deep effects on every facet of individual, communal, national, and international life were acknowledged by the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA). The MIPAA went on to emphasise the value of **"strengthening of solidarity through equity and reciprocity between generations"** and advocated for programmes that would foster respectful, fruitful communication and learning between generations, with an emphasis on older people as a resource for society.

The "5th Report on the Situation of Older Generations in **Germany** (2005)" emphasised the value of older people for intergenerational harmony in its subtitle, "The Potential of the Old Age for Economy and Society." It touches on the advantages of taking a multigenerational viewpoint as well as the advantages of knowledge transfer and interchange between the generations. The



report urges policymakers to open new perspectives for civic engagement and intergenerational support in families, private social networks, local communities, and neighbourhoods. It also suggests fostering more intergenerational practices throughout all formal, non-formal, and informal learning activities.

The value of older volunteers as mentors for the younger generations, including in a cross border context, is being addressed by the Erasmus Plus project "Mentoring Across Borders" (MAB)³⁴ led by the CESES network. The project involves a partnership that includes network members and other important stakeholders in the field such as AGE Platform Europe and the Centre for European Volunteering (CEV).



The project will last for two years (2023 and 2024) and focuses on shaping a mentoring methodology responding to the needs of the **Eastern and South-Eastern European** countries and the development and implementation of an online platform to help match senior volunteer mentors and mentees, including across borders. The platform will be open to people over 50 years of age who wish to offer, as volunteers, their knowledge and experience, as well as to young people who need mentoring or coaching in their area of interest.



For young people in formal education and young professionals/workers in their initial in-service training, the support of senior expert volunteers as mentors and role models is life changing. The contribution that this unique methodology contributes to skills development and decoupling educational attainment (and achievement) from socio-economic and cultural status is critical to better allowing for diverse and extensive talent to flourish within the European Education Area. The benefits of these kinds of intergenerational volunteer programmes go far beyond new and increased skills and educational attainment however. The contribution to inclusion and the increased possibility for young people to fully realise their potential as active and engaged citizens respectful of, and concerned for, their fellow citizens in a European values framework needs to be also stressed and highlighted alongside improved educational attainment and skills.



The involvement of senior expert volunteers in education and training, sharing their extensive skills with others can lead to true social and economic transformation. Around the world, we are witnessing increasing challenges for young people and also SME owners and entrepreneurs due to the consequences of the COVID19 crisis as well as the war in Ukraine and subsequent cost of living and energy crisis. The active engagement of senior experts in a voluntary capacity during this period has reaffirmed the importance of solidarity between generations as a way to address common challenges and inequalities, as well as protect rights and support vulnerable people and people not reaching their potential in terms of social and economic participation. Senior experts' volunteer engagement contributes to the European Education Area and Education and training and provides a framework for a constructive response to common challenges and instances of exclusion and inequalities. The mentoring and role model methodology providing support to the target groups from engaged senior experts in a voluntary capacity has a proven track record in advancing "hard" and technical skills in a direct way but also through enhancing of soft and transversal skills which, while having a value in themselves, also lead to improved attainment and performance in hard skills development. Senior volunteers will continue to contribute to the development of skills and nurture talent in the younger generations as well as promoting equal opportunities, improving equality and inclusiveness in senior citizen engagement itself.

"Volunteering, both as a form of lifelong learning and as a way to actively contribute to community life, provides a valuable tool to shape inclusive societies that work to reduce the vulnerabilities and protect the dignity of people of all ages."³⁵

ENDNOTES

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