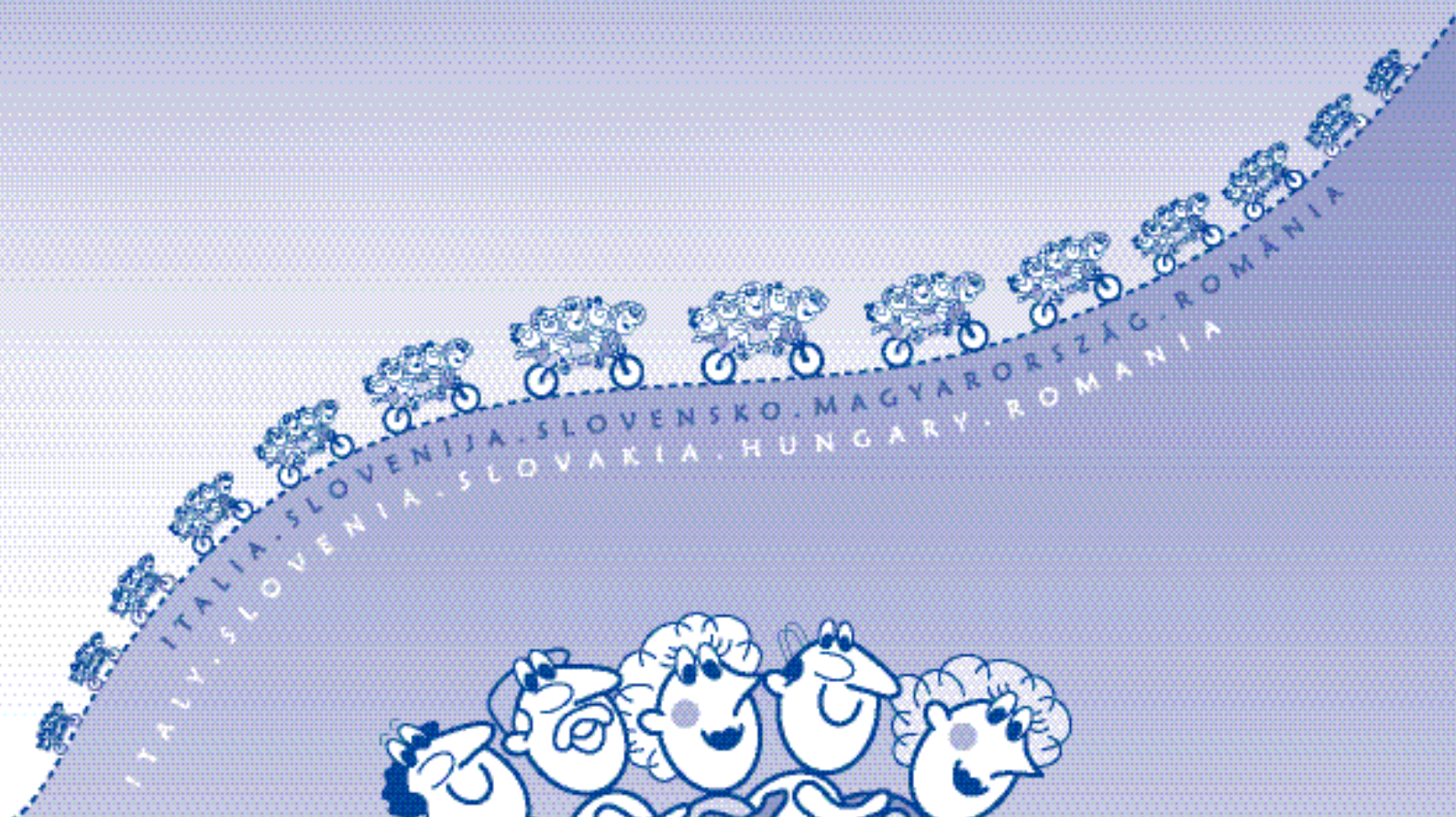


PROMOTION OF SENIOR
VOLUNTEERING THROUGH
INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGES
PRACTICAL AND POLICY
RECOMMENDATIONS



THINK FUTURE,
VOLUNTEER TOGETHER

Promotion of senior volunteering through international exchanges - practical and policy recommendations

CALL FOR ACTION

Project of ENEA preparatory action supported by the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (2007-2013)

3 December 2007 - 3 December 2009

Coordinating organisation: SPES - Centro di Servizio per il Volontariato del Lazio

Partners: Slovenska Filantropija (Slovenia), C.A.R.D.O. (Slovakia), Önkentes Központ Alapítvány (Hungary), Pro Vobis (Romania), CEV - the European Volunteer Centre (European network, Belgium), ADA (Italy), ANTEAS (Italy), AUSER (Italy), Comune di Roma (Italy).

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADA - Associazione per i diritti dei cittadini
ANTEAS - Associazione nazionale terza età attiva
AUSER - Associazione per l'autogestione dei servizi e la solidarietà
CEV - the European Volunteer Centre
CSR - Corporate Social Responsibility
DG EMPL - Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
EC - European Commission
EU - European Union
EVS - European Voluntary Service
GDP - Gross Domestic Product
JHU - Johns Hopkins University
NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation
ÖKA - Önkentes Központ Alapítvány
OMC - Open Method of Coordination
SPES - Centro di Servizio per il Volontariato del Lazio
SVP - Senior Volunteer Projects
WHO - World Health Organisation

INTRODUCTION

Two years, five countries, one hundred senior volunteers taking part in a two-weeks exchange, hosted by fellow volunteers of more than sixty local volunteer organisations - to exchange best practices and to promote community engagement and active ageing.

This publication presents in brief the outcomes of the project "Think Future, Volunteer Together" coordinated by SPES - Centro di Servizio per il Volontariato del Lazio (Roma, Italy) and co-funded by the European Commission - Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (DG EMPL) under the ENEA preparatory action for mobility of people older than fifty five years. The project has run between 3 December 2007 and 3 December 2009 and has been the fruit of collaboration among volunteer support centres of Italy (SPES), Slovenia (Slovenska Filantropija), Slovakia (C.A.R.D.O.), Hungary (ÖKA - Önkéntes Központ Alapítvány) and Romania (Pro Vobis). All partner volunteer support centres are active members of CEV - the European Volunteer Centre, who has partnered the project and has provided the primary framework for European networking, promotion and policy work. The Italian national partnership is made of three major federations for voluntary engagement and quality of life of the elderly - ADA Associazione per i diritti dei cittadini, ANTEAS Associazione nazionale terza età attiva e AUSER Associazione per l'autogestione dei servizi e la solidarietà - and the Municipality of Rome, who partnered the project from the very first stage. In other partner countries a national partnership was similarly formed at the onset of the project, so in five countries more than sixty organisations were involved through exchanges and promotion in the course of the project.

Through the project one hundred volunteers and prospective volunteers from five project countries have had the opportunity to visit, share experience and be active together with fellow volunteers in another country. The exchanges lasted two weeks, were organised in small groups, the hosting was prepared and managed by local partner volunteer involving organisations. Extensive networking and promotion of senior volunteering has accompanied the work on exchanges throughout the project. The initial project assumption that elderly citizens in ex-communist countries are extremely reluctant to engage in volunteering and difficult to reach and involve has proved only partially true and from the project work a new and strong attention to the potential of senior volunteering has emerged and developed in the Eastern and Central European countries involved. For volunteers involved through exchanges and through hosting activities the project has provided an exceptionally warm and stimulating occasion for dialogue across cultures and an injection of openness and plans for the future.

Once the exchanges have finished, the project work has been just as intensive. Follow up occasions of discussion and further planning, microprojects realised by returned volunteers, elaboration of strategies and further planning for support to senior volunteering and European cooperation, elaboration of practical and policy recommendations, preparation of the motivational portrait book with 100 volunteers who had experienced the exchange, making the most out of the final conference, promotional and impact evaluation initiatives, public presentations (an important process of learning, building common grounds of understanding for development and mainstreaming the attention to senior volunteers) has taken place. A synthesis of project partners' recommendations for better senior volunteering, springing from the project experience, is presented in this publication. Our aim is to share what we have learned and

discussed, to claim institutional attention and support to active ageing through volunteering and to put our experience at disposal of colleagues interested in getting engaged in exchanges and common projects with senior volunteers.

Our hope is that this work can contribute towards making 2011 European Year of Volunteering a landmark occasion when the contribution of elderly through volunteering can be recognised and favoured through concrete support.

We also hope this work can show how volunteering is an important element of active ageing and that this can be assumed in the preparation work towards 2012 possibly the European Year of Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity which we wholeheartedly support.

Chapter 1 sets the scene and provides understanding about the project and the context of our work.

Chapter 2 concentrates on the organisation of the exchanges focusing on elements of quality on the basis of our experience, thus providing suggestions to organisations interested in hosting, organising or developing senior volunteers' exchanges.

Chapter 3 is organised as a check box, listing practical elements and suggestions according to which the protagonists of the exchanges can plan and control their readiness for the exchange.

Chapter 4 defines all actors whose active involvement is necessary to build a positive environment for active ageing through volunteering and proposes actions, divided according to the role of the different stakeholders.

Chapter 5 sets senior volunteering in the context of relevant policies and points out its positive contribution to certain policy areas: Active ageing, Lifelong learning, Economic and Social cohesion and Active European Citizenship.

The initial **Glossary of terms** defines the essential methodological terminology used in project exchanges, a not secondary outcome of the project, fruit of thorough and shared understanding of different volunteering traditions and social contexts of the five countries involved.

Finally, the **Partners address book** lists the reference details of all partners. It represents the standing invitation to all to get in contact and work together on shared ideas and through common projects - not merely for a better environment for voluntary engagement - but - through volunteering - for cohesive, inclusive and respectful European societies.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

BRIEFING COURSE / PREPARATORY TRAINING

Pre-departure 3-day long seminar providing basic information for volunteers who will participate in an exchange, such as: basic language course, information about the country (local culture, habits, laws, traditions, beliefs and norms), short introduction to the

sending country's voluntary sector, detailed programme of the exchange, together with rules, indications and logistics details. Finally, if possible, the briefing course can be the place for handing out the tickets and insurance arranged by the coordinating organisation.

BRIEFING KIT

Translated didactic material given to the volunteers going to an exchange at the beginning of the briefing course. Prepared by every hosting country manager, it collects general information about the country, the voluntary sector and the hosting organisations. It also includes the programme of the exchange with practicalities. Part of the briefing kit is a small essential dictionary.

COORDINATING ORGANISATION / VOLUNTEER SUPPORT CENTRE

Coordinating body in the respective country. The coordinating organisation works as placement agency for senior volunteers and should possess a range of all the possible projects that can be offered to senior volunteers by host organisations in different countries. In our project coordinating organisations are all volunteer support centres: not for profit organisations whose primary mission is to promote volunteering and networking for better volunteering environment and support volunteers and voluntary organisations through training, information, consultancy and other services.

COUNTRY MANAGER

Person who coordinates the whole project in each country. Country manager recruits volunteers, organises briefing course, arranges travel for sending volunteers, designs the hosting programme, arranges accommodation and travels within country for hosting volunteers, stays in contact with volunteers during the exchange, coordinates the implementation phase, works on evaluation, reporting and administration. Country manager is also the key element for the promotion of the project activities and of senior volunteering in general. Country managers have also prepared the practical and policy recommendations and are the key players in triggering new projects with and for senior volunteers.

HOST ORGANISATION

Organisation or institution that runs volunteer activities in social, environmental, healthcare, cultural or other fields where volunteers are involved and which will host senior volunteers at least for several hours or a day. This organisation is a national or local partner organisation to the coordinating organisation.

NATIONAL / LOCAL PARTNER

Host and sending organisations cooperating with coordinating organisation for sending, hosting or promotional activities.

SENDING ORGANISATION

Organisation which does the first recruitment and sends its own volunteers or potential volunteers to other country.

SENIOR VOLUNTEER

Person of over 55 years of age who freely gives his/her time and energy into the service on behalf of others, of the community or to the common good without being motivated by financial or material gain.

LINGUISTIC FACILITATOR

During the exchange, linguistic facilitator is the person who accompanies the group of senior volunteers in all the activities and translates from hosting to sending country language. Not merely translator, for hosted senior volunteers the linguistic facilitator is also a tutor, a guide, the first aid and the main reference person together with the hosting country manager. She/he is in contact with host volunteers during the whole stay in the foreign country and is the major channel for intercultural understanding and dialogue. During the briefing course, the linguistic facilitator is also the teacher of the hosting language and provides first hand information on habits of everyday life.

VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION

Usually a non-governmental not for profit organisation working directly with volunteers or which organises voluntary activities and meets its goals through volunteers.

1.

ACTIVE AGEING AND VOLUNTEERING: STATE OF THE ART AND PERSPECTIVES

1.1.

DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION: TOWARDS THE EUROPEAN YEAR 2012

In the past years the European Union (EU) has been concerned with some new major societal trends. Technical progress, globalisation and population ageing were identified as three main factors that affect and influence the life of every single European. In particular, the EU demographic trends became the starting point and rationale for this project. Today, people live longer and healthier, which is of course a considerable achievement. However, due to the low birth rate and the fact that the "baby boomers generation" is about to retire, there is a fear that ageing population will become a burden for younger generations. The figures give a clear picture: by 2060 life expectancy is expected to rise by eight years. Also, the share of people aged 65 or over is going to increase from 17% in 2008 (60 million) to 30% in 2060 (150 million). Similarly, the number of people over 80 is going to triple in the next years. Finally, while we count today 4 persons in working age for every person aged 65 or more; this ratio is expected to be 2:1 in 2060. The population is projected to become older in all EU countries, which might create imbalance and tensions between generations¹.

Consequently, for some years the EU has been encouraging the Member States to promote activities, policies and programmes designed to stimulate active ageing. Currently, it considers declaring 2012 as the European Year for Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity in order to improve understanding of these important societal trends and ensure political commitments and actions from the part of decision-makers in a way to respond to the related challenges. According to the World Health Organisation

¹ These trends have been presented in: The European Commission, 2nd Demographic Report 'Meeting Social Needs in an Ageing Society', 2008

(WHO) active ageing highlights the importance of social integration and health throughout the life course². Therefore active ageing should no longer be seen only as a means to ensure that people live healthier and work longer. Today, this concept also refers to active and autonomous engagement of elderly beyond retirement and it is considered as an excellent opportunity for intergenerational solidarity and dialogue³.

In this perspective, volunteering can play an important role. Older people can make a major contribution as volunteers - to local community, to living examples of intergenerational dialogue, to social cohesion in general. Volunteering of the elderly should be seen not only as repeating tasks that have been done in their professional lives, but also as an expression of participation, solidarity and active citizenship. Voluntary engagement is also a source of personal benefit to any volunteer in terms of wide and positive social relationships, satisfaction, meeting intellectual and diversity challenges, physical fitness. These are all positive components of active ageing which have a positive impact not only on individuals, but also generate savings to public expenditure in social and health sector - a growing worry as regards the third age.

A Eurobarometer survey carried out in September 2008⁴ revealed that almost three quarters of Europeans who are not yet retired would consider participating in community work or volunteering after retirement. Moreover 44% of the population affirmed that they have already planned or are planning to do volunteer work. In view of these observations volunteering should be recognised and should become a basic element of all active ageing strategies, as it constitutes an important part of many Europeans' lives.

1.2.

VOLUNTEERING IN EUROPE: TOWARDS THE EUROPEAN YEAR 2011

Another recent Eurobarometer survey has shown that at least 3 out of 10 EU citizens volunteer and 80% of Europeans say that active participation in society is a crucial part of their life⁵. Thus, far over 100 million European citizens put the European values of solidarity, social cohesion and active citizenship into practice. However, volunteering is a very diverse phenomenon and almost every European country has developed its own understanding, reflecting the differences in history, attitudes and perceptions. It has developed differently in the Northern, Western, Southern and Eastern Europe, where for example the concept was misused to impose collective, physical and obligatory activities thus causing it to receive nowadays partly negative connotations.

Consequently, there is not any common - formal and institutionally recognised - definition of volunteering in Europe. Some countries have in place the legal frameworks for volunteering and provide its definitions; others do not have a volunteering law as such but have very favourable and enabling volunteering policy environment, including strategies, office(s) for the third sector and available funding. Despite diverse traditions and legal frameworks, common characteristics of volunteering are at the core of activity across European societies.

² http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/alc_embrace2001_en.pdf

³ See Commission Communication COM (2006) 571 Final, The Demographic Future Of Europe - From Challenge To Opportunity

⁴ Special Eurobarometer 273

⁵ Idem

Volunteering is described as an activity:

- of voluntary character and personal commitment, it can not be compulsory service or citizen's obligation;
- undertaken for the benefit of other individuals and society as a whole, rather than for personal interest, although its contribution to the volunteer's personal development is undeniable;
- which is unpaid, however volunteers should not incur the cost of their work and their expenses may and should be reimbursed;
- with structured framework and within a more or less organised setting, although volunteering can also be spontaneous and informal⁶.

There is also the enormous diversity of activities covered by the concept. Volunteers can be found in the provision of education and services, health and social care, sport and cultural events, mutual aid or self help, advocacy, human rights campaigns, peace operations and electoral assistance, development cooperation, poverty eradication, humanitarian relief and environmental actions, animal protection and many others. Whatever the field of action, the common denominator of voluntary action is the direct involvement of citizens for the benefit of a frail or excluded target group, community or common good. But volunteering is not only action - it is also, and sometimes foremost, participation, voicing the needs of the citizens, exercising and defending rights and equal opportunities for all. The importance of volunteering is recognised also by the European institutions: the European Parliament Resolution (April 2008) on the "Contribution of volunteering to economic and social cohesion" expressly recognises also the positive and widely spread contribution of volunteering to democratic life of European communities.

Volunteering is not only a social but also economic factor. It contributes considerably to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The research done in 37 countries by the Johns Hopkins University (JHU), one of the first academic institutions exploring the contribution of the voluntary sector and volunteering to national economies ("Comparative Non-Profit Sector Project"), shows that volunteers represent the equivalent of up to 7% of the economically active population in many countries and make a 400 billion US dollars contribution to the global economy⁷.

Consequently, the EU shows increasing interest in supporting volunteering. There have been number of policy documents issued by the EU's institutions and bodies touching upon volunteering and acknowledging its values and contributions⁸. At present, the largest single source of support for volunteering from the EU is in the field of youth policy, where numerous documents were adopted and a special policy tool (the Open Method of Coordination: OMC) for voluntary activities introduced. The main element of support is constituted by the European Voluntary Service (EVS), which is a part of Youth in Action Programme⁹, sending young volunteers abroad. The recent most important initiative is accepting volunteering as a horizontal feature of the new Europe for Citizens Programme¹⁰. This means that project promoters are widely encouraged to take it into consideration while applying for European funds and while designing and implementing their projects within this Programme.

6 CEV Manifesto for Volunteering in Europe 2006.

7 <http://www.ccss.jhu.edu/index.php?section=content&view=9&sub=3>

8 For the full list of documents please consult the CEV website on: http://www.cev.be/23-eu_policy-EN.html

9 http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index_en.htm

10 http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/index_en.htm

When it comes to volunteering of older people, until 2009, there were only limited possibilities within the Grundtvig Programme (being as of 2007 part of Lifelong Learning Programme)¹¹ for the development of senior volunteering. In this programme volunteering has been recognized as one of the tools to mobilize the full potential of older people through active ageing and to foster their contribution to society. Under the ENEA preparatory action, the EC encouraged activities connected to seniors' mobility in the field of formal and informal education. Following numerous civil society initiatives, projects and advocacy work, in 2009, the new action under Grundtvig programme was introduced, initially called GIVE, and currently titled Senior Volunteering Projects, which is a scheme of grants to support projects that aim at enabling senior citizens to volunteer in another European country for any kind of not for profit activity, as a form of informal (and mutual) learning activity (learning intended also as sharing knowledge); at creating lasting cooperation between the host and sending organisations around a specific topic or target group, and thanks to the exchange of volunteers, and at enabling the local communities involved in the exchange of volunteers to draw on the potential of senior citizens as a source of knowledge, competence and experience¹².

Also the mentioned European Parliament Resolution on the Contribution of volunteering to economic and social cohesion expressly calls on the EC to promote opportunities for senior volunteers by introducing a specific programme for senior volunteers exchanges and new programmes for intergenerational volunteering and tutoring (point 9).

Nevertheless and despite these developments, in Europe there are 7 in 10 people who do not volunteer. Volunteering is often perceived as something that simply and easily happens. Yet, this is a wrong impression as people meet many barriers when trying to engage in voluntary activities. These might origin in scarce or negative political, social, economic or individual recognition of volunteering, its negative image and connotations, lack of information about volunteering opportunities, unfriendly legal and policy frameworks, administrative difficulties, organisational shortages, inadequate resources, lacking time, cultural and religious constraints and different limitations for people with fewer opportunities. From the practice and work of CEV and its member organisations, it is visible that still there is not sufficient knowledge and research on volunteering, not enough volunteer programmes for all age groups, missing strategies, legal framework and infrastructure for volunteering.

To address these challenges CEV and 21 other European civil society organisations and networks advocated for the announcement of 2011 as the European Year of Volunteering, which will be an excellent occasion to work towards an enabling environment for volunteering in the EU, empower volunteer organisations and improve the quality of volunteering, reward and recognise volunteering activities and raise awareness about the value and importance of volunteering¹³.

1.3

PROJECT: BACKGROUND, IDEA, ACTIVITIES, DEVELOPMENT

Our starting assumption in the preparation of the project was that in East and Central European countries elderly people are extremely reluctant to engage in volunteering. The

11 http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc86_en.htm

12 http://ec.europa.eu/education/grundtvig/doc986_en.htm

13 More information on the European Year of Volunteering please find on www.eyv2011.eu

essential cause put forward for this phenomenon was the negative attitude towards volunteering by the generation who in communist times underwent compulsory state actions for the community benefit labelled as voluntary work. This, it was assumed, has bred substantial reluctance in understanding the nature of volunteering.

Our basic project idea was that transnational exchanges can contribute to improve negative attitudes and stimulate social engagement of senior citizens and make a breach in the public perception of volunteering in people over 55 years of age. We assumed that international exchanges can obtain this through:

- Positive personal active experience of volunteers and potential volunteers selected for the exchange;
- Transferral of best practice from voluntary organisations of the hosting country to voluntary organisations of the sending country who upon return continue, or start to, work with volunteers who experienced the exchange;
- Upon the return from the exchange to the sending country: constructive input of new ideas and active attitudes into local community social capital; through follow up of activities of volunteers who experienced the exchange, promotional activities, microprojects and follow up in the implementation phase.

This is what we had set out to do: promote senior volunteering, organise European exchanges of 100 senior volunteers based on extensive national partnerships primarily for hosting activities, use the project to understand better the social context and its barriers, evaluate the potential of senior volunteering and identify common grounds for future developments.

2. EUROPEAN EXCHANGES OF SENIOR VOLUNTEERS: PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Building upon the experience of the project partners in organising exchanges of senior volunteers, this chapter intends to highlight a number of recommendations that could prove useful when taking on such a task in the future. In this respect we have divided the chapter in sections that follow the process of organising a senior volunteer exchange, thus assuring a logical flow of what we would like to share with others.

2.1 PARTNER ORGANISATIONS AND PARTNERSHIP BUILDING

National and local partnerships are the basic premises of this project. In the first place, without a strong partnership it is not possible to offer a variety of volunteer projects and activities for hosting volunteers. Secondly, it is important that voluntary organisations themselves may propose and select motivated volunteers for the exchange, and subsequently build the exchange experience into the life and prospects of the organisation. In Italy the strong national partnership had been formed from the very design of the project, so three major Italian federations for the quality of life in third age and senior volunteering are full partners of the project. On the other hand, the country

managers from Central and Eastern Europe countries participating had to develop their own ways of research and look for potential project partners at the beginning of the project.

Within this project by local and national partners we mean host and sending organisations which work to a certain extent with senior volunteers or which at least involve volunteers in senior age in their projects. Country Managers built partnerships with local and national partners which in general were:

- Universities of Third Age or lifelong learning institutions;
- employment services;
- national associations of elderly;
- local elderly associations;
- senior clubs;
- organisations which provide help and support to seniors;
- local Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) active in different fields of activity which include also senior volunteers;
- all volunteers involving organisations;
- local institutions.

The development of partnerships started with personal meetings, sending emails and promoting project ideas through the Internet. The roles of partners were to be sending and hosting organisations in the project. When sending volunteers, they had to choose the volunteers or potential volunteers in the first round and refer them to the country managers. When hosting volunteers, they had to organise a programme for volunteers from abroad together with the coordinating organisation. Coordinating organisations - volunteer support centres - could act as both sending and hosting organisations and in this way urge a bigger impact on their environment.

Partnership building was improving from exchange to exchange, since all the partners had been continuously more certain about their roles in the project and they felt the impact of it on their organisations. Partnership has also influenced the country managers' perception of senior volunteering. Even though at the beginning of the project country managers were not sure whether they would be able to find good partnerships with senior volunteer organisations, during the project it started to be obvious that there are in all countries voluntary organisations involving seniors which could be good examples also for other countries.

2.2 LINGUISTIC FACILITATOR

The linguistic barrier is perhaps the most evident obstruction to meaningful exchanges of volunteers and represents one of the foremost challenges we approached from the initial design of the project. In all project countries it is rather rare for people of medium social background and above adult age to speak English, and no other channel language exists among countries involved in the project. The project partners took up this challenge by putting forward the figure of a linguistic facilitator, who would accompany the group of

visiting volunteers throughout the exchange. The linguistic facilitator acts as interpreter, from the hosts to visitors, and the other way around. However the linguistic facilitator is much more than this: she or he is the cultural channel between the hosting environment and the visiting volunteers. The linguistic facilitator not only translates presentations of activities and dialogues among volunteers, but also guides the visiting group to understanding the social and cultural context and habits of ordinary life. It is also a precious resource for hosting organisations: hosts can present themselves in their own language and in their own manner and easily satisfy their curiosities. Throughout the project we have had facilitators of different backgrounds - students or seniors from sending country living in the hosting country, representatives of immigrant communities and national minorities, foreign languages students and bilingual social workers.

Together with the hosting country manager, the linguistic facilitator becomes the most important reference point for the visiting group. For this reason it is important to choose the person with great care and that she/he understands perfectly the project's objectives and protagonists. It is the hosting country manager that selects the linguistic facilitator, evaluating the person not only as to the linguistic ability, but also according to her/his potential of interacting well with the group and, to a certain extent, acting as a tutor.

2.3

HOW TO WORK WITH ELDERLY VOLUNTEERS

When talking about volunteering it is very important to see the diverse types of motivations of the different age groups. There is a generally used distinction between old-fashioned volunteering, meaning volunteering as a contribution to something useful and modern volunteering where volunteer activities are not only seen as giving but also as receiving experience, knowledge and different competences. Elderly volunteers are mostly "pure heart" volunteers, who are driven by their desire to give, to be able to share their life-long experience and to be accepted as a useful part of the society.

It is particularly important for older people after retirement to find themselves occasions for feeling useful and interact with other people. Surveys show that reasons for volunteering with the age of 55 and above are meeting other people and making friends. Getting involved in new activities and with new people is also an important source of learning and keeps the brain challenged and active. With the help of volunteer activities integration into society can be more easily reached as well as boosting seniors' self-confidence. In this way (volunteer coordinators and experts are convinced, although serious research into this aspect is missing) loneliness, isolation and health problems provoked by inactivity can be prevented.

2.3.1 BEFORE THE EXCHANGES

Sending volunteers

RECRUITMENT

When advertising and promoting a senior volunteering project a special focus is needed on the way of reaching out to seniors. It is not enough to simply publish the call for elderly volunteers on websites and in newsletters. To get to a target group that has not

grown up with Internet, publishing the call in local newspapers, approaching existing leisure time and social networks of seniors, getting in contact with municipalities or visiting directly pensioners clubs assures a more successful outcome.

From the exchanges, a good selection has proven itself as an important success factor. The country manager organises a thorough interview with all applicants, putting together the general life stories, the motivations, and the community involvement history. The potential for promotion and networking is assessed. It has proven to be a useful method to involve the local partner organisations of the project to spread the opportunity, to do a first selection, and then add their recommendations to the application form of the volunteer. A final decision is made by the coordinating organisation.

Knowing beforehand the draft programme of the upcoming exchange also allows making a better matching of the volunteers to the different exchanges. However, as these two-week-long exchanges are set as volunteer visits, meaning a couple of projects and organisations to be visited every day for the duration of two weeks, it has to be stressed that the exchanges do not focus on one special active ageing project, but give a picture of the certain country's voluntary sector, with special focus on senior volunteering.

Finally, the volunteers *to-be* for the exchange are considered as a group and trained as such.

INCLUSIVE OPPORTUNITY

We have observed that when proposing this kind of opportunity past experience and cultural background can make a significant difference. Great care must be taken not to turn the possibility of exchange into a selective action, but encourage the participation of people who may have less access to information and opportunities because of their cultural, social, or rural background or because of health problems or disabilities.

PREPARATORY TRAINING and BRIEFING COURSE

Every exchange was preceded by a preparatory training organised in the sending country by the sending country manager. The briefing course lasts three days and is based on the elements explained below.

Linguistic facilitators provide for the acquisition of very basic language competence in the hosting language. It is not a language training, of course, but it generates curiosity and guarantees a sense both of security and anticipation of the experience to come. We felt it was a rather nice way to "feel" the European dimension of the project. More importantly, from the start we were convinced that learning a dozen words in a hosts' language is a way of showing respect and appreciation.

Other components of the preparatory training are: offering some basic knowledge about the hosting country's culture and tradition and an overview of the volunteering landscape. These notions and indications are written and assembled in the briefing kit prepared by the hosting country manager in advance, translated and distributed as didactic material. A short introduction to the sending country's voluntary sector guarantees an easier sharing of knowledge when abroad.

The briefing course should be organised 1 week to 3 weeks before volunteers go abroad - that provides the volunteers to get to know each other before an exchange as well as to prepare for the actual exchange (in the period before leaving they can practice the language, find out more information about hosting country and its volunteer sector, etc.) During the briefing course the detailed programme of the exchange is presented to the volunteers, together with rules, indications and logistical details. If possible the briefing course can be the place for handing out the tickets and insurance arranged by the

coordinating organisation. It is important for the country manager to be present on the briefing course and to accompany the group to the airport or train station when starting off for the exchange in order to create a friendly atmosphere between the country manager and the group.

The briefing course is also an extremely valuable occasion for the coordinating organisation to give data and global information on voluntary sector of the sending country. During the exchange volunteers are subject to lots of questions and curiosity, they are considered as "volunteering ambassadors" of their country and should therefore be prepared not to feel unqualified when presenting the volunteering environment as a whole, beyond their personal experience.

THE VALUE OF THE GROUP

Networking ties are created for the future when seniors are prepared as a group during the briefing course and going to the exchange as a group: the bonds created from sharing an exceptional experience generate an additional positive impact on the participants in terms of learning and social competences. Working well on team building in the preparation of the exchange contributes to volunteers' feeling more at ease and more safe when interacting with novelty, logistical difficulties and intercultural challenges during the exchange.

Thus we recommend sending groups consisting of at least 2 to 4 volunteers to facilitate integration, sharing of tasks and experiences and also for a better dissemination and follow up upon return.

Hosting volunteers

PREPARATION OF THE PROGRAMME

When preparing the programme for the coming volunteers an ongoing communication with the sending country's manager is crucial in order to fit needs. The selection of the different projects to be visited and the balance between free time and active time needs also a special focus. Elderly volunteers need more free and leisure time than young. The programme should not be overfilled and they should not last until late evening. Also, cultural and sightseeing programmes can be organised for them, so that they get a more detailed picture of the country.

2.3.2 DURING THE EXCHANGES

Sending volunteers

KEEPING CONTACT WITH VOLUNTEERS

During the exchange the country managers are in contact with each other to easily overcome any raising obstacles. Keeping contact with the sent out volunteers allows a better interfering possibility in case of need.

*Hosting volunteers***KEEPING CONTACT WITH VOLUNTEERS**

Both the linguistic facilitator and the country manager are two essential actors in assuring a smooth exchange. They should be reachable during the organised programme: the facilitator at all moments, the country manager should accompany as much as possible the group. These relationships with the elderly volunteers are the base of a successful exchange. Elderly volunteers need special attention and a familiar atmosphere. Our experiences show that all projects visited in the exchanges were well-organised and the hosts extremely welcoming, which from the beginning promised a secure ground for informal learning and easy socialising, beyond the language barrier.

Accommodation and boarding should receive special emphasis for this age group. In this, accessibility, diet, programme balance and privacy issues should be considered.

2.3.3 AFTER THE EXCHANGES

*Sending volunteers***FOLLOW UP, PROMOTION, MICRO PROJECTS**

When the volunteers come back to their sending country with their inspirations we suggest gathering them for sharing their reflections on the exchange and have a brainstorming session for future micro projects. It is also a proven good practice to organise a meeting for all participating volunteers after the exchanges. It is a great opportunity for sharing diverse experiences in the different countries. The role of the country manager and the coordinating organisation in keeping volunteers together and supporting their micro projects is central after the exchanges.

The project has also taught us that volunteers who experienced the exchange are the best promotional instrument for senior volunteering: their direct enthusiastic testimony and new drive for community involvement are extremely convincing for potential volunteers, and local press.

*Hosting volunteers***FOLLOW UP**

The work with national and local partnership does not end with the exchange. It is important that coordinating organisations evaluate the hosting experience with voluntary organisations and involve them in promotion activities. Also in the recommendations preparation and in policy work the national partnership is an important source and ally. These are also occasions to make plans for the future. Hosting organisations are also very keen to have news about the foreign volunteers they hosted, especially about the micro projects implemented. Whenever possible, it is advisable to give feedback to hosting organisations about the impressions and benefits that visiting volunteers received from that particular experience.

2.4 PROGRAMME AND PRACTICALITIES

The following section is meant to highlight some of the most important lessons learned during the implementation phase of the project, regarding how to effectively and efficiently put together and manage the organisation of an international senior volunteer exchange. Having this in mind, the recommendations regard two aspects of the issue - namely, the programme for the exchange and the pragmatic aspects.

2.4.1 PROGRAMME CHECKLIST

PROGRAMME IN ADVANCE

Have the hosting programme - or at least a draft programme - for the senior volunteers exchanges prepared in advance.

A continuous communication flow between the organisations involved in the senior exchanges allows for the programme of the exchange to be set in advance so the senior volunteers are briefed about the activities they will be involved in. This grants them the possibility to better prepare for participating in the exchange.

When working on setting up the programme, take into account, as much as possible, the interests of the senior volunteers and set activities accordingly. However the senior volunteers should be made aware that not all of the activities will coincide with what they usually do in their volunteer work. In addition it should also be made clear to the volunteers that the programme is likely to suffer minor adjustments due to last minute cancellations or switches between organisations and activities. These features may make this programme uninteresting for some people and we believe it is important to make things clear before departure, so if volunteers misunderstood the whole experience they have their chance to withdraw or maybe simply change their minds.

We must consider in this regard the important role of the hosting country manager, who has to be flexible to the volunteers' wishes, even during the exchange. Some of the volunteers do not express everything in the recruitment phase or briefing course, therefore the country manager can add some activities into the programme while the exchange is already taking place. Flexibility and preparation of the country manager makes the exchange more efficient.

VARIETY OF ACTIVITIES

In the hosting country include a wide range of volunteers involving organisations and institutions from different fields of activity.

From cultural to environmental, from social to civic - it is useful to include in the programme as many and as diverse as possible volunteering projects and activities. This helps the visiting senior volunteers to get a more comprehensive view on the concept and practice of volunteering in the hosting country. In addition, seeing an array of examples of community involvement activities can contribute to the stimulation of new ideas for the senior volunteers to put into practice once they return to their countries.

VARIETY OF ACTORS

Favour intercultural and intergenerational communication.

It is important not to conceive the exchange as just the old meeting the old around

the activities for third age: it is important to include occasions for the visiting senior volunteers to interact with local volunteers of different ages and backgrounds.

PROGRAMME NOT TOO CHARGED

Planned activities per day during the exchanges should sum up to a maximum of 6 working hours.

Ideally, on average, the senior volunteers should practice volunteer activities for about 20 - 30 hours per week. It is necessary to allow time for leisure and socialising activities, and also for sufficient intimacy to rest, relax and think over the experience. The exchange is an intense experience, but it must not become a source of stress and strain.

EXCHANGE LENGTH

The length of the senior volunteers exchange should range from 10 to 14 days.

A period of 14 days allows seniors to have better knowledge and experience from the visited country and volunteering. At the same time, it is not too long in order to prevent homesickness" or exhaustion.

WEEKEND FREE

Allow a fair number of free days for the senior volunteers.

It has been our experience that weekends should be free of programmed activities. The senior volunteers need time to rest, reflect and explore their placement locality on their own. Suggestions on how to spend their free time can be made by country managers; however it is up to the senior volunteers to opt for how to manage their free time.

HEALTH CONDITION

It is important that both sending and hosting country manager are acquainted with the health condition and special needs of the senior volunteer.

As the project is meant for elderly above 55, it is important to be acquainted with volunteer's health conditions and also about the age, especially if the programme is well charged and demands a lot of activism. It is important that during the selection interview any dietary needs, chronic illnesses, frailties in communication or hindrances to movement are registered and that these are known to the hosting country manager in advance. During the exchange such personal needs must be taken care of, without making the volunteer feel it is a burden to the group.

2.4.2 PRACTICALITIES CHECKLIST

SIZE OF THE GROUP

The group of senior volunteers in exchange should be rather small. In our experience with groups of varying sizes, a group of four volunteers represents the optimum. This size allows to include more voluntary activities for hosted volunteers and to develop more personal contacts among hosting and local volunteers. It is also more manageable for the linguistic facilitator and the country manager to work with smaller groups of people who do not speak the language of the visited country. The experience has shown that large groups (ten volunteers in our project) require extra attention and resources and should be managed through a somewhat different methodology. Smaller groups also generate a stronger cohesion, interchange and solidarity among the volunteers themselves, thus building better possibilities for future contact and collaboration.

LANGUAGE

In international exchanges the language barrier and diversity is one of the factors that excludes most of the volunteers. From this point of view, speaking the language of the placement country should not be a compulsory condition in order to participate in the transnational volunteer exchanges. Also using English as vehicular language excludes most senior volunteers from the possibility to participate in an international exchange. It is recommended to have a linguistic facilitator who accompanies the senior volunteers during the exchange, to facilitate the communication between senior volunteers and local people. This solution enables the visiting volunteers to get the most of the intercultural experience of exchange, widens the range of local partners to possibly involve in hosting activities and promotes the diversity of European cultures and traditions.

LINGUISTIC FACILITATOR

In our project experience, this has proven a key component in assuring the success of an exchange. Being more than a mere translator, the linguistic facilitator is the link between the senior volunteers and their placement country. It is a person who the senior volunteers can rely on during the exchange. For this reason the linguistic facilitator should also be selected and prepared with great care by the hosting country manager.

ACCOMODATION

The place where hosted volunteers stay is their home away from home and therefore plays an important role in the volunteer exchange. Elderly people are accustomed to a certain type of living arrangement and have certain habits. The best option is to provide the participating volunteers with a single room and private bathroom. However this is not always possible. The alternative would be a twin room in which senior volunteers can decide who to go with, rather than imposing cohabitation with someone they do not know well or do not want to stay with. It is useful that practical arrangements regarding the accommodation are known in advance, so the sending country manager informs the volunteers about this during the briefing course, so expectations and rules are clear before the departure.

INSURANCE

Correct health, travel and third party liability for incidents insurance is an essential element to ensure a well-organised senior volunteer exchange. Not only does it contribute to increasing the sense of security of the volunteers but it also helps both the volunteer and the project coordinator to be prepared for some unforeseen events. Most insurance companies are reluctant to insure people older than 80 or will insure only for a higher cost: be prepared to claim equal opportunities for all and active ageing policies on this issue.

3.

SENIOR VOLUNTEERS EXCHANGE CHECK BOX CHART: AM I READY?

In this chapter we present some practical questions and comments to consider when thinking about organising an international senior volunteer's exchange.

3.1. SENDING ORGANISATION

A sending organisation is responsible for the recruitment of volunteers, preparation, and support during the service abroad and evaluation. It is expected to:

GENERAL DUTIES

- Recruit the volunteers according to their motivation, personal choice and characteristics.
- Evaluate the project.
- Take care of and be responsible for the volunteers during and after the project, ensuring contacts with the host organisation while a volunteer is in the project.

SELECTION OF VOLUNTEERS FOR EXCHANGE

- Motivation: want to learn about volunteering abroad, want to get inspired and want to develop new volunteer activities once coming back home.
- Potential for sharing experience and implementing new ideas upon return.
- Flexibility and potential to manage difficult and unexpected situations.
- Health condition (chronic illness, dietary needs, disabilities).

AFTER THE EXCHANGE

- Collect and help organise information, documentation, photos, memories.
- Evaluate the experience with the volunteer and help plan for the future.
- Provide opportunities for sharing the exchange experience.
- Keep on-going contact with the volunteer.

3.2. HOSTING ORGANISATION

- Present the project and the exchange to volunteers and staff.
- Prepare and send sufficient information to the coordinating organisation, in due time.
- Prepare your part of the programme in cooperation with the coordinating organisation.
- Divide and organise the hosting tasks among hosting volunteers and involve them in the preparation.
- Welcome the visiting volunteers and introduce them to all members, volunteers and staff.
- Familiarise volunteers with the activities of the host organisation, through discussions, presentations and dialogue.
- Organise a simple non verbal concrete voluntary activity together with hosting volunteers whenever possible.
- Allow some time for informal socialising.

3.3.

COORDINATING ORGANISATION / VOLUNTEER SUPPORT CENTRE

The coordinating organisation works as a placement agency for senior volunteers and should possess a range of all possible projects that can be offered to senior volunteers by host organisations in different countries. The coordinating organisation sends volunteers to other countries and receives volunteers from abroad.

GENERAL DUTIES

- Promote the opportunity of exchange through local partnership and directly.
- Recruit, select and inform the volunteers.
- Organise the briefing course.
- Organise team building activities for the volunteers during the briefing course.
- Take care of travel arrangements.
- Provide travel insurance for sending volunteers.
- Prepare the list of names with short descriptions of the visiting volunteers and send it to the hosting country manager.
- Prepare the volunteers on the programme and practicalities.
- Keep in contact at all times with the hosting country manager.

BEFORE HOSTING ACTIVITIES

- Prepare the briefing kit and send it to the hosting country manager.
- Prepare the hosting programme with local partnership.
- Select and prepare the linguistic facilitator.
- Arrange all practicalities including meals, accommodation and local transport.
- Send the programme and practicalities to the sending country manager in due time for the briefing course.
- Prepare the cultural programme, socialising moments and information on free time opportunities.
- Translate the list of names with short descriptions of the visiting volunteers and give to hosting organisations.

DURING THE EXCHANGE

- Welcome and first orientation for volunteers: introducing the volunteers to the project, the programme and volunteers and staff of the coordinating organisation.
- Introduce the local culture, customs, laws, traditions, beliefs and norms to the volunteers.
- Inform the sending country manager upon arrival.
- Coordinate the daily work for the volunteers and keep an open channel of communication with the linguistic facilitator and hosting organisations at all times.
- Arrange transportation from the meeting point to the hosting activities site.
- Organise socialising activities or give information about different options in the local

area for the free time.

- In case of a health/medical emergency, make sure that the volunteers are taken proper care of and have access to medical treatment.
- In case of difficulties or changes of programme inform the sending country manager.
- Attend some of the programmed activities, together with the senior volunteers.

3.4. SENIOR VOLUNTEER IN EXCHANGE

Principles for participating to the project and required behaviour for a successful outcome of the experience:

- Leave only if motivated.
- Willingness and availability to getting to know and understand new realities.
- Being able to adapt easily.
- Being able to listen.
- Being available and able to communicate.
- Being discrete when presenting own experiences and competences.
- Being ready to learn from others.
- Overcome pre-formed ideas not allowing for an understanding of new realities and potentially leading to advance proposals not appropriate for the context.
- Being committed to favour the building and up keeping of the group and the participation of all its members.
- Contribute to the group, do not isolate yourself.

How to prepare for the exchange

- Inform oneself on the culture, history and other aspects of the country to be visited in order to have the correct expectations and behaviours fitting the local context.
- Study the weather of the places to be visited and carry along only the essential.
- Learn the greetings and some words of the hosting country language.
- Inform oneself on the general situation, legal framework and current status of volunteering in your country.

4. DEVELOPING SENIOR VOLUNTEERING ACROSS EUROPE: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the conclusions of the project and recommendations for different stakeholders, based on the project's findings. Our primary aim is to contribute to better active ageing through volunteering by promoting policy development, an all ages inclusive strategy for volunteering at European and national levels and new institutionally supported programmes for senior volunteers at European and local level.

4.1. CITIZENS

It is important that European and national public institutions, volunteer support centres and other stakeholders with proactive interest in active ageing and in active citizenship introduce a specific focus on senior volunteers, and on seniors as potential volunteers, in their policies and in their everyday work.

This should start from defining a European consensus on the age bracket that defines "seniors" and by supporting comparative or comparable knowledge base about the characteristics of senior volunteering. In particular, base line measurements on the impact of volunteering on the individual well-being of seniors would be necessary, and could represent an important pull factor towards active engagement in the long run. Such data could help us understand any characteristics specific to senior volunteers, the possible patterns of involvement or differences in relation to other age groups. Important insight could also be gained about the motivations for volunteering of the elderly and what are the barriers or difficulties that hinder active, or more active, engagement.

Adequately monitored programmes for the promotion of senior volunteering could provide us with the knowledge base necessary to answer a series of questions, like the following, that organisations in the field pose, especially in new accession and candidate EU countries where both volunteering and active ageing have little public recognition: What are the benefits for a voluntary organisation to have a senior rather than a young volunteer? What age specific difficulties can a senior volunteer place on the voluntary organisation? Why should volunteer support centres focus on senior volunteering? What senior citizens ask in terms of support and competences?

The most important thing though is that elderly citizens themselves never give up on their place in the community and voice their interests and needs, as individuals and as organised groups. Support for equal access to volunteering for all, regardless of their age, social background or any disability is perhaps the one most important claim. So the generation that had chosen the idea of the European Union for their future, can contribute to building an enabling framework for volunteering, across Europe, for everybody.

4.2. VOLUNTEERS INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS, LOCAL AND NATIONAL

Volunteer involving organisations at local and national level are the ones engaging daily with volunteers, thus in a privileged position to improve the volunteer opportunities targeting senior citizens. In order to do so, here follows a list of suggestions for action.

- Adapt volunteering activities in order to render them possible and accessible also to the specific needs of elderly people, also by developing more flexible volunteering opportunities.
- Provide relevant and adapted information about volunteering possibilities for retired and senior persons and promote the benefits of volunteering and the existing opportunities for senior volunteering.
- Provide for good socialising inclusive environment.

- Make elderly people aware that they have something very valuable to offer and thus empower them to act.
- Promote intergenerational projects and tutoring for seniors with youth or migrants.
- Guarantee reimbursement of out of pocket expenses incurred during volunteering in order to make volunteering possible for all senior citizens.
- Provide an open and supportive environment for the elderly to learn, to express their views, to exercise their creativity and leadership.
- In policy and educational work, put emphasis on volunteering as a path to active ageing and life long learning.
- Provide voice for elderly citizens and strive to include elderly as volunteers.
- Promote the exchange of best practice through exchanges of senior volunteers.

4.3. SENIOR ORGANISATIONS AND FEDERATIONS

Senior organisations and federations have a special interest in recognising and promoting volunteering a key element of active ageing. Suggestions for action are listed below.

- Include support to volunteering and to European exchanges of volunteers among its lobbying priorities: put European Year of Volunteering 2011 on their agenda and include senior volunteering development as a priority in the preparation for European Year of Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity 2012.
- Introduce volunteering as priority in the work and policy development of national and European networks for the quality of life of elderly citizens.
- Network and partner with voluntary organisations at local, national and European level on the realisation of common volunteering activities.
- Provide expertise and training on active ageing issues and policy to voluntary organisations, also by promoting the exchange of best practice of active citizenship at the European level.

4.4. VOLUNTEER SUPPORT CENTRES

Volunteer support centres are in the prominent position for putting senior volunteering at the heart of volunteering development strategies. Suggestions for action are listed below.

- Help to get a comprehensive view of the concepts of volunteering in the hosting country.
- Include a focus on senior volunteering within their work and in national and local development strategies for volunteering.

- Lobby with institutions for better recognition of the contribution of senior volunteers.
- Liaise and cooperate with local employers and trade unions to introduce volunteering into the pre-retirement planning and phased retirement.
- Stimulate and encourage partnerships between diverse organisations and partners.
- Adapt communication strategies and tools for the promotion of volunteering in order to render them accessible to elderly people.
- Invest in developing inclusive environment for seniors in local and national voluntary organisations.
- Provide a supportive environment for elderly first time volunteers.

Especially during the international exchanges of senior volunteers:

- Ensure that volunteers and volunteers' coordinators receive specialised senior volunteers' management and training adapted to third age learning habits and possibilities.
- Ensure good and smooth contacts between hosting and sending organisations in senior volunteer exchanges.
- Maintain and support the enthusiasm of senior volunteers when they come back home from the exchanges, encourage and empower them to implement their volunteer projects in their own communities.

4.5.

CEV AND EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORKS

The European civil society organisations and networks have a special role as intermediates between the volunteer organisations in different countries. Their main role with regard to senior volunteering should be as follows.

- Promote understanding of what volunteering is and provide a comprehensive view of the different concepts and meanings of volunteering in different countries.
- Encourage exchange of good practice on different aspects of volunteering to stimulate and inspire new ideas and promote high quality projects.
- Strengthen knowledge among all stakeholders through research on senior volunteering and promote exchange of knowledge.
- Include the promotion of and support to senior volunteering in the priorities of action for 2011 and lobby for volunteering to be recognised as a key element of the active ageing strategy.
- Actively engage in the preparation of 2012 European Year of Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity.
- Call the attention of the European institutions to the member states with a poor institutional environment for active ageing and volunteering.

- Promote and advocate for flexible retirement strategies.
- Devise instruments to use seniors as ambassadors for volunteering.

4.6.

LOCAL AND REGIONAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Regional and local authorities play an important role in the promotion, facilitation and recognition of volunteering. They are the main interlocutors and partners of volunteer centres, and are therefore involved in the implementation of volunteering programmes. In some European countries, regional and local authorities run volunteer banks and are the intermediaries between the individuals that want to volunteer and the civil society organisations that seek volunteers. Moreover, regional authorities, by cooperating with local civil society organisations like volunteer centres, may address in a more effective way the diverse regional and local challenges such as unemployment, growing multiculturalism and diversity, integration of migrants, intercultural dialogue, civil protection, delivery of social services.

- Establish volunteer offices / departments within the municipalities.
- Introduce employee and pre-retirement volunteering schemes in the public sector.
- Encourage and fund retired and senior volunteering programmes in their regions.
- Encourage and facilitate networking between organisations and different stakeholders in the field of volunteering, for example by organising information sessions and occasions where organisations offering volunteering placements and prospective volunteers can meet, or by promoting the creation of social partnerships.
- Promote and fund intergenerational tutoring activities among senior volunteers and youth from difficult backgrounds and migrants.
- Favour volunteering in sheltered homes and communities for the elderly, promote and fund experimental voluntary activities for home volunteering for elderly and very elderly confined to home.
- Make sure that out of pocket expenses for voluntary activity are reimbursed, in order to grant the possibility to volunteer to elderly citizens of all backgrounds.
- Ensure and fund the insurance coverage for volunteers over 65 years of age.

4.7.

NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

National governments play an important role in providing a favourable environment both for active ageing and for volunteering. The project experience has shown that active support for senior volunteering can grow only where general social and cultural context appreciates and supports the contribution both of the elderly citizens and of voluntary action - and many Member States are lagging far behind positive national experiences and EU policy frameworks. In order for National Governments to promote, encourage and

facilitate an enabling environment for senior volunteering our recommendations are listed below.

- Guarantee economical, social, health and cultural well being of retired citizens.
- Promote and develop inclusion and integration strategies, recognising that senior volunteering is a means of social inclusion and healthy life for third and fourth age
- Adopt (on the basis of wide civil society consultations) a holistic voluntary policy and ageing strategies to enable a more elderly-friendly society, where volunteering would play a major role.
- Formally recognise the importance of active ageing and accordingly stimulate it through supporting facilities for life long learning and active engagement and enhance the involvement of elderly citizens for the benefit of community through promoting and supporting senior volunteering and intergenerational programmes.
- Promote and improve cooperation and communication between different sectors - public, non-governmental and private - for the promotion of senior volunteering.
- Promote volunteering to all public institutions employees as pre-retirement scheme.
- Establish offices for the third sector that would coordinate the work of volunteering departments in the municipalities.
- Encourage local authorities to support senior volunteering programmes and introduce volunteering as an indicator to assess how local authorities are performing on active ageing and life long learning and as indicator of participative democracy.
- Support and strengthen voluntary organisations, promote and sustain the creation of a local and regional volunteer infrastructure as well as national networks for senior volunteering.
- Guarantee a correct legal and implementation framework for collaborations of public institutions and voluntary organisations in the provision of services, in order to prevent voluntary organisations from becoming merely instrumental to public sector.
- Support placement and initial training specific to senior volunteers, making it a part of core funding of volunteer support centres.
- Spread information about EU possible funding for senior volunteering projects and grant co-funding to EU projects focusing on senior volunteering.
- Guarantee that reimbursement of out of pocket expenses for voluntary activity does not jeopardise people's retirement benefits.

4.8. EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS

Although the competences of the EU in the field of volunteering are limited to coordination and complementary actions, it has a huge role to play in stimulating and supporting senior volunteering. This can be achieved through policies, programmes, strategies, policy papers and actions adopted on the basis of the needs of the civil society

organisations and of senior citizens. In general, for the last few years there has been a tendency in the EU institutions to build a culture of consultation and dialogue with civil society organisations working in the field of volunteering. Instigating civic engagement can stimulate a direct and participative democracy and therefore it can foster a democratic, participative European civil society. Specifically, volunteering can be a legitimisation tool of the European project as it reflects the core values of European integration - democracy, solidarity, tolerance, human rights and is an expression of active European citizenship. The number of people involved in voluntary activities in the EU Member States clearly indicates the great political, social and economic potential that resides in volunteering and justifies the claims to consider it as a key European concern. Volunteering can contribute to the achievement of objectives of national and EU policies. Specific measures to promote senior volunteering also as an important possible answer to the future demographic challenges are listed below.

- Recognise volunteering by elderly citizens as a key element of active ageing.
- Explicitly name and recognise senior volunteering in EC Active ageing, Life long learning and Active citizenship policy documents and programmes.
- Introduce the European Voluntary Service (EVS) for all age groups with a special attention on senior volunteers.
- Favour and fund the creation of bilateral or multilateral senior volunteering and intergenerational exchange programmes, including funding for linguistic facilitator for group exchanges of senior volunteers.
- Grant major funding to the Senior Volunteer Projects (SVP) action of the Grundtvig programme and include a reliable insurance scheme as in EVS action for young volunteers already in place.
- Increase EU budget line and funding to support development of voluntary actions and organisations, specifying as a priority the involvement of senior volunteers.
- Include volunteer support centres in the preparation of European Year of Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity 2012 and include senior volunteering as one of the main objectives of the Year.
- Provide framework and funding for volunteer support centres to adequately promote senior volunteering; work on placements and training of senior volunteers; organise European senior volunteers exchanges; and recognise the role of voluntary support centres as coordinating organisations in all European partnerships in order to allow small local organisations to also participate.
- Establish a European network of coordinating organisations for exchanges of senior volunteers.
- Introduce the OMC as a policy tool for the volunteering field. OMC is a relatively new tool in EU governance; it is based on creating common indicators, benchmarking and sharing good practices among member states in different areas. The "Think Future, Volunteer Together" project proved that the exchange of best practices in the field of senior volunteering and volunteering in general is a highly valuable learning tool for organisations and volunteers and it enhances the quality of the projects. OMC would also give possibilities for voluntary organisations to be involved in policy planning and implementation.
- Organise a comprehensive research for evaluating the contribution of the elderly to community development and social cohesion.

- Prepare and adopt the White Paper on Volunteering, encompassing volunteering in different age groups.
- Introduce and implement the employee volunteering scheme and pre-retirement schemes with volunteering in the EU institutions and bodies, which could serve as an example for national public administrations.

4.9. BUSINESS

The project partners identified business as a stakeholder in the field of active ageing. Here follows a list of specific actions.

- Introduce employee-volunteering schemes within Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).
- Organise extensive information on volunteering, its value, benefits and concrete opportunities to all workers close to retirement. Include such activities in the CSR policy.
- Introduce flexible retirement schemes with volunteering as one of the elements, alternatives and options which would allow seniors to take part in social life after they leave the labour market.
- Create and invest in pre-retirement planning and phased retirement - people who were active as volunteers before their retirement tend to volunteer also when they retire. Pre-retirement plans could for example involve people in volunteering before their retirement and increase this amount of time when retirement gets closer, thus making the transition easier.
- Claim equal terms of insurance for volunteers without an upper age limit.

4.10. RESEARCH, ACADEMIC AND EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The project partners believe that research, academic and education institutions play a role in facilitating, supporting active ageing and senior volunteering. They can do so by taking the following actions.

- Do research on the number of senior volunteers and their contribution to society.
- Introduce intergenerational volunteering programmes in schools and universities.
- Develop tools to certify competences and skills acquired through informal learning and volunteering thus granting public recognition to informal learning and competences acquired through volunteering.
- Collaborate in education and training of volunteers.
- Disseminate a positive image of seniors, senior volunteers and present their contribution to the society.

5. THE IMPACT OF SENIOR VOLUNTEERING ON POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Volunteering can be relevant to a variety of policy areas, at national and European level, in the public as well as in the private sector. Volunteering in its horizontal nature is indispensable in a wide range of EU policy areas such as active ageing and inter-generational dialogue, social inclusion, the provision of life-long learning opportunities, policies affecting young people, integration of migrants, intercultural dialogue, civil protection, humanitarian aid and development, sustainable development and environmental protection, human rights, social service delivery, raising employability, the promotion of an active European citizenship, fighting the "digital gap", and within CSR. This chapter will focus on the contribution of senior volunteering to certain chosen policy areas, most relevant to the project. These are: Active ageing, Lifelong learning, Economic and Social cohesion and Active European Citizenship.

5.1. ACTIVE AGEING

Active ageing can be understood as the number of positive opportunities to keep elderly people active in society. This concerns not only the benefits of volunteering for the seniors as volunteers but also the contributions that they can make as volunteers to the society.

Voluntary activities produce personal benefits to volunteers. In the first place, volunteering has a positive impact on volunteers' health and well-being, both mental and physical. Another important aspect is how volunteering strengthens volunteers' relational network. Through engaging in voluntary activities, elderly people can maintain and develop new social networks, actively participate in organisational structures or simply meet new people and make friends. Volunteering provides senior citizens with the opportunity to contribute to the democratic development of their community and to influence policy, which also boosts the feeling of usefulness and self-assurance. Furthermore, voluntary organisations are an environment where often different generations and cultures meet, which keeps the elderly up to date and open to the challenges of a changing world.

Complementarily, elderly people make a great contribution to society through volunteering as they can share their knowledge and experience with younger generations. Furthermore, senior volunteers can get involved in the provision of social and health services (e.g. home care to other older people - psycho-social support) and engage in the organisation of recreational and sports activities for other seniors. They can also help to better address the needs and requirements of this age group and thus improve public policy support and service delivery.

5.2. LIFELONG LEARNING

Senior volunteering offers manifold learning opportunities not only for elderly people but

also for people who work with senior volunteers. Elderly people are amazingly rich sources of knowledge and experience, which they acquired through their courses of lives. This does not only concern professional experience but also non-formal and informal learning.

Finally, intergenerational volunteering projects with senior volunteers as tutors can also foster personal development that increases the chances of employability of younger people. Volunteering is thus part of the Lisbon strategy towards a more competitive European labour market, providing life-long learning opportunities that arise when people engage in volunteering.

5.3. ACTIVE EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP

"Think Future Volunteer Together" exchanges proved that seniors are active and willing to engage in volunteering across Europe. Exchanges can strengthen and encourage active engagement of elderly people provided that the activities are adapted to the interest and needs of this age group and take its limits and benefits. Moreover, such international volunteer exchanges build trust in the local communities and a culture of engagement and solidarity beyond national borders; stimulate common understanding between different countries, reinforce ties between European citizens and therefore promote the European dimension within local organisations; strengthen cooperation and relations across Europe between different volunteer organisations, senior organisations, municipality bodies and services as well as other actors in the field of social services.

5.4. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC COHESION

Volunteering has an important added value for social and economic cohesion. The socio-economic role of volunteering is recognised in a Resolution of the European Parliament on the Contribution of Volunteering to Economic and Social Cohesion (A6-0070/2008 - Marian Harkin's Report). The report indicates that volunteering positively affects the social and economic conditions of society, which is particularly beneficial at the regional level, where it helps to improve social and economic conditions in concrete terms. Volunteering, as an expression of active citizenship, is a vital component in the creation and maintenance of social capital. As stated before, elderly people by engaging in voluntary activities extend their individual and social networks and thus strengthen the social capital of the communities and societies they live in. Although social capital is difficult to measure, it contributes decisively to the well-being of a community and has been proven to enhance social inclusion and cohesion, which in turn constitute the prerequisites for a quality economic performance of regions. Social capital, created through volunteering is therefore especially important for economically disadvantaged regions. Through the creation of social capital, volunteering indirectly helps to create a healthy economy.

Moreover, volunteering has a significant economic value. The trends and perspective for the coming years show that particularly senior volunteering constitutes a huge and still not sufficiently deployed resource. The economic benefits, resulting from the positive

influence of volunteering are especially tangible at local and regional level. As volunteering encourages the active involvement of citizens, through local action, economic and social conditions can be influenced and improved on the grassroots-level, which is especially important in economically difficult times. A significant number of volunteering projects in one specific sector help increase the well-being of regions and thus improve living-conditions of citizens. In times of urban migration and globalisation, where rural areas are at risk, volunteering contributes to the economic health of regions, by making them culturally, economically and ecologically attractive. Elderly people, who have considerable knowledge and experience, can greatly enhance these processes.

5.5. INTERGENERATIONAL AND INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

The 2nd Demography Report of the European Commission warns about the possible tensions between generations that might be caused by the imbalance between the growing number of older people and decreasing number of young people. Senior volunteering in this aspect can become a link between generations. Volunteers through engagement in projects become aware of social problems and develop interpersonal relationships. Moreover, voluntary activities create a sense of responsibility and belonging; it offers benefits, such as personal development, not only to the individual but to the society as a whole. Through volunteering people are encouraged to actively engage within their community, thus reaching out also to the isolated and excluded members of society (because of their age, origin or economic status). Volunteering thus improves the interaction and relationship between these groups, being the "social glue" that connects people. Intergenerational solidarity is fostered, as elderly contribute through their experiences and youngsters through their activeness. Exchanges constitute an enabling tool for such intergenerational dialogue between senior volunteers and the hosting community.

Volunteering furthermore promotes the intercultural dialogue, as well as the integration of elderly migrants. As volunteering brings people from all backgrounds, ethnicity and ages together, it is particularly beneficial in a divided and fragmented society. Senior volunteers' exchanges give numerous occasions to improve people's knowledge and understanding of other countries' culture and allow them to confront their prejudices and stereotypes. Through preparation for the exchanges, senior volunteers go through practical learning experience about some basic language expressions, get to know the cultural background of host countries, which they can later use when being in the host country and interacting with volunteer organisations and local volunteers of different backgrounds. Thus, such senior volunteer exchanges provide an excellent opportunity for education to diversity.

Finally, there is great intercultural and intergenerational educational potential not only for individuals but also for the organisations involved in senior volunteering exchanges. The volunteer and senior organisations as well as volunteer support centres and development agencies benefit from working with senior volunteers - they learn about elderly people needs, open up, enrich their experience and acquire new organisational sensitivity and culture. They can later on act as multipliers for other organisations to pass this knowledge on.

6.

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CALL FOR ACTION: THINK FUTURE, VOLUNTEER TOGETHER TOP TEN CLAIMS FOR SUPPORT TO SENIOR VOLUNTEERING

The European Parliament, the European Commission, the Member States Governments and Local Public Authorities, in respect of the principle of subsidiarity but following one shared vision of mainstreaming the attention to and the recognition of the potential of old age, should pursue policies aiming to guarantee the autonomy of senior citizens, through actively supporting programmes for self-sufficiency, mobility, life long learning and social networking of elderly people from all social and cultural backgrounds. An enabling active ageing framework should become a distinctive trait of the European Union. Our claims for support to senior volunteering should be seen as a specific part of this more general need for communities where senior citizens are encouraged to interact and contribute, but where specific needs and frailties of old age are cared for and where all rights are respected.

1. The important contribution of senior volunteers' to building social cohesion and intergenerational dialogue should be recognised through specific programmes during European Year of Volunteering 2011.
2. Knowledge and base line measurements on the impact of volunteering on the individual well being of senior citizens should be built through comparable research and monitored experimental projects.
3. Volunteering should be clearly recognised as an element contributing significantly to active ageing: a specific focus on volunteering by seniors should be included in the preparation work towards European Year of Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity 2012.
4. Voluntary organisations at local level should be singled out as privileged stakeholders of public institutions at all levels and regularly consulted during the elaboration of policies that touch the elderly: because they involve many senior citizens, are actors of participative democracy, who feel and acknowledge the emerging needs and changes at grass roots level.
5. Public institutions at all levels should promote volunteering to senior citizens, using easily accessible communication channels and supporting adequate initial training, tutoring and placement.
6. Pre-retirement schemes and active retirement programmes aimed based on volunteering should be implemented.
7. Volunteering must be an opportunity accessible to all elderly citizens, regardless of income, previous education, place of residence, social or cultural background: an essential condition to obtain this is the certainty that reimbursement of expenses incurred during the voluntary activity are entirely guaranteed.
8. Insurance coverage for all volunteers, including seniors, should be ensured and funded.
9. Exchanges of experiences and best practice among senior volunteers should be supported: European Voluntary Service should become accessible to all ages and the Senior Volunteer Programme under the Grundtvig action should be better funded and rendered more widely known and accessible.
10. Intergenerational volunteering programmes should be specifically funded, pursuing the basic objectives of social inclusion and life long learning.