



GER-APP
INACTIVITY IS NOT AN OPTION

Guidelines for the development of senior competencies



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Project Nr: 2020-1-HR01-KA204-077766

<https://gerapp.eu/>



Guidelines for the development of senior competencies

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Publisher:

Udruga za cjeloživotno strukovno obrazovanje STRUKA
HR - 35000 SLAVONSKI BROD, Nikole Zrinskog 34,
Erasmus + KA2 – Partnership Project 2020-1-HR01-KA204-077766
GER-APP – Inactivity is not an option

Graphic design:

Tin Horvatin

Printing:

AUTOR studio za grafički dizajn,
HR-35000 SLAVONSKI BROD, Naselje kralja Tomislava 1/2

Edition:

100 pieces

October 2022
Slavonski Brod. Ljubljana, Rende, Visonta

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

This publication [communication] reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein

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INTRODUCTION

The guidelines for developing seniors' competences have been developed in the framework of the Erasmus+ project "GER-APP: Inactivity is not an option", by an international partnership composed by 5 members: Udruga za cjeloživotno strukovno obrazovanje #Struka (Croatia), Euroform RFS (Italy), Inštitut Antona Trstenjaka za gerontologijo in medgeneracijsko sožitje (Slovenia), Mátrai Welding Ltd (Hungary), and Industrijsko-Obrtnička škola Slavonski Brod (Croatia).

Anton Trstenjak Institute (IAT), with its expertise in gerontology and intergenerational relations has developed guidelines for implementation of activities to support older people. As a part of Intellectual output 1 IAT prepared three workshops for project partners which covered the basics of gerontology, key elements for working with older people, highlighting loneliness and social isolation as the most pressing issues for them, specific needs at the old age and the importance of lifelong learning.

Guidelines are kind of collection of theoretical and practical knowledge. IAT added its own expertise, working in this field for the last 30 years. As a part of this IO, the partners have conducted the survey among older people in the partners' countries which gave them important information about older people's views of lifelong learning competences and skills which (by their opinion) are required at the old age. The survey has been conducted among over 100 older people. Additionally, in the time between the workshops the partners have carried out conversations with older people and have explored how principles for good conversation have enriched them. IAT identified the most important principles for conversations with older people and have incorporated them in the guidelines. Both, the guidelines for conversation and survey results are included in the GER APP framework.

In the context of lifelong learning, with diverse learning opportunities, the partnership also considered that the users of these guidelines can be various profiles of educators implementing activities for older people - trainers, mentors, facilitators, volunteers etc.

1. SENIORS' COMPETENCES

The first chapter explores the seniors' competences which are vital for old age. First, we identify the competences for quality ageing which are not defined by individual's health or possibilities but rather by the understanding of the process of ageing, acceptance of ageing and personal attitude towards it. Further the chapter explores different dimensions of a human being, taking into consideration the value of the individual perspective, interests and abilities in the end of the chapter.

1.1 Competences for good ageing

a) Knowledge about ageing

Ageing is a biological, natural, lifelong process. Chronologically we are ageing every minute, every birthday we are one year older. This is an ageing on which a person cannot have any impact. When it comes to physical and mental health, it is also changing over the time - some of the organs can regenerate to a certain degree, others are slowly decreasing in their functionality. This kind of ageing **is functional**, and it is at least 50% in person's hands. It can be influenced by healthy lifestyle and be postponed to older age. But for quality ageing **experiential** perspective is particularly important - how to experience our age, our capabilities; it completely depends on every person. Some people are ashamed of their age or just cannot accept this process, others are more comfortable with their age and live relaxed life. One should not deny and run away from the fact of ageing and not live to full potential because he/she feels old and thinks that older people's lives do not matter anymore. It is important to have in mind that all life periods are equally important and purposeful. A human being is developing for the whole life. It is also important to accept each life stage - with all the tasks and challenges and to keep learning about intergenerational coexistence and solidarity.

Retirement is usually the most obvious and important transition to the last period of life – old age or third generation. After retirement a person can continue learning and participating in social life. The life after retirement has extended over the last few decades. In the whole population of older people, 75% of them are healthy, independent and continue helping younger generations. Some of traditional tasks are taking care of grandchildren, learning, doing things for which there was no time earlier, travelling... However, this life period brings its own tasks which influence the quality of ageing. In the old age, a person can bring all his/her life experiences together with a proudness, gratefulness and happiness and save them in his/her "life granary"; yet one should throw bad experiences on the compost – forgiving him/herself and others, letting go what is not important and learning to except present conditions, including helplessness. Processing life experiences is an important task and gives a person a deeper insight and life wisdom.

Even in the third generation it is important to acknowledge various subcategories of retired persons; life is different at the age of 65, 75 or 85. There are many stigmas and prejudices around old age in European societies; the best answer against "ageism" is older people accepting the old age by themselves and finding the purpose in it.

The partnership have received encouraging results in the survey among older people from four European countries which confirmed that retirement brings new opportunities, hobbies and leisure time activities as well as continuation of learning. Older people recognize the need for learning new skills after retirement due to the changing world; this shows that they recognize their own value, possibilities to adapt and contribute to the society as well as their growth-oriented mind. (See survey results in annex).

- Ageing is a natural process. Ageing can be chronological, functional, and experiential. It is very important for the quality of ageing how we perceive our age and our own ageing.
- Retirement is an important transition to the old age; older people have more time, much more than before, for traveling, hobbies, taking care of grandchildren etc. It also gives them important task - to store the positive experiences in the "life granary" and to compost the bad ones.

b) Positive attitude

Negative stereotypes about age predominate and by being exposed to these stereotypes, people also internalize negative attitude about ageing and behave accordingly. This is reflected in showing disrespect for older people and in expressing prejudices about their incompetence and dependency. In western societies there are many prejudices about older people - that they are senile, depressed, incompetent in the workplace, weak, stubborn, inflexible, in poor health and socially isolated, and have a lack of desire for intimacy.

Ageism is a prejudice or discrimination on the grounds of a person's age. Ageism refers to the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) towards others or oneself based on age.

Short guide to avoid stereotypical communication when talking about ageing and older people:

Wrong language or images can easily convey a stereotypical idea of older people. The table below gives concrete communication tips that can make a huge difference in the way we talk about ageing and older age.

Language *

<i>Instead of...</i>	<i>Prefer to...</i>
Catastrophic terms about growing population of older people ("time bomb", "silver tsunami")	Talk affirmatively about longer and healthier lives and ageing as an opportunity
References to youth to describe older age ("accumulated youth") or positive aspects of one's personality ("young at heart")	Use direct affirmation of being old ("I'm old and that's ok") or alternative adjectives to describe positive aspects of one's personality
Terms that are homogenising and stoking stereotypes ("seniors", "elderly")	Use "older people" or "older adults" that are more neutral
Pronouns ("they", "them") or framing that are "other-ing" older people as a group to set aside assuming they are different from "we"	Use "we" and "us" pronouns in reference to the universal experience of ageing and giving a voice to self-advocates
Possessive assuming older people are someone's property ("our older people")	Remove the possessive pronouns
Adjectives around frailty to describe a whole age group ("vulnerable", "at-risk" population)	Specify the risk factors that are putting people in situations of vulnerability

*Inspiration: (c) FrameWorks Institute. 2017. Quick Start Guide. Washington, DC.

It goes the same for the images:

- Prefer pictures showing people's faces rather than their back or a body part (wrinkled hands) – it helps representing older people as persons with emotions and thoughts
- Try to represent diversity in older age in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, ability, etc.
- Avoid pictures of hunched-over person – although many older people are living with a disability, disability can take various forms and not only be physical
- Prefer group pictures instead of lonely older people – if possible intergenerational for this specific topic (although not necessarily a family gathering as more and more older people are also now ageing without children)
- Prefer promoting active representations – older people are far too often pictured as passive, looking at others or contemplating the landscape from a bench, receiving care or guidance rather than doing things or passing on knowledge
- Prefer coloured pictures instead of black and white or sepia.

An even greater problem is the presence of implicit prejudices about age in the thinking of the older people themselves, as it strongly influences their behaviour and functioning. Such prejudices have many negative consequences for older people. Numerous studies have shown that older people with a positive attitude towards ageing have better memory, are more efficient, competent in reading and writing and are enjoying their lives. A positive attitude towards ageing is also related with taking good care of one's own health (healthy eating habits, regular exercise, etc.).

The older age is a result of a long-life process which goes on over the entire adult life span of any living being. The knowledge and understanding that ageing is a lifelong process is important for creating a positive attitude towards it. Gerontologists have long agreed that we do not become "old" on any specific date, such as the day one's first grandchild is born or on reaching a specific age, including the legally designated retirement age. Physical, psychological, and socio-cultural ageing is a gradual process that may last decades and span over the greater part of one's adult life.

Hence, to develop a positive attitude towards ageing is foremost important to have a positive attitude towards **our own ageing** and retirement. Some think that after retirement or in old age there are no more changes or that life is empty and without possibilities. For creating positive attitude towards ageing the following points are important:

- **Actively learning to see good things.** Try to direct thoughts and the conversation to a positive way and positive personal experiences. This should be even more encouraged with people who are focused on criticism, complaints or in abstract debates, which in the end leaves the person empty.
- **Having personal connection with every generation.** In the traditional society the interactions between all generations have been more common and integrated in the daily life. It is now important for each generation to actively make an effort to have a connection with children, working (employed) people and older people.

1.2. Competences for positive personal development

A person cannot achieve personal development in any age without satisfying his or her needs. Needs are automatic impulses of any living organism that motivate it and direct it to behaviour and coexistence with the environment that it is kept alive and develops. Needs are the main driving force for a person's personal development. All living beings have common basic survival needs, and each species and every human being always has its own specific needs. A human being has the most complex scope of needs. In 1954, humanist psychologist Abraham Maslow classified human needs by hierarchy into basic or biological, followed by higher human needs: security, love and belonging, reputation and self-esteem, and at the very top of the pyramid there is a need for self-fulfilment. Addressing and satisfying the higher needs is what makes a difference between a human and any other living being and defines us as human beings. The needs can be presented through six dimensions of a human being:

- **The physical or biophysical dimension** - these are fundamental needs for self-preservation (needs for growth, health, food and fluid, warmth, exercise, and rest) and the preservation of the human species (reproduction, childcare).
- **The mental or psychic dimension** - the needs for information, pleasure, security, validity.
- **The spiritual dimension** - the needs for freedom, responsibility, and life orientation.
- **The interpersonal social dimension** - the needs for basic interpersonal relations and functional relationships, for one's own reputation in society, for the rational organization of society.
- **The developmental or historical-cultural dimension** - the main needs are learning, creativity, work success, passing on one's life knowledge and experience to other people, preserving culture.
- **The existential dimension** – the need to experience the meaning of the present moment, of different periods in one's life, as well as the need to experience the meaning of human history and the world around.

Every individual person has a specific set of needs. Needs **change during life development**: some are quite constant throughout life; others appear in certain periods of life and some occur only in a particular period of life.

Ageing is a lifelong process. Every generation (young, middle-age, old) is a complementary whole and equally important and meaningful.

The needs change during the life course. Every person's human dimension and specific needs during a particular life course should be considered.

1.3. Specific competences based on interest and possibilities

In the previous chapter (1.2.) healthy personal development has been explored, in which all human dimensions need to be considered; it is necessary to have in mind that each **individual person is unique**. During the life span different historical, societal, cultural aspects shape every human being, along with development of skills, competences, knowledge, and interests.

When working for or with a particular person or group of people the uniqueness of an individual or a group should be integrated in the development of the competences. This is especially important when working for or with older people. During their lifetime older people have developed specific knowledge, skills and interests through active work and contributions to society, participation in various societal and individual activities and have developed individual habits and particular lifestyle/way of being.

Educators, trainers or volunteers will be able to work better by addressing specific needs based on the uniqueness of each individual. It is much easier if person's biography is known. Knowing person's occupation or profession, what are his/her hobbies and interests, how was he/she engaging in the society will help us to create achievable and meaningful competences and more personalised curriculum, workshops, events, or conversations.

Every individual person is unique, therefore acknowledging and including person's interests, knowledge and skills is important when creating competences. The same principle applies when working with groups of people.

2. WHY DO WE NEED GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING SENIORS' COMPETENCES

In this chapter the importance of the seniors' competences is explored. The demographic changes, changes in the family care, rapid technological innovations are making our lives faster, longer, and more variable. At the same time, while adapting to these changes, it is also important to consider the specifics of a life course in old age.

2.1. Phenomenon of demographic changes

Europe in the 21st century is facing the phenomenon of demographic change. In the transition from the twentieth to the twenty-first century, the fertility rate in developed countries decreased below the replacement level of its population, which is 2.1 children per woman. The life expectancy and the "baby boom" generation after the 2nd World War has also accelerated the ageing of the whole population.

The Green Paper of the European Union (2021) highlighted that the demographic trends of population ageing are unprecedented. The World Health Organization has developed four main priorities for a world's response to the demographic changes:

- How to take care of older people who need long-term care
- How to take care of older people who are still relatively independent and active
- How to take care of economic development, considering the ageing of working force
- How to teach the entire population about traditional solidarity between generations

These tasks need to be tackled in different ways, for example by ensuring that age-friendly aspects are considered in construction of buildings and built public spaces; similarly, it is necessary to consider older people's needs in the organization of transport, social and health services, security, communication and information, social life, and overall integration into society. In European countries there are about 20 -25% of older people. About 4% of older people need long-term care and out of which 3% remain at home and 1% live in retirement homes or are in non-institutional or institutional care; and there are about 20% of active older people who can be more actively engaged in the society, contribute with their knowledge, skills, and competences. The lifelong learning must create learning opportunities for all groups of older people.

Along with demographic changes, we are also experiencing the **transition from traditional models of family life and care**. The past two centuries of industrialization and urbanization led to structural adjustments of care and the introduction of professional care institutions and services like care and retirement homes and followed by home care and other services. Still, around 80 % of all care is still provided by informal carers, usually family members, who often face extreme challenges, usually balancing between the care and their own professional and personal life. Hence, it is important to acknowledge that the traditional patterns of solidarity known for millenniums are expiring. **It is essential** to learn a new solidarity for good intergenerational and interpersonal relations in the professional care institutions, in our families, social networks and society. Considering all life stages of individuals and generations it is necessary to fully understand that later life is equally important and purposeful part of an individual's life as any other.

World's population is ageing, life expectancy is increasing, the numbers of older people in the need of long-term care and relatively independent and active ones have also increased. The traditional family life and care system have changed; therefore, we need to learn about new solidarity among the generations.

2.2. Quality ageing and older people's needs

At the old age certain needs are particular and important. From the point of view of a comprehensive anthropological analysis of human life after the age of 60, the following human dimensions are important:

1. **The need for an interpersonal relationship.** An old person needs at least one person of his/her age who knows him/her and has a pleasant human relationship with him/her. For positive psychosocial development in old age, it is advised to have regular personal interactions with (at least) one young, one middle-aged and an older peer.
2. **The need to pass on person's life experiences and insights to the young and middle generation.** Older person's most important personal asset is his/her life experiences and

insights. In old age, it is very important for a positive self-esteem when person's experiences and knowledge are accepted and appreciated by others.

3. **The existential need of an older person is to experience his/her age as an equally meaningful and valuable period of life as youth and middle age.** Ageism is widespread and prevents a person from experiencing ageing and old age from the positive side. On the other hand, the society should recognize older people's abilities, experiences and potentials. Ageism is a serious obstacle for experiencing the meaning of age.

The basis of good ageing is certainly a balanced satisfaction of the **basic needs** for material supply and for maintaining physical, mental, and working spirit. In old age, **the need for care** is often particularly important.

By researching the physical, mental, spiritual and developmental needs of an ageing population it is possible to obtain the genuine information needed by policy and decision makers to plan and guide the development of an ageing society. Knowledge and consideration of all human needs is also a prerequisite for any meaningful work with or for older people.

2.3. Lifelong learning

Lifelong learning (LLL) is continuing development of knowledge and skills that we experience after formal or compulsory education, throughout life.

Formal learning/education is well known: It's always organised and structured, intentional, has learning objectives and is delivered in a formal setting. Typical examples are learning within

- a) the formal education system (primary, secondary school, university etc.) and
- b) training system or workplace training arranged by the employer. This is the education with certain standards and is delivered to learners by trained teachers. Formal learning usually ends with an official recognition paper (certificate, diploma etc.).

Compulsory (mandatory, obligatory) education refers to a period of education that is required for all people and is imposed by the government. During compulsory education, parents are obliged to send their children to school (or home-school them).

In most European education systems, compulsory education starts with primary education, usually at the age of 6 and lasts 9-10 years ending at the age of 15-16.

Lifelong learning refers to the learning that occurs outside a formal educational institution, usually after finishing the formal education.

Non-formal learning is usually organized, structured, and has learning objectives. It is an intentionally chosen learning that takes place outside the formal education and training system, typically in local settings: reading groups, debating societies, amateur choirs and folklore groups, ICT and language courses etc.

Informal (experiential) learning is not organised and is never intentional from the learner's standpoint. Each person has many learning situations in everyday life, at work or during leisure time. Learning happens outside the classroom, in museums and libraries, at home, we can learn from books, TV, films, from friends and other people etc. It is a lifelong process in a natural, intuitive way.

In the survey among older people from four different European countries the partnership explored the interest for lifelong learning and their understanding about it. The analysis of the results shows that participants value all the three types of education and that they have benefited from all of them; all

three have been important in personal and professional life. Yet, results show that formal education is very important for professional life (60%); as for personal life, the most important is informal learning (64%). Most of participants (above 90%) in the survey have agreed that learning after retirement is (very) important. According to the survey, the most common reasons for keeping learning are a) because there is always something new to learn; b) because the world is changing, and it is important to learn new skills; c) it is important for our health and wellbeing. The respondents have told us that the most common way of learning after retirement is informal or experiential learning (68%). Participants reported that they had learned most by watching TV, news or by being in contact with other people. The survey also shows us that the least interest among older people is for long – term training programs.

- **Lifelong learning is important for quality ageing.**
- **The most common way to learn after the retirement in informal learning – through interactions with people, following the newspapers, TV, books, radio.**

3. WHO ARE THE GUIDELINES FOR?

3.1. Trainers, educators, volunteers, long-term care workers

With the development of lifelong learning opportunities, different methods and learning styles have been used. Traditionally we have **teachers** in the formal learning; and teachers are the ones who pass on especially the theoretical knowledge, concepts, and theories. The job title *teacher* is usually associated with primary and secondary education.

An educator is a person who helps students to acquire knowledge and competences. An educator is someone skilled in the theory and practice of education and usually teaches others how to teach and to pass on the knowledge, which methods to use, create curricula and so on.

In the non-formal learning, we usually do not learn from teachers, but we participate in engaging workshops, trainings, and other forms of learning that are often led by a trainer.

A *trainer* is a person who trains other people. A trainer uses specialized courses that target practical or technical skills; the main aim is to develop the competency and skill sets in the trainees to perform effectively and efficiently.

Volunteering: giving time and energy for the benefit of other people in the community as a social responsibility rather than for any financial reward.

A ***volunteer*** helps an individual, group or community by providing information, lessons or various preventive activities, treatment, care etc. This is done without financial compensation (payment) and for people other than his immediate family, during his/her leisure time and from a humanitarian solidarity point of view to human needs and problems.

Long – term care workers are defined as paid staff, typically nurses and personal carers, providing care and/or assistance to people limited in their daily activities at home or in institutions, excluding hospitals.

All the above-mentioned profiles work with or for older people. Either is a teacher at Third Age University, a trainer in the yoga class or computer workshop; a volunteer in the Red Cross or in a debate group; be it a long-term carer with regular home visits.

3.2 The role of the trainers, educators, volunteers, long-term care workers

While every profile described above (trainers, educators, volunteers, long-term care workers) has a particular qualification, skillset and uses different methods in his/her work, the main principle of working with older people (that we suggest) is a peer-to-peer learning approach.

The peer-to-peer approach directly addresses the specific needs of older people (passing on person's life experiences and interpersonal relationships) and can be implemented across different social groups and settings and is used in a variety of contexts. Peer learning can be defined as learning through active help and support from peers. It usually involves people from similar social groupings learning from each other and by themselves; participation of every participant is encouraged. Another method like peer learning is *in-group social learning* (see 4.3 – *Innovative method*). They both emphasize active engagement of every participant and sharing experiences and knowledge for the purpose of learning. Additionally, the in-group social learning focuses on sharing personal positive experiences and negative ones only when they have been successfully resolved.

The role of the group “leader” (trainer, educator, volunteer) is moderating the conversation. The group leader who is specially trained to use this method helps the group to cognitively process the good experiences in their memories.

Both above-described social learning types contribute to quality ageing by developing and shaping human personality and interpersonal relations.

4. HOW WE DEVELOP SENIORS'S COMPETENCES - ELEMENTS OF INNOVATION

4.1. Examples from the project Inactivity in not an option

For creation of the guidelines for developing seniors' competences the authors - project partners - used various exercises, principles, and methods to put the theoretical knowledge into the practice and – what is crucial - designed activities for older people **together with older people**. For this purpose, a **survey** among older people was carefully planned and carried out; older people – interviewees - shared their interests, their learning preferences etc. The main results are presented in the next sub-chapter (4.2.).

Another important aspect was to use the theoretical **gerontological knowledge in practice**. Having in the mind loneliness, the most pressing challenge of the old age, a very important tool to tackle this challenge is **conversation**. Therefore, we included the guidelines for conversations with older people through which we could address specific needs and possibilities in old age.

There is equal importance of both, creating activities to address the possibilities, interests and skills of older people and at the same time, enriching them with meaningful conversation that address other important aspects of ageing. For illustration we can share examples:

- An active group of older people who meet every morning for outdoor exercise included a “warm up” circle in which they play word games. In this way they are taking care of their wellbeing - apart from physical fitness they also maintain their mental health, keeping their brains sharp.
- A cooking group of older women started a new program with a nearby school in which they provide cooking classes to pupils, who are encouraged to “modernize” the recipes in a way that are less oily, have shorter preparation time, are healthier etc. The important element of the class is exchange of experiences. Apart from learning practical skills there are other intergenerational interactions, passing one's life experiences; by doing this, other important needs of old age are satisfied.

Created guidelines for conversation with older people and the example of survey are enclosed in the annex:

1. **Good conversation with an older person**
2. **Basic communication principles**
3. **Guidelines for conversation - visiting and talking to older people**
4. **Template: Describe your experience after the conversation with an older person**
5. **Template: Conversational experience with older people**
6. **Template: Design an activity for older people based on the key elements**
7. **Guidelines for conducting the survey among older people**
8. **Template: Survey among older people**

4.2. What did we learn from old people?

In December 2021 the partners conducted a survey among older people from the partner's countries – Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia, and Italy, to learn more about the learning preferences after retirement. The survey is based on three main ways of learning: formal, non-formal and informal (see 2.3).

According to the responses, the main findings from the survey are the following:

- Each way of learning (formal, informal, and non-formal) is beneficial for the individual's professional as well as for personal life; yet informal learning is significantly important for personal life.
- After retirement older people are frequently involve in informal learning – following news, reading newspapers etc., they do not like long-term courses about a particular subject. Most commonly they learn life and ICT skills and frequently engage in handcrafts, recreational sports, discussion, and self-support groups.
- Many older people expressed their interest to learn ICT skills, foreign languages and life skills.
- The most common transfer of the information is through family members and friends; internet search is also important.
- It is important that the learning opportunity for older people is free of charge and in person, face to face.
- Older people know that learning after retirement is important because a) there is always something new to learn, b) because the world is changing and new skills are needed c) it is important for health and wellbeing.

4.3 Innovative method: In-group social learning

In-group social learning is a group learning method based on the sharing of participants 'personal experience and knowledge. It was developed by prof. Jože Ramovš, the founder of Anton Trstenjak Institute. The method is based on gerontological knowledge on ageing, anthropological knowledge on intergenerational relations and psychological knowledge on importance of experience sharing.

The method focuses mostly on positive experiences; the only negative experiences considered are the ones that have been successfully resolved.

The method is used in group work: groups are based on the principles of solidarity, mutual understanding, and confidentiality. Each group is moderated by a facilitator, previously trained volunteer (methodology, group dynamics, communication etc.). In a group there are around 10 members, they usually meet once per week. In Slovenia, over 500 volunteers have been trained with this method in the last 20 years; they facilitate some hundreds of groups for quality ageing on a regular basis all over the country.

Informal carers, mostly family members of older and/or disabled, carry out a significant amount of long-term care support. Therefore, a special attention has been given to development of the in-group social learning method for informal carers' training.

5. EXPECTED IMPACT AND TRANSFERABILITY POTENTIAL

In the guidelines the basic gerontological findings have been considered. When referring to ageing in general, the medical and biological views are still the most common. Nevertheless, the individual psychological and sociological view on ageing plays an important role. Hence, the guidelines emphasise the importance of positive attitude towards ageing and directly address the problem of loneliness which has been recognised as crucial for older people.

Therefore, the focus is to help the educators, trainers, carers, volunteers, and anyone working with older people to understand better the specifics of the old age – special needs, possibilities, required skills etc. The guidelines bridge the theoretical gerontological knowledge with the insights from older people, sharing their views, skills, and interests and in this way, creating the activities for older people with older people.

The transferability potential therefore is a possibility of using it in variety of settings and environments. While it can be most directly used for trainings of educators, teachers, carers and other people who work directly with older people, it could be also useful for organizations, associations, clubs, day centres for older people, to incorporate some of the guideline's principles into their activities.

Expected impact of the guidelines are following:

- Creation and implementation of more tailored activities for old people
- Better communication and deeper relations among the people, in group and in the society
- Fulfilling more needs at the old age and exploring more interests, skills and possibilities of older people through various activities
- Reducing loneliness among old people

ANNEX:

ANNEX 1: GOOD CONVERSATION WITH AN OLDER PERSON

The quality of communication among people is the main indicator of the quality of their coexistence. This also applies for socializing and working with older people. Therefore, we will list some characteristics of communication.

People communicate with each other **in three ways:**

1. **Verbally**, by speaking,
2. **Non-verbally**, with behaviour, facial expression, hand gestures, body language and silence,
3. **By deeds** we do to each other.

Communication, however, takes **three different forms:**

- **Chat** is talking about anything that is interesting to the interlocutors at the given moment; these conversational themes are not particularly important for life or coexistence. A chat is used for relaxation, entertainment and superficial communication between people. But we should keep in

mind that a chat should be honest and does not harm anyone: that it does not turn into malicious gossip about the people who are not present.

- **Working conversation** is the exchange of messages related to work, cooperation, organization of time, activities and professional coexistence, education, with the aim of meeting human basic needs (material, mental, social), everything that allows to develop physically, mentally and socially.
- **Personal conversation** takes place in the proximity of a person to a person or group of people. It happens in a personal relationship, where a person does not have in mind what he/she gives and what he/she expects to receive, where he/she "offers" a part of himself/herself: experiences, desires, hardships... and where he/she accepts the same from another person without feeling inferior. Through personal conversation, people connect in a human way, which allows us to experience some deeper human happiness and meaning in life. Above all, personal conversation is the material for personal growth.

In any coexistence, all three forms of conversation are indispensable, but not equally. Working (about employment or business) conversation predominates in an employment relationship, where a personal conversation may be occasional, but nevertheless important for relaxed working atmosphere. There must always be sufficient personal conversation in family coexistence for the family to survive and fulfil its mission. On the other hand, it is impossible to survive in the family without necessary working and organizational arrangements. Among friends, a chat is most frequent form, followed by personal and then working conversation.

When organizing activities with older people and socializing with them, special attention should be paid to amount of time devoted to each of these forms. Volunteering, for example, is similar to friendship: relaxed chat should be combined with good personal conversation with meaningful conversational content, while a working conversation is usually just occasional.

Personal conversation: it seems it is the most neglected in today's society and is missed by many older people. First some theoretical issues will be defined, and then we will explore this type of conversation practically, with the method of participatory research.

In recent years, science has been discovering the rules and principles of personal conversation. For the introduction of conversational culture in an activity or in a certain environment, practical rules were adopted, along with the practical courses for learning and practice. This needs to be consciously learned, like the process of learning foreign languages. Recommendations for the personal conversation are - for example - calling a person by his/her name, good storytelling, good listening, and good "silence keeping". You can find them in Annex 1.

In the methodologies for training professionals and volunteers for different types of personal and group volunteering a conversation with an older person or with a group of older people is given an important place. At this point, let us emphasize the importance of the **topic of conversation**.

- The good content is the one that is interesting to both or all interlocutors in the conversation, that everyone likes to talk about and listen to it with interest. It is important to listen to the person carefully, observe and empathize.
- The topic should be told in the form of personal experience, which is the greatest treasure of each person. Everyone has personal experiences, regardless of education, social status and position. Therefore, personal experiences put us in a horizontal relationship, connect us humanly and enrich us.
- The principle of choosing five positive experiences to one negative one should be encouraged.



- Directing the conversation to a positive way and to personal experiences should be used even more with people who are negatively focused on criticism, complaints or in abstract debates, which in the end leaves the person empty.
- It is very important that during the conversation the roles of listener and narrator change. If a person only listens to the narrator – older person (older people usually like to talk) and only asks questions, the old person *is not really socially included*.

ANNEX 2: BASIC COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

ADDRESS EACH OTHER BY NAME

- ❖ When addressing somebody, use his/her name, also during the conversation and when giving feedback to his/her story.

WHEN YOU TALK

- ❖ Choose a topic, interesting to both you and your listener(s), it is recommended to talk about own personal experiences and findings
- ❖ Choose positive topics and encouraging stories as much as possible
- ❖ Think about what the conversational partner needs to know to understand what you are saying – he/she might not know people you are talking about, on which occasion it happened, circumstances etc.
- ❖ Mention also how you experience what you are telling about, thus allowing the listeners to know about your feelings and point of view.
- ❖ Talk in the first person.
- ❖ Talk clearly, slowly in loud enough to be heard.



- ❖ Make sure that you are both listener and the talker; in a group everyone should have a space and time to be heard during a meeting.

WHEN YOU LISTEN

- ❖ Listen carefully, do not interrupt your interlocutor with your own story or opinion nor try to change the subject.
- ❖ Listen with all your ears, eyes and your whole body, allowing you to understand what the narrator wants to say
- ❖ If you like to hear more details, ask the narrator, but with no pressure, if narrator is not willing to share them with others.
- ❖ Do not judge whatever one says, his/her views or experiences, but try to respect them as his/hers.
- ❖ Thank the person when he/she finishes speaking, underlining something interesting/important from what you heard from him/her.

KNOWING HOW TO KEEP SILENCE

- ❖ Listen without interruptions, as this is the only way to really understand the narrator and empathize with him/her.
- ❖ Whatever personal is said in the conversation, should stay there. If you want to share a story you heard make sure you tell it in a way that it cannot be tracked back to the person who told it.
- ❖ Do not talk about people who are not present nor on their behalf. Do not tell what you heard and could hurt somebody.

ANNEX 3: GUIDELINES FOR A PERSONAL CONVERSATION - *visiting and talking to older people*

To have a pleasant conversation with an old person, three steps need to be taken:

1. Get in a pleasant human contact with an old person; this could be done deliberately or accidentally.
2. When meeting an older person, try to get used to his/her condition, way of experiencing and speech, listen to this person carefully and tell him/her in a clear way what you expect and what are you interested in.
3. In the end, say goodbye along with the feedback about the most interesting and pleasing things you have experienced with this person.

The following instructions can help you get the most out of visiting and talking to an old person. These are not “old school” instructions that should be strictly followed, but rather help you to remind you about the principles of a pleasant conversation, which in most cases is already used anyway, spontaneously.

- Choose a natural situation for this conversation, no matter if it is with a relative you have not visited for a long time, an acquaintance from the neighbourhood, a participant in one of the activities you organize, a retired co-worker, a known or unknown person in a nursing home etc.

Visiting somebody could be the most suitable situation for a personal conversation. During Covid-19 pandemic personal contacts were restricted. Nevertheless, depending on restrictions, meetings could be held outside, at a safe distance and by wearing protective masks. However, in the times of crisis such as the pandemic, the safest way is to have a phone conversation or videoconference if both conversation partners can handle it.

- It is necessary to take at least an hour of your time for a visit and conversation, to avoid being under time pressure. However, if the conversation does not run smoothly and the atmosphere is not relaxed, you should better say farewell in a polite and humanly warm way and leave.
- The main character in the conversation is the older person. Listen to him/her well and observe carefully. The secret of a pleasant relationship with an old person is good listening and storytelling, addressing the interlocutor with his/her name and following the principles of "good silence" (*read the principles for a pleasant personal conversation from time to time*).
- Approach the old person unobtrusively, warmly and openly with a pleasant and relaxed chat as an introduction. If the conversation is on the phone, it makes sense to call twice, in the first conversation is mostly a chat. It might be helpful to extract a meaningful conversation topic for the next time, for example next week, when there will be less chatting and more focusing on the topic of conversation.
- Start the conversation on certain topic when the atmosphere is suitable, usually after a short introductory chat. The beginning of the talk is not good for the meaningful conversation, much less the end, when is the time to say goodbye. We can start a conversation on the chosen topic at the appropriate time in one of the following two ways (methods):
 1. We can take the initiative and start telling our story to the older person in an appropriate and vivid way, e.g. *"When I thought about our meeting, I wished I could tell you about..."* or *"I will be happy to tell you my experience, and then I ask you to tell me about yours too."* When the story is told, you ask the older person to share his/her experiences on the same subject.
 2. With appropriate explanation we **ask** the old person to tell us about his/her experiences, insights (story) about this. We listen carefully. In the end we respond gratefully to this narration. Then we start telling our experience on this **topic**.
- No matter which method is used, it is important to switch roles - that both have a chance for speaking and both for listening. Therefore, we should pay special attention to mastering the skill of changing the role of narrator and listener.
The conversation, of course, should not be carried out mechanically but always fluently, in a dialogue. Nevertheless, it should be clear at any time who is the narrator and who is the listener.
- Pay attention not only to what, but also how the narrator talks: his/her gestures, facial expressions, eyes, mood... Try to understand as much as possible how the person currently feels and experiences, what are his/her needs and how they could be met.
- Make sure you say goodbye at the right time and in the best possible way; before leaving, gratefully mention one of the positive aspects **of this visit**.
- After returning from the visit, write down your impressions and findings from the conversation. You will find further instructions (a reminder) about this in a separate document.

ANNEX 4: TEMPLATE – DESCRIBE YOUR EXPERIENCE AFTER THE CONVERSATION WITH AN OLDER PERSON

Name of the interlocutor (can also be a fictional name): _____

Age: _____ years

Notes about the situation and/or context in which the conversation took place

How was the conversation done? (by telephone, videoconference, in person – where?)

Date – anything special about this day (maybe a holiday or...) –, time, duration and weather:

Unforeseen events during the conversation and other information related to the context of the conversation:

Notes on conversation

How did I experience the conversation? Which were my feelings at the beginning and which at the end of the conversation?

What did I do well in the conversation?

What was the mood of the interlocutor at the beginning of the conversation and what was it like at the end?

At the farewell, how did the interlocutor show - in words or behaviour – his/her experience of our meeting?

What do you think meant the most to the interlocutor in the conversation?

What positive experiences and interests does this person have that are interesting to me as well?

Which principles of pleasant conversation did I use? What about my interlocutor? What effect did this have on the conversation?

Which principle of good conversation I wish to use and test further at the next meeting/conversation?

Positive thoughts or considerations that came to mind during this conversation (write down a sentence or an interesting thought, the best literally):

My open question after this conversation:

ANNEX 5: TEMPLATE – CONVERSATIONAL EXPERIENCES WITH OLDER PEOPLE

Name of the group (country): _____

1. How many conversations with older people have you conducted (the whole group)?
2. Which principles of good conversation have been used? Please list them below and write in what ways each of these principles have increased the quality of conversation.

-
-
-
-
-



3. Please list interesting conversation topics that you have used for your personal conversation with older people.

-
-
-
-
-

4. How would you summarise as a group the whole experience of personal conversations with older people? Share some thoughts that are staying with you after this experience.

ANNEX 6: TEMPLATE – DESIGNING AN ACTIVITY WITH OLDER PEOPLE BASED ON KEY ELEMENTS

Name of the group (country): _____

1. Describe an idea how you will refine an activity that is already in progress OR describe a new activity that you will start.

2. Plan your activity (concretization)

- WHO – write who will be engaged in the activity

- WHERE – write where will the activity take place

- WHEN – Write the time frame of your activity

- HOW – write how will you implement this activity (who will do what, what resources will you need, what kind of preparations are needed before the implementation etc.)

ANNEX 7: GUIDELINES AND PRESENTATION OF THE SURVEY'S CONTENTS

With the survey we want to know more about the learning preferences after retirement. It is based on three main ways of learning: formal, non-formal and informal. Here are some explanations about each way of learning, as it is important to know the differences:

- **Formal learning** is always organised and structured, intentional, has learning objectives and is delivered in a formal setting. Typical examples are learning within
 - a) the formal education system (primary, secondary school, university etc.) and
 - b.) training system or workplace training arranged by the employer.
 This is the education with certain standards and delivered to learners by trained teachers. Formal learning usually ends with an official recognition paper (certificate, diploma etc.) Compulsory (mandatory, obligatory) education refers to a period of education that is required for all people and is imposed by the government. During compulsory education, parents are obliged to send their children to school or home school them. In most European education systems, compulsory education starts with primary education, usually at the age of 6 and lasts 9-10 years ending at the age of 15-16.
- **Non-formal learning** Usually, it is organized, structured and has learning objectives. It is an intentionally chosen learning that takes place outside the formal education and training



system, typically in local settings: swimming classes, reading groups, debating societies, amateur choirs and folklore groups, ICT courses etc.

- **Informal learning** is not organised and is never intentional from the learner's standpoint. Some call it experiential learning. Each person has many learning situations in everyday life, at work or during leisure time. Learning happens outside the classroom, in museums and libraries, at home, we can learn from books, films etc. Informal education is completely optional.

Here are some practical tips about **the method for conducting the survey**:

- Survey can be conducted in person with printed copies which you distribute to the respondents
- You can ask the questions and fill the questionnaire by yourself; this way you can do it in person or over a phone call
- Respondent directly answers the survey questions into google form
- Other

ANNEX 8: SURVEY

Dear participant,

Thank you for taking time for this survey. Your answers will be important for us to understand the learning preferences of older people.

Age: _____

Gender: _____

1. Please select the level of completed formal education:

- Primary school
- Technical school
- High school
- Bachelor degree/diploma
- Master's degree
- Other _____

2. From which type of education have you benefited the most in your professional life? Please choose the one answer that is the true for you for each sub question.

a) Formal learning: primary, secondary school, college etc.

Not at all to certain level Very much

b) Non formal learning: workshops, seminars and trainings

Not at all to certain level Very much

c) Informal learning: what I have learned from other people, from media, books etc.

Not at all to certain level Very much

3. From which type of education have you benefited the most in your personal life? Please choose the answer that is true for you for each sub question.

a) The formal learning: primary, secondary school, college etc.

Not at all to certain level Very much

b) Non formal learning: workshops, seminars and trainings

Not at all to certain level Very much

c) Informal learning: what I learned from other people, from media, books etc.

Not at all to certain level Very much

4. In what forms of learning have you participated after your retirement? Please choose the most accurate answer for you for every sub question:

a) I participate in long-term training courses to get deeper understanding about a particular subject/theme.

Frequently Occasionally Never

b) I attend events, seminars or short-term trainings on a particular subject.

Frequently Occasionally Never

c) I am a member of a group with shared interests and regular practices (for example – pensioners' associations, choirs, hiking group, local firemen group, arts&crafts and other groups)

Frequently Occasionally Never

d) I am in contact with other people and learn from them.

Frequently Occasionally Never

e) I follow news on TV or radio or read a newspaper/book.

Frequently Occasionally Never

5. What are you currently learning? Please select all the answers that are true to you.

- a) Life skills (gardening, cooking...)
- b) Fine arts (painting, craft work...)
- c) Recreation and sports (physical activities - yoga, walking...)
- d) Music (Choir, orchestra, folk or other dances...=
- e) ICT skills (use of smart phone, online banking...)
- f) Foreign languages
- g) Discussion and self-help groups: to exchange opinions and experiences on certain topics (mutual learning)
- h) Other: _____

6. What would you be interested to learn in the future? Choose all the options that you would like to learn.

- a) Life skills (gardening, cooking...)
- b) Fine arts (painting, craft work...)
- c) Recreation and sports (physical activities - yoga, walking...)
- d) Music (Choir, orchestra, folk or other dances...=
- e) ICT skills (use of smart phone, online banking...)
- f) Foreign languages
- g) Discussion and self-help groups: to exchange opinions and experiences on certain topics (mutual learning)
- h) Other: _____

7. If you have chosen "Other" in the question 5. or. 6. Please let us know what else are you learning or would you want to learn.

8. Where have you received information or advice on learning possibilities? Choose all the answers that are true to you.

- a) Internet search
- b) By email
- c) On social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)
- d) By phone call

- e) In printed media (newspaper, local bulletin...)
- f) Posters
- g) Leaflets
- h) In person from family members, friends, neighbours, ...
- i) Others: _____

9. What is important when you are choosing a learning opportunity? Please choose important/not important for each sub question.

- | | | |
|--|-----------|---------------|
| a) The learning opportunity is free of cost. | Important | Not important |
| b) The learning opportunity is in person. | Important | Not important |
| c) The learning opportunity is held virtually. | Important | Not important |

10. When is the best time for you to join the learning opportunity? Please choose all the possible answers.

- a) During the weekend
- b) During the working days
- c) In the morning
- d) In the afternoon
- e) Anytime
- f) Others: _____

11. What obstacles could prevent you from joining the learning opportunity/learning group? Please choose all the answers that are true to you.

- a) I do not have a transport to join the training/seminar/group
- b) I do not have required ICT skills
- c) I do not have sufficient financial resources
- d) I do not have time
- e) Other: _____

11. Do you think it is important to keep learning after the retirement? Choose the answers that are true to you.

a) Yes, there is always something new and interesting to learn.

Strongly disagree Dis-agree Indifferent Agree Strongly agree

b) Yes, the world is changing and it is necessary to have new skills.

Strongly disagree Dis-agree Indifferent Agree Strongly agree



c) Yes, it is very important for our health and wellbeing.

Strongly disagree Dis-agree Indifferent Agree Strongly agree

d) No. I already know what I need to know.

Strongly disagree Dis-agree Indifferent Agree Strongly agree