

Grey4Green

Active ageing and climate action through the involvement of senior citizens in nature conservation



UNRAVELLING THE POTENTIAL OF ACTIVE AGEING FOR NATURE CONSERVATION

Policy paper



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Photo credits:

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Layout and Cover:

Center for the Advancement of Research Development
Under the scope of Erasmus+ Project

Grey4Green:

Senior Volunteers for Nature Conservation
Project Number: 2021-1-DK01-KA220-ADU-000026601
September, 2024



Co-funded by
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

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PROJECT PARTNERS

DENMARK

Frit Oplysningsforbund-Aarhus (FO-Aarhus) - Coordinator

FO-Aarhus (Association for Adult Education) is a non-government, non-profit organization established in 1973 to provide non-formal adult learning and counselling to the citizens of Aarhus. It has its own elected Board of Governors composed of representatives from the private sector, public administration, and the formal and vocational education sector. FO-Aarhus' basic expertise lies in non-formal adult education for the general public and specialization in programmes that help disadvantaged groups – e.g. immigrants, unemployed people, people with learning disabilities, dyslectics, people with mental issues – to enhance their quality of life and to integrate (or re-integrate) into society and the workforce. The aim is to strengthen the participants' personal, social, and vocational competencies as a stepping-stone to re-education, re-inclusion into the job market or further education.



CYPRUS

Center for the Advancement of Research & Development in Educational Technology (CARDET)

CARDET is one of the leading adult education research and development centers in the Mediterranean region with global expertise in adult education, social inclusion, project design and implementation, capacity building, and e-learning. CARDET is independently affiliated with universities and institutions from around the world, such as the Yale University, the University of Nicosia and the International Council of Educational Media. CARDET has completed numerous projects relating to adult education, eLearning, literacies, blender learning, university – community collaboration, MOOCs, digital tools, volunteering, and VET. CARDET brings together an international team of experts with decades of global expertise in designing, implementing, and evaluating international projects.



FRANCE

European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA)

ALDA is a non-profit association founded by the initiative of the Congress of the Council of Europe in 1999 whose main goal is to promote good governance and citizen participation at the local level. ALDA is a membership-based organization gathering more than 350 members (including local democracy agencies, local authorities, an association of local authorities, civil society organizations, universities, NGOs, grassroots associations, and public bodies), based in 45 countries over most of Europe and the European Neighbourhood countries, amongst these the Balkans, Belarus, Moldova, the Caucasus area, Turkey, and a few countries from the North African region. Its offices are based in Strasbourg (FR), Brussels (BE), Vicenza (IT), Subotica (RS), Skopje (MK), Chisinau (MD) and Tunis (TN). ALDA has 40 staff and various interns and volunteers who support the activities of the different offices. Today, ALDA is a key stakeholder in the field of local democracy, active citizenship, good governance, EU integration, human rights, and cooperation between local authorities and civil society. Most of its work is based on multilateral decentralized cooperation.



ICELAND

Environment Agency of Iceland

Under the direction of the Ministry for the Environment, EAI's role is to promote the protection and the sustainable use of Iceland's natural resources, as well as public welfare by helping to ensure a healthy environment. EAI is a leading agent in environmental issues and nature conservation in the community. Its role is to closely monitor the development of environmental issues and safeguard the welfare of the public. One of the main roles of EAI is to manage and protect the Snæfellsjökull National Park and other 115 protected areas in Iceland. According to the nature conservation act a Nature Reserve is an area protected for its importance for wildlife (flora and fauna) and landscape. The primary work method of EAI is group work and works well for formulating the future policy of the EAI in each instance. It has about 90 full time employees.



PORTUGAL

The Municipality of Lousada (Município de Lousada)

The Municipality of Lousada (ML) is a local public administration that manages an area of 95 km² with about 50.000 inhabitants. This highly populated area, in a peri-urban region, faces many challenges regarding its sustainable development, life quality, and population literacy and citizenship. Thus, the ML's mission is to define guiding strategies and execute the resulting local policies through measures and programmes in various areas of our competence, promoting the quality of life of all citizens and ensuring high standards of quality services. Our work is directed at achieving sustainable development with benefits and opportunities to all our citizens, in terms of environment, social and economic fields.



PORTUGAL

Associação BioLiving

The objectives of this NGO are, among others, to promote sustainability through the engagement in environmental citizenship and public participation for the protection of nature, while boosting the social economy and fostering inclusion, peace, and solidarity, using education, natural resources, and the protection of nature as leitmotiv. BioLiving's operating model focuses on the proximity to communities, municipalities, schools, companies, and other NGOs. It believes that working in partnership with the stakeholders and populations facilitates the dialogue and the search for solutions for environmental education and nature conservation and their involvement and interest in environmental issues is more effectively promoted.



1. Executive Summary



This policy paper collects the main takeaways which emerged throughout the project. It is based on both the oral and written feedback received by the participants (elderly), the third age personnel, the project partners and all the relevant stakeholders which were involved during the activities (such as volunteering and nature conservation organizations).

It aims at providing an overview of the project results, useful for policymakers to integrate in their policymaking activity. More specifically, the policy paper explains the main challenges encountered and the opportunities identified by the participants and stakeholders directly and indirectly involved in the project. Based on these, GREY4GREEN Team elaborated several policy recommendations, both

at local and national level, which could be valid and applicable to all the EU member states, with the adequate adjustments.

In fact, although the project took place in diverse geographical and cultural settings (e.g., Cyprus, Denmark, France, Iceland and Portugal), the reactions and advice received were often similar and shared among the locations. This policy papers hopes to inform and counsel policymakers and related relevant stakeholders on how to best promote the adoption of active aging activities in nature in their communities.

Key words: Active ageing; Environment and climate change; Volunteering; Inclusion, promoting equality and non-discrimination; EU Green Deal; EU values

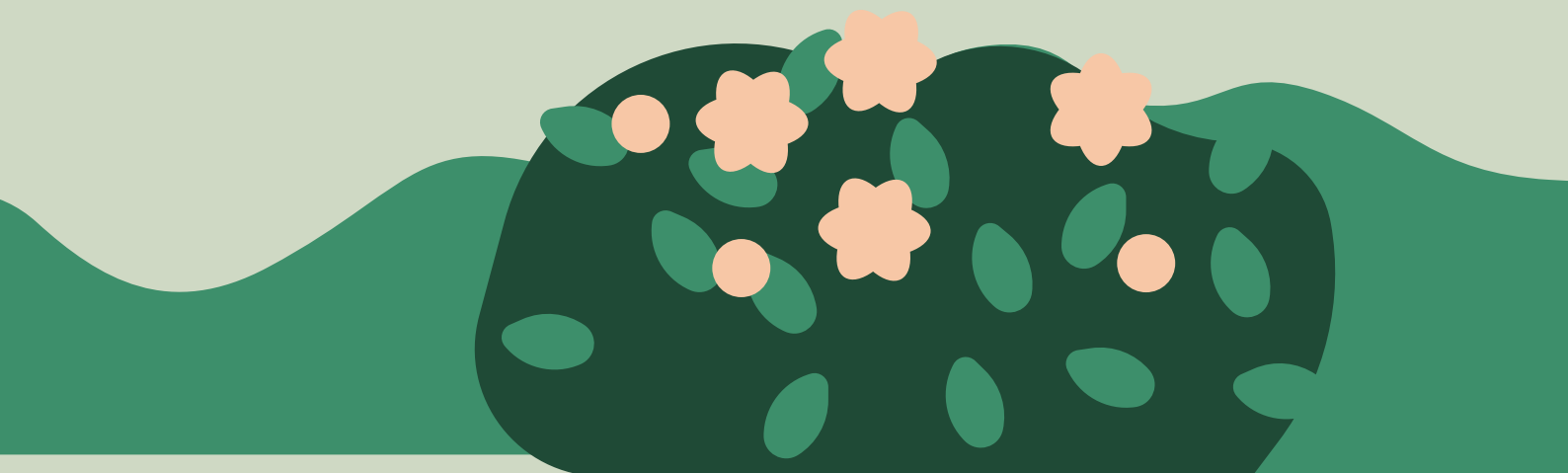


Interpretative walk to observe local biodiversity in Mata de Vilar (Lousada, Portugal)



2.

Overview of the GREY4GREEN (G4G) project



2.1. Rationale

At a global level, birth rates are declining, and longevity is increasing. The share of 60+ people increased from only 8% (200 million people) in 1950 to around 11% (760 million) in 2011 and it is expected to reach 22% (2 billion) by 2050. From an economic perspective, the fiscal costs linked to pensions, health care and long-term care rise as population continues to age significantly. Overall, in the EU, the total cost of ageing (public spending) is expected to increase by 1.7% to 26.7% of GDP between 2016 and 2070. The forecast is that by 2050 those age >60 will be over 30% of the entire population of the developed countries – a share threatening all social systems with degradation, according to demographic experts. In the countries of this consortium, population >60 is considerable compared to others in Europe: Cyprus 18.5% of population over age 60 in 2017 vs 32.7% in 2050; Portugal 27.9% vs 41.7%; Iceland 20.1% vs 30.6%.

At the same time, all countries face environmental challenges, which, at a local level, are tackled more by local governance and civic movements, than by national policies. Some northern countries like Scotland or England have developed a culture of having older people helping nature, for instance through a long tradition in bird or insect watching. But the elderly from southern countries such as Portugal or Cyprus are not used to such collaborations. Preparation work of the partners and resulting direct contact with the agents working directly with the elderly in several countries (Denmark, Portugal, Iceland)

revealed that the third age sector and the elderly would like to contribute to nature conservation. The main reason of this are the numerous positive inputs that the contact with nature brings to the seniors' mental and physical health, and because it enhances autonomy. However, both elderly and third age personnel said to lack competences to address nature-related actions and to organize safe outdoor activities.

This framework, in addition to the environmental global crisis and the EU Green Deal prerogatives, led the partners to plan a project aiming at fomenting active ageing policies that would bring added value to both the socio-economic systems and the environment, to both the elderly and communities.

2.2. Objectives

G4G PROJECT SEEKS TO:

- **Promote active ageing** through senior volunteering environmental programs,
- **Enable partners and 3rd age personnel** to lead senior volunteering environmental programs,
- **Empower the elderly** and all their potential as productive citizens and agents of change,
- **Generate key competences and environmental awareness** in seniors and 3rd age personnel,
- **Produce high quality outputs** to encourage the implementation of senior volunteering programs across the EU,
- **Advocate** for social inclusion, active ageing and green policies.



Intergenerational birdwatching activity in Lousada, Portugal

2.3. Target audience

GREY4GREEN TARGETED THREE MAIN DIRECT GROUPS OF PARTICIPANTS:

1. Elderly people, meaning citizens over 60 years of age from the partners' communities, and/or attending a local day-care, club or nursery home;
2. Third age personnel, i.e. professionals working with elderly people, such as adult educators, animators, social officers, nurses, managers, psychologists, etc.;
3. External stakeholders that will be involved in the project, namely institutions related to nature conservation and/or from the 3rd age sector, and policymakers.

2.4. Methodology

GREY4GREEN created training courses and intercultural exchanges for both seniors and the personnel who work in the third age sector. All the materials resulting from such activities are available online on the project website for the sustainability and replicability of the project.

The 3rd age personnel received high-quality training on nature conservation, active ageing needs and opportunities, social inclusion and social entrepreneurship, management of human and other resources, logistics, communications, and other relevant topics. These staff members developed bespoke competences to implement quality active ageing programs, becoming empowered and able to further promote social inclusion, environmental and social action, contributing to social integration of the elderly while simultaneously developing their own skills and competences as adult educators (here intended as education in a broad and integrative sense).

The seniors had the opportunity to engage in cultural exchanges and live full and happy experiences with their peers from their home country and from a completely different cultural and environmental landscape. This experience, in addition to their feeling of being active and valid, boosted their sense of European citizenship, contributing to their full inclusion in modern society. Furthermore, GREY4GREEN trained and empowered senior citizens to take action and **be part of the EU Green Deal**. Their volunteering and work power contributed to improve local sustainability tasks, such as taking care of green areas, reduce littering, vigilance, etc.

THE PROJECT DEVELOPED 9 INTELLECTUAL OUTPUTS:

IO1 – Best practice report

A report collecting best practices which includes results from new surveys and debates organized with the elderly, active ageing staff, and stakeholders, namely through each partner's network.

IO2 – Online platform and observatory

The project's website includes a document repository, contacts and funding information, the project's goals, results and outputs, an e-learning/virtual exchange environment for our target groups, and an online observatory of environmental projects involving elderly people as a showcase for successful cases of green/active ageing programs in each partner country.

IO3 – Handbook for senior volunteers in nature

A handbook for senior citizens that want to volunteer in nature conservation programs, addressing relevant topics and providing education.

IO4 – Senior volunteers for nature - Implementation handbook

A handbook for staff members, who want to orderly implement programs of senior volunteering for nature conservation. This handbook will provide a step-by-step guide, addressing relevant topics.

IO5 – GREY4GREEN Training Course: Active Ageing and Nature Conservation

A modular training course on active ageing in nature conservation programs to support the acquisition of key high-value competences by entities working with the elderly.

IO6 – Senior environmental volunteering programs Executive Package

A ready-to-use package of documentations for any entity willing to implement a senior volunteer program in nature conservation.

IO7 – Audiovisual instructive package

8 videos working as advocating materials for the inclusion of the elderly.

IO8 – Policy paper: Unravelling the potential of active ageing for nature conservation

Targeted at decision and policymakers, this policy paper aims to inform and inspire improvements in policy and local governance.

IO9 – Layman report

A report presenting the project's objectives, achievements and conclusions in a condensed and accessible way for broad dissemination including non-specialist audiences.

3 Senior Mobility Exchanges

Mobility exchanges for senior citizens to learn about nature conservation, environmental protection, civic participation, citizenship, active ageing, and volunteering in a multinational context; also developing their social, language, civic and intercultural competences, empowering and boosting personal development.

5 Active Ageing and Nature Conservation Seminars + 1 International Final Conference

Open seminars in the five partners' countries around the topics of the elderly contribution to nature conservation and the need for active ageing, where the project and its full suite of resources, benefits, results, and opportunities are presented and discussed. The final international conference will also present the results and draw conclusions on the project.

2.5. Impacts

GREY4GREEN is expected to cause a significant impact at various levels and on all considered target audiences.

ELDERLY PEOPLE direct or indirectly participating in the project to have an enriching and last-longing experience. The project allowed them to develop a series of competences and personal skills: knowledge on natural values, the individual role and importance of each person in contributing to a better environment, improve language, intercultural and interpersonal competences, gain confidence and happiness. Thanks to the exchanges, they met foreign peers, debated volunteerism and motivations, which allowed for upgrading their sense of belonging, fighting prejudice and fomenting acceptance of the difference, thus promoting shared EU values.

STAFF FROM 3RD AGE SECTOR were trained for specific needs through innovative and tailored techniques to gain key competences to foster socio-educational and personal development of the elderly. A lifelong learning process was adopted, enabling them to independently deliver the training to their peers in the future, further increasing the number of people addressing the active ageing topic. Since the training was intercultural and multinational, also

this group of professionals experienced and shared the EU values, celebrating diversity and promoting tolerance.

ASSOCIATED STAKEHOLDERS AND DECISION-MAKERS gained a privileged access to a set of high-quality resources, evidence-based research and policy recommendations of great use to their daily responsibilities. For instance, municipalities and NGOs now have a step-by-step guide and executive kit to readily implement a volunteering program, with risk analysis already undertaken. Governance entities can use and adapt policy recommendations and gather support and evidence for lobbying in the addressed topics. The actual implementation of volunteer programs or the adoption of more elderly- and eco-friendly policies will have tremendous impacts both in social and environmental aspects.

COMMUNITIES living near the partners and the wide internet audience of the project are also expected to largely benefit from the project findings and outcomes. Firstly, they can become more aware and conscious of social and environmental issues, and of possible solutions. The project aims at increasing the public's sense of responsibility towards nature and society, in other words, their European citizenship values. All resources are freely available for consultation, up-take and replication, with the expected - already explained - benefits to all. It is expected that the project will have a real, effective impact throughout Europe, meeting the European's 2030 and the EU Green Deal's goals of embedding social inclusion and the improvement of basic environmental knowledge in a strategy for enhancing social cohesion.

GREY4GREEN is a cross-sectoral project, tackling pressing social and environmental issues, which are at the heart of the EU Green Deal and priority goals of the Erasmus+ program. GREY4GREEN project has great potential to achieve significant impact at several levels (national, regional, local) in each European country and thus generally at the EU level. In this sense, the project contributes to 1) social inclusion of the elderly, 2) the dissemination of European values of active citizenship, 3) providing high quality learning resources, 4) the acquisition of much-needed skills amongst the elderly and their supporting staff, 5) implementation of green volunteering programs, and 6) the development of language and digital skills among a considerable number of people.



3. Lessons Learned



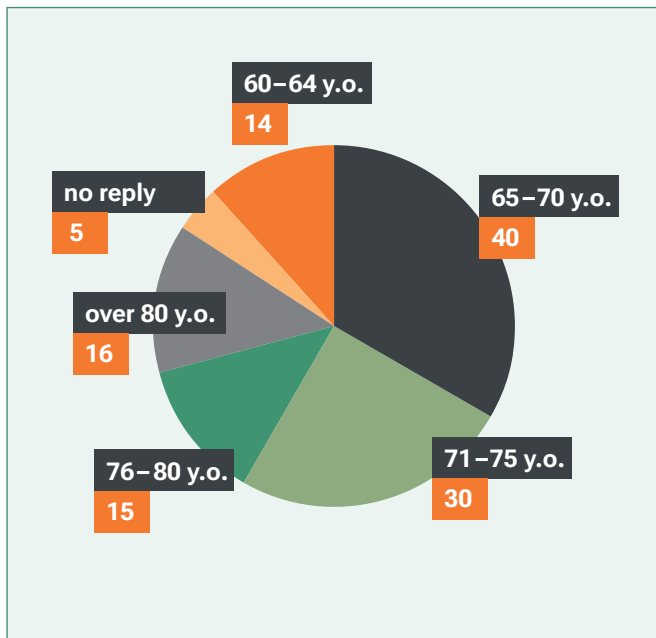
3.1. The elderly’s voice

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE RESPONDENTS OF THE SURVEY

The following information is the result of a survey conducted among seniors of Denmark (24 replies), Iceland (18) and Portugal (78), for a total of **120 respondents**. Most of them (40 respondents) were in the age range 65-70, followed by 71-75 (30), over 80 (16), 76-80 (15) and 60-64 (14). 5 people did not reply on their age. We collected responses from 93 women (of which 70 retired and 23 not) and 27 men (19 retired, 8 not). Most of the seniors interviewed reside in the countryside (76 of them), while 28 in a city of 100.000-500.000 inhabitants, 7 people in smaller cities 10.000-100.000, 3 in villages of 5.000-10.000 residents, other 3 in small municipalities of 800-1.000 people and last 3 in big cities of over 500.000 residents. 54 are active volunteers, 24 volunteered at least once, 42 never volunteered before. The questions focused on their opinion and knowledge regarding the environment, volunteering and the political situation in their respective countries. The number of responses is always shown, when it does not reach the 120 total, it means that the missing responses were not counted and reported.



Intergenerational volunteering plantation of native species (Lousada, Portugal)



↑ Figure 1. Number of respondents per age range

Gender	Retired	Not retired	Total
Women	70	23	93
Men	19	8	27

↑ Table 1. Respondents’ composition per gender

Place of residence	Number of respondents
Countryside	76
Small municipalities (800-1.000)	3
Villages (5.000-10.000)	3
Small cities (10.000-100.000)	7
Big cities (100.000-500.000)	28
Cities of over 500.000 residents	3

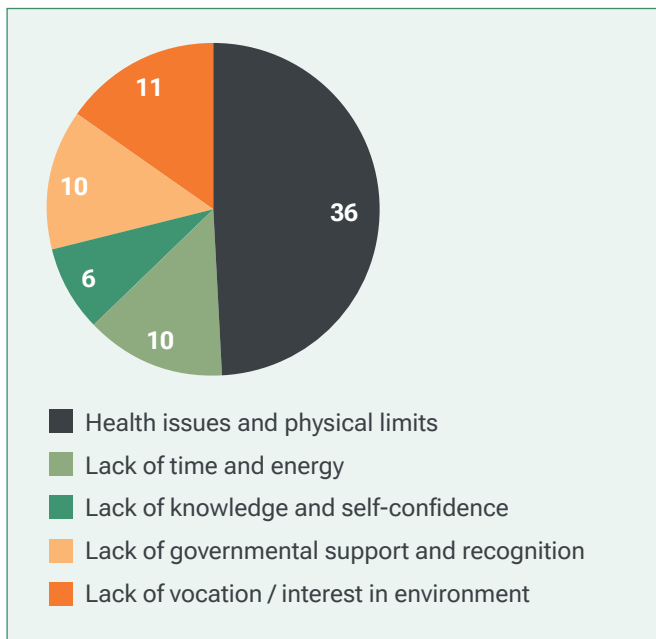
↑ Table 2. Respondents’ place of residence

3.1.1. On environment

In all the 3 case study countries, most of the seniors declared to attribute a big importance and to care about environmental topics: 56 of them rated the maximum level of importance (5/5 stars), 35 voted 4/5, 17 voted 3/5 and only 12 of them replied 2/5 or 1/5.

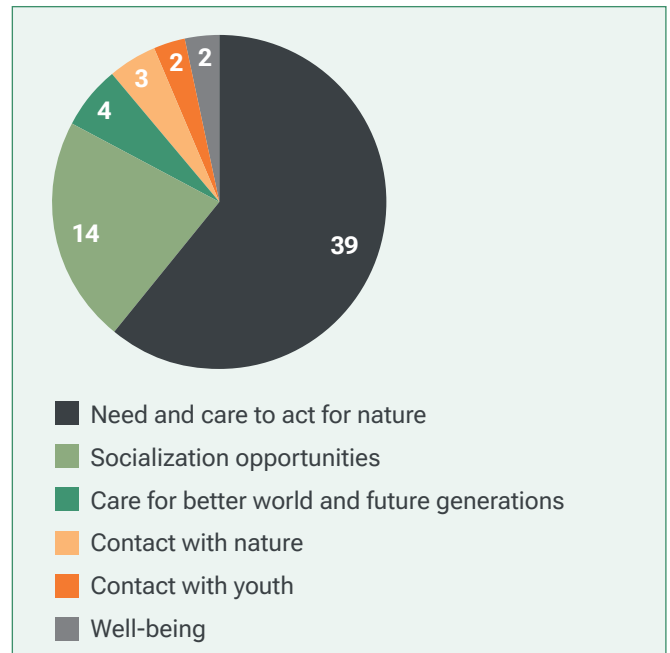
- ★★★★★ → 56 votes
- ★★★★ → 35 votes
- ★★★ → 17 votes
- ★★ or ★ → 12 votes

83 of them declared that they would like to volunteer for the environment specifically, and 37 of them wouldn't. The reasons behind those who declared not to be willing to volunteer are mainly linked to **health issues and physical limits** (36), together with **lack of time and energy** (10). Interestingly, 6 replied the **lack of knowledge** on the flora and fauna and the lack of self-confidence on how to perform nature conservation activities, which is exactly what G4G aims at contributing to. Moreover, many (10) highlighted the need of more **governmental support** in public transportation and funding and in recognition of the value of the activity. While 11 mentioned the absence of a vocation or interest in environment, it is encouraging that 18 replied that **nothing would stop them** from volunteering for nature conservation.



↑ **Figure 2.** Reasons why respondents are/would not be willing to volunteer for nature protection

On the opposite, among the main incentives to volunteering the respondents highlighted **socialization opportunities** (14) and the persuasion that peers can exercise. The need and **care** to act for nature conservation remained dominant with 39 mentions, together with the care for a better world and future generations (4) and the possibility to be in contact with nature (3) and youth (2).



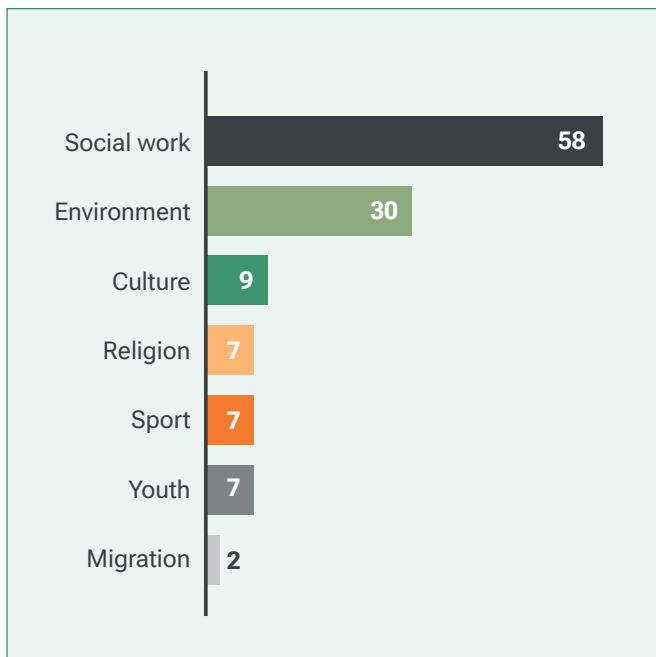
↑ **Figure 3.** Reasons why respondents are/would be willing to volunteer for nature protection

Some of them (2) were already aware of the positive impacts of such activities on their wellbeing, but 4 mentioned the need of well-organized, interesting opportunities. 9 people highlighted the need of the government to promote such opportunities by **informing the population with detailed information on the activities themselves and the benefits** which these bring to the volunteers, the surrounding community and environment. Other 9 also stressed the need of the government to be supportive by **recognizing the value of these activities and the people** performing them, providing funding and logistical support (for ex. public transportation).

3.1.2. On volunteering

IF YOU MAY CHOOSE A FIELD FOR VOLUNTEERING, WHICH WOULD IT BE?

Participants declared their preferred field of volunteering to be social work (58 responses). However, the second most cited field is environmental protection (30), demonstrating the validity and relevance of G4G project. Minor preferred fields of volunteering are culture, religion, sport, youth and migration (9, 7, 7, 7, 2 respectively).



↑ Figure 4. Elderly's preferred field of volunteering

IN WHICH OPPORTUNITIES THAT VOLUNTEERING BRINGS YOU, WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN?

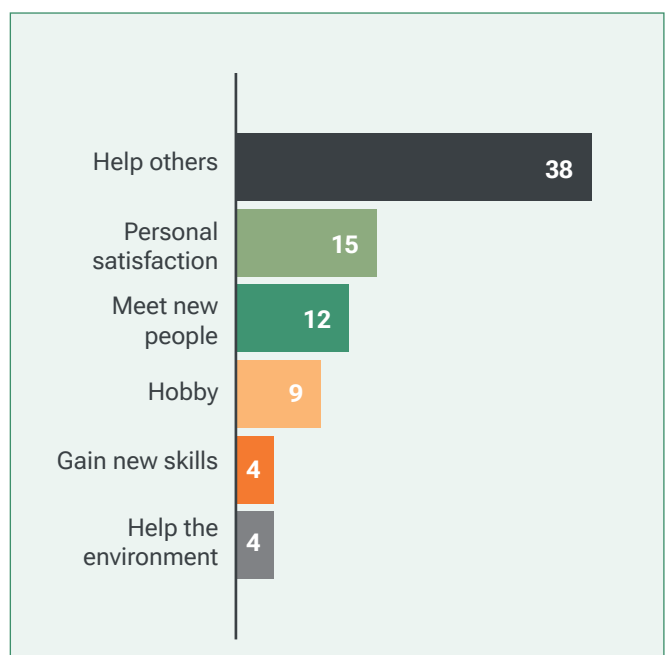
Elderly are clearly interested in the contact with children and young people (58 votes), as well as travelling and/or meeting people of different nationalities (22). A striking number of them (37) emphasizes their appreciation for local trainings and work camps (2), once again confirming their need and will to be trained on the topic of the volunteering activities.



↑ Figure 5. Elderly's preferred opportunities brought by volunteering

WHAT WAS THE MAIN REASON FOR YOU TO VOLUNTEER?

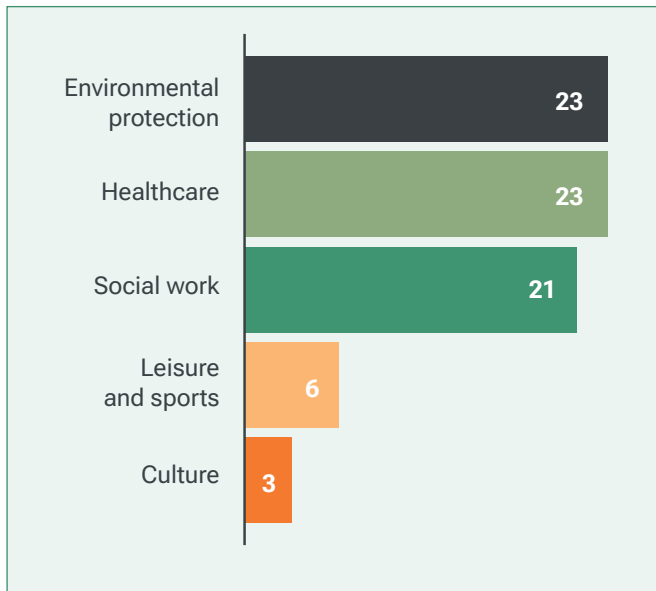
The main reasons why elderly volunteer is to help others (38 votes). A second reason they expressed is for personal satisfaction (15) or to meet new people (12), demonstrating socialization is also very relevant, beside the willingness to be helpful for the community. For few of them (9) it is a hobby to enjoy in the free time. A smaller number of them (4 and 4) said to do it to gain new skills or help the environment.



↑ Figure 6. Elderly's main reason to volunteer

IN WHICH FIELD HAVE YOU VOLUNTEERED?

Compared to the expressed preferred field of volunteering, when it comes to the volunteering activities that elderly concretely implement, they turned out to be as active in environmental protection as in social work and healthcare. In fact, the number of people who are active in environmental protection (wildlife conservation, farm work, animal rescue, climate change etc.) (23) is the same of those active in healthcare (elderly care, counseling, etc.), and slightly higher than that of social work (teaching, interaction with children and youth, community development, etc.) (21). Leisure, sports and culture registered lower numbers (6 and 3).

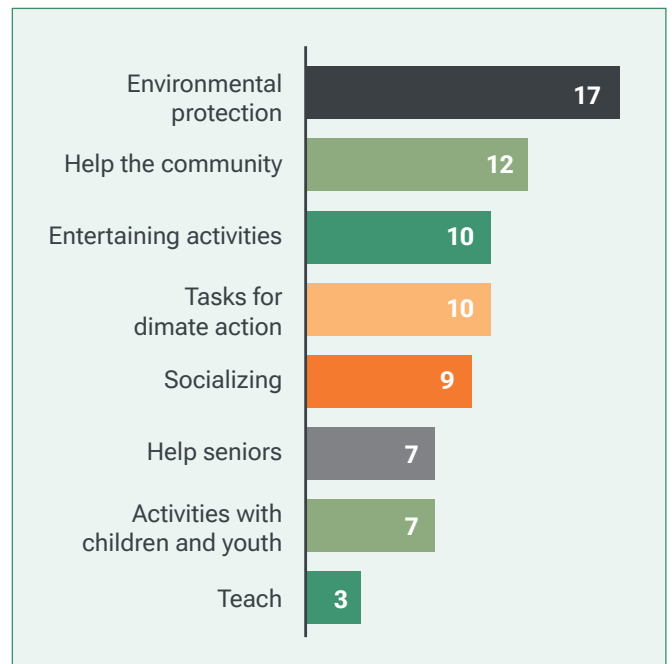


↑ Figure 7. Elderly's main field of volunteering

WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE ACTIVITY AS A VOLUNTEER?

Environmental activities (tree-planting, projects related to nature conservation and heritage, environmental protection, gardening, park visits etc.) received the highest level of appreciation (17 responses). Demonstrating that, although they may not be elderly's first choice *when asked* what they would prefer to do as volunteers (see the first question of this section), *when involved* in environmental activities, elderly strongly like them. In fact, such activities eventually even outdo social work (engaging with vulnerable groups, social entrepreneurs...) (12 responses), which is what elderly *declared* to prefer to do, theoretically. Similar to helping the community, elderly also enjoy entertaining activities (leisure, theatre, sport, handwork...) (10) and being active in the organization and performance of practical task related to climate action, also aimed at inspiring other people to participate (10). This data is very prom-

ising and indicative of the relevance and impact of G4G project: It indicates that elderly want to be more involved in climate action and environmental protection at present and in their nearest community. Moreover, socializing (9), helping other seniors specifically (7), engaging in activities with children and youth (7), are also mentioned as favorite activities. This demonstrates that socialization and the contact with other people (of the same or different age) is a relevant aspect for the elderly, something they are looking for if/when volunteering. Few people (3) also mentioned their will to teach, transmitting relevant experience-based knowledge to younger generations on the past status of nature and the environment.



↑ Figure 8. Elderly's favorite volunteering activities



Intergenerational activity regarding sustainable cities using LEGO bricks in a school in Lousada, Portugal

DID YOU FIND ANY BARRIER TO START YOUR VOLUNTEERING? IF SO, WHICH ONES?

74 respondents declared that they do not see any barriers to volunteering, while 2 declared that the individual health condition may be one.

FROM 1 TO 5, HOW MUCH HAS YOUR VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE CONTRIBUTED TO YOUR PERSONAL LIFE AND OVERALL WELL-BEING?

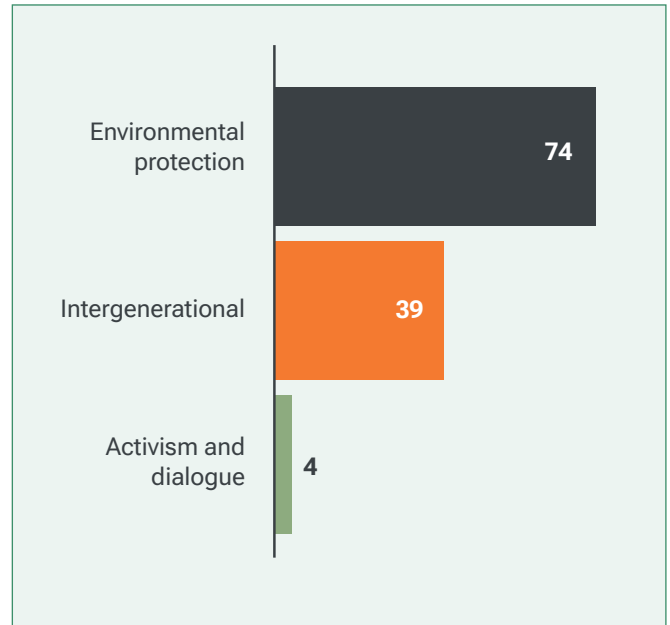
Most respondents (48 people) identified the contribution that volunteering gives to their personal lives as very high (5/5) and only 4 people declared it to be low. Other 16 and 11 people ranked it 4/5 and 3/5 respectively.

- ★★★★★ → 48 votes
- ★★★★ → 16 votes
- ★★★ → 11 votes
- ★★ or ★ → 4 votes

WHICH OF THESE ACTIVITIES WOULD YOU LIKE TO IMPLEMENT?

When interviewed on which activities they would like to implement in volunteering, 74 people mentioned activities related to nature, like cleaning beaches/forests/national parks, restoring paths, planting trees, nature and heritage

conservation, monitoring rivers, regenerative agriculture etc. A high number of people (39) also likes to perform intergenerational activities. Activism and dialogue (writing posts, showing by example, teaching, being representative of an activity/cause/organization) was mentioned by less people (4) in this case.



↑ Figure 9. Activities that elderly would like to implement



Placement of a bird nest in senior’s backyard in Lousada, Portugal

3.1.3. On political / institutional support to volunteering

DOES YOUR COUNTRY FACILITATE BEING A VOLUNTEER AT YOUR AGE?

Even though the majority (62) of the elderly declared that their country of origin facilitates being a volunteer at their age, 33 people did not know and 25 declared no. This data demonstrates that there is an urgent need to inform the society (and seniors especially) better on the volunteering opportunities and services that the country offers to them. Moreover, the percentage of people who declared that their country does not facilitate being a volunteer highlight the numerous challenges and gaps that should be addressed by various European governments, which are going to be discussed in chapter “4. Recommendations” of this report.

- 62 YES
- 33 DO NOT KNOW
- 25 NO

IS THERE ANY POLITICAL/ECONOMIC/SOCIAL INCENTIVE IN YOUR COUNTRY TO VOLUNTEER AFTER RETIREMENT?

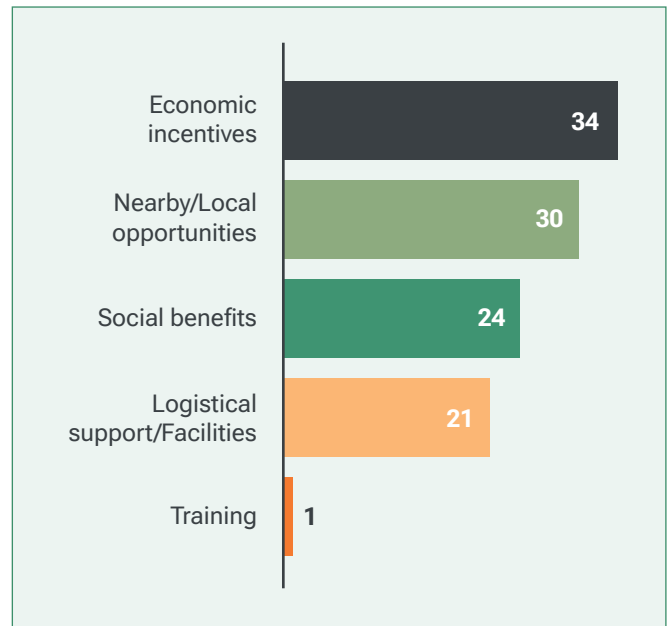
49 people declared not to be aware of any not aware of any political/economic/social incentive in their country to volunteer after retirement and almost the same number (48) said no. This remarks once again the need for better information and support from many European governments on volunteering and activities to include the elderly in it. 23 people replied that there are such incentives.

- 23 YES
- 49 DO NOT KNOW
- 48 NO

IF POSSIBLE, WHAT WOULD YOU NEED TO VOLUNTEER IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

Most respondents (34) agreed that economic incentives and the presence of nearby/local opportunities (30) are the most needed aspects they would like to receive from the government as a support to volunteering. Social benefits and logistical support/facilities (such as an organized

transport service, third-age care personnel etc.) offered to perform the activities are also very important (with 24 and 21 people mentioning it respectively). Only 1 person highlighted the need to be trained on the activity in this specific question, but – as mentioned in this report – many respondents agreed on the need to receive more preparation and knowledge on the volunteering activities they will engage in.



↑ Figure 10. What the elderly believe it's needed to volunteer in the community

HOW CAN LOCAL INSTITUTIONS SUPPORT YOU TO START OR CONTINUE VOLUNTEERING?

Raise awareness, make better dissemination and information. As emerged also in the other questions, most respondents (29) highlighted that local institutions should work more on raising awareness and making better dissemination and information on the volunteering projects/activities/opportunities available. Most importantly, seniors emphasized the relevance of advertising also the specificities and needs that the volunteer is going to tackle, the specific skills required by the volunteer and the benefits that this last one is going to obtain. Making preliminary trainings on the activities to be performed would be optimal.

Provide funding and incentives. Another big number of seniors (21) mentioned that funding and financial incentives (such as subsidies, financial pools etc.) would be key to encourage them to volunteer.

Value the potential of older people. Many seniors (16) say to still have energy and resources to be active. They

would like to be valued for such potential. Moreover, they ask to be included in the activity planning and design of the volunteering opportunities, so that to increase their number and make them more suitable opportunities for them.

Provide logistical and technical support. Many seniors (16) are prevented from volunteering because they feel a lack of logistical and technical support. Providing project managers, personal assistants, transportation, and appropriate spaces and facilities would be a crucial incentive to involve them in volunteering.

Work on partnerships and collaborations. Seven seniors think that better partnership and collaborations among the parties involved in the volunteering activities (e.g., public

institutions, social/civic institutions, professionals etc.) could improve the quality and quantity of such activities. For example, they suggested collaborations between public bodies and institutions working with children for intergenerational exchanges, or with private social solidarity institutions, and many others for various kind of activities.

Provide socialization and networking opportunities. Seniors proved to be willing to and satisfied with volunteering because of the opportunities for socialization and networking that it offers. Five of them suggested that providing physical meeting places would be the first relevant step to take to help the creation of a community of like-minded people).



A team of volunteers doing some trailwork in Ásbyrgi (Iceland)

3.2. The project partners' voice

WHICH ARE THE KEY ISSUES RELATED TO ACTIVE AGEING AND NATURE CONSERVATION RELEVANT AT NATIONAL LEVEL?

Age of retirement is increasing, reflecting demographic shifts and policy changes.

Lack of opportunities for older adults in employment, volunteering, and lifelong learning. When present, opportunities are few or restricted to cities and social institutions.

Lack of knowledge of the available opportunities and organizations.

Geographical constraints for people living in more isolated or in urban areas, who do not have easy access to programs combining active ageing and nature conservation or focused on one of the two.

Social constraints linked to ageism and limited public awareness about the capabilities of older adults.

WHAT IS THE POTENTIAL OF ACTIVE AGEING FOR NATURE CONSERVATION IN YOUR EXPERIENCE AS AN ORGANIZATION?

Historical and empirical knowledge that the elderly can share with younger generations (creating opportunities for **intergenerational exchange**), especially on changes in agricultural practices and methods (e.g. use of herbicides and pesticides, most appropriate season for crops etc.). They can also use it to help catalogue and monitor biodiversity (new and old species, triggering events which caused changes...).

Strong interest in nature, which leads to high motivation in its protection.

Openness and motivation to take part in intergenerational programs and outdoor activities, to get a deeper and meaningful knowledge on topics related to fighting climate change.

WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU NEED TO ENCOURAGE THE CREATION OF VOLUNTARY PROGRAMS FOR ELDERLY PEOPLE, OR IN THE CASE YOU ALREADY DO SO, TO STRENGTHEN THEIR SUSTAINABILITY?

Trust and safety need to be built by involving them in the creation of the programs and by starting to implement sporadic activities. These two actions ensure: that the activities will fit the elderly's interests and (cap)abilities; that the elderly will trust the people implementing it (their expertise, competency and human presence); that the participants will feel safe in the outside environment (against the belief that openair activity intrinsically holds dangers).

Strong partnerships and collaboration with local communities and organizations is beneficial to promote and organize the activities.

Sustainable funding needs to be secured to allow the activities to be performed and continue throughout time. **Effective awareness campaigns** are necessary to attract participants and to fight social constraints/stereotype.

Providing proper training for volunteers and staff is essential to ensure their participation, because it will make them feel prepared and knowledgeable on what they will do.

Measuring the impact of these initiatives and regularly collecting feedback from participants to eventually refine the programs.

Extend activities to wider parts of the population and of the country promotes inter-generational and intra-national interactions and can significantly enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of the activities.

WHAT IS THE MAIN CHALLENGE THAT YOUR COMMUNITY OF OLDER PEOPLE FACES REGARDING VOLUNTEERING PROGRAMS?

Lack of opportunities due to a lack of coordination between volunteers and (mainly) protected areas managers. Plus, associations for elderly people very seldom take the lead on organizing big projects of nature conservation.

Social constraints/stereotypes and **loss of engagement over time**. There is a strong belief that elderly have no possibility or low impact to be involved in the community. Also, seniors prove to be very active straight after their retirement, but less and less the older they become. Health issues and mobility problems of the elderly also discourage their participation.

Limited awareness of and accessibility to the opportunities, both in terms of physical access to volunteering sites and the ability to participate in activities that match

their physical abilities and skills. In some countries, the number of opportunities which are possible to organize is also restricted by the weather conditions (e.g., in Iceland outdoor projects can only be done mainly over the summer).

HOW DO YOU FEEL YOUR COMMUNITY OF OLDER PEOPLE HAS EXPERIENCED AN INCREASE IN WELL-BEING AND HEALTH THROUGH THE WORK LINKED TO NATURE CONSERVATION?

Activities in nature encouraged seniors to be active mentally, socially and physically. More specifically, such activities brought to the elderly the following benefits:



Improved memory (of both past and present events).



Establish and deepen social interactions. Fight isolation. Enjoy being with other (younger) people, feeling a kind of rejuvenation.



Perform fine motor skills.



Mood booster. People felt happier after spending some time in nature.

IS THERE ANY LAW OR POLITICAL/ECONOMICAL/SOCIAL INCENTIVE THAT ENCOURAGES ELDERLY TO VOLUNTEER AT NATIONAL OR LOCAL LEVEL?

The UN has created a "[Knowledge Portal on Volunteerism](#)" to share information on the practice of volunteering all over the world. In the portal, also laws, policies and schemes of the participating countries are shared. According to the portal, out of the 27 current EU members states, 17 of them have a piece of legislation relevant to volunteering. Moreover, the portal provides information on the link between national policies, schemes, plans and strategies and the UN SDGs. For instance, the countries of G4G project partners (Cyprus, Denmark, France, Iceland and Portugal)

reported in the portal to have put in place the following legal measures:

- **Cyprus** has implemented "Managing volunteers in emergency situations" (established in 2018), the "Charter on the Rights and Responsibilities" (2013), and the "Volunteer House" initiative (2014). Moreover, as detailed in the [Republic of Cyprus's Second Voluntary National Review](#), for volunteerism, Cyprus established the [Pan Cyprian Volunteerism Coordinative Council \(PVCC\)](#). The council oversees the volunteer efforts across Cyprus, showcasing a robust civic engagement within the country.
- **Denmark** is not present in the UN portal at the time of writing. However, Denmark has general laws and rules covering all volunteers and for all types of volunteer work. Such [rules and guidelines for volunteering in municipalities and regions](#) can be found on the website of the [Danish Institute for Voluntary Effort \(DIVE\)](#). On the same website there are also Denmark's [rules on the working environment in voluntary social organizations](#).
- **France** is reported to have a "Draft Law on the Institutionalization of Voluntary Service No 458" in 2001.
- **Iceland** data is not available on the UN Portal. In fact, the general framework is that special laws do not apply to the employment of volunteers or to their work. However, it may be that special groups are stipulated in special laws, e.g., in the law on lifeguards and search and rescue teams, as explained in the GREY4GREEN "[Handbook for Senior volunteers in nature](#)".
- **Portugal** established the "The Volunteer Act 71/98" in 1998, a legal framework for volunteering.

IS THERE ANY LAW OR POLITICAL/ECONOMICAL/ SOCIAL INCENTIVE THAT DISCOURAGES ELDERLY TO VOLUNTEER AT NATIONAL OR LOCAL LEVEL?

One discouraging element was already mentioned above and are the **social constraints/stereotypes** spread inside the community. More specifically, there is the tendency to interpret the role of the elderly as limited/useless after a certain age and, on the contrary, of seeing the elderly as a burden to society.

Beside this, also the predominance of the (mental and actual) **connection of volunteering with the humanitarian field**, instead that with others, could discourage volunteering. Because of this connection, people are not aware of all the other potential fields in which they could volunteer, which might be more interesting and/or appropriate for them.

HOW DID YOU DIAGNOSE THE SITUATION OF NEED FOR A VOLUNTEERING PROGRAM OR FOR THE NEED OF GREY4GREEN PROJECT?

Carry out (informal) surveys within the organization managing the activity to first agree – internally – on formats and contents. For example, discuss solutions to the issues found, pedagogical needs, active ageing and potential/actual senior volunteering programs.

Connect with local stakeholders, present them the project concept and planned methodology to gather their interest and support. Eventually involve them to boost the potential impact of the project.

Identify social trends and act accordingly. For instance, in both Iceland and Cyprus it was found a turnover of retired skilled professionals interested in nature conservation and willing to continue engaging in meaningful activities for its protection also after their working life. They lacked organized support, highlighting the necessity for the GREY4GREEN project's assistance, which consisted in creating handbooks and a supportive network.

Identify and involve key skilled professionals. Retired experts in nature conservation were often found to be still willing to stay active after their working life. Their skills and their presence prove to be effective to incentivize other groups who, on the contrary, have less opportunity/knowledge/willpower to engage in meaningful activities in nature conservation.

HOW DOES HIGH QUALITY TRAINING FOR 3RD AGE PERSONNEL ON NATURE CONSERVATION AND ACTIVE AGEING CONTRIBUTE TO THE IMPROVEMENT OF SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES?

Increase in the number of activities on nature conservation. Third age personnel have daily contact with the elderly, therefore, if they are informed and motivated, they will try to implement more activities/programs related to nature conservation. The increasing number of these activities/programs has the potential to decrease social exclusion and isolation of older people, improve their mental and physical health, and increase awareness regarding environmental issues. These last ones may, in return, become a topic for conversation and encourage community action, creating a positive self-perpetuating cycle.

Social and environmental benefits. Equipping older adults with the skills and knowledge to actively participate in environmental initiatives allows them to address

environmental concerns and engage in social activities. This enhances their social inclusion, their well-being and their environmental stewardship within the community.

More motivation on both sides (elderly and personnel). Having instructed both third age personnel and seniors will motivate them to participate in projects/activities in nature conservation, making both parts willing to learn and/or share their knowledge on the topic.

CONCRETE EXAMPLES OF HOW TO MONITOR AND EVALUATE VOLUNTEERING PROGRAMS ADDRESSED TO ELDERLY IN YOUR ORGANIZATION.

Surveys to volunteers and to the entities involved, during and at the end of the program. During the G4G project, a number of surveys were used to collect feedback from participants. Among them, one addressed to the elderly (and used for this report) collected their input regarding their experiences with volunteering, with nature, and with social, public and third age organizations in their respective countries. The surveys proved to be a useful tool for the elderly to express their opinions and needs, and for the organization to monitor the level of interest, satisfaction and engagement, and to orient and adjust the activities of the project.

Counting the number of actions and the number of **volunteers** involved in each action. Numbers and statistics are always a quantitative, objective instrument for monitoring and evaluation.



4. Recommendations

LOCAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROMOTING NATURE CONSERVATION OR ELDERLY VOLUNTEERING OR BOTH.

Creating accessible, safe, and environmentally friendly public spaces where older adults can engage in conservation activities alongside younger generations. Such spaces could host educational workshops, gardening clubs and environmental awareness events, promoting both nature conservation and social interaction.

Promote more occasions/initiatives to match people interested in volunteering and promoting organizations.

There are different ways to match potential volunteers and organizations: from websites, to apps, to specific in-person events. For instance, the Local Volunteer Bank of Albergaria-a-Velha (Portugal) offers a meeting place for people interested in volunteering, who offer their availability to provide a set of actions inherent to the condition of active citizenship and solidarity, and the promoting organisations (<https://www.cm-albergaria.pt/viver/acao-social/banco-local-de-voluntariado>).

Emphasize the social and educational aspects of volunteering. Volunteering helps building social relationship with people of the same age or from other generations. It is a way to share experiences and expertise, to learn and to teach. Such interactions enhance community building and deepen one's theoretical and practical knowledge and skills.

Provide training to older adults on environmental protection and local environmental initiatives and **persuade them to become ambassadors** for such local environmental initiatives. In case they have the adequate physical conditions, elderly have plenty of free time which they could invest in learning on environmental issues and become representatives of them to their nearby, local population. This role entails engaging in spreading the knowledge they acquire to their peers and the society and persuade them to care and act more for the environment.

NATIONAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROMOTING NATURE CONSERVATION OR ELDERLY VOLUNTEERING OR BOTH.

Educate communities about sustainable practices. Include education on environment and sustainable development in school and education institutions and/or promote educational opportunities for all the components of the community to learn on such topics.

Lead (more) conservation projects. Establishing nature conservation projects or increasing their number, also by involving the community in the activities, is an effective way to increase awareness and sensitize the population on environmental conservation. If the population sees that the national level invests in such projects, their perception of the importance of natural resources raises indirectly.

Create specific national programs/projects/initiatives to include the elderly in the community and in nature conservation. For instance, the Icelandic government has decided to make the work of seniors on climate issues a special focus project. The title of the project is "Seniors and Climate Issues – For the Benefit of Both" and is run by the Nordic Council of Ministers (the summary is available [here](#)). Other publications of the Nordic Council of Ministers, among which the full report of the project, are available [here](#)).

Elaborate a specific strategy for nature and biodiversity conservation at national level. For instance, Portugal has a "National Strategy for Nature Conservation and Biodiversity to 2030" (original title "Estratégia Nacional de Conservação da Natureza e Biodiversidade 2030") available [here](#).



5. Resources



- Estratégia Nacional de Conservação da Natureza e Biodiversidade 2030 (National Strategy for Nature Conservation and Biodiversity to 2030), <<https://files.dre.pt/1s/2018/05/08700/0183501880.pdf>>.
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- GREY4GREEN Facebook page <<https://www.facebook.com/Grey4GreenProject>>.



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Co-funded by the
European Union

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein. Project Number: 2021-1-DK01-KA220-ADU-000026601