

Co-AGE Volunteers

Slovakian-Austrian Network for Intergenerational Volunteering

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Intergenerational Volunteering Strategy and Action Plan



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Introduction

Many changes in society, including greater geographic mobility, breakdown of family relations and a demographic shift towards an ageing population, have resulted in the increasing segregation of generations. This separation can lead to a decrease in positive exchanges between older and younger people and increased negative stereotyping. However, both groups have resources of considerable value to each other and share many areas of concern; for example, many younger and older people feel isolated within their communities and marginalised in decision-making that directly affects their lives.

Intergenerational approaches are many and varied. However, there are a number of core principles and characteristics, as set out in the definition below:

„Intergenerational practice aims to bring people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and contributes to building more cohesive communities. Intergenerational practice is inclusive, building on the positive resources that the young and old have to offer each other and those around them.“ (Beth Johnson Foundation, 2009)

In bringing generations together, challenging negative stereotypes and breaking down barriers within communities, various approaches are able to contribute significantly to the achievement of targets in various policy areas of national and local concern.

This document- **Intergenerational Volunteering Strategy and Action Plan, Deliverable.T1.2.1 (hereinafter as Strategy)** provides overview of main principles and actions to be implemented for the intergenerational crossborder volunteering activities in Slovakia- Austria neighboring regions. The strategy provides the framework **for establishing a cross-border network of regional actors in order to support the commitment of young volunteers to work with seniors on a cross-border exchange basis.**

The document is being developed within the project Co-AGE Volunteers, funded by the crossborder INTERREG V-A SK-AT programme.



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Co-AGE Volunteers summary

Due to arising demographic imbalance and aging population, Europe is facing great economic and social challenges for the coming decades. The most obvious consequence is of financial nature – expenses of pensions, health and long-term care will not be able to be covered by the contribution of later generations under current policies, for example. But behind financial challenges Europe needs to combat also the damages on social cohesion. What are the socio-economic circumstances in which elderly people live? What is the nature of the social network they are embedded in? How can we support a better understanding and solidarity between generations?

From this aspect, the motto of the European Year 2012, “Active aging and solidarity between generations” has obtained a more serious meaning in the last years and inspired us to develop the concept of Co-Age Volunteers in order to improve intergenerational cooperation in the border region of the Slovak Republic and Austria.

Our project’s vision is to establish a cross-border network of regional actors in order to support the commitment of young volunteers and to promote intergenerational solidarity and transnational volunteering of youngsters in the border region, as an answer for the above described challenges and in accordance with the EU Youth Strategy.

In addition, volunteering is an excellent example of non-formal learning for young people and plays an important role to develop social skills and other labor market relevant soft skills. Further important aspect of the project is to show how young people can utilize all personal, social and labor market relevant advantages of the voluntary work.





Benefits of intergenerational volunteering

The benefits are endless when blending the generations in a purposeful and directed way. According to Generations United: The Benefits of Intergenerational Programs Fact Sheet, there are specific benefits for older adults, youth and children, and the community:

Benefits for Older Adults:

- Enhance Socialization — Adults want to remain productive and engaged in the community.
- Stimulate Learning — Adults want to use their skills and continue to learn about new innovations and technology.
- Increase Emotional Support — Being involved and active has been shown to keep older adults healthy and functioning as they age.
- Improve Health — Older adults who volunteer with children and youth burn more calories, are less reliant on canes, and perform better on memory tests than their peers.

Benefits for Youth and Children:

- Improve Academic Performance — In schools where older adults volunteered an average of 15 hours per week, students had improved reading scores compared to their peers at other schools.
- Enhance Social Skills — Youth have better communication and problem-solving skills, a sense of purpose and community service, and increased self-esteem.
- Decrease Negative Behavior — Youth involved in intergenerational mentoring programs are less likely to participate in risky behaviors.
- Increase Stability — Youth gain positive role models who they can trust and develop an interest in volunteering.

Benefits for the Community:

- Improve Health — Older adults who volunteer with children and youth burn more calories, are less reliant on canes, and perform better on memory tests than their peers.
- Strengthen Community — Intergenerational programs unify generations, dispelling inaccurate and negative stereotypes. Youth and older adults are less alienated while the community recognizes both groups as a valuable resource.
- Maximize Human Resources — Able to engage all generations as volunteers in different types of opportunities.

- Encourage Cultural Exchange — Transmission of cultural traditions between generations builds a sense of personal and societal identity while encouraging open-mindedness.
- Maximize Financial Resources — Joint programs have a greater chance of financial support due to the resource reaching a greater audience.
- Expand Services — Community service programs can expand the level of services to meet more needs and address more issues.
- Inspire Collaboration — Unite community members in addressing an issue that affects human needs across the generations.

Main principles for intergenerational volunteers

Below is a list of top 10 best practices for intergenerational volunteers to be followed in Co-AGE Volunteers project, a compilation of common themes from many resources:

1. **Making an effort to recruit volunteers** — many say it is hard to find volunteers but most of that is due to the recruitment effort. Think about the ways your organization recruits volunteers. A simple announcement in the organization's newsletter may not be enough. Network with your other staff members, current volunteers, or community members to select the right volunteers and personally ask them if they are willing to volunteer. Don't be afraid to re-ask people who previously said no. They may be able and willing to help now.
2. **Match the volunteer's passion** — adults typically volunteer based on their own values and passions. Showcase your organization's purpose, mission, and goals and find volunteers that believe in your organization.
3. **Develop a relationship with volunteers** — take time to get to know your volunteers. Ask questions about their family, hobbies, and what they enjoy doing. The more developed the relationship, the more willing the volunteer is to help with different opportunities. Additionally, by getting to know your volunteers, you will be able to



ask them to do specific tasks that are based on each volunteer's skill set and knowledge.

4. **Be flexible** — volunteers want the opportunity to fit volunteering into their schedule. Let them know the completion time line or event date so they can check if they're available. Volunteers may be night owls or early risers — work with them so the time they can volunteer can fit the need.
5. **Be open to the level of commitment** — some volunteers are nervous about saying yes because they do not feel they can devote the time and energy needed. Propose a one-time event with a start and ending date for that volunteering role. If the volunteer enjoys it, more times than not, she or he will volunteer for another opportunity. Soon, that volunteer may go from being an episodic volunteer to a multiple project/event volunteer.
6. **Develop volunteer descriptions** — it is important to lay out the entire volunteer opportunity and expectations to the volunteer. Last minute "I forgot to tell you" details are not welcomed by anyone. The volunteer that you finally got may never volunteer again if he or she feels that the organization is unorganized and is not providing quality programs.
7. **Empower volunteers** — allow volunteers to be empowered instead of managing them. Many volunteers are willing to accept an entire project once they know the expectations, guidelines, and deadlines. By empowering them, they take ownership of the project. Managing volunteers means that the volunteers have to ask permission for each step — think about what could be accomplished with empowerment versus management!
8. **Communicate with your volunteers** — determine the best way to communicate with your volunteers. Do they prefer an email, phone call, or text message? Different generations communicate in different ways — be open and responsive to the needs of your generations. The right form of communication can go a long way!
9. **Provide feedback to volunteers** — volunteers need and appreciate feedback to know how they are doing with the project.



Learn how your volunteers prefer to receive feedback. Some volunteers appreciate a formal recognition; others need a verbal "Good Job"; and still others like a handwritten "Thank You." Generations differ about the kind of feedback and recognition that is important to them.

10. **Remember to have fun** — no matter the task, fun is a must for the youth and adults participating in an organization. Volunteers and participants will not want to return to your program or organization's events unless they are able to have fun. Education and fun do go together!

Types of intergenerational working

Although intergenerational projects take on different shapes and sizes, the following types of volunteering work are usually provided:

- **Skills Swapping/ sharing**

This is where one generation is working with the other to teach the other generation a new skill or information. E.g. Young people helping older people learn IT skills.

- **Mentoring and/or Befriending**

"Mentoring is a one-to-one, non-judgemental relationship in which an individual voluntarily gives time to support and encourage another. This is typically developed at a time of transition in the mentee's life, and lasts for a significant and sustained period of time."

"Befriending is a process whereby two or more people come together with the aim of establishing and developing an informal and social relationship... Ideally the relationship is non-judgemental, mutual, purposeful and there is commitment over time."

"Support, assistance, advocacy or guidance given by one person to another in order to achieve an objective or several objectives over a period of time" E.g. a young person visiting an isolated older person or an older person supporting a younger person through applying for jobs.

- **Joint learning**

Generations come together to learn a new skill or subject that they are both interested in. E.g. a community allotment where all involved are learning about how to grow vegetables.

- **Improving health and wellbeing**

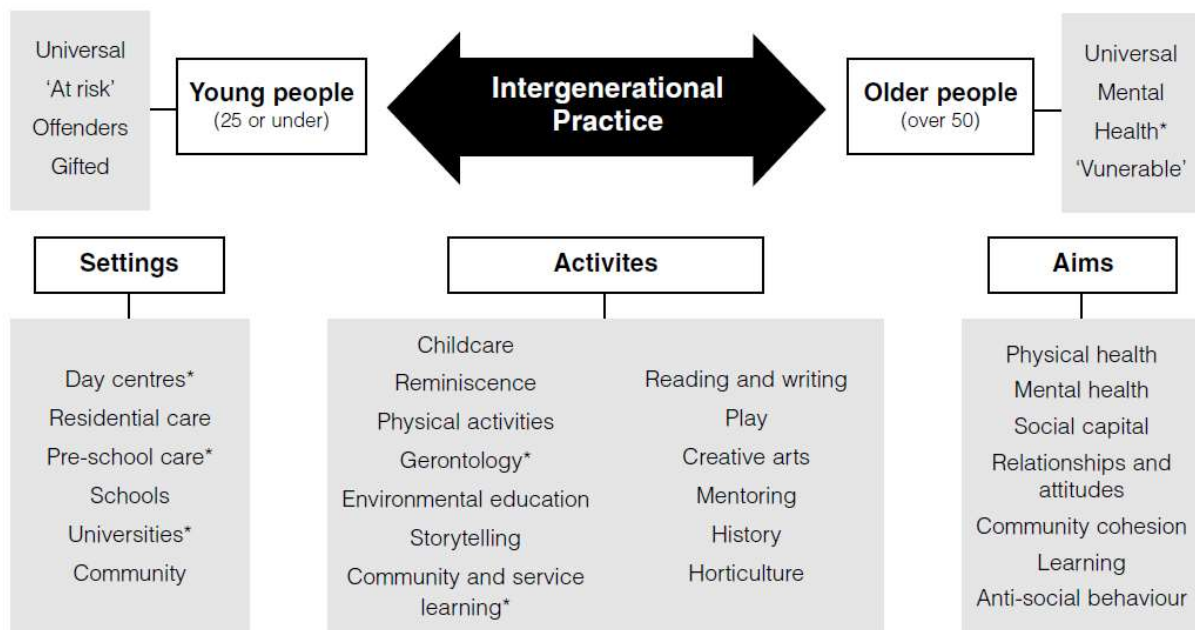
Parties are working together to improve their health and general wellbeing such as hair and beauty students using older people as models.

- **Improving the community**

Generations working together to improve the community in which they live. E.g. Generations working together to improve a local green space or play area.

- **Continued learning/ social interaction**

After a joint learning project, the work may continue regardless. A general social interest occurs and projects don't necessarily fit anywhere they just happen and people enjoy them. This is the ultimate goal no agenda, just generations working together naturally because they enjoy it and want to.



Intergenerational volunteering project lifecycle



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There will be 4 main phases involved in Co-AGE Volunteers project cycle development. The main goal is to maintain evolving and sustainable mindset and output:

Phase 1: Assess

This phase uses research, field work, and outreach to evaluate the current conditions for intergenerational volunteering opportunities and situation in the region..

Phase 2: Plan

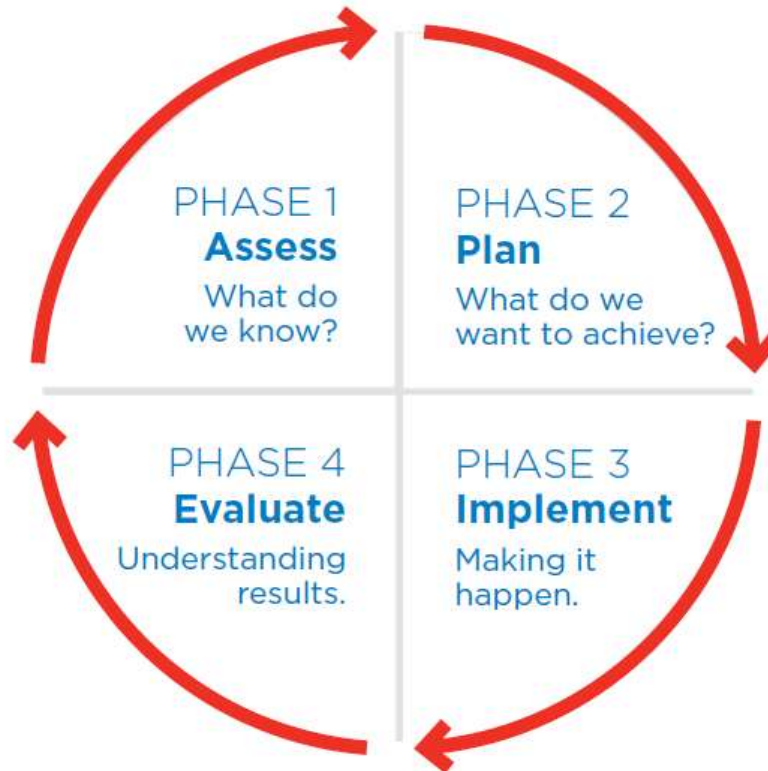
The inclusive strategic planning process is carried out resulting in objectives and actions to be implemented over the next time period.

Phase 3: Implement

The plan is implemented in collaboration with the partners and according to the timelines named in the Action plan.

Phase 4: Evaluate

Interim reports are made at the end cycle to document progress toward that indicators. The indicators for the following year will be set at this time. At the end of the implementation phase, plan accomplishments will be evaluated and reported upon in a Final Report, and a new strategic planning process will be undertaken.



Main Co-AGE strategy pillars

1. Identify and deploy volunteers

- Identify, collate and publicise a range of volunteering opportunities for interested target group
- Shape the opportunities to attract volunteers who have a range of motivations. These opportunities may provide a mix of:
 - giving something back and addressing key community issues and needs
 - feelings of social connectedness · improved wellbeing, happiness and purpose
 - qualifications and skills that may lead to employment
 - lifelong learning opportunities
 - informal but quality assured
- Ensure these opportunities provide a menu of themes, different types of volunteering, and regular and flexible opportunities



- Devise a communications plan that amplifies and raises the profile of volunteering and the different types of available roles –using a digital platform
 - Devise a training course and material that prepares volunteers to provide quality work
 - Work with the partners and stakeholders to encourage the recruitment of young volunteers enabling them to contribute to their communities and support potential career paths
 - Identify and link young volunteering opportunities into other strategies and approaches
 - Learn and reflect – there have been many instances of good practice in volunteering and community action. One should build on the methods and approaches that have worked well in the pandemic such as the COVID-19 to sustain volunteering activity. This may lead to a wider and sustainable model

Support partner organisations network creation – to recruit, train and place volunteers

- Create and develop a network that is committed to achieving the principles of the intergenerational volunteering and becoming project stakeholders
- The role of the Co-AGE partnership will be focused on:
 - Empowering organisations to increase the number and quality of volunteers to strengthen their delivery capacity by providing advice, guidance and training as part of a project deliverables
 - Creating a standardised approach to engaging volunteers e.g. induction and monitoring processes
 - Signposting to volunteering opportunities across region and developing improved monitoring and evaluation systems. These may include volunteer baseline assessment, goal setting, and reward and recognition
 - Providing accurate metrics and improved tools to help measure impact, future planning, and informing funding bids
 - Sharing learning and best practice to drive continuous improvement
 - Stage training and development events and toolkit for partners
 - Researching the potential scope of a localised digital platform to support the efficiency of the project

Ensure the impact of volunteering plays a positive role in building a more cohesive, united and fairer society



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- Offer a range of motivation, profiling and recognition activities – these may include activities in National Volunteering Week, etc.
- Broaden these types of activities to acknowledge and motivate the roles of people who wouldn't necessarily think of themselves as volunteers
- Undertake evaluation to determine the impact on volunteers regarding their sense of belonging, wellbeing and happiness
- Share the learnings of the recruitment processes and scale approaches to secure greater participation

Evidence that the beneficiaries of volunteering feel supported and their needs are met

- Provide an evaluation tool that captures the outcomes felt by beneficiaries and provide a feedback loop for the project partnership to drive continuous improvement and motivate for further success
- Publish an annual impact survey highlighting the role of volunteers and the outcomes felt by beneficiaries and the partner organisations working with volunteers
- Engage beneficiaries in the motivation, profiling and recognition activities to build a greater sense of social connectedness