



FOCUS GROUP REPORT

JOINT REPORT



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Executive Summary

Overview

This joint report, prepared by Sinergia (Italy) under the ESFC Erasmus+ project, consolidates findings from focus group discussions conducted in March 2025 by partner organisations Meath Partnership (Ireland), Sinergia (Italy), and Aging4Future (Spain). Engaging 21 seniors, 26 local citizens, and 21 public/private service providers across Ireland, Italy, and Spain, the research identifies systemic barriers including digital exclusion, fragmented healthcare access, transport inadequacies, and housing challenges that hinder seniors' social inclusion and active participation.



Key recommendations focus on enhancing digital literacy programmes, expanding age-friendly transport options, accelerating housing adaptations, and fostering intergenerational initiatives. These align with the project's goal of transforming ageing into a period of dignity, connection, and societal contribution.

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS BY COUNTRY

Insights from Ireland, Italy, and Spain

This section presents the outcomes of focus group discussions conducted in March 2025 by partner organisations Meath Partnership (Ireland), Sinergia (Italy), and Aging4Future (Spain). Each country's findings are categorised by participant groups—seniors, local citizens, and service providers—followed by cross-national themes identified across all three nations.

Ireland: Perspectives from Seniors, Local Citizens, and Service Providers



Local Citizens



Community and Healthcare

- **Healthcare & Services:** Medical card services have been reduced, making it harder for seniors to access essential services like dental and hearing care. The increasing digitalization of services creates barriers for older people unfamiliar with technology. Access to GPs is challenging due to long wait times.



Transportation

- **Transportation:** Limited transport options, especially in rural areas, affect seniors' mobility. Bus routes are often inadequate, and schedules are difficult to access. Solutions suggested include taxi fare concessions, volunteer driving groups, and more accessible public transport.



Housing

- **Housing:** Many homes lack age-friendly modifications such as stairlifts and accessible bathrooms. Government grants for housing adaptation are limited, and waiting lists are long. There is a need for more affordable and integrated retirement communities.



Social Participation

- **Social Participation:** Many seniors are unaware of available activities. Successful programs like ALONE's digital skills courses and intergenerational activities were mentioned as positive models. However, insurance and liability concerns discourage informal volunteer initiatives.



Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

- **Outdoor Spaces & Accessibility:** Many buildings and public spaces remain inaccessible due to poor design. Community members suggest creating clear accessibility guidelines and an annual review process for public spaces.



Respect and Social Inclusion

- **Respect & Inclusion:** There is a lack of systemic respect for seniors, who often struggle to access services. Successful programs like Foróige's Big Brother Big Sister initiative could help foster intergenerational relationships and improve inclusion.

Seniors



Community and Healthcare

- **Healthcare & Services:** Many seniors find it difficult to book medical appointments online and struggle to access information about available services. The panic button system was praised for providing a sense of security. However, not everyone is aware of this service.



Transportation

- **Transportation:** Seniors were generally satisfied with bus services but noted challenges with Flexi Bus, which now requires passengers to walk to bus stops rather than offering home pickups. Some seniors were unaware of this service.



Housing

- **Housing:** Paying bills and maintaining homes is a significant concern. Many seniors feel home care services are insufficient, with carers spending minimal time with them. Some prefer hiring their own private help. Long waiting times for home repairs and support services are problematic.



Social Participation

- **Social Participation:** Many seniors engage in community activities like bingo, daycare centers, and women's groups. Programs like Meath Befriending Service provide companionship and emotional support, but only a few seniors use digital tools like WhatsApp or Facebook to stay connected.



Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

- **Outdoor Spaces & Safety:** Seniors feel unsafe due to theft incidents and poorly designed public spaces. Some buildings remain difficult to access, such as the local credit union.



Respect and Social Inclusion

- **Respect & Inclusion:** Some seniors feel disrespected when accessing services, such as not being taken seriously in medical appointments. They report declining neighborhood connections, with fewer community members checking on them during emergencies. Some rely on ALONE and Old Age Meath for check-ins.

Service Providers



Community and Healthcare

- **Healthcare & Services:** The digital divide is a major issue, as many seniors struggle with online medical services. Lack of awareness about available services and long waiting times for medical care further complicate access. There is also poor coordination between different healthcare services, leaving seniors to navigate complex systems alone.



Transportation

- **Transportation:** Seniors face significant mobility challenges due to frequent route cancellations, lack of bus shelters, and inaccessible transport information. The JAM (Just A Minute) Card, which helps individuals signal they need extra time, could be beneficial but is not widely known.



Housing

- **Housing:** Many seniors lack suitable housing, and while grants for home modifications exist, accessing them is difficult. Some seniors are resistant to modifying their homes. Security concerns and high monitoring costs for alarm systems are additional challenges.



Social Participation

- **Social Participation:** COVID-19 has had a lasting impact, with some seniors still hesitant to engage in social activities. Funding is available for activities but not for transportation, making it difficult for some to participate. Digital literacy programs exist but are not well-adapted to seniors' specific needs.



Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

- **Outdoor Spaces & Buildings:** Poor lighting, lack of adequate seating, and costly parking fees make it difficult for seniors to access public spaces. There is a need for senior parking passes similar to disability permits.



Respect and Social Inclusion

- **Respect & Inclusion:** Family caregivers feel underappreciated and unsupported by the state. Some healthcare services unfairly label seniors as "bed blockers" instead of recognizing their needs. Funding for senior services exists but is often misallocated or used inefficiently. The Dementia Café in Kells was cited as a successful initiative providing structured support.

KEY THEMES ACROSS ALL THREE GROUPS

DIGITAL DIVIDE

Seniors struggle with online services, making access to healthcare and transport information difficult.

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION & SAFETY

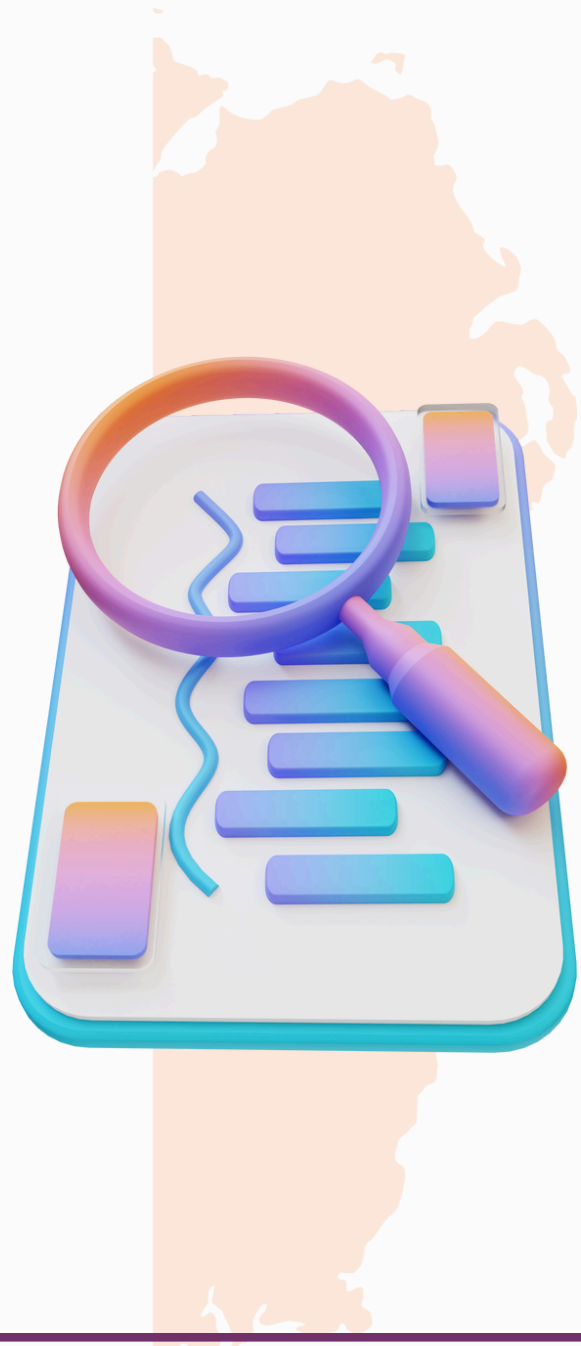
While community programs exist, barriers such as insurance, COVID-19 fears, and transport limitations reduce engagement.

HOUSING CHALLENGE

Seniors face difficulties in modifying homes, long waiting lists for support, and high maintenance costs.

RESPECT N INCLUSION

Seniors often feel ignored in service provision, with poor communication from healthcare providers and declining community support.



TRANSPORT BARRIERS

Limited rural transport, expensive taxis, and inaccessible bus stops create mobility issues.

Spain: Perspectives from Seniors, Local Citizens, and Service Providers



Local Citizens



Community and Healthcare

- Healthcare:
 - Long waiting times for medical care.
 - Difficulty in getting appointments, especially online.
 - Need for home visits from doctors to avoid unnecessary travel.



Transportation

- Transportation:
 - Poor transport connections between towns and villages.
 - Accessibility barriers at train and bus stations.
 - Online ticketing systems exclude seniors who lack digital skills.



Housing

- Housing:
 - Old housing lacks lifts, isolating seniors in upper floors.
 - Few accessible housing options or financial support for home adaptations.
 - Shared housing with caregivers or aides could provide more support.



Social Participation

- Social Participation:
 - Seniors should be included in intergenerational activities.
 - Need for more training, recreational workshops, and accessible leisure spaces.



Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

- Outdoor Spaces & Safety:
 - Lack of shade, seating, public toilets, and well-maintained streets.
 - Pavements are often uneven and full of barriers for mobility.
 - Poor lighting creates safety concerns.



Respect and Social Inclusion

- Respect & Social Inclusion:
 - Seniors face ageism (e.g., people saying, "At your age, what for?").
 - Seniors should be included in urban planning decisions.
 - More diverse cultural activities beyond traditional events like bullfighting.

Seniors



Community and Healthcare

- Healthcare:
 - Severe doctor shortages result in endless waiting lists.
 - Age discrimination in healthcare is a concern.
 - Need to speed up healthcare processes.



Transportation

- Transportation:
 - Many seniors lack transport options, preventing independence.
 - No paper tickets—everything is digital, causing access issues.



Housing

- Housing:
 - Need for better accessibility in homes.
 - Young people also struggle with housing, leading to intergenerational challenges.
 - Seniors need more support for home adaptations.



Social Participation

- Social Participation:
 - More digital training needed for seniors.
 - Distance learning options should be provided.
 - Cleanliness in public spaces needs improvement.



Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

- Outdoor Spaces & Safety:
 - Poor street lighting makes seniors feel unsafe.
 - Public spaces need better maintenance and cleanliness.
 - Pavements must be fixed to accommodate mobility challenges.



Respect and Social Inclusion

- Respect & Social Inclusion:
 - Call for better behavioral practices in the community.
 - More respect across generations is needed.
 - Seniors struggle with digital access, but no formal training is provided.
 - Many must rely on family or neighbors for daily tasks.

Service Providers



Community and Healthcare

- Healthcare:
 - Long waiting lists and poor hospital access.
 - Need for more home-based medical care.
 - More healthcare staff & flexible hours are needed.



Transportation

- Transportation:
 - Poor public transport links within and between towns.
 - Lack of mobility-friendly transport options.
 - Digital-only ticketing systems exclude seniors.



Housing

- Housing:
 - Old buildings lack lifts, making them inaccessible.
 - Need financial aid for housing adaptation.
 - Shared housing with caregivers could improve quality of life.



Social Participation

- Social Participation:
 - Seniors lack awareness about activities designed for them.
 - Need for leisure spaces for all ages.
 - Intergenerational activities should be promoted.



Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

- Outdoor Spaces & Safety:
 - Lack of benches, shade, and lighting in parks and public areas.
 - Pavements are obstructed and unsafe.



Respect and Social Inclusion

- Respect & Social Inclusion:
 - Older people feel undervalued in society.
 - Need for age-inclusive events and cultural programs.
 - More learning opportunities tailored to seniors.
 - Digital banking and online appointments create huge barriers.
 - Seniors often give up on services due to lack of guidance.

KEY THEMES ACROSS ALL THREE GROUPS

DIGITAL EXCLUSION

- Seniors struggle with online banking, ticketing, and healthcare.
- No structured digital training is available.

HEALTHCARE ACCESS BARRIERS

- Long waiting times, shortages of doctors, and poor home-based care.
- Ageism in healthcare prevents proper support.

TRANSPORT ISSUES

- Poor transport links between towns, lack of mobility-friendly options.
- Everything is digital—seniors can't buy tickets or book rides.

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION BARRIERS

- Many seniors don't know about available activities.
- Need for more intergenerational events and digital training.



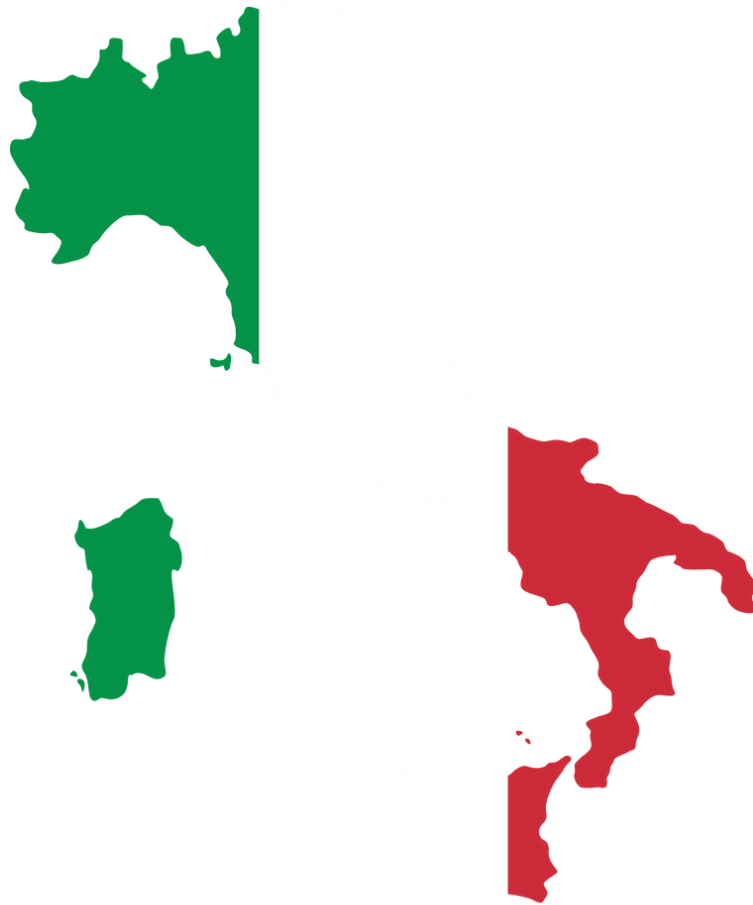
LACK OF RESPECT & INCLUSION

- Ageism in daily life and healthcare.
- Seniors excluded from urban planning decisions.
- Need for more diverse cultural activities beyond traditional events.

OUTDOOR SAFETY ISSUES

- Unsafe pavements, poor lighting, lack of seating.

Italy: Perspectives from Seniors, Local Citizens, and Service Providers



Local citizens



Community and Healthcare

- Healthcare and Services
 - Residential healthcare facilities play a key role for those who are no longer independent.
 - Healthcare is sufficient.



Transportation

- Transportation
 - Communities are improving, with increased accessibility, better transport.
 - Good discounted services and social taxis help.



Housing

- Housing
 - Housing solutions remain insufficient.
 - Urban housing is isolating, few co-housing options.
 - Urban housing is isolating and only have few co-housing options.



Social Participation

- Social Participation
 - Positive spaces for social interaction include parishes, dedicated gyms, neighborhood gardens, clubs, and the University of the Third Age.
 - Positive but needing improvement.



Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

- Outdoor Spaces and Buildings
 - Urban safety is inconsistent.
 - Outdoor spaces are good but need improvement.



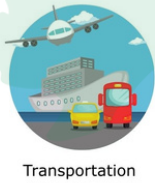
Respect and Social Inclusion

- Respect and Inclusion
 - Many seniors struggle with digital services, affecting access to banking, postal services, and public services.
 - There is a need for non-digital alternatives to ensure inclusivity.
 - Seniors have difficulty staying informed due to digital-first communication methods.
 - Many seniors don't know about available services.
 - Digital Transition – The digital divide excludes many seniors from essential services.

Seniors



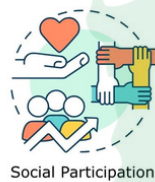
- Healthcare and Services
 - Seniors report a negative perception of public healthcare, noting that while private services work well, public healthcare is lacking.
 - Many seniors are unaware of available healthcare assistance programs.



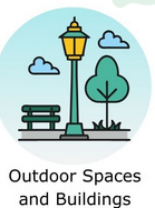
- Transportation
 - Transportation is viewed positively by seniors, but limited schedules reduce its usefulness.
 - Some seniors don't know about subsidized transport programs designed for them.



- Housing
 - Perceptions of housing are mixed: some seniors are happy with their living arrangements, while others want smaller homes but lack viable options.



- Social Participation
 - Social participation is rated positively, but seniors emphasize that services need better communication to reach more people.
 - Many are unaware of social programs or activity centers available to them.

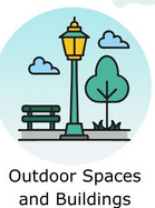
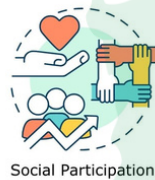
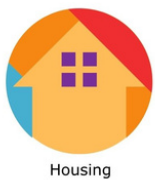
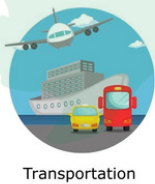


- Outdoor Spaces and Buildings
 - Uneven sidewalks, potholes, poor lighting, and unclean public spaces make cities unsafe for seniors.
 - Outdoor spaces receive mixed reviews: some areas are well-maintained, while others are poorly kept.



- Respect and Inclusion
 - Seniors feel ignored or excluded from community life, leading to a negative perception of inclusion.
 - Aging challenges, such as new physical limitations, make adaptation harder, especially when seniors don't acknowledge these limitations.
 - General age-friendliness ratings vary from 2 to 5 out of 10, reflecting inconsistent opportunities and poor communication about existing services.

Service Providers



- Healthcare and Services
 - Restoring family doctors as key coordinators could improve healthcare.
 - Proposed: Social facilitators to help seniors access services.
 - Focus groups rated Community & Healthcare as INSUFFICIENT (fragmented planning).
- Transportation
 - Seniors struggle to reach services due to poor transport.
 - Dependence on family/carers rises when public transport fails.
 - Recommended: Enhanced assisted transport (e.g., subsidised taxis).
 - Transportation rated INSUFFICIENT (inconsistent access).
- Housing
 - Urban housing isolates seniors; few co-housing options available.
 - Proposed: Local neighbourhood programmes and co-housing initiatives.
 - Housing rated INSUFFICIENT (lack of senior-friendly policies).
- Social Participation
 - Too few senior social spaces, causing isolation.
 - Proposed: More senior-focused activity centres.
 - Social Participation rated INSUFFICIENT (poor volunteer coordination).
 -
- Outdoor Spaces and Buildings
 - Inconsistent urban safety limits public space use.
 - Outdoor Spaces rated INSUFFICIENT (lacking safe infrastructure)
- Respect and Inclusion
 - Seniors resist new routines; better communication needed.
 - Recommended: Outreach via flyers/community meetings (non-digital).
 - Average age-friendliness: 5/10 (policies lag behind other groups).
 - Inclusion rated INSUFFICIENT (fragmented planning/disorganised volunteers).

KEY THEMES ACROSS ALL THREE GROUPS

SOCIAL SPACES & INCLUSION

- Few dedicated spaces exist for seniors, leading to loneliness and limited engagement.
- Some good initiatives (e.g., University of the Third Age, social taxis), but not enough outreach.

DIGITAL DIVIDE & ACCESS TO INFORMATION

- Seniors struggle to access information about services due to the digital-first approach.
- Non-digital alternatives (like flyers, in-person meetings) are needed.

HEALTHCARE CHALLENGES

- Public healthcare is difficult to access, with long wait times.
- Private care is available but expensive, leading to inequalities.
- The role of the family doctor should be strengthened.

URBAN & TRANSPORT BARRIERS

- Uneven sidewalks, poor lighting, and inaccessible spaces pose risks.
- Public transport exists but isn't always practical due to scheduling and accessibility issues.



FRAGMENTATION OF SERVICES

- Many services exist but are poorly coordinated, leaving seniors unaware of their options.
- Volunteer initiatives are disorganized, meaning services lack consistency.

CROSS-NATIONAL KEY THEMES

Shared Challenges and Opportunities

This section synthesises recurring issues and recommendations identified across Ireland, Italy, and Spain, derived from focus groups with 21 seniors, 26 local citizens, and 21 service providers.

Comparative Report

This summary integrates insights from the focus groups conducted in Italy, Ireland, and Spain, highlighting common trends and unique challenges regarding the needs of seniors in their communities.

Challenge	Italy	Ireland	Spain
Digital Divide	Poor digital access to healthcare and banking; Difficult access to digital information	Lack of digital skills training for seniors	No non-digital alternatives for services like banking and ticketing
Healthcare Barrier	Public healthcare is underfunded and slow	Medical card services reduced, making essential care unaffordable	Severe doctor shortages and longest waiting lists
Transportation	Limited options	Poor accessibility, long wait times	No transport links between towns, seniors can't buy tickets offline
Housing	Buildings lack accessibility, no incentives for alternative housing	Housing adaptation grants are available but insufficient	Many seniors live in upper-floor apartments with no lifts
Social Isolation	Limited awareness of social programs	Insurance liability prevents informal volunteering	Seniors are not integrated into municipal planning
Public Space	Sidewalks are uneven, creating hazards. Poor lighting make outdoor spaces unsafe	Many GP offices lack lifts, insufficient seating	Poor lighting and lack of public seating make outdoor spaces unsafe
Inclusion	Seniors feel left out of decision-making	Lack of respect from service providers, especially in healthcare	Ageism in daily life and lack of representation in urban policies

Recommendations

◆ Improve Digital Inclusion

- Develop in-person service options alongside digital tools.
- Create digital training programs tailored to seniors' needs.

◆ Enhance Public Transport & Accessibility

- Introduce senior-friendly ticketing systems with non-digital options.
- Expand community-based transport programs.

◆ Address Housing Challenges

- Support alternative housing models (co-housing, intergenerational living).
- Increase home adaptation funding.

◆ Improve Healthcare Access

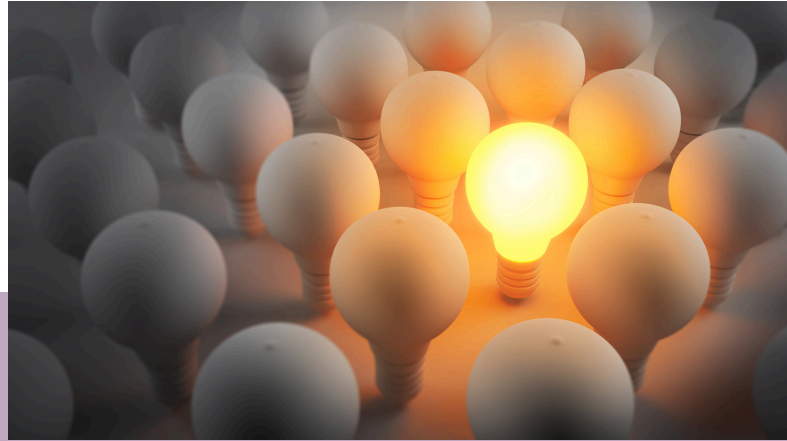
- Expand home-care medical services.
- Increase geriatric healthcare staff and speed up appointment processes.

◆ Improve Urban Spaces for Seniors

- Ensure age-friendly urban planning (benches, lighting, sidewalks).
- Consult seniors in community design.

◆ Tackle Social Isolation

- Develop senior-led community projects and intergenerational programs.
- Encourage volunteering and mentoring opportunities.



Conclusion

The insights gathered from these cross-national focus groups, which engaged 21 seniors, 26 local citizens, and 21 service providers across Ireland, Italy, and Spain, illuminate both the universal and localised challenges faced by older adults. From digital divides to fragmented healthcare systems, the findings reinforce the need for targeted interventions that align with the ESFC Erasmus+ project's vision of fostering age-friendly communities.

The recommendations outlined—ranging from digital literacy programmes and improved transport accessibility to intergenerational housing models and senior-led urban planning—serve as a roadmap for stakeholders to bridge gaps in inclusion. By prioritising seniors' voices in decision-making, strengthening partnerships across sectors, and embedding respect into service design, we can ensure that ageing is not a barrier but a bridge to societal enrichment.

As Meath Partnership, Sinergia, and Aging4Future continue their collaborative efforts, this report stands as a testament to the power of transnational cooperation. Together, we can transform challenges into opportunities, ensuring seniors are not only included but celebrated as pillars of resilience and wisdom in our communities. Let this work inspire actionable change, fostering a Europe where every generation thrives.



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Thank You

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