

MODULE 4

Social Participation



Community &
Healthcare

Transportation

Housing

Social Participation

Outdoor Spaces &
Buildings

Respect and Social
Inclusion



European Seniors Friendly Communities Guideline

MODULE: SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION

Social participation is a key factor in promoting the well-being and quality of life of older adults. As life expectancy increases and populations age, it becomes ever more crucial to ensure that seniors remain active, engaged, and valued members of society. Social participation refers to the involvement of individuals in activities that foster interaction, a sense of belonging, and contribution to community life.

For seniors, this can include a wide range of activities: volunteering, joining cultural or recreational groups, attending educational courses, participating in intergenerational projects, or contributing to civic decision-making. These activities not only prevent isolation and loneliness, but also enhance mental and physical health, promote lifelong learning, and reinforce a sense of purpose.

Barriers to participation, such as mobility issues, digital divides, limited income, or societal ageism, must be addressed through inclusive and accessible policies. This means creating age-friendly environments, offering transportation solutions, supporting digital skills development, and promoting positive narratives about aging.

Intergenerational initiatives are especially powerful: they allow the transmission of knowledge and traditions, reduce stereotypes, and build stronger communities. Seniors, with their life experience and resilience, are a vital resource for society.

Promoting social participation is not only a right but a necessity for healthy, cohesive societies. By valuing and enabling the active involvement of older adults, we invest in a future where aging is seen as a time of potential, contribution, and connection.

STATUS QUO

Engaging in social and community activities is essential for seniors' well-being, yet many older adults remain unaware of available opportunities due to poor communication and outreach. Despite the presence of local events, educational programs, and community groups, information about these initiatives often fails to reach the seniors who need them most. Many rely on word of mouth, printed notices, or local organisations for updates, yet much of today's communication happens online or through digital platforms that seniors may not use. As a result, many older adults remain disconnected from social networks, reinforcing isolation and limiting opportunities for engagement.

Beyond access to information, bureaucratic and legal concerns have also created barriers to participation, particularly in volunteering. In some communities, strict liability and insurance policies prevent informal volunteering, making it difficult for seniors to engage in meaningful ways. Local groups and individuals who want to offer assistance—such as transportation support or companionship programs—often face complex legal requirements, discouraging initiatives that could otherwise benefit both seniors and the wider community.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further deepened social isolation, as many seniors who once participated in community centers, recreational activities, and lifelong learning programs stopped attending due to health risks. While some activities have resumed, many seniors have not returned, either out of fear, a loss of routine, or due to lingering mobility and health concerns. For many older adults, the disruption of regular social habits has led to prolonged isolation, making it harder to reintegrate into community life.

Another major issue is the lack of intergenerational programs, which has weakened connections between younger and older generations. Many seniors have limited opportunities to interact with youth in meaningful ways, leading to a loss of knowledge-sharing, mentorship, and mutual support. Younger generations often see aging from a distance, while seniors find themselves increasingly marginalised from civic engagement, digital transformation, and evolving social dynamics. Without structured intergenerational initiatives, social cohesion suffers, and seniors are left without a strong sense of belonging in their own communities.

In summary, barriers to social participation—including poor outreach, restrictive volunteering regulations, lingering effects of the pandemic, and a lack of intergenerational programs—continue to limit opportunities for seniors to remain active, engaged, and socially connected. Addressing these challenges requires better communication strategies, policy changes that facilitate informal community support, initiatives that encourage post-pandemic reintegration, and dedicated programs that bring generations together to foster stronger community ties.

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In summary, barriers to social participation—including poor outreach, restrictive volunteering regulations, lingering effects of the pandemic, and a lack of intergenerational programs—continue to limit opportunities for seniors to remain active, engaged, and socially connected. Addressing these challenges requires better communication strategies, policy changes that facilitate informal community support, initiatives that encourage post-pandemic reintegration, and dedicated programs that bring generations together to foster stronger community ties.

Country-Specific Findings

- **Italy:** Parishes and the University of the Third Age offer activities, but many seniors remain isolated.
- **Ireland:** Programs like Men's Sheds and Women's Sheds exist, but insurance issues limit informal volunteering.
- **Spain:** Intergenerational programs are nearly absent, and seniors feel excluded from community planning



LEARNING OUTCOMES

Description of the main learning objectives and results to be achieved in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes by:

- *Educators*
- *Stakeholders and local actors*
- *Seniors*

Educators: *will learn to recognise and challenge common stereotypes about older adults, gaining a deeper understanding of the impact of ageism on well-being and exploring strategies to counteract age-based biases in both personal and professional contexts. They will be encouraged to promote positive and realistic narratives around aging.*

The module will also equip them with the tools to design and facilitate intergenerational events, helping them understand both the benefits and potential challenges of intergenerational interaction. Educators will co-design inclusive event concepts and draft practical plans to bring youth and seniors together in meaningful, engaging ways.

Stakeholders and local actors: *will explore the bureaucratic and structural barriers that may discourage older adults from volunteering, and will work collaboratively to develop simplified and age-friendly processes. They will be guided to raise awareness within their own organisations and networks—such as NGOs, municipalities, and public bodies—on the value and potential of senior volunteering.*

Additionally, they will facilitate networking among key community players, mapping both existing and potential opportunities for senior engagement. Together, they will co-create actions that enable seniors to contribute actively to community life in meaningful roles.

Seniors: *will be encouraged to reflect on their personal interests, hobbies, and talents, discovering or rediscovering meaningful activities that support a sense of purpose and promote active aging. The module will provide opportunities for self-expression and connection with others, reinforcing social ties and community participation.*

In addition, seniors will be introduced to digital tools—such as social media, video calls, and online communities—through hands-on activities designed to build basic digital confidence. They will explore how these tools can help maintain and strengthen relationships with family and friends, fostering greater inclusion and autonomy in daily life.

EDUCATIONAL TOOLS

Beyond the Mirror: Challenging Stereotypes about Aging

Target:

- *for educators*

Duration

2 to 3 hours (adjustable based on specific needs)

Materials*

1. Pc and project with internet connection
2. Papers, markers and pens
3. Cards with scenarios (e.g., in a doctor's office, a job interview, a family setting)

Description

(2000 characters):

1. Welcome and Icebreaker (15-20 min)

Activity: "Word Association Circle"

Ask participants to say the first word that comes to mind when they hear "old age" or "elderly." Write responses on a flip chart. Then ask:

- Which of these are positive? Negative?
- Are any based on stereotypes?

2. Stereotypes Brainstorming (30 min)

Activity: Group Work - Myth or Reality?

Provide a list of common statements like:

- "Old people are grumpy."
- "Older adults can't learn new things."
- "Elderly people are a burden."

Let small groups discuss whether these are myths or realities, and ask them to explain why.

Debrief: Connect their answers to research and statistics on aging.

3. Impact of Stereotypes (20-30 min)

Mini-lecture or video on ageism: how stereotypes affect self-esteem, social roles, health outcomes, and societal participation of older adults.

Optional Video Resource: "Let's End Ageism" TED Talk by Ashton Applewhite.



	<p>Discussion Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have you witnessed these effects in your work?• How do seniors internalise or reject stereotypes? <p>4. Role-Play Scenarios (30-40 min) Activity: Empathy Through Role-Play Prepare short scenarios where participants must act as seniors being stereotyped (e.g., in a doctor's office, a job interview, a family setting). Others act as the people around them.</p> <p>5. Building New Narratives (30 min) Activity: Campaign for Change Each group creates a short slogan, poster, or social media post that promotes a positive and realistic image of aging.</p>
<p>Tips for trainers</p>	<p>Create a safe space: set the tone early: encourage active listening, openness, and non-judgment.</p> <p>Engage multiple learning styles: use visuals, movement, group discussion, and individual reflection to keep everyone engaged.</p>
<p>"Let's End Ageism" TED Talk by Ashton Applewhite: https://www.ted.com/talks/ashton_applewhite_let_s_end_ageism?utm_campaign=tedspread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare</p>	



Bridging Generations: Designing Meaningful Intergenerational Events

Target:

- *for educators*

Duration

One full day (6–7 hours)

Materials*

1. Flipcharts, post-its, markers
2. Projector and slides
3. Persona templates
4. Event canvas templates
5. Comfortable seating for group work

Description (2000 characters):

1. Welcome & Icebreaker (30 min)

Activity: "Generations in a Circle" – Participants share an object or story representing a different generation in their life.

2. Understanding Intergenerational Engagement (45 min)

Mini-presentation or video: Benefits of intergenerational events (cognitive stimulation, reduced loneliness, cultural transmission, etc.).

3. Mapping Needs & Interests (1 hour)

Activity: Persona mapping – participants create profiles of seniors and youth they work with.

Explore: What are their motivations, fears, communication styles?

4. Creative Brainstorming (1 hour)

Small groups generate event ideas around shared themes (e.g., food, arts, digital storytelling, games, local history).

Use "How Might We..." prompts to frame ideation (e.g., "How might we create a space where seniors teach youth something traditional?").

Lunch Break (1 hour)

5. Co-Design Lab: Event Planning Simulation (1.5 hours)

Groups select one idea and develop:

- Objectives
- Roles of seniors and youth
- Activities
- Materials needed
- Timeline
- Inclusivity & accessibility strategies



	<p>6. Sharing and Feedback (45 min) Each group presents their event concept. Peer feedback: use "I like / I wonder" format.</p> <p>7. Final Reflection and Next Steps (30 min) Individual reflection: "What will I apply next week?" Group reflection: Write a "commitment postcard" to themselves with one concrete action.</p>
<p>Tips for trainers</p>	<p>Mix groups intentionally: Try to ensure diversity in group composition (age, background, roles) to enrich discussions.</p> <p>Time management: Display a clear agenda and assign a co-facilitator or "timekeeper" per group during group work.</p>

Removing Administrative Barriers to Senior Volunteering

Target:

- *for stakeholders and local actors*

Duration

2 hours

Materials*

Flipcharts, post-its, markers

Description

(2000 characters):

1. Welcome & Framing (15–20 min)

Introduce the topic by highlighting:

- The importance of senior volunteering (social cohesion, intergenerational links, personal well-being).
- The common challenges seniors face (registration forms, digital requirements, insurance issues, lack of recognition).

Use data or testimonials to make it more relatable.

2. Problem Mapping – What’s Stopping Us? (30 min)

Small group discussion or post-it brainstorming. Ask participants:

- Have you encountered difficulties in volunteering or supporting volunteers?
- Which administrative burdens are most discouraging (e.g. complex forms, digital illiteracy, excessive paperwork, ID or health certificates, rigid hours)?

Create a shared visual map of barriers.

3. Barrier Breakdown – Let's Fix It! (30 min)

Solution co-design session. Divide participants into thematic groups (e.g. "forms & bureaucracy," "digital access," "legal/insurance," "recognition").

Each group:

- Identifies one key barrier.
- Designs a simplified, senior-friendly solution (e.g., a one-page registration form, in-person help desks, flexible scheduling, analog alternatives to digital forms, volunteer cards for seniors, etc.).

4. Plenary – Pitch Your Solution (20 min)

Each group presents its idea. Collect them into a "Mini Charter for Inclusive Volunteering" to share with local institutions.



**Tips for
trainers**

Mix roles in groups: Include seniors, NGO staff, municipal reps, and volunteers together so discussions reflect real intersections.

Use visual facilitation tools: Use color-coded post-its or icons to help identify recurring issues and types of solutions.



Connecting Generations, Strengthening Communities: A Local Stakeholder Lab

Target:

- *for stakeholders and local actors*

Duration

Half day

Materials*

Flipcharts, post-its, markers, Community map or blank town layout
Templates: Idea canvas, partnership planner

Description (2000 characters):

1. Welcome & Opening Circle (20 min)

- Introduction of purpose and flow of the event
- Quick round of name, organization, and one word that describes "community"

2. "Speed Networking" Activity (30 min)

- Rotate every 5 minutes to meet someone new and answer prompts like:
 - What does your organization do?
 - What's one challenge you see in involving seniors?
 - What opportunity do you wish existed in our town?

3. Inspiration Panel (30 min)

Short 5–7 min stories from:

- A senior who volunteers
- An organization with successful intergenerational experience
- A youth who benefited from connection with older adults

4. Community Mapping Workshop (45 min)

- Group work with maps or post-its:
 - What resources already exist for senior engagement?
 - What gaps or missed opportunities are visible?

Output: a large "Community Assets and Needs" board

5. Co-Creation Lab: From Needs to Actions (60 min)

- Mixed stakeholder groups work with templates to answer:
 - What initiative or activity could engage seniors more?
 - Who could lead or support it?
 - What support/resources are needed?
- What partnerships can we activate?

	<p>6. Gallery Walk and Commitment Wall (30 min)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each group presents their idea on a poster. • Participants place stickers or comments on ideas they support or want to join. <p>Everyone writes one commitment on a “Next Steps” card (e.g., “I will call X org to explore...”).</p> <p>7. Closing Circle (10 min)</p> <p>Quick feedback: “What’s one connection or insight you’re taking with you?”</p>
<p>Tips for trainers</p>	<p>Model inclusive behavior: use inclusive language: “older adults,” “community contributors,” “lifelong learners.”</p> <p>Have a co-trainer or timekeeper to support group transitions and logistics.</p>



Rediscovered Passions: Uncovering Your Talents and Interests

Target:

- *for seniors.*

Duration

2 to 3 hours (can also be structured as a cycle of 3 sessions)

Materials*

Colored markers and pens

Paper, Post-it notes in multiple colors

Flipchart paper or large posters labeled with categories:

- Artistic / Creative
- Manual / Practical
- Nature / Movement
- Intellectual / Learning
- Social / Volunteering

Description

(2000 characters):

1. Welcome and Icebreaker (15–20 min)

Activity: “Once Upon a Time... a Past Hobby of Mine”

In pairs or small groups, invite each participant to share a hobby they once enjoyed, even in childhood.

Prompts to guide the sharing:

- When did you start it?
- How did it make you feel?
- Why did you stop?

2. Hobbies Brainstorming Wall (20 min)

Activity: Post-it Brainstorming Session

Ask participants:

- What are all the hobbies you’ve ever had—or wanted to try?
- What activities make you lose track of time?
- What brings you joy or gives you a sense of purpose?

Participants write their answers on post-its and stick them on a large sheet divided into categories:

- Artistic / Creative
- Manual / Practical
- Nature / Movement
- Intellectual / Learning
- Social / Volunteering

	<p>3. Personal Reflection – “My Map of Passions” (30 min) Activity: Create Your Own Map of Interests Hand out blank sheets with the following sections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I used to enjoy doing... • I would like to try... • I feel skilled at... • I would like to share with others... <p>Participants are encouraged to write, draw, doodle, or create collages using colors and materials.</p> <p>4. Talent Circle (30–40 min) Activity: Sharing Our Passions Participants voluntarily share a hobby they’d love to return to—or try for the first time. Discussion prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What support would you need to restart? • Would you like to do this in a group? <p>5. Mini Discovery Lab (30 min) (Optional) Activity: Hands-On Exploration Offer 2–3 small “tasting” stations where participants can try out hobbies in a relaxed, informal way, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Painting or mandala coloring • Knitting or crochet • Puzzles or memory games • Writing a short memory • Listening to or playing music • Gardening ideas <p>6. Closing and Commitment (15 min) Wrap up the session with a moment of reflection. Ask participants to complete the sentence: “One thing I want to do for myself after today is...”</p>
<p>Tips for trainers</p>	<p>Take notes on common themes and interests—these can inspire future workshops, peer groups, or hobby clubs.</p> <p>Foster a warm, welcoming, and unhurried atmosphere</p>

Connected with the World: Exploring Social Media, Video Calls, and Online Forums	
Target: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>for seniors.</i> 	
Duration	2 to 3 hours
Materials*	1. <i>Laptop with internet connection</i> 2. <i>Projector or large screen</i> 3. <i>Notebooks and pens for participants</i>
Description (2000 characters):	<p>1. Welcome & Expectations – 15 min</p> <p>Activity: “Digital Curiosities” A relaxed and open round of introductions where participants share what they’re curious about or hope to learn.</p> <p>We’ll also ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Have you ever used WhatsApp, Facebook, Zoom, or similar tools?” • “How do you usually keep in touch with family and friends?” <p>Responses will be noted on a board to tailor the rest of the session to participants’ interests.</p> <p>2. Why Stay Connected Online? – 15–20 min</p> <p>A simple, visual mini-presentation on how digital tools can help:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay in touch with grandchildren and friends • Join groups and events based on personal interests • Access services and support when needed <p>3. Social Media for Beginners – 30–40 min</p> <p>Focus: WhatsApp or Facebook (choose based on group needs)</p> <p>Participants will learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to find and follow family, friends, or local groups • How to react, comment, and share posts • How to protect their privacy and avoid scams or fake news <p>4. Video Calling Made Easy – 30–40 min</p> <p>Tools: WhatsApp Video, Zoom, or Google Meet (pick 1–2 depending on familiarity)</p>



	<p>Participants will practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Joining a call• Turning camera and microphone on/off• Inviting others• Using chat and reactions <p>5. Closing & What's Next? – 10 min</p> <p>Quick feedback with a smiley scale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">😊 I feel confident😐 I need more practice😞 I'm still unsure <p>Each participant will be invited to share: "What will I try with my phone or computer this week?"</p>
<p>Tips for trainers</p>	<p>Keep goals realistic: Aim for confidence and curiosity, not perfection</p> <p>Test your tech setup: ahead of time (Wi-Fi, projector, demo accounts)</p>





TRAINING RESOURCES		
An Overview of Social Participation in Older Adults: Concepts and Assessments	Explores definitions, types, and assessments of older adults' social participation and its role in health promotion.	https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8419478/
L'ANZIANO COME RISORSA -CASI, TESTIMONIANZE E CONDIZIONI PER LO SVILUPPO DELLA PARTECIPAZIONE SOCIALE DEGLI ANZIANI	Investigates how older adults contribute to society through social participation, with case studies and policy analysis	https://www.fondazionevittorio.it/sites/default/files/content-attachment/2008-L'ANZIANO_COME_RISORSA_-_Area_Welfare_0.pdf
Mechanism of the impacts of older adults social participation on their health	Analyzes how social participation impacts older adults' health via group cohesion, using a study in Beijing	https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/public-health/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1377305/full
Indagine IRES – Protagonismo sociale degli anziani: stili a confronto	Compares styles of senior social engagement in Italy and Europe, based on local case studies and volunteer activities	https://www.fondazionevittorio.it/sites/default/files/content-attachment/protagonismo_anziani_0.pdf

TRAINING RESOURCES

<p>Guía metodológica de Participación Social de las personas en situación de pobreza y exclusión social</p>	<p>For the European Anti-Poverty Network in Spain (EAPN-ES), the participation of people experiencing poverty or exclusion is essential and constitutes one of its fundamental and priority lines of work.</p>	<p>https://www.eapn.es/publicaciones/31/guia-metodologica-de-participacion-social-de-las-personas-en-situacion-de-pobreza-y-exclusion-social?</p>
<p>Participación Comunitaria en Salud - Rioja Salud</p>	<p>Community participation is a fundamental ingredient for Community Health Action, understood as the process that promotes the mobilization and meeting of different community stakeholders (citizens, professionals and technicians, and administrations).</p>	<p>https://www.riojasalud.es/escuela-salud/la-salud-en-tu-comunidad/salud-en-el-entorno-sanitario/participacion-comunitaria-en-salud</p>
<p>Mechanism of the impacts of older adults social participation on their health</p>	<p>Analyzes how social participation impacts older adults' health via group cohesion, using a study in Beijing</p>	<p>https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/public-health/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1377305/full</p>
<p>Indagine IRES – Protagonismo sociale degli anziani: stili a confronto</p>	<p>Compares styles of senior social engagement in Italy and Europe, based on local case studies and volunteer activities</p>	<p>https://www.fondazionevittorio.it/sites/default/files/content-attachment/protagonismo_anziani_0.pdf</p>

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Assessments Section





MODULE: SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

EDUCATORS

Topic: Ageism and Stereotypes

1. Which of the following is an example of ageism?
 - A. Inviting seniors to a workshop
 - B. Assuming older adults can't learn technology.
 - C. Asking older adults to share life stories
 - D. Promoting senior volunteering
2. True or False: Older adults cannot learn new skills as effectively as younger individuals.
– Yes / No
3. Which of these is a positive effect of intergenerational projects?
 - A. Reinforcement of stereotypes
 - B. Reduced mutual understanding
 - C. Increased isolation
 - D. Cultural knowledge transmission

Topic: Intergenerational Engagement

4. What is one benefit of intergenerational programs?
 - A. More rules for volunteers
 - B. Reduced opportunities for youth
 - C. Strengthened community bonds
 - D. Limited sharing of skills
5. Do you feel confident designing an intergenerational event plan after this training?
– Yes / No



MODULE: SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

STAKEHOLDERS AND LOCAL ACTORS

Topic: Administrative Barriers

6. Which of these is a common barrier to senior volunteering?
- A. Lack of interest from seniors
 - B. Complex registration and insurance requirements
 - C. Abundance of programs
 - D. Shortage of digital resources
7. True or False: Simplifying procedures and forms can increase senior participation.
– Yes / No
8. Do you plan to implement more senior-friendly procedures in your organization after this training?
– Yes / No

Topic: Local Ecosystem and Networking

9. What's the purpose of mapping community assets?
- A. To evaluate staff performance
 - B. To create barriers for access
 - C. To identify engagement opportunities
 - D. To avoid collaboration
10. Which of the following is *not* a useful partner in community networking for senior engagement?
- A. Youth associations
 - B. Local governments
 - C. Cultural institutions
 - D. Private senior-only clubs with no outreach





MODULE: SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

SENIORS

Topic: Rediscovering Interests

11. Do you feel more motivated to resume or start a new hobby after this session?
– Yes / No

12. Which of these activities best fits in the “Intellectual / Learning” category?

A. Gardening

B. Painting

C. Language classes

D. Volunteering

13. Have you identified a talent or interest that you would like to share with others?
– Yes / No

Topic: Digital Confidence

14. Which of these tools can be used to make a video call?

A. WhatsApp

B. Google Meet

C. Zoom

D. All of the above

15. True or False: Sharing your password on Facebook is safe if it's with a friend.
– Yes / No

16. After today's session, how confident do you feel about using a smartphone to stay in touch?

A. Very confident

B. Somewhat confident

C. Need more practice

D. Not confident at all

17. Have you ever joined an online group or community before?
– Yes / No