

# Volunteering in old age?

*Why not?!*



Project "Keep going, reach goals, get an award: empowering senior volunteerism" (GGA)

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the content which reflects the views only of the authors, and the European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

# Table of Contents

Project Introduction	5
Preface	7
Volunteering as a personal experience	
Bulgaria	9
Latvia	16
Lithuania	20
Slovenia	28
The Netherlands	34
Volunteering as an institutional experience	
Bulgaria	39
Latvia	43
Lithuania	47
Slovenia	53
The Netherlands	55

All our working life we keep rushing,  
playing numerous social roles.

When we go into retirement, we suddenly have a lot of time.

How to use this extra time?

How to be useful?

How to stay connected ?

How to manage this new age of life?

How to pass on our long experience of life?

How and where to learn?

Keep going...

## “Keep going, reach goals, get an award: empowering senior volunteerism”

The aim of this Erasmus+ project co-funded by European Union is to empower older people to act as active citizens by what is called Senior Award Program. It is a programme that promotes learning, volunteering and older people's social participation.

The project pursues a number of objectives: to empower older people to engage in learning and take on volunteering activities following the award program developed by the partnership; to strengthen adult educators' competences to support older volunteers in the pursuit of their personal growth; to raise public awareness about the issues related to aging societies and the benefits that older volunteers' contribution may produce for the well-being of the entire society.

To meet the above mentioned needs and reach the project objectives the partnership consisting of five partner organisations from five European countries: Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, The Netherlands and Slovenia have put together their volunteering experience to develop

- an Online toolkit for older people/adult educators “Promotion of Older Adults' Organized Volunteerism”
- the Senior Award Program for older citizens.
- a Manual for Adult educators on how to run the Senior Award Program

These outputs are meant to improve educators' skills and abilities to work with older learners in order to motivate and empower older people's engagement in active social life, non-formal lifelong learning, and volunteering.

The project is primarily targeting older people and older adult educators - adult educators practitioners involved in providers of both formal and non-formal adult education; as well as member organizations not primarily concerned with education (e.g. community centers, cultural houses, libraries, museums, NGOs, volunteer centers, etc.).

## Coordinator and partners in the GGA project



Lithuania  
Kaunas Region Third Age University  
(LT)  
[www.kaunortau.lt](http://www.kaunortau.lt)



Bulgaria  
University of Ruse Angel Kanchev  
[www.uni-ruse.bg](http://www.uni-ruse.bg)



Latvia  
NGO Grannies.lv (Vecmāmiņas.lv)  
[E-mail: grannies@inbox.lv](mailto:grannies@inbox.lv)



Slovenia  
Slovenian Third Age University  
[www.utzo.si](http://www.utzo.si)



The Netherlands  
S.A.F.E. Projects  
[www.projectsforyou.eu](http://www.projectsforyou.eu)

## Preface

This Brochure enables the reader to get familiar with older people's volunteering, it is a collection of volunteering narratives, revealing both individual and organizational experience. The narratives are real life stories from partner countries that will encourage older people, future volunteers, to engage in volunteering activities. State-of-the-Art Review, which was carried out at the beginning of the project, revealed that older people who had volunteered at an earlier stage of life are more eager to engage in volunteering activities than their peers who had not volunteered before. Well, it is never too early, nor too late to start volunteering though volunteering would ideally require a life course approach.

From the narratives in this Brochure it is possible to conclude that older and very old people work as volunteers for different reasons but mostly: to do something good and useful for the others; to share and transmit their professional and experiential knowledge and skills; to make their life meaningful; to do things with others; to become more confident, to increase their self-esteem etc. They are ready to transmit their knowledge and technical skills over to peers, older and younger generations.

Further, the project State of Art Review has disclosed a variety of areas of volunteering depending on older people inclinations, talents, professional experience and their leisure time activities, any activities they do not perform for earning their living. Such activities may be gardening, environmental clean-up volunteering, town decorating, tree planting, volunteer work with children, older people, people with disabilities. Volunteers may be engaged in caritative voluntary work but also in all other areas common to all people and society; education, culture, health. They may be involved in social welfare working with the homeless and migrants and other groups pushed to the edge of society. They might support a cause (protection of animals) what they treasure or their community treasures or needs (cemetery preservation, event planning, food/clothing collection and distribution campaigns, home delivery of library books for older or disabled people, professional and non-professional healthcare in hospitals, retirement homes, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, giving out free legal, health and financial advice to individuals who cannot afford to pay, free lectures, seminars and courses at the University of the Third Age. Moreover, volunteering structures the life of older people.

Very old people, very old volunteers like to say that volunteering makes them more responsible and even loneliness becomes acceptable if they have something to care for and think about.

# Volunteering as a Personal Experience



**Rumyana Radkova (79), Bulgaria**

**At the age of 78 I wrote in my pad**

*The point is not to be able to give love, tenderness, warmth or just an outstretched hand. The point is that there is someone on the other side to take it on, to share it!*

*The point is not to find an unnecessary moment or endless time, but to take the necessary time. It may be short, but it has to be REAL!*

*The point is not to resign yourself and take something for granted.*

*The point is to fight!*

*The point is not the change, it is not wanting to be changed*

*The point is for others to accept you as you are and to make them rediscover you again and again ...*

*The point is to be meaningful for someone*

I was born on the first of September 1942 into an educated family to my father a lawyer / and my mother a pharmacist. I graduated with full honors from the High School in Vidin and the University of Chemical Technology in Sofia. I participated in the voluntary farming brigades, working for the benefit of society and there I internalized certain social values. Thanks to them I later managed things successfully on my life path. At the University I met my first and only love, which ended in a marriage and I joined the Chemical Plant in Vidin. Most significant for me was that both, my husband and myself we participated in the construction of the Chemical Plant and several other plants affiliated to it. Our children graduated from university, started their own families, gave birth to their children and are already well-established professionals. Traditions, as Zagovezni (Forgiveness Day), and national values are and still remain part of our family's life.

And so, before I knew, the day of retirement came. The pension reform left me with meager means of subsistence. I took on extra work for a modest payment and then I started doing charity work. My cause turned out to be 10 children from the Home for Abandoned Children. An idea of a Family for the weekend was born. To this day, we still maintain contacts with these children, who have already grown up and who have children themselves. Years ago, one of them wrote to me: You were our mother. You were our angel. You deserve so much more than this card. Happy March the 8th - Mother's Day! Ani.

Despite my advanced age I have a great cause to defend- protection of the rights of older people or, in particular, their aspiration to stand up for these rights.

Life sometimes presents us with unexpected surprises and misfortunes. 4 years ago, I underwent a surgery, spent 4 days in the intensive care ward and underwent 6 months of chemotherapy. I did not panic and despair. I decided that no matter how much time I had left, I had to use it. While I was being treated, I kept reading. I did not cut off my contacts with people. This is when the idea for the Resource Center "With care and love for older people", affiliated to the Bulgarian Red Cross, was born. It was evaluated and nominated in the competition for volunteer initiatives under the patronage of the President. We organized events and looked for ways to prove that older people are not a problem, but an opportunity if they use their knowledge, skills and strength of spirit in useful activities. This is how the ideas for the Festival Staying Young in Old Age and the procession titled Aging - an opportunity to be useful to others, were born and realized, two activities that are held on October 1 - International Retirement Day.

That is why, even now, as a volunteer with the Bulgarian Red Cross, I work to the best of my ability to help other elderly people. This satisfies me because I know that I am useful with my knowledge and skills, with my contacts. I also have many friends, those from the retirement club, where we strive to fill the daily lives of more than 80 people with meaningful activities. For our life to be full, I believe that one must be part of our political system. To fight the shortcomings of society, but also to encourage others not to be apathetic to the reality around us. This makes me an active participant in the political life of the city, the country and part of the political community, whose ideas I have been professing for 54 years. With these considerations, I only confirm that old age and retirement are not a problem, but an opportunity to live the rest of your life using your potential of knowledge and skills. But that's not enough! Every day, every opportunity should be used to learn, to look for new ideas and to stand behind causes. But even that is not enough if you do not attract and you are not followed by other peers, who sometimes have given up their dreams cooped up in front of the TV watching soap operas. Being active does not mean that you are detached from the problems of your family. Because I live with the joy of

the success of my children and especially my grandchildren. I am glad that my granddaughter is part of the team of the Mathematical High School and will defend their project in Moscow, that my grandson has been studying for two years, but has also been working for a prestigious company, where he has won the respect of his colleagues and that my other grandson is flying to Germany and will train under the Erasmus + program. But most of all I am proud of their independence and respect for their family, and their love for Bulgaria.

## **Rumyana Radkova's message:**

### **My message to younger people is:**

Do more than just exist - live!  
Do more than dream - act!  
Do more than get - give!  
Do more than think - implement!  
Do more than spend - invest!  
Do more than change - improve!  
Do more than encourage - inspire!

Do more than just live - dedicate your life to a chosen mission and follow your star path!

### **What remains for me**

Don't be afraid to grow old, many have been denied this!  
Life is given to everyone, but aging - to the chosen few.





### **Veska Uzunova (79), Bulgaria**

Volunteering cause: improving the social status of the pensioners and preserving and transmitting the cultural and historical heritage to the younger generations

Mrs. Veska Uzunova was born in 1942.

I graduated from the primary school in my native village and later I completed my secondary education in “N. J. Vaptsarov” school in the town of Ruse. I graduated from the University of Ruse with a degree in Pedagogics with an excellent diploma. For better work with the pedagogical and administrative staff, I completed a master’s course in Management of Education at the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. I have two sons. One of them graduated in Human medicine in Leningrad, Russia, and the other in Economics in Svishtov, here in Bulgaria. Each of my sons has two children who have grown up.

At the time of my retirement, I had 15 years of work experience as a teacher and 28 years of experience as a director of United Kindergartens. I was attracted by the novelties and I worked for the introduction of new technologies and methods of educational work. As a Bulgarian, I was very excited about the issues related to our historical and cultural heritage. We worked with the older children on the presentation of Christian customs.

After I got retired, I was elected and worked for 6 years as a Mayor of my native village Chereshovo. Since 2004, for 17 years, I have been the President of the Union of Pensioners at the Municipality of Slivo Pole. This is voluntary work - without pay. The main means of my existence is the pension that is enough for me. My hobby - books (I have a very large library), tapestries and my garden.

In 2013, my husband died, and I had to leave the town hall, but I continued my work with pensioners until today because I wanted to do something. I have the knowledge, skills and competencies to organize such kind of activity. I want to be needed, to help someone, not to be alone.

My experience as a director of United Kindergartens helped me in my work as a Mayor and as the President of the Union. But I also encountered great difficulties, because so far, no common activities had been organized for pensioners in the municipality. There were only 7 clubs, the members of which had no planned joint educational and social activities. Over the years we have gradually opened new clubs - now they are 21, united in a Union of Pensioners.

Through our activities, we proved that older people are not a problem - they are an opportunity for society to use their knowledge, skills and strength of spirit in useful activities.

The attitude towards older people has changed to a great extent. We are now supported by the Mayor V. Atanasov and his team, who demonstrate care for the elderly people. The Chairman of the Pensioners' Club in the town of Slivo Pole is also a municipal councilor and Chairman of the Committee on Social Activities, Education and Healthcare. The municipality provides financial resources for the pensioners - premises and supplies for all clubs, free transport and food for the holidays, home care during the pandemic and more.

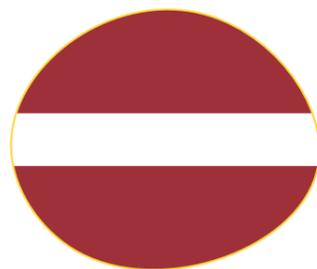
My main goal as President of the Union of Pensioners with more than 700 members is to improve their social status, preserve and transmit cultural and historic heritage younger generations.

I am satisfied from working with retirees. With my enthusiasm, experience and the results of my many years of volunteering, I succeed to attract both older and young people to participate in volunteering. I manage to improve and diversify the social life of pensioners by providing free regular trips, excursions, lunch for the socially disadvantaged, participation in cultural competitions in Bulgaria, organizing educational theatre with participants of all generations, cleaning playgrounds, afforestation of large areas with wetlands, nature conservation in the region.

For 11 years I have been leading the participation of retirees from the Union in many educational and cultural international projects, activities and conferences with the assistance of the University of Ruse "Angel Kanchev". They're as follows: Danube Networkers-Neighbours at Work; Danube Seniors Universities; Building Bridges for Europe; Danube Stories; Discovering European Neighbours in the Third Age; Tastes of Danube: Bread, Wine, Herbs; The Tastes of Danube: Bread Connects; The Wanted Danube; Living Intangible Culture; Sign of Friendship along the Danube; Give a Sign of Friendship to Ethnos; Connecting Danube Neighbours by Culture; Come Together! Connecting People in Times of Corona by Culture; Three Generations Together in the Digital World; Sharing Beyond Borders; Sharing Culture Between Ethnos; Culinary Contest; Culinary Exhibition; Musical Festival Talent Has No Age; Musical Contest, etc.

### **Veska Uzunova's message:**

My message to the next generations is to preserve Bulgaria as an European country and as an European society by preserving the cultural values and historical heritage that we have received from our parents - language, traditions, customs, attitude towards the older people!



### **Ilona Kviesīte, Latvia**

After graduating from high school, God gave me a wonderful gift - I became a mother to my first daughter. 4 years later my second daughter came into the world. When my daughters were a little bit older, I completed a Sunday school teachers' training course. Later I entered Luther Academy (which was not accredited at that time), became a Christian teacher, then did various things related to Christian teaching and also completed a course for social care workers.

I started to serve as a volunteer in my parish at that time. About 22 years ago. I volunteered by doing diaconal work, visiting the elderly who were not able to come to the church and I also served in Sunday school. I delivered and distributed humanitarian aid to the congregation. Later I felt that the elderly was not exactly my field, nor could I volunteer to serve the homeless. It gives me joy to serve children and young people.

It was decided by the parish priest and the parish council. Without even asking my opinion. I remember being mad at them for not asking me. But they announced during the service that I was going to be a Sunday school teacher and do the same diaconal work in the parish. But of course, I understood that God spoke through the pastor, because I was managing great and then I also understood that working with children is one of my talents that God has given me, and I have to put it to use. And when I was little, I liked to give, and gave things to other children that I was not supposed to give, and my mother was angry about it. But for me, being able to give something to others, makes me happy. And my mum also told me that I had loved children since I was 3 years old. As a child, when I played with my cousins, even though they were older than me, I was always in a role of a mum. Also, in primary school, when we had to earn free school lunches, in the summer we had to work in the collective farm, weed and dig beetroots, but I didn't do that, they arranged for me to work in the kindergarten as a nanny. So, I think the only inspiration in my life is God! I am very grateful to Him!

I have been working 14 years with children and young people from socially at-risk families, but not only that, also with children from normal families. I help in many different ways. Both by listening and praying together, and materially, if the children need something, that is, starting from food to furniture, whatever is needed.

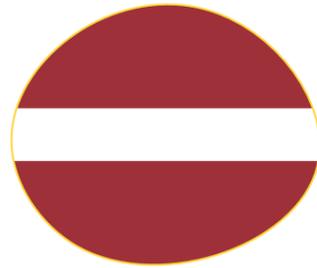
Benefits. I have gained experience and of course there is satisfaction when I see in those hopeless children how they have changed (not all of them, of course) but the joy of my fruits. Therefore, what I can say, is that we who do this volunteer work have to sow the seed and then God does everything! By volunteering we have a very positive experience. Volunteering is not a source of profit, we do it out of free will, so you have to feel it in your heart, whether it is your call or not.

### **Ilona Kviesīte's message:**

If you are good at it and enjoy it, then go ahead, do it!  
And definitely, you have to love what you do!

My wish for older people that they should try, go and do it!  
It is never too early to do good deeds!

And if you get pleasure from what you do, that's what is needed at any age. And what's more, you won't feel lonely, there will always be someone to talk to!



### **Maira Magreca (64), Latvia**

#### **I have always been fascinated by learning and culture**

I am closest to the field of culture and education.

I studied German language and literature at the University of Latvia. During my studies I worked in a kindergarten, then in an antique shop selling foreign language books. I really liked this job. I got to know a lot of valuable books in German. After having children, I worked for 20 years at the German Embassy, in visa department and answering the phone. I have also worked as a tour guide and can still take you on a tour in Latvia.

I am active, I cycle, ski, exercise, do Nordic Walking. I have even done Nordic walking and slalom when I visited the Alps. I can't do it intensively anymore, though, because I have to take care of my health. I also do cross-country skiing. This year we had a real winter and there was a lot of snow, so I could ski all winter. I only started skiing when I was 50. When I tried it, it was like a hook in the lip. I really like slalom.

What inspired me to volunteer? I have always been fascinated by learning and culture. I once helped my daughter's godmother to deliver a parcel with an address from the disabled people's organization "Star of Hope". The sender was from Sweden. I began to correspond and learnt the first words in Swedish. Then I read about a fantastic person, Hillevia Sellebrant, who came to Latvia twice a year, free of charge, to volunteer to teach Swedish language to Latvians. That's how I became a member of Latvia-Sweden association (Lettland-Sweden), which was founded in 1993. Together with other members we celebrate festivals such as Walpurgis, Lucia Day, Crayfish Festival. I help to organize events. Usually before each event we divide the duties, who will provide the flowers, who will help to set the tables, who will wash the dishes, who will welcome the participants. The Walpurgis celebrations are usually held at the Open-Air Museum. Then I put on my Latvian folk costume. We gather nettles and enjoy a delicious nettle soup. Family members and other interested persons are also invited to the Walpurgis Day celebration.

I've been to Sweden three times, also when I sang in the choir.

My other volunteering experience is with the organization "Dievturi". It unites people who are interested in all things Latvian, in the Latvian way of life. We celebrate Latvian festivals together, such as the winter and summer solstice, Great Day, Shrovetide. How did I get involved in this organization? I read an invitation on web group Draugiem.lv to participate in a Latvian event and applied for it. Before the summer solstice we pick flowers, weave wreaths, help set the tables and put away the dishes. I also always adorn myself with my national costume.

My volunteering hours are not many, maybe 8-10 days a year. It's more before and after events.

I believe that "everyone has to lend a helping hand to make the great work go forward", as our national poet Rainis has said.

The benefits of volunteering are - a festive feeling for the soul, celebrating together events, talking. Everyone benefits.

Let your hobby become a job and your job to become a hobby!

### **Maira Magreca's message:**

Keep your eyes open and observe the world around you, and get involved where your heart is drawn.



### **Albina Linkeviciene (76), Lithuania**

#### **Volunteering - the horizon of 'self-expression', shared joy and pain**

I was born in 1945. I graduated from Kaunas Polytechnic Institute. I lost my job in the process of privatization of the enterprise I worked for. I felt bad and unsafe because I hadn't reached state pension age at the time. How was I going to move forward? Now I understand that helping others is the best way to gain control over sadness and depression. But it was only later that I realized that.

My relatives in Germany heard my story and invited me to stay at their house to divert my mind from negative thoughts. I accepted their offer. There was someone in the family who had a serious illness. I witnessed how caregivers were responsibly providing attentive health care services to the patient. I was deeply moved. I thought to myself, that was very meaningful, I could also be useful to people.

When I came back to Lithuania, I already knew what I was going to do. I was invited to volunteer at an orphanage in St. Virgin Mary Convent in Marijampolė. That's how I started volunteering. I was preparing food, communicating with children who were lacking care, love and attention and who were temporarily removed from the custody of their parents.

Due to this volunteering opportunity I learned about U3A in Marijampolė. At the moment I am Head of the Faculty of the Culture of Life-mode, I also joined 'Senapilė' folk ensemble as a singer. I am actively involved in U3A projects, different campaigns, community service. Christmas volunteering in Marijampolė cultural center was quite an interesting experience. Together with other elderly ladies we told fairy tales for kids, taught them to sing and dance.

Here I met the director of U3A Onutė Sakalauskienė whose spouse was seriously ill. It was hard for her to combine intensive responsibilities at work with caring for a sick spouse. I offered her my help: first I took care of him at home, then in hospital, later in nursing home.

Many older people attend the U3A. For some this is the way to overcome loneliness for others much more. Sigita Lankininkienė is one of them. Former teacher of the Lithuanian language and literature she lost her eyesight, she wasn't able to perform daily tasks at home. She asked me for help. She dictated letters to me so that they could be written down and sent to her relatives and close people. I also read books for her and helped her out around the house. We were able to create a beautiful, memorable and warm relationship. Now she receives help through a social worker. Anelė Vosylienė was a student of the Faculty of Music at the U3A. When her life was disrupted by a sudden and critical illness, I helped her daughters to look after her while she was in hospital (she passed away).

Most often your neighbours become your close, most sincere and attentive friends. I happened to provide help to my older neighbour Aneliukė. I brought her over a home-cooked dinner, listened to her stories of past events, got her medication from a pharmacy, let her send for the priest during Christmas Season.

Right now, together with 30 team members from U3A I am volunteering for the Silver Line. Onutė, director of U3A, gave us a name - 'silvers'. I have a nice companion who is interesting to talk to, we sing together, read poetry and recite poems. We are also both involved in learning the German language. Our conversations may last two or more hours, instead of one.

I myself have health problems. I became widowed early, raised three kids. This experience has helped me better understand people who are encountering with health issues or other life challenges. Being a volunteer has broadened my horizons of self-expression, moments of shared joy and experiences. I have found happiness in seeing gratitude in the shining eyes of others.

### **Albina Linkeviciene's message:**

Doing small deeds to others mean a lot for them, bring them happiness and hope.



**Loreta Feitusiene (53), Lithuania**

**‘Best multiplication is division’**

I am a professional cook in retirement. As far as I can remember, I have always been active since childhood. I liked crafts and participated in amateur artistic activities. 16 years ago, U3A started in Marijampolė. I joined the U3A community, and now I am head of the faculty of Spiritual development.

This has been the greatest discovery and success in my life. I have been volunteering in different spheres of social life for 20 years. Having lost 60 per cent of work capacity after a serious illness, I joined the association of disabled people. I am also an active member of the association of cancer patients in Marijampolė called ‘Rūpestėlis’. I am grateful for all the help I received from many people when I got sick. It is very important to have something to say about your activities when someone ask you ‘How are you?’ I started volunteering for the Silver Line helpline a year ago. I have regular conversations with my companion from Panevėžys. We talk once a week. We celebrate joy and sorrow together, share our life experiences. This service helps reduce loneliness.

Now that my children are grown ups, I have moved back to my hometown Liudvinavas. I joined the local church choir. Seven years ago, Caritas of Vilkaviškis bishopric appointed me Head of St. Ludwig parish in Liudvinavas, we provide opportunities for people to be involved in a craft club, community (s educational activities, cleaning the floor of the church. We live a life of mutual support and concern of each other. In 2019 Liudvinavas celebrated its 300th anniversary and was awarded the status of Small Capital of Culture, which required local volunteers to organise events. Thinking out loud was enough and a lot of people heard our thoughts. From there came the idea that the Church Christmas Tree should be decorated with 300 knitted Christmas angel ornaments. Local knitters were invited to lend a hand to this community project.

The volunteers were willing to give their time and worked almost all year round to finish the project. The unusual Christmas Tree decoration idea brought joy to our hearts. We shared pictures, people from neighbouring

parishes also came to see our Christmas Tree. I crocheted the Altar cloth and the Credence table cloth. I had my solo exhibition ‘From heart to heart’ there in the library of Liudvinavas. We took part in all cultural and sport events, organized a town clean-up, because we were expecting visitors to come to our town. We were invited on the LRT radio show and Marijampolė TV. I was awarded The Angel of Kindness and a letter of Thanks from the Mayor of Marijampolė municipality for being a volunteer in ‘Liudvinavas – Small Capital of Culture 2019’. I was given a hot air balloon ride as a gift, which was a truly memorable experience.

Sharing my expertise with others is like a tribute to the people who helped me. According to the priest A. Toliatas – ‘Best multiplication is division’. Which is true. The more things we give to others, the more things we will have because of our good deeds.

**Loreta Feitusiene’s message:**

We must share our time and ideas with others. Let’s volunteer. The more volunteers we have in our communities, the more beautiful community environment we will live in. Two people in a room can get more done. It is always better to give, than to receive.



### **Vida Mickuviene (73), Lithuania**

#### **'Tree branches' of my volunteering experience**

It is hard to write about myself, it is always easier to write about others, because from a distance it seems that others can do things more and better. I am from Marijampolė. I teach Lithuanian language and literature. I received my first degree in

Philology at Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences (former Vilnius Pedagogical Institute), later I pursued my a MA degree in Educational Sciences at Šiauliai University in 2003. I am 73. I have been volunteering since high school (Rygiškių Jonas gymnasium). As far as I remember, I have always been a socially active person, working hard in the fields of culture and art. After the Restoration of Independence of Lithuania a special tradition has emerged, the directions of volunteer work have been defined, choices and possibilities have settled down. As I have devoted myself to many volunteering activities, here is a chronological list of them.

Since the very beginning of U3A in 2005, I have become involved in volunteering, I am Dean of the faculty of Culture and Art (now Culture). Every year brings something special, interesting and meaningful. Every year you can meet the country's or local prominent people who create culture. Before the lockdown, we used to travel a lot, learned about beautiful and historic places of Lithuania as well as neighbouring countries. We tailored creative and thematic-educational events. All our activities that took place and the topics of the workshops covering three five-year periods have been portrayed in 3 university books. Here are only some of them: Christian culture and art; Theatre in our lives; Literature pages; Interesting cross-country trips and trips abroad; Eastern cultures; Famous people of Lithuania and Sūduva, etc. The University certificate award ceremonies would take place during trips, including mini self-expression concerts. For example, in manor houses of Rundalė and Mežotnė in Latvia, in Church of St. Lipka and the Cathedral of Seinai near the Monument of A. Baranauskas; in Birštonas and Vilnius (in the museum of music, theatre and cinema); in the ethnographic village in Žiūrai and in Marcinkonys; in Naisiai, etc.

I have worked on a few national projects, I was also a team member of the Danish international project for older adults 'From heart to heart'.

Since 2008 I have been Head of the society of blessed Jurgis Matulaitis of Marijampolė division. It is a religious group with practices of spiritual growth and religion, whose founders and guardians are the Marian fathers and the Monastery of the Poor Sisters. This society focuses on prayer and spreading the word about the significance of the Blessed and perform their volunteer duties in the Small basilica in Marijampolė. Some physically stronger members of the group help sick people or the ones who cannot attend church because of old age or illness (or lockdown). The care they provide to people is very individual, sensitive and impalpable. Besides their daily silent prayers, monthly meetings and thematic meditation and analysis, the members of the group are active participants in the feast days of the Blessed: religious services on the 12th of each month, national conferences on the 27th of January (the day of death and birth), Wakes week in July.

I have been heading of Kristijonas Donelaitis society in Marijampolė since 2010. It is one of the most active societies nationwide. Marijampolė is not far from the border with Kaliningrad. Due to the favourable geographical situation, the society members often visit East Prussia to perform voluntary work in Tolminkiemis, Lazdynėliai, Narkyčiai (the pace of death of Herkus Mantas). We maintain good relationships with the Nesterov library (Stalupėnai), named after K. Donelaitis, as well as the culture division in Nesterov. This allows the society members to take part in mutual events and concert tours. It's been several years since we started working in partnership with the association of the teachers who teach Lithuanian language in Kaliningrad (as far as possible due to political issues) and whose chairman is former exile Aleksas Bartnikas. He has given presentations at national and international conferences organized by our society. One of the most important events were dedicated to the 300th anniversary of K. Donelaitis: the elocution competition where pupils from the county and pupils from Darius ir Girėnas gymnasium in Punks were invited; the writing competition 'Writing to Donelaitis'; international conference 'Under Donelaitis sign'. The most important focus was on the monument to the poet. The monument was initiated by our society and built near the



Evangelical Lutheran Church (sculptor Zigmantas Buterlevičius). In 8 April, 2014 Lithuanian president Dalia Grybauskaitė visited the monument. Our society is still taking care of cherishing and informing about the cultural heritage of Little Lithuania; popularising the name of K. Donelaitis, his creative heritage and memorial places; organising science conferences, seminars and readings; maintaining relations with Lithuanians living in Little Lithuania; cleaning the surroundings of Tolminkiemis and Lazdynėliai.

I have been President of the cultural club 'Aistuva' in Marijampolė since 2015. It is a social association responsible for culture and leisure time activities, keeping in touch with educational institutions, clubs and other cultural institutions. With the help of the sponsors we are able to organize different festivals and educational events: European Heritage Days in Kietaviškės manor, historical dance festivals and national festivals, project programmes on youth employment, taking a walk with school children and adults through the manor park or discovering a tourist route 'On the Rosary Route of Countess Butlerienė' (I have designed this tourist route).

These are the four branches of my volunteering experience. Why do I volunteer? This is my second life, I have always wanted to do more than my personal life, my family. I have always cared about society. This my nature – I have always wanted to be outside the box. My involvement in pedagogical work and Lithuanian philology has encouraged me to devote

## **Vida Mickuviene's message:**

The answer to how volunteering would prove to be beneficial to you and society lies in the end of my article in the book which was dedicated to the 15th anniversary of U3A: Can time disappear? I don't think so, it stays in our hearts, dreams, hopes....I believe that our souls are limitless, they constantly fill themselves with new shared impressions and good emotions....years pass by and you realize that each single day, positive glance, hand touching are very important. Again and again you are reinforced by love!

This could be a message to a future volunteer. Life can be beautiful and meaningful when you live for others. Your sparkling eyes can motivate others and help them live their lives. These are eternal Christian truths and values that must be confirmed by our lives. May be that's where the greatest meaning comes from!



**Dr. Anica Mikuš Kos (85), Slovenia**

**I am paying off the good I received from community**

Area of volunteering? She has been volunteering for older people, refugees, social inclusion, education and learning, psychological assistance, advocacy.

*The role of mental health professionals in war and war induced situations is to transfer knowledge and experience to parents, teachers, and others who are working to improve the quality of the children's life."*

When Dr. Anica Mikuš Kos, a pediatrician and a child psychologist got retired, she wanted to be useful for herself and society. Capitalizing on her knowledge and her social network, she started Slovene Philanthropy that has become an umbrella organization for promotion of voluntary work.

Dr. Anica Mikuš Kos helped refugee children from conflict zones in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Kosovo, Georgia, and Iraq. When refugees from the Balkan conflict came to Slovenia, she helped thousands of children and their parents. Since these children were not accepted in Slovenian schools, Dr. Mikuš Kos helped organize refugee teachers to run schools for them. Thanks to her belief in the capacities of refugees, thousands of children have finished school and received psychosocial assistance.

What inspired her or rather made her volunteer? Born in Yugoslavia in 1935, in her childhood, Anica Mikuš Kos was a witness of the terrible events of the World War II: bombing, killing, and violence. These experiences also provided her with a basis for optimism: in the face of the brutality of the war, people responded with positive actions. She discovered the capacity of human resilience and the ability of people to cope with traumatic experiences. Her professional activities with children affected by war are based on her own experiences as a child during the war. A Dr. Mikuš Kos's central assumption is that in war suffering and painful memories are unavoidable. The consequences of experiencing a war, surviving a war, should not be treated in the same way as other psychological disturbances.

She strongly advocates that despite their suffering and painful war memories, most children will not be permanently psychologically disturbed and will be resilient. As a pediatrician and a child psychologist, she argues that statements of some mental health professionals, can predispose children to be psychologically hurt for the rest of their lives. They may contribute to their learned helplessness. She believes that children can be empowered to overcome their trauma and lead fulfilling lives as adults.

One does not become a volunteer without reference to one's past . Dr. Mikuš Kos' experience as a child during the war time has taught her the importance of kindness and compassion in a child's environment. Her main goal is to provide children with positive experiences that will counteract their negative war experiences. She believes that the role of teachers, volunteers, and primary health care workers that come in contact with children and their parents are most important helping children to get positive experiences about human relationships.

She has been volunteering all her life particularly since the war broke out in ex-Yugoslavia. In fact, she launched and spread a volunteering project and she has been the driving force behind it ever since. Also, her profession of psychologist dealing with children with psychological issues had been leading her to deal with the problems from her professional point of view and many other views of course.

She has been volunteering on all levels, local, national, regional, international, global as well as in most diverse areas.

## Dr. Anica Mikuš Kos's message:

In the Forum of Volunteering 2020 Dr. Anica Mikuš Kos explained her motives for being a volunteer. In a film about her she said:

I am working because I feel responsible and concerned by the social developments leading to people becoming people in need;

I am working out of compassion and despite my age I do not think I should stop being useful and caring;

I am working because I would like to pay off the good I have received from community;

I am working because I would like to make it up for what I have omitted to do but I could have done;

I am satisfied that I can usefully use my knowledge and experience;

I am working because volunteering gives meaning to my life;

*My message to older people is:*

Try to work for your own benefit and the benefit of society. Do not think that you have to do big things or be extremely knowledgeable. Small things can do a lot, especially in everyday life.

If you are young and middle aged, voluntary work for older people is an investment in the future



**Dušana Findeisen (72), Slovenia**

### **Volunteering as a way of life**

Dr. Dušana Findeisen was born in December 1948, she studied in different countries (Slovenia, France, Serbia) different subjects. In 1969 after the student May revolution at Sorbonne composing one's own study curriculum out of several study subjects was a must – but she majored in general linguistics, English and French language, literature and civilisation. On the post graduate level, she conducted her MPhil and her PhD in the field of andragogy and she became a university teacher having created a new study subject based on the basis of the findings from her voluntary work. She authored or co-authored several hundreds of articles, wrote five books and launched many nation-wide set innovations one of them being organized volunteering in the field of culture as well as associated education programmes.

Her volunteering has been both personal and organised. On personal level she has been volunteering all her life having supported her friends and people in need. This has always been one of her characteristics mostly due to some invisible psychological imperative. If she were not available for other people, she felt bad and guilty. Now that she has gained a lot of knowledge in the field of psychology and has been reading psychology at Slovenian Third Age University for a decade or so, she knows where her need to volunteer comes from. In her primary family she was allowed and encouraged to study, she was praised for her diligent learning and having »a good heart«, for being hyper socialized. Both passions led her to become a volunteer but also made her suffer from adrenal burnout. Before burning out she had not been able to limit her efforts to what was reasonable.

Dušana has never volunteered for an organisation rather she created her own organisation, from scratch. She did not really mean to volunteer but there was no other possibility to launch, with no funding, The school of the third age. Her volunteering was not appreciated as one would expect



in former socialist Yugoslavia. The doctrine was that the State should provide for its citizens and meet their needs. So, volunteering, and on the top of it in the State controlled field of education, was rather unusual. There was stigma put on both older people and volunteering which was qualified as unworthy, not reaching the standards of professionalism, (volunteers worked exclusively in the field of sports, in fire brigades and for popular political organisations organised top down). But Dušana started developing education for older people, researching, conceptualizing the field together with her six older students of French. So, education for older people was born in ex-Yugoslavia. It had to be imagined from scratch (there was practically no literature on older people in those days and certainly none on their education). Dušana got inspired by literature, Russian classic writers, and a lesson in a commercial manual of French she was using in her teaching French, a module devoted to old age and the first Third Age University in Toulouse. In turn, she created Ecole du troisieme age in the framework of the language centre where she was employed leading the Department of French. In those days she was greatly supported by the directress of the institution. Soon it became clear that understanding older people and their social position was even more important than teaching French, developing educational programmes on the basis of students' analysed needs. Dušana dwelt on her wide social network of intellectuals and her still employed middle aged adult students who were occupying most different responsible positions in society. They helped her a lot also in launching public campaigning. Dušana, her students and colleagues, started a social movement of older people and for older people which could not be understood but since it was meant for older people it was somehow tolerated. From the very beginning it was labelled as elitist which was a bad label. Still nowadays Slovenian Third Age University is not considered as an organisation enabling older people's inclusion in society, as an alternative place where older people can be ambitious learners, innovators and doers, where they can meet and create together, where they can volunteer in areas other than caritative work, where their creativity is being supported and their position in society secured.

Dušana has never stopped volunteering in some way or the other, but for decades with her volunteering activities – donating knowledge, time and money- she supported Slovenian Third Age University and other NGOs. Thus, her volunteering her active citizenship turned into her professional work determining all her major professional and even personal decisions. She rejected important positions and attractive offers as to stay in the country and continue working for the U3A. When she looks back on her own or collective national and international innovations, rewards she has received or Slovenian U3A has received, she tends to consider this huge project (21000 students, 55 universities, more than 1000 jobs created) carried out in co- operation with Prof. Dr. Ana Krajnc (co-founder of Slovenian U3A) Alijana Šantej and her other colleagues and students, volunteers etc.) as a kind of collective obsession, an obsession that she would gladly repeat, that has given a meaning to her life and has determined most of her important and less important relationships.

She has been volunteering in the area of education, culture, social well-fare, advocacy, organising and conducting volunteering activities, researching volunteering, publishing etc. Her volunteering has always been in the field of transmission. Dušana Findeisen has been mentoring voluntarily and in many and different ways several young people to find their way.

### **Dušana Findeisen's message:**

Contrary to what is thought, volunteering is not a purely altruistic activity. It basically meets the volunteer's psychological need to experience emotions, to be accepted and recognized while meeting the needs of the community. It also means continuous learning and personal growth. Being committed and having knowledge helps knowing who you are, transcending your fears and standing up for your beliefs and community.



**Gerrit Dommerholt (86), The Netherlands**

**Fifty - five years of experience as a volunteer**

He was born in 1935 in The Netherlands. His lifelong volunteer work, national and international, was the reason for Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands to honor him with Officer in the Order of Oranje Nassau decoration. In 1983 he took over the development work within the International Huntington Association (IHA), which he could take on only after having been retired full time in 1990. He says: "When I look around, in my country, volunteer work done by older people is rather common. They volunteer in nursing homes, homes for older people, sporting clubs and a lot of other institutions".

After his wife died, he had to stop traveling around the world and had to learn to live on his own with less contact with other people.

What to do? How to fill days with useful volunteer work?

He started his volunteer work in 1976 and has gained 55 years of volunteer work experience. He coordinates international Huntington disease association.

As a senior officer he had worked in the army as well as in the air force. In the second world war as a 10 year boy he saw the Canadian army crossing a big river just 400 meters from his house, which had a great impact on his whole life. He decided to join the group of volunteers of the Information Centre of the Canadian war cemetery. He gave the visitors, among which were many family members of the Canadian soldiers an insight into the fights in which ended the lives of many thousands of young soldiers.

**Gerrit Dommerholt's message:**

The years spent in the Information Centre of the Canadian war cemetery gave me a lot of satisfaction. In the Netherlands we are still very thankful to the Canadian soldiers.

You are useful with all your life experience.

It makes you spend your time usefully as you are helping other people who need people who have time and energy to support other people and institutions.

To be clear, voluntary work is nice to do, but volunteers must be aware that this work is not without duties.

My conclusion after more than 55 years of volunteering is that on one hand it has helped the others, and on the other hand, it has given me a lot of satisfaction".



### **Maria Heitling (71), The Netherlands**

#### **I have become acquainted with many cultures**

Maria Heitling is a retired teacher of Dutch as a second language and a passionate chorister. She has been volunteering for a migrant women language development group and in the choir.

In 1983 I started teaching Dutch mainly Turkish and Moroccan men and women. At that time, courses were organized in the Cultural Center in Lochem. The majority of men and women were low-skilled or in state of (functional) illiteracy. Men had to move in to the labor market as quickly as possible. Civic integration, state diploma levels did not exist at that time. Later the first refugees came. In 1984 they were the Tamils.

In 1987, Dutch as a second language became an official training programme, with certificates and diplomas. The Civic Integration Act was adopted in 2007.

I have become acquainted with many cultures: Turkish, Moroccan, Tamil, Iraqi, Lebanese, Iranian, Afghan, South American, Polish, Syrian, too many to mention.

I have learned a lot: I have experienced unlimited hospitality, friendliness, openness, I have tasted delicious food. I also met brave women who often fled their own country and were curious about what the Netherlands had to offer. And women who had come to the Netherlands with a partner, who had to and wanted to find their way into a foreign culture, to learn a foreign language.

I have a lot of respect for that. At this time, (I have been retired since 2013) we have a reading and speaking group of migrant women, once every 14 days.

What I also do voluntarily is the directorship of my classical choir, where I have been singing for 35 years. I have been responsible for the public relations, contacts with newspapers, writing articles, contacts with the municipality and authorities, fundraising, because large performances with orchestra and soloists are expensive.

I was the chairwoman for more than four years. This means, that I coordinated and delegated a number of tasks, we also had a secretary, treasurer, choirmaster and a public relations officer. This is a great club, especially in these times, as we often have to meet (via zoom) and adjust goals every time.

### **Maria Heitling's message:**

This is my voluntary work, work for my soul, which I enjoy doing. After the meeting they thank me. But I also want to thank them for the things I have learned from them every time, still. I feel rich.

Through this work, I remain actively involved in the things in my life that I find pleasant and valuable, namely contact with other cultures and nationalities and making and organizing music events.



# Volunteering as an Institutional Experience

## Bulgaria

Volunteering is becoming a cause that motivates both the old and the younger generation to affirm the national values and traditions, virtues for justice and solidarity in our society.

The Union of Pensioners of Slivo Pole Municipality (UPM) is an example of good practice of voluntary work and cooperation between NGO of the older citizens and the local government.

UPM has 700 members in 21 clubs in 11 villages and towns of the Municipality. Its main aim is to protect the interests, rights and dignity of retirees. The concept of the activities covers four areas: Stronger and more active communities; Sustainable environment; Social integration and common public value; Solidarity and learning between generations. There were held mass events and activities that established a positive image of the older persons in our society and encourage them to participate more actively in the civil dialogue to improve the quality of life. UPM organizes joint events with local government, business, Community Houses, schools, kindergartens, centres, etc. The Union has a representative in the local parliament as Chairman of the Committee on Social Activities, Education and Health.

The Mayor of the Slivo Pole Municipality V. Atanasov, his team, the Presidents of UPM V. Uzunova take care of improving the social status of pensioners and citizens. They organize free premises and consumables for all clubs, free transport and food for the holidays, preparation for local and national elections, annual meetings with each club to report on achievements and problems, public discussions, meetings for solving problems concerning healthy lifestyles, vaccinations, socially disadvantaged, the disabled, the provision and delivery of free food and supplies during the pandemic. During the pandemic, the Municipality expanded the groups of volunteers for Emergency Aid in Disasters and Accidents. The pensioners are actively involved in the activities of the Municipality such as afforestation of wetlands, dissemination of information about the achievements of the people of the Municipality.

SPM pays special attention to events of educational, social, cultural and economic nature, which contribute to achieving and maintaining full

social integration, preserving ethnic peace between the ethnic groups, preserving the natural, cultural and historical heritage of the region, dialogue, solidarity and intergenerational learning. There are events and activities such as: Sharing Culture between Ethnos; Give a Sign of Friendship along the Danube; Give a Sign of Friendship to Ethnos; Tastes of Danube: Bread, Wine, Herbs; recreating customs The Road of bread, Wedding, celebrating Tsvetnitsa, Velikden (the Easter), Koleda (Christmas), Baba Marta, etc. UPM take part in the International projects, workshops, conferences such as: Danube Networkers-Neighbours at Work; Danube Seniors Universities; Building Bridges for Europe; Danube Stories; Discovering European Neighbours in the Third Age; Tastes of Danube: Bread, Wine, Herbs; The Tastes of Danube: Bread Connects; The Wanted Danube; Living Intangible Culture, etc.

“With care and love for the elderly” Resource Center for Elderly Support (RC) is a successful practice of the Bulgarian Red Cross – Ruse in cooperation with UR and Union of Pensioners-Ruse. The concept of RC is a possible innovative model for the participation of the older persons in creating a fair society for everyone. The main goal of the Resource Center is to provide information for the older persons on a wider range of issues about their rights, as well as to organize various events and initiatives to stimulate their activity and volunteering. The working areas are: Consultative and informational; Discussions, “Let’s Create Goodness” – standing behind certain causes and attracting like-minded people; Solidarity between the Generations. They include: preparation of future volunteers; training of the volunteers for increasing their capacities on various topics; meetings with experts in social assistance and doctors in a healthy lifestyle. Important for pensioners also are: discussions on protection of the rights as rights in inheritance and wills; daily shifts of volunteers and a hotline for information; celebrating with school students, disabled children and Bulgarian Red Cross Youth; festival “Young in Old Age”; “Create kindness”; a booklet “Create good – I give you a hand”; a parade “Growing with dignity – an opportunity to be useful to others”; studying of international practices, etc.

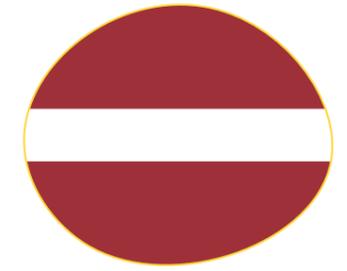
The University of Ruse Angel Kanchev (UR) is an autonomous state-funded higher educational institution. It is also one of the leading institutions of volunteer work in North Bulgaria. The good practices of UR have been done through several channels. There are bachelor and master degree

courses which use volunteer work as part of its education and training. They are: Social Pedagogy; Social and Pedagogical Activities; Social and Pedagogical Work with Children and Families; Pedagogical Crime Prevention and Probation Practices, Occupational Therapy, Social Activities. The curricula and syllabuses for these courses have a balanced ratio between theoretical and practice-oriented training.

Centre of Education of the Third Age was established in 2014 at UR. The UR staff use up-to-date teaching and assessment methods. UR has a law clinic which provides free of charge services to the local community on a voluntary basis. Innovation in teaching is achieved through active networking with a large number of external partners – universities, international network Danube-Networkers Ulm, vocational training centers, municipalities, business organizations, Union of Pensioners (UP) – Ruse or Slivo Pole Municipality, Bulgarian Red Cross – Ruse, Bulgarian Red Cross



University of Ruse  
"Angel Kanchev"



## Latvia

Need information and support? Call the Volunteer Call Centre for Seniors in Riga!

SOCIETY "RIGA ACTIVE SENIORS ALLIANCE" (RASA). The Society was set up in late 2010 with the aim of promoting Riga (and Riga planning region seniors) aged 50 years plus in socialization and integration processes.

Currently, the Society has more than 700 members (individuals). The Society has granted public benefit organization's status.

Volunteers are vital in order to address the main problem of the project "Let us be active!"- social exclusion and loneliness of older people through the improvement of information and development of new opportunities for voluntary work. In order to make information on volunteering options more accessible for older people as well as to support them emotionally, the concept of a volunteer call centre for older people has been implemented in Riga.

Following the successful meetings with the representatives of older people organizations and social workers, these older people who had applied for voluntary work in the call centre, were invited to participate in the workshops to receive theoretical knowledge and necessary practical skills. The leading specialists in geriatrics introduced the topic of active ageing to the workshop attendees. Daina Zepa, internist, geriatrician and cardiologist from Riga East University Hospital explained that active ageing is a process that allows people to realize their potential for physical, social and mental wellbeing throughout the life course and remain socially active. Janis Zalkalns, Head of Geriatric clinic talked about ageing as one of the greatest social and economic challenges of the 21st century for European societies. Both lecturers provided convincing reasons why to be active and engage in voluntary work. Significant part of the workshop was devoted to improvement of telephone communication skills as there is no doubt that these skills are essential to handling phone calls effectively.

Elina Kusiņiceva, social worker from the day care centre in Riga, and working daily with various people, introduced the top qualities of a successful call centre volunteer. Elina has been a volunteer herself and could share her experience on volunteering issues. Theoretical part was followed by situation games when the attendees were split into groups and could practice calls between callers and “call operators”.

On 8 February the volunteer Call centre for older people was launched. The call centre operation is managed by three older volunteers every week day from 10:00 to 14:00. The older adults volunteering in the call centre can freely choose their volunteer work days based on their availability and willingness.

It is planned that the call centre will be operating on the project basis for at least eight months. The call centre is established for older people but there are no strict age limits, however, most people who call are over 65.

After receiving the call, the call centre operators offer to call back to those who would prefer not to spend their means. The main functions of the call centre is to provide information about voluntary work options and leisure time activities in Riga, offer information on various activities for older people or simply to chat with those who feel neglected and lonely.

Callers are free to express their feelings and describe their lives – they will be understood and their privacy will be respected.

Although only a short time has passed since the call centre has been up and running, it has proved to be crucial for both – volunteers and callers. The calls have already revealed the truth about our older people “who don’t want to be a burden because there are so many people worse off than I am” and at the same time they feel lonely and ignored. In a rather short time the volunteer call centre has turned out to be a place where volunteers come with pleasure.

Janina from the Federation of Latvian Retired Persons is happy to volunteer in the call centre: “I feel good because I see that I can help others just with a word.”

The National Museum of Art’s volunteer programme provides its participants with an exclusive opportunity to acquaint themselves with the sites of the four museums and one exhibition hall, which make up the Latvian National Museum of Art, their current exhibitions, daily work, and gain a behind-the-scenes view of the five branches.

Volunteers of the programme, by participating in museum activities and receiving training, are able to improve their knowledge of art and gain experience in the art world, all while expanding their circle of acquaintances. With their newfound knowledge, participants can also contribute to society by helping to make the Latvian National Museum of Art more accessible to the public through the promotion of dialogue between the museum and the community.

The Volunteer Programme of the Latvian National Museum of Art, initially titled Museum Ambassadors, was started in 2009 in response to changes in the living standards in Latvia caused by the global economic crisis. Through the Ambassador Programme, the Museum provided an opportunity for people with limited economic means to attend cultural events for free, while also serving as a feedback tool from visitors. The museum’s Ambassadors began to engage in various other activities of the Museum, performing not only the ‘messenger’ function, but also doing practical work to improve the Museum’s activities. During the European Year of Volunteering (2011) many new members joined the programme. Volunteers have shown themselves to improve and enrich the Museum’s work with their intellectual skills as well as by actively speaking and reporting to the public about the positive experiences and interesting events taking place at the Museum.





## Lithuania

Volunteering in Lithuania is regulated by the Law on Volunteering of the Republic of Lithuania 22 June 2011 to define the principles, peculiarities, requirements, rights and responsibilities of a volunteer. The Law also specifies who can become a volunteer work organizer (charitable and support funds; budgetary institutions; associations; public institutions; religious communities, associations and centres; branches of international social organizations, associations; political parties; labour unions; other legal persons whose activities are determined by special law and whose goal is not primarily for profit, the participants of legal persons can't earn a profit. When the law was published, two goals were set:

- To encourage older people to do volunteer activities
- To support youth volunteering

Due to historical context of Lithuania, it is not easy to describe the volunteering culture as well as the 'age groups' for volunteers in Lithuania. There have always been people who were willing to help others and take care of their own country out of their own free will, without any form of payment. But this activity has never been identified as volunteering or certified in legal documents. In our country we have our own understanding of what volunteering is: because of a complicated Lithuanian historical background, for a long time the definition of a 'volunteer' has been a soldier who willingly and without force protected and defended his homeland. Lithuania had a long history of domination by Tsarist Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. It wasn't until the nineteenth century that we began seeing examples of meaningful national volunteering. In 1864 local Lithuanian schools were closed, the publication of Lithuanian press printed in the Latin alphabet was banned. There were those book smugglers who voluntarily transported Lithuanian books across the border. Risking their lives they distributed Lithuanian books in towns and villages to save the language. Historical reasons such as Russian occupation of Lithuania and its political ideology were the major barriers to raising awareness for volunteering in Lithuania. 'Our society is rather passive and inactive. Most of us perceive community service as a forced voluntary activity. Which is a negative perception associated with the Soviet era. It took years for people to forget the negative shade of this activity, and for a new generation to

grow up. The hardest thing is to move from one way of thinking to another. But it's happening. I would describe the present situation as some kind of breakthrough', in one of his interviews in 2010 said Vaidotas Ilgis, the founder of the Alliance of the Voluntary Service Organizations (Ogulevičiūtė J., 2010). This demonstrates the growth of volunteer initiatives and reveals why older people tend to be less active in terms of volunteering.

Research studies indicate the volunteer movement in Lithuania: 'The research findings in 1998 reveal that only 5 per cent of citizens chose to volunteer. A study on the attitude and openness of Lithuanian citizens to volunteering performed in 2008 by 'TNSGallup' showed that 46 per cent of Lithuanian citizens took part at least in one voluntary activity (Volunteering in Lithuania: what? where? how?, 2008). Based on the order of the European Commission Representation in Lithuania in the beginning of 2011, Market and Society Opinion Research Center 'Vilmorus' carried out a research about the attitude of Lithuanian society towards volunteering. The research study showed that 78 per cent of Lithuanians knew what volunteering was, but only 34 per cent have been engaged in irregular voluntary service or at least once. The respondents believed that the lack of volunteering culture (51 per cent of the respondents) as well as the lack of proper infrastructure (42 per cent of the respondents) were the main barriers to the growth of volunteering in Lithuania. Even 56 per cent of Lithuanian citizens emphasised that people don't have enough information about volunteering, they would like to volunteer but don't know where to start. (Volunteering in Lithuania: what? where? How?, 2008). So volunteering culture is slowly spreading across, based on good practice examples from foreign countries, where volunteering is deeply rooted in the traditions of different communities. The research study in 2019 (Research on Community-based and Voluntary activities in Lithuania, 2020) shows that people's perception of what volunteering is has changed, 15 per cent of Lithuanian citizens volunteer regularly.

Similar to many other countries, volunteering in Lithuania is divided into three types: reciprocal support, service provision, societal involvement. Volunteering comes in all shapes and sizes in different spheres of social and cultural life. Environmental clean-up volunteering, town decorating, tree planting, volunteer work with children, volunteering for people with

disabilities, elderly care volunteer, helping the homeless, volunteer for pets, cemetery preservation, event planning, food/clothing collection and distribution campaigns, home delivery of library books for older or disabled people, professional and non-professional healthcare in hospitals, retirement homes, especially during COVID-19 pandemic, free legal, health and financial advice to individuals who cannot afford to pay, free lectures, seminars and courses at the University of the Third Age. Seniors with university education can be good advisors, teachers in orphan homes as well as retirement homes; patient listeners and 'silver line' psychologists to lonely people, their neighbours and friends.

Volunteering has significantly increased among young people. Basic reasons for volunteering - helping others, finding (new) friends, companions, developing skills or gaining work experience in a specific field, supporting certain ideas, self-realization, meaningful way to spend time, the feeling of being needed, socializing, getting to know yourself and others better, sharing your experience and knowledge. There is that one-time volunteering tendency in Lithuania among young people and elderly people: 'Kindness Days', 'Knitted gifts for seniors and elderly', 'Christmas soup', 'Food on wheels', 'Decorate your town' and others. The most popular type of volunteer work in Lithuania is providing organized services, working in charity organizations such as 'Red Cross', 'Food Bank', 'Caritas', 'Green Movement', 'Silver line', 'Maltese Charities' and voluntary organisations such as VŠĮ 'The Center for Volunteering', the association of nephrology conditions in Lithuania 'Donorship', 'Order of Malta' and others.

The statistics show that 'the enrolment of older people into voluntary work in Lithuania is very poor: 48 percent of the respondents don't volunteer and don't plan to volunteer (the majority of the respondents - people aged 70 years and over), 22 per cent of the respondents have never volunteered because no one asked them to, 17 per cent of the respondents don't believe they can be useful for others, 8 per cent of the respondents don't think that someone needs help, 4 percent of the respondents have never heard of volunteering, and 16 per cent of the respondents had no opinion. By the way, 51 per cent of the respondents wouldn't know where to start if they wanted to volunteer (Market and Society Opinion Research Center, 2012). Based on the survey results, elderly people lack psychological preparation

and methodical training to start volunteering' (For High Quality Senior Adult Volunteers, 2014); elderly people have health issues; elderly people are not properly motivated by organizations or individual persons to search for volunteer activities.

For a higher engagement of older people in volunteering (over the age of 55), Ministry of Social Security and Labour announced 2014–2020 EU Investment Fund „54+“ in 2017, focusing on engaging older workers as volunteers, improving their general skills, and keeping them socially active. It includes such activities as: providing training programmes and individual consulting hours in organizations that recruit volunteers, offering them mentorship services; delivering older people volunteer consultation; updating a database of the organizations that recruit volunteers. Statistics show that due to the growth of the network of the University of the Third Age and the growing role of local communities and non-governmental organizations, more and more older adults who volunteer find volunteering as a meaningful experience. It is a welcoming fact that more and more



## Literature and references

1. Research on Community-based and Voluntary activities in Lithuania, Vilnius, 2020.
2. The ordinance A1-330 of the Minister of Social Security and Labour (Lithuania) 'On approval of the conditions and description of the arrangements of the compensation for expenses of a voluntary activity', Vilnius, 2011. <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.6BF263B19463/DOzmKOhTGr>.
3. Ogulevičiūtė J. Voluntary work: are Lithuanians willing to work for free? // Alfa.lt, 2010.
4. Republic of Lithuania law on volunteering, Vilnius, 2011.
5. Sakalauskas G., Čepas A., Nikartas S., Ūselė L. . Volunteers in probation: assumptions and oportunities. <https://teise.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Savanoryste-probacijos-sistemoje.pdf>, 2012.
6. Volunteering in Lithuania: what? where? how?, 2008. [http://www.3sektorius.lt/docs/Kas\\_kaip\\_kur\\_2013-01-15\\_14\\_56\\_14.pdf](http://www.3sektorius.lt/docs/Kas_kaip_kur_2013-01-15_14_56_14.pdf)
7. For High Quality Senior Adult Volunteers. [https://www.esinvesticijos.lt/lt/paraiskos\\_ir\\_projektai/uz-kokybiska-vyresnio-amziaus-zmoniu-savanoryste/](https://www.esinvesticijos.lt/lt/paraiskos_ir_projektai/uz-kokybiska-vyresnio-amziaus-zmoniu-savanoryste/), 2012.



## **Slovenia**

### **The “Covid-19 Tracker Slovenia”**

is a group of volunteers that collect, analyse and publish data on the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, the cause of COVID-19, in Slovenia. They wish to give the general public a better overview of the magnitude of the issue and a proper assessment of the risk.

In the experience of those countries where the spread of the virus has been most effectively curbed, correctly collected, up-to-date and transparently published data is vital for the effective response of public healthcare systems. Only then the published data can stand as the basis for understanding of what is happening, for the active self-protective behaviour of people and for accepting the urgency of the safety measures taken. Data is collected from various publicly available sources, and since Saturday, March 28, they also have a direct connection with healthcare institutions and the National Institute of Public Health (NIJZ). They share with them unstructured data, which are then validated and shaped into a format suitable for visualization to be presented to the public as well as for further work in model development and forecasting. As data published in the media and certain other sources may sometimes be vague and inconsistent, the table also includes notes on sources and deductions based on incomplete data.

### **Cultural mediators in public institutions**

Slovenian Third Age University network has been developing and has been experimentally implementing its new, comprehensive model, aiming primarily at the education of older people for personal growth and voluntary work and civic engagement in general, and simultaneous “education” of the representatives of public institutions to integrate volunteers in their activities. The programme was for different generations pursuing the same goal and purpose - introduction of new social roles for older people in public institutions and transforming their views and the views of the staff as regards volunteering. After the implementation of the educational and training programme, museums and other public institutions are enabled to integrate highly educated older people as volunteers and older people

are able to take on voluntary roles that are far from being traditional since older people's individual culture and newly acquired knowledge and skills are taken into account. Not only do the volunteers fit in the existing institutional structure, but they also contribute to shaping their voluntary role within it. More importantly, this new model comprises also parallel public campaigning for raising public awareness about new social and volunteering roles of the elderly, about intergenerational learning and above all intergenerational co-operation. This model can be said to be a new major breakthrough in adult education and intergenerational education in Slovenia. Namely, Slovenian Third Age University – together with selected institutions – has been offering opportunities to older people to learn and to work together with the staffs which are composed of different generations. Thus older students learn together with other generations and work with them as volunteers and in public institutions (public space!) in the fields of culture, education and health care, as well as preserving bio-diversity.

### **Social Network Of Intergenerational Programmes For Quality Ageing**



## **The Netherlands**

In the Netherlands there are more than 360 organizations and different volunteers' centers who are taking care of effective employment of volunteers. Each municipality support volunteers' centers. Many voluntary organizations, umbrella organizations and support organizations are members of The Association of Dutch Voluntary Work Organizations (NOV). NOV is the organisation that defends the different needs of the voluntary organisations. In 1994 NOV was appointed as one of two support institutions for volunteering. The other organisation was the Stichting Vrijwilligersmanagement (Foundation Volunteers Management - SVM). Its role consists of renewing and professionalising volunteering.

In 2003 the Dutch foundation that dealt with the management of volunteering, SVM and the NOV joined forces and formed CIVIQ. NOV has historically sustained and represented the interests of more than 4 million volunteers while the objective of SVM was to modernise voluntary work and make it more professional. Over the years, the differences between the two organisations became less evident, to the point that in 2003 they merged. NOV continued its activities under the name of Organisation to Foster Volunteering (NOV Association). In 2007, CIVIQ became part of MOVISIE. MOVISIE concentrates on the infrastructure and provision of knowledge and advice to volunteering in the Netherlands. It is the institution which covers the whole of social support and welfare. It implements the programme commissioned by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport. MOVISIE is the national organisation funded to gather and disseminate knowledge about all aspects of volunteering to organisations and councils. They develop tools, offer advice, support and training, as well as carrying out promotional work, research and product development.

NOV is the leading organisation within the voluntary effort sector of the Netherlands. NOV has 350 member organisations that work with or for volunteers. NOV is unique because it is the only organisation in the Netherlands geared to strengthening voluntary work. It has two kinds of members: organisations that perform voluntary work and those that fulfil a supporting or coordinating role. NOV has three main tasks:

1. To serve the interests of the voluntary effort sector. NOV is the spokesperson and lobbyist for Dutch voluntary work and as such is a

serious partner in discussions with politicians, government officials and other policy-influencing parties.

2. To act as an intermediary for its members. As a network actor, NOV gives its members the possibility to exchange knowledge and experiences, and to develop collaborative projects. Through these networks member organisations mutually strengthen each other.
3. To provide a major stimulus to the voluntary effort. NOV works towards more public recognition of voluntary effort, and its name is also used in innovative initiatives.

By voluntary organisations it is meant those organisations which entirely consist of volunteers or which work with volunteers and request funding. There is no official definition of such organisations at national level but municipalities tend to set certain criteria especially with regard to how far the paid workforce is involved in the organisation. Municipalities are currently working on defining such organisations in terms of improving the funding mechanisms. It is at the local level that funding for such organisations is decided. There are around 250,000 voluntary organisations. Furthermore, there are other active volunteers who provide services to the community which are unaccounted for given the legal status of the organisations in which they operate.

Voluntary organisations in the care sector are nationally organised (they are all members of the NOV) and are often active in regional and local departments. Besides these, there are local initiatives and religious initiated activities. Voluntary organisations such as the Red Cross and UVV (Union of Institute of Volunteers) sign contracts with care organisations to provide a supply of volunteers. Some of the organisations in the care sector work exclusively with volunteers (especially mutual support and campaigning and are often local departments of larger organisations). Other organisations work mainly with paid staff but have volunteers do the



## CONCLUSION

Personal and institutional narratives are a great source of inspiration and an important trigger for learning. They are meant to trigger older people's primary motivation for remaining or becoming an active citizen. Nevertheless, just reading about voluntary endeavors is not enough. If older people do not volunteer it means that their volunteering is not expected nor is it appreciated, that nobody has invited them to take over volunteering tasks. The mission of organized volunteering and volunteering institutions is to extend the invitation to volunteer to older people, to accompany them in their volunteering creativity, to make them visible and recognized in society for the good they do to themselves and for the welfare of society.

This brochure has been funded with support from the Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership Project No. 2020-1-L01-KA204-077966 "Keep going, reach goals, get an award: empowering senior volunteerism"

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the content which reflects the views only of the authors, and the European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the

