Facilitating intergenerational solidarity and learning through building friendships between youngsters and elderly

Bonding

Annex F

National Report

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KINDLING A BETTER WORLD

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1   INTRODUCTION

The population in the EU is ageing, as indicated by the rapid increase of the elderly population, the share of whom almost doubled in the period between 2001 and 2020. Specifically, people aged 80 and over, represented 3.4% of the population in 2001, and the rate escalated to almost 6% in 2020. As for those aged 65 and over, they accounted for 16% of the population in 2001, while their share increased to 21% in 2020. The ageing of the population becomes more and more evident given that at the same time, the share of young people aged 0 to 19 years old in the EU has decreased by three percentage points during the period 2001-2020. Concerning Greece, it is among the EU countries with the highest percentage of people aged 65 and over, who represent 22% of the total population in the country (Eurostat, n.d.). The figure below depicts the rise of the elderly population in Greece and the EU between 2001 and 2020.

Figure 1. Population aged 80 years and over in Greece and the EU between 2001-2020.

Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/digpub/demography/bloc-1c.html?lang=en
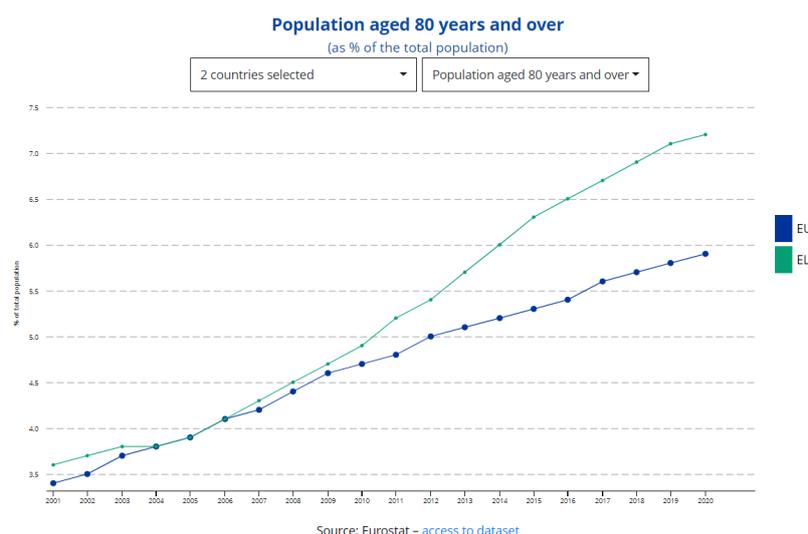
In general, approximately one-tenth of older people in Europe in 2015 were without anyone with whom they could discuss personal matters. However, getting together with family or relatives daily was more common in the southern EU Member States, including Greece, where 43.8% of older people aged 75 years were getting together with family or relatives daily (Eurostat, 2021). Yet, it is also known that 30.5%[1] of the elderly population in Greece live alone and could thus, be more affected by social isolation or loneliness. What is more, the COVID-19 pandemic and the social distancing measures have

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[1] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/digpub/ageing/

exacerbated feelings of loneliness, negative emotions, fear, and anxiety, especially among the elderly. A recent report on loneliness in the EU (Baarck et al., 2021) showed that feelings of loneliness after the pandemic escalated, as depicted in the diagram below.

Figure 2. Loneliness by macro-region before and after the pandemic.
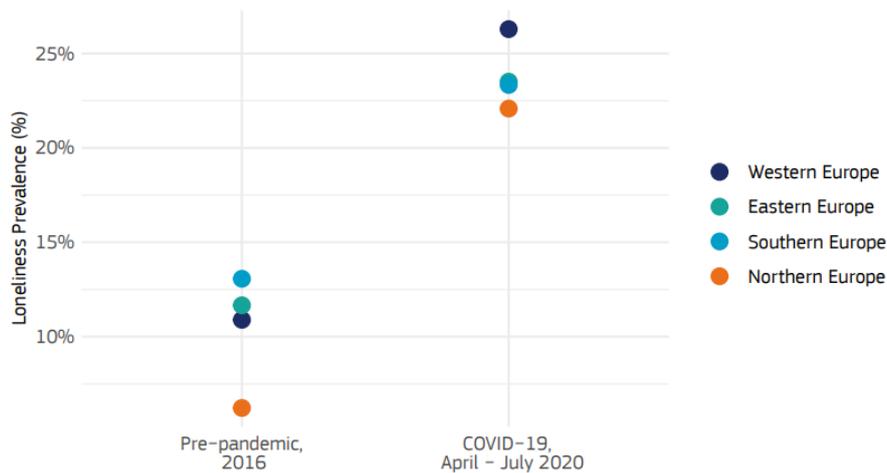
Source:

https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC125873/loneliness_in_the_eu__insights_from_surveys_and_online_media_data_online.pdf

Specifically, the loneliness increase in Greece was less than ten percentage points which is limited compared to other regions. Nonetheless, Greece presented with very high levels of social isolation, which reportedly affected 43% of the population. At the same time, it is already known that the elderly may be more socially isolated compared to other age groups (European Commission, 2018). Based on the data mentioned above, social inclusion and support of the elderly through the adoption of support measures and good practices is of the utmost importance.

Concerning befriending services in Greece, they are no standard practice. However, "Friendship Clubs" in Athens operate at the neighbourhood and district level and provide services to older people, including creative activities, visits to cultural venues, fitness, self-defence, nursing, and physiotherapy programs. In "Friendship Clubs", the older Athenians may experience warmth, social support, and contact with peers, which are very important, especially for those who do not have family or relatives to care for them. With regard to befriending services provided by youth to the elderly, there are no such long-term programs in Greece. On the other hand, intergenerational learning and intergenerational solidarity are issues that may be touched upon in the education system, but this depends on teachers' willingness to participate in such initiatives and foster collaboration with the elderly or organisations in the field (IDEA Partnership, 2021). A related example was the "Grandpa, talk

to me about your life"[2] project which used digital storytelling for students to develop their social competencies and documentary skills and older people working together with the students to develop their digital skills.

[2] https://seniors.ntlab.gr/news/2/

2 REPORT ABOUT THE GOOD PRACTICES

Good Practice no.1

Title	Friendship at Every Age: A Program to Combat Loneliness and Social Isolation of Elderly People
Location	Greece
Organisation	Prolepsis Institute
Website	https://www.prolepsis.gr/en/programs/friendship-at-any-age-a-program-to-combat-loneliness-and-social-isolation-of-elderly-people https://filiasekatheilikia.gr/
Overview	Prolepsis Institute, in collaboration with the international organisation "Les Petits Frères des Pauvres", is implementing the program "Friendship at Every Age", which started on 12/4/20 and will last until 30/6/25. The program seeks to decrease social isolation and loneliness among older people in Greece through human contact and bonding. Additional aims of the program include strengthening the older people's self-confidence, putting their needs and problems in the spotlight, and promoting volunteering in Greece. The program was initially launched as a pilot scheme from December 2019 to April 2020, with volunteers and beneficiaries in the fire-stricken areas of Eastern Attica (Mati) and Palaio Faliro. Then, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteer visits to beneficiaries and collective activities were replaced by telephone communication. At the same time, cooperation with several care centres was established (i.e., Athens Nursing Home, Elderly Care Unit of the Meropeio Charitable Foundation, and Home of Christian Love). "Friendship at Every Age" involves groups of volunteers that operate at a local community-neighbourhood level, providing support to older people, such as weekly telephone communication or home visits and collective activities, events etc. Within the program framework, small groups of volunteers who are connected with older people are created to develop befriending relationships. For example, 2-3 volunteers are linked with 2-3 older persons, which helps the latter acquire more friends. Each volunteer contacts the beneficiaries by telephone at least once a week. When possible, volunteers make visits and activities such as walks, and visits to cultural activities, along with the beneficiaries. As a result, the elderly feel like active members of a community that values them while they are motivated spiritually and emotionally.
Impact	Provided that the program is relatively new and started operating during the COVID-19 pandemic, there is no data yet on its actual impact and the number of people involved. However, the program is expected to have a significant effect, especially regarding actively promoting volunteering

	through its activities. Anyone with sensitivity towards the elderly can volunteer for the project even without specialised knowledge or skills. The program welcomes pupils and students to become volunteers either through collaboration with their schools and universities or independently. The aim is for younger people to increase their knowledge of ageing and the challenges associated with it for older people while at the same time instilling a sense of social participation and contribution. Moreover, through their participation in the program, pupils and students can upgrade their CVs and academic and professional profiles. The "Friendship at Every Age" program is as well an ideal field for corporate volunteering, which allows employees to develop their competencies and skills and promotes team-building while at the same time contributing to society and a good reputation for the company.
Innovation	Within the program's framework, a telephone line (+30 2106101300) is available to support older people who feel lonely and/or their carers, family members, and friends. The hotline operates from Monday to Friday, from 11 am to 8 pm, providing communication in a safe environment by trained staff; calls are not recorded, and the institute does not maintain or process the beneficiaries' personal data. The services provided through the landline include communication for human contact and bonding, information about the befriending program and connection with volunteers, and liaison with other social services when required. As for the staff operating the hotline, they are trained volunteers who receive ongoing supervision and training. Another innovative aspect of the program is that it is both based on the volunteers' contribution and also seeks to promote volunteerism in Greece.
Sustainability	The "Friendship at Every Age" program is implemented with a donation by the TIMA Charitable Foundation and supported by Envolve Entrepreneurship, while it will run at least until 2025. Moreover, the Region of Attica recently decided to put the program under its auspices, providing practical support to recognise the Prolepsis Institute's initiative to combat loneliness in old age. Also, the program has multiple supporters[3], including municipalities, elderly care units, social services, local associations, public and private bodies, etc. It should be noted at this point that Prolepsis Institute participated with the "Friendship at Every Age" project in the Bravo 2021 - Bravo Sustainability Dialogue[4]. Within this framework, initiatives and programs that promote sustainable development, responsible entrepreneurship, and social responsibility are evaluated and awarded for their contribution to society.
Transferability	The "Friendship at Every Age" program is implemented by Prolepsis Institute in collaboration with "Les Petits Frères des Pauvres (PFP)", a large international organisation based in France with extensive experience in supporting the elderly. PFP executives provide expertise and guidance on

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[3] https://filiasekatheilikia.gr/supporters/

[4] https://bravosustainabilityawards.com/bravo-sustainability-week-2021/society/#

	training and the program's overall implementation. Furthermore, Prolepsis Institute has extensive research experience on preventive medicine, awareness-raising, and information actions addressed to the elderly. Greece is among the fourteen countries worldwide in which this initiative is being implemented. Provided that several organisations and social partners participate and support the program (e.g., Municipalities of Agia Barbara, Lykovrisi – Pefki, Metamorphosis, Moschato – Tavros, Nea Smyrni, Serres, Oropos, Elderly Care Unit "House of Peace, Rodi Care Elderly Care Unit etc.) it is expected that the program will expand and the circle of support for older people will grow.
Additional info	https://humanities.byu.edu/building-fraternity-between-young-and-old/

Good Practice no.2

Title	Online Companionship for the Elderly
Location	Greece
Organisation	Doctors of the World (Médecins du Monde)
Website	https://mdmgreece.gr/epigousa-paremvasi-se-evalota-atoma-60/ https://mdmgreece.gr/diadiktiaki-sintrofia-ilikiomenon/ https://www.timafoundation.org/el/grants/giatroi-tou-kosmou-iatriki-kai-psychologiki-ypostirixi-apomonomenon-kai-evaloton-atomon-60-2020/
Overview	As part of the emergency intervention program required due to the unprecedented situation of the COVID-19 pandemic in Greece and worldwide, the organisation Doctors of the World launched a program called "Online Companionship" for vulnerable people over 60 years of age. The program involves the creation of virtual companionship and discussion groups that seek to break the isolation and feelings of loneliness experienced by older people during this period, especially for those without relatives. Specifically, older people are provided with tablets and easy-to-use technology, allowing them to connect even in the post-pandemic era. Older people are connected in virtual teams forming groups under the guidance of a specialist doctor and a psychologist and engage in simple activities together, such as drinking coffee online at a particular time of day. The program is part of a broader emergency intervention program for vulnerable people, covering multiple needs for isolated and vulnerable older individuals in the region of Attika. Apart from the Online Companionship, the intervention scheme entails as well the provision of medical advice and psychosocial support at a distance by telephone and the home delivery of medicines by the Doctors of the World's staff.

Impact	Even though the actual data for the numbers of vulnerable older citizens who participate in the "Online Companionship" program are not available, the program is considered to be of significant social impact as it aims to reach all isolated people over 60 years of age in the region of Attica. It is essential to note that the companionship program constitutes one of the three pillars of support provided to the elderly during the challenging COVID-19 period. The other two pillars are the provision of medical counselling and psychosocial support services by telephone and the home delivery of medicine. About the first one, the organisation's doctors provide medical advice. At the same time, psychologists and social workers support older people in dealing with feelings of isolation or their circumstances, thus, reducing the chances of developing psychosocial problems. As for the delivery of medicine to the elderly and especially to those who are financially vulnerable, the action aims to ensure that these people continue to receive their medication and prevents them from having to line up in queues at pharmacies, risking becoming infected with the coronavirus. Data is available for the numbers of beneficiaries in the actions mentioned above: 823 people registered to receive psychosocial and medical support by the end of July 2020, and the organisation's team conducted 565 psychosocial consultations, 442 medical consultations, and 505 door-to-door visits with 323 beneficiaries receiving free medication[5].
Innovation	The "Online Companionship for the Elderly" program is pioneering for the Greek standards since there are not many similar initiatives available in the country to reduce feelings of loneliness and social isolation experienced by the elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, an innovative aspect of the program was the technological means used to ensure its smooth implementation. Specifically, a tablet device was given to beneficiaries to connect via video call and communicate with the other members of the group and the Doctors of the World specialised staff. The elderly who were not familiar with digital processes were facilitated in their efforts by the specialised team. Therefore, the means used were simple, functional, and suitable for the elderly population to be still valuable even after the end of the pandemic.
Sustainability	The emergency intervention program for vulnerable people over 60 years old, run by the Doctors of the World in Greece, is funded by the TIMA Charitable Foundation and the Hellenic Initiative Canada. Also, as mentioned previously, even though the program was launched as an emergency intervention program to support the elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic in Greece, it ultimately aims to keep operating in the long run. The technological means used for its implementation and the digital skills provided to the elderly for their participation will still be relevant and valuable even in the post-pandemic period.

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[5]   https://ca.thehellenicinitiative.org/legacy-uploads/2020/08/1st-Narrative-and-Financial-ReportTHI-Canada-July-2020.pdf

Transferability	Provided that the online companionship program is coordinated by the Doctors of the World's specialised staff, the practice can be adapted in other contexts where psychologists and social workers are already employed to support the elderly. In addition, elderly care units, services, and associations could collaborate to organise activities to bring together their beneficiaries who could develop friendships among them. Moreover, digital tools could further facilitate this process, making it more feasible to arrange such expected time together for elderly peers.
Additional info	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IObqZu76F2I&t=135s

3 FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS

3.1 Findings from the interviews with youth

Basic Information

Three young people took part in the interviews. The first participant was a 24-year-old male with a Bachelor's degree in Psychology, currently doing an internship in his field of studies. The second participant was a 23-year-old female with a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Psychology and Mental Health, currently employed in an NGO. The third participant was a 20-year-old female studying Dietetics Nutrition at a Vocational Training Institute.

1. *Have you volunteered before? If yes, could you please share a bit about that experience?*

The first participant mentioned that they had not volunteered in an organised manner with an organisation. However, they had volunteered on their initiative, for example, cleaning up the coastline in their hometown or the sports facilities they used along with a small group of friends. The second participant had volunteer experience as a student at school and at university in a peer support helpline for fellow students regarding difficulties in their studies, relationship issues etc. The third participant had no volunteer experience.

2. *Have you ever worked/volunteered with older people? If yes, could you please share a bit about that experience?*

Two of the participants had never volunteered with older people in the past. One participant mentioned they had recently joined a befriending service for older people in connecting the young volunteers with the older people to whom they provide regular phone calls throughout the week to keep them company, discussing several topics.

3. *Have you heard of befriending services before? What is your understanding of befriending services?*

Two participants said that they had never heard of befriending services before. As for the term befriending services, one participant indicated that, in their opinion, it has to do with the psychological support for older people for them to feel more comfortable with their carers and vice versa. They added that it is mainly isolated and senior people who need such relationships. The other participant mentioned that what comes to mind regarding befriending services is that younger and older people come together in groups and share opinions, engage in conversations, etc. The third participant mentioned that they knew of befriending services in general. Still, the first time they heard of befriending services between

the younger and the older people was when they started volunteering for a related project. They said: *"I think it is a very important initiative as there is a general conviction that these two age groups are far apart and have no common topics to discuss. Young people may think that older people are prejudiced, and older people may think that young people do not do things right."* They added that even though young people usually have older people in their everyday lives, such as grandparents, related projects and actions are not widely discussed or known in Greece.

4. Have you ever participated in befriending services?

Two participants had never participated in befriending services before. The other participant had personal experience volunteering for a related program regarding befriending services between youth and older people. They mentioned that the program now takes place over the telephone due to the pandemic, but the goal is for youth to visit older people in person. They said that their role is to connect younger people with older people who may live in their area or close so as for them to go out together, have coffee, or go for a walk in their neighbourhood. The first step is to explore the younger person's interests and match them with an older person with common interests, making it fun and pleasant to spend time together.

5. Are you aware of any befriending services for older people in your local community?

Two participants had never heard of befriending services for older people in their local communities before. One participant mentioned that the program they volunteer in could involve people from the broader community. However, they had never heard of similar programs running at the municipality level. They added that it is essential to raise awareness about such initiatives through advertising them: younger people may listen about befriending services through social media, but older people may get informed through advertisements, brochures, etc.

6. What do you think motivates young people to participate in befriending services for elderly people?

Two participants highlighted personal experiences as motivation for young people. One participant said it has to do with the specific young person involved: how they perceive older people or personal experiences, such as having a grandfather or grandmother in a similar situation or an older person in their area. In such cases, young people get more sensitive toward these issues. They added that when you do not have such experience, it is unlikely for most youth to get involved in those services because nowadays, young people are more indifferent and harsher towards older people; sometimes, they are even disrespectful. The other participant who agreed on the importance of personal relationships with grandfathers and grandmothers added that young people might as well recognise the loneliness that older people experience: *"Even though time goes by quickly for younger people who have many things to do during the day, it is not the same for older people who may only have a TV to*

entertain them, especially if they live in a remote area or if they have a mobility problem." They said that young people, motivated for volunteerism and sensitive towards the target group of older people, might be interested in this befriending service. The third participant noted: *"I feel that young people like to converse with others and exchange opinions, not be alone. They like to learn from older people and listen to what they have to say, their stories, etc."*

7. What do you think are the benefits that young people might have from participating in befriending services for elderly people?

Concerning the benefits of participating in befriending services for younger people, two participants highlighted that the mere development of a befriending relationship is a significant benefit. Furthermore, participants added that participation in befriending services helps young people develop qualities and traits like respect and appreciation*: "When you work with this target group, you learn to appreciate even more several simple things in life such as health, the help that someone may provide you with that we take for granted, especially the younger ones. You enjoy feelings of happiness for offering something to someone and also pride."* Participants noted that older people have knowledge, experience, and maturity and pass these on to the younger people through their advice, dialogue, conversations, and the exchange of opinions. One participant shared the following statement: *"Older people have been through a lot, have many things to share, and it is enjoyable to listen to them, even though you may recognise that things are different now. Today's older people may actually be the last generation with such experiences to share. Thus, younger people have many things to gain on a personal level."*

8. What do you think will be challenges/obstacles in involving an older person in a befriending service?

Concerning the challenges and obstacles in involving older people in befriending services, one participant noted that older people are pretty absolute as far as their opinions, beliefs, or behaviours towards others are concerned. This could cause conflict in the befriending relationship with the young person. On the other hand, they mentioned that some older people are very receptive, optimistic, cheerful, and polite, and, in this case, there would be no such issues. They also added a vast generation gap between younger and older people. For example, a younger person may joke about something or say something that the older person is more sensitive to or consider inappropriate. Another participant highlighted difficulties in terms of practical issues, such as the service operating at a considerable distance from the older person's residence or not being able to commute to participate in it. Moreover, they added that many things take place online, but the online means may not be suitable for older people; for example, the telephone may be a better alternative. Another challenge mentioned was that older people may feel ashamed for not having family, friends, or other relatives. It may be hard for them

to accept it and feel comfortable taking part in befriending services. They may be reluctant to participate and not able to see the benefits it will provide them with.

9. What kind of skills do you think that young people need to be able to participate effectively in befriending services for elderly?

Participants said that the skills that young people need to participate in befriending services include respect towards others, understanding, flexibility, and adaptability to adjust their language, for example, to be understood by an older person in case they use jargon. They highlighted that communication skills are essential: the ability and willingness to listen, patience, sensitivity, and the ability to delve deeper into things. Participants emphasised interpersonal skills, such as kindness, friendliness, politeness, openness, talkativeness, and not holding back. They added that since this kind of relationship is delicate, it requires special attention from the young volunteers. The latter should be tolerant of things they may hear, be human, and understand the difficulties and obstacles older people may experience.

10. How can befriending services become more attractive?

All participants noted the importance of advertising befriending services as necessary means to spread the word. For younger people, advertising through social media would be essential to learn about such services and become more interested and get involved. They provide young people with information about related services and how important these are for older people. *"It may not require too much time from them, but for the older person, it may be something that they look forward to the whole week"*, as one participant noted. As for older people, it is essential to inform them using the appropriate means. *"If we use websites and social media, chances are we will not be able to reach them. But brochures given to places where older people usually encounter and phone calls may be more appropriate"*. Participants also suggested that informative sessions or events for young people informing them about these services or field trips to homes that take care of older people to get to know them and establish direct contact with them and get information from professionals working with them about possible difficulties or issues that those face would be helpful. Also, indirect contact with older people's circle, for example, by providing this information to their grandchildren, would make it easier to reach them.

11. Please evaluate each of the following statements on a 1 to 7 scale (where 1 is Strongly disagree and 7 is Strongly Agree):

STATEMENT	GRADE Participant 1	GRADE Participant 2	GRADE Participant 3

I enjoy helping elderly people	5	7	7
Becoming a befriender of an older person can be a useful way to learn new things	5	7	7
Befriending an older person can help me develop my skills	4	6	6
Befriending can help me meet new people and socialize	6	7	6
Befriending can increase empathy and active listening	6	7	7
I would like to learn more about befriending	5	7	7
I would like to be part of a befriending service	5	7	6

12. In your opinion, which topics should be included in a training programme for young people interested in engaging in befriending services?

According to participants, a training program for young people should cover the skills that they need in order to be able to participate in befriending services, such as communication skills, respect, empathy, and listening skills despite personal convictions. *"The training should also cover more technical and practical issues, such as how to behave towards older people, how to approach them if they are reluctant, conversations or topics that you could initiate, or activities that you could engage them in."* They added that the training should focus on what befriending services are about, what young people who participate will be asked to do, the benefits for younger and older people, what they may learn, etc. Also, the training should present the difficulties that older people face, their needs, and their everyday reality so younger people can understand how they can assist older people and help them improve their daily lives using psychological methods, such as empowerment or through practical means.

13. Do you have any additional comments you would like to share?

One participant added that it is essential to raise awareness among youth about such services to learn about them and how they can help older people through their participation. Another one noted that it is necessary also to consider the pandemic period and its impact on all people, but mainly on older people who did not work remotely or use the Internet for entertainment, and how this experience could be used to improve things for them.

3.2 Findings from the interviews with the elderly

Basic Information

The first participant was a 72-year-old female who described herself as an unconventional older person active in tourism, drama and attending university for older people. She used to work in public relations, marketing, and journalism. The second participant was a retired 75-year-old female who graduated high school and studied design in a vocational training institute. The third participant was a retired 63-year-old male who studied social work and had extensive work experience with vulnerable groups.

1. Have you ever had the opportunity to use any services/support from young people? If yes, could you please share a bit about that experience?

The first participant mentioned that they had not used services/support from young people and added that meeting young people gives life to older people. They noted that they were somewhat uncertain whether there are such services provided by the state or NGOs in Greece and only heard of the "Home Help" program, which is provided by the state to older people who have severe difficulties, such as mobility problems, and has many bureaucratic procedures. Another participant mentioned that their children were the only young people they received support from, while the third participant engaged in such services in the context of a European project abroad that involved young volunteers.

2. Have you heard of befriending services before? What is your understanding of befriending services?

The first participant had never heard the term befriending services before. However, they mentioned knowing the word intergenerational, which they encountered in the work of a specific organisation that provides activities that foster collaboration between generations. They further elaborated: _"Younger people usually do not need help in this area; generally, older and isolated people need a befriending relationship and do not know where and how they can pursue it without external help."_ Another participant had heard the term, which they said is about mutual support. The third participant noted that befriending services have to do with establishing friendships between younger and older people or between other groups.

3. Do you think there are benefits from befriending services? If yes, could you please clarify which?

All participants mentioned that there are multiple benefits for both younger and older people, including companionship, dialogue, psychological uplifting, a positive and fun connection with another person, and the exchange of experiences. *"Older people gain joy from the young person's company and the freshness that youngsters bring and transfer to older people",* as one participant noted. *"Also, young people provide knowledge about things that older people like me have never even imagined."* Participants added that young people gain as well in terms of learning from the older people's experience and knowledge and can have their questions answered regarding historical events through the older person's sharing of their lived experiences.

4. What do you think will be challenges/obstacles in involving an older person in a befriending service?

The first participant noted that most challenges and obstacles are *"in our head"*, and if the older person is willing to do so, they can overcome many obstacles. A fundamental obstacle may be mobility problems that some older people have and many obligations such as taking care of their grandchildren that prevent them from having free time to get involved. Also, many older people feel bored and are not motivated; they think that such things concern younger individuals and that older age is for someone to settle and rest. All participants noted that a significant challenge is the lack of knowledge of technology and digital skills that could hinder older people from participating online or acquiring information for related events and opportunities to get involved. Another participant mentioned that an obstacle could be the generation gap and that older people often underestimate younger people due to their lack of experience and find it hard to trust them.

5. Are you aware of any befriending services for elderly people in your local community?

The first participant did not know of befriending services for the elderly other than "Friendship Clubs" that bring together older people. As for intergenerational services, another participant mentioned the Open Care Centres for Older People (KAPI) that offer socialisation opportunities for older people in Greece. The third participant did not know of related services in their local community.

6. Do you think that there are enough intergenerational services?

The first participant mentioned that they only knew of the work of one specific organisation and did not know whether other organisations try to bring together older and younger generations. The remaining two participants had never heard of such services.

7. Have you ever participated in befriending service?

One participant was involved in the local Friendship Club but noted they already had friends and relationships in their life. Another participant was part of their local Open Care Centre for Older People (KAPI), and the third one had never participated in such services.

8. Would you be interested in taking part in befriending services?

The first participant noted that they would be interested in participating in these services as long as their and the young person's needs and interests coincide. They mentioned, *"We may go out for a jog, and my speed will be 3 km/hr and the younger person's 10km/hr because they have power and strength. This I think would be a problem for the younger person."* The second participant mentioned that they would participate in such services if they were younger but are not currently in the mood to do so. The third participant said they would participate and found the idea interesting both personally and professionally.

9. If yes, what kind of socialising activities would you like to do with the youth befriender?

The socialising activities that the first participant would like to engage in with their youth befriender would be visits to museums, exhibitions, theatre shows, walks, excursions, and trips that could also provide guided tours that would help her build her knowledge. All participants mentioned that they would like to engage in conversations and dialogue with the younger person and exchange experiences about their past and future. Moreover, one participant noted, *"Another thing that would be helpful would be for a young person to familiarise me with digital technology; it would make me jump with joy!"* adding that this would be interesting for many older people.

10. If yes, what form of communication would you prefer (e.g., face to face, via telephone, via the Internet)?

The first participant said they would not prefer telephone communication as they feel it is often a waste of time. They would enjoy going out with the young person and having face to face contact with them. Another participant also agreed, noting that they would prefer communication over the Internet because they lived in a rural area and were uncertain whether befriending services could be provided in his local area in person. The third participant added that communication over the internet would be more accessible and convenient than having to set a specific date in person.

11. How can befriending services become more attractive to elderly people?

According to the first participant, the first step is for older people to learn that these services exist, while a description of what these services may offer would intrigue older people. *"For example, if reading groups are held with young volunteers, an older person who may enjoy reading but does not have a good vision to do so would be very interested in this activity. Or a person who would like to*

do something specific, such as visit a particular park, but they will not do it on their own and young volunteers will motivate them to engage in this activity together". Hence, they added that if there were announcements in the context of the project informing older people that "at this date and time the specific activity will take place", older people would be motivated since they need to know what they will engage in. Providing information is of utmost importance. All participants noted that group activities and events that would bring older and younger people together, such as excursions or walks, should be the first step. One participant said that "*We could start from these groups to get to know each other and then progress to more personal relationships in dyads, choosing the ones from the group that suit you better to establish the befriending relationship with them."*

12. Please evaluate each of the following statements on a 1 to 7 scale (where 1 is Strongly disagree and 7 is Strongly Agree):

STATEMENT	GRADE Participant 1	GRADE Participant 2	GRADE Participant 3
Befriending will stimulate companionship and conversation	7	7	7
Befriending will be a chance for new leisure opportunities	7	7	7
Befriending can help me meet new people and socialize	6	7	7
Befriending can increase empathy and active listening	7	7	5
I would like to learn more about befriending	7	5	7
I would like to be part of a befriending service	7	5	6

13. Do you have any additional comments you would like to share?

One participant mentioned: "*I gained knowledge through this interview, and I would like to learn more about the future project activities. Even small steps are essential and pave the way for successful future activities. The way I see it, BONDING is a social project that also helps younger people engage in positive social activities and helps bridge communication between generations."* Another participant said, "*It is a very nice and interesting idea, and it will be beneficial, especially for older people, but young people will benefit as well"*. Last but not least, another one noted: "*This initiative will bridge the generation gap between older and younger people. Young people have the knowledge, and older people have experience. So, it is great; go for it!"*.

4 CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The population in the EU, including Greece, is rapidly ageing. Even though older people in Greece have regular contact with their friends and families, many older people live alone. Moreover, Greece is among the EU countries with the highest levels of social isolation, while the COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing measures have aggravated feelings of loneliness and isolation. Concerning befriending services in Greece, the desk and field research confirmed that they are not widespread in the country, except for "Friendship Clubs", which provide socialisation opportunities for older Athenians. As for intergenerational services, these are also relatively uncommon, while related initiatives may take place in education based on teachers' interest and motivation to organise and implement them. The two good practices identified during the desk research were programs run by NGOs for a specific period that provided companionship to older people. Thus, it goes without saying that as the numbers of the ageing population will grow even more shortly, the systematic provision of social inclusion and support services for the elderly in Greece is pivotal.

The interviews conducted with younger and older people in the field research context confirmed that befriending and intergenerational services are unfamiliar to most people interviewed. Nonetheless, all interviewees believed that befriending services have a lot to offer to both younger and older participants, such as companionship and the fruitful exchange of knowledge and experience between generations. Related difficulties may include the so-called generation gap and practical issues, such as older people's lack of digital skills, which will hinder their participation if befriending services are organised and provided online. Participants highlighted that advertising befriending services using the appropriate means is necessary to make them more well-known and attractive. Advertising through social media may be more appropriate for young volunteers, while brochures or TV commercials may be more suitable for older people. As for the type of communication interviewees preferred, opinions were somewhat divided. On the one hand, they would choose face-to-face contact, but the online format is often more convenient. However, participants agreed that group activities and communication might be preferable to one-to-one, at least in the initiation phase.

To sum up, the desk and field research in Greece revealed that the provision of intergenerational befriending services among youth and older people in the national context was considered an innovative idea that would be extremely helpful and it was warmly welcomed by the participants interviewed. Thus, it is expected that the BONDING project and its results will largely benefit the stakeholders involved and enrich the existing services for older people's inclusion and support in Greece.

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