ESN Autumn Seminar
Retaining and regaining independence and inclusion in later life: the role of social services
ESN-Herbstseminar
Erhaltung und Wiedergewinnung von Selbstbestimmung und Teilhabe im Alter: die Rolle des Sozialamts

24-25 October 2012, Stuttgart
‘Please be nice, I’m a volunteer’ – volunteering by older people in the EU

By
Klára Fóti
Research Manager
Eurofound, Living Conditions and Quality of Life Unit

ESN Autumn Seminar on
‘Retaining and regaining independence and inclusion in later life: the role of social services’
Session 3 on ‘Adapting to the demographic challenge: lessons from other actors’
25th of October 2012, Stuttgart
Introduction: older people and volunteering

- Older people are perceived rather as *beneficiaries* than *contributors* (i.e. volunteers)
- Indeed, according to data, an overwhelming majority of people 65+ (78%) never participate in volunteering and the situation is worse in Central and Eastern Europe, where this share stands at almost 90%.
- However, relating to current *demographic change*, there is a growing need for *reorientation in perspectives*, i.e. older people should be seen not only as *recipients*, but increasingly as *providers*
Policy context

- Inclusive growth” as one of the key objectives of the „Europe 2020” strategy
- Focus: vulnerable groups, being at risk of social exclusion (among them: elderly people, after retirement, i.e. 65+)
- European Year for Volunteering 2011
- European Year of Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity
Volunteering by older people in the EU
key focus and objectives of the project

• **Focus:**
  - On elderly people who **have already left the labour market** (the risk of social exclusion rises once a person leaves the labour force)
  - Volunteering activities at **local** level

• **Main objectives:**
  - To identify case studies (best practices) which managed to involve elderly people into volunteering as **actors**
  - To explore those facilitating factors which promote and those obstacles which hinder volunteering by elderly people
  - To draw lessons and conclusions not only for policy makers (governments, local authorities) but also for organisations
Case studies from the following countries

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3 case studies from each, with the exception of Lithuania, where 1, and Latvia, where 2 case studies were conducted. Altogether, 30 case studies from 11 countries were prepared.
Key issues addressed

• **Background information** on the countries concerned in terms policy for older people and volunteering
• **Case studies:**
  - Contents and targets of the measure
  - Recruitment, involvement and participation of older persons (including those who are at risk of social exclusion),
• Target/target group of the respective measure,
• Results and effectiveness,
• Promoting factors
• Obstacles and barriers to both volunteering and the measures,
• Sustainability and transferability to other measures, regions, countries
Practical example of retaining independence and inclusion (prevention):
‘Seniors Show the Way’ (UK)

- **Objective:** to train and support *Community Health Champions* (CHSs) through tailored workshops, with specific subjects (e.g. nutrition)
- **Involvement:** After the training, „spreading the word” to five individuals. *Super Champions*: regular, two-hour commitment of leading regular health walks, relaxation, music, etc.
- **Results:** Help to reduce feelings of isolation, promoting civic engagement.
- **Outcome:** Gained good reputation. Key to its success: *financial support* from the Lottery Fund (backed by government assistance). Future challenge: securing funding in a climate of cut-backs, uncertainty (proposed restructuring of the NHS).
Practical example for regaining independence and inclusion: ‘Silver Line’ (Italy)

- **Objective**: to help older people living alone with services, by e.g. providing free telephone number, connecting older people to the nearest counselling centre
- **Involvement**: in the Ancona headquarter, 40 volunteers work, mainly elderly women (aged between 65 and 75)
- **Results and effectiveness**: 70% of phone calls from women living alone, aged between 75 and 85 (many ill, and/or just discharged from hospital, having hardly any family support, experiencing difficulties in accessing services)
Volunteering as a tool for regaining and retaining independence in later life

- Importance of maintaining and/or gaining new social contacts
- Knowledge transfer (exchange knowledge not only among themselves, but transfer their experience to younger age groups: e.g. participation in oral history projects)
- “Seniors help Seniors” (Germany, City of Minden). Aim: preventing the need for long-term care by helping very old people
Key findings of the report

- Wide range of voluntary activities by older people: not only traditional age-related activities (support to frail or sick older people), but also others, such as support to parents with children.

- **Lack of political awareness of potential** of older people and their role in volunteering.

- Many *obstacles* for individuals to become volunteers including:
  - poor health status,
  - limited access to public transport,
  - lack of recognition of the value of activities
  - high expenses linked to voluntary activities,
  - low financial status of elderly people
Conclusions and recommendations

- Active ageing strategies: to be embedded in comprehensive senior policy
- Impact of volunteering on creating and maintainig social network – hence its significance on health. Implications for health promotion
- Importance of acknowledging the value of volunteering (also on local level) – need for involving the media
- Sufficient, stable funding, professionalism (availability of professionals) and appropriate infrastructure needed
- Cooperation between professionals and volunteers: a challenge which should be monitored and permanently addressed
Conclusions and recommendations (cont’d)

- Importance of appropriate legal framework (to cover issues like insurance, expenses, training, counselling, professional support, etc.)
- Need for database for best practices as well as for efficient information (for searching opportunities for the potential volunteers)
- Volunteering: early stage in the life course (its possible involvement in education)
- Municipalities: need to be equipped with the necessary financial, infrastructural and personnel resources to promote volunteering in their local area
Thank you for your attention!