



AFEcò

EMPOWERING OLDER ADULTS TO APPLY AFFORDABLE
ECO- AND AGE-FRIENDLY SOLUTIONS TO AGE IN PLACE

Report on good practices of age- and eco-friendly principles

WP2.A3



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1. Aim of the report

The aim of this short report is to summarize the good practices identified by project partners so that they could serve as inspiration between partners and across countries for the curriculum development in WP3 of the AFECO project. It is structured as follows: the next section describes the methodology, succeeded by the main findings on age-friendly solutions. The fourth section summarizes the findings on eco-friendly solutions, and the final section concludes.

2. Methodology

This report was put together based on the inputs provided by the project partners in Poland, Germany, Portugal, Italy, Greece and The Netherlands. Each project partner was asked to identify at least one age-friendly and one eco-friendly solution that constitutes a ‘good practice’ (for the definition of ‘good practice’ used here, see Annex 1 below). These solutions were identified based on desk reviews and internet searches, as well as partner organizations’ own knowledge. A recurrent weakness was the lack of solid evaluations of the solutions that were found – either because they were too recent to have been evaluated, or because the initiatives are too small scale or too short in duration to allow for meaningful results.

3. Main findings: Age-friendly solutions

With regard to age-friendly solutions, we identified five main types among the good practices found in the six partner countries: counselling services, housing adaptations provided by local authorities, adaptation of public spaces, trainings for older adults, and appropriate policy frameworks.

First, there are **counselling services** to help with housing conversions and adaptations. In Germany for example, free housing counselling services (by certified housing counsellors) exist in all federal states and are offered by various providers such as welfare organisations, care centres or senior support centres (Slavici 2022: 140). The offer is primarily aimed at people with limited mobility and senior citizens who want to make their own living environment barrier-reduced and age-appropriate and who possibly do not have the necessary financial resources or are not yet aware of the various funding options (Institut für Wohnen und Umwelt 2018: 120). The solutions themselves are usually paid for by funds from state subsidies and various organisations from the non-profit sector are involved in the implementation of the services (Slavici 2022: 139-140). During home visits, the counselling services cover the following topics: a) suggestions on housing adaptation measures; b) suggestions on suitable aids and procurement; c) information on financing and funding (e.g. public care insurance); d) support in hiring contractors and e) information on housing alternatives (Simons 2023). The measures include having single-level floors, a roll-in shower, adapted beds/chairs (in height, etc), walls that can carry the load of bars, (i.e. no plasterboard), additional railings or anti-slipping ground panels (shower/bath tub),

widening doorways for wheelchair users; aids include smart watch to monitor health data with or without an alarm.

Related to the first type is the second type of age-friendly solutions, namely **housing adaptation services for older adults provided by local authorities**. For example, the *Programa de Apoio Municipal para Adaptação e Requalificação de Habitações* [Municipal Support Programme for the Adaptation and Requalification of Dwellings] (AMPARHA) in Pombal, Portugal, is upgrading the homes of older adults and citizens with disabilities, in partnership with 21 non-profit institutions and 13 Parish Councils/Unions of the Parish Council. The program fosters the capacity of recipients to remain autonomously in their respective homes, reducing functional risks and adapting spaces in terms of comfort, safety and accessibility. The municipality established partnerships with 21 Private Social Solidarity Institutions and 13 Parish Councils/ Unions of the Parish Council. From 2017 to May 2021, 20 houses were rehabilitated, with a total of €49,140.66 invested from the municipality (Município de Pombal, n.d.). A much more small-scale good practice is the *Oficina Domiciliária* [Home Workshop] in Belmonte, Portugal, where a multidisciplinary team helps Belmonte's 65+ adults, free of charge, with small home repairs (electrical installations, water taps, sanitary equipment, etc (beira.pt, n.d.; CMB, n.d.).

Housing adaption measures often include more technologically advanced solutions, such as the Project of teleassistance called *Pontes* [Bridges] run by the Vila Franca de Xira in Portugal since 2018. The project installs equipment that replaces the normal telephone of the beneficiary, which, at the push of a button, will allow the person, in case of emergency, to contact directly the local services, namely the Fire Brigade of the parish and trigger the help process (VFX, 2021).

Similarly, in the autonomous province of Trento in Italy, the *Pacchetto Domotico Trentino* policy was put in place during 2004-2007. It was directed at the residents over 65, who could receive for free or by making a small investment (depending on their income) things like smoke detectors, visual sound detectors for the telephone and the entrance door, safe doors, video intercom, technologies for supporting physical problems, and sensors for monitoring room and water temperature. Along with these instruments, a service of remote assistance and help was funded. While the project ended in 2007, starting in 2008, some municipalities in the province implemented info-points and contact centres aimed at promoting the adoption of technology devices into the houses of older people, while others opted for creating services of remote assistance and help.

This example resembles a good practice found in The Netherlands, namely the iZi house in The Hague, where one can see and try out more than 90 smart aids that make daily life safer or easier, such as Tessa, the care robot, or a mobile bed. There is also a [website](#) that guides the older people to products and places where products can be borrowed to try out at home. Most products have to be bought or rented at commercial prices, though some are covered by health insurance. The iZi house is an initiative of the municipality of The Hague and is run by enthusiastic iZi ambassadors and volunteers. Not all prices are displayed on the website, but one can contact the iZi home or lending points for more information. The iZi-pilot has been [evaluated](#) by Leiden University Medical Centre and the municipality of The Hague in 2020, and the main conclusion is that the use of technology has a positive effect on the perceived quality of physical health of older adults in The Hague. Older people, if properly introduced and supported, use technology to continue living at home for longer.

Third, age-friendly solutions also include **adapting public spaces**, not only private spaces. For example, the Pedestrian Accessibility project in Lisbon LX2020 focuses on adapting pavements, pedestrian crossings, and bus stops for the needs of those aged 65+ (Lisboa Cidade de Todas as Idades, n.d.). Similarly, under the *Progetto Gabriele* program in Trento, Italy, people aged 65+ could book public transportation when needed.

The fourth type of age-friendly solutions are **trainings for older adults**. For example, in Poland, a range of organizations (mostly independent associations) under the label 'The University of the Third Age' promote lifelong learning to keep the body and the mind healthy. They offer educational, artistic, and recreational activities. A wide range of classes and training in foreign languages, sports, leisure activities, yoga, computer fundamentals, and Internet use are all part of a diversified curriculum that is specially designed for older adults. Topics covered in the courses include healthcare and the socio-psychological needs of older adults (Szwarc, 1993). Universities (meaning publicly accessible courses) specifically designed for older individuals provide these groups with greater autonomy while preventing alienation among their members, who often find it difficult to keep up with the world's changes.

Finally, The Hellenic Intermunicipal Network of Healthy Cities of the WHO illustrates the **importance of a strong age-friendly policy framework** in which local solutions can then be embedded. This network strives for the adoption and implementation of WHO policies for Healthy Cities, including Third Age and Healthy Ageing, by documenting and studying the problems and needs of the older adults, and by considering their own suggestions for improving the quality of their lives. In addition, the network tracks the demographics of the area in order to anticipate future needs and put in place age-friendly solutions in good time. The Network's main finding was that while there are programs and actions concerning mainly health and social policy for people in the third age, even in large municipalities there is no single policy for the Third Age. In order to cover this lack, the Network created a Group of professionals who studies the policies of the WHO and the European Union. This group put forward a policy proposal for people of the Third Age, which can be adapted to the data and the possibilities of Greek municipalities. The policy measures include health and health awareness, intervention programs regarding better medication, cognitive training, lifelong learning, the promotion of empowerment and active ageing, intergenerational communication, as well as cultural and physical activities.

4. Main findings: Eco-friendly solutions

As for the eco-friendly solutions, the reported good practices included solar power generation (and investing in more sustainable buildings more generally), community gardening, and greening initiatives.

In most European countries, tenants or flat owners can **generate their own energy** by installing solar panels on their balcony, garage or terrace, i.e. without cost-intensive initial costs for construction or maintenance. Germany highlighted this relevant measure, which aims to save tenants and landlords from high electricity costs in times of rising energy prices. At the same time, generating one's own electricity is environmentally friendly. However, this technical solution is not suitable for feeding electricity into the grid. The solar panels are mounted on the balcony, garage or terrace and fed into one's own electricity circuit via a 230V plug. Since the installation in Germany has to be reported to the authorities but not approved by them, this simplifies the

private use of such systems (Verbraucherzentrale 2023). Conventional photovoltaic systems can only be installed by owners. Technical support is available nationwide, as it is a private-sector offer, but initial investment costs are around €350 for small devices. With annual savings of 60-80€, these costs can be recuperated after a few years, depending on placement and location (Verbraucherzentrale 2023; Solarwatt 2023). In addition, such devices are now subsidized by some bodies such as individual municipalities and federal states in Germany and supported by grid operators and electricity suppliers, which makes the purchase and use even easier. However, certain criteria, such as specific meters, must often be met in order to receive subsidies, which can make installation more difficult. Similarly, in Portugal, the national Support Programme for More Sustainable Buildings offers 70-80% co-financing to persons who own single-family residential buildings, autonomous units in multi-family buildings, or entire multi-family buildings in order to fund improvements related to heating/cooling, ambient and/or hot water systems, installation of photovoltaic panels, interventions for water efficiency, and incorporation of bioclimatic architectural solutions. A total of €135 million has been invested between 2020-2022.

In Poland, **eco-friendly mobility solutions** for seniors were developed in the municipality of Gdansk through the GreenSAM (<https://greensam.eu/>) Interreg project (2019-2021). It addressed three specific mobility challenges; to make bicycle sharing systems more age-friendly, to develop more age-friendly public transport systems, and to design public spaces in a way that seniors feel more confident with green mobility modes. The overall aim of the GreenSAM project was to increase the acceptance of eco-friendly mobility services among senior citizens. The project encouraged behavior change among the user group of older adults, helped public authorities to gain structured knowledge on user needs, and increased needs-driven decision-making in urban mobility planning.

Another good eco-friendly practice refers to **collective or municipal vegetable gardens** in many towns throughout Greece. They bring together engaged citizens, people of various ages and cultures, who socialize and engage creatively for the benefit of their families, thereby stimulating intergenerational interaction without discrimination and exclusion, physical activity, (re)connecting with nature, and reducing urban poverty and food insecurity. In municipal vegetable gardens in Greece, beneficiaries are selected according to socio-economic criteria: unemployment, marital status, age etc. and with priority to vulnerable social groups. The total time of the land use right is two years, and only organic cultivation is allowed. Such gardens involve soil improvement, reduction of irrigation water consumption, space for composting, space for protection from the sun and rain, tool storage, and space for plant propagation. All these actions demand collective work, team spirit, free time, and ecological consciousness.

Linked to this is the example from The Netherlands, the STEENBREEK (Break the stone) initiative. While it is not aimed exclusively at older adults, it is relevant as the initiative aims to **replace stones and tiles by greenery** in both private and public spaces. This ensures that water drains into the soil, city temperatures are reduced, particulate matter is captured, insects, birds and small animals find a habitat again, soil life improves, and people feel more comfortable and healthier. Stichting (Foundation) Steenbreek wants to halt the trend of petrification, both in public and private spaces (as more than 40% of Dutch gardens are covered with tiles), and sustainably green the living environment in the Netherlands. In doing so, they look beyond just 'doing green', because that is not enough. Their activities focus on four core themes: biodiversity, climate adaptation, social cohesion and health. Where possible, actions are taken to replace unnecessary paving in private and public spaces with a diversity of greenery with the help of municipalities,

residents and businesses. Greening actions include the construction of model gardens, building insect hotels, creating hanging gardens and greening an entire street together with local residents. But there is also a focus on more greenery around business premises, care locations and schoolyards. The **Social gardening activity** involves volunteers sustainably refurbishing and maintaining neglected gardens of vulnerable people, including older adults. These may be people with health problems, without a social network and few financial resources. As residents may find it difficult to maintain and green their gardens themselves, the volunteers of Social Gardening help. This group in particular benefits from more greenery and a tidy living environment, as this has a positive effect on health and on the quality of life and safety in the neighborhood. Moreover, it creates wonderful contacts between people who would otherwise never meet. Municipalities, regional authorities, water authorities, housing corporations, science and technology actors participate with Steenbreek and organise several activities, such as National Green Day, workshops and days.

5. Conclusions

This report has brought together a number of good practices of age- and eco-friendly principles in the partner countries. It is clear that these are merely examples of many more good practices fitting our definition out there. We will add more examples to this report if more results become available during the course of the project. The aim is to use the practices in the development of the e-learning curriculum, to serve as a structuring device, inspiration and stimulate cross-country exchanges.

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Annex 1: Definition of ‘Good practice’ in the AFECO project

A “good practice” can be defined as follows:

A good practice is not only a practice that is good, but a practice that has been proven to work well and produce good results, and is therefore recommended as a model. It is a successful experience, which has been tested and validated, in the broad sense, which has been repeated and deserves to be shared so that a greater number of people can adopt it.

The following set of criteria will help you determine whether a practice is a “good practice”:

- **Effective and successful:**

A “good practice” has proven its strategic relevance as the most effective way in achieving a specific objective; it has been successfully adopted and has had a positive impact on individuals and/or communities.

- **Environmentally, economically and socially sustainable:**

A “good practice” meets current needs, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poorest, without compromising the ability to address future needs.

- **Gender sensitive:**

A description of the practice must show how actors, men and women, involved in the process, were able to improve their livelihoods.

- **Technically feasible:**

Technical feasibility is the basis of a “good practice”. It is easy to learn and to implement.

- **Inherently participatory:**

Participatory approaches are essential as they support a joint sense of ownership of decisions and actions.

- **Replicable and adaptable:**

A “good practice” should have the potential for replication and should therefore be adaptable to similar objectives in varying situations.

- **Reducing disaster/crisis risks, if applicable:**

A “good practice” contributes to disaster/crisis risks reduction for resilience.