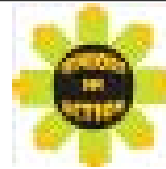




Lifelong Learning Programme



Seniors in Action

Information Note

It is more than well-known, nowadays, that the population all around the developed world is aging, while at the same time the fertility rate has reached its lowest level. No doubt the same holds true for the entire European Union (EU) membership whose 'senior citizens' continue to be on the increase at an unprecedented rate. A plethora of official statistics and special reports on the demographic trends and developments throughout the different countries concerned along with the every-day experiences of everyone of us in his/her own society, are unquestionably the most convincing testimony in this respect. Certainly, individual differences from country to country concerning the aging population in each case do exist, but the overall picture as to the prevailing trends remains unchanged. In short, the fact that, for some time now, contemporary societies have started to include within their structures more and more old and older individuals, whose numbers and their respective proportion as percentage of the entire population concerned continues to be on the increase -for a variety of reasons and particular characteristics of our era that need not be discussed in this context – constitutes a relatively 'new reality' of our personal and social fabric that we have to come to terms with and organize our collective lives accordingly.

Expectedly, like it or not, this new demographic/social reality of ours has given rise to ever increasing numbers of pensioners, whose retirement from work ought in no way imply and a "retirement" from life. This particular development, which appears far from subsiding over the last years, combined with the present economic crisis characterized by a series of multifaceted negative ramifications at all fronts and the alarmingly continuous increase of the unemployed resulting from this phenomenal crisis world-wide (a significant proportion of those "pushed out of work" being already or approaching the "senior age status") have created an environment extremely difficult and "bleak" for many individuals over 50 years of age. In addition, the profound "weakening" of the welfare state that we have already started experiencing for several years now in many developed societies, has its detrimental impact felt on the well-being and the needed social support of the aging population.

Thus, in brief, been the case with regard to an overall socio-economic and demographic-political framework within which our contemporary senior co-citizens have to live and survive, a framework that definitely influences all other age groups as well to differing degrees and intensity, our elderly should not be left out of the so-called mainstream society by intentional (or otherwise) "exclusion or seclusion" practices of ours.

Accordingly, by definition one is tempted to say, *all these senior citizens within our own doorstep, within our families and our neighborhoods not only need and deserve our attention, care and cooperation at many levels and fronts, but they themselves have a lot to offer to all of us, especially so to the younger generations.*



Among others, our seniors through their long professional/occupational experience on the one hand, and their overall life experiences for five, six or more decades amidst all pertinent developments registered throughout all those years for that matter, are the “living carriers” and the “indispensable reservoir” of valuable knowledge, skills and competencies. Therefore, concrete initiatives and joint projects at both the national and the international level are urgently needed in order to “bring together” in a mutually creative and beneficial manner the older and the younger generations, so that there is a long-lasting and continuous interaction and interchange between the two groups. And such initiatives do constitute an obligation on the part of the state’s socio-political priorities but, in addition, private organizations with social and educational sensitivity/orientation may very well make their valuable contribution as well.

Fortunately enough, the European Commission (among other international organizations) has already warned all member states on these developments, underlining a variety of immediate “repercussions” stemming from such developments, along both the personal and the societal level. Furthermore, over the last few years, the Commission has put forward a series of recommendations and has taken concrete initiatives by instituting and funding special programs aimed at the aging population through concrete “intergenerational” activities and joint endeavors. As already said, one important/central concern and objective along these lines has been defined as the so-called intergenerational gap and, thereafter, the need for concerted efforts to “bring closer/together” this aging population with the younger generation. It is obvious that, by bringing together those two groups in a systematic and humane fashion through well-planned/prepared activities and by “capitalizing” on the accumulated knowledge/experience of the elderly, all individuals involved in these “human transactions” will enjoy the beneficial processes and outcomes of such co-existence.

*It is within the framework of all those developments of our contemporary societies and the urgent need to genuinely turn our collective attention to our seniors that the joint transnational project “**Seniors in Action**” has already concluded its entire implementation phase, with the active participation of decades of seniors and young children/adolescents alike in several European countries. Senior volunteers from seven European countries aged “fifty years and plus”, coming from and representing virtually the entire spectrum of social and professional strata, have already joined forces through this project and are ready/willing to share their invaluable knowledge and /competencies with the youth Europe-wide.*

It should be stressed that this innovative project has “produced” very tangible and concrete results, central of which has been the formation of a kind of “reservoir of knowledge” which consists of a substantial number seniors across a number of European countries ready and willing to volunteer and transfer their knowledge/experience and competencies to younger generations. Thus, it goes without saying that this unique “know how” of our senior co-citizens who, themselves, have been sensitized and “trained” to reach out and “train” the younger generations of ours, should in no way be lost or wasted in the routine of a seemingly “plain indifference” characterizing -unfortunately- much of our daily space. It could and



ought to be used in the most systematic and effective manner through small-scale or larger projects. It should be “exploited” in a context of social care, collective obligation to the elderly, public awareness and responsibility via joint endeavors at all levels (e.g. local, municipal, national, international).

ECOSE, the central coordinating organization of the “**Seniors in Action**” joint project, along with all the other partner organizations at the national level (ZNANIE-Bulgaria, PEC 29-France, DEPTAKAL-Greece, REZEKNE DISTRICT COUNCIL-Latvia, ARCS-Romania, AZM LU-Slovenia and TOWN HALL of LOS PALACIOS Y VILLAFRANCA-Spain), may act as the liaison and the facilitators in contacting and arranging all relevant details for “bringing together” our senior volunteers and the youth of Europe.

Undoubtedly, the challenge is there. The people to work with are there. Any sense, any policy and any rhetorical declaration about the vital issues of social cohesion and solidarity at all levels of our collective lives have no actual meaning and real-life content, if the elderly are excluded and their unique “reservoir of knowledge” is not creatively integrated into the mainstream-global society of ours.

Further information at project's site (regularly updated):
www.ecose.org/seniorsinaction

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