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GOOD PRACTICES

55+ Initiative: An Example of
Activation and Social Inclusion
of People Aged 55 and Over
in Portugal

09/2026



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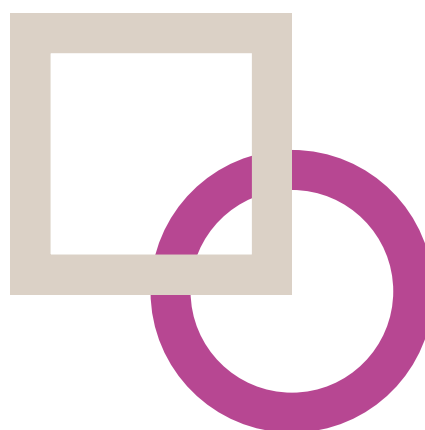


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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
How is it applied?	5
Project summary	10



Introduction



The **“55+” initiative** is considered a good practice, as it effectively addresses the social isolation of older people through active ageing and their social reintegration.

Through an innovative platform, the initiative enables people aged 55 and over to showcase their skills, knowledge, and experience and offer them, in exchange for payment, to members of the local community who require support.

In this way, the beneficiaries of the initiative regain a sense of purpose, strengthen their self-esteem, and experience improvements in their mental and physical well-being.

Furthermore, the project is considered a good practice because it has produced measurable positive outcomes and represents a sustainable and flexible model of social innovation that can be replicated and implemented in different regions across Europe and beyond.

How is it applied?

The 55+ initiative is a **social inclusion programme** for people aged 55 and over, which was launched in **Portugal** in **2018** with the aim of supporting **active ageing** among the population. According to this initiative, older people should not be viewed solely as individuals who require care or support, but also as people who possess knowledge, experience, skills, time, and the ability to continue contributing to their communities.

The need for such an initiative arose primarily from the **demographic changes** observed in Portugal and, more broadly, across the developed world. Specifically, according to the available data, almost **40% of Portugal's population is aged over 55**, and Portugal is expected to become **the oldest country in the world by 2050**. More than **60%** of this population is economically inactive, due to difficulties in finding employment or forced retirement, while among unemployed people aged over 55, **57%** have been unemployed for more than one year. Furthermore, **6 out of 10 older people** (aged 65+) experience social isolation and loneliness, which increases the risk of mental and physical health problems. In addition, **15%** of people aged over 60 experience some form of mental health disorder.



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Other factors that exacerbate the problem include:

- **Age-related attitudes and stereotypes**, with 1 in 2 people worldwide believing that older people are no longer useful or capable of contributing to society.
- The **lack of employment opportunities** for older people.
- **Changes in healthcare, social work, employment, and other systems**, which have failed to keep pace with demographic changes.

Retirement or difficulties in finding new employment among the active population can lead to a reduction or even loss of everyday social interactions and, consequently, to **loneliness, social isolation**, and the feeling that one **is no longer useful or needed**. The “55+” initiative therefore seeks to address precisely this issue.

More specifically, “55+” is an **independent non-profit organisation** supported by various **public and private stakeholders**, such as the Lisbon City Council, the Aga Khan Foundation, and other companies and organisations. The initiative is based on an **online platform** through which people aged 55 and over can create their own personal profile. There, they provide information about their **knowledge, skills, legal status, experience**, and the **activities** they can offer to the community, ranging from cooking, gardening, and minor repairs to childcare, companionship for older people, assistance with everyday tasks, and other services.

Subsequently, applications are reviewed by the initiative's team, and the **necessary checks** are carried out to ensure compliance with legal requirements, such as personal insurance, criminal record certificates, and other relevant documentation, particularly in cases involving activities with children or older people. Once the application is **approved**, an **initial trial period** follows before the service is made available.



Subsequently, the beneficiaries' services are offered for an **hourly fee** and can be purchased by **members of the community** who need or require them (e.g. families, older people, local organisations, etc.). At the end of each transaction, both the beneficiary and the person purchasing the service provide an **evaluation** of the transaction.

Consequently, through this system, the skills and experience that individuals have acquired throughout their lives can once again gain **value** for everyone. On the one hand, beneficiaries are able to earn an income while regaining a sense of purpose and belonging to the community and on the other hand, recipients of these services can benefit from them, making their everyday lives easier.

Another important aspect of the initiative is that the relationship created is **not necessarily limited to a simple transaction**. More specifically, a beneficiary may join the programme by offering a particular service, but over time may develop **new social relationships**, thereby reducing feelings of social isolation.

Furthermore, participants can develop **additional knowledge and skills** that can also be useful to them. For example, one beneficiary joined the programme offering general repair services and eventually specialised in the renovation of old buildings.

Similarly, a retired art teacher initially began by offering painting lessons, but later became involved in preserving and teaching traditional Portuguese recipes. Today, she offers Airbnb experiences for tourists visiting Lisbon.



At the same time, the “55+” initiative also enables services to be **provided to municipalities and local authorities**, allowing the skills of beneficiaries to be utilised to address important community needs. Specifically, rather than designing an initiative exclusively for older people, **people aged 55 and over themselves become part of the solution to problems affecting the wider community**. For example, in some areas there is a need to support people with disabilities, assist older people, and provide support to caregivers who often devote many hours to caring for a family member. In addition, beneficiaries can help families with childcare or accompany children to extracurricular activities.

Another important advantage of the “55+” initiative is the **creation of a community** among beneficiaries through its “**dynamic talents**” activities. Specifically, many beneficiaries have taken the initiative themselves to organise activities for other participants in the programme, such as book clubs, cooking classes, guided tours, and other activities. This demonstrates that the programme not only provides financial security but also promotes the development of new social connections and greater **engagement** within the community.

Consequently, the “55+” initiative is not simply another service for older people. Instead, it seeks to change the very perception of later life and, rather than presenting people aged 55 and over as a group that primarily needs assistance, it presents them as people who can contribute, **create, work, learn, and participate**. This is also the initiative’s key element of social innovation: **addressing a social problem by empowering the group that is often perceived as being part of the problem**.

Finally, although the initiative was initially developed in key **urban areas of Portugal**, it is now officially active in the wider areas of Lisbon, Cascais, Oeiras, Porto, and Aveiro.

Furthermore, as the initiative's implementation model is **flexible** and **easily adaptable**, supported by documented methodologies, comprehensive training programmes, and established impact measurement tools, there have been plans to expand it on a **pilot basis beyond Portugal**, with **Spain** being considered as one of the potential next destinations.



Project summary



Scope

Social inclusion of people aged 55 and over and active ageing.



Country / Region

Portugal



Where is it applied?

The “55+” initiative is **directly aimed at people aged 55 and over**, including retirees and unemployed individuals, who wish to play an active role in their local community. **Indirectly, it also targets members of the local community** who require support, care, or specialised services as part of their everyday lives.



When did it applied?

The implementation of the “55+” initiative began in **2018**.



Results

According to the available data presented in the **2024 Impact Report**, during the period 2018–2024, the initiative had reached more than **4,282 beneficiaries (342 in 2024)**, providing **51,842 hours of services**. The average age of participants was **65 years**, with **60% being women beneficiaries and 36% living alone**.

Furthermore, according to the research, 85% of clients who had worked with a beneficiary stated that they recognised the **positive role** that older people can play in society, while **88%** of the beneficiaries themselves reported feeling more **useful and more confident**.



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Regarding the main **changes in their lives**, the following outcomes were recorded:

- 61% gained new experiences.
- 37% acquired new knowledge.
- 29% increased their income.
- 29% gained self-esteem and a stronger sense of personal worth.
- 26% developed new activities and made new friends.
- 18% became more socially engaged and experienced a greater sense of excitement through the initiative.

Overall, the experience received a rating of 4.7/5.

Furthermore, the initiative has been recognised by the European Parliament **as a representative project for social rights**. It is also included among the **good practices** of the European Social Fund, as well as in the KORALE – Interreg Europe project, which focuses on preventing and addressing loneliness among older people and young people.



Information

More information about the “55+” initiative can be found here:
<https://55mais.pt>



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