



Effects of Intergenerational Cooperation on Older and Younger Generations

RESEARCH STUDY REPORT



Assoc. prof. Jelena Tanasijević, PhD, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad

Assoc. prof. Jovana Škorić, PhD, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad

Miljana Marić Ognjenović, PhD, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad

Prof. Jelica Petrović, PhD, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad

Novi Sad, 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	3
	1.1. Care for the Older Adults and Seniors in the Republic of Serbia.....	3
	1.2. Intergenerational Solidarity - Conceptualisation and Perspectives	5
II	QUANTITATIVE PHASE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY	8
	2.1. Sample of the research.....	8
III	RESULTS OF THE QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH STUDY.....	9
	3.1. Research results collected from persons aged 55 and over.....	9
	3.2. Research results collected from persons aged 18 to 40.....	13
	3.3. Research results collected from the “Sandwich Generation” (aged 41 to 54):.....	16
IV	CONCLUSION OF THE QUANTITATIVE PHASE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY.....	18
V	QUALITATIVE PHASE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY	20
	5.1. Focus group results – older adults (initial focus groups):.....	20
	5.2. Focus group results – young people (initial focus groups):.....	25
	5.3. Focus group results with older adults after intervention (post-control focus groups):.....	30
	5.4. Focus group results with young participants following the intervention (post-control focus groups):.....	36
VI	DISCUSSION, FINAL CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	42
	6.1. Discussion	42
	6.2. Concluding Remarks and Recommendations for Enhancing Intergenerational Cooperation.....	45
	References:	50

INTRODUCTION

Within the framework of the project “*AGE+ Building Age-Friendly Communities through Intergenerational Action*”, the Novi Sad Humanitarian Centre (NSHC) implemented a variety of intergenerational activities during 2024/2025, involving both young people (students) and older adults. In parallel, a research study was conducted with the aim of expanding evidence-based knowledge on the effects of intergenerational cooperation on both older and younger generations.

The AGE+ is a regional programme dedicated to supporting the well-being and social inclusion of older persons. The AGE+ project contributes to empowering vulnerable older men and women, in the field of social exclusion, healthcare and social protection, sustainable social development, good governance practices that protect the rights and meet the needs of older persons and women, developing institutional capacities at the local level, as well as inclusive society and social cohesion. The AGE+ programme has been implemented from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2025, with *Volkshilfe Solidarität* as the lead partner and local partners *Syri i Vizionit*, *TARA International Consulting* and the *Novi Sad Humanitarian Centre*, supported by the *Austrian Development Agency (ADA)* and *Volkshilfe Solidarität*.

The aim of research was to expand knowledge on intergenerational cooperation and exchange between older and younger generations and contribute thereby to the social inclusion of older adults and creation of communities adapted to all generations.

I THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Care for the Older Adults and Seniors in the Republic of Serbia

Serbia has faced a number of challenges in the past, including severe economic situation, wars and social instability (Perišić, 2018). These factors have contributed to frequent marginalisation of issues concerning the position of older persons, despite the fact that they, as part of the broader social community, were deeply affected by these problems. During the transition period, legislative changes have led to gradual improvements in the status of the older adults and seniors in Serbia. However, there are still numerous obstacles the society must overcome to achieve a full social inclusion and access to services.

According to the latest data from the Republic Statistical Office based on the *2022 Census*, the population of Serbia is 6,647,003. Of these, 22.1% (1,468,855 persons) are aged 65 and over, representing an increase compared to 2011, when that percentage was 17.4%. The average age of the population has increased to 43.8 years, up from 42.88 years according to estimates from 2016. Women constitute the majority of the older population, representing 57.5% of individuals aged 65 and above (Republic Statistical Office, 2022). The life expectancy for the period 2019–2021 was 73.2 years for men and 78.3 years for women, representing a slight increase compared to the period 2014–2016. However, women often spend a longer portion of their lives facing health difficulties and experience less favourable material conditions in old age, particularly if they live alone.

In general, population ageing also presents (new) challenges for existing social support systems and has an impact on nearly all areas of life. Contemporary social policy and social development inevitably include the issue of population policy management as one of their key priorities. In conditions where one-sixth of the population is aged 65 and over, the proportion of the working-age population is decreasing, while the need for care for the elderly population is increasing, especially in areas experiencing "demographic decline" and disappearance of settlements. The process of population ageing in Serbia is progressing from both the top (increase in the number of older individuals) and the bottom of the age pyramid (decline in the number of young people). As a consequence, the number of persons under the age of 15 is almost equal to the number of those aged 65 and over.

One of the key indicators of the population's age structure is the *ageing index*, which reflects the ratio of older persons to young persons. When this index exceeds 40 (indicating there are 40 older individuals per 100 young persons), a population is considered to have entered the phase of demographic ageing (Global AgeWatch Insight, 2018). In the Republic of Serbia, this index has remained above the critical threshold for over a decade, with a continuing upward trend. Demographic projections for the coming decades indicate a continuous ageing process, with the number of persons aged 65 and over expected to increase by one-third, whereas the percentage of this age group is projected to constitute 27.5% of the total population. This increase in the number of older persons, being predominantly economically inactive individuals, will inevitably result in the increased expenditure, particularly in the health and social care sectors. Further projections suggest a steady rise in life expectancy, which will contribute to a growth in the population aged 80 and above. A considerable portion of these older individuals will, due to illness, disability and frailty, require access to social and healthcare services, which will necessitate a continued development of the social security system, as well as the adaptation of living conditions and needs of the ageing population. Despite the formal protection of older adults' rights, current support for families who provide care to elderly and dependent members remain underdeveloped. Given that the Republic of Serbia ranks among the countries with the oldest populations in both Europe and globally, there is a need for a strategic approach that would effectively address the challenges of population ageing.

A contemporary approach to ageing envisages the interconnection of economic, cultural, social and urban development programmes at both the local and national levels. In September 2023, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the *Strategy for Active and Healthy Ageing in the Republic of Serbia for the Period 2024–2030* - eight full years after the expiration of the previous ageing strategy. This Strategy envisions the development of a network of social and health services at the local level, improvement of service accessibility for families caring for elderly members, as well as for older persons living alone. In addition, the goal of the new strategic document is to enhance the quality of life of older citizens by promoting the concept of active and healthy ageing. The Strategy, inter alia, envisages a greater participation of older persons in the community life, improved access to healthcare and palliative care, enhancing the capacities of social protection service providers dedicated to the elderly, strengthening the capacities of healthcare and social workers to work with the elderly and implementing measures to reduce violence against the elderly. Furthermore, the improvement of both institutional and non-institutional protection for older persons - including health protection, social protection, safety and violence prevention

-is one of the specific objectives of this Strategy. On the other hand, the *Report on Long-Term Care in the Republic of Serbia*, prepared by the European Commission in 2018, states that the Republic of Serbia lacks a comprehensive long-term care policy that would adequately respond to the needs of the elderly population.

In order to improve the quality and increase the availability of services for the elderly, both government and non-governmental organisations should work toward a better coordination among the public sector, non-profit organisations, private sector and families, to ensure adequate protection for this population. Additionally, it is necessary to develop intergenerational cooperation, which would foster stronger connections between different generations through initiatives that encourage joint activities, the exchange of experience and mutual support, thereby contributing to the strengthening of social cohesion and improvement of the quality of life of older persons.

1.2. Intergenerational Solidarity- Conceptualisation and Perspectives

Intergenerational solidarity may be defined as the “conscious establishment of bonds and relationships within and between individuals in multigenerational family networks, as well as among different age cohorts in the wider community” (Amparo Cruz-Saco, 2010:9). This, therefore, implies that solidarity exists both within individual families and within larger social systems and networks, or communities and societies.

In the field of social sciences, various authors have long been interested in the ongoing changes and contemporary concepts of family life and models, taking into account current demographic trends, all with the aim of considering perspectives and developing appropriate policies and support programmes to preserve the function and role of the family (Hagestad, Dykstra, 2016). A key concept and “principle of organisation” within this perspective is the idea that individuals’ lives are interdependent, that is, connected and intertwined. In this regard, Marshall and Bengtson argue that the concept of “linked lives” is a highly useful tool for understanding the functioning and interactions that exist among family members, as well as within the broader community (Marshall, Bengtson, 2011). In his work, Elder discussed how changes experienced by one family member affect the lives of other members. He also emphasised that the family serves as a medium between social changes and the lives of individuals at the micro level (Elder, 1974). For this reason, and considering the speed and complexity of contemporary demographic changes

and their impacts, it is important to understand how processes such as population ageing, declining birth rate and migrations, as the most intense demographic phenomena, affect the structure and functioning of today's families and society at large.

Declining birth rates and the reduction in family size, alongside the existing plurality of family forms, pose a challenge to the existing intergenerational support. Nevertheless, research indicates that the majority of citizens disagree with the assertion that older adults constitute a "burden on the society." However, notable differences may be observed between the attitudes of men and women, which could be explained by the fact that women are more involved in the care of older family members. These realities place demands on states to develop service programmes to ensure care for older adults, given that a substantial portion of this responsibility is still assumed by household members. At the same time, the development of such services increases costs and requires greater state funding, while enabling older persons to live and age with dignity. Conversely, these services may help preserve the quality of family relationships by alleviating family members and organising part of the care for elderly household members through various services and support mechanisms. Additionally, it is a fact that grandparents are involved to a certain extent in raising their grandchildren, with this role being more pronounced in countries where childcare services are less developed and accessible, and vice versa. Another important aspect of support provided by older adults is evident in countries with high unemployment rates, particularly among younger generations. In such countries, older individuals often provide significant financial assistance to their children or grandchildren. Given the diversity of family models, it is clear that the process of population ageing has created a complex network of interdependent relationships among members of different family generations. In this context, it is important to consider the models according to which national policies and legislation are shaped, as these could contribute to establishing the intergenerational cooperation.

When discussing intergenerational connectedness and solidarity, it is evident that differences exist in how these concepts are understood across European countries, and accordingly, national policies and existing programmes also vary. Looking across Europe, several models may be identified through which family policies and legislation are regulated, which, in turn, influence the occurrence of intergenerational dependency, that is, they could either strengthen or weaken family ties. In general, all European countries support models that encourage family members to remain connected and to care for one another. On the other hand, there are significant differences in legislation concerning the obligation of children to provide

for their parents. This model is more prevalent in Central, Southern and Eastern European countries, where it is regulated by national legislation.

At the level of the European Union, the concept of intergenerational solidarity has been well represented for more than two decades, both in policies and official documents, as well as in practice, particularly since the United Nations declared 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons. Since then, the European Union has started developing policies that incorporate intergenerational solidarity, including related agendas, such as the active ageing agenda. Subsequently, the Treaty of Lisbon explicitly defined intergenerational solidarity as one of the core objectives toward which the European Union is oriented (Treaty of Lisbon, 2009). The "Europe 2020 – A Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth" also included the programme of active ageing as part of its policy framework. In this context, active ageing was positioned as one of the key aspects of inclusive growth, emphasising the importance of the European Union's capacity to respond to the challenge of promoting healthy and active ageing, in order to ensure a greater social cohesion and higher productivity (COM, 2010).

Thus, it may be concluded that the concept of intergenerational solidarity is inextricably linked both to social action and social support on the one hand, and to the challenges of the life course, on the other. Particularly in this regard, it is important find solutions, or in fact, develop programmes through which members of different generations will have defined roles and activities, and where both younger and older individuals will be able to act as both "recipients" and "providers" of care and support.

II QUANTITATIVE PHASE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The quantitative phase of the research study was carried out between May and October 2024. The study was implemented through an online questionnaire created using the Google Forms platform, specifically designed to collect data on knowledge, attitudes and practices related to intergenerational solidarity within the general population of the Republic of Serbia. The questionnaire was structured to cover the key aspects of this topic, enabling an in-depth analysis and identification of patterns in citizens' perceptions and behaviour across all age groups. This approach ensured a broad respondent reach and the efficient collection of relevant data. In addition, respondents assessed their willingness to participate in various activities with the elderly and young individuals. The respondents answered the statements related to knowledge, attitudes and practices using a three-point scale (1 – Does not apply to me, 2 – I am not sure, 3 – Applies to me). For questions regarding the frequency of participation in activities with older or younger individuals, respondents chose from the following scale: I would not participate, once a day, once a week, once a month. Sampling was conducted using the snowball sampling method, whereby the questionnaire was distributed via social media, non-governmental organisations, educational institutions and various personal networks of the researchers. The total research sample consists of 822 individuals, whose demographic characteristics will be presented in the following section.

2.1. Sample of the research

As previously noted, the study involved a total of 822 participants from the territory of the Republic of Serbia. Of the total number, 74.2% were female respondents and 25.8% were male respondents. Regarding educational attainment, 75.5% of respondents have completed or are currently attending secondary school (the questionnaire also included adult secondary school students), 11.1% hold a bachelor's degree or vocational academic qualification, 10.9% possess a master's or postgraduate degree and 2.4% of respondents have completed doctoral studies. With respect to the distribution of the sample by place of residence, 20.7% of respondents live in rural areas, 12.9% in suburban settlements, 19.1% in small towns, 20.2% in medium-sized cities and 27.1% reside in large cities. Age groups in the sample were divided as follows: 18-45 years: 90.3% of respondents, 45-55 years: 5.7%, 55-65 years: 3% and 65 years and older:

1% of respondents. This age distribution may be explained by factors such as digital literacy and the general motivation to participate in the study. For the purpose of data analysis, respondents were categorised into three age groups: 18-40 years, 41-54 years and 55 years and older.

III RESULTS OF THE QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH STUDY

3.1. Research results collected from persons aged 55 and over:

The research results, presented in the following charts, reveal several interesting patterns concerning individuals aged 55 and older. This group demonstrates the highest level of willingness to engage in conversations with younger people on pre-arranged topics, most frequently estimating their readiness for such interactions as an activity occurring once per week.

However, it was observed that individuals over 55 exhibit the lowest willingness to teach younger people various skills, as well as to participate in creative activities. Moreover, the research study indicates that currently, this age group rarely or almost never engages in activities with young people. Nevertheless, according to their self-assessments, persons above the age of 55 express a desire for greater involvement in intergenerational activities, albeit showing limited willingness and a lower degree of confidence when it comes to teaching or leading creative initiatives.

These findings underscore the potential for improving intergenerational cooperation, as well as the need for additional support and empowerment of older adults to increase their participation in activities with young people. After standardising the sample by gender and place of residence, the research results indicate that female respondents are more willing to engage in all the aforementioned activities with young people and are willing to participate more frequently (once a week) compared to male respondents. Regarding their current involvement in activities with youth, the results show no significant gender differences.

When the place of residence was considered to obtain more relevant results, respondents were redistributed into three groups based on residence: urban, rural, and suburban areas (due to the fact that some original categories contained very few respondents, which could impact the research findings). The research results indicate that urban residents are much more likely to participate in creative activities with younger people, in discussions on agreed topics and are also more willing to learn from younger individuals.

On the other hand, residents of suburban and rural areas show greater willingness to assist younger people with cooking, childcare and similar tasks, as well as to teach skills such as knitting, baking and the like. No significant differences were observed between rural and suburban respondents regarding these answers. Respondents do not differ by place of residence in terms of the frequency of participation in activities with youth, while those living in suburban and rural areas are currently significantly more involved in childcare activities compared to respondents from urban environments. Conversely, urban residents are more frequently involved in social activities such as going to cafés with younger people compared to those from suburban and rural areas.

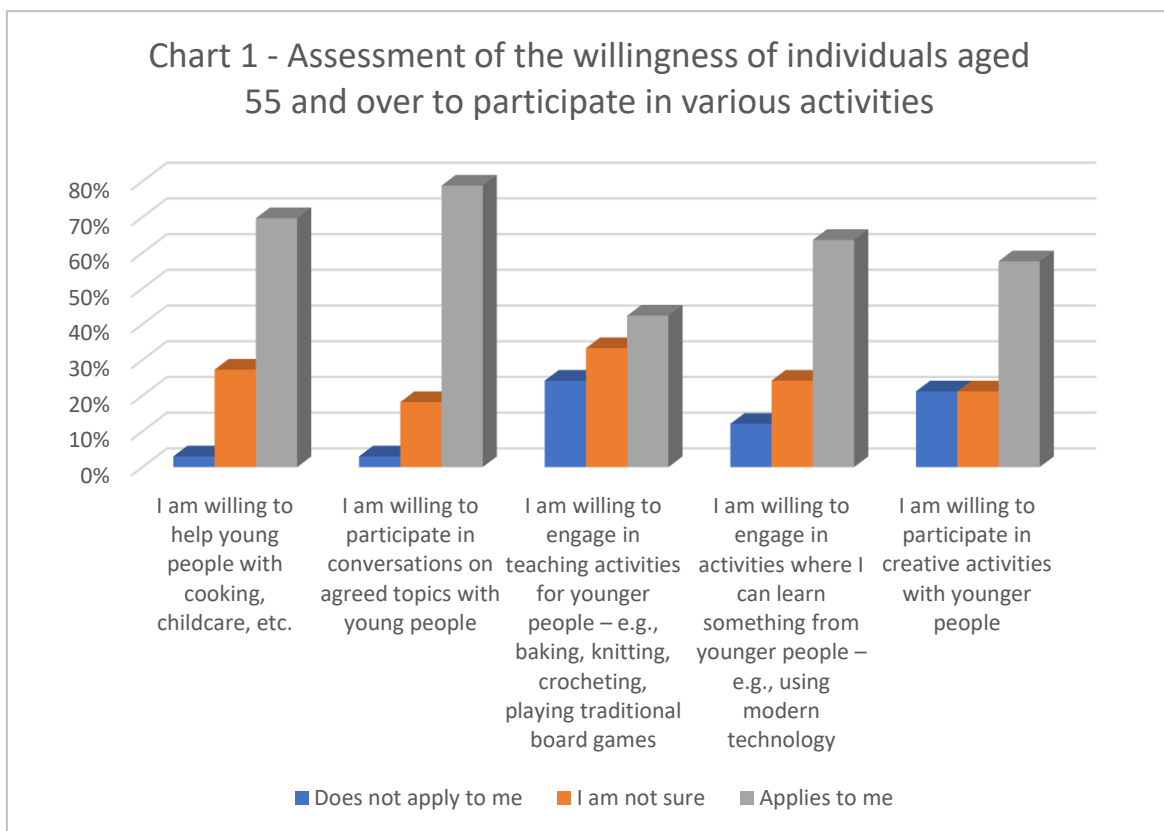


Chart 2 - Assessment of the frequency of participation of individuals aged 55 and over in various activities

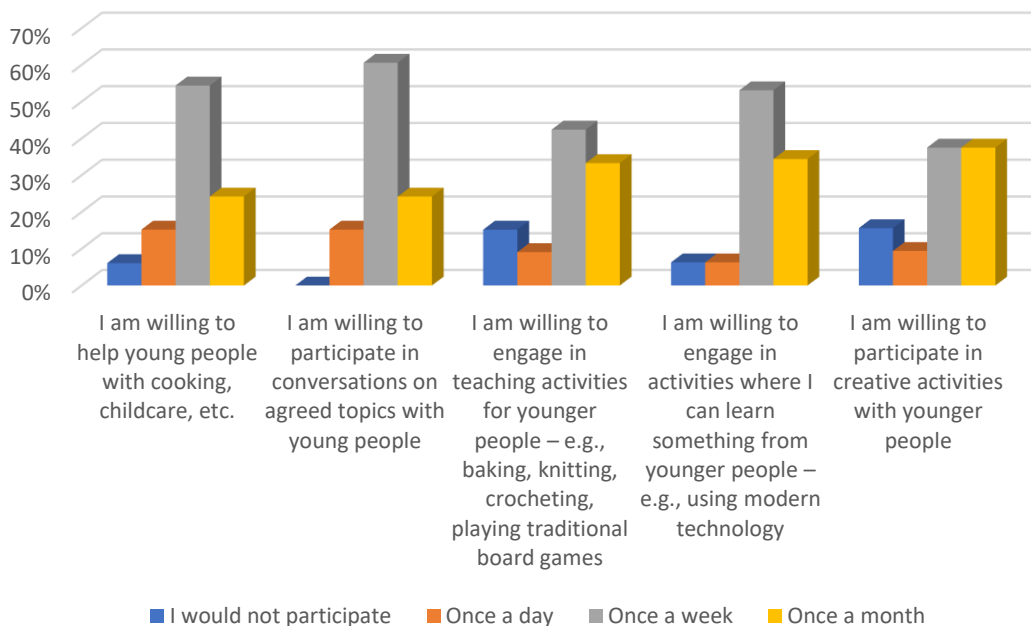
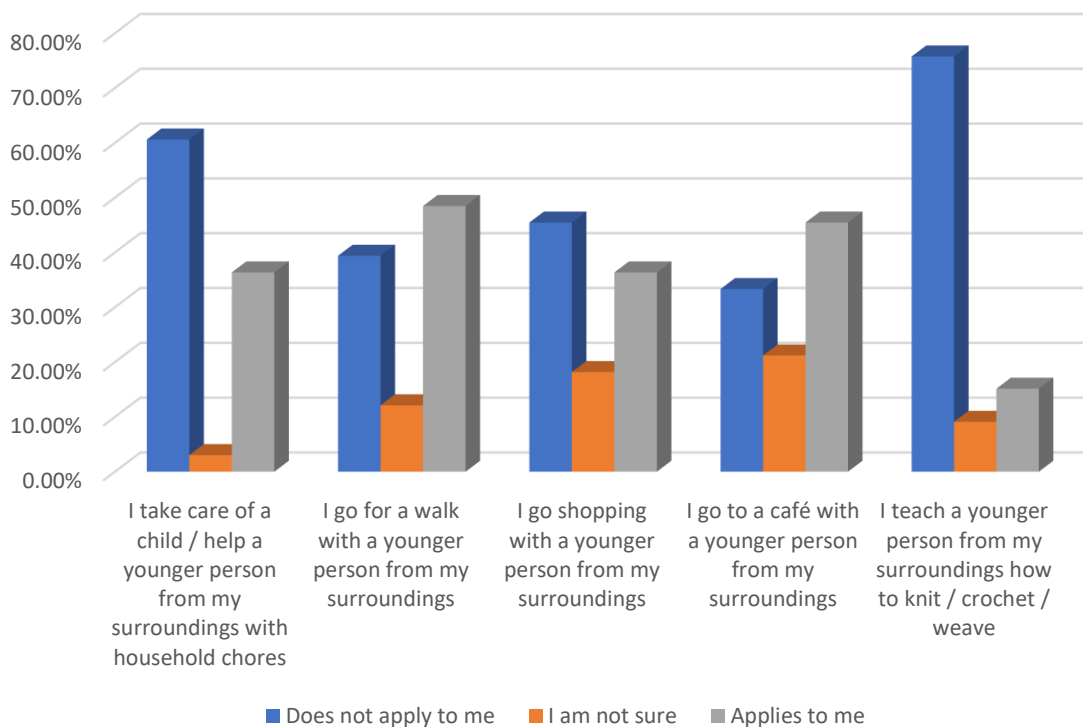
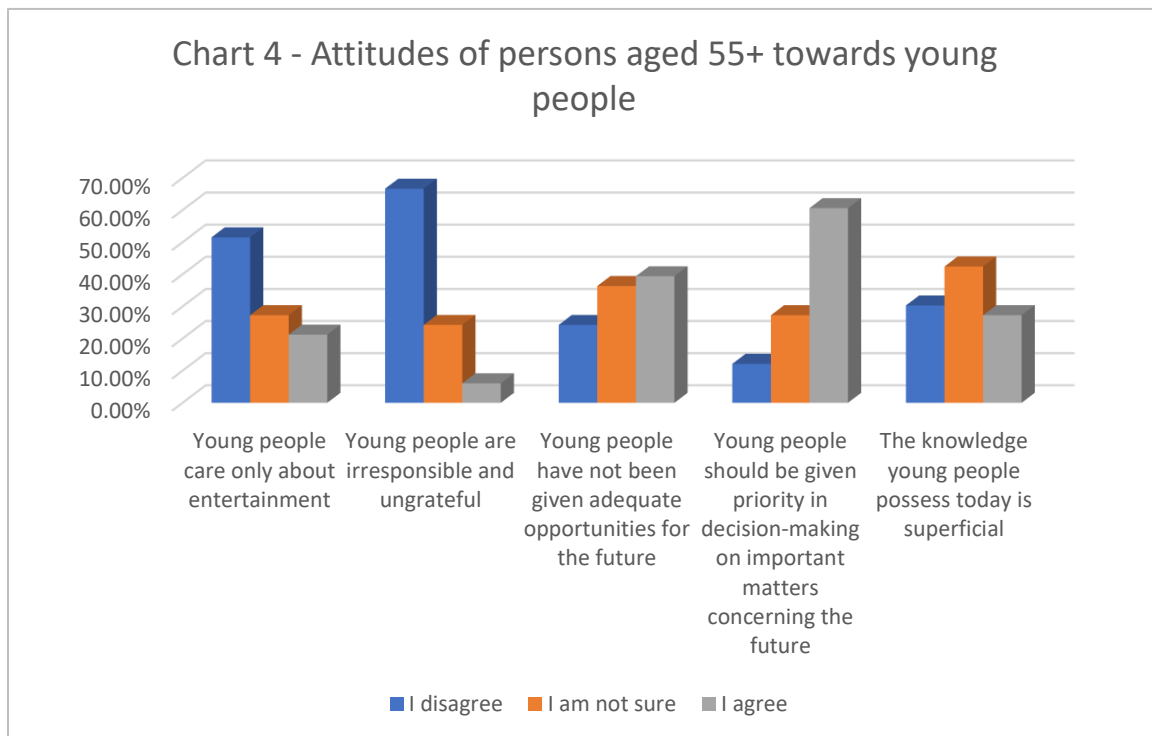


Chart 3 - Current involvement of individuals aged 55 and over in activities with young people



The results presented in *Chart 4* indicate that individuals aged 55 and over generally hold positive attitudes toward young people. They disagree with the statements suggesting that young people are solely interested in entertainment, or that they are frivolous and superficial. As opposed to that, they support the views that young people should be given priority in making decisions on important issues concerning the future, and that they have not been provided with adequate opportunities for progress. These attitudes remain consistent across respondents regardless of gender, as no differences were observed even after the sample was standardised according to this criterion. However, differences do appear based on the place of residence. Urban residents are more likely to support the view that young people should be given priority in decision-making about the future, while respondents from rural areas are more likely to believe that young people are primarily focused on entertainment, compared to those from suburban and urban settings. No significant differences were observed among respondents from different types of settlements regarding the other issues.



3.2. Research results collected from persons aged 18 to 40:

The research results presented in *Chart 5* indicate that individuals aged 18-40 years (hereinafter: young people) are most willing to assist older persons with errands such as going to the store, taking a walk or visiting the bank, while they are least willing to participate in creative activities. The assessed willingness for other activities is approximately similar. It may be concluded that young people are most willing to engage in instrumental activities with older adults, i.e. to provide functional support, while their lowest willingness relates to unstructured and creative activities, which is somewhat understandable, as this may be viewed as a matter of personal preference for these types of activities.

Regarding the frequency of such activities, the results shown in *Chart 6* show that young people are most often willing to participate in joint activities with older adults once a month. Analysing their current engagement practice, it may be observed that young people most frequently assist older adults in mastering modern technologies, while they least frequently choose to play board games together. This behavioural pattern aligns with the previously obtained results (*Chart 7*), which indicate young people's preferences regarding the types of activities shared with older generations. These findings suggest the need to encourage more diverse intergenerational interactions to strengthen their mutual connection and exchange of experiences.

After adjusting the respondents by sex/gender, it is noticed that the female portion of the sample is more willing to participate in activities such as conversations on agreed topics and learning various skills from older adults, whereas male respondents are more willing to help with errands such as going to the store, going for a walk or visiting the bank. Regarding the frequency of participation in activities, female respondents are more willing to engage in almost all listed activities compared to male respondents, with no differences observed in responses related to participation in creative activities. Currently, female respondents are more involved in all of the mentioned activities compared to male respondents, except for creative activities, where no differences exist.

Concerning the differences based on the place of residence, respondents living in suburban areas are more willing, compared to those living in rural or urban areas, to assist older adults with errands such as going to the bank, store or for a walk, while no differences are observed in other activities. Furthermore, respondents living in cities are more likely to participate more frequently (once a week) in activities with older adults compared to other groups.

Chart 5 - Willingness of persons aged 18-40 to participate in activities with older adults

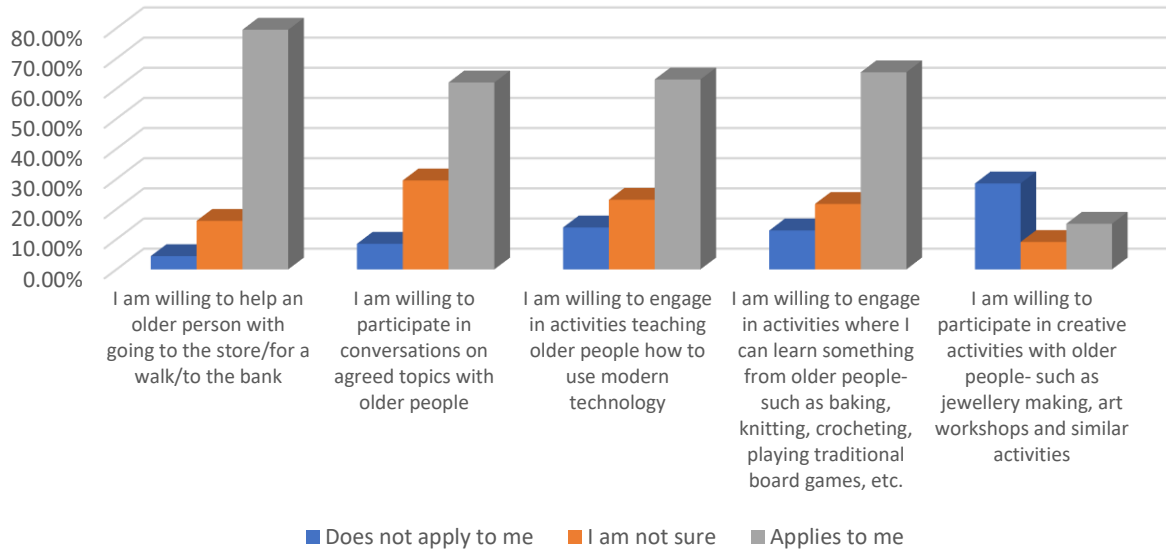
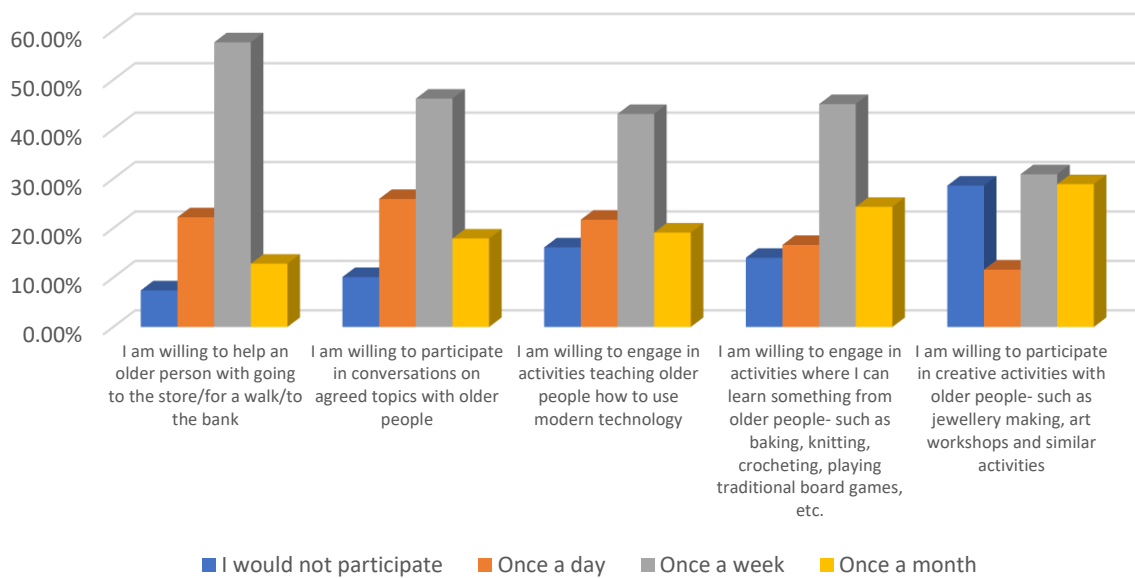
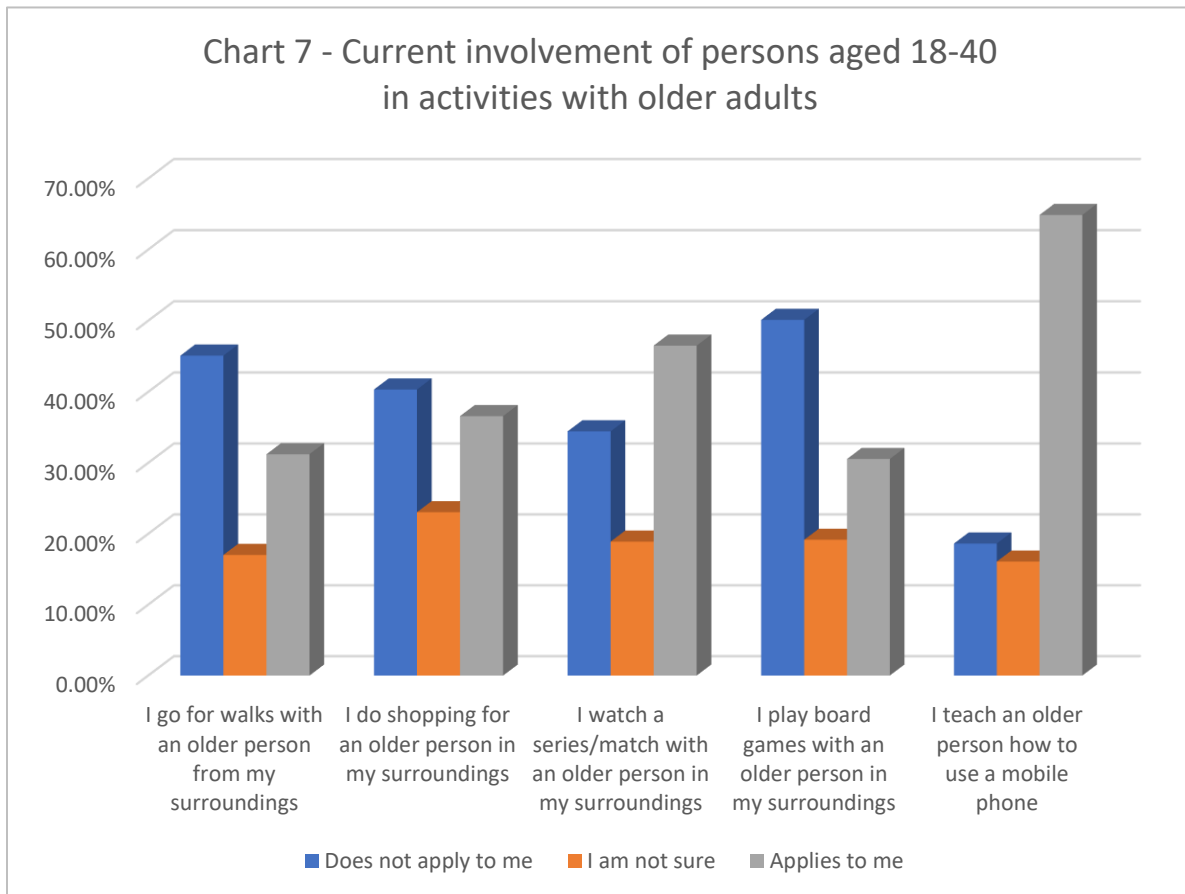
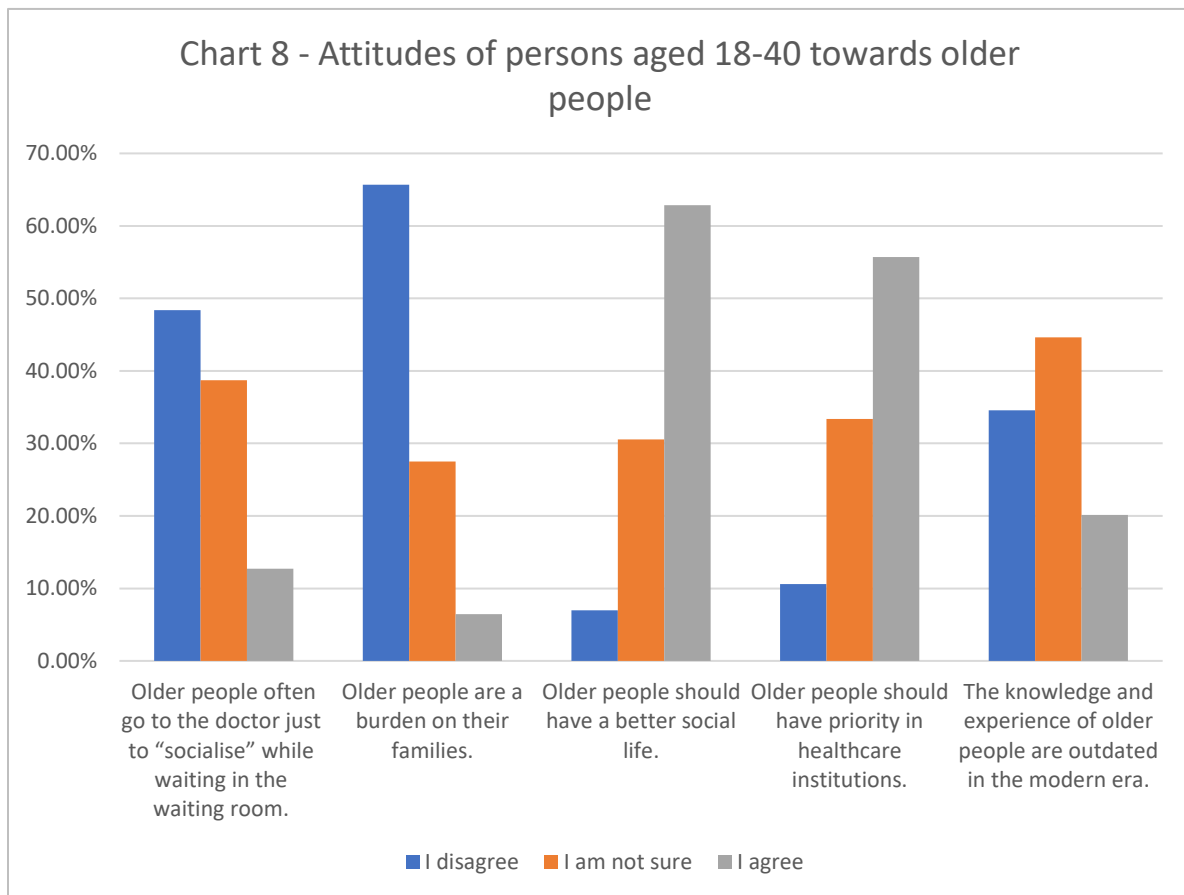


Chart 6 - Assessment of the frequency of willingness of persons aged 18-40 to participate in activities with older adults





When it comes to young people’s attitudes toward older adults, the research results show that young people largely disagree with statements that older people are a burden on their families or visit doctors out of boredom. On the other hand, young people express the opinion that older adults deserve a better social status and believe they should enjoy certain privileges within the healthcare system. These findings indicate a high level of empathy and respect among young people toward older generations, especially in the context of their social and health status.

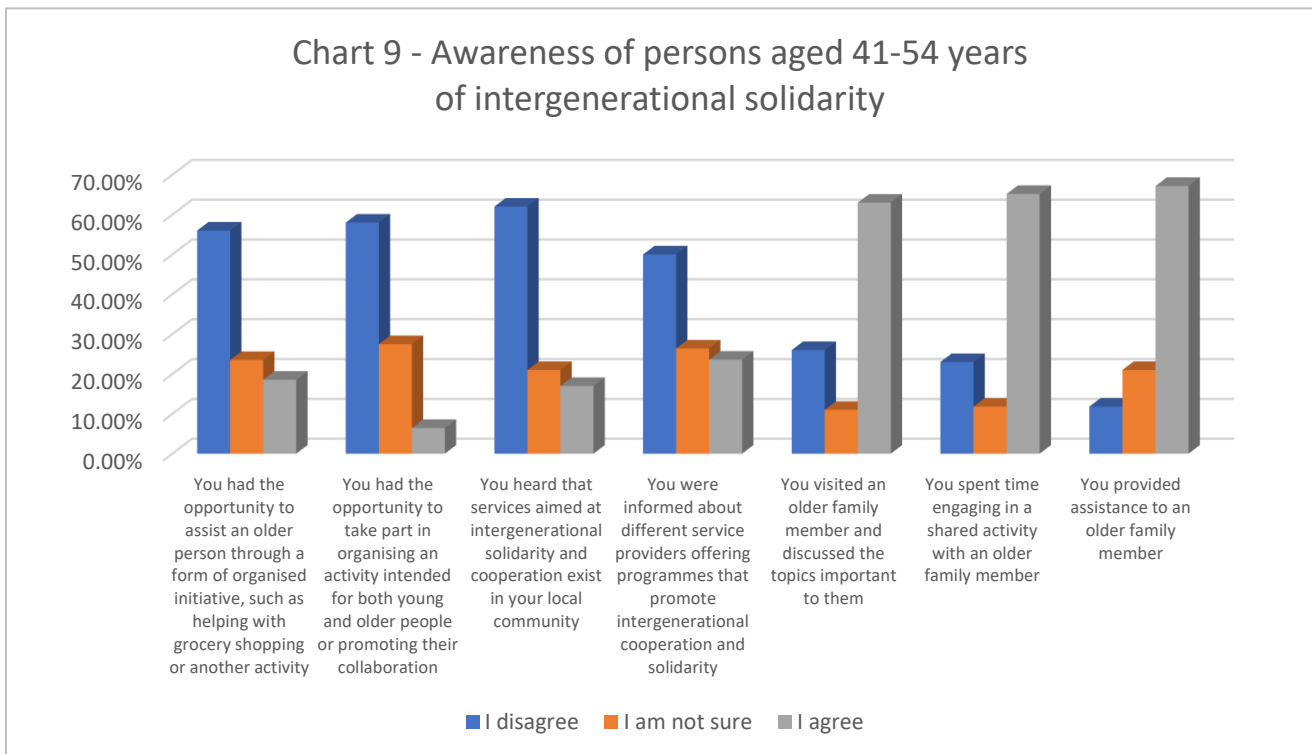


3.3. Research results collected from the “Sandwich Generation” (aged 41 to 54):

Respondents aged between 41 and 54 years (the so-called “sandwich generation”) completed the part of the questionnaire related to attitudes towards both young people and the elderly, about awareness of the existence of various services that encourage intergenerational solidarity, as well as their contribution to intergenerational solidarity.

The research results show that people aged 41 to 54, in the majority of cases, have not had opportunities to participate in joint activities with either older or younger persons organised as part of various support programmes for the elderly, nor are they informed that such activities are carried out within their local communities. On the other hand, the research findings indicate that this group of respondents had opportunities to participate in various activities contributing to intergenerational solidarity with their

family members (Chart 9). Regarding the attitudes towards young and older people, the results point to a predominantly positive relationship of respondents towards both groups. Respondents believe that joint activities between young and older people bring significant benefits to both sides, emphasising the importance of their mutual interaction and exchange of experiences. Particular emphasis was placed on the importance of respecting the opinions of both groups, highlighting the need to establish an equal dialogue between generations. *Chart 10* presents these results and sheds additional light on the positive potential joint activities could have in promoting intergenerational solidarity.



IV CONCLUSION OF THE QUANTITATIVE PHASE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

Based on the results of the quantitative phase of the research, which focused on examining the general population by analysing three generational groups, it may be concluded that intergenerational solidarity is already practiced among generations, particularly within family relationships and close surroundings. The results indicate differences in willingness and approaches to activities between younger and older generations.

Specifically, young people demonstrate a slightly higher willingness to engage in various types of activities, with a preference for providing functional support and assistance. On the other hand, older individuals are more open to participating in activities more frequently, yet they exhibit lower willingness when it comes to engaging in creative leisure-time activities, which younger generations do not prioritise. These findings offer an opportunity to better understand the needs of older people, as well as to align them with the capacities and willingness of younger generations. To achieve balance, it is important to clearly define what the older population truly needs and what the younger generation is able and willing to provide. In this context, it would be useful to design specific activities that simultaneously meet the needs of both groups, giving them a chance to build deeper mutual understanding and solidarity through joint engagement. Such programmes could contribute to strengthening intergenerational ties and to creating a social environment that fosters solidarity, respect and mutual support.

Regarding the attitudes of the different respondent groups, it is evident that they are generally positive, and that each group considers the needs and different perspectives of other generations. This is supported by the fact that the vast majority of respondents believe it is necessary for all age groups to participate in decision-making processes on important issues. Moreover, no generational divide is observed, nor devaluation of values and existing needs of other generation group. However, what emerges from the findings is a potential lack of personal responsibility, as positive attitudes do not necessarily translate into behaviour consistent with those attitudes. In other words, while positive views are a necessary precondition, they are not sufficient on their own to drive personal engagement in this area.

When analysing respondents' levels of knowledge and awareness regarding intergenerational solidarity, it becomes apparent that most are either not involved in such activities or are not adequately informed about their existence. Such result may reflect insufficient availability and distribution of intergenerational support

programmes in the communities where respondents live. Additionally, there are other factors that may cause the restricted visibility and sustainability of such initiatives, such as territorial homogeneity, project-based funding constraints and unequal access to information and resources. The results suggest that it is crucial to enhance the promotion of these activities and increase the awareness about their significance and benefits. In this context, particular attention should be given to designing outreach strategies that effectively engage different generations, highlighting the practical advantages of intergenerational programmes for all participants. This includes developing campaigns that effectively emphasise the value of intergenerational solidarity, thereby encouraging greater civic participation across all age groups and fostering the formation of deeper and more lasting social bonds.

V QUALITATIVE PHASE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

Six focus groups were conducted in April 2024. The total number of participants was 71. Of these, 28 were older adults and 43 were young people. Three focus groups were held with individuals over 60 years of age, while the remaining three were conducted with students of the Faculty of Philosophy, aged between 20 and 30 years. Focus groups participants were individuals who expressed an interest in improving intergenerational cooperation. Each focus group lasted between two and three hours, on average.

Following the implementation of the planned intergenerational activities, additional six follow-up focus groups were organised in April 2025. The total number of participants was 78, with 40 older adults and 38 young people. As in the first cycle, three focus groups were conducted with persons over 60 years of age, and three groups with students of the Faculty of Philosophy, aged between 20 and 30. Each focus group lasted between two and three hours, on average.

5.1. Focus group results – older adults (initial focus groups):

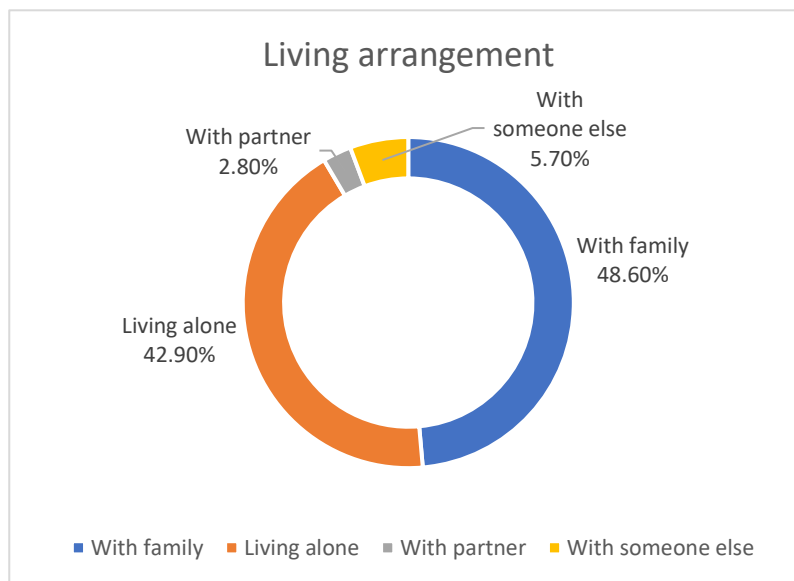
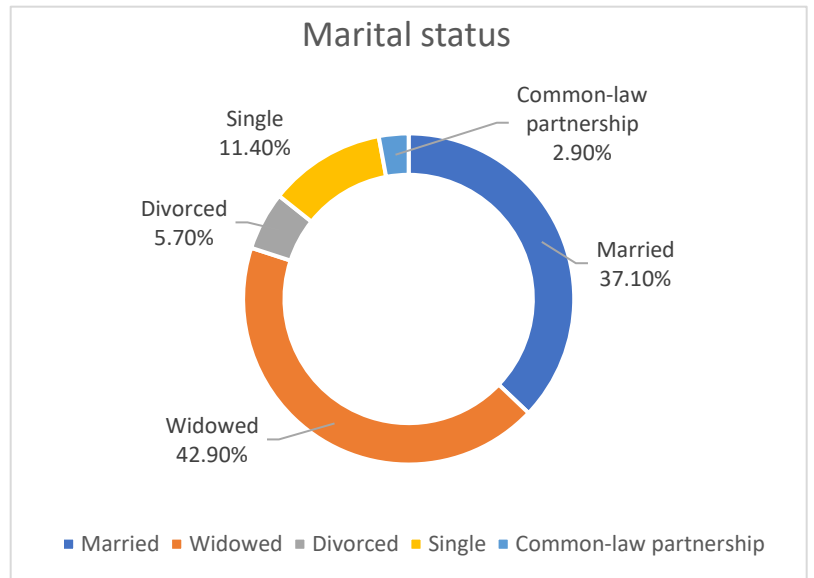
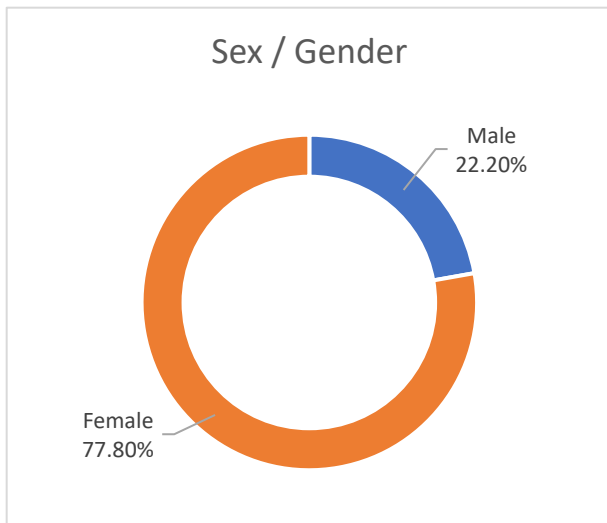
Discussion within the focus groups with older adults was carefully structured to encompass key themes relevant to understanding their needs, attitudes and experiences in the context of intergenerational cooperation and solidarity. Conversations were organised into several thematic units, enabling participants to reflect on various aspects of daily life as well as to share personal observations and suggestions.

The themes that guided the discussion included:

- Challenges faced by older adults in contemporary society,
- Barriers and opportunities in building intergenerational cooperation and solidarity,
- Positive examples and experiences of successful collaboration with younger generations,
- Ideas and proposals for enhancing intergenerational solidarity in the future.

This structure enabled a deeper insight into the everyday lives of older individuals, their needs and expectations, as well as their perspectives on the importance of mutual understanding and support between generations.

The next section presents the sample distribution by gender, marital status and respondents' current living arrangements:



In relation to the first topic, older adults shared the most common challenges they face in everyday life, how they overcome them and how they perceive those challenges. Some participants identified feelings of loneliness and a lack of social interaction and quality of life compared to earlier periods. Several stated that their main form of communication is with neighbours they meet in their buildings. On the other hand, some reported having engaged in more activities to prevent loneliness and isolation. They expressed

appreciation for participation in community programmes such as choir singing, painting, poetry evenings and attending the theatre. They also recognised the value of activities organised by NSHC within the AGE+ programme.

Most participants reported having good relationships with family members, but also expressed a desire for more frequent interaction, particularly with grandchildren. They also acknowledged the busy schedules of younger family members which is why they make efforts to accommodate them. They noted that “times have changed,” that they were raised differently than today’s youth. They recalled that it used to be taken for granted that older individuals were to be listened to and respected as “authority” figures, something they perceive has nowadays changed. They also emphasised that they now need to explicitly express if there is something they need (e.g., assistance or support), whereas such needs were once understood without being verbalised. Some participants viewed certain changes in the behaviour of younger people as positive, but also felt that boundaries are sometimes being excessively pushed, leading them to wonder how today’s children will treat older adults in the future. Regarding health-related challenges, they expressed a desire for a system that would prioritise their needs when visiting medical facilities, so they would not have to wait long and could complete everything in one place.

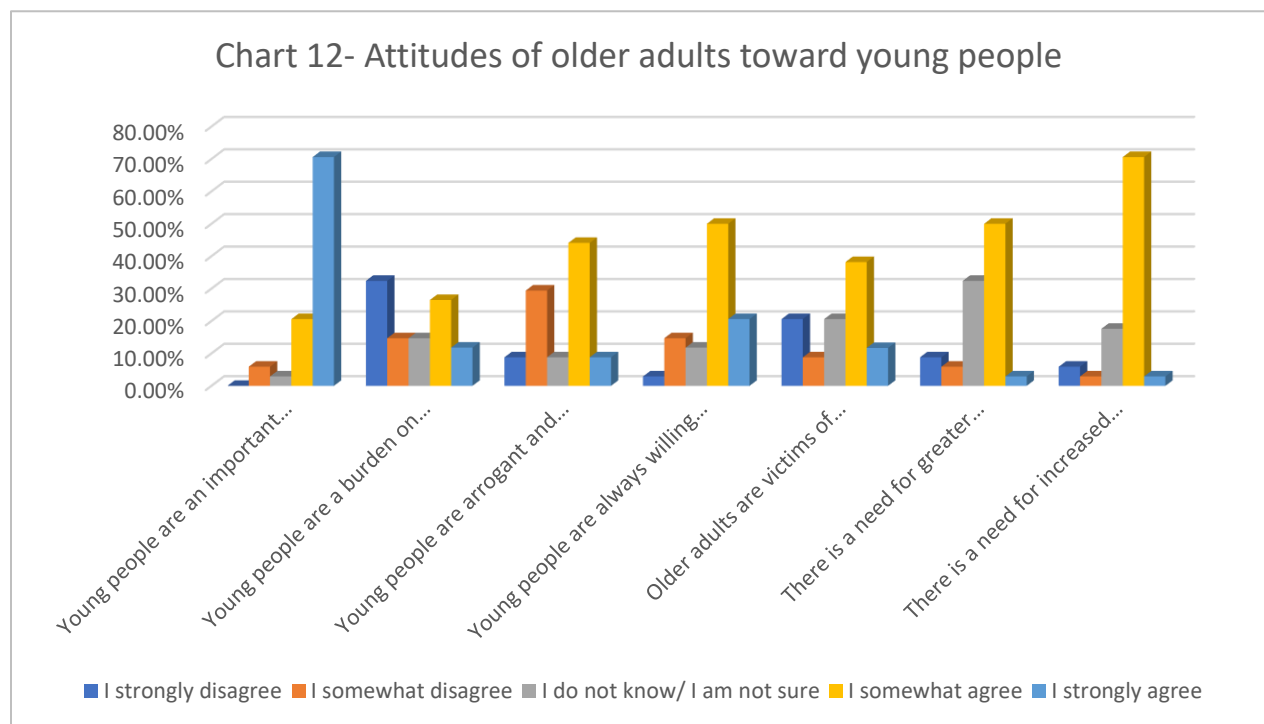
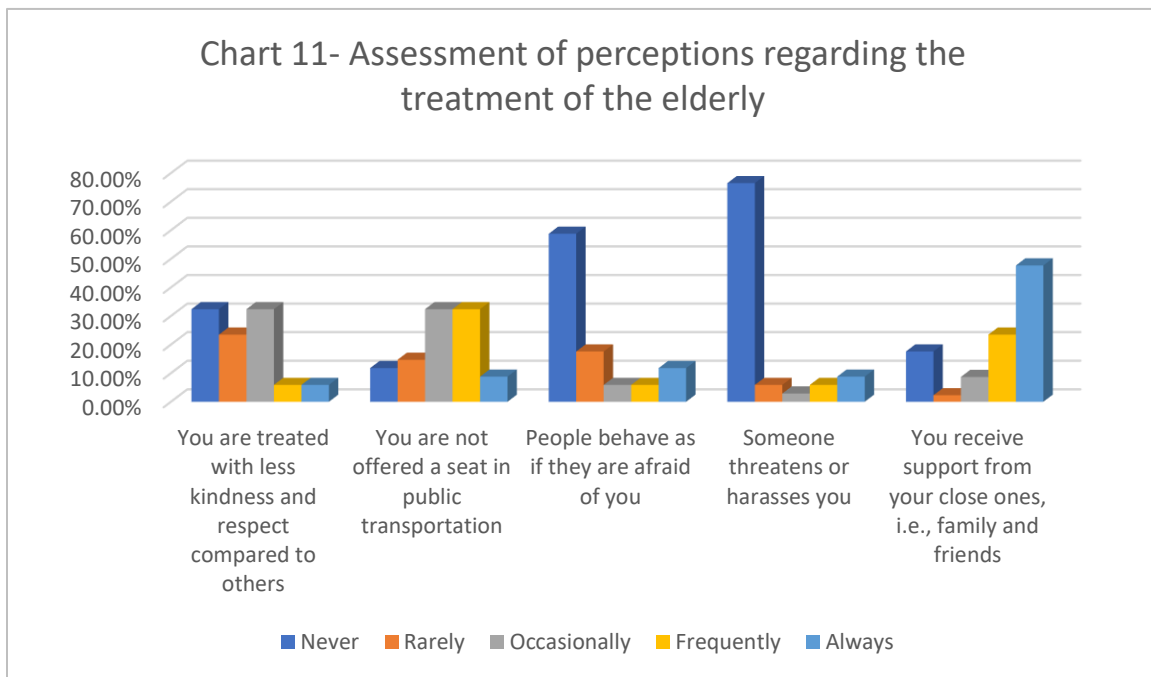
When discussing challenges of intergenerational cooperation, they noted that younger individuals are largely focused on their own needs or the needs of their immediate families, leaving little time to engage with older adults. Throughout the discussions, it became evident that participants value the attention they receive from their loved ones, even in small gestures such as helping with grocery shopping and the like. They also reported instances of mockery by younger people in situations such as struggling to walk or having difficulty using mobile phones. As examples of successful intergenerational cooperation, participants mentioned activities that allowed them to showcase their knowledge and skills, where they felt valued, rather than a burden. In this regard, they expressed enjoyment in attending senior clubs with organised activities. They also looked forward to interactions with students of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad, especially during their internships, which they see as opportunities not only for socialising but also for co-creating and engaging in joint activities. Another positive example was the theatre performance organised for preschool children in Novi Sad. Older participants created the script and played the roles themselves. They reported that the children responded positively and emphasised the importance of introducing the concept of intergenerational solidarity to children from an early age. When asked what they could offer to young people, what young people could learn from them, they

mentioned storytelling about tradition, values and how life used to be. When asked what they could learn from young people, they highlighted the need to learn more about digital technologies, expressed interest in having a guide for mobile phone use, participating in joint workshops on various topics and visiting the Faculty.

They also provided concrete suggestions for joint intergenerational activities:

- A written manual for using mobile phones and other digital technologies and content, which older adults could keep with them
- Workshops on mental health
- Workshops on values
- Workshops on etiquette
- Workshops on tradition, “Life then and now”
- Organising chess tournaments
- Visits by older adults to the Faculty of Philosophy during students’ practical work defense
- Hiking
- Teaching traditional folk dances to young people
- Poetry evenings, and more.

In addition to the open-ended questions discussed in the focus group sessions, participants also completed two rating scales. The first scale focused on how they perceive others’ attitudes and behaviour toward them, while the second scale aimed to examine older adults’ attitudes toward younger people. The results from these scales are presented in *Chart 11* and *Chart 12*.



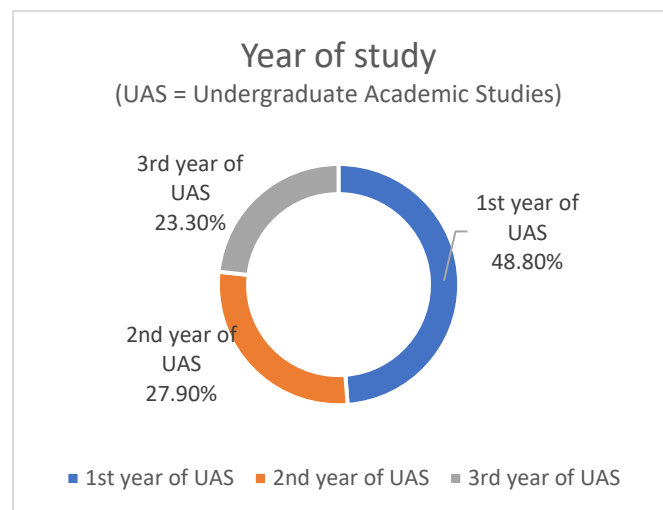
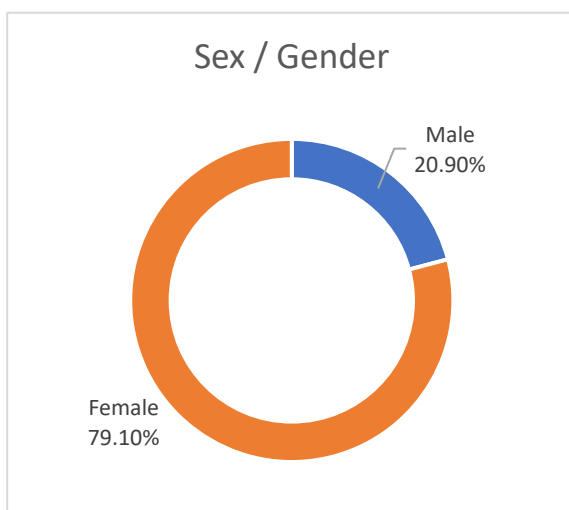
- Young people are an important part of our community and should be valued
- Young people are a burden on their families
- Young people are arrogant and ill-mannered
- Young people are always willing to help
- Older adults are victims of discrimination and stigma in society
- There is a need for greater education and awareness-raising regarding the needs and rights of older people
- There is a need for increased investment in mental health programmes specifically designed for older adults

Based on the data presented in *Chart 11*, it may be observed that older adults generally perceive that they have support from their family members and friends. Additionally, they almost never report feeling that others are afraid of them or that they are being threatened in any way. On the other hand, the findings suggest that when it comes to being offered a seat on public transportation and being treated with appropriate levels of respect and politeness, older adults report a range of experiences. The most frequently selected responses were “often” and “sometimes,” although there were also responses indicating “never,” “occasionally” and “always.” When the variable “with whom the respondents live” is taken into consideration, no significant differences are observed in responses across the measured items.

The findings presented in *Chart 12* indicate that older adults predominantly hold the view that young people are arrogant and ill-mannered, yet still willing to offer help. Moreover, the majority of respondents expressed the belief that older individuals are victims of discrimination and stigma within the society. With regard to the statement “young people are a burden on their families,” the responses were divided. On the other hand, older adults believe that young people represent an important part of the community and should be valued and that it is necessary to invest resources in awareness-raising and education about the rights and needs of older adults, as well as in the development of mental health support programmes for the elderly. Older adults living with family members express more positive assessments, compared to those living alone, particularly on the statement that young people are willing to help.

5.2. Focus group results – young people (initial focus groups):

The following section presents the distribution of the sample by gender and year of study.



The discussion during the focus group with young participants was structured around several thematic units, enabling a deeper understanding of their experiences and attitudes. The first segment focused on identifying challenges in daily interaction with older generations, particularly in the context of mutual understanding, communication and differences in value systems. This was followed by a discussion on general challenges in building intergenerational cooperation and solidarity in the contemporary society. A special emphasis was placed on positive examples of successful collaboration that young people had experienced or observed in their environment.

The themes that guided the discussion included:

- Challenges in collaboration with older generations,
- Challenges in building intergenerational cooperation and solidarity,
- Examples of successful intergenerational cooperation,
- Ideas for improving intergenerational solidarity.

Regarding the first topic pertaining to challenges in collaboration with older generations, young people shared a range of experiences. It was generally noted that those young people who grew up with grandparents or maintained a close relationship with, them showed greater understanding of their needs and of the changes and challenges that come with older age. Some participants pointed out that modern life is fast-paced and as a result, young people often lack time for the elderly. They also had the opportunity to listen to their older family members talk about life in the past, tradition and traditional values, and expressed that they found this both interesting and useful. They recognised that such stories offer a range of valuable life lessons.

Young people acknowledged the challenges associated with discrimination that older people often face in our environment. They observed that older individuals are sometimes treated rudely, and shared examples where older adults are perceived as a burden on their families, the society and so on. While most participants felt this was unfair, some noted that this perception may stem from the increased life expectancy and the lack of plans that would enable older people to spend their free time meaningfully. Participants also mentioned knowing some older individuals who prefer not to engage in community activities, tend to withdraw and mostly stay at home. The young participants were highly engaged in offering proposals for improving intergenerational cooperation.

The ideas they expressed that they would like to implement with older people included:

- Joint visits to museums, cinemas, theatres and day trips
- Watching TV series or films together
- A workshop on values, traditions, “Life then and now”
- Experiential workshops
- A reading club
- Chess tournaments
- Playing board games
- Joint sports activities
- Cup of coffee with elders (i.e., going out for a coffee together)
- Inviting older people to attend defense of students’ practical works at the Faculty of Philosophy

Group work dynamics:

In all focus groups, participants were highly active and engaged with the topic and discussion. At the start, participants agreed on group rules, although it was necessary to guide the discussion to ensure that all voices were heard and that participants did not interrupt each other. The focus groups proceeded according to the plan, within the scheduled timeframe and defined discussion framework.

In addition to the open-ended questions raised during the focus group, participants also completed two rating scales. The first scale assessed their perception of how society and their environment treat them as older individuals. The second scale explored their attitudes toward younger generations. The results of these assessments are presented in *Chart 13* and *Chart 14*, offering insights into how older individuals perceive their own position in the society, as well as their views on young people. This approach provides a deeper understanding of intergenerational relations and the attitudes that shape them.

Chart 13 - Assessment of Personal Attitudes and Behaviour Toward the Elderly

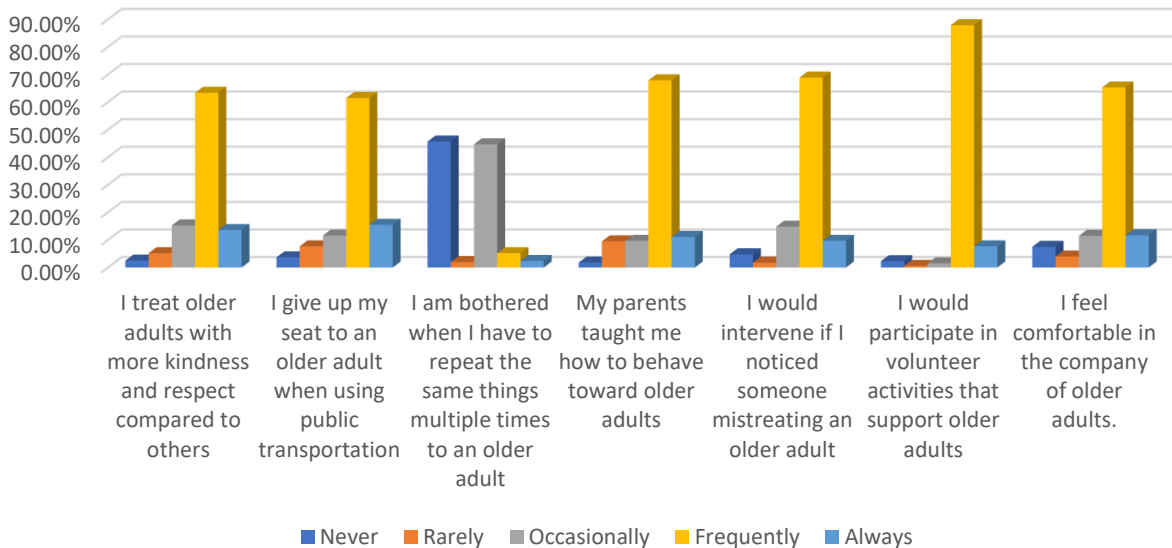
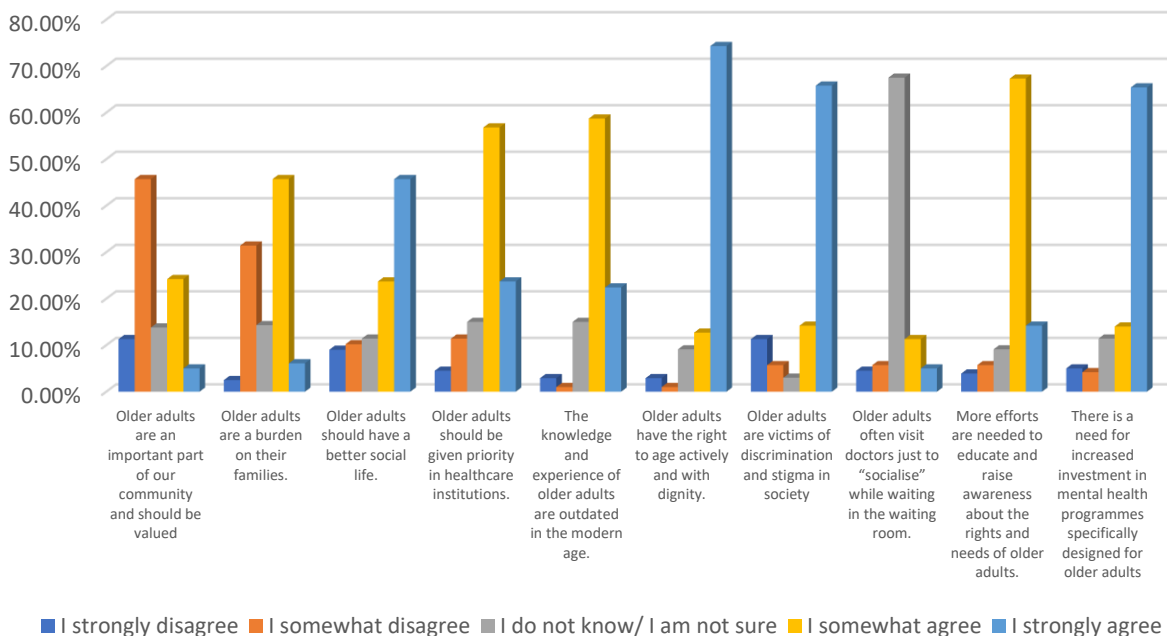


Chart - 14 Attitudes of Youth Toward Older Adults



Findings from the youth survey scales indicate that young participants rate highly their own behavior toward older adults. This may be concluded based on their frequent selection of “often” when evaluating items, suggesting that they generally maintain relationships characterised by respect, consideration, closeness and warmth toward older individuals and so on. Notably, the item “It bothers me when I have to repeat the same things multiple times to an older person” showed a split response, in fact, some respondents chose “never,” while others chose “occasionally.” Among all statements assessing youth attitudes toward the elderly, repetition was the most frequently cited source of frustration. Otherwise, it may be concluded that young people view themselves as sensitive to the needs of the elderly, demonstrating respect and willingness to provide support and help to them. When analysing the responses by year of study, it is found that final-year students rate all items more positively compared to second- and third-year students.

When analysing attitudes of young people towards older individuals, certain contrasts are observed. Actually, most young people disagree with the statement that older adults are a significant part of society deserving respect, while responses to “Older adults are a burden on their families” show divided opinion. In contrast, the remaining statements concerning older adults’ rights and needs received high degree of agreement. Young people clearly express support for developing mental health support programmes for older adults and emphasise the need for greater awareness and education about the rights and needs of older adults. Overall, youth attitudes toward older adults are predominantly positive, but there is a tendency to shift responsibility for older adults’ well-being onto the broader community and society. They believe older adults have the right to live with dignity and agree that more attention and support programmes should be directed toward them. They also recognise that older adults often face discrimination. However, a significant number of young people still view older adults as a burden on their families and do not see them as a significant part of the society deserving to be valued and appreciated. These results suggest the need for continued efforts to change youth perceptions of older adults through education and awareness of older generations’ societal contributions.

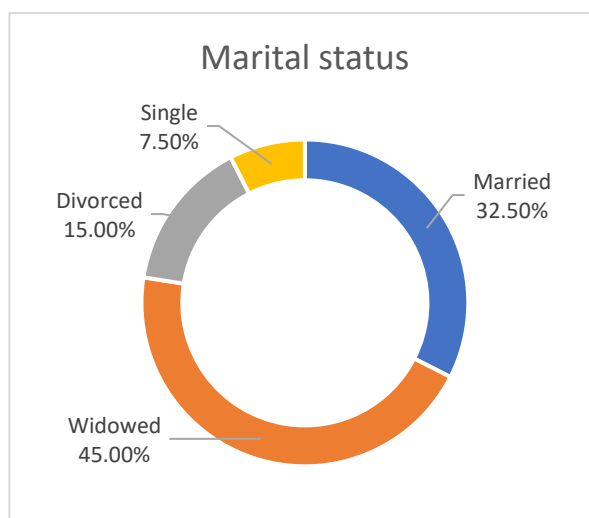
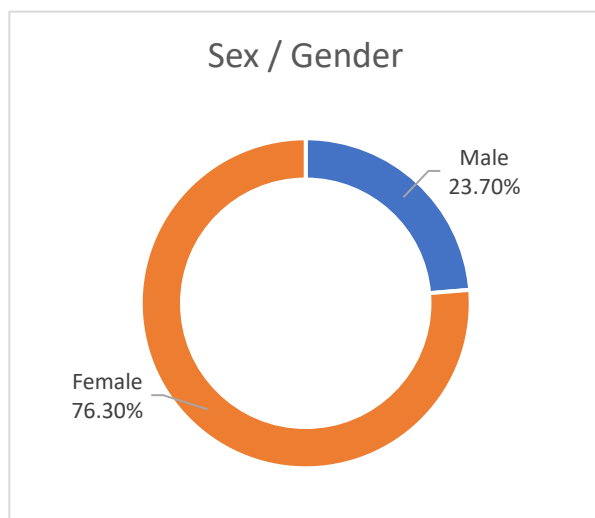
5.3. Focus group results with older adults after intervention (post-control focus groups):

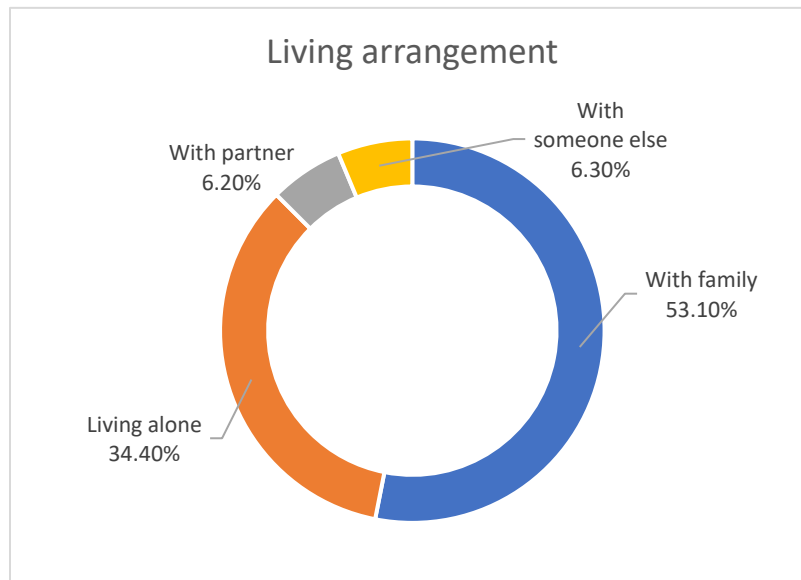
The focus-group discussions primarily centered on exploring older adults' experiences after the implementation of intergenerational activities with young people. Several events were organised in the recent period, including social gatherings, museum visits, workshops and so on. A special segment of the discussion in the course of focus groups addressed the question how intergenerational solidarity in the community could be further enhanced.

Discussion themes were divided in the following segments:

- Challenges experienced by older adults in society,
- Potential for successful building of intergenerational cooperation,
- Older adults' experiences during implementation of the intergenerational solidarity plan,
- Ideas for improving intergenerational solidarity based on "the lessons learned".

The distribution of the sample according to sex/gender, marital status and current living arrangements of the respondents is presented in the following section:





Generally, focus groups participants held positive views on intergenerational solidarity. There is an impression that they now speak more frequently about positive examples, which may indicate that, as a result of their positive experiences with young people, they are more focused on noticing positive examples in everyday life and in society. Participants shared many positive experiences, noting that much of this, in their view, 'starts at home,' referring to the role of parental upbringing. In addition, they recognised the negative influence of the media and social networks on shaping the behavior of children and young people. On the other hand, they believed that a young person's behavior could also depend on how older individuals relate to them. By this, they meant that if they themselves communicate respectfully and kindly, it increases the likelihood that young people will respond in a similar manner toward older individuals.

Focus group participants who had previously taken part in joint activities with young people stated that their perceptions of youth *had become more positive* and they came to realise that things are not simply 'black and white.' Although they initially expressed some reservations, after the activities they expressed:

- Surprise at the openness and attention of young people,
- Feeling respected and acknowledged in conversations and shared tasks,
- Greater understanding of challenges faced by today's youth,
- Recognition of shared values despite the generation gap.

They expressed appreciation for the workshops and activities with young people, viewing them as a valuable initiative that should be continued. Participants felt that these activities gave them an opportunity to challenge some of their own preconceptions about youth. Some mentioned that, due to professional obligations during their working years, they had not spent enough time with their children, and in some cases, even with their grandchildren, and that only now had they come to see how kind, considerate and helpful young people can be. These reflections were particularly noticeable among male focus group participants. One female participant stated:

"When I spend time with young people, I feel useful and connected to the present. Their energy and curiosity motivate me to keep learning, and I enjoy being able to share something from my own life with them." (Female focus group participant, aged 79).

Besides offering opportunities for meeting and fostering mutual connections, participants also recognised that activities of this kind could play a significant role in reducing prejudices and breaking down stereotypes (such as perceptions of the younger generation being uninterested, superficial or individualistic), which they identified as prevalent in our society and existing between younger and older generations. Older adults recognise that the presence of prejudice and stereotypes is mutual and they emphasise the importance of expanding such programmes to allow for stronger connections and broader social networks within each local community. They also view positively the fact that these activities have given young people the opportunity to expand their social circle to include older individuals, since their interactions are typically limited to family members, neighbours or relatives. Furthermore, older participants note that young people do not always have positive experiences with older adults in their immediate environment. From this perspective, such programmes are seen as beneficial for young people as well, especially considering the increasing life expectancy and the growing number of older citizens in every local community. Another important aspect that emerged is the increased motivation among older adults to participate in similar programmes following the workshops and social gatherings. Some individuals even expressed their willingness to volunteer in the future as mentors to young people in various fields (e.g., choir activities). One of the participants shared the following reflection:

"For me, this feels like therapy. I go home with a smile and tell my grandchildren about how we spent time together and learned from one another." (Male focus group participant, aged 71)

In addition to emphasising the importance of intergenerational solidarity, participants also offered concrete suggestions for strengthening relationships between youth and the elderly. They placed particular emphasis on joint activities within the local community as a means of fostering mutual support and the exchange of experiences. Some of the proposed initiatives include:

- Joint care for the city/town – through volunteering in community initiatives (e.g., cleaning green spaces, improving neighborhood areas), where young people could develop a sense of responsibility and usefulness, while older adults would take on an active role in the community.
- Mentorship programmes – where older individuals could share their knowledge and life experience with younger people, for example through workshops on traditional crafts, cooking classes, or lectures on local history.
- Joint projects – such as creating local memory maps based on the recollections of older residents, with the support of younger participants in digitalising and preserving these stories.

Older participants emphasised that such activities would provide young people with an opportunity to develop *a sense of responsibility and belonging*, while offering older adults *a sense of purpose and societal contribution*, the factors that could significantly enhance their psychosocial well-being.

Many respondents cited as an example of good practice a shared visit to an art gallery followed by informal socialising over coffee and pastries with university students. This activity was described as particularly valuable, as participants noted:

- it created a relaxed, informal atmosphere in which age differences were naturally “dissolved”;
- it provided an environment for the exchange of views on art, life and society;
- it demonstrated that intergenerational solidarity does not need to be formal or institutional, but could be fostered through simple, everyday encounters such as this one.

In addition to the open-ended questions discussed during the focus group sessions, participants also completed two rating scales following the activities conducted with young people. As in the initial rating, the first scale focused on their perception of how others treat them, while the second scale aimed to examine older adults’ attitudes toward young people following the activities conducted with young people. *Charts 15* and *Chart 16* present the results obtained.

Chart 15 - Assessment of Perceptions Regarding the Treatment of the Older Adults

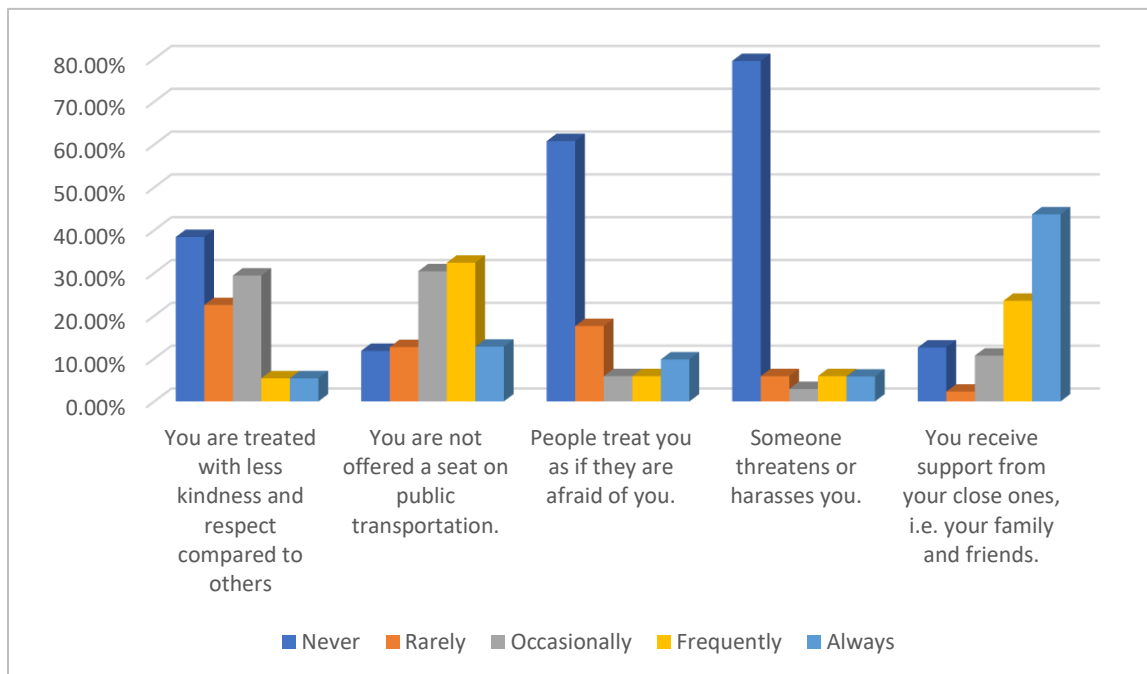
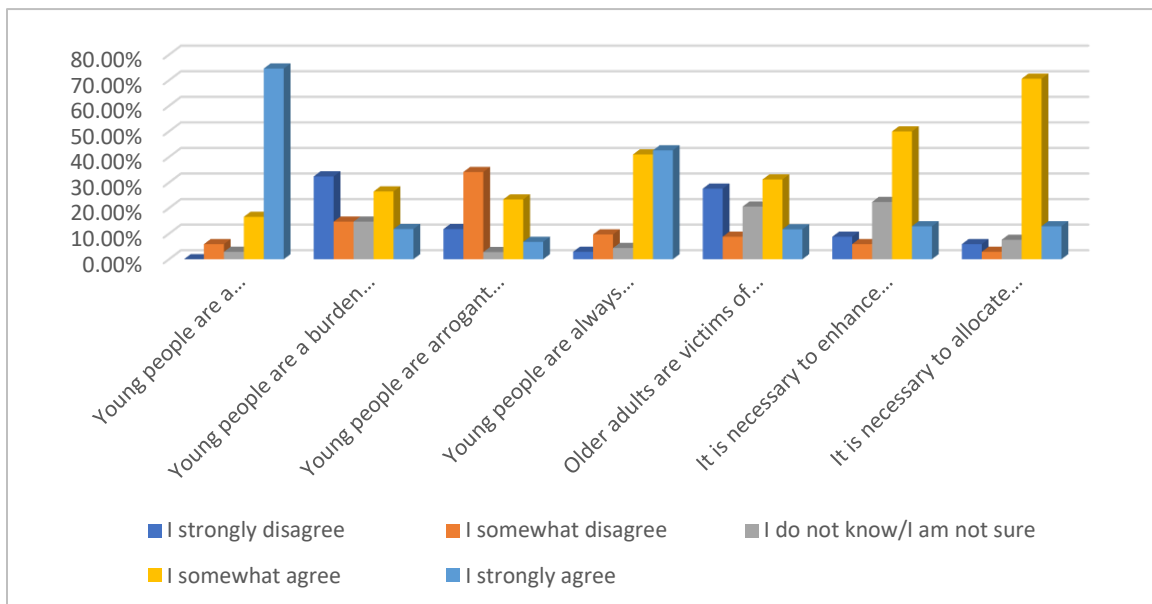


Chart 16 - Attitudes of Older Adults Toward Young People



- Young people are a significant part of our community and should be valued.
- Young people are a burden on their family.
- Young people are arrogant and ill-mannered.
- Young people are always willing to help.
- Older adults are victims of discrimination and stigma in the society.
- It is necessary to enhance education and awareness-raising activities about the needs and rights of older individuals.
- It is necessary to allocate more resources to mental health programmes designed for older individuals.

Based on the results presented in *Chart 15*, it may be observed that older adults generally feel supported by their family and friends and almost never report feeling that others are afraid of them or that they are being threatened. On the other hand, the findings suggest that experiences related to being offered a seat on public transportation or being treated with an appropriate level of respect and courtesy vary among older individuals. When these findings are compared with those obtained during the initial assessment, no significant differences are observed in the attitudes toward older adults or in their self-perception. These results may be understood and explained by the fact that such attitudes are deeply rooted in the beliefs of older individuals and have been reinforced repeatedly through personal experience. As such, a broader range of differing experiences would likely be required to bring about a change in these perceptions. On the other hand, the research demonstrated that the implemented activities had a largely positive impact on older respondents. Moreover, the attitudes expressed were not negative; in general, older adults evaluated the context of their lives positively.

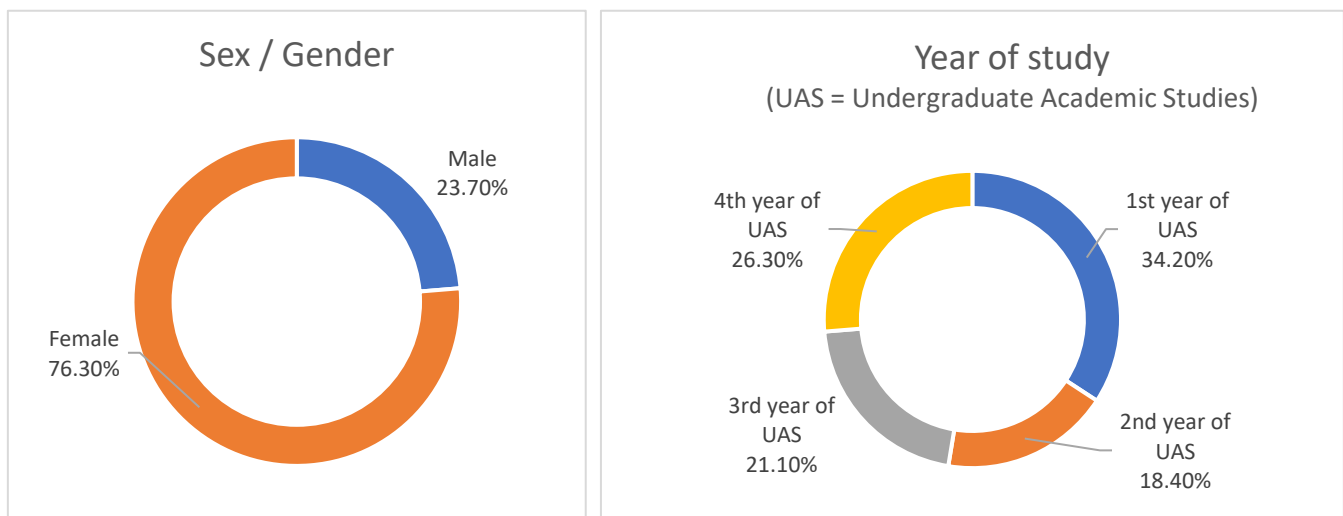
The obtained findings (*Chart 16*) indicate that older adults perceive themselves as willing to help and view themselves as an important part of society who deserve to be valued and respected. They recognise the importance of investing resources in awareness-raising and education about the rights and needs of older individuals, as well as in programmes that support their mental health. A significant portion of the sample believes that older adults are victims of stigma and discrimination within the society. Regarding the statement that young people are a burden on their families, opinions among older adults are divided, as they are on the view that young people are arrogant and ill-mannered. However, when comparing the results with those obtained in the initial assessment, a **significant shift is observed specifically in relation to the attitude that “Young people are arrogant and ill-mannered.”** *Following their participation in the activities, older adults would more frequently assign lower ratings to the statement in question, with the response “I somewhat disagree” showing a statistically significant difference between the first and second rating ($\chi^2 = 4.5$; $p \leq 0.05$), as well as the response “I strongly agree” ($\chi^2 = 3.9$; $p \leq 0.05$). Differences were also observed for the item “Young people are always willing to help” between the first and second assessment. Specifically, the response “I somewhat disagree” showed a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 3.4$; $p \leq 0.05$), as did the response “I strongly agree” ($\chi^2 = 4.8$; $p \leq 0.01$). These findings may be understood as a result of more frequent interaction between older adults and young people, as well as their joint participation in various project activities, which may have contributed to a shift in the said attitudes.*

5.4. Focus group results with young participants following the intervention (post-control focus groups):

The focus group discussions were themed around the following:

- the potential for successful development of intergenerational cooperation;
- young people's experiences during the implementation of the intergenerational activities;
- ideas for enhancing intergenerational solidarity based on “the lessons learned.”

The following section presents the sample distribution by sex/gender and year of study.



A significant insight, which aligns with findings from the focus groups conducted with older adults, is that the implemented activities **substantially contributed to the process of familiarising and connecting young people with older adults**. According to the participants, these activities provided an opportunity to meet older individuals beyond their immediate family members. In doing so, they expanded their understanding of the needs of older adults, as well as the valuable experiences and knowledge that older persons can offer. The young participants reported that they had initially expected to engage primarily in the field of technology, teaching older adults how to use mobile phones, the internet, computers and similar devices. However, they ultimately achieved much more than that. They expressed surprise at how many older adults hold *contemporary perspectives, how supportive they are toward youth and how willing they were to share their life experiences* in ways that allowed the younger generation to derive “valuable insights”. This approach, through the organisation of informal activities, contributes to the reduction of prejudice

and stereotypes among young people (as well as older adults), while also enhancing both individual and societal capacities to foster tolerance, connection and solidarity within the context of intergenerational cooperation. Some of the young participants shared their experiences volunteering with older adults, where, as they noted, they had, for the first time, the opportunity to "hear a life story from a different era" and to realise how much could be learned through such dialogue. They pointed out that these moments also made them aware of their own biases - acknowledging that they, too, sometimes assumed older adults were not interested in making contact, were unwilling to talk about emotions or incapable of understanding the modern world. Young participants also spoke about the need to create space for mutual learning. While older generations can share their life experiences and wisdom, younger people can contribute by helping others acquire digital skills, adopt contemporary approaches or simply offer a different perspective. They were particularly inspired by moments when older adults demonstrated a willingness to learn something new, for example, how to use a social media platform, write an email or navigate a mobile application. Some participants also reflected on feelings of uncertainty in communication, noting that they often did not know how to initiate a conversation with older adults, what topics to discuss, or feared they might come across as disrespectful. Similarly, several young people pointed to a generational divide in values, especially regarding attitudes toward education, work, family or social norms, which further complicated their sense of connection. Another barrier identified by the participants was the lack of visibility of intergenerational solidarity in the media and public discourse. They noted that positive examples of intergenerational connection are rarely portrayed, and when they are, they tend to be presented as exceptions rather than as a societal value that should be nurtured.

During discussions with young participants, it became evident that they recognise the need for greater patience when communicating with older adults and that they have become more sensitised to their needs. It was also observed that they increasingly perceive personal benefits from such interactions, for example, by understanding how older individuals function and how they can assist them, they are more likely to receive a positive response, which will allow them to build closer relationships with people in their environment, contribute to a more positive atmosphere in their local community and personally feel much better. There is a general impression that young people are willing to share these experiences with others, thereby helping to spread the idea of intergenerational solidarity and encouraging broader participation in similar activities that could potentially be organised in their local communities in the future.

Young participants also recognised how meaningful these types of activities are for older adults, particularly noting that such opportunities are often lacking in the communities they come from. They pointed out that while many towns have pensioners' associations, these typically focus on social events or occasional excursions. However, such programmes are usually intended exclusively for retirees, or at least perceived as such, which, in the opinion of the young participants, further contributes to the isolation of older adults and fosters a segregated environment. They expressed the belief that older individuals would respond positively if similar activities were organised in all local communities and if such initiatives were offered on a continuous basis. In this context, some of the young people began reflecting on programmes or projects they themselves might implement in their hometowns after completing their studies. The following ideas were proposed by youth for enhancing intergenerational solidarity:

- Designing regular, ongoing social gatherings between young people and older adults within the community.
- Learning traditional crafts, organising exhibitions presenting the work produced during workshops that involved representatives of youth and the elderly.
- Inviting older adults to participate in activities at universities.
- Developing collaborative projects aimed at enhancing the quality of life in the community (e.g., neighborhood improvement, identifying and addressing local needs and so on).

In this context, one of the participants shared the following reflection:

"I believe that collaboration with older adults is important because they possess experience that we lack, while we bring energy and ideas that can be meaningful to them. When we work together, we learn much more from one another than when we remain separated". (Male focus group participant, aged 21)

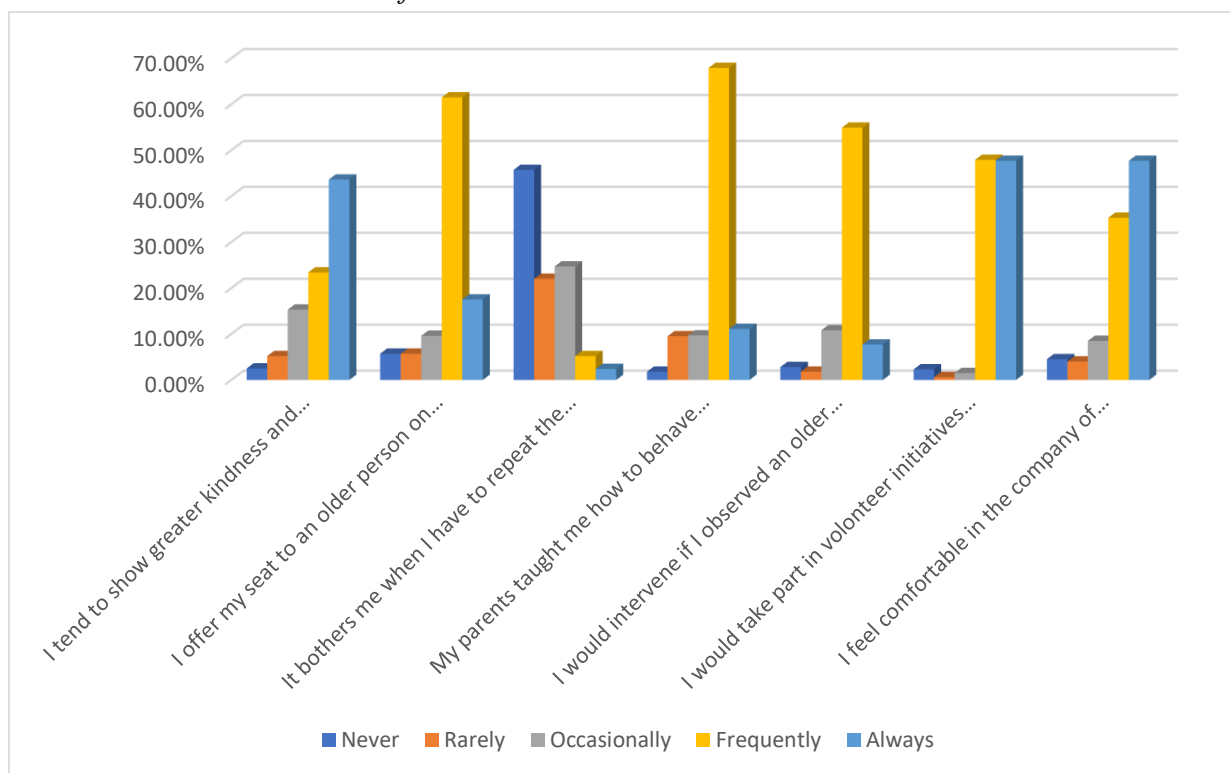
Group work dynamics:

In all focus groups, participants were highly engaged and showed considerable interest in the topic and discussion. The facilitators noted that, in the second round, participants were even more open to sharing and exchanging impressions, largely due to the positive experiences they had during the implementation of the joint activities. At the beginning of each session, the group revisited the ground rules for

participation; however, it was evident that less guidance was needed to encourage active listening, as participants demonstrated greater cooperation and patience in expressing their observations. The focus groups proceeded according to the plan, respecting the scheduled timeframe and thematic structure of the discussion. The atmosphere was encouraging and participants shared their thoughts and experiences freely, thereby fulfilling the objectives set for this part of the research.

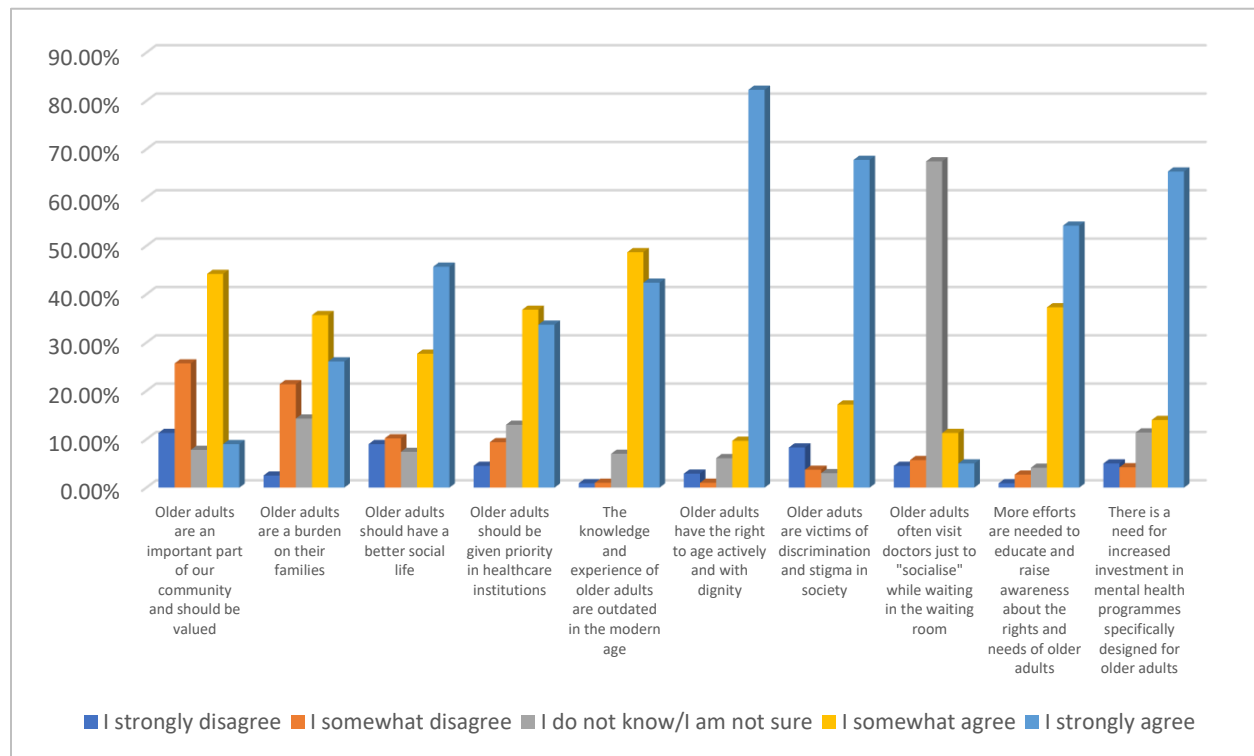
In addition to the open-ended questions discussed during the focus group, participants completed two rating scales, as they did in the first phase of the research. The first scale assessed their perception of how others treat older adults, while the second aimed to examine young people's attitudes toward older individuals. The results obtained are presented in *Chart 17* and *Chart 18*.

Chart 17- Assessment of Personal Behavior Toward Older Adults



- I tend to show greater kindness and respect toward older individuals than toward others.
- I offer my seat to an older person on public transportation.
- It bothers me when I have to repeat the same things multiple times to an older person.
- My parents taught me how to behave toward older individuals.
- I would intervene if I observed an older individual being harassed or mistreated.
- I would take part in volunteer initiatives aimed at supporting elderly individuals.
- I feel comfortable in the company of older adults.

Chart 18 - Young People's Attitudes Toward Older Adults



The results collected from young participants during the second phase of measurement, based on the aforementioned rating scales, indicate that they rated their own behavior toward older adults highly (most frequently selecting the response “often”). In general, young people expressed positive attitudes toward older adults, with a noticeable “shift” toward more favourable evaluations following their participation in project activities. A statistically significant change was observed in responses to the item “It bothers me when I have to repeat the same things multiple times to an older person.” Notably, a greater number of young people now rated this item more positively, with a significant portion of the sample selecting “never” ($\chi^2 = 3.8$; $p \leq 0.01$), and significantly fewer selecting “sometimes” ($\chi^2 = 3.2$; $p \leq 0.05$). **These results may be understood as a consequence of increased interaction and active involvement in activities with older adults.**

Regarding young people's attitudes toward older adults, the findings show that youth perceive the elderly as an important part of society and believe they should be valued. However, responses to the statement “Older people are a burden on their families” remain divided, as was the case in the initial measurement. In contrast, the remaining items were rated with high levels of agreement. Young participants expressed

the view that there should be more programmes supporting the mental health of older adults, as well as increased efforts in awareness-raising and education concerning the rights and needs of the elderly. Compared to the first round of measurement, statistically significant changes were observed in responses to the statement “Older people should have a better social life”, specifically in the categories “I somewhat agree” ($\chi^2 = 3.8$; $p \leq 0.01$) and “I strongly agree” ($\chi^2 = 3.2$; $p \leq 0.05$). Differences also appeared in responses to the item “There is a need for more education and awareness-raising regarding the rights and needs of older people”, with statistically significant changes in the “I somewhat agree” ($\chi^2 = 3.2$; $p \leq 0.05$) and “I strongly agree” ($\chi^2 = 3.2$; $p \leq 0.05$) categories. **The obtained results suggest not a shift from negative to positive attitudes, but rather an intensification of already positive views. In other words, through participation in the activities, young people reinforced their prior positive views of older adults and now evaluate these statements even more favorably.**

VI DISCUSSION, FINAL CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Discussion

The results of this research, notwithstanding limitations related to the instruments used, may be comparable to findings from studies conducted in neighboring countries. Specifically, in examining the potential for intergenerational cooperation in Slovenia, Meško and associates concluded that younger generations demonstrate a willingness to participate in traditional activities with older adults (such as crocheting, sewing, preparing traditional dishes, etc.), as well as in educational seminars designed to provide further insight into the way of life as it once was. Young people in Slovenia see their potential contribution as teaching older adults about new technologies, as well as actively socialising through sports or community activities. An interesting suggestion from the youth was to regularly organise neighborhood meetings (local districts) where all community members would participate, thereby identifying the needs for intergenerational cooperation. Older participants in this study suggested that intergenerational cooperation take place through various sports activities (walking, hiking), hands-on workshops and courses, as well as assistance with everyday tasks (driving, gardening help, etc.) (Meško et al., 2013). Our results reveal similar examples of activities between generations.

The greatest challenge identified is the lack of contact between young and older people in which the needs and potentials of both groups would become more “visible.” This would help overcome the older generation’s feeling that they lack sufficient competence to offer their skills to the young. The sense of competence is one of the three fundamental psychological needs, the importance of which is particularly emphasised in old age, when the level of autonomy decreases. In the long term, this would also positively influence the well-being of older adults. On the other hand, it would offer young people the opportunity to recognise that valuable skills are not limited only to those associated with the contemporary modern era. Thus, efforts to popularise “traditional skills” (for example, through modern technologies) would be an excellent example of connecting these two groups. Moreover, activities do not have to be solely educational. Considering that both younger and older individuals feel best when providing functional support, it would be beneficial to improve awareness about the significance of contact and spending time together.

When it comes to the middle generation, our research study showed that they hold the most positive attitudes toward both younger and older individuals, an outcome that is, to some extent, expected. A study conducted by Todorović and associates in Serbia found that among middle-aged respondents, in relation to their parents, familial solidarity is most strongly expressed in the domain of emotional solidarity (manifested as emotional closeness with family members), followed by solidarity in contact (maintaining regular contact with family members several times a week or daily) and functional solidarity (home repairs, shopping/transportation, household chores, personal care, financial support) (Todorović et al., 2019). In this context, the findings of our study further indicate the existence of a *current practice that may be described as intergenerational solidarity, particularly within the family or immediate environment*. These results support the notion that solidarity and care for all family members are still actively maintained within families in Serbia. Similarly, a study conducted in the territory of Belgrade and Kragujevac examined intergenerational solidarity among a sample of younger adult and middle-aged women. The findings revealed that mothers, or parents, heavily relied on grandparents, specifically maternal grandmothers, for support. The support provided by grandparents was described as frequent, substantial and exhausting. The respondents (mothers) expressed the view that caring for grandchildren enhances the quality of life of grandparents and contributes to a more positive and fulfilling aging experience. Furthermore, caregiving for older adults emerged as an important and largely assumed aspect of family life in Serbia (Bobić and Vesković-Anđelković, 2020). In the study by Todorović and associates, regarding the perceived obligations of adult children toward their aging parents, three-quarters of respondents agreed that a certain obligation exists, indicating a strong willingness among family members to assume responsibilities related to the care and support of older family members. The majority of respondents agreed with the statement that older adults should rely on their adult children for assistance with daily tasks (64%) (Todorović et al., 2019). The most comprehensive study of public attitudes in the EU regarding intergenerational solidarity was published in 2011, as part of preparations for the “European Year for Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity.” More than half of the surveyed population strongly opposed the notion that older people are a burden on the society, while over one-third of EU citizens believed that grandparents or other relatives provide the best care for children prior to school age (Eurostat, as cited in Perišić et al., 2019).

The responses of younger participants that diverge from the overall pattern were recorded within the focus groups and pertain to three specific items. Namely, a greater number of younger respondents expressed the view that older individuals are a burden to their families and disagreed with the notion that older

people should be valued as an important part of the society. Although the reasons for such views were not directly explored, it may be assumed that young people primarily perceive the financial burden placed on their families and that their reservations may stem from the perception that the participation of the older population in important societal and political decision-making is not sufficiently aligned with the interests of younger generations. This may indicate a generational divide in the perception of priorities and values. Some theoretical perspectives also emphasise that a conflict of values and priorities can deepen the generational gap and foster feelings of misunderstanding (Bengston and Roberts, 1991). One study conducted in Serbia also showed that the role of the state is most commonly recognised as crucial in the domain of financial support for older people, whereas responsibilities such as assistance with household tasks and caregiving are still largely seen as falling within the realm of family obligations. Compared to other countries participating in the same project (OASIS), the balance between family and state in Serbia is tilted more strongly toward the family (Todorović et al., 2019).

An important finding of our research study is the striking similarity between the views of younger and older participants regarding the perception that older individuals are victims of discrimination and stigma in society. Both groups agreed that older people deserve a higher social status and that it is necessary to invest resources in the awareness-raising and education about the rights and needs of the elderly, as well as in the development of mental health support programmes for the elderly. Hence, both age groups recognise the persistence of age-related stereotypes and prejudices in the society, as well as the significance of initiatives aimed at preventing and reducing these phenomena. Although it was not directly examined from whom such initiatives are expected, the participants' responses suggest a tendency to shift responsibility toward the broader community and society at large. Similarly, the Eurostat research found that nearly *two-thirds* of the EU population over the age of 15 believe that there are not enough initiatives in place to encourage a contact between young and older people and their engagement in joint activities. Furthermore, nine out of ten EU citizens stated that they believe local authorities should support initiatives and organisations aimed at fostering connections between different generations. At the same time, in nearly all EU member states, less than half of the population stated that states should be the primary actors responsible for promoting better understanding between youth and the elderly. (Eurostat, as cited in Perišić et al., 2019). Some theoretical considerations also emphasise that in contexts where there is no adequate institutional support, intergenerational solidarity tends to be lower (Hofstede, 2001).

6.2. Concluding Remarks and Recommendations for Enhancing Intergenerational Cooperation

If we were to summarise the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative components of the research study conducted on the sample of older participants, the following conclusions may be drawn:

- Older respondents, particularly those living in urban areas, express a clear desire to be more involved in activities with young people. As recipients, they are most willing to learn from younger generations and engage in joint activities, with the majority reporting that they currently receive support from family and friends in these efforts. However, in the role of providers, older individuals feel the least competent when it comes to teaching young people or participating in creative activities. This points to potential barriers associated with their perceived role in these types of intergenerational activities;
- On the other hand, older respondents from suburban and rural areas showed greater involvement in activities with young people and were also more willing to assist younger generations with practical tasks such as cooking, childcare and similar activities. Additionally, in this context, older individuals expressed a willingness to pass on various manual skills to the youth, indicating their desire for more active participation in intergenerational interactions;
- Although they notice differences in young people's behaviours and sometimes criticise certain aspects, older respondents generally hold positive attitudes towards youth. They believe that young people are willing to help, especially those living with their families, as well as those residing in urban areas. This reflects an acknowledgment of the positive aspects of intergenerational relationships and the need to further encourage mutual support between generations;
- Regarding the social status of older adults, respondents believe that older people are often victims of discrimination and stigma. In their view, the society must invest more resources into raising awareness and educating about the rights and needs of older individuals. It is also crucial to create specialised programmes focused on supporting the mental health of older adults. These attitudes highlight the need for a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by older people, as well as the need for concrete actions to improve their position in the society.
- Overall, the interventions conducted, i.e., the intergenerational activities, had a positive impact on reducing the generation gap. Older participants emphasised that through direct communication, joint

activities and the exchange of experiences with young people, they developed greater understanding, respect and a sense of mutual connection. This reflects notable progress in creating a society based on solidarity and inclusion. However, although the activities with the youth had a positive effect on certain attitudes, the general perception of the older adults remains rooted in their previous life experiences. **This also indicates that longer-term and more intensive intergenerational interaction is necessary for (more) significant changes in attitudes.**

Regarding the younger respondents, the following conclusions could be drawn:

- Younger respondents in the sample are most willing to engage in instrumental activities with older adults, that is, to provide functional support, while showing the least willingness to participate in unstructured and creative activities. Teaching modern technologies is seen as the most frequent and needed activity in which they can contribute (especially among the female participants and particularly in urban areas);
- Younger participants generally believe that older adults deserve a better social status and should be given priority in healthcare institutions. They recognise that older people are subjected to discrimination and think that there should be programmes supporting the mental health of the elderly, as well as increased awareness and education regarding their rights and needs;
- Some responses from younger participants that do not correspond to the previous findings were those obtained during the focus groups, specifically on two items. In fact, a larger number of younger participants believe that older people are often a burden on their families and that the elderly do not represent an important part of society worthy of respect. There are several potential explanations for these results. Namely, the lack of cooperation between generations may contribute to mutual misunderstanding, and consequently, to more negative attitudes toward older adults. On the other hand, such attitudes are more prevalent among university students in the early years of their studies, who have not had the experience of growing up in close proximity to an older person or their parents may have been caregivers for an elderly relative with an illness, so it may be assumed that they have yet to become sensitised to issues concerning the elderly in society. What previous research has shown is that in families where older members are fully dependent on younger ones (e.g., due to illness or disability), the younger members may experience stress or a sense of burden. This may contribute to the perception of older adults as a burden, even in situations beyond the control of the elderly themselves (see also Pavlović, 2019).

- Although young people perceive themselves as sensitised to the needs of older members of society and express their respect and willingness to provide support and assistance, what frustrates them the most in communication with the elderly is the repetition of what has already been said;
- The implemented intergenerational activities have significantly contributed to the reduction of social distance and prejudice that young people often hold toward older adults. Participation in these programmes enabled young participants to perceive older individuals as active, wise and valuable members of the community, thereby further strengthening mutual trust and understanding. Following the participation in joint activities, notably more positive attitudes were observed regarding the understanding, patience and appreciation of older adults.

In conclusion, it could be stated that there is a pronounced need (expressed by both younger and older members of society) for strengthening *institutional support for programmes that promote intergenerational solidarity*. As the participants themselves pointed out, it is crucial to systematically involve educational institutions, local self-governments and other relevant stakeholders to ensure the sustainability and broader accessibility of such initiatives. Particular importance lies in the development of educational content and campaigns that promote intergenerational cooperation, not merely as an occasional activity, but as a lasting social value rooted in the principles of mutual respect, community and social cohesion. The need for social support for older adults was recognised by both age groups. **This mutual recognition indicates a strong potential for joint efforts to improve the position of older persons in the society.** Changes in perception indicate that contact and interaction have a positive impact; however, attitudes toward others are often a reflection of prior relationships and frequently rooted in deeply ingrained stereotypes and prejudices. While the interactions contributed to a greater understanding, they do not fully eliminate stereotypes without additional educational and cultural interventions.

The respondents particularly emphasised the key role of the NSHC organisation, highlighting the need for a broader range of similar community services that would significantly contribute to the promotion of intergenerational solidarity. According to them, the advancement of such initiatives would not only benefit the society at large, but also enhance the quality of aging, ensuring that older adults lead better, more dignified and more fulfilling lives. Before the implementation of the interventions and intergenerational activities, participants exhibited many patterns of misunderstanding, stereotypes and a sense of distance

between the generations. Older participants often reported feelings of social isolation and limited engagement within their communities, while younger participants noted that they seldom had opportunities for meaningful interactions with older adults. The conducted activities, consisting of joint workshops, conversations, creative tasks and experience sharing, helped to shift these perceptions. Through these interactions, participants were able to better understand and appreciate one another, fostering an environment of mutual respect. Following the interventions, noticeable progress was observed in intergenerational connectedness - older adults felt more accepted and valued, while younger participants developed a deeper understanding and respect for the older generations. Members of both groups expressed a strong desire for these activities to continue and expand, recognising their importance not only for personal growth but also for strengthening the social cohesion and solidarity. In this regard, the project team formulated the following recommendations:

→ **Intensifying intergenerational contact**

Especially among older adults in urban areas, it is necessary to organise programmes that encourage joint activities with young people, such as educational workshops, artistic projects, or sports events;

Focus on activities that enable older adults to share their knowledge and experience, while young people provide support through modern skills, such as digital technologies.

→ **Empowerment of competencies of older adults**

Develop educational programmes and campaigns to help older adults recognise their abilities, competencies and contributions to society;

Organise workshops for older adults aimed at enhancing their social and communication skills, as well as building confidence in interactions with younger generations.

→ **Education of families on the ageing process**

Develop methods of informing families about the specific characteristics of ageing, including its physiological, psychological and social aspects, in order to foster a better understanding of the needs of older family members;

Organise seminars, lectures and distribute educational materials (such as brochures and pamphlets) that promote the importance of respect for and inclusion of older individuals within the family unit;

→ **Encouraging volunteerism through the local community**

Actively engage local organisations and institutions in developing volunteer programmes for all generations, including both older and younger individuals, aimed at fostering intergenerational solidarity;

Develop community-level support networks that identify the needs of older persons and enable young people to actively participate in providing assistance and support;

→ **Role of media in promoting intergenerational solidarity**

Media should consistently highlight positive examples of good practice in intergenerational cooperation through television and radio programmes, articles, interviews and campaigns;

Educational and promotional campaigns should focus on raising awareness of how solidarity benefits not only individuals, but also contributes to the development of the society at large;

→ **Promoting support programmes for older adults**

Initiate the development and promotion of programmes that provide support for the mental health of older adults, as well as education on their rights and needs;

Design interactive projects that engage all generations in addressing issues faced by older people, such as intergenerational workshops, collaborative art projects or environmental activities.

→ **Involving decision-makers in the planning of intergenerational policies**

Local and national decision-makers should be actively involved in the development of policies that promote intergenerational solidarity and active ageing. The findings clearly indicate a broad public consensus on the need for such policies.

The promotion of intergenerational solidarity requires a systemic approach that involves families, local communities, the media, both governmental and non-governmental sectors, as well as the society at large. Raising awareness, providing education and fostering the inclusion of all generations in joint activities form the foundation for a society built on mutual understanding, respect and support. This not only enhances the quality of life for older adults, but also ensures long-term well-being for the broader society.

References:

- Amparo Cruz-Saco, M. (2010). Intergenerational Solidarity, u: *Intergenerational Solidarity: Strengthening Economic and Social Ties* (ur: Maria Amparao Cruz-Saco, Sergei Zelenev), Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2010: 9.
- Bobić, M., Vesković-Anđelković, M. (2020). Međugeneracijska solidarnost u staranju – slučaj Srbije. *Stanovništvo*, 2 (1): 2-22.
- Bengtson, V. L., & Roberts, R. E. L. (1991). Intergenerational solidarity in aging families: An example of formal theory construction. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 53 (4), 856–870.
- Eurostat, Active ageing and solidarity between generations (2011). *A statistical portrait of the European Union 2012*. European Commission, Brussels.
- Elder, G. H., Jr. (1974). *Children of the Great Depression: Social Change in Life Experience*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Global AgeWatch Insight (2018). *Global AgeWatch Insight*. London: HelpAge International.
- Hagestad, G. O., & Dykstra, P. A. (2016). Structuration of the life course: Some neglected aspects. In: M. J. Shanahan J. T. Mortimer, & M. Kirkpatrick Johnson (Eds.), *Handbook of the Life Course, Volume II*, pp. 131-157. New York: Springer.
- Hofstede, G. (2001), *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations*. 2nd ed. New York: Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Marshall, V. W., & Bengtson, V. L. (2011). Theoretical perspectives on the sociology of aging. In R. A. Settersten, Jr. & J. L. Angel (Eds.), *Handbook of Sociology and Aging*, pp. 17-33. New York: Springer.
- Meško, M., Roblek, V., Štok, Z. (2013). Intergenerational Relations and Cooperation. 14th Management International Conference. Koper.
- Perišić, N., Vesić, Z. M., i Sjeničić, M. (2019) Međugeneracijska solidarnost u dokumentima i aktivnostima Evropske unije. *Socijalna politika*, 54 (1), 51-72.
- Republički zavod za statistiku (2022). *Popis 2022*. Beograd: Republički zavod za statistiku.
- Perišić, N. (2018). Social Welfare Reforms in Serbia - Undelivered Welfare for Able-Bodies Beneficiaries. *Revija za socijalnu politiku* 11(14): 41-78.
- Pavlović, D. (2019). *Stavovi i predrasude prema starijim osobama*. ResearchGate. Pristupljeno: 29.12.2024. Available on: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333856552_Stavovi_i_predrasude_prema_starijim_osobama.
- Todorović, N., Vračević, M., Stanislavljević, D., Milić, N. (2019). *Međugeneracijska solidarnost između porodice i države*. Beograd: Crveni krst Srbije.
- Williams, A., & Nussbaum, J. F. (2001). *Intergenerational communication across the life span*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.