

# EUROPEAN SENIOR VOLUNTEERING

# ESV GUIDELINES

*a vademecum for designing and  
implementing senior volunteering activities  
based on intergenerational approach*

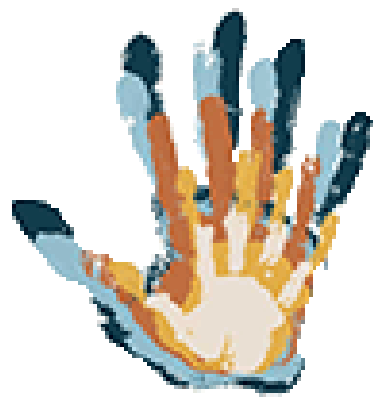


Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

Project Coordinated by



# The ESV Guidelines represent the main output of the project



## ERASVUS+

EU opportunities for RAising Skills through  
Volunteering of Unengaged Seniors

Project number:  
2020-1-IT02-KA204-079211

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# The Partnership

*Credits for this publication and the general success of this project go to all the partners*

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# ABOUT ERASMUS+

Erasmus+ is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth, and sport in Europe. The 2021-2027 programme places a strong focus on social inclusion, the green, and digital transitions, and promoting young people's participation in democratic life.

It supports priorities and activities set out in the European Education Area, Digital Education Action Plan, and the European Skills Agenda. The programme also

- supports the European Pillar of Social Rights
- implements the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027
- develops the European dimension in sport

Erasmus+ offers mobility and cooperation opportunities in

- higher education
- vocational education and training
- school education (including early childhood education and care)
- adult education
- youth
- and sport

Key Action 2: Cooperation among organisations and institutions

This Key Action supports:

- Partnerships for Cooperation, including Cooperation Partnerships and Small-scale Partnerships;
- Partnerships for Excellence, including Centres for Vocational Excellence, Teachers Academy, and Erasmus Mundus Action;
- Partnerships for Innovation, including Alliances and Forward-looking projects;
- Capacity Building projects in the field of youth;
- Not-for-profit European sports events.

[www.erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu](http://www.erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu)



# INTRODUCTION

This basic guideline is a tool addressed to all the seniors and people working in the social field who would like to have a thorough knowledge of what the European Senior Volunteering (ESV) is about. This guideline aims to reach organizations, institutions, seniors, youth, and leaders who are willing to organize their first activities addressed to seniors under the EU Programmes or other volunteering actions.

This final output of the “ERASVUS+” project represents the recommendations gathered by the four partner organizations, on how to manage international volunteering projects for seniors, focusing on their needs and expectations and taking into consideration the effectiveness of the intercultural and intergenerational aspects of the learning paths.

Choose to be a volunteer and bring your life experience, wisdom, and skills! Not only millennials can be volunteers, but now it’s your chance to make a difference!



# HOW ERASVUS+ STARTED



ERASVUS+: European opportunities for Raising Skills through Volunteering of Unengaged Seniors” was a 30 months long initiative for the exchange of practices, which involved 4 organizations from Italy, Spain, and Hungary, with different socio-cultural backgrounds, all of them working for the education of the over-50s.

As the final report on Volunteering in the European Union (2018) showed that the highest number of volunteers are represented by adults aged between 30-50 y.o., the Consortium aimed at investigating what happens with the over-50s. Senior citizens have a crucial role in the development of European society, from social, economic, and cultural points of view.

They need to feel useful and their great baggage of experience is essential for the growth, in primis, of the youngest generations.

In this scenario, how can educational institutions support unengaged seniors in enhancing their soft skills and key competencies in an international environment, enriching, at the same time, the sending and hosting communities? Is European Senior Volunteering the right tool to answer this question? What if the methodology foresees an intergenerational approach?

Could the young adults who had a previous EVS (European Voluntary Service) or ESC (European Solidarity Corps) experience help somehow the Institutions in developing Guidelines for designing and implementing senior volunteering projects in the EU?

ERASVUS+ answered all these questions by adopting a structured work plan, counting 3 TPMs, 5 LTTAs, and 16 Local Activities (L.A.s).



<https://erasmuspluswebsite.wixsite.com/erasvus>



<https://www.facebook.com/erasvusplus>

# GENERAL INFORMATION

## The objective

The idea was to involve young adults, who have already been EVS or ESC, in the mentoring and tutoring activities to participate as volunteers in the blended mobilities in partner institutions, in an intergenerational and intercultural environment. A total of more than 36 over-50s were engaged in the mobilities, together with their accompanying persons (coordinators/educators and translators).

They were supported in the exchange of experience with senior peers and youngsters from the hosting communities. However, the involvement of the seniors did not end with their participation in the mobilities. To give sustainability and a wider impact to ERASVUS+, after each LTТА, the senior volunteers organized "experience restitution" workshops, to transfer the outcomes of their experience to the local communities - act as mentors for the over-50s volunteers who participated in the next blended mobility.

The direct engagement of the seniors in their sending Institutions, as mentors, is the key to ensuring that the mobilities are not just spot initiatives, but, better, a starting point for a long-term collaboration between the senior volunteers and their organizations, for a wider impact at personal (for continuous learning) and local level (for growth of the communities where they live). All the experience collected after this phase was analyzed and elaborated and merged into this “ESV: European Senior Volunteering Guidelines”, a Vademecum for the designing and implementation of volunteering initiatives for the over-50s, based on an intercultural and intergenerational approach.





# About Volunteering



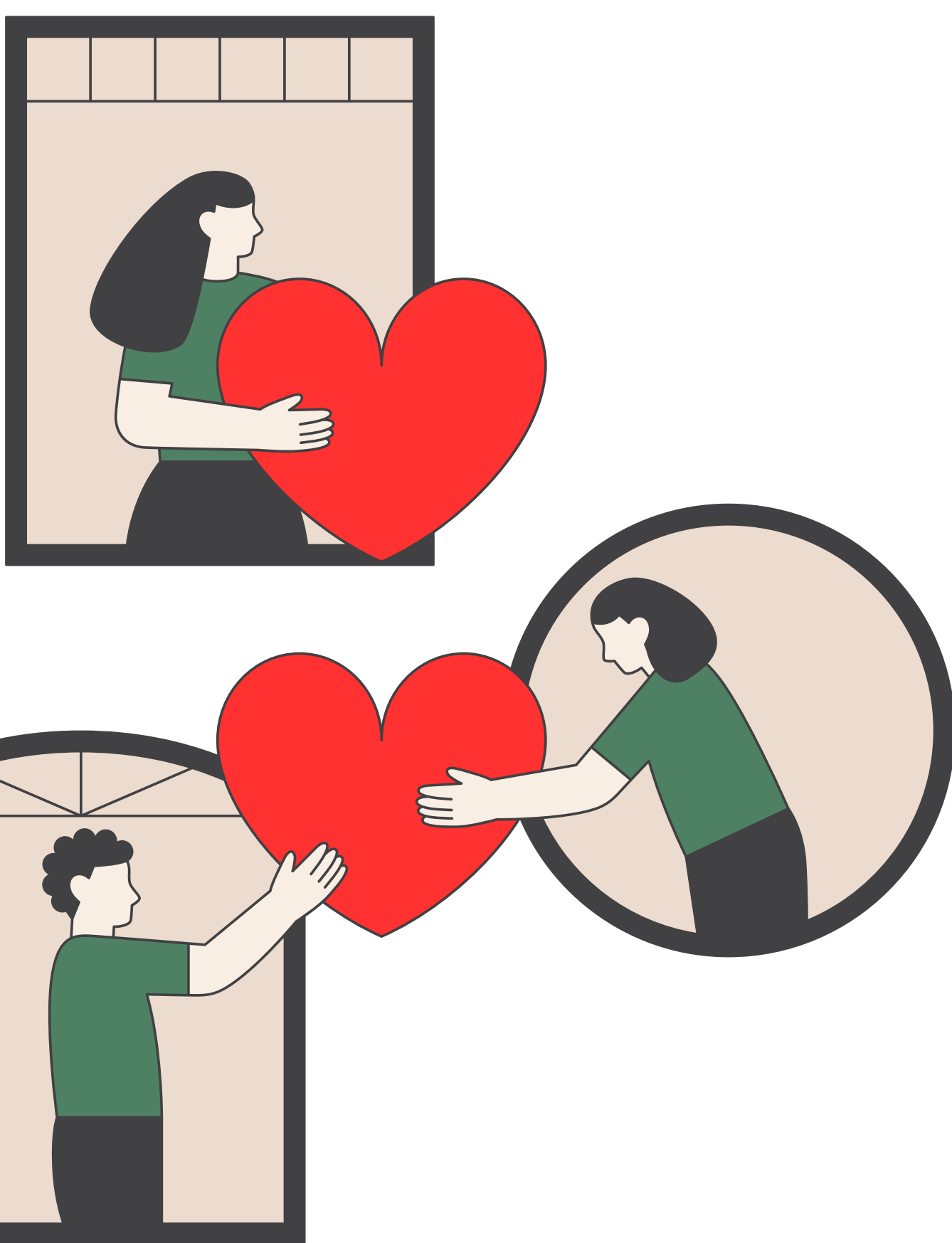
Past research (Batterham et al., 2012; Dunner, 2003; Vink et al. 2008; Waern et al., 2003) suggests that volunteering improves the health and quality of life of seniors. University of California-Irvine Medical Center (2006) stated that depression, followed by anxiety disorder is the most encountered mental health problem by senior individuals.

Volunteering is an active expression of civic participation that helps in strengthening common EU values such as solidarity and social cohesion. The final report on Volunteering in the European Union (2018) shows that the highest number of volunteers is detected among adults aged between 30-50 y.o. But what happens with the 50+ generation? Senior citizens are an important part of European society, culture, and lives and their experience could be an added value to any local and/or international project for civic participation. So, how can be ensured that these citizens are socially included and can enjoy their rights as EU citizens? How to give them new and more stimulating learning opportunities at the European level? The over-50s need to feel engaged in civil society organizations and volunteering activities, as they need to feel useful for the growth of their society. Their huge wealth of experience can't be lost but must be valorized as the engine for future successful initiatives for social development, an incredible resource for the whole community.

In this context, the ERASVUS+ project aimed at reaching the following OBJECTIVES:

- 1/ to contribute to the development of competencies of the educators and staff members working with adults, specifically with the over-50s
- 2/ to create new opportunities for learning for the over-50s, through European mobilities for volunteering (LTTAs)
- 3/ to establish a network of European Institutions cooperating in the education of seniors.

ERASVUS+ aimed at creating a space for bringing together different generations to discuss and promote European volunteering opportunities for senior citizens. Thanks to the adoption of an intergenerational approach, some young people shared their experience as EU volunteers (in programs like EVS, European Solidarity Corps, EuropeAid,...), while the seniors gave them back their great wealth of experience and their specific knowledge. The project allowed local communities, involved in the exchange of the over-50s volunteers, to tap into the potential of senior citizens as a source of know-how, expertise, and experience. The interaction between the elderly and the youth is considered one of the expressions of social innovation to encourage active aging. This interaction is a new way of socially based working on a specific conceptual framework. It is in fact assumed that the number and type of interpersonal relationships are some of the determinants of active aging, as suggested by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2002).



## Benefits of volunteering

The project intended to offer, at the same time, opportunities for the development of the skills of those professionals working in the adult education sector and opportunities for learning in an intergenerational and international environment and for exchanging experience for senior learners. Through the implementation of international volunteering activities, it was proven to gain soft skills and core competencies.


The importance of volunteering as a tool for lifelong learning, knowledge, and personal skills development is universally recognized. Through voluntary activities, as opportunities for actively participating in the growth and development of the involved communities, it is also possible to encourage and enhance the acquisition of civic skills, while promoting fundamental human values.

Volunteering is then a chance to exchange experience, even between generations, for mutual enrichment of all the categories involved (young, adults, and senior citizens). It must be underlined, however, that In the European programs, there are no longer specific measures for the volunteering of the over-50s, which is actually a specific category, with its own educational and logistic needs. Senior Volunteering requires an ad-hoc structured program.

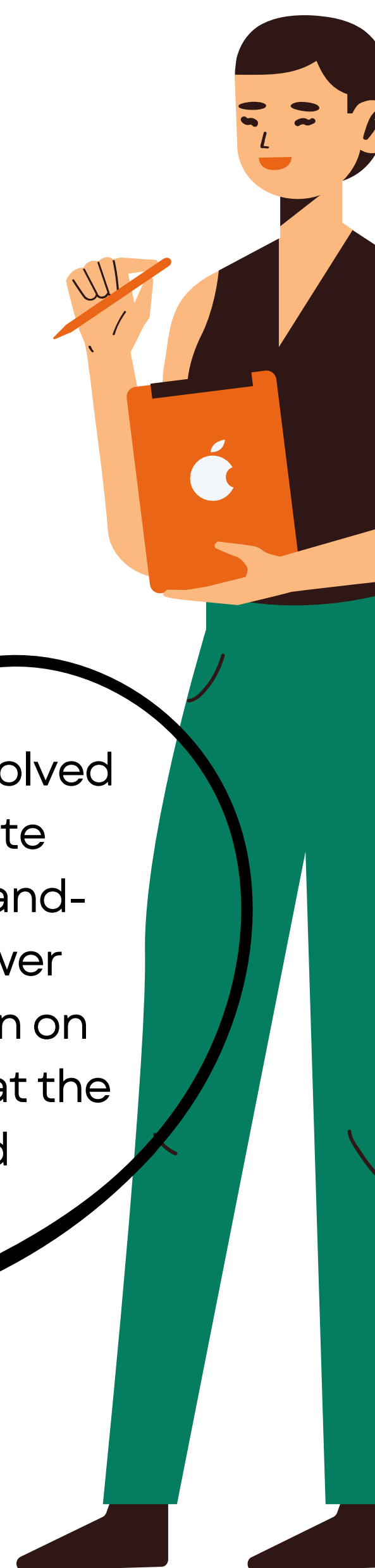
This full engagement both in the project activities and in the Institutional activities ensured the senior learners' participation in a particularly enriching pathway, during the entire project life cycle, improving their self-esteem, despite the economic and/or geographic obstacles that they have to face daily.



## Target groups of the Guidelines



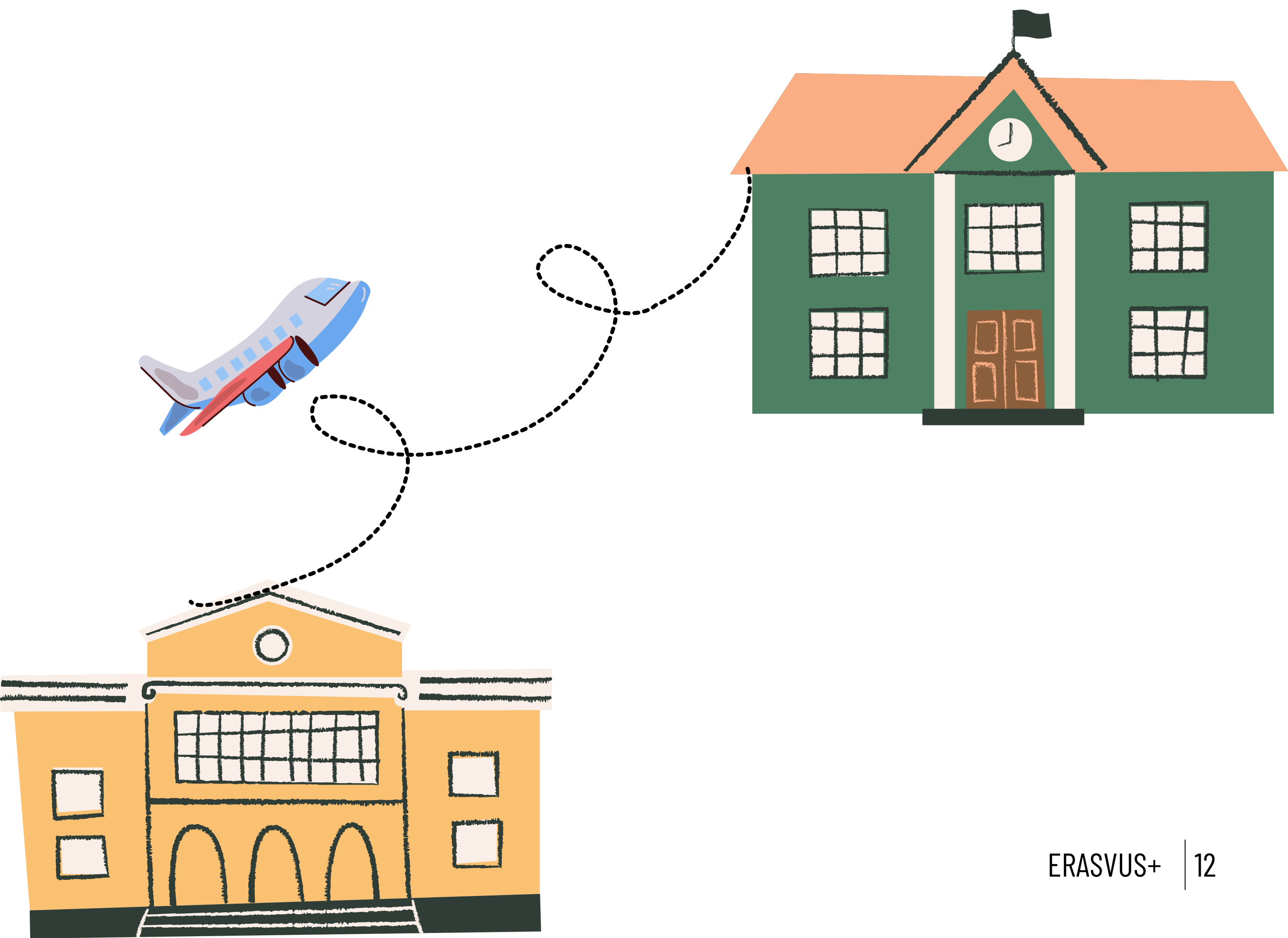
60+ y.o. people who are active, motivated, focused on volunteering, promote volunteering, have time available, balance of the give-and-take process, are engaged (or willing to be) at the community level, open-minded



staff members who are willing to be involved in the selection process, who promote volunteering, the balance of the give-and-take process, include people with fewer opportunities, offer proper information on the program, engaged in projects and at the community level, offer training and mentoring



# SENDING AND HOSTING ORGANIZATION



# How to organize an International SV project

## Steps to be followed?

When it comes to supporting seniors when participating in a volunteering programme abroad, there are some rules and steps to be followed, such as:

1. **SHARE** the detailed **PROGRAMME**: info pack, agenda, culture and language, maps to be downloaded, currency exchange, mobile data, safety tips, etc.
2. Pay attention to the **LOGISTICS**: find adequate accommodation, places to eat, extra night accommodation due to long-distance travel, request cost-free wheelchair service if needed, airport shuttle and transport schedule, etc.
3. **Efficient COMMUNICATION**: have an interpreter because not everyone can communicate well in a foreign language
4. The place where the activities are held should be **CLOSE** to the accommodation
5. Build an **SOS line**: emergency contacts, health issues, special needs
6. **Basic FIRST AID and HEALTH PREPARATION**
7. **PLAN** the **AGENDA**: make it interactive, but not too busy, choose attractions and activities that are tailored toward seniors, schedule free time in between activities to allow seniors to have some rest if needed; in the free time get to know each other activities such as joint baking, trips, concerts, theater, etc.
8. **DAILY EVALUATION** for eventual adjustments in the agenda
9. Give an **ACTIVE ROLE** to the senior volunteer such as leisure activities, international evenings, culture presentations, etc.
10. Continuous **MONITORING** of the accessibility of the activities to the seniors
11. A **STORYTELLER** of the hosting country (e.g. a young person who is a tour guide and could offer pieces of culture and history of the place)

# Agenda Planning

While planning the agenda of the volunteering programme, the hosting organization should keep in mind that it has to be adapted according to the target group and their needs. The activities proposed have to keep the senior volunteers active, involved, and valued, building in this way a positive and cohesive working atmosphere.

Here you can find some tips and tricks:

- Physically accessible places (accommodation and volunteering places)
- Proper selection of means of transport
- Do not start or finish activities at 10 P.M.
- Be aware of special diets for meals and coffee breaks
- Have a real teamwork
- Foster personal development of each senior (talk about their personal needs, make them write a mission statement about their aims, cultivate a positive experience for each volunteer)
- Stay active: daily active movements, adequate physical activities, ice-breaking activities, and energizers
- Make sure that the participant's health condition is appropriate
- Make it more practical and engaging: study visits to local institutions, museums, theaters, etc.
- More optional programs
- Create an intergenerational environment by organizing activities with people of all ages (juniors, adults, and seniors)
- Collecting ideas for leisure time: quiz, music, take and share photos
- Motion programs such as Eurhythmia
- Use of music, art, meditation, and yoga, as a method for emotional support of the volunteers

# Selection process of the staff members

## Eligibility Criteria

- Language skills (the language of the project and/or of the destination country)
- Soft skills (problem-solving, team leadership, digital, organizational, creativity, etc.)
- capacity to adapt to different socio-cultural contexts and to create empathy with the senior participants
- Traits: open, easygoing, adaptable, communicative, flexible, empathetic, etc.
- Experience in working with the elderly and having patience
- Motivation and willingness to continuous learning

## PREPARATION PROCESS

- Programme information and time management: activities, events, activities, planning and keeping an agenda of when you need to get specific tasks accomplished, etc.
- Prepare a strategic plan involving Recruitment, Engagement, Communications, and Recognition of the seniors
- Developing strategic partnerships with stakeholders in other countries



- Establishing a communication system (e.g. a database for storing contact information and facilitating communication)
- Setting up the project teams
- Rules and expectations
- Set clear goals and ways of measuring success
- Teambuilding activities
- Language assessment (basic levels of the language of the place of mobility)
- Logistics: planning and programming the traveling options, accommodation, meals, places, waste and environment protection policies, etc.
- Special needs support: food, mobility, medication
- Financial rules: exchange currency, co-financing, the budget of the project
- Emergencies: useful numbers, first aid, health insurance, etc
- Techniques for daily monitoring of the level of involvement and satisfaction of the participants
- Return support: back to daily life after a long period of volunteering projects (daily monitoring, psychological support, active involvement in the sending organization's local activities)



# Staff Member Tasks

For having well structured and successful volunteering programme, the staff members involved in this action have to :

- coordinate the project and organize the activity
- distribute equally the roles and responsibilities among the working team and the seniors' volunteers
- provide assistance
- inform the volunteers of their rights and duties embadded to the European volunteering charter
- establish a network of European institutions cooperating in the education of seniors
- be open and actively listen to the seniors
- be clear and empathic communication
- speak different languages
- be creative
- manage the digital tools: google, presentations, MS Office, Social Networks Management (FB and IG)
- manage an intercultural group
- provide mediation
- implement a culture of constructive feedback
- implement non-formal activities, European Citizenship actions and provide the intergenerational learning



# Tools to reach the potential participants

## ONLINE AND OFFLINES OPEN CALLS

- Social Media: open calls with posters on FB, IG, TWT, LI, etc.
- Newspaper, flyers, posters

promote the volunteering programme via local television, newspapers, flyers (tools that are used more by elders)

1

Contact different institutions for reaching the target group

2

share information about the sending and hosting organization

find influencers

3

prepare promotional activities

go directly to the source and invite them to attend at the promotional activity

# THE SENIOR VOLUNTEERS





# Ten steps for being a volunteer



1

Be motivated

Contact the sending  
organization

2

3

Set your expectations

Practice a foreign language

4

5

Be aware of your tasks  
and duties

Get information on the  
agenda and programme

6

7

Attend the pre-departure  
training

Get insurance and set  
your budget

8

9

Baggage and weathers  
check

Embrace the difference

10

# Selection process of the senior volunteers

## Eligibility Criteria

- Active people
- 60+ years old
- Priority to disadvantaged seniors (never traveled, living in rural areas, economic and social obstacles, etc.)
- Open-minded (open to others and new cultures)
- Motivation to volunteer, and participate in programmes opposed to tourist purposes
- Willingness to continuous learning and share their experience, knowledge, and skills (e.g. new foreign languages, intercultural understanding, soft skills for re-entering the job market, for self-esteem increase, for contributing to the growth of another community)
- Language skills
- Promote volunteering opportunities through different channels (in-person events, social media, newspapers, flyers, etc.)





## PREPARATION PROCESS

- Set expectations: providing information on the programme, attendees, events, activities, rights, responsibilities, etc.
- Teambuilding activities: get-to-know each other the ones traveling
- Financial aspects: co-financing or not, exchange currency
- Logistic aspects: accommodation, traveling, food, hosting place, etc.
- A clear task badge
- Description of different cultural backgrounds
- In case of no translation, language skills assessment
- Improvement of basic digital skills for using Google Translate if needed
- Health issues and Psychological Support (special needs, medication, nutritional issues, physical exercises assessment, talk about anxiety, fears, wishes of the seniors, etc.)
- How to face emergency situations (emergency numbers, first aid, etc.)
- 24h support: answer questions and queries

# Responsibilities and working hours

From 4 to 6 working hours/day, 5 days/week; 2 days off/ month. It is important to clarify the expectations from all sides. Furthermore, the time contribution has to be appreciated. Record it and value it.



As a volunteer you'll have to :

- Attend the pre-departure and on-arrival training
- Respect the regulations of the host organization
- Be present at the proposed dates and hours. If you can't attend due to health issues, notify the coordinator
- Share your experience and knowledge
- Perform the proposed duties at your best
- Be available
- Raise questions, requests, and/or suggestions if you have
- Be honest and do not offer sensitive information to the public
- Stay active and motivated
- Promote your culture
- Be polite, respectful, and communicate with the team





# QUALITY AND SUPPORT



# Educational Support

## Language and training

For ensuring a great experience and that the volunteers learned as much as it was possible, pre-departure and on-arrival training must be realized. Within this training, all the volunteers will approach topics such as the mission of the volunteering programmes, roles, and responsibilities of the participants, health and safety measures, intercultural awareness, etc.



For the volunteers, this training is a good tool to adapt to the new culture, learn more about the rights and duties, logistic matters, communication, assess the experience, and even more.

As previously mentioned when it comes to volunteering abroad, knowing a foreign language such as English or the hosting country's language is always an asset. The language barrier can be overcome in two ways:

1. Basic English level (level A2-B2)
2. Providing translation/interpreter

## Mentoring

Upon arrival, the volunteers must have a mentor that would help them to settle in, assimilate into the new culture and the organization's environment, and adapt to the new experience. Proper mentoring means a clear distribution of roles and responsibilities. The mentor has to keep in mind that they must appreciate the fulfillment of the tasks.

The right person should be patient, helpful, empathetic, and cooperative.

## Evaluation

For knowing if the volunteering programme reached its objectives, an evaluation in-itinere and final has to be realized. Always use a mixed methodology (qualitative and quantitative items).

There are different approaches for evaluating the volunteers' skills:

- Joint discussion as verbal recognition
- Open discussion
- 1:1 evaluation such as surveys via google modules/on paper, practical tests, etc.
- Group evaluation such as “Open Space Technology”
- Continuous evaluation: feedback sessions, be open for improvement suggestions

## Certification

- Provide a certificate of participation and a diploma in their native language
- Specific certifications of each partner institution (e.g. self-assessment made through the exchange of experience with their own community)
- EuroPass Certification



# Risk assessment

The basic principle is that the participants during the volunteering period must always be all-time safe. For ensuring this, insurance is the key. There are 3 types of insurance:

1. European Health Insurance Card
2. If attending through a European Project, CIGNA
3. Private Insurance paid by the host organization

Besides health issues, that can be covered with an insurance plan, other risks could occur as:

- Cultural and/or religious contradictions
- Lack of participation
- Psychological issues
- Misunderstanding
- Failure in meeting the participants' expectations

For preventing the before mentioned risks, the conflict prevention and management plan could consist in:

- Practice simulation games
- Daily closing discussion, feedback circle with the group, creating a safe and free judgment space
- Ensure active involvement of the seniors
- Re-schedule, change the methodology/approaches
- Constant dialogue
- In particular, cases, contact the sending organization and eventually provide psychological support online
- Address conflicts as they arise
- Don't make a rash judgement or take sides, offer mediation tools such as the "Stop-Think-Act model"
- Welcome different perspectives while teaching and modeling healthy communication skills
- Stay calm and identify feelings and non-verbal gestures
- Respect others and practice empathy
- Explore options and solutions

Often conflicts arise due to misaligned perspectives, values, goals, and priorities. So, clear communication, management of expectations, and teambuilding exercises are the key.



# Projects' Impact

How do you know that the senior volunteering programme achieved its goals and had a positive impact? Think about the following aspects and if you answer “yes” to each category, it most probably was a successful programme:

- Addressed common needs and priorities in the fields of education, training, youth, and sport
- Enabled transformation and change (at individual, organizational, or sectoral level), led to improvements and new approaches
- Increased quality in the work, activities, and practices of the partner organizations
- Network: increased transnational and trans-sectoral work; opened up to new actors

Of course, there are several assessments ways that the leading organization could use to evaluate the programmes' impact:

## **Evaluation methodology:**

- Questionnaire (individual experiences, learning outcomes)
- Interview (personal talk)
- Observations
- Rating Scale
- Checklist
- Attitude Scale
- Semantic Differential
- Anecdotal Notes

Quantitative: number of seniors involved, number of activities carried out, number of days/months; the number of volunteers willing to continue collaborating with the institution; the number of new potential volunteers after the restitution activity;

Qualitative: level of foreign language and digital skills; percentage of personal satisfaction with the general management of the project;

*For long-term effects: a follow-up questionnaire*

# CONCLUSION



Recent studies have shown that the most active older people are those able to give and receive (in all aspects) in associative and primary networks, that is, in families, where people belonging to different generations are spontaneously and naturally present. In this process, the role of civil society organizations and educational institutions, in general, is crucial. The staff members (facilitators, educators, teachers, tutors, etc...) must be adequately prepared for creating EU Volunteering Opportunities for Seniors, accompanying them in discovering and taking advantage of European mobilities for volunteering, through the Erasmus+ program, among all. Staff members need also to get acquainted with the adoption of informal and non-formal methodologies for the education of seniors in a European and intergenerational learning environment. In order to be sustainable, this process must include the possibility, for the seniors who have taken part in a volunteering project, to give something in return to their communities, contributing to the implementation of new European senior volunteering activities. They could become mentors of the next senior volunteers, thus stimulating and supporting the newcomers in their lifelong learning paths at the EU level.

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Taurisano, Italy 2023

This output has been realized in the frame of the project  
"ERASVUS+: European opportunities for RAising Skills through  
Volunteering of Unengaged Seniors "

The content has been created with the collaboration of the  
ERASVUS+ Network.



Co-funded by the  
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**ERASVUS+**

EU opportunities for RAising Skills through  
Volunteering of Unengaged Seniors



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