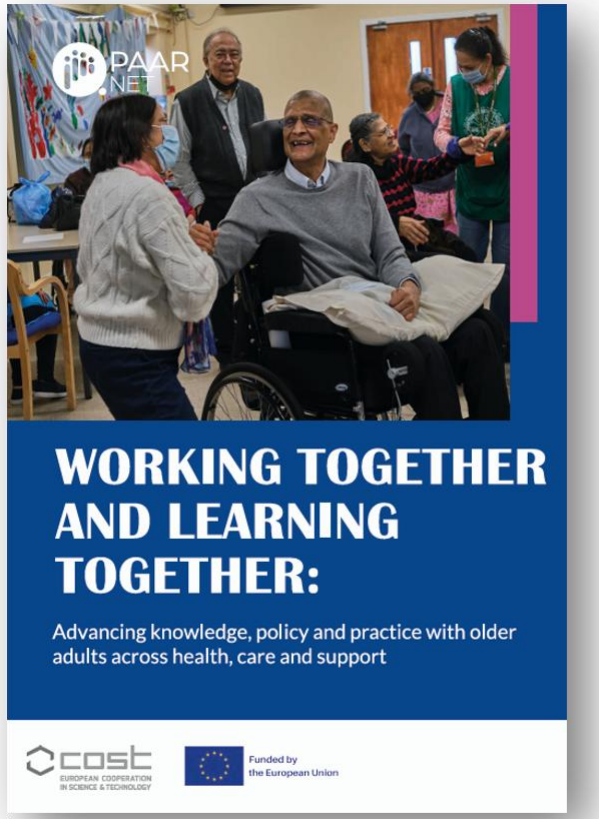
PAAR-Net White Paper 1

Co-creating Health, Care & Support

Practical insights for Practitioners, Researchers, and Policymakers

This White Paper calls for action to:

- **Challenge ageism and power imbalances.**
- **Embed co-creation in research, practice, and policy.**
- **Equip professionals with the skills and tools to collaborate meaningfully with older adults.**



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30+ researchers from 14 countries

contributed to White Paper 1, reflecting diverse expertise across health, care, and social policy fields

Co-creating Health, Care & Support

By 2100, 30% of EU population will be 65+ years (UNFPA, 2022)

How This White Paper Was Developed:

This paper was co-created by members of the PAAR-Net network through a collaborative process involving:

- cross-country workshops
- participatory discussions with older adults and synthesis of lived experience
- policy reviews,
- case study analysis.

It reflects shared insights from academics, practitioners, policymakers, and older adults.

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WHAT WE LEARN IN WHITE PAPER ONE

Older adults are experts in their own lives.

Practitioners and researchers will benefit from working with older people as co-creators to make health, care, and support systems more relevant, inclusive, and impactful.

Policymakers will gain insights to embed co-creation in health, care, and support policies, ensuring they are inclusive, evidence-based, and responsive to the diverse needs of older adults.

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Co-creating Health, Care & Support

Learning for Practitioners and Researchers

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Challenges

Confusing terminology
Lack of shared understanding of terms like co-creation, co-production, and involvement across sectors.

Tokenistic involvement
One-off or “tick-box” participation that doesn’t give older adults meaningful influence.

Practical barriers
Limited training, time, funding, or culturally sensitive methods for participation.

Poor reporting
Weak documentation of participatory activities, limiting shared learning.

Opportunities

Use creative and culturally sensitive participatory methods, including arts-based engagement, storytelling, and peer-facilitated workshops, adapting approaches for different cultural contexts, literacy levels, and abilities.

Establish Living Labs and innovation spaces to create interdisciplinary hubs where researchers, practitioners, older adults, and policymakers collaborate on real-world challenges.

Continue to build capacity and skills in participatory methods and inclusive communication and offering orientation and mentorship for older adults who want to engage as co-creators.

Strengthen evaluation and evidence-sharing by documenting and publishing the impact of participatory projects and joining networks like PAAR-Net for cross-country learning and sharing case studies.

Prioritize inclusion and intersectionality by proactively engaging marginalized older adults, such as minority ethnic groups, rural residents, and low-income communities, and using participatory approaches that address combined factors like age, gender, income, and disability.

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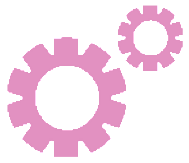
Implementation Imperatives

practitioners and researchers can:

Map all relevant stakeholders early, including older adults, carers, practitioners, and policymakers, to ensure diverse representation and collaboration from the start.

Co-design research agendas, project plans, and services in collaboration with older adults, giving them a meaningful role in shaping priorities and decision-making.

Build capacity by providing targeted training and support for researchers, practitioners, and older adults on participatory approaches and inclusive communication methods.



Create safe and accessible participation spaces, ensuring that involvement methods are culturally appropriate and inclusive of different literacy levels, abilities, and languages.

Measure and share the impact of co-creation activities by using frameworks such as the PIRIT Toolkit, making outcomes visible to funders, stakeholders, and communities.

Join networks like PAAR-Net to participate in cross-country knowledge exchange, peer learning, and sharing of good practice examples.

Document and publish participatory processes and lessons learned to build the evidence base and help improve future research and practice across the sector.

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Learnings for Policymakers

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Challenges

Confusing language and cultural barriers
Different countries and sectors use terms like “co-creation” in different ways. Without shared definitions and inclusive language, older adults can be excluded.

Participation that isn’t meaningful
Too often involvement can be tokenistic or “tick-box,” with older adults having little real influence. Power imbalances and transactional approaches undermine co-creation.

Practical and resource constraints
Participatory work is underfunded and often poorly reported. Limited resources, box-ticking exercises, and poor-quality outputs reduce impact.

Missed opportunities to learn from each other
Countries don’t always share experiences or reflect on what works, meaning valuable lessons from participatory projects are lost.

Opportunities

Recognize diversity: Policies must reflect the heterogeneity of older adults’ experiences, abilities, and cultural contexts.

Mandate co-creation: Embed participatory approaches (co-production, Living Labs, citizen councils) into health, care, and support policy planning and frameworks. Build and sustain cross-sector networks (researchers, policymakers, communities) to translate knowledge into action.

Develop national and EU-wide standards for participatory practice@ (e.g., NIHR Public Involvement Standards)

Fund training & capacity-building : Allocate sustained funding for training older adults, researchers, and practitioners in participatory methods.

Leverage PAAR-Net toolkits, case studies, and cross-country insights can guide participatory policy design.

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Implementation Imperatives

Policymakers can …

- Adopt inclusive participatory practices in all health, care & support research, Use PAAR-Net's policy-focused toolkits, case studies, and cross-country insights to design evidence-based, co-created health and care policies
- Engage older adults as co-creators in policy, research, and practice development
- Mandate inclusive language and anti-ageism training in all publicly funded health and care.
- Allocate sustained funding for participatory research and co-creation initiatives
- Require intersectional impact assessments for new health, care, and support policies
- Require transparent reporting on how older adults' involvement changes outcomes in projects and policies
- Translate participatory activities into published outputs and visible policy change

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Case Studies – rich insights from …

Country	Theme 1: Co-Design	Theme 2: Marginalized Groups	Theme 3: Building Capacity	Theme 4: Measuring Impact	Theme 5: Safe Spaces
Austria	Multilingual Co-Creation	Caritas Elder Abuse Prevention		Participatory Evaluation Framework	
Croatia		Faith-Based Community Outreach	Healthy Ageing Training	Qualitative Evaluation Methods	
Germany		Creative Co-Design Workshops	Mentorship Models		Trauma-Informed Engagement
Netherlands		Living Labs Inclusive Co-Design	Living Lab Learning Ecosystems	Living Lab Reporting System	
Portugal					Inclusive Public Health Planning
Serbia	EmPreV Elder Abuse	EmPreV Roma Engagement	Volunteer Facilitator Training	Community Reporting	
Slovenia					Community Health Access Programme
Spain	Multicultural Creative Co-Design	Practical Participation Supports	Community Capacity Building	Community Research Dissemination	
Turkiye	INOSEL Programme	INOSEL Rural Access		Qualitative Storytelling	INOSEL Participation Supports
UK	IDoService Toolkit	IDoService Adaptations	PIRIT Toolkit	PIRIT Impact Reporting	

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