

Stakeholders and Participatory Approaches with Older Adults

Virtual Mobility Grant

Willeke van Staalduinen

Summer 2025

COST Action Number 22167

Executive summary

During the Summer of 2025, desk research, a survey and interviews were conducted to learn more about the experiences and needs of stakeholders and practitioners in applying participatory approaches with older adults. Stakeholders in these activities are defined as individuals working in fields such as policymaking, ICT, education, health and social care, leisure and sports, and housing who deliver products, services, and policies to and for older adults.

Desk research on participatory approaches with older adults and practice provided a variety of literature in which researchers collaborated with stakeholders in user-centred design and participatory design of products, services, and policies through different means. Some literature presented overviews of the benefits and challenges of participatory approaches.

Seventy-nine respondents from 24 countries submitted their answers to the survey, 42 of them consider themselves active outside the academic or research world. Most respondents apply participatory approaches on a regular or occasional basis in a large variety of methods. Better meeting the needs of older adults and empowering older people were the main goals for applying participatory approaches. Experienced barriers focus on the difficulties of engaging older people, as well as the lack of time and resources. They would greatly benefit from receiving practical tools or templates, training or capacity-building, and examples of good practices.

The research activities were concluded with 18 interviews with survey respondents who indicated that they were willing to participate. The interviews highlighted the variety of participatory approach methods applied. The interviewees face several organisational and logistical challenges when applying PAAR, including a lack of participation and commitment, difficulties with involvement over time, and language barriers. Social and psychological challenges, for example, are how to include vulnerable people, dealing with stigma and ageism, lack of self-esteem among the participants and the heterogeneity of the older age group. The interviewees cordially welcome examples of good practices (successes and lessons learned) on motivating older people, organising participatory activities, or getting accessible scientific results, tools and standards.

Recommendations to the COST Action PAAR-Net concentrate on further detailing the proposed deliverables of the COST Action. These contain D15, the new scientific standards for PAAR with older adults, and the Seal of Quality, as well as D14, the repository of good practices. Examples of recommendations are (1) to achieve a clear definition of what PAAR is, (2) successful methods of participatory approaches and lessons learned, (3) lessons learned and successfully engaging and motivating older people, (4) keeping them engaged and inspired, (5) examples of involving older people as equal partners, (6) examples about involving people with dementia and other vulnerabilities, and (7) an overview of the variety of successful working methods, such as spoken or written input from the participants, building and drawing with tools, photovoice, citizen science.

Table of contents

Executive summary	2
1. Introduction.....	4
1.1 Methodology	4
1.2 Structure of the report.....	4
2. Desk research	4
2.1. Participatory approaches used	5
2.2 Benefits and challenges.....	5
3. Survey	6
3.1 Survey results	6
3.2 Membership and interest in PAAR-Net	10
3.3 Survey summary	11
4. Interviews	11
4.1. Interviewees.....	11
4.2. Applied participatory approaches with older adults	11
4.3. Challenges in Applying Participatory Approaches.....	12
4.4. Support Needed from the Scientific Community	13
5. Recommendations to the COST Action PAAR-Net	13
Annex 1: List of interviewees.....	17
Annex 2: Survey text	18
Annex 3: Interview questions.....	24
Interview Questions	24
Annex 4: Data protection statement and declaration of informed consent form	25
Procedure interview and data collection	25
Declaration of informed consent Interview Willeke van Staalduinen	26

List of figures

Figure 1: Organisation of work for respondents.....	6
Figure 2: Content of the professional role (multiple answers).....	7
Figure 3: Country of work of the respondents.....	7
Figure 4: Non-academic/non-research familiar with PAAR.....	8
Figure 5: Familiar with PAAR - all respondents	8
Figure 6: Used PAAR methods by respondents (multiple answers)	8
Figure 7: Primary goals to apply PAAR (multiple answers)	9
Figure 8: Experienced barriers to applying PAAR (multiple answers)	9
Figure 9: Support for applying PAAR (multiple answers)	10
Figure 10: PAAR-methods of interest (multiple answers).....	10

1. Introduction

The primary objective of this Virtual Mobility (VM) grant was to explore and map the interests, needs, and practices of stakeholders and practitioners to use participatory approaches with older adults in their daily work successfully or to find the barriers they experience. Stakeholders in this VM are defined as individuals working in fields such as policymaking, ICT, education, health and social care, leisure and sports, and housing who deliver products, services, and policies to and for older adults. By identifying key motivations, challenges, and contextual factors that influence participatory practices, the VM aimed to generate insights that can inform and strengthen the strategic direction of PAAR-Net to involve stakeholders and practitioners in the Action successfully.

This VM has gathered perspectives from diverse stakeholders, including social workers, community organisers, healthcare workers, educators, technology developers, policy-makers, and service providers across different European contexts and countries through virtual interviews, surveys, and desk research. The resulting analysis provides a structured overview of current practices, highlights gaps and opportunities for applying participatory approaches with older adults in practice, and informs recommendations to enhance the relevance and applicability of PAAR-Net's results.

The outcomes have been compiled into a concise report, which includes stakeholder experiences maps, thematic findings, and actionable recommendations for the Action's Leadership Group and Working Groups. This will support PAAR-Net's overarching goal of promoting inclusive, innovative, and context-sensitive participatory methods with older adults, while strengthening the network's engagement with real-world practitioners.

1.1 Methodology

The first methodology used in this Virtual Mobility is desk research in the literature to find written practices of stakeholders with participatory approaches with older adults (PAAR). For this search, Google and Google Scholar were used with the search query "Participatory Approaches with Older Adults" AND "Practice".

A survey was conducted among stakeholders using the EU Survey tool. To invite respondents, the COST Action sent an invitation to the COST Action members, and the VM-grantee used her social media account and personal invitations.

Finally, a series of interviews was conducted with respondents from the survey who indicated they were willing to be interviewed in a 30-minute interview during July or August 2025.

1.2 Structure of the report

The report is structured as follows. At first, the results of the desk research are presented. This is followed by the presentation of the survey results, which were obtained from 79 respondents. Finally, the outcomes of the interviews are described. The report concludes with recommendations for the COST Action to support the field of practice and stakeholders in applying participatory approaches successfully with older adults.

2. Desk research

For the Desk Research, Google and Google Scholar were utilised as databases. The search query was "Participatory Approaches with Older Adults" AND "Practice". This led to a total of 36 relevant scientific contributions. One contribution was part of another contribution, the introductory chapter of Urbaniak[1] in the Routledge International Handbook of Participatory Approaches in Ageing Research, edited by Urbaniak and Wanka[2].

The majority of the stakeholders involved in Participatory Approaches were researchers, who initiated or researched participatory approaches in designing technology, applications, policies, and communities. They

collaborated, besides older adults, with stakeholders such as caregivers, ICT designers, policymakers and civil servants.

2.1. Participatory approaches used

Examples of found participatory approaches used are the following.

- user-centred design and participatory design:
 - participatory community mapping workshops to enable older peoples' voices [3]
 - community-based participatory research for occupational therapy [4]
 - community aged care co-production [5]
 - co-design of gerontechnology [6]
 - co-design and development of mobile apps to support community-living [7]
 - community-based participatory needs assessment: shaping communities policies and services [8]
 - participatory design with older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic [9]
 - participatory methods to change practice in residential care [10] [11]
- interviews to collect older people's opinions about ambient technology applications to support in daily life [12]
- situated participatory design: in situ design of robotic interaction with older adults [13]
- focus groups as part of mixed methods to design robots [14], services or policies
- rapid prototyping to facilitate the swift creation, testing and refinement of a prototype [15]
- photovoice to explore older adults' opinions on age-friendly cities [16] and
- visual storytelling as a trigger for memories and greater engagement [17]

Methods like SPIRAL[18] and PAR4POA[19] demonstrate how older adults can contribute from the earliest stages, influencing both agile development and policy.

2.2 Benefits and challenges

Involving older adults in participatory approaches, such as participatory action research and user-centred design, presents a range of benefits and challenges. This engagement is increasingly seen as vital for creating effective policies, programs, and technologies that genuinely meet the needs of an ageing population.[20], [21]

Benefits of participatory approaches

Participatory approaches are valued for their potential to foster equitable participation, co-learning, and community mobilisation, leading to personal and social transformation. The involvement of older adults is viewed as a means to enhance the quality and responsiveness of public services, increase their effectiveness, and reduce costs. For technology development, this participation can lead to the creation of more need-based, easy-to-operate digital tools that are better tailored to the users' needs and preferences, which in turn can facilitate greater adoption of the technology.[20] [5] [21]

Beyond the tangible outcomes of a project, participation itself can be a positive and uplifting experience for older adults, increasing their interest and confidence in digital technology and helping to combat negative stereotypes. It provides a platform for their voices to be heard, not only for themselves but also for other older persons, and can lead to an increased sense of participation and belonging. A key benefit is the opportunity for mutual learning, where academic researchers gain insights into the social context and lived experiences of older adults. In comparison, older adults acquire information and skills related to technology or research. The process is also shown to add value in terms of enhancing research quality, building skills among older people, and achieving meaningful action outcomes. [21], [22]

Challenges and barriers to participation

Despite the clear benefits, the meaningful involvement of older adults in participatory research and design is still relatively rare and faces several barriers. One significant barrier is the exclusion of older people from design activities, often based on negative stereotypes that they are resistant to technology or limited by their age. This lack of involvement can contribute to their reluctance to engage with new products.

Participatory projects can be labour-intensive and challenging. A critical review found that the promises of PAAR are not always fully realised, as older adults are often positioned as participants rather than equitable partners. Their involvement can be limited in key phases, such as designing research questions, acquiring research skills, and implementing findings to drive change. Power differentials between researchers and older adults can be evident, and the success of the collaboration relies heavily on building mutual trust and respect.[20]

From the perspective of older adults, participation may not always live up to their initial expectations, leading to disappointment. They may experience a fear of failing the project team or feel disappointed in their own performance with new prototypes. Additionally, they may not increase their knowledge of digital technology as they had hoped. Methodological challenges, such as a need for greater attention to research rigour and the training of older adults as researchers, also exist. These pragmatic, epistemological, and ethical barriers present ongoing challenges for successfully implementing participatory approaches with older populations.[20], [21]

3. Survey

From mid-June to early August 2025, a survey was published to collect answers from multiple stakeholders. The survey was created using EU Survey¹, the online survey tool provided by the European Union. The survey was anonymous; however, if people wanted to receive more information about the COST Action PAAR-Net or were willing to be interviewed, they were asked to provide their email address. The invitation and link to the survey were shared via LinkedIn, the COST Action 22167 mailing list, and through personal invitations using the SHAFE network and the author's personal network. The full text of the survey questions is in the Annexes.

3.1 Survey results

79 respondents answered the survey. From them, 11 worked in the public sector, 18 worked for an NGO or non-profit organisation, and 13 worked for a private company or were freelancers. The other 37 respondents worked for an academic or research organisation. This could be a university, a private research organisation, or a public research organisation.

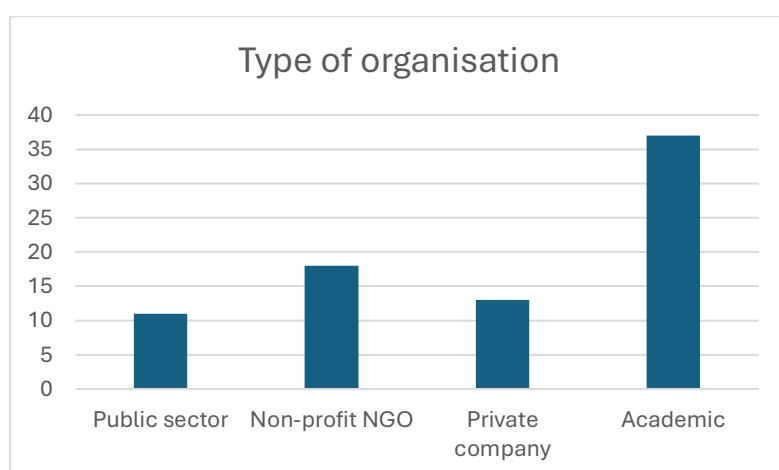


Figure 1: Organisation of work for respondents

¹ EU Survey: <https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/home/welcome>

The majority of the respondents described the content of their professional role as working in the health, social care or social work sector. Respondents could choose multiple options. Policymaking and technology/ICT are other fields of work. The food sector is not represented.

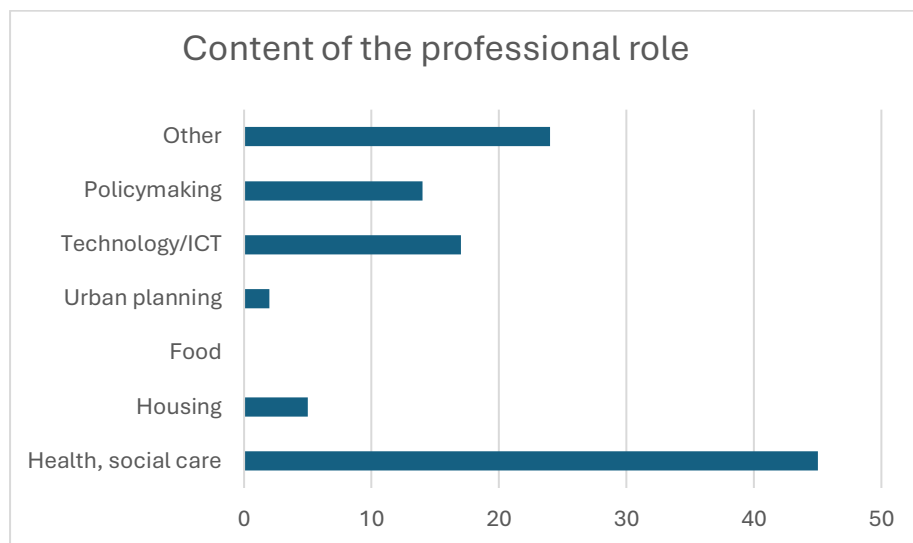


Figure 2: Content of the professional role (multiple answers)

The answers in the category Other are: Research (6), Education (3), Consultancy (2), Project management (3), Library (2). Single answers are, for example, social policies and international affairs.

Participants from 24 countries contributed to the survey. The majority of answers come from the Netherlands and Portugal. Türkiye, Germany and Italy follow with respectively 8, 6 and 5 respondents.

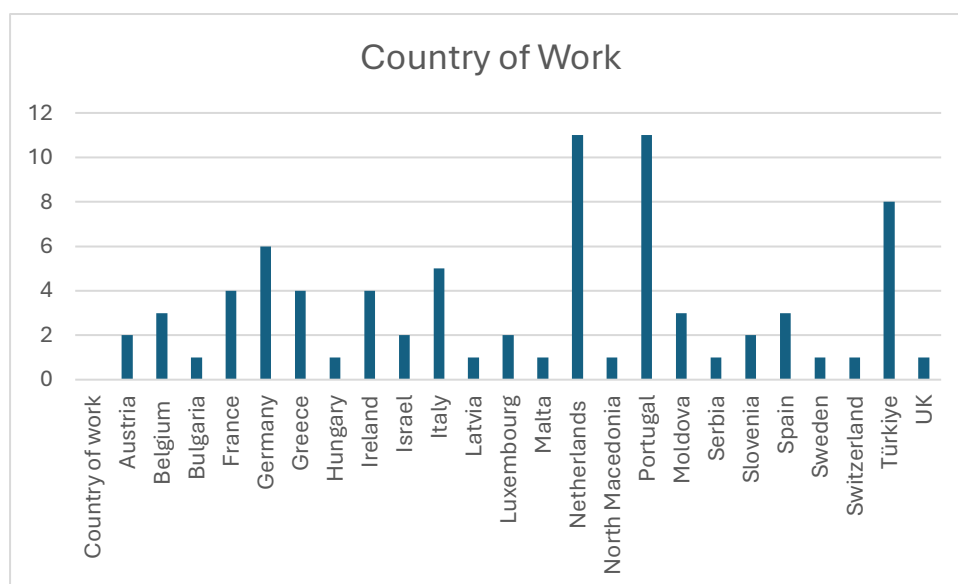


Figure 3: Country of work of the respondents

Two-thirds of the respondents (52) are very familiar with participatory approaches (PAAR). One third is somewhat familiar (26), and one respondent indicated: “no, not at all”. For the 42 non-academic/non-research respondents, 26 (62%) persons are very familiar with PAAR; 15 (36%) are somewhat familiar, and one person is not at all familiar.

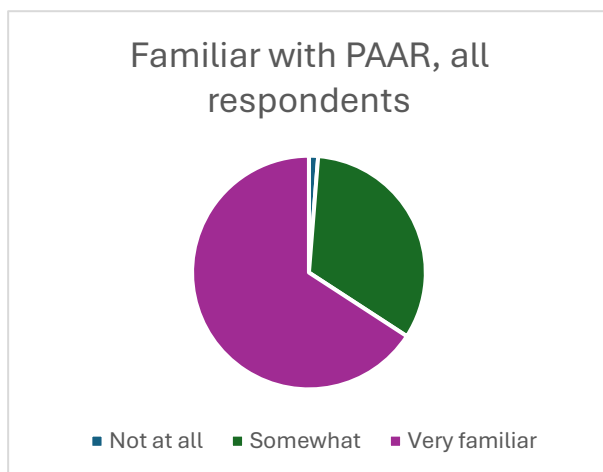


Figure 5: Familiar with PAAR - all respondents

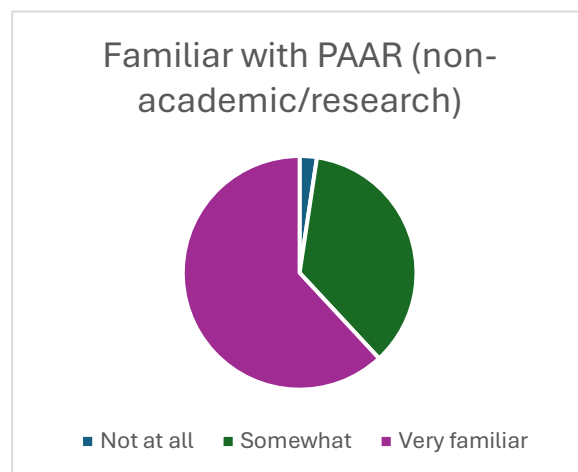


Figure 4: Non-academic/non-research familiar with PAAR

Participatory approaches with older adults are applied regularly (34%, N=27) or occasionally (49%, N=39). Nineteen respondents plan to use participatory approaches (24%), while one respondent will not apply them. Among the respondents from non-academic or non-research organisations, 45% (N=19) applied PAAR regularly, 36% (N=15) occasionally, and 19% (N=8) had not applied PAAR thus far but planned to do so.

Respondents who apply occasionally or regularly PAAR indicate that they use the methods of co-creation and co-design, workshops, focus groups, and interviews. Older adults in advisory or decision-making roles are another approach used by the respondents.

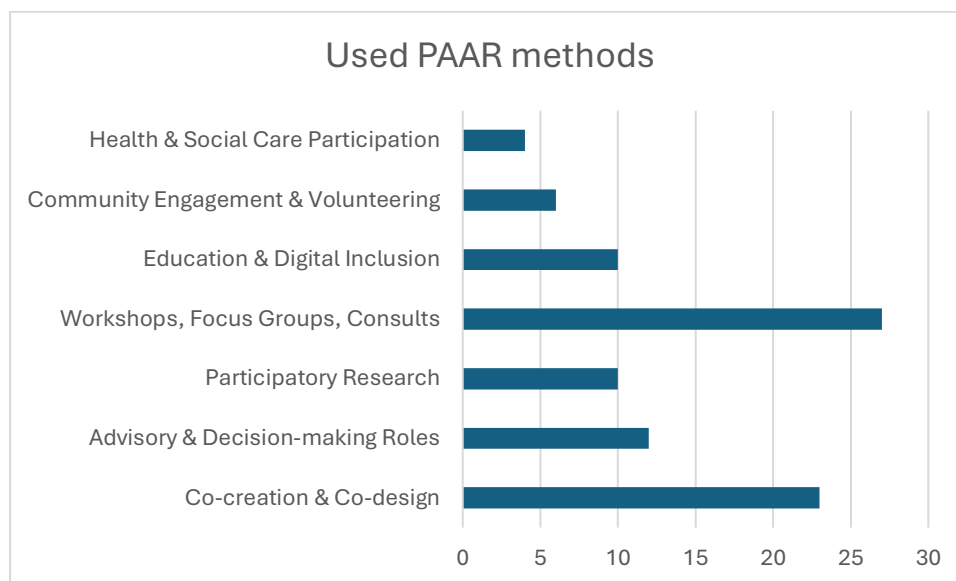


Figure 6: Used PAAR methods by respondents (multiple answers)

The primary goals for respondents who occasionally or regularly apply participatory approaches with older adults are to better meet the needs of older people and to empower them. Improving the project quality is another goal of the respondents. Similar percentages are found among the respondents who are not working in an academic or research organisation.

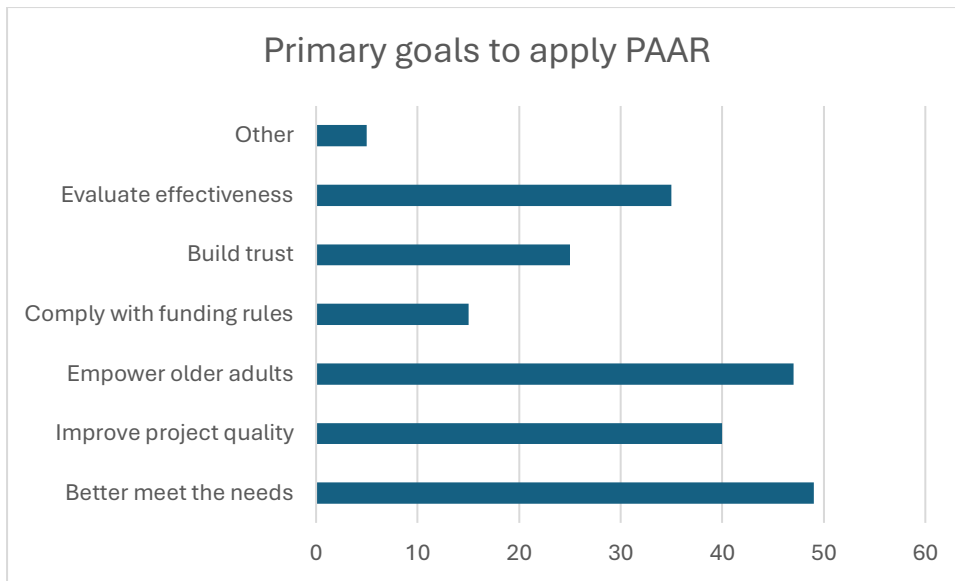


Figure 7: Primary goals to apply PAAR (multiple answers)

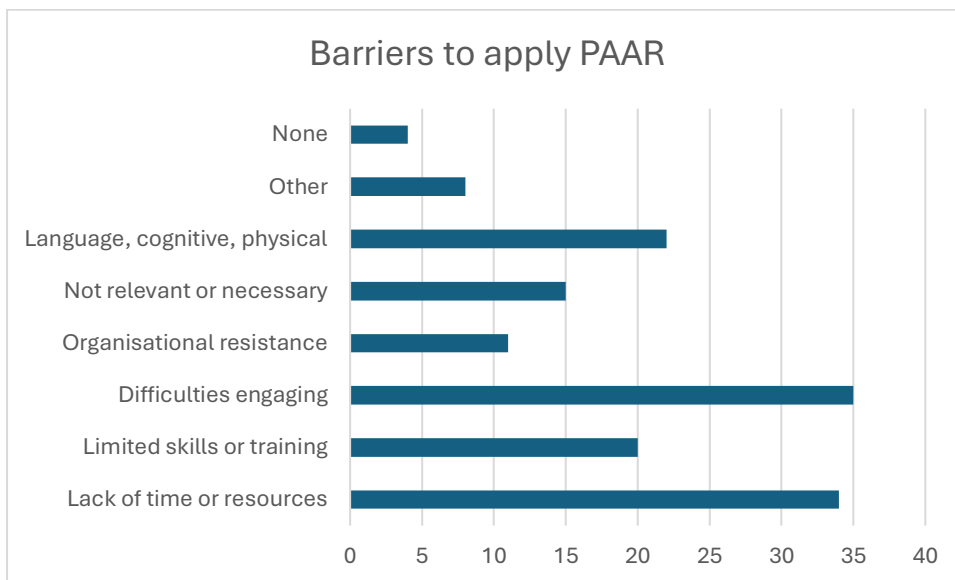


Figure 8: Experienced barriers to applying PAAR (multiple answers)

The barriers to applying PAAR are mainly the difficulty in engaging older adults and a lack of time or resources. Language, cognitive and physical barriers and limited skills or training follow on this list. Similar percentages can be found among respondents from NGOs, the public sector and private companies.

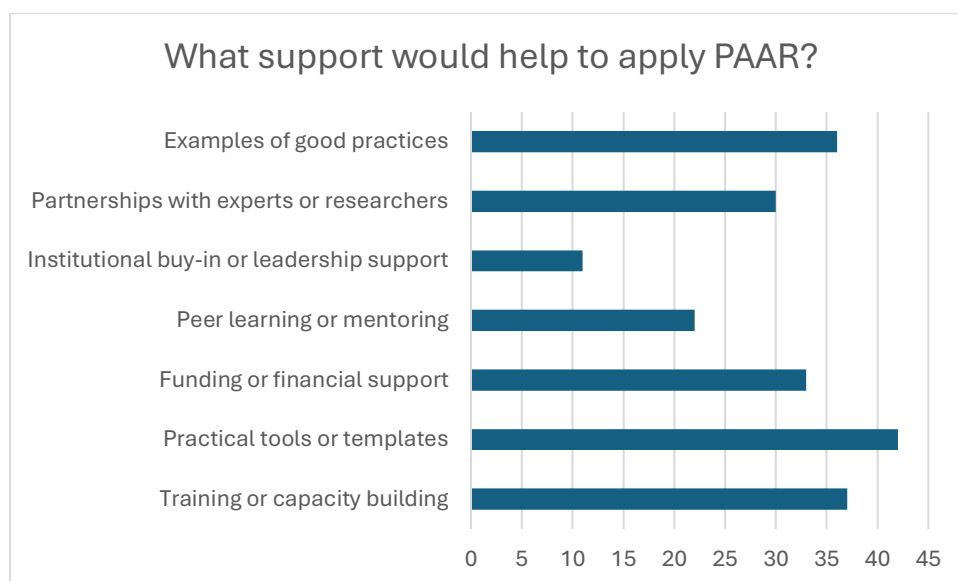


Figure 9: Support for applying PAAR (multiple answers)

For the entire group of respondents, practical tools or templates, training and capacity building, and examples of good practices are the most favourite. For the group of non-academic respondents, practical tools or templates and examples of good practices are most preferred. Training or capacity building is the least favourable compared to the whole group. Other and none were not given as answers.

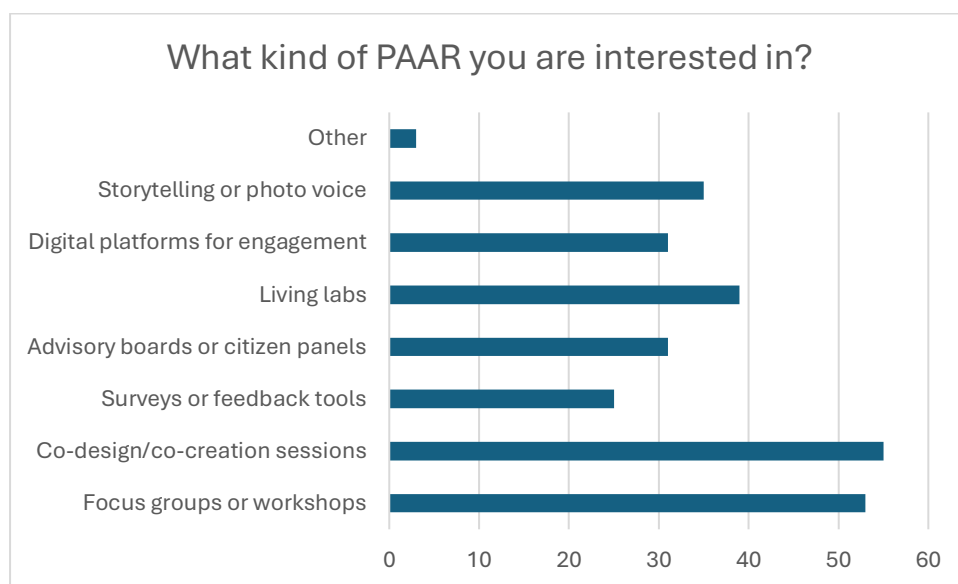


Figure 10: PAAR-methods of interest (multiple answers)

Co-design and co-creation and focus groups or workshops are the most preferred forms of PAAR where the respondents are interested in. Living labs and storytelling/photovoice are options that are third and fourth favourite. Similar results are found among the respondents with a non-academic work profile.

The other PAAR methods mentioned were described as: urban walks, citizen science, and methods to meet less literate people.

3.2 Membership and interest in PAAR-Net

33 respondents are members of the COST Action PAAR-Net. The respondents mainly come from Working Group 2 (10), the other Working Groups are more or less equally represented. 46 respondents are not members,

24 of them are interested in PAAR-Net, and 15 others would like to learn more about it. Seven people indicated they were not interested.

3.3 Survey summary

The survey involved 79 respondents, representing a diverse field of work, sectors and countries. Participatory Approaches with older adults (PAAR) are quite familiar among the respondents: two-thirds are very familiar with it; one-third is somewhat familiar. Half of the respondents applied PAAR occasionally; one-third regularly. Used methods are co-creation and co-design, workshops, focus groups, and interviews. Empower older adults and better meet their needs are the main benefits of applying PAAR. Main barriers are difficulties of engaging older people and lack of time and resources.

The requested support for applying PAAR by the respondents focuses on five main features: practical tools or templates, training or capacity building (this feature is less preferred by the respondents from non-academic or non-research organisations), examples of good practices, funding or financial support, and partnerships with experts or researchers. The most preferred methods of PAAR are co-design or co-creation sessions and focus groups or workshops.

4. Interviews

4.1. Interviewees

Fifty-two respondents indicated their willingness to be interviewed. Based on this indication, the interviewees were selected. The following criteria were used: people primarily working in academic or research institutions were excluded from the selection. The other invitees were equally divided between private companies, NGOs, and the public sector, as well as among countries. 23 people were invited for an interview. 18 people responded positively and were interviewed in late July and early August 2025.

The group of interviewees represented the public sector (2 persons), education and knowledge (4 persons), older people (organisations) (5 persons), private companies (2 persons), living lab (1 person) and service/social care/care providers (4 persons).

4.2. Applied participatory approaches with older adults

The interviewees apply a variety of participatory approaches, often referred to as co-creation or co-design, in their work and activities. These methods go beyond a simple "top-down" approach and instead actively involve older adults as experts and collaborators.

Examples of approaches are:

- Co-creation: From the interviewees, a variety of methods of co-creation were mentioned, such as questionnaires, interviews, face-to-face workshops with mock-ups, online workshops with older adults who are digitally literate, using a game to capture ideas, workshops in which people orally contribute and workshops using traditional paper-based tools like mind-mapping and post-its or building with Lego bricks. The phases of co-creation vary from collecting ideas from scratch, collecting requirements before designing, testing and validating halfway or end-products and services or policymaking.
- Project planning and decision-making: Older adults participate in public consultations and city talks to express their opinions on policies and services, and sometimes vote to select projects to be funded. They can also collectively choose future activities or learning topics, such as different types of exercise (yoga, ballroom dance, strength training), and health topics (fall prevention, nutrition, mindfulness).
- Programme making: Participatory workshops organised for learners to identify their ideas for future programmes. Older adults are hired as "Silver Experts" to be lecturers and guides for their peers. They aim to create programmes "for seniors, but with seniors". Or taking suggestions from older adults for activities to offer, and then working to implement them, such as adapted reading clubs and workshops. Others work with people with dementia and caregivers, focusing on non-pharmaceutical interventions like cognitive and physical exercises, music, and dance therapy.

- Intergenerational workshops: A specific project involved seniors and students in a workshop on augmented reality. The seniors tested the technology and developed storyboards, while the students provided explanations, which helped to break the ice between the generations and improve didactic approaches.
- Participation based on groundwork from others: Some organisations apply best practices and standards from others who have used participatory approaches or developed insightful information about older adults and standards. They also involve older adults in testing applications, such as a COVID app, to gather their feedback.

4.3. Challenges in Applying Participatory Approaches

The interviewees encounter several challenges when trying to involve older adults in participatory approaches. These challenges include organisational, social, and psychological factors.

Organisational and logistical challenges:

- Timing and duration of meetings: Appointments need to be communicated quite specifically and clearly. Political sessions or meetings are often held in the evening and can last for several hours, making it difficult for many older adults to attend due to personal commitments, weather, or fatigue.
- Time constraints: Projects often offer limited or insufficient time to organise successful participation with older adults.
- Lack of participation and engagement: It can be hard to find a sufficient number of older adults. In smaller meetings, not all invited older adults participate. Some who don't attend will later complain about the decisions made by the active participants, even though they were invited to contribute.
- Commitment over time: Keeping people motivated and committed to a project over a long period can be difficult, as initial enthusiasm may fade due to time commitment or fatigue.
- Language barriers: The language barrier can be a significant challenge, as many older adults are not comfortable with English or other languages, requiring translation services. For migrant older adults, the national languages can be an obstacle, as for older adults in multilingual countries.
- Digital skills: Lower levels of digital skills or digital illiteracy of older adults often form a barrier to full participation in co-design or co-creation activities.
- Lack of sustainability of projects: Project proposals often have too short a preparation time to involve older adults actively in the proposal stage. Projects often end when funding runs out, which is a major disappointment for participants.
- Political instability: The support and funding for a project can be uncertain, as a new administration may not be as supportive as the previous one.

Social and Psychological Challenges:

- Reaching "Passive" Older Adults: It can be difficult to engage older adults who are accustomed to being consumers rather than active participants. Some individuals may feel useless or lack confidence after retirement, which can make them less inclined to participate.
- Expectations and trust: It is important to manage expectations about what is feasible regarding the outcomes. Based on earlier experiences of older adults with the government or PAAR methods by researchers and others, people may lack the confidence to participate. Therefore, it is crucial to build trust and a comfortable environment. Some older adults may also be hesitant to share personal issues if they don't have a strong relationship with the facilitators.
- Self-esteem: A lack of confidence in themselves can be a barrier, as some older adults may not believe they have anything to contribute.
- Ageism and stigma: older adults, and especially people with dementia, are confronted with a stigma. Therefore, it can block people from participating as they are ashamed to come out that they have dementia or are old.
- Heterogeneity of the older age group: Older people are a heterogeneous group. There are significant differences between older adults aged 65 or 85 years, including varying educational levels, backgrounds, and socioeconomic achievements throughout their lives. Including a representative group is quite challenging, and their input is quite diverse.

- In contrast to younger participants, older adults require more time before and during participatory activities. They want to be broadly informed about the requested participation, take the time to contemplatively explain the contexts of their answers, and dare to do so.

4.4. Support Needed from the Scientific Community

The interviewees expressed a clear need for support from the scientific community to improve their work with participatory approaches.

Specific needs include:

- ❖ Clear definitions: A well-defined, clear definition of "co-creation" and "participatory approaches" is needed to ensure a shared understanding.
- ❖ Guidance and practical methodologies: Stakeholders/practitioners need guidance, methodologies, and practical examples of how to implement theoretical concepts into real-world applications. They deem practical examples of the lived environment of the older adults to be beneficial to make older adults feel comfortable and intrigued to participate in a project, because it "represents" their reality and their everyday problems. There is a specific need for a "recipe" for empowering older adults to feel valued and confident.
- ❖ Strategies for engagement: Participants are eager to learn how to make participatory approaches more attractive to passive individuals and how to maintain participants' motivation for long-term projects. A specific need is to learn more about the effective involvement of people with dementia in co-creation and participatory activities.
- ❖ Practical training: Interviewees would appreciate practical training on how to interact with older adults and apply these approaches effectively.
- ❖ Accessible scientific results: There is a need for scientists to communicate their research findings in a more practical way (to create a solid groundwork of findings about older adults) that can be easily integrated into the work of practitioners, rather than just papers or presentations.
- ❖ Standards and recommendations: The interviewees would benefit from a "seal of quality" or standards and recommendations that can be applied to their projects.
- ❖ Strategies for sustainability: Interviewees are looking for ways to ensure a project's sustainability after funding ends.
- ❖ Tools: They also want tools and instruments that are more visual and non-writing-based to capture ideas from older adults.

5. Recommendations to the COST Action PAAR-Net

The above-described experiences from stakeholders and practitioners lead to the following recommendations to the COST Action PAAR-Net members. Above all, the inclusion of older adults in the development of services, products and policies is perceived as an added value by the involved respondents and interviewees. The proposed deliverables, 14 and 15, of the COST Action PAAR-Net Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) [23] are very welcome to the participating stakeholders and practitioners. The recommendations focus on these two deliverables.

Recommendation D15: New scientific standards for participatory research with older adults and a Seal of quality. According to the MoU this is "A document with guidelines for the participatory approaches in research, policy and practice with older adults will be developed by month 48 of the Action to ensure quality of the co-creation process that promotes closing the gap between science, policy makers and society throughout Europe and beyond".

The respondents welcome clear definitions of what participatory approaches are and which are not. This will enable them to propose and apply participatory approaches effectively in their daily work, while also equipping them with the knowledge to evaluate proposals for co-creation appropriately. They would like to have an overview of methodologies that meet the standards of participatory approaches and guidelines to support them as they apply these approaches. Guidelines may contain recommendations on how to invite, engage, and

motivate participants, as well as definitions of stages of involvement in the processes, including online and face-to-face settings of co-creation, and methods for involving heterogeneous groups of older adults and vulnerable people, such as those with dementia, and PAAR working methods.

Recommendation D14: A repository of innovative practice and policy strategies relating to co-creation with older adults. It will include strategies that encourage meaningful involvement and co-creation with older adults that emerged from new research completed by Action members.

The respondents would like to have a repository of good practices, including the following items:

- Successful methods of participatory approaches and lessons learned;
- Common standards and requirements of designing for older people as a basis for co-creation (groundwork);
- Intergenerational approaches;
- Lessons learned and successfully engaging and motivating older people, and keeping them engaged and inspired;
- Examples of involving older people as equal partners;
- Examples about involving people with dementia and other vulnerabilities;
- Variety of successful working methods, such as spoken or written input from the participants, building and drawing with tools, photovoice, citizen science;
- Examples of successful planning, timing and settings with older adults or lessons learned;
- Resources and funding, also including beyond projects;
- Practical tools and instruments to apply participatory approaches.

Resources

- [1] A. Urbaniak, 'Role of reflexivity in challenging participation inequality in participatory approaches with Older Adults', in *Routledge International Handbook of Participatory Approaches in Ageing Research*, Routledge, 2023.
- [2] A. Urbaniak and A. Wanka, Eds, *Routledge International Handbook of Participatory Approaches in Ageing Research*. Taylor & Francis, 2024. doi: 10.4324/9781003254829.
- [3] M. L. Fang, R. Woolrych, J. Sixsmith, S. Canham, L. Battersby, and A. Sixsmith, 'Place-making with older persons: Establishing sense-of-place through participatory community mapping workshops', *Soc. Sci. Med.*, vol. 168, pp. 223–229, Nov. 2016, doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2016.07.007.
- [4] 'Community-based participatory research remodelling occupational therapy to foster older adults' social participation - Pier-Luc Turcotte, Annie Carrier, Mélanie Levasseur, 2019'. Accessed: Aug. 04, 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0008417419832338>
- [5] G. Ottmann, C. Laragy, J. Allen, and P. Feldman, 'Coproduction in Practice: Participatory Action Research to Develop a Model of Community Aged Care', *Syst. Pract. Action Res.*, vol. 24, no. 5, pp. 413–427, Oct. 2011, doi: 10.1007/s11213-011-9192-x.
- [6] A. Grigorovich, P. Kontos, A. Jenkins, and S. Kirkland, 'Moving Toward the Promise of Participatory Engagement of Older Adults in Gerotechnology', *The Gerontologist*, vol. 62, no. 3, pp. 324–331, Apr. 2022, doi: 10.1093/geront/gnab026.
- [7] Z. H. Abdullah Sani, D. Mohd Nizam, and A. Baharum, 'Participatory Design: Apps from The Older Adults to The Older Adults', *Pertanika J. Sci. Technol.*, vol. 29, no. 4, Oct. 2021, doi: 10.47836/pjst.29.4.35.
- [8] 'Older Adults as Key Assets in a Community-Based Participatory Needs Assessment: How Partnering With Older Residents Improves Local Aging Policy and Practice - Carrie Leach, Thomas B. Jankowski, 2024'. Accessed: Aug. 04, 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/23337214241234237>
- [9] R. Paluch, K. Cerna, D. Kirschsieper, and C. Müller, 'Practices of Care in Participatory Design With Older Adults During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Digitally Mediated Study', *J. Med. Internet Res.*, vol. 25, no. 1, p. e45750, July 2023, doi: 10.2196/45750.
- [10] M. A. Lindeman *et al.*, 'Changing Practice in Residential Aged Care Using Participatory Methods', *Educ. Health*, vol. 16, no. 1, p. 22, Apr. 2003.
- [11] N. Gasteiger *et al.*, 'Participatory Design, Development, and Testing of Assistive Health Robots with Older Adults: An International Four-year Project', *J Hum-Robot Interact*, vol. 11, no. 4, p. 45:1-45:19, Sept. 2022, doi: 10.1145/3533726.
- [12] W. Wilkowska, P. Brauner, and M. Ziefle, '1 - Rethinking technology development for older adults: A responsible research and innovation duty', in *Ageing, Technology and Health*, R. Pak and A. C. McLaughlin, Eds, San Diego: Academic Press, 2018, pp. 1–30. doi: 10.1016/B978-0-12-811272-4.00001-4.
- [13] L. Stegner, E. Senft, and B. Mutlu, 'Situated Participatory Design: A Method for In Situ Design of Robotic Interaction with Older Adults', in *Proceedings of the 2023 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, in CHI '23. New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery, Apr. 2023, pp. 1–15. doi: 10.1145/3544548.3580893.
- [14] W. A. Rogers, T. Kadylak, and M. A. Bayles, 'Maximizing the Benefits of Participatory Design for Human–Robot Interaction Research With Older Adults', *Hum. Factors*, vol. 64, no. 3, pp. 441–450, May 2022, doi: 10.1177/00187208211037465.
- [15] 'Co-Creating a Synchronous Tele-Education Program With Community-Dwelling Older Adults Using a Participatory Approach: A Mixed-Methods Study - Yichi Zhang, Wei-Peng Teo, Yin-Leng Theng, 2024'. Accessed: Aug. 04, 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/07334648241260614>
- [16] M. von Faber, Z. Tavy, and S. van der Pas, 'Engaging Older People in Age-Friendly Cities through Participatory Video Design', *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public. Health*, vol. 17, no. 23, Art. no. 23, Jan. 2020, doi: 10.3390/ijerph17238977.
- [17] 'Engaging older people through visual participatory research: Insights and reflections - Sarah Quinton, Daniela Treveri Gennari, Silvia Dibeltulo, 2023'. Accessed: Aug. 04, 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/14687941221110163>
- [18] 'Guidelines towards better participation of older adults in software development processes using a new SPIRAL method and participatory approach | Proceedings of the 11th International Workshop on Cooperative and Human Aspects of Software Engineering'. Accessed: Aug. 04, 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://dl.acm.org/doi/abs/10.1145/3195836.3195840>

- [19] C. van Leeuwen, J. Devis Clavijo, I. Mariën, and A. Jacobs, 'Invisible in the smart city: Using participatory design methods for age-friendly solutions', *Front. Sustain. Cities*, vol. 4, Aug. 2022, doi: 10.3389/frsc.2022.956787.
- [20] T. Blair and M. Minkler, 'Participatory Action Research With Older Adults: Key Principles in Practice', *The Gerontologist*, vol. 49, no. 5, pp. 651–662, Oct. 2009, doi: 10.1093/geront/gnp049.
- [21] E. W. E. Viklund, I. Nilsson, S. Hägglund, L. Nyholm, and A. K. Forsman, 'The perks and struggles of participatory approaches: Exploring older persons' experiences of participating in designing and developing an application. | EBSCOhost'. Accessed: Aug. 04, 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://openurl.ebsco.com/contentitem/doi:10.4017%2Fgt.2023.22.1.816.03?sid=ebsco:plink:crawler&id=ebsco:doi:10.4017%2Fgt.2023.22.1.816.03>
- [22] 'A systematic literature review on user centered design and participatory design with older people | Proceedings of the 18th Brazilian Symposium on Human Factors in Computing Systems'. Accessed: Aug. 04, 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://dl.acm.org/doi/abs/10.1145/3357155.3358471>
- [23] 'Action CA22167', COST. Accessed: Aug. 27, 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://www.cost.eu/actions/CA22167>

Annex 1: List of interviewees

28.07.2025: Lucimere Bohn (University of Porto, Portugal)
28.07.2025: Vibeke Walter and Martine Hoffmann (Gero, Luxemburg)
29.07.2025: Horst Schöberl (Frankfurt, Germany)
31.07.2025: Nina Svetelj (Public Library, Kranj, Slovenia)
31.07.2025: Dimitris Theodoropoulos (Frodizo, Greece)
04.08.2025: Kenneth Bone (Seasus, Malta)
04.08.2025: Juliana Louceiro (SHINE 2Europe, Portugal)
04.08.2025: Maya Marinova and Irina Ilieva (Alzheimer Bulgaria, Bulgaria)
05.08.2025: Ángel Yagüe Criado (CEOMA, Spain)
06.08.2025: Martina Rimmele (Bavarian Health and Food Safety Authority, Germany)
07.08.2025: Joana Portugal (Aproximar, Portugal)
07.08.2025: Francesca Cesaroni (COOSS, Italy)
12.08.2025: Nomen Nescio (Germany)
12.08.2025: Karen Wink-Verdonk (Municipality of Gouda, Netherlands)
26.08.2025: Leen Broeckx (Lica Lab, Thomas More Hogeschool Vlaanderen)
26.08.2025: Ilenia Gheno (AGE Platform Europe)

Annex 2: Survey text

Stakeholders/Practitioners and Participatory Approaches with Older Adults (CA22167)

Fields marked with * are mandatory.

Stakeholder Survey on Participatory Approaches with Older Adults

Estimated time: 10–15 minutes

Purpose: This survey aims to understand your experience, interest, and needs related to using participatory approaches with older adults. Your input will help inform the PAAR-Net network's strategies to better support real-world practitioners and policy-makers.

PAAR-Net is an EU-funded COST Action and stands for CA22167: Participatory Approaches with Older Adults. PAAR-Net focuses on reshaping ways to involve older adults in scientific research, policymaking, and practice. PAAR-Net aims to foster inclusive social innovation, by tapping into the knowledge and experiences of older adults, particularly those at risk of social exclusion, to address the complex challenges of ageing societies. As a networking framework, it brings together academics and old and young innovators both from wider Europe and elsewhere in the world.

Participatory approaches with (non-academic) older adults are ways of working together with older people— not just for them—when developing projects, services, policies, or research. This means actively involving older adults in decision-making, planning, and creating solutions, so their voices, experiences, and needs help shape the final outcome.

Active and meaningful involvement of non-academics is a crucial aspect of participatory approaches (such as “inclusive research”, “user-led research”, “community research”, “participatory action research”, “collaborative research”, “co-research”, or “citizen science”). Participatory approaches capture the voices, the lived experiences, possibilities, and the needs of diverse groups of older adults as experts-by-experience.

They allow to gain of insights into older adults’ experiences and enable their voices to be heard. They contribute to reorienting research, policy and practice interventions from a focus on combating exclusion to a positive focus on enabling participation.

Data management and privacy

This survey does not collect any names, emails or other privacy details unless you provide your name and/or email address for a follow-up interview or to receive more information about PAAR-Net. Your data will only be used for these purposes. The data will be stored in EU-Survey and AFEdeemy

(www.afedemy.eu). If at any time you want your data to be removed, please contact Willeke van Staalduinen (willeke@afedemy.eu).

Section 1: Background information

* 1. What type of organisation do you work in or for?

- ☐ Public sector (e.g. municipality, government agency)
- ☐ Non-profit or NGO
- ☐ Private company or business
- ☐ Academic or research institution
- ☐ Other

If other, please describe

* 2. Which best describes the content of your professional role? (You may choose more than one)

- ☐ Health, social care, social work
- ☐ Housing
- ☐ Food
- ☐ Urban planning, architecture
- ☐ Technology, ICT
- ☐ Policymaking
- ☐ Other

If other, please describe

* Country of work: Drop down list of countries used.

Section 2: Experience with Participatory Approaches

* 4. Are you familiar with the concept of participatory approaches (e.g. co-creation, co-design, advisory roles, participatory research)?

- ☐ Yes, very familiar
- ☐ Yes, somewhat familiar
- ☐ I've heard about it, but don't know much
- ☐ No, not at all

* 5. Have you applied participatory approaches with older adults in your work?

- ☐ Yes, regularly
- ☐ Yes, occasionally
- ☐ No, but planning to
- ☐ No, and not planning

* If yes, please briefly describe the participatory activities you have used:

* What were the main goals of using participatory approaches? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Better meet the needs of older adults
- ☐ Improve project quality or innovation
- ☐ Empower older adults / inclusion
- ☐ Comply with funding or policy requirements
- ☐ Build trust / relationships
- ☐ Evaluate effectiveness of services/products
- ☐ Other

* What barriers have you encountered in using participatory approaches with older adults? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Lack of time or resources
- ☐ Limited skills or training
- ☐ Difficulties engaging older adults
- ☐ Organisational resistance
- ☐ Not seen as relevant or necessary
- ☐ Language, cognitive or physical barriers
- ☐ Other
- ☐ None

* What motivates you to use (or consider using) participatory approaches with older adults?
(Select all that apply)

- ☐ Improved outcomes for services/products
- ☐ Ethical commitment to inclusion
- ☐ Policy or funding requirements
- ☐ Positive experience from colleagues/partners
- ☐ Other

* What barriers do you foresee in using participatory approaches with older adults? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Lack of time or resources
- ☐ Limited skills or training
- ☐ Difficulties engaging older adults
- ☐ Organisational resistance
- ☐ Not seen as relevant or necessary
- ☐ Language, cognitive or physical barriers
- ☐ Other
- ☐ None

3. Support and methods

* 6. What support would help you use participatory approaches? Select up to three

Maximum 3 selection(s)

- ☐ Training or capacity building

- Practical tools or templates
- Funding or financial support
- Peer learning or mentoring
- Institutional buy-in or leadership support
- Partnerships with experts or researchers
- Examples of good practices
- Other
- None

If other, please describe

* 7. What kind of participatory methods are you most interested in? (Choose any that apply)

- Focus groups or workshops
- Co-design/co-creation sessions
- Surveys or feedback tools
- Advisory Boards or citizen panels
- Living labs
- Digital platforms for engagement
- Storytelling or photo voice
- Other
- None

If other, please describe

4. Future engagement and PAAR-Net

* 8. Are you a member of COST Action 22167 PAAR-Net ([Participatory Approaches with Older Adults](#))?

* ☐ Yes

* ☐ No

* If yes, which Working Group? ([Link](#))

- Working group 1 – Health, Care & Support
- Working group 2 – Community and Place
- Working group 3 – Technology and Innovation
- Working group 4 – Synthesis and Quality Criteria

* Would you be interested in being involved in PAAR-Net activities (e.g. training schools, briefing papers, guidelines, workshops)?

- Yes
- I would like to know more
- No

* Please provide your email address to send the link to apply for membership or more information

* 9. Would you be willing to be contacted for a short follow-up interview with Willeke van Staalduinen (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/willekevanstaalduinen/>) about participatory approaches with older adults (about 30 minutes)? The interview will focus on further detailing the needs and wishes of stakeholders to apply participatory approaches with older adults in their daily practice or work and eventual barriers that should be solved.

☐ Yes

☐ No

* If yes, please provide your name and email address

10. Do you have any other comments, questions or suggestions about participatory approaches with older adults?

Annex 3: Interview questions

COST Action PAAR-Net (CA22167) is an EU-funded COST Action and stands for Participatory Approaches with Older Adults. PAAR-Net focuses on reshaping ways to involve older adults in scientific research, policymaking, and practice. PAAR-Net aims to foster inclusive social innovation by tapping into the knowledge and experiences of older adults, particularly those at risk of social exclusion, to address the complex challenges of ageing societies. As a networking framework, it brings together academics and innovators of all ages, from across Europe and beyond. PAAR-Net advocates for participatory approaches, which emphasise collaboration between experts by training, typically academics, and experts by experience, older adults aged 65 and above.

Willeke van Staalduinen (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/willekevanstaalduinen/>, willeke@afedemy.eu) received approval for a so-called Virtual Mobility Grant to explore and map the interests, needs, and practices of stakeholders who successfully use participatory approaches (PAAR) in their daily work, or to identify the barriers they encounter. On September 15th, she will report her findings to the Grant Awarding Committee and Leadership Board of the COST Action.

In the 30-minute interviews, the main focus will be on the personal or work-related motivations for applying or not to PAAR with older adults as a stakeholder, as well as what the interviewees would need from the members of the COST Action for the future in terms such as scientific information, practical guidelines, or else.

Interview Questions

1. Please can you tell more about your current work or activities?
2. Do you apply participatory approaches with older adults? If yes, please tell me more. If not, please explain.
3. Which challenges do you meet when applying participatory approaches with older adults?
4. To successfully apply participatory approaches with older adults, what information or guidance would you need from the COST Action?
5. Any further comments or information you would like to share?

Annex 4: Data protection statement and declaration of informed consent form

COST Action PAAR-Net (CA22167) is an EU-funded COST Action and stands for Participatory Approaches with Older Adults. PAAR-Net focuses on reshaping ways to involve older adults in scientific research, policymaking, and practice. PAAR-Net aims to foster inclusive social innovation by tapping into the knowledge and experiences of older adults, particularly those at risk of social exclusion, to address the complex challenges of ageing societies. As a networking framework, it brings together academics and innovators of all ages, from across Europe and beyond. PAAR-Net advocates for participatory approaches, which emphasise collaboration between experts by training, typically academics, and experts by experience, older adults aged 65 and above.

Willeke van Staalduinen (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/willekevanstaalduinen/>, willeke@afedemy.eu) received approval for a so-called Virtual Mobility Grant to explore and map the interests, needs, and practices of stakeholders who successfully use participatory approaches (PAAR) in their daily work, or to identify the barriers they encounter. On September 15th, she will report her findings to the Grant Awarding Committee and Leadership Board of the COST Action.

In the 30-minute interviews, the main focus will be on the personal or work-related motivations for applying or not to PAAR with older adults as a stakeholder, as well as what the interviewees would need from the members of the COST Action for the future.

Procedure interview and data collection

The interview will last approximately 30 minutes

The meeting will be conducted virtually.

With your consent, the interview will be recorded for subsequent analysis.

Participation in the interview

Your participation in the interview is voluntary. You are free to choose which questions you want to answer, and you may stop the interview at any time without giving any explanation.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without having to justify your decision and without suffering any kind of detriment as a result.

Confidentiality

All information provided during the interview will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Your data will be anonymised and used solely for research purposes within the framework of the COST Action. At no point will any information that could directly identify you be disclosed.

We are fully committed to protecting your privacy. All data will be handled in accordance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the relevant national data protection laws of the country where the interview or focus group takes place.

Your contact details will only be accessible to Willeke van Staalduinen, who is responsible for collecting the data. Once the data collection phase is completed, all personally identifiable information (such as your name and contact details) will be removed from the dataset, unless you consent to include your contact details in our stakeholders' databases for future research and consultation activities of the project.

The anonymised data will then be securely shared with the Grant Awarding Committee and Leadership Board of the COST Action for research purposes. This will be done following strict scientific and ethical standards, with full respect for participants' privacy and rights.

Your name and contact details will be permanently deleted at the end of the COST Action evaluation and approval in 2027.

The remaining anonymised data will be securely stored for an indefinite period for use in further scientific analysis or publications. Every effort will be made to ensure that no participant can be identified in any reports or publications resulting from this research. Any exception to this—for example, the use of your name or image—will only occur with your explicit written consent.

Your rights

Provided that we can identify your answers, you have the right to object to the processing of your personal data, to access, rectify and erase any information about you, and to ask us what information we store about you. Once personal data, such as your name and address, is deleted, it will no longer be possible to retrieve the information you provided.

For more information on the General Data Protection Regulation:

http://ec.europa.eu/justice/data-protection/reform/files/regulation_oj_en.pdf

Declaration of informed consent Interview Willeke van Staalduinen

Please tick all appropriate boxes:

	I hereby declare that I am willing to take part in the CA 22167 VM Grant interview.
	I declare that I have been properly informed about the CA 22167 VM Grant, and I understand the written and verbal explanations.
	I was given proper time to reflect on the participation request; I had the opportunity to ask the necessary questions, and I received satisfactory answers.
	I authorise audio/video recordings, which will only be used for analysing the data from the interview and further technical development.
	I know that the data from the interview will be analysed and summarised by my interviewer; I will have the right to review this summary before it is shared with the research team for integration in the project
	I was informed that the data will only be stored until the end of the COST Action PAAR-Net and evaluation period (December 2027 at the latest), after which it will be deleted and that I can access or change/delete it at any time.
	I understand that my name will only be displayed with my express consent.
	I understand I can withdraw my participation at any time, without having to give a reason and will have no penalties because of it.

Please, select **ONLY ONE** option:

<input type="checkbox"/>	I would like my name to be mentioned as a participant in the VM Grant report of Willeke van Staalduinen.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I do not allow my name to be used.

INTERVIEWEE

Name:

Date:

Signature: