A RecomMendation letter

for COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS (ngos) on the base of research in South-Estonia

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| Date  | Name of the project  | prepared by  |
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**2 The DESCRIPTION of THE SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS**

The population of Estonia is 1.3 million. **Population density is 30 persons/km².** Since 1990, Estonia’s population has decreased by 16% both due to negative birth rate and emigration. Out of total population, Estonians amount to 68.7%, while Russians are the largest ethnic minority group (25.1%). The share of individuals 65 years old or older of total population was 19% in 2017. As of the beginning of 2017, there were approximately **417,000 old age pensioners** in Estonia, amounting to **31.7% of the population**.

The ratio of women to men in the 55–64 age group is 1.32, in the 65–85 age group the ratio is 1.94 and in the 85+ population the share of men barely exceeds one fifth. The large share of women in the older age groups is caused by the **lower life expectancy of men** (men 73.1 and women 81.5 years in 2015). Life expectancy is increasing and the growth rate is faster among men. Compared with the average figures of the European Union, the average life span of men in Estonia is approximately six years lower and that of women two years. The gap is even larger regarding the **healthy life expectancy** – while the EU average is 61–62 years, an average Estonian woman lives 58 years in good health and an average Estonian man only **54 years**.

**Estonia is 22nd in the EU as to wealth**. The GDP purchasing power standard per resident in 2014 was 20, 900, which amounted to 76% of the EU average. At the same time Estonia is among the top ten most unequal countries in the EU as the gap between the poorest and wealthiest fifths of the population stays at 5.7 times.

75+ people mainly subsist on pension (average old age pension in 2017 amounted to 409 euros). **Among 50–74-year-olds, for 38% a regular source of income besides pension is also salary** or income from entrepreneurship (minimum salary in 2014 was 470 euros and average gross salary 1,224). 59% of 50–74-year-olds consider the income of their household adequate incl. 11% completely adequate).[[1]](#footnote-1)

The elderly in Estonia have a higher education level than the average elderly in 28 EU member countries. In 2014, **35.4% of Estonia’s 55–74-year-olds had tertiary education (EU average is 19.1%)** In the 55–74 age group the largest share (44%) has secondary education and approximately one fifth has primary education. Out of Estonia’s **55–74-year-olds 3.8% participate in education or self-improvement**, while the average for 28 EU countries is 4.8%.

Half of the elderly live in two-person households and **30% live alone**.While 24% of 50–74-year-olds lives alone, their share among 75-year-olds or older is as high as 49%. In a number of European countries, including Estonia, the cohabitation of several generations has been replaced by single family households. **Extended families** with more than two generations living together are relatively rare in Estonia – there are **only 4%.**

**59% of all elderly live in apartment houses, 23% in private residences and 12% in farm houses.** 58% are complete owners of the living space, in 16% of cases it belongs to some member of the household, in 15% of cases it is in co-ownership and only in 10% of cases belongs to someone else.

92% of the elderly in the age group of 50–74 use either a regular mobile phone or a smartphone.[[2]](#footnote-2) 62% and 75% of the 50-74-year-olds have Internet access via computer or smartphone**. The regular use of Internet among older population and especially among older men is lower than EU average** (SHARE).

**3 The DESCRIPTION of THE researched COMMUNITies: THE BACKGROUND OF STRONG AND WEAK results/achievements**

A large stretch of South Estonia’s border is also outside border of Estonia: with the Russian federation in east and southeast and with the Republic of Latvia in south. The territory of South Estonia amounts to 35% of Estonia’s overall territory. As of 2017 the population of South Estonia amounted to 24% of Estonia’s total population. Population density is 29.5 persons per km². Men amount to 46% of the population and women 54%. **The share of pensioners is 34%, out of whom 70% are old age pensioners and 30% disability pensioners**.

The share of rural inhabitants is higher than the national average. 53–55% of the population lives in cities, (the share of urban population for the whole of Estonia is 68%). The most remarkable feature of the South Estonian population is its ethnic makeup – **88% are Estonians**, which is close to the share of Estonians in the pre-war Republic of Estonia. **The population of South Estonia has declined by nearly 20%** starting from 1990 until the beginning of 2017.

**The income in South Estonia is lower than the national average**. The average gross monthly salary in Estonia in 2016 amounted to 1,146 euros, but 947 euros in South Estonia, which is **17% lower**.

The interviews of the survey were carried out in Põlva, Valga and Võru counties, the main economic sectors of which are respectively gardening and bioenergetics; energy-efficient logistics and winter tourism and forestry and timber processing. The **employment in South Estonia (65.1%)** is lower than the national average (71.7%). The lowest rate of employment was recorded in Põlva county – 56.4%, the indicator is also low in Valga county.

**The share of the relatively poor** is significantly higher in South Estonia than in the country in average. The highest share of relatively poor people was in Põlva county (35%), but the indicator of relative poverty was above the national average also in Valga county (28%) and in Võru county (27%).

Health indicators in South Estonia are lower in South Estonia compared with the national average. Life expectancy of 65-year-old men in most South Estonian counties was lower than the Estonian average (15.5 years). **The number of years spent in full health in the South Estonian regions under study was 4–9 years shorter than the Estonian average**.

On the base of development plans of municipalities of South (and also East) Estonia that were available in January 2018, the following tendencies were detected:

* Local governments have ensured the availability of all necessary social services for the older people that need to be provided by municipalities according to the Social Welfare Act. **The older people are often referred to as disabled who are in need of social services**.
* Some development plans also mention **the involvement of older people in community activities by listing their meeting places**: chambers of disabled people, pensioners' unions and associations as well as day centres.
* All rural municipalities **regard aging as a problem** andin some of them the **development of social living spaces is considered as a solution**. Development plans do not mention older men and consequently do not address their active participation in society. It seems as if these people do not exist at all!

In general, regional policies do not address older people as active citizen.

Areas are characterised by the fact that many older people and our **respondents have been living there from their childhood** or at least decades. Therefore they feel themselves as a full member of the community.

**The main weakness for older men is their health condition**. In case of severe health limitations men can not drive any more and therefore reaching out of home is very problematic. The rual areas in Estonia are characterized as sparse settlements, therefore events and undertakings are often organised far from homes and without **proper public transport** it is impossible for men to take part in community life.

Family is important for older men. If one can not **maintain frequent contacts with his adult children**, e.g. because of limited e-skills; the situation is traumatic for older men. One objective reason of older men’s disconnection with their younger family members is the younger cohorts’ trend to move away from rural areas. Younger people have been moved not only to local cities but even abroad. In last case the only channel for frequent communication is internet and the lack of skills results in cutting off family connection.

One part of older men can be characterised as indviduals with **insufficient social skills**. These men have had less communication experience compared to that of women because of their previous profession (a miner, a truck driver etc).

The life of older men is often influenced by **alcohol exaggeration**.

**4 THE LIST OF PRESENT AND/OR PREDICTABLE PROBLEMS ELICITED/EVALUATED FROM THE research**

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| ProblemS  |  |  |
| Poor average levels of **health** of the elderly and **long waiting lists** in specialist healthcare |  |  |
| Insufficient or lacking **transport**. Buses take people to work/school in the morning and back in the evening. Therefore, people who need to go to the nearest village or town for choir rehearsal have to spend there a whole day due to transport problems. Often there is nowhere to stay, even no shelters to offer protection for bad weather at the **bus stops**. |  |  |
| **Excessive workload at home**. As young people have left homes, the whole household is left to be run by the elderly, which means that no energy is left for other activities except domestic chores. |  |  |
| Women are offered more activities than men. E.g. handicraft clubs are mostly targeted at the handicraft traditionally done by women - sewing, knitting, etc. There are practically **no suitable activities available for men.** |  |  |
| **Information** about the activities offered does not reach the target group, the reason being either the wrong target group or advertising medium. The fact that computer classes are advertised on the Internet whereas they are needed for the people who are not computer literate and do not have Internet access, serves as the most curious example. |  |  |
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**5 THE OVERALL RESULTS OF THE INTERVIEWS (N=98): RECOMMENDATIONS FOR nGOS**

1. Map the number of older men in the county, how many of them live alone or in remote locations.
2. Review transport issues –bus schedule and routes so that elderly people in remote villages could have equal opportunities to participate in social life.
3. Address older men and women as active citizen in regional policies. For that decision makers need to be trained on the field of active ageing as well as school teachers and older poeple leaders.
4. Ensure that necessary information will always reach the target group by determining the channels suitable to the group. (Direct and individual communication is preferred as the first step, but other information channels could be developed in time.)
5. Find opportunities for older men to use their skills, jobs and part-time employment, dependent on their abilities and state of health. A special official to provide labour market services particularly for the elderly.
	1. Bring activities to home for men with impaired mobility – e.g. material/blueprints for making something
	2. Find opportunities for the realisation of the products, which could serve as additional source of income for the elderly men
6. Find opportunities for recognising the older men’s contribution to the community – e.g. via the pensioners day centres; create a tradition of setting up signs on buildings, structures and places where people have built or created something or done conscientiously their daily work.
7. Provide activities of interest primarily to men – e.g. outfit a workshop with equipment and tools men would not have at home. Develop a scheme for ensuring safety of the use of the workshop without obstructing the activity due to excessive safety regulations.
8. Organise visits/outings of interest primarily to men – e.g. technical fairs, beer museums, vintage vehicle collections etc.
9. Organise health days for elderly men, which would include lectures on male health, health checkups, and some physical activities.
10. Connection between generations – find ways for the older men to transfer their experience to younger people, as well as vice versa – e.g. the older men could teach woodworking to the young, while the younger could teach the use of smartphones. Cooperation with schools.
11. Organise meeting with other elderly men in pensioners’ day centre, which would allow making new acquaintances, e.g. hold speciality days or events based on (former) hobbies to bring together current and former colleagues.
12. Record whether all grand(parents) have the opportunity to keep in touch with their (grand)children, e.g. living abroad. If not, develop a support system helping them to have contact with their family members (e.g. computer and Internet support line, individual training in computer use in day care centre and technical support person).
13. Help NGO-s to support the buddy-system: Recruit active older men to invite their passive friends to participate in events and activities. Develop a recruitment plan – e.g. five cups of coffee for free or other bonus to every person bringing a new participant and to the new member.
1. Study of life of the elderly 2015. TNS EMOR, PRAXIS.lk.53-58 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Review based on the following source: Eesti Statistika Kvartalikiri,3/2017. Statistikaamet.Tallinn.2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)