A RecomMendation letter

for municipalities on the base of research in East-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**

East Viru county is located in the north-eastern part of Estonia bordering on the Gulf of Finland and Russia, the Lake Peipsi and West Viru County. East Viru county is crossed by the Tallinn–St. Petersburg road and railway. The Estonian (European Union) and Russian border checkpoint is located in Narva. The administrative centre is the town of Jõhvi. The distance between Jõhvi and Tallinn is 165 km and between Jõhvi and St. Petersburg 250 km.

Approximately 144,000 people live in East Viru county with a population density of 43.1 residents per km². Men account for 46% of the population and women 54%. The share of people in the age of 65+ is 23%. East Viru county ranks Estonia’s third and fifth as to surface area.

East Viru is primarily an industrial area. Oil shale mines and oil shale processing enterprises are located there as well as Estonia’s largest power station. The Kreenholm textile manufacture used to be an important enterprise in Narva before going bankrupt in 2010 and leaving 570 workers jobless. East Viru county provides nearly the entire electric energy produced in Estonia.

East Viru county has stood out among other Estonian counties in recent years as to its economic development (the growth of regional GDP has been among Estonia’s fastest in East Viru). The growth of wage income has also been the highest in Estonia in the years 2007–2017. New investments have been made in the county’s traditional oil shale industry as well as in other sectors; the logistics and transport sector has made fast progress (e.g. the volume of goods turnover through the Sillamäe Port has increased to eight million toms per year by 2013 since its opening in 2005) as well as retail trade (several large shopping centres have been opened in larger East Viru cities in recent years), while tourism and services industry are also developing well. Despite numerous signs of progress East Viru county lags behind others as to various socio-economic indicators.

East Viru county is one of Estonia’s regions where the population ages and contracts the fastest. According to the Statistical Office forecasts, the population of the county will shrink by a further 27% by 2040. The share of children younger than 14 and of youths of the county’s population is only 14%, lowest in Estonia. According to forecasts it man decline to 10% by 2040. This is why the labour market pressure index is the least favourable in Estonia – more people will leave the labour market due to age in the next ten years than will enter (six new working age people per every ten retirees).

Another peculiarity of East Viru county is the small share of Estonians of the population. According to the 2011 census data, the share of Estonians in the county’s population is 19%, while it is even lower in the cities – 5% in Narva and Sillamäe, 16% in Kohtla-Järve. The relatively low number of Estonian-speakers makes it difficult to integrate the region closely with the rest of Estonia.

The share of retirees is high, they amounted to 43.2% of population in 2017. 67% of the pensioners are old age pensioners and 33% disability pensioners. East Viru county displays Estonia’s highest ratio of exclusion from the labour market and of unemployment. In 2017 only 54% of the county’s working-age population was employed and the unemployment rate was one of the highest in Estonia – 13.5%. Compared with the rest of Estonia the labour of East Viru county is relatively immobile. More than 80% of employed people in East Viru work in the home county according to the 2011 census data and 3% work abroad. Since this is historically an industrial region, employment in the industrial sector is the highest in Estonia.

East Viru county also displays Estonia’s highest ratio of people in relative poverty, approximately 31% of residents in 2013. Relative poverty and the resulting low quality of life are an especially acute problem primarily in the cities of East Viru county. Based on only registered crime statistics, the security of living environment in East Viru county is the lowest in Estonia.

On the base of development plans of municipalities of South and 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 and in 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.

Many respondents have been living there from their childhood or at least decades and 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**

Local municipality need to create a community identity which among others address older men. One common „nominator” need to be developed by the municipality that helps **to create a sense of community** among local people having no common past experience.

**Existing activities** in East-Estonia targeted to older people (mainly to older women) **should engage older men**. One possible way is the offer of **temporary mini tasks**. For example there are less older women having driving licence compared to older men. Tasks of transportation or giving a lift can easily be the first step to be engged in existing undertakings. ˇ

**Sport, exercise and physical activeness**

Older men are interested in playing table tennis but there are only few places equippped with tennis tables in Jõhvi and no places in rural areas. **Tennis tables or other indoor sport** equipment should be set up in every community room. Competitions for older people with diverse levels of skills need to be organised.

Older men able to drive tend to overuse cars for their everyday needs, they need to be encouraged to **move more**. Men who use mobility aids (walking stick, scallop, roller) need to be encouraged to move as much as possible. Awareness rising campaines need to be organised.

**Local cultural work**

Older people need to be seen as a **recource for local cultural work**. Their (previous) hobbies and collections may form the exposition for interactive exhibitions, in cooperation with local schools older people may present and create web based archives of their artefacts (trips, working life, personal life etc); their stories may be the source of concerts and plays. Older men **creativity and ability to invent need to be introduced** to the broader community. Men’s shed movement should be introduced and (financial) support of local municipality need to be provided.

 **Work**

Just as there is the Airbnb for senior people, there might also be a **job brokering platform** for Estonian seniors. In Estonia, older people job mediation system can be supported by e-platform Letsworkabit and business bank account for indviduals.

**Senior-Uber** together with a dispatcher system run by voluntary senior workers (like fire brigades).

Mediation of Vintage Services: the **information pool of older men skills** from where community members can apply them or learn how these skills would be useful for them.

The **checking-call-service for lonely people** offered by voluntary workers. The service represents the call made on every day to be in contact with somebody on everyday bases.

**It is time to start with intergenerational practice (IGP)**

For IGP there is a need for common rooms; common goals. Older participants need to feel that in some areas they are authorities for young people and vice versa. All parties need to have the opportunity to share their skills, knowledge and/or experience. There are some ground rules agreed by both parties. IGP can be organised on the base of family links (e.g. young people together with their friends doing things with their grandfathers accompanied by their friends) and on the base of geographical area / common hobbies / common life experiences etc.

**Trainings and share of knowledge** The range of existing opportunities for older men to be engaged in social activities is narrow or unattractive, therefore **trainings, consultancy and brainstorming need to be offered for community leaders** to rise their skills and moderinise their principles of work.

**Consultancy for older men and women how to initiate club activities** (the lack of skills and experiences was the main reason why the idea of senior men club in Voka did not come true. If there were better awareness and more skills it would be succeeded.) Traditional gatherings like classmates reunions or previous colleagues gatherings can be refreshed by new ideas and forms. This types of meetings often represent the only network for older men outside of family, on the other hand these tend to be boring.

**Consultancy for working young-old age men how to set up one’s gradual retirement** to avoid the risk of overwork in their age.

**Educative courses for older men’s partners** about their roles in activating husbands.

**Communication and self-managment trainings for older men** need to be offered: how to avoid and how to manage stress; how to manage your sleeping behviour; listening skills, how to respond to agressive style of communication etc.

**Consultancy on family relationships, including skills to manage and enjoy relationships with members of extended family** (step-grandchildren, ex-sons- and ex-doughters-in-law). General awareness of modern family models and social connections need to be improved among older people.

**Training how to adopt to new roles and circumstances by entering the retirement** need to be offered. How to give away the role of a decision maker; how to be an ordinary professional in the fields one used to be a manager; how to do a team work.

**Training for GP-s** (family physician) to be able to support older men social health.

Ideas for older men training courses: Introduction of younger people voluntary work to break the older men’s stereotype of „younger people as a group unable to do things without a charge”. Follow-up club in which topics of current social trends are introduced and disussed. Discussions and story telling how to find and define new perspectives after retirement; real local cases (like Amway; new position in municipality board etc).

**Tips for communication**

Community leaders need to be aware of barriers and risks they may meet by trying activate older local men. These obstacles need to be taken into account in planning and implementing activities targeted to older men. Such obvious recommendation comes from the fact that older men had been **wrongly defined as passive in nature**.

There is the need for **personal approach**, no need to expect immediate response from older men; time and money need to be invested for persuading older people to be socially more active.

**The principle „life is an adventure** despite the age” need to be introduced or reminded.

The target group of learning activities should be addressed as **re-starters**, not followers or out-of-dates.

**All activities shoud be targeted to couples not to individuals** (partners, couples of friends, couples of family members).

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)