

BRIDGE

Breaching Reservation and Improving Dialogue
through Generational Exchange





Preface

Have you ever experienced in your team or organisation that the cooperation between younger and more experienced professionals did not run smoothly? This can lead to misunderstandings between colleagues or even to a conflict. But why? There are many answers. One aspect that has not been taken much into account in youth, social and educational work is the generational issue.

Younger and more experienced youth workers (Juniors and Seniors) have quite different approaches to their work, be it with the target group (young people), or with colleagues, or as staff or volunteers of an organisation. How do we deal with this as youth workers or as an organisation?

In addition, demographic trends are revealing an intergenerational gap:

- The baby boom generation will retire in the next 10-15 years;
- The share of young people in the labour market is decreasing.

To address these challenges, the partners decided to take a more detailed look at the whole situation. They created the project BRIDGE (**B**reaching **R**eservation and **I**mproving **D**ialogue through **G**enerational **E**xchange) - a strategic partnership funded by Erasmus+ Youth.

The aim of BRIDGE is to promote intergenerational dialogue in youth work and youth social work by:

- exploring strengths and differences between junior and senior youth workers;
- Developing transfer of knowledge and knowledge management by structurally anchoring the learning outcomes within the organisation,
- Formulating recommendations to policy makers and other organisations, which work with young people.

The participating organisations are IB (leader of the project, DE), ÖJAB (AT), Moissons Nouvelles (FR), Gio. Net (IT), Activa Foundation (SW) and YES Forum (DE). All these organisations work with young people in the youth (social) work in diverse work fields.

Duration of the project: March 2021 to August 2023 (30 months).

During the first phase of the project, "Building Bridges - Potentials & tools", we focused on the following topics: Potentials of Juniors and Seniors and learning from each other. To this purpose, each partner formed a working group with Juniors (younger youth workers) and Seniors (more experienced youth workers) within their organisation. The partners worked independently. The results were shared, exchanged and deepened at partner meetings and European workshops. Furthermore, we developed an online questionnaire on skills and methods for knowledge transfer in the participating countries and collected results.

To improve the quality of cooperation, it is necessary to identify how the knowledge can be shared between generations, and how it can be anchored in organisations through knowledge management methods. With an online questionnaire, we gathered an overview on the skills of different generations and also on the most effective methods (informal or formal) to transfer knowledge. In the second part of the project, we focused on knowledge transfer and knowledge management methods and developed them in detail.

The third part of the project gathered recommendations directly from youth and social workers and organisations for staff, organisations and policymakers. These recommendations aim to provide fresh ideas to raise awareness on the impact of demographic change in the workplace and to improve inter-generational dialogue between junior and senior workers to create a more inclusive and productive work environment for all. We further aim to bridge the gap between the policy and practice for a better-quality youth and social work.

In this publication you will find very useful information to deal with the intergenerational issues:

- How can we raise awareness on this issue? What are the potentials of seniors and juniors? (Part 1, Framework concept "Building Bridges – Potentials & Tools")
- Which methods promote the mutual transfer of skills between juniors and seniors? What methods can we use to ensure knowledge management in our organisation? (Part 2, Handbook "Crossing Bridges – Transfer & Anchor")
- What employees can do to strengthen the dialogue and solidarity with their colleagues from other generations? What organisations can do to improve intergenerational dialogue at their workplace? What policymakers can do to raise awareness on the generational gap at the workplace and to support organisations and employees? (Part 3, Recommendations „Bridging the Gap – Policy Brief“)

Note regarding the annexes

In order to keep this document from becoming too large, we decided to save the annexes on the project's website. You can access and download the annexes by using the QR code at the end of each part.

Introduction

1. Demographic change

The way we will work in the future is changing with two mega-trends driving this transformation: a shift in who is entering and leaving workforce, and the technological evolution (Deloitte, 2018). While the baby boomer generation is coming to the age of retirement, other developments are happening simultaneously. The rise in the general population's life expectancy and the willingness of older-aged individuals to remain professionally active for more years are some of them. On the other hand, due to low birth rates over the past decades, fewer young people are set to enter the workforce in the near future – particularly in European countries. These demographic trends call for multigenerational workplaces with a greater mix of workers of all ages and experiences.¹

According to a recent European Union (EU) annual statistics on employment based on the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS), while employment among young people (people aged 15-24) has been decreasing from 33,3% (2005) to 31,5% (2020), the employment of seniors (persons aged 55-64) has increased from 40% (2005) to 59,6% (2020).

Figures 1 and 2 below show the youth and senior employment rates in the EU and Austria, Germany, France, Italy and Sweden, partner countries of the project BRIDGE.

Figure 1:
Youth Employment in the EU and BRIDGE Partner countries

Source: Eurostat

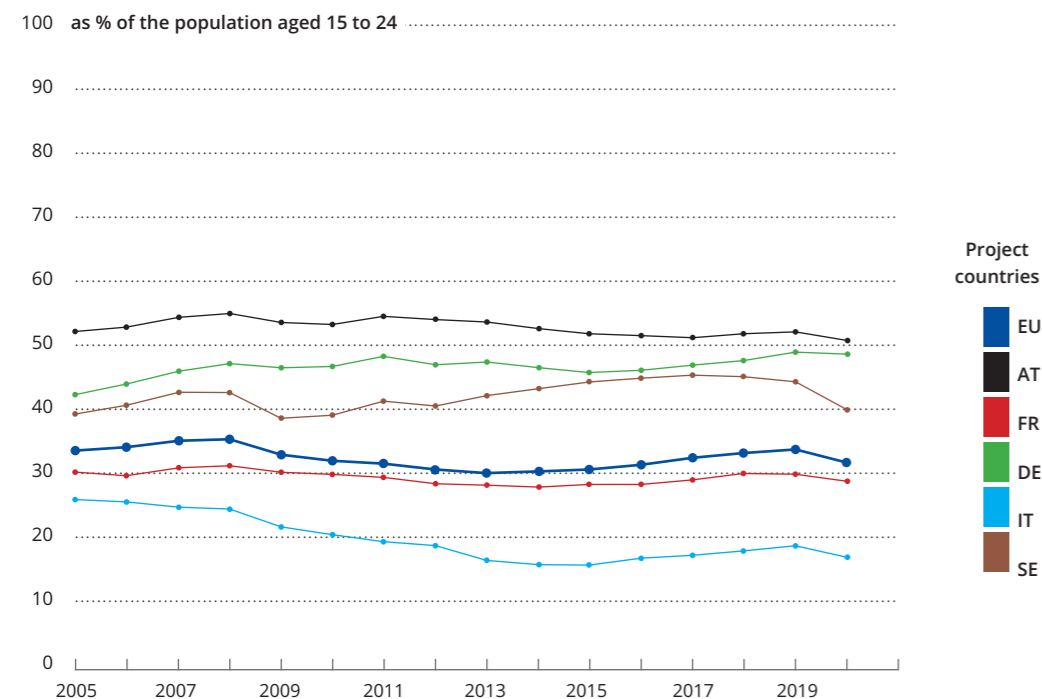
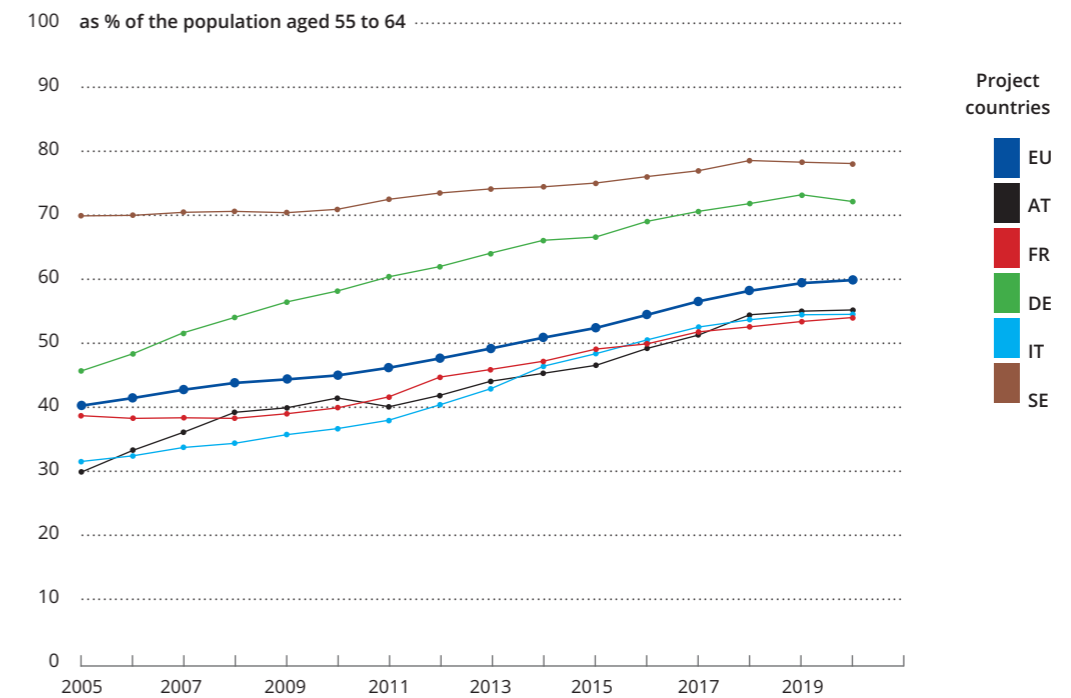


Figure 2:
Senior Employment in the EU and BRIDGE Partner countries

Source: Eurostat



Similarly, taking the whole population of employed people aged 15 to 64 as a reference, the part of young people employed (15-24 year old) and the people aged 25-54 has decreased since 2005, while the part of the seniors (55-64 years old) has increased.

These data clearly show that employment is up for seniors and down for young people in Europe compared to the past. This trend indicates that different generations will continue to work together, and there is a need to improve the intergenerational dialogues in the workplace.

¹ <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/ce/Documents/about-deloitte/voice-of-the-workforce-in-europe.pdf>

² <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/203647/1004071/EU+LFS+DOI+2021v1.pdf>

2. Impact on youth work organisations

What makes us tick, what makes the other generation tick? To what extent do differences between the generations play a role at work? Because apart from age, other factors also play a big role, such as the social, political, economic and ecological environment in which they grew up or studied. According to the project partners, the lack of understanding might lead to disagreements in teams and make the integration of young workers harder leading them to search for opportunities elsewhere.

It is a fact moreover that the baby boomer generation will retire in the next few years. In their working lives, they have gained a lot of knowledge and experience. What happens to their knowledge and experience? Does it also go away with them?

Finally, the lack of skilled workers in the pedagogical fields is very present in some countries, such as France or Germany, Italy or Sweden. The organisations there are working hard to find suitable staff. Sometimes the situation is so extreme that organisations even hire pensioners.

How can we build a bridge between the generations to achieve a better communication and cooperation and for a successful transfer of knowledge and experience?

Legal notice

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Visit our BRIDGE website to get further information, downloads:

www.bridge-erasmus.eu

Refer to our documents:

BRIDGE – Preface & Introduction
Building Bridges – Potentials & Tools (Framework concept)
Crossing Bridges – Transfer & Anchor (Handbook)
Bridging the Gap – Policy Brief

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