1. **Overall aim**

The overall aim of the EVARS project is to improve the potential of senior volunteers, without professionalizing their role, as an extra and valuable resource in our society, in order to maintain some of the relationship oriented services of the welfare state, which are the areas where local authorities especially make austerity initiatives due to the financial crisis.

2. **Rationale of and background to the project**

Europeans are living longer lives than ever before, which is a successful achievement for the European society. Still, a lot of the political discussion is only focused on the burden that the older population is for the society, related to early retirement issues, growing pensions and costs related to the health care system.

This project lies within the scope of the European Innovation Partnership within Active and Healthy Ageing, where focus is on how to change the societal challenge of an ageing population into an opportunity to create innovation and development, focusing on organizational solutions and new ways to organize the work in the health and social care sector.

The partners behind the EVARS project want to address the issue of political awareness of elderly volunteers as a resource for our society and in that connection develop, test and implement a training module in a close collaboration between training organizations, local authorities and senior volunteers.

Through the involvement of a number of local authorities from all participating countries during the development process of the EVARS project, the partnership already knows, that senior volunteers could be a valuable collaborating partner for the local authorities in areas such as:

- Contact to other seniors, who are in danger of social exclusion
- Assistance to families needing help to take care of children after school
- Assistance in youth clubs or schools in relation to e.g. homework and social activities
- Assistance and mentoring towards young people who need stable contact with an adult with healthy life experiences.

However, the use of volunteers, need a well-structured framework in order to become a win-win situation, and therefore, the project will incorporate the importance of engaging the elderly in the voluntary work through dedicated training activities. The following areas could be some of the focus areas for training:

- Illnesses such as dementia and alzheimers (what kind of symptoms can they meet when they deal with other seniors)

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- Pedagogical principles that are important when working with children and young people
- Ethical issues (awareness about limitations of the volunteer's role, respect, confidentiality, and dealing with sensitive / personal situations and ensuring inclusivity)
- How to take care of themselves, making sure that the voluntary work will not hurt them in any way

3. The setting-up of the consortium

The consortium consists of 5 partners from 4 countries; 2 from Denmark (management team), 1 from Germany, 1 from Austria, 1 from Slovakia. Together, the partners represent a substantial pool of knowledge within pedagogies, development of training courses, practical work with seniors, practical work with volunteers and practical and process oriented collaboration and coaching of local authorities. A pool of knowledge will ensure a successful and qualitative implementation of the EVARS project.

The partners come from several parts of Europe, representing different cultures, political structures and educational traditions. With this in mind, and with these diversities pooled in one project team, it will be possible to introduce sufficient flexibility and diversity in the training modules and good practice examples that the project wants to develop, so that transferability to other countries than the ones present in the project, is improved significantly.

4. Aims and objectives

To obtain the overall aim, the project puts forward 5 more specific objectives:

1) To develop, test and propose a training module for senior volunteers, which will provide them with basic knowledge within different areas, where the local authorities which have been involved in the development stage of the project have already expressed their needs. The training module will as a minimum cover these 5 themes.

2) To support closer links between organizations providing training activities for senior citizens and local authorities, ensuring that senior citizens are encouraged to volunteer and that they receive the esteem and acknowledgement they need.

   This objective will be reached through a direct involvement of the main target groups (senior citizens and local authorities) throughout the whole project period.

3) To support competence development of senior citizens and to improve the quality of voluntary work from senior citizens, ensuring that a common understanding of the frame and the conditions for the voluntary work is created and that the seniors are comfortable with their role as volunteer.

   This objective will be reached through the testing of the training module and active involvement of the senior volunteers.

4) To support and improve the mainstreaming process on local level for the engagement of senior citizens as volunteers, ensuring the exploitation of results and the sustainability of the project on local level.

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This objective will be reached through the process and action research oriented approach of the project, where a concrete trial out phase is included, where the partners will provide coaching to the local authorities to see the project as part of an overall strategic priority and provide training to the senior volunteers.

5) Create political awareness on local and European level of the potential of engaging senior citizens in voluntary work, ensuring the exploitation of results beyond the partnership and beyond the project period.

This objective will be reached through the establishment of a European reference group with members from Age Platform Europe, the European Volunteer Centre, the European Council for Municipalities and Regions, the European Parliament an active use of these organizations dissemination channels and possibilities.

5. Methodology

The methodology proposed for achieving the objectives in the project are related to the four main phases of the project being:

1) Preparation phase

In order to ensure the action learning and bottom-up approach, a close collaboration to four local authorities will be established in the beginning of the project. This collaboration will be used to gather knowledge about the training needs, differences between the partner countries, both concerning culture for training and pedagogical thinking, for ways to engage authorities in volunteering work, for differences in recruiting volunteers and other diversities relevant for the project.

2) Development phase

Within this phase of the project, the actual training module will be designed and developed in a close collaboration between the partners. Input from the preparation phase will be used to develop the training module.

3) Training and trial out phase

In order to ensure the relevance, usefulness and mainstreaming of the project and the training module it wants to develop, a trial out phase has been planned in each country. As the project is based on a process oriented and action learning approach, the activities in phase will be structured by successive ‘action-learning-circles’.

The Learning Circle:

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4) Conceptualization, exploitation of results and policy recommendations

Practical experiences will be gathered from the participating local authorities and elderly volunteers, and based on this feedback, the training concept will be evaluated, adapted and fine-tuned.

Measurable Indicators and Milestones

1) 4 local authorities in each participating country will be engaged on a voluntary basis in phase 1
2) European training module covering at least 5 themes will be produced in the 2nd phase
3) 40 elderly volunteers from each participating country will receive training in the trial out phase in the 3rd phase in order to test usability
4) 4 local authorities in each participating country will have received coaching from the project and will have begun to see more strategically on the use of seniors as volunteers in phase 3 in order to ensure sustainability
5) Policy recommendations will be produced, including a “voluntary idea catalogue” raising awareness and increasing readiness on local level for the positive use of elderly volunteers (Creating win-win situations will be the main focus) in the 4th phase.
6) European Website to disseminate results and material will be produced in phase 1 and further developed during the entire course of the project to be a final product by the end of the project.
7) National and European Workshops and conferences will be held during the 4th phase of the project.

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