

## Raising Awareness on Learning as a Key Factor in Active Ageing

### 1. Project Relevance

SLIC project emphasises the role of adult learning as one major factor of active ageing. The key message of the project was the empowerment of older people through a participative approach as a contribution to active ageing. Seniors were given the opportunity to get involved in all phases of the educational programme, and their opinions and experiences were taken into consideration during the development of the training. One of the benefits of the SLIC project was that it helped participants get to know their own strengths and recognise their value.

The main impact of the project was its successful dissemination, which contributed to raising awareness about the role of adult learning as one major factor of active ageing. Due to the good response to and great interest in SLIC, a follow-up of the project – SLIC II Valuing older people's skills and experience: Training peer facilitators –started in January 2011. Within the European Year of Volunteering, the Austrian Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection funded 30 SLIC workshops to be carried out throughout Austria. Also, trainers belonging to the major health and care organisations (BAG) in Austria have already been trained to carry out these workshops.

*The reason for choosing this project as a good-practice-case was its aim to develop new, practical ways to help older adults review their past experience and personal skills as well as to explore new and potential opportunities for learning and community engagement. This was achieved through developing an innovative workshop model.*

### 2. Background and Aims

SLIC was a European Commission funded project under the GRUNDTVIG programme, coordinated by the Austrian Red Cross. The project started in December 2007 and ran until January 2010. Nine adult education organisations and organisations working with volunteers from six European countries – Austria, Italy, Finland, Hungary, United Kingdom and Germany – participated in the project. SLIC project addressed the issue of increasingly ageing societies, and the promotion of active ageing. The project was implemented for the purpose of working against social exclusion of older people through the promotion of active citizenship. The aims of the SLIC-project were to help older people become more active in their community, to support older people to become more confident and take part in formal and informal learning, and to increase older people's self-esteem and feelings of usefulness. The development of the innovative workshop model was one practical way to help older adults review their past experience and personal skills, and to discover new and potential opportunities for learning and community engagement. The partners originated from different sectors, such as educational and cultural institutions, volunteer organisations, university, umbrella organisation, local government institution and an independent research institute. Each project partner piloted an interactive workshop.



**Project name:** Sustainable Learning in the Community – SLIC. Raising awareness of older people's competencies and identifying new opportunities for learning and engagement  
**Agreement number:** 2010-3407/001-001  
**Coordinating organisation:** Austrian Red Cross  
**Countries involved:** Austria, Italy, Finland, Hungary, United Kingdom, Germany  
**Types of organisations involved:** Adult education organisations, Organisations working with volunteers  
**Implementation level:** Local level, European Level  
**Website:** <http://www.slic-project.eu/>

### **3. Description of the Target Groups**

In the SLIC project, “older people” are understood as people older than 50 years, or in the transition from full time work to retirement. Specifically, the SLIC project addressed two target groups: One is composed of volunteers and learners over 50 who are already active and possible role models for their peers. The other is formed of older people who are not yet engaged in community activity or formal learning, but who could be encouraged to become involved. The workshops were implemented and tested with 103 older learners participating from six countries. Between 9 and 18 participants took part in the pilot competence workshops. The age of most workshop participants ranged from 60 to 69 years, with the exception of the first and second workshops in Austria: Here, most participants were younger, some were even less than 50 years old. In contrast to that, the Hungarian workshop succeeded to involve the highest share of people over 70 years, one of them being even older than 80.

A question about the participants’ ethnic background was only asked in Italy, where all the participants were Italian, and in Scotland, where 8 participants were Scottish, while 5 participants were British. Questions about the current profession or the profession before retirement were asked within the Scottish, Italian, Finnish and first Austrian workshops. Here the indications reveal that workshops attract mostly members of the middle class with higher education. Without any clear distinctions between countries, we find teachers, civil servants, librarians, doctors, nurses, ergo therapists, social workers, technicians, clerical workers, secretaries, managers and self-employed persons.

The recruitment policy had a major influence on the respective results as far as the previous volunteer experience of the participants is concerned. In Scotland and Finland, most participants were already working as volunteers when they attended the orientation course. In Italy and Hungary, the highest shares belonged to participants who had gained experiences as volunteers in the past. The Austrian workshops were the only workshops in which most participants had never volunteered before. Thus, the open advertising of the Austrian workshops in newspapers successfully attracted complete newcomers in this field.

### **4. Outputs and Multiplying Outcomes**

The results of the first work package on research were summarised in each country in 20-40-page reports in English. This information was compiled in a 40-page European overview in English. The reports served not only as the basis for the workshop and portfolio/action plan design, but they also gave an overview for older learners and volunteers, as well as for professionals from other organisations on the national situation concerning competence portfolios. The reports compiled by partners included the relevance of the project for their organisations with a view to implementing the SLIC workshops in their establishments in the future, short information on the relevant political discussion in the respective country, an overview of tools to assess informal learning, as well as results of consultations with older learners.

Furthermore, a handbook on how to run SLIC workshops was developed within the project. It provided a short overview on the background of the SLIC project and how the workshops were developed. This handbook can be used as a resource book to help interested people or organisations to run similar workshops. The handbook and a project summary leaflet is available in English, German, Finnish, Hungarian and Italian in hard copy, as well as on the project website ([www.slic-project.eu](http://www.slic-project.eu)). Apart from the overall work plan and highlighting the needs to be considered when planning and running the workshop, the following activities are included:

- Ice breakers/introduction sessions;
- Skills profile;
- “Homework”;
- Input on volunteering and learning opportunities;

- Action plan;
- Motivating and involving others/Competence market;
- Follow-up;
- Evaluation.

The following components are stated for each activity: objectives, how long it will take, which resources are needed, how to run the activity, and which issues to consider.

Also available for download on the project website are the following additional tools (in German), which were used in the SLIC workshops:

- Introduction-Questionnaire;
- Memory Map – Feedback;
- Voluntary work in Vienna;
- Group discussion on voluntary work;
- Overview of skills and competences.

Not only does the handbook target professionals working in this field, but it also addresses older champions who would like to run SLIC workshops themselves. This was already demonstrated in Italy where two volunteers who had participated in the SLIC workshop in Rome ran their own workshop in Ferrara a few weeks later.

## **5. Impact and Sustainability**

The SLIC project emphasised the role of adult learning as one major factor of active ageing. The project showed that the basic tools developed within the SLIC workshops are adaptable to different countries, settings and target groups.

SLIC contributed to an open learning environment through facilitating older people to assess their experience and know-how, and to identify what education is further needed for their active engagement in society. The project broadened access to lifelong learning by providing guidance on a range of learning and engagement opportunities for participants in the “competence workshops”. It therefore contributed to the accessibility of formal and informal learning opportunities, and promoted flexible learning paths for older people. The SLIC workshops further encouraged participants to become active citizens and motivated them to take part in formal and informal education. The SLIC project especially dealt with improving skills for civic competence, such as the ability to engage effectively with others in the public domain and to display solidarity and interest in solving problems which affect the local and wider community. SLIC’s approach links lifelong learning to later life transition, rather than the more common context of training for work. The SLIC project also made an effort to involve disadvantaged groups, such as migrants, ethnic minorities, unemployed older people, older people from isolated communities as learners and educators in the community in the course of developing the workshops.

As a result of its positive impact, the SLIC project won the Lifelong Learning Award in the category “Products and Results”, which was awarded by the National Agency for Lifelong Learning on November 29, 2010 in Vienna. Furthermore, a follow-up project, SLIC II, was started. Its aim is to train peer facilitators who are going to run SLIC workshops, creating a stronger focus on community involvement and improving the process of accompanying participants after the workshop. Exploring how the workshop can be embedded in organisational policy on older volunteers, as well as networking and cooperating with other organisations are also going to be parts of the new project. Within it, each partner organisation will have a different priority: The Austrian Research Institute of the Red Cross is focusing on how workshops can be embedded in the organisations’ overall volunteer policy including the process of accompanying participants in implementing their action plans. The second Austrian partner, Ring Österreichischer Bildungswerke, is focusing on biographically oriented tools for assessing older people’s skills and experience. The Budapest Cultural Centre is concentrating on ways to strengthen the community involvement of SLIC participants, especially people who are recently retired. The Italian partner organisation

Lunaria is going to review past experiences concerning the use of SLIC workshops to prepare senior volunteers for exchange programmes. The German research institute ISIS is going to emphasise the aspects that need to be put in place in order to cater the needs of older people from ethnic minorities/migrants. Furthermore, it is going to design a peer facilitator training and trial workshops, which suit this specific target group and support it in carrying out projects within communities. The Senior Studies Institute of the University of Strathclyde in the UK is going to attempt to create a stronger emphasis on the community involvement of workshop participants, as well as on networking and cooperating with other organisations and agencies.

## **6. Educational Process**

The project approach was, on the one hand, to provide an overview of the existing materials/tools in each country and to consult older learners on their needs with respect to the issues at hand. 100 older people – 74 women and 26 men – were consulted for their opinions on community engagement and volunteering in interviews and group discussions. The result of the search for tools and consultation with older learners was the basis for the development of the workshop design. Each partner planned their workshop according to their target group and thematic focus using the “tool-kit”. The workshops were piloted by each project partner, and a handbook was developed for further guidance on carrying them out.

The purpose of the two-day-“competence workshops” was to encourage seniors to develop and/or re-detect their skills and competences through formal and in-formal learning opportunities. A “personal skills profile with an action plan”, visualising the participant’s profile, qualification and plans, and a SLIC certificate were developed to show the individual competences of the participant forming a direct output of the competence workshop. In each country, the partners adapted the materials from the toolkit according to their own needs and the presumable wants of the participants.

Some methods of the workshop designs can be summarised as:

- Short lectures on a specific topic;
- Mutual activities and coffee breaks;
- Time for free discussion;
- Exploring topics through questions, dialogue and discovery;
- Understanding latent problems (related to learning and ageing);
- Demonstrations;
- Creating a good atmosphere;
- Combination of self-assessment and counselling.