

## Seniors as Mentors for Younger Co-workers

### 1. Introduction and Project Relevance

The main purposes of SISC deal with making seniors acquainted with their own “shadow competencies”, providing tools for properly transferring know-how to new generations of workers, as well as with enhancing senior workers’ willingness to contribute to intergenerational learning. One of the main SISC results is to convince entrepreneurs about the importance of making better use of senior workers’ know-how, since SISC

fosters the transfer of know-how to new generations of workers through the implementation of mentoring, and making seniors useful for the development of new generations of workers. SISC reached a wide network of enterprises through dissemination contacts with entrepreneurs, convincing them of the importance of exploiting senior workers’ know-how. This enabled a deep, transnational and motivated use of the realised ICT-based learning tool by a wide number of senior workers.

SISC also promoted the exploitation of an innovative model of inter-generational and collaborative learning between older and younger persons within companies. Based on the assumption that senior workers represent precious elements owning professional skills and social capital, SISC considered senior workers to be proficient mentors of and reference points for newly hired workers.

*The project is a good practice case because its aim is to equip senior citizens with the skills they need in order to cope with the changes in the modern society, to remain active, and to strengthen the contribution of older people to the learning of others.*

### 2. Background and Aims

SISC answered to the need to implement active ageing strategies in order to avoid social exclusion. The aim of SISC is to make a better use of the potential of senior workers (particularly if they are close to retirement), and to calibrate a tool overcoming two main obstacles:

- making seniors acquainted with their own individual *acquis*, stressing their “shadow competencies”;
- providing knowledge/tools for properly transferring them to new generations of workers, enhancing their will to contribute to intergenerational learning.

The SISC project increased the value of elderly workers’ competences, and contributed to the fight against age discrimination within workplaces. The ILO (International Labour Office) recently underlined an increase in age-related discriminations. Proximity to retirement often leads to exclusion from planning future company perspectives. This project strengthened the role of seniors as a crucial resource enabling companies to move on.



**Project name:** SISC - Senior Intergenerational Social Capital  
**Project number:** 142159-2008-LLP-IT-GRUNDTVIG-GMP  
**Coordinating organisation:** ERIFO  
**Countries involved:** Italy, Germany, Poland, Bulgaria  
**Types of organisations involved:** research and training centres, business development organisation, NGO engaged in fighting against social and work exclusion, ICT centres.  
**Implementation level:** European level  
**Website:** <http://www.sisc-project.eu/>

This two-year project defined, tested and calibrated an *ad hoc* individualised e-learning pathway targeting senior workers close to retirement, taking into account different EU national priorities and andragogy key statements.

The developed platform has a wide range of usage, and its content may be adapted for different targets, e.g. Public Administration and public companies. The presence of an expert and a practical guideline, adaptable to different contexts (private and public companies, Public Administration), would increase the attractiveness of SISC platform. This is a key recommendation for the future of this platform, because the intent is to extend the target users, using this platform in medium and big enterprises, cooperatives, public administrations, etc.

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

The SISC project targeted:

- Companies, to make them retain the “know-how” of the highly qualified workers before the retirement of such workers;
- Entrepreneurs and Human Resources managers, as stakeholders of the knowledge transfer methods;
- The 50+ employees, to make them become mentors;
- The younger and less-experienced, as beneficiaries of the knowledge to be transferred.

The SISC program has potential to be broadly disseminated and used. In the opinion of the project partners, it will be successful if it is part of an entire training offer for companies. The possibility to popularise the platform at a national level is being considered by project partners. To execute this task, searching additional partners like chambers of commerce, local business development organisations and publications on demographic topics has intensified. New partners introduce the SISC tool to their network and invite members to use the e-learning program for further projects and daily work with clients.

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

The SISC Project aims at supporting companies in their efforts to retain the know-how of the highly qualified workers in the company, before they retire. SISC produced an approach and a set of tools, available in English, Italian, German, Polish and Bulgarian versions:

- SISC e-learning pathway - <http://www.edu.sisc-project.eu/> - An ICT-based tool targeted to women and men 50+, enabling them to make autonomously via PC their own individual balance of competencies (stressing strengths and weaknesses), and to run an individualised training pathway on Mentoring, aimed at convincing them of their own importance in terms of owned know-how to be transferred to new generations, and giving them proper tools. A SISC User guide was also produced;
- SISC European good practices in raising seniors intergenerational social capital - A document describing good practices in the implementation of SISC training pathway and stressing the deriving added value, to be used as a base for the sustainability of the project after its conclusion, and for convincing managers to promote mentoring programs within companies.

The positive feedback of the platform users included the demand for further e-learning programs in the future. This would encourage project partners to focus on e-learning as a training tool for different contents. SMEs show a potential for development, and this requires individual offers, supporting tools and advertising for raising awareness.

The possibility to receive a certificate from the training can be one of the key points to influence the interest in this course within smaller companies (in Bulgaria's case, this element was one of the main motivators in the recruitment).

## 5. Impact and Sustainability

The initially foreseen short-term target group, namely male and female workers aged over 50 at risk for labour market expulsion or nearing retirement, has been reached in number and was exceeded. Moreover, in addition to this target, many other stakeholders were reached, namely: journalists, employees and employers, NGOs, chambers of commerce, trainers and training associations, web site users, and public bodies. A total of about 1,800 people (without taking into account the 3,400 visits to the web site) were reached during the project.

The following means were used:

- Information about the project presented on **project website**. An informative public website was developed at the beginning of the project with different sections and purposes: to inform the general public about the project and its vision and targets; to provide the general public with access to the products of the project; to provide means of communication between the general public and the project partnership executing the project. The website is also used to communicate with the project beneficiaries – companies and stakeholders involved in the mentorship program. The public website was accessed by more than 3,400 visits during the overall project.
- Information about the project on each participating **institution website**. Each partner published SISC references and/or a link to the SISC dedicated website onto their own institutional web spaces.
- **Newsletters** delivery. Newsletters were addressed to company managers, and aimed at convincing them about the importance of the knowledge transfer and at informing them about discoveries and steps.
- **National field researches**. During the national research interviews, more than 120 different companies from different countries of Europe were approached and requested to participate in the interview. 60 of them agreed and successfully participated in an interview. The partnership produced the final versions of the SISC e-learning pathway after the definition and finalisation of the SISC training tool, the finalisation of the translation in all the project languages, the definition and the translation of the SISC user guide in the project languages.

The platform has a total of 180 users/enterprises registered, more than it had been planned at the beginning. The positive feedback of the platform users included the demand for further e-learning programs in the future. This would encourage project partners to focus on e-learning as a training tool for different contents.

Concerning the sustainability, the quality of the courses was evaluated in two different ways: by the use of questionnaires in the end of the training path, and by personalized interviews conducted with participants in the testing session. The feedback from the users of courses is positive. The overall quality of courses was evaluated as high: their contents and sources are well defined, and globally they are not difficult to understand. Moreover, courses are theoretical and, at the same time, they are easily applicable in everyday life. The language used is accessible and not overly technical. Potential for upgrading was seen in the difficulty of the testing sessions and in the amount of time for the test in general: it could have been even more interactive if users were given a chance to go through more questions and case studies.

To expand the project on a broader scale, it should rather be a part of a bunch of actions to face the visible demographic change. Human resources management in SMEs will require more effective tools to save know-how and expertise and to encourage a constantly aging staff.

The e-learning platform users aged 50+ and companies will be more satisfied if the platform is more interactive and includes even more testing. Companies and individual users also need an offer on how to implement the training sessions in their organizations (written guides, manuals), as they request constant personal assistance and guidelines.

## **6. Educational Process**

First of all, in order to define a universal model, which better meets the needs of the target group, SISC addressed entrepreneurs and HR managers, asking them to express their opinion on the knowledge transfer methods, barriers to these processes, along with their expectations. In particular, the research aimed at gathering key information about possible ways/good practices for the implementation of mentoring and e-learning schemes within EU companies. The main answers from the enquiry are:

- modalities to foster intergenerational learning within enterprises, so as to give value to the experiences gained by the eldest employees during their own working lives;
- main ways to foster the introduction of e-learning as an updating modality for senior employees: how to engage them in overcoming any possible barrier;
- main ways to introduce mentoring schemes within companies and to best motivate seniors, and ways to organise mentoring sessions;
- knowledge and competencies required by senior employees in order to become effective mentors, and main gaps existing between the skills owned and to-be-owned.

Mentoring in SISC project is based upon interpersonal and social competencies, enabling a constructive relation between the mentor and the mentee. Consequently, this project strongly focused on interpersonal competences, meant as behaviours that must be mastered in order to enable an individual to efficiently and constructively participate in social life, and to resolve conflicts where necessary. Interpersonal skills are necessary for an effective interaction on a one-to-one basis or in groups.