



Unifying Generations:

Building the Pathway to
Intergenerational Solidarity

Ireland Report 2022



Edwards



About Edwards Lifesciences

Edwards Lifesciences is the global leader of patient-focused innovations for structural heart disease and critical care monitoring. We are driven by a passion for patients, dedicated to improving and enhancing lives through partnerships with clinicians and stakeholders across the global healthcare landscape. ■



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Foreword

Mary Butler, T.D.
Minister of State for Mental Health
and Older People



Ireland's population is ageing, and people are living longer. By 2051, the number of people over 65 will double. This demographic shift represents a significant achievement and bears testimony to our success in supporting healthy and positive ageing throughout the life course. However, we still face a challenge in addressing negative perceptions about older people, who are too often viewed as a burden on society. We need to recognise the invaluable contribution that older people make to our families and communities, economy and society. Older people are never a burden, they are an opportunity.

The *Unifying Generations* report makes an important contribution to recognising the important role that over-65s, and especially the 3rd

generation, play in our country. Not only does it show that they make a significant contribution through volunteering, caring for others, mentoring and providing financial support, but also that they play a pivotal role in building cohesion between generations. The voice and choice of older people should always be heard.

Across the six countries included in the Unifying Generations Survey, I was particularly pleased to see that Ireland emerges as the most age friendly country, with younger Irish people greatly appreciating the support, advice and skills provided by the older generations.

While the report also reveals that the pandemic has negatively impacted intergenerational interactions, it highlights a strong desire on the part of everyone to rebuild these bonds as we

emerge from this difficult period that affected all of us in many ways.

Finally, this report makes three recommendations that I strongly support: to transform perceptions and recognise the important contribution of the older generation; to encourage mentoring initiatives to allow the passing on of knowledge from older to younger generation; and to improve digital skills for older people to prevent isolation and increase connectivity between generations.

We all have a role to play in implementing these recommendations which will help to tackle ageism, foster intergenerational solidarity, and support active and healthy ageing. ■

Introducing Unifying Generations

Demographic changes and medical advances mean that, for the first time, four generations share a longer life span together. By 2051, it is anticipated that there will be twice as many people aged 65 and over living in the Republic of Ireland¹. This demographic evolution is often perceived as a burden while in fact, older people, and especially the 3rd generation, play a central role as the unifier of the community providing significant support to the younger generation. Unfortunately, interactions between generations have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, this report highlights a strong desire to rebuild these bonds. The benefits brought by these interactions are being underestimated, whereas they can contribute to the recovery of the post-pandemic world. Based on a comprehensive survey into the perceptions and experience of intergenerational solidarity of 1,657 Irish citizens, this report provides insights on the role of older people in society and the power of intergenerational solidarity. It is a first step on a mission of *Unifying Generations*.

Objectives of the *Unifying Generations Survey*

- Highlight the value and contribution of the 3rd generation in order to drive greater appreciation for their role in society.
- Identify ways in which the 3rd generation can contribute more effectively to society.
- Understand the impact of the pandemic on intergenerational interactions.
- Begin to add to the knowledge base on intergenerational solidarity. Based on the results of the survey, and in keeping with its objectives, three chapters were established to form the basis of this report. ■

Chapter 1

The true value of older people in Ireland

The role of older people within the family, the community and the wider society and the level of their contribution. How their contribution is valued by the younger generation.

Chapter 2

A desire for unifying generations

A narrative focused on generational division neglects the overwhelming unity between younger and older people that we see in our society. It is vital to highlight the desire for unity amongst both generations.

Chapter 3

Recovering from the pandemic – time for action

After two years which reshaped society, we find ourselves in a position to make significant and lasting changes. The survey provides inspiration for possible actions to be taken to enhance intergenerational interactions and build a more age-friendly society.

¹ Institute of public health, 2020, *Ageing and Public Health – an overview of key statistics in Ireland and Northern Ireland* <https://publichealth.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/20200416-AGEING-PUBLIC-HEALTH-MAIN.pdf>

Unifying Generations Survey – Methodology

The survey was carried out by *Censuswide*, an international consumer research agency which employs members of the Market Research Society and abides by the ESOMAR principles. The field work took place between 4th April 2022 and 14th April 2022 in six European countries; France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Ireland, and the UK. A total of 12,850 respondents across Europe were surveyed aged 18-40 and 65+,

weighted in age and gender (50/50). 6,425 people surveyed were between the ages of 18 and 40, with a further 6,425 people over the age of 65. Specifically, in Ireland a total of 1,657 people responded to the survey, weighted in age and gender (50/50).

Survey respondents were recruited through *Censuswide*'s database by the delivery of an email invitation. An initial vetting

question was used to ensure all respondents were within the target groups of those aged 18-40 or 65+, and demographic questions, including gender and regional location (within country), were then used to ensure a robust sample population spread. Respondents were asked to complete an online questionnaire which comprised of 20 questions, including 14 questions with open ended response options. ■

Unifying Generations – Advisory Team

Edwards Lifesciences worked closely with a team of experts across Europe to develop the survey and the subsequent Irish report.

Dr Catherine Elliott O'Dare,
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Chapter 1: The true value of older people

By 2051, the amount of people over the age of 65 in Ireland is expected to double – rising from 696,000 in 2019 to 1,563,000 by 2051.¹ Society often frames the ageing population as an issue, however, we believe that a healthy, active and engaged older population can make a significant contribution to their families, local community and wider society, both from a social and economic perspective.

“There are challenges, but we should also emphasise and remember that there are marvelous, real opportunities in an ageing population, and that this can be perceived as a demographic bounty.”

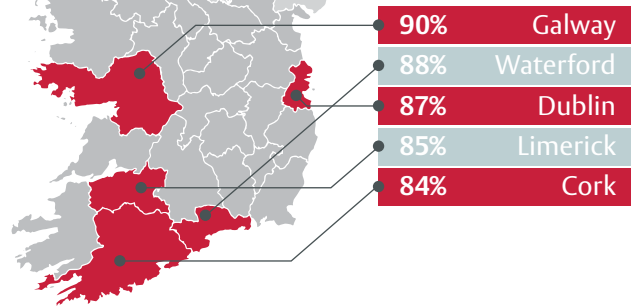
Dr Catherine Elliott O’Dare, School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

In contrast to existing perceptions that the older generation are a burden for society, this survey allows a re-evaluation of the role they play and a better measurement of their positive impact on younger generations.

Indeed, according to the survey, **87% of younger generation respondents in Ireland say the support provided by the older generation in their daily life is important.** This percentage is one of the highest amongst the 6 European countries surveyed, ranking second after Spain (91%).



Percentage of younger people saying the support provided by the older generation in their daily life is important



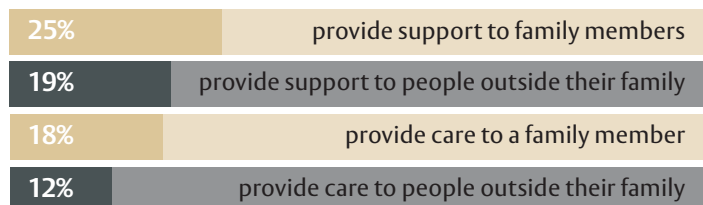
Providing social support

The survey results highlighted the significant social contributions of the 3rd generation in terms of caring for others, volunteering and providing support inside and outside of the family. In Ireland, 25% of over-65s provide support to family members (e.g., shopping, driving or other daily tasks).

There were notably higher instances of people living in Waterford, Limerick and Galway providing support to family members (shopping, driving and other daily tasks) at 39%, 30% and 29% respectively.

The survey also shows that 19% provide support to people outside their family and 18% provide care to a family member, such as their partner, children, grandchildren, or other relative. Limerick is leading the ranking with nearly 4 in 10 people (38%) providing some form of care toward a family member, followed by Waterford (33%) and Galway (29%).

Contribution of over-65s



Finally, care provided by over-65s, such as looking after grandchildren or cooking, is valued by the younger respondents. Thirty-three percent (33%) of 18-40s said it is the most important or valuable thing older people can offer to younger people.

Ireland is the country where over-65s are the most engaged in their local communities, especially when it comes to volunteering:



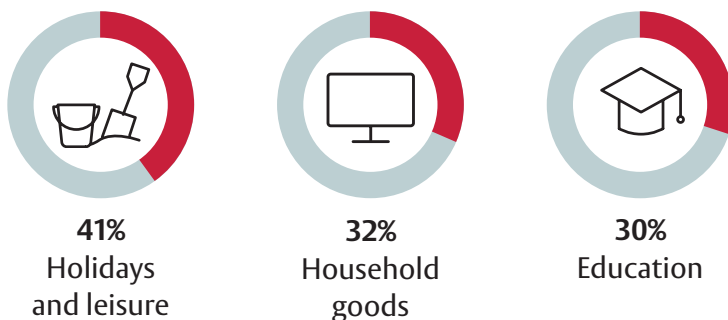
Nearly half (49%) of great grandparents and 29% of grandparents volunteer in their local communities.

Finally, 6% are an elected representative of a village, town or city council.

Providing financial support

The financial contribution made by over-65s was found to be even more significant. **Sixty-six percent (66%) provide financial support to the younger generations within their family** in Ireland.

This financial support is to help with:



- People living in rural areas (66%) were more likely to provide financial support to younger family members than those living in urban areas (63%).
- Urban dwellers were the most likely to provide financial support for education (39%), 10% higher than both rural (27%) and suburban (27%) dwellers.

Experts' insights

The 3rd generation play a key role in society – perhaps even more so than society realises.

The results from this survey only strengthen existing research which highlights the value of the contribution brought by the over-65s throughout Ireland, both socially and economically. Once retired, older people have the freedom to decide how to allocate their time. They provide care and support to others; they volunteer in charities or in their community, and they provide advice and coaching.

The financial contribution brought by the 3rd generation within their families is significant.

The survey demonstrates that this financial support is used to cover essential needs such as education and household goods but also leisure and holidays which can support wellbeing.

Supporting the older generation can in turn help society at large.

Helping to maintain older people healthy and active is essential so that they can fulfil their role as “unifiers” within their family, community and more broadly to society. ■

Chapter 2: A desire for *Unifying Generations*

Divisions between generations have been widely reported in recent times, with the expected growth of the older population often described as being a “demographic challenge.” However, this narrative creates a false impression which does not reflect the positive contribution of older people and may be a barrier to deeper cohesion. In fact, the survey demonstrates that there is no such conflict between generations, but a strong desire for more intergenerational interactions.



Across all ages, family is the area Irish respondents think would benefit most from better intergenerational interactions (56%). This was followed by community (51%) and care (41%).

“The strong desire for more intergenerational interactions and appreciation for the support of older groups could help inform positive strategies that help counter the impact of ageism in society.”

Dr Catherine Elliott O’Dare, School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

“Historically in Ireland family units are built on a foundation of respect for one another and culturally there has always been the concept that we look after our older people, both within the family and in wider contexts. The report demonstrates that there is a clear desire for more opportunities for intergenerational activities, and recognising the value both younger and older generations bring. Engagement with others brings a warmth to people, whether that be increased social interaction, reducing loneliness, mentoring. There is a role for all in creating stronger integrated communities representing the views of all citizens, regardless of age.”

Dr Adrienne McCann, Research Manager, Innovation Value Institute, Maynooth University/Age Friendly Ireland, Ireland

Willingness to build more intergenerational interactions

In Ireland, the desire for more intergenerational interaction was even stronger than in other countries.

Respondents amongst both the younger and older generation across the country were about **28 times more likely to think closer interactions between different generations are a good thing (85%) rather than a bad thing (3%).** Ireland was the top-ranking country surveyed in this regard.

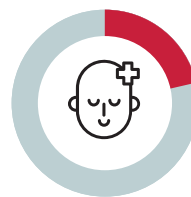
The power of intergenerational friendship

A number of benefits from intergenerational interactions were highlighted by survey respondents, which suggest a broad spectrum of opinions on the subject, undoubtedly influenced by personal circumstances.

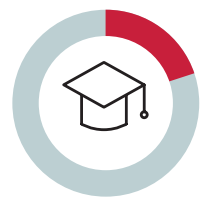
Companionship/friendship, learning and mental and emotional wellbeing are the most important benefits identified by all respondents.



33%
Companionship or friendship



21%
Learning



20%
Mental and emotional wellbeing

According to the younger respondents, **companionship/friendship is the most valuable thing younger people could offer an older person (62%). This is followed by mental and emotional wellbeing (52%).**

The desire for companionship or friendship between generations is striking. According to the survey, over 60% of respondents across all age groups reported having a friend of a different generation to them. In addition, 35% said that they would be open to being friends with people of a different generation. Galway and Waterford are leading the ranking with 64% respondents who reported having a friend from a different generation to them, followed by Dublin (61%), Limerick (57%), and Cork (56%).



60% have a friend of a different generation to them

35% are open to being friends with people of a different generation

“Older persons are too often relegated to the margins of society, their contributions ignored and their potential underestimated. At Age Action, we know that fostering intergenerational contact is crucial to older persons being welcome and respected in our shared communities. We all have parts to play in this process, including to celebrate and learn from the strong bonds that already exist across generations.”

Mary Murphy, Research Officer, Age Action

“Through intergenerational friendship, older adults seek and maintain connectedness and belonging. They continue ‘being themselves’, enjoying pursuits and interests both existing and new, with people who share their interests or whose company they enjoy, regardless of chronological age.”

Dr Catherine Elliott O’Dare, School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

Younger people in Ireland feel more strongly than any other country surveyed about the need for mentoring. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of the respondents say that mentoring or educational schemes provided by national or local government would help them to do more with the older generation. This is the highest rate across the 6 countries surveyed.

The value of mentoring and knowledge sharing

Younger respondents seem to value mentoring skills from the older generation. **Listening and giving advice (62%) is what younger generation respondents consider to be the most valuable skill older people can offer to younger people.** Professional mentoring (19%) and educational support (16%) also appeared in the ranking. Female 18–40-year-olds (68%) were more likely to cite listening and giving advice as the most valuable offering of their older counterparts than male respondents (47%).



62%
Listening and giving advice



19%
Professional mentoring



16%
Educational support

“Younger and older people seek and value intergenerational exchanges of experiences and support. Employers, policy makers and community groups need to recognize the importance of intergenerational mentoring and provide opportunities and platforms to cultivate these exchanges between adults of all ages.”

Dr Catherine Elliott O’Dare, School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

The digital gap

The digital generation gap refers to the assumed gap between the younger and the older generations due to young people's ability to adapt to new technologies more successfully than older generations. The survey shows that learning new technology and digital media skills is the key thing older respondents would most want to learn from younger people. **Fifty-four percent (54%) of the older generation in Ireland state they would most like to learn new technology and digital media skills from younger people.** This is again the highest rate across all countries surveyed, the European average being 40%. New technology and digital media came far above new ways of working (19%), current trends (12%) and environmental awareness (11%).

“The teaching of digital skills to older generations is an area that can be led by younger people to bring age-groups together. Mentoring and knowledge sharing does not always have to be top-down, from old to young. Younger people also have a wealth of knowledge and can help older populations utilise the benefits technology can bring us.”

Dr Adrienne McCann,
Research Manager,
Innovation Value Institute,
Maynooth University/Age Friendly
Ireland, Ireland

Experts' insights

The older generation undervalue their own contribution – that could be a form of internalised ageism that needs to be addressed. Perhaps as a result of negative media perceptions, the older generation may feel they are not capable of contributing to society in areas in which they are well equipped to do so. More needs to be done to empower older people to continue to provide this significant contribution.

We should look beyond tangible benefits and value the friendship itself. We often talk in terms of 'give' and 'take' when it comes to intergenerational solidarity, but one of the most encouraging results from this survey was a willingness to engage in relations purely for one's own enjoyment. Intergenerational friendships could play a huge role in social inclusion, that then filters down into social cohesion. Encouraging these friendships could change the face of society and promote intergenerational solidarity.

There are expectations from both age groups towards institutions, governments and businesses to develop mentoring programmes. Older people have expertise and stories that should be shared and learned from. It could be that older generations are simply not being given enough opportunities to share their knowledge, and more needs to be done to create platforms for this to occur (for example, inviting older generations to schools to talk about historic periods they lived through).

Older people have practical skills to offer that may have been lost over the years. Even if some skills are not as widely used as they used to be, it does not mean they do not have merit. In fact, as we move towards a more sustainable future, practical skills such as repairing clothes that are more typically possessed by the older generation could become increasingly useful. It is important to create spaces to share these skills. ■

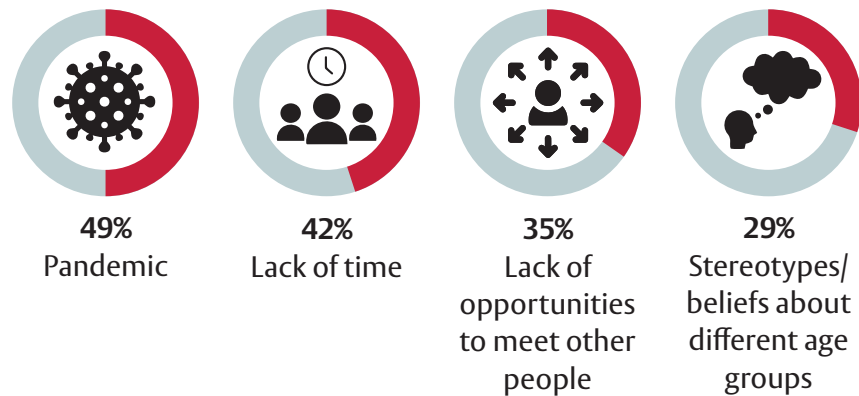
Chapter 3: Recovering from the pandemic – time for action

The pandemic has impacted all generations and especially the older generation, who had to isolate for a long period of time. As a result, intergenerational interactions were negatively impacted – a sentiment expressed in the results of this survey. Fewer opportunities to connect with family and friends undoubtedly contributed to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Yet, the desire for unifying generations and the value young and older people have for each other has been firmly established through this survey – suggesting that now is the time to make real and lasting societal changes to improve solidarity between generations.

When asking respondents what the barriers were preventing further interactions between generations, the pandemic appeared to be the main one.



Main barriers according to all respondents were:



Female respondents (53%) were 12% more likely to believe the pandemic was the greatest barrier than men (41%).

In addition, 49% of respondents believe younger and older people are further apart since the COVID-19 pandemic – the highest response rate amongst surveyed European countries.

Forty-three percent (43%) of respondents admit that they spend less time with people of a different generation who are outside of their household since the pandemic.

“New efforts now need to be made to empower and encourage intergenerational interaction outside the family domain across society; in the workplace, and in our communities. Research indicates that older and younger people seek knowledge exchanges, share a plethora of interests, and enjoy each other’s company – the will is there, we (individuals, organisations, society) simply need to work harder together to find the way.”

Dr Catherine Elliott O’Dare, School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

The need to create opportunities

The survey reveals that some practical solutions could be implemented to create more opportunities for generations to meet and, therefore, help society recover from the pandemic.

The six things that younger generation respondents said would most help them to do more for/with older generations are:

1. More physical spaces to meet people from older generations 45%
2. Cultural or historical knowledge provided by older people through clubs or societies 35%
3. Better presence of older generations on social media or use of messaging platforms or the Internet 30%
4. Mentoring or educational schemes provided by national or local government 29%
5. Intergenerational housing (different ages living in shared housing developments or communities) 24%
6. Business advice or mentoring schemes offered by businesses 14%

“All age groups, but especially older generations, need to be involved in helping to co- create solutions so that they are relevant and long-lasting. It’s important to identify common interests that both age groups are passionate about.”

Dr Adrienne McCann, Research Manager,
Innovation Value Institute, Maynooth University/Age Friendly Ireland, Ireland

Experts’ insights

There are opportunities to apply the skills and knowledge of older generations to help address contemporary issues. As we go through difficult periods, it is important to consider the experience of older generations in battling tough times. For instance, the experience of living through tough economic periods or reducing waste could be shared as examples of living sustainably and helping to address problems, such as climate change.

The impact of COVID-19 on intergenerational interactions demonstrates the importance of interacting in the digital world. With extended periods of isolation between families and friends, the only way to connect with one another was through the digital realm. While there has been evidence to suggest that digital skills amongst older generations did improve during this period, the survey suggests that further progress can be made. In many aspects of modern life, it is impossible to interact without digital access – and it is important older generations do not feel cut off.

Intergenerational housing could provide solutions. Arguably, one of the reasons intergenerational divides were exacerbated during the pandemic is that, increasingly, different generations in Ireland do not live together. Intergenerational housing has the potential to solve problems – not only could it promote solidarity, but also combat the rising cost of living and housing problems in major cities. ■

“We particularly endorse all the findings of this report that highlight the value and contribution of older people in their families and communities as parents, grandparents, friends, neighbours, volunteers and role models for their generation. We recognise the positive relationship that many of the young people expressed regarding the older people in their lives and families, and the potential this offers for intergenerational mentoring – both formal and informal.”

Áine Brady, CEO of Third Age

Case study



Joan Fitzgerald, 67
Westport, Co. Mayo

Retired passionate scientist and pharma industry leader, Joan, just completed in 2022 a PhD on the *genetics of cognitive resilience in ageing* at the National University of Ireland, Galway, to help bring new knowledge to the community.

Alongside her studies - mainly conducted remotely because of COVID-19 - she spent time supervising younger students, coaching them for job interviews and passing on her knowledge.

“What I loved the most were social interactions. I felt, hopefully, I was able to inspire younger people and give them an example of what you

can do in later life. They were often talking to me about the problem they were facing, and I could give them advice and share my experience,” she commented.

Since retirement, Joan has been involved in running several organisations. She is the chairman of the *Western Care’s Rights Review Committee* which aims to empower people with a wide range of learning and associated disabilities in Co. Mayo to live full and satisfied lives as equal citizens. Recently cured from cancer, she is also a board member at *Cancer Care West*, where she believes that *“giving back and improving lives provide a huge satisfaction”*.

Finally, Joan is part of the psychology registration board at Coru, a multi-profession health regulator body promoting high standards of professional conduct, education, training, and competence.

In the recent past Joan has provided computer training to older people to help overcome isolation.

“I benefited from digital training myself, especially to manage statistics around my research. When training older people on computer use, I realized the main issue was often the use of the mouse. Once they acquire this ability, it becomes much easier,” she said.

When she is not busy volunteering, Joan, who is a mum of three and married to Stephen for 40 years, also looks after her three grand children, aged 2, 4 and 6.

“The legacy we leave is really our example. Now, I can explore things through my own experience. Older people have a huge amount of experience. At my age, you are not concerned about winning in a situation, you are concerned about the best outcomes, finding the best solution. I had a great life and want to give back.” ■

Case study



Stephen Hosty, 72
Galway

Born and bred in Galway, volunteering in the community has always been a part of Stephen's life, even long before his retirement in 2015. With two rugby playing sons, he spent as much leisure time as he could, mentoring and managing youth teams at the local Rugby Club and helping to run the organisation. He advanced to provincial and National Committees of the IRFU.

Stephen spent 4 years as a Chairman of the Board of Management at the National School where he managed a project to refurbish the school facilities.

Since retiring, Stephen has volunteered for a variety of organisations. He is a member of the Residents' Association Committee, Secretary of the Cemetery Committee, Chairman of the local Church Finance Committee and Chief Steward of Connacht Rugby since 2014, managing around 50 Steward Volunteers.

"I try to get up quite early in the morning and always have something on my agenda to keep me occupied for the day" says Stephen. "I feel younger than I am, and I am happy where I am."

Stephen is also heavily involved with the Croí Heart & Stroke Charity where he provides support for Fundraising events in particular – taking on many varied roles in logistics and recruiting Volunteers for outdoor events, including marshalling during outdoor charity events.

As a father of two boys and grandfather of seven kids, family is very important to him and his wife Maura, to whom he has been married for almost 50 years. Together they are always ready to help those they love.

"During COVID-19, one of my sons faced difficulties due to the pandemic on the renovation of his house in Dublin. So, he and his wife and five children moved back to our house and spent 25 months with us". It proved to be a rewarding exercise when travelling to visit family was so restricted. ■

Conclusions

The *Unifying Generations Survey* results are in stark contrast to the prevailing narrative of intergenerational conflict and an older generation posing a challenge to society. Instead, the survey gives a clear picture of the pivotal social and economic contribution brought by older people, a contribution that is greatly valued by the younger generation. Far from there being conflict between generations, there is compelling evidence of intergenerational cohesion and a wish for greater interactions in the future.

The results also point to three initial actions that can be taken to enable greater intergenerational interactions and empower older people, and especially the 3rd generation, to play a stronger role as a unifier.

They are:

- 1. Transform perceptions** – The survey results provide one important tool for a multi-stakeholder campaign which communicates a more realistic narrative of the positive, unifying role of older people and the overwhelming desire for greater intergenerational solidarity.
- 2. Mentoring and knowledge sharing** – The younger generation have made clear their desire to learn from the 3rd generation via mentoring and knowledge sharing. Business, academics, senior organisations and policy makers should work together to create more opportunities for older people to mentor and pass on their knowledge, experience and skills to younger people through educational initiatives.
- 3. Digital Interaction** – However, the wish for learning is not one way. The older generation recognise that younger people can support them in becoming better-connected digitally. The pandemic confinement demonstrated that generations can be more isolated from each other if they cannot connect via social or digital channels. The introduction of schemes which allow older people to build their digital skills and connectivity will reduce their isolation and ensure ever greater intergenerational cohesion.

If we can all play a role in correcting perceptions and enabling greater interactions between generations, we can help to create a more cohesive society for people of all ages. ■

Contacts

For more information about *Unifying Generations* and access to the full survey results:

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