

# Unifying Generations:

Building the Pathway to  
Intergenerational Solidarity



Edwards



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## 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. ■

## Foreword

Jean-Luc Lemercier  
Corporate Vice President EMEA,  
Canada & Latin America  
Edwards Lifesciences



The European population is ageing. By 2040, 155 million people are expected to be over-65.<sup>1</sup> This demographic change is often referred to as a challenge, but we believe that this description ignores the considerable benefits that society can gain from an experienced, active and engaged 3<sup>rd</sup> generation. Above all, this group can play a pivotal role in building greater intergenerational cohesion. This is not just our view; it is what the 12,850 respondents to our first ever *Unifying Generations Survey* indicate.

In this report, based on this survey across six European countries (France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Spain, and the UK), we learnt that the population aged above 65 is active as carers, volunteers, and wise mentors. They provide essential financial support and are at the heart of their families and societies. Moreover, the younger generations value greatly the contribution that senior people make in their lives, and they appreciate their friendship and support. Unsurprisingly, we learnt that the COVID-19

pandemic negatively affected the interactions between the generations, and the impact was felt even more heavily by the younger generations.

As we build back after the pandemic, it is time to stop talking about generational conflict and value the benefits that come from intergenerational solidarity. It seems clear that our senior population can be the catalyst for unifying our society through unifying our generations.

So, why is this subject important to Edwards Lifesciences?

Our company was founded on a classic example of intergenerational solidarity. A retired engineer, Lowell Edwards, partnered with a young surgeon, Albert Starr, to pioneer the first successful heart valve replacement. In the intervening 62 years, our focus has been on developing innovative therapies for structural heart disease, which is largely a condition of senior people. We want these patients to recover fully and rapidly so that they can play that essential role in society. In other words, this

initiative springs from our commitment to the patients we serve and illustrates our aspiration to create a community unified in its mission to improve quality of life around the world.

With this report, we aim to celebrate the critical role the older generation plays in our society – whether at home, in the workplace, or in the wider community. Their contribution remains underestimated while the younger generation strongly value their skills and support. I would like to thank the advisory committee, whose wise counsel has helped us to shape the survey and the resulting report that you read today.

The report is a first step of what we call our *Unifying Generations Initiative*. It creates the foundation for future actions to enhance intergenerational solidarity, underlines the mutual respect and value of younger and older generations, and demonstrates the start of a path towards an age-friendly society. ■

## Introducing Unifying Generations

Demographic changes and medical advances mean that, for the first time, four generations share a longer life span together. This demographic evolution is often perceived as a burden while in fact, the seniors, and especially the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation, play a central role as the unifier of the community and provide 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 for more intergenerational interactions. The benefits brought by intergenerational 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 12,850 citizens across 6 European countries (France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Spain, and the UK) this report provides insights into the role of the senior population 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 3<sup>rd</sup> generation in order to drive greater appreciation for their role in society across Europe.
- Identify ways in which the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 the senior population

*The role of the senior population within the family, the community and wider society and the level of their contribution. How their contribution is valued by the younger generation. The depth and wealth of the knowledge and skills of the senior population.*

### 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.*

## 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 4<sup>th</sup> April 2022 and 14<sup>th</sup> April 2022 in six European countries: France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Ireland, and the UK. A total of 12,850 respondents were surveyed aged

18-40 and 65+, equally weighted by age and gender. 6,425 people surveyed were between the ages of 18 and 40, with a further 6,425 people over the age of 65. 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 was comprised of 20 questions, including 14 questions with open ended response options. ■

## Unifying Generations Survey – Advisory Team

Edwards Lifesciences worked closely with the following team of experts in the creation and development of this report.

**Anna Wanka, PhD,**  
Deputy Professor  
Goethe University, Germany



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Trinity College Dublin, Ireland



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## Chapter 1: The true value of the senior population

Society often frames the ageing population, which the World Health Organisation (WHO) predicts will rise to 155 million by 2040, as an issue rather than an opportunity.<sup>1</sup> However, we believe that a healthy, active and engaged senior 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 marvellous, real opportunities in an ageing population and this can be perceived as a demographic bounty rather than a challenge”.*

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

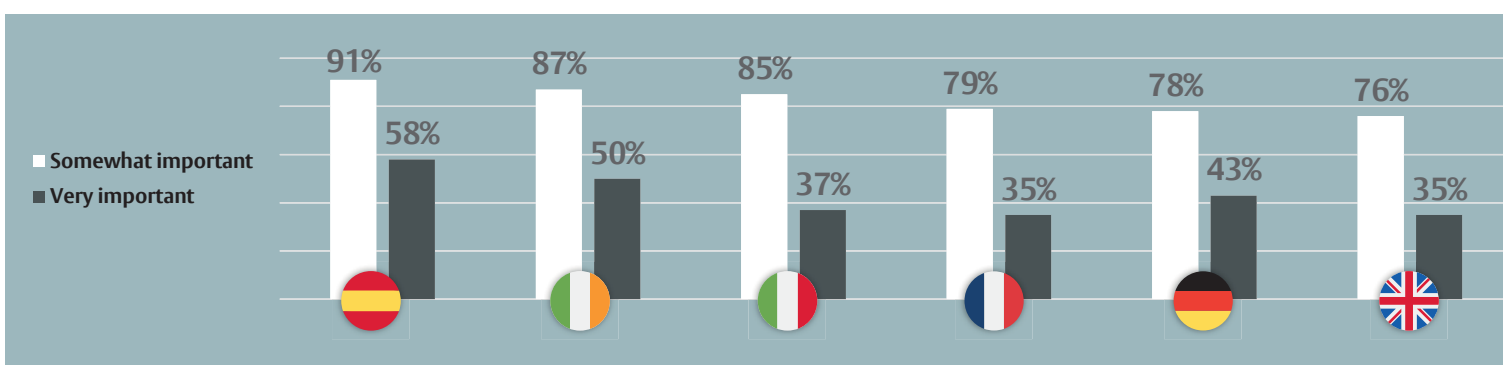


In contrast to existing perceptions that the older generation are a burden to society, this survey allows a re-evaluation of the role they play and a better measurement of their positive impact on younger generations.

Indeed, according to the survey, **more than 4 in 5 (83%) of younger generation respondents say the support provided by the older generation in their daily life is very important or somewhat important.** Among them, 2 in 5 state the support provided is very important (44%).

**Overall, how important is the support provided by the older generation in your day-to-day life?**

**Country breakdown**



*“We were very struck by the positive responses. We did not assume younger respondents would have such positive attitudes and also to have already fostered these links with senior members of society”.*

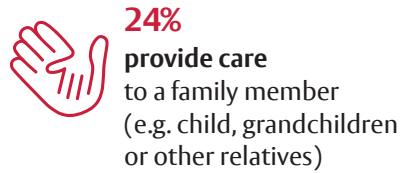
Alissa Dörr, Junior Consulting Sciences Po, France

*“Both children and older adults are often framed as frail, care-dependent, and less productive members of society. In gerontology, we call this the deficient images of ageing. This study shows that this is not at all the case”.*

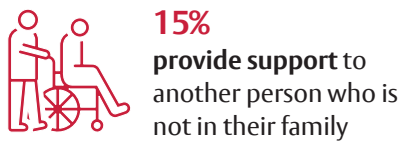
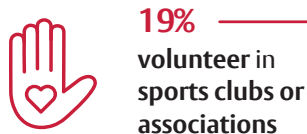
Anna Wanka, Goethe University, Germany

### Providing social support

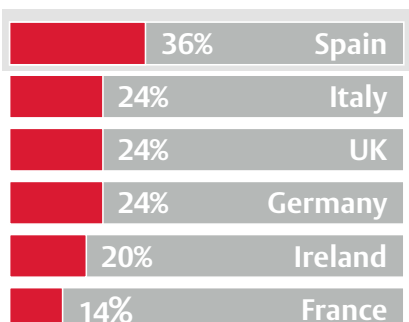
The survey results highlighted the significant social contributions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation in terms of caring for others, volunteering and providing support inside and outside of the family.



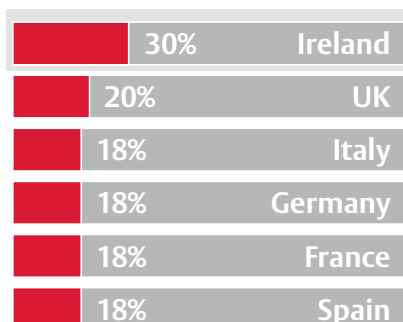
Caring for the family, such as looking after grandchildren or cooking, is valued by the younger respondents. Thirty-three percent (33%) say it is one of the most important or valuable things older people offer to younger people.



Country most likely to provide care to a family member



Country most likely to volunteer in local community

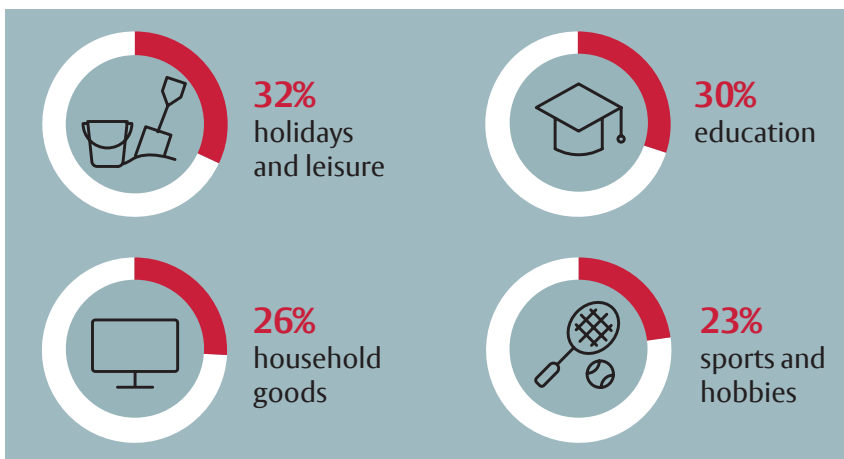


**Providing financial support**

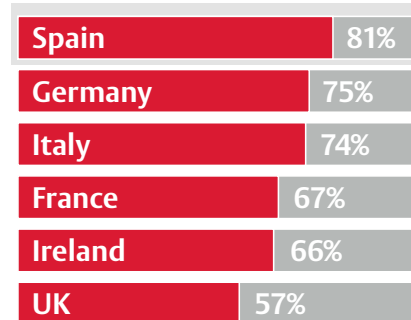
The financial contribution made by over-65s was found to be even more significant. **Seven out of ten provide financial support to**

**the younger generations within their family.**

Some of these contributions included financial support for:



A breakdown of financial support per country:



**Experts' insights**

**The 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 in our society, both socially and economically. Once retired, senior 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 particularly provide advice and coaching.

**The financial contribution brought by the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

**There is clearly a need to change the way we perceive the older generation.**

Healthcare systems can help to maintain healthy and active senior people so that they can fulfill 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, while the future growth in the senior population has been described as a “demographic challenge”. However, this narrative does not reflect the positive contribution of the senior population and can lead to a false impression which 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.



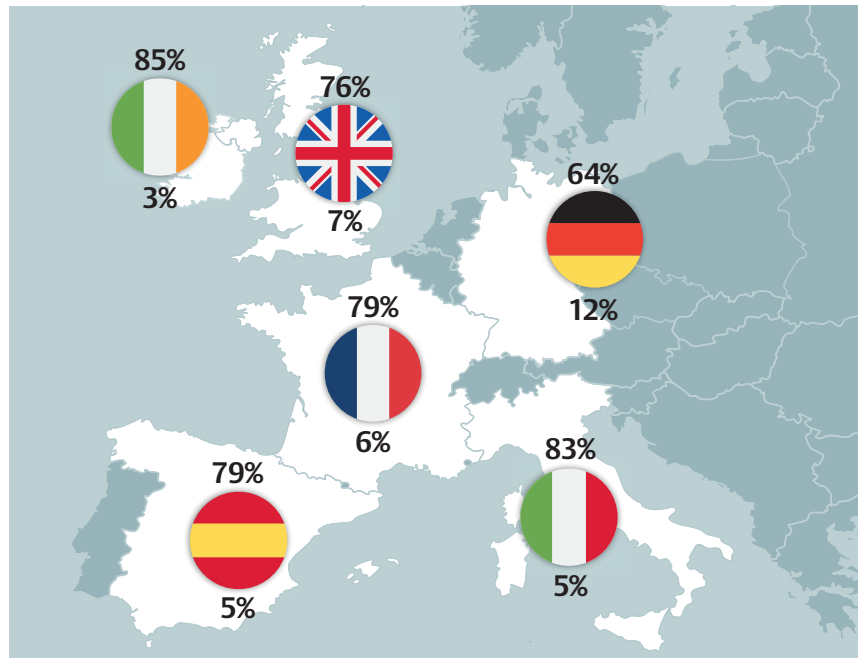
Respondents in Ireland (85%) are the most likely to think closer relations between different

generations is a good thing, closely followed by Italy (83%).

*“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

### Country breakdown (Good / Bad)



### Willingness to build more intergenerational interactions

Respondents amongst both the younger and older generation were **11 times more likely to think closer relations between different generations are a good thing (77%) versus a bad thing (7%)**. While there were a few disparities in results amongst different countries, the consensus is clearly in favour of greater intergenerational solidarity.

*“The study suggests that intergenerational interactions are both present in society and valued by all age groups. It’s important that policies and strategies are developed that help maintain and strengthen these relations going forward.”*

Prof. George Leeson, University of Oxford, UK

Regardless of country or generation, family is the area respondents think would benefit most from better intergenerational interactions (51%). This was followed by community (36%) and culture (34%).

**The power of intergenerational friendship**

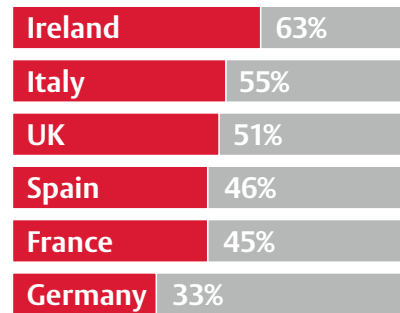
A number of benefits from intergenerational interactions were highlighted by survey respondents, which suggest a broad spectrum of opinions on the subject, undoubtedly influenced by personal circumstances. **Companionship/friendship, learning, mental and emotional wellbeing are the most important benefits identified by all respondents.** These three factors remain in the top three for both generations, but the younger respondents feel even stronger about it.

The desire for companionship and friendship between generations is striking. According to the survey, **92% of people were open to having a friend from a different generation. Indeed, over half (57%) of respondents have a friend that is a different generation to them, while a further 35% are open to being friends with people of a different generation.**

*"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".*

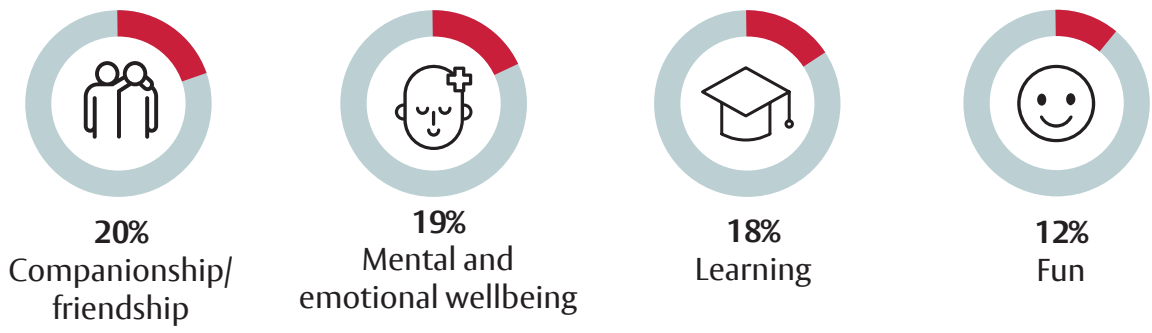
Dr Catherine Elliott O'Dare, School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

Companionship/friendship is the most valuable/important thing younger people could offer an older person:



*"We talk a lot about the value provided by senior populations, in terms of mentoring or financial support, but there's also companionship and an enjoyment value. I don't see intergenerational relationships as some kind of give and take, but also as a source of fun and enjoyment".*

Guillaume Fowler, Junior Consulting Sciences Po, France



**The value of mentoring and sharing knowledge**

Younger respondents seem to value mentoring skills from the older generation. **Listening and giving advice (56%) is the thing younger generation respondents consider to be the most important or valuable thing older people can offer to younger people.** This is followed by sharing historical or cultural knowledge, sharing work experience and providing educational support such as assistance with homework. Older people seem to underestimate the value they can bring through mentoring, **with only 12% believing that it would be valuable to younger**

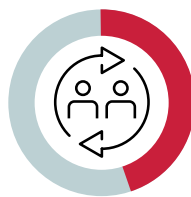
**people. In reality, 23% of younger respondents believe that mentoring or educational schemes provided by national or local government would help them to do more with older generations.** This is followed by business advice or mentoring schemes offered by businesses (14%).

According to the older generation, mentoring or educational schemes provided by national or local government (19%) and opportunities offered by clubs or societies to provide cultural or historical knowledge (19%) are among the top things that would help them to do more for/with younger generations.

According to younger respondents, what is the most important or valuable thing older people can offer to younger people?



**56%**  
Listen and give advice



**43%**  
Share historical or cultural knowledge



**28%**  
Share work experience



**19%**  
Educational support (e.g.: homework, after class support)

**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.

Across the countries, 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.

**Forty percent (40%) of the older generation state they would most like to learn new technology and digital media skills from younger people.** This came far above environmental awareness (17%), current trends (16%) and new ways of working (12%).

Given that older generation respondents are most likely to want to learn about new technology and digital media from the younger generation (40%), it's interesting to point out that younger generation respondents in Spain (48%), Ireland (44%) and Italy (43%) are more likely to be currently sharing knowledge of digital/modern technology than those in Germany (38%), France (38%) or the UK (31%).

*“Sharing of digital skills and knowledge is an area where younger people can play a leading role and help create a stronger sense of connection with people older than them.”*

Alissa Dörr, Junior Consulting Sciences Po, France

*“The Unifying Generations survey gives an accurate picture of the current situation of intergenerational solidarity in several European countries. The results of this survey show a strong desire for more intergenerational interaction from both younger and older generations. The survey also presents the great value of listening, mentoring and coaching; contributing to community well-being through volunteering; sharing knowledge of new technology and digital skills; and many other ways of cooperating in a society for all ages.*

*The survey data is a useful reference document that will encourage social organisations to promote intergenerational solidarity programmes at local, national and international levels in European countries.”*

Angel Yagüe Criado, CEOMA, Spain

### 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 the 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 groups towards institutions, governments and businesses to develop mentoring programmes.** The senior population 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. As above, it is important to create spaces to share these skills.

**There is significant scope for action within digital skills.** Using social media and digital devices has become second nature to younger generations, and acts as an important knowledge gap that can be filled by younger people. Increasing digital skills will not only allow older generations to create closer connections with different generations, but it will also make their voice heard. The development of training programmes can help the older generation learn to use technology. ■

## 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 affected – 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 senior populations 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 main barriers were preventing further interactions between generations, the pandemic appeared to be the main cause (38%).**

*“The realisation that COVID has had a big impact on intergenerational interactions reflects the importance of finding new ways to develop these relationships.”*

Guillaume Fowler, Junior Consulting Sciences Po, France

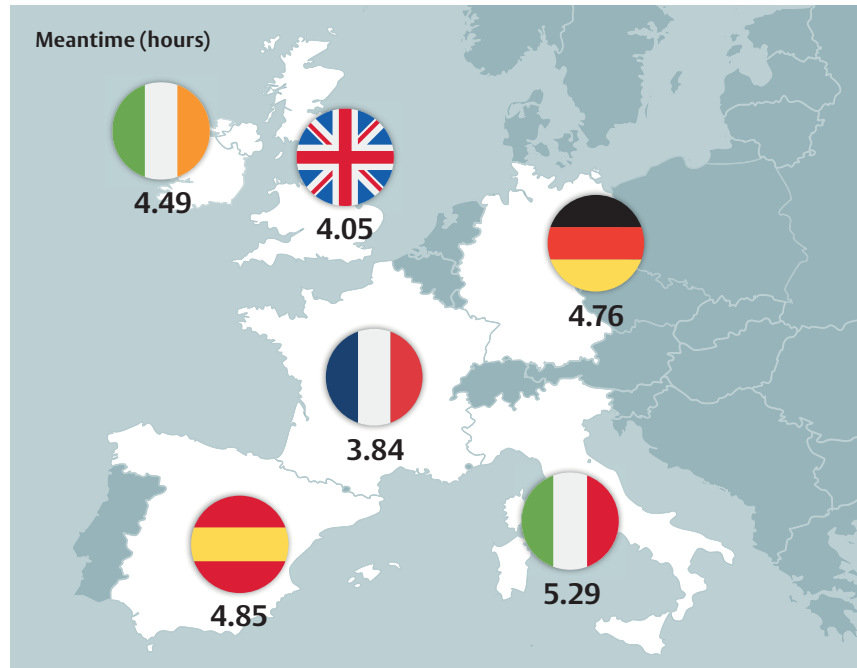
Main barriers preventing interactions between generations:



### Changing relations since the pandemic

On average, respondents are spending 4.5 hours per week with people of a different generation to them (who are not in their household or family).

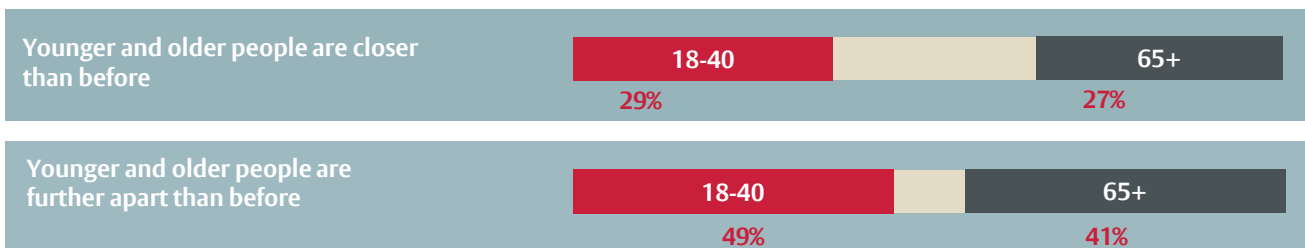
- Younger generation respondents report they are spending an average of 5 hours per week with people of a different generation to them, while the average for older generations is 4 hours.
- Respondents in Italy report spending an average of 5 hours a week with people of a different generation to them, the highest average amongst the countries.



**The pandemic seems to have had a negative impact on intergenerational interactions.** Across all countries surveyed, generations were found to have spent less time together since the pandemic – Indeed, **2 in 5 (40%) respondents say the amount of time they spend with people of a different generation to them has decreased since the pandemic.** There is little difference in percentage when comparing the older and younger generations, however, there is some contrast

between the countries. For example, over 2 in 5 respondents in Germany (45%) and Italy (46%) say they spend less time with different generations since the pandemic, whereas just 3 in 10 (30%) respondents in France say the same. This data may suggest that relations have changed since the pandemic.

Indeed, both age groups seem to agree that younger and older people are further apart since the COVID-19 pandemic:



### 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 five 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 **38%**
- 2. Cultural or historical knowledge provided by older people through clubs or societies **33%**
- 3. Better presence of older generations on social media or use of messaging platforms or the Internet **30%**
- 4. Intergenerational housing (different ages living in shared housing developments or communities) **25%**
- 5. Mentoring or educational schemes provided by national or local government **23%**
- 6. Business advice or mentoring schemes offered by businesses **14%**

Respondents in the UK (35%), Germany (38%) and Ireland (45%) are most likely to say more physical spaces to meet people from older generations would help them most to do more for/with older generations. However, respondents in France (32%), Italy (39%) and Spain (42%) are most likely to say cultural or historical knowledge provided by older people through clubs or societies would help them most.

*“All age groups, but especially older generations, need to be involved in helping to 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, Innovation Value Institute, Maynooth University/ Age Friendly Ireland, Ireland

*“The study shows that we clearly need a mainstreaming of the facilitation of intergenerational relations in many fields of policy, from landscape planning to digitalisation”.*

Anna Wanka, Goethe University, Germany

#### 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 relationships 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, generations 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. ■

## Conclusion

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 the senior population, 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 3<sup>rd</sup> generation, to play a stronger role as a unifier.

They are:

- 1. Transform perceptions** – This report should lead to a multi-stakeholder campaign which communicates a more realistic narrative of the positive, unifying role of senior 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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** – 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 senior people to build their digital skills and connectivity will reduce their isolation and ensure even 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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## References

<sup>i</sup> Eurostat (2017) People in the EU – population projections, [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=People\\_in\\_the\\_EU\\_-\\_population\\_projections](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=People_in_the_EU_-_population_projections)