

# JRC's work on loneliness interventions - findings to date

Roundtable with Experts 11.10.2022

*Minna Nurminen and Elizabeth Casabianca JRC I.1*

A stylized illustration of a city street in the rain. In the foreground, a woman in a blue hooded raincoat holds a large yellow umbrella. To her right, a man in a dark blue shirt and light blue pants also holds a yellow umbrella. In the background, several other figures are visible, some holding umbrellas, against a backdrop of blue and yellow buildings and a windmill. Rain is depicted as vertical lines falling across the scene.

# Agenda



- **Loneliness project at the JRC**
- **Research on Loneliness interventions**
  - **Mapping of loneliness interventions**
  - **Interviews with Experts**

# Loneliness project at the JRC



**25%** of Europeans feel lonely more than half of the time

# Policy context

- **Pilot project of the EP**
  - European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion & Joint Research Centre joined forces
- **Closely followed by Vice-President Šuica**

*“To effectively tackle the complex issues of loneliness and social isolation, we need first of all to fully understand them.”*

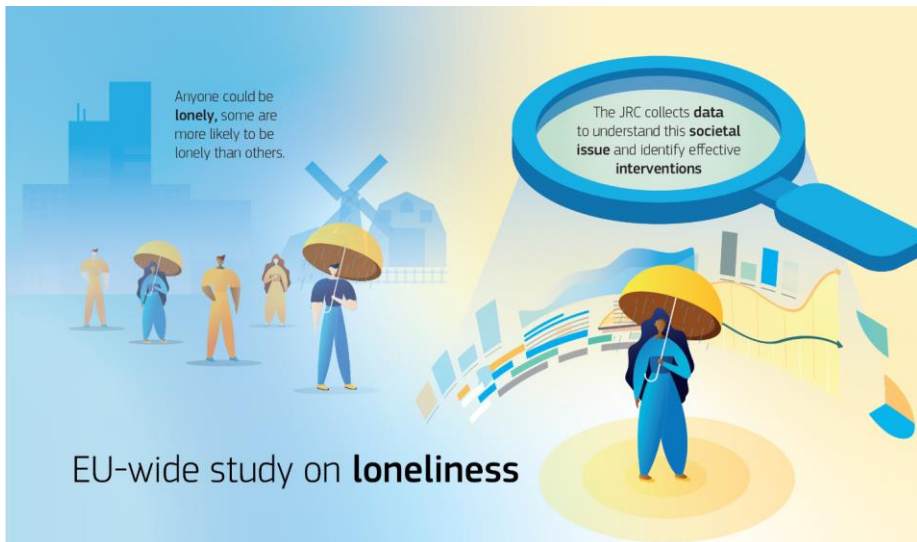
Dubravka Šuica  
European Commission Vice-President



# Main elements of the project



- ✓ First ever EU-wide data collection on loneliness – coming up soon!
- ✓ Web platform to monitor loneliness
- ✓ A number of literature reviews and Policy Briefs
- ✓ Awareness raising and fostering collaboration on the topic
- ✓ Research on loneliness interventions



# Main elements of the project



JRC TECHNICAL REPORT

Risk factors for loneliness

A literature review

Barjaková-Martina,  
Gemeo Andrea

2022



Loneliness among older adults – A European perspective<sup>1</sup>

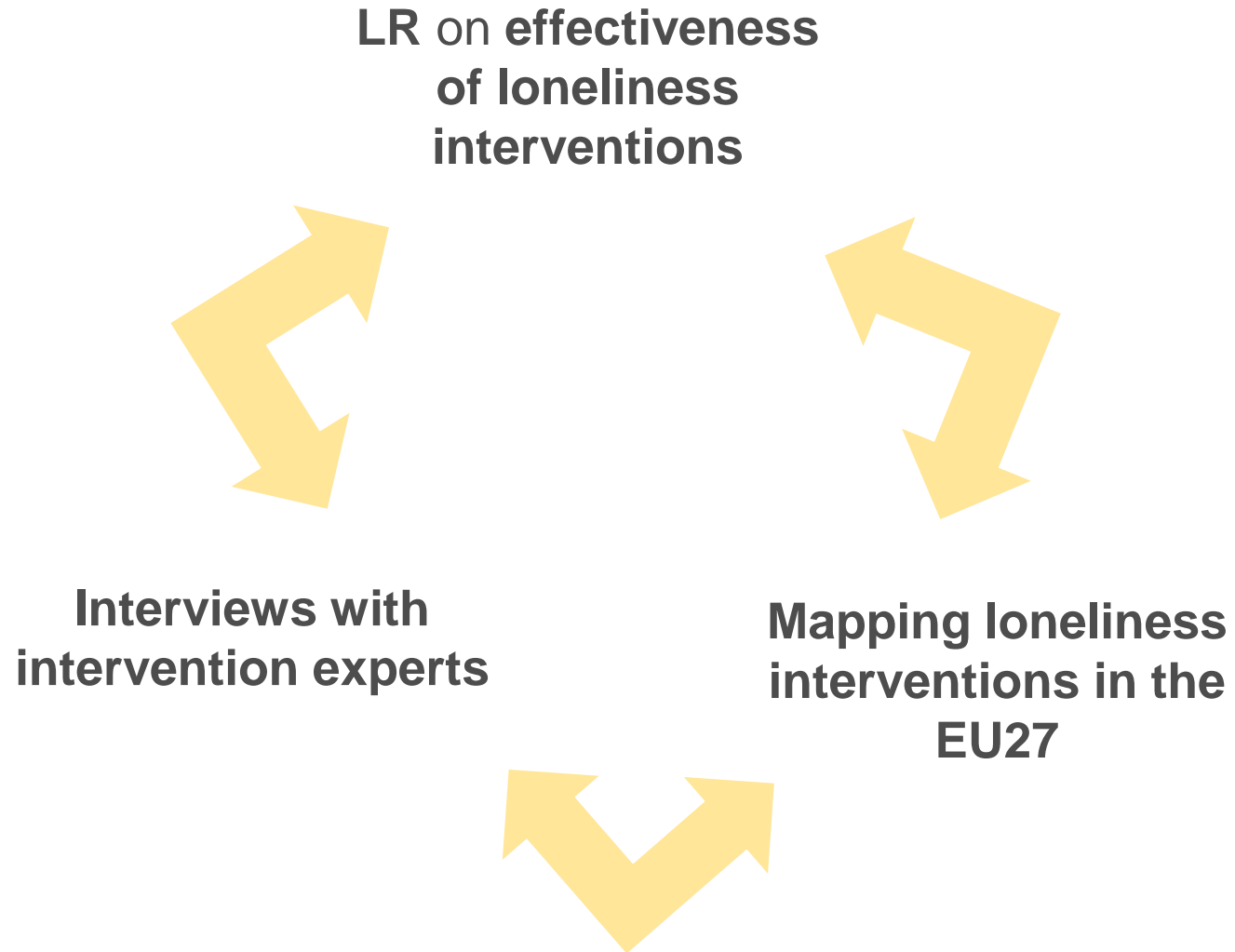
#### HIGHLIGHTS

- Older adults are particularly vulnerable to loneliness because they are more likely to experience life transitions and disruptive life events that expose them to a higher risk of feeling lonely.
- Loneliness in later life becomes particularly relevant in our ageing society and deserves the attention of policy makers. It not only affects individual well-being but it might trigger adverse consequences at societal level, including reduction in social cohesion and community trust and ultimately economic growth.
- The incidence of loneliness among Europeans aged 50+ is relatively higher in Southern and Eastern Europe (between 31 and 46%), than in Western and Northern European countries (between 20 and 30%). A similar pattern emerges when considering the incidence of severe loneliness across EU Member States.
- Social distancing and shutdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated feelings of loneliness among people, including older adults. The percentage of older Europeans who report feeling more lonely after the outbreak of COVID-19 than before ranges from 20 to 60%, depending on the country.
- Among the main risk factors for loneliness, a person's living arrangements and financial wealth play a prominent role. Moreover, in later stages of life, loneliness represents a major risk factor for physical and mental illness. However, there are important variations across countries that remain hidden when performing an analysis at EU level.
- Although many loneliness interventions targeted at older individuals already exist, a more collaborative effort is needed to identify best practices and develop better targeted interventions that also account for cross-country differences across EU.

- ✓ First ever EU-wide data collection on loneliness – coming up soon!
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- ✓ **Research on loneliness interventions**



# Research on loneliness interventions





# Mapping of loneliness interventions

# Why to map loneliness interventions?

- To know **what is out there** – how is loneliness being addressed on the ground across the EU?
- To **share practices** with policy makers, practitioners, experts as well as the general population.
- To understand **what works to tackle loneliness** and identify potential gaps with the ultimate goal of **informing and supporting policy making**



# Scope of the mapping

- Keyword search in the language of the country

**lonely, loneliness, social isolation, initiative, strategy, measure, programme, intervention**

- One-off COVID-19 initiatives not included
- Some interventions may not explicitly mention loneliness
- **Not exhaustive!**



Please note that the repository is not an exhaustive list of loneliness interventions in the EU-27.

To learn more about the Loneliness project see [Loneliness in the European Union](#).

**Country**

All

**Target group**

All

**Type of intervention**

All

**Type of organisation**

All

Country	Project title
Austria	Gemeinsam statt Einsam
Austria	Innovationsnetzwerk "Wege aus der Einsamkeit"
Austria	Kampagne "LauteStimmenGegenEinsamkeit"
Austria	Lass uns telefonieren!
Austria	Pilotprojekt gegen Einsamkeit im Alter
Austria	Plattform gegen Einsamkeit & soziale Isolation Social City Wien
Austria	Plaudertischer!
Austria	Projekt Plaudernetz
Austria	Rocking Community
Austria; Poland	Green Care Verein
Belgium	1toit2ages
Belgium	30plus30
Belgium	Babbelkot

Select a project on the left to read additional information

**321**

Projects

**290**

Organisations

[Download the dataset](#)

**Target group**

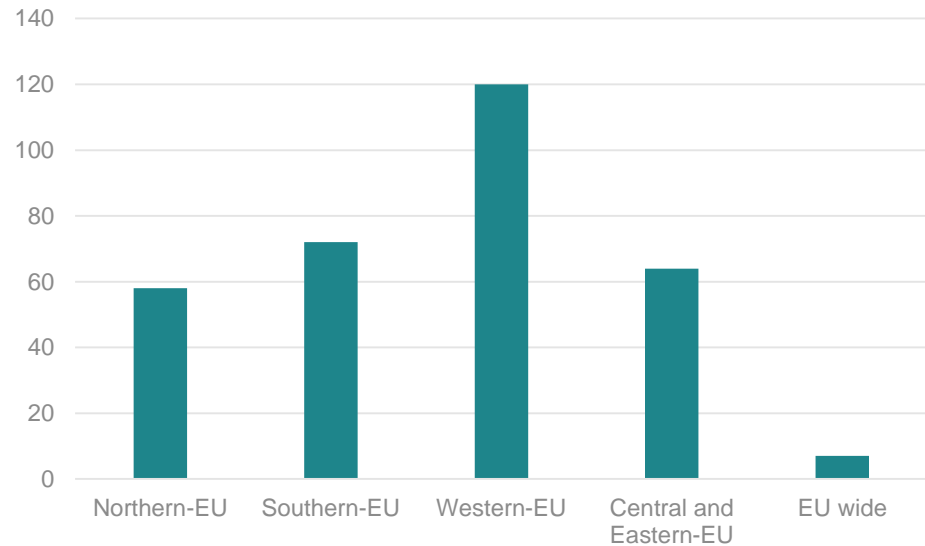
Target group	Percentage
Older adults	55%
All	32%
Young people	10%
Children	2%
Men	1%
Persons with disabilities	1%
Adults	1%
Women	1%
People at risk of exclusion	1%
Older adults with immigrant ...	1%

**Type of organisation**

Type of organisation	Percentage
NGO	35%
Local Gover...	18%
Joint initiative	12%
Association	10%
Private entity	8%
Foundation	5%
National Government	3%
Public entity	2%
Church/Religious organisation	2%

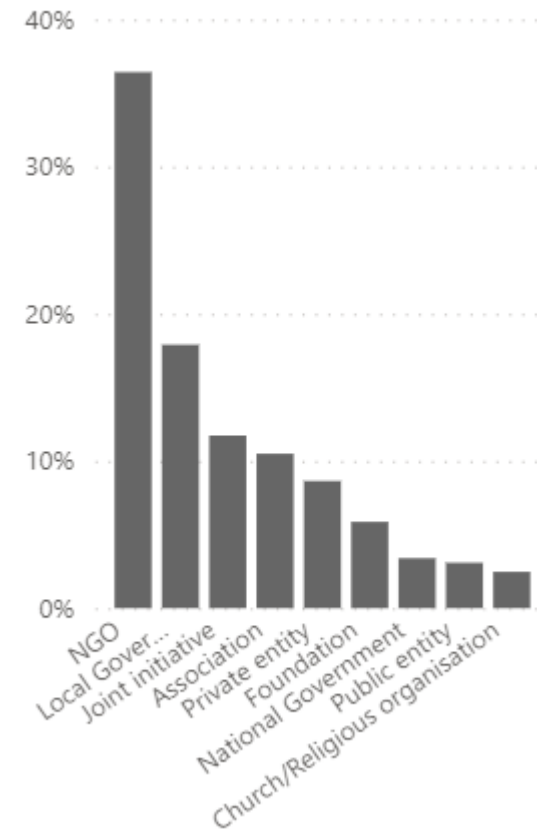
# Interventions across the EU are most implemented by NGOs

Number of intervention mapped

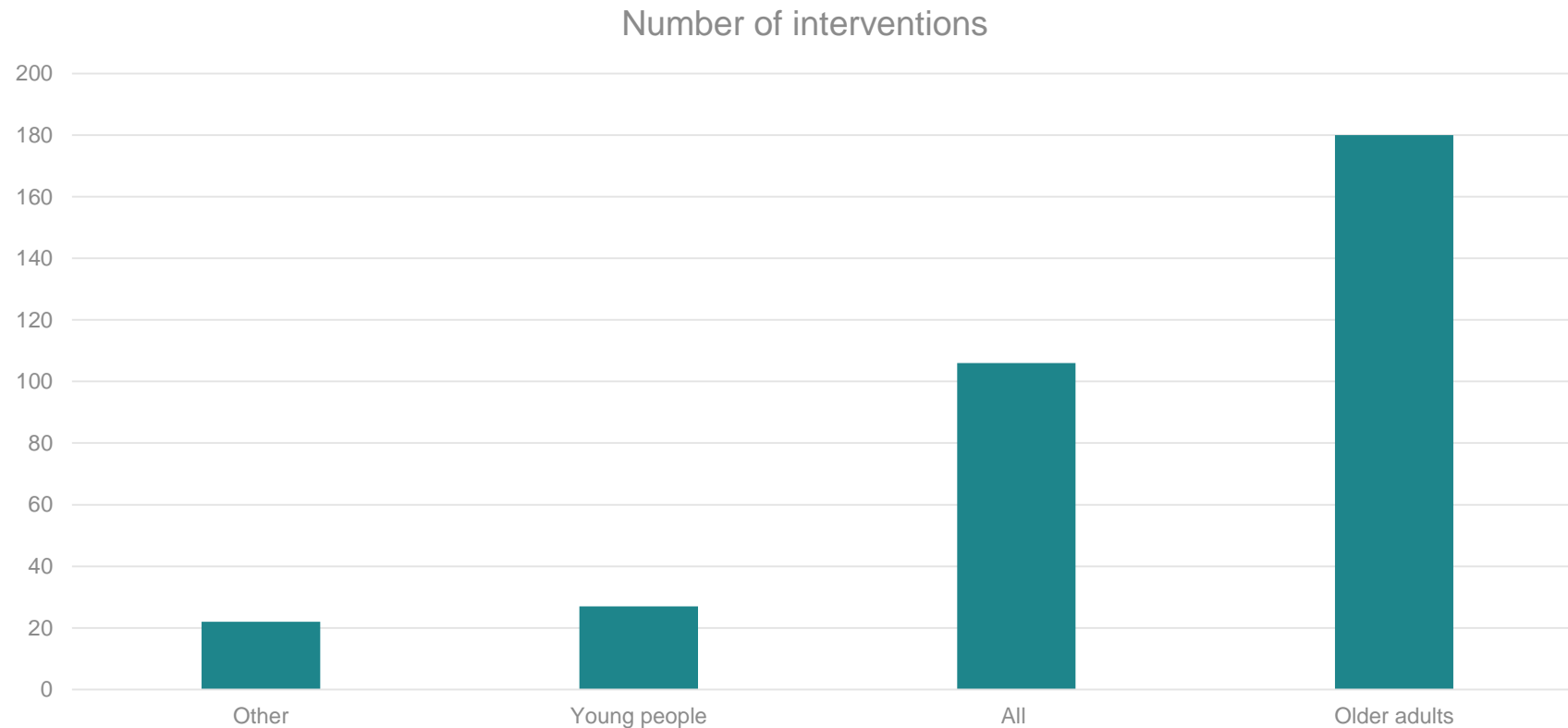


Total: 321 interventions

Type of organisation



# Most interventions targeted for older adults



# 'Connecting people' the most popular type of intervention



# Examples of interventions



- **Belgium:** Flemish Loneliness Plan
- **Denmark:** Boblberg
- **Poland:** Telefon Pogadania
- **Romania:** Niciodata Singur



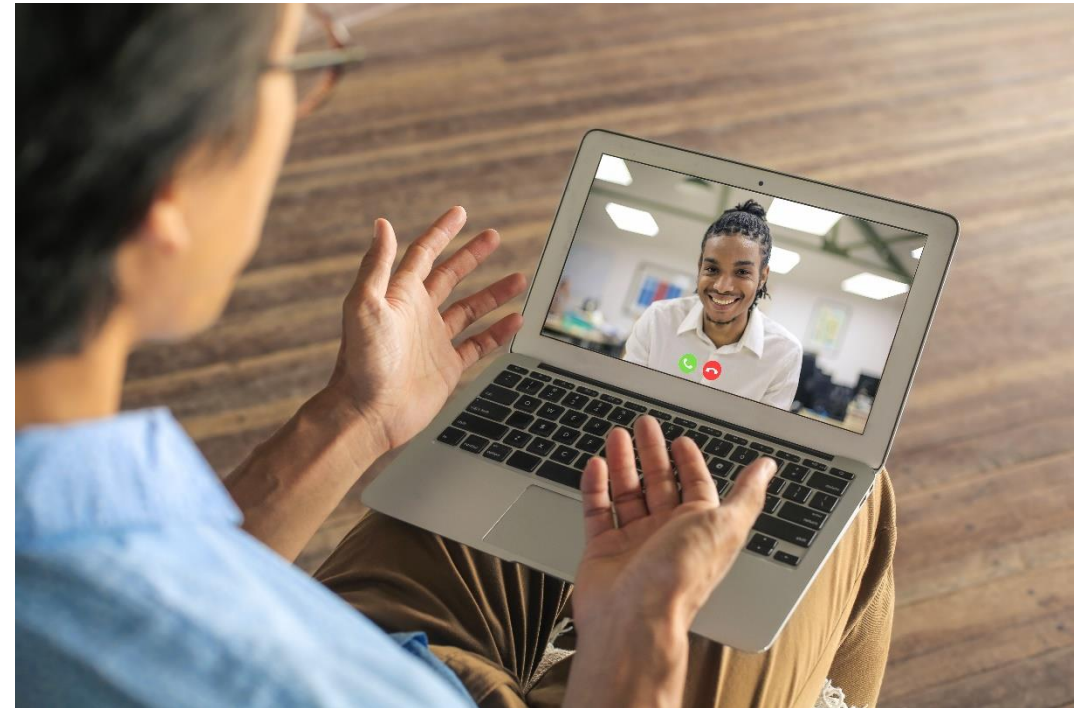
# What did we learn from the mapping?

- There is a **great range and diversity** of interventions across the EU
- Challenge of **identifying** loneliness interventions
- Loneliness interventions are **complex and multifaceted**
- The low number of interventions for **young people**
- **Evaluations** needed and they should be embedded in intervention policy

# Interviews with Experts

# Interviews with intervention experts

- **What?** 26 semi-structured online expert interviews
- **Who?** Loneliness Intervention experts from across the EU
- **Why?** Expand the literature review on effectiveness of loneliness interventions and learn from experts on the ground.



# Data collection instrument: Expert interviews

- **Experts in this context:**  
Practitioners across sectors (NGOs, public, associations...) who design and/or implement loneliness interventions on the ground at any level (national, regional, local)
- **Interview method:** semi-structured online interviews
- **Analysis method:** Thematic Analysis



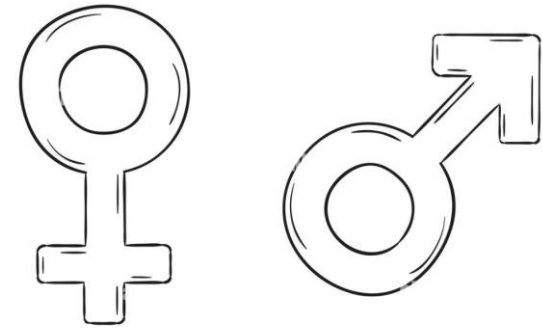
# What did we want to find out?

- ✓ Experts' view on **factors/characteristics that make interventions effective** in reducing loneliness
- ✓ **Challenges** that hamper the effectiveness of interventions in reducing loneliness and **how to overcome them**

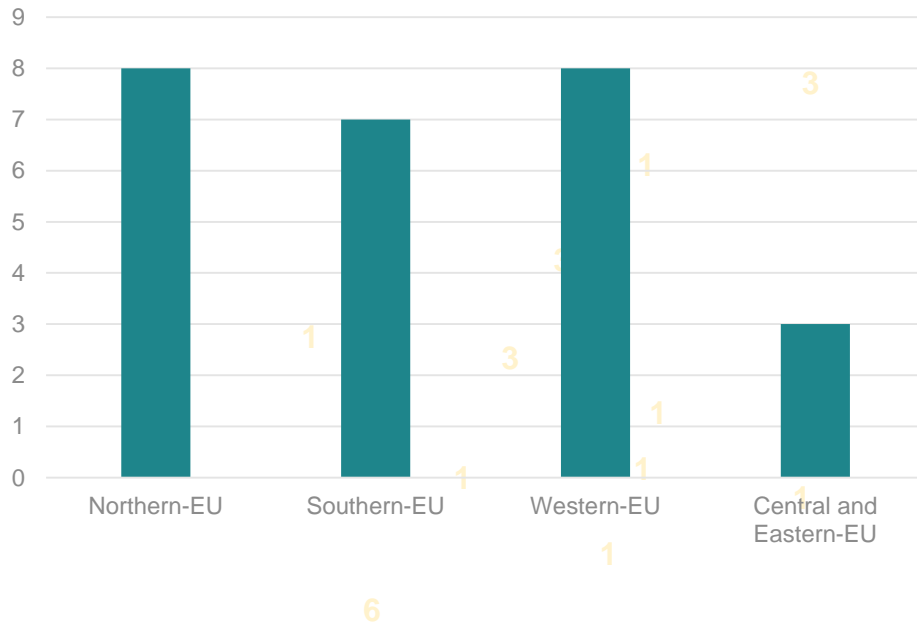
*Also...*

- ✓ Gather **direct insight** from experts on the intervention offered

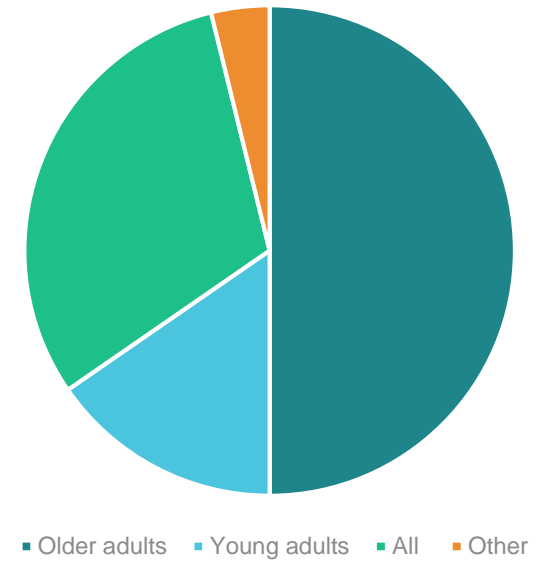
# Sample of experts



By macro-region



By intervention target group



# Preliminary results – factors/characteristics that make interventions effective

## CONNECTION

- Being heard/understood/supported
- Build a sense of belonging
- Knowing you are not alone in your loneliness

*“But I think one of the effective thing is to be sure that, in the intervention, the people have the feeling that they are important for someone, for example, for the volunteers, that they count for someone”*,  
Expert from France, older adults

## INCLUSIVENESS

- Stigma
- Communication
- Low-threshold services
- Equalising effect

*“So we always make it open we say, you can give us a call, then you can come, it’s all free. We never have entries. Never, never, because we have a lot of poor older people because loneliness belongs also to poorness”*,

Expert from Germany, older adults

# Preliminary results (cont.d)

## SELF-WORK

- Self-help
- Personal work
- Understanding your own loneliness
- Accepting the loneliness

*“[...] and like a lot of the work that our clients do, [...] a lot of it is independent. It’s something that happens in their day-to-day lives. It’s what they do in those everyday situations, in everyday encounters with people, it is not something that we’re giving to them”, Expert from Finland, 18+ population*

## TRUST

- Build trust
- Coordination at city level

## LONG-TERM

- Availability of time
- Long-term intervention

## TAILORING

- Meet individual needs
- Share common interests

## FACILITATORS' ROLE

- Training
- Motivation



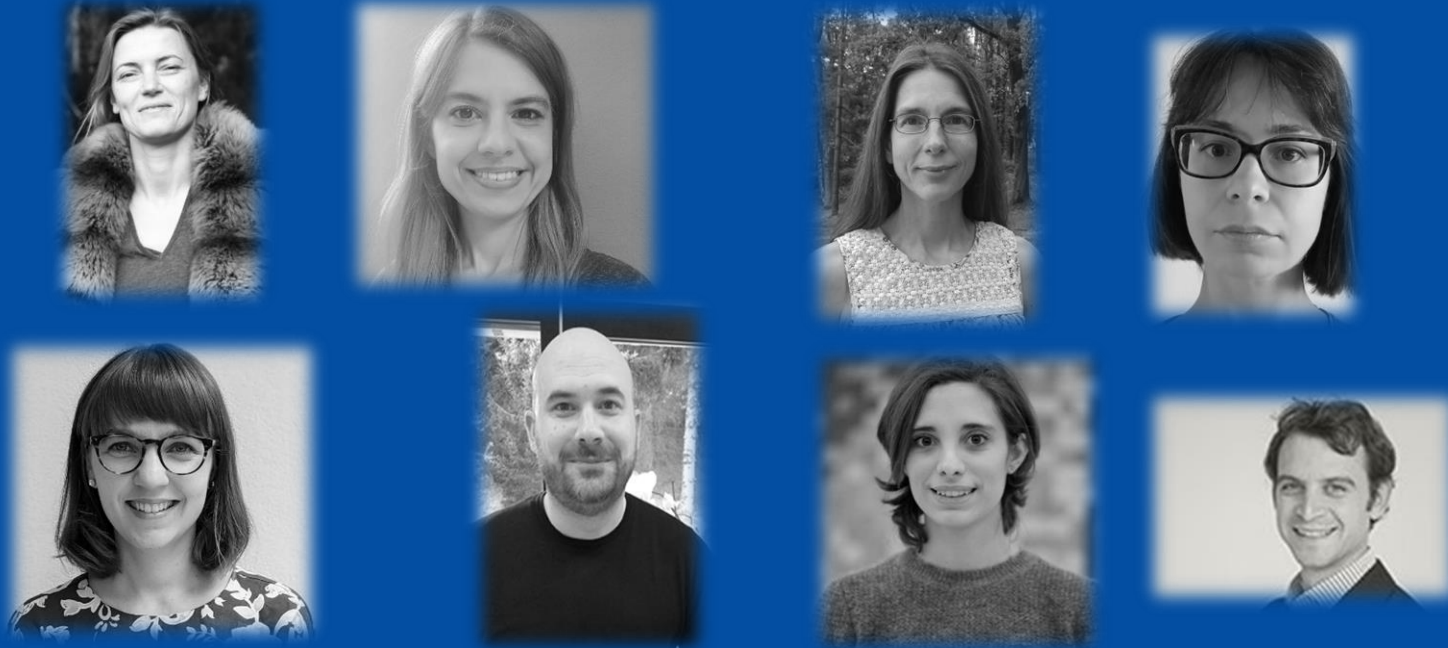
# What did we learn from the interviews

- Practitioners provided **invaluable information** that goes beyond scientific literature!
- Interviews captures **elements related to effectiveness** that would have been more challenging to identify in quantitative studies
- Differences between interventions targeting older vs young people
- Impact of **cultural and historical factors** - what works where?
- Importance of **coordination and collaboration**
- Different views/experiences on **evaluation methods**

# What's to come?

- Report, Articles and Policy Briefs
- Additional perspective from the EU-wide survey:
  - ✓ “Demand side” – what do lonely people *do* to reduce their feelings of loneliness?
  - ✓ Awareness of existing programs and initiatives
  - ✓ The role of different actors in reducing loneliness and social isolation in society





Contact us [JRC-COIN@.ec.europa.eu](mailto:JRC-COIN@ec.europa.eu)

*Want to know more about the project on « Loneliness in the European Union » ? Check out the [dedicated webpage](#).*

# Thank you



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