Breaking Isolation

Agen, France
35 000 inhabitants

Challenge

In 2022, Agen had begun tackling social isolation, focusing on residents over 80. However, this issue also affects other age groups. Research has shown that the factors contributing to isolation are diverse (poverty, addiction, long illness, domestic violence, etc.), but retirement also plays a role.

Local heroes

This would not have been possible without the valuable suport of citizens and a strong political commitment.



ULG members Testing Actions in the pedestrian street of Agen

Lessons learnt

Collaborate with your Human Resources Department to identify civil servants nearing retirement who fit the target profile and inform them of this opportunity.

Gather participants'areas of interest and connect them with relevant associations.

Maintain regular follow-up with all parties to ensure successful implementation.

Solution

"Active Retirement"

We know that retirement can be one of the causes of isolation.
To tackle this issue, the City of Agen decided to experiment the "Active Retirement" process.
This process allows municipal employees, who are around 6 months before their retirement, to get involved in a local association of their choice (cultural, sporting, social, etc.) during their working time (3 hours per week).
This innovative action prepares the civil servants for their departure.
It is also a good mean to support local associations who are more and more in lack of volunteers.



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Breaking Isolation

Bijelo Polje, Montenegro
38 600 inhabitants

Challenge

Social isolation is an increasing issue in Bijelo Polje, particularly affecting elderly people living alone, the Roma community, young people without stable employment and persons with disabilities.

Local heroes

This action would not have been possible without the Municipality of Bijelo Polje, the URBACT Local Group, Home for Elderly Bijelo Polje, NGOs, the Red Cross, Roma mediators, volunteers and active citizens.



Lessons learnt

- Social isolation requires an integrated, cross-sectoral approach
- Early identification of people at risk is essential
- Community involvement and cooperation build trust and sustainability

Solution

Breaking Isolation – local action against social isolation

Within the URBACT Breaking Isolation network, Bijelo Polje developed a local action plan addressing social isolation through telecare support for elderly people, mediation and access to services for the Roma community, and intergenerational activities involving young and older citizens. These actions aim to reduce loneliness, improve access to support services, strengthen community solidarity and ensure that no one in Bijelo Polje is left alone or forgotten.



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Breaking Isolation

Fót, Hungary
21.400 inhabitants

Challenge

Most residents work in Budapest, work from home since 2020 or live in segregated neighbourhoods. As a result, regular communication and a strong sense of community are lacking. The pandemic has further worsened the situation, leading to encreased social isolation.

Local heroes

This would not be possible without the collaboration of Fót Municipality, the Library, and the Cultural Center. Key active contributors included relevant civil organizations, the Social Centre, and local schools. Communication and visibility were ensured through civil organizations, schools, and the local press.

Lessons learnt

When starting a similar community project, always begin small with an easily accessible and welcoming community space, and make sure to actively involve all age groups.

Collaborate closely with local institutions and NGOs, and continuously listen to participants' feedback to ensure the project truly meets the community's needs effectively.

Solution

"Social Café & Chat Corner"

The Breaking Isolation Café & Chat Corner in the library provides a welcoming community space where people can enjoy coffee and engage in conversations. Its purpose is to create a relaxed, friendly environment that helps reduce social isolation. The project aims to strengthen community cohesion, foster intergenerational dialogue, and support the well-being of local residents. Success is measured by stable visitor numbers (>80 per week), high satisfaction rates (>80%), stronger community ties, and sustainable operation beyond a single project. The expected impact is improved social connections and overall community engagement.



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Breaking Isolation

Isernia, Italy
20.684 inhabitants

Challenge

In Isernia social isolation is growing, mainly because of a declining and aging population but also economic and social factors are relevant.
The elderly are more affected but the problem is growing also among young people and vulnerable groups (e.g., disabled people, migrants, etc.)

Local heroes

ULG members were fundamental to design the IAP but also contributions from thematic experts and professionals were necessary to better understand the problem and look for possible solutions.
This was shown by a testing action (focus group with experts) that provided relevant inputs for IAP design. Both ULG members and experts are necessary for IAP implementation and will cooperate within the "Observatory on Social Isolation".

Solution

"Observatory on Social Isolation (OSI)"

The OSI it's not only the continuation of the ULG but a wider participatory mechanism open to all the actors wishing to contribute to IAP implementation.
Main activities: i) *Research and analysis* on social isolation; ii) *Focus groups and Participatory workshops* to provide input for IAP implementation and future development; iii) *Annual survey* on social isolation in Isernia (e.g. questionnaires, interviews, etc.); iv) *Fundraising and networking activities* (at national and EU level). The OIS will give specific attention also to territorial integration (trying to involve neighboring municipalities sharing with Isernia an ERDF/ESF+ Territorial strategy) and vertical integration (promotion of IAP results towards Molise Region, RP ERDF/ESF+ Managing Authority).



Lessons learnt

Political support is fundamental, not only from the Mayor but also from municipal Councillors responsible for the topic.

Relevant sectors of the Municipality must be actively involved in the actions since the design phase.

An active and open ULG is fundamental; it must be constantly informed and stimulated.

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https://comune.isernia.it/

Breaking Isolation

Jumilla, Spain
27.263 inhabitants

Challenge

In Jumilla, many citizens suffer from isolation. The diversity of nationalities and languages within our population along with the deterioration of family relationships caused by excessive working hours lead to people having a poorer private life, prone to feeling misunderstood and forgotten.

Local heroes

This would not be possible without the strong commitment of the local volunteers, associations and civil servants involved in the task. It is also important to highlight the political involvement of the major and the city councillors from right and left political parties.

Lessons learnt

Regular, scheduled meetings to keep the local groups involved in the task.

We are not every citizen loneliness or isolation situation, but rather giving them tools to better address it and become more active in social activities.

Yearly evaluations are needed in order not to waste resources on inefficient measures.

Solution

"2x7 (Elderly care service)"

Prevent unwanted **loneliness on elder people** who live by themselves and lack family/neighbourly support through a specialized personal-care service which will help them function on their day-to-day life (grocery shopping, medical appointments, take money out from the ATM, going to the theatre, etc.) and promote their participation in workshops and leisure spaces. This person would be available for 2 hours a day 7 days a week For this service, it would be previously discussed with the person the arranged schedule for the visits, combining both, volunteers and specialised staff.



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Ayuntamiento de Jumilla

Breaking Isolation

Pombal, Portugal
52 000 inhabitants

Challenge

In Pombal, over 10% of residents live alone and more than half are over 65. Due to emigration, many older adults remain on their own, yet the city's natural surroundings (sea and mountains) support a high-quality retirement period.

Local heroes

This solution will be possible through the valuable contributions of the Health Unit of the Leiria Region, the Social Security Institute, and the Municipality of Pombal. Working together as true local heroes, these partners will combine knowledge, resources, and community commitment to promote socialization and reduce isolation. Their joint effort strengthens local networks and ensures that individuals have meaningful opportunities to stay connected and supported.

Lessons learnt

Strong partnerships between health, social services, and local government are essential to address social isolation effectively. A structured referral pathway improves coordination and outcomes. Continuous monitoring ensures meaningful engagement, while community-based activities significantly enhance wellbeing. Local collaboration is vital for creating sustainable, person-centred solutions.

Solution

"Social Prescribing"

This initiative represents an innovative and structured approach aimed at strengthening the links between individuals, healthcare services, and community-based support resources. Its purpose is to promote health, wellbeing, and quality of life among people who are socially isolated or at risk of social isolation. A designated professional will assess each case and formally refer individuals—through a "social prescription"—to the responses that best align with their needs and interests. Each referral will be systematically monitored to evaluate participation and outcomes. Implemented within one of Pombal's Family Health Units, this initiative may benefit all registered users and enhance professional capacity to address social isolation.



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POMBAL

Breaking Isolation

Roman, Romania

56 000 inhabitants

Challenge

The City of Roman is facing increasing levels of loneliness and social isolation, particularly among older residents and vulnerable groups, driven by demographic change, youth outmigration, and evolving social behaviours. While existing local services address social needs in a traditional manner, there is a lack of innovative, participatory and cross-sector solutions that actively connect people, revitalise public spaces, and leverage digital and community-based tools. The city therefore needs integrated and innovative approaches to strengthen social bonds, enhance community resilience, and improve quality of life in a sustainable and inclusive way.

Local heroes

In the project, local heroes – including volunteers, social workers, and engaged community members – play a central role in combating loneliness by fostering social connections, supporting vulnerable groups, and revitalising local community life.

Lessons learnt

Social connection has a significant impact on well-being – activities that encourage regular interaction among residents help reduce isolation and loneliness.

Mixed and innovative approaches work best – combining traditional support, digital tools, and creative activities yields sustainable results.

Municipality-community cooperation is key – joint involvement of local authorities and civic groups ensures acceptance and continuity.

Solution

"The Loneliness Phone"

The Loneliness Phone in Roman is an innovative social solution that provides people experiencing social isolation with a safe, confidential, and easily accessible communication channel, allowing them to talk to trained volunteers or professionals. Through regular phone calls, the initiative reduces feelings of loneliness, offers emotional support, and helps maintain social connection, especially for older people and other vulnerable groups. The solution complements existing social services and can be integrated into a broader community-based approach to preventing social isolation.

The young members of the ULG meet with seniors from the community to create a space for intergenerational dialogue.



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TØNDER KOMMUNE

Breaking Isolation

Serres, Greece
74.004 inhabitants

Challenge

In Serres, social isolation is a growing challenge affecting different groups. Ageing population, shrinking social networks, unemployment and social stigma could leave residents disconnected from community life, increasing invisibility and social exclusion.

Local heroes

The URBACT Local Group inspired the initiative bringing in their knowledge, experience, and access to vulnerable groups. Local art professionals guided the workshop, mentoring participants in self-expression. Municipal services assisted with logistics and local businesses provided additional support. Together, they created an inclusive experience that amplified the Breaking Isolation network's message.

Lessons learnt

A local ecosystem of actors delivers meaningful social work and its impact grows through collaboration.

Consistency and regular interaction among partners foster trust and shared ownership of initiatives.

Communication and visibility are critical to participation beyond existing networks.

Solution

"Art breaks Isolation"

The Municipality of Serres organized the event "Art Breaks Isolation" at the atrium of the Xenakis Contemporary Art Museum. Thematic discussions shared real-life experiences and fostered empathy among attendees. A creative workshop nurtured authentic voices using artistic expression. Led by local artists, the workshop engaged vulnerable groups reached through ULG partners. Supported by local businesses, the event strengthened social bonds, highlighted art as a tool to overcome isolation, and empowered participants to spread the Breaking Isolation network's message across the community.



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ΔΗΜΟΣ ΣΕΡΡΩΝ ΣΤΡΥΜΩΝ

Breaking Isolation

Škofja Loka, Slovenia
23.845 inhabitants

Challenge

While social isolation is not yet a major issue in Škofja Loka, several groups are at higher risk of becoming socially isolated. A number of practices targeting these groups already exist; however, it has been noted that significantly more attention needs to be given to older people, especially those living in areas geographically distant from the city centre.

Local heroes

A number of volunteers already dedicate their time and effort to preventing the growth of social isolation. Their feedback and proposals were highly valuable during the preparation of the IAP, and addressing this challenge would not be possible without their contribution.

Lessons learnt

Begin with an overview of existing services and programmes, as these often provide a strong foundation for further action.

Connecting existing services can lead to sustainable initiatives that do not require significant additional funding.

Solution

LET'S GO TO CULTURE TOGETHER

During the process of analysing groups at risk of social isolation in Škofja Loka, the ULG identified that older people living in rural or more remote parts of the municipality are particularly vulnerable to a lack of social interaction.

In response, a programme was developed specifically for this target group. Older individuals identified as being at risk are invited to cultural events within the municipality and are provided with free tickets and organised transport from their homes to the event venues. The additional value of this solution is in the fact that we can combine various already existing services in order to implement it, such as the Prostofer car service (volunteer-based car service for elderly) and publicly funded cultural activities, while the programme is coordinated by Information point for elderly Halo 65+.



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Občina Škofja Loka

Breaking Isolation

Tønder, Denmark

36 000 inhabitants

Challenge

Loneliness is rising in Tønder Municipality due to broader national trends and local demographic factors. In rural areas like Tønder, the risk is further heightened by an ageing population, youth outmigration, and fewer local meeting places, all of which reduce everyday social contact. The municipality's participation in the Breaking Isolation project reflects a growing need to address social isolation and strengthen meaningful community ties.

Local heroes

The participation of the Urbact Local Group was invaluable in this process. Their time, insights and input created a solid foundation for the experiment and strategy.

Lessons learnt

People's colleges can be organized for any target group, as long as they share a common risk factor of loneliness.

Be sure to follow-up with the relevant associations, municipal staff, and participants to maintain momentum.

Collective ownership by citizen associations and the municipality are fundamental for success.

Solution

"People's college"

In Denmark, there is a long tradition of "learning for life" taking place at people's colleges. Building on that tradition, an experiment was carried out in the form of a daytime people's college program for a group of people with dementia and their closest relatives.

Over the course of three days, participants experienced nature, culture, exercise, and singing in a social setting. This created a space where they could talk openly about their shared challenges related to dementia together with others in the same situation.

ULG members and participants foraging for local herbs and cooking together at a bonfire.



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