the climate we speak

Older People Engage in
Climate Communication.



Let's Talk About Climate!

How-to Guide to Engage Older People in Climate Communication

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The Climate We Speak: Notes on the Project

The Erasmus+ project The Climate We Speak set out to foster more constructive, empathetic conversations about climate change and sustainability with and among older adults. We — partners from Poland, Portugal, Belgium and Austria — worked toward a shared goal: to break the silence surrounding climate change and support older adults in exploring how this global challenge relates to their everyday lives.

Over the past two years, we created and tested a variety of interactive exchange formats ("Climate Hubs"). Practitioners in all partner countries developed and explored hands-on methods to start meaningful climate conversations with older adults. A key priority was to create a welcoming and respectful atmosphere where participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences, asking questions and contributing their ideas. We have compiled a collection of some of these methods, which is available for download on the project website (see "Collection of Methods and Formats").

Furthermore, we organised online and face-to-face exchanges with people involved in climate change and sustainability as well as with adult educators working with older people. In our "Learning Communities of Practice" we discussed constructive ways of climate communication and shared practical experiences. More information on the organisation and implementation of these exchange formats can be found in the "Guidelines: Learning Communities of Practice", which are also available for download on the project website.

This How-to Guide is built on what we learned throughout our project journey. We designed it for practitioners, facilitators and anyone working with older people who want to engage in conversations about climate change. We hope it provides you with practical inspiration, confidence and concrete tools to take the first step — because every conversation matters.

About this How-To Guide

This guide is not a lengthy presentation of our project, but — at best! — an inspiration for your own constructive and low-threshold ways of engaging older adults in talks about climate and sustainability issues.

It builds on

- **the guiding principles of our project,**
- **resources collected and further developed, and**
- **experiences gained in exchange formats ("Climate Hubs") with older people.**

If you consider climate change a difficult, even controversial issue, we have good news for you: You do not need to be a climate expert to engage others in meaningful conversations about climate and sustainability! This guide breaks down barriers and fears related to these issues.

It provides you with

- **basic information about climate communication,**
- **key principles for effective public engagement — tailored to the needs of your target group,**
- **important steps and common challenges in climate communication,**
- **"cheat sheets" — quick summaries of basic facts and common steps, and**
- **insights into the very diverse real-world practice of climate communication with older adults in our partner countries.**

If you ask yourself "Is this How-to Guide really meant for me?", you should remember that older adults are often overlooked in climate communication, even though they:

- **contribute unique experiences,**
- **bring in specific needs and vulnerabilities, and**
- **may be important multipliers and change agents.**

As an adult educator, a facilitator, a stakeholder or a community leader working with older people, you can support them to be part of the communication about and the action against climate change!

Why talking about climate change matters

Fact-based communication is important, but you do not have to be a climate researcher to talk about climate issues. Obviously, climate and sustainability are large-scale, far-reaching topics, and we can never know everything about them. Climate change affects all areas of our lives — health, housing, food, mobility, finances and community wellbeing. This can be frightening, but at the same time it presents a great opportunity to make climate an issue in all contexts. However, many people avoid talking about it.

Talking about climate change is important because it

- **helps people understand how climate impacts their daily lives,**
- **reduces fear and confusion,**
- **builds community resilience,**
- **empowers people to take meaningful action,**
- **strengthens democracy and participation,**
- **helps counter misinformation, and**
- **creates hope and agency.**

Climate change is not only a scientific issue — it is also a social, emotional and community issue. Talking about it helps all of us feel less alone and more capable.

"We don't need more facts — we need conversations. Facts don't convince people, but shared experiences do."

Wim Aerts, Grootouders voor het Klimaat, Netherlands

Why older adults are an essential audience

"Older people are often not considered as a key target group for climate communication — there's a general assumption that climate change is mainly an issue for the younger generation. But older adults can contribute a lot; they can share their experiences and the changes they've seen over the years."

Caterina Rompianesi, Anziani e Non Solo, Italy

Older adults are often overlooked in climate communication, despite having unique experiences and vulnerabilities. However, older persons are by no means a homogeneous group. They differ in their values, experiences, expectations, and self-images. Climate change impacts older individuals differently — depending on their socioeconomic background, place of living, their health or disability status, gender, whether they work or are retired, and other factors. This is why successful climate communication must always be designed for specific target groups.

This is why older adults matter in climate conversations:

- **They have lived experience of environmental change.**
- **They often have strong community networks.**
- **They go to the polls at higher rates and influence public decisions.**
- **They may face higher climate risks (heatwaves, energy poverty, mobility issues).**
- **They can be powerful story-tellers and trusted messengers.**
- **Many are skilled in reuse, repair, and low waste living.**
- **Many care deeply about future generations.**

Risks and barriers older adults may face

Ageism — the discrimination faced by older people — makes it harder for them to access information, support, and take part in finding solutions. Some may even be isolated, offline, and left out of important decisions. As a result, they are more likely to be exposed to climate risks and less equipped to adapt and respond. These problems are intensified by the fact that older people are more likely to live with health conditions that make them more vulnerable to heatwaves and pollution.

In addition to health and/or mobility challenges and limited access to digital information, older people may also face psychological barriers such as:

- **feeling overwhelmed or powerless**
- **anxiety about the future**
- **believing that "it's too late for me to change"**
- **distrust in institutions or politics**

However, older adults can contribute valuable life experiences and insights into climate change. They can act as community leaders and take part in climate discussions. Many have lived through times of scarcity and know how to reuse and reduce waste. Their knowledge can support more sustainable habits and the circular economy. In any case, they should be empowered to make lifestyle changes to better adapt to the climate change and get support when needed.

The following questions can help you better understand the people you work with. They are good starting points for climate dialogue:

- **What are the climate and sustainability issues that concern you?**
- **How do you experience conversations about climate and sustainability in your personal environment?**
- **What do you find easy to discuss?**
- **What do you find difficult?**
- **What motivates you to engage in climate issues?**
- **Do you have any ideas for joint activities to promote exchanges on climate and sustainability issues?**

Short & simple:
5 cheat sheets spread all over this publication for your effective climate communication

Our “cheat sheets“ provide you with basic facts and strategies as well as helpful tips for your climate communication with older adults.

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Basic facts about climate change

- ***The climate is warming fast.***
- ***Humans are the main cause.***
- ***The effects are harmful.***
- ***99% of scientists agree.***
- ***There is still hope.***
- ***Solutions exist today.***
- ***Every action helps.***
- ***Local changes matter.***

You do not need to be a climate expert

A very important message and a kind of "motto" of our project is: You do not need to be an expert to talk about climate issues. However, knowing some facts or where to look them up can make you feel more secure.

Knowledge gaps are not a weakness. On the contrary, they are chances to learn together. This approach lowers barriers, builds trust and models curiosity in the people you work with.

Your job is not to know everything. Your job is to guide a conversation.

Try these phrases when you are confronted with a question you are not sure how to answer:

- **I don't know — let's look it up together.**
- **That's a great question. Let's explore it.**
- **Let's see what reliable sources say.**

However, there are some skills that are relevant to a meaningful climate communication. They help you to create an atmosphere of trust and enable others to open up and participate:

- **basic understanding of climate change**
- **awareness of older adults' needs**
- **listening and facilitation skills**
- **ability to create safe spaces**
- **confidence to say "I don't know yet"**
- **knowledge of reliable sources**

Basics of climate communication

Climate communication is not about dumping facts on other people. It is about connecting with their values, emotions, and life experiences. Facts and figures alone are not enough — successful communication focuses on the target group and appeals to their feelings, values and identities.

Good climate communication is...	Good climate communication is not...
✓ *empathetic*	overwhelming
✓ *respectful*	patronising
✓ *simple*	abstract
✓ *local*	global
✓ *solution-oriented*	moralising
✓ *hopeful*	fear based
✓ *non-judgemental*	blaming
✓ *interactive*	one-way
✓ *story-based*	technical
✓ *considerate*	fast or rushed

Older adults can benefit from conversations that are slow, personal, and grounded in everyday life.

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Key Principles

The working paper "Ten key principles: How to communicate climate change for effective public engagement" from Climate Outreach, written by Maike Sippel, Chris Shaw and George Marshall, provides a good overview of the basics of climate psychology and climate communication. We have further developed them into a simple-language version that focuses on older adults:

10 key principles of "How to communicate climate change for effective public engagement", adapted to the target group of older adults:

1. Connect with people's values

We need to ask what issues and concerns older people have regarding climate change. Ask them what matters most: health, grandchildren, community, safety, savings, comfort. Older people want to be heard and have their issues and experiences taken seriously. Connect the topic of climate change with values that matter.

2. Use trusted messengers

People listen to people they trust — peers, neighbours, doctors, grandchildren, local experts. Talking about climate also works best with people we know, we can relate to and trust. To communicate authentically we recommend giving the voices to older people themselves.

3. Test and adapt

Some methods work well with certain groups but not at all with others. Try different methods, take a moment to reflect, ask for feedback, adjust.

How to Talk about Climate Change with Older Adults

4. Bring climate home

Show and discuss relevant local/national examples of the consequences of climate change and/or climate action — always with a focus on solutions. Start with topics that move and affect older people directly or recent newspaper articles, movies etc. **Use local and practically relevant examples: heatwaves, energy bills, mobility, food prices.**

5. Use frames consciously

Use words wisely. Take up words that come from older people themselves, e.g.: If they talk about "climate change", use "climate change". If they use "climate crisis", use "climate crisis". Sometimes it is advisable not to use the words climate or sustainability at all, but rather to **use words that resonate, such as care, responsibility, community, health, savings.**

6. Tell stories, not statistics

It is important to show the humans behind climate changes — with real-world stories and authentic imagery. **Stories stick. Numbers don't.**

7. Make it social

People follow social norms — what others around them do. **Joint activities make it easier for people to get involved.**

8. Address emotions

Many older people feel powerless in the face of climate change. Anxiety, fear, guilt, and overwhelm are normal. Try to break down general, often negative emotions into smaller "bites" people can emotionally and deeply relate to, e.g. enthusiasm for nature, hopes for the future of children, fun in taking action with others, pride in expertise about reuse and recycling. **No action is possible without emotions.**

9. Show solutions and agency

People need to feel that action is possible and meaningful and that people "just like you and me" are already taking climate action. **Talk about local and concrete solutions everyone can contribute to.**

10. Focus on co-benefits

Do not talk about climate action as a story of losses and limitations. Focus instead on its co-benefits: **Climate action often improves health, comfort, finances, and community life.**

2

10 key principles (short version)

- ***Connect with values.***
- ***Use trusted messengers.***
- ***Test and adapt.***
- ***Bring climate home.***
- ***Use frames.***
- ***Tell stories.***
- ***Make it social.***
- ***Address emotions.***
- ***Show solutions.***
- ***Highlight co-benefits.***

How to build confidence as an educator

If you do not feel fully confident to engage others in talks and action about climate change, please bear in mind that confidence is not a matter of perfection, but of preparation.

Simple steps to feeling more confident:

- Learn a few basic facts.
- Prepare 2–3 local examples.
- Bring a story from your own life.
- Use simple language.
- Practice saying "I don't know yet".
- Bring printouts of information from reliable sources.
- Start with questions, not answers.
- Focus on listening more than talking.

Your mindset matters more than your knowledge and people respond best when you are:



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How to feel confident:

- ***You don't need to know everything.***
- ***Use simple language.***
- ***Ask questions.***
- ***Listen more than you speak.***
- ***Say "I don't know yet."***
- ***Bring reliable sources.***
- ***Start small.***
- ***Focus on hope and solutions.***



How to start conversations

Most people need to feel save and competent to enter a conversation. As an adult educator you are most likely familiar with providing easy entry points that make participants feel invited and respected.

We have collected a few topic specific "Dos and Don'ts" to inspire your climate communication with older persons:

Instead of saying...	Ask something like...
Climate change is a crisis.	✓ *Have you noticed how hot the summers have become?*
We need to reduce emissions.	✓ *How do you feel about rising energy prices?*
The science says...	✓ *What changes in weather have you seen in your lifetime?*
You should...	✓ *What helps you stay cool during heatwaves?*
We see extreme weather events, heatwaves and damage to the environment...	✓ *What do you think your grandchildren will experience?*

Start with their world,
not the world.

How to keep conversations constructive

Climate change is one of the topics that may cause irritations and confrontation. We have distilled a few hacks to keep the flow and to keep discussions constructive.

Use open questions, such as

- What concerns you most?
- What feels confusing?
- What gives you hope?
- What would make things easier?

Use reflective listening, for example

- I hear that you're worried about costs.
- It sounds like you've seen a lot of change.
- You're not alone in feeling overwhelmed.

Express shared exploration, for example with

- Let's look this up together.
- Let's see what local experts say.
- Let's compare options

How to handle emotions, anxiety, and resistance

Older adults may experience and express a lot of different — positive and negative — emotions when talking about climate change. Some may find the topic overwhelming and react with emotions such fear, anger, guilt, hopelessness, denial, avoidance, confusion or mistrust.

Avoid ...	Instead try...
arguing	✓ *Many people feel overwhelmed.*
correcting immediately	✓ *It makes sense that you feel this way.*
overloading with facts	✓ *Let's take this step by step.*
minimising feelings	✓ *You're not alone.*
blaming	✓ *There are things we can do together.*

Your role is not to fix emotions — but to hold space for them.

How to recognise and respond to misinformation

As with other topics, there is a lot of disinformation and misinformation about climate change on the internet. It is particularly important to use trustworthy sources, translate the information into clear messages and to respond in simple and respectful ways. In our work, we have identified common misinformation themes and we have collected simple responses to address these themes and set boundaries — politely and constructively.

Common misinformation themes	Try to respond with...
Climate has always changed.	✓ *Yes, climate has changed before — but not this fast.*
It's too expensive to act.	✓ *Most solutions save money in the long run.*
Nothing we do matters.	✓ *Every action adds up.*
Scientists disagree.	✓ *99% of climate scientists agree.*
It's a hoax.	✓ *Let's check a reliable source together.*
Technology will fix everything.	✓ *There are many factors that interact and technology is one of them. Let's see what else we can do.*

There are three helpful tools that help you to deal with dis- and misinformation constructively:

- **ASK:**
  "Where did you hear that?"
- **OFFER:**
  "Would you like to look at what scientists say?"
- **SUGGEST:**
  "Let's compare information!"

Misinformation basics – Common myths and simple responses

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- ***Climate always changes.*** → ***Not this fast.***
- ***Scientists disagree.*** → ***Scientists agree.***
- ***It's too expensive.*** → ***Solutions save money.***
- ***Nothing we do matters.*** → ***Every action counts.***

How to make things easier with frames, narratives, and co-benefits

Bring co-benefits (= positive side effects) into the conversation and frame climate topics with narratives that are grounded in people's everyday experiences. This makes it easier to relate to and change perspectives. For example: If we make the connection between the climate and taking care of ourselves, our health and safety, then the idea is clearer. When working with older adults facing economic hardship, it is crucial to consider the importance of saving money.

Frames that work well with older adults

- health
- comfort
- safety
- savings
- community
- care for grandchildren
- independence
- dignity
- fairness.

Co-benefits to highlight

- lower energy bills
- better indoor comfort
- cleaner air
- safer neighbourhoods
- more social connection
- better health
- more independence
- stronger communities.

How to profit from trusted messengers and storytelling

Talking about climate works best with people we trust and believe ("trusted messengers"). Older people who suffer particularly from the heat or other causes of climate crises or older men and women who are active in climate activist groups could speak about their experiences and motivations. Inviting local experts, like people from administration and politics, could be an option, too. Instead of relying on facts and figures use storytelling techniques to enable emotional connection and impact.

Stories

- **are memorable**
- **build trust**
- **connect emotionally**
- **show real people, and**
- **reduce defensiveness.**

Types of stories that work

- **How heatwaves affect me...**
- **What I've seen change in my lifetime...**
- **How I save energy at home...**
- **Why I care about my grandchildren's future...**
- **How our community came together...**

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Conversation starters

- ***What changes in the weather have you noticed?***
- ***What helps you stay comfortable in summer?***
- ***What worries you most about the future?***
- ***What gives you hope?***



A mindset for climate conversations

Climate communication is not about being perfect, but about being present. It is not about lecturing, but about asking questions and listening. It is not about overwhelming people, but about giving them space to talk about their experiences. It is not about spreading fear, but about empowering others to take action.

Climate affects all areas of our lives — what an opportunity to make climate an issue everywhere!

With a mindset based on curiosity, patience, respect, hope, humanity and compassion, you will reach your goal:

- **not to convince,**
- **not to teach,**
- **not to win,**
- **but to connect, listen, and open a door.**

And once people feel heard, they are ready to learn, reflect, and act.

Climate Hubs —
A look into our experiences

As part of the project, low-threshold workshops on climate issues – so called "Climate Hubs" – with older people were held in Austria, Portugal and Poland. While all formats shared a common goal, the settings and target groups varied significantly across countries.

In this chapter, we present the different approaches and experiences from each country. This offers insight into how the Climate Hubs were designed and facilitated in practice.

Detailed descriptions of the methods used can be found in the accompanying publication "Collection of Methods and Formats" available as a download on our project website.



the-climate-
we-speak.eu

Climate Hubs in Vienna, Austria

In our The Climate We Speak project, four Climate Hubs were implemented in Austria. All sessions took place in a senior day centre in Vienna and were facilitated by *queraum* and *Hallo Klima!* The Climate Hubs were designed as low-threshold, interactive exchange formats to engage older people in conversations about climate change and sustainability.

Across the four sessions, between 11 and 14 participants took part, most of whom were regular visitors to the senior day centre. The group was supported by staff members, including a psychologist, the director of the centre and a volunteer. The familiar environment and the presence of trusted staff played a crucial role in creating a safe and welcoming atmosphere for open dialogue.

A setting that enables participation

The choice of a senior day centre as the Climate Hub setting proved to be highly effective. Participants were already familiar with the space and with each other. This lowered barriers to participation and encouraged engagement. The Climate Hubs were integrated into the centre's daily routine, so participants did not need to make any additional effort to attend. However, it was very helpful that centre staff personally invited people to participate in the activity. In addition, a short description of the format was displayed on the information board at the centre.

All sessions were designed to be inclusive and accessible, regardless of prior knowledge, cognitive abilities, or physical limitations.

The team focused on creating a supportive atmosphere where everyone felt comfortable contributing, for example by:

- **speaking very clearly,**
- **working with (enlarged) visual materials, and**
- **ensuring that participants with visual impairments could follow by encouraging verbal descriptions of images.**

"It made me aware of what we are already doing right but also what we could still improve to do better."

Participant

> “There is so much expertise around this table.”
>
> Participant

Another important factor was the time structure: Each of the four sessions lasted around two hours and included a short coffee break after approximately one hour. This helped maintain attention and energy levels and contributed to the overall positive experience.

Methods that spark conversation

A key success factor of the Climate Hubs was the use of simple, interactive, and varied methods. Rather than relying on lectures or complex information, the sessions focused on participation, exchange, and personal relevance.

Visual prompts played a central role, especially at the beginning of sessions. For example, participants were invited to choose climate-related images or cartoons and reflect on what they saw and what the image meant to them. This approach helped create an immediate entry point into the topic and encouraged storytelling and personal connections.

Interactive tools such as quizzes on food, waste, mobility, and energy were introduced. Participants used simple signs to indicate their answers, making it easy for everyone to participate — even those who preferred not to speak in front of the group. This method proved particularly effective in combining learning with interaction and fun.

Small group discussions were also used to deepen conversations. For example, participants worked in groups of three to reflect on the effectiveness and feasibility of climate-friendly actions in everyday life. This format allowed for more intimate exchanges and gave everyone space to contribute.

Importantly, the content of the sessions was adapted to reflect the participants’ interests. After the initial meetings, participants expressed a desire for more concrete information, particularly on topics such as food, waste, mobility, and energy. Facilitators responded by integrating concise facts and explanations into the sessions, always combined with opportunities for discussion.



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What we learned

Older people are interested

One of the most important insights from the Vienna Climate Hubs is that older people are very interested in engaging with climate topics — especially when these are connected to their everyday lives. Participants were eager to share their experiences, compare past and present practices, and reflect on changes they have observed over the decades.

Respect is key

The sessions showed that a respectful, non-judgemental approach is key. Creating space for different perspectives, questions, and even uncertainties allowed participants to engage openly and without fear of "saying or asking the wrong thing."

Simple and interactive methods are fun

Another key learning was the importance of interaction. Methods that involved movement, visual elements, or simple tools (such as cards or signs) helped maintain attention and made participation easier for everyone. Repetition of familiar methods (e.g. using the same quiz signs in multiple sessions) also increased confidence and comfort within the group.

No lectures needed

The role of facilitators was not to "teach" but to guide conversations. Their task was to create a space where participants could learn from each other, ask questions, and reflect together. Support from the daycare staff members was essential in this regard, as they helped maintain group dynamics and ensured that everyone was included.

Practical details matter

Practical considerations also played a role. For example, using printed materials instead of digital presentations sometimes led to a more interactive and relaxed atmosphere. Flexibility in adapting to technical limitations or group needs proved to be an important competence for facilitators.



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"Thank you for coming. You make it so that I can understand."

Participant

Impact and takeaways

The Climate Hubs created a space where climate change could be discussed in a way that was accessible, relevant, and empowering for older people. Participants reported that they enjoyed the sessions, learned new things, and appreciated the opportunity to exchange with others. Some highlighted that the discussions helped them better understand complex topics and reflect on their own behaviour.

At the same time, the Climate Hubs strengthened participants' confidence to engage with climate issues and continue conversations beyond the sessions. They also demonstrated that small-scale, low-threshold formats can have a meaningful impact.

Finally, the experience showed that such formats can be sustainably integrated into existing structures. At the end of the four sessions, materials and methods were handed over to the staff of the day care centre, enabling them to continue similar activities independently. Staff from several day care centres were trained to run similar workshops at their own centres.

Climate Hubs in Lisbon Region, Portugal

In Portugal, the project team from USO implemented the Climate Hubs in close cooperation with local partners. The sessions took place at senior universities and centres in the wider Lisbon region and were always organised on site by the respective cooperation partner, e.g. Senior Center of Bairro do Rosário, 3rd Age University of the Red Cross in Cascais, Senior University of Lumiar, Tavira Proverbs Association and the municipality of Oeiras. One Climate Hub took the form of a full-day excursion to the Alqueva Multipurpose Project in Alentejo, carried out together with the environmental organisation ZERO and the municipality of Oeiras. Between 20 and 23 older people took part in each session.

"The interest is very high. Participants asked for more presentations. They want to learn more about climate in daily life."

Adolfo Steiger, USO project team

"Thanks for inviting me to join the group. I am used to being in a group with people and discussing different subjects."

Participant in the excursion

A distinctive feature of the Portuguese context is the team behind the Climate Hubs: The sessions were facilitated by former university professors with a background in climate-related fields, who today volunteer at the Senior University of Oeiras. They brought a wealth of scientific knowledge and credibility to the topic and, over the course of the project, a remarkable willingness to develop their approach.

From lectures to dialogue

Reflecting their academic background, the first Climate Hubs were strongly lecture-oriented: presentations rich in facts and figures, with relatively little room for discussion. From Climate Hub to Climate Hub there was a notable development: As the team observed how much the participants wanted to ask questions, share experiences and exchange views, they increasingly opened up the format. Presentations were paused to make space for discussion, and interactive elements were introduced. The structure became more and more flexible. In some sessions, the planned programme was adjusted on the spot to allow more time for exchange.



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"In our workshops 'it was going with the people'. Some workshops took more than three hours as the interaction was so strong."

Cristina Mourao, USO project team

The Climate Cube as a turning point

A central tool in this development was the Climate Cube — a playful, interactive device presenting facts and figures on different climate issues. Participants engaged with it enthusiastically, and it quickly became a focal point of the sessions. At the Senior Center of Bairro do Rosário, the cube sparked so much engagement that the group decided, on their own initiative, to set up a climate club called Speaking with Climate, with themes they want to explore together. The cube showed that factual climate content can be made accessible and engaging for older people when it is presented in a hands-on, playful way.

"What can we do?" — a clear interest in everyday action

Across the Portuguese Climate Hubs, one interest stood out clearly: Participants wanted to know what climate change means for their own daily lives, and what they themselves can do. The conversations kept returning to practical questions: How to act sustainably in everyday life? And how to adapt to a changing climate?

The excursion to the Alqueva dam project made these questions tangible, showing on site how a large infrastructure project shapes the surrounding region and how energy security, nature conservation and the needs of local communities have to be weighed against one another.

What we learned

Expertise is valuable, but flexibility is key

The Portuguese experience showed that deep subject expertise is a great asset, but that it works best when combined with room for dialogue. The team's willingness to move from a lecture-based format towards more interactive, participatory methods was decisive for the success and growing popularity of the Climate Hubs.

Playful tools open the door

Interactive elements such as the Climate Cube made factual content approachable and gave participants a sense of ownership. When older people feel that the process belongs to them, they are ready to take the initiative, as the newly founded climate club clearly demonstrates.

Leave room for the group's questions

Allowing the structure to respond to the participants' questions and interests, made the sessions richer. Workshops ran considerably longer than planned simply because the exchange was so lively – a sign of genuine engagement rather than a problem to be solved.

Different groups need different formats

From classroom-style sessions to a full-day excursion, the Portuguese Climate Hubs made clear that different target groups and settings call for different forms of address. An insight that feeds directly into the project's guide on climate communication with older people.



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For inspiration: video of the excursion to Alqueva Multipurpose Project

Impact and outlook

"What is needed is to plant a seed and help older people to continue discussions and get information."

USO project team



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The Climate Hubs in Portugal received a strong response. Participants repeatedly asked for additional sessions, and more Climate Hubs are already planned. To match this interest and cover a wider range of themes, the team intends to build a lasting network of Climate Hubs. The idea is that partner institutions provide the practical backbone for these meetings by making rooms, computers and projectors available and handling the digital communication with participants (e.g. promoting the Hubs, sending out materials and collecting suggestions). The aim is explicitly not a "one-shot" event, but a sustainable flow of activity. To this end, the team is supporting the institutions in setting up clubs on climate change that they can run independently over the long term.

The project team sees this strong interest as exactly the kind of seed it set out to plant. By keeping the format open, participatory and connected to everyday life, the Climate Hubs aim to lay the ground for a more consistent and informed climate discussion in the long run and for a more structured understanding of the models that shape climate-friendly behaviour.

Climate Hubs in Wroclaw, Poland

In Wroclaw, Poland, the partner organisation LAB60+ implemented four Climate Hubs with older people.

The Climate Hubs brought together very diverse groups of older adults, ranging from small groups of highly active seniors to large gatherings of up to 50 participants. The participants were between 60 and 95 years old and included members of senior clubs, universities of 3rd age and neighbourhood centres. The sessions focused on creating accessible and motivating opportunities for older people to exchange ideas about climate change, sustainability and environmental action.

The Climate Hubs in Poland took place in existing community structures such as senior clubs and local activity centres. These familiar and trusted spaces encouraged participation and created an open atmosphere for discussion.

Flexible settings that involved older people as active contributors

The Polish Climate Hubs showed that climate conversations can work very well with both small and large groups of older people. However, the size and age diversity of the groups influenced the facilitation. In some sessions, more than 40 participants attended, including people up to the age of 95. Facilitators therefore had to carefully balance information, interaction, and breaks to avoid exhausting the participants.



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Another important aspect was connecting climate topics to participants' own lives and memories. Discussions often centred around everyday experiences, food, health, neighbourhoods, nature, and changes participants had observed over decades. This personal approach made climate change feel relevant and tangible.

The sessions also highlighted the importance of recognising older people as active contributors to climate action. Rather than seeing older adults as passive recipients of information, the Climate Hubs emphasised their knowledge, life experience, and practical skills related to repairing, saving resources, gardening, or caring for nature.

"We should take better care of the environment, because it's our legacy — it's what we'll leave behind!"

Participant



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A variety of methods

The Polish Climate Hubs combined short presentations, humour, quizzes, storytelling, and group discussions. Facilitators intentionally used humour as a key method to approach climate topics in an engaging and accessible way. This proved particularly successful in creating openness and reducing fears or resistance around difficult subjects.

Interactive quizzes were used in several sessions to stimulate participation and discussion. Topics included climate misinformation, healthy and sustainable nutrition, waste reduction, energy use, and the relationship between climate change and health. Facilitators observed that quizzes worked especially well in larger groups because they encouraged participation from everyone, including quieter participants.

A strong emphasis was placed on connecting climate issues with memories and lived experiences. Participants reflected on how food habits, neighbourhoods, seasons, or urban green spaces had changed throughout their lives. In one Climate Hub, trees were the central theme of a reflective memory exercise. Sitting in a circle, participants were invited to close their eyes and remember the trees and landscapes of their childhood. This created a calm and emotional atmosphere that encouraged deep reflection and exchange.

The sessions also explored the role of older people in climate action today. Discussions highlighted that many sustainable practices associated with modern "zero-waste" lifestyles — such as repairing, reusing, or saving resources — have long been part of older generations' everyday lives. Facilitators used examples from international movements such as the Swiss *KlimaSeniorinnen* to demonstrate that older people can also play an active role in climate advocacy and community action.

What we learned

The power of humour

Humour proved to be an especially powerful tool. Facilitators observed that humour helped make complex or difficult climate topics more approachable and encouraged active participation. It also contributed to a positive and relaxed atmosphere.

Memories help us to connect to the present

Another important insight was the value of memory and storytelling. Inviting older people to reflect on the past — how people lived, ate, repaired things, or experienced nature — created strong emotional connections and meaningful discussions. Reminiscing about childhood, neighbourhoods, smells, trees, or seasonal changes often led naturally to conversations about current climate challenges.

Empowerment makes a difference

The Climate Hubs also demonstrated that older people want to feel empowered rather than blamed. Participants responded particularly positively when facilitators highlighted the strengths, experiences, and environmental practices of older generations. Showing that older people can still contribute meaningfully to climate action increased motivation and engagement.

A variety of methods helps to maintain focus

Facilitators also learned that methods and timing need to be carefully adapted to the group. In large or age-diverse groups, activities should remain dynamic, interactive, and not too long. Short presentations, quizzes, and regular opportunities for exchange helped maintain attention and participation.

Impact and takeaways

Finally, the Polish Climate Hubs showed that climate conversations can inspire concrete local action. Some participants became interested in organising neighbourhood clean-ups or joining educational initiatives within their communities. This shows that even small-scale dialogue formats can strengthen both community spirit and climate engagement among older people.

> "We can see how difficult life is in a city that isn't ready for these climate changes right now. We need to be more proactive!"
>
> Participant

Collection of Methods and Formats



Looking for concrete ways to get the conversation started?

Our Collection of Methods and Formats brings together thirteen hands-on approaches – from simple icebreakers to in-depth reflective exercises – all developed or tested together with older adults in our Climate Hubs. Each method comes with step-by-step instructions, practical tips and ready-to-use materials. Scan the QR code to download it for free.

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- **LAB60+, Poland**
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