



YOU'RE NOT ALONE

ALONE Submission for the
United Nations Economic Commission of Europe (UNECE)
Name of receiving organization: UN Standing Working Group on
Ageing (SWGA)

2 February 2025



01/02/2025

In February 2025, the UN Standing Working Group on Ageing (SWGA) requested examples of good practice from EU member states to inform a Policy Brief on Ageing: Unlocking the Potential of an Ageing Workforce¹, which was published in April 2025. The brief considered the topics both from a collective, population-ageing perspective (in terms of how labour markets, employers and social partners respond to ageing workforces) and from the perspective of older workers and working lives in the context of increasing longevity and later retirement.

The UN SWGA sought examples regarding ageing and labour market policies; lifelong learning and re-skilling; social security and retirement; active labour-market programmes; combatting age-discrimination in the labour market/hiring practices; and making work and workplaces age friendly.

ALONE provided information to the UN SWGA regarding digital training, including ALONE's HiDigital Programme; social models such as the ALONE befriending and support model; and overall information regarding the flexible pension age in Ireland as examples of good practice.

Below are the three submissions sent to the UN SWGA.

¹ https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2025-05/PB_30_EN_ECE_WG.1_45.pdf

1. Country

Ireland

2.Name of policy measure in original language

See below

3.Name of policy measure in English

ALONE Support and Befriending Volunteer Model

4.Policy instrument - Select your answer

Programme/Campaign

5.Government level

Subnational

6.Year policy measure was introduced (came into force) and time frame (if a project)

ALONE 2021-2024 Strategic Plan, initially launched in 2013

7.Description of policy measure

Please describe the policy measure in 150-200 words addressing the following:

WHAT: What is the primary goal/objective of the policy measure. What challenge does it aim to address and what outcome does it seek to achieve?

WHO: Indicate the lead entity(ies) and partners that developed/implement the policy measure (here you can also specify the level of government (national, regional or local)).

for WHOM: What is the scope / coverage / target population of the policy measure.

HOW: Describe the key features / specific ways through which the policy measure seeks to achieve its goal and objectives.

RESULT: If applicable, please describe the results (e.g. how many people benefited, changes achieved, lessons learned). What makes this measure an example of good practice?

The ALONE support and befriending model aims to address the issue of loneliness and the negative health and cognitive decline issues that arise from social isolation by providing practical support, linking older people to social activity and health and wellbeing advice and information. ALONE volunteers engage with older people via telephone or visits to their home on a regular basis. Volunteers have access to an integrated care services app to report directly back to ALONE staff who can provide assistance and coordinate community services to support the older person.

According to ALONE's 2024 ECC Report, 108,824 Visitation Support and Befriending visits and 201,532 Telephone Support and Befriending calls were conducted by volunteers. 9,117 volunteers

contributed 264,430 hours, with an estimated value ranging up from €3.36 million (NMW) to €7.81 million (Average Hourly Earnings).

In ALONE's 2024 feedback survey, 91% of older people that ALONE served felt their visitation support and befriending volunteer had positively impacted their life and 89% felt that their telephone support and befriending calls had a positive impact on their lives. As a model for good practice, this type of volunteer model for support and befriending services is an effective, cost-efficient preventative method for early ageing.

8.Link to website or other source (if available)

[HALO Report](#)

<https://alone.ie/library/alone-ecc-report-q2-2024/>

<https://alone.ie/library/alone-older-people-survey-2024/>

9.Contact name for follow-up

Alexis Henning-FitzGerald, Research Evaluation and Policy Officer

10.Contact email address

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Country

Ireland

2.Name of policy measure in original language

See below

3.Name of policy measure in English

ALONE HiDigital Initiative – Digital Skills Training for Older People

4.Policy instrument - Select your answer

Programme/Campaign

5.Government level

Subnational

6.Year policy measure was introduced (came into force) and time frame (if a project)

2021

7.Description of policy measure

Please describe the policy measure in 150-200 words addressing the following:

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RESULT: If applicable, please describe the results (e.g. how many people benefited, changes achieved, lessons learned). What makes this measure an example of good practice?

ALONE partnered with Vodafone Ireland Foundation to deliver a nationwide 5-year digital skill training program for older people, aiming to train 230,000 older people in Ireland. The HiDigital programme has been developed to help bridge the digital divide by offering free digital skills training to older people and upskilling the organisations that support them to use technology for empowerment and to promote health, wellbeing and drive care response. It includes an online learning platform, in person group classes, and Digital Champion workshops to train individuals from organisations that support older people.

The HiDigital Programme is part of ALONE's wider IT strategy, which focuses on how technology can empower older people, improve health and wellbeing, and drive appropriate support responses. It includes the distribution and installation of Assistive Technology and a software platform that will support early responses to issues arising.

Between 2022-2024, ALONE reached 62,004 people with its Digital Champions programme, with 20,971 "lives improved" by the training. Additionally, ALONE trained 6,029 digital champions to support other older people. In total, Vodafone report that to date approximately 120,000 "lives have been improved" since 2021. This figure is a combined effort from all partners and includes all types of engagement.

8.Link to website or other source (if available)

<https://alone.ie/hi-digital-digital-skills-training-for-older-people/>

9.Contact name for follow-up

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Country

Ireland

2.Name of policy measure in original language

See below

3.Name of policy measure in English

Flexible Pension Age

4.Policy instrument - *Select your answer*

Law/Regulation

5.Government level

National

6.Year policy measure was introduced (came into force) and time frame (if a project)

2024, to come into force January 2025

7.Description of policy measure

Please describe the policy measure in 150-200 words addressing the following:

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WHO: Indicate the lead entity(ies) and partners that developed/implement the policy measure (here you can also specify the level of government (national, regional or local)).

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HOW: Describe the key features / specific ways through which the policy measure seeks to achieve its goal and objectives.

RESULT: If applicable, please describe the results (e.g. how many people benefited, changes achieved, lessons learned). What makes this measure an example of good practice?

New flexible pension arrangements for people turning age 66 and applying for State Pension (Contributory) were introduced by the Irish Department of Social Protection from 1 January 2024. This will allow people to defer claiming the State Pension (Contributory) at age 66 to receive an actuarially adjusted higher payment rate up to age 70.

This pension is a weekly payment based on a person's social insurance if they have ever worked in Ireland and paid any social insurance contributions. The State pension is not means tested, so the payment will not be impacted by any additional income a person has. The pension is subject to tax, but individuals are unlikely to pay tax if it is their only income.

With sufficient planning and budgeting, the anticipated increase in pension costs could be met by several means other than increasing the pension age. Ireland's retirement age is currently higher than many other OECD countries, and if maintained at its current level, it will be average among OECD countries. Workers can and should be supported to work later in life, but this should be an option, not an obligation.

8.Link to website or other source (if available)

<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/e6f908-state-pension-contributory/>

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/70400-changes-to-pay-related-social-insurance-prsi/>

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