



EUROPEAN NETWORK ON  
INTERCULTURAL ELDERLY CARE

**May 15-17**  
**Annual Meeting 2022**  
**The Hague**



Welcome in this report made by several members of ENIEC

**Sunday Afternoon May 15: Welcome and preparations**

The meeting of new members with the Board. Hosts Feruze and Mohammed made final checks on their scripts . Yvonne, Conny, Ellen and Karen welcomed all members with a warm welcome and giftbags. Participatiekeuken brought a great dinner in!





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### Sunday Evening at Haagwonen: introduction to the theme and The Hague



We made a small walk from the hotel to the offices of Haagwonen. After everybody dropped in, hosts Feruze and Mohammed welcomed everybody and after that, Ezbieta (Chair) opened the Annual Meeting with the following speech.





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### About ENIEC

‘ENIEC is a non-profit European network of professionals whose work is related to the elderly people with different ethnic background in Europe. ENIEC constitutes a platform to exchange ideas, experiences and practices. Our main aim is to secure that elderly migrant across Europe can live in an environment of tolerance, intercultural understanding and respect. It is important to mention that ENIEC membership is directed at individual professionals, not the institutions. That is the official description, but I must say that ENIEC is a very special network and many of us experienced it during the pandemic. We supported each other in many ways, and we could count on each other.



### The reasons for the topics for this Annual Meeting.

We decided to organize two Annual Meetings as a Diptych in 2022 and 2023. A diptych is a term used in the world of art, it is one painting on two panels. Diptych – two parts of Europe, two parts of the world. In a way, those two parts are still apart and we need to build bridges. ENIEC can act as one of those bridges. Since we are going to meet in Gdansk next year, I would like to focus on that symbolic meaning of East and West.

### Eastern versus Western Europe?

The name Eastern Europe is used to refer to all European countries that were previously ruled by communist regimes while the name Western Europe refers to the more economically stable and developed Western countries. Sometimes we also hear about central and eastern European countries. Polish people prefer to hear that they come from Central Europe. After 1989 Eastern European Countries were in a way expected to copy the western models. Krastev and Holmes said:

*The futile struggle to create a truly credible copy of an idealized model involves a never-ending torment of self-criticism if not self-contempt.... It also entails the assumption that central and eastern Europe's copycat nations accept the West's right to evaluate their success or failure at living up to Western standards. In this sense, imitation comes to feel*



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*like a loss of sovereignty. (I. Krastev, S. Holmes, Explaining Eastern Europe: Imitation and Its Discontents, Journal of Democracy, 29(3), 2018)*

Due to historical turbulences, many people from Eastern European countries have a constant feeling of being not good enough. We can't change the history, but we can all learn from it. **Historia magistra vita est.** I believe that now we have a chance to reunite, collaborate and share the best we have.

Special theme of the diptych is the east to west migration inside Europe. Free migration between Eastern and Western European countries is a relatively new phenomenon. We have the evidence from many countries, that relatively big numbers of migrants decide to stay abroad. In The Hague we discussed on how we could prevent potential problems related to those migrants' ageing outside of their home country. We were sharing stories about possibilities and problems that might occur for elderly living abroad, and about lessons learned from care in earlier stages of migration.

For a long time, Poland has been an emigration country sending political refugees and economic migrants abroad. The situation changed dramatically when the war broke out in Ukraine. Now Poland hosts close to 4 mln refugees from Ukraine. 25% of Gdansk's inhabitants are Ukrainians. When we decided last year to choose the subject of migration from east to west and aging as the theme for the diptych, we didn't know how topical (unfortunately) it would become.

It is important to notice that the annual meetings 2002 and 2023 are not particularly about The Hague and Gdańsk. Those two cities are only examples of western and eastern countries.

### Re-connection

The other important theme of our one-meeting over two years is (re)connection which was always a central topic for ENIEC. I believe that due to turbulences in the world, re-connection it is more important than ever.

In The Hague, we discussed the ways how to (re)connect to our aims after COVID-19 and we celebrated the 15-year anniversary of ENIEC. We tried to explore the ways to connect European professionals and volunteers willing to work on better circumstances in healthcare, elderly care, and workspaces. We also discussed on how we could adapt to the changing circumstances.'





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After this introduction from Ela, the floor was for Bert van Alphen, former alderman of The City The Hague. he supported ENIEC from the beginning and talked about the city of The Hague, the challenges for European cities and what needs to be done. He also shared some personal issues about the sensitiveness of professionals .



Then we listened to Nina, member of ENIEC and main speaker this evening.

This is her speech:

I stand before you today as a migrant ageing in a ‘foreign’ country and as a professional aiming to increase the wellbeing of those ageing abroad.

Where does it all begin? A Bulgarian saying posits: ‘We make plans, the mouse ruins them’. And so it was for me, and likely many others like me.

I planned to come to the Netherlands to complete a bachelor degree, experience a different culture and a vibrant student life and move back home. In fact, I never thought of emigrating!



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In August 2003 I arrived in Groningen, the North of the Netherlands – against the will of my parents, without an accommodation to stay and with only a few pennies in my pocket. All I had was the motivation for a better education and more exciting life, and a network that made the move possible. Many people from my city Pazardzhik were already students in Groningen and helped me in the first months. Those first months were difficult! Bulgaria was not part of the European Union yet,

heavy bureaucracy, institutional discrimination and lack of financial means made that time hard and I was practically busy ‘surviving’. There was nothing of the lovely student life I have dreamt of, I did not even like my studies. And yet I decided to finish it. After that, everything became easier.

After an initial cultural shock, I got acquainted with the life in the Netherlands. Yes, I did experience a cultural shock: I have been born and raised in (post-)communist Bulgaria and we did have banana’s and oranges only during Christmas (in fact those were part of our New Year presents) and no supermarkets with 5 different types of tomatoes and fruit from far lands. I had never seen a bankcard before, did not own a computer and things that were self-evident for many, were totally foreign to me. But I did get acquainted with the life in the Netherlands and since Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007, I could receive financial support for my studies. So I decided to do a master. Having to work less odd student jobs allowed me to be a better student and while enjoying the student life I dreamt of I graduated with distinction from the research master Population Studies at the University of Groningen and ensured myself a position as a PhD student at Erasmus University Rotterdam.

During my studies I met my current partner, a young, smart and handsome man from Bavaria, Southern Germany, with whom I bought our first house in the Netherlands, married in 2018 and now have two children. We both have a ‘good’ job and live in our house in Utrecht – that is our 4 person 4 lingual household.



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We are now 19 years further and if I can be sure of something – that is that things worked differently than planned and that I am ageing as a migrant who came from the East to West!

But what does it mean to age as a migrant from the East to the West? Is that very different than ageing as a native or another migrant?

Good questions, he? But I have to be honest: I do not have a firm answer to these questions and in fact, I think that there is no one truly correct answer! Not in my point of view as a person! As a researcher I have learned one or the other thing. For example we have shown quite convincingly by now that there are certain similarities between all migrants and natives when it comes to ageing: Regardless of where we come from we want to remain healthy, social and engaged. We want to be with beloved ones and once becoming sick we wish to stay home for as long as possible. Yet, once we zoom in, we see enormous diversity of wishes, life courses and resources, all very important determinants of ageing well. Where we come from and the baggage we carry shape our ageing experiences and give a specific meaning to what it means to stay healthy, social and engaged. Some age well and happy, others are faced with bad health and insufficient financial means and third experience loneliness and feel socially disconnected.

And so, as you will see, my story of ageing as a migrant is just one of many...

The ‘group’ of migrants from the East is featured by enormous diversity!

We can speak of diversity due to reasons to migrate (for example to study, work, marry, escape), age at migration (young vs. old or ageing in place vs. coming at an older age) and geographical diversity (East-West beyond EU). Moreover, the situation in the origin country matters: historical, political and economic (macro) factors play an important role.

Let me introduce to you a number of different East to West migrants:

Surely, if I say Central and Eastern European (CEE) migrants to countries such as England, Germany and the Netherlands, many of you will think of the so-called guest workers from Central and Eastern Europe. Polish people working in construction and agriculture, Bulgarians and Romanians working in the cleaning sector or not working at all, not anymore. While these are definitely the most common profiles of migrants from the East, they are not the only ones. Diversity within the ‘group’ guest workers is enormous, from expats to low educated, from for example ethnic





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Bulgarians via Roma to Turkish Bulgarians. For the Dutch people among us: Did you know that the majority of Bulgarians in the Netherlands is from a Turkish origin? According to Statistics Netherlands about 400 thousand people in the Netherlands come from CEE countries (EU), around 210 thousand are from Poland, 45 thousand from Bulgaria, 45 thousand from Romania and some 33 thousand from Russia, just to name the largest groups.

Then, we have students and those like me – (ex-)students. Once they finish their studies, some will stay, other will return and third will move to a different Western country in search for labour opportunities. Some never marry, others marry a compatriot, a person from the destination country or a third national, as we call them in a research language. People like my partner. According to Eurostat, 1.3 million students from abroad were undertaking tertiary level education across the EU-27 in 2018 and 44% of those had European origin.

A third type of CEE migrants are those who moved to marry. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in the Netherlands, where researchers speak of the so- called ‘Polish and Russian brides’. This phenomenon is relatively understudied however, so I cannot tell you much about it.

Migration from East to West is not restricted to the European Union and it is not always



voluntary. Most recently, we observed an increased flows of refugees from Ukraine to mainly Poland but also other Western European countries. In the past we saw the migration of people from Former Yugoslavia. These flows of war or political refugees are accompanied by what I call the ‘religious and cultural’ refugees: Polish people escaping from extreme religious beliefs, Hungarians escaping from extreme right wing beliefs and homophobia. Soon I believe we will witness flows of Russians escaping Putin’s regime.



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Although strictly speaking no (longer) migrants, in the Baltic states but also other countries from the former Soviet Union, we find Russian minorities, people of age now, people who left Russia at different moments of time, most recently after the fall of the Communism and age in a country different than the one they have been born in.

Although in different geographical locations and migrating for different reasons, all these examples share a commonality. People arrived at younger age and those who remain are ‘ageing in place’ as a migrant from East to West. When speaking of east to west migration we often envisage the younger generations, but many people stay in the destination countries and age there. In fact, research has shown that at least half of all Eastern European migrants settle permanently in the country of destination. In the Netherlands, at present there are some 38 thousand people from CEE countries aged 55 or more, that is split into for example around 20 thousand Poles (in top 20 of the biggest groups older migrants), 3 thousand respectively from Bulgaria and Romania, 5.5 thousand from Hungary and 5 thousand from Russia and other smaller groups. Just to put these numbers in context, think about those 45 thousand refugees from Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan or close to 60 thousand older migrants with Turkish origin.

Another less well known in Western countries migration flow is that of Eastern European women to Western and Southern European countries such as Austria, Germany and Italy. Those are middle aged to older women who migrate in order to care for older and sick persons abroad. The phenomenon is widely widespread in Italy. The so-called “badante women” are well known in Bulgaria and Romania, where towns are left without women, the men look after children, cook, do the washing and wait for money from their wives working abroad. Similar phenomenon is known to exist in Austria and Germany, with Slovaks taking the main role as care givers. Next to earning money, some of these women use migration to escape ruined marriages and never return, other find freedom and new, better life and bring their children to the destination country, while third live with a constant nostalgia and for the few visits when they can go home to hug their children and grandchildren. What research has convincingly shown is that these women, like other low educated guest-workers, often work in precarious working conditions, without social protection and often experience loneliness and deprivation.

### East-West vs. South-North: What have we learned?

Although never exactly the same, certain characteristics of the East-West migration resemble the South-North migration patterns. What have we learned from the past and what should we pay attention to? Without going into details, I would like to mention a few points that in my point of view deserve our attention.



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1. Language: Learning the language of the host country is a must! The story of the first generation guest workers with Turkish and Moroccan background needs no repetition.
2. Social networks: Investing in social networks pays back! Research on loneliness has shown that it is widespread even among Western EU expats. We also know by now that Polish networks are often restricted to the nuclear family and that they find it difficult to establish friendships with natives.
3. (Institutional) Discrimination: Research on for example older refugees has shown that discrimination is one significant determinant of ageing well. People who experience discrimination are much more likely to belong to a cluster of less well ageing older adults. Discrimination is also positively associated with loneliness among older migrants.
4. Health: Especially for low educated guest-workers health is a of a paramount importance. Bad working conditions and minimum (social) protection lead to early age co-morbidity. At play are early retirement schemes resulting in later life poverty and high care costs.
5. Living arrangements: Migrants are scattered in big cities and often live in deprived neighborhoods leading to bad living conditions and possibilities for improvement of their language and social networks.

Is it the right time to speak about older migrants from the East to the West?

YES!

We have learned a lot as we go, take for instance the example of the first generation guest-workers from Turkey in Germany, France, Denmark, the Netherlands and other Western European countries. Once old(er) in a foreign country, there is little one as a person and policy as a societal tool can change. All we can do is try to mitigate the challenges people experience. The East to West migration is an young phenomenon with people who have not yet reached very old ages. Let's not wait until people become in need for care to give urgency to the phenomenon. Like with all migrants, migrants from the East bring challenges and opportunities, every challenge can be turned into opportunity and every missed opportunity becomes a challenge!





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We are the professionals of today. We are the experts of own countries. We together can make a difference. I would like to end with a great quote from mother Teresa: “ You can do things I cannot, I can do things you cannot; together we can do great things!”



With this words Nina finalized her speech. The hosts thanked Nina for this wonderfull speech and introduced the initiative of the Participatiekeuken, a social catering service who serves dinners in neighborhoods so people can meet each other. This evening they serve us, all though it is well known that ENIEC-members don't need anything special to just start meeting and talking!!



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### Monday 16: Let's reconnect!

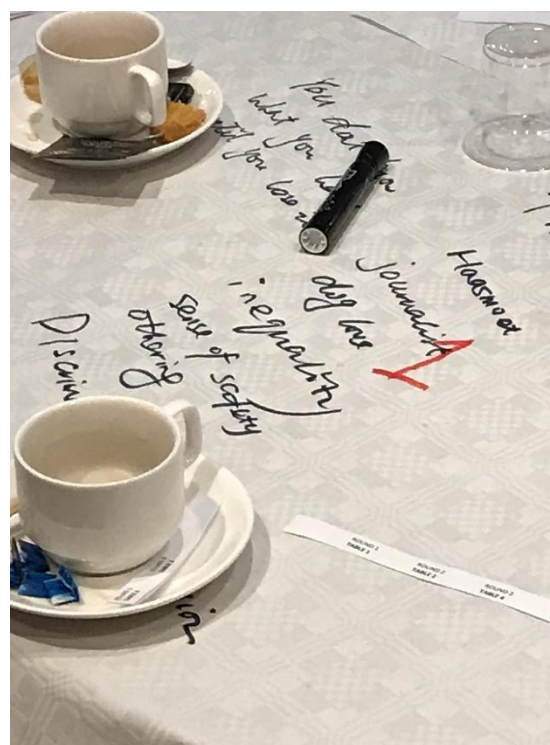
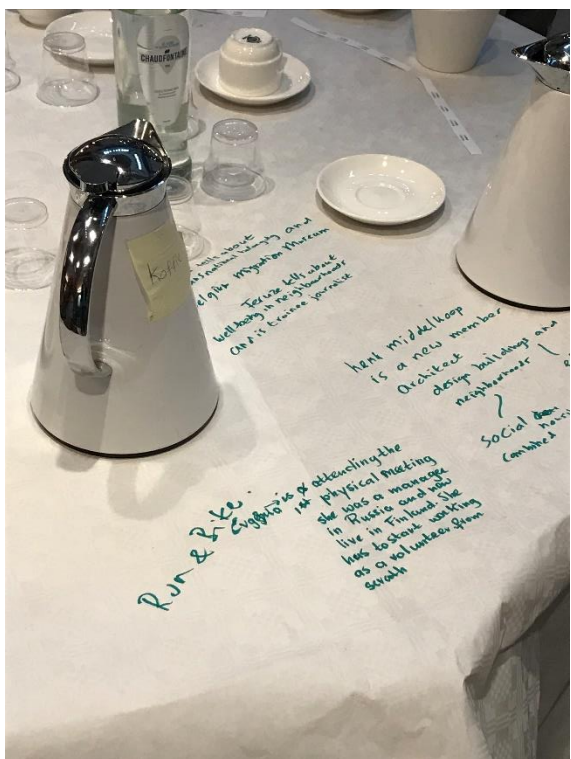
On this day, we had the opportunity to deliberate in a picturesque place - Julianaplaza. The authentic and historic building, a former church, from 1926 and the modern event location created a beautiful backdrop for our meeting. World Café that opened the meeting was a good occasion to know each other and also share our knowledge with a lot of members, especially it was helpful for new members who are just starting their adventure with ENIEC. Our member Thijs supported us in a couple of rounds to come to know each other and share your knowledge with a lot of members.







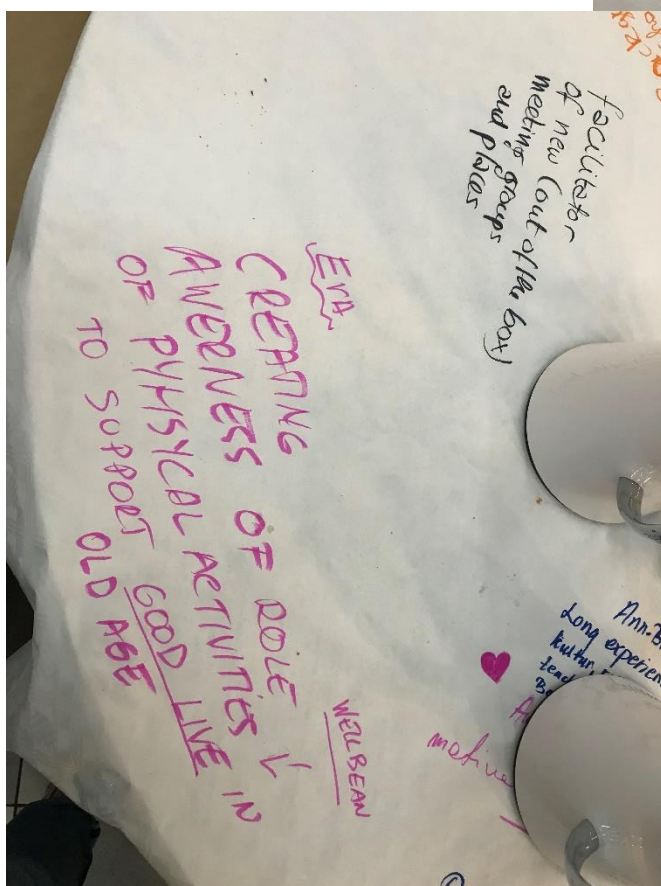
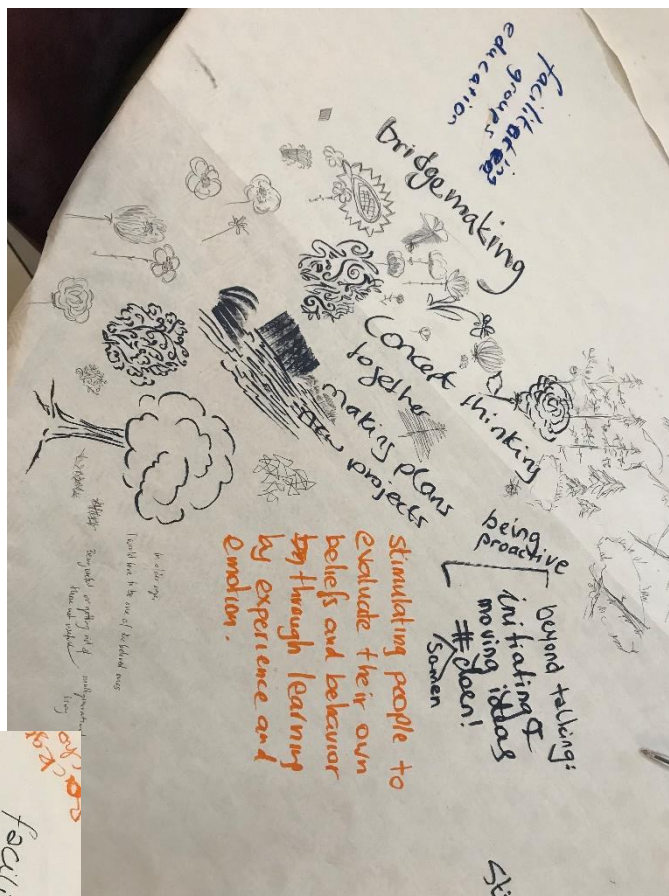
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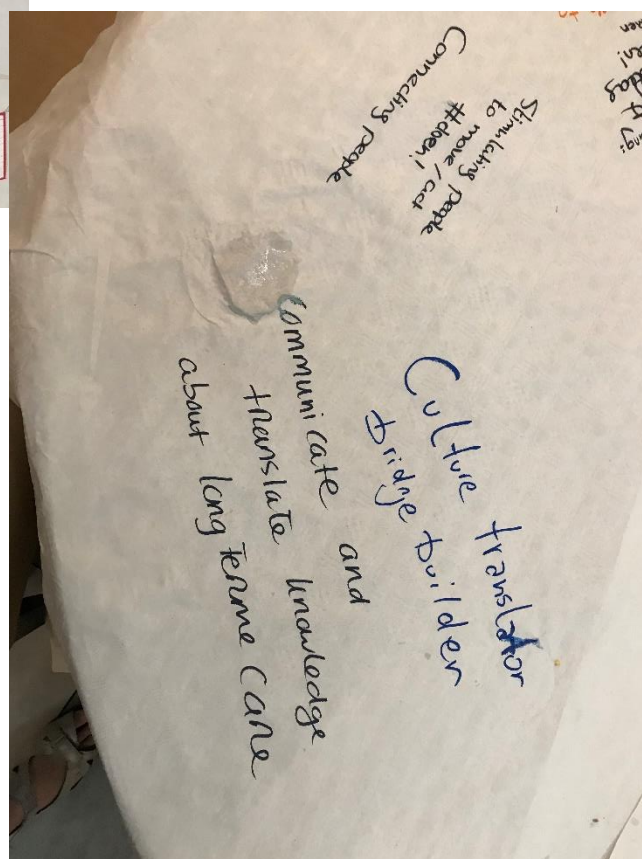
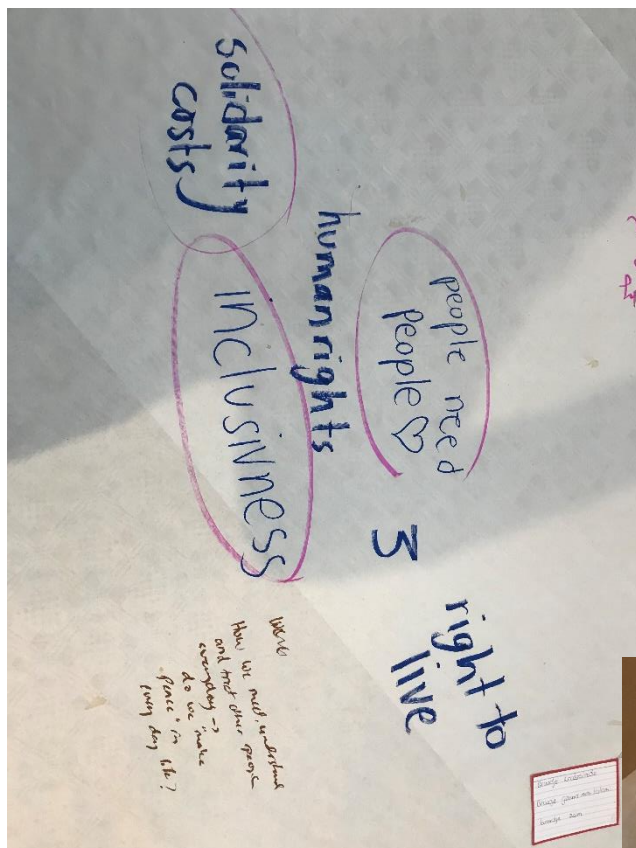


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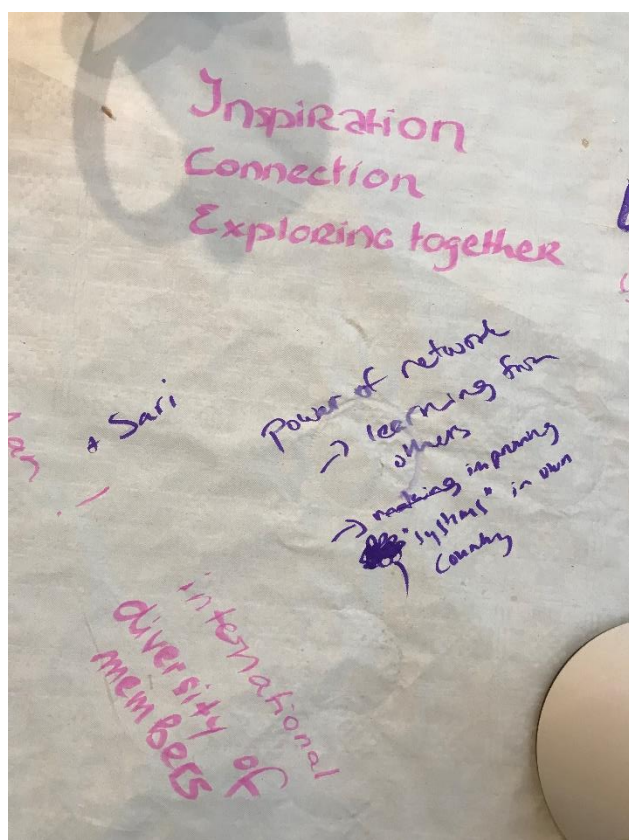
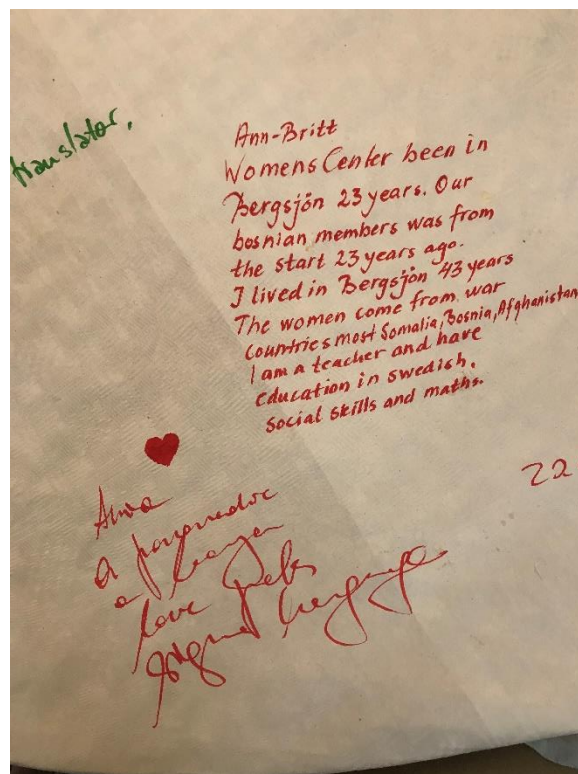
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After the World Café experience we were hosting Polish women living in the Netherlands. The discussion was led by our member Frans, supported by our chair Ela. The Polish women told about their work for Polish women who need support in various life issues. They shared their experiences with us. They have decided to devote their voluntary activity to other Polish women to make their lives in the Netherlands better and easier. Volunteers want them to feel at home as soon as possible, so that they can be fulfilled both in the professional and private field. They provide information, inspiration and language training. They also offer the opportunity to spend time with other women.

#### **Notations regarding the interview of people with Polish background living and working in The Hague**

- They came for many reasons to the Netherlands. For example as a child accompanying their parents, for reason of getting an education, moving from a third country over here or fleeing the communists regime.
- Only ladies showed up. Apart from a single gentleman who felt a little awkward to go public with his story.
- One of the ladies (who came to the Netherlands as a student) told she used to feel ashamed being Polish nowadays she feels proud about it and feels everyone should be.
- Some married a Dutch husband, others married a Polish one.



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- Some work as a volunteer or professional with Polish/CEE people.
- Getting older means staying healthy. They want to travel and enjoy life. Health is also important for men making long hours believing they will stay healthy forever. They don't really prepare for an old age in the Netherlands.
- Care homes have a bad press and they rather stay within their family. Their social network mainly consists of people or family with a Polish background. This makes it hard to reach out to others, for that they need help of organizations.
- Language is very important. Everyone mentions it. Almost all ladies speak Dutch, many men don't. Being short of time and a limited network prevents them to.
- A discussion followed whose responsibility it should be for them seeking a place in Dutch society. On the one hand it was considered to be a personal responsibility, language included. On the other hand: working conditions prevent men to take this responsibility. Unfair working contracts and long working hours prevent them to.
- It was mentioned that second-generation children, born in the Netherlands, can play a major role in preparing for old age. They are tri-lingual and can help elderly very well.







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- These young people can become employees of care homes in which they not only care for their elders but also help them with language problems along the way.
- Information should be available more easily. Though one of the ladies reminded one should seek for it oneself. Nobody will help you if you don't reach out to them. Still, one must be able to find one's way which isn't easy.
- It is important as well to examine the needs of the people related.
- They might be inclined to return to their fatherland when they retire, yet they are hesitant about it because their children live here.
- Getting older is being regarded as stopped working, being retired.





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**In short:**

For a good old age both health and being in connection with one's family is essential.

The quality of life improves with language capabilities and having the right information. This needs both an active roll of the elderly themselves and support of organizations as well. Especially for men regarding health- and language issues. Employment conditions are often not very good. Women do often the house holding: in Polish culture they are the ones taking care of the family. Conclusion: this doesn't much differ from former migrant groups.

After the interesting discussions and sharing insights the hosts thanked Frans and the Polish ladies for their contribution.





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### Monday Afternoon: let's explore!

In the afternoon program during lunch we had possibility to hear speeches of owner of Julianaplaza, Atalay Celenk and, alderman of the city of The Hague, Martijn Balster, who is responsible not only for the neighborhood approach but also for labour and housing for migrants. This two speakers introduced us into the neighborhood of Transvaal which we were going to see and meet in the afternoon. Transvaal is a neighborhood with lots of opportunities and problems and both sides need to be more explored.





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Our members Ellen, Karen and Irene introduced the participants of the AM to the three worthwhile field trips to:

- Nursing home WZH Transvaal for Surinam-Hindustan elderly,
- Community Centre Mandelaplein with special culturally specific groups for Moroccan elderly with reading lessons and Hindustan cooking group,
- Foundation Mother and Daughter for emancipation of Moroccan-Berber women.

After the introduction we split up and when in smaller groups to these interesting meeting places. We managed to meet each other at Kaapse Plein, the square where the Municipality is dealing with lot's of problems such as illegal housing and work and the unsafe environment that occurs of that. A civil servant and former police officer tells about the tools they use and the results.



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Then it was time to visit the largest market known for its diversity - Haagse Market- and monument of Ghandi where we met former alderman of the city Ram Ramlal , who told us about the inhabitants of The Hague with Surinam-Hindustan background. He also talks about the meaning of the Ghandi statue and why it is important to keep Ghandi's ideas alive, especially at important places as where we are. His foundation tries to rise a statue in every city. We lost some members at the market, so that's why our group photo is not complete. We are pretty sure the members not on the photo did some great shopping meanwhile!





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### Monday Evening

At the end of the first day Annual Meeting 2022 in The Hague ENIEC we had a nice dinner and members had the opportunity to reveal their dancing skills. Our dear member Eva designed a dance for us, based on folkdances from Europe and especially Ukraine . Everyone had fun and laughter. This unforgettable moments also accompanied us on the next day of the meeting.







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### Tuesday Morning: meeting in the nursing home and Goodbyes!



Tuesday we went to the nursinghome Saffier Nolenshaghe. Here we were welcomed by our former member Vidya, who told us about inclusion and other themes in nursing home care. We also held our General Assembly, a special report on this part is available.

With an introduction about Gdansk, the next city we are going to visit as the other half of the diptych we closed our annual meeting. The new Boardmembers were introduced and the former board was thanked for their work.







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### Evaluation

**22 participants** filled out the evaluation form.

### The results

Evaluation of The Annual Meeting Program (1-it was not so good, 5-it was fabulous)

Category:	1	2	3	4	5
Overall experience			4	4	14
The organization of the AM			1	3	18
The program topics & content			4	5	13
The format, ways of learning, meeting			3	5	14
The distribution of time – formal meetings			5	3	14
The distribution of time – informal meetings			4	3	15
The facilities			1	3	18
The clarity of the information provided			2	5	15

Ideas for improvement for the program, format, facilities



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- Maybe a little bit more time for breakfast and less time for transportation, if possible.
- Everything was all right, but we need some more time for rest 😊
- Everything was wonderful, so keep going!
- Little bit more sharing together ideas what people are up to. World café was a nice way to talk with other members informally.
- I wished a little bit more time to interact with other members within some topics that we need for our work. World café was very good.
- More about old people.
- More time for discussion.
- Enough social talk.
- A bit of history of the work with elderly in the country.
- Starting 15 minutes later in the morning.
- Maybe we should try to be more innovative in discussing some topics as we have years of experience and have learned from that.

### Evaluation of the General Assembly

Category:	1	2	3	4	5
Overall experience			2	3	17
The GA program, topics and content			1	4	17
The distribution of time			4	4	14
The clarity of information provided			1	3	18

### Ideas for improvement for our General Assembly, information, etc.





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For that time there is no more ideas, thank you!!!

Thank you!

Thank you!

It's great that we can interrupt and talk free about ideas!

Technology improvement.

Compliments to the Board and the Organizing Committee.