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ACPA – Adapting European Cities to Population Ageing: Policy challenges and best practice

Targeted Analysis

**Case Study Report:
Barcelona**



A city for all phases of life

Case Study Report: Barcelona

This Case Study is part of the ESPON Targeted Analysis ACPA, which is conducted within the framework of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme.

The ESPON EGTC is the Single Beneficiary of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme. The Single Operation within the programme is implemented by the ESPON EGTC and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the EU Member States and the Partner States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

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Contact: info@espon.eu

ISBN: 978-2-919795-37-6

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Version 24/04/2020

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Abbreviations

EC	European Commission
ESPON	European Territorial Observatory Network
ESPON EGTC	ESPON European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
WHO	World Health Organization

Foreword

Tackling demographic change is one of the main challenges facing modern societies, a transformation that has an impact on all areas of life and people's entire life cycles.

A widely shared perspective is that the challenge of demographic change and ageing is not only about senior citizens, but must be seen as a challenge for society as a whole, including all times of life. If we want a diverse, complex Barcelona, the inter-generational perspective is a necessary condition. The gender perspective is essential for rethinking the care model and the ageing process itself, among other things. Prioritising social and gender justice means including recognition and respect at all times of life, and in that way, overcoming the stereotypes that segregate and impede people's self-sufficiency.

By 2030, nearly one out of every three Barcelona residents will be 60 years old or over. This is how one of the factors of demographic change will be expressed, but it is by no means the only one.

Above all, demographic change is about women. In Barcelona, two out of every three residents aged 80 or over are women. They also account for 56% of the generation aged between 60 and 79.

Longer life expectancy and the need to care for the oldest

Average life expectancy in the city is 83, with a continuing upwards trend. Although old age does not necessarily mean dependence, various indicators show that limitations on daily life and the need for help increase year by year from 75 onwards, especially among women. In the over-84 age group, most of the population present some form of disability that causes significant limitations for undertaking everyday activities (60%). However, age is not the only factor: prior life trajectories and socio-economic inequalities lead to an enormous variety of situations among older people.

Remaining in their own home and in the same neighbourhood is a preferred option

Ninety percent of people aged 80 or over state that, in the event of wanting to change their residence and being able to do so, they would choose their current neighbourhood. Therefore, public, community and family support for these people in their own homes becomes essential, when it is considered that there are more and more senior citizens living alone. This means a continuing increase in the demand for support services at home.

Vulnerabilities related to housing: less security, access problems and adaptation needs

Eighty % of people aged 65 or over currently live in their own homes, without any pending payments, which increases ownership security for senior citizens. However, in a context of increasingly expensive rental prices, separation or divorce (which are becoming more and more frequent at advanced ages) and reduced access to property can lead to situations of

residential vulnerability or the need to change city. One of the factors that also influences people remaining in their own homes is adapting their accommodation to their new needs, regarding both interior features of the home and communal elements.

Taking into account all of these considerations, for Barcelona it is relevant to have the opportunity to know and share experiences and policies developed to face ageing processes. As we commented before, we are totally convinced that the ageing is a process that affects not only our close environment, but also the majority of cities and urban areas in Europe.

Accordingly, being involved into the “ACPA – Adapting European Cities to Population Ageing: Policy challenges and best practices” project has let us not only to know those best practices developed by our partners, but testing and receiving feedback about our own actions. We believe too, that there is a large field to explore in terms of social innovation, especially in ageing policies. Therefore, we positively appreciate to analyse the experiences of other European cities, because they become potential actions to apply in our context.

Ramon Pablo Malagrida and Natalia Rosetti Maffioli

Ajuntament de Barcelona

1 Introduction

Many countries in Europe are facing a demographic transition which also entails an increasing number of older people. This trend is usually most apparent in rural areas. However, in urban areas this phenomenon is starting to become visible as well. The cities of Amsterdam, Barcelona, Gothenburg, Hengelo, Greater Manchester, Nantes, Oslo and Zaragoza belong to a group of cities that are either already facing relatively high percentages of older people in their populations, or expect such high percentages in the near future. During the last years, these cities have undertaken action to improve quality of life for older people. Still, they have a knowledge need related to the following questions:

- How do older people experience the daily life in the cities?
- What do older people view as benefits and constraints associated with urban living?
- How are the eight stakeholder cities responding to population ageing?
- Which policies have been the most effective in developing age-friendly cities and how have they been implemented and which are the success factors?

ESPON ACPA has resulted in good practices and policy recommendations based on case study research in the eight stakeholder cities. These insights have been combined in the ACPA synthesis report, main report and policy handbook. While those reports offer valuable information in aggregated form, it is also valuable to look at the situation in each of the eight stakeholder cities in more detail.

Therefore, eight city reports are available that provide a closer look at each stakeholder city. The present report focuses on Barcelona and portrays the state of affairs in Barcelona in terms of:

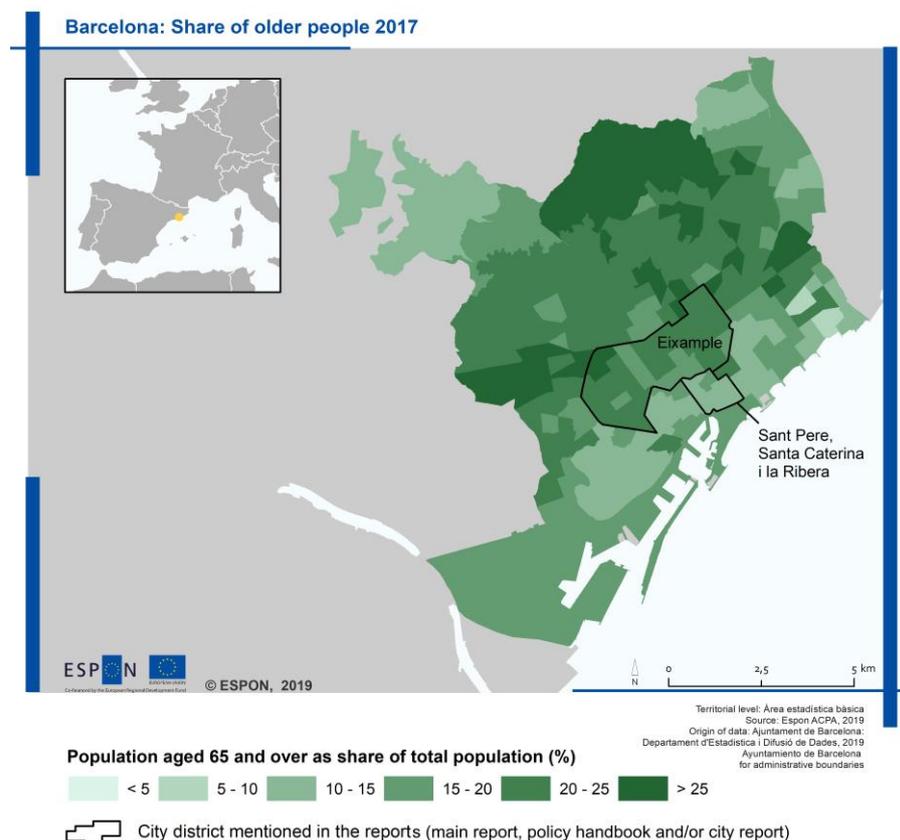
- Demographic trends and developments related to population ageing within the city;
- The strategy and policies that the urban authorities, professionals and other stakeholders in Barcelona pursue to cope with population ageing;
- A selection of inspiring examples of how the ageing policy has been implemented;
- Challenges and opportunities from the perspective of older people, interest groups and policy makers;
- Policy recommendations for the city of Barcelona based on the insights that have emerged from ACPA.

2 Demographic profile

Barcelona, capital city of the autonomous community of Catalonia, is the second largest city in Spain with 1.620.343 inhabitants (2018).¹ The territory is organised in ten districts comprising 73 neighbourhoods. Population density ranks high, with 15.706 inhabitants per square kilometre.

In 2019, older people represent one fifth (21.3%) of the population in Barcelona², two percentage points above the national average.³ Demographic forecasts for the city suggest that the current proportion will increase up to a third by 2030. Today, 53.4% of Barcelona's older people are concentrated in the inland districts of Eixample, Sant Martí, Horta-Guinardó and Nou Barris.

Map 2.1: Barcelona: Share of older people 2017



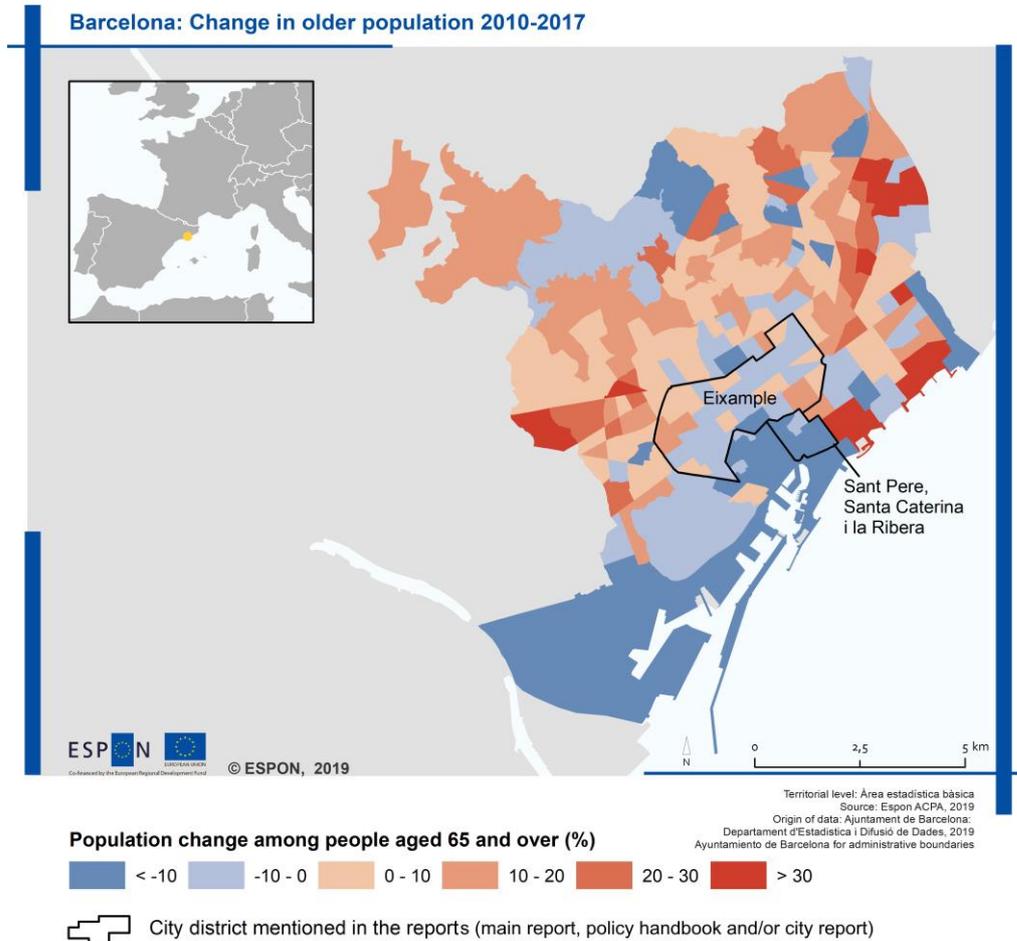
Note: the map also indicates the names of particular neighbourhoods that are mentioned within ESPON ACPA.

¹ Instituto Nacional de Estadística (2019) *Barcelona: población por municipios y sexo*. Available at: <http://www.ine.es/jaxiT3/Datos.htm?t=2861>

² Ajuntament de Barcelona (2019) *Estadística*. Available at: <https://www.bcn.cat/estadistica/castella/dades/inf/lecpadro/lec19/t21.htm>

³ Instituto Nacional de Estadística (2019) *Proporción de personas mayores de cierta edad por provincia*. Available at: <https://www.ine.es/jaxiT3/Datos.htm?t=1488>

Map 2.2: Barcelona: Change of older population 2010-2017



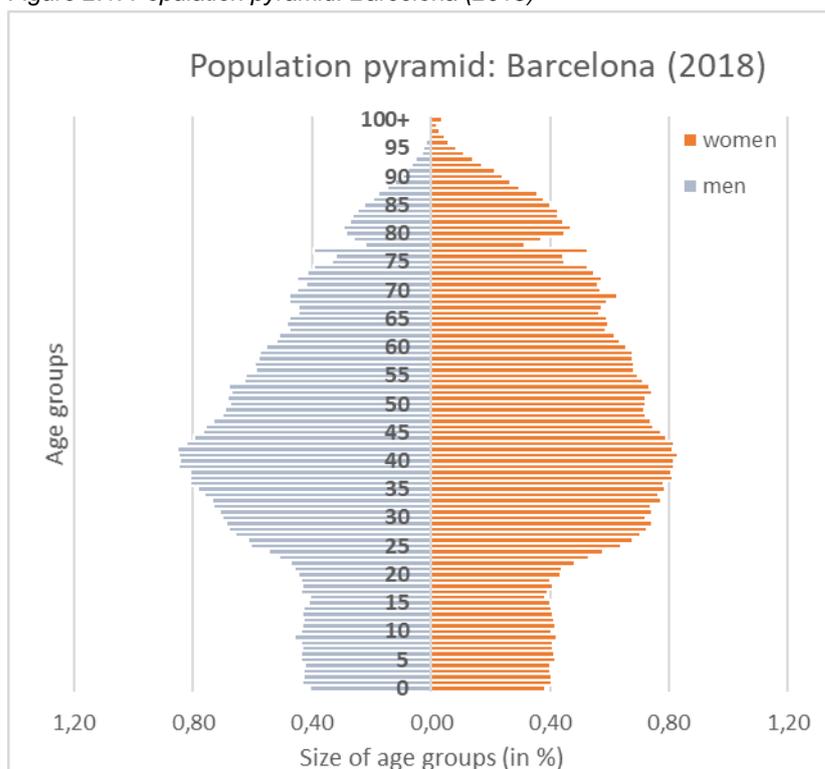
Note: the map also indicates the names of particular neighbourhoods that are mentioned within ESPON ACPA.

The average life expectancy stands at 81.2 years for men and 86.9 years for women (2016).⁴ However, a closer look reveals differences across districts and socio-economic conditions. For instance, life expectancy of people living in Les Corts (district with the highest economic capacity) is 4.3 years higher than of those living within Ciutat Vella (district with the lowest economic capacity).

Women represent 60% of all senior citizens in Barcelona. The proportion of older women compared to older men grows with age, as the population pyramid illustrates below. This situation affects women's experiences of aging.

⁴ Agència de Salut Pública (2018) *La salut a Barcelona 2017*. Available at: <https://www.aspb.cat/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Informe-Salut-2017-web.pdf>

Figure 2.1: Population pyramid: Barcelona (2018)



Source: Ajuntament de Barcelona (2019) *Estadística*

Loneliness affects a growing section of this age group, as four out of ten older people live alone (most of them women). In addition, 26.3% of citizens over 74 are at risk of poverty and social exclusion.⁵

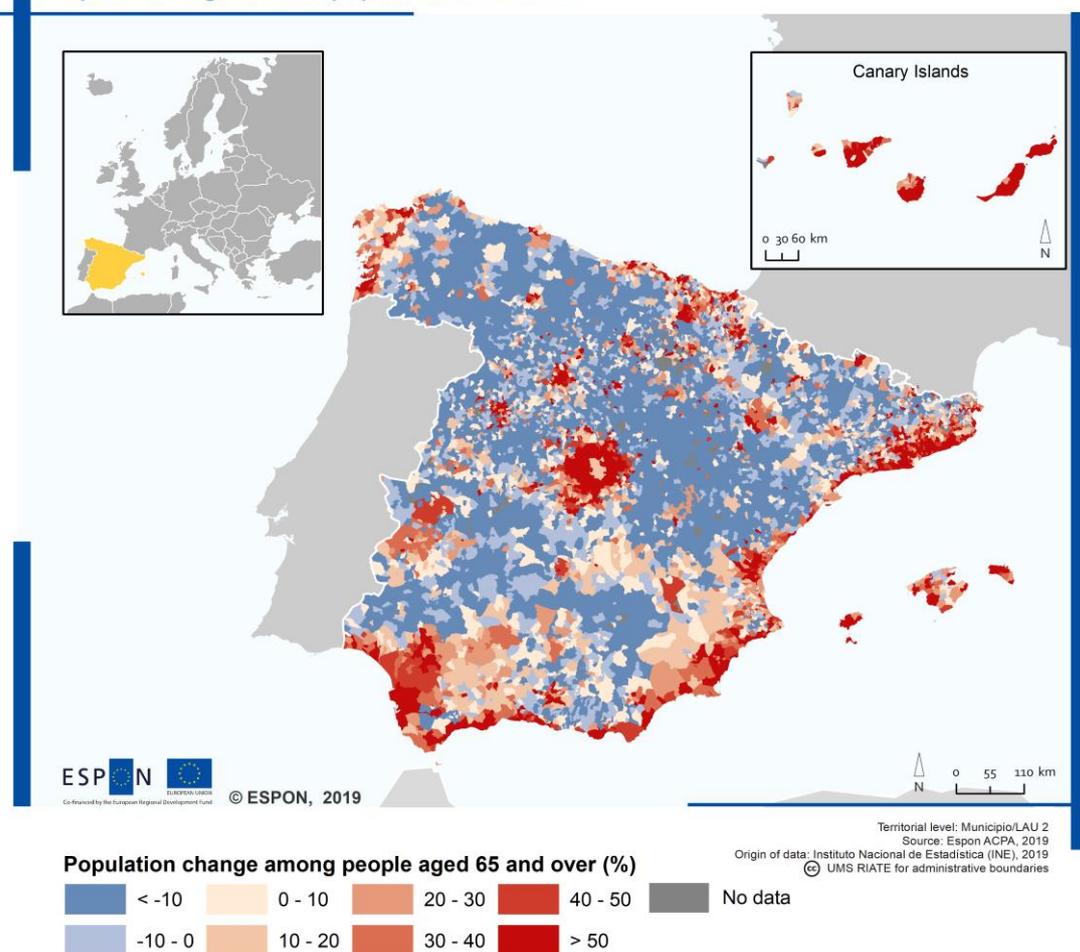
As map 2.3 illustrates, compared to most regions in Spain, Barcelona has experienced a significant change in older population over the last twenty years.

⁵ Ajuntament de Barcelona (2019) *Estadística*

Available at: <https://www.bcn.cat/estadistica/castella/dades/tvida/esd/esd17/persones/taxes/trp.htm>

Map 2.3: Spain Change in older population 2000-2018

Spain: Change in older population 2000-2018



Gentrification is having a dramatic impact on older people living in the city centre. With housing rent rocketing in areas such as Ciutat Vella, Raval, Ribera, Barceloneta and Eixample, many older residents are forced to leave their homes seeking cheaper options. Some nursing homes have closed, leaving senior citizens relocated to other residences or back to their families.⁶ This phenomenon changes the social composition of neighbourhoods and brings negative consequences for the mental health of those affected by it. Research suggests that gentrification generates ‘chronic stress, depression and suicidal thoughts’, especially to those who may face eviction.⁷ Older people are particularly vulnerable, as their economic resources may not suffice to deal with the higher costs of living, and feeling expelled from their homes typically represents a disheartening experience.

⁶ EIPeriódico (2019) *Residencias, las últimas víctimas de la gentrificación en Barcelona*. Available at: www.elperiodico.com/es/barcelona/20190603/residencias-la-ultimas-victimas-de-la-gentrificacion-en-barcelona-7470750

⁷ EIPeriódico (2019) *Gentrificación: un riesgo para la salud*. Available at: www.elperiodico.com/es/barcelona/20181104/gentrificacion-barcelona-problemas-salud-7122562

3 Policy overview

Barcelona has a long track record of public policies addressing population ageing. Notable examples include the 2008-2011 and 2016-2019 Municipal Action Plans, the 2006-2010 Municipal Programme for Older People, 2017-2021 Plan to Improve Barcelona's Age Friendliness, and the 2018-2030 Strategy for Demographic Change and Ageing.



Figure 3.1: Logo of Ciudades Amigables con las Personas Mayores (Age-Friendly)

In 2009, the Barcelona City Council commenced the *Barcelona, Age-Friendly City* project in the framework of the Age-friendly Cities programme promoted by the World Health Organisation (WHO).⁸ Two years later, the city joined the Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities with the commitment to involve older people in community activities and to improve their quality of life.

At the Barcelona City Council, the concept of 'right to the city throughout life' is preferred to 'age-friendliness'. This implies that Barcelona aspires to become a city "that offers opportunities, space and the possibility for people of all ages to live together".⁹ Thus, the slogan *A city for all phases of life* ("Una ciudad para todos los ciclos de la vida") was developed.

3.1 Motivation and goals

The city decided to implement a series of initiatives specific for older people as awareness on the changing demographic trends grew. Addressing the concerns of senior citizens is now part of the agenda of all political parties, as the 2019 local elections campaign evidenced.¹⁰

Barcelona's strategic positioning with regards to population ageing policies may be observed from two aspects: the executive structure of the local administration and the most relevant measures to defend and promote the rights of older people. First, the City Council hosts a specific Department for Childhood, Youth and Older People responsible for ensuring the efficient delivery of projects and services for these groups. Then, the 2016-2019 Municipal Action Programme holds measures for improving the quality of life of seniors in a prominent position, stressing the importance of promoting active ageing and personal autonomy. The Programme keeps in mind that older people constitute a diverse, heterogeneous group with a

⁸ World Health Organisation (2019) *Barcelona -Committed to Becoming More Age-Friendly*. Available at: <https://extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/network/barcelona/>

⁹ Ajuntament de Barcelona (2018) *Strategy for Demographic Change and Ageing 2018-2030*, page 67

¹⁰ El País (2019) *Los partidos compiten por la Barcelona que envejece*. Available at: https://elpais.com/ccaa/2019/05/25/catalunya/1558807606_736753.html

different profile compared to previous generations of seniors, e.g. they are better educated and familiar with some new technologies.

3.2 Priorities

Table 3.1 shows how representatives from the city have weighted their priorities against the eight WHO policy domains.

The latest city administration prioritised the domains of Housing and Community Support & Health Services in their age-related policies, with a special focus on personal autonomy and active ageing.

In relation to housing, the City Council faced the challenge of not having competences to develop drastic policies. Still, initiatives such as ‘apartments with services’ (hosting 1.500 users), ‘social blocks’ integrating several services (e.g. healthcare) and ‘shared apartments’ were developed for senior citizens over the last few years. Home care services were also promoted. Facilitating life in people’s homes (as 90% of people over 80 wish to stay in their homes and waiting lists for retirement/ nursing homes are considerably long) and combating loneliness stood at the core of the initiatives.

As for community support & health services, actions mainly addressed the issue of loneliness. Flagship projects such as Radars and Vincles (see section 4), as well as ‘Meals in Company’ or ‘Breathe More’, decidedly contributed to this domain. The City Council strives to grant dependent senior citizens the same opportunities as non-dependent ones and ensure the well-being of all.

Table 3.1: Priority Table

Priority areas according to city representatives of Barcelona <i>(scores range from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates a very low priority and 5 a very high priority)</i>	
Domain 1: Outdoor spaces and built environment	4
Domain 2: Transport and mobility	4
Domain 3: Housing	5
Domain 4: Social participation	4
Domain 5: Social inclusion and non-discrimination	4
Domain 6: Civic engagement and employment ¹¹	3
Domain 7: Communication and information	3
Domain 8: Community support and health services ¹²	5

¹¹ Of the WHO policy domains, domain number 6 is only partly addressed in Age-friendly Gothenburg, as civic engagement is an area of focus, whereas employment is not explicitly included and primarily addressed within policies concerning labour market and adult education. Nevertheless, in the forthcoming action plan for Age-Friendly Gothenburg, one central element will be to make better use of the resources of older people in volunteer work.

¹² Older care and home care are not explicitly included in the Age-Friendly Gothenburg programme.

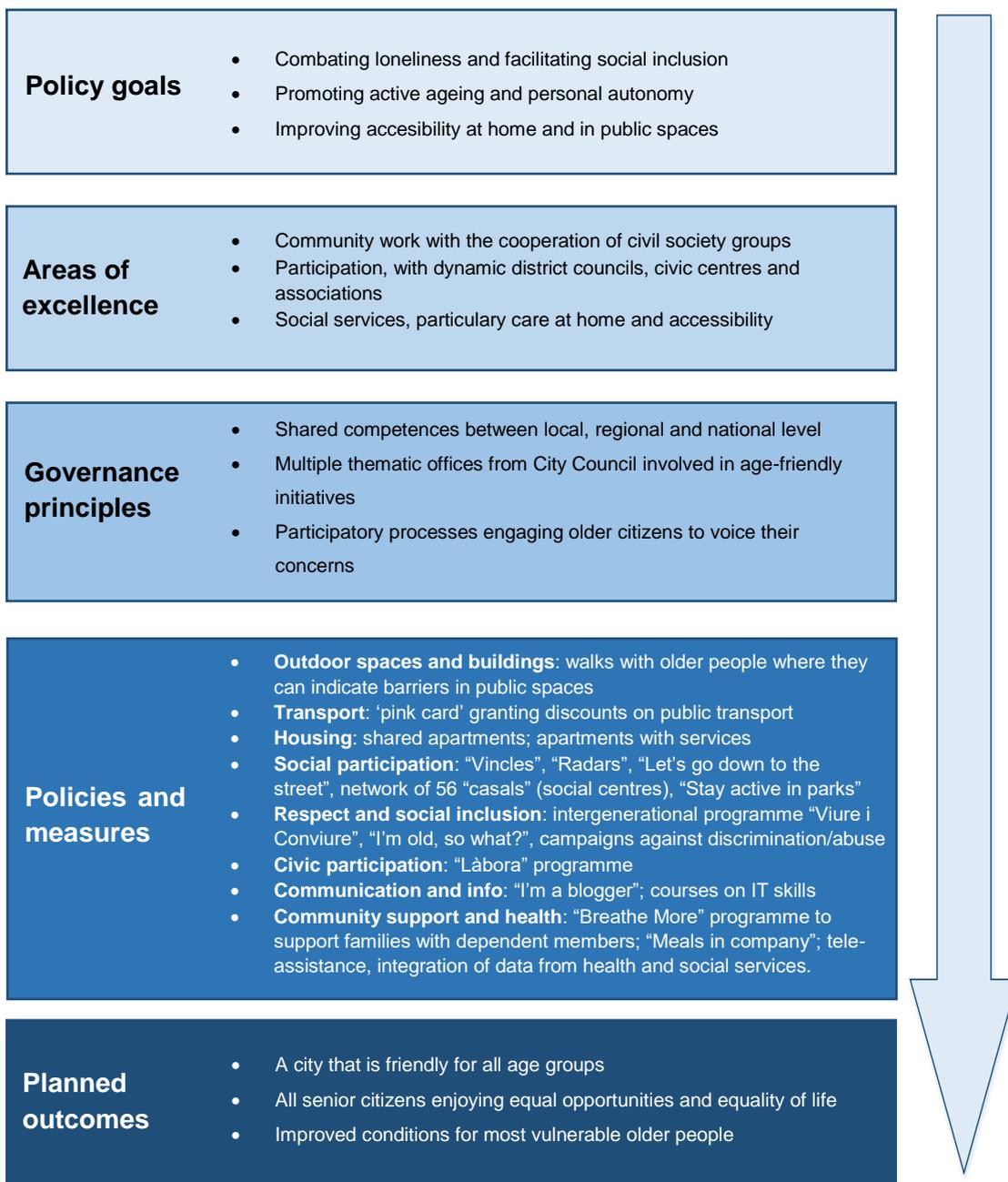
3.3 Approach

The Barcelona City Council works on age-friendly policies from a multidisciplinary approach, combining expertise from different offices such as social care, promotion and participation. Monthly meetings are arranged for civil servants to exchange experiences and ensure coordinated action.

Many initiatives have a transversal nature, as they are not strictly designed for senior citizens. Rather, they may bring a positive impact for most age groups in the city. That would be the case of measures concerning accessibility, social inclusion or environmental protection.

Participatory processes were arranged to give older citizens a say on the city policies concerning ageing. For instance, group walks around the city with seniors were organised in order to understand the daily challenges they encounter when using public transport or going to the market. Focus groups, qualitative research and forums such as the Voices of the Older People convention, are other practices.

Figure 3.2: Policy Overview



4 Perspectives on policy initiatives

A selection of inspiring policy initiatives and organisational structures in the municipality of Barcelona is presented below. These initiatives were selected based on intensive consultation with policy makers, stakeholders and older people in Barcelona. They outline innovative methods that have produced tangible effects. The promising practices that are mentioned have only started recently and do not show measurable results as of yet but are still considered initiatives with high potential. For the complete methodology, please consult the scientific annex provided in the main report of the ESPON ACPA study.

Vincles ('Bonds')

Content and organisation

- Designed for people over 65 who feel lonely and want to engage in social life.
- Consists of creating and strengthening social bonds through the use of an app that facilitates communication between users and/or between users and their family and friends.
- The City Council has provided tablets for 1.000 users and delivered personalised training courses to get started using the app. A helpdesk is also available in case of technical problems.

Effectiveness

- Vincles has 2.331 users (situation March 2020). According to the users, the app has encouraged older people to participate in social activities, decreasing the feeling of loneliness
- It has also tackled the digital divide, increasing users' self-esteem and autonomy.

Innovativeness

- Its innovative design was recognised with the Bloomberg Foundation's Mayors Challenge award in 2014 (worth €5 million), as a promising project to improve citizens' quality of live.

Transferability

- This initiative does not depend on specific local conditions, which makes it easily transferable
- Transferability is facilitated in cases where potential users already have a tablet and all local authorities have to provide is the app, as it decreases costs.

Radars

Content and organisation

- This initiative articulates a residential network dedicated to the prevention and detection of risk situations for older people living alone in the neighborhood.
- Neighbours and people working in proximity shops and pharmacies are the main actors checking on older people. In case of anomaly or incident, they inform the relevant social services.
- Some volunteers periodically call older citizens to establish a relationship of trust.
- Health centres, civic centres and NGOs are involved to encourage older people to participate.
- It is jointly coordinated by the City Council and civil society associations of each neighbourhood.

Effectiveness

- This has been running in the city since 2008.
- *Radars* is currently present in all districts, operating in 55 neighbourhoods.
- These networks are currently taking care of more than 170.000 people over 75 years old.

Innovativeness

- It engages the local community to care for each other, strengthening bonds between neighbours.
- Volunteers, professionals and local authorities act in a coordinated, complementary manner.

Transferability

- This initiative succeeds due to the particular social culture of some neighbourhoods and the local administration in Barcelona, which could make it hard to replicate in other cities.

Viure i Conviure ('Living and Sharing')

Content and organisation

- Inter-generational initiative where an older person hosts a student at home during the academic year. This combats loneliness among older people and offers housing for young students.
- Students should be under 35, enrolled at university and not be residents in Barcelona.
- Hosts should be over 65 and living alone, be able to carry out their daily activities autonomously.
- The City Council and the Roure Foundation are in charge of coordinating this initiative.

Effectiveness

- In 2018, 74 senior citizens and young people took part in the project.
- Many participants have repeated the experience over several academic years.

- The average age of the older participants was 87, with 86% of them women.
- A total of 76% of students were young women aged between 18 and 23.

Innovativeness

- This project touches several domains: housing, participation and inclusion, community support.
- It goes beyond the material exchange, offering participants the chance to share experiences, provide mutual company and help each other.

Transferability

- This initiative could be easily replicated, especially in cities with higher education centres.

5 Challenges and opportunities

Although the previous section has shown successful examples of initiatives for older people, interviews with various groups of stakeholders in Barcelona have resulted in the insight that in certain policy domains, there are still improvements possible. The following overview indicates this from the viewpoint of older people in Barcelona, the interest groups representing them and policymakers in the city.

Table 5.1: Challenges and Opportunities | Older people

	Challenges	Opportunities
Older people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of commitment from politicians, sometimes reluctant to listen to the concerns of older people. • Public budget not granting enough funds for age-friendly initiatives. • Some civil society initiatives do not have their own resources and depend on subsidies to exist. • Information on activities for older people is not easily accessible for everyone. • Use of new technologies sometimes proves challenging, especially for completing administrative procedures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children can be educated in civic responsibility and respect towards older people. • Initiatives to make the city friendlier with senior citizens will be beneficial for all age groups. • Society can take advantage of the experience and knowledge of older people to improve initiatives. • Senior citizens can participate in groups like the Advisory Council of Older People to inform and persuade policymakers on age-friendly actions. • Civic centres offer many opportunities for older people to socialise and stay active.

Table 5.2: Challenges and Opportunities | Interest groups

	Challenges	Opportunities
Interest groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most research on population ageing does not address the specific experiences of women and other minority groups. Older people are taken as a single group, disregarding its diversity. • Many age-friendly projects focus on the short term and may disappear if the next local administration is led by a different political party. • It is not always easy to convince older people to participate in age-friendly initiatives; psycho-social barriers frequent in cases of loneliness. • Conditions of care workers are still precarious. • Increasing gentrification of the city, with negative effects for areas where older people live. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policymakers are willing to cooperate with interest groups to improve the quality of life of older people, granting visibility and economic support. • The administration is increasingly incorporating social clauses in the terms of reference of tenders. • Active, committed civil society in the city. • Older people generally welcome initiatives to combat unwanted loneliness.

Table 5.3: Challenges and Opportunities | Policy makers

	Challenges	Opportunities
Polycymakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reaching out to senior citizens who do not normally engage in social life. • Division of competences between local and regional administrations (sometimes belonging to different political parties) hinders the adoption of ambitious age-friendly policies in some domains. • Sometimes the demands of older people are too abstract, unclear or even contradictory. • Slow bureaucratic procedures delay the adoption of policies. • The successful implementation of 'age-friendly shops' has not been possible yet. • Insufficient synergies among Departments working on age-friendly initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consensus from all political parties on the need to address population ageing. • Barcelona has a long tradition of community life, with an active network of civil society associations and social centres to support people of all ages. • Cross-cutting/transversal nature of some actions can bring positive impacts to several domains. • Older people are sometimes better organised than other age groups, and advocate for measures benefiting the whole society.

6 Policy recommendations

Based on the feedback received from senior citizens, local authorities and civil society groups in Barcelona, a series of policy recommendations is formulated in this final section.

6.1 Strategic recommendations

Policymakers, especially at the local level, should continue encouraging a frequent dialogue with older people and interest groups in the design, implementation and improvement of measures. Within the Barcelona City Council, stronger synergies should be explored among Departments whose work related to older people.

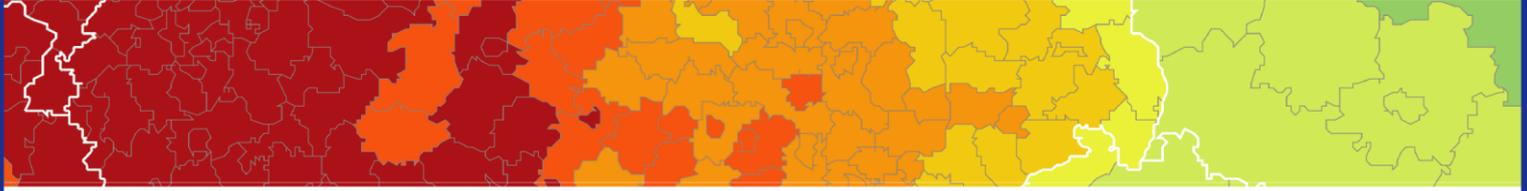
Promoting personal autonomy and, especially, active ageing for people with dependency remains a significant challenge for Barcelona. The next Municipal Action Programme should make a priority of this principle, which would affect most domains.

The diverse nature of this age group should be further acknowledged, granting more attention to the particular experiences of women and minority groups when designing and revising initiatives.

6.2 Thematic recommendations

In terms of the World Health Organisation's domains for age-friendly cities, the following recommendations are suggested:

- **Outdoor spaces and built environment:** more benches and public toilets should be installed in outdoor spaces.
- **Transport and mobility:** full accessibility to all metro/train stations and buses should be ensured. Distance between bus stops should be decreased in some cases.
- **Housing:** mechanisms to ease the life for those who wish to stay at home should be further promoted, e.g. with more resources for home care and teleassistance, as well as apartments with services and shared apartments.
- **Social participation:** additional efforts should be made to reach out to older people who normally do not participate in social life, especially those with physical difficulties;.
- **Social inclusion and non-discrimination:** inter-generational activities should be protected and further promoted, as they have been satisfactory for all parties involved. Campaigns raising awareness about discrimination against older people should continue.
- **Civic engagement and employment:** accessible training on IT skills should be expanded, as it has reportedly been crucial for senior citizens willing to remain professionally active.
- **Communication and information:** additional efforts should be devoted to communicating initiatives designed for older people, as well as to informing them on their rights. Disseminating information on television would increase outreach, as seniors use this medium on a daily basis.
- **Community support and health services:** health and community services should put more emphasis on mental health; measures to eliminate precariousness of care workers are needed.



ISBN: 978-2-919795-37-6

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