

## **Generational change in pensioner organisations: challenges and opportunities in leadership succession**

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Leadership succession is a crucial factor in ensuring the sustainability of organisations across both business and civil sectors, particularly in community-based organisations whose activities are strongly person-dependent and locally embedded. In the context of pensioner organisations, succession planning becomes even more significant due to demographic shifts and the ageing leadership base, raising pressing questions about how organisational knowledge, culture, and management responsibilities can be effectively transferred to new generations.

### **Aim/Scope**

This pilot study aims to explore leadership succession practices, attitudes, and challenges among civil society organisations working with older adults in Hungary's Northern Great Plain region. The research seeks to identify current approaches, highlight structural gaps, and examine how these organisations prepare - or fail to prepare - for generational change and leadership transition.

### **Methods**

A quantitative research design was applied, using a structured questionnaire completed by a targeted sample of 14 pensioner organisations from the counties of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Hajdú-Bihar, and Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok. The survey investigated succession practices, leadership competencies, selection mechanisms, and intergenerational dynamics.

## Results

The findings show that although the leaders of these organisations typically have extensive experience, leadership succession is most often handled on an ad hoc basis, without formal strategic planning or documentation.

Succession issues generally emerge only in crisis situations, such as retirement or unexpected departures, which is particularly problematic in the civil sector where leadership often shapes both daily operations and long-term strategic decisions.

Respondents identified key leadership competencies - including empathy, effective communication, and strategic thinking - reflecting the complex demands of managing civil organisations. However, formal frameworks for preparing future leaders are largely absent; leadership skills are mainly acquired through self-training and practical experience. Successor selection tends to rely on informal relationships rather than structured mentoring. Most leaders are already of retirement age, highlighting an urgent need for conscious and pre-planned leadership transitions. Despite this, written succession plans remain rare and are usually limited to formal management roles. Nevertheless, there is a strong intention among organisations to engage younger generations and ensure the transfer of organisational culture through intergenerational collaboration and mentoring.

## Conclusion

The study confirms that while leadership in civil society organisations in the Northern Great Plain region is highly committed and experienced, significant structural deficiencies exist in succession planning. Sustainable organisational continuity requires formalised planning processes, leadership development initiatives, and institutionalised mechanisms for transferring organisational knowledge and values.

The findings underscore the need for supportive policy frameworks to strengthen succession practices, especially in rural contexts.

This pilot research contributes to the limited body of knowledge on leadership succession in organisations serving older adults and provides a foundation for future studies and interventions aimed at fostering a culture of conscious generational change.

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