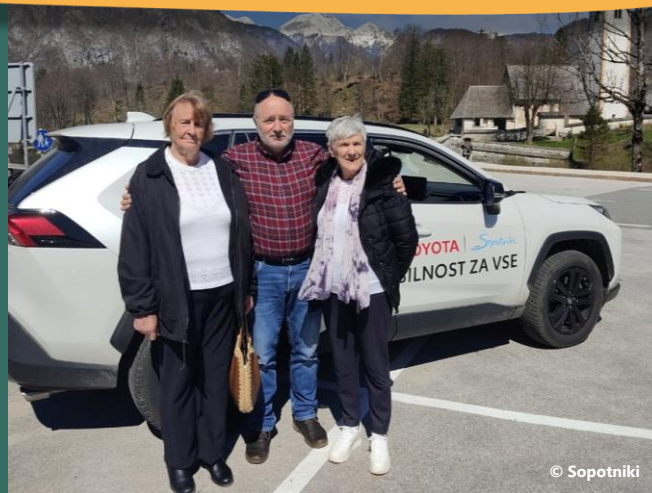


### SUMMARY

'Sopotniki' is a Slovenian non-profit organisation offering free transport for elderly residents in rural areas, ensuring access to essential services and social activities. Operating across 17 municipalities, the service is run by volunteers who provide door-to-door transport, fostering intergenerational connections while promoting community solidarity. The initiative combines a human-centred service with innovative digital tools, including a volunteer coordination platform and a custom-built mobile application for trip management.



### CONTEXT

Many rural areas in Slovenia face depopulation and ageing demographics, creating a pressing need for accessible mobility services.

Public transport options are often scarce or non-existent in remote settlements, leaving elderly residents without means to travel for medical appointments, shopping, or social engagements. The inability to drive, financial constraints, and lack of family support further contribute to the isolation of older rural residents.



### OBJECTIVES

- > Provide free and reliable transport services for elderly residents in rural areas;
- > Reduce social isolation and promote intergenerational engagement through volunteer drivers;
- > Enhance access to essential services, including healthcare, shopping, and social activities;
- > Develop a sustainable mobility model that can be expanded to new municipalities;
- > Leverage technology to optimise operations and improve user experience.

**Themes:** Transport and mobility, urban-rural linkages

**Country:** Slovenia

**Organisation:** Zavod Sopotniki, Institute for Intergenerational Solidarity, NGO

**Start & end date:** 04/2014 - ongoing

**Budget:** EUR 200 000

**Funding sources:**

- > Ministry of Public Administration Slovenia
- > European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)
- > Active Citizens Fund
- > Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV)
- > Local and private funding partnerships

**Website:** <https://www.sopotniki.org/>

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## ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

Sopotniki operates through a **network of volunteer drivers** who provide **free, daily door-to-door transport** using dedicated vehicles, ensuring elderly residents in rural areas have access to essential services and social activities.

The management of the network is structured in **regional units grouping several local coordinators**. Each unit typically coincides with municipal borders, but in some cases, smaller municipalities are grouped into one unit to optimise service delivery. Local coordinators in each unit manage daily operations and scheduling using an advanced IT system that ensures efficiency and reliability.

The recruitment of volunteer drivers follows a multi-channel approach, combining promotional activities such as public events, media coverage, online outreach, and partnerships with local organisations. Many volunteers also join through referrals from existing drivers, creating a **strong community network**.

Sopotniki maintains high volunteer engagement through **professional management, offering structured training, regular support, and the necessary equipment and IT tools** to ensure a seamless and effective transport service.

To optimise coordination, Sopotniki has developed a **custom-built, volunteer platform and mobile application** that facilitate trip planning, navigation, and communication, streamlining operations while improving the user experience.

Beyond essential transport, Sopotniki has launched **additional initiatives to enhance the mobility and well-being of elderly residents**. [ToyotaGO](#) is a partnership with Toyota Slovenia that provides fuel-efficient, hybrid vehicles to support sustainable transport solutions, reducing the environmental impact of the service. [‘Transportation to a Thousand Wishes’](#) is an initiative that grants seniors the opportunity to fulfil personal wishes by taking them on special trips, from visiting loved ones to seeing meaningful places from their past. These projects contribute to a higher quality of life for elderly passengers, fostering emotional well-being alongside practical mobility solutions.

Sopotniki also engages local businesses and healthcare providers to create added benefits for elderly passengers, including discounts and medical transport partnerships.



## RESULTS

- > **Service coverage in 17 municipalities across Slovenia** to improve access to mobility for elderly residents in rural communities;
- > **Over 6 370 active elderly users** benefitting from free transport services;
- > **Network of 310 active volunteer drivers** contributing time and effort to reduce isolation among rural seniors;
- > Approximately **13 000 rides taken annually**, ensuring seniors can reach medical appointments, shopping areas, and social gatherings;
- > Recognised with **multiple national and international awards** highlighting its innovative social impact;
- > Development of **advanced IT solutions** enhancing service efficiency and volunteer coordination;
- > **Integration with commercial mobility services** (ToyotaGO) to expand transport options for elderly users.
- > Establishment of **business partnerships** to provide additional services and benefits for elderly passengers.



## SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

The success of Sopotniki lies in its innovative volunteer engagement model, which combines a **community-driven approach with professional management**. This structure ensures high volunteer retention and service reliability, while fostering a sense of intergenerational solidarity.

The integration of **human-centred technology**, including a volunteer coordination platform and mobile application, has significantly improved operational efficiency without compromising personal interaction between drivers and passengers.

Strong **partnerships** with municipalities, businesses, and NGOs have been essential in securing **financial sustainability and enabling service expansion**.

The initiative has demonstrated **scalability**, successfully growing from one municipality to 17, proving its adaptability and **potential for replication** in other rural regions.

Challenges related to volunteer recruitment and funding have been addressed through a mix of professional management practices, strong community engagement, and innovative funding models **combining public financing with private partnerships** to ensure long-term viability.

The holistic approach to elderly mobility of the Sopotniki initiative **goes beyond transport** – it fosters social inclusion, reduces isolation, and enhances well-being.



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