



Federal Ministry for
Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,
Women and Youth

German Federal Government's strategy to counter loneliness

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Structure of this paper

- 1 Introduction: A brief outline of the issue of loneliness, awareness and basic information for first-time readers.
- 2 The five objectives of the German Federal Government's strategy to counter loneliness are explained. Each objective is preceded by an introductory paragraph describing the context and specific problems.
- 3 The objectives are linked to respective measures:
 - a A maximum of two core measures at the centre of policy actions
 - b Further measures

In part, this includes measures that are already underway. In other cases, review mandates, objectives for policy action or targeted measures that are not (yet) backed by funding are included.

- 4 The annex contains a list of **current and envisioned measures** to counter loneliness. The connection of these measures to the respective objectives and measures is highlighted, and concrete descriptions and timeframes are provided.

Introduction – Towards greater social connection

Loneliness is a subjective negative feeling that “results from a perceived negative discrepancy between a person’s desired and their actual relationships” (Perlman and Peplau, in: Luhmann 2022). This perceived painful feeling arises when desired social relationships do not concur with actual social relationships and can relate to both the quantity and quality of relationships.

Loneliness can have a variety of negative effects on a person’s mental and physical health as well as their social participation and thus social interaction, particularly if loneliness becomes chronic or persists over a longer period (Bücker 2022). While almost everyone is familiar with an occasional feeling of loneliness, significantly fewer people feel lonely most or (almost) all the time. 2022 data for the European Union Member States show that 13 per cent of respondents felt lonely most or all of the time, while one in three persons experienced loneliness at least sometimes (Berlingieri et al. 2023). According to a survey by Sozio-oekonomisches Panel (German Socio-Economic Panel, SOEP), 14.2 per cent in Germany felt lonely at least sometimes in 2017. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic led to a significant increase in the number of affected persons. During the first lockdown measures in March 2020, 40.1 per cent of people living in Germany stated that they felt lonely at least sometimes. At the end of the second lockdown measures in 2021, this figure had risen to 42.3 per cent (Entringer 2022).

The term loneliness should be distinguished from related terms such as social isolation or being alone. **Social isolation** is understood as an objective lack of social relationships and contacts. For instance, having few or no friends, missing social networks or a low frequency

of social interactions might play a role. Social isolation does not necessarily lead to negative feelings of loneliness, although it increases the risk of feeling lonely (Luhmann 2022).

By contrast, the term being alone refers to a momentary state in which other people are absent. This state can be temporary and thus differs from social isolation, which describes a persistent lack of social relationships and contact. Furthermore, being alone is not unconditionally associated with either negative or positive feelings (Luhmann 2022). In this sense, being alone can also mean a conscious, deliberate retreat from other people for the purpose of contemplation or self-reflection.

Loneliness requires intersectional analyses and approaches

Loneliness is a phenomenon that can occur at any stage of life and **regardless of the affected person’s age**. It is often triggered by life changes or drastic events. In general, elderly and old people (over the age of 75) were particularly affected by loneliness in 2017 (Entringer 2022). However, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic led to a reversal in the loneliness levels of the various age groups, whereby younger people (under the age of 30) were particularly heavily affected by loneliness (Entringer and Kröger 2021; Entringer 2022). By contrast, older people, who were previously the most affected, became the least lonely when compared to other age groups, although the occurrence of loneliness among older persons remained at a very high 36.6 per cent (Entringer 2022).

In addition, **certain demographic groups** are at an increased risk of experiencing loneliness. These include single parents, people with a migrant or refugee background, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and other queer people (LGBTIQ+), people with disabilities, chronically and terminally ill people in the last phase of their lives and their relatives, as well as people in need of care and respective family carers (Entringer 2022; Fischer 2022).

There are also more general risk factors for loneliness, such as lacking public spaces providing opportunities and structures for social interaction (Neu 2022). However, this has rarely been researched to date. One review concludes that the availability and accessibility of public infrastructure, leisure opportunities and mobility in the neighbourhood reduce the risk of loneliness in later life (Lyu and Forsyth 2022). Moreover, there is a significant correlation between loneliness and poverty. SOEP data shows that people in households with an increased risk of poverty are more likely to report feelings of loneliness than those in households without poverty risk (Dittmann and Goebel 2022). In addition to the heavy time burden resulting from care work, this connection between loneliness and poverty is also one of the reasons for the increased risk of loneliness among single parents (Schobin et al. 2021).

SOEP data shows that women tend to experience loneliness slightly more often than men, although the differences between the sexes are not very pronounced (Entringer 2022). However, women in older age are more than twice as likely to experience loneliness than older men. The proportion of lonely women aged 80 and over is at 15 per cent, while the respective figure for lonely men at this age is at 7.4 per cent. This difference can be explained by the fact that women tend to live longer and are thus more often widowed in old age than men, thus leading to fewer partnership contacts (Kaspar et al. 2022). In addition, studies show that men tend to trivialise the loneliness that they experience in survey responses to avoid (self-) stigmatisation (Mund 2022).

In general, partnerships as well as a large social network spanning persons who are important to the individual can be identified as protective factors against loneliness in old age. This protective function is observed for people who live in private households and those in care homes. 35.2 per cent of the latter reported particularly frequently experiencing loneliness in a survey conducted in 2020/2021 (Kaspar et al. 2022).

Previous research suggests that experiences of discrimination can increase the likelihood of feeling lonely. This correlation has been found to be largely independent of the specific reason for discrimination, whether age, ethnicity – including being a member of a national minority or speaker of a regional or minority language – gender identity, sexual orientation or socio-economic status (Schobin 2022). For instance, LGBTIQ+ people are around twice as likely to be affected by loneliness as the control group (Kasprowski et al. 2021).

Current research also indicates regional differences in experiencing loneliness, although the type of settlement itself (i.e. urban vs. rural) is not responsible for these differences. According to Neu (2022), socio-economic and demographic dynamics (outflow of other people from the region, structural change, transformation) and the remoteness of a region (measured by the distance to the nearest urban hub) are more decisive.

Furthermore, certain personality traits can fuel or inhibit the development of loneliness. Traits that have a positive effect on establishing and sustaining social relationships, such as extraversion and good-naturedness, are considered to inhibit loneliness. By contrast, neuroticism, which is associated with increased reactivity to social stressors, appears to be particularly conducive to loneliness (Bücker et al. 2020).

Loneliness is a social issue that many affected people associate with feelings of shame. This makes it difficult to reduce and alleviate loneliness at an individual level and encourage public debate. Therefore, a special focus on vulnerable groups, an intersectional perspective (on) and social awareness of the issue are necessary (in addition to the strategy's other objectives, see pp. 8 ff.).

Loneliness is a challenge for society as a whole

Loneliness is as diverse as the persons who experience it, as multifaceted as the causes that give rise to it and as individual as the personal biographies behind the phenomenon. There is thus no simple solution or single measure to improve prevention and reduction efforts. Rather, loneliness is a complex challenge for society as a whole. It encompasses numerous negative effects on people's health and social interaction and therefore requires both comprehensive analyses as well as strategic countermeasures and approaches. While not everyone who is lonely needs external support or professional assistance, the Federal Government considers loneliness to be an important area of prevention and intervention measures.

Loneliness is associated with a variety of negative health effects, including an increased risk of cardiovascular diseases such as coronary heart disease and stroke, mental illnesses such as depression, and neurodegenerative diseases such as dementia (Erzen et al. 2018, Qiao et al. 2022, Ren et al. 2023, Valtorta et al. 2018). International studies also indicate that loneliness can result in greater pressure on the healthcare system (Bücker 2022). Chronic loneliness has a negative impact on people's mental and physical health and is also a key risk factor for suicide (Deutscher Ethikrat 2022).

Furthermore, loneliness is often associated with an erosion of interpersonal trust. This means that lonely people often lack trust in their fellow human beings, making it difficult for them to build or maintain relationships (Schobin 2022). Furthermore, loneliness has a negative impact on democratic participation, such as voting in elections, expressing social solidarity and cohesion as well as trust in political institutions (Langenkamp 2021b, 2021a). The results of a survey conducted by Das Progressive Zentrum (The Progressive Centre) in 2022 show that young people between the ages of 16 and 23 who often feel lonely, misunderstood and disconnected are more likely to believe conspiracy narratives, agree with authoritarian attitudes and condone political violence (Neu et al. 2023).

Using data from the European Social Survey, a similar correlation between high levels of loneliness and low levels of trust in other people and institutions was also found among older people in countries of the former Eastern Bloc (Rapoliene and Aartsen 2021).

Loneliness is a political challenge

Loneliness has been increasingly recognised as a societal issue in recent years and is being addressed politically at various levels. At the international level, countries such as the UK and the Netherlands have already set out to improve prevention and reduction efforts against loneliness. In 2018, the British government published the world's first "Strategy for tackling loneliness", and has been working on its implementation ever since. The strategy focuses in particular on raising public awareness, promoting sustainable change and improving research and knowledge. It includes national coordination of measures at the ministerial level as well as financial support for initiatives and cross-departmental cooperation initiatives (HM Government 2018). In the Netherlands, the "Een tegen eenzaamheid" ("United against loneliness") programme was launched in 2018 and includes a campaign to raise awareness among the general population. Moreover, municipal stakeholders are encouraged to set up so-called "local coalitions" to coordinate and jointly address the issue. In addition to these coalitions, a "National Coalition" in which civil society organisations and businesses are to work together as well as a commission of experts advising politicians and other key actors have been established (the German National Association of Senior Citizens' Organisations, Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Seniorenorganisationen - BAGSO 2019).

The World Health Organization (WHO) has focused on the issues of loneliness and social isolation and formulated recommendations for action, including increased and broadened research efforts (WHO 2021). In addition, in 2020 the United Nations proclaimed the Decade of Healthy Ageing, whereby member states are to take measures countering loneliness and social isolation (UN 2020). Loneliness is also included in the second Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA)

(UN 2002) and the Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS) within the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) region (UN 2002), as well as the final declarations of the conferences of the ministers of the UNECE region responsible for age/ageing issues.

Moreover, the European Commission's Joint Research Centre is conducting further research and analysis into the prevalence of loneliness in Europe (European Commission and Joint Research Centre 2021).

The German Federal Government's strategy to counter loneliness also holds importance regarding the United Nations 2030 Agenda and the German Sustainable Development Strategy. A successful transformation process towards a sustainable society depends on the participation of as many people as possible. Preventing and reducing loneliness and thus strengthening social participation reflects the guiding principle of the 2030 Agenda to "Leave no one behind". Overall, the Federal Government's policy is guided by sustainability as defined by the global Sustainable Development Goals set out in the 2030 Agenda.

Within Germany, there are numerous approaches and funding instruments for projects and programmes at the state level aiming to improve prevention and reduce loneliness. In addition, the state parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia has comprehensively addressed the topic in a committee focusing on "Countering social isolation in North Rhine-Westphalia and the resulting physical and psychological consequences on health". A corresponding report with policy recommendations has been presented (Landtag NRW 2022).

Since 2021, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth has been funding the Kompetenznetz Einsamkeit ("Loneliness Network Germany") project, run by the Institut für Sozialarbeit und Sozialpädagogik e.V. ("Institute for Social Work and Social Education"). The objective of is to pool existing knowledge on loneliness, close research gaps and implement new insights into practice at the political and societal level.

In June 2022, the KNE organised the "Gemeinsam aus der Einsamkeit" ("Leaving Loneliness Behind Together") conference in collaboration with the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. At this conference, Federal Minister for Family Affairs Lisa Paus initiated the development of the strategy to counter loneliness.

This strategy of the Federal Government represents a further building block in the systematic approach to counter loneliness in Germany. It contains concrete contributions and measures from the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (BMI), the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL), the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ), the Federal Ministry of Health (BMG), the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building (BMWSB). The strategy includes five objectives towards strengthening social cohesion, connection and interaction, insofar as the Federal Government (and not the single federal states) is authorised to do so. These objectives, namely **(1) raising public awareness, (2) strengthening knowledge, (3) strengthening practice, (4) acting across sectors, and (5) supporting people - expanding services**, are explained in more detail below. They are underpinned by measures that are already being implemented as well as initiatives that are being envisioned and yet to be reviewed. Responsibilities are distributed between the Federal Government and the states in accordance with the German Grundgesetz (Basic Law, i.e. constitution). The strategy is designed for the long term, and a first assessment is to be conducted at the end of the 20th legislative period.

The strategy paper does not prejudice any public budgets or social security funds' budgets. Measures resulting in financial burdens or additional personnel requirements for the federal budget do not prejudice current or future budget negotiations. Any additional requirements resulting from the measures or related future measures can only be financed by the Federal Government if it has the legislative and administrative authority to do so. They must also be covered by the individual financing plans within the applicable budget estimates and personnel plans in the preparation of the respective federal budget.

Objectives of the strategy to counter loneliness

1 Raising public awareness and subjecting the issue of loneliness to public discourse.

Many people associate loneliness with feelings of shame, as there has been no broad social discourse and therefore no awareness to the significance and impacts of loneliness. This often prevents people from talking about their experiences of loneliness or seeking support. Moreover, many who experience loneliness encounter a lack of understanding or perplexity from other people around them. Furthermore, shame hampers social discourse on the issue and therefore also impedes coping with, preventing and reducing loneliness.

For these reasons, it is particularly important to raise awareness among social work and health professionals, civil society actors and activists, private sector actors and the general public. To sensitise the (professional and general) public and promote social discourse and the exchange of knowledge on loneliness, the following measures should be taken. The focus should not be exclusively on loneliness and its negative effects, but rather positive aspects of social connection and social cohesion should explicitly be emphasised. When designing awareness-raising and sensitising measures, attention should be paid to a target group-specific approach as well as the choice of media and formats. The diverse life situations in which loneliness occurs should also be highlighted in the design of the awareness measures. Opportunities for participation should be offered and discrimination-sensitive language and presentation modes be utilised. Furthermore, attention should be paid to a positive portrayal of diverse life situations and identities.

Core measures:

- 1.1 The BMFSFJ supports the design and implementation of nationwide publicity and awareness campaigns on the issue of loneliness as well as their evaluation.
- 1.2 Drawing on the “Loneliness Awareness Week” in the UK, the BMFSFJ is involved in initiating and establishing the annual “Gemeinsam aus der Einsamkeit” (“Leaving Loneliness Behind Together”) loneliness awareness week. During this week, various actors and stakeholders from civil society are to work together and provide a multifaceted information and sensitisation programme.

Further measures:

- 1.3 The BMFSFJ is to organise regular, low-threshold and public information events on various and current aspects of the issue of loneliness and support corresponding supra-regional events organised by key institutions.
- 1.4 The BMFSFJ is to organise regular conferences and corresponding supra-regional events organised by key institutions. The objective is to disseminate evidence-based and practice-oriented knowledge and qualify and enhance the discourse and enable actors in the field to network.

- 1.5** The BMFSFJ is to fund application-oriented publications by key institutions such as mixed theoretical and practical guidelines that combine evidence-based knowledge with a practical perspective and thus contribute to the qualification of actors and stakeholders in social work, civil society and at the municipal level.

2 Fostering knowledge around preventing and reducing loneliness in a professional context and in civic engagement.

Several research gaps need to be closed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of loneliness in Germany. This includes long-term monitoring of loneliness, which would enable determining the extent and prevalence of loneliness in different age and risk groups and documenting changes over time. Moreover, monitoring data could be compared at the international level (Mund 2022). Even more research is needed on the issue of loneliness, its causes and long-term consequences in young rather than older people (Thomas 2022). Similarly, one research focus should be placed on specific population groups that display additional risk factors for loneliness.

Moreover, there remain knowledge gaps regarding the concrete and practical prevention and reduction of loneliness. Knowledge about the mechanisms, effectiveness and persistence of individual interventions needs to be expanded. Evaluating interventions, programmes and measures is an important means of closing existing knowledge gaps and further developing evidence-based programmes. Consequently, investigating the factors that inhibit or support the prevention and reduction of loneliness at an individual and societal level would be useful. The following measures aim to promote knowledge as well as further research on the issue of loneliness.

Core measures:

- 2.1** The BMFSFJ is funding the Einsamkeitsbarometer (loneliness barometer), which regularly surveys the scope and prevalence of loneliness in different social groups. In addition, particular risk factors and vulnerable groups as well as corresponding resilience and protective factors are to be identified and focussed on. Both the nationwide and regional prevalence of loneliness is to be analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Moreover, the development of new data sources on the issue of loneliness is to be assessed.
- 2.2** The BMFSFJ is to fund practical and participatory research that identifies inhibiting and supporting factors in connection with the prevention and reduction of loneliness as well as effective intervention opportunities.

Further measures:

- 2.3** The Federal Government is to fund research on, for instance, the health, social and political effects of loneliness, the process of loneliness becoming chronic and risk as well as protective factors in the prevention and reduction of loneliness.
- 2.4** The BMFSFJ is to fund expert reports that pool existing knowledge, identify and close research gaps and contribute to further qualification of the discourse.
- 2.5** The BMFSFJ is to publish a regular monitoring report on the implementation status of its strategy to counter loneliness.
- 2.6** Funding of dedicated university chairs on the issue of loneliness is to be considered in cooperation and consultation with the federal states.

3 Supporting the work of social work professionals and their efforts to prevent and reduce loneliness.

Numerous and diverse actors and stakeholders in welfare organisations, civic engagement groups and social work professionals are already actively preventing and reducing loneliness in Germany. The projects and initiatives use a variety of approaches, methods and procedures to improve the situation of many people experiencing loneliness by providing concrete support and preventing further isolation of affected persons. The work of self-help organisations also holds major importance. In addition, the experience and practical knowledge of people active in volunteering and social work can be accessed and might have a positive impact on improving work in the context of loneliness. The measures mentioned in the following should be taken to strengthen the work of professionals active in the prevention and reduction of loneliness, facilitate better networking and promote exchange.

Core measures:

- 3.1 Future BMFSFJ funding programmes for measures and projects to prevent and reduce loneliness should enable a variety of approaches. Both age-independent and target group-specific funding programmes should be supported. Discrimination-sensitive approaches should also be taken into account and a specific focus be placed on vulnerable groups. The objective is to test and evaluate different approaches and implement these approaches based on the evidence found. The measures should be barrier-free and accessible in their design.
- 3.2 The BMFSFJ funds regular exchange and participation formats to support the networking of actors in the fields of social work and volunteering.

Further measures:

- 3.3 The BMFSFJ supports a systematisation of the numerous and diverse measures for preventing and reducing loneliness to obtain an overview of the existing range of measures and projects and enhance networking.
- 3.4 The BMFSFJ aspires to develop sustainable and process-oriented funding programmes and enhance existing programmes to enable targeted measures for the prevention and reduction of loneliness. The creation of duplicate structures is to be avoided. A focus should also be placed on low-threshold access for affected persons. To achieve this, existing research as well as evaluations of measures and access to them should be utilised.
- 3.5 The BMFSFJ supports and provides regular information formats on current topics and developments in the context of loneliness for actors in the professional community.

4 Understanding loneliness as a challenge for society as a whole and focusing on its prevention and reduction across sectors and areas of work.

Given the complexity of the issue, the numerous negative individual and social effects and the risk factors described above, loneliness is a cross-sectional topic that needs to be jointly addressed by society as a whole. Achieving a sustainable improvement in the prevention and reduction of loneliness requires considering and addressing the issue in various areas of society and at different levels. Social services, in particular care for the elderly as well as child and youth welfare services, play an important role in this regard. Moreover, the municipalities, local political and organisational levels bear specific responsibilities.

International research indicates that social support measures can contribute to reducing loneliness. Adopting a cross-sectoral approach with actors from different disciplines (such as medical, educational, nursing, psychological and social work professionals) being sensitised to the issue would therefore be a sensible approach. In addition, psychological interventions focusing on perceptual distortions of chronically lonely people, for instance, have also proven to be effective (Bücker and Beckers 2023).

Based on research findings, it can be assumed that the promotion of voluntary and civic engagement/volunteering could be a suitable instrument for preventing and reducing loneliness as well as strengthening people's political participation (Schobin 2022).

The following measures should be taken to increase the understanding of loneliness as a challenge for society as a whole and across sectors and areas.

Core measures:

- 4.1** The Federal Government is examining the initiation of a nationwide “coalition against loneliness” to bring together interested actors such as companies, trade unions, associations, initiatives, foundations, clubs, religious communities and organisations that want to contribute to preventing and reducing loneliness through concrete measures and campaigns.
- 4.2** Aiming to promote a sustainable and cross-sectoral approach to the issue, the Federal Government is establishing an inter-ministerial working group under the lead of the BMFSFJ. The working group's objective is to facilitate interministerial dialogue as well as joint and coordinated approaches.

Further measures in specific sectors and areas of society:

- 4.3** The BMFSFJ is considering establishing systematic dialogue between the Federal Government and the relevant departments of the single federal states, taking into account existing structures.

The following measures in the societal areas of local communities, education, business and work life, health and care, digitalisation as well as voluntary and civic engagement are suggestions from the Federal Government. These are mindful of the division of competences between the Federal Government and the states as stipulated by the German constitution.

Local communities

- 4.4** The Federal Government supports social spaces and hubs at the municipal level that offer room for exchange, encounters and voluntary and civic involvement for people of all age groups. This is achieved via a series of model measures by, among others, the BMI, the BMEL and the BMFSFJ.
- 4.5** Integrative social planning should include the issue of social infrastructure with opportunities for encounters in rural districts and cities in conjunction with planning issues such as elderly care services, child and youth services, regional and urban development, transport and construction. For this purpose, in coordination with the responsible ministries and partners, the BMFSFJ also considers promoting the development of additional strategies and policy recommendations on the issue of loneliness for municipalities.
- 4.6** In consultation with the relevant ministries and partners, the BMFSFJ is also reviewing funding for developing policy recommendations/recommendations for action for municipalities to support the establishment of cross-sectoral and -divisional local “alliances” (named Allianzen zur Vorbeugung und Linderung von Einsamkeit; alliances for the prevention and reduction of loneliness). The objective is to achieve a coordinated and networked approach including a wide range of local actors, e.g. medical institutions, village community facilities, church congregations and religious communities,

municipal administrations, so-called multi generational centres and multi-functional housing facilities, neighbourhood meeting spaces, private sector and business actors, neighbourhood management institutions, associations and clubs.

- 4.7** Within the framework of its constitutional abilities, the Federal Government funds measures at the municipal level to address the impact of demographic change. Urban development measures and similar initiatives enhance the residential environment and public spaces as places for encounter, leisure and mobility, while also improving the social infrastructure. Furthermore, more water and green spaces are needed in urban areas to adapt cities to climate change. Good housing thus also includes communal and green spaces as well as more flexible floor plans and layouts, which should be given greater consideration in urban planning and construction in the future. In addition, barrier-free access is a basic prerequisite for the accessibility of familiar living environments. This is supported by the BMWWSB funding measures to convert existing housing stock into age-appropriate living spaces. Moreover, the Federal Government is pursuing the goal of overcoming homelessness as a serious and visible form of poverty and social isolation by 2030.
- 4.8** The BMFSFJ encourages the continuation and expansion of formats for citizen participation in designing local public spaces.
- 4.9** The BMFSFJ strengthens intergenerational forms of housing, which enable the development of care structures offering support in everyday life as well as opportunities for social interaction.

Education

- 4.10** The BMFSFJ supports projects focusing on mental health, loneliness and the importance of social relationships in education, particularly in schools (including all-day care) and early childhood education facilities. The objective is to sensitise children and adolescents at an early stage and provide them with action and communication strategies for countering loneliness.

- 4.11** The Federal Government and the states are jointly examining an increased integration of the issue of loneliness in vocational training and study programmes related to health and social care. The objective is to enable graduates to support their future patients and clients in potentially emerging and existing loneliness-related situations.

- 4.12** In the spirit of lifelong learning, the BMFSFJ supports projects to strengthen education in old age, enabling people to lead independent lives well into old age. Education is fundamental for organising everyday life, maintaining health, using media or for political and social participation, essentially reflecting a fulfilling life.

Business and work life

- 4.13** The BMFSFJ supports the sensitisation of business and labour stakeholders to promote prevention and reduction of loneliness at the company level and counteract the increased risk of loneliness during life transition phases (e.g. entry into vocational training, retirement).
- 4.14** Moreover, an expansion of cooperation between companies/employers and social infrastructure institutions is being supported to encourage volunteering work after professional retirement.

Health and care work

- 4.15** The Federal Government is seeking to sensitise actors, stakeholders and healthcare institutions to the effects and risks of loneliness as well as effective therapies and medication that can enable increased social participation for people with mental health conditions.

These actors include doctors, self-help activists, outpatient care services, pharmacists, professionals in disability care, social work professionals, statutory health insurance funds, health departments, geriatricians, paediatricians and other specialists, care professionals, care support centres, social services in hospitals and inpatient care facilities. The objective is to anchor the prevention of loneliness more firmly in the framework recommendations of the Nationale Präventionskonferenz (National Prevention Conference, NPK).

- 4.16** The Federal Government supports the sensitisation and understanding of psychological, psychotherapeutic and psychiatric specialists on the issue of loneliness, including those from the fields of child and adolescent psychiatry and psychotherapy as well as geriatric psychology and psychiatry. At the same time, the expertise and experience of the aforementioned specialists should be utilised to improve the prevention and reduction of loneliness.
- 4.17** Given that loneliness affects the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents, identifying, preventing and counteracting it has a measurable positive impact on many areas of young people's lives and their future careers, while also reducing subsequent social costs. The Federal Government is therefore examining the adoption of permanent measures that strengthen the resilience, mental health and well-being of young people and destigmatise loneliness and mental health conditions. The ideal settings for these measures are spaces where children and adolescents naturally spend time, particularly at school (including all-day care).

- 4.18** The BMFSFJ promotes measures for the further development of hospice and palliative services designed to enable social participation for terminally ill people living alone in particular, but also for very old people and, not least, for children with life-threatening illnesses and their families, right up to the last phase of their lives.
- 4.19** In order to improve the situation of family carers, the Federal Government's coalition agreement provides for the further development of Caregiver Leave and Family Caregiver Leave Acts, including by enabling more time sovereignty. Time relief can mean reducing another external risk factor for loneliness. The BMFSFJ is preparing a fundamental reform of family caregiver leave to ensure better reconciliation of care and paid work.
- 4.20** Measures to preserve the skills of older people and to support them are being promoted to enable and sustain social participation.
- 4.21** The coalition agreement stipulates that waiting times for psychotherapy treatment should be significantly reduced, in particular for children and adolescents, but also in rural and underdeveloped regions. People with severe mental illnesses are particularly affected by long waiting times. In consultation with the relevant stakeholders, the BMG is therefore planning options for expanding care capacities specifically for these patients.
- 4.22** In cooperation with the other responsible departments, the BMFSFJ is examining ways of providing referrals to social contact points to better reach people who experience long-term loneliness in particular. In this context, cooperation between actors in the medical care system and local support services to prevent and reduce loneliness is key. Funding from statutory health insurance is not an option in this regard.

Digitalisation

4.23 Digital skills are increasingly a prerequisite for social participation, including for older people. The first gateways to the digital world are in particular applications that serve to maintain contact, become involved in the neighbourhood and share leisure activities. The Federal Government promotes the acquisition of digital skills by older people.

In this regard, people with care needs and older people living outside their home should also be considered and included. As a result of the changes to Section 8 (8) SGB XI (Social Code Book XI) through the Pflegeunterstützungs- und -entlastungsgesetz (Long-Term Care Support and Relief Act) (effective 1 July 2023), vocational training, further education and other training courses on digital skills for people in need of care as well as care staff in long-term care are now also eligible for funding (see Section 8 (8) sentence 3 SGB XI).

4.24 The Federal Government supports the development of young people's skills in the careful and responsible use of digital media and social networks.

Voluntary and civic engagement

4.25 Voluntary and civic engagement by people of different age groups as well as the diverse life of clubs and associations (e.g. sports and music clubs) help in strengthening social interaction, social participation as well as people's self-efficacy and promote meaningful interactions. At the same time, engagement infrastructures (e.g. initiatives, associations) create spaces and occasions for feelings of participation, community and belonging. It is important that these spaces are open to people of all social classes and ages. In particular, the involvement of older people with their long life experience can strengthen the dialogue between the generations, create interaction and thus help to reduce loneliness, especially in old age. Voluntary and civic engagement is thus supported by the Federal Government.

4.26 The BMFSFJ and the BMI promote the democratic engagement of citizens. In the same vein, group-focused enmity is being countered.

5 Providing people who experience loneliness with low-threshold and barrier-free access to needs-orientated services.

For many people, long-term loneliness is linked to an erosion of trust in others as well as feelings of shame and shyness. These people often experience difficulties in escaping loneliness without outside support and assistance (Schobin 2022). People who experience loneliness therefore need low-threshold access to social infrastructure services. Existing services should be better adapted to their needs, and low-threshold support and assistance services should be expanded (Neu and Müller 2020). In doing so, particular attention should be paid to target group-orientated, participatory, age-specific and discrimination-sensitive approaches and design, while the services should also be accessible to all. Although previous research has not identified a superiority of any particular type of intervention for a specific target group, interventions against loneliness might be more effective if the specific needs of different age and risk groups are taken into account in their design (Bücker 2022b).

Protective factors against loneliness in old age include having a large social network with people who are important to the affected person. This protective function can be observed for people living in private households and those living in care homes (Kaspar et al. 2022). Therefore, services aimed at expanding and maintaining social contacts for older people are useful. Outreach programmes are also a promising approach for reducing loneliness among older people and those with limited mobility (Bücker 2022). Regarding younger adults, programmes to promote social skills are recommended (Bücker 2022b). Special attention should be paid to vulnerable groups in this regard. The following measures are taken to achieve this.

Core measures:

- 5.1** The Federal Government is funding projects and programmes with offers geared towards preventing and reducing loneliness for various target groups on a model basis. These projects and programmes will be evaluated.
- 5.2** The Federal Government is funding a wide range of nationwide and free digital, telephone and local counselling services aimed at supporting people from different target groups. People affected by loneliness can also receive counselling and support within this general support framework.

Further measures:

- 5.3** When designing measures to prevent and reduce loneliness, the perspective of people from different social groups experiencing loneliness is taken into account and included in the design process.
- 5.4** The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have led to a significant increase in loneliness in German society in general and among young people in particular. The BMFSFJ is thus promoting a wide range of programmes to strengthen young people's social participation. In this context, the Federal Government also continues to support public and accessible child and youth work, school and youth social services as well as work in youth associations, all of which are also intended to raise awareness of the issue of loneliness.

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Annex: Overview of ongoing and envisioned measures

The following are both ongoing and envisioned measures, including measures from the Federal Government's coalition agreement for which feasibility studies have not yet been completed or which have not yet been agreed within the Federal Government.

Regarding the timeframes: implementation from 2024 onwards only, as far as financial resources are available to relevant sections of the budget.

No.	Title and description	Timeframe	Responsible ministry
1	Sensitising the public		
1.1	Publicity and awareness campaigns		BMFSFJ
1.1.1	A nationwide awareness-raising campaign on the issue of loneliness aimed at both people experiencing loneliness and those close to them is being designed and implemented by the BMFSFJ. Digital communication, information and social media resources are being created to reach the various target groups in both the analogue and digital space. The objective is to raise awareness of the issue of loneliness and to provide information about corresponding counselling and support services.	11/2022–12/2023, continuation intended	BMFSFJ
1.1.2	Publicity measures and actions by the BMFSFJ	Until 12/2025	BMFSFJ
1.2	Establishment of the “Gemeinsam aus der Einsamkeit” loneliness awareness week		BMFSF
1.2.1	Planning and implementation of the nationwide “Gemeinsam aus der Einsamkeit” loneliness awareness week	First in 6/2023, continuation intended	BMFSFJ
1.3	Support for regular, low-threshold and public information events organised by key institutions		BMFSFJ
1.3.1	The Kompetenznetz Einsamkeit (KNE) (Loneliness Network Germany), run by the Institut für Sozialarbeit und Sozialpädagogik (ISS) (Institute for Social Work and Social Education) and funded by the BMFSFJ, organises an event series entitled KNE Salons , which predominantly take place online. The series explores various aspects of the issue of loneliness from both a practical and scientific perspective.	2021–2024	BMFSFJ
1.4	Organisation and/or support of regular supra-regional (specialist) conferences		BMFSFJ

No.	Title and description	Timeframe	Responsible ministry
1.4.1	On 13 and 14 June 2022, the KNE organised the “ Gemeinsam aus der Einsamkeit ” (“ Leaving Loneliness Behind Together ”) conference in cooperation with the BMFSFJ. The event was attended by social work professionals, volunteers and other active individuals, politicians, researchers as well as representatives from charities and other projects and organisations. It was the second conference of this kind.	06/2022 06/2023 further events intended	BMFSFJ
1.5	Support for practice-related publications from key institutions		BMFSFJ
1.5.1	The KNE produces theoretical and practical guidelines with a focus on civil society, municipalities and digitalisation as well as other application-oriented publications.	2021–2024	BMFSFJ
2	Fostering knowledge and research		
2.1	Support for an “Einsamkeitsbarometer” (loneliness barometer)		BMFSFJ
2.1.1	The KNE is cooperating with the BMFSFJ to establish an “Einsamkeitsbarometer” (loneliness barometer) to improve the data basis for political and professional decision-making on the prevention and reduction of loneliness and provide an essential foundation for further research into loneliness.	2023–2025	BMFSFJ
2.2	Support for research with practical application and affected persons in mind		BMFSFJ
2.2.1	As part of the KNE’s qualitative practical research with affected persons and experts, factors that promote and inhibit the prevention and reduction of loneliness are to be identified.	2021–2024	BMFSFJ
2.3	Support for research		interministerial
2.3.1	With its “Rahmenprogramm Gesundheitsforschung” (Health Research Framework Programme), the BMBF supports research into wide-spread health issues, both through project funding measures and via the Deutsche Zentren der Gesundheitsforschung (German Centres for Health Research). For instance, the forthcoming Deutsches Zentrum für Psychische Gesundheit (German Center for Mental Health) is currently being established. This institute is to conduct research into prevention and intervention options as well as vulnerability and resilience factors in mental illnesses.	Since late 2018, with a term of 10 years	BMBF
2.4	Support for expert knowledge		BMFSFJ
2.4.1	The Kompetenznetz Einsamkeit publishes its “ KNE Expertisen ” series, which offer scientific papers on the issue of loneliness. The objective is to pool existing knowledge and identify research gaps.	2021–2024	BMFSFJ
2.5	Monitoring report on the implementation of the Federal Government’s strategy to counter loneliness	From the start of implementation and initially until 12/2025	FF BMFSFJ
2.5.1	The “ Geschäftsstelle zur Begleitung der Strategie gegen Einsamkeit ” (Office for monitoring the strategy to counter loneliness) at the KNE supports the preparation of the report.	8/2022–12/2025	BMFSFJ

No.	Title and description	Timeframe	Responsible ministry
2.6	Reviewing mandates to support university chairs on the issue of loneliness		BMFSFJ and respective responsible ministries
3	Supporting practitioners		
3.1	Expansion of age-independent and discrimination-sensitive access to funding programmes – focus on vulnerable groups		BMFSFJ
3.2	Regular formats for exchange and participation		BMFSFJ
3.2.1	As part of the KNE's networking activities, various actors and stakeholders active in civil society, science and politics as well as the prevention and reduction of loneliness are brought together at various networking events. The objective is to further develop the work activities and measures against loneliness, using existing knowledge and experience.	2021–2025	BMFSFJ
3.3	Systematisation of the numerous and diverse measures		BMFSFJ
3.3.1	The “Kompetenznetz Einsamkeit” is conducting an online survey to identify projects and initiatives working on the issue of loneliness and is to present a dedicated report.	2021–2024	BMFSFJ
3.4	Development of sustainable and process-oriented funding programmes as well as further development of existing programmes.		BMFSFJ
3.5	Promotion of regular information measures on current issues and developments in the context of loneliness.		BMFSFJ
3.5.1	“Kompetenznetz Einsamkeit” newsletter	2021–2024	BMFSFJ
3.5.2	“Kompetenznetz Einsamkeit” podcast	2021–2024	BMFSFJ
4	Cross-sectoral measures		
4.1	Nationwide coalition to prevent and reduce loneliness		interministerial
4.2	Establishment of an inter-ministerial working group on the issue of loneliness		interministerial, under the lead of the BMFSFJ
4.3	Regular dialogue between the Federal Government and the relevant state ministries, taking into account existing structures		BMFSFJ
	Local societies/communities		
4.4	Support for social spaces dedicated to exchange, encounters and engagement		interministerial
4.4.1	The federal “Mehrgenerationenhaus.Miteinander – Füreinander” programme supports around 530 so-called multi-generational centres (Mehrgenerationenhäuser, MGH) throughout Germany. As meeting places, these are to strengthen neighbourly interaction and thus contribute to the attractiveness of communities/municipalities. In 2021, 442 MGHs (83 per cent) implemented dedicated service offers for the specific target group of “lonely people”.	2021–2028	BMFSFJ

No.	Title and description	Timeframe	Responsible ministry
4.4.2	The federal “Bundesprogramm Gesellschaftlicher Zusammenhalt” (BGZ) (“Social Cohesion”) programme promotes projects geared towards bringing lasting positive change in living conditions and communities in cities and municipalities. The projects are to create spaces for joint activities and enable people to accept, appreciate and familiarise themselves with one another. One of the funding priorities for new projects in 2023 and 2024 is entitled “Wege aus der Isolation – Begegnung und Teilhabe fördern” (Ways out of isolation – promoting encounters and participation).	Since 2021	BMI
4.4.3	As part of the “Bundesprogramm Ländliche Entwicklung und Regionale Wertschöpfung” (BULEplus, Federal Rural Development Scheme plus) development programme, the BMEL supported ideas for the flexible and diverse use of buildings as so-called multi-functional houses, which not only bring basic services back to the villages but are often used by associations, clubs, initiatives and other groups as attractive meeting places. Funding for these “Mehrfunktionshäuser” is now part of the funding programme entitled Regelförderung der Gemeinschaftsaufgabe “Verbesserung der Agrarstruktur und des Küstenschutzes” (GAK) (regular support of the Joint Task for the Improvement of Agricultural Structures and Coastal Protection). As part of the BULEplus “Soziale Dorfentwicklung” (“Social development of villages”) social programme, the BMEL supported a total of 36 projects that impressively demonstrated how communities can be strengthened, how different social groups and generations can be involved and how committed stakeholders and actors in rural areas can be supported. Building on the success of this project, the findings and approaches will be taken up in a follow-up programme. The objective is to further develop and expand on the issues of “creating social meeting places” and “social isolation and loneliness”.		BMEL
4.4.4	Under the umbrella of the “Nationaler Aktionsplan für gesunde Ernährung und mehr Bewegung IN FORM” (National Action Plan “IN FORM – German national initiative to promote healthy diets and physical activity”) national action plan, the BMEL is funding the project entitled “Im Alter IN FORM – Wohlbefinden älterer Menschen mit besonderen Bedarfen fördern” („IN FORM in old age – Promoting the well-being of older people with special needs)“ of the Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Seniorenorganisationen (BAGSO, German National Association of Senior Citizens’ Organisations), whose services focus in particular on lonely older people, people with low incomes and older people with migrant backgrounds. Important partners in the project are actors and stakeholders in local senior citizens’ work, local politics, civil society as well as representatives of migrant organisations and integration agencies.	07/2021–06/2024	BMEL
4.5	Development of recommendations for action in integrative social planning for municipalities (“Soziale Gelegenheitsstrukturen”)		BMFSFJ and respective responsible ministries
4.6	Support in founding local alliances to counter loneliness: “Allianzen zur Vorbeugung und Linderung von Einsamkeit”		BMFSFJ and respective responsible ministries
4.7	Measures at the municipal level (within the scope of constitutionally permitted actions) for managing the effects of demographic change		interministerial

No.	Title and description	Timeframe	Responsible ministry
4.7.1	Municipalities are supported by the BMFSFJ-funded “Zukunftswerkstatt Kommunen – Attraktiv im Wandel (ZWK)” (“Workshop on the Future of Municipalities - Remaining attractive through Change”) pilot project at the “Kompetenzzentrum Technik – Diversity – Chancengleichheit e.V.” (Competence Center Technology-Diversity-Equal Opportunities e.V.) in managing the consequences of demographic change. Further objectives include active social interaction between all generations and the integration of people with migration or refugee backgrounds. The municipalities develop individual measures with the participation of citizens. These measures can also include meeting spaces for older people or adolescents/youth.	2021–2024	BMFSFJ
4.7.2	With the “Förderprogramm Altersgerecht Umbauen” (“Age-Appropriate Conversion”) funding programme, the BMWBSB specifically supports measures to remove accessibility barriers in existing homes. The programme is geared towards all citizens, regardless of age and income, and is intended, in particular, to help people with limited mobility and families with children to remain living in their familiar surroundings for as long as possible. One advantage of the programme is its funding and eligibility regardless of age and income. The funding can be used for various measures, including upgrading of sanitary facilities, adaptations to the layout of rooms, removing barriers in the entrance area and in access to the home as well as measures to improve the home’s surroundings. The objective of these measures is to enable people to live in their familiar surroundings for as long as possible, thus helping to sustain existing social contacts.	Since 2014	BMWBSB
4.7.3	The draft of the “Nationaler Aktionsplan zur Überwindung der Obdach- und Wohnungslosigkeit” (National Action Plan to Tackle Homelessness) is currently being developed together with stakeholders from the federal ministries, state ministries, municipal umbrella organisations and representatives of affected persons from civil society and the real estate industry. The draft is to be presented to the Federal Cabinet in the first quarter of 2024. Providing accommodation for people in need of housing falls under the responsibility of the municipalities.	Still open	BMWBSB

No.	Title and description	Timeframe	Responsible ministry
4.7.4	Federal and state funding for urban planning The Federal Government provides financial assistance in accordance with Article 104b of the German constitution (Grundgesetz – Basic Law) and thus plays a major role in promoting renovation, preservation and stabilisation of building stock in cities and municipalities. For more than 50 years, together with the states, the Federal Government has been supporting local authorities in their urban planning and adaptation needs and overcoming urban development deficits through this urban planning funding. The overriding objective of urban planning funding is to enable participation and exchange in social life for all people. Measures such as improving/renovating and adapting the residential environment and public spaces as places to meet, spend time and be physically active, as well as improving social infrastructures that are suitable for children, families and the elderly help to create opportunities for social interaction and thus counter loneliness. Full accessibility or low-barrier infrastructure is a basic prerequisite for ensuring access. Measures aiming for accessibility and low barriers are explicitly eligible for funding across all urban planning funding programmes. All urban planning funding programmes support the goal of “ensuring equal living conditions” for all. This applies in particular to urban and rural areas with greater structural challenges. The combination of (urban) planning and development measures with socially integrative measures in the “Sozialer Zusammenhalt” (Social Cohesion) programme holds particular importance. The programme is to stabilise and upgrade urban and suburban districts that face considerable social challenges. It thus improves the housing and living conditions of socially disadvantaged groups in areas with high social segregation. The focus is placed on the integration and inclusion of disadvantaged population groups, the strengthening of social participation and the involvement and activation of residents. This also counteracts social isolation and loneliness in particular. In areas covered by the programme, the respective Quartiersmanagement (neighbourhood management) set up by local authorities plays a particularly important role as a networking body at the interface between local administration and politics, social institutions and other active parties as well as the citizens in the neighbourhood.	Since 1971	BMWSB
4.8	Incentivising citizen participation		BMFSFJ
4.9	Support for cross-generational forms of housing		BMFSFJ
4.9.1	The BMFSFJ supports communal and collaborative forms of housing by funding the “Wissen, Informationen, Netzwerke – WIN für Gemeinschaftliches Wohnen” (“knowledge, information, networks – WIN in favor of communal living”) project. Moreover, the support and information services offered by “FORUM Gemeinschaftliches Wohnen e.V.” (Forum for Communal Living) help project organisers and initiatives to plan and develop community housing projects.	2020–2024	BMFSFJ
4.9.2	The BMFSFJ model programme entitled “Leben wie gewohnt” (“Stay Living at Home”) supports construction and investment projects for communal living to enable people to live at home for as long as possible, encourage social participation and counteract loneliness in old age.	2020–2023	BMFSFJ

No.	Title and description	Timeframe	Responsible ministry
Education			
4.10	Supporting and promoting the debate around mental health, loneliness and the importance of social relationships in education, particularly in schools (including all-day care) and in early childhood education		BMFSFJ
4.10.1	As part of a pilot project, “Mental Health Coaches” are deployed from the beginning of the 2023/24 school year. These professionals are to reach tens of thousands of children and adolescents in more than 100 schools across Germany.	School year 2023/24	BMFSFJ
4.11	Strengthening the integration of the issue of loneliness in vocational training and study programmes with a health and social focus		interministerial
4.12	Supporting education in old age in the spirit of lifelong learning		BMFSFJ
4.12.1	Supporting the “Servicestelle Bildung und Lernen im Alter” at the German National Association of Senior Citizens’ Organisations “Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Seniorenorganisationen” (BAGSO), which offers a database of events, good practice examples, literature and materials on lifelong learning.	2023–2025	BMFSFJ
Business and work life			
4.13	Support for the sensitisation of actors in the field of work		BMFSFJ
4.14	Support for civic engagement after retirement/in post-work life		BMFSFJ
4.14.1	Co-operation between companies/employers and social infrastructure facilities like “ Mehrgenerationenhäuser ” (multi-generational centres)	2021–2028	BMFSFJ
Health and care			
4.15	Sensitisation of stakeholders, actors and healthcare institutions/ federal framework recommendations of the National Prevention Conference (“Bundesrahmenempfehlungen der Nationalen Präventionskonferenz”) (NPK)		interministerial
4.16	Support for sensitisation and information for psychological, psychotherapeutic and psychiatric professionals		interministerial
4.17	Strengthening resilience, mental health and well-being of young people, de-stigmatising loneliness and mental health issues		interministerial
4.17.1	In a two-year project funding phase, the BMBF is supporting the establishment of the future “ Deutsches Zentrum für Psychische Gesundheit ” (German Center for Mental Health), which will conduct research into protective and risk factors for mental impairments, among other issues. This also includes the mental health of children, adolescents and their families in the context of daycare centres and schools.	Since May 2023	BMBF
4.18	Funding measures for the further development of hospice and palliative services		BMFSFJ

No.	Title and description	Timeframe	Responsible ministry
4.18.1	The BMFSFJ is running the “Sterben wo man lebt und zu Hause ist” (“Dying where you live and are at home”) pilot programme to enhance and advance outpatient, day-care and inpatient hospice and palliative care services. The projects support and enable people to remain living in their own homes and thus sustain relationships with their neighbours, friends and relatives, thus preventing social isolation in the last stages of life.	2020–2024	BMFSFJ
4.19	Offering relief for family carers by enhancing and further developing family caregiver leave. The coalition agreement provides for the further development of the Caregiver Leave and Family Caregiver Leave Acts to improve the situation of family carers. This includes enabling more time sovereignty. By freeing up time, another external risk factor for loneliness can be reduced. The BMFSFJ is preparing a fundamental reform of family caregiver leave to ensure better reconciliation of care and employment.	Current legislative period	BMFSFJ
4.19.1	Offering relief for family carers by providing competent and empathetic advice via the “Pflegetelefon” (care helpline) , which acts as a counselling hotline for family carers on all aspects of care. This care hotline is directed at people in need of care, family carers, service providers in the care sector as well as employers and persons close to family carers.	Continuously ongoing	BMFSFJ
4.20	Support for measures to maintain the skills of older people and support them		interministerial
4.20.1	Implementation of the “Nationale Demenzstrategie” (National Dementia Strategy)	2020–2026	BMFSFJ, BMG
4.20.2	The “Länger fit durch Musik” (Staying fit longer through music) project by the Bundesmusikverband Chor & Orchester e.V. (Federal Music Association Choir and Orchestra), funded by the BMFSFJ from 2023 to 2026, aims to prepare choirs and orchestras across Germany with regard to their ageing members. People should be able to continue making music even in old age and with dementia. Specifically, the medium of music is to counteract the loss of cognitive abilities and enable social interaction.	2023–2026	BMFSFJ
4.20.3	The “Lokale Allianzen für Menschen mit Demenz” (“Local Alliances for People with Dementia”) federal programme promotes the networking of local professional and voluntary actors to enable people with dementia and their relatives to participate, support them if necessary and sensitise the general public to the issue of dementia. Ignorance regarding dementia often leads to prejudice, isolation and marginalisation and impedes support. The alliances are supported via a network centre based at the BAGSO.	2020–2026	BMFSFJ
4.20.4	The “Wegweiser Demenz” (A Guide to Dementia) website provides people suffering from dementia, their relatives and interested parties with a wide range of information on the issue of dementia. Additionally, a digital exchange platform is offered, supervised by qualified moderators. The issue of loneliness has already been addressed on this platform.	Ongoing/ permanent project	BMFSFJ

No.	Title and description	Timeframe	Responsible ministry
4.20.5	Activities of the “Mehrgenerationenhäuser” (multi-generational centres) to maintain the skills of older people and support them	2021–2028	BMFSFJ
4.21	Further development of outpatient psychotherapeutic care		BMG
4.22	Investigating and assessing potential referrals to social contact centres		BMFSFJ and respective responsible ministries
Digitalisation			
4.23	Promoting older people’s digital competences / skills		interministerial
4.23.1	The “ DigitalPakt Alter ” (Digital Pact for Older People) funds 300 so-called experience centres across Germany until the end of 2025. At these centres – namely local meeting places, community centres, care homes or even at home – older volunteers teach digital skills to other older people from the community free of charge. Older people learn how digital technologies can facilitate and enrich their everyday lives and establish long-term contacts with each other while learning together. The office of the “DigitalPakt Alter” (s.o.) is located at the BAGSO.	2023–2025	BMFSFJ
4.23.2	“ Digitaler Engel plus ” (“Digital Angel PLUS - local, in person and specific guidance”) provides older people with practical, personalised and on-site information on how digital applications can enhance and simplify their daily routines and habits. For this project, digital experts are touring Germany with two information trucks. They lead face-to-face discussions to introduce and explain digital services, answer specific questions and allay fears. The project is organised by “Deutschland sicher im Netz e.V.” (DsiN).	2022–2025	BMFSFJ
4.23.3	Promoting digital competences via activities by the “ Mehrgenerationenhäuser ” (multi-generational centres)	2021–2028	BMFSFJ
4.24	Strengthening digital competences of younger people with regard to careful and responsible use of digital media and social networks		BMFSFJ, interministerial
Voluntary and civic engagement			
4.25	Strengthening volunteer and civic engagement		interministerial
4.25.1	Promotion of the “ Bundesfreiwilligendienst ” and “ Jugendfreiwilligendienst ” (federal voluntary service and youth voluntary service). The objective is to provide a year of education and orientation for young people up to the age of 27 in the youth voluntary services or for people of all ages in the federal voluntary service. Both voluntary services can in individual cases of assignment have direct (i.e. lonely volunteers perform voluntary service “to counter their personal loneliness”) or indirect (volunteers dedicate themselves to people who would otherwise be lonely) effects against loneliness. However, this potential impact has neither qualitatively nor quantitatively been assessed or analysed.	Ongoing, depending on legal basis	BMFSFJ

No.	Title and description	Timeframe	Responsible ministry
4.25.2	Support for the foundation “Deutsche Stiftung für Engagement und Ehrenamt” (German Foundation for Civic Engagement and Volunteer Work) to strengthen, connect and support civic and volunteer work.	Ongoing, depending on legal basis	BMFSFJ, BMI and BMEL
4.25.3	Development of a federal engagement strategy . The participation of volunteers and civic activists as well as their respective organisations is facilitated by the “Deutsche Stiftung für Engagement und Ehrenamt” (DSEE) (EN s.o.) foundation and supported by the network “Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement” (BBE) (National Network for Civil Society).	Until end 2024	BMFSFJ, interministerial
4.25.4	Funding for intergenerational sponsorship and mentoring projects via the “Aktion Zusammen Wachsen” (AZW) . The federal service hub “Aktion Zusammen Wachsen” is run by the “Bundesamt für Familie und zivilgesellschaftliche Aufgaben” (Federal Office of Family Affairs and Civil Society Functions, BAFzA) .	Since 2008	BMFSFJ
4.25.5	Promoting civic engagement via the activities of the “Mehrgenerationenhäuser” (multi-generational centres)	2021–2028	BMFSFJ
4.25.6	Supporting civic engagement as part of the “Gesellschaftlicher Zusammenhalt” (BGZ) (Social Cohesion) federal programme	Since 2021	BMI
4.25.7	Promoting volunteering as part of the “Integration durch Sport” (IdS) (Integration through Sport) federal programme	Since 2001	BMI
4.25.8	Supporting civic engagement as part of the “Houses of Resources” (HoR) programme	Since 2016	BMI
4.26	Promoting democratic engagement and countering group-focused enmity		BMFSFJ, BMI
4.26.1	The BMFSFJ promotes the democratic engagement of citizens through the “Demokratie leben!” (“Live Democracy!”) federal programme, among other initiatives. This programme is to strengthen civic society in their commitment to better, democratic coexistence and against group-based hostility and misanthropy. For instance, the multi-year “kollekt” model project addresses experiences of loneliness among young people and explores the extent to which these experiences can foster anti-democratic tendencies or even extremist thought. Furthermore, local democratic engagement is promoted and civil society strengthened, for instance within the framework of so-called “Partnerschaften für Demokratie” (Partnerships for Democracy) , in which democratic participation processes are established, enhanced and further developed. Based on local conditions and challenges, actors are to jointly develop a strategy tailored to the specific local situation.	2020–2024	BMFSFJ
4.26.2	Promoting democratic engagement and countering group-focused enmity via the activities of the “Mehrgenerationenhäuser” (multi-generational centres)	2021–2028	BMFSFJ

No.	Title and description	Timeframe	Responsible ministry
5	Supporting people – Enhancing services		
5.1	Promoting measures to prevent and reduce loneliness		interministerial
5.1.1	The BMFSFJ is funding the Malteser Hilfsdienst's "Miteinander Füreinander" ("Together for each other") pilot project, which is geared towards preventing and reducing loneliness among older people. For this purpose a wide range of programmes and various approaches are being used to reach senior citizens, especially the very old, at around 110 locations throughout Germany.	07/2020–12/2024	BMFSFJ
5.1.2	The ESF Plus programme entitled "Stärkung der Teilhabe älterer Menschen – Gegen Einsamkeit und soziale Isolation" (Strengthening the participation of older people – countering loneliness and social isolation") is funding more than 70 projects with innovative social services aimed at preventing and reducing loneliness and social isolation.	10/2022–09/2027	BMFSFJ
5.1.3	The BMFSFJ is funding the German Olympic Sports Confederation's (DOSB) "Verein(t) gegen Einsamkeit" (Clubs united against loneliness) pilot project to develop and test a strategy for sports clubs on how lonely people can be reached and integrated via the 87,000 sports clubs and the variety of sports associations in Germany. The project thus utilises the potential of sport to prevent and reduce loneliness in society.	10/2022–09/2024	BMFSFJ
5.1.4	The BMFSFJ is preparing another ESF Plus programme against loneliness entitled "Zusammenhalt stärken - Menschen verbinden" ("Strengthening cohesion – connecting people") for pilot testing in municipalities. This programme targets 28 to 59-year-olds and is part of the ESF Plus federal programme. There is still little comprehensive knowledge and expertise on specific interventions and programmes to counter loneliness for this target group. The objectives of the programme are to promote social participation, prevent and reduce loneliness and social isolation, provide people with necessary financial security and to test model measures for this purpose at the municipal level. The findings from this pilot programme will be disseminated and shared nationwide.	Envisioned: 2024–2027	BMFSFJ
5.1.5	As part of the federal rural development programme entitled Bundesprogramm Ländliche Entwicklung und Regionale Wertschöpfung (BULEplus) , the BMEL has published an announcement entitled " Soziale Dorfentwicklung - Starke Gemeinschaften für zukunftsfähige ländliche Räume " (Social development of villages – strong communities for viable rural areas). As part of this campaign, model projects in the field of social village development are being sought which are dedicated to one of the following key topics: • Creation or (re-)activation of social meeting spaces and meeting points; • Support and assistance structures for older people; • Diversity, social cohesion and inclusion in action; • Greater self-responsibility for active and social village development. As part of BULEplus, the BMEL funded the "Regionale Community-Software Inklusion4.0" project within the "Land.Digital" funding programme.	2023–2026/2027	BMEL
5.2	Promotion of low-threshold digital and telephone counselling services		interministerial

No.	Title and description	Timeframe	Responsible ministry
5.2.1	“TelefonSeelsorge Deutschland e. V.” offers counselling to anyone seeking advice on problems and crises at any stage of life. It is available free of charge, anonymously and around the clock via telephone, email and chat.	Continuously ongoing	BMFSFJ
5.2.2	Supporting the “Nummer gegen Kummer” (Number against grief) helpline, which counsels children and adolescents as well as parents via phone and online. The nationwide network of “Nummer gegen Kummer” is coordinated by the “Nummer gegen Kummer e.V.” office.	01/2023–12/2025	BMFSFJ
5.2.3	Funding the “[U25] Suizidprävention” (U25 suicide prevention) project of Deutscher Caritasverband (German Caritas Association) as a low-threshold, free online help service for adolescents and young adults under the age of 25 in (suicidal) life crises. Counselling is provided anonymously via email within the Caritas counselling system by volunteers (peer counsellors) of similar age who accompany those seeking advice during their crises. The young volunteers are supported by pedagogical professionals.	01/2022–12/2024	BMFSFJ
5.2.4	Support for the “Jugendnotmail.de” counselling service, an online counselling service for young people in psychological distress. Around 250 volunteer professionals from the fields of psychology and social pedagogy provide counselling on topics such as depression, self-harm, suicidal tendencies, violence, bullying, abuse, family issues, eating disorders, etc. The service makes a decisive contribution to preventive psychosocial child and youth welfare. Children and adolescents receive confidential and sensitive counselling. The confidential and cost-free service is available 24 hours a day. The objective of the project, which has been running since 2001, is to develop individual solutions for the respective life situations in dialogue with the adolescents, to strengthen and empower them and to teach them skills that enable them to organise self-help and support.	05/2023–04/2026	BMFSFJ
5.2.5	Support for “JUUPORT.de” , a nationwide online counselling platform for young people who experience issues or problems online. Volunteer teenagers and young adults from all over Germany – the “JUUPORT scouts” – assist their peers confidentially with online problems such as digital loneliness, cyberbullying and excessive media use. Counselling via the contact form or Messenger (WhatsApp) is free of charge and complies with data protection regulations. In addition to providing counselling, “JUUPORT” also carries out active educational and prevention work.	2023–2024	BMFSFJ
5.2.6	Support for “Lambda Peersupport” for LGBTQI+ adolescents and young adults, organised by the Lambda e.V. youth network.	Annually	BMFSFJ

No.	Title and description	Timeframe	Responsible ministry
5.2.7	Support for the office of the “Bundeskonferenz für Erziehungsberatung” (bke) (Federal Conference for Child Guidance Counselling), which advises adolescents aged 14 to 21 via its website www.bke-jugendberatung.de anonymously, free of charge and with appropriate data security measures. Counselling is provided exclusively by experienced professionals from family and youth counselling centres throughout Germany. The bke counselling service supports young people affected by loneliness in individual as well as group sessions and thus assists them in building social contacts outside the virtual world. If necessary, the counsellors motivate the adolescents to seek the assistance of relevant local support services.	Annually	BMFSFJ
5.3	Including the perspective of affected persons in the design of measures		interministerial
5.3.1	KNE AG is a group of people affected by loneliness who provide critical advice for the work of the Kompetenznetz Einsamkeit (Loneliness Network Germany) (KNE) and thus support the network with their personal expertise.	2021–2024	BMFSFJ
5.4	Support for social participation of young people		BMFSFJ
5.4.1	Support for the “Zukunftspaket für Bewegung, Kultur und Gesundheit” (“Future Package for Physical Activity, Culture and Health”) project	2023–2024	BMFSFJ
5.4.2	Support for “Off-Road-Kids” by the nationwide aid organisation “Off-Road-Kids-Stiftung” for children living on the street, young homeless persons and young people (up to the age of 27) who are acutely threatened by homelessness in Germany.	01/2021–12/2023 envisioned until 12/2025	BMFSFJ
5.4.3	The Bundesforum Männer (BFM) (Federal Forum for Men) runs the “www.maennerberatungsnetz.de” portal as part of its “Männer stärker in die Gleichstellungspolitik” (Greater involvement of men in gender equality policy) funding programme . The project specifically targets boys and men and simplifies the search for help and counselling services that at least reflect images of masculinity/ male socialisation/stereotypes in their work. It links to counselling services for men on a wide range of issues: work/employment, poverty, education, parenting, family, health, violence, imprisonment and jail, homosexuality, crises, partnership, care, homelessness, sexuality, separation & divorce, fatherhood, reconciliation of work and care, contentment & happiness. The services range from individual counselling to self-help groups and guided men’s groups. By entering a postcode and the respective counselling subject, services available in the respective area can be found in just a few steps. The online service aims to prevent and reduce loneliness by offering specific services and thus addressing a target group that is generally more difficult to reach in problematic life situations.	02/2020–12/2023	BMFSFJ

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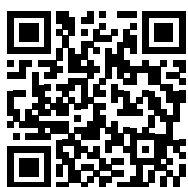
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