



DigitalScouts

ENHANCING THE DIGITAL LITERACY
AND PARTICIPATION IN EUROPE

National Report for Austria

Digital participation of people 60+: readiness, support structures,
professionalisation of supporters and examples of opportunities.

About this publication

This report summarises the results of the research activities carried out in Austria within the Erasmus+ project **DigitalScouts: Enhancing the Digital Literacy and Participation in Europe** (cooperation partnership in adult education, project number: 2022-1-DE02-KA220-ADU-000086499). More information is available at DigitalScouts.eu.

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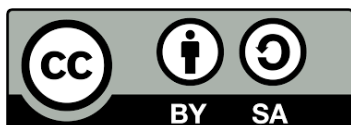
ÖSTERREICHISCHES ROTES KREUZ

Aus Liebe zum Menschen.

Credits

We would like to thank all those who took part in the interviews and contributed their knowledge, experience, wishes and expertise to our project.

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1. Introduction and methodology

The COVID19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of digital technologies and skills for participation in all areas of society. Although the digital divide between younger and older generations in Europe is getting smaller, the need for support remains, in particular for the very old and those with lower levels of formal education.

The consortium members of the DigitalScouts project, co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union, aim to train people who want to support older people in using digital tools, thus enabling them to benefit from the opportunities of digital participation. By digital participation we mean that citizens use digital tools (such as the Internet, social media, etc.) to take part in personally relevant areas of life, be they social, cultural, political, or related to health promotion.

The main focus of the project is to develop an educational offer that qualifies "digital scouts" to enable older people to benefit from the opportunities of digitalisation. For this purpose, a Digital Training will be developed as an independent self-learning course. It focuses on the various possibilities of digital participation and health promotion and enables digital scouts to acquire comprehensive knowledge to support people aged 60+ in using digital tools according to their individual interests. In addition, a Toolkit for Trainers will be available to support adult educators in embedding the digital training into a blended learning course.

The first outcome of the project will be a European Compendium highlighting the importance of promoting the digital participation of older citizens. It will also provide illustrative examples from the participating countries of how older people can benefit from using digital tools in terms of cultural, political and social participation as well as health promotion.

In all countries involved in the DigitalScouts project (Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal and Romania), a research phase was carried out to prepare the development of the training materials and to identify the current situation of older people with regard to digital participation. This phase of the project also focused on determining respective local and regional offers and structures to facilitate digital literacy, as well as to identify best practice examples of digital opportunities for people aged 60+.

In order to achieve these objectives, the partners of the project consortium:

1. carried out desk research in their national countries and languages, taking into account the current public discourse, recent publications, databases and policy papers, and
2. conducted interviews with potential supporters of older people and therefore participants in the DigitalScouts training, as well as with relevant experts, stakeholders and practitioners, in the field of e.g. policy, administration, science or advocacy, active in training or supporting trainers or older people.

The questions for the semi-structured interviews with experts and stakeholders as well as with potential training participants (see Annex: Lead questions used in guided interviews) were adapted according to the function, expertise and personal background of the interviewees.

A total of eleven interviews were conducted in Austria, both online and via telephone. The participating experts include five women and one man from different backgrounds, including

Irmtraud Ehrenmüller, a professor at FH Linz focusing on societal and social innovation, Carina Brauneis, a project manager in the field of digital innovation in the health care sector at Caritas Vienna, Hannah Dambachmayr, responsible for developing new services for older people at Elisabethinen in Linz, Maria Fellner, CEO of DigitAAL Life, a Graz-based enterprise that developed an app for cognitive training for seniors, and Edith Simöl, a long-term trainer in senior education and head of the service platform *Digitale Senior:innen* in Vienna, and Franz Bergler Hellein from Austrian Red Cross. Five interviews were conducted with potential digital scouts, four of whom were women. Three women working in different parts of Styria for the Austrian Red Cross as multi-hour companions took part in the interviews, along with one woman and one man from Freistadt in Upper Austria who are active as volunteers in visiting services. Volunteers' digital skills range from being advanced and being digital natives to needing digital training themselves.

This report summarises the results of the research activities in Austria and gives an overview of the situation of older people regarding their digital readiness (infrastructure, internet use, digital skills) and relevant limiting aspects for their digital participation (income, formal education level, gender), the support structures and offers for the digital participation of older people and the professionalisation of trainers in Austria.

The following report sections also contain lessons learnt from existing training of trainers and recommendations on what content and skills are important for the training of digital scouts. In addition, this report also describes good practice examples of digital participation opportunities for people aged 60+.

2. Results of the research phase in Austria

2.1 Status quo of the digital readiness of people aged 60+

According to Statistik Austria (2023), Austria's senior citizen population aged over 65 exceeded 1.75 million in early 2022, marking a new record high. This age group represents the usual retirement age in population statistics. The number of senior citizens has been on a constant rise during the previous years, owing to an increase in life expectancy. Currently, 19% of Austria's inhabitants fall in this age group. Due to demographic change (Statistik Austria, 2023), this trend is expected to continue. However, the rate of change will vary across different regions in the individual federal provinces.

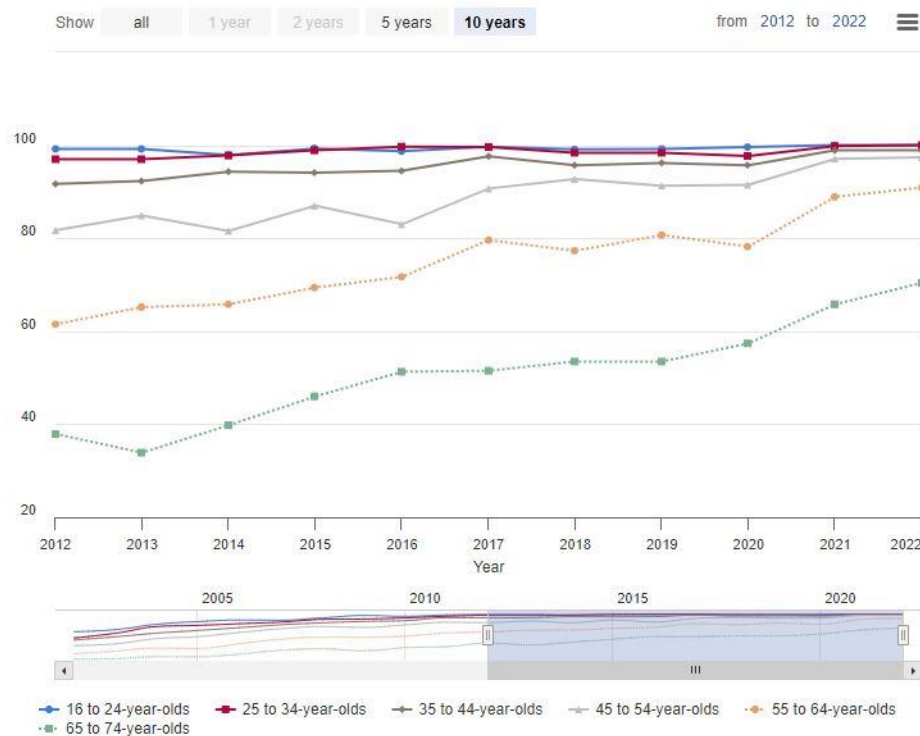
According to Eurostat (2022), the percentage of households with Internet access in the EU has increased to 93% in 2022 from 72% in 2011. In the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), Austria ranks slightly above average, being number 10 out of the 27 EU Member States in 2022. However, there are regional disparities in the access to the Internet, especially when comparing urban and rural areas. Austria ranks 14 out of 27 countries in terms of Internet access. At the same time providing better connectivity with higher available speeds in rural areas remains one of the biggest challenges (DESI 2022: 8f).

Individuals: Internet use in the last 12 months (percentage, 2022)

	Overall	55-64 years old	65-74 years old
Austria	94,16	91,73	72,56
European Union	91,14	88,04	69,73

Table 1: Internet use in the last 12 months (Eurostat, 2023)

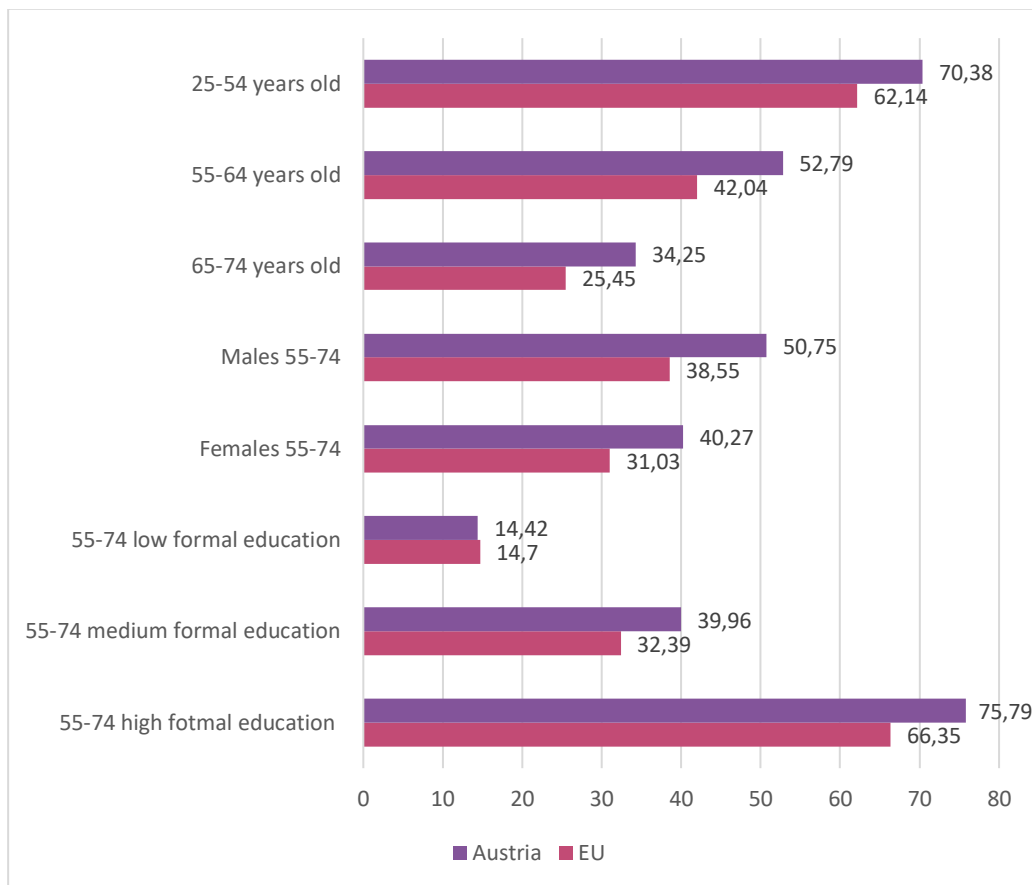
In assessing digital readiness of senior citizens in Austria, internet usage is seen as one of the significant factors. Eurostat uses data from the micro census which only includes people up to the age of 74. According to this data, over 90% in the 55-64 age group used the internet in the 12 months prior to the survey, while 73% in the 65-74 age group did the same. (Eurostat, 2023). At the same time, internet usage has increased significantly during the last years (see graphic 1). While in 2012 only 38% of the age group 65-74 used the internet in the last three months prior to the survey, this figure had risen to 70% by 2022. However, according to Statistik Austria (2022: 20), 11% of the 55-64-year-olds and 34% of the 65-74-year-olds in Austria had no access to the internet in the three months prior to the survey.



Graphic 1: Individuals using the internet in the last three months by age 2012 – 2022 (Statistik Austria, 2022)

Regarding limiting aspects, sociologist Rebekka Rohner points out that there is a lack of empirically proven knowledge regarding the diverse limiting aspects that prevent older people from participating in digitalisation (Rohner, 2023). In the interviews, two main barriers were identified: lack of digital literacy and the diversity of the target group in terms of attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Edith Simöl also discussed three main groups of seniors who, from a practitioner's point of view, face different challenges.

Firstly, it is important to note that the digital world is highly complex, with numerous intersecting and constantly developing technologies that make linear teaching and learning impossible for trainers and the learning process challenging for senior citizens. Digital literacy and skills are critical for digital participation. According to the Digital Economy and Society Index, in 2021 63% of the Austrian population aged 16 to 74 possessed at least basic digital skills (DESI, 2022: 5, see also graphic 2). While digital skills among older people in Austria have improved, there is still a lack of digital education to ensure digital sovereignty. The topic of digital education for seniors has come into focus in national policies since 2011, nevertheless there are still gaps in infrastructure and offers provided (see next chapter).



Graphic 2: Individuals with basic or above basic overall digital skills (percentage), Austria 2021. Source: Eurostat, 2023

Regarding digitalisation and digital skills, it needs to be taken into consideration that older people are not a homogeneous group, and limiting aspects vary according to personal attitudes, as well as socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, level of education, income, and place of residence (Rohner, 2023; graphic 2). There is still a significant gender gap when looking at the internet usage among the 65+ age group. 76% of men aged 65-74 used the internet in 2021, compared to only 57% of women (Statistik Austria, 2021). Furthermore, differences in internet usage according to educational level have decreased over the years, but nevertheless still exist. People with higher levels of education are more likely to use the internet regularly (Statistik Austria, 2021). The affordability of internet connections is an issue that affects some older people as well, especially those with lower pensions which statistically are more often women than men. While mobile data usage is very cheap in Austria (ITU, 2021), the average pension of women is still 41% lower than that of men and thus women are more likely to face financial barriers when it comes to digital participation.

With regard to the limiting aspects of digital participation, Edith Simöl from *Digitale Senior:innen* identified three different groups among older people who each face different barriers. First, older adults who are highly interested in digitalisation and want to become digitally literate; second, older individuals who do not possess a strong interest in digital tools but know that they will have to learn the basics, and third, the group that does not want to use digital tools at all. Older adults in the first group who want to learn may face economic barriers that can make it difficult to access

digital tools and the internet. The second group is often unsure about where to get knowledge from and what knowledge they want and can access. The last group faces the barrier of lacking motivation and encouragement to get digitally active. In many cases, they already are so-called proxy-users since they use digital tools through somebody else (partner, children, grandchildren, etc.), but are hesitant or unwilling to become users themselves.

2.2 Support structures in regard to digital participation

"What is important is digitalisation while leaving no one behind." - Digital Action Plan Austria

In 2021, the Federal Ministry of Finance (previously the Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs) developed a national strategy for digitalisation called *Digitaler Aktionsplan Austria*. One of the principles outlined in the plan is to improve the quality of life for people of all ages and regions through digitalisation. The plan identifies six key areas for action, with one of them focusing on health and care. Its aim is to enhance the health and well-being of people of all generations through digitalisation. Apart from this most recent nationwide strategy, three main stakeholder groups were identified in providing support structures: policy documents on digital education for seniors, academia, and small-scale and local initiatives.

When it comes to digital education for seniors in Austria, three policy documents are central to its development: The Strategy for Lifelong Learning (2011), the Federal Plan for Seniors (2014), and the Guideline for General Senior Promotion (2016). These documents point out that the promotion of digital education for seniors has increasingly become the focus of political measures. In the policy documents, educational measures are described as a central form of intervention to promote the digital skills of seniors. However, these measures are formulated in very general terms, and no goals are mentioned for the development of long-term support and information networks (Rohner, 2023).

The second relevant stakeholder for digital education in old age is academia and the research sector. Various research projects are funded on a national, but also European level. The focus here, however, is primarily on care and assistive technology, particularly, in assisted living. The focus here is on emergency and monitoring systems. How digital competencies are built up and how digital education can look in the context of Ambient Assisted Living (AAL) systems is not an explicit topic in most projects (Rohner, 2023).

Apart from national and regional policies and academia, a variety of different offers that aim at improving digital skills for older people are only available in certain provinces or cities and are not implemented on a nation-wide level. However, in 2019, the BMSGPK (formerly known as Federal Ministry for Digitization and Economic Location (BMDW)) and the senior association *Österreichischer Seniorenrat* initiated a collaboration with the fit4internet association to launch several nation-wide projects aimed at individuals aged 60 and older. These projects include the *Smartphone-ABC*, which features learning videos on how to use smartphones, and *Kaffee Digital*, a cost-free in-person course with professional trainers designed to promote basic digital skills for seniors in two locations of all federal states in Austria. They also offer the possibility to obtain a so-called smartphone driving license¹. Apart from that there are many organizations that offer teaching of digital skills in a wide variety of formats, mostly locally and on a smaller scale. Public non-formal educational institutions such as the *Volkshochschule*, Christian organizations

¹ Further information fit4internet.at/view/generation_60plus

(Katholische Bildungswerke), senior associations (*Seniorenbund OÖ*) and private companies (*A1, Emporia, Wifi*), small NGOs and private initiatives (such as the *Seniorenstammtisch* in Freistadt/Upper Austria), all offer educational formats for older people in the field of digitalization. In the case of private companies and educational institutions, paid staff offer courses on digitalization. They are held in bigger cities and include smartphone, computer, and internet. In the interviews, potential digital scouts reported that these courses are hard to attend on regular basis when living in the countryside and cannot be considered low threshold. When it comes to small NGOs and senior associations, they offer local informal recurring meetings (*Stammtische*) and often volunteers or peers act as trainers. These offers are easier to access but are regionally restricted.

Increasingly, formal education projects are also being set up, these mostly teach digital skills at a higher level (e.g., Uni 55 Plus in Salzburg). In general, the lack of structures has been criticized, especially also by interviewees working as professionals in the health care sector in Styria. There is a lot of room for improvement when it comes to assisting older people in the usage of digital tools for clients in care facilities.

2.3 Findings on the professionalisation of support of older people using ICT

The digitalisation of older people has been a key focus of strategic approaches on the federal level in recent years, resulting in several initiatives and projects being funded on a national or regional level. While the Federal Ministry for Digital Affairs supports numerous educational programs for seniors to acquire or improve digital skills and there is a wide range of offers in this area, there are not as many offers visible to train trainers to educate seniors in digital skills. To address this gap, the Federal Ministry for Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection (BMSGPK) has developed quality criteria for senior-friendly teaching and learning on digitalisation. Additionally, the ministry evaluates educational offers for seniors in general and provides good practice recommendations. 12% of the projects that were recommended as good practice projects since 2009 were dealing with digitalisation and teaching digital skills. In the following passages, the report will highlight various educational offers and initiatives.

The *DigitaleSenior:innen* service center, an offer by the Austrian Institute for Applied Telecommunications (*ÖIAT*) and funded by the *BMSGPK*, has been highlighting the relevance of digital education for seniors since 2017. Through various projects and initiatives, the centre has made an important contribution to the further development of adult education in Austria. The centre offers an online training called *Senior:innen-Trainer für digitale Alltagskompetenzen*, which educates trainers in training older people in digital skills.² The course is offered once a year, has a duration of four months with 90 learning units and currently costs 249 EUR. Employees, self-employed and volunteers alike are invited to attend the course. Additionally, the centre provides a range of training materials, criteria catalogues, and manuals, and offers workshops. They also award a quality label to offers that meet a set of criteria.

A formal training course at the level of higher education is offered by the *Kirchliche Pädagogische Hochschule* in Vienna. The course is called *Geragogik - Lebenslanges Lernen Leiten*³ (geragogic – life-long learning and leading) and is aimed at people with academic degrees, work experience or

² Further information: digitaleseniorinnen.at

³ Further information: Geragogik - Lebenslanges Lernen Leiten (bildung.kphvie.ac.at/geragogik-lebenslanges-lernen-leiten.html)

certificates in pedagogy. Participants receive a master's degree upon completion and the duration is five semesters and the price according to the website is € 8.400. Students learn about the specifics of learning in older age, how to address the special needs of learners and how to integrate older people in the learning process. Also, project management skills and event management in this area are taught.

One project that received the *Digitale Senior:innen* quality label is the *Netzwerk Computerias Tirol* which is a network with five locations in the federal state of Tyrol⁴. This initiative adopts a self-help and peer-to-peer approach, with volunteers acting as learning facilitators. The volunteers include retired ICT specialists who are now passing on their knowledge. There are no specific requirements for becoming a volunteer, but good technical skills and understanding are considered an advantage by the network representatives. To support the training of the volunteers, they are given access to shared folders containing a wealth of resources on digitalisation and digital tools and are encouraged to identify their interests and needs to improve their facilitation skills (Rohrbacher 2022).

Another project that has been awarded the quality label by *Digitale Senior:innen* and cited by the BMSGPK as an example of good practice is the project *Technik in Kürze / Tablets für alle* (technology in a nutshell/tablets for all) by *Katholische Bildungswerke Steiermark*⁵. This project offers training for young people between 16 and 24 years of age in Graz/Styria who already have good digital skills and want to specifically teach older people how to use tablets. The training programme emphasises the importance of younger people understanding the learning needs of older individuals and learning didactic skills. The courses for the older people are then held in different locations in Styria on different topics, according to the wishes of the host (libraries, churches, municipalities) and are held by two trainers for a group of 8-12 learners on one day a week for three weeks in a row. In addition, the project allows seniors to borrow tablets free of charge to test the device before making a financial investment. The training programme lasts 9 hours (2 face-to-face sessions, 3 e-learning assignments, 1 job shadowing, 2 reflection sessions) and costs € 50 per person. The training is also co-funded by the BMSGPK.

Overall, there are few initiatives in Austria to professionalise ICT support for older people. Additionally, there is no comprehensive overview of all available educational programmes for trainers, volunteers, or other staff, with offers varying from one province to another. Quality labels have been awarded to some initiatives to improve visibility and ensure quality, but there is still a lack of national. The rural-urban divide is particularly pronounced, with most trainer training programmes being offered in the provincial capitals or in the capital Vienna. There is a clear need for more opportunities for trainers, particularly for people living outside urban areas.

⁴ Further information: Computerias Tirol | InfoEck der Generationen (infoeck.at/computerias-tirol)

⁵ Further information: Ausbildung zum/zur TIK-Trainer/in (bildung.graz-seckau.at/einrichtung/202/ausundweiterbildungen/artikel_ausbildung/article/18324.html)

2.4 Examples of opportunities for digital participation of people 60+

2.4.1 BRAINMEE, Styria, online

Austria

Area covered: Health promotion

1. Short Description

As we get older, our cognitive abilities decline. In order to slow down this process, the app BRAINMEE has been developed to improve cognitive abilities. The app is specially designed for tablets but can also be used on a smartphone. It is based on scientific methods and ensures the holistic activation of cognitive performance.

2. Implementation and objectives

Although there is no age recommendation, the app is designed to be used by older adults either with a caregiver or alone at home. It can be used in outpatient care settings with professional care workers, various types of supporters, and volunteers. It can also be used with trained caregivers, volunteers, or other supporters in residential care facilities.

Each training session lasts 50 minutes and focuses on a specific topic that users can choose from a variety of areas. The trainings can be done independently, regardless of location and time. Each topic offers four different levels of difficulty, and each training covers five pillars: memory, movement, perception, everyday activities, and playful creativity.

By using the app, cognitive performance improves, and motivation for older adults to continue their training and learning journey increases. This offer is aimed at older adults who wish to improve their cognitive skills in a scientifically proven, user-friendly, and enjoyable way. With improved cognitive skills, societal participation is improved as well.

3. Key facts

BRAINMEE is developed by the company digitAAL Life GmbH and is a private commercial offer that grew out of Joanneum Research, a research institution in Austria.

Content-wise the app is supported by different research institutions like Joanneum Research, the medical university in Graz, the University of Graz, and the Austrian Red Cross among others. The testing of the app has been done in hospitals and institutions by the Austrian Red Cross Styria.

The app is not free of charge and must be paid for monthly or in advance. Subscriptions are available for one, three or twelve months at a price of 31,18€/month, 35,98€/month or 29,98€/month, respectively. A free trial is available to download. To use the app, you must have access to a tablet of at least 8 inches in width with Android version 8.0 or an iPad with OS 8.2. and access to the Internet for the time it takes to download the app. The person also needs basic knowledge of how to use a tablet.

4. Results

The app was tested in different settings including the Graz State Hospital, where it received positive feedback from clients. The app was also tested at the Austrian Red Cross in Styria as part of the visiting service and received positive feedback. The tests have been scientifically accompanied and the results have influenced the ongoing development. Extensions in different directions are planned.

5. More information

Website [brainmee.com/en/our-offer]

2.4.2 Klub Online, Vienna, online

Austria

Areas covered: Social participation, health promotion

1. Short Description

Klub Online is an interactive, online leisure and health promotion activity offered on a weekly basis with a weekly schedule for pensioners.

2. Implementation and objectives

Klub Online is a social, sports, and language club for pensioners in Vienna, organized by the *PensionistInnenklubs*. It takes place via Zoom and Microsoft Teams and currently offers nine one-hour programmes per week. Participants can take part in various activities such as group reading, yoga, dancing, learning English and playing games. The club aims to educate, engage, and physically and mentally activate people over the age of 60 by providing a social platform for them to connect with others and enjoy various activities, regardless of the physical location.

3. Key Facts

Klub Online is a public, free of charge, online based service provided by the PensionistInnenklub Wien, a public institution of the City of Vienna. The weekly schedule can be found on the *PensionistInnenklub* website. To participate, individuals must have an internet connection, know how to use Zoom/Microsoft Teams or have someone to help them and have access to a device that supports the software. Detailed instructions on how to download and access Zoom/Microsoft Teams can be found on the website.

4. Results

The service was launched during the COVID19 pandemic. It is still running and being developed.

5. More information

Online offer for seniors [kwp.at/pensionistenklubs/programm/mitmachen-neues-online-klubprogramm]

2.4.3 E-Government, Digitales Amt, nation-wide, online

Austria

Area covered: Political/municipal participation

1. Short Description

E-Government is a service provided by the Austrian government that simplifies political participation and bureaucracy. With *E-Government*, citizens can conveniently process various administrative tasks from the comfort of their homes, including the signing of PDFs in a safe way, supporting referendums and popular consultations, generate their registration sheets, arrange financial matters, and more. This platform offers an efficient and user-friendly way for people to engage in politics and exercise their rights as citizens.

2. Implementation and objectives

The Austrian government provides an e-government service, that allows older citizens to avoid physically visiting district offices, tax offices, etc. for various tasks. The government's website facilitates online signing of referendums, commenting on draft laws, and requesting tax balance, among other services. This online platform enables older citizens with limited mobility, as well as those living in isolated and rural areas, to actively participate in political processes in a more convenient and independent manner.

3. Key facts

E-Government is provided by the Austrian government free of charge. Depending on the service, it is available to any individual with Austrian citizenship or an Austrian residency permit. To utilize the tools, users require an internet connection and either a smartphone or a so called *Bürgerkarte* (citizenship card). Additionally, individuals must possess the necessary digital skills or receive support in setting up the account and using the tools effectively. Any costs associated with acquiring devices must be borne by the individual. Various initiatives (such as Computerias Tirol mentioned in chapter 2.3) offer free webinars or other explanatory formats to help older individuals understand the tools and opportunities available to them.

4. Results

The practice is ongoing and is constantly being developed. The service eliminates the need for many visits to governmental institutions and makes political participation accessible, convenient, and efficient.

5. More information

Website [bmf.gv.at/themen/digitalisierung/Digitales-Oesterreich]

2.4.4 Omas Gegen Rechts, nationwide, online and in person

Austria

Areas covered: Political/municipal participation, social participation

1. Short Description

Omas Gegen Rechts (Grandmothers Against the Right) is a platform for civil society protest that started in 2017. They are active against right-wing developments in the country, such as the dismantling of parliamentary democracy and the rule of law, the strengthening of populism and right-wing extremism.

2. Implementation and objectives

The platform is a volunteer-run initiative, primarily led by older women who are grandmothers themselves or belong to the older age group. However, they welcome anyone who wants to join their movement. *Omas Gegen Rechts* actively participates in mostly on-site activities such as protests and demonstrations and offers educational opportunities throughout the country, with a particular focus on the capitals of various provinces. The group communicates and organizes itself through its website and Facebook page. As a visual symbol, they wear pink pussyhats, a pink, crafted brimless hat or cap which became popular during the women's rights and political resistance protests in Washington D.C. in 2017. The group is active almost every day of the week, and they sing unique songs during their marches.

Older women are often overlooked in the political agenda. Therefore, the group's aim is to amplify the voices of older women who experienced World War II and/or its aftermath and the older generation, as well as to oppose right-wing parties and promote the importance of democratisation. The direct beneficiaries are the participating women, who are able to make their voices heard, and society, as the platform raises awareness.

3. Key facts

Omas Gegen Rechts is a civil society platform founded on Facebook in November 2017 by Monika Salzer, with strong support from Susanne Scholl. In May 2017, an association was registered in Austria. The platform is funded by donations and all members are active on a voluntary basis. Participation is free of charge. Basic digital skills and access to a device and the internet are required to find activities on the website and Facebook.

4. Results

The platform is well-known and very popular in Austria and has been established in all federal provinces of Austria and in some federal provinces of Germany.

5. More information

Website [omasgegenrechts.at]

YouTube Channel [youtube.com/channel/UCe5apGMO3hHSceflt4wj6tg]

2.4.5 Vollpension, Backademie, Vienna, online and in person

Austria

Areas covered: Social participation, cultural participation

1. Short Description

Vollpension is a Viennese coffeehouse concept in which senior citizens bake cakes to earn money on top of their often-small pension and to escape isolation in old age. During the COVID19 pandemic, when catering establishments were closed, *Vollpension* ventured into the internet. They established the *Backademie*, which provides digital and stationary learning opportunities for all aspiring bakers. Senior citizens teach the best recipes in online video baking courses.

2. Implementation and objectives

The online baking courses give the opportunity to older people to pass on their knowledge on recipes for classic Austrian desserts and cooking techniques. Through the employment of older people baking-teachers, poverty and loneliness of this group is addressed and a place for intergenerational interaction is created. Through this experience in giving online baking courses, seniors experience the possibility to share their valuable knowledge online and generate an income.

3. Key facts

The offer is provided by *Vollpension Generationendialog GmbH*, a subsidiary of the social enterprise *Vollpension* located in Vienna. The video and baking courses are available for purchase by the participants, with prices varying depending on the course. A comprehensive list of courses and prices can be found on the website. *Vollpension* currently employs approximately 70 seniors in various positions, and all senior bakers have the opportunity to lead baking courses. The selection of senior bakers who lead a course always depends on recipe specifics and availability.

4. Results

Participants have given very positive feedback, especially the stories told by the senior baking instructors were welcomed by clients. Since the opening of the baking school, more than 50 baking courses for private individuals and about 70 baking courses for companies have taken place. Thus, about 1,000 people have already learned to bake from seniors in *Backademie*. By opening the baking school, 5 additional jobs for seniors were created. The coffee house, baking school and online baking courses are ongoing offers.

5. More information

Website [backademie.com/en/bakademy]

Video baking courses [backademie.com/en/video-baking-courses]

2.4.6 Story Tree, Upper Austria, online and in person

Austria

Areas covered: Social participation, cultural participation

1. Short Description

Story Tree is an EU funded project that aims at reducing loneliness of older people by using the method of storytelling. Older people should be given the opportunity to

share own life stories either in an App or person with a listener (usually a volunteer) and thus inspire creativity and self-efficiency.

2. Implementation and objectives

The objective of the training is to reduce loneliness and isolation of older people through a story telling training. A training teaches volunteers to become good listeners and use storytelling interventions to reconnect older people with their social environment. The stories can be written down or shared in person on pen and paper or via an app called the Stor-E Tree. For story telling different types of prompts are available for seniors and volunteers are trained in how to encourage older people to share their stories online or on paper. Also, the content of the story can be the basis for different follow-up activities, such as visiting places from the story or searching for pictures, music, etc. related to the story online.

3. Key facts

Story Tree was an Erasmus+ project with partners from UK, the Netherlands, Luxemburg, and Austria that was implemented from 01.09.2018 - 31.08.2021. The project developed a training that uses storytelling and supports people to share their story. Especially for people with low literacy skills, storytelling can offer new opportunities to share feelings, develop social skills and prevent social exclusion. Considering their needs, this project aims to develop an e-training that can be used both online and offline. The training includes face-to-face support from volunteers/professionals while taking advantage of digital solutions to capture and process stories. The aim is to accompany, reach and motivate lonely older people through this training.

4. Results

The tool was tested with older people and volunteers in an NGO in Upper Austria with positive results. However, it was noted that older people preferred using pen and paper rather than the app.

5. More information

Website [story-tree.eu]

2.4.7 Discover Culture, Styria, online

Austria

Area covered: Cultural participation

1. Short Description

Discover Culture is an online platform that allows users to take virtual tours of museums, castles, and other cultural venues from the comfort of their homes, with a diverse range of offerings from cultural institutions across Austria and Germany. The platform offers content in both German and English. The website is available in different languages.

2. Implementation and objectives

This platform is designed to help museums modernise their services while offering people interested in culture the opportunity to experience cultural sights remotely. Museums, castles, and other cultural institutions showcase their exhibits. The activity offers virtual presentations of museums and cultural institutions in through virtual reality tours, interactive livestreams, interactive books, chat functions, audio, and video guides by experts at the location, and opportunities to exchange ideas with other viewers via live chat. This platform offers an interactive and engaging experience that allows individuals to explore and learn about different cultures from the comfort of their own homes.

3. Key facts

Discover Culture is a collaborative project between LightCyde New Media Solutions GmbH and the Benedictine Abbey of Admont. The initiative receives partial financial support from the Austrian government, as well as from the federal province and the European Union. Additionally, various cultural partners lend their support to the project. Offer costs range from free of charge and EUR 4.99 per tour. To access the tours, an internet connection, and a suitable device such as a tablet or computer are required, as well as knowledge on or support in how to operate a browser and make online payments.

4. Results

The practice is still ongoing and with the intention to expand. The aim of the platform is to become an international network to present museums and cultural institutions.

5. More information

Website [discover-culture.com/en/about]

Facebook [facebook.com/discovercultureonline]

Instagram [instagram.com/discovercultureonline]

2.5 Recommendations for the DigitalScouts trainings

According to interviewees, facilitators who work with older learners need to be sensitive to the specific needs and experiences of this target group. One important consideration is to reflect on the different life experiences of older generations, such as the understanding that news has traditionally been edited before publication, or that important or official content should be sent via post rather than email (Edith Simöl, Irmtraud Ehrenmüller). Additionally, facilitators should be aware of their own stereotypes and assumptions about older people and strive to bring a positive attitude towards ageing and senior education into the teaching setting. All interviewees agreed that humour, respect, trustworthiness, patience, and empathy are important skills for educators working with older learners. Hannah Dambachmayr from Elisabethinen in Linz, served as an unofficial trainer for digital tools in home for older people during the COVID19 pandemic, emphasized that older learners should never be made to feel inferior to their trainer or educator. Scouts should avoid teaching from a position of superiority, particularly if they are much younger than their learners. Instead, facilitators should use simple language and highlight the shared experience of learning together in the digital field and relate to their own learning journey with

digital tools. Also, the digital scout should avoid creating stressful situations for the learners but ensure a positive experience (potential digital scouts).

Additionally, it is important that the training focuses on building self-confidence and empowering older people in their learning journey. Researcher Rebekka Rohner (2023) and Edith Simöl, head of *Digitale Senior:innen*, emphasise the importance of decreasing fear of digital tools for older people and the motivational work that is often necessary. To decrease fear, facilitators should make it clear to older people that they do not need to know everything about digital tools to use them. Just as many of us do not know how a car engine works but still have a driving licence, the focus should be on practical use. Contents need to be relevant for the learners and there should be enough time and space for repetitive practice. The direct benefit for the older person needs to be clear, and motivation to learn should be ignited. When working with the learners, digital scouts shall therefore consider the relevance in their teaching plan. Many potential digital scouts and experts reported the highest interest of older people in digital communication tools such as making video calls, texting, and social media. A volunteer from Upper Austria recommends showing games on smartphones and tablets to seniors. Multi-hour daily companions reported that their clients are especially interested in using search engines and video portals for gardening and cooking tips as well as listening to old songs or informing themselves about political developments (Theresia Vasold). Responding to these specific needs and interests can be achieved best when learning happens in very small groups or ideally in a one-on-one setting, in which the facilitator has the time and capacity to deal with these wishes (Edith Simöl).

It is crucial to respect the boundaries and personal preferences of older adults regarding the use of digital tools. As highlighted by Theresia Vasold, a multi-hour care worker, it is important to acknowledge that not all older people want to use digital tools, and they should not be forced to do so. Instead, the training should empower them to make conscious, self-determined informed actions in the digital sphere. This includes respecting their decision not to use digital tools, under the condition that this choice has been made in an informed and self-determined way (Bohrn et al 2023 / Theresia Vasold).

Digital scouts should consider the physical capabilities of the learner. Certain illnesses or impairments (hearing/seeing) make using digital tools more difficult. Older people often have for example difficulties with finger motor skills or drier skin and touch devices therefore do not react well. In these cases, for example, a pen suitable for these devices can be used to aid the learner. Regarding hearing impairments, it could be beneficial to communicate to the scout that speaking slowly and in a rather deep calm voice might help to understand. Also, other medical conditions such as dementia or neurological diseases affect the ability to use digital tools.

Regarding didactical skills, interviewees highlighted the importance of how to transfer knowledge on digital tools and skills to older people. Edith Simöl highlighted the complexity of the digital world that cannot be explained in a linear way. This increases the facilitators' necessity for a good understanding of what digitalisation is. Ehrenmüller and Ertl stated that is also important to work with metaphors when explaining non-tactile aspects of digital tools. The organisation Katholische Bildungswerke in Styria for example developed the analogy of a city to explain all things relevant for seniors on digitalization.

The interviews conducted revealed a diverse range of needs and skill sets among potential digital scouts. Some individuals in Styria expressed a desire to receive training in digital tools themselves so that they can become better teachers. This sentiment was echoed by Edith Simöl, the

representative of *Digitale Senior:innen*, who emphasized the importance of both digital and didactic skills in becoming a successful digital scout. She noted that many people tend to overestimate their digital proficiency and as a result, *Digitale Senior:innen* has developed the Austrian Competence-Model for Digital Competences, which includes six areas of digital competence to help individuals assess their own digital skills. However, some potential digital scouts who are considered digital natives expressed the belief that digital skills do not need to be a part of the training. To ensure a similar level of knowledge among interested scouts, it is recommended to provide a pool of knowledge or other educational offers, such as Computerias Tirol provides (see chapter 2.3), for those who want to educate themselves on their own in digital literacy.

To support digital scouts in their activities, it is recommended to offer workshops and network meetings to exchange practices, educate and socialise. This helps the scouts to stay motivated, but also stay informed on current trends in the fast-moving digital world. The multi-hour day care staff members in Styria reported that they receive regular updates in the field of health care from the Red Cross, and they would appreciate similar updates in the field of digitalisation. It is also important to consider the duration of the educational program and to offer continued support and training to the digital scouts as they implement their newly acquired skills.

Regarding training formats, different suggestions were made. One digital scout suggested meeting in person for a duration of four weekly meetings. Another potential digital scout said that either online or in-person training would be appreciated and that they were open to anything. Another interview suggested having one to three days of training on Saturdays for the whole day in person. An online version could be an additional offer. Regarding the methodology, self-learning and self-reflection should be an important part, also communication training was deemed important to train building analogies and explaining complex tools/functions in a simple way, perhaps through role-play scenarios in which one digital scout plays the learner, the other the scout. Also, one potential digital scout pointed out the importance to learn a teaching well-structured approach. To achieve this, possible learning scenarios should be elaborated to go through what topics/tools should be taught first, what second, etc. to offer a coherent learning experience for learners.

2.6 Testimonials of interviewees

“A lot of motivational work is necessary to get these people interested. This is not yet about training measures, but about “All right, I’ll take a look at it.”

(Edith Simöl, Head of Digitale Senior:innen)

“Digital participation for older people is very important because our world is in constant evolution. And I think it’s also important for older generations, even if it’s not the main goal, but still to be a bit present in today’s world. Because it’s the future, and it’s getting faster and faster, and some people are afraid to educate

themselves. But I think that everyone can do it, regardless of age. It just needs the willingness to do it.“

(Volunteer, Besuchs- und Begleitdienst)

”I always tell my participants that they are all too young to say "no I don't need this anymore". When people plan to live a few more months, I feel digital education is part of it.“

(Edith Simöl, Head of Digitale Senior:innen)

”The digital participation of older people is very important because they still want to take part in modern times. The older generation is aware that time is evolving and becoming increasingly faster. They see this through their relatives, their grandchildren, and they also want to participate. And they are often very fascinated.“

(Theresia Vasold, Multi-hour accompanying services, Styria)

”There are now developments in our system where the principle of equal treatment should be reconsidered. Population groups are excluded from receiving something simply because of a lack of IT equipment or less than highly professional competence.“

(Irmtraud Ehrenmüller, Professor for System and Process Management)

”But I think the hypothesis is, women are less confident because they never had to develop it (technical skills, digital skills), in the generation 80-year-old men are probably more confident but need to be guided.“

(Irmtraud Ehrenmüller, Professor for System and Process Management)

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Annex: Lead questions used in guided interviews

1. Do you think digital participation of older citizens is important? Why?
2. Which barriers do you know that prevent older citizens from digital participation?
3. Which support structures and learning offers for older people in using ICT do you know?
4. Do you think there is a need to expand these support/learning offers? If so: Why? Which kind of offers are not available? What is missing in the current offers?
5. Do you think there is [also] a need to train people to support/train older people using ICT? If so: Why?
6. Which opportunities/offers are available [do you know] to be trained themselves (as trainers) in [country/region]?
7. Is there a need to expand these offers [trainings for trainers/supporters]? If so: Why? Which kind of offers are not available? What is missing in the current offers?
8. What are trainers for digital education of older people keen to learn? [Potential learners: What would you like to learn to be able to support/train older people?]
9. What are the most important skills/knowledge for supporters?
10. From your personal point of view, which skills/knowledge do the (potential) trainers/you lack?
11. In addition to contents, which format is attractive (duration, online/on-site/ ...) for you/trainers on digital skills?
12. Can you also recommend methods/media to be included in training offers for trainers?
13. Which examples of opportunities interesting for/targeted at older people in the digital area do you know, covering one of the following areas: health promotion, social participation, cultural participation, political participation/municipal services?