



Digital Scouts

ENHANCING THE DIGITAL LITERACY
AND PARTICIPATION IN EUROPE

National Report for Romania

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 Romania 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.

Authors

Radu Meiroşu

Teodora Alexandra Pălărie

Asociația Grupul de Educație și Acțiune pentru Cetățenie (GEAC)

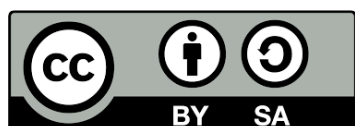
contact@geac.ro



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.

13 online interviews, using computer-mediated written communication, have been conducted in Romania, with eight experts/practitioners, six women and two men, and five potential digital scouts – four women and a man. In the first group, there are people from private entities with solid project management experience, and respondents who coordinate, or have been involved, some as trainers, in projects addressed to seniors, digital projects included. The potential digital scouts have a broad range of professional skills and backgrounds: social services, communication, digital marketing, computer engineering, volunteer management or teaching.

This report summarises the results of the research activities in Romania and gives an overview of the situation of older people with regard to 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 Romania.

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. Good practice examples of digital participation opportunities for people aged 60+ are also described in this report.

2. Results of the research phase in Romania

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

The 2022 edition of the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), which monitors Member States' progress in the digital area, tells us that Romania ranks 27th of the 27 EU Member States, facing among others a lack of basic digital skills among the population: the country scores well below the EU average in basic digital skills (28% compared to 54%) and above basic digital skills (9% compared to 26%).

The *human digital disability* is worsened by the very low level of digital public services for citizens, and citizens' using e-government services: the country scores significantly below the EU average on the availability of digital public services for citizens (a score of 44, compared to the EU average of 75), while digital interaction between public authorities and the general public is also low, with only 17% of internet users using e-government services (DESI, 2022).

The only indicator Romania performs well is connectivity: the take-up of at least 100 Mbps fixed broadband (57%) and fixed very high-capacity networks coverage (87%) surpasses the EU average (ibid).

Speaking of individuals' internet use in EU, and "how popular is internet use among older people", the latest Eurostat data shows that in 2022, 61.26% of people aged 65-74 in Romania used the internet in the last 12 months, which places the country in position 19 out of EU 27.

In Romania, relevant data for this research regarding the access of older adults to internet, and the reasons for using it can be drawn from National Statistics Institute inquiry "Population access to information and communication technology in 2022", based on a sample of 10188 households:

- In 2022, 82% of households in Romania had access to the internet at home, an increase of 1.3 percentage points compared to 2021, with 61% of them concentrated in urban areas.
- The share of people using the internet decreases with age: the percentage of internet users in the 16-34 age group was 98% while for the 55-74 age group it reached 73%.
- Households with the highest shares of internet access are those whose household head is employed (98%). On the other hand, the lowest share of households with internet access is found in households headed by pensioners (64%).
- Looking at occupational status, in the last 3 months preceding the inquiry, more than 9 out of 10 pupils and students (96%) accessed the internet more than once a day, with around 1 out of 2 pensioners (44%) at the opposite.
- Regarding the share of individuals using the internet for personal use in the last 3 months preceding the inquiry, by purpose of use, almost 93% of the pensioners inquired used the internet in communication, here including emailing, but mostly instant messaging, vocal/video calling, and social media participation.
- Pensioners are also active in using the internet for accessing information, and reading online news (58%), in searching general health related information (38%), and for entertainment purposes (31%), mostly for listening online radio, and using YouTube.
- Only 2,1 of the pensioners used the internet for participating in online consultations or voting for supporting civic or political actions (e.g., signing a petition), and also very few use the internet for making a doctor's appointment via a website or app (4%), or for using internet banking, including mobile banking (7%).
- When speaking of the share of people using the internet for personal use, by the purpose of use, age group, and sex, in the last 3 months preceding the inquiry, a relevant conclusion is that women of age 55-74 use the internet more than men for searching general health related information (43% vs. 31%), and for vocal/video calling (70% vs. 65%), while men use it more than women for reading online news (51% vs. 41%).

In relation to the primary use of Internet by older people, which is communication, Vajda and Gyöngyvér underline in their recent paper called "Digital Media Use of Older Adults in Mureş County, Romania" that the new technology has been adopted by older adults first and foremost for connecting with family, and friends, especially in the case of families whose younger generations have moved away from the settlement, or left the country to work abroad. This practice can be rooted in the early 2000s, when international phone calls were quite expensive, and parents were thus forced to learn how to use Skype, followed more recently by Facebook messenger, and other communication services free of charge. The connection with the dear ones is what matters most and is seen as a stronger motivational factor than other benefits of using the new media devices.

Digital opportunities and limitations faced by the older population in Romania have strongly come into focus during COVID-19 Pandemic. "Older Adults and the Digital Divide in Romania: Implications for the COVID-19 Pandemic" analysis (Ivan and Cutler, 2021) refers to a second level of the digital gap among older people, arguing that the pandemic period has deepened the risk of social isolation of older adults with poor digital skills or without Internet access. According to the authors mentioned above, policymakers should thus address those facing higher risks of social exclusion, with interventions in small communities, aiming to improve older people's digital skills relevant to their community life, such as trading products. Developing digital skills, the authors state, is a *matter of opportunity*, and they plead in this respect for strengthening the role of

community centres, and university short-term courses addressing the everyday digital needs of older people.

Regarding the limitations and obstacles which prevent older people from acquiring digital skills, the desk research and the interviews we made with relevant stakeholders in Romania have revealed, among others:

- the lack of training programmes, or courses on the market that address older people in an adapted, personalised, face-to-face way, which prove to be more effective especially for people over 70, since they feel less embarrassed by the lack of knowledge, can manage frustration better, and have a pace of information delivery tailored to their acquisition capacity.
- the fact that many older people in Romania do not have access to the internet, and devices, since they cannot afford to pay for them.
- the lack of digital trainers for seniors.
- seniors' fear to use the device, to break it.
- fear of making mistakes and their consequences.
- fear of data security issues and possible financial losses.

2.2 Support structures in regard to digital participation

In Romania, non-formal digital education is mainly targeted at children and young people from urban areas. The digital education efforts towards older people, and those from rural areas are lower, which can only lead to a widening of the already existing digital gap between generations. This is one of the conclusions of the National Study regarding Digital Inclusion and Exclusion in Romania, published in April 2022 by EOS Foundation - Educating for an Open Society, from Timișoara, as part of the national digital education and inclusion project "Together in Digital Romania". The project aims, among others, to provide free courses in basic digital skills, and also to develop a national digital inclusion strategy.

Regarding the promotion of older people's digital inclusion, non-governmental organisations, general directorates of social protection (seniors' clubs), and public libraries, mostly county libraries, are, by themselves, or in partnership, the only structures in Romania which have been delivering digital courses. However, these initiatives are few, and most of them proved to be inconsistent, at least until now, when digitalisation is a national priority.

The National Institute of Statistics in Romania indicates that there are 8.458 national, university, specialised, school, public or private libraries in Romania today, out of which 41 are county libraries. These county community libraries, at least, which are supposed to have more generous educational spaces, and learning offers can, and could provide digital literacy training for seniors, but, from the research in the DigitalScouts project, it can be concluded that, for the time being, their digital initiatives for seniors are minimal.

"Octavian Goga" county library, from Cluj-Napoca, is one of the few public libraries which shows consistency in its mission to improve seniors' basic digital skills. The library started the digital courses in 2016, under a programme called "Seniors and the computer", aiming to help this age group to adapt to the demands of the information society and to learn how to spend their time in cyberspace efficiently. In 2023, the course is being held daily, for one week, at the library's headquarters, with groups made up of 6 participants of 60+.

EOS Foundation project “Together in Digital Romania” mentioned above has also targeted public libraries, as cultural centres dedicated to improving citizens’ digital skills in Romania. During the 2023 campaign (April 17 – May 7), the foundation called for the libraries, among others, to organise digital inclusion activities to highlight the importance of digital education and inclusion in Romania, rewarding five of the most creative and interesting digital activities performed during the campaign. One of the libraries which responded to the call was “V.A. Urechia” county library, from Galati, which invited people of all ages to a basic training session focused on: making an email account (email) or on social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram); paying the bills online (telephone, electricity, gas, water); registering on Ghiseul.ro platform to pay local taxes and duties; creating accounts on the website of the National Public Pension House; interacting with the authorities online, etc.

An opportunity for libraries to become more consistent as digital competencies hubs show up under Romania’s Recovery and Resilience Plan, Component 7 - Digital transformation, Operation D. Digital Skills, Human Capital and Internet Usage, managed by the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania, as implementing agency of the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation. The overall objective of the call for projects is to improve the basic digital skills of communities with limited access to digital training and marginalised groups, while the specific objectives of the call for projects include, among others: renovation of county libraries, and equipping them with computers and technical equipment so as to become hubs for the development of digital skills; renovation of rural and city libraries and equipping them with computers and technical equipment to be transformed into digital competence development hubs; development of basic digital skills for citizens from disadvantaged communities.

In 2021, the Romanian Association for Smart City, whose mission is to create a network of creative-smart communities and develop the Smart City Industry in Romania, announced the launching of a programme, a kit for local authorities to cover all the necessary steps to open a Centre for Digital Inclusion. Snagov Town Hall was the first to open such a centre, with the mission to provide digital inclusion for young people, seniors, unemployed, local entrepreneurs, or local government representatives. One of the Romanian Association for Smart City partners in this programme is again EOS Foundation, whose contribution to the programme consisted in providing the curriculum for the digital literacy courses delivered by the Centre for Digital Inclusion. The Romanian Association for Smart City initiative seems to be singular for the time being, and Snagov Centre for Digital Inclusion has not announced yet publicly any digital activities for older citizens in Snagov.

General Directorates of Social Protection in Romania have been trying to be active in delivering, among other community services (within seniors’ clubs/day centres), digital courses for their older beneficiaries, pensioners. These local authorities’ initiatives have started before COVID-19 pandemic, but they have increased recently, and seems to be more articulate than before.

This is the case of General Directorate of Social and Child Protection (DGASPC) Sector 2 Bucharest, which in 2021 concluded a partnership, through Sector 2 City Hall, with ECDL Romania, for piloting a programme of digital education for seniors in the community. For one month, seniors from the day centres of DGASPC have learnt the basics of computer and Internet, how to write documents, how to search and select the right online information, how to communicate through online channels, how to access various online services (commercial, administrative, medical, etc.). “The first Digital Citizen programme for digital education of older people”, as ECDL calls it, continued in 2021 through a partnership with the Centre for Seniors of the Municipality of Bucharest (CSMB).

ECDL Romania, which is part of the most widespread internationally recognised digital skills certification programme in over 100 countries, with over 17 million people registered in the programme to date, proves to be one of the few organisations in Romania which is implementing an articulate strategy addressing the digital needs of the older people, even since 2012, in partnership with general directorates of social protection, public libraries, and NGOs, like the one with Never Alone Association (Asociația Niciodată Singur – Prietenii Vârstnicilor) which has been concluded quite recently, and about which we will elaborate more in the following section of the report.

More recently, at the beginning of 2023, DGASPC Sector 6 Bucharest announced a course called “From analogue to digital: digital senior, technology expert” addressed to the seniors’ members of Sector 6 Seniors’ Clubs, with a number of 16 seniors divided into two groups weekly. The courses, as mentioned, helps seniors adapt to the technological changes in society, stay active and connected to the world, simplifying their everyday life by learning how to pay bills, or shop online.

General Directorates of Social Protection will for sure strengthen their role, and capacity to provide digital literacy services for older citizens. Since 2022, Romania has a new National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction. Oriented towards investment in people (vulnerable people and people in need, children, young people, adults, older people, etc.), education and training, social protection and prevention, the Strategy proposes a framework to ensure equal opportunities necessary for all citizens to maximise their potential for harmonious personal development, stable integration into the labour market and active ageing and, last but not least, social inclusion. Two of the specific objectives of the Strategy Action Plan refer to effective, equitable and inclusive education and training, and integrated social services, geared towards promoting independent living in the community. Development of social services aimed primarily at single or dependent older people with the objective of ensuring active ageing and equal opportunities is a priority, and the number of older people who have acquired digital skills is one of the indicators.

Speaking of social, and digital inclusion strategies, it is worth mentioning that Cluj-Napoca is the first city in Romania which adopted in 2021 a so-called “Digital Transformation Strategy”, which from the very beginning states that its focus is centred upon citizens. The Cluj-Napoca strategy pleads for the involvement of relevant stakeholders in the IT&C field (citizens, companies, local and central authorities, educational institutions, clusters, digital innovation hubs, NGOs) in projects to increase, among others, citizens' digital literacy, with a focus on people at risk (older people, children, people with disabilities, poorly educated people).

2.3 Findings on professionalisation of support of older people using ICT

The desk research indicates that educational offers/trainings in Romania available for paid educators, volunteers, or within vocational trainings lack almost entirely, and, for the time being, there are no identified tendencies/measures to promote the training of trainers for older people in using ICT, in any of the local, regional, or national strategies, or policies.

In the following, this report focuses on an ongoing project in Romania, as being the only one, or, at least, the most visible for the time being, which started about two years ago, and shows an articulate component of training strategically targeted at younger supporters of digital inclusion of seniors.

Never Alone Association (Asociația Niciodată Singur – Prietenii Vârstnicilor) is one of the most reputed NGOs in Bucharest, and Romania, with social services, and volunteers taking care of isolated, lonely older people. Between 2020 – 2022, in light of the evolving COVID-19 pandemic, the organisation focused on seniors' digital inclusion, delivering with help from its volunteers several digital workshops, donating 3G tablets to older people, and even covering the costs for connecting the vulnerable ones to the internet network. The NGO volunteers have even visited seniors at their homes for showing them how to use the tablets. In 2022, the organisation has opened “Never Alone” Centre, “the first socialising centre for seniors in Bucharest”. The opening of the seniors' centre has been a good opportunity for the organisation to intensify, and professionalise its digital workshops, first in partnership with ECDL Romania. Never Alone Association benefited from specialised input, written digital literacy support, and delivery of training by an ECDL IT specialist.

At the beginning of 2023, “Never Alone” started a partnership with another NGO, Social Incubator, for an intergenerational project called Reconnect. Social Incubator supports the social and professional integration of young people from vulnerable backgrounds through the development and implementation of tailor-made services and innovative entrepreneurship solutions. Sponsored by United Way Romania, Reconnect aims to bridge the generation gap through inclusive digitalisation workshops for older people, and at-risk youth, acting as digital mentors. In the first stage, the youth, called in the project “future digital trainers”, have went through a training workshop delivered by a non-formal trainer of Social Incubator, who “gave them useful tools to use in future sessions on connecting with seniors through technology.”

In a second stage, there have been organised “speed meeting” sessions, for the younger and older generations to have the opportunity to get to know each other and get their first impressions. Following the designed sessions, small groups of young people and seniors have connected, based on common interests and values. Finally, those with similar views have matched and formed pairs for the one-to-one digitalisation workshops.

It is too early to talk about national/local actions to promote the training of trainers for older people in Romania, but it is an opportunity to start such an effort. The country does not yet have a national strategy for the development of digital literacy, there are surprisingly few ongoing projects specifically for older people, and the newly adopted strategies for social inclusion and active ageing do not address the specific issue of supporting those who support older people in digital literacy. The newly launched call for projects under “Romania’s Recovery and Resilience Plan, Component 7 - Digital transformation, Operation D. Digital Skills, Human Capital and Internet Usage” while proposing to improve the basic digital skills of disadvantaged communities, does not specifically address the training of digital trainers for older people. This is also the case of the first local “digital transformation strategy” adopted by a city in Romania, which is Cluj-Napoca, and which has a strategic line of action aiming to increase the digital competences and inclusion of the citizens, especially those at risk.

The need for professionally trained trainers is obvious, and this has been clearly stressed by most of our respondents to interviews, at least those directly involved in seniors' digital inclusion projects, and whose answers and recommendations will be detailed in section 2.5.

2.4 Examples of opportunities for digital participation of people 60+

2.4.1. Super Lingo

Romania

Areas covered: Health promotion and cultural participation

1. Short Description

Super Lingo is a free of charge online English-language learning service incorporating a set of interactive vocabulary games and role-playing scenarios, whose structure, and learning methods are particularly useful for (older) adults with health-related issues, and those who tend to process new information at a slower pace.

2. Implementation and objectives

Designed by a team of language, technology and dementia experts who have tested and refined the training package, Super Lingo is a European Commission Erasmus+ project whose aim is to create an online English-language learning tool for adult learners. The learning content is recorded and can be listened to as many times as needed. The adult learners have access to memory card games, like putting letters in the right place, hangman, etc., and they can practice their newly learned language skills so as to feel safe. All these ingredients support active ageing and lead to improving neuro-degenerative problems. Users must register to access the application.

3. Key facts

Super Lingo is developed in Romania by Asociatia Habilitas – CRFP, a non-governmental organisation mostly focused on intergenerational, and policy projects in the field of ageing and lifelong learning. The programme consists of short, intensive language classes designed for healthy adults, as well as for those with Subjective Cognitive Decline (SCD), Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI), and people with early-stage dementia. Super Lingo is also made available online by Athens Association of Alzheimer’s Disease & Related Disorders, Greece, Lingo Flamingo, UK, SlovenskoZdrufenje ZA Pomoc PRI Demenci – Spomincica Alzheimer, Slovenia, and Marathon Group, Ireland.

4. Results

This innovative English-learning programme for adults’ cognitive training is available online since 2022. Super Lingo has been used since then both in a group, or individually, at home, or in day centres, seniors' clubs, and residential centres. Additionally, the organisations using the learning platform mention as secondary impact the creation of a social network of users.

5. More information

Habilitas Website, Super lingo page [habilitas.ro/index.php/en/super-lingo-2/]

Habilitas Facebook [facebook.com/profile/100070472861128]

Super Lingo App [app.superlingo-app.eu]

2.4.2. RestartiX

Romania

Area covered: Health promotion

1. Short Description

RestartiX is a fee-based educational programme that teaches people to take control of their own health through online assisted physiotherapy.

2. Implementation and objectives

RestartiX online platform is useful both for those who want to improve their health, and those who are experiencing a pain and need the support of a physiotherapist. A more targeted service, called RestartiX Seniori, is available for older adults. RestartiX has behind a professional team, with members licensed in physiotherapy, and a TV celebrity. The RestartiX programme is available in 2 formats: online, on the RestartiX Platform, and recorded, on DVD, or USB Stick.

3. Key facts

The RestartiX Seniori programme has been launched in order to provide all seniors access to a physiotherapy programme, adapted to their needs. When purchasing the online programme, users get lifetime access to the RestartiX Seniori Programme. The programme contains 20 physical therapy sessions, plus 20 episodes of “Inspiration Dose” with the Romanian TV moderator Mihaela Tatu. The total duration of the videos is 660 minutes. The RestartiX Seniori programme is available in 3 versions: online, on the RestartiX Platform, on DVD, or on USB stick. RestartiX Seniori Programme regularly cost around 250 Euro, but discounts are also available.

4. Results

The programme is said to contribute to: hygiene of the joint apparatus; reducing the risk of falling; keeping and improving the static and dynamic balance; improving peripheral circulation; optimising the cardiovascular system; improving the psycho-emotional status, etc. RestartiX Seniori programme has a dedicated Facebook group for older adults, with over 5500 members, who have access to lots of free-of-charge professional explanations and exercises on how to “live an independent life after the age of 55”, “how to regain your self-confidence”, and “how to reduce the risk of injury from falls”, among others.

5. More information

Webiste [restartix.ro]

Facebook [facebook.com/groups/restartixseniori/]

Webinars [restartix.ro/programe]

2.4.3. Ghiseul.ro

Romania

Area covered: Political/municipal participation

1. Short Description

Ghiseul.ro is an online national service provided by the Romanian government that simplifies bureaucracy. The Romanian citizens can pay their fees and taxes without authentication, based on the Information about their debts provided by the public institutions.

2. Implementation and objectives

Ghiseul.ro objectives are to simplify citizens' lives, and also to make the process of tax collecting more effective. Tax deductions are available if payments are made in 15 calendar days. Payments relating to the provision of any public service, including any community service in the public interest, as well as any payments related, directly or indirectly, to the provision of that public services, may also be made.

3. Key facts

The system only allows the payment of taxes to the registered institutions. The electronic payment processor has taken all measures to ensure the security of card transactions over the internet. Citizens' card information is strictly confidential: neither the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania, nor the beneficiary institutions request or store this information.

4. Results

According to the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania, the evolution of the Ghiseul.ro platform is the following: 2019 – 500,000 users, 2020 – 775,000 users, 2021 – 1,145,000 users, 2022 – 1,495,000 users. More than 1300 public institutions are currently enrolled in this platform. Ghiseul.ro app has been recently launched, 11 years after the online platform. According to the Romanian authorities, it will only take a photo and facial recognition to log in the app. The authorities promise that through the mobile application Romanians will be able to pay quickly and safely over 350 types of public services, taxes and debts. Romanians abroad will also be able to pay their public taxes.

5. More information

Website [ghiseul.ro]

2.4.4. Declic

Romania

Areas covered: Political/municipal participation, social participation

1. Short description

Declic has started as a civic movement of several volunteers gathered around a sound environmental campaign in Romania, called “Save Roşia Montană”. In the meantime, Declic has become a strong online community of citizens in Romania concerned about social and natural environment, education, health, human rights, and democratic values.

2. Implementation and objectives

Launched officially in 2017, the platform has evolved into an independent community driven by social values, not by political interests, capable of influencing public policies. Coming from different backgrounds, Declic members discuss and engage in community campaigns, using online petitions to quickly influence authorities’ intentions, or decisions. Offline, Declic members use different influencing tactics, from visiting members of the Parliament, to purchasing advertising space, collecting signatures in the street, or calling people to protest.

3. Key facts

The initial idea for a campaign coordinated by Declic can come from inside the team, or from external sources: exchanging ideas on the Declic Facebook page; email messages, or tweets sent to the team by citizens; recommendations of the experts collaborating with the Declic team. Declic is inspired by and shares the values of sister organisations such as MoveOn in the United States, GetUp in Australia, 38 degrees in the UK, Campact in Germany, or Akcja Demokracja, in Poland. Declic financially supports its activity through individual donations, grants, and other mechanisms specific to NGOs, for example the redirection of 3.5% of the income tax.

4. Results

Declic has managed to win fights with little chance of success. The withdrawal of certification for illegal timber products from Romanian forests is one example. Another one is saving the Nera River ecosystem. Currently, 1,130,426 active members are campaigning for a more just society on Declic.

5. More information

Website [declic.ro]

Facebook [facebook.com/declic.ro]

2.4.5. SfatulMedicului.ro

Romania

Area covered: Health promotion

1. Short Description

SfatulMedicului.ro is a health-focused online platform providing since 2005 free of charge medical information, including advice and recommendations for medical services.

2. Implementation and objectives

SfatulMedicului.ro publishes professional medical information for people to better understand their state of health and make the best therapeutic decisions. Started as a private editorial project in collaboration with a team of doctors from Fundeni Clinical Institute, SfatulMedicului.ro has gained its top place within medical online platforms in Romania, with a complex team of collaborating physicians covering an entire range of medical specialties. Besides medical information and recommendations, platform users can anonymously benefit from an automated function called “Medical analysis interpreter”, meant to help people decipher a medical analysis report.

3. Key facts

SfatulMedicului.ro has more than 100 collaborating physicians, and partnerships with six private medical operators. The informed opinions of the doctors, the advice, and any other information about health available on the website are for informational and educational purposes. They cannot replace the direct medical consultation, or the diagnosis established after the medical investigations. The platform is being coordinated since 2018 by MedLife, the largest operator of private medical services in Romania.

4. Results

According to SATI - The Internet Audience and Traffic Study (a BRAT study that measures audience, traffic, and socio-demographic profiles of websites), SfatulMedicului.ro had over 800.000 online visitors in April 2023. The registered users have received advice on: specific health problems; interpretation of the medical analyses; information, advice on medicines, treatments; a second opinion on a treatment, etc.

5. More information

Website [sfatulmedicului.ro]

Facebook [facebook.com/sfatulmedicului.ro]

2.4.6. Avocatnet.ro

Romania

Area covered: Political/municipal participation

1. Short Description

Managed and owned by the Romanian company Inteligo Media, Avocatnet.ro is an interactive online platform that explains the Romanian legislation for everyone to understand it, be it individuals with specific needs, or private entities.

2. Implementation and objectives

Founded in 2001, as an online publication with information for lawyers, Avocatnet.ro has evolved today to a service available to the general public and herewith having a huge impact in the day-to-day lives of the citizens. The free of charge (to a certain degree), and fee-based services allow access to avocatnet.ro articles, daily updates, professional information about taxes, human resources, finances, HR, PFA, legal environment, GDPR, etc.

3. Key facts

Avocatnet.ro keeps the users updated with easy-to-follow analyses and information regarding Romanian legislation. One can also use the “Ask a question” to get free of charge information and can access information asked by other platform users. The option to access the Consultants Catalogue and select consultants depending on the subject, their specialty, or geographical area is also available. The free Q&A section of the platform is of great help for people who do not know whom to ask for particular advice, and who cannot afford paid legal services. The avocatnet.ro premium services allow users to have access to real-time specialised legislation updates, received by email, and legislation webinars, among others. The prices for such services range from about 80 Euro to 100 Euro in the first year.

4. Results

The avocatnet.ro community consists of over 450,000 members. More than 6,500 consultants have so far signed up for avocatnet.ro, answering questions, and providing advice to community members, along with other specialists on the platform. During the last 16 years, more than 9,321,378 people have found solutions through the platform to their legal, economic or business problems (figure reported as of April 2018).

5. More information

Website [avocatnet.ro]

Facebook [facebook.com/Avocatnetro]

2.4.7. National Museum of Art of Romania

Romania

Area covered: Cultural participation

1. Short Description

The National Museum of Art of Romania (MNAR) is the most important art museum in the country, functioning under the Ministry of Culture and Cults. The museum was established in 1948 and is housed in the Royal Palace in Bucharest. Its website allows virtual tours.

2. Implementation and objectives

At the beginning of 2022, The National Museum of Art of Romania launched the digital programme Through the Pages of Exhibitions, with the invitation to browse the MNAR albums from home or even from the study room. The Internet users can enjoy, through online albums, famous Romanian painters: Theodor Aman, Nicolae Grigorescu, Ioan Andreescu, Nicolae Tonitza, Gheorghe Petrașcu, Theodor Pallady, Lucian Grigorescu, Iosif Iser, Camil Ressu, Francisc Șirato, Alexandru Ciucurencu, Dimitrie Ghiață, but also graphic art images, and European, or Japanese art.

3. Key facts

Virtual tours of the National Museum of Art of Romania are available free of charge for those who prefer to visit the art collections from the comfort of their homes. The Romanian art works are divided into paintings of the modern school, of the artists from the early twentieth century, avant-garde works, the works of Constantin Brancusi, works of artists from the interwar period, plus sculptures and many other equally fascinating sections. The National Museum of Art of Romania also features online and offline multimedia resources including sign language videos, dramatizations, audio descriptions and diagrams. All materials are available only in Romanian language.

4. Results

The patrimony of over 70,000 exhibits the museum houses is organised into two galleries: the European Art Gallery, and the National Gallery, which includes the Old Romanian Art Gallery, and the Gallery of Modern Romanian Art. European works include works of sculpture, painting and decorative art from the fourteenth century to the twentieth century, largely from Italian, Dutch, Russian and German culture. 11 art publications can be accessed online or can be purchased from the MNAR online store.

5. More information

Website [mnar.arts.ro]

Website Quest [museumquest.ro/mnar]

Facebook [facebook.com/MuzeulNationalDeArtaAlRomaniei]

2.4.8. Răsăritul de Argint

Romania

Areas covered: Health promotion, social participation

1. Short Description

Founded in 2020, “Silver Sunrise” Association (Asociația Răsăritul de Argint) addresses the active ageing challenge by offering an online health programme for seniors.

2. Implementation and objectives

“Silver Sunrise” classes are held online on Zoom app, usually every Monday, with 40-70 participants/session. The programme is designed so as to help the functional movement and personal growth of people 55+. At a larger scale, the programme works towards SDG3: “Good health and wellbeing”.

3. Key facts

The online classes are delivered by specialists, free of charge, and they are focused on: yoga, tai chi, perineum gym, daoyin qigong. The Association covers entirely all the necessary costs by raising funds from private sponsors, and individuals. “Silver Sunrise” keeps the online community alive through sometimes offline socialising meetings. A strong online community of seniors has been formed in the last two years, where everyone feels like belonging to a valued group, based on seniors’ feedback.

4. Results

“Silver Sunrise” online programme has impacted until now over 500 seniors nationwide, aged 55-78 years old, 64% of them with health vulnerabilities. 98% have reported that are more active and aware of the sedentarism risks. 15%, that is 76 seniors, say that they have changed their lifestyle. Encouraged by the results, “Silver Sunrise” is now building Senior Fit – announced as the “first Romanian interactive platform for functional movement”, with video recordings available for free, and a premium version. The videos will be available online on www.seniorfit.ro, by the end of November 2023.

5. More information

Website [rasarituldeargint.ro]

Facebook [facebook.com/AjutorPentruSeniori]

Seniorfit Website [seniorfit.ro] (Available from November 2023)

2.5 Recommendations for the DigitalScouts trainings

Relevant interviews with stakeholders from ECDL Romania, Simplon România, Never Alone Association, and Omenia Pensioners' Mutual Aid House Association (CARP Omenia), who coordinate, or have been involved, some as trainers, in digital projects for seniors, clearly reveal the need for the professionalisation of the offers, which would lead to an increased digital literacy

of older people, and, ultimately, to an improvement of their lives. For this, they believe, a (potential) trainer need to: understand older people age-related needs; use approaches and adapted methods, not only from the age perspective, but also in relation to seniors' physical, psychological, and cognitive capacity; understand that "a person who generally succeeds in working well with young people and adults, and who is a good trainer may not succeed in being a good trainer for seniors"; understand that in case of older adults, "repetition is the mother of learning" really works; understand that an older adult's attention needs to be continuously maintained; exchange good practices with other trainers, for improving the quality of training.

Some of these seniors' training and trainers characteristics have been also signaled, along with others, by Romanian literature review (Popescu, Pitic and Dragomir, 2020). Following their own research, and interviews with older people of 65+, the authors have brought into focus relevant findings related to seniors' attitude towards the idea of training, preferences on training methods, trainers, and the training process. Regarding the trainer, that is seniors' preferences on "with whom to learn", they wish to work with professionals, but more with relatives, or people they know well, close in age. The language used by the trainer needs also to be considered, since many older people are not so familiar, or not at all, with the specific ICT jargon. Regarding the preferences "in which way to learn", the seniors surveyed prefer to attend classes vs. online training, to be part of a group of people of the same age, to know from the beginning, and clearly, the structure of the course. As for the "how to learn" preferences, for older people it is important, among others, the rhythm of teaching, the repetition of information, the possibility and time to write down the information, and the simple teaching language.

Going back to our interviewees, one of our respondents, a volunteers' coordinator from Never Alone Association, directly involved as a digital trainer for older people, partially confirms the fact that seniors prefer to learn from people they know, for example, from their grandchildren, seen as the easiest, and most pleasant way to learn. „But many older people don't have grandchildren or don't have them close by, so they happily *adopt* a young volunteer willing to share details about new technologies". Seniors need to feel safe, and at ease in their relation to the trainer, and for this they need some time to get to know the person behind the trainer, to connect emotionally with the trainer. "Never Alone" young volunteer has told us she prefers "face-to-face" classes, like a reversed mentorship, "where questions can be asked openly, and where personal experience is shared". The ECDL Romania trainer has also stressed this idea of one-to-one connection, as a practice which allows (future) trainers to better understand how to approach and work with the learner. The personalised 1-to-1 course is also the recommendation of "Never Alone" programme manager, because thus older people would feel less embarrassed by their lack of knowledge", would "manage frustration better", and because the information transmitted would be better adapted to their acquisition capacity.

We can see that, speaking of older people, the key for a successful training is given in a great measure by the relationship established between the trainer and the learner, and this requires a trainer's capacity to be a person who above all shows humanity and sensitivity. Simplon Romania executive director, organisation with experience and expertise in delivering ICT courses, has told us that, besides knowledge and abilities on the new technologies, a trainer for older adults needs to have communication skills, and empathy. "Patience", "empathy", and "pedagogical sense" are also personal qualities a trainer should have, according to another respondent, who is social worker for older people at CARP Omenia. "Patience" is again on the list of soft skills in the opinion of "Never Alone" programme manager, along with "interpersonal skills".

Simplon Romania executive director is very specific when speaking about the recipe of an attractive training format for the digital scouts. Such a course must be very well structured with “clear and concise information”, “practical examples and exercises to strengthen the knowledge and abilities acquired”, with “feedback sessions and performance evaluation”, with “case studies and simulation scenarios”, with “group management and interactive techniques”.

CARP Omenia social worker, who is also an informal English teacher for older people, also points out when speaking about the structure of a digital scout training that “the training length should be of maximum 1-2 months, with weekly sessions of 2-3 hours”, and recommends, among others: using PowerPoint like presentations, simple and to the point, with lots of examples; role plays where one participant plays the role of the trainer, and the other participants play the role of the older people; practical ways and “tricks” to capture and maintain attention, since older people tend to be easily distracted from activities.

We conclude by saying that most of the interviewees, be it potential learners, or experts, have shared similar views regarding what a digital scout would need, or like to learn so as to be able to design, and deliver a digital literacy training session for seniors:

Technical knowledge

A “DigitalScout” learner needs to master quite well the technical knowledge related to the use of electronic devices and the internet, and how to identify and address online security and privacy issues.

Communication skills

A learner needs to be prepared to convey the technical knowledge, to know how to translate it into a friendly, understandable, explanatory, well-structured language, and format.

Age-tailored approach

A learner would like to know how to work with older adults taking into account the age-related physical, sensory, cognitive, or health changes. One of the respondents, who is a retired IT expert, and a potential digital scout, considers that a learner needs to have “some knowledge of psychology” for understanding older age and people.

Training practice

Finally, a learner should benefit from practical preparatory experiences in order to better understand how to work with older people, to identify the most suitable approach, to become aware of possible barriers in communicating and relating with them. One of the practitioners interviewed, an experienced trainer for older people, has recommended that a digital scout should practice the newly acquired knowledge and teaching skills in a seniors' club, under supervision.

2.6 Testimonials of interviewees

“For older people, new technologies, and digital engagement can mean a major improvement of their quality of life – whether we speak about ordering online the groceries they can no longer physically carry (...), or about

communicating with geographically relocated loved ones in a more personal way, making them feel less alone.”

(Bianca Dumitrița Pintilie, Programme Manager, Never Alone Association (Asociația Niciodată Singur – Prietenii Vârstnicilor)

“In a society that is becoming increasingly dependent on the use of technology, I believe that every person, regardless of age, education or gender, needs digital skills for being capable to access services online. Digital isolation is a particular risk for older people.”

(Mihai Adrian Peca, Trainer, ECDL Romania)

“There is definitely a need to expand the learning offers for older people, because the number of older people who want to learn will increase, once they realize that digital skills training is absolutely necessary in a world that depends more and more on technology, where we use our smartphone for almost everything! Considering that older people are a special category of population, with specific psycho-cognitive traits, the persons who work with seniors should be trained in this regard.”

(Andreea Florentina Ștefan, Social Worker, CARP Omenia – potential learner)

“There are so many seniors who can't use a phone without keys (...), don't know how to send/view a message, take a picture with their phone and send it, use a computer. There is a lack of awareness of the ease and usefulness of using electronic devices, of the introduction to the digital world and of the multitude of existing applications that can increase the quality of life with a "click". If they find out what benefits come with digital knowledge, they will want to learn.”

(IT expert, pensioner – potential learner)

“It would be beneficial to develop tailor-made programmes, adapted to the needs and knowledge level of each individual, as well as competency assessment tools. It would also be useful to involve public authorities and non-governmental organisations more closely in the development of such programmes (...) Speaking of what is lacking in the current training offers, it would be useful to take constant steps to develop these courses, and to increase the diversity of training formats and teaching materials. For example, some people would like to learn through a hands-on approach, while others would prefer to access online courses, or attend seminars and workshops. A more inclusive and diverse approach, taking into account the needs and requirements of specific groups of older people, would also be useful.”

(Ioana Rusu, Executive Director, Simplon România)

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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?