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2018-1-TR01-KA204-059175 ICT for Seniors' Social Inclusion

Seniors@ICT

Report on Positive Impact of ICT on Seniors' Social Inclusion



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INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT

In the context of the European Union, two of the most important changes that marked the 21st century are the emergence of an elderly population at a rate that has never been seen before and the rapidly developing information and communication technologies. While it is necessary that the simultaneous development of these two changes should support each other, the elderly population is the part of society that is the farthest from the technology.

This project focused on the two concepts that need to be integrated with each other for a better future in the new world: Seniors and ICT. The aging population will be isolated from social life and have bigger difficulties to cope with the different situations brought by aging if they are left alone and cannot integrate with technology. Seniors, who may have difficulty in leaving their homes, will not be excluded from social life thanks to technology, they will be able to undertake their tasks, shopping, bank transactions more easily, connect with their loved ones through technological means and access lifelong learning opportunities on the internet. Thus, the technology will not only eliminate the feelings of loneliness but will also contribute to their participation in social life through various platforms.

In this context, this project examined how information and communication technologies were used in practice in increasing the participation of seniors in social life and identified and shared good practices.. It has been documented that ICT drives seniors' social inclusion. With the help of materials, practices, techniques and approaches they observe, partner organizations improved their practices to include ICT and technology in seniors' education and activities and therefore aim to contribute to social inclusion of seniors.

In this context, objectives of this Project were:

- To compare, contrast, identify and promote good practice that can enhance seniors' active social inclusion in social life and lifelong learning practices
- To enhance the provision of good quality learning opportunities to seniors
- To contribute to seniors' social inclusion by using ICT in partner countries
- To develop and extend the competences of adult education providers and organizations that work with adults in general and seniors in particular

- To demonstrate the significant role ICT plays in ensuring social inclusion of seniors and their active participation in social life and lifelong learning through current practices across EU
- To present identified best practices and develop new ideas to prepare a Good Practice Resource Guide and Seniors@ICT social media channel.
- To drive social change and contribute to society's outlook to seniors' active involvement in society by writing and sending a report on Positive Impact of ICT on Seniors' Social Inclusion to policy makers in adult education sphere and by providing local, regional, national and EU level dissemination activities

These objectives were achieved with ICT for Seniors' Social Inclusion- Seniors@ICT Project which were conducted in a period between 2018-2021 (extended due to the pandemic) with participation of 9 partners from Turkey, Poland, Bulgaria, Spain, Greece, Scotland, United Kingdom and Italy and the expected results were:

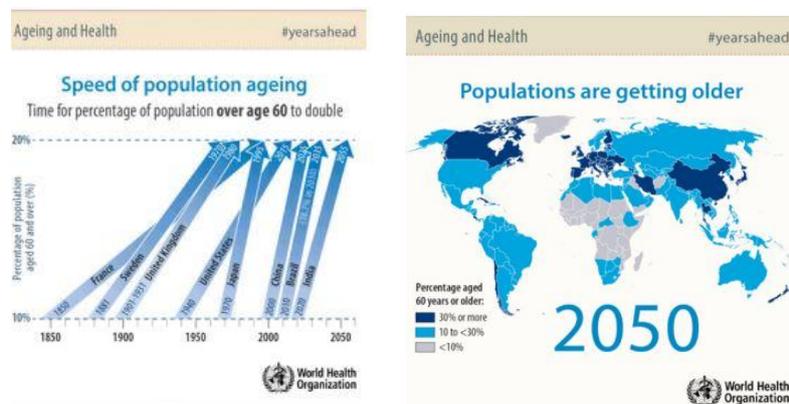
- increased social inclusion skills for seniors
- increased ICT skills and competences for seniors
- increased competences and skills for educators in partner organizations
- increased capacity of partner organizations to serve seniors and inclusive EU

by

- 6 joint training events and 1 transnational meeting
- Good Practice Resource Guide and Seniors@ICT social media channels
- Report on Positive Impact of ICT on Seniors' Social Inclusion

BENEFITS OF ICT AND TECHNOLOGY FOR SENIORS

Future demographic trends show that we are living in an increasingly aging world. Population ageing studies have demonstrated that seniors who adapt to societal change will be less vulnerable. New policies and programmes should take that into consideration and find ways to increase seniors' quality of life, autonomy and socialization via lifelong learning opportunities.



United Nations declared 2021-2030 as the Decade of Healthy Ageing (<https://www.who.int/initiatives/decade-of-healthy-ageing>). Healthy ageing is “the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables well-being in older age.”

Healthy ageing includes a person's ability to:

- meet their basic needs;
- learn, grow and make decisions;
- maintain mobility;
- build and maintain relationships; and
- contribute to society. (<https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/healthy-ageing-and-functional-ability>)

Information and communication technologies provide us with opportunities in these regards and allow us to offer seniors a chance to live their lives with more connection, stimulation and ease.

Old age is marked with progressive loss of intellectual, functional and interactional capacities for the elderly which makes them more dependent on others as time goes by. The use of ICTs opens new and exciting opportunities for ageing adults. They can become the best enablers of healthy-ageing environments. Today we can connect with anyone, anywhere without the need to travel. We can have access to different products and services including learning and entertainment online. We can age healthily in our local environments and homes which can be adapted to our specific needs and requirements (file:///C:/Users/Oben/Downloads/Ageing%20in%20a%20digital%20world%20%20from%20vulnerable%20to%20valuable%20(1).pdf)

With the help of technology and ICT, seniors' quality of life will improve and they will enjoy their life with more interconnectedness and social stimulation.

The pandemic has also highlighted the social and physical vulnerability of seniors and how their problems can be eased if not fully overcome by the use of ICT skills. During the pandemic, more seniors used ICT, learned ICT skills or improved them. However, the population aging shows us that this trend in aging will continue and to ensure healthy aging, ICT skills will be more and more important.

The benefits of learning ICT needs to be understood well by the seniors, their care givers and also adult educators who offer courses to the seniors as well as policy makers. Knowing these benefits will ensure that seniors will be more motivated to learn ICT skills and use assistive technologies with more ease in their lives. Adult educators and people who provide educational materials and courses for seniors should also be informed of these benefits because this knowledge will help them convince seniors to learn ICT skills and benefit from a higher quality of life with the help of these skills. ICT sector also needs to be prepared to meet the needs of seniors and offer them accessible and age-friendly options for digital inclusion so that they are included in the societal change and not left behind.

These benefits can be summarized as follows:

Socialization: Promoting Social Interaction and Social Connections

Using ICT will promote social interaction and social connections. Seniors who use ICT will be able to participate or follow social networks, they will be able to talk to their loved ones more and be informed of what is going on in their neighborhood, city, country or the world. These networks and social media channels will connect them with others and even if they cannot meet others in person, they will have have a chance to text them, chat online or make video calls.

Providing Mental Stimulation

ICT skills will provide seniors mental stimulation because internet offers a wide variety of topics to explore and follow areas of interest, allow them learn new things and read different materials. Participation in e-learning will keep seniors' minds active and may reduce the risk of dementia by keeping them engage with new things every day. Using ICT supports intellectual curiosity to learn and to explore. Some online games may also be helpful to stimulate the brain. Learning and training improve perception and stimulates brain activity.

Ensuring Well-being

Wellbeing is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy.” Using ICT ensures well being by connecting seniors with loved ones and allowing them to spend quality time. They feel more satisfied with their lives in general when are active and busy with things which can be possible through ICT. They feel more confident and have higher self-esteem when they can undertake their tasks and have a social life as they used to do before.

Promoting independent living

Using ICT will enable many seniors to live independently. In addition, use of home multi-sensor systems based on artificial intelligence (AI), advanced telecommunications and information technologies will support independent living too. People who live in assisted homes can also benefit from ICT and digital technologies to increase the degree of their independence.

Increasing Safety

ICT or technology will provide safety to seniors. Alert systems, smart house technology, personal emergence response systems, **fall detection systems** or even simply using smartphones come in handy for seniors who live alone. In case of emergencies, seniors may use online methods to reach others and request assistance.

Encouraging Exercise

Seniors may not be able to engage in physical activities like they used to do before. But there are various activity videos that can be found online and they are geared towards light exercises for seniors. These exercises can be done while seated on a chair as well. Hence, seniors who are unable to work out outside or cannot take walks can use ICT to exercise and stay healthy.

Helping with Health Care

Today, many health services and health related information are provided with the help of internet and relevant systems. Technology can help seniors to stay healthier as well. E-health applications are used in many countries now. These applications are useful to track appointments, make appointments, keep health histories, provide test results and have video calls with medical personnel. In addition, specific apps be used to remind seniors medication times and measure blood pressure and wearable devices can track significant health data which can be sent to doctors or caregivers.

Delivering Fun and Entertainment

Seniors can use ICT to enjoy themselves and watch online programmes, play games, follow the news and use social media, among many options. Seniors who live together will have the opportunity to spend their days and nights by doing fun things and will not get bored or lonely.

Providing Convenience

ICT provides convenience in banking, shopping, making appointments, etc. e-banking and e-commerce are becoming more and more widespread in the world and today, seniors can do transactions from home, do their shopping online, make their appointments and send packages. When seniors are able to do their daily tasks on their own, they will have higher self-esteem and will not depend on others for everything.

Lifelong learning is “all learning activities undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence, within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective” (European Commission [EC], 2001, p. 9). Seniors should be provided with lifelong learning opportunities and when they develop digital skills; their mainstreaming to online learning environment will be easier and more beneficial.

Below, you can find a recent research on seniors' social inclusion

The use of ICT in older adults strengthens their social network and reduces social isolation: Literature Review and Research Agenda

Nedeljko, Mihael & Bogataj, David & Kaučič, Boris. (2021). The use of ICT in older adults strengthens their social network and reduces social isolation: Literature Review and Research Agenda. IFAC-PapersOnLine. 54. 645-650. 10.1016/j.ifacol.2021.10.524.

Abstract: The life expectancy of the population at the global level is increasing, and the share of older adults is growing. We are interested in how the use of ICT affects the quality of life of older adults. In doing so, we have paid special attention to the impact of ICT on social isolation. We have used the method of scientific literature review. The selection of articles was made according to the following inclusion criteria: accessibility, scientificity, content relevance and topicality. After selection, the results were analyzed by qualitative content analysis. With the content analysis of thirteen scientific articles, we gained an insight into how ICT affects the quality of life of older adults. Two content categories were identified: social connection with people in a social network and social isolation. We find that ICT affects the quality of life of older adults. On one hand, the use of ICT enables connection between family members and friends in a social network, while also reducing social isolation and feelings of loneliness. Based on an evidence review, we find that many older adults are not empowered to use ICT in their daily lives. We believe that poor digital literacy of older adults affects their health literacy, which is an important factor affecting the quality of life.

Major findings of the literature review

The majority of older adults have learned to use the internet and use it weekly. There have been less depression and loneliness among them. The psychosocial effect of the internet use among older adults dictates a trend in a positive direction (White et al., 2002).

There has been a noticeable increase in internet users among people over the age of 55, in order to stay active, in social contact and also due to the need for further learning through internet-related tools (Casado-Munoz et al., 2015).

The video conferencing system that connects the home environment to the call center was used by 8 users. 7 of them confirmed that the use of this system reduces the feelings of loneliness and social isolation (Savolainen et al., 2008)

64% of older respondents use digital social networks at least once a week. Facebook is one of the most popular platforms. The use of digital networks represents for older adults the following: getting out of social isolation, finding new friends, the same language with their children and grandchildren, real-time information. Communication is tied to building social relationships with their families, friends or even strangers. The positive impact of digital social networks on the quality of life of older adults has been noted (Machado et al., 2014).

The problem of introducing digital solutions in the health sector in Poland is represented by digital exclusion, which is related to the lack of ICT skills in older adults. This can lead to social isolation, which is a risk factor and affects the health status of older adults and their quality of life (Kwiatkowska & Skorzewska-Amberg, 2019).

The use of ICT has a significant impact on the sense of purpose in older adults and is very important for them, as it serves as a tool for maintaining social cohesion (Francis et al., 2019).

Socio-economic status plays an important role in digital inequality among older adults. The use of ICT in older adults has a significant impact on well-being, but there are noticeable differences according to socio-economic status (Ihm & Hsieh, 2015).

The use of digital social networks was higher among the elderly who were trained to use them. The feeling of social isolation and loneliness was lower in older people who were trained to use ICT (Rolandi et al., 2020).

Older adults mostly use ICT to connect with their attachment figures, and not to gain new information. The users of ICT devices feel better physically and mentally. There is a link between using ICT to connect with family and friends, and greater life satisfaction and lower loneliness. There is also a link between the use of ICT to learn and acquire new information and better subjective health and less functional limitations (Sims et al., 2017).

Frequency of internet use reduces loneliness, but does not affect the perception of social isolation among the elderly (Cotten et al., 2013).

Technologies such as iPads can reduce social isolation by connecting older adults to online social networks, their use can help restore relationships from the past, and improve communication with family members (Delello and McWhorter, 2017).

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2018-1-TR01-KA204-059175



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