BOOMER Skills and Competencies Audit

Work Package No. 3

Executive Summary

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This report examines the digital literacy of older adults in the European Union (EU), with a focus on identifiying barriers to digital literacy and promoting digital literacy among older adults. The EU is experiencing a demographic shift towards an older population structure due to low birth rates and higher life expectancy, and while the elderly population saw a significant increase in internet usage due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they still have a decreasing rate of internet usage compared to younger age groups. However, the pandemic has not been ideal for digital adoption among the elderly, resulting in increased feelings of digital isolation for those who lack basic digital competencies. Despite these difficulties, ongoing initiatives aimed at improving digital literacy skills among the elderly population in the EU are crucial to addressing the digital divide in this group.

The EU's structured dialogue with Member States, national coordinators, and recent initiatives aim to bring digital technologies to education and help people, including the elderly, improve their digital skills. Efforts are being made to promote digital literacy among the elderly population, including providing access to technology, training opportunities, and support to build digital confidence and trust. The BOOMER project is an example of an initiative that aims to improve digital literacy skills among older adults, and this report establishes the framework for future research and project outcomes.

The report not only offers an overview of the current state of digital literacy among the elderly population in the EU and highlights the key findings of the study but also encompasses country reports on Italy, Spain, Germany, and Croatia. These country reports provide a comprehensive understanding of the state of digital literacy among seniors in each country and can be valuable resources for policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders who seek to develop targeted initiatives to promote digital literacy among older adults in their respective nations.

Germany has a comprehensive policy framework in place to promote digital literacy among older adults, while Italy has a decentralized approach to digital inclusion, emphasizing the integration of digital skills development into lifelong learning. Spain has a relatively strong policy framework for promoting digital literacy among older adults, with initiatives targeting this population and a focus on non-formal education and community-based approaches. However, Croatia's policy framework is relatively weak, highlighting the need for comprehensive surveys and research to assess the level of digital skills and competencies among older adults and the importance of expanded international collaborations.

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In addition to the country reports, the in-depth interviews conducted with adult education providers in Spain, Italy, and Germany offer valuable insights into the particular obstacles and prospects involved in imparting digital skills training to older learners. In Germany, there is a growing interest among older adults to learn digital skills, and various organizations and initiatives have been developed to support them. In Italy, the government has launched initiatives to enhance digital skills and eliminate disparities in access to technology and services, while in Spain, lack of prior knowledge and resources, occasional training courses, and fear of using technology alone contribute to disillusionment and frustration among older individuals.

The Croatian survey of pensioners indicates that seniors are frequent users of the internet and feel comfortable using internet content independently, which is a positive indication of their willingness to adapt to the ever-changing digital landscape. Moreover, with the majority of respondents reporting supportive close and distant relatives and friends, there is a strong sense of community and intergenerational support in embracing technology. These findings suggest that many seniors are not only open to using digital media but are actively incorporating it into their daily lives.

The report offers a thorough evaluation of digital literacy among seniors in the EU, incorporating country reports and in-depth interviews on digital literacy-related challenges and initiatives in each country. To make sure digital environments are age-friendly and secure and to empower elderly individuals with digital technologies, it is essential to promote digital literacy among them. The country reports and interviews emphasize the need to engage multiple stakeholders, address specific barriers to digital inclusion, and tailor educational content to suit older adults' needs. On the EU level, it is critical to continue providing resources and training opportunities for digital skill development, considering senior citizens' needs with a human-centered approach. The insights presented can guide policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders in creating targeted initiatives to promote digital literacy among seniors in their respective countries, bridging the digital divide, and allowing everyone to participate in today's digital world.

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