DIGITALIATORS - Digital upskilling for senior citizens, focused on their everyday necessary online transactions, especially after the pandemic

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Desk Research Cyprus

Emphasys Centre

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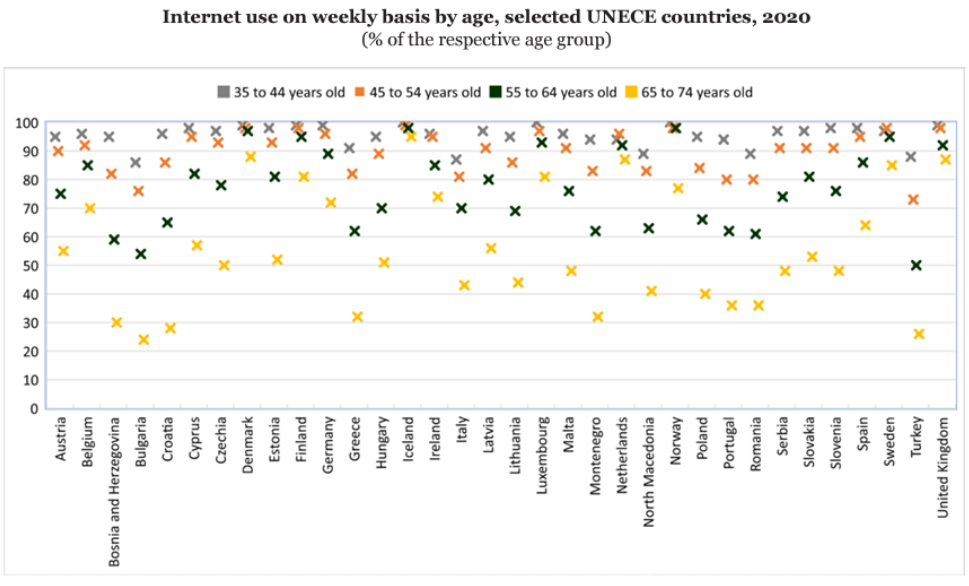
DESK RESEARCH - Cyprus

Current situation

Technology has become a fundamental element of our daily life, no matter origin, gender, or age. It allows instant and constant communication with people in any part of the world, assists in learning new skills, improves the management and delivery of health and social care services for ageing populations and many more. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the advantages that technology and digitalization can bring to society are not for everyone. More specifically, older generations were digitally excluded and still are since more and more services are provided online.

Seniors in Cyprus are no exception. In fact, there is an improvement in the level of ICT use among the Cypriot population over the past, since in 1998 only around 10% were using the internet whereas in 2019, more than 80% do so. In regards to seniors, as can be seen in the following chart, around 65% of people aged 55 to 64 years old are using the internet on a weekly basis whereas less than 60% of people aged 65 to 74 years old do so. In comparison with other countries, it seems that Cyprus is actually in the middle since there are countries with lower percentages (such as Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece) and higher ones (Denmark, Iceland, the UK).

Moreover, over the last 10 years, the Cypriot



Source: Eurostat, ISOC_CI_IFP_FU (2021)

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government has evolved digitally since a lot of its services are now online. For example, Ariadne is an online portal that offers information on the status of requests for various Government Organisations and governmental procedures, allows applications for participation in written examination for police vacant posts and makes available various Governmental Certificates.

Another example of digital modernization of the Cypriot government is the fact that the Ministry of Health arranged, during Covid-19, that any appointments for vaccinations were booked online in order to avoid social gatherings and facilitate the procedure. However, this procedure resulted in major issues as seniors, which were one of the first groups to be vaccinated, were not digitally equipped nor comfortable to book their appointment online. Their children or relatives who were more comfortable with eServices were the ones to book their appointments, highlighting the need of improving digital competences of seniors.

Even after Covid-19, issues related to health services are still present. The General Healthcare System of Cyprus (GHS) was updated in 2019 allowing to all people healthcare without any limitations. However, seniors were once again the ones facing issues, since they were required, as any other person, to register on the GHS platform which allows users to check their appointments, prescriptions etc. Many were the seniors that they didn't have an email, didn't know how to register and to use the platform, requiring once again the assistance of their children or relatives.

These are just some examples that highlighted the need of programmes or seminars for older people in order to avoid their exclusion from basic facilities. In fact, many programmes and seminars in the island focus on the improvement of digital skills of seniors even if the current situation related of lifelong learning is not the best one in Cyprus (less than 5% of seniors had taken part in formal and non-formal education and training in the four weeks preceding the survey conducted by Eurostat in 2019).

Educational programmes, tools and resources available

Below a list of educational programmes, tools and resources available in Cyprus is demonstrated:

- The ICT4 the Elderly Handbook is a toolkit that helps trainers working on digital skills for the elderly. More specifically, it is a European initiative that seeks to make older people between the ages of 55 and 75 more digitally competent and aware of some of the many opportunities the Internet has to offer through an online training environment with pathways for upskilling the digital skills. It is free of charge and it includes content such as scenarios, education resources etc.

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- The Productivity Center (KEPA) of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security conducted programs for people 55 years and older using a smartphone / tablet type Android " in all cities of the island. The programs, lasting 30 hours, covered among others, Introduction to the use of smart phones and tablets, Web Browsing, E-mail, Electronic Banking (e-Banking), JCC account payments Smart (telephones, taxes, water supply, renewal of registration license, hunting license, etc.), Other Internet Applications, e-Government (GHS, Social Security Services contribution payment system, Taxisnet and filing Tax Form), Tax Form Of social network. The courses are still available around the island and a schedule is available online.
- The 'Curriculum for Teaching Basic Digital Skills to Adults' is an Open Educational Resource (OER) available for free download from the website of the Cyprus Ministry of Education of Cyprus. The curriculum was developed as part of government actions on adult education for the period 2014 to 2020, with the aim of promoting basic digital skills in adults. The curriculum involves units such as Basic Knowledge on ICT, emails, Windows Office etc.

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