



JOINT ANALYSIS OF TWO QUESTIONNAIRES:

- 1. THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL
ISOLATION AMONG SENIORS**
- 2. COMMUNICATION AND
CREATIVE NEEDS OF SENIORS**

FIRST RESULT

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Introduction

During the last two years our senior's population has faced one of the hardest situations. As being in a high risk, they were told to self-isolate during the Covid-19 pandemic, and lockdowns and quarantines were declared. It is well known that social isolation among older adults is a “serious public health concern” because of their heightened risk of cardiovascular, autoimmune, neurocognitive, and mental health problems. Social disconnection puts older adults also at greater risk of depression and anxiety. Those who do not have close family or friends, and rely on the support of voluntary services or social care, are placed at additional risk, along with those who are already lonely, isolated, or secluded.

The Covid-19 has strongly emphasised the importance of digital technologies for the functioning of individuals. Online technologies play a crucial part and need to be harnessed to provide social support networks and a sense of belonging. People had to adjust to the situation and communicate with others on-line using their creativity. Almost everything went on-line like concerts and connecting and communicating with relatives and friends through video-conferences.

While the younger generation have the needed skills to be creative when using digital tools, the seniors don't have that opportunity. They are facing a lack of knowledge and skills to be able to communicate through technology.

The goal of the Digital Generations partnership is to analyse the situation of isolation of seniors in partner countries and to create a framework of what digital skills older people already have and which are the needs of this vulnerable target group.

The aim of this analysis is:

- to analyse the skills that are needed by the target group (people that have retired and are over 65), to create a framework of evaluation of the digital skills that the individuals of the target group have.
- To analyse the impact of isolation in the elder population

The innovative aspect of this analysis is that it does not only analyse the needs of the retired citizens, but it also proposes an evaluation that will allow adult educators, trainers and social workers to measure the level of digital skills retired citizens have. This way we will gain a sustainable tool that can measure the level of knowledge about digital skills of the senior population in the future and, at the same time, this tool will allow trainers and social workers to know what level of knowledge elder population have and from there they will try to upgrade their knowledge. They will be able to focus on specific needs that elders have.

Two different questionnaires were prepared to achieve our goal.

1. The first one is for seniors Associations, Informal caregivers, Private Social Solidarity Institutions, Associations working with the aim of supporting retired people, Welfare institutions and for others that work with seniors and know their situation. Seniors' associations have given opinions on the impact of isolation in the elder population because they are the ones who have spent a greater period of isolation with elder citizens and know exactly how it has affected them and how they have tried to reduce that influence in their organisations. Each partner has received the answers of at least 10 organisations /institutions.
2. The second questionnaire was for the seniors to answer questions about their knowledge of digital tools and skills and what creativity needs they have. Each partner has collected the responses from at least 10 seniors

The results of the research will be used as an inspiration to implement activities to train the seniors in ICT skills, to better understand the needs of this vulnerable target group and to raise awareness on the mental health issues that arise from isolation in the elder population.

1. Analysis of the questionnaire " The impact of social isolation among seniors"

1.1 Summary

This questionnaire was disseminated among the seniors Associations, Informal caregivers, Private Social Solidarity Institutions, Association working with the aim of supporting retirement period, Welfare institutions and others that work with seniors and know their situation.

After the joint analysis, we came to some common conclusions, but the analysis that has been done in each of the countries will be more relevant for further work. The results by country differ slightly, but we still got a framework of the most outstanding answers, based on which we can state the conclusions that will be highlighted in the following text.

Most of the participants in the research are highly experienced in the field of senior's well-being. The participants are employed in various fields such as Seniors Associations, public and private Social Solidarity Institutions, nurse homes, health centres, and institutions that provide psychological assistance to seniors and work in a variety of professions.

Through research, we found out that the pandemic of Covid-19 did not drastically affect the contacts of seniors with their relatives. There were minor fluctuations in the frequency of contacts during the epidemic, but overall, the number of more frequent contacts (more than twice a week) even grew during the pandemic and remained high even after the pandemic.

Participants generally agree that isolation among older people can lead to health problems and has serious consequences for longevity, health and well-being.

Social isolation has the greatest impact among those seniors who live alone and especially on those seniors who don't communicate regularly with friends and relatives compared to those who do.

Most participants estimate that inaccessibility of digital technology and lack of digital skills increase the loneliness of the seniors.

Several causes can lead to social isolation and according to participants the most common causes are inadequate transport opportunities, inaccessibility to digital technology, lack of socio-economic resources and marginalisation.

The most appropriate solutions to deal with social isolation according to the opinion of the participants are motivating seniors to be active in on-line events, encouraging

intergenerational activities and informing seniors about the various local (non-clinical) sources of support and counselling they can turn to.

We also got an insight into several actions that participants have taken to address the challenges of social isolation among seniors, which are listed below in this text.

1.2 Respondents involved in the research

Most of our respondents are highly experienced in the field of seniors' well-being. The majority (**43%**) have been working in the field of seniors' well-being for more than 10 years. **12%** of respondents have been working with seniors for over 5 years, **24%** of them between 3-5 years and **21%** of them less than 3 years. The overall profile of participants in the questionnaire, professional working with seniors, is highly experienced. The vast majority of respondents work in the field of seniors' well-being for more than 3 years.

We have participants answering from organisations such as Seniors Associations, public and private Social Solidarity Institutions, nurse homes, health centres, and institutions that provide psychological assistance to seniors.

Respondents work in a variety of professions such as caregiver, therapist, counsellor / psychotherapist, occupational therapist, social worker, social Educator, sociocultural animator, cognitive stimulation centre, councillor, social intervention technician, clinic assistant, psychologist, neuropsychologist, gerontologist, or whether they represent management staff or head of the business unit.

1.3 How often do seniors communicate with their relatives (before/during/after the Covid)

Regarding the question "How often do seniors communicate with their relatives in different periods (before/during/after the covid)?" the differences between the different periods are not very high.

Most respondents estimate that seniors had contacted their relatives more than twice a week (**41,6% before covid-19 outbreak/43,4% during covid-19 outbreak/44% after covid-19 outbreak**). Some respondents estimate that seniors had contacted with their relatives twice a week (**21,4% before covid outbreak/27,2% during covid-19 outbreak/18,8% after covid-19 outbreak**) or at least once a week (**16,2% before**

covid-19 outbreak/14,2% during covid-19 outbreak/24,4% after covid-19 outbreak). A low number of respondents said that seniors had contacted their relatives once or twice a month or rarely.

Through research, we found out that the pandemic of Covid-19 did not drastically affect the contacts of seniors with their relatives. At the time of the pandemic, there was a slight decrease in contacts to once a week, but the number after the coronavirus pandemic increased again. The number of more frequent contacts (more than twice a week) even grew during the pandemic and remained high even after the pandemic.

1.4 The impact of social isolation on seniors (especially in the last 2 years because of the Covid-19)

Respondents generally agree that isolation among older people can lead to health problems. Most respondents estimate that social isolation has an impact on feelings of inferiority, loneliness and depression among seniors.

The vast majority of respondents believe that it is completely true that social isolation has serious consequences for longevity, health and well-being. It has affected the cognitive functions of seniors and has negatively influenced mental and physical health of seniors.

Respondents believe that social isolation has the greatest impact among those seniors who live alone while among those who live in institutions, they do not perceive such a large impact of social isolation.

There is a negative impact on health among seniors who don't communicate regularly with friends and relatives compared to those who do.

Most respondents estimate that inaccessibility of digital technology and lack of digital skills increase the loneliness of the seniors.

1.5 Most common negative impacts of social isolation among the seniors and what are causes that can lead to social isolation and loneliness

The most common negative impacts that have been considered by the respondents are: loneliness increase, reduce the quality of life, stroke and diabetes.

When asked what are the causes that can lead to social isolation and loneliness, respondents estimate that the most common causes are inadequate transport opportunities, inaccessibility to digital technology, lack of socio-economic resources and marginalisation. The other relevant causes according to our respondents are also ageism, living in remote places and poor housing conditions.

1.6 Solutions to the challenge of social isolation among the elderly

Respondents ranked various possible solutions to deal with social isolation. The most appropriate solutions according to the opinion of the respondents are:

- To motivate seniors to be active in on-line events
- Encouraging intergenerational activities
- Teaching seniors to be creative online
- Seniors need to be informed about the various local (non-clinical) sources of support and counselling they can turn to
- Community level strategies: Strategies from various fields can contribute to reducing the loneliness and social isolation of older people at the community level

1.7 Actions by our respondents to try to solve the challenge of social isolation among seniors in their network/institution

The actions that were taken by our respondents were:

- Implementation of digital innovations and greater use of digital technologies and tools (video calls, use of social networks, training in the use of smartphones and tablets, online education, involvement in online activities)
- Greater employee engagement and more individual treatment of seniors
- Implementation of free psychological counselling also by phone and skype for those who could not attend the face-to-face counselling
- Extensive activation of volunteers (talks and intergenerational gatherings, writing letters to seniors, walks with seniors, performing daily activities instead of the elderly such as visiting the post office, shopping, arranging formal matters)
- Encouraging seniors, providing emotional support, willingness to talk to them
- Promoting socialisation in therapies through the intermediation of primary prevention methods of hygiene and safety in person, and the use of mobile telephony in a non-face-to-face manner.
- Making an unwanted loneliness plan.
- Through telephone management, online communications and home help service.
- With the ones that have a decent cognitive level encouraging them to communicate on the telephone and developing local community action networks.
- Telephone assistance and ICT education through prevention.
- During Covid-19 the centre had to close due to political regulations but several workbooks were sent to the users (ludic, physical, and memory).
- In day centres to date, they worked a lot on the social and emotional part promoting relationships between users, and improving their self-esteem.
- Videoconferences with relatives, leisure time activities, psychological support.

2. Analysis of the questionnaire "Communication and creative needs of seniors"

2.1 Summary

This questionnaire was disseminated among the seniors to answer questions about their knowledge of digital tools and skills and what creativity needs they have. Each partner included at least 10 seniors.

Also, for this questionnaire, the analysis that has been done in each of the partner countries will be more relevant for further work, as the results vary slightly from country to country. We will therefore try to adapt the follow-up activities to the results in each of the partner countries. In the following text, we will present those points that are most highlighted or most emphasised by the participants.

The majority of respondents participated in this research are female. Most of the participants are aged between 65-75. The educational background of the respondents is diverse. We have all levels of education, the lowest is the number of individuals with incomplete primary school, and the highest is the number of individuals with vocational or university education. However, the percentage of all levels of education is very close, so we cannot say that one level stands out.

Most of the respondents live alone or in couples and most of them are inhabitants of the urban environment. In a percentage, very few respondents use services for seniors because they don't need this type of services and a few of respondents stated that such services are not available to them.

In all partner countries where the survey was conducted the significant majority of the seniors stated that they communicate or wish to communicate with more than 5 persons, e.g., friends or relatives or at least 2-5 persons.

It is extremely encouraging to find that seniors who participated in the research generally communicate with their friends and family every day, or at least every week. Only a few seniors stated that they communicate with family and friends once a month or infrequently.

We can conclude from this research that the majority of respondents have very basic digital skills, finding it hard to use the internet efficiently and in general, almost all respondents lack advanced knowledge of the internet and digital skills. We can conclude

from the data that most participants are aware of the benefits of digital communication but there's also a lack of competences and confidence.

The most used smart device among seniors is the smartphone. Most of the respondents use it every day or at least every month, they also occasionally use a computer / laptop while tablet is the least used item among the seniors.

A large proportion of respondents consider the use of digital tools to be important or very important. Regarding the use of technological devices most of the participants use their technological devices to browse on the internet and check their emails.

Regarding the obstacles encountered by seniors in using new technologies most of the respondents indicated lack of knowledge and skills as the main obstacle.

The significant majority of the respondents did not declare any drastic loneliness sentiments. However, some of our respondents sometimes feel like their social relationships are superficial, lack companionship and feel starved for company. Occasionally, some of the discomfort occurs among seniors, but these feelings do not occur very often.

2.2 Respondents involved in the research

The respondents that participated in the Digital Generations' questionnaire represented **63,8%** women and **36,2%** men. The majority of respondents are therefore female.

In terms of age range the most respondents (**67%**) are aged between 65 – 75, **24,2%** are aged between 75-85. Only **9%** of respondents are aged over 85 years .

The educational background of the respondents is diverse. We have **3,6%** of respondents with unfinished primary school and **19%** with finished primary school, **15,6%** of respondents with vocational education, **10,4%** with four-year vocational, professional or general education, **13,2%** with higher education, **23,6%** with university degree and **14,4%** with a master's degree, specialization or PhD.

Regarding the living situation, most of the respondents live alone (**41%**), the rest live either in a couple (**35%**), with their families (**15,5%**) or in a welfare institution (**7,6%**).

Most of the respondents **67%**, are inhabitants of the urban environment, although **33%** of the respondents currently live in the rural areas.

When asked "Are you included as a receiver of any local services for seniors?" the vast majority of the respondents stated that they don't need this type of service. Only a few

respondents use the food delivery service, and or participate in organised exercises for seniors and home care. In a percentage, very few respondents use services for seniors and **11.4%** of respondents stated that such services are not available to them.

2.3 Communication and creative needs

In all partner countries where the survey was conducted the significant majority of the seniors stated that they communicate or wish to communicate with more than 5 persons, e.g., friends or relatives, or at least 2-5 persons.

It is extremely encouraging to find that seniors who participated in the research generally communicate with their friends and family every day, or at least every week. Only a few seniors stated that they communicate with family and friends once a month or infrequently.

2.4 Internet and digital skills

We can conclude from this research that the majority of respondents have a very basic digital skills level, finding it hard to use the internet efficiently.

The most common skills they have are:

- They know how to use internet to find different information
- They know how to open a new tab in their browser
- They know how to use messaging and calling apps
- They know which information I should and should not share online

Less respondents were sure of being skilled in establishing an email account and use it to connect with others, and they don't exactly know how to use a text editor or how to download/save a photo they found online.

In general, almost all respondents lack advanced knowledge of the internet and digital skills. Lots of them don't know how to share content they have created with friends and how to create something new from existing online images, music or video. They wouldn't feel confident putting video content they have created online.

Although most of the respondents, reportedly, prefer communicating with their friends and relatives in person they agree that online communication is a very useful and an important tool that helps prevent isolation and that on-line communication enhances

social connectivity and brings people together. Lots of respondents stated that they don't have enough digital communication skills, they just occasionally communicate on-line with their friends and relatives and they think that they have certain limitations to be able to communicate online.

Respondents are not entirely sure if they wish to attend on-line events and actively participate and they are not sure if they wish to learn how to be creative on-line.

We can conclude from the data that most participants are aware of the benefits of digital communication but there's also a lack of competences, confidence and they are not entirely sure if they wish to learn how to be creative on-line.

2.5 Digital technologies' usage by the seniors

The most used smart device among seniors is smart phone, most of the respondents use it every day or at least every month. They also occasionally use a computer / laptop while a tablet is the least used item among the seniors. From this data we could conclude that Smartphones would be the best technological device to be used for the training activities.

We have very equal results in the use of social networks. We can say that somewhere 50% of respondents do not use social networks, while the other 50% use social networks at least 2-3 times a week (of these, about 20% are seniors who use social media every day).

A large proportion of respondents consider the use of digital tools to be important or very important, while a small proportion of respondents' state that the use of digital tools is not important.

Regarding the use of technological devices most of the respondents use their technological devices to browse on the internet and check their emails. Quite a few seniors use technological devices also for communication via digital tools for video chatting and taking photos.

Few respondents use technological devices for travel arrangements, playing games, online shopping, accessing e-health services, measuring their health status and visiting senior sites.

Regarding the obstacles encountered by seniors in using new technologies most of the respondents indicated lack of knowledge and skills as the main obstacle. The second most clicked obstacle indicated is lack of motivation and interest. The following relevant obstacles mentioned by seniors are also: lack of adapted teaching methodology,

lack of support, lack of confidence and lack of competent trainers. The fewest respondents indicated financial difficulties, lack of time and health issues as obstacles.

Regarding the applications used by seniors, they occasionally use Email / Personal management (Gmail / Outlook) and apps for Instant online messaging (e.g., Messenger, Viber, Facetime, WhatsApp). Online communication platforms (e.g., ZOOM, Skype, etc.), Social networks (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, TikTok) and Listening and direct viewing platform on the web (e.g., Youtube, Spotify, Netflix), Online games, Online gambling and Online dating (e.g., Tinder, etc.) are very rarely used.

2.6 Feelings of loneliness expressed by seniors

The significant majority of the respondents did not declare any drastic loneliness sentiments. Most respondents state that they have someone to talk to, can tolerate being alone, they are not unhappy doing so many things alone, they don't feel like nobody really understands them and they don't feel left out and isolated from others.

We're glad the seniors also stated that they don't feel like they are no longer close to anyone, they don't feel withdrawn and unhappy and they don't feel like people are around them but not with them.

Most of them don't wait for people to call them or write to them, they are able to reach out and communicate with those around them, it is not difficult for them to make friends, they have someone they can turn to, their interests and ideas are shared by those around them and they don't feel alone or excluded by others.

However, some of our respondents sometimes feel like their social relationships are superficial, lack companionship and feel starved for company. Occasionally, some of the discomfort listed above occurs among seniors, but these feelings do not occur very often.

3. ANEXXES

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Annex 1: Questionnaire #1: The impact of social isolation among the elder population

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- Annex 1.2.: [Analysis of the questionnaire #1 – Greece](#)
- Annex 1.3.: [Analysis of the questionnaire #1 – Bulgaria](#)
- Annex 1.4.: [Analysis of the questionnaire #1 – Spain](#)
- Annex 1.5.: [Analysis of the questionnaire #1 – France](#)

Annex 2: Questionnaire #2: Define your level of digital skills, communication and creative needs

- Annex 2.1.: [Analysis of the questionnaire #2 – Slovenia](#)
- Annex 2.2.: [Analysis of the questionnaire #2 – Greece](#)
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