

# **Ageing in digital societies: enablers and barriers to older persons exercising their social rights**

**Austria**

**June 2022**

**Contractor: European Training and Research Centre for Human Rights and Democracy**

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## Contents

1	Legal and policy framework .....	3
1.1	National legislation on digital public administration .....	3
1.2	National policy, strategy or action plan on the digitalisation of public services or digital inclusion .....	3
1.3	National recovery and resilience plans covering the digitalisation of public services.....	4
2	Programmes and practices aimed at ensuring equal access to public services in the digital age ..	4
3	Research and data focused on equal access to public services in the digital age .....	5
4	State of digitalisation of selected public services .....	7

# 1 Legal and policy framework

## 1.1 National legislation on digital public administration

In Austria, equal access to public services undergoing digitalisation is not explicitly recognised as a guiding principle, commitment or similar in the relevant national legislation on digital public administration.<sup>1</sup> Also the explanatory remarks to the most pertinent pieces of legislation do not include any such mentioning.<sup>2</sup>

However, the most pertinent national legislation in digital public administration, the eGovernment-Act,<sup>3</sup> lays down in § 1 (1) the freedom of choice for users in selecting the means of communication when contacting public authorities as a measure to ensure that people's rights are respected.

A review of the national legislation revealed that older persons are not explicitly mentioned or addressed in the respective legal framework. The legal framework rather addresses all citizens or users in general and sometimes mentions persons with disabilities explicitly. The federal Web-Accessibility Act, for instance, explains in § 1 that this law sets out the accessibility requirements for the federal websites and mobile applications to make them more accessible to users, especially people with disabilities.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.2 National policy, strategy or action plan on the digitalisation of public services or digital inclusion

In Austria, the Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs (*Bundesministerium für Digitalisierung und Wirtschaftsstandort*) published the "Digital action plan for Austria" ("*Digitaler Aktionsplan Österreich*"). The plan is a living document developed by the Ministry in cooperation with experts and stakeholders.<sup>5</sup> It outlines the goals, principles and guidelines to create a society of "digital responsibility" that uses digital transformation as a service for people, freedom and prosperity and acts as a broad framework for implementation<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Relevant legislation that has been reviewed is listed on a [website of the Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs](#).

<sup>2</sup> Austria, eGovernment Act (*E-Government-Gesetz*), Federal Law Gazette I No. 10/2004; Austria, General Administrative Procedure Act 1991 – AVG (*Allgemeines Verwaltungsverfahrensgesetz 1991 – AVG*), Federal Law Gazette No. 51/1991; Austria, Web-Accessibility Act (*Web-Zugänglichkeits-Gesetz – WZG*), Federal Law Gazette I No. 59/2019 and related provincial acts implementing the Web Accessibility Directive in the provinces.

<sup>3</sup> Austria, eGovernment Act (*E-Government-Gesetz*), Federal Law Gazette I No. 10/2004.

<sup>4</sup> The eGovernment-Act does not include a reference to people with disabilities anymore. § 1 (3) eGovernment-Act included such a reference in the past. However, this regulation on barrier-free web accessibility for public authority websites in the eGovernment-Act was dropped with the entry into force of the Web-Accessibility Act.

<sup>5</sup> Digitalisation Agency, Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs (*Digitalisierungsagentur, Bundesministerium für Digitalisierung und Wirtschaftsstandort*), Digital Austria, [website on the Digital Action Plan](#).

<sup>6</sup> Digitalisation Agency, Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs (*Digitalisierungsagentur, Bundesministerium für Digitalisierung und Wirtschaftsstandort*), Digital Austria, [website on the Digital Action Plan](#).

Providing for digitalised public services is a concrete field of action introduced in the plan. The document does not provide operational information on any of the visions outlined, does not explicitly mention groups at risk of digital exclusion and thereby does not recognize equal access to public services undergoing digitalisation. There is no mention of specific safeguards in place to ensure access to public services.

### **1.3 National recovery and resilience plans covering the digitalisation of public services**

In Austria, the “national recovery and resilience plan 2020-2026” mentions four concrete measures in the field of digitalisation, one of which pertains to “the digitalisation of public services”. One concrete measure is the installation of a digitalisation fund for public services. The digitalisation fund seeks to promote digitalisation within the government agencies by funding projects that support IT-consolidation in the federal government, develop IT-services for citizens and businesses, and help improve the efficiency of procedures. The resilience plan does not outline groups at risk of digital exclusion and does not set out safeguards to ensure that people’s rights are respected and that access to public services and inclusion is promoted. In March 2021, the National Parliament agreed on the installation of the fund with a total of 160 Million Euros for 2021 and 2022. The corresponding Law on the Digitalisation Fund (“*Digitalisierungsfondgesetz*”) entered into force in May 2021.<sup>7</sup> It contains not reference to barriers and risks of digital exclusion or specific measures targeted at groups at risk.

## **2 Programmes and practices aimed at ensuring equal access to public services in the digital age**

In Austria, there is a range of non-governmental initiatives and services specialising in digital literacy.

The association “Institute for Telecommunication in Practice” (“*Institut für angewandte Telekommunikation*”, ÖIAT) runs the ongoing service centre “digital seniors” (“*Digitale SeniorInnen*”), which offers consulting services to educational institutions and trainers on how to plan and implement educational offers on digitalisation for older people. The service centre is active nationwide and was initiated in September 2013.<sup>8</sup> The initiative offers free training materials to educators, a quality seal on digital education measures for older people (“*Gütesiegel Digitale SeniorInnenbildung*”), free workshops and counseling

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<sup>7</sup> Austria, Law on the Digitalisation Fund ([Digitalisierungsfondsgesetz-Digi-FondsG](#)), Federal Law Gazette I, No. 91/2021.

<sup>8</sup> Austrian Institute for Applied Telecommunications (*Österreichisches Institut für angewandte Telekommunikation*), [website on service centre Digitale SeniorInnen](#).

sessions for educators, as well as a training course for pedagogues on teaching digital literacy to older people. Digitale SeniorInnen receives funding from the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection (*Bundesministerium für Soziales, Gesundheit, Pflege und Konsumentenschutz*). No information is available on monitoring or evaluation activities.

In Austria, “fit4internet in Austria – Raising Digital Competences” is an association with the objective of qualifying and quantifying digital literacy among the Austrian population.<sup>9</sup> Several services cater explicitly to the age group 60+. Together with the Austrian Seniors Council (“*Österreichischer Seniorenrat*”), the association initiated “Coffee Digital”, a cost-free, in-person training series for digital competences.<sup>10</sup> In 2018, the first meetings were held in two locations in each of the nine Austrian provinces. Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, no trainings have taken place but a range of free learning materials<sup>11</sup> on digital competences is offered instead. The initiative receives funding from the Federal Ministry of Digitalisation and Economic Affairs as well as the Austrian Seniors Council. No information is available on monitoring or evaluation activities.

### **3 Research and data focused on equal access to public services in the digital age**

The number of complaints registered in 2021 related to discrimination on the ground of old age in the context of access to public services is not available.

**Example 1)** The policy paper “Digital Inclusion” by the Chamber of Labour Vienna takes stock of the “first digital divide” (access to hardware) and “second digital divide” (user competences) in Austria.<sup>12</sup> It finds that access to the Internet and hardware is not equally distributed in Austria, and that a lack of knowledge leads to shyness in the digital realm, particularly among marginalised groups. The paper highlights various groups that experience exclusion in the digital sphere, including people aged 65 and above, and provides policy recommendations to eradicate exclusionary practices in digitalisation. One concrete recommendation on e-government states: “the digitalisation of public services requires a co-creative process with the inclusion of all relevant target groups and affected people. This process must be supported by ongoing evaluations and norm-critical

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<sup>9</sup> Fit4internet, Association for the improvement of digital competences in Austria (*Verein zur Steigerung der digitalen Kompetenzen in Österreich*), [Website on raising digital competences](#).

<sup>10</sup> Fit4internet, Association for the improvement of digital competences in Austria (*Verein zur Steigerung der digitalen Kompetenzen in Österreich*), [Website on project Kaffee Digital for generation 60+](#).

<sup>11</sup> Fit4internet, Association for the improvement of digital competences in Austria (*Verein zur Steigerung der digitalen Kompetenzen in Österreich*), Computeria Axams Module, [link to online folder with learning materials for older people](#).

<sup>12</sup> Berger, Ch., Lethner, E. and Moder, C. (2021), [Digitale Inklusion](#), AK Policy Paper, Chamber of Labour Vienna, June 2021.

adaptations.”<sup>13</sup> The policy paper is based on desk research and provides a literature review of studies and academic texts covering various aspects of digital usage in Austria.

**Example 2)** The “Spectra Digi-Monitor Austria 2018” is a regular trend study published by the marketing agency Spectra (*Spectra Marktforschung*).<sup>14</sup> In the most recent 2018 edition, over 2,000 face-to-face interviews were held nationwide in Austria with people aged 15 and above. The study focuses on various aspects of digitalisation, including internet usage in Austria and the usage of various online applications, including e-government. It finds that only 5% of Austrians aged 66 and above use e-government applications.<sup>15</sup> Among 50 to 65 year-olds, 15% used such applications in 2017 and 20% in 2018.<sup>16</sup> This correlates with overall internet usage, which decreases with age: the older people get, the lesser they use the Internet.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Berger, Ch., Lethner, E. and Moder, C. (2021), [Digitale Inklusion](#), AK Policy Paper, Chamber of Labour Vienna, June 2021, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> Spectra Marktforschung (2018), [Spectra Digi-Monitor Österreich \(Teil 1\)](#), Vienna, July 2018.

<sup>15</sup> Spectra Marktforschung (2018), [Spectra Digi-Monitor Österreich \(Teil 1\)](#), Vienna, July 2018, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Spectra Marktforschung (2018), [Spectra Digi-Monitor Österreich \(Teil 1\)](#), Vienna, July 2018, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Spectra Marktforschung (2018), [Spectra Digi-Monitor Österreich \(Teil 1\)](#), Vienna, July 2018, p. 1.

## 4 State of digitalisation of selected public services

Access to health records and public statutory pensions are accessible via an online signature, social benefits are accessed after creating a user account using an online signature. The information stated in the table is thus not open to the public and was obtained via a personal login of the researcher. The information in the table relates to the services offered *within* the e-government portals and not to the informational websites that lead to the portals, unless explicitly stated. The electronic health record service, the *ELGA-Portal*, is accessed via the *ELGA (Elektronische Gesundheitsakte)* homepage. Access to public statutory pensions is provided via the online portal of the social insurance carriers, *MeineSV*, accessible via the website of the Umbrella organization of Austrian Insurances (*Dachverband der Sozialversicherungsträger*). Services related to social benefits ( unemployment, emergency benefits and certain types of childcare allowance ) are accessed via the online portal eAMS, accessible via the Public Employment Service (*Arbeitsmarktservice, AMS*). Other social benefits, as outlined in the OECD's definition, are accessed via a variety of different offices. Benefits related to retirement are contained within the table under column 2, "public statutory pensions". Benefits related to healthcare are administered via the social insurance carriers. Benefits related to minimum benefits/social assistance (*Sozialhilfe*) are administered by the respective magistrate but require registration as being unemployed, which is done via the eAMS portal.

		Selected public services relevant for older persons			
		Access to health records	Public statutory pensions	Social benefits	Other (as relevant in your context)
<b>Stage of digitalisation</b>	Not digitalised (Y/N)	No	No	No	
	Information is available online (Y/N)	Yes	Yes	Yes	
	Transactions are possible online (Y/N)	No	Yes	Yes	
<b>Recognition of groups at risk of digital exclusion</b>	Service specific regulation recognises barriers to digital inclusion / vulnerable and	Yes	Yes	Yes	

	disadvantaged groups (Y/N).				
	<p><b>If yes, please list the barriers and groups that are mentioned.</b></p>	<p>Information on accessibility is provided via a button that says “Declaration on accessibility” (“<i>Barrierefreiheitserklärung</i>”). The linked page states the Ministry for Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection responsible for the website aims to provide the website in accordance with the Web-Accessibility Act and relevant Acts implementing the Web Accessibility Directive of the European Parliament and Council.<sup>18</sup> This refers to people with disabilities requiring accessible webpages.</p> <p>Besides the Web Accessibility Act, no reference is made to persons experiencing barriers to digital inclusion. No other risks</p>	<p>Information on accessibility is provided via a button that says “accessibility” (“<i>Barrierefreiheit</i>”). The linked page states the provider responsible for the website, the Umbrella organization of Austrian Insurances (<i>Dachverband der Sozialversicherungsträger</i>) to provide the website in accordance with the Web-Accessibility Act and relevant Acts implementing the Web Accessibility Directive of the European Parliament and Council.<sup>19</sup> This refers to people with disabilities</p>	<p>Information on accessibility is provided via a button that says “Declaration on accessibility” (“<i>Barrierefreiheitserklärung</i>”). The linked page states the Public Employment Service (<i>Arbeitsmarktservice, AMS</i>) responsible for the website aims to provide the website in accordance with the Web-Accessibility Act and relevant Acts implementing the Web Accessibility Directive of the European Parliament and Council.<sup>20</sup> This refers to people with disabilities</p>	

<sup>18</sup> Austria, Web-Accessibility Act ([Web-Zugänglichkeits-Gesetz – WZG](#)), Federal Law Gazette I No. 59/2019 and related provincial acts implementing the Web Accessibility Directive in the provinces.

<sup>19</sup> Austria, Web-Accessibility Act ([Web-Zugänglichkeits-Gesetz – WZG](#)), Federal Law Gazette I No. 59/2019 and related provincial acts implementing the Web Accessibility Directive in the provinces.

<sup>20</sup> Austria, Web-Accessibility Act ([Web-Zugänglichkeits-Gesetz – WZG](#)), Federal Law Gazette I No. 59/2019 and related provincial acts implementing the Web Accessibility Directive in the provinces.



		or barriers are acknowledged or addressed.	requiring accessible webpages.  Besides the Web Accessibility Act, no reference is made to persons experiencing barriers to digital inclusion. No other risks or barriers are acknowledged or addressed.	requiring accessible webpages.  Besides the Web Accessibility Act, no reference is made to persons experiencing barriers to digital inclusion. No other risks or barriers are acknowledged or addressed.	
<b>Multichannel access options</b>	<b>Telephone service (Y/N)</b>  <b>If yes</b> , please describe what kind of personalised services it provides.	Yes. The health record portal displays personalized health records and automatically provides the contact details of the responsible doctor, including the telephone number. General information on the health portal itself is provided via the nationwide service line. It is not stated in which cases this number shall be contacted.	Yes. The online pension records are contained within the broader website of the Umbrella organization of Austrian Insurances ( <i>Dachverband der Sozialversicherungsträger</i> ). There is an overall support hotline provided.	Yes. The online portal providing access to social benefits provides a direct link to the contact details of the Public Employment Service office responsible for the person logged in (this differs by district of residence).	
	<b>Physical administrative access points (Y/N)</b>  <b>If yes</b> , please specify the level of availability (local, regional, national), the opening days and hours.	No, although hospitals, doctors and pharmacies have access to certain health records via a person's social insurance card, providing there is an ongoing relationship or transaction (eg. needing a prescription).	Yes. It is stated that in addition to accessing the public pension records online, you can look at your pension account directly in the offices of the relevant social insurance carrier, request it from them via post, or	Yes. In Austria, social benefits are administered via the Public Employment Service (AMS). The AMS has 294 offices (" <i>Servicestellen</i> ") nationwide. All online	

			request it from your employer. In Austria, there are five major social insurance carriers. All carriers have offices in each of the nine Austrian provinces.	services can be accessed offline.	
	<p><b>Specific locations</b> that facilitate <b>offline</b> access to the service (Y/N)</p> <p><b>If yes</b>, indicate the location(s).</p> <p>Please describe what kind of support is provided.</p>	No, although hospitals, doctors and pharmacies have access to certain health records via a person's social insurance card, providing there is an ongoing relationship or transaction (eg. needing a prescription).	No.	No.	
	<p><b>Specific locations</b> that facilitate <b>online</b> access to the service (Y/N).</p> <p><b>If yes</b>, indicate the location(s).</p> <p>Please describe what kind of support is provided.</p>	No. The portal can be accessed via a website and via a personal "Citizen Card" ("Bürgerkarte") or the so-called "mobile signature" ("Handysignatur"), both being a government issued digital signature.	No. The portal can be accessed via a website and via a personal "Citizen Card" ("Bürgerkarte") or the so-called "mobile signature" ("Handysignatur"), both being a government issued digital signature. It can also be accessed via the individual online tax account ( <i>FinanzOnline</i> ).	Yes. The Public Employment Service has 294 offices ("Servicestellen") nationwide, 104 of which provide services for unemployed people, including computers with access to the eAMS portal, as well as other public online services.	
	<p><b>Other</b> – please indicate any other access channels to the service.</p>	n/a	n/a	n/a	

<p><b>Other forms of support for online use</b></p>	<p>Please indicate any other <b>form of support to facilitate the use of the online service</b> for older persons such as easy-to-read versions, different language versions, etc.</p>	<p>The health records contained in the portal are displayed according to “Clinical Document Architecture”, which optimizes structure and layout to improve user-friendliness and understanding. So far, this architecture is implemented for discharge letters, laboratory reports or radiology reports.<sup>21</sup> All reports can also be downloaded as PDF documents. At the bottom of the page there is a link to download a PDF reader</p> <p>The portal website uses big writing and symbols to illustrate certain functions (confirmation buttons, search buttons, show-as-PDF, logout). There is no option to change the visual settings.</p> <p>No other language versions of the portal are available. It is stated on the informational website leading to the portal that there are plans to provide different language versions in</p>	<p>It is possible to change the contrast of the portal website. The website uses symbols to guide users (question mark for help page, silhouette of a person for contact form). No easy to read or other language versions are available.</p> <p>The public statutory pension portal is accessible via the website of the Umbrella organization of Austrian Insurances (<i>Dachverband der Sozialversicherungsträger</i>). This website features an informational video explaining how to use the online portal, however this is not targeted to any particular group.<sup>23</sup></p>	<p>It is possible to change the size of text on the portal website via set of three buttons (A, A+, A++). No easy to read or other language versions are available.</p> <p>The website of the Public Employment Service, via which the digitalised social benefits are accessed, offers videos in sign language outlining details of the online services provided. There is a video about the online portal in sign language, which additionally offers subtitles, a transcript, the ability to change text size and contrast on the particular page of the video.<sup>24</sup> In addition, there is a range of downloadable forms available on the website in Word and PDF format covering those services</p>	
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<sup>21</sup> ELGA GmbH, [website on FAQ about the electronic health record portal ELGA](#).

<sup>23</sup> Umbrella organisation of the social insurance institutions (*Dachverband der Sozialversicherungsträger*), MeineSV, [website on how to use the online social insurance portal MeineSV](#).

<sup>24</sup> Public Employment Service (*Arbeitsmarktservice*), [barrier-free video on how to use the Public Employment Service online portal](#).

		the near future. The informational website features explanatory videos on how to use the portal. <sup>22</sup>		accessible via the online portal.	
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<sup>22</sup> ELGA GmbH, [website on FAQ about the electronic health record portal ELGA](#).