



AFECCO

EMPOWERING OLDER ADULTS TO APPLY AFFORDABLE
ECO- AND AGE-FRIENDLY SOLUTIONS TO AGE IN PLACE

Baseline Report and Implementation Strategy



Co-funded by
the European Union

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About this publication

This report presents the findings emerged from the activities carried out in the first phase (December 2022 – November 2023) of the Erasmus+ project AFECO – Empowering older adults to apply affordable eco- and age-friendly solutions to age in place (cooperation partnership in adult education, project number: 2022-1- NL01-KA220-ADU-000086242). This is the deliverable “Baseline Report and Implementation Strategy”, Work Package 2- Activity 6 (WP2- A6).

More information is available at <https://afeco.eu/>.

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1. Introduction

AFECO is an Erasmus+ project that aims to empower older adults to apply affordable age-friendly and eco-friendly solutions in their own living environments. Through this, AFECO aims to contribute to older adults’ participation in society, quality of life and prolonged independent living. AFECO’s objectives are: a) highlighting the importance of age-friendly and eco-friendly environments at home and within communities and neighbourhoods as a valuable tool for active ageing and ageing in place; b) raising awareness; and c) educating older adults, (in)formal caregivers and social workers.

This report contains the findings from the project partners in Greece, the Netherlands, Germany, Portugal, Italy and Poland. It aims to collect and present the results from the activities carried out in the first phase of the project (December 2022 – November 2023). The conclusions are drawn from a literature review (A1), a comparative analysis of the adaptation of age and eco-friendly solutions (A2), a report on good practices (A3), findings from interviews and focus groups (A4) and related case studies from partner countries (A5) (Table 1). Overall, this report includes information on:

- A descriptive and comparative analysis of the different health, social, financial, and environmental country contexts and the impact of age- and eco-friendly principles on them (results mainly from A1 & A2);
- The guidelines for age-friendly principles and their potential to co-shape the dimensions of active ageing and ageing in place (in both home and community settings) for older people and older people in need of care (results mainly from A1 & A2 & A3);
- The key findings from the interviews with older adults, caregivers, and other experts (results mainly from A4);
- The learning needs of (in)formal caregivers and social workers (results mainly from A3 & A4);
- The educational needs of older adults and how these needs can be met with a tailored training curriculum (results mainly from A4);
- The evaluation of the practical adaptations and interventions needed for the e-Learning platform, as described in the case studies (results mainly from A5).

The guidelines produced by the baseline analysis will show the conceptual framework for the training material and provide recommendations for the upcoming actions of the project.

Table 1. A summative table for the activities (A1-A5) of the Work Package 2

Activity Number and Title	Description	Key Findings
A1- Literature Review	A comprehensive literature review of the state-of-the-art age- and eco-friendly solutions in partner countries	Age-friendly principles in the political agenda of partner countries are relatively new, and not sufficiently implemented. Growing individual knowledge and responsibility is one of the most crucial aspects for the dissemination of eco-friendly solutions, along with governments as one of the primary sources of

		information on eco-friendly lifestyles in some partner countries.
A2- Comparative Analysis of Adaptation of Age and Eco-friendly Solutions	Comparative analysis in each partner country based on barriers and facilitators who affect the adaptation of age-friendly and eco-friendly principles in home and neighbourhood environments	There is no remarkable mixed initiative combining the two domains; most initiatives have dealt with eco-friendliness or age-friendliness separately.
A3- Report on Good Practices	Report on existing or emerging good practices on age- and eco-friendly principles among partner countries	Some examples of good practices can be counselling services for home adaptations, the University of the Third Age, and community gardening.
A4- Assessment Report	Assessment report on target groups' education and training needs based on qualitative semi-structured interviews and focus groups in each partner country	Interviewees thought it is more difficult to find eco-friendly solutions than age-friendly ones. Also, their knowledge is lacking in the areas of technology, and they have difficulties in finding a common information hub on financial support for the implementation of age- and eco-friendly solutions.
A5- Case studies development	The development of case studies to compare and identify existing problems and needs for changes.	Gaining basic ICT skills, raising awareness about age-friendliness and eco-friendliness, and acquiring knowledge on the policies and funds for age- and eco-friendly solutions were the most mentioned themes in the case studies.

2. An overview of older adults, and age- and eco-friendly principles

According to the Eurostat database, the population aged 65+ will continuously increase in the future; this highlights the importance of empowering older adults to apply eco- and age-friendly solutions to age in place (Eurostat, 2023). Since at least 20% of the total population in each partner country is aged 65 and over, their quality of life is closely linked to care. Most of the older adults over the age of 75 need either formal or informal care (UN-Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Ageing, 2017).

In the countries of project partners, care services are mostly provided by public and private entities as well as associations and co-operatives, either at home or in institutional settings. Generally, 80% of older adults in Europe are the recipients of informal care (Eurocarers). A similar result was also found in the partner countries: 98% of the older adults in Greece, for instance, depend on home care. In the Netherlands, this percentage is 95 whereas in Germany

is 84. As the partner countries reported the tendency for deinstitutionalisation, there has been an increase of home care, possibly caused by older adults’ reduced financial capacity.

The case of the Netherlands is different from the other partner countries in terms of financial capacity. As institutionalised care traditionally dominated the landscape of older adult care, the government has recognised the need to ensure financial accessibility for older adults seeking care within their homes. Unfortunately, this was not a viable option for those with limited financial means. However, the government has recently introduced a significant policy change aimed at making home care services accessible to older adults with limited financial resources. Under this policy, only those who require round-the-clock care will be admitted to nursing homes, thereby ushering in a noticeable shift towards the preference for home-based care.

In Portugal, Greece, Poland, and Italy, due to low pensions and lack of State funding, many older adults resort to either unlicensed or informal homes with very poor conditions. Others hire undeclared informal caregivers (Greece, Italy, Poland, and Germany). When looking at formal versus informal care, the majority of older adults in partner countries receive informal care. Since most of the informal caregivers are unpaid and unregistered (Tur-Sinai et. al., 2023: UN- Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Ageing, 2017), their exact number cannot be defined by the project partners.

Allowing older people to age in place is directly linked to the preparedness and efficiency of the national social and healthcare structure and to policies to promote active ageing and age-friendly solutions through community or institutional care. Based on the current situation in partner countries on the homeownership status of older adults, more than 70% of them are homeowners except in Germany (49.1%). However, since housing prices in the EU have increased by 46.3% from 2010 to 2023, it has become difficult for people to buy a home (Figure 1).

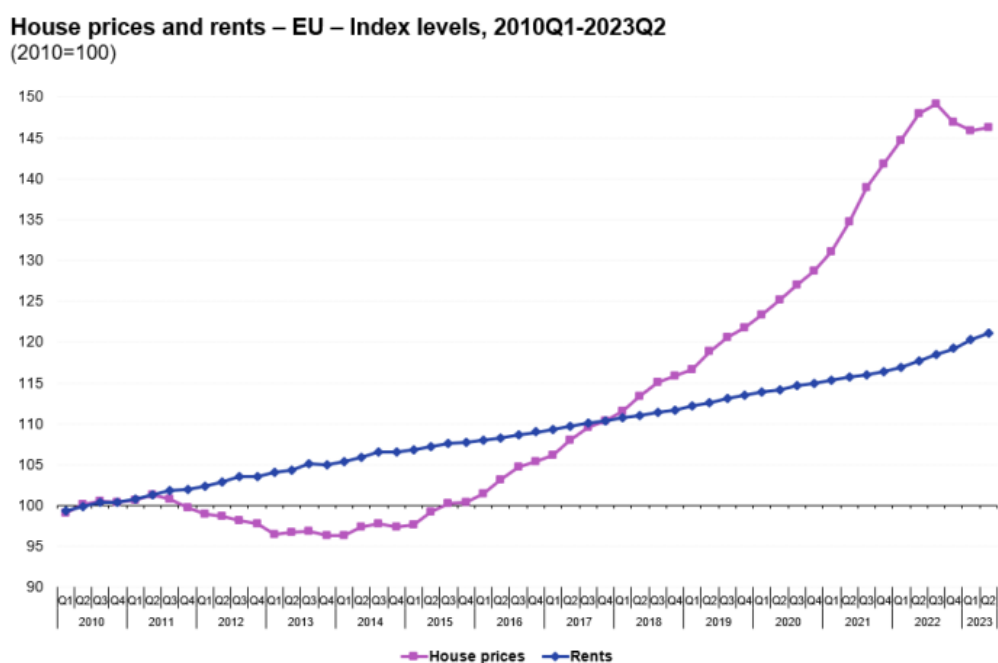


Figure 1. House prices and rents in the EU (Index levels; 2010Q1-2023Q2 (2010 = 100))

A comprehensive review of the state-of-the-art age-friendly and eco-friendly solutions in the partner countries has been conducted. Age-friendly principles in the political agenda of the partner countries are relatively new, and not sufficiently implemented. Because of this, it can be concluded that the top-down plans are still in the development phase or their implementation is slow. Therefore, bottom-up initiatives need to be developed to accelerate the adoption and implementation of age-friendly principles. Such initiatives are mainly based on municipalities and various kinds of social welfare organisations and institutions. Hence, the lack of central strategies and coordination and homogeneity of initiatives at the national level is causing a time mismatch in the development and implementation of age-friendly practices. At the level of municipalities, it is noticeable that the Netherlands, especially the municipality of The Hague, is advancing well in the field of age-friendly policymaking. According to the grey literature review done by the project partners, Germany, Italy, Poland, Portugal, and Greece are at the early stages of politically driven large-scale implementation of age-friendly initiatives in the core areas of housing, social participation, and transportation.

Age-friendly policies in the partner countries are centred around health and autonomy, economic, educational, social and cultural activities, silver economy and intergenerational relations as well as programmes for supporting ageing at home. Implemented policies mostly follow the guidelines and framework of the WHO policies for Age-friendly Cities. Relevant initiatives can be found under policy planning, funding, research, and training. Various investments have been made in partner countries to disseminate age-friendly principles. For example, in the field of transport and mobility in Poland, an initiative called Senior Tickets has been implemented by Polish Railways with the introduction of national discounts for the elderly. Another example is the Municipal Support Program for Housing Adaption and Rehabilitation of the city of Pombal in Portugal which aims at intervening in and upgrading the homes of older adults and citizens with disabilities.

Besides the governmental authorities being the main source of information for raising awareness on eco-friendly lifestyles, increasing personal awareness and responsibility is one of the most important steps to disseminate environmentally friendly solutions. This also applies to older adults and their caregivers, as emphasised by partner countries. For instance, a research-based study (van de Griend et al., 2019) showed that in the Netherlands, around one-third of citizens (34%) are motivated to make choices within their capabilities that help combat climate change. In comparison, in Germany (BMU 2021), 56% of respondents over 65 agreed with the following statements: “It is a human being's duty to protect nature” and “We may only use nature in such a way that this is also possible for future generations to enjoy it to the same extent”. In a recent study among older adults in The Hague (THUAS 2023), eco-friendly attitudes and behaviour are strongly influenced by their financial position. Six clusters of older adults can be recognised, varying from strongly willing or not and whether or not they can afford such a lifestyle. The numbers may indicate that many older adults are possibly unaware of eco-friendly solutions, and further awareness, motivation, and education are needed, as mentioned by the project partners.

As yet, there are no mixed initiatives founded on age- and eco-friendly principles mentioned by the project partners.

Learning from good practices of age and eco-friendly principles from the countries of project partners and using them as inspiration can strengthen the curriculum and e-Learning platform. Good practices have been identified through desk reviews and internet searches by the project

partners. Partner organizations' knowledge was also used. Good practices can be categorised as follows:

- Counselling services to help with housing conversions and adaptations;
- Solutions to reduce functional risks and adapt spaces in terms of comfort, safety, and accessibility;
- University of the Third Age; open university-type courses specifically designed for older adults to provide them with greater autonomy and help to keep up with the world's changes;
- Investigations to have more sustainable buildings (generating own energy mostly from solar energy);
- Community gardening and greening initiatives (e.g., removing tiles in private gardens and public spaces).

3. Analysis of first-hand experiences of older adults, caregivers, and experts

The findings of the last three completed activities of the WP2 A3- Report on Good Practices, A4- Assessment Report and A5- Case Study Development are the main topics presented below. During these activities, interviews and focus groups to identify the learning needs of older adults and focus groups with health and social care professionals were held in partner countries. Furthermore, the details on the age- and eco-friendly solutions that older adults are currently aware of or utilising in their day-to-day activities or lifestyles were collected.

3.1. Participants' demographics (interviews and focus groups)

In June and July 2023, project partners conducted interviews with 110 older adults and held focus groups with 60 (in)formal caregivers in their primary languages (Table 2). Out of 110 interviewees, 72 (69.2%) were female, 31 (29.8%) male and 1 (1%) did not wish to provide information on their gender. 98 (94.2%) interviewees lived independently with only 6 (5.8%) interviewees requiring assistance with daily living. 72 (69%) owned their properties, whereas 32 (31%) were living in rented flats. 60 (57.7%) interviewees were between 65 and 74 years of age, 27 (26%) between 75 and 84, and the rest were either below the age of 65 (4 interviewees - 3.9%) or above 85 (13 interviewees - 12.4%).

Table 2. Number of the participants in interviews and focus groups

Project's Partner Countries	Number of Older Adults Interviewed	Number of (In)formal Caregivers in the Focus Group
DE	19	10
GR	10	10
IT	20	10
NL	21	10
PL	20	10
PT	20	10
Total	110	60

In terms of education, 36.5% of the interviewees had an academic degree, whereas 15% had received primary education and 21.2% obtained VET qualifications. Approximately one-third of participants described their financial situation as moderate (29.8%), while 24% rated it as sufficient.

Focus groups consisted of social workers, nurses, doctors, speech therapists, and psychologists (See Annex 1 for further information).

3.2. Age- and eco-friendly solutions

During the interviews with older adults, several aspects were mentioned about age-friendly solutions such as in-house adaptations, technology, adapting age-friendly solutions to their everyday habits, basic needs and participation, social monitoring, adaptations in public space, mobility, health, information, culture, security, cleanliness, local community, and social monitoring (these aspects are listed in order from most mentioned to least mentioned). As shown in Figure 2, in-house adaptations as age-friendly solutions were mentioned more often than the other age-friendly solutions. Such solutions are: grab bars in the bathroom, appropriate height of furniture and good accessibility to all important appliances in the home, lifts, ramps and stair lifts, and easy access to showers. Technological solutions were the second most mentioned aspect by the interviewees in each partner country. According to the interviewees, technical devices should be able to monitor health (healthcare robotics) or location (GPS trackers), automatically switch off unused devices, or call for help in an emergency. Interviewees are also expected to maintain social relationships and enable neighbourhood services.

Another frequently mentioned age-friendly aspect was the adaptation of public spaces. Barrier-free pavements and streets, no parked (or speeding) vehicles in pedestrian areas, seating and public toilets were only some of the examples mentioned by the interviewees.

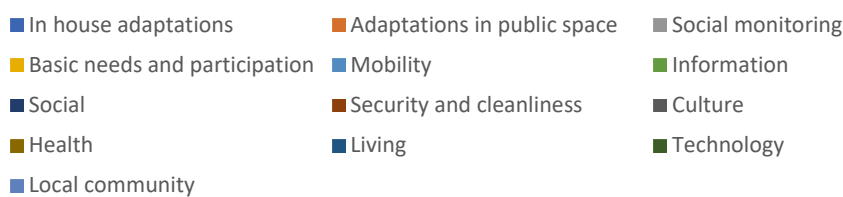


Figure 2. Age-friendly solutions mentioned by interviewees (Adapted from the input from Assessment Report- A4 of the project)

Consumption/waste (purchasing local and seasonal products, using environmentally friendly and organic cleaning agents and soaps were mentioned by the interviewees from Italy. Other examples are engaging in food sharing to avoid food waste and redistribute food that has been left over to people who will eat it. Other areas where savings could be made are: energy, water, mobility (walking or cycling, using public transport at reduced rates, car-sharing services, and minimising the number of individual journeys in cars were mentioned as examples). Interviewees also mentioned the importance of adopting solutions at home and in everyday life, creating more green spaces planting more trees, and adopting environmental design at the city level. Social issues are all aspects that could be addressed with eco-friendly solutions (these aspects are listed in order from most mentioned to least mentioned) (Figure 3). The majority of the interviewees agree that conserving resources is essential for the environment, particularly for energy, water, food, and waste production.

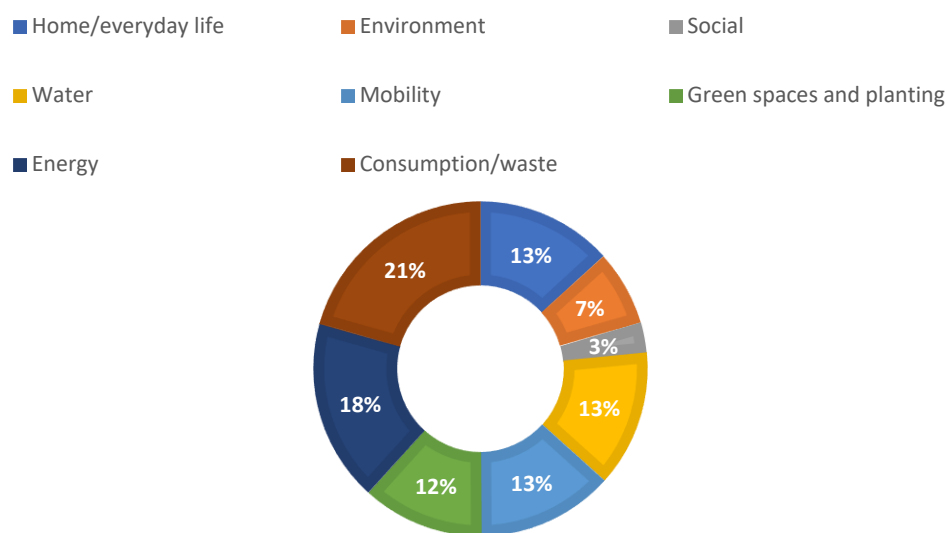


Figure 3. Areas where eco-friendly solutions could be adopted as mentioned by interviewees (Adapted from the input from Assessment Report- A4 of the project)

3.3. Existing skills and learning needs

Many interviewees encounter greater difficulties in finding eco-friendly solutions as opposed to age-friendly ones. Even though they have a good understanding of eco-friendly solutions such as energy conservation and material reuse, their knowledge is lacking in the areas of mobility and use of technology to adapt age- and eco-friendly solutions. Financial constraints were frequently brought up as a hindrance to eco-friendly solutions (Figure 4).

The majority of interviewees had a good understanding of what age-friendly environments would be like for them or what changes may enhance their quality of life. However, it was noted that interviewees found it difficult to know who to contact for assistance when seeking to implement adaptation measures. Interviewees mostly need individualised and personal support, particularly in terms of which organisations, associations, or individuals they should get in touch with if they wish to join local activities or modify their living environments. As it was mentioned by an interviewee from Poland, the assistance of a peer or mentor can be helpful. They also need support with the administrative procedures that must be followed to

be approved for funding for age- and eco-friendly house alterations (it was also stated by the focus group).

Due to their experience with working with older adults, some of whom they had known for a long time, it became obvious during the focus group discussions that participants already had a solid understanding of age- and eco-friendly everyday solutions. Overall, the focus groups concluded that social contact was a fundamental component for older adults to age in place.

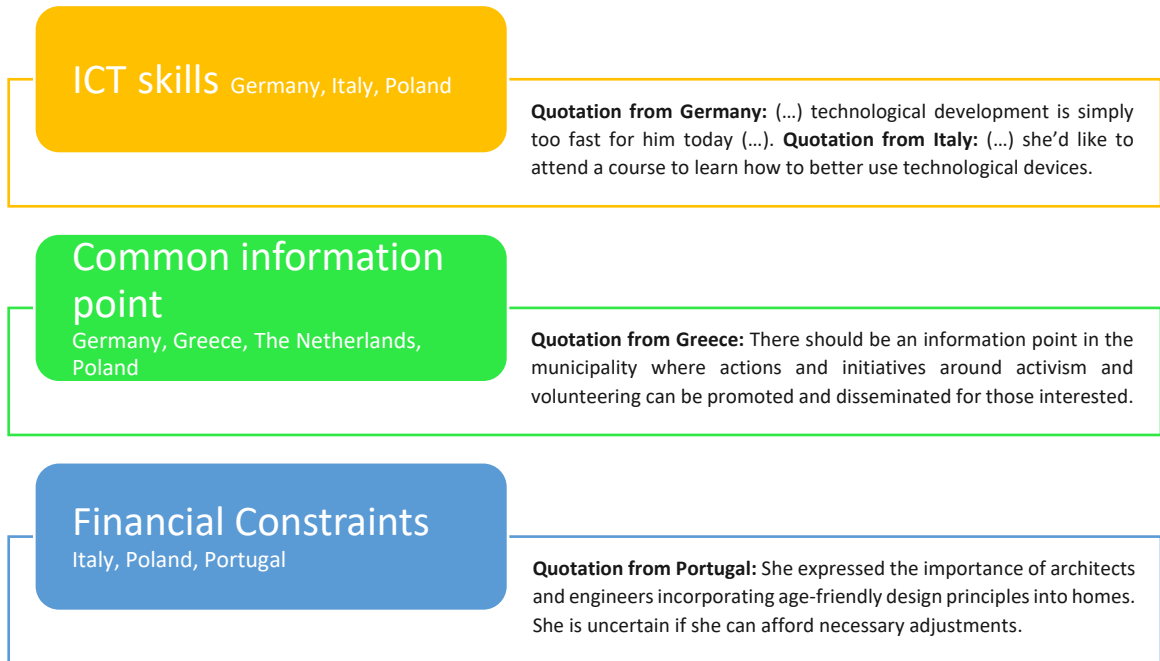


Figure 4. Main categories according to the case studies (Adapted from the input from Case Study Development- A5)

4. Main categories of learning needs for the training material

Since the main focus of the project is to enhance the implementation of age- and eco-friendly principles, identifying the learning needs on these topics is important to develop relevant training materials. Based on the information that was collected from the activities of the WP2, the training material can be focused on the following categories of learning needs:

Learning needs about age-friendliness and eco-friendliness

One of the important parameters for implementing age-friendly and eco-friendly principles in home and community settings is awareness. Lack of awareness and knowledge on these issues affects the implementation of existing age- and eco-friendly solutions. In some of the project partners' countries, such as Italy and Greece, most of the householders are not conscious enough of the energy efficiency grade of their residential areas or rely on misleading information about eco-friendly solutions. This finding shows the importance of raising awareness among older adults about eco-friendly principles and highlighting the main

categories that should be developed further. Those main categories can be the basics about the energy efficiency of buildings: how to save energy, how to finance and carry out insulation, and what subsidies are available for heating and home adaptations. It is also important to stress-reducing CO₂ emissions in older adults' daily routines can be one of the focal points of the training. Simple but effective eco-friendly principles such as ventilating, sun-blocking measures, making neighbourhoods greener, using simple water-saving measures, or applying other cost-saving principles at home can be applied. They can also be useful to mitigate negative health outcomes due to heat stress. Additionally, and as a result of the interviews carried out by project partners, older adults could do with learning skills related to resource or waste avoidance measures or how to make one's living environment greener. Thus, information on waste prevention, composting, and gardening can be provided. As mentioned by the focus groups, spending time in nature, gardening, and planting in one's home also have a positive impact on individual health.

Although older adults know age-friendly solutions better than eco-friendly solutions, they still need some information on this subject. For instance, older adults in Portugal mentioned two specific needs: security of their homes and prevention of accidents like falls. Tips can be provided for rearranging home interiors to make them age-appropriate.

In terms of learning needs, support by a mentor or a "buddy", as Polish participants described, was suggested. This suggestion can be a vital point for participants in all countries and can become one of the focus areas of the AFECO's learning offer.

Most participants mentioned that people would like to have more concentrated information about the topic of ageing and how to age well in place in general. Lastly, participants mentioned the need for support in implementing measures which could be provided through, for example, real-life case studies.

Acquiring knowledge on policies and funds for age- and eco-friendly solutions

There is a need for more collaboration between governments, community organisations, and older adults to ensure that age-friendly initiatives are tailored to the needs and preferences of older adults and to find ways to best promote them in practice. Most older adults from each partner country mentioned financial problems and lack of a common source of information to find financial support as the key barriers to adopting age- and eco-friendly solutions. In addition, the lack of information about policies and financial support hampers the implementation of these solutions. For instance, older adults living in rented accommodation mentioned that funds to instal solar panels are available but only for homeowners. This may lead to age-friendly and eco-friendly solutions focusing on the more privileged, i.e., wealthier part of the population, such as homeowners, and therefore not being inclusive or accessible to all. Despite subsidised infrastructural actions, public funds should also cover social projects with older adults not only receiving knowledge about age- and eco-friendly solutions but also being actively involved in "learning by doing".

A common information source of age- and eco-friendly solutions or finding funds, related policies, and calculation tools can be provided.

Gaining basic ICT skills

The internet provides the majority of the knowledge on age- and eco-friendly solutions for older adults. Even though the number of older adults without any digital skills is declining, older adults' digital illiteracy might be a barrier since online platforms sometimes overlook the hands-on approach that is essential for them.

Since many older adults have doubts about technical principles and privacy issues, it is necessary to provide clearer and easy-to-access information about technological tools (e.g., smart meters and smart home technologies). Even though smart home technologies and ambient assisted living (AAL) applications contribute to creating age-friendly and eco-friendly environments, the fear of being hacked and misusing personal data as well as the fear of privacy breaches make implementation and operation of the aforementioned solutions harder by older adults.

Considering that in the case of low ICT skills, the use of technological solutions may be associated with a sense of anxiety among older people, teaching ICT skills requires the involvement of actors who enjoy the trust of older people that they have previously gained. Therefore, key actors in this activity can be found in local communities among organisations engaged in education (e.g., universities of the third age or other NGOs) or individuals serving as informal teachers.

5. Implications for the design of the e-learning platform

To develop a fully operational e-Learning platform, specific educational and training materials should be delivered. Most interviewees need practical cases, i.e., real-life examples and practical applications so that they can see the results in a short time and can learn by doing. They also need to know the benefits of the training and their interests and curiosity have to be stimulated. The majority of the interviewees stated that they learn mostly by reading (books and leaflets), listening (podcasts), and watching (videos). They mentioned Facebook and forums as knowledge-sharing points.

Overall, the learning platform must be sustainable. This means that it needs to be regularly updated according to new requirements and technological developments. The platform itself should be user-friendly, and easy to access. It should also be accessible to people who have different abilities and impairments. For instance, the platform must be supplemented with a text-alternative description of the information provided (i.e., alt text), as well as changeable text size, font and colour. It should support blended learning features since some older adults prefer traditional ways of learning. The platform should be compatible with assessment, testing, reporting, and tracking methods by using AI-powered learning tools. The platform can create social online learning experiences as well as engage learners through gamification. Furthermore, the security of the e-learning platform should prevent cyberattacks. The language chosen for the platform and its contents should be clear, unbiased, and there should be language options. The platform itself should be aesthetically appealing avoiding overly designed ornamental or figurative elements. Technical terms should always be explained when first used, and accuracy needs to be prioritised over unnecessarily complex terms. Maintaining causal relationships between expressions is necessary to guarantee logical development, distinct structure, and consistency throughout.

6. Next steps

The upcoming actions of the AFECO project are designing the e-Learning platform, developing a curriculum based on the results outlined in this report, testing the e-Learning platform and its contents before disseminating the results of this project to a wide variety of stakeholders. A preliminary analysis of associated stakeholders was performed in the WP2 on behalf of each partner for the conclusions of the future platform's potential (Figure 5). The associated stakeholders' network and know-how can be used in co-creating the platform in the next phases of the project. We will also promote all project results within this network of stakeholders.

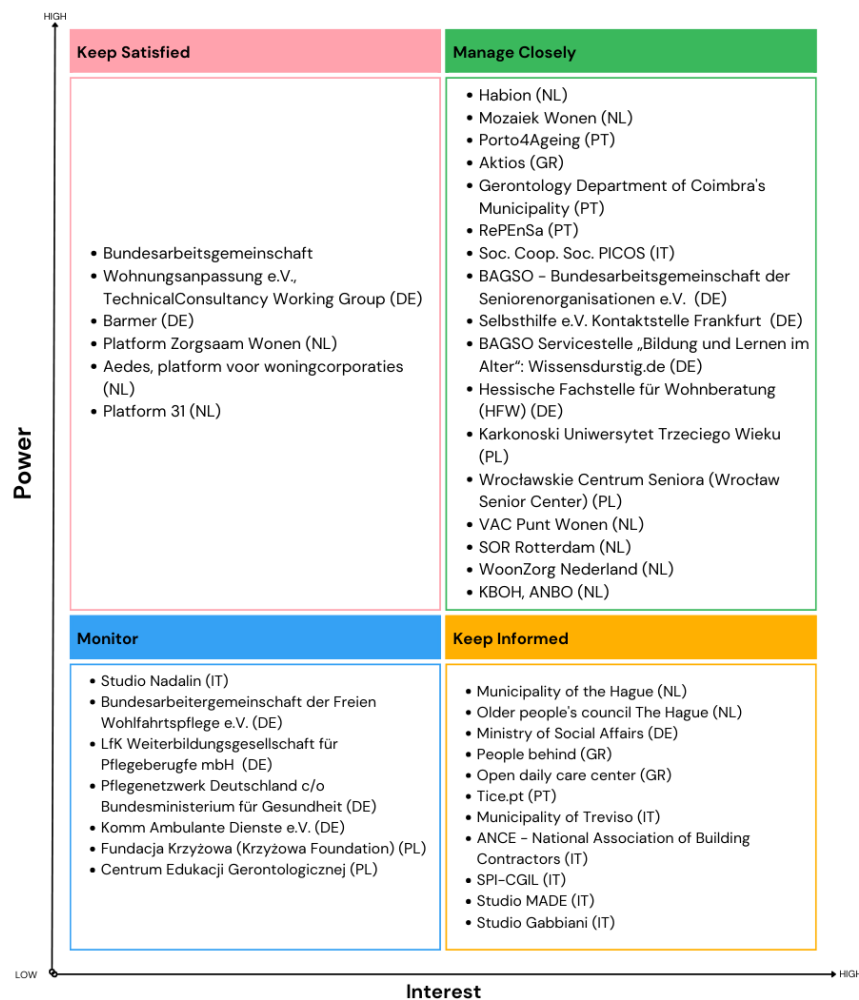


Figure 5. Stakeholders' map (Adapted from the input from WP1 Project Management- 08 Sustainability)

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Annex 1: Information about the Focus Group

Project Partner	Gender	Profession
GR	Female	Nurse
GR	Male	Social Worker
GR	Female	Care Worker
GR	Male	Doctor
GR	Female	Speech therapist

GR	Male	Social Worker
GR	Female	Physiotherapist
GR	Female	Psychologist
GR	Female	Nurse
GR	Female	Psychologist
IT	Male	A representative for the Italian Association of Builders (ANCI)
IT	Male	The former president of the Older People Association AUSER
IT	Female	An architect expert in design for all
IT	Female	A care worker from ISRAA, providing home care
IT	Female	A trainee in Education Studies
IT	Female	An ISRAA employee specialising in AFE
IT	Male	A trainee in Education Studies
IT	Male	A physiotherapist from ISRAA, providing home care
IT	Female	An engineer expert in AFE
IT	Female	The President of Picos, a social cooperative specialised in providing legal, psychological and health support to people with disabilities and their families
PL	Female	Educator in an NGO, mainly involved in projects mixing age- and eco-friendliness
PL	Male	Educator in an NGO, involved in social projects
PL	Female	Psychogeriatrician, in charge of a daycare centre
PL	Female	Psychogeriatrician, NGO
PL	Female	Psychogeriatrician, NGO
PL	Female	Lecturer at the University of the 3 rd age
PL	Female	Lecturer at the University of the 3 rd age
PL	Female	Lecturer at the University of the 3 rd age
PL	Female	Coordinator of age-friendly projects
PL	Male	Coordinator of age-friendly projects
DE	Female	Professional carer
DE	Female	Professional carer
DE	Male	Professional carer, elder mediator, former informal caregiver
DE	Male	Energy adviser, informal caregiver
DE	Male	Social worker, psychotherapist

DE	Female	Housing advice coordinator and educator
DE	Female	Former informal caregiver
PT	Female	Psychologist and socio-cultural animator of nursing home
PT	Female	Technical director of nursing home
PT	Female	Auxiliary Health Technician in a nursing home
PT	Female	Auxiliary Health Technician in a nursing home
PT	Female	Auxiliary Health Technician in a nursing home
PT	Female	Nurse in a nursing home
PT	Female	Nurse in a nursing home
PT	Male	University Professor at School of Pharmacy
PT	Female	PhD student in social ecology
PT	Female	Doctor (General Practitioner)
NL	Female	Consultant for older adults
NL	Female	Consultant for older adults
NL	Female	Board member of the professional nursing association for geriatric care
NL	Female	Nurse
NL	Female	Nurse
NL	Male	Nurse / lecturer nursing
NL	Female	Nurse / lecturer nursing
NL	Female	Nurse / lecturer nursing
NL	Female	Nurse
NL	Female	Nurse