



Deaf Senior Education for Active Living

Project Number: 2020-1-IT02-KA204-079227

**IO1 - Deaf Senior needs in Europe:
Analysis and Abstract**

NATIONAL COUNTRY REPORT

Organisation: ISTITUTO DEI SORDI DI TORINO



NATIONAL BACKGROUND

Only a few and non-specific study with focus on the situation of deaf seniors has been undertaken in Italy. In fact, the present national background is based on these studies and on the information given from the Institutions and Deaf community.

According to Eurostat, 22% of the population is 65 years old or older, with a share of elderly who live alone around 30%, whereas 28% still travel after age 65. ICT skills are far under European average (25%). For Italy, longevity figures for one of the oldest European population. According to the report, the European average life expectancy is 78.2 whereas with 82.7 years, one of Italy's regions is in first place for the longevity of men.

Up to 5% of the world's population have some kind of hearing impairment or is D/deaf. The data was released by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on the occasion of the "International Ear Care Day" in 2014. Approximately 360 million people in the world has a form of hearing disability; According to ISTAT, the national statistic centre in Italy, over 877,000 people of the peninsula has a form of hearing impairment. Despite this, deafness is still a socially little-known condition and the difficulties it entails, mostly in terms of communication, are often ignored.

In epidemiological terms, the prevalence of hearing impairment in Italy is estimated at 12.1% of the population, around 7 million Italians with hearing loss, hearing impairment or deafness, with a significant differentiation between age groups and a significant increase with ageing (from percentages of no more than 10% of the 13-45 age group to 25% of those aged 61-80, up to 50% of the over 80s).

According to ISTAT's surveys the amount to a little more than a million people aged 15 and over, 78% of whom are seniors, with a greater presence of women, who declare deafness and deaf-mutism to a greater extent (52.4% against 47.6% of the total (tab. 2).

There are a variety of associations dedicated to D/deaf people, but no association in particular that focuses on the deaf seniors. The formation and training for educators, caregivers and assistants is limited either to the support to seniors or to deaf, but not both of them together.



QUESTIONARY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION:

We conducted two surveys, one for Deaf seniors and one for professionals working with them as part of the international DESEAL project (Deaf Senior Education for Active Living). The aim of this project and of the survey is to identify the needs of senior citizens in terms of various forms of education and activation (i.e., active participation in society). The answers are going to support the consortium to create an international guide about educating and activating seniors.

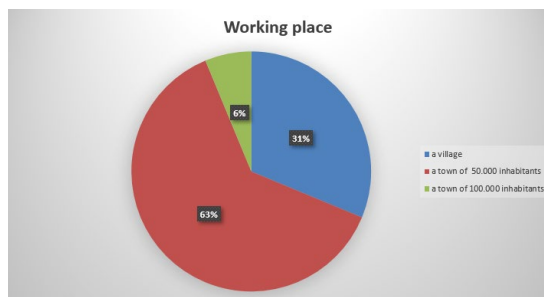
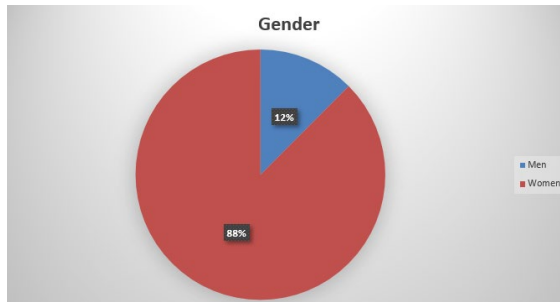
Methodologically, an online questionnaire was chosen. This format was chosen due to the possibility to translate the question from plain text to videos with sign language. The survey consisted in multiple-choice questions and open ended questions. All questions have been written in English and every partner has translated it in their national language. The survey started with some demographic questions and then asked about the topic of the needs of deaf seniors to live a more active life.

The surveys were put online and the link was send to answer to deaf associations and deaf seniors on the area of Piedmont. But the online method was not really suited for the deaf senior population, so we had to print the surveys and give them to them.

The final result is a total of 36 surveys completed by deaf seniors and 16 by professional who work with them.



SURVEY FOR PROFESSIONALS

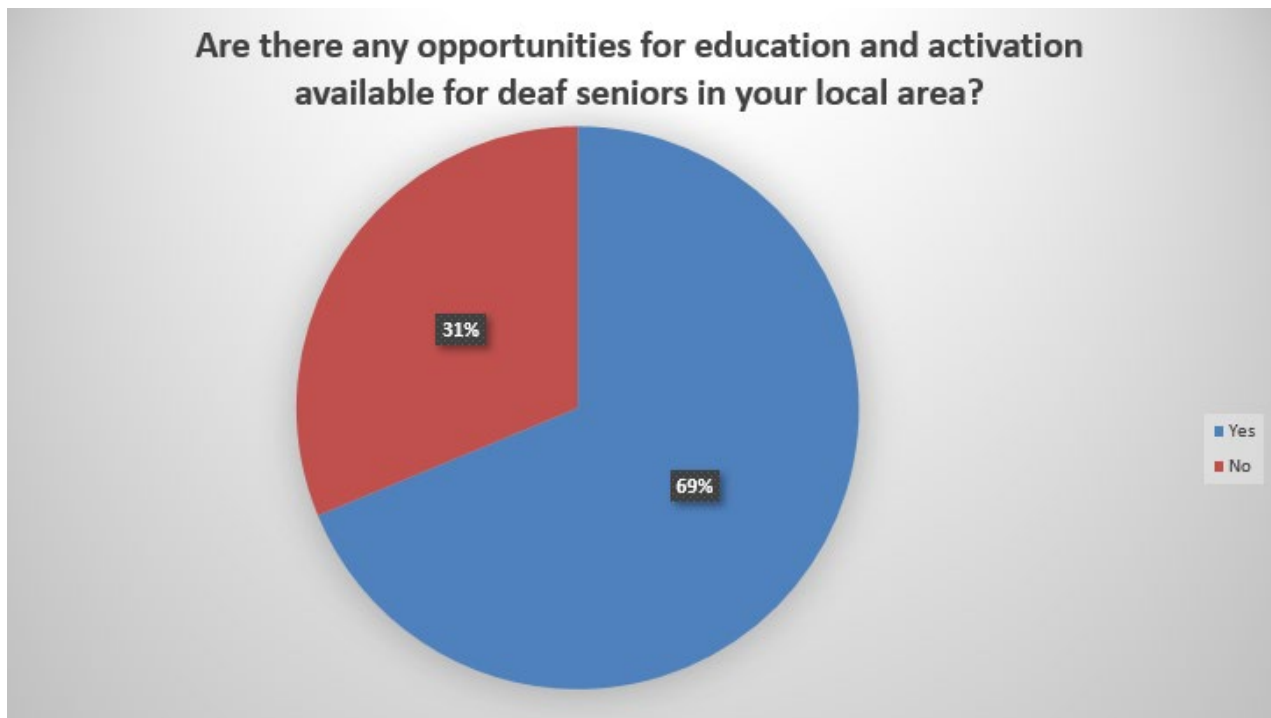


- **Participants**

16 professional workers took the questionnaire: 14 women (88%), 2 (12%) man. Analyzing the working place of each professional worker we can find out: most of the participants (10) work in a town of 50.000 inhabitants (63%), 5 of them work in a village (31%), and only 1 in a city of 100.000 inhabitants (6%). Going further, among these 16 professional employee we can evaluate: 14 of them work with/for Deaf senior (88%), 1 works with/for senior (6%) and always 1 works with young and old Deaf.



- **Findings**

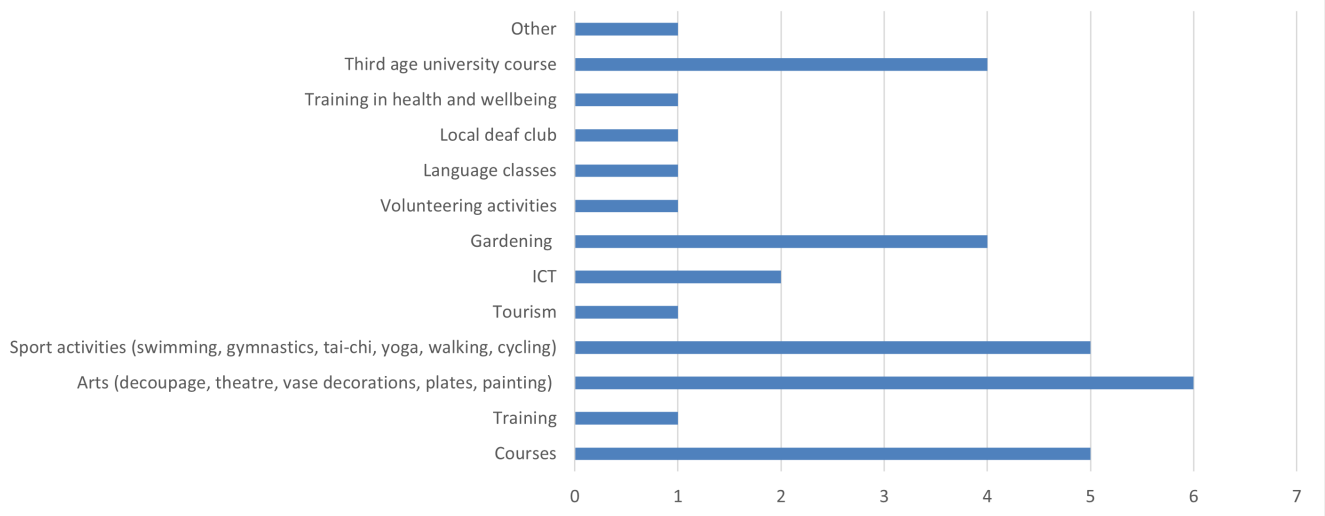


Aiming to create an international guide about educating and activating seniors we ask professionals if there are any opportunities for Deas seniors in their local area and they respond so: 11 yes (69%) and 5 no (31%). DESEAL Project's objective is to help these professionnals to have a better access to these opportunities, in order to help more the people they support

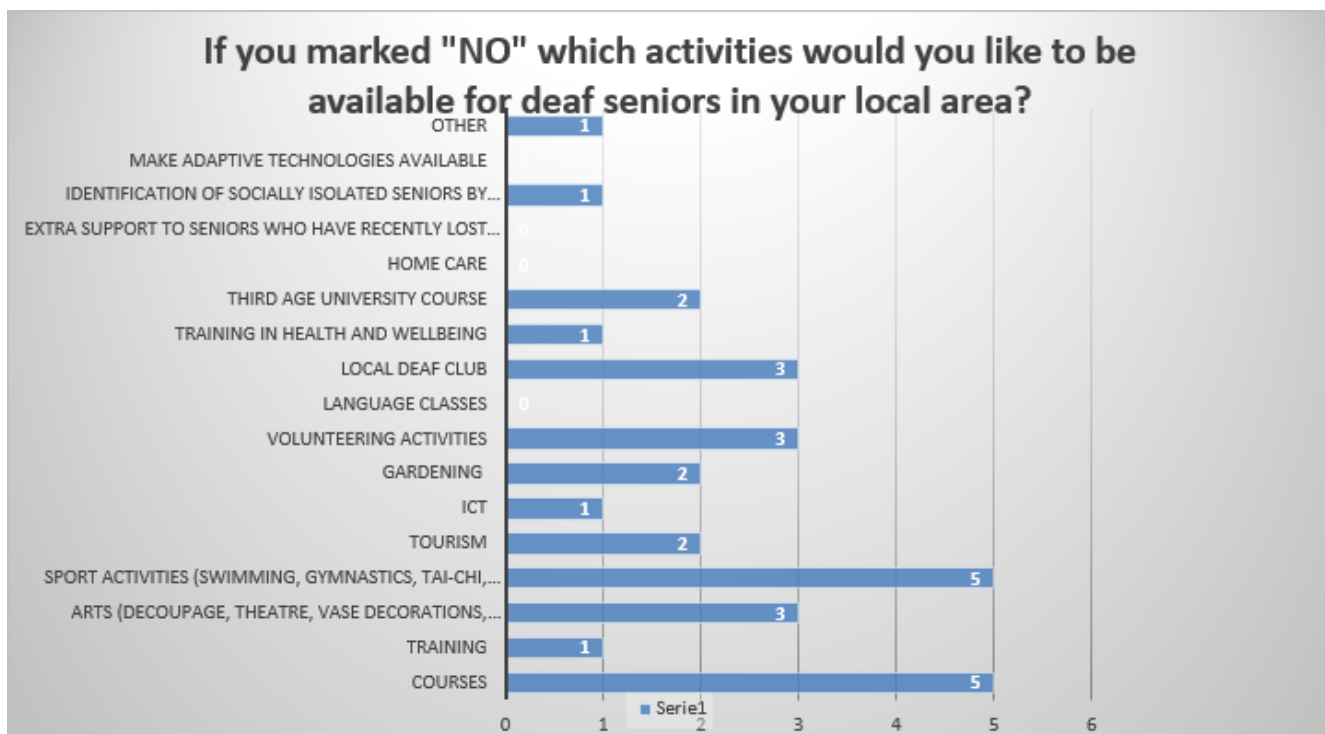
Professional workers who respond YES were asked to mark which kind of opportunities for educating and activating seniors are present in their local area. Many different answers were chosen, giving a distribution of all the provided options, but Third age university course (4 times) gardening (4 times) Sport activities (5 times) arts (6 times) and courses in general (5 times) were the most chosen one.



If you marked "Yes", please choose which one



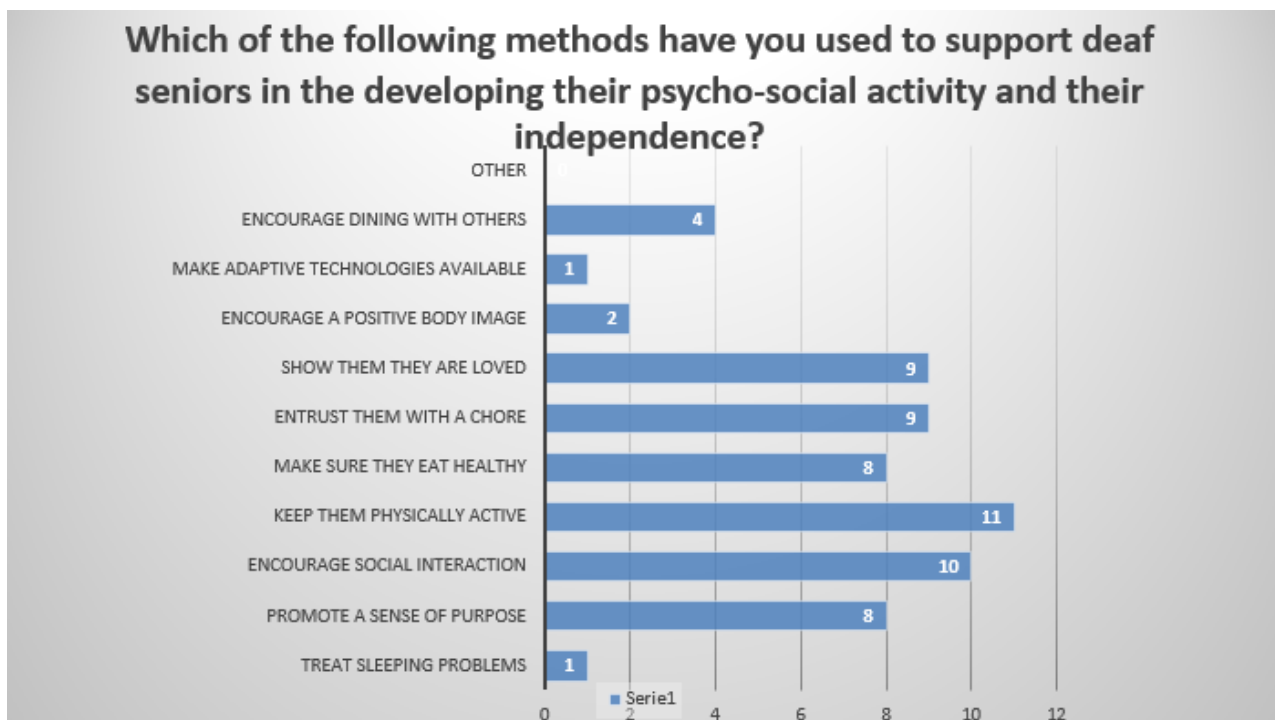
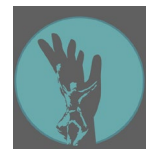
Professional workers who respond NO were asked to mark which kind of opportunities for educating and activating seniors they would like to have in their local area. Many different answers were chosen, giving a distribution of all the provided options. Considering that options like “make adaptive technologies available” “home care” “language classes” and “extra support to seniors who have recently lost a spouse” were not chosen, options like sport activities (5 times) and courses in general (5 times) were chosen the most. Other options were provided as shown in the graphic.



Thinking about your local resources, what changes are needed so that deaf seniors can participate more willingly and more often in social life?

- More accessibility and opportunities
- More accessibility
- Involve them in the planning of activities
- They should be involved by making them feel useful, mutual exchange of skills etc...
- Raise awareness of the world of deafness
- It will be necessary for deaf people to participate in meetings of older deaf people from different areas, regions that they can integrate to get to know their cultures and so they do not feel unique, that there are so many older deaf people.
- Awareness should be raised among the population by providing basic life skills courses and how to deal with elderly deaf people in order to be able to welcome them properly.
- Creation of social situations where people can establish relationships and share interests.
- Greater involvement of inhabitants and deaf elderly people

The three main topics from the question are “accessibility”, “involvement” and “awareness”. First comments show there is a need to make opportunities more accessible in order to give the Deaf seniors more possibilities to make experiences. Secondly and connected to the first topic, involvement in activities should be provided so that Deaf seniors don't feel isolated and also so that they feel useful for others. Third topic that is fundamental is awareness from the “outside”. So for example it is important to sensitize the population about the world of deafness to make it easier for Deaf people to integrate and be integrated into the social life of the own town/city.



Deaf professionals responded to the question about what kind of methods they used to support Deaf seniors in the developing of their psycho-social activity and their independence. Basically, most of the options were selected, considering that “treat sleeping problems” “make adaptive technologies available” “encourage a positive body image” were chosen less than other options.

In the field of education and activation, what kinds of activities, methods, and forms of support are most important and need to be developed?

- Support educators
- That they participate in workshops, integrate, make new acquaintances with people and play sports, to always be together so they get active. That they don't feel abandoned and alone....
- Presence of interpreters and trainers who teach how to welcome elderly deaf people.
- The use of Italian sign language and readjustment of the notions conveyed according to the difficulties of the individual
- presence of an interpreter, simplified texts, people who are very willing to welcome & show empathy
- I would train volunteers to alternate with the operators on duty to make them understand that they are appreciated and considered also by people who do not do it only for work... increasing the number of people who take care of them especially when the family is absent.
- I would increase play activities, also trying to involve deaf elderly people who are not part of the structure.
- Motor activities
- Group activities



The answers to the question what kinds of activities, methods, and forms of support are most important and need to be developed, professionals answered that different kind of activities are important and should be developed. Some of the most important aspects are communication and motor activities. In particular, interpreter and Italian sign language should be mandatory for a more inclusive and accessible approach. Moreover, a support to educators (for example volunteers) should be provided.

What kind of training would you like in order to work with deaf seniors?

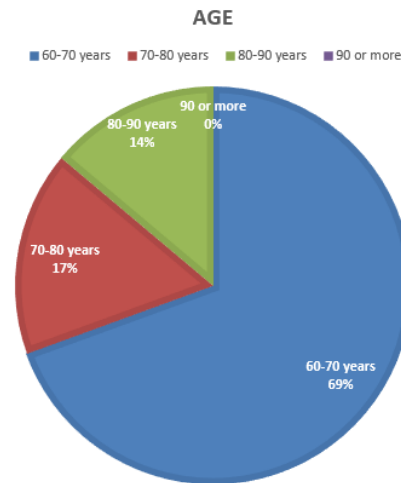
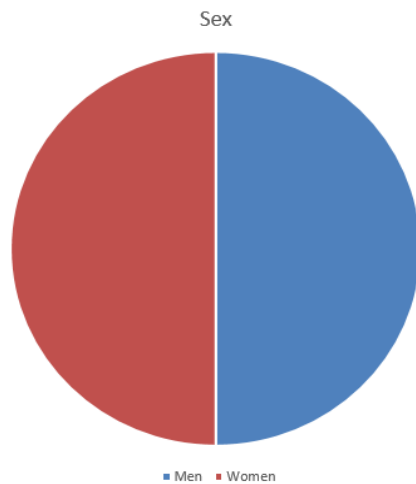
- Sector-specific language adapted to older deaf people
- Specific adult training
- Educators, specialised OSS
- I would love to teach them international sign language, because my goal is that they could also get to know deaf people abroad and be at least a little bit flexible in communicating with them.
- trainers competent in the relationship with the elderly person
- Educational, italian sign language, deaf culture
- Training that is not very theoretical and very practical. Respect for the person must be taught. It is necessary to respect the elderly person with whom we work and to put his/her needs first.
- More than training, ask the deaf elderly what they want and try to meet their needs.
- Courses on their psychology and Italian sign language courses
- Methods for maintaining an active mindset
- Art therapy
- Understanding deaf culture better and how it has developed over time in order to better empathise with it, as well as training in geriatric care.
- Educational
- The right one to enter well into an important and difficult world such as that of old age

The trainings that professionals would like to attend to work with deaf seniors are mostly sign language classes, both Italian and international, and trainings related to psychology and mindset. Important for the participants are practical competences more than theoretical one. Also professionals want some classes about deaf culture.

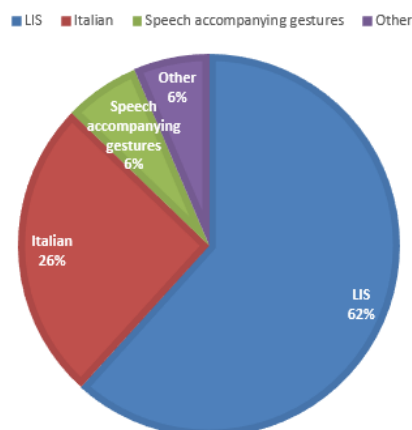
SURVEY FOR DEAF SENIORS



• Participants



WHAT IS YOUR PREFERRED FORM OF COMMUNICATION?

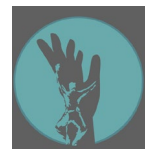


A total of 36 Deaf seniors took part to the questionnaire. The distribution of gender was perfectly split: 18 men and 18 women. Most of the participants (69%) are in an age range of 60-70. Moreover, 17% are 70-80 years old and 14% are 80-90 years old. 62% of the participants use Italian sign language as preferred form of communication, while 26% declare to use Italian. 6% said, they use speech accompanying gestures and another 6% stated other, explaining that they use either Italian sign language and Italian or lip reading as preferred communication form. Participants stated their living situation: nearly half of the participants (40%) live with their

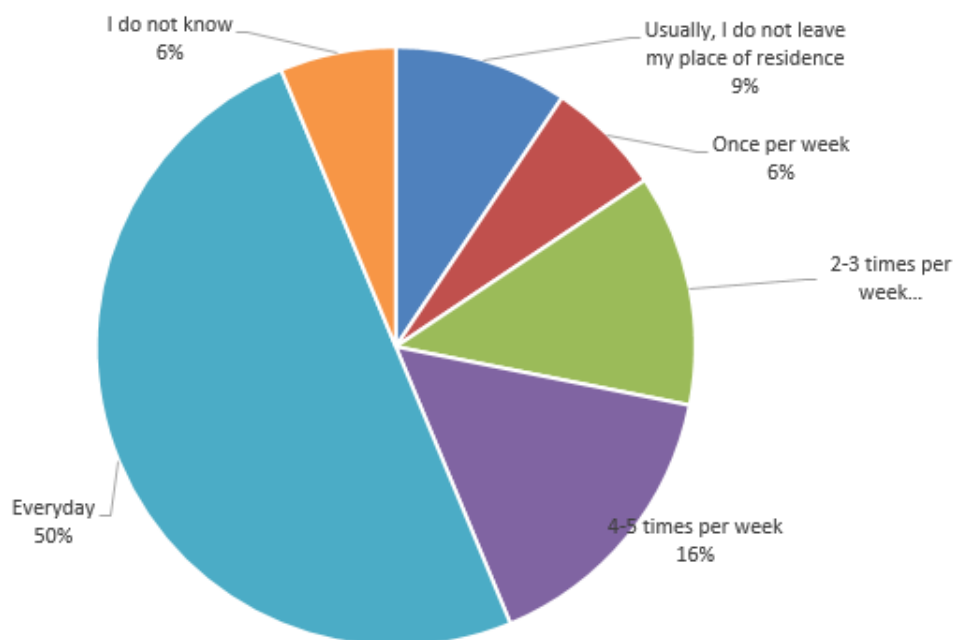
spouse, 23% with a friend and 23% stated other, mainly in a community or with their family. Just a small part of the participants lives in a retirement house, nursing home or even alone.

• Findings

Most of the participants (83%) feel able to go wherever they want to, while 17% don't. 50% of whom marked affirmatively stated to be away from home every day, while the other 50% of the participants stated to be away from home at least some days a week. Interesting is to notice that 9% of the people who have the possibility to go wherever they want actually stay at the place of residence.



If you marked “Yes”, how many times per week are you away from home?



If you marked “No”, why?

I am ill

I cannot walk, I have Parkinson's disease.

I'm afraid of getting lost in the streets

I don't know streets, buses are difficult

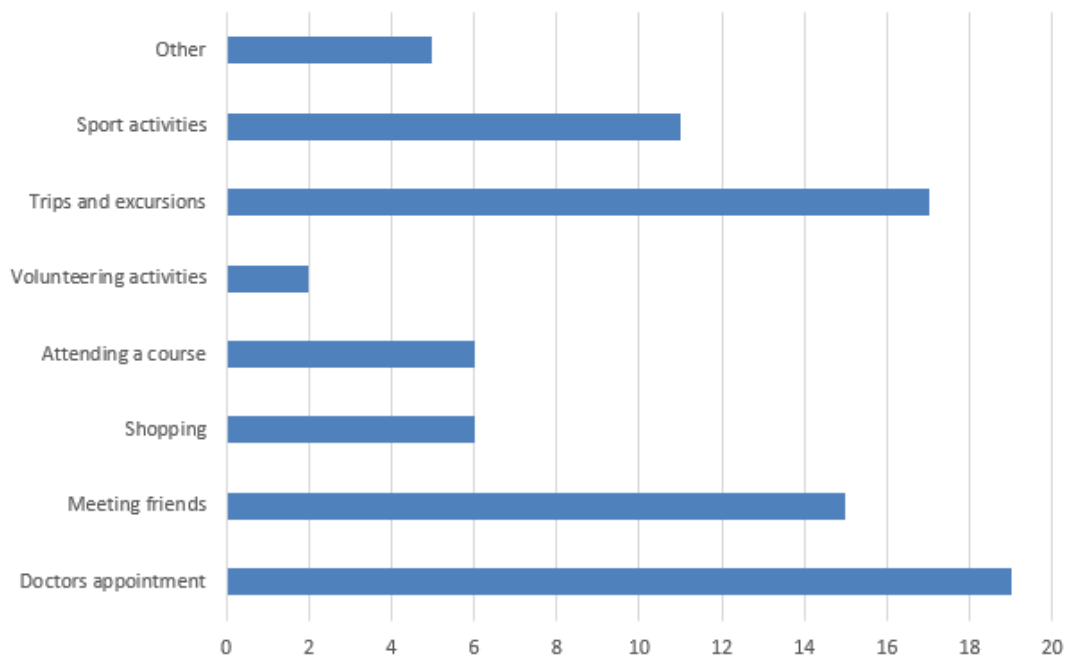
I am not able but I follow the educators

I follow my family or educators, I am not able to go alone

Participants who respond negatively to feeling able to go wherever they want to stated three main reasons: don't knowing the streets and being afraid of getting lost, secondly not being able to go alone but following the family members and/or educators, thirdly being physically unable because of illness or disease.



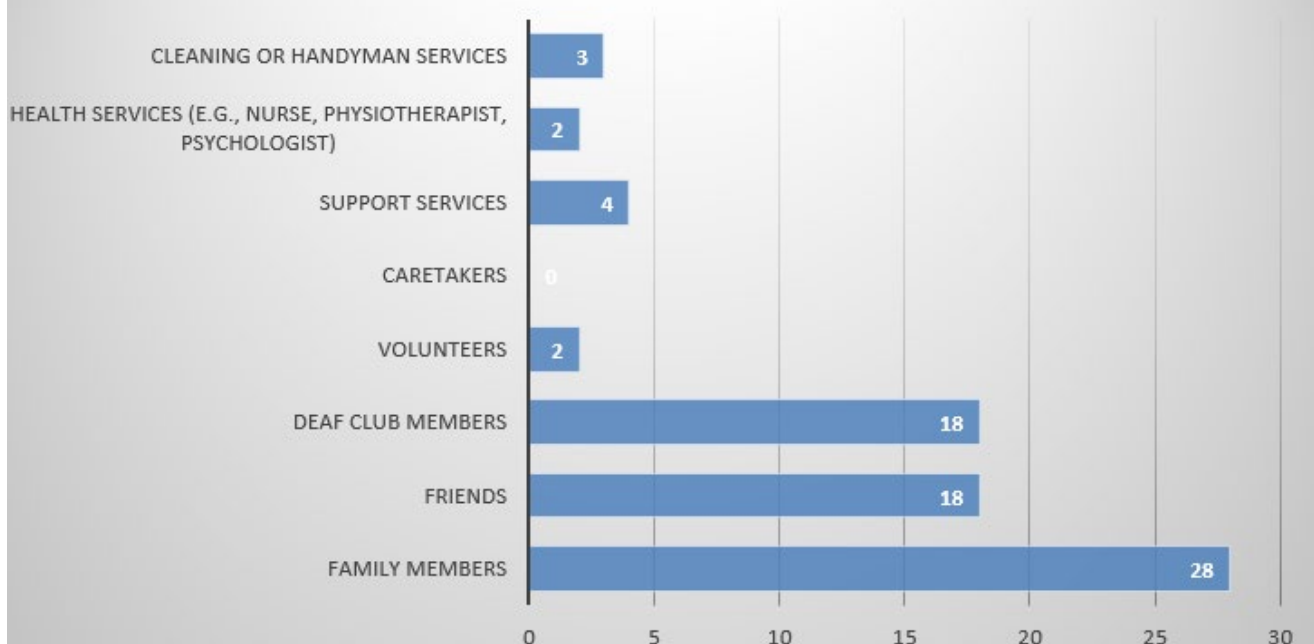
Why do you leave home? (tick all that apply)



Mainly, Deaf seniors leave home for doctor appointments (19 answers) and shopping and buying at the supermarket, but interesting to notice that also trips and excursions (17 times) and meeting friends (15 times) were chosen too. Sport is a present activity (11 votes). Volunteering activities seems to be the less voted.

Most of the participants (32 out of 36) have contact with other people in your daily life. As shown in the table below, most contact for Deaf seniors are family members, friends and deaf club members, while they have less contact to with people they don't know.

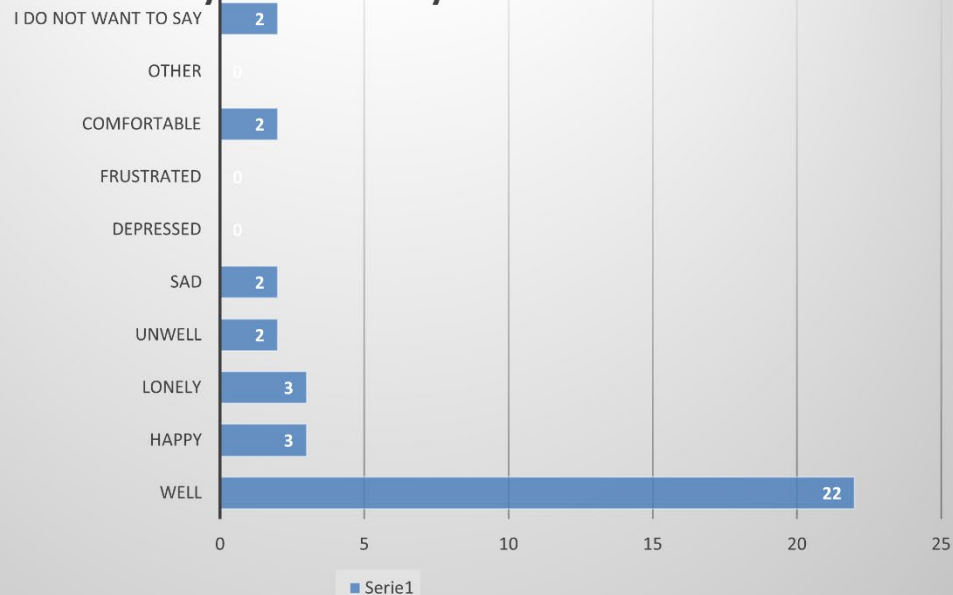
If you marked "Yes", who?





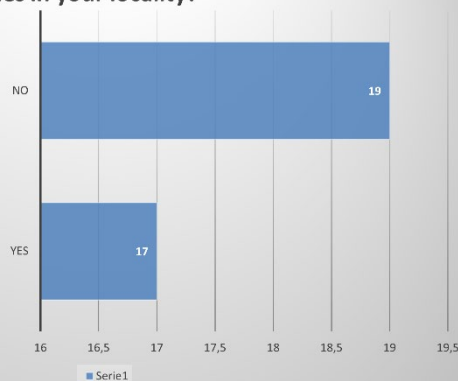
How would you describe your wellbeing at the present time?

Do you feel mostly...

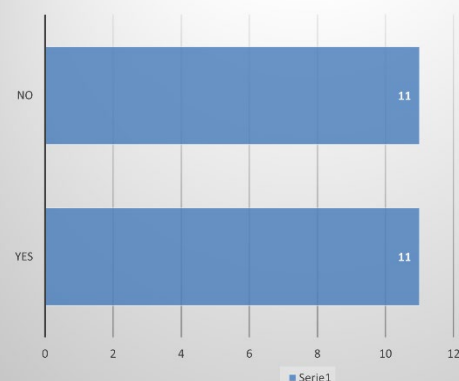


Most of the participants (27 out of 36) state to feel well (22), happy (3), and (comfortable). Seven participants describe their wellbeing with negative emotions like lonely (3), sad (2) and unwell (2), while 2 participants prefer not to respond to this question. We can state that 75% of the participants express positive emotions and that 25% don't feel positive about their wellbeing.

Do you know of education and activation opportunities in your locality?



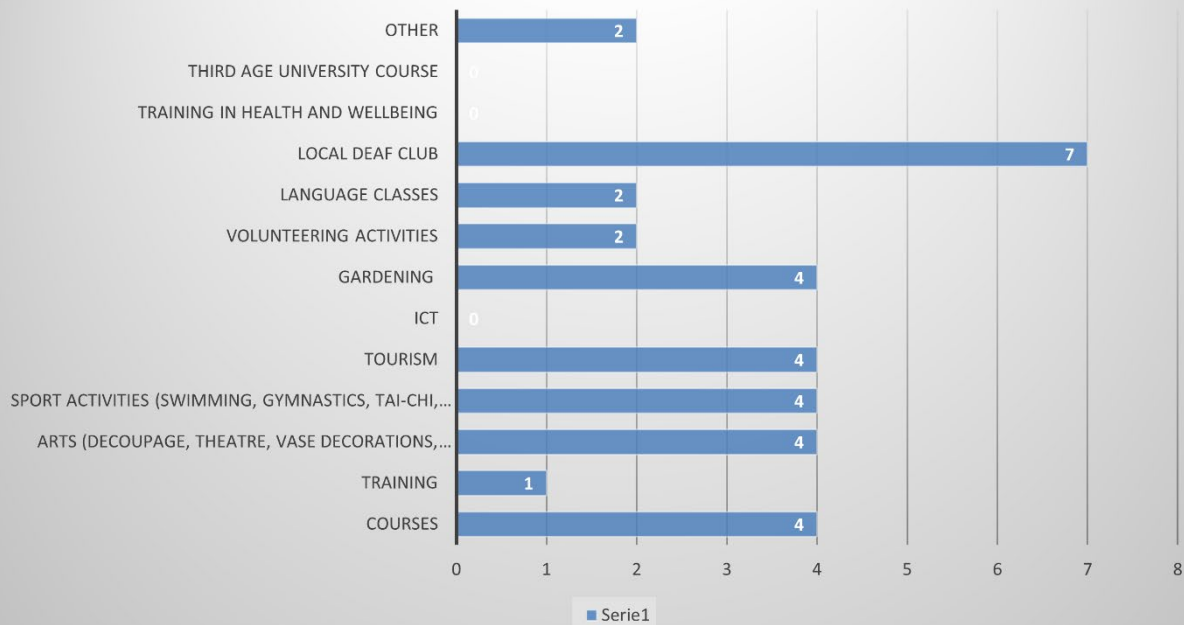
If you marked "Yes" do you use them?



The participants were asked to state if they knew about education and activation opportunities in their locality. 53% of the Deas seniors did in fact know activities, while 47% of the participants did not. Of these 53%, half of them use these opportunities. In fact, 11 participants use several activities like sports, tourism, deaf clubs and gardening. They don't use ICT opportunities or third age university courses or trainings in health and wellbeing.

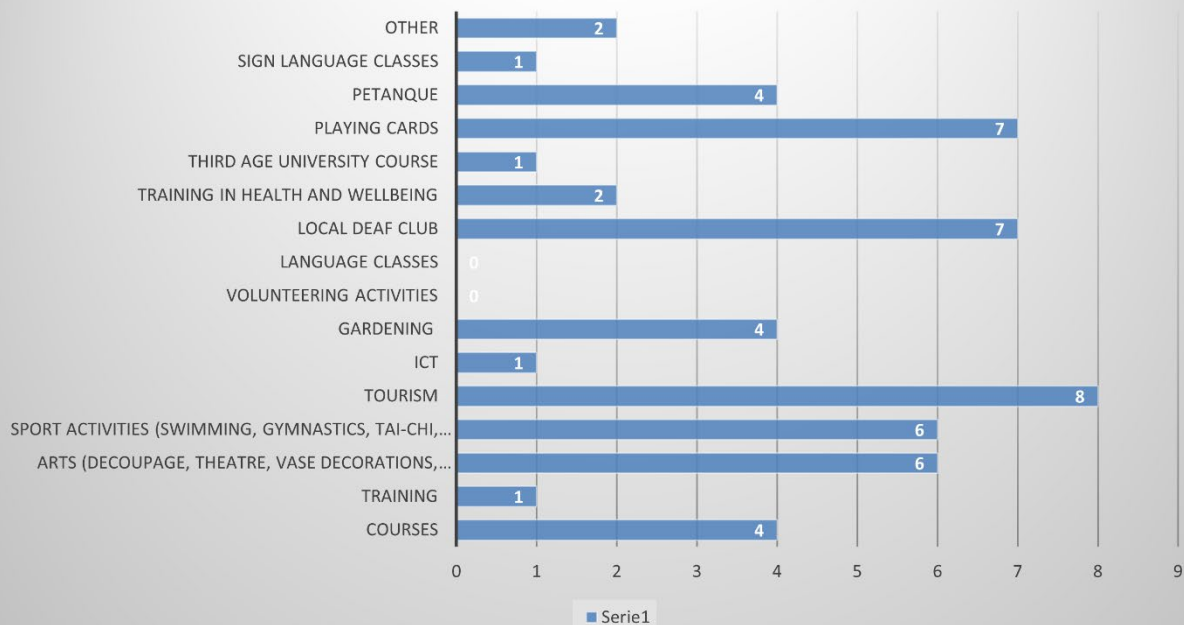


If you marked “Yes” which one did you use?



In general we can state that approximately 30% of all participants know and use education and activation opportunities, about 30% know but do not use these opportunities and 40% do not know about some kind of opportunities they could use.

If you marked “No” which activities, you would like to do?





The Participants who stated they do not know about opportunities showed interest mostly for Tourism, Playing Cards, Local Deaf clubs, Sport activities, Arts, gardening, courses and petanque. Instead, language classes, volunteering activities, where not chosen and ICT and third age university courses where chosen 1 time each. In general we can assume that Deaf seniors in Italy want opportunities that comprehend some kind of activities that are typically more appropriate for seniors on one hand, and some activities like sports and arts that could be more activating.

What activities usually make you happy or satisfied?

I don't know

Nothing

Family and Nephews

Long walks in the mountains and by the sea

Everything involved, visual and manual

Bookbinding and restoration workshop Hobby of decupage on one's own

Walking with deaf/hard of hearing friends

Taking walks with deaf or hearing friends at high altitudes, organising deaf or hearing groups to cultural visits travels

I get on quite well in my area and get by in everything despite my deafness.

A little bit of everything makes me happy, there's no specification.

Tourism

working at the bar, training with a deaf group, meeting family.

Meeting my family, playing cards, watching cards and swimming.

Meeting family, playing cards, walking, bowling

Watching films and playing checkers

Watching films. looking after workshop things, taking walks and helping to cook

Taking part in workshops, drawing and colouring, going for walks

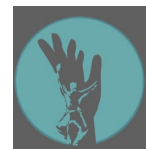
I like going to Juventus football, walks, films, swimming and playing cards

I like to go out when it's nice, play cards and work.

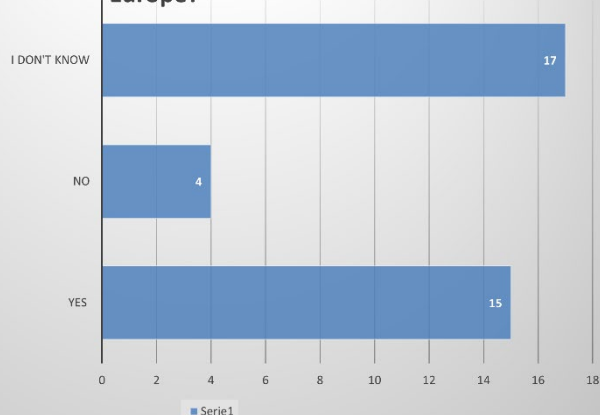
I like painting, drawing, watching films and playing cards.

I like to see my brother and dad. And going out by myself.

The activities that the participants usually find satisfying are quite widespread like some that were mentioned in the survey (tourism, playing cards, deaf club, arts, sports etc) and some that refers to meeting the own family, going for different kind of walks and watching films.



Would you like to connect with other deaf elderly people in Europe?



As shown in the graphic, 47% of the participants do not know if they want to connect with other deaf elderly people in Europe, while 42 % agreed on connecting. Only 4 participants answered negatively. Often a elderly senior does not feel comfortable to interact with new people and strangers. This leads to answers that are not a strict no, but more a vague answers like I don't know.



CONCLUSION

Most of professionals (70%) think that there are opportunities for Deaf seniors like third age university, gardening, arts and sport activities, while other options were less chosen. The 30% that does not think that there are opportunities for Deaf seniors would like mainly sports activities and courses above other activities. Also arts, volunteering activities and local deaf clubs are good alternatives, while home care, language classes and making adaptive technologies available are thought as less relevant.

The three main issues about change referring to Deaf seniors are accessibility, involvement and awareness.

Most of the professionals who were asked which kind of methods they use to support Deaf seniors answered almost every possibly answer apart from making adaptive technologies available, treating sleeping problems and encourage a positive body image. (in line with eu stats about use of ICT). Some of the most important aspects are communication and motor activities.

The trainings that professionals would like to attend to work with deaf seniors are mostly sign language classes, both Italian and international, and trainings related to psychology and mindset. Important for the participants are practical competences more than theoretical one. Also professionals want some classes about deaf culture

Regarding Deaf Seniors, the survey showed participants demographic data according to the national standards. Most of the participants (70%) were between 60 and 70 years old, most of the participants use Italian sign language as preferred way of communication. Interesting to notice, in line with the national situation, that 38 % of Deaf seniors do not use Italian sign language as preferred communication channel. 26% of them use Italian and the rest (12%) use other kind of communication strategies. This could mean that 1 out of 10 can have issues of going wherever they want because of communication failure. Moreover, Italian sign language is not known by everyone, so the statistic could be worse. In line with that, two questions of the survey show us the difficulty of deaf Seniors. On One hand, elderly does not feel really comfortable getting in contact with other elderly people in Europe. On the other hand 17% , nearly 2 out of 10, of the participants does not feel able to go wherever they want to because of diseases and illnesses or incapability. Moreover, 9% of the participants who define themselves able to go wherever they want, actually don't use this possibility. We can conclude, that almost 25% of the participants does not use opportunities outside their stay unless maybe they are at the place they live at. The other 75% instead declared to go outside at least some days of the week and to use several different opportunities which goes from sports, friends, trips and selfcare. Nevertheless, almost every participant have contact with other people, mostly relatives or friends. This shows the difficulty for deaf Seniors to approach other people outside their comfort zone. Moreover, 10% of the participants stated not to have any contact at all with somebody. This is in line with the Eurostat data. In fact, most of the participants feel well, happy or comfortable, while 20% of the respondents do not have positive feelings.

Very important is the aspect of knowledge about opportunities. Almost half of the representative of Deaf seniors in this survey does not know about any opportunities they could use, whereas the other half does, but only half of them, so 30% of all participants seems to use these opportunities. In fact, they stated to go to local deaf clubs, and in general use the opportunities listed in the survey, except for third age university



courses and training about health and wellbeing. This evidence gives us a hint about how much Seniors actually use the opportunities they have around. Although as stated before, more than half of participants feel they can go wherever they want, apparently, not all of them seem to use the opportunities given in the local area. In general, we can assume on one hand that Deaf seniors in Italy would like opportunities that comprehend some kind of activities that are typically more appropriate for seniors, like playing card or playing patanque, on the other hand some activities like sports and arts and tourism that could be more activating. This is also in line with the responses given by Deaf seniors who doesn't know any opportunities in their local area. They would like some activities related to family, walks, playing cards, films, arts and sports. Also other option were listed like cultural visits and workshops.

Trying to combine the two surveys of professionals and deaf seniors, we can state that in Italy the results seem to be in line with the national background concerning the living situation of deaf people and all seniors in Italy and that the two surveys are aligned with each other.

The surveys show us that deaf seniors are often alone and do not engage with opportunities around them, But the part of Deaf seniors that actually uses these opportunities have quite an active life: they leave most regularly their residence, do different activities but might have few contacts in their lives.

Participants, both seniors and professionals do not know enough about opportunities for education and activation available for deaf seniors. That confirms the issue noticed in the national background: professional social workers are not specialized in deafness or elderly deafness.

A recurring topic for both surveys is the relevance of sign language. Therefore, the DESEAL project will be able to contribute to filling this gap by developing information videos in sign language. Overall, the results give a quite clear picture of what is needed for deaf seniors and professionals to be more included and empowered, namely The needs in courses for the professionnals mostly in the area of communication and more offers in sign language on one hand, and the improvement of engagement for elderly in different activation activities that allows them to amplify their comfort zone.

An other recurring topic is the popularity of local deaf club. This shows also that deaf people are a strong community and that they feel more alike to interact with people they know and with whom they can communicate.

While the respondents were mostly interested in the topics of, tourism, deaf clubs and playing cards, sports and arts, which are activities mainly related to leisure, physical activities and social contacts, and showed less interest in topics related to education, professionals would like more educational activities.

For sure a topic of interest for the DESEAL project is the low use of internet or interest in developing skills in the ICT field by deaf seniors and professionals. The results of both surveys are in line with each other and also with the Italian national background statistics, and since most of the outputs of the DESEAL project will be digital, this could represent an issue for the Italian representatives. Therefore, the development of the guidelines and training materials for professionals working with deaf seniors will be key to familiarising the main target group with the outputs. For instance, the inclusion of topics related to digital literacy and ICT is fundamental in the materials to be developed in the DESEAL project as the low results in the survey clearly show that this is a field in which many deaf seniors are lacking competences, access, and interest.