

EQualCare Policy Report Germany



Alone but connected? Digital (in)equalities in care work and generational relationships among older people living alone

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1 Introduction

Ageing and digitalisation are two central drivers of current social transformation. Increased life expectancy, increasingly liquid family structures, and cultural changes to living later life have called into question assumptions that are sometimes taken for granted in regard to the life course and relationships between age groups. Digitalisation has brought a significant change to perceived and enacted care relationships in terms of distance and proximity between people. Whilst the digital age adds new cultural expectations of care, collaboration and mutuality, it has the potential to perpetuate inequalities between generations, income groups and countries due to available care resources and infrastructure. Living alone in later life raises specific challenges for care work and on- and offline care relationships, particularly in contexts where tension with close or immediate, hands-on, physical caring, as well as caring responsibilities involving younger generations, arise. Digitalisation has contributed to the connectedness of young and old generations within families – or lack thereof - as employment opportunities have forced younger generations to leave their hometowns. The COVID-19 pandemic and its accompanying repeated social lockdowns have led to a particular increase in the numbers of older people using mobile technologies to stay in touch with family and friends. As people live longer, seek more autonomous living, do not tolerate unsatisfactory family or household relationships, and are obliged for various reasons to live alone either temporarily or on a more permanent basis, living alone has become a central theme to understanding later life. Living alone also necessitates some degree of self-care. Thus, an aspect of great empirical, policy and societal interest is the relation of (self-)care of older people and the digital webs of caring work towards and from family members, friends, and indeed, wider circles of neighbours, acquaintances and those of similar service or mutual co-operation organisations and networks.

EQualCare: Alone but connected? Digital (in)equalities in care work and generational relationships among older people living alone is a three-year international project involving four countries: Finland, Germany, Latvia and Sweden. The project is part of the Joint Programming Initiative (JPI) “More Years Better Lives” of the European Commission and started its work in April 2021. The project is funded by national research councils: the Academy of Finland, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Germany), the Ministry of Education and Science (Latvia), and the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare. EQualCare aims to further understanding of, and policy development on, the intersections of digitalisation with intergenerational care work and

care relationships of older people living alone, and to contribute to reducing inequalities through collaboration and co-design. For information on the scope of the project and the national research teams, please visit: <https://jp-demographic.eu/projects/equalcare/>

EQualCare interrogates inequalities by gender, cultural and socio-economic background between countries, with their very different demographics and policy backgrounds. As a first step into empirical analysis, the policy review aims to set the stage for a better understanding of, and policy development on, the intersections of digitalisation with intergenerational care work and care relationships of older people living alone in Germany.

The policy review will follow a critical approach, in which the problems policy documents address are not considered objective entities, but rather discursively produced knowledge that renders visible some parts of the problem which is to be solved as other possible perspectives are simultaneously excluded (Ahmed, 2007; Bacchi, 2009). Twenty publicly available documents have been studied to analyse the processes in which definitions of care work and digital (in)equalities are circulated, translated and negotiated between the different levels of national government, regional governments and municipalities as well as other agencies in Germany.

2 Background

This chapter provides background information on the social structure of Germany. After discussing the historical development of Germany after the Second World War (2.1), its political structure is presented (2.2), information on the demographic situation with a focus on the 60+ age group is given (2.3) and the income of this age group is discussed (2.4). Building on this, the structure of work and welfare (2.5), the organisation of care for old people (2.6) and the state of digitalisation in Germany (2.7) are presented.

2.1 Historical development of Germany after the Second World War

After the Second World War, Germany was divided into four occupation zones, three governed by the Western Allies of France, the United Kingdom and the US, and one by the Soviet Union. The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was founded in 1949 as a parliamentary democracy with a constitution. At the same time, the Soviet occupation zone became the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Until reunification 1990, there were two German states.

Also until 1990, the FRG had 12 federal states. In the GDR federal states were replaced by 14 districts with administrative duties. The GDR was organized top-down by the Central Political Committee (Sturm, 2013). In the federal organization of the FRG both before and after reunification, decision making was and continues to be decentralized to the federal governments. Responsibilities that could not or cannot be met at that level were and continue to be organized at the national level (see section 2.5.1).

From 1952 onwards the border between FRG and GDR was hardened, and in 1963 the border was closed and the Berlin Wall erected (Geyer, 2021). In the FRG, the reinstatement of democratically organised social order and the Marshall Plan led to rapid economic growth. Demand for a growing labour force initiated labour recruitment agreements with Italy, Turkey, Greece and Spain in the 1960s. This first wave of workforce immigration transformed West Germany to a country of immigration, followed by immigration from post-Soviet countries in the 1990s and then free movement of labour within the European Union, leading to a further wave from Eastern European countries in the early 2000s (Baykara-Krumme & Nauck, 2011; Huneke, 2011).

While men and women were integrated into the labour market full-time in the GDR, a male-earner model was established in the FRG, with married women expected to stay at home. However, gender

equality was not fully achieved in the GDR, requiring women to combine both full-time employment and caring for dependents (Scholz, 2019).

Since the reunification of the two Germany states in 1989, Germany has consisted of 16 federal states, of which three are city-states (Berlin, Hamburg, Bremen), and a population of about 80 million. There are considerable differences between rural and urban areas, partly due to rural-urban migration, particularly among younger age groups. Many rural areas, particularly in Eastern Germany, are characterized by shrinking local infrastructures and an older population (BBSR, 2021). The latter is a particularly stark development in eastern Germany, where there are more rural areas and migration by younger people has been continuous.

2.2 Organisation of policy structure

Germany's political system is characterised by the federalism enshrined in its constitution. This means that, in addition to those at the national level, the policies of the 16 federal states play an essential role. Legislation in Germany takes place through the interaction of the national parliament (Bundestag) and the representation of the federal states in the form of the Federal Council of Germany (Bundesrat). Additionally, the Federal Council plays a role in the administration of the Federal Republic and affairs concerning the European Union. Certain policy areas are entirely within the competence of the federal states (e.g. education). The executive branch acts both at the national level through the federal government - which is composed of the chancellor and the ministries - and at the level of the federal states, each of which also has a prime minister and various ministries (Schmidt, 2007, pp. 196–220). In terms of state organisational law, the municipalities are part of their respective federal states and thus do not represent a separate federal level. However, they have a constitutionally guaranteed right to self-government and thus a certain independence. In addition, the municipalities take on tasks as local administrative bodies of the federal states (Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat, 2022).

At the national level, the most important ministry regarding older people is the Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ). However, the creating and enacting of policy for the older population is also divided between the federal government and the federal states/municipalities. Policy on and affecting older people is not one of the municipalities' compulsory tasks, but the municipal level nevertheless has a key role to play, since the needs of daily life and the living environment can only be shaped at the municipal level (BAGSO, 2017).

There are no institutions for the direct representation of older people. However, there are senior citizens' advisory councils at the national, federal state and municipal levels (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Landesseniorenvertretungen e.V.). In addition, there are lobby organisations that work for the interests of older people. The most important of these is the umbrella organisation of the Federal Association of Senior Citizens (BAGSO), which currently unites 120 nationwide organisations, associations and initiatives (BAGSO, 2022).

2.3 Demographic information 60+

Germany has a total population of 83.2 million. The gender structure is relatively equal, with 42.2 million women and 41.1 million men as of 2021 (Destatis, 2022). As is the case in many other countries, Germany is facing demographic ageing due to increasing life expectancy and persistently low birth rates. Today, every second person in Germany is over the age of 45 years, and every fifth person is older than 66 years (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2021b).

Both women and men are growing older, with the life expectancy of women at birth being 4.8 years longer than for men (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2021a). Women who were 65 years old between 2018 and 2020 had a remaining life expectancy of 21.1 years, while men had a remaining life expectancy of 17.9 years. The gap between men and women diminishes with increasing years. Women and men who turned 80 between 2018 and 2020 had a remaining life expectancy of 9.6 and 8.1 years respectively (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2021a).

The higher life expectancy of women leads to larger number of women in the population. However, the number of men and women is becoming more equal, with an overproportion of women in the 70+ age group (Institut Arbeit und Qualifikation der Universität Duisburg-Essen, 2021).

AGE	MEN	WOMEN
60-70	48.5%	51.5%
70-80	45.7%	54.3%
80-90	39.9%	60.1%
90+	27.1%	72.9%

Figure 1: Population by age group and gender. Source: Institut Arbeit und Qualifikation der Universität Duisburg (2021): Bevölkerung nach Altersgruppen und Geschlecht. Online: https://www.sozialpolitik-aktuell.de/files/sozialpolitik-aktuell/_Politikfelder/Bevoelkerung/Datensammlung/PDF-Dateien/abbVIII3.pdf accessed 16/09/2022

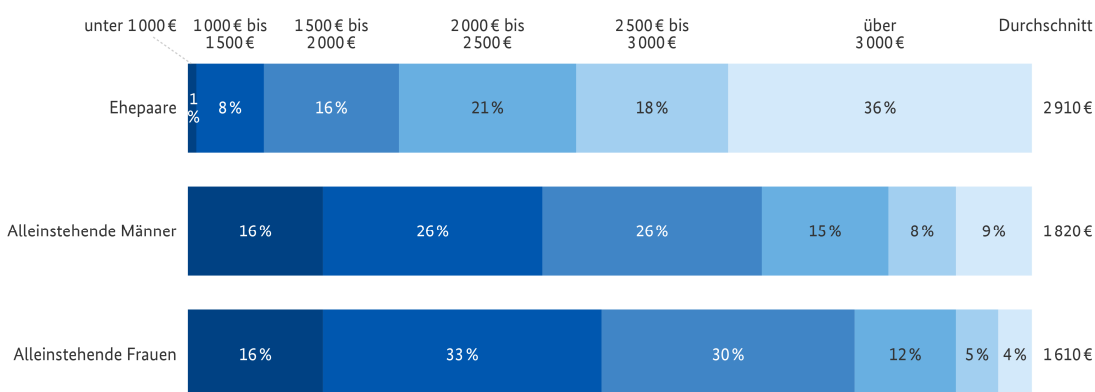
Persons aged 65 years and over are more likely to live alone than those belonging to younger age groups. 33.8 per cent of the 65+ year-olds live alone compared with 20.7 per cent of the general population. Particularly women aged 65+ live alone (44,3 per cent), while men of the same age are as likely to live alone as the general population (men 65+: 20.8 per cent; general population: 20.7 per cent). The rate of persons living alone increases with age. While only 24.4 per cent of persons aged 65 to 70 years live in one-person households, 67.4 per cent of 90+ year-olds live alone (Tesch-Römer & Engstler, 2020)

2.4 Income groups 60+

The majority of monthly income is based on pension payments, followed by private savings. Income through paid employment or other pension plans is less frequent. The organisation of the pension system is explained in Chapter 2.4.

Haushaltseinkommen der Bevölkerung ab 65 Jahren, 2019

Höhe des monatlichen Nettoeinkommens nach Haushaltstyp



Datenquelle: Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales (Alterssicherungsbericht 2020); Berechnungen: Bundesinstitut für Bevölkerungsforschung
 Bildlizenz: CC BY-ND 4.0 (Bundesinstitut für Bevölkerungsforschung 2021)



Figure 2: Household income of population aged 65 and over. The table shows the amount of net monthly household income by household type. The first row shows the income distribution for married couples, the second for single men and the third for single women. Source: Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales (Alterssicherungsbericht 2020), Berechnungen: Bundesinstitut für Bevölkerungsforschung.

The amount of monthly income varies considerably among the population aged 65 years and over. Older women living alone have on average less income than men living alone. Every sixth person aged 65+ living alone has an income of less than €1000 per month. Three per cent of the population aged 65 and over received top-up payments (Grundsicherung) on their pensions (Demografieportal, 2021), although the group of eligible persons is assumed to be higher (Bäcker & Kistler, 2020). Moreover, there is a discrepancy between the top-up payments and the at-risk-of-poverty-rate. Germany follows the definition of relative income poverty as agreed by EU member states, which is defined as income below 60 per cent of the median income of the total population. The at-risk-of-poverty-rate is 15.7 per cent in the 65+ age group (Statista, 2021) and was estimated to be €999 per month for one-person households in 2017 (Bäcker & Kistler, 2020). However, top-up payments on pensions are lower than the median at-risk-of-poverty-rate and require recipients to use up savings before becoming eligible (Bäcker & Kistler, 2020).

Women are more affected by poverty in later life than men and are more likely to receive top-up payments (Romeu-Gordo & Sarta, 2020). Over the past 15 years, poverty rates in later life have been on the rise.

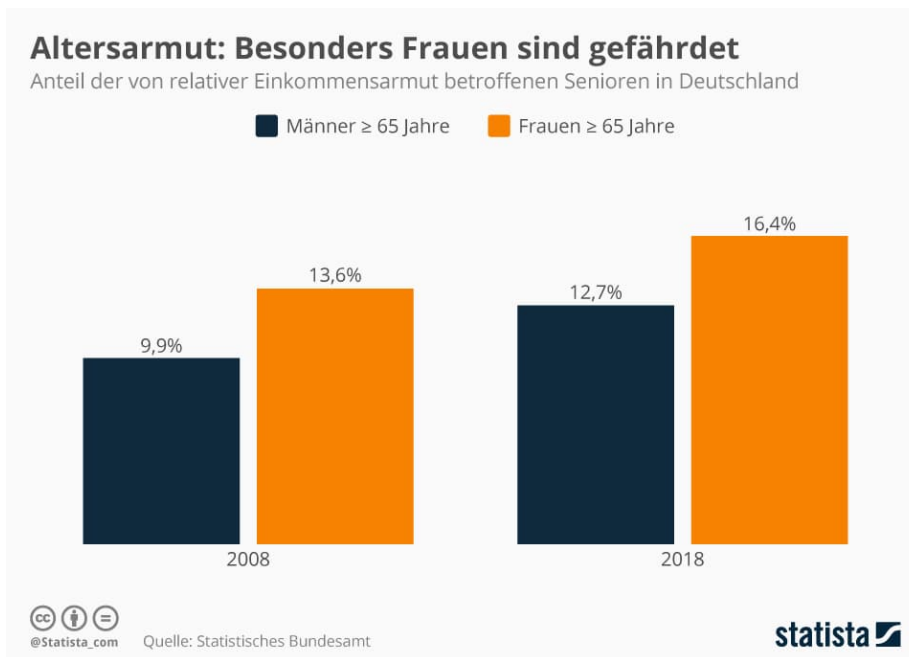


Figure 3: Poverty in old age: Women are particularly at risk. Proportion of seniors in Germany affected by relative income poverty. Black: men, orange: women. Source: Statistisches Bundesamt (2019): Altersarmut. Besonders Frauen sind gefährdet. Online: <https://de.statista.com/infografik/19906/risiko-fuer-altersarmut-in-deutschland-nach-geschlecht/> accessed 16/09/2022

2.5 Work and welfare structured

The social security system in Germany is divided into five insurance systems (often referred to as “pillars”) covering: health, care, accident, pension and unemployment. Health insurance is the oldest of the five pillars, founded in 1883, and care insurance is the youngest pillar, introduced in 1995 (Schlüter, 2021). The five insurance pillars are based on the principle of solidarity: every person who pays into the system and who is affected long term by ill health, care needs, injury, old age or unemployment can expect to receive payments. All five insurance systems are funded through membership payments. Health and care insurance are mandatory for all persons living in Germany. Pension insurance is mandatory for all employees, with contributions scaled to income levels. Contributions to health, care and pension insurance are shared in equal parts by employees and their employers, with extra funding coming from national budgets.

The pension insurance is founded on the principle of a generational contract. Employees fund the pension payments of current pensioners, thus securing their entitlement to future payments in their retirement, funded in turn by the following generation. Pension payments are calculated on the basis of the amount of contribution paid and years of contribution. Points can also be gained for caring for children and family members. Changes in work patterns, like more short-time and temporary

employment, and demographic change are increasing pressure on the pension system. In 2019 the ratio of pension contributors and receivers was 2.1:1, compared with a ratio of 6:1 in 1962 (Bundesinstitut für Bevölkerungsforschung, 2021).

Pension insurance is regulated by national legislation, but there are specific regulations for pension recipients in East and West Germany, mainly affecting the amount of the pension payments. Since the last reform of the pension insurance system in 2012, state retirement age has risen from 65 to 67 years for men and women. This increase in the retirement age is being introduced incrementally for birth cohorts from 1964 onward and will be completed by 2031. Transition into retirement before state retirement age leads to a reduction in pension payments. Rates of early retirement were high in Germany up to the reform 2001, when deductions to pensions were minimal or avoidable. Policies on extending working lives have contributed to making the transition processes into retirement more flexible (e.g., Wanka, 2020). The development of average retirement ages is shown in Figure 4:

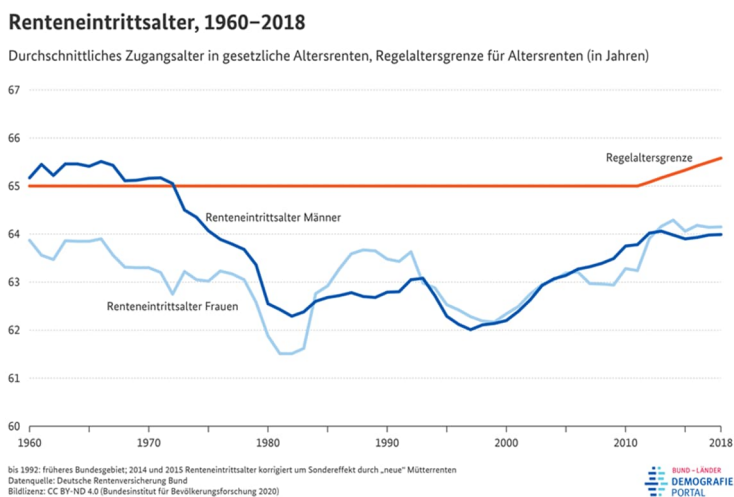


Figure 4: Retirement age 1960-2018. Orange line: Standard retirement age; dark blue line: actual retirement age men; light blue line: actual retirement age women. Source: Bund-Länder Demografieportal (2022): Renteneintrittsalter 1960-2018 Online: <https://www.demografie-portal.de/DE/Fakten/renteneintrittsalter.html> accessed 16/09/2022

The minimum number of years of contribution is five years, and there are specific regulations for retirement due to incapacity and for widows/widowers. Pension payments in these cases are made up of portions of the pension payments of the deceased combined with the payments of the bereaved. The aim is to secure the income of bereaved persons who do not have a large pension themselves.

In addition to the national pension system there are occupational pension schemes and private pension plans. The amounts paid into the schemes and duration of payments determine the pension levels in these systems. With the reform of state pension insurance in 2001, employees have been incentivised to secure their income in later life by contributing to occupational or private pension plans, as the state pension insurance level will decline to 43 per cent by 2030 (Romeu-Gordo & Sarta, 2020). The gender-pension gap amounts to 46 per cent in Germany, with the gap being more pronounced in West Germany than in East Germany: this is one of the highest rates in Europe (Romeu-Gordo & Sarta, 2020).

2.6 Organisation of care of older persons

The concept of care in the EQualCare Project is not limited to health and physical care but is defined as the totality of all relationships in which older persons receive and give care. This broad concept of care also includes low-threshold assistance in everyday organisation, advice and emotional care. However, in this chapter we focus on regulations and background data with respect to healthcare in later life, as they provide the legal basis to social provision into old age in Germany. Moreover, with their emphasis on maintaining independence and living at home, these policies are central to understanding living alone in later life. Health and care insurance are not age-related and are constituted on the basis of illness, defined as an irregular physical or mental state that requires treatment, leads to incapacity (to work), or both (Rixen, 2020, p. 314).

The responsibility of care insurance sets in when an illness becomes long-term (at least six months) and is considered non-treatable. An assessment of independence in six areas (mobility, cognitive and communicative capacity, mental health, self-care, capacity to administer medicinal and therapeutic treatments, and organisation of everyday life and social contacts) determines the level of care, from grade 1 (moderate needs) to 5 (intense needs). As the process of applying for an assessment of care needs and the assessment itself are considered complex, every person in need of care as well as informal care providers are entitled to care consultations (Rixen, 2020; § 7a SGB XI). The aim of the care insurance is to support a person with care needs in such a way that they can live an independent and self-directed life as much as possible (§ 2 SGB XI). Personal wishes are to be taken into account as well as gender-specific and culturally-specific needs § 1 SGB XI. Independent and self-directed living are described as central to the care insurance system. The benefits of the care insurance are to support care at home and the care provided by relatives, friends and neighbours through personal care budgets, so as to ensure that persons in need of care can remain

in their homes for as long as possible. A reform of care insurance in 2022 has increased the budgets for short-term care and long-term care in care homes, but not for care at home, and has included a capped budget of €50 per month for digital care applications. Despite these changes, benefits towards domestic care or short-term home care accommodation precede institutional care arrangements § 3 SGB XI. The care system in Germany has been described as “conservative-compensatory” (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999/2003) or “family-based” (Backes et al., 2008).

Three-quarters of the people who receive benefits through care insurance are cared for at home, predominantly by female family members (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2022, own calculations). In addition, there is a large number of people who need help in everyday life but do not yet fall under the care insurance criteria (Klaus & Vogel, 2019). With a growing interest of the state in keeping all adults of working age in employment, a scheme that allows carers to take time off work has come into being. Care secondments are capped at six months and can be taken full- or part-time. A further three-month secondment can be taken for supporting a person during their end-of-life care. Unlike parental leave arrangements (up to three years for every child under eight years and payment for up to 12 months), there is no financial payment attached to care secondments. Carers are eligible for an interest-free loan from the Ministry of Family and Social Affairs.

2.7 Digitalisation

In the Digital Economy and Society Index of the European Commission, Germany is rated 11 of the 27 member states (European Commission, 2021, p. 2). For specific indicators, such as “digital competence” and “software competence”, Germany is rated above the EU average (European Commission, 2021, p. 6). The supply of broadband varies considerably between rural and urban areas, however, though the coverage in rural areas is above EU average (European Commission, 2021, p. 9). Access to public services online is on the other hand is below EU average. To enhance the digital access to public services an ‘Online-Zugangs-Gesetz’ (Digital Access Law) (2017) that obliges administrative bodies at the federation and federal levels to offer their services online (European Commission, 2021, p. 16) was passed in 2017. In addition, the ‘Digitale-Versorgungs-Gesetz’ (Digital Public Service Law) (2019) requires health insurance companies to expand their digital competencies in health care (European Commission, 2021, p. 17).

The year 2017 also introduced a State Minister for Digitalisation, with the aim of coordinating and improving the collaboration of state ministries on issues of digitalisation. In addition, the new

Ministry has issued a strategy paper on digitalisation that sets out tasks for a digital transformation. This paper will be discussed in the critical policy analysis in Chapter three.

Over 90 per cent of the German population is online or uses the internet (D21, 2021). The remaining 10 per cent - about 6.3 million people - are offline or do not use the internet. The digital divide is most pronounced in terms of gender, age and level of formal education, with more women in higher age groups and with low levels of formal education not using the internet (Huxhold & Otte, 2019). A particular area of growth in online households can be found among one-person households, which had previously been below the average digital index (D21, 2021).

Age continues to be relevant in terms of uptake of digital devices and use of internet. However, older cohorts are making the digital transition in ever increasing numbers. The proportion of people who do not have access to the internet is only 3.3 per cent among 46 to 60 year-olds, and 8.4 per cent for 61 to 75 year-olds. The proportion is more pronounced for age groups above 75 years, with 47.8 per cent having no access to the internet (Kortmann et al., 2021). The comparison between 2017 and 2020 shows that the number of older people offline has also decreased from 17 to 13 percent due to the pandemic (Kortmann et al., 2021). Overall, a closure of the gap between the young and old is noticeable, as more cohorts of people who have used digital technologies in their private and working lives move into retirement. The influence of education and financial resources, however, will continue to be relevant to inequalities in digitalisation due to gender, education, household size and income (D21, 2021; Kortmann et al., 2021).

Access to the internet continues to be particularly restricted for people living in care and nursing homes, as few homes have the relevant infrastructure in place. Digital access points are often only available in communal areas and can be subject to extra charges. As a result, the proportion of older people online in care homes is lower than that of the same age group living at home. Given the strict social distancing rules and temporary social isolation of care home residents during the first waves of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021, the lack of internet access potentially increased their level of isolation (Endter et al., 2020).

3 Critical Analysis

The following chapter focuses on the analysis of official documents that deal with the interplay of living alone in old age, care and digitalisation. First, the method (3.1) and the documents (3.2) are presented, then the results of the analysis (3.3) for each topic area (3.3.1) and in connection with other topic areas (3.3.2).

3.1 Methodology and Methods

The following analysis of policy documents follows the approach developed by Bacchi known as WPR: “What is the Problem Represented?”. The WPR approach is a poststructuralist, critical (Foucauldian) analysis of knowledge that aims to look behind the “conduct of conduct”, i.e. the thinking behind the actions of certain (powerful) social actors (e.g. governments and their organisations) who want to change social relations at the micro level through policy. In the WPR approach, the problems policy documents address are not considered objective entities, but rather discursively produced knowledge that renders visible some parts of the problem which is to be solved while simultaneously excluding other possible perspectives (Ahmed, 2007; Bacchi, 2009).

This methodological approach is appropriate for EQualCare, as the project sets out to produce policy recommendations, and because its focus on digitalisation and care in later life has already been deemed worthy of attention in policy terms. Moreover, other areas of interest to EQualCare such as living alone and intergenerational care relationships, have not received much policy attention. The WPR approach sets out to find answers to “what has been deemed to be problematic” so that the answers can shed light on how the themes of EQualCare are already being defined and addressed.

Alongside understanding how problems are framed, this critical approach sets out to reveal how social actors manage political arguments, and as a result, how certain groups of citizens (e.g. older people) are identified as worthy of investment and thus become target populations (Schneider & Ingram, 1993) for social policy. In line with the understanding that policies make citizens (Campbell, 2003), the analysis will show how policy renders certain groups visible while ignoring others.

Publicly available documents are analysed to show the processes in which definitions of “older people”, “living alone”, “care work”, and “digital (in)equalities” are circulated, translated and negotiated between the legislative levels in Germany. The review aims to provide a detailed overview of existing knowledge and to identify knowledge gaps in Germany, so as to develop policy

indicators according to the policies and actions in place. In a first step, the four central elements of EQualCare (living alone, older people, care, digitalisation) were translated into six areas of analysis. An overview of the areas is provided in Figure 5. The areas enable the analysis of policies related to one element but also in combination with another element (e.g. older people and digitalisation). Thus, the areas of analysis do not cover all possible combinations of the four central elements, but rather the ones that appear pertinent on the basis of what is known about living alone in later life.

AREA OF ANALYSIS					
OLDER PEOPLE LIVING ALONE	OLDER PEOPLE AND CARE OF OLDER PEOPLE	OLDER PEOPLE AND DIGITALISATION	OLDER PEOPLE	DIGITALISATION	DIGITALISATION AND PEOPLE LIVING ALONE
Who are “older people living alone”? What is the problem and how can it be understood?	Who are older people in policy? What are care and care systems of older people according to policy? What is the problem and how can it be understood? (What problem does the care system represent?)	What is digitalisation as it relates to older people and older people’s needs? What is the problem and how can it be understood?	Who are “older people”? What is the problem and how can it be understood?	What is digitalisation? What is the problem and how can it be understood?	What is digitalisation as it relates to people living alone and how can it be understood?
What is not mentioned?	What is not mentioned?	What is not mentioned?	What is not mentioned?	What is not mentioned?	What is not mentioned?
What effects are produced by this problem representation?		What effects are produced by this problem representation?	What effects are produced by this problem representation?		What effects are produced by this problem representation?
How has this representation come about?		How has this representation come about?	How has this representation come about?		How has this representation come about?
DIGITALISATION CONNECTED TO CARE AND OLDER PEOPLE LIVING ALONE (OVERARCHING ANALYSIS)					

Figure 5: Areas of Analysis

The analysis was guided by posing the questions for each of the selected documents (see Chapter 3.2). Depending on which of the six areas of analysis the respective document was aligned to some questions were not relevant. For the overarching analysis, the connection of digitalisation and care relationships of older people living alone, the questions were integrated inductively, on the basis of how the documents addressed the issues at stake, across areas of the analysis. The results section will present the findings of the integrated analysis.

3.2 Documents analysed

A total of 20 policy documents were chosen for the critical analysis. The selection process was guided by the areas of analysis and included documents published in the context of law and social policy, but also included reports commissioned by ministries at national and local levels, as well as statements and commentaries from lobby organisations related to these commissioned reports and more generally on the themes living alone, old age and care. At the same time, the number of documents had to be limited to ensure a thorough analytical process. An overview of all selected documents and how they were categorised is provided in Figure 6. The selection process was also guided by the federal structure of policy making in Germany as described in Chapter 2.4. Thus, legislation on care, health and social care comprise the first three documents. These are followed by two policy reports on the situations of older people in Germany commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. A commission of scientists from various disciplines writes the reports, which are published every four years or once per legislative period, on a specific topic. The 2016 report focused on care and shared responsibility at local level, and the 2020 report focused on digitalisation (documents 4 & 6). The reports were published together with a statement of the federation government. The statements associated with each of the reports have been considered separate documents as they are different in tone, purpose and authorship to the reports themselves (documents 5 & 7). Lobby organisations for older people widely echo the findings of the reports, issuing statements and recommendations in response (documents 8, 9 and 11). The commission for the report on digitalisation additionally published a paper about the connection of digitalisation to the pandemic (document 10). In light of the new government that began work in autumn of 2021, the coalition agreement of 2021 (document 15) was chosen to show how future policy development might proceed, which led to the inclusion of a new national policy on digitalisation (document 17). In line with the federal structure of Germany, political reports on digital implementation strategies at the level of the federal state of Hesse and

on municipal levels (where the participatory research projects of EQualCare in Germany are based) have been included (documents 18-20). Finally, four publications by national lobby organisations on issues of ageing and digitalisation are also part of the analysis (documents 12, 13, 14 & 16).

	German Title	English Title	Year of Publication	Author	Type of document	Short title
1	Sozialgesetzbuch (SGB XI) Elftes Buch – Soziale Pflegeversicherung	Social Code XI – Care insurance	1994, amended 2014	German Parliament	Law	SGB XI
2	Sozialgesetzbuch (SGB V) Fünftes Buch – Gesetzliche Krankenversicherung	Social Code V – Health insurance	1988, amended 2021	German Parliament	Law	SGB V
3	Sozialgesetzgebung (SGB XII) Zwölftes Buch – Sozialhilfe	Social code XII – Social aid	2003, amended 2021	German Parliament	Law	SGB XII
4	Siebter Altenbericht¹: Sorge und Mitverantwortung in der Kommune – Aufbau und Sicherung zukunftsfähiger Gemeinschaften	Seventh Report on the Elderly: Care and Shared Responsibility in the Municipal Community	2016	Members of the Expert Commission for the Seventh Report on the Elderly	Political report	7th Ageing Report
5	Siebter Altenbericht: Stellungnahme der Bundesregierung	Seventh Report on the Elderly: Statement Government	2016	Federal Government	Government statement	Statement 7th Ageing Report
6	Achter Altersbericht: Ältere Menschen und Digitalisierung.	Eighth Government Report on Older People: Older People and Digitization	2020	Members of the Expert Commission for the Eighth Government Report on Older People	Political report	8th Ageing Report
7	Achter Altersbericht: Stellungnahme der Bundesregierung	Eighth Government Report on Older People: Statement Government	2020	Federal Government	Government statement	Statement 8th Ageing Report
8	Achter Altersbericht: Stellungnahme BAGSO – Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Seniorenorganisationen	Eighth Government Report on Older People: Statement BAGSO - Federal Working Group of Senior Citizens' Organisations	2020	BAGSO	Statement by lobby organisation	BAGSO 2020
9	Achter Altersbericht: Stellungnahme Fachbeirat Digitalisierung und Bildung für ältere Menschen	Eighth Government Report on Older People: Statement by the Advisory Board on Digitization and Education for Older People	2020	Advisory Board on Digitisation and Education for Older People (DigiBÄM)	Statement by lobby organisation	DigiBÄM 2020

¹ Both the English and the German titles of the Ageing Reports changed from the 7th (2016) to the 8th Ageing Report from “Altenbericht” to “Altersbericht”, and from “Report on the Elderly” to “Government Report on Older People”.

10	Positionspapier: Ältere Menschen und digitale Technologien in der Zeit der Corona Pandemie	Position paper of the Commission Eighth Government Report on Older People: Older people and digital technologies in the time of the coronavirus pandemic.	2020	Members of the Expert Commission for the Eighth Government Report on Older People	Position paper by expert commission	Covid Amendment, 2020
11	Positionspapier: Soziale Ungleichheit durch Zugang für alle reduzieren – Chance vertan	Position paper: Reducing social inequality through access for all – an opportunity missed	2020	Stiftung Digitale Chancen	Position paper by lobby organisation	Digitale Chancen 2020
12	Positionspapier: Ältere Menschen in der digitalen Welt	Position paper: Older people in the digital world	2016/2017	BAGSO	Position paper by lobby organisation	BAGSO 2016/17
13	Digitalpakt Alter	Digital Strategy for Ageing	2021	BAGSO, BMFSFJ	Strategy by lobby organisation, Federal Ministry	Digitalpakt, 2021
14	Impulspapier für den Koalitionsvertrag 2021	Impulse paper for the coalition agreement 2021: Advisory Board on Digitisation and Education for Older People (DigiBÄM)	2021	Fachbeirat Digitalisierung und Bildung für ältere Menschen (DigiBÄM)	Impulse paper by lobby organisation	DigiBÄM, 2021
15	Koalitionsvertrag 2021	Coalition agreement 2021	2021	SPD/FDP/Bündnis 90, Die Grünen	Political document	Coalition agreement 2021
16	Positionspapier: Den digitalen Wandel im höheren Lebensalter in Deutschland gestalten	Position Paper DGGG (German Society for Gerontology and Geriatrics eV): Shaping the digital transformation in older age in Germany	2021	DGGG (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Gerontologie und Geriatrie eV)	Paper by lobby organisation	DGGG 2021
17	Digitalisierung gestalten. Umsetzungsstrategie der Bundesregierung	Shaping Digitalization. Implementation strategy of the Federal Government	2021	Federal Government	Political report	Digitalization Strategy 2021
18	Strategie Digitales Hessen: Intelligent, Vernetzt, Für Alle	Digital Hesse Strategy: Intelligent, Connected, For All	2016	Regional Government	Political report	Strategy Hesse 2016
19	Digitales Hessen: Wo Zukunft zuhause ist	Digital Hesse: Where the future is at home	2021	Regional Government	Political report	Digital Hesse 2021
20	Smart City Frankfurt	Smart City Frankfurt	2021	City of Frankfurt	Political report	Smart City FFM 2021

Figure 6: Selected documents

3.3 Results

Most of the selected documents only deal with one of the areas of analysis, with the exception of ageing and digitalisation. Living alone is an aspect that is only addressed in the subtext of some of the documents. The Eighth Government Report on Older People (2020) is the only document that combines three aspects: digitisation, old age and care. Thus, in order to show both the effects of the single subjects and the intersections, the analytical areas of living alone, digitisation and care are presented as standalone areas (3.3.1). In a second step, their interactions with other areas are presented (3.3.2).

3.3.1 Standalone subjects

3.3.1.1 Older people living alone

We have addressed the wide scope of living along with a focus on old age. Living alone in old age is not a central theme in any of the documents examined and appears explicitly only in passing. However, living alone is implicitly addressed in some of the papers, since the primary objective in the care of older people in Germany is to enable them to live in their own homes for as long as possible. The goal of living at home is a central theme in many of the reports examined (7th Ageing Report, 2016; 8th Ageing report, 2020), as it is located at the interface of the topics of old age, care and digitalisation. The need for and organisation of care for people who live (alone) at home is a central theme in the legislation on care (SGB XI) and in the Seventh Report on the Elderly. Care legislation in Germany is age-independent and follows the premise that people who need care, regardless of their age, should be cared for at home for as long as possible. Only when this becomes impossible should live-in or residential care be considered and subsequently receive financial support (§ 3 SGB XI). The Seventh Report on the Elderly assumes that it is the wish of older people to be able to live in their own homes for as long as possible. On this basis, the report asks how municipalities must be organised to make that possible.

3.3.1.2 Older People

Age is of different significance in the documents examined and is addressed in different ways. Social legislation is not age-specific with regard to care and health insurance. Age only plays a role in

relation to pensions and retirement ages in the sense of calendar age. In the government reports examined, age is a central topic in relation to demographic change (7th Ageing Report, 2016). It is emphasised that this change brings with it both opportunities and challenges. However, the opportunities are usually mentioned briefly and the challenges are placed at the centre. A similar situation can be observed with regard to the images of old age negotiated in the reports. In the Eighth Government Report on Older People, the scientific commission focuses on a competence-oriented image. In this understanding, older people are able and willing to learn digital competencies and to participate in digitisation. Nevertheless, implicit throughout the commission's report and especially the government's statement on the report is an idea of older people as a population group that not only requires a great deal of support in using digital devices, but has to be convinced of their benefits and motivated to use them (Statement 8th Ageing report, 2020, 10; 18; 24). A deficit perspective on old age thus creeps in through the back door. The foundation Digitale Chancen highlights the superficial focus on a competence-oriented view of people. This view, they comment, prevents the report from exploring which groups of older people have to overcome particular hurdles in the area of digitalisation and how they can be supported (Digitale Chancen, 2020, p. 10).

The Seventh Report on the Elderly in particular points out that the group “older people” is extremely heterogeneous. There are major differences in terms of socio-economic status, health, participation opportunities, unequal conditions in urban and rural areas, and in different regions (7th Ageing Report, 2016). A closer look at the report show that older people are implicitly divided into two groups: those who can take care of themselves and who are addressed as active agents of society, especially with regard to the possibility of recruiting them as volunteers, and a second group, which is described as in need of care and support and is thus comprised of passive recipients. Implicitly, a separation of an active third, and a dependent fourth age is taken up and reproduced. Persons with dementia are also included in the latter group. Most of the analysed papers were written and/or published before the pandemic so that the specific vulnerability of older people or the notion of an at-risk group is not raised.

3.3.1.3 Digitalisation

Digital transformation is predominantly understood as a positive transformation process that affects numerous areas of life. On the part of the state, digitalisation is seen as an opportunity that should be driven forward in the coming years. The focus here is on economic efficiency and digital skills. To this end, strategies are being developed to make the opportunities exploitable, the benefits

experienceable and the risks manageable (Digitalization Strategy, 2021, p. 8). The federal government's digitalisation strategy, for example, contains an extensive list of projects and programs aimed at advancing digital development in Germany. Digitisation also occupies a positive and central position in the German government's coalition agreement of 2021-2025, and is seen as a field in which further investments should be made.

At the state level, it is firmly emphasised that digitalisation must be shaped "because technical-economic revolutions are not by nature gentle and benevolent" (Strategy Hesse, 2016, p. 5). Accordingly, limits are seen and set within this positive framing. In this context, digitalisation strategies are formulated to be geared towards people by placing them at the centre, so that digitalisation serves them and not the other way around (Digital Hesse, 2021, p. 4). Risks are addressed primarily in regard to issues of data protection. The strategies formulated and the state-supported programs referred to single out groups that are at risk of being left behind, including older people.

3.3.1.4 Older people and care

The topic of care is based on a narrow definition focused on the aspect of nursing. Different forms of help and support beyond physical care, which are provided by various groups of people such as relatives, neighbours, and professional caregivers (§ 3 SGB XI), are barely mentioned. The Seventh Report on the Elderly is an exception. Here, a distinction is made explicitly between informal care and physical nursing, and it is pointed out that a differentiation is on the one hand necessary to counteract a narrowing of care exclusively to nursing, but on the other hand, has been met with resistance, since it contradicts a uniform concept of nursing (7th Ageing Report, 2016, p. 194). In addition, the responsibility for care is located at the individual and family level, and premised around enabling people in need of care to stay at home for the as long as possible (§ 3 SGB XI).

Even if care beyond nursing is not explicitly addressed, it implicitly plays an essential role when neighbourhoods, families, peers and volunteers are addressed as important in relation to the care of older people or in relation to the teaching of digital skills (7th Ageing Report, 2016; 8th Ageing report, 2020; Digital Hesse, 2021).

3.3.2 Intersections

3.3.2.1 Ageing and Digitalisation

Digitalisation is framed as a potential means to deal with and counteract the effects of demographic change and urbanisation, which often leave older people in rural areas behind after younger cohorts have left. More generally, digitalisation is portrayed as a positive development that will help to manage Germany's ageing society, which is portrayed less favourably. Digitalisation is described as one strategy in responding to increasing care needs with fewer and fewer carers available. At the individual level, digitalisation is presented as an opportunity for autonomy and social participation in old age (Digital Hesse, 2021; Digitalization Strategy, 2021; Strategy Hesse, 2016).

A prominent position in this discussion is taken by the Eighth Ageing Report on the topic of digitalisation which, along with an analysis on the many aspects of digitalisation in later life, focuses on the promoting digital skills. Taking an educationalist perspective, the report calls for media competencies that understand digital skills not merely as one's becoming proficient in using digital devices, but as building capacities to understand and actively shape digital processes. This argument is based on the understanding that media competence needs to be person-centered and not machine/device-centered.

Comparisons with other generations are used to show the gap between generations/cohorts and increasing digitalisation. In this context, older people are often understood as offline and in danger of being left behind. Two aspects are seen as the main reasons why some older people remain non-users: first, old people do not want to participate in digitalisation and learn digital skills because they do not see its relevance for their lives, so that the costs involved appear higher than potential benefits. Issues around security and fraud also deter them from using the internet (BAGSO, 2016/2017). Secondly, dealing with technical devices in general and digital devices in particular is presented as a challenge for old people. Thirdly, awareness is raised for a considerable group of older people who are not able to acquire sufficient digital skills due to their physical or mental limitations (Digitale Chancen, 2020, 5; 10-12).

Within the group of old people, social differences and inequalities are considered, such as gender, age, education, socio-economic background, rural or urban lifestyle and ethnicity. In particular, people who experience poverty in old age are described as a group who do not have the necessary

funds to buy technological devices and pay for their running costs (BAGSO, 2016/2017, p. 3; DGGG, 2021). However, while the digital divide between generations is a central argument across documents, inequalities play a subordinate role. The analysis shows that migration and ethnicity in particular are not considered explicitly in the documents of the lobby organisations. One exception is the Seventh Report on the Elderly, which deals with the topic of inequalities within the group of older people and how it affects digitalisation over the course of fifty pages (7th Ageing Report, 2016, pp. 54–106).

The question of how to reduce or eliminate the digital divide is central to the policy documents on ageing (DGGG, 2021; DigiBÄM, 2020; Statement 8th Ageing Report, 2020). In contrast, policy documents not specifically addressing ageing, such as the coalition agreement, do not consider any digital divide and instead outline digital strategies for the future with a focus on children, schooling, education, and training, which mentions senior-friendly approaches in the envisioned digital space (Coalition agreement, 2021, p. 102). Similarly, DigiBÄM a policy focused on education, does not address the needs of older people (DigiBÄM, 2020). The analysis of the policy documents on ageing and digitalisation confirms that few programmes and little money are invested in reducing the digital divide in older age groups.

This lack of strategy for ensuring the integration of older people into current digitalisation is criticised in documents from lobby groups, such as (BAGSO, 2016/2017; DGGG, 2021). They show that the impulses provided by advisory boards such as DigiBÄM for the coalition negotiations have not been taken up, and that federal policy still does not address the intersection of digitisation, ageing and education. In their view, past and current political measures for digitalisation put the focus on economic factors rather than on the reduction of inequalities. Critics, like Foundation Digital Chance, argue that populations with no easy access to digitalisation are being ignored, and that recommendations to and demands of the federal government to change this have gone unheard for over twenty years (Digitale Chancen, 2020, pp. 4–5), leaving the intersection of ageing and digitalisation outside of the current political agenda.

Expert groups focusing on ageing, older people and (digital) technologies (BAGSO, 2016/2017, 2020; e.g. DGGG, 2021; DigiBÄM, 2020) call for nationwide, standardised, and low-threshold contact points and support services that are aimed specifically at older people. In doing so, they emphasise the role and potential of peer learning in voluntary structures. However, they highlight the need for paid staff in order to create a sustainable structure. In addition, the DGGG criticises that data

protection and ethical issues related to the use of technologies play a subordinate role or are decided over the heads of older users. Germany's largest lobby for older people, BAGSO, also makes the point that the decision not to use digital applications must remain possible. To ensure this, analogue options need to remain available across all relevant areas of society. Full civic participation without the internet and technological devices must remain a possibility, and not only for old people (BAGSO, 2016/2017, p. 2).

In response to the Eighth Government Report on Older People, BAGSO launched the programme 'Digitalpakt Alter' (Digital Strategy for Ageing). It draws on the programme 'Digitalpakt Schule' (Digital Strategy for Schools), which provides school children with access to digital devices and was launched in 2020 in reaction to the pandemic and the closure of schools. 'Digital Strategy for Ageing' received funding in 2021 by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, but for less than one year, and with a fraction of the necessary budget. In a bidding process, local organisations for older people could apply for a fixed one-off payment with which to buy digital devices, such as tablet computers, that in turn could be lent to older people wanting to learn digital skills. In small steps, the programmes funded by the federal government are being expanded into models for further development. The 'Digital Strategy for Ageing' is an example of how the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth promotes lighthouse projects for a short period of time without a broader view on continuity or sustainability.

The small-scale programmes aimed at reducing age-related digital divides stand in contrast to large-scale national strategies for digitalising central public services. In the social legislation on health (SGB V), organisation, communication and, in part, medical treatments, are being digitalised (SGB V). This law outlines that patient orientation is the central goal for the change § 20k, § 365 SGB V, with usage remaining voluntary for the time being. However, the future course of healthcare is set out in different paragraphs and laws such as the 'Digitale-Versorgungs-Gesetz' (Digital Public Service Law) and the 'Digitale-Versorgung-und-Pflege-Modernisierungs-Gesetz' (Digital Public Service and Nursing Modernisation Act). In which process, telemedicine is described as a solution to combat the absence of health infrastructure in rural areas (7th Ageing Report, 2016; 8th Ageing report, 2020). Policy on the federal level of Hesse has described telemedicine as a viable method for ensuring that immobile and older people can have their health and care needs met at home for as long as possible (Strategy Hesse, 2016).

Despite these planned structural changes, which require digital competences at the individual level, the SGB V §20k mentions the need to ensure the digital transitions of all groups, but does not include strategies. These also remain unmentioned in SGB XI, where the digitalisation of the care system is, among others, regulated in §8, §40a, §148. The subtext of increasing digitalisation between state and citizen includes two arguments that are specific to older people: it focuses on the advantages for older people of living an autonomous and independent life for as long as possible and doing so in their own homes. It does not take into account the everyday reality and the digital competences of the increasingly heterogeneous group of old people. Moreover, both arguments stress the importance of individual responsibility in remaining an independent citizen and thus avoiding becoming responsibility of the state. The arguments brought forward for the digitalisation of many aspects of life also underscore the benefits of staying at home for as long as possible, which chimes with existing policy on care (see Section 3.3.1).

The heterogeneity of the older population and inequalities among them are not addressed in the legal documents analysed. Support needs and special needs relating to physical, mental and financial resources are overlooked as are opportunities to establish customised solutions.

In summary, strategies to expand digital skills among older people appear to be short-term and sporadic in structure as well as reliant on voluntary work, whereas long-term aims and objectives, such as establishing, further developing and enhancing 'learning and digital competences' [Bildung und Digitale Souveränität] (Statement 8th Ageing Report, 2020, p.17) are merely mentioned. The recommendations and demands of organisations working for the needs of old people (BAGSO, 2016/2017, 2020; DGGG, 2021; DigiBÄM, 2020) remain unheard. While lobby organisations see digital education for older people as a backdrop and key to self-determination and full citizenship, there are no strategies at the state level ensure all groups are able to make the transition.

3.3.2.2 Old age and care

The principle of subsidiarity is key to national and federal policies on care; it recognises the importance of informal networks for the care of older people before formal care is funded (Statement 8th Ageing Report, 2020; Strategy Hesse, 2016). These networks not only include family members, but also friends and neighbours, as those responsible for older people in their buildings or neighbourhoods (7th Ageing Report, 2016; § 3 SGB XI). This bottom-up approach is presented in the context of enabling older people to live at home for as long as possible.

However, it does not address or recognise changes to family structures, employment or (global) locality of families. Relatives, especially children, often no longer live in the same place as their ageing parents. In addition, older people today have fewer children of their own than in the past, and daughters(-in-law) are in most cases employed. According to the Seventh Report on the Elderly, relationships between relatives remain stable despite greater physical distances, but support and care are more difficult to organise and provide (7th Ageing Report, 2016, 238; 241-242). This has shifted the focus to neighbours, friends and voluntary helpers as potential providers of support. However, the Seventh Report on the Elderly emphasises the problem that it is not in the nature of neighbourly help to take on long-term and binding tasks. It refers to studies showing that such networks are not desired or used by older people. This calls the idea of using neighbours to fill the gap left by relatives in care into question (7th Ageing Report, 2016, p. 259). Moreover, even where neighbours, relatives, volunteers and professional supporters are involved, they do not see themselves as a team, which can lead to further complications in terms of responsibility and information exchange.

In the documents analysed, older people are not only understood as people in need of care, but also as caregivers of other older people, and younger family or community members. The commission of the Seventh Report on the Elderly emphasises that older people, and especially older women, make significant contributions toward the care of relatives and people in their communities (7th Ageing Report, 2016, pp. 51–52). While the Seventh Report on the Elderly explicitly addresses the caring role of older people, it is often implicit in the other documents, when older people are addressed as a resource for voluntary work in private settings, e.g. for (grand)children and parents, as well as in local settings, e.g. teaching peers how to use digital tools. The documents address informal care across a range of possibilities, from neighbourhood help to voluntary work. Building support within the age group simultaneously reproduces the divide between the third (of active citizens) and fourth ages (passive citizens in need of [paid] support).²

² The intersection of digitalisation and care are not addressed as intertwining aspects because age is not included. However, age as a third aspect yields more promising results central for our analysis. Also, ageing and living alone is not taken in account because the intersection is not directly addressed in the analysed papers.

3.3.2.3 Digitalisation, age and care

Digitalisation and care, regardless of age, are considered in the Sozialgesetzbuch (Social Code) under the rubric of "digital care applications" § 39a, § 40a, b SGB XI. They are presented as additional sources of support for care, so as to minimise impairments and to increase the independence and the abilities of the person in need of care §41a SGB XI. However, the main focus of digitalisation strategies in care is on institutional care settings and training programmes for professional caregivers. Less attention is paid to digital applications for care provided at home. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, digital or distant assessment of care needs were worked into the national care system §147 f SGB XI. This could be the first step toward a more digitalised assessment process in the future, thus making the interim change permanent.

In the context of maintaining independence in old age, ambient assisted living (AAL) and smart homes are presented as instruments by means of which older people can remain at home despite increasing care needs. Especially for old people living alone, smart homes and digital emergency systems are seen as important tools in maintaining their independence. The notion of autonomy through digitalisation and technical devices is also presented as an economical factor in saving the costs of professional caregiving (7th Ageing Report, 2016, p. 8; 8th Ageing report, 2020, p. 64). This is exemplified in a calculation of potentially saved costs for the state (Strategy Hesse, 2016, p. 95). At the same time, the complementary role of technical aids and digitalisation in care is strongly emphasised, distancing the use of digital/technical care equipment (as "fake" care) from the idea of replacing human (real) care (8th Ageing report, 2020, p. 123). How AAL and smart homes may be implemented or become available is not defined (8th Ageing report, 2020, 72f.). At the municipal level, e.g. in the city of Frankfurt, concepts of Smart Cities and Age-Friendly Cities are mentioned but not connected (Smart City FFM, 2021).

Lobby organisations for older people draw attention to the connection between the use of digital devices and receiving help from family members when needed. They also draw attention to the fact that older people are often online indirectly, such as when shopping, appointments and access to information are organised by proxy through partners or family members (BAGSO, 2016/2017, p. 1). These people could also be key to providing access to digital devices, getting connected and supporting the use of digital technologies (DGGG, 2021, p. 11). What remains uncharted is how people without such support persons/networks go about their daily tasks when navigating increasingly digitalised areas of life.

In summary, the norm of staying at home for as long as possible is a strong narrative across policy and is enhanced through the digitalisation of everyday life and the relationship between state and individual. The combination of different caregivers and digital tools enables working people to provide care even if they do not live nearby. It supports caregivers and enables them to remain employed while providing care but provides less support (both in terms of time and money) than that afforded to parents caring for children.

4 Summary

In this policy review, twenty publicly available documents were studied in order to analyse the processes by which representations of care, ageing, living alone and digital (in)equalities are circulated, translated and negotiated between the different levels of national and federal governments and municipalities, as well as other agencies in Germany. Following the critical WPR approach by Bacchi (2009), the problems the policy documents address were considered to be discursively-produced knowledge that shows some part of the problem to be solved, while simultaneously deflecting from other aspects. As set out in Chapter 3.1, six areas of analysis were chosen with which to examine the documents. Returning to these areas of analysis and the questions from WPR (Who are/what is ...? What is the problem? What is not mentioned?), the representations can be summarised as thus:

People living alone: this group is not addressed explicitly in the reports; examples of people living alone are older persons.

Older people living alone: old age is represented more in terms of challenges (health, social connectedness) than opportunities; a deficit perspective frames the arguments made; living alone is not problematised and remaining independent in one's own home is presented as desirable and a norm.

Older people and care of older people: care is represented as nursing and care for older people is presented as the responsibility of families or personal networks beyond the family. Persons in need of care should be cared for in their homes for as long as possible; older people are represented both as being in need of care and as care providers.

Older people and digitalisation: older people are presented as a group at risk of being left behind; digitalisation for older people is presented as a potential means to deal with the challenges of an ageing population

Digitalisation: represented as a goal of its own and an unstoppable process; although affecting all parts of society, the focus is on the potential of economic development and younger age groups; data protection is represented as a challenge, as are groups at risk of being left behind, among which older people are counted.

Digitalisation and people living alone: digitalisation is presented as a potential means of supporting people's ability to stay at home and live independently for as long as possible; areas of implementation such as ambient assisted living focus on autonomy and the saving of (municipal/communal) spending.

In terms of what assumptions underly these representations, four themes were identified: firstly, ageing is framed largely as a challenge to society, whereas digitalisation is framed as a potential way to tackle social challenges, such as an ageing society. Secondly, challenges of ageing, such as need of care, are set at the individual level, requiring people to organise their care within their own families and immediate social networks, with state support following a principle of subsidiarity. This is characteristic of Germany's conservative welfare state policy (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999/2003), which is increasingly coming under strain as members of the adult population are employed while simultaneously providing for persons from younger and older age groups. Despite the financial support available to persons in need of care and to carers through care insurance, the strain of organising and performing care work is not removed. Thirdly, voluntary peer support provides the basis for addressing digital support needs and strategies. The BAGSO and DGGG publications highlight the important work done by voluntary peer support for digital training and the benefits this approach has (for instructors and learners); they also draw attention to the over-reliance on this form of unpaid support and call for an increase in professional support in ensuring all older people are supported in digital life (BAGSO, 2016/2017; DGGG, 2021). Fourthly, ageing as a hinderance to participation in digital life is seen as an interim challenge among younger old people already online.

5 Conclusion

Our analysis shows the discrepancy between policy papers with impact such as those on laws (SGB) and the coalition agreement, and position papers and policy reports with less power (e.g. 7th Ageing Report, 2016; 8th Ageing report, 2020; BAGSO, 2016/2017; DGGG, 2021; DigiBÄM, 2020; Statement 7th Ageing Report, 2016; Statement 8th Ageing Report, 2020). The former papers do not address the intersection of digitisation and ageing nor do they give it low priority, which can be seen in the low investment in providing structures (e.g. long-term projects and education programs) and the superficial presentation of these issues in current policy documents. Organisations and advocacy groups dealing with ageing, on the other hand, have been criticising this lack of investment for twenty years, and see too little change on the horizon (Digitale Chancen, 2020). Despite the pandemic, which has shown the important role of digitalisation in everyday life, and an increase in the use of digital devices by older people over time, this has not led to more infrastructure for groups of people either at risk of being left behind or in need of support to handle increasing digitalisation of civic participation. Whether the concrete measures outlined in the Eighth Government Report on Older People (Statement 8th Ageing Report, 2020) and the position paper by the German Society of Gerontology and Geriatrics (2021), that include the right to offline civic participation will be followed up on and remains to be seen. The analysis shows that the connection between ageing and digitalisation remains a marginal topic in current politics. The focus on older people merely as a potential group at risk of being left behind implies a deficit perspective on ageing and a homogenising of a large and diverse age group. Lessons learnt from the pandemic should not be interpreted in a one-sided way, by merely acknowledging the increasing number of (older) people moving online, but by acknowledging intersecting inequalities that mitigate social participation. Being able to communicate with friends and family online does not necessarily include being able to navigate and actively participate in digitalised state-civic engagements. Providing stable support systems for current groups of people marginally online or completely offline (at present predominantly found in the age groups 70+) has the potential to provide a policy basis for future populations in need of support.

6 References

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