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ALTER ALTERNATIVE SAFETY NETS

Erasmus+ Programme

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**Austrian National Report | Development of capacity building
methodology for educators of alternative education institutions
for adults**

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 1 Introduction | 4 |
| 2 Brief summary of the desk research and online questionnaires on how social and digital media are used for job search | 4 |
| 2.1 Desk research about how social and digital media are used for job search in Austria | 4 |
| 2.1.1 General context | 4 |
| 2.1.2 Job application channels in Austria | 5 |
| 2.1.3 Career portals | 7 |
| 2.1.4 Social media | 7 |
| 2.2 Online questionnaires on how social and digital media are used for job search | 8 |
| 3 Brief summary of the interviews with the focus groups | 13 |
| 3.1 Focus group with educators of adults having dropped out of school and attending alternative educational institutions | 13 |
| 3.1.1 Services offered by the interviewees’ institutions | 13 |
| 3.1.2 Main target groups/beneficiaries of the interviewees’ institutions | 13 |
| 3.1.3 Challenges faced by adults who want to improve their digital skills for job search | 13 |
| 3.1.4 Qualifications of adult education providers and their main challenges | 14 |
| 3.1.5 Interviewees’ opinion about importance of skills | 15 |
| 3.2 Focus Groups with adults having dropped out of school and attending alternative educational institutions | 16 |
| 3.2.1 Interviewees’ educational level and employment status | 16 |
| 3.2.2 Social media sites/networks used by the interviewees | 16 |
| 3.2.3 Main challenges faced by adults having dropped out of school in searching for a job | 17 |
| 3.2.4 Interviewees’ interest in receiving training for developing social and digital skills and competences | 18 |
| 3.2.5 Interviewees’ opinion about importance of skills | 19 |
| 4 Conclusions and recommendations | 20 |
| 5 Sources | 20 |

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1 Introduction

The content of O1 is to develop the most effective capacity building methodology for the educators of adults in alternative institutions, combining on the one hand the prerequisites in terms of skills and competences driven by how web-based job search is met now (mainly through social media) and on the other hand what is the existing level of digital skills & competences of adults attending these alternative educational institutions.

The key aim of this report is the identification and study of the main methodologies, practices and tools applied by employers through the use of social and digital media for attracting, recruiting, screening and selecting personnel.

2 Brief summary of the desk research and online questionnaires on how social and digital media are used for job search

2.1 Desk research about how social and digital media are used for job search in Austria

Die Berater® has conducted a desk research in Austria about how social and digital media are used for job search, capitalizing on information provided by employers' stakeholders in their countries: corporate annual reports, researches and press releases made by Chambers and other employers' associations, articles, announcements etc.

2.1.1 General context

Already in 2011, more than **85%** of all job vacancies in Austria were published on companies' websites and more than two thirds on online career portals (e.g. karriere.at, meinjob.at, StepStone)¹. The majority of Austrian companies prefers **e-mail** and **online form applications**².

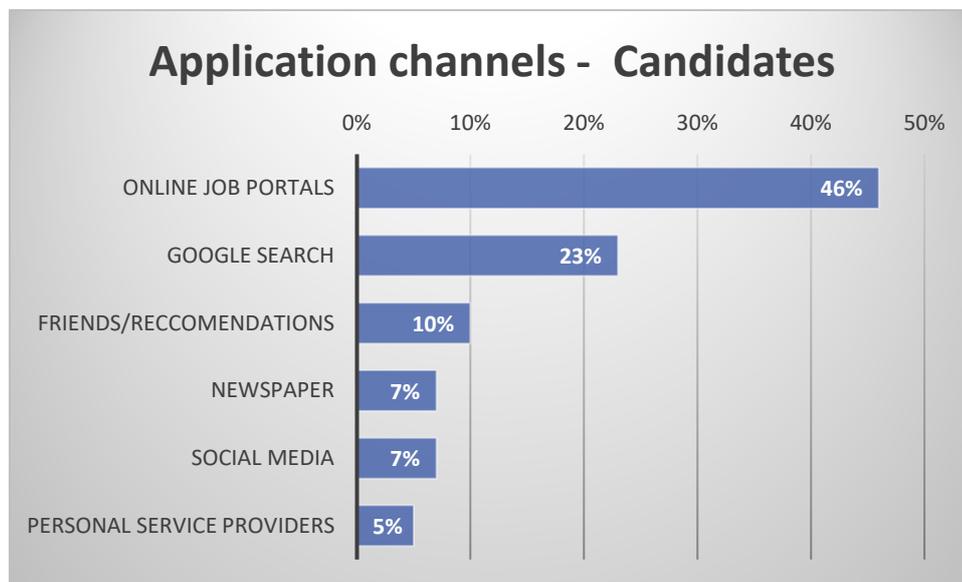
In 2012, more than 80% of all job applications reached the top-500 Austrian companies online². In the same year, **15.8 %** of the companies had a **dedicated social media strategy** – including listing job offerings, actively searching for candidates and researching additional information on them. One factor holding down the implementation of social media was the additional skillset required on the side of the recruiters.

According to the report Deloitte Human Capital Trends 2017, the Austrian HR departments see **digital transformation as the greatest task**⁵. 68% of Austrian respondents state that their HR processes are not or only partially automated. Only 22% think their HR systems are efficient and effective. Margareta Holz, partner at Deloitte Austria, claims that Austrian HR departments are usually **still very traditional** when it comes to recruiting. The search for suitable candidates requires an innovative approach. Therefore, more attention needs to be paid to using digital channels and cognitive technologies to acquire employees.

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2.1.2 Job application channels in Austria

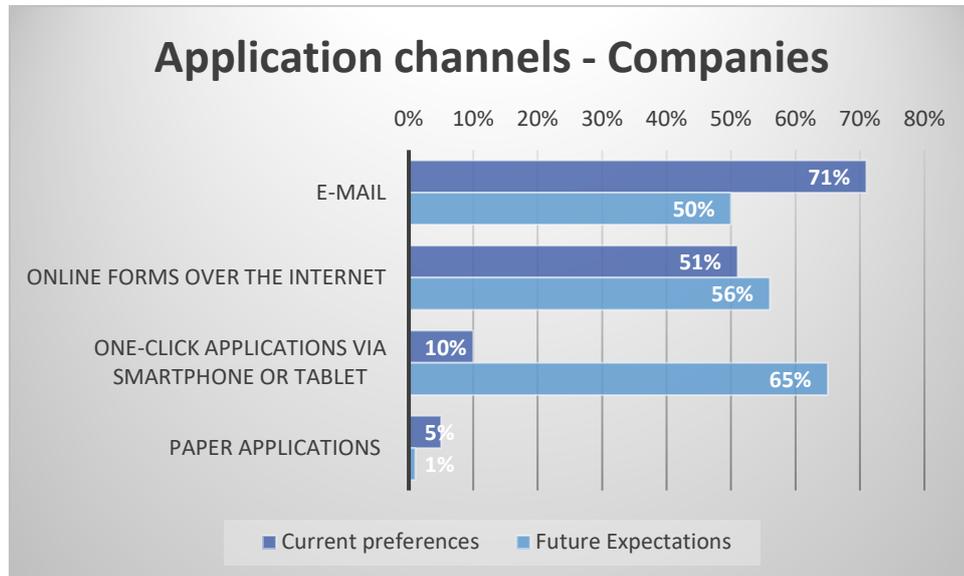
More than **80%** of the Austrians use a **smartphone or tablet** to look for job opportunities³. The most important channels for job seekers are **online job portals**, these are followed by Google search and personal contacts/recommendations. Social media channels are becoming increasingly important as well, however, their full potential still remains to be discovered. The **age group 15-44** is most active in applying for a job online.



Source:³

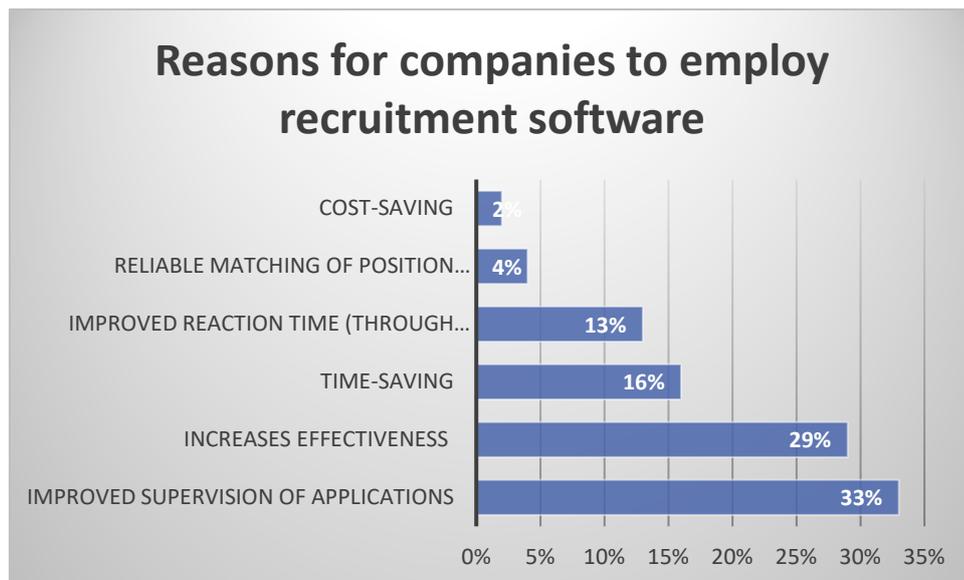
While companies are already mostly using digital recruitment channels, they are looking for future trends. Traditional applications via email are expected to decrease. Instead, they forecast an increased **automation** of the recruitment process: the candidates will be able to make **one-click applications** over their mobile devices, and their profiles will be reviewed by specialised software.

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Source:²

Trends likely to affect the job market in the future include **automation, video, virtual reality or machine learning**. Companies believe that by employing recruitment software, they will be able to match candidates much better to their open positions. Needless to say, a precondition for that is that candidates are able to list all their skills and experience, so that the software can analyze them and find a suitable match.



Source:²

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2.1.3 Career portals

At the moment, carrier portals are still the main medium for job applications. There are many carrier portals active in Austria, but the most important ones include:

karriere.at (<https://www.karriere.at/>): one of the biggest online job portals in Austria and according to a study², the favourite of the Austrian companies, clearly beating any competition in terms of user-friendliness and client satisfaction

Monster (<https://www.monster.com/>): 2.6 million search queries every month

MeinJob.at (<https://meinjob.at/>): 6,500 new job offers per month; 2.3 unique users per month

StepStone (<https://www.stepstone.at/en/>): 6,000 new job offers per month

e-Jobroom (<https://jobroom.ams.or.at/jobsuche/Suche.jsp>): run by the Austrian Employment Service (AMS)

2.1.4 Social media

Recruiting via social media – “**social recruiting**” – is becoming increasingly important in Austria. Social media has made both applicants and companies more transparent. The most popular websites used for a job search are **XING, LinkedIn and Facebook**⁶.

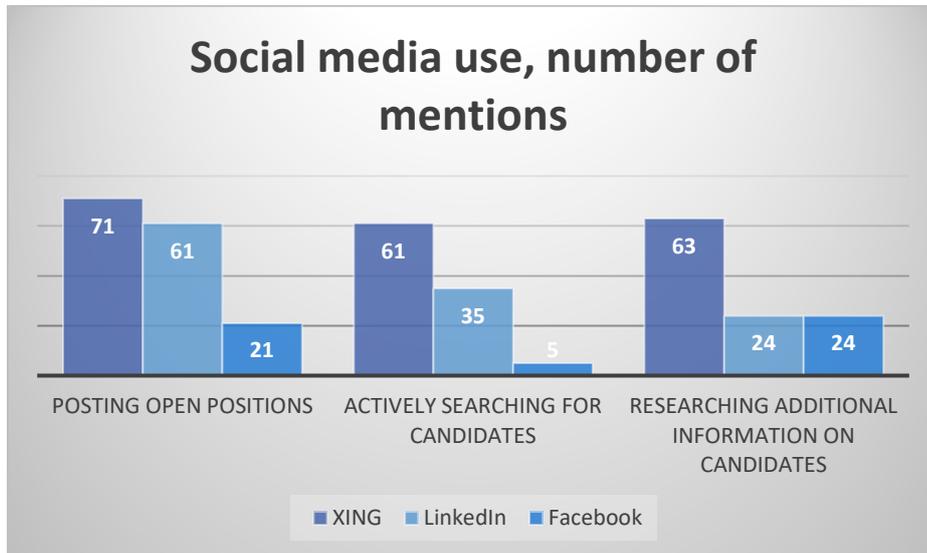
XING is a social networking site focused on the German-speaking world: Germany, Austria and Switzerland. It is very popular in Austria with 1.39 million registered users, quite successfully competing with LinkedIn. There is a significant demographical difference between the two, with XING being more popular among **senior workers** – 69% of users are over 35 years old.

LinkedIn narrowly overtakes XING as largest career networking website in Austria with around 1.4 million users. It is often used by young professionals due to better international career opportunities. It attracts a significantly **younger demographic group** – 77% of users are under 34 years old. Furthermore, LinkedIn grows with an astonishing speed – a few years ago, it had considerably less users than XING, but has managed to close the gap and is likely to become more popular in the future.

Facebook is the most widely used social media network in Austria with around 3.9 million users. While the network certainly has a considerable untapped potential, users prefer to use Facebook for personal purposes. Job search is one of many possible applications, and certainly not the main one.

According to the study Recruiting Report 2018², XING still had a minor lead over LinkedIn regarding job listings (71 to 6 mentions by companies) in 2018, and a significant lead for the purpose of headhunting (61 vs 35 for companies actively searching for employees). XING was with a number of 63 also the clear leader for background checks, compared to LinkedIn and Facebook with 24 each.

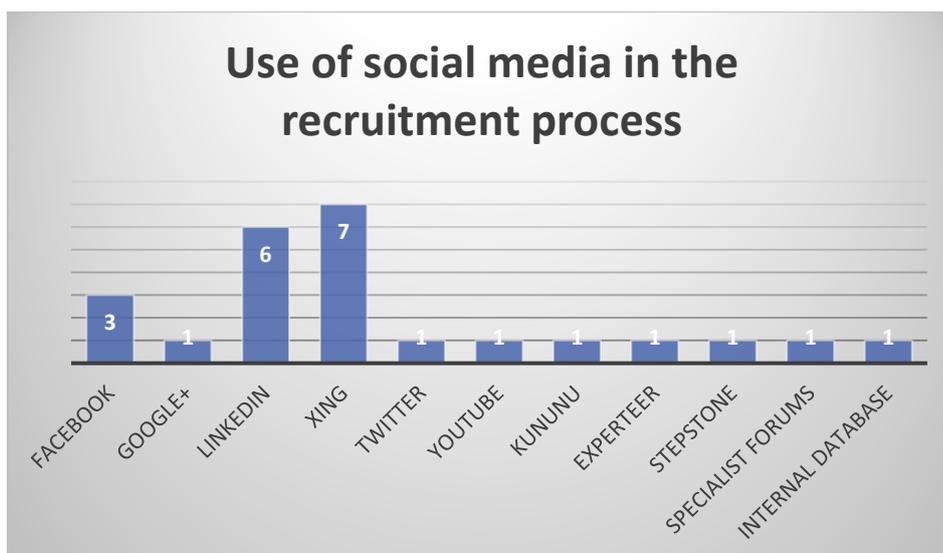
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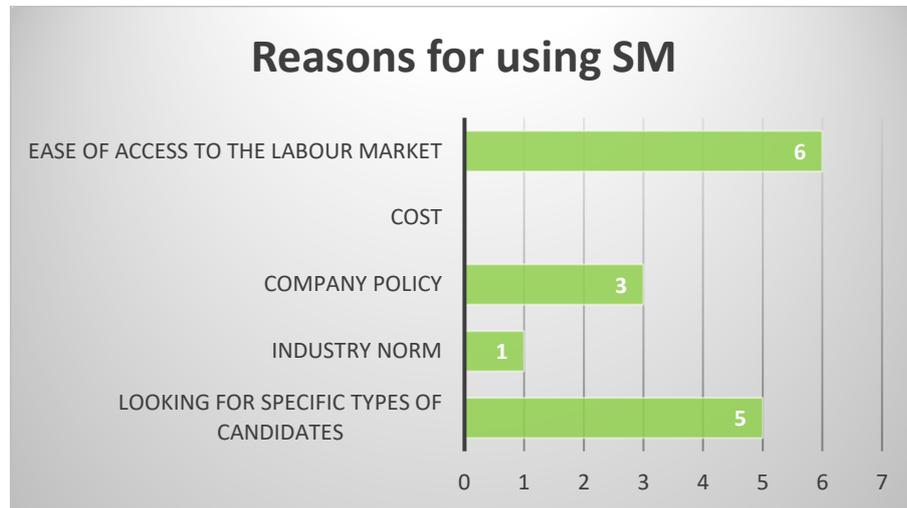
2.2 Online questionnaires on how social and digital media are used for job search

A total of 10 respondents were interviewed for the duration of the research. 6 of them held positions in management and 4 in human resources. 8 of the companies involved are working in the field of recruitment and personnel consultancy, one in telecommunication, and one in mail-ordering. Some of the companies work exclusively on the Austrian market, some are globally active.



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XING and **LinkedIn** are clearly dominant in the recruitment field, although companies use a plethora of other tools and platforms, often depending on the specifics of their field of work and the competences of the candidate required. There is no universal platform to meet all their needs.

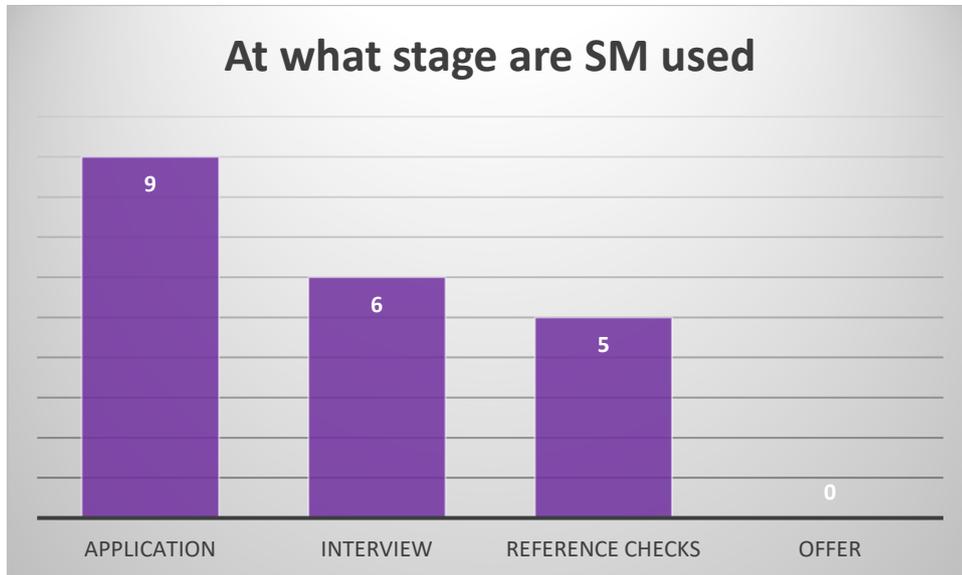


The **ease of access**, the ability to reach candidates directly and often informally, and the ability to **find the right match** for a position appear to be the main reasons for companies to make use of social media. It is interesting to note that although cost was provided as an option, none of the companies chose it as a factor influencing their decisions.

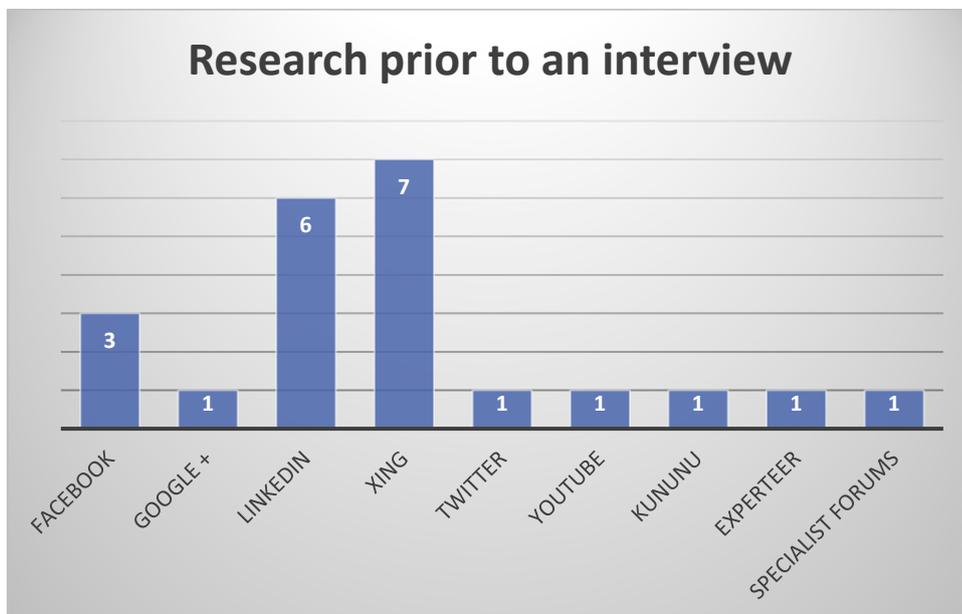


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There appears to be one dominant focus of attention for companies in their search for candidates: the presence of **specific skills** required for a position.



Practically all companies use social media at the **application** stage. Around half of them continue to make use of them during the interview and reference check phases. However, offers are always extended through traditional channels.

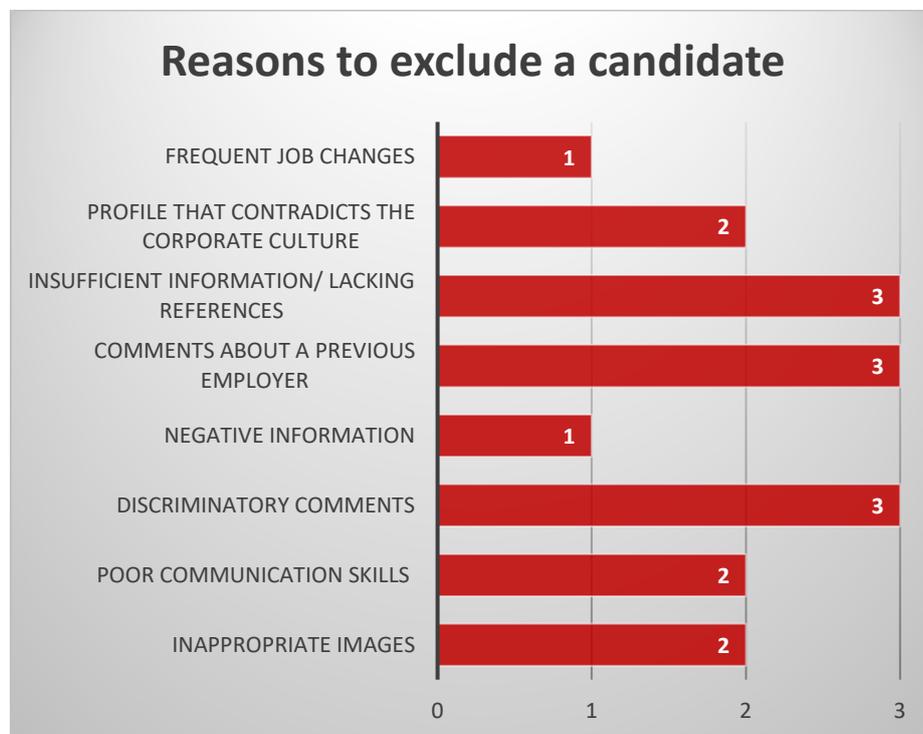


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The channels used in the research phase closely mirror the ones used generally, with **XING** and **LinkedIn** in the lead, followed by a variety of specialised channels.

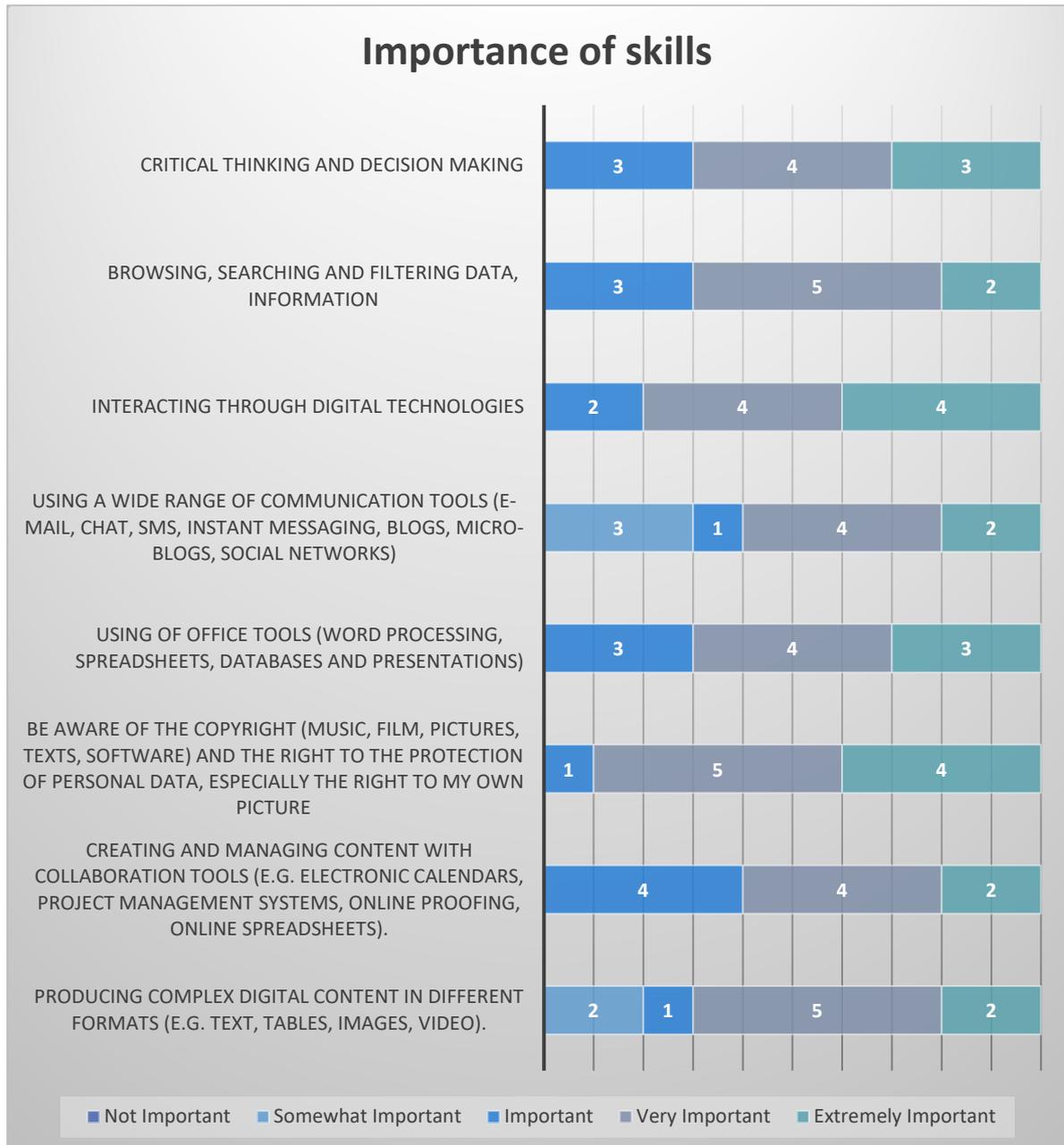
Relatively few employers encountered difficulties related to the use of social media for recruitment. The ones mentioned included:

- **Potential discrimination** (not treating all candidates equally, or having access to private information about candidates)
- The risks of targeting a **certain pool** of candidates only
- **Some positions and/or target groups can only be reached through** traditional channels



There appears to be no consensus among employers about what the main reasons are to exclude a candidate from an interview. Some of the reasons are **general**, not specific to social media, like frequent job changes or poor communication skills. Others are related to the **lack of sufficient information** in order to take an informed decision. Still others are **value-related**: the presence of discrimination or a contradiction to corporate culture.

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In general, most employers see all digital competences as **important**. None of the employers found any of the competence listed as non-important. The ones that were rated **highest** include **interacting through digital technologies** and **copyright awareness**. At the same time, the use of a **wide range of communication tools** and the ability to **produce different digital content** are seen as **less important**.

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3 Brief summary of the interviews with the focus groups

3.1 Focus group with educators of adults having dropped out of school and attending alternative educational institutions

The first focus group interviewed by Die Berater® was made up of trainers working in the field of adult education. Their areas of expertise range from foreign languages (English) to mathematics and IT skills. Almost all of the trainers interviewed also offer job application training.

3.1.1 Services offered by the interviewees’ institutions

The trainers interviewed are offering courses in the following areas:

- Application and job training: Writing CVs and job applications (also EUROPASS), conducting research and performing online job search (only after preceding basic computer training), self-presentation
- Application programs: Word, Excel, PowerPoint
- Computer skills in English (including language exercises and exam preparation)
- IT: Part 1 – Develop a web blog, Part 2 – Internet security
- Mathematics: Learning mathematics through apps (learn through play) like Kahoot and TikTok

3.1.2 Main target groups/beneficiaries of the interviewees’ institutions

The beneficiaries of the interviewees’ institutions differ very much regarding age, educational level and previous knowledge. One main target group includes adults who have abandoned their education and have no experience in working with computers at all. Another main target group exists of young people under 25, mostly with migration background, who often have not graduated (in some cases because they had to flee before) and want to complete compulsory school. In this group, the educational level differs most. In addition, their countries of origin vary a lot, which makes it more difficult to offer courses in a single language.

Projects such as the “Competence check” have participants in the age group 25 to 65. Other projects such as the “Youth College” target 16 to 25-years-olds, with migration background as well as without, who have dropped out of the education system.

3.1.3 Challenges faced by adults who want to improve their digital skills for job search

In an (online) application process, the challenges faced by the target groups are more or less the same:

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- Especially online applications are seen as very time consuming, many applicants already give up in the beginning when they are confronted with mountains of forms that need to be filled in. Therefore, many of the applicants first need a training in time management and computer skills.
- For the target group it is very important to find out their skills and how they can make use of them. Especially computer skills are essential in an age where everything is speeding up.
- Regarding migrants, there often exists an additional challenge because of language barriers. The question is if it makes more sense to offer computer training in their native language or if this is not necessary since the “computer language” is a universal one.
- Another hurdle can be the certificates and diplomas that often need to be uploaded. Many migrants dropped out of their school, university, education etc. and therefore do not have any certificates or diplomas, or the ones they have are not valid in their country of arrival.

3.1.4 Qualifications of adult education providers and their main challenges

The trainers interviewed indicated that there was no specific training for the staff working with adults in their institutions. Their knowledge, e.g. about didactics and methods of how best to convey the contents, was gained through their own experience (e.g. in projects such as "Pole Position"). Many of them studied at the university and then continued their education independently.

The interviewees are of the opinion that further training in this area is a must, even if there is currently no offer from their institutions in this direction. They think that also other trainers in their institutions would be interested in further developing their capacity to provide education and training for adults. There would even be a great need for it, since, for example, Apps are constantly being developed by the AMS (Public Employment Service Austria) that the trainers should use. Unfortunately, many of them lack the skills for that and often the information chain is broken shortly before the target group, which means that the desired effects are not achieved. Further training in this area would therefore not only be highly desirable, but also urgently necessary.

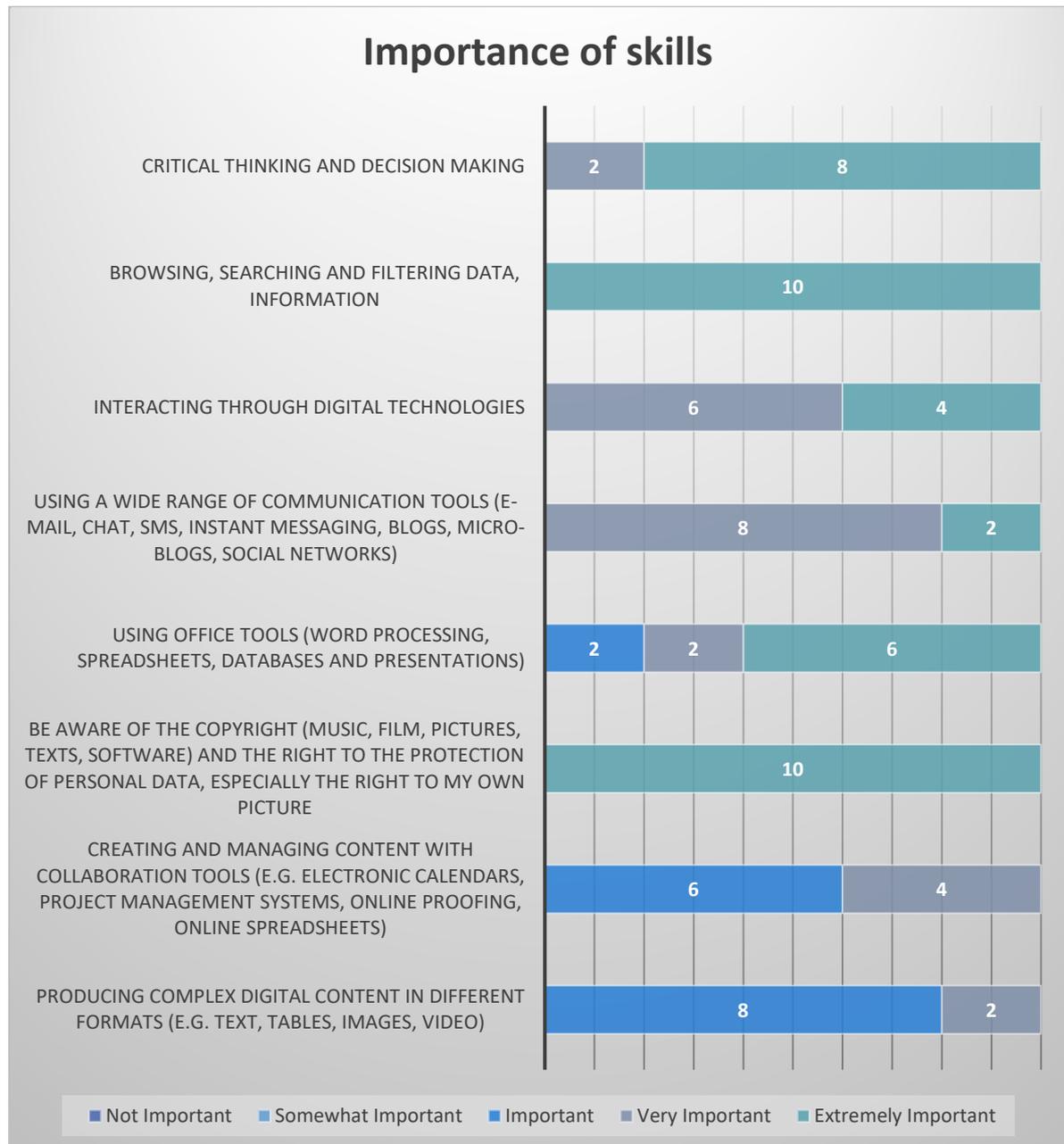
In many cases, the main problem is the financing. Often, the AMS (Public Employment Service Austria) does not offer financing for basic computer skills or the course participants lack the equipment at home (no computer, only mobile phone etc.).

All interviewees expressed their interest in an additional training on how to teach their colleagues in providing courses for adults who want to improve their social and digital skills for the application process. They would be particularly interested in seminars where one learns how to work explicitly with the target group and how to exchange ideas with other trainers, for example about how learning can be fun.

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3.1.5 Interviewees’ opinion about importance of skills

In the last part of the interview, the trainers were asked to assess the importance of the following social and digital skills:



The interviewees agree that the ability to **browse, search and filter data and information** is **extremely important** nowadays, as well as to be aware of the **copyright and the right to the protection of personal data**. A great majority of them also assesses **critical thinking and decision making** as well as

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using **Office tools** as extremely important. What is seen as **very important** by most of the trainers interviewed is **interacting through digital technologies** as well as **using a wide range of communication tools**. The majority of the interviewees find that **creating and managing content with collaboration tools** as well as **producing complex digital content in different formats** is important. None of the mentioned skills was assessed as somewhat important or not important.

3.2 Focus Groups with adults having dropped out of school and attending alternative educational institutions

The second focus group interviewed by Die Berater® consisted of adults having dropped of school and attending alternative educational courses financed by the AMS (Public Employment Service Austria) in the fields of foreign languages (English), mathematics and IT skills. Almost all of the adults interviewed also participated or still participate in job application trainings.

3.2.1 Interviewees' educational level and employment status

The educational levels of the interviewees range from university graduates (only migrants who have graduated in their country of origin and whose diplomas are not recognized in Austria) over persons who completed compulsory school to people without any school leaving certificates or diplomas.

Since the persons interviewed are attending courses financed by the AMS (Public Employment Service Austria), all of them are actually unemployed and/or job seeking. A few are currently marginally employed.

3.2.2 Social media sites/networks used by the interviewees

Almost all interviewees have social media profiles. Which social media networks they use depends a lot on their age and their professional experience. The following social media websites were mentioned:

- Instagram
- Snapchat
- Tik-Tok
- Youtube
- LinkedIn
- XING
- Own websites
- Blogs

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Which sites they use to find job offers and to apply for them is also depending on the age. The interviewees older than 30 years already have more personal contacts and professional experience, therefore they can rely on own networks. In general, all of them use the Internet in order to find job offers (karriere.at, Indeed.com etc.), but not really social media sites. All of them also take advantage of the offers by the AMS (Public Employment Service Austria).

The social networking sites XING and LinkedIn are also increasingly used by the target group aged 30 and over. These are used less by younger people.

The interviewees opinion about companies checking the social media profiles of job applicants is that it is more important to do profound research about the company itself during the application process than having a ‘perfect’ social media profile that is followed by the employers.

3.2.3 Main challenges faced by adults having dropped out of school in searching for a job

Asking about the main challenges that adults having dropped out of school are facing when they are searching for a job, the interviewees mentioned the following hurdles:

From the applicant’s point of view:

- Lack of information about the job market
- Lack of knowledge about different fields of work
- Lack of motivation: Especially for the long-term unemployed it is particularly difficult to find motivation to continue applying for a job
- Lack of self-confidence
- Language barriers
- Competition – too much competition on the job market

From the employer’s point of view:

- Applicant’s lack of certificates and diplomas
- Applicant’s lack of professional experience
- Applicant’s lack of language competences
- Employer’s lack of confidence in applicants
- Employer’s doubts on applicant’s perseverance (especially regarding long-term unemployed)
- Sometimes also the origin of the applicants (depends on the company policy).

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3.2.4 Interviewees’ interest in receiving training for developing social and digital skills and competences

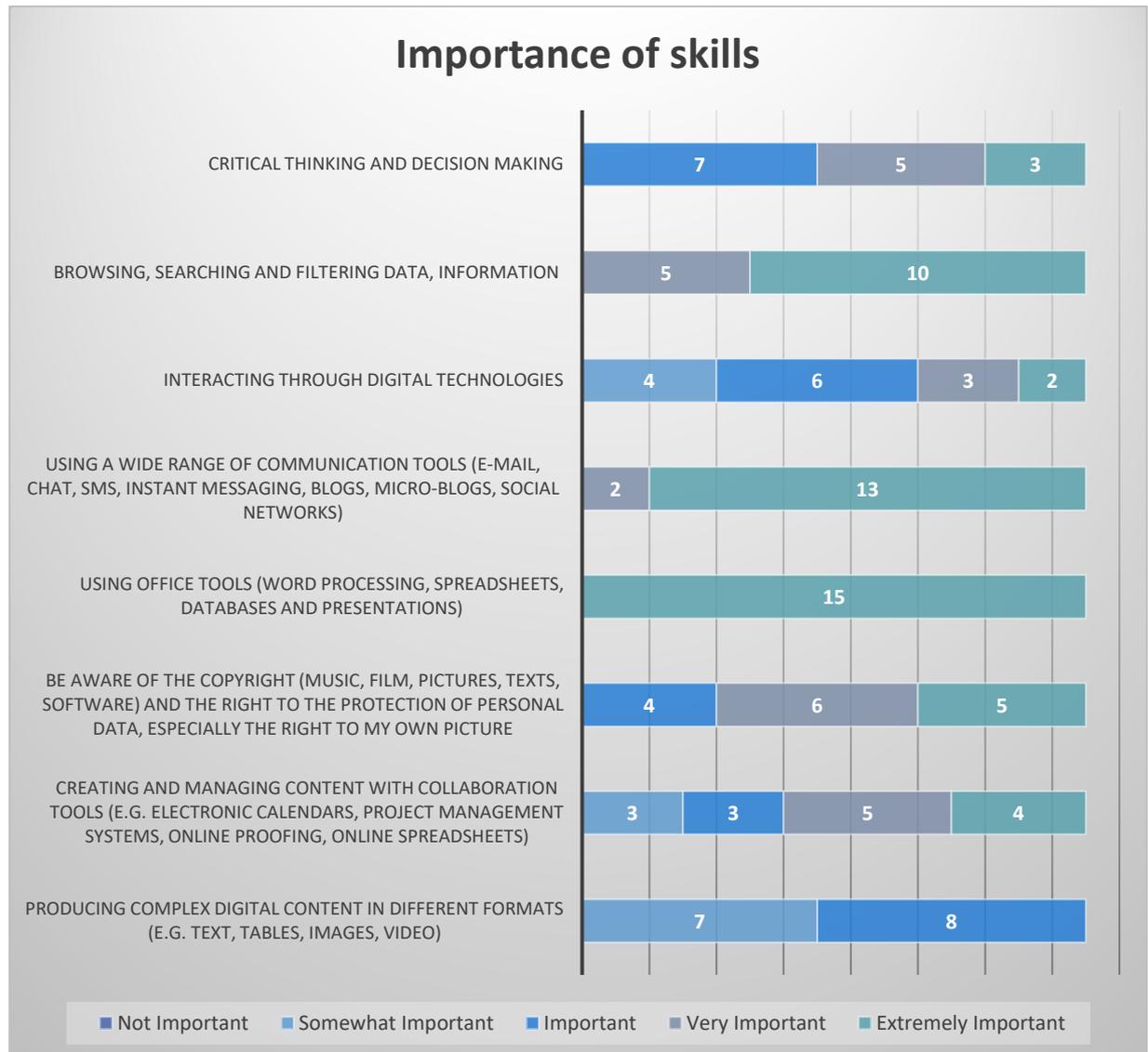
First, the interviewees were asked if they have already participated in trainings on media literacy and digital skills. Almost all of them answered the question with yes. The following trainings were attended by the interviewees (always 6 hours per day):

- “Digital lab”: 2 to 4 weeks
- “Youth college”: One year with continuous social care
 - Competence check: 5 weeks
 - “Activation Lab” 4 weeks
 - English 4 weeks
- Mathematics: 4 to 6 weeks
- IT: 2 weeks (basic knowledge)

The second question was if the interviewees were interested in participating in trainings to develop their social and digital skills and competences for a more effective and easier job search. The majority of the interviewees is interested in attending additional trainings because they know how important it is to continue to educate themselves in order to increase their chances of getting a job.

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3.2.5 Interviewees’ opinion about importance of skills



The interviewees fully agree that the knowledge how to **use office tools** is **extremely important** nowadays. The majority also thinks that **using a wide range of communication tools** is extremely important and, to a bit lesser degree, also **browsing, searching and filtering data and information**. Also die other skills are mostly assessed as very important or important. Skills that are found **not that much important** by the interviewees are **interacting through digital technologies, creating and managing content with collaboration tools and producing complex digital content in different formats**. Asked for the reasons, the interviewees stated that they think those competences are these competences are already very deep and would rather be covered by specialists.

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4 Conclusions and recommendations

The trainers interviewed appreciated the idea of the project due to the fact that there exists a great need among the target group as well as the trainers themselves regarding further education on Information and communication technologies and how they influence access to the labour market. The project can be seen as a bridge for adults in alternative educational institutions between the application for a position and actually finding a job. What became evident through the interviews is that the great diversity of target groups makes it difficult to develop standardized trainings that meet all requirements, trainings should therefore be flexible enough to be adaptable to all age groups and educational levels.

Particular attention should also be paid to specific groups such as refugees and migrants, who often face additional hurdles in accessing the labour market, be it lack of documents and certificates or prejudiced and negative basic attitudes on the part of employers.

The interviews have shown that there is great interest but also great need for further training on the part of the trainers, which the institutions where they are employed cannot always meet. Many of them would also be willing to undergo further training in order to pass on their knowledge to their colleagues afterwards. These training courses should not only focus on purely technical skills, but should also provide empathy and understanding on the part of the trainers for their course participants, as they are often discouraged by long-term unemployment and have a lack of self-confidence and self-esteem, which must first be rebuilt.

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