



POLICY
RECOMMENDATIONS



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

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Authors:	Gabriela Ruseva, ALL DIGITAL 
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Abstract

This document summarizes the findings from the piloting experiences gained through the implementation of the ICT 4 the Elderly project methodology.

The document has been produced taking into account the input from all project partners provided through dedicated evaluation tools used to collect feedback from project participants and trainers.

The aim is to provide policy recommendations regarding the promotion of digital skills among older adults using the project methodology and training a number of those adults to become ambassadors of digital inclusion among their peers and in the community. The project methodology has been tested with learners from four European countries (Germany, Malta, Slovenia, and Switzerland).

The recommendations are based on the project's impact and address:

- (a) other organisations and training providers working with older adults, and
- (b) policy makers at regional, national, and European level.

1. Project Description

Project Duration: 39 months (extended due to COVID-19)

Start Date: 01/09/2018

End Date: 30/11/2021

Partner countries: Belgium, Germany, Malta, Slovenia & Switzerland.

The ICT 4 the Elderly project **aims to facilitate a pathway for up-skilling the digital competences of individuals between the age of 55 and 75** and to make them aware of some of the many opportunities that the Internet offers.

To do so, a collection of best practices from other successful projects was undertaken to develop a training manual and an [online academy](#). These training materials have been used to train individuals aged 55-75 who were selected through a call for applicants, to become ambassadors of the project. Two pilot training sessions, with 12 people each, were foreseen to take place in Malta and in Berlin in Spring 2020, but just before the first one, the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Partners postponed the pilot training, hoping to be able to organise it internationally. As the travel restrictions persisted, partners decided to organise the first pilot training session locally in each country. However, the pandemic also affected the possibility to organise face-to-face pilot training, in the partnering countries. Some partners managed to organise piloting one training in the Summer of 2020, whilst others continued into 2021. Thus, the piloting was divided into two phases: a first phase, taking place at national level, and a second phase, which was finally realised at international level between 13th - 17th September 2021 in Malta.

1.1. Project results

- Collection of Best Practices and Open Educational Resources (OERs)
- Training Manual with training materials in information technologies
- Online Academy

Project results are expected to benefit other organisations and training providers who work with older adults and seek to improve their digital skills and awareness.

The Training Manual and Online Academy have been designed and implemented in English, but during the national piloting, partners have also collected many relevant resources in German, Slovene and French.



1.2. Project Partner organisations

- [Tech.mt, Malta](#)
- [Simbioza Genesis, socialno podjetje Slovenia](#)
- [Foundation Yinternet.org, Switzerland](#)
- [Stiftung Digitale Chancen, Germany](#)
- [ALL DIGITAL, Belgium](#)

2. EU Policy context in active aging and digital inclusion

The age structure of the European Union (EU) population is projected to change significantly in the coming decades. The demographic old-age dependency ratio (people aged 65 or above relative to those aged 15-64) is projected to increase. Being about 25% in 2010, it has risen to 29.6% in 2016 and is projected to rise further, in particular up to 2050, and eventually reach 51.2% in 2070.¹

This increasingly ageing population overall in Europe is due to declining fertility, “Ageing from the bottom”, and longer life expectancy, “Ageing from the top”. This population aging brings many challenges for society, as well as a need for interventions that can maintain or improve the mental and physical health, the personal autonomy, and the social wellbeing of older people.² While European citizens are growing older, European societies and economies are experiencing significant changes, digital and technological innovations as well as labour market and demographic changes. Recently released data of Eurostat projects a decline of the working age population by 5% until 2030, falling from around 66% to just above 60% of the total population³. These changes do not only impact adults’ work life but also private one. The lack of digital skills in the senior population is often synonymous with social isolation, difficulty in access to information and services, loss of autonomy and increased sense of inability to adapt to society.

Improving digital skills in older adults is one way of improving their quality of life through an active lifestyle (education, social participation, hobbies, etc) and freedom of choice and decisions (leisure time, information, travelling, health care etc). By improving such knowledge, senior citizens may stay on the job market for an extended period, contributing to the society’s productivity, as well. Further education also has mental health benefits, facilitating their participation in society, independence, and autonomy. The ability to make informed choices about one’s life and a sense of responsibility to participate in the world and to influence people, events, and circumstances – is, according to the OECD, at the centre of learning, and consequently, of any change in society⁴. Therefore, lifelong learning opportunities enable older people to acquire the skills that they need to live actively in today’s society. Adults cannot just rely on the skills they acquired at school. The latest results from the EU labour force survey show that in 2020, the proportion of persons aged

¹ European Commission (European and Financial Affairs), The 2018 Ageing Report - Underlying Assumptions & Projection Methodologies - INSTITUTIONAL PAPER 065 | NOVEMBER 2017, <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/2018-ageing-report-underlying-assumptions-and-projection-methodologies>

² Radu SZEKELY, Intergenerational Learning - Results from the European Network for Intergenerational Learning ENIL, EPALE Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe, 9 NOVEMBER 2017

³ EAEA, The Future of Adult Learning, Background paper, December 2019, available at: <https://eaea.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/The-future-of-adult-learning-in-Europe.pdf>

⁴ EAEA, The Future of Adult Learning, Background paper, December 2019, available at: <https://eaea.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/The-future-of-adult-learning-in-Europe.pdf>



25 to 64 in the EU who participated in education or training was 9.2 %; a share that was 0.9 percentage points lower than the corresponding share for 2015 and 1.6 points lower compared to 2019. It is considered that part of the decrease could be related to the COVID-19 pandemic, i.e. cancellation of training activities.⁵ Such statistics are not even available for 65+, where the share is believed to be even lower.

Beside the overall trend in adult learning, around a quarter of the European adult population has poor numeracy and digital skills. Adults who do not possess a sufficient level of such skills face a high risk of social exclusion. According to the results of the EU-wide Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) Report 2020, in 2019 a large part of the EU population still lacks basic digital skills, even though most jobs require such skills. The share of EU citizens without basic digital skills amounts to 42%.⁶ In 2020, the world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Like other parts of the world, Europe faced an unprecedented crisis and urgent need to respond to immediate public health challenges and consequent economic and social issues. The COVID-19 crisis led to an unprecedented shift to online learning and digital technologies, which, as mentioned below, may have negatively impacted the participation of adults in lifelong learning.

Actions at European level have been undertaken to address the above-mentioned needs. Specific key EU policies and national initiatives such as the 'Digitalpakt Alter' programme in the field of adult learning and digital education, are listed below.

In January 2021, the European Commission presented the Green Paper on Ageing - Fostering solidarity and responsibility between generations⁷ to launch a broad policy debate on the challenges and opportunities of Europe's ageing society: "The Green Paper takes a life-cycle approach, reflecting the universal impact of ageing on all generations and stages in life. In doing so, it highlights the importance of striking the right balance between sustainable solutions for our welfare systems and strengthening intergenerational solidarity." The public consultation which followed the Green Paper confirmed that "lifelong learning [...] should be fostered as a shared responsibility between state- and non-state actors, entailing the need to recognize informal and non-formal education. Stakeholders stressed that addressing the digital divide was a prerequisite for a successful digital transformation which is inclusive for the elderly."

In September 2020, the European Commission published the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027⁸ (DEAP) focused on two strategic priorities: (1) To foster a high-performing digital education ecosystem; and (2) To enhance digital skills and

⁵ Eurostat Adult learning statistics https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Adult_learning_statistics

⁶ European Commission, Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) Report 2019 - Human capital, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/human-capital>

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/1_en_act_part1_v8_0.pdf

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan_en



competences for the digital age. The COVID-19 crisis has reinforced the need to promote a sound understanding of the digital world and support the development of digital competence of citizens and learners of all ages. Actions under priority 2 look at both basic and advanced digital skills with the aim of fostering digital citizenship and inclusion. The DEAP highlights how the uptake and use of digital technologies for teaching and learning requires a critical approach and a holistic perspective: “Embedding digital technologies in teaching and learning processes does not mean simply replicating or transposing face-to-face practices or traditional approaches online. It is a complex process, which requires robust digital capacity, including planning for organisational change, ongoing monitoring and adaptation, and a strong focus on learning driven pedagogy”. A specific Digital Action Plan for older people should be designed as unfortunately the current DEAP does not include any actions addressing this specific target group and related needs. The environments where older people are and would like to learn are not covered by the Plan.

The key competences as defined in the Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning⁹, adopted in May 2018, aims to lay the foundation for achieving more equal and more democratic societies. The Recommendation updates the definitions of key competences and stresses the need to develop teaching practices, assessment tools and innovative learning environments. The definition of digital competences is extended and updated to reflect the changing nature of digital technology in working life and society more broadly: “increasing and improving the level of digital competences at all stages of education and training, across all segments of the population”. The new definition was also aligned with the Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp)¹⁰: The Recommendation proposed a Reference Framework as a reference tool for policy makers, education and training providers, educational staff, guidance practitioners, employers, public employment services and learners themselves.

In February 2021, the European Commission launched the follow-up of the Education & Training 2020 (ET2020) strategic framework – the Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)¹¹, setting an ambitious goal for adult education – to increase the share of adults 25-64 who have participated in learning during the last 12 months to 47% by 2025. As a reference, in 2020 the participation rate of the working citizens in lifelong learning stood at only 11.1%¹².

⁹ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)&from=EN)

¹⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/digcomp>

¹¹ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/48584/st06289-re01-en21.pdf>

¹² EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS), 2018 available at :

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=sdg_04_60&plugin=1

The European Commission is also working on the implementation of the Global Agenda 2030¹³ and is currently reviewing the European Agenda for Adult Learning as a key document to outline European adult education policies. The European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL)¹⁴ defines the focus for European cooperation in adult education policies. It was adopted by the Council in November 2011. The Agenda highlights the need to significantly increase adult participation in learning of all kinds (formal, non-formal and informal learning) whether to acquire new work skills, for active citizenship, or for personal development and fulfilment. National coordinators in each Member State of the European Union follow up on the implementation process of the agenda.

The European Skills Agenda¹⁵ for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, presented by the European Commission in July 2020, sets ambitious, quantitative objectives for upskilling (improving existing skills) and reskilling (training in new skills) to be achieved within the next 5 years. Its 12 actions focus on skills for jobs by partnering up with Member States, companies, and social partners to work together for change, by empowering people to embark on lifelong learning, and by using the EU budget as a catalyst to unlock public and private investment in people's skills. The aim is to ensure that the right to training and lifelong learning, enshrined in the European Pillar of Social rights¹⁶, and also referring to the Upskilling Pathways¹⁷ initiative, becomes a reality all across Europe. "The Commission is placing skills at the heart of the EU policy agenda, steering investment in people and their skills for a sustainable recovery after the coronavirus pandemic. Businesses need workers with the skills required to master the green and digital transitions, and people need to be able to get the right education and training to thrive in life"¹⁸.

Finally, it is relevant to mention that adult learning related to the active ageing policies received a particular emphasis in 2012, with the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations¹⁹. During 2012, there were hundreds of separate initiatives at all levels in the European Union and beyond. These initiatives were particularly centred on promoting Intergenerational learning between elderly and young generations. The 'EY2012 Coalition' was created and managed by a network called AGE-Platform Europe²⁰. The publication Towards an Age-Friendly European Union by 2020²¹ seeks to explain what can be done to create an age-

¹³ <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

¹⁴ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_2011.372.01.0001.01.ENG

¹⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1196

¹⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1226>

¹⁷ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016H1224\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016H1224(01)&from=EN)

¹⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1196

¹⁹ [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2015/536344/EPRS_IDA\(2015\)536344_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2015/536344/EPRS_IDA(2015)536344_EN.pdf)

²⁰ <https://www.age-platform.eu/articles/29-april-eu-day-solidarity-between-generations>

²¹ https://www.age-platform.eu/sites/default/files/Towards_an_Age_Friendly_EU_FINAL.pdf



friendly EU by fostering solidarity between generations and enabling the active participation and involvement of all age groups in society.

During its presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2020, Germany organised a conference titled “Strengthening Older People’s Rights in Times of Digitalisation – Lessons Learned from COVID-19” which led to the presidency's conclusions on empowering older people for the digital era. For the first time since 2010, Council Conclusions focused on the topic of older persons/ageing. The conclusions stress that “active and healthy ageing should be promoted, including by using digital technology”²².

Finally, aging is not a separate policy at the European level. Instead, it should be mainstreamed in education, social inclusion, healthcare, etc. But it can be a challenge to mainstream it. Including aging as a topic in the European semester can help to see where member states are, what are the common challenges, and how to address them.

²² <https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/pau/age/WG.13/Presentations/Item-4-Martin-Amberger.pdf>

3. Policy recommendations

The training methodology developed in the project ICT 4 the elderly was positively evaluated both by participants and trainers. Nevertheless, the impact of COVID-19 on the implementation of the pilot activities was significant. The original plan was to implement two international training sessions. The main aim of the international training sessions was to test the training manual and online academy in an international setting, as one of the main aspects of the methodology is intercultural exchange. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, partners had to teach part of the content at national level. Only one international training session was possible, one year and a half after the initial launch and promotion of the training programme. This resulted in partially missing out on an important aspect of the methodology. Travel restrictions resulted in fewer participants in the international training session (9 instead of 12) as some seniors were not allowed to travel. In addition, one partner was not able to participate face-to-face and another partner was able to bring only one participant. Online participation of the trainer and participants from Slovenia was hampered due to technical problems, which resulted in decreased motivation.

Nevertheless, the programme was implemented at national and international level, and valuable conclusions were drawn, translated into two sets of recommendations – for training providers and for policy makers – on how to promote and support digital skills training among older adults. Recommendations are based on project results and experience and expertise of project partners in the field.

Number of participants in the national training sessions:

- Germany (10th and 12th August 2021): 5 (6-1 dropout)
- Malta (17th June – 15th July 2021): 5
- Slovenia (06th May – 10th June 2021): 8 (9-1 dropouts)
- Switzerland (24th May– 08th July 2021): 5 (7-1 dropout)

Number of participants in the international training session in Malta 13-17th September 2021:

- from Germany: 3
- from Malta: 3
- from Slovenia (online participation): 2
- from Switzerland: 1

3.1. Recommendations to training providers

The following recommendations are based on the ICT 4 the elderly experience and the feedback provided by project participants in different project countries and are addressed to educators and training providers supporting digital inclusion and active ageing of older people.

- Be aware that elderly people are not a homogenous group. Definitions of who is an elderly person vary across countries. Some include people of working age, while others focus on retired people. Training providers should be aware of this difference. But more importantly, they should further differentiate between elderly people who already have digital skills and are interested in more advanced topics, and those who enter the digital world for the first time. The first group is more interested in future technologies²³, while the second - in more basic skills. Other factors such as income, contacts with family and friends, isolation and professional background have a bigger influence on their skills and interests than age itself.
- Training providers should not use “elderly” as a compound noun, as this does not reflect the differences outlined above. The term “elderly person(s)” should be used instead to acknowledge that each person has their own background and interests.
- Some of the **main topics of interest** with regards to digital technology, identified by older people during the ICT 4 the elderly project, are related to new online phishing schemes, new authentication tokens that were not there a few years ago, and staying in touch with family and friends via online tools. Older adults also do care about forward-looking topics related to **future technologies such as VR and artificial intelligence**.
- Training programmes for older adults should be made **practical and fun**. They should be enabled to create their own digital content and not only to be consumers in the digital age.
- The training content of such programmes should be varied in terms of content, but also methods, **combining class time with self-study and outside visits**, e.g. visiting a museum and testing the media guide, trying out AR / VR. Participants in the ICT 4 the elderly international training session have learnt as much in an informal education setting (outside the classroom, while visiting Malta) as they did during the classroom activities. The sharing process of personal stories and knowledge was constant.
- It is important to **tailor the training** to the specific needs and requirements of older people. Training programmes should be flexible, and should answer topic requests and provide individual support. Participants should be asked about their specific interests and needs in the planning stage of the training. Moreover, elderly people should be included from the very early phases in a co-design process not only of developing training programmes, but also of applications designed for them. A label « certified » by elderly persons can also be envisaged.

²³ ICT 4 the elderly project worked mainly with older adults who already possess basic digital skills. This is reflected in the recommendations, which should be read having in mind this perspective.

- International exchanges reinforce and motivate older adults in their volunteer work for other elderly persons. The international approach was very valuable as it broadened the perspective of the volunteer ambassadors. It gave them the opportunity to learn about new approaches and encouraged them in their activities, as they realized that in other countries there are similar challenges but also solutions, and equally committed people.
- Social contacts are a key aspect of successful peer learning. A completely digital or virtual implementation cannot bring these results and this sustainable added value. "Peer-to-peer learning is very important, because in the end it is about interacting, about empowering. And if you empower people to empower others, that's even more empowering".
- Participants valued the online academy as a resource for self-learning that can complement but not replace face-to-face courses.
- Inclusive practices and continuous sharing of good practices, resources, and experiences among the participants, guarantee a successful training implementation.
- Training organisations should pay special attention if they want to implement training in a hybrid mode. Good technical conditions must be ensured at both ends: equipment like camera, sound and Internet connection must be very good.
- Engage eager stakeholders. To ensure the success of the project it is crucial to engage an adequate number of stakeholders who are genuinely interested in using project outcomes. To attract interested stakeholders, project partners applied a combination of techniques: working with associated partner organisations (e.g. Red Cross, Caritas, Associations of grandparents); personal invitations; presentation of the training programmes at events.

3.2. Recommendations to policy makers

The following recommendations specifically target policy makers in the field of adult learning, active ageing, social and digital inclusion:

- Increase the support (financial and institutional) for active ageing and digital inclusion policies and initiatives in various sectors of society (e.g. education, citizenship, health, public services, etc.). Small-scale projects have a limited impact and funding should be available to scale them up.
- Strengthen adult learning policy making. Political approaches to lifelong learning miss the opportunity to create more ambitious and holistic strategies that take learners of all ages into account. Specific European and National Digital Action Plans for older

people should be designed, shared and promoted as much as possible across Europe.

- Broad and holistic approach towards adult learning and education. Education policies and strategies need to move from a focus on restrictive and generalised curricula towards learner-centeredness. Anyone can learn, irrespective of age and background, provided that learning programmes take the learners' needs into account.
- Adults of 65+ should be included in statistics and policy initiatives to set objectives and monitor progress with regards to their participation in lifelong learning, as it is the case with adults of working age.
- Further support education and training organisations to adapt to the digital transformation, including a more inclusive approach to digital competence development and looking beyond formal education in a lifelong learning perspective.
- Provide greater visibility and acknowledgement to the initiatives that use peer-to-peer learning to enhance active ageing and digital inclusion of older people in the framework of non-formal adult education by offering more opportunities to present and share good practices. In the same way, support participation of representatives of public administrations in these initiatives to additionally underline their support.
- Greater visibility and acknowledgement of the initiatives for active ageing and digital inclusion of older people can be achieved by more opportunities to present and share good practices, e.g. initiatives at national level promoted by governments such as awards and campaigns.
- Increase awareness on the benefits of improving digital skills in older adults.
- Support pedagogical and digital upskilling of educators working in digital education programmes with older people in both formal and non-formal settings. Increase the recognition of these educators. Often, they are also elderly persons from organisations such as Caritas, Red Cross, etc. or care workers, who are teaching other elderly people. They should receive more recognition for their work, including in terms of financial compensation.
- Good practices in digitalisation in care homes which go beyond digitalisation of healthcare services and allow older people to stay in touch and stay active should be up-scaled.
- Quoting the DEAP 2021-2027 (page 6): "The key lesson of the COVID-19 crisis is that digital education should no longer be viewed as an island of its own but considered an integral part of all education and training". This approach should be also



transferred to older adults. That should be not only person-centred but also problem-centred and relevant to individual real life needs and environment.

- Lifelong learning should be made a reality for older adults and drastic measures are needed to make that happen. One such measure could be to make all university facilities accessible to them, they should be able to attend lectures along with university students. Companies/industries/service providers should be obliged to provide at least 10h of training for any tablet they sell. Companies should collaborate with NGOs to implement the training programmes.