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<http://SeLid.efos-europa.eu/>

How we see the future of older people in the digital sphere?

Digitalization shapes our lifeworld and our interpersonal relations. The changes that are already taking place in our society, and the provisions concerning further changes due to the increasing process of digitalization, represent a great challenge also for older persons and seniors.

If seniors want to understand the modern world, they are "forced" to develop their digital skills and competences to follow the societal changes. On the one hand, the older persons too as members of human society need to communicate, share knowledge, information and interact digitally; on the other hand, they need to deal with the challenges for usage information technologies and digital devices at home and the digital services that connect them to society.

The prevention of the marginalization of older people in the field of new technologies can be supported by educational programmes and projects (local and international), computer workshops conducted by the Universities and Academies of the Third Age (U3A, A3A), libraries and Senior's Clubs. New technologies improve access to the new areas of non-formal education, so all educational initiatives that fight against the digital marginalisation of the elderly should be considered a priority in senior education. It is necessary to know the learning goals, motivation and barriers of the older participants to take part in digital learning programmes. The main objectives are open education and implementation of innovative practices in a digital era. Besides that, are focusing on improving and extending quality learning opportunities digital technologies and ICT, tailored to the needs of low-skilled individuals or low-qualified adults.

The most obvious needs of the older persons are:

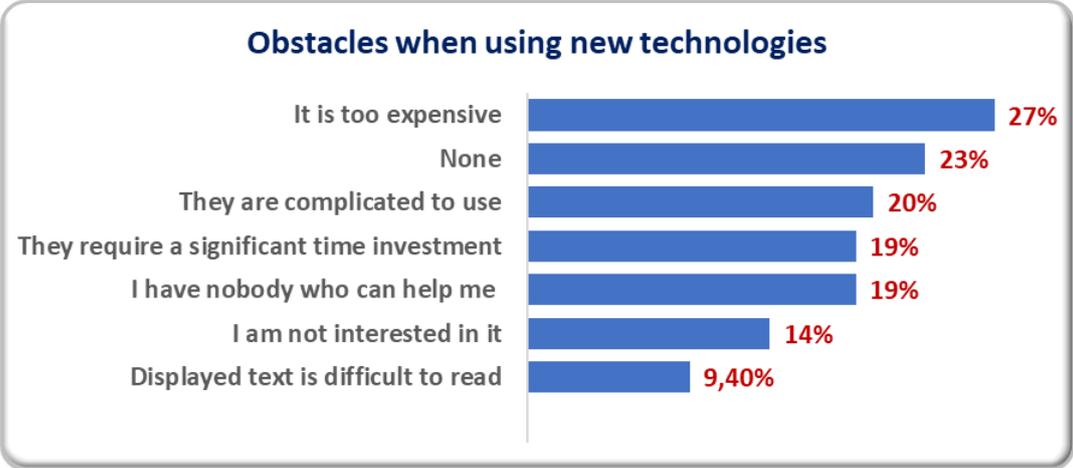
- help in better understanding of social, financial and economic changes in digital society and its digital services;
- integration of seniors into the digital society and minimalization of feelings of social inadequacy through personal encouragement
- help in preserving personal agility, interests, self-reliance, self-fulfilment and inclusion in the digital environment;
- differentiation of digital competence levels inside groups of seniors which poses practical challenges to both lecturers/tutors and senior participants;
- find out about the learning ICT programs, training possibilities and ways of enrolment and participation in them;
- acknowledge new innovative curricula and learn about new practices and programs;
- exchange and share skills and knowledge with other elderly in many different countries; comparison of the conditions and results;
- collection of the best practices for the exchange of knowledge and skills in two main target groups: lecturers and seniors.
- practical utilisation of the collected and shared good practices from other institutions and personal training, with the responsible citizen as a goal.

Digital skills make it possible to expand and update one's knowledge in the fast-changing world. It is a fact that many older people do not even know the benefits of digital technology. Their digital skills are not sufficiently available, they do not believe in digital technology because of e.g. fake news.



Source: Project Erasmus+ Senior's learning in the digital society (SELID), Results Bratislava, 2020-2021

One of the barriers to the use of new technologies by older people is the own financial background, because technical equipment is sometimes too expensive. The new technologies are complicated to use, therefore developers should take into consideration the older people's needs to design age-appropriate devices.

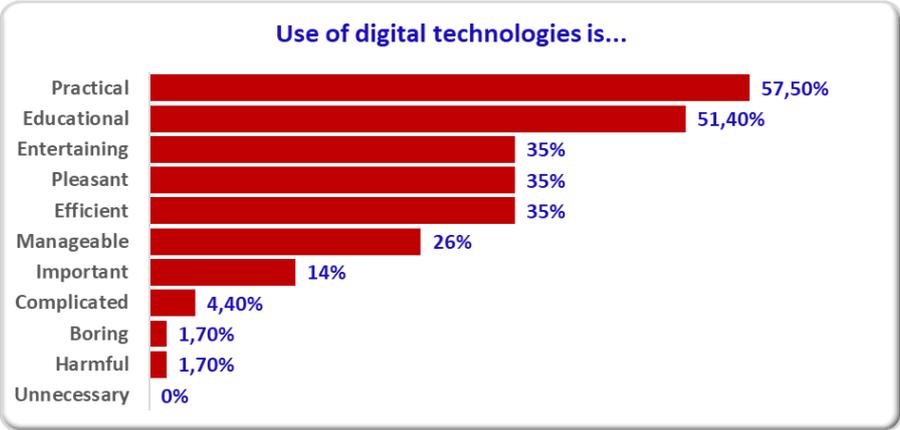


Source: Project Erasmus+ Senior’s learning in the digital society (SELID), Results Bratislava, 2020-2021

The project "SeLiD" wants to encourage the older people to strengthen their digital learning interests and train the seniors to be prepared for an independent life in the digital society and reduce the number of low-skilled adults.

Especially in the time of pandemic, access to internet and social connection is very important. Digital technology can be a solution from exclusion and loneliness of elderly people, who must be included into society and use these tools against discrimination. We don’t want to left one behind and must develop many ways for bringing new technologies in housing also for people with disabilities as for diversity of people in rural areas. For this tasks, older people need to make themselves as decisions makers more visible.

Despite the risks, the new technology opens up a new world for users in different areas of life. The elderly, after their digital learning and training, will be more flexible in their daily life in using the digital equipment in their own home, in using the banking digital tools and digital services of the municipalities, e-shopping, personal material-technical equipment and computer security in practice. The elderly people tend to use new technologies to become more integrated into the society and to maintain connections to their relatives and friends.



Most illustrative are the respondents' comments on new technologies in our questionnaire. Here are some examples:

- “a lot of information, instructions and links are in English; the older generation in our country (Slovakia) usually does not speak English”. (It means digital technologies.)
- "Smartphone help me in lot of situations in my life. I learn a new language and improve my English, which helps me to take notes of my friends and write to them later, to win time on better stuffs. I think it's basically about controlling the technology, if the smartphone was limited in some things it would be much more helpful".
- “Since I am living alone, it is in my interest to maintain my socio (my social life) in an appropriate form. I have this duty not only for myself, but also for my children and grandchildren. Through technology, I enjoy their school and sports success almost daily. Thanks to them, I managed this level. I know I still have some gaps and I am looking forward to new challenges.

Digitalisation is progressing in all virtual areas of human life – including household appliances such as washing machines, refrigerators, dishwashers and others. Most consumers know very well how to operate a washing machine in the "analogue way". With the digital technology they have to learn the completely new procedures. However, consumers, often fails at the installation of a new appliance if they do not have the description at hand as a printed manual instruction.

- “It is a problem for older people to maintain their PC or laptop and phone in terms of installing ordinary software, or various updates, antivirus, etc. If they don't have anyone in the family to help them, they don't want to use it. In addition, older people have problems with vision and fine motor skills; they have less sensitive and agile fingers, which are needed when using these technologies. Therefore, they prefer different buttons and knobs, e.g. on the electric oven, the old man prefers to turn the knob, because he knows e.g. that if he turns the knob 180 degrees, he has set the oven temperature to XY ° C and does not have to look for glasses to see what he has set.”

The use of new technologies is very important, especially for older people to increase the sense of security and accessibility for family, friends, etc. It gives the opportunity to be connected with family and friends around the world. The required condition to have internet (Wi-Fi) is sometimes not available to everyone.

According to the results from the project research, we can present conclusion:

Most respondents have a positive attitude towards digital technologies and are willing to overcome possible difficulties in using equipment.

Therefore, we believe that older people who have doubts about the need for new technology would be most likely to accept it if they found it beneficial for themselves. This also applies to all digital devices that can bring great relief to older people in their daily lives.