

MAGYAR GERONTOLÓGIA

VOL. 16. CONFERENCE SPECIAL ISSUE/ KONFERENCIA KÜLÖNSZÁM

2024. Vol. 16. Conference Special Issue/ Konferencia Különszám

ISSN 2062-3690

[www.https://ojs.lib.unideb.hu/gerontologia](https://ojs.lib.unideb.hu/gerontologia)

The role of digital scouts in promoting digital literacy and participation among older adults

**Angela Freitas¹, Inês Saavedra¹, Natália Machado¹, Carina Dantas¹, Jana
Eckert²**

¹SHINE 2Europe, Portugal;

²ISIS Institut für Soziale Infrastruktur gemeinnützige GmbH, Germany

Keywords: digital scouts, older adults, online digital program

Abstract

In 2023, older people - defined here as those aged 65 years or more - living in the EU-27 corresponded to one fifth (21.3 %) of the total population. During the next decades, this share will also gradually increase and is projected to reach approximately 30% in 2050 [1]. With the continuing advancement of digitalization of everyday life, digital literacy becomes more and more a necessity, especially for older people. Older adults are typically less digitally active and also less skilled in digital technologies than younger populations [2]. The COVID-19 pandemic triggered rapid changes in the use of digital technologies and highlighted not only the digital

divide, but the need of support services and digital skills training tuned to older people preferences, needs and technological abilities [3].

To address these challenges, the Erasmus+ project Digital Scouts is creating a digital educational program, within the framework of blended learning, designed to train 'digital scouts.' These scouts will support older adults in using digital tools, promoting their digital inclusion, and empowering them to take advantage of opportunities for health promotion, as well as social, cultural, and political participation [4].

This presentation will focus on the development process of the online digital program, which is being co-created with partners from five countries: Austria, Portugal, Germany, Romania, and The Netherlands. The content creation was guided by prior research and interviews conducted in the five participating countries with experts in adult education and potential older adult learners. These interviews provided valuable insights into the needs and challenges of learning new technologies, as well as suggestions for enhancing the Digital Scouts educational program.

Taking the National Report for Portugal as an illustrative case, recommendations encompassed different dimensions, such as the training design and content, the format and duration of the training and the role of the facilitator (digital scout) [5]. Suggestions emphasized the need for a curriculum based on real-life examples, integrating hands-on approaches and practical activities. This is crucial, as older adults with low digital literacy often face challenges in tasks such as submitting tax returns, accessing retirement information, managing bank accounts, booking medical appointments, and other daily activities. Another key recommendation is to ensure that the training format is inclusive and tailored to the specific needs and preferences of potential learners and trainees, integrating both face-to-face and online sessions. The characteristics and role of the digital scout were also highlighted, particularly the importance of the facilitator's empathy and communication skills. Conducting an analysis on needs at the outset to adapt the training to the audience was identified as a crucial step.

The shared needs and suggestions from all countries have formed the foundation for developing the Digital Scouts training platform. This online training will be available in the languages of all partner countries and tailored to meet each country's specific requirements, reflecting the variations in local needs. By doing so, it is expected to support the development and expansion of local services, such as courses, counselling, and in-home personal support, by integrating an

individualized, needs-based approach for digital literacy among older adults, ultimately helping to bridge the current digital divide.

References

- [1] Eurostat (2024). *Population structure and ageing*. Statistics Explained. Link: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Population_structure_and_ageing#The_share_of_elderly_people_continues_to_increase
- [2] Vercruyssen, A., Schirmer, W., Geerts, N., Mortelmans, D. (2023). How “basic” is basic digital literacy for older adults? Insights from digital skills instructors, *Frontiers in Education*, 8:1231701. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1231701>
- [3] Hicks B, Gridley K, Dixon J, Baxter K, Birks Y, Colclough C, et al. and DETERMIND team (2023). Using digital technologies to facilitate social inclusion during the COVID-19 pandemic: Experiences of co-resident and non-co-resident family carers of people with dementia from DETERMIND-C19. *International Journal Geriatric Psychiatry*. 38(2): e5886. <https://doi.org/10.1002/gps.5886>
- [4] DigitalScouts project website. Link: <https://digitalscouts.eu>
- [5] Saavedra, I., Machado, N., Dantas, C. (2023). *National Report for Portugal. Digital participation of people 60+: readiness, support structures, professionalisation of supporters and examples of opportunities*. DigitalScouts: Enhancing the Digital Literacy and Participation in Europe. Link: https://digitalscouts.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/DigitalScouts_National_Report_Portugal.pdf