



Mobile Apps and Digital Services for Seniors

COLLECTION OF RESOURCES

FOR IMPROVING THE DIGITAL SKILLS OF ELDERLY PEOPLE



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1. INTRODUCTION

The present document represents a Collection of Resources of effective approaches and methods for improving the digital skills of elderly people. The Collection of Resources is based on the results from the exchange of experience and good practices performed between Spain, Bulgaria and The Netherlands. The extracted teaching and learning approaches are linked to selected good practices which give an example of their application with elderly people and help elaborate new approaches for making their digital inclusion more practical and engaging.

The document is targeted at trainers, educators, social workers and volunteers working for the educational and social inclusion of elderly people and offers them successful approaches and educational resources to make non-formal education more innovative and engaging for elderly people. Ultimately, the Collection of Resources can also benefit the elderly people by motivating them to gain practical digital skills to learn how to take advantage of the opportunities offered by different digital services and thus gain better access to services, goods and social interactions.

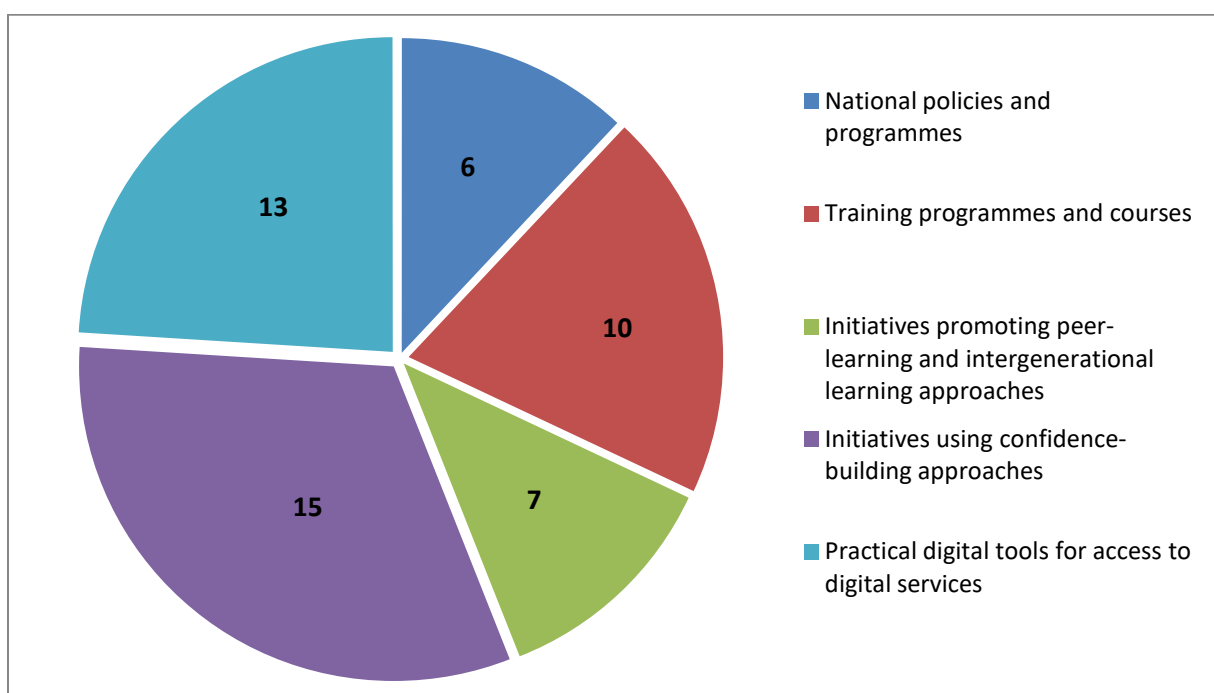


2. COLLECTION OF GOOD PRACTICES

As a result of the performed research the participating organisations have identified 22 good practices focused on improving the digital competences of educators, social workers and volunteers working with elderly people as well as developing digital skills of older adults for active aging and social inclusion. The methods used included desktop research, surveys, interviews and workshops with target groups and stakeholders, looking for the most suitable approaches and methods to enhance the digital engagement of elderly people and improve their digital skills.

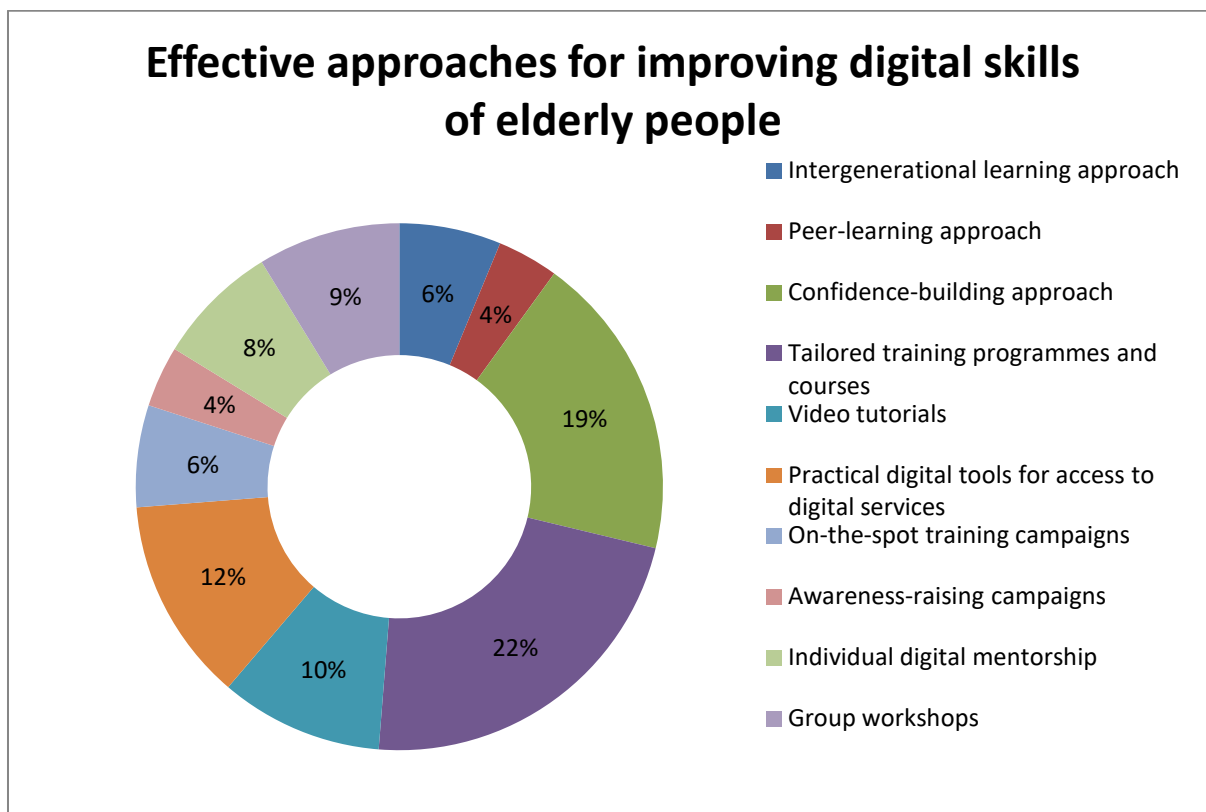
The selection of good practices from the 3 participating countries followed a pre-agreed template based on set impact targets and selection criteria. The participating organisations focused on identifying specific types of good practices which would contribute to a comprehensive exchange of experience and ideas between the partner countries, allowing comparison of the needs, progress and results related to digital training offers and approaches applied with elderly people between 3 EU countries with different pace of development and level of digital skills of their populations. Thus the research focused on the following types of initiatives:

- **National policies and programmes** directed at the digital inclusion of elderly people
- **Training programmes** focused on upskilling educators and developing digital skills of elderly people
- **Initiatives promoting peer-learning and intergenerational learning approaches** for educational and social inclusion of elderly people
- **Initiatives using confidence-building approaches** for enhancing the motivation and engagement of elderly people
- **Practical digital tools** for access to digital service





Following the research, the participating organisations performed an analysis of the information and extracted the most effective approaches and resources for improving the digital competences of elderly people which can be adopted and applied in the context of engaging, training and autonomous learning of elderly people. The specific focus is on equipping the elderly with practical digital skills which to allow them to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by different digital services and thus gain better access to online services, goods and social interactions.





3. EFFECTIVE APPROACHES FOR IMPROVING DIGITAL SKILLS OF ELDERLY PEOPLE:

3.1. *Intergenerational learning approach*

The intergenerational learning approach promotes learning through inclusive and collaborative engagement between younger and older adults for sharing knowledge, skills, values and experiences. Beyond the transfer of knowledge, intergenerational learning fosters reciprocal learning relationships between different generations and helps to develop social capital and social cohesion in our ageing societies. Intergenerational learning is inclusive and builds on the positive resources that younger and older generations have to offer each other and those around them.

Intergenerational learning can occur in different educational and social settings (formal, informal, in-class, out-of-class, etc.) and through different programmes, projects or initiatives aimed at the transfer of knowledge and better social cohesion. The intergenerational approach is one of the few solutions to combat ageism, respond to demographic challenges in societies, bring solidarity across the life cycle, break down barriers and stereotypes, encourage cross-generational work, etc.

Intergenerational learning brings along benefits for both younger and older generations. Younger people participating in intergenerational learning improve their goal-setting skills, overcome stereotypes, change their attitude towards ageing, improve their willingness to contribute to community, develop their self-esteem, among others. The benefits of participating in intergenerational learning for older adults include preventing loneliness and isolation, creating a feeling of worthiness, improved health and functional capacity, developing more positive attitudes, etc. In addition to the traditional direction of the flow of knowledge between participants in intergenerational learning from the older generation to the younger, new forms of approach have also been developed like reverse mentoring or service-learning approach in which young people are seen as a source of new skills.

Intergenerational programmes mutually benefit participants as well as volunteers, staff, family members, organisations and the community and can address major concerns and issues in the local community such as:

- building active and safer communities
- reducing inequality
- reducing social isolation and loneliness
- building relationships in communities
- improving health and mental wellbeing
- increasing digital connectivity
- contributing to improve climate challenge

Principles of the intergenerational approach that should be considered when adopting it:

1. Mutual and Reciprocal Benefit – All participating generations gain benefit and are engaged on equal status. By working together, both groups also ensure that important traditional skills are maintained for future generations.



2. Equal participation – Successful intergenerational learning is based on the aspirations of the generations participating. The participants are fully involved in shaping the programme and feeling a sense of ownership and power in shaping it and taking it forward.

3. Asset Based (person centred) intergenerational learning – It works with the generations to help them discover their strengths and then builds on these assets to build success, understanding and mutual respect.

4. Well Planned intergenerational learning is not intended to replace natural connections, but instead, reflects a conscious attempt to create positive changes that are in addition to naturally occurring processes.

5. Culturally Grounded – The rich cultural diversity that exists across Europe means that there cannot be common programmes that will work in all settings. Whilst the principles behind the approach may be the same, the needs, context and attitudes of people may differ widely.

6. Strengthens Community Bonds and Promotes Active Citizenship – It promotes the engagement of people from across the generations with each other and those around them. Its emphasis on positive connection, recognising and building on people's strengths, is a highly effective way of building stronger, better connected communities with increased social capital and citizens who are more engaged in local democracy and social concerns.

7. Challenges Ageism – The young and old are the victims of ageist attitudes to varying degrees across Europe. Intergenerational learning provides a mechanism for the generations to meet each other, to work and explore together and from this rediscover the reality of who they really are and what they have to gain from being more involved with the other generations.

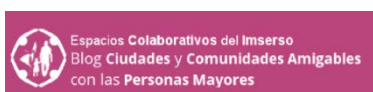
8. Cross-disciplinary – The intergenerational learning approach provides a vehicle and an opportunity to broaden the experience of professionals to working in a more inclusive way and to become involved in cross-training with other groups to enable them to think much more broadly about how they undertake their work.

Examples from the Mobi-Dig collection of good practices which use the intergenerational learning approach:

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3.2. Peer-learning approach

Peer learning represents a two-way, reciprocal activity which is meant to be mutually beneficial and involve the exchange of knowledge, ideas and experience between participants. It can be described as a way of interdependent or mutual learning based on constant interaction of educator and learner and of a learner with other learners.

Peer learning includes different learning models, including such where more advanced learners tutor less advanced ones or learners assist each other in both learning content and personal issues. Other peer learning models can also be discussion seminars, private study groups, counseling, peer-assessment schemes, collaborative project work, group works, workplace mentoring and community activities.

Peer learning is suitable both in a formal educational environment and in more non-formal contexts involving volunteers with knowledge in a certain field. In this context, peer learning could be beneficial also to people from different ethno-cultural backgrounds, support the integration of different disadvantaged people and promote social inclusion.

The peer learning approach is especially useful for the low educated and/or disadvantaged people with limited access to a learning process. Peer learning not only presents opportunities for learners to discuss issues but it also presents opportunities for learners to enrich their emotional intelligence, to better understand the background of their peers and thus better understand their actions and motivations.

When it comes to digital technologies, peer tutoring has proved to be an efficient and preferred method for acquiring digital skills in later life. In this aspect, peer tutoring can take the form as an individual digital peer support usually taking place as non-formal meetings with an appointment proceeding at the pace of the person who is being helped, depending on their own needs and wishes. Peer tutoring can also take the form of digital support which takes place in training courses, where the role of the peer tutor is to assist the course teacher and offer low-threshold support by sitting alongside the participants, ensuring no one gets left behind. Peer learning in the context of digital support is generally needed with daily tasks, such as using digital services and devices, different applications, etc.

Examples from the Mobi-Dig collection of good practices which use the peer-learning approach:





3.3. Confidence-building approach

When it comes to digital technologies, confidence can be gained from positive experiences of use and it helps with better technology engagement. Positive experiences motivate people to experiment and engage better with their own devices. Furthermore, using technology for activities that correspond to one's personal interests provides great motivation for people to expand the use of their mobile technology devices. This is extremely relevant for older adults who need to build up their self-confidence and strengthen their sense of self-efficacy i.e. the user's belief in their capacity to use technologies and will achieve a positive outcome with it. Personal interests influence positively the confidence of older adults as they find more relevance in using technologies that relate to their interests and they are more willing to learn how to use devices and apps that are more closely related to tasks and skills they were familiar with.

Confidence is thus a complex concept that is related to multiple emotions and it can dynamically increase or decrease depending on the quality of the experiences with technologies that older adults encounter. The facilitation of activities with older adults to learn about technologies needs to be clear, patient and step-wise to contribute to building their confidence in technology use.

According to studies, when it comes to training of older adults to use technology, goal-oriented training (task-based training) is more effective than a standard training approach. This means that older adults become more conscious of their mistakes and can adapt their behaviour according to the expected goals. In terms of supporting activities, individual activities for learning prove to be more efficient than group activities because the competition between group members can cause anxiety and frustration to some participants. In group settings positive results could come from incorporating the peer learning approach. Older adults tend to rely on peers in the group to validate their behaviour and a person with more advanced digital skills within the group can demonstrate to others what can be achieved through technology use. This leads to believe that the most important factor is not whether there is a group setting or not but how the groups are set up and function.

Another factor that has a substantial influence on the confidence of older adults in using technology is the language used during training activities. Older adults do not respond well to technical terms and specific jargon used which can be discouraging for them to move forward with the training. The language used should be straightforward and supported by examples and practical associations.

In a nutshell, when speaking about building the confidence of older adults in technology use, the following factors should be taken into consideration:

- Older adults should have a positive experience when learning about technology
- The learning process should align with the older adults' personal interests
- Chose the correct learning environment and adapt it to the comfort of the learner(s)
- Training, either individual or group, should follow the own pace of the learner(s)
- The language used should be straightforward and supported by examples and practical associations
- Older adults need to practise by themselves using technologies and go through the steps



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Examples from the Mobi-Dig collection of good practices which use the confidence-building approach:

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INTERNET FOR ALL: 55+

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Enhancing the
Social and Digital
Participation of
Older People





3.4. Tailored training courses and training programmes

When designing a training programme or course for improving the digital literacy and skills of older adults it is important to keep in mind that not all older adults have the same level of digital proficiency. They all come along with different skills, levels of experience, learning styles, strengths and learning barriers. In this respect, effective digital training of older adults should be tailored to address the specific needs and challenges, both in the context of individual and group learning environment.

In order to develop an effective tailored training programme for older adults you can focus on the following key aspects:

- Assess the needs of the learners

Learn about the level of digital skills and specific needs of the older adults who will participate in the training. You can use questionnaires, interviews, simple tests, etc. to tailor the training session to their needs and ensure they are not overwhelmed.

- Create a curriculum

Based on the results from the needs assessment, you need to develop a curriculum that reflects the level of skills of the participants. For better results, the learning content should be divided into topics and subtopics in order to offer the information piece by piece. Hands-on practical activities are mandatory when it comes to acquiring and upgrading digital skills.

- Create a comfortable learning environment

Create a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere for learning. Make sure that the learning space is adequately illuminated, furnished with comfortable seating and devoid of any distractions.

- Apply different teaching methods and approaches

Choose the teaching techniques based on the learning content and use different methods such as hands-on practice, visual aids such as diagrams and videos, verbal explanations, etc.

- Use user-friendly devices and software

Choose user-friendly devices and software for training that are easy to navigate and understand. This will help older adults feel more comfortable and confident in learning.

- Keep it entertaining

Make the training programme more engaging and interesting for older adults by including fun activities like games, quizzes and other interactive exercises.

- Involve volunteers or peers

Use the help of volunteers or peer older adults with good digital skills during the training sessions to provide additional support and make the experience more relatable for the participants.

- Encourage questions and provide support

Encourage the older adults to ask questions and provide individual support when needed to help them overcome any challenges they may face.

- Conduct assessments and feedback



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In order to monitor the progress of the learners and adjust the training programme as needed, perform regular assessments using different means and gather feedback from the participants.

- Recognise progress

Make sure to celebrate the participants' progress, small victories, milestones and achievements throughout the training sessions to boost their confidence and sense of accomplishment.

- Encourage daily practice

Setting daily tasks that require practicing newly acquired skills and using digital tools reinforces learning and ensures consistent improvement.

Examples from the Mobi-Dig collection of good practices which use tailored training courses and training programmes:





3.5. Video tutorials

Videos are a great tool for learning because they not only help in cognitive load reduction but also grab viewer attention and add to learner engagement. Videos can make training to be flexible, on-the-go, bite-sized and focused as well as learning content to be rendered in engaging way that allows learning, practice and handling challenges.

Text-based or audio training is very productive when it comes to teaching structured content and setting tasks. On the other side, video training, including gamification, simulations and other interactive content, is great for promoting behavioural change and it has the power to demonstrate the predicted behaviour for learners to practice and model. Video learning can be incorporated in different learning styles and keep learners engaged throughout the experience. Videos can use animation, sound effects and even interactive elements that help older adults with memory retention of the content.

Some of the advantages of video learning include:

- Easy to access

Video learning can be done at home or on the go and video learning content can be accessed on a variety of devices (phones, tablets, computers, etc.). This makes videos much easier to access than other forms of content such as books or articles that may require physical copies in order to use them.

- Learn whenever they want

Video learning allows learners to engage whenever and wherever they want to. Finding a bitesize, visually engaging educational video on a certain topic can help learners focus more on subject taught and less on worrying about how they're going to remember everything.

- Good for learning at their own pace

Through video learning older adults can engage in learning at any time and they will be able to go into more detail on a subject. If they feel like they need more information or to go over a topic again, video learning allows them to learn at their own pace.

- Encourages self-initiated study

Educational videos can present topics in fun and engaging ways. Video learning can also be delivered in bitesize parts so that older adults don't have to feel overwhelmed with too much information at once.

- Increased retention rates

Videos capture sound and visuals simultaneously, increasing the amount of multimedia learning materials and sensory information stored in our minds. Thus through videos learners tend to remember more of what they contain because they are engaging and easy to recall later on.

- Better efficiency

Videos can render complex subjects quickly and easily by presenting visuals, audio or both that add an extra dimension of engagement to the learning process. With videos, learners can also observe real-time demonstrations.



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Examples from the Mobi-Dig collection of good practices which use video tutorials:

INTERNET FOR ALL: 55+



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3.6. Practical digital tools for access to digital services

Nowadays, more and more services from all aspects of life are increasingly designed and offered as digital but in order to access them people need a certain level of digital skills. Having practical digital skills in new technologies and services can facilitate the older adults' social interactions, foster independent and autonomous living and improve the access and management of health and social care services. With some targeted support from trainers, caregivers or family members, older adults can develop the skills and knowledge to identify and access the right digital services, take advantage of mobile apps and online services and feel confident using digital tools to succeed in daily tasks.

Older adults represent a growing market for digital technologies tailored to their needs, ranging from assistive devices, smart living and health monitoring devices, to digital advancements in the health and care sectors that can improve service delivery. For this reason, it is important for older adults to develop the right set of skills to use mobile devices, navigate through useful apps and learn how to use and adapt them to their personal needs.

Examples from the Mobi-Dig collection of good practices which use practical digital tools for access to digital services:

INTERNET FOR ALL: 55+

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3.7. On-the-spot training campaigns

On-the-spot training campaigns are a great way to engage older adults with new technologies and motivate them to take on digital training, even on a very basic level. Workshops on location can focus on different topics like health, mobility, first steps on the internet, searching the internet, etc. During such events older adults can practice together with other peers under the guidance of trained volunteers. Older adults greatly appreciate the personal approach and attention as well as the opportunity to ask questions. As a result they start to feel more confident and freer in using digital devices and improving their digital skills.

On-the-spot training campaigns can be made in different formats, ranging from one-to-one support in retirement homes, IT drop-in sessions, larger-scale community events, etc. There doesn't have to be set lesson plans. The learners can pick their own topics depending on what they'd like to learn about, and these topics can be repeated as many times as needed.

Examples from the Mobi-Dig collection of good practices which use on-the-spot training campaigns:



INTERNET FOR ALL: 55+

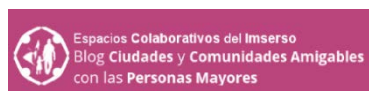


3.8. Awareness-raising campaigns

Awareness-raising activities help to spread the word about the benefits of being digital and inspire and motivate people to engage with digital inclusion services. Such activities are specially designed to reach older people who are at risk of digital exclusion and inform them about how digital can help them personally. This will help encourage people to find out more about the many ways in which digital can make day-to-day life easier and more enjoyable.

Examples from the Mobi-Dig collection of good practices which use awareness-raising campaigns:

INTERNET FOR ALL: 55+



3.9. Individual digital mentorship

Individual digital mentorship provides a comfortable and safe environment for older adults to learn about technology use based on their own goals and interests, previous experiences with digital technologies, level of digital skills, access to different types of digital devices, etc. Some people are reluctant to reveal much information about themselves in group activities and they prefer to talk more about their experiences privately.



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Individual learning settings also give an opportunity to tailor the training activities and programmes to the individual learning needs, motivations, personal interests and specific questions of the learner. The learning should follow the own pace of the learner, with instructions to be delivered slowly and tasks repeated at a later stage. For better results, individual digital learning should be followed by additional formal training, informal assistance by family and friends, or self-led practice.

Pairing older adults with tech-savvy mentors can provide personalized guidance and support. Family members, community volunteers, or even professional services can fulfil this role, offering step-by-step assistance and encouragement.

Examples from the Mobi-Dig collection of good practices which use individual digital mentorship:

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3.10. Group workshops

When it comes to older adults learning about technology use, group learning can encourage peer learning and support, increasing the participants' confidence and resulting in better social interactions and inclusion. While individual learning could increase knowledge and skills based on a personalised approach, collaboration with more advanced peers could further enhance this and expand the zone of development. Group activities that are engaging provide a more positive user experience, participants build a closer relationship with each other and this allows them to collaborate and learn from each other within the group.

Examples from the Mobi-Dig collection of good practices which use group workshops:

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4. CONCLUSION

The joint efforts of 3 organisations from 3 European countries (Spain, Bulgaria and the Netherlands) resulted in the development of a collection of 22 good practices focused on improving the digital competences of educators, social workers and volunteers working with elderly people as well as developing digital skills of older adults for active aging and social inclusion. The ultimate goal is to empower older adults to embrace technology, enhance their connectivity, health and lifelong learning by finding ways to address the barriers they face when it comes to new technologies and link them to the right tools and support for making them feel confident and included in our rapidly evolving digital world.

The selected good practices provide a number of effective approaches and resources for improving the digital competences of elderly people which can be adopted and applied in the context of engaging, training and autonomous learning of elderly people. The specific focus is on equipping the elderly with practical digital skills which to allow them to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by different digital services and thus gain better access to online services, goods and social interactions.

The partner organisations focused on identifying relevant national policies and programmes directed at the digital inclusion of elderly people, training programmes focused on upskilling educators and developing digital skills of elderly people, initiatives promoting peer-learning and intergenerational learning approaches for educational and social inclusion of elderly people, initiatives using confidence-building approaches for enhancing the motivation and engagement of elderly people as well as practical digital tools for access to digital service.

The effective approaches for improving the digital skills of elderly people described in this document have the aim to provide new ideas, methods and resources to trainers, educators, social workers and volunteers working for the educational and social inclusion of elderly people to make non-formal education more innovative and engaging for elderly people. Ultimately, this can also benefit the elderly people by motivating them to gain practical digital skills to learn how to take advantage of the opportunities offered by different digital services and thus gain better access to services, goods and social interactions.



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