



EUROPEAN UNION

Digital for All

Policy Recommendations

Higher education
School education
Vocational education and training
Youth
Sport
Jean Monnet

Erasmus+
Enriching lives, opening minds

Adult education

This publication is developed in frames of the Erasmus+ Digital for All adult education project. This document is providing policy recommendations for improving digital literacy levels of people with disabilities. The recommendations are based on real life experiences of different user groups from 4 communities – Estonia, Malta, Lithuania and EUCAP (European Council of Autistic People). Neither the Estonian Chamber of People with Disabilities nor any person acting on behalf of EPIK is responsible for the use that might be made of this publication.

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Estonian Chamber of People with Disabilities, Agency for Protection of Rights of Persons with Disabilities under Lithuanian Ministry of Social Security and Labour, Directorate for Disability Issues of Malta, Estonian Foundation of Disabled People, European Council of Autistic People,

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PDF ISBN 978-9949-7372-2-2

Estonian Chamber of People with Disabilities, 2025

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How to cite this document: Erasmus+ project Digital for All Policy recommendations

Language editing and proofreading: Kacey Clark, Meelis Joost

Design and layout: Kermo Aruoja at Skald

Editorial coordination: Eero Kipli, Mihkel Tõkke

Title: Policy recommendations

Abstract

As a result of the Erasmus+ Digital for All project a community-based digital support program for individuals has been created, which can be adapted and implemented without license fees, in different cultural environments. Four communities participated in the testing phase (Estonia, Lithuania, Malta and EUCAP members) and have tested a training program with now 30 trained digital skills peer support persons, who are able to pass their skills on and improve digital skills levels of people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. The focus of the project was on digital education. Specifically on increasing the digital skills and readiness of people with disabilities. Since digital literacy today permeates all areas of life horizontally, it is extremely important that people with disabilities are not left behind. With sufficient digital skills, people with disabilities can more easily participate in society, have access to the labour market, participate in adult education and engage in self-fulfilment in the field of culture.

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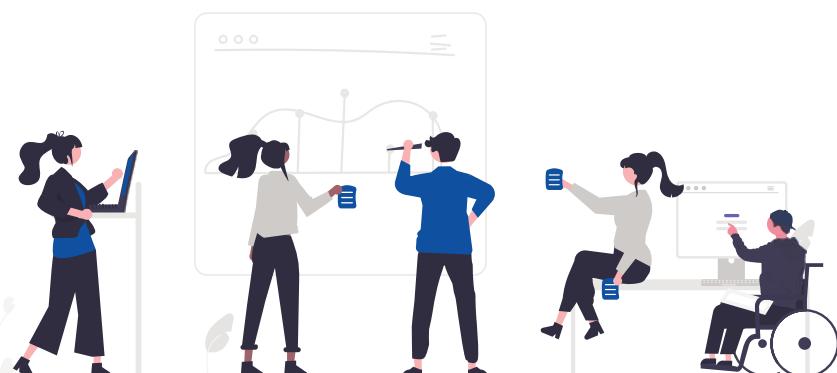
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Introduction

This publication was developed within the framework of the Erasmus+ project, **Innovation for digital skills education for disadvantaged groups in Europe – DIGITAL FOR ALL** (Project number: 2023-1-EE01-KA220-ADU-000155662) adult education project. The recommendations in this document are based on the work undertaken within the project to enhance digital literacy and digital accessibility for people with disabilities. The knowledge gathered is based on real life experiences of different user groups from four communities – Estonia, Malta, Lithuania and EUCAP (European Council of Autistic People). This document aims to make the use of digital technology more accessible for people with disabilities and to improve their independence and inclusion in society.

About the project

As a result of the Erasmus+ Digital for All project, a community-based peer-to-peer digital support programme for individuals has been created, which can be adapted and implemented without licence fees, in different cultural environments. This can be used in future community-based digital support programmes. Four communities (Estonia, Lithuania, Malta, and EUCAP members) participated in the pilot training development for digital assistants, who in the future will be able to pass their knowledge on and improve the digital literacy skills of people with disabilities and other groups who need assistance. Since digital literacy today has presence in all areas of life, it is imperative that people with disabilities are included. With sufficient digital skills possibilities can be created for people with disabilities to participate in society, the labour market, adult education and the field of culture. The European Disability Forum, the European umbrella organisation for people with disabilities, has backed the project as an additional partner and was consulted in the drafting of the current policy recommendations.



Why is it important?

According to Eurostat: “In 2023 only 56% of EU citizens had basic or above basic digital skills, with significant differences across countries. According to the EU target, 80% of all adults should have at least basic digital skills by 2030. To have at least basic overall digital skills, people must know how to do at least 1 activity in each of five different competence areas.”¹

In 2023, 27% of the EU population over the age of 16 had some form of disability, which is more than 1 in 4 adults in the EU. An average of 29.2% of the total female population has a disability, compared to 24.3% of the total male population.² This underlines the importance of making digital technologies accessible to a significant part of the population in the EU. The need for accessible ICT is further emphasised by the fact that in 2023, 91% of EU citizens used the internet in the previous 3 months. The most common online activities were sending and receiving emails (86%), instant messaging (82%), making phone or video calls (75%) and finding information about goods and services (70%).³

When it comes to EU policies, digital accessibility has been advanced through the European Accessibility Act (EAA), which is in force from June 2025.⁴ Web Accessibility Directive (WAD), the European Electronic Communications Code and the Audiovisual Media Services Directive are also regulating accessibility. The implementation of the EAA and WAD is supported by European Standards, especially EN 301 549. The European Telecommunications Standards Institute and the European Disability Forum have also drafted guidelines for accessible ICT development⁵, web accessibility⁶ and accessibility in general⁷.

In the rapidly changing digital environment, with more and more tasks required by individuals to be completed at their computers or hand-held devices, the need for proper digital skills is increasing. Regulations for the accessibility of goods and services are calling for rapid improvement of the environment used, which also often can cause trouble for users who have been accustomed to a certain layout and structure. Each change can potentially pose problems. **The most crucial issues and findings from the Erasmus+ Digital for All project are listed in the policy recommendations below.**



¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/interactive-publications/digitalisation-2024>

² <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/disability-eu-facts-figures/#:~:text=How%20many%20people%20have%20a%20disability%20in%20the,one%20in%20four%20people%20adults%20in%20the%20EU.>

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/interactive-publications/digitalisation-2024>

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2019/882/oj/eng>

⁵ https://www.etsi.org/deliver/etsi_en/301500_301599/301549/03.01.01_60/en_301549v030101p.pdf

⁶ <https://www.edf-feph.org/web-accessibility/>

⁷ https://www.edf-feph.org/content/uploads/2020/12/final_edf_transposition_toolkit_accessibility_act.pdf



Recommendations

1. What data about digital literacy is required?

To support the digital skills of people with disabilities effectively, decision makers need accurate, detailed and relevant data – not just general statistics. Researchers must consider the type and specifics of each disability, as diverse groups face different challenges.

It is crucial to know:

- › what digital skills people with various disabilities already have
- › where the biggest gaps are
- › what assistive technologies are used and how well they are understood
- › what barriers people face in learning
- › what support systems (family, peers, services) are already helping

This data should be collected regularly, in cooperation with people with disabilities and their organisations, and in a similar and comparable way across Europe to ensure consistent insights and effective cross-country policy development.

Recognition of realities is needed. Today, in many cases, peers are assisting their peers with the use of digital solutions. This is an extra burden on the people who are assisting, the assistance is often provided on a voluntary basis and is time-consuming. One of the aims of the current policy recommendations is to raise awareness of the fact that digital skills development is required even amongst digitally well-developed communities.

1.1 Adequate statistics about digital skills and user levels must be regularly collected. Many users are assisted by peers and this data may not be adequately addressed in current statistical overviews.

1.2 Major cross-border initiatives of data exchange must address user friendliness and secure quality and comparability of data. User views are crucial in the design process. One such initiative is the European Health Data Space, which requires a lot of competence from all users.

2. How can we achieve better digital literacy levels for people with disabilities?

Improving digital skills among people with disabilities requires strategic investments, inclusive design, and localised implementation.

2.1 Dedicated funding for digital literacy trainings must be secured. This will bring long-term benefits, such as reducing the need for in-person services and making public administration more efficient.

2.2 End users must be involved in the design of the training programmes. Training must be inclusive and adapted to different types of disabilities, learning styles, and support needs.

2.3 Training must be delivered both locally and contextually. It is important to find an approach where global standards and practices are adapted to fit regional contexts. This approach allows for more targeted and relevant training, addressing specific local needs and challenges.

3. What solutions are needed?

To truly support digital inclusion for people with disabilities, a combination of practical support, financial help, and positive examples which inspire, and guide action are necessary.

3.1 Successful models such as The Foundation for Information Technology Accessibility (FITA) in Malta should be promoted, showcasing what works and inspiring similar initiatives. Best practices can also be highlighted through establishing national and international awards for most user friendly and effective digital competence training schemes. Ensure affordable access to technology by providing computers in community and day care centres, along with basic, tailored digital training on-site.

3.2 Affordable access to technology can be ensured through the provision of computers in community and day care centres, along with basic, tailored digital training on-site. Where these centres do not exist, funding should be secured to create them.

3.3 Grant programmes should be created to help individuals with disabilities access digital devices such as laptops and smartphones. The application process for such grants must be accessible and from the beginning, enabling easy access to the funds. These grants should also be advertised in order that people with disabilities know they are available.

3.4 Smartphones must be recognised as assistive technology devices, with full acknowledgement of their vital role in communication, independence, and accessibility.

4. How will safety and security be ensured?

Through a combination of accessible safety tools, targeted digital skills training, and sustainable funding, a digital environment which protects and empowers people with disabilities can be created.

4.1 Digital safety must be included within skills training. People with disabilities need to be equipped with digital safety skills – such as recognising online scams, phising, managing privacy settings, and safely using assistive technologies.

4.2 Crisis preparedness tools, such as emergency alerts, disaster response apps, and communication platforms, must be fully accessible to people with all types of disabilities. In a dangerous era, no-one should be left behind.

4.3 Make users better aware of threats in the use of digital technology. The ability to recognise attempts to misuse data needs to be incorporated in trainings and be in an even stronger way present in awareness raising campaigns.

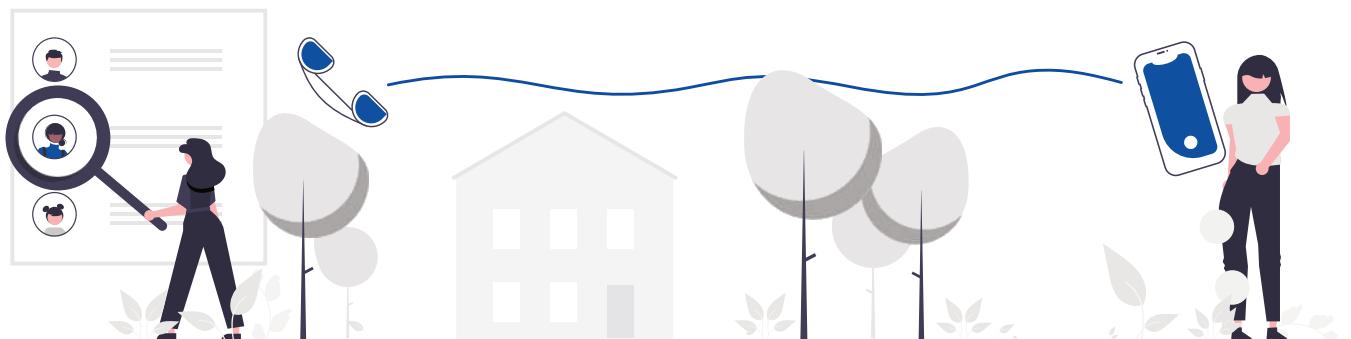
5. How to make the change work?

To make digital inclusion effective and lasting, we need to strengthen training systems and keep up with rapid technological change.

5.1 Training the trainers must be provided. Stakeholders need to develop comprehensive training programmes for those who teach digital skills, ensuring they understand both the technology and the diverse needs of people with disabilities.

5.2 People with disabilities are involved throughout the process. Include individuals with disabilities in both the design and delivery of training.

5.3 Stay ahead of digital change. Training systems must be flexible and regularly updated to help learners – and trainers – keep pace with new technologies, including AI, platforms, and risks. Ensure that the stakeholders in policy development are aware of the complex needs of users and are taking onboard those needs.





Summary

The most important recommendations we consider, based on the above-listed points are:

- 1.** Secure earmarked funding for digital literacy training for people with disabilities. Digital competence improvement can provide the public sector with cost-saving benefits.
- 2.** Secure users view in the design of the training programmes. Foster inclusive and context-sensitive training approach with a tailored digital literacy training at local and regional levels.
- 3.** Ensure that public and private digital services are developed considering the needs of people with disabilities and are accessible by also including the necessary accessibility information. Users must be put into the centre of technological developments.
- 4.** Secure adequate data about digital literacy levels. Currently, often with help of external assistance, people with limited digital skills will manage to use the environment they are required to. Therefore, administrative data is looking quite good. Survey based statistics is needed to adequately assess the situation.
- 5.** Take steps to ensure that crisis preparedness tools are fully accessible for people with disabilities. Secure sustainable funding to enhance accessible cybersecurity and digital safety measures into digital policy.
- 6.** Training the trainers. Ensure comprehensive training programs for the trainers. Involve individuals with disabilities in the design and delivery of training programs and encourage peer-to-peer training.

The EU Disability Strategy 2020-2030 emphasises the importance of equal access to digital technologies and services for persons with disabilities. Also, the European Disability Card⁸ is fostering the need for good digital skills of people that will use the card. Such developments underline that improvement of digital literacy of people with disabilities can create a significant change in the inclusion to society.

We consider the recommendations relevant to all levels of policymaking – local, regional, national, European and international levels. From the project team, we encourage dissemination of the current policy recommendations and ask all relevant stakeholders to highlight user involvement in design processes of any new digital initiatives.



⁸ Union of equality: Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030 - European Commission



