Digital Adult Educators
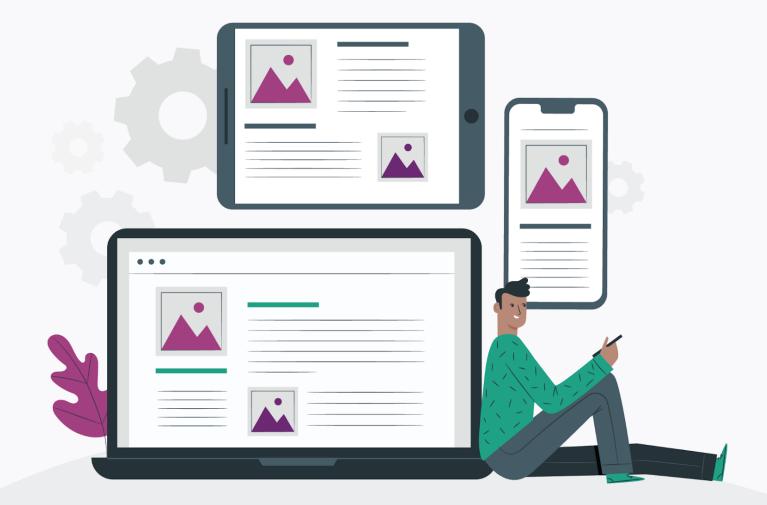
Preparing Adult Educators for a Digital World

IO4: Policy Recommendations Report

Transnational Report

Contents

EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

Executive summary

The DigitALAD project, funded with the support of the Erasmus+ programme, aims to support adult educators in developing their digital competences, a need that proved to be even more urgent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Alongside a handbook and an e-learning platform with easy-to-use materials, project partners have also looked into the wider policy context that facilitates or hinders acquisition of digital competences. The DigitALAD policy report provides a perspective from six partner countries (Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Spain, Switzerland) as well as an EU perspective on strategies that can support adult educators, opportunities for professional development and barriers that make it difficult, lessons learnt from the implementation of the DigitALAD training course and the outcome policy recommendations.

Although all partner countries report an increased interest in digital competences at the policy level, it is a relatively recent phenomenon. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to more policy support for twin transitions and skills development. That said, policy measures that have been announced do not explicitly target the acquisition or improvement of digital competences among teachers and educators, who are the ones with a direct connection to adult learners. There are persisting gaps in connectivity, infrastructure, as well as a lack of understanding of non-formal adult education as a sector and what it can achieve. Many adult educators still face barriers in access to professional development opportunities, or do not find the offer relevant in the context they work in. Lack of time among adult educators, who work long hours and juggle different professional obligations, is another factor that makes it difficult to streamline professional development opportunities across the sector.

Policy and practice recommendations suggested by the project partners advocate for a holistic approach to learning, one that goes beyond quick fixes and sees digital competences as part of a framework of skills for life, in which competences interlock. Relevance of the offer both for learners and for adult educators is key in ensuring that there is a continued interest in personal or professional development. In-service training should also be embedded in everyday work of adult educators instead of making it an additional responsibility on top of the significant workload. A functioning ecosystem, in which different stakeholders cooperate with each other instead of competing, needs to be developed so that digital transformation does not leave anyone behind, not least adult educators.

Introduction

Spotlight on digital competences: a European perspective

The need for improved digital competences among adults has been highlighted for years. Although subject of global and European surveys, research papers and policy documents, it was not until 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic moved all of the teaching to virtual environments, that the digital divide became particularly apparent. As learners around the world struggled to overcome various obstacles to join online classes, their teachers and educators also found it difficult to deliver their courses in a completely new setting, not least because they felt that their own digital competences needed an update.

At the same time, digital competences are not required only to participate in online learning; far from it. As many public spaces and services are moving to the virtual environment, digital citizenship has become a reality, and all adults should be able to make a conscious use of it (All Digital, 2021). Digital competences have also become the norm in many sectors of the labour market, with those adults feeling inadequate being left behind.

> *"Nowadays, the digital competence is considered increasingly important to actively participate in citizenship. Both digital technology and services are constantly changing, that is why the digital competence should be a transversal skill that is continuously updated in order to reduce the risks of digital exclusion"*
>
> National report for Spain

Are European citizens prepared for the impending digital transformation? Far from it. It is currently estimated that 56% of adults in the EU-27 have basic or above basic levels of digital competence (Eurostat, 2021). Worryingly, this number had not increased much in recent years, set at 54% already in 2015. Results of the Survey of Adult Skills paints an equally dire picture, with one in ten adults (11.7%) reporting

no prior computer experience. Aiming to measure levels of proficiency in problem-solving in technology-rich environments across OECD countries, the study found that 43% of adults scored at level 1 or below (OECD, 2019).

The Digital Society and Economy Index also suggests there is room for improvement and shows a clear disparity between EU-27 member states. For example, the percentage of adults who connected to the Internet in the past three months (2019) ranges from 82% (Netherlands) to 42% (Romania), with the EU average at 65%. The numbers change depending on the age category, with an average of 79% for adults between 25-54, and only 56% for those between 55-74 (DESI, 2019a).

Looking at other aspects, for example e-government, the picture is also fragmented. While in Estonia 74% of individuals submitted completed forms to public authorities online, the numbers are much lower elsewhere in Europe: for example, in Bulgaria and Romania (15% and 6%, respectively). Again, the numbers change depending on the age group, with the EU average at 28% for adults aged 55-74, and 46% for those between 25-54.

The statistics collected above tend to be below average in countries that are part of the DigitALAD consortium, hence the need for the project and an implementation of its results. While the project partners recognize that adult educators urgently need to update their digital competences, they also see them as potential ambassadors of change.

> *"Adult educators, whose role is being redefined, come across as ambassadors of the digital transition concerning adults' skill and competence development."*
>
> National report for Cyprus

EU strategies promoting the development of digital competences

This is not to say, however, that the problem has gone unnoticed at the policy level. Digital competences were at the front and centre of Upskilling Pathways, an initiative announced by the European Commission in 2016 and rolled out across the EU in subsequent years. Aiming to boost adults' literacy, numeracy and digital skills, Upskilling Pathways targeted those adults who were most in need of improving their basic skills. As many as 14 countries out of the EU-28 (as of 2019) put the focus on digital skills specifically, frequently going beyond digital literacy and adding measures that supported the skills of the workforce (European Commission, 2019).

The focus on digital competences was taken further in the new European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, launched in July 2020. Serving as a five-year plan and a "paradigm shift on skills" (European Commission, 2020), it recognizes that Europe is in the midst of a digital transition, one accelerated by COVID-19. Skills to support the twin transitions as well as skills for life are two of the eight actions to ensure that people have the right skills for jobs.

In parallel, EU institutions have also launched the Digital Education Action Plan (2021-27), which aims to provide a strategic vision for "high-quality, inclusive and accessible digital education". The initiative focuses on two priority areas: Fostering the development of a high-performing digital education ecosystem and Enhancing digital skills and competences for the digital transformation. Importantly, the first priority area mentions the need for "digitally competent and confident teachers and education and training staff".

Digital competence has also been highlighted in the Key Competence Framework (2006), last updated in 2018. In 2010, the EU Science Hub was tasked with mapping digital competence, leading to the publication of several frameworks: DIGCOMP: A Framework for Developing and Understanding Digital Competence in Europe (2013), DigComp 2.0 and 2.1 (2016 and 2017, respectively), DigCompEdu: European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (2017) and DigCompOrg: European Framework for Digitally Competent Educational Organisations (2019).

Looking beyond education, the Digital Decade was announced by the European Commission in early 2021, with the "Digital Compass" set out as a translation of EU

objectives into concrete terms (European Commission, 2021a). The level of ambition is impressive: by 2030, at least 80% of adults should have basic digital skills; all EU households should have gigabit connectivity and all populated areas should be covered by 5G; all key public services should be available online.

Digital competences of adult educators: a pan-European challenge

Although frameworks and initiatives at the European level have already been launched, their take-up remains fragmented, at best. As the present transnational report demonstrates, in several countries of the DigitALAD project consortium the improvement of digital competence has only come to the policy attention in recent years, and adult education staff still face barriers to improve their own digital competence.

The present document briefly describes the most recent strategies targeting the development of adults' digital competence, with specific attention paid to professional development of adult educators in this regard. It also offers insight into successes and challenges faced by adult educators who attempt to update their digital competence. The report closes with a set of recommendations targeting practitioners and policymakers.

Aiming to offer a transnational perspective, the report is based on national reports of six countries in the DigitALAD project consortium: Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Spain and Switzerland. The reports were drafted by the project partners: University of Aegean for Greece, Centre for Advancement of Research and Development in Educational Technology LTC (CARDET) and INNOVADE for Cyprus, Rural hub for Ireland, JAITEK Tecnología y Formación for Spain, and the Swiss Federation for Adult Learning (SVEB) for Switzerland. The transnational report has been drafted by the European Association for the Education of Adults, based in Belgium.

Significant part of the results is also based on focus groups that were organised in six partner countries. Focus groups were made up of local, national and European experts in adult learning, representing both policy and practice. Detailed summaries of focus groups as well as national reports are available on request.

National strategies addressing digital competences

National reports collected in preparation for the present document clearly demonstrate that at the policy level, there is a clear will to advance digital competences of adults; even if in some countries the focus is a relatively recent one, closely tied to the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, some of the countries that contributed to the report often have two policy strategies that support the improvement of digital competences: one focusing on adult education or lifelong learning explicitly, and one tackling digital transformation as an economic and societal challenge.

One example of a renewed focus on digital competences is the new Lifelong Learning Strategy 2021-27 of Cyprus, in which acquiring a minimum level of digital competence constitutes a horizontal priority. Importantly for the adult education sector, a European and International Affairs, Lifelong Learning, and Adult Education Office was established under the auspices of the Ministry of Education to manage and coordinate the learning programmes and opportunities offered to adults in Cyprus. The quality of the adult education sector and any relevant operation are expected to be better monitored by this unit.

In parallel, the Ministry of Education (MoECSY) established the Deputy Ministry for Research, Innovation and Digital Policy, responsible for the country's digital transformation, among other priorities. In its recently published strategy (Cyprus National Board for Strategy and Innovation, 2019), Digital Skills is one of the main pillars, along with Strategies, Infrastructures, and Technologies. According to the Digital Economy and Society (DESI) Index, Cyprus ranked 24th out of the 28 EU Member States in 2020. This index measures the national digital readiness based on five dimensions. Human capital and its digital capacity are one of these dimensions. As stated in its strategic framework for the upcoming programming period (2021-2023), the Deputy has declared commitment to improve Cyprus' ranking in the DESI index (DigitALAD, 2021a).

Similarly, Latvia has published its Guidelines for the Development of Education for 2021-2027 "Future Skills for the Future Society," where digital competencies are mentioned in the current problems of the Latvian education system for the year 2021-2027 and are summarized in the ten most important challenge points. They are based on the study of the current situation, which was performed by analysing

the results of the mid-term evaluation of the Education Development Guidelines 2014-2020 (informative report "On the mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the Education Development Guidelines 2014-2020 in 2014-2017") "Latvian Skills Strategy Assessment and Recommendations" (2019), as well as other data obtained by Latvia's participation in international comparative OECD, IEA, and EC studies, as well as by receiving recommendations from international organizations.

The overarching goal of education development guidelines for 2021-2027 is to provide quality education opportunities for all Latvians to promote the development and realization of their potential throughout their lives and build their ability to change and responsibly manage constant changes in society and the economy.

Another policy document of Latvia that emphasizes the importance of digital skills is Guidelines for Digital Transformation 2021-2027, a medium-term policy planning document that determines Latvia's digital transformation (information society development) policy, covering the period from 2021 to 2027. The guidelines expand the digital transformation policy's settings, action directions, and tasks approved in the National Development Plan for 2021-2027.

The guidelines will define a unified digital development policy for public administration, economy, and society. It will provide the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills for every citizen at any stage of life according to the need to use the options provided by digital transformation while providing businesses with a suitable digital environment that will enhance the ability of entrepreneurs to develop more competitive services and solutions. Digital skills and education are one of the five lines of actions identified for the implementation of the guidelines (DigitALAD, 2021b).

Similarly, parallel strategies have been launched in Spain to tackle digital transformation. After the Covid-19 pandemic, the Spanish government has created a Digital Skills Plan to address the development of digital skills. This Plan is based on an international and European contextualisation of the proposed public policies, providing a strategic framework aligned with the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The main objectives of this plan are to ensure digital inclusion, reduce the gender digital divide by increasing the number of female ICT specialists. Another objective is to ensure the digitisation of education and the acquisition of digital competences

for education for teachers and students at all levels of the education system. In addition, this plan also aims to guarantee the acquisition of advanced digital skills both for the unemployed to improve their employability and for the employed, to ensure that Spain has ICT specialists and to ensure that Spanish companies in general, and SMEs in particular, have the necessary digital skills to tackle their digitisation.

With regard to the development of digital competences in education, the aim of this point is to ensure that all pupils in the education system acquire the digital competences necessary for their full social integration and future professional development. The "Plan for the Digitalisation and Digital Competences of the Education System" consists of a set of actions to support the digital transformation of the educational system through the provision of devices for schools and students, digital educational resources, the adaptation of teachers' digital competences and digital skills of teachers and actions involving the application of artificial intelligence to personalised education (DigitALAD, 2021f).

> *"(…) there is a significant need to invest in digital literacy training for adult learners in Ireland; however, without sufficient investment in improving the digital competence of adult educators, it will not be possible to achieve the national objective of improving the digital literacy of adult learners in Ireland."*
>
> National report for Ireland

In other countries, publication of updated strategies is still underway. Such is the case in Ireland, where the 10-year Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy was subject of national consultations in 2020. The consultation process concluded in December 2020, however, as of yet, there has been no publication of the policy document that will set the national agenda for digital literacy in the adult education sector in the future.

In relation to a national digital policy, the first phase of the National Digital Strategy was launched in July 2013. This strategy focuses on digital engagement and how Ireland can benefit from a digitally engaged society. It set a clear vision and a number of practical actions to help increase the number of citizens and businesses engaging

online through industry and enterprise, citizen training, schools and education. Building on Phase 1, the government is working to develop a new National Digital Strategy. This is in response to technological change over the years and the range of opportunities and challenges this presents to Irish society. A public consultation on a new National Digital Strategy was held at the end of 2018; however, to date there has been no updated National Digital Strategy for Ireland (DigitALAD, 2021c).

Consultations and civil society involvement are also described as an important part of the policymaking process in Switzerland. For example, the director of SVEB is involved in several work groups at a policy level. This work has resulted in a bigger awareness of the need of continual training regarding basic skills and resulted in more investments from the state to different umbrella organizations like SVEB (DigitALAD, 2021e). Interestingly, although Switzerland is not part of the EU, there are several policy priorities that are similar, such as the focus on basic skills in adult learning including workplace learning.

In terms of policy development, Greece has seen significant attention paid to its National Digital Coalition, which was established in May 2018. Many social, educational, business and scientific organisations participated in this action. All population groups, including the unemployed, fall within this strategy. It needs to be noted that to date, many tools have been developed through this strategy and used to train primary and high school students, public servants and entrepreneurs. These tools tend to be industry-specific (e.g. tourism, medicine), meaning that an unemployed individual may choose specialised industry-based digital knowledge. Another important fact is that technology giants such as Google (National Coalition Greece, 2018) and Cisco (National Coalition Greece, 2019) actively participated in the project, offering the necessary technical know-how to develop tools for digital skills learning (Kokkosis, 2020).

Professional development of adult educators

European opportunities for professional development

At the European level, there are several opportunities for adult educators to update their competences. The most important one is the Erasmus+ programme, whose new seven-year framework was rolled out in 2021. The priorities of the programme are in line with the Digital Education Action Plan and support its second strategic priority by offering actions that can enhance digital skills among all citizens. Adult

educators are encouraged to participate in staff mobility, under Key Action 1, which allows them to attend training programmes and to do job shadowing. They can also apply for partnerships under Key Action 2 to exchange best practices and foster innovation in the sector.

Capacity-building and professional development are also possible thanks to the work of European stakeholders in adult learning and education. The European Association for the Education of Adults offers its annual Younger Staff Training, which since it was launched in 2011 has already had over 100 alumni. Other thematic training programmes are offered online and hosted on EAEA's e-learning platform: https://ae-learning.eu/. Also worth mentioning is the Adult Education Academy, organised by the University of Wuerzburg, Germany, and its partners. The two-week programme hosts MA and PhD students in adult education as well as practitioners from around the globe to look at adult education policy, professional development in the sector and other issues from a comparative perspective.

Adult educators are also welcome to use EPALE: Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe, and exchange with their colleagues from around the continent. The platform provides a space for discussions, resources, podcasts, news articles, blog posts and more. Importantly, EPALE services are run at the national level, which makes the platform multilingual and therefore more accessible. As of October 2021, EPALE counts 100,000 registered users.

Entry to the profession of an adult educator in Europe: a fragmented picture

National reports clearly show that there are diverse approaches to professional development of adult educators in Europe. In several countries, there are no entry-level requirements to join the profession in liberal adult education; however, quality and professional standards have been established for trainers working in the field of VET (Vocational Education and Training). That said, there is a recognized pathway to enter the profession of an adult educator in Switzerland, who is responsible for the national train the trainer programme.

Another exception in this regard is Spain. In adult education centres, the most common level of the classes given correspond to the educational level of Compulsory Secondary Education and Higher education. Taking this into account, in order to enter the profession of an adult educator teachers must have the university degree of the subject they teach on and the Teacher Training Master's

degree. However, depending on the type of school, teachers need to follow different paths.

Those wishing to enter public schools must pass the competitive examinations for teachers. In order to take these examinations, in addition to having a university degree and also specialising in the subject they wish to teach, they must have a Master's degree in teacher training too. Once they have obtained the post by passing the competitive examination, teachers must apply for a transfer to these adult education centres.

Digital competences in professional development of adult educators

Most partners of the DigitALAD project agree that digital competences either do not make part of the entry-level or in-service training, or have only been included recently. A notable exception is Switzerland, where the training programme has been updated to include digital competences. Trainers are trained to develop their skills in planning, implementing and reflecting on digital learning processes with adults.

In Spain, among the training subjects in the master's degree for teachers, the one closest to the development of digital competences is Teaching innovation and initiation to educational research. In Greece, students enrolled in university courses on adult education enjoy a holistic approach to learning and an updated curriculum which includes the development of digital competences.

Some partners mentioned systemic problems that make it difficult for professional development of adult educators to be consistent. In Cyprus, the concept of digital competences has different understandings, with no single framework in use across the sector.

All of the EU countries in the project consortium have EPALE services available. Some also use other platforms and social media networks to get in touch with their peers and exchange information and resources. Such is the case in Spain, where some communities on Facebook have gathered thousands of followers, who interact and post their teaching practices in order to share them with their colleagues. Switzerland also has an e-learning platform available for adult educators who wish to exchange.

Barriers to accessing professional development

Several barriers make it difficult for adult educators across Europe to access professional development opportunities, which are extrinsic or intrinsic. Lack of time is a barrier cited by most project partners; as adult educators are busy with their significant workload, they are often unavailable to attend courses, events or training programmes.

> *"Teachers are not enthusiastic supporters of training because they have difficulty combining teaching with the heavy workload, but much depends on the field represented by adult educators".*
>
> National report for Latvia

Although most partners agree that there are opportunities on offer, they also add that not all of them might be relevant for the needs of adult educators, especially as adult education is a sector that depends heavily on the local context and the profile of learners. Other barriers to access include geographical factors (for example in Greece, made up of many islands), connectivity issues and lack of adequate equipment.

Implementation of the DigitALAD training programme: lessons learnt

INNOVADE LI & CARDET, Cyprus

In Cyprus the training was implemented in two phases online. The first implementation that addressed adult educators was conducted in three stages: a workshop presenting the project and its main results, autonomous online engagement via the project's e-learning space, and another workshop for digesting knowledge, reflecting practice, and recommending practical topics (e.g., lesson plans) with 62 participants involved. The last workshop hosted 26 participants. Additional thematic areas were integrated, such as the digital gap and inequality in

participation, presentation of lesson plans, debriefing and evaluation. Overall, participants were satisfied with the programme. As expected, they appreciated the most practical part of the training, where examples and digital tools were explained, providing tips and ways to use them in their classes. Therefore, one of the key messages was that digital skills are to be learnt in practice because, by nature, they imply practical work rather than theoretical knowledge. The most apparent gaps rely on maintaining learners' interest and engagement during online classes and conducting formative and summative assessments because they cannot easily ensure if learners digested knowledge due to limited teacher-student interactions.

University of the Aegean, Greece

In Greece the training was also divided into two phases, in the first one online there were 26 adult education participants and the workshop facilitators presented the project, the training programme, the available OER, and the e-learning platform. Collaborative activities followed. Having completed the first workshop the adult educators requested to allow more study time at the e-learning platform, as they realised that the content of the training sections was completely new to them. Over the next two weeks, the facilitators supported the adult educators' learning process and the development of their lesson plans that they presented at the second online seminar along with examples of good practice and group work. In the second phase, six adult educators were able to pilot the lesson plans they developed with their student groups. In addition, a focus group was created with representatives of the main institutions of adult education—technical and vocational education, higher education, lifelong learning, education of disadvantaged groups, and others—as well as important politicians and decision makers who have sealed with their action adult education and lifelong learning in Greece.

The Rural Hub, Ireland

Throughout the two live online sessions, they engaged 12 adult educators in total. All of the adult educators who were engaged in this training were community-based facilitators and worked in rural settings. None of the participants had previous working knowledge or experience using the DigComp Framework, as such. Participants were interested to learn about the framework and to plan how this framework could be integrated into their teaching practice. This was particularly the

case for the two educators from the Digital Skills for Over 55s Programme who agreed that this framework could be used as the basis for re-designing their digital skills programme. The framework competences related to problem-solving, security and information literacy were thought to be most relevant to the target group for this programme, which is adults over the age of 55 with low levels of digital competence.

University of Latvia, Latvia

The first part of the DigitALAD training programme involved 64 participants from different educational institutions of Latvia. Activities were delivered virtually via the Zoom platform. Adult educators were told about the importance of digital competence in Latvia and why enhancing digital competence can positively improve their skills in the professional field. Following the seminar, adult educators were introduced to the DigitALAD project, its aim, tasks and results. Adult educators were encouraged to use the handbook developed by the DigitALAD project and to use the tools in it autonomously. In the second part of the training programme, which took place in September, adult educators were taught to use DigitALAD project resources and learning modules according to their needs and learning objectives. Some of the lessons learned from such training are as follows: it is important to take into account the different levels of digital competence of adult educators and to adapt teaching materials, it is crucial that adult educators understand the nature of digital competence and its sub-competences, which shows that digital competence is a multifaceted concept. Besides, it may be important to develop short guidelines for the use of training modules and other materials.

Jaitek Technology & Training, Spain

Twelve adult educators took part in the online training programme in Spain. In general, they were not familiar with the DigComp framework, so they found it very useful to acquire knowledge in this area. Through the project platform, they were able to learn the contents of the training programme competence by competence. This was of particular interest to them, as almost 60% of the participants only teach online or integrate new technologies in the classroom between 0 and 10%. After the training programme, 33% of the participants felt as Integrators, and another 33% as Explorers. This is a positive result, considering that, prior to the training programme, many participants considered themselves to be beginners. The feedback has been very positive, with almost all responses being rated a 2 or 3, a

high score. We would like to highlight the assessment that the didactic materials are up to date and are used in a varied way.

Preparing adult educators for the digital world: successes and challenges

Successes

The reports show that the biggest accomplishment during the pandemic was to realize and revolutionize a need for digitalisation. The situation forced people to learn new things every day to keep up with the sudden shift of workspaces, according to SVEB and the University of Latvia, however, the time has shown that the current need is to try to focus on quality. Our partners from Cyprus agreed and also further elaborated that because of the plethora of online courses and their accessibility (no travel and other associated costs) professionals and learners became more interested in quality products that would help them to upskill themselves. However, "programmes of developing digital competence are fewer and not very targeted yet, meaning that they mostly refer to generic knowledge and not specific digital skills. Also, the quality of these programmes is often questioned since there is no mechanism to ensure minimum standards and official recognition of content, methodology, and the intended learning outcomes" (DigitALAD, 2021a).

Our colleagues from the University of Aegean believe that the training courses focused on digitalisation are helpful, especially when done practically. During and after the implementation of their training course they received positive feedback, especially on providing practical examples on how to use the digital workplace to the educators' and learners' advantage. The practical aspect has been a success elsewhere as well because many learners need to try new tools and programmes by themselves, following step by step tutorials with adult educators' help.

Challenges

Unfortunately, the challenges of the digital world outweigh the successes according to the received national reports from DigitALAD partners. To understand this in

more depth, we need to look at it in more ways than one: lack of infrastructure, time constraints, inner motivation, financial struggles etc.

To start from the bottom up with the infrastructure, we need to comprehend the digital divide that is still present in many areas in Europe. Latvian, Irish, Greek and Swiss partners explicitly mentioned that many individuals still do not have access to digital technologies while also not being able to connect to the infrastructure, as they might not have the financial means to do so or they live so remotely that it is not yet possible to build a stable connection. Even though the adult educators and learners had a possibility to use work and learning spaces and computers to connect, this was taken away from them during the lockdowns, which in that prolonged periods of time was not beneficial as it alienated them from the community.

Work from home has, in many cases, prolonged our availability to the employer and blurred the lines between personal and professional life. Cypriot, Spanish, Greek and Latvian participants have admitted that lack of time gravely affects their everyday life and therefore makes it impossible for them to attend courses intended for adult learners. When it comes to Greek adult educators, they said that "the two phases of the training have been implemented immediately after the lockdown, when both adult educators and adult learners had to complete many pending tasks, including exams, so the timing was not ideal" (DigitALAD, 2021d). On the other hand the Latvian report also mentions that "often, the work of an adult educator is like extra work that must be combined with a heavy workload" (DigitALAD, 2021b), which is true, as many countries do not employ them for a full-time position. Greeks agreed to that, as they also experience their work as adult education professionals as a part-time position only.

In the case of Ireland, "most adult education is delivered in a community-based facility that is focused on in-person instruction and building basic skills through practical activities delivered in the classroom. This is not easily transferable to online learning platforms and environments, and this is something that the sector in Ireland has struggled with in the past year" (DigitALAD, 2021c). As such, part of the problem could also be that the practicalities of face-to-face classes lose its momentum online. In Cyprus, "one of the most critical learning processes, assessment and feedback, faces problems in its implementation due to the lack of immediate and frequent interactions in online settings'' (DigitALAD, 2021a). With a lack of interaction comes as well less willingness to learn (according to the findings of Swiss and Latvian participants). In the Spanish case, the educators were the one

to reimagine the online classes. Voluntary adult learning is often associated with social interactions as well, therefore digitalizing learning isolates individuals even more and soon after the desire to learn is lost.

"Most adult education is delivered in a community-based facility that is focused on in-person instruction and building basic skills through practical activities delivered in the classroom. This is not easily transferrable to online learning platforms and environments, and this is something that the sector in Ireland has struggled with in the past year.

National report for Ireland

When it comes to digitalisation, changes are happening often faster than we would like. In the reports, we have discovered a common problem that is associated with the suitability and availability of online courses. Spanish participants noted they are experiencing "scarcity of training opportunities" (DigitALAD, 2021f). Latvian partners discovered that there is a "lack of a structured, targeted offer" (DigitALAD, 2021b) for adult educators and learners. Irish results agreed to that, especially emphasising the upskilling courses on the topic of digitalisation for adult educators. This could be because there isn't enough understanding of future usefulness, shortage of funding of high-quality digital courses or perhaps even the non-formal aspect of adult education itself. Particularly interesting was that when it comes to Spain, the pandemic "has revealed that communication skills, not only online, but also in face-to-face format, are severely lacking among students and teachers" (DigitALAD, 2021f)), therefore there is a need for the upskilling in this competence as well. On the other hand, adult education encompasses learners from various learning backgrounds (basic skilled to post doctoral), therefore it is often very hard to manage all the necessities that can arise in this field.

Recommendations

As the partner perspectives clearly demonstrate, there is already willingness both on the policy and practice level to make digital transformation a reality. That said, adults will not be able to become active citizens in the digital world and contribute to a twin transition without quality education, which can only be ensured by digitally competent and confident teachers and educators. The following recommendations were shared by DigitALAD project partners in the view of improving both practice and policy and fostering a learning environment among adult education staff.

Recommendations for practitioners

Take the initiative to **update your digital competences** using existing resources, MOOCs, online platforms: opportunities for self-directed learning might be easily available. Have a look at the resources available on EPALE or on other platforms that might be running in your country.

Exchange and network to find more peer-learning or training opportunities. EPALE as well as social media networks might be a good place to meet like-minded organisations and colleagues. Encourage peer-learning at your workplace: something as informal as a social media group could be a way of sharing ideas, tools and approaches. Regular staff meetings could also help to see who from the team could have the expertise to support you in a problem that you are facing.

Take small steps and be patient e.g. when integrating digital tools in your practice. Change doesn't happen overnight. Give yourself enough time to try out a new tool and to see how it works in the classroom.

Find mentors, professionals who are passionate about ICT and who could help you out. Perhaps your colleagues would be available and interested in a knowledge exchange?

Attend (or organise!) events and workshops supporting the development of digital competences. With many opportunities now available online, you might find that there are events taking place in other countries that you can now attend. Organising your own event to showcase the tools and approaches that you are using might be another occasion to expand your professional network and open new opportunities.

Reflect on digital competences of your learners holistically, taking into account empowering learners and building meaningful relationships with them. Understanding the unique needs of adult learners is essential. Respect for the life experiences they bring to a learning endeavour is an integral part of adult learning theory. Discussion regarding what this competency means in a digital environment is vital. Learners can and should be engaged at different stages of the learning process, encouraging co-design, to foster ownership. In addition, recognition of some physical challenges that might be involved in working with adults (especially older adults) in a digital world is important: eye strain, the mesmerizing effect of the screen, to name only a few.

> *"Working with adult learners as a professional adult educator requires more than techniques. Understanding the unique needs of adult learners is essential. Respect for the life experiences they bring to a learning endeavor is an integral part of adult learning theory."*
>
> National report for Greece

Recommendations for policymakers

Streamline digital competences in the training of adult educators. Teaching and learning in a digital environment has become a reality. As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, adult educators need a variety of skills to deliver quality teaching online, and need to be supported in the endeavour. Both entry-level and in-service training of adult educators need to include digital competence while looking at learning holistically, for example using a life skills perspective.

Offer a self-assessment tool for adult educators. A self-assessment tool could support adult learning professionals in reflecting on their digital competences, learning objectives and process in achieving them. The DigitALAD project has developed such a tool that is available on its e-learning platform free of charge.

Use one reference framework for digital competence to ensure transferability and transparency. The use of reference frameworks across one country can differ, depending on the needs and preferences of adult learning providers. The use of European frameworks - such as DigCompEdu - can make the acquisition and

assessment of competences more transparent within the country and across borders.

Offer incentives to join in-service training. Many adult educators would be interested in joining more training opportunities, but lack the time to participate in them. Some incentives should be available to encourage adult education staff to update their competences. These could include time benefits, such as training during working hours, course subsidies, job promotion for the training of trainers.

Focus on equity, analyse the local context and barriers to access, and provide a relevant offer. Broadband connectivity, equipment, financial issues, lack of adequate offers are all important factors that might discourage adult educators from attending in-service training. In-service training of adult educators should be available in diverse locations and on a variety of topics, taking into account current demands as well as the fact that the work of adult educators is context-bound.

Recognize adult learning and education as a policy field and provide adequate funding to support acquisition of digital competences. Adult learning has an important role to play in equipping adults with competences that they need to be learners and citizens in a digital environment. Without funding for adult learning structures, as well as equipment, reaching the targets foreseen in the recent EU strategies will not be possible. That said, funding cannot stop at infrastructure: investment in people is one that has the most potential to pay off long term, as technology should not be an end in itself.

Foster partnerships and create an ecosystem in which adult learning is supported. Digital transformation is a complex topic: it requires cooperation between different stakeholders: AE providers, NGOs, SMEs, start-ups, public services, the tech industry... The policy environment in which adult learning functions needs to encourage collaborative partnerships between diverse stakeholders instead of competition. Broadly speaking, adult learning needs an ecosystem to support it, including employers, social partners, municipalities, giving adult learners better access to learning and adult learning professionals an opportunity to grow professionally.

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Appendix 1

DigitALAD Questionnaire for policy focus groups

We kindly ask you to discuss the following questions about adult education policy in your country, focusing specifically on the opportunities for adult educators to improve their digital competences. Your answers will help EAEA draft relevant policy recommendations, and will also support you in writing your national report. The questionnaire is divided into two section: focusing on policy and practice. We welcome your responses until 20 July. If you have any questions, please contact Aleksandra at aleksandra.kozyra@eaea.org . Many thanks!

* Required

Country*
- Cyprus
- Greece
- Ireland
- Latvia
- Spain
- Switzerland
- Other:

Please briefly describe the profiles of the members of the focus group (e.g. adult educators, managers of adult education institutions/providers, representatives of umbrella organisations, policymakers...)*

National policies and strategies: challenges and opportunities
Here we'd like to ask you to discuss the priorities of ongoing policies and strategies on adult education, reflecting specifically on whether they provide adult educators with opportunities to update their digital competences.

Why do you think it's important for adult educators in your country to improve their digital competences? Think about recent developments, profiles of learners, changing learning environments, etc. *

Are digital competences considered important in the adult education / lifelong learning policy in your country / region? Could you give examples of policy documents / strategies that mention digital competences? *

Are European frameworks and strategies in adult education and lifelong learning (e.g. the European Agenda for Adult Learning, Upskilling Pathways, the new Skills Agenda) reflected in your national/regional policy? If yes, how?*

Would you agree that (adult) educators and teachers in your country are provided with enough opportunities for professional development? *

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

What are the barriers that might be keeping adult educators from taking up more opportunities for professional development, especially in the field of digital competences? (e.g. financial barriers, lack of time, lack of adequate offers, inadequate equipment/broadband...) *

Preparing adult educators for the digital world in practice
Here we'd like you to reflect on your experience as practitioners, reflecting critically about how your organisaion and your peers work on improving digital competences among adult educators.

Does your organisation work with any of the following: *
- The European Key Competence Framework
- The Digital Competence Framework
- The Digital Competence Framework for Educators
- A life skills framework

If you picked any of the options above, could you give an example of how you work with the framework(s) (other than in the DigitALAD project)?

Looking at the DigCompEdu, what competences do you think are particularly needed to be improved by adult educators in your country? E.g. professional competences, such as professional communication in an online environment, or pedagogic competences, such as creating/managing digital resources? (If you participated in the implementation of the training programme, you can consider its results; otherwise you can reflect on your own professional experience). *

Is there a good practice or initiative in your country that aims at preparing adult educators for the digital world, other than the DigitALAD project, that you would like to share? *

What recommendation(s) would you give to improve digital competences among adult educators? Think about what would be needed to be done by 1) practitioners themselves, 2) policymakers. *