

DIGITAL SKILLS OF THE CITIZENS - MY e-START PROJECT RESEARCH REPORT

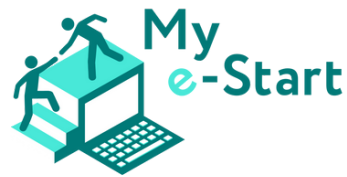


The My e-Start project aims to equip disadvantaged adults with skills necessary for using the most common e-Government and e-Commerce services in their countries and ensuring a positive (first) e-experience as well as a sense of digital achievement. In order to establish the needs of these group, partners carried out research in each participating country (Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Germany, and the UK), taking into account variations between countries and even within the countries themselves. This research aimed to identify what digital services are available in partner countries and how citizens can make use of them.

Even though partner counties have achieved impressive results in providing cheap and assessable Internet services to their citizens, in no country does the level of basic digital skills as defined by DESI (The Digital Economy and Society Index) match the number of Internet users. Thus, a dangerous **digital skill gap** has developed, making citizens an easy prey for data theft, scams, and disinformation, or barring their access to services they should be able to afford.

The group most widely excluded from the digital world, are, beyond a doubt, the **older citizens**. Age is the most important predicting factor for digital exclusion. While some of the older people simply don't perceive a need to go online, many of them lack the digital skills necessary to do so. In addition, there are widespread security concerns that prevent people from making full use of the potential services available to them.

In addition to age, one's educational level, economic status, and a presence of a disability also impact the participation in digital service. People with a lesser educational status, economically inactive, or



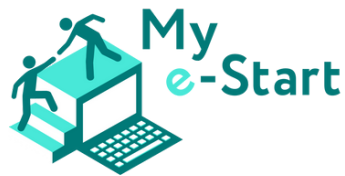
suffering from a disability, are less likely to make use of online services. On a positive note, gender and migration status by and large do not appear to effect the digital participation of citizens considerably.

Unfortunately, a common European approach addressing the low digital competence of citizens is lacking. Some countries have detailed national strategies in place, while in others there is a distinct lack of available measures to address the identified priorities, even if they have been already formulated. It is probably not coincidental that the countries that have the most well-developed training infrastructure also have the highest level of digital competence of their citizens. Still, older people have consistently the least access to digital training in all partner countries – a problem that the My e-Start projects aims to address.

The picture presented by partner research regarding device use appears to be mixed and inconclusive. Smartphones are increasing in penetration everywhere, but some users in the older generation still only have a home PC or laptop. Because of that, neither technology can be excluded from the educational approach of the project. A training needs to address both and be available on both in order to truly achieve the goal of digital inclusion.

The usage of online services also varies considerably by country. A common pattern in all countries is the increase in the use of all e-services. There are several key areas growing in prominence: entertainment, communication, news and information, e-Commerce, e-Banking, and e-Government.

In order to use many of these services, a digital identity is often necessary. However, partner countries have reached different stages towards establishing a unified digital identity for their citizens.



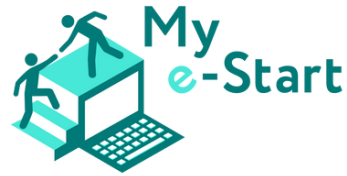
The German-speaking countries are taking the lead, while Bulgaria, Cyprus, and the UK have yet to establish a unified digital identity. The need for using different methods for identification for each service is a barrier to their effective use by disadvantaged groups. While the only long-term solution is the creation of a single identity, in the meantime educating adults about e-signatures and PIN can assist them in accessing some of the more important services.

Learners also need to learn about online payments. New payment methods are replacing the older ones, and disadvantaged adults need to acquire knowledge of their features, as well as how to handle them safely, in order to be empowered to make use of all available e-Government and e-Commerce services. Through the services of e-banking bank transfers can make a smooth transition to an online environment while retaining the safety and reliability associated with them. Cards and e-wallets are also widely used as methods for online payments.

In order to make effective use of the e-services available to them, disadvantaged adults require certain skills and competences. Based on an analysis of 26 popular e-Government and e-Commerce services in Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Germany, and the UK, it appears that they need to learn how to:

- browse, **search** and filter online information;
- **evaluate** that information;
- engage in **citizenship** through digital technologies;
- manage their **digital identity**;
- protect their **personal data**;
- identify the technological **responses** to their needs.





In order to train disadvantaged adults, the way the information is presented is especially important. Easy language concepts have been specifically designed for people with learning difficulties or reduced linguistic capacity to simplify complex facts and enhance the understanding of text. Partners have prepared checklists of what these concepts entail in practice for Bulgarian, German, Greek, and English, so that the requirements of easy language are respected in the development of training material to address the identified needs of disadvantaged adults.

