

Digitalization and its impact on the human and digital rights of older people in the EU

The Digital Divide and Older People

- **Digitalization** has become an essential part of our lives – from making phone calls to accessing healthcare services.
For example: banking; making appointments with public offices and authorities, doctors, etc.
- However, many older people face a “**digital exclusion**”— that is, they may have less or no access to these technologies, understand them less well or have problems using them.

Why?

- **Income:** Some older people may not be able to afford internet access or smartphones.
- **Education:** People who didn't use computers in their jobs may find it harder to adapt to new technologies.
- **Health:** Vision or mobility issues can make it harder to use devices like smartphones or tablets.
- **Conscious decision for fear of data theft, surveillance.**

Example: Imagine someone who has never used a smartphone – learning to use it at an older age can feel overwhelming.

Digital Literacy vs. Digital Proficiency

- **Digital literacy** is about *understanding* and *navigating* digital environments — knowing *what* digital tools are, *how* they work, and being aware of things like online safety, privacy, and information credibility.
- **Digital proficiency** goes a step further — it means being able to *apply* those digital skills *confidently and independently* in real-life contexts, like managing online banking, using telehealth services, or communicating via apps.

In short:

Digital literacy is *knowing how*, while

Digital proficiency is *being able and confident to do*.

Why Digital Literacy Matters

- Builds foundational understanding of digital tools and environments
- Increases awareness of online safety, privacy, and data protection
- Helps older people recognize trustworthy information and avoid digital scams
- Reduces anxiety and fear around using technology
- Enables informed choices in an increasingly digital society

Why Digital Proficiency Matters

- Empowers independent access to essential services (e.g., healthcare, banking, communication)
- Promotes social inclusion and reduces isolation
- Supports active participation in digital public life
- Enhances confidence and autonomy in daily digital tasks
- Protects human rights in a digital age (e.g., access, freedom of expression, privacy)

Human Rights in the Digital Age

- You may be wondering: **What do human rights have to do with digitalization?**
- The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** ensures basic rights like the right to freedom of expression, education and access to information.
 - **But** this was written before the internet existed.
 - Today, **access to the internet** is increasingly seen as a human right because so much of our life depends on it.

The Role of Social/Local Policy

- **Social policies** play a key role in ensuring older people are not left behind in the digital world.
 - Governments can promote **digital inclusion** by providing affordable access to the internet and training programs, such as freely accessible computers in public institutions.
 - Example: In **Sweden**, public libraries offer digital training for older people.

What Does This Mean for You?

- **Access and Affordability:** Everyone should be able to afford an internet connection and digital devices.
 - This could be supported by government policies or community programs, like those seen in **Sweden**, where libraries help people learn how to use technology.
- **Digital Literacy:** older people should have the opportunity to learn how to use technology.
 - In some countries, NGOs are working to close this gap. The “**Digitalpakt Alter**” and the “**Digital Kompass**” in Germany, for example, help older people to access and use digital services.

EU Digital Rights and Principles

- The **European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles** is a guide to ensure everyone in the EU can fully participate in the digital world.
 - These principles emphasize:
 - **Access to the internet** for all.
 - **Privacy and protection** from online risks like surveillance or fraud.
 - Ensuring everyone, regardless of age, can **learn digital skills**.
- While not legally binding yet, these principles aim to ensure that older people are included in this digital world.

Challenges Older People Face in the Digital World

- **Health issues** can make technology difficult to use (e.g., poor eyesight, hearing impairment, arthritis, mobility restrictions).
- **Insufficient digital media equipment in public buildings.**
- **Ageism in Technology Design:** Many devices and apps are not made with older users in mind, making them hard to navigate.
 - This can discourage older people from trying to learn.

Digital Rights as Human Rights

- As the world becomes more digital, ensuring **fair access** to the internet and digital services is becoming a part of **human rights**.
 - Think about the **right to education**—in the digital age, this includes the right to learn how to use technology.
 - The **right to privacy** now includes online privacy, like protecting your personal information from fraud or identity theft.

The Right to Stay Analog in a Digital World

- Human rights also protect what the law doesn't (yet).
- You have the **right to stay analog**—to access services in non-digital ways.
- EU's human rights agency (FRA) says older people should choose how they access services.
- But: learning digital skills is still important—to stay included, connected, and independent.

How You Can Get Involved

- **Lifelong Learning:** If you are not comfortable using technology, it's never too late to learn.
 - There are many community programs, NGOs, and online courses aimed at helping older people become more digitally literate.
- **Advocacy:** You can help push for better digital rights for older people by getting involved in local or national groups that focus on senior citizens' issues.

Conclusion

- **Digitalization** affects all of us, regardless of age.
- The EU is working to ensure that digital rights are considered human rights, and that **everyone**, including older people, has access to the digital world.
- Your voice and participation in this digital world matter—whether it's by advocating for better policies or learning new digital skills.

Q&A

