



Digital Scouts

ENHANCING THE DIGITAL LITERACY
AND PARTICIPATION IN EUROPE

National Report for The Netherlands

Digital participation of people 60+: readiness, support structures,
professionalisation of supporters and examples of opportunities.

About this publication

This national report summarises the results of the research activities carried out in The Netherlands within the Erasmus+ project **DigitalScouts: Enhancing the Digital Literacy and Participation in Europe** (cooperation partnership in adult education, project number: 2022-1-DE02-KA220-ADU-000086499). More information is available at DigitalScouts.eu.

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Credits

We would like to thank all those who took part in the interviews and contributed their knowledge, experience, wishes and expertise to our project.

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1. Introduction and methodology

The COVID19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of digital technologies and skills for participation in all areas of society. Although the digital divide between younger and older generations in Europe is getting smaller, the need for support remains, in particular for the very old and those with lower levels of formal education.

The consortium members of the DigitalScouts project, co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union, aim to train people who want to support older people in using digital tools, thus enabling them to benefit from the opportunities of digital participation. By digital participation we mean that citizens use digital tools (such as the Internet, social media, etc.) to take part in personally relevant areas of life, be the social, cultural, political or related to health promotion.

The main focus of the project is to develop an educational offer that qualifies 'digital scouts' to enable older people to benefit from the opportunities of digitalisation. For this purpose, a digital training will be developed as an independent self-learning course. It focuses on the various possibilities of digital participation and health promotion and enables digital scouts to acquire comprehensive knowledge to support people aged 60+ in using digital tools according to their individual interests. In addition, a Toolkit for Trainers will be available to support adult educators in embedding the digital training into a blended learning course.

The first outcome of the project will be a European Compendium highlighting the importance of promoting digital participation of older citizens. It will also provide illustrative examples from the participating countries of how older people can benefit from using digital tools in terms of cultural, political, and social participation as well as health promotion.

In all countries involved in the DigitalScouts project (Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Romania), a research phase is carried out to prepare the development of the training materials and to identify the current situation of older people with regard to digital participation. This phase of the project also focuses on determining respective local and regional offers and structures to facilitate digital literacy, as well as to identify best practice examples of digital opportunities for people aged 60+.

In order to achieve these objectives, the partners of the project consortium:

- Carry out desk research in their national countries and languages, taking into account the current public discourse, recent publications, databases and policy papers, and
- conduct interviews with potential supporters of older people and therefore participants in the DigitalScouts training, as well as with relevant experts, stakeholders and practitioners, in the field of e.g., policy, administration, science or advocacy, active in training or supporting trainers or older people.

The questions for the semi-structured interviews with experts and stakeholders as well as with potential training participants (see Annex: Lead questions used in guided interviews) are adapted according to the function, expertise, and personal background of the interviewees.

In the Netherlands, the interviews are divided between experts and volunteers. A total of 9 interviews were conducted, of which 5 were carried out with experts and 5 with volunteers. One interview has not been conducted in the standard format, as such, since the person did not feel

up for it but provided a brief written information about the topic via e-mail. This has been considered valid and useful, therefore is included as the 5th volunteer in the result presentation of the interviews. Regarding the gender-related data, 4 of the experts identify themselves as female and 1 as male and in the case of the volunteers, 3 as female and 2 of them as male.

Among the group of experts are a social worker carrying out tasks in the field of promotion and teaching of digital skills and another expert working in healthcare and innovation for the municipality. One of the interviewees also works in the municipality and additionally at the university and is responsible for promoting digital innovation in care and support for older people. Furthermore, one of the experts is active in an organization that provides volunteers to help older adults gain digital skills and another volunteer works at the library, focusing on providing training and support for seniors and others in term of digital skills.

The group of volunteers includes experienced volunteers with a broad knowledge in the ICT world, who accompany older people who want to learn basic and advanced skills. The other two are potential students, one of whom is involved in the living lab 'Experience Home' and the other volunteers at an internet café, where adults can consult technology-related doubts. The methods used to conduct the interviews have varied throughout the process so that most have been carried out over the phone, one interview has been in-person and one potential digital scout answered questions over e-mail.

This report summarises the results of the research activities in The Netherlands and gives an overview of the situation of older people with regard to their digital readiness (infrastructure, internet use, digital skills) and relevant limiting aspects for their digital participation (income, formal education level, gender), the support structures and offers for the digital participation of older people and the professionalization of trainers in the Netherlands.

The following report sections also contain lessons learned from existing training of trainers and recommendations on what content and skills are important for the training of digital scouts. Good practice examples of digital participation opportunities for people aged 60+ are also described in this report.

2. Overview of research results in the Netherlands

2.1 Status quo of the digital readiness of people aged 60+

In terms of digital literacy, the Netherlands ranks highly among European countries, second only to Iceland, with Norway and Finland sharing the same level. As of 2021, data collected by Eurostat, the European statistical office, indicates that 79% of Dutch citizens aged 16 to 74 possess basic or higher-level digital skills. This figure has remained constant for the past five years, as shown by data from 2017 and 2019. The Netherlands is therefore close to meeting the European goal of achieving 80% digital proficiency by 2030, set by the European Commission and CBS, the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics. However, the statistics show a clear gap in digital literacy among different age groups, with a decline in digital skills as individuals age. Although the number of people with digital skills in the 18 to 55 age group remains above the European target, a significant number of individuals aged 65 and above lack basic digital skills. In 2019, only 28% of those aged 75 or over had basic or higher-level digital skills. Furthermore, the gap is wider among women

than men, although specific data for gender-specific digital skills in the 75 and above age group is not available since research in this target group has not been conducted yet. These trends are illustrated below in figures 1 and 2, based on data from Eurostat and the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS, Eurostat, 2022a, Eurostat, 2022b).

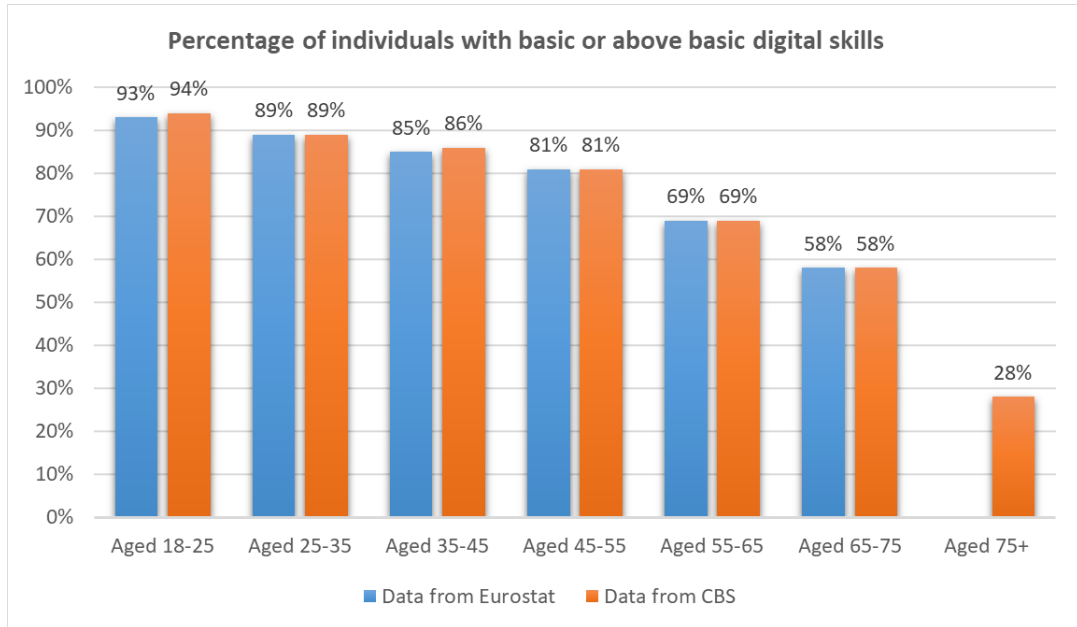


Figure 1: Percentage of individuals with basic or above digital skills, per age group in the year 2019 (Eurostat, 2022b)

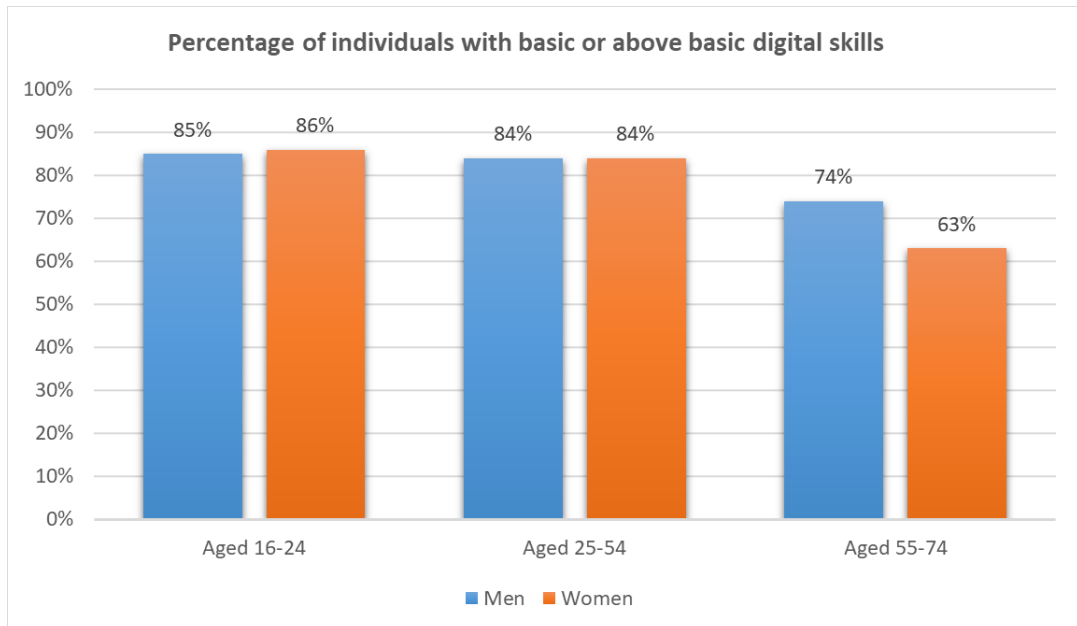


Figure 2: Percentage of individuals with basic or above digital skills, men and women in separate age groups from the year 2021 onwards (Eurostat, 2022a).

Although older citizens may be less proficient in their digital skills, the availability of digital data in the Netherlands appears to be more than satisfactory. A significant number of Dutch individuals (97%) have internet access at home, with this percentage remaining high (above 96%) for nearly all age groups (refer to figure 3). Even among those aged 75 and above, the percentage of individuals with internet access still stands at 80%, which is considerably higher than the

percentage of individuals with digital skills in the same age group. Additionally, more than 90% of individuals aged 12 to 65 report using internet connection daily, while 79% of people aged 65 to 75 and 52% of people above the age of 75 do the same.

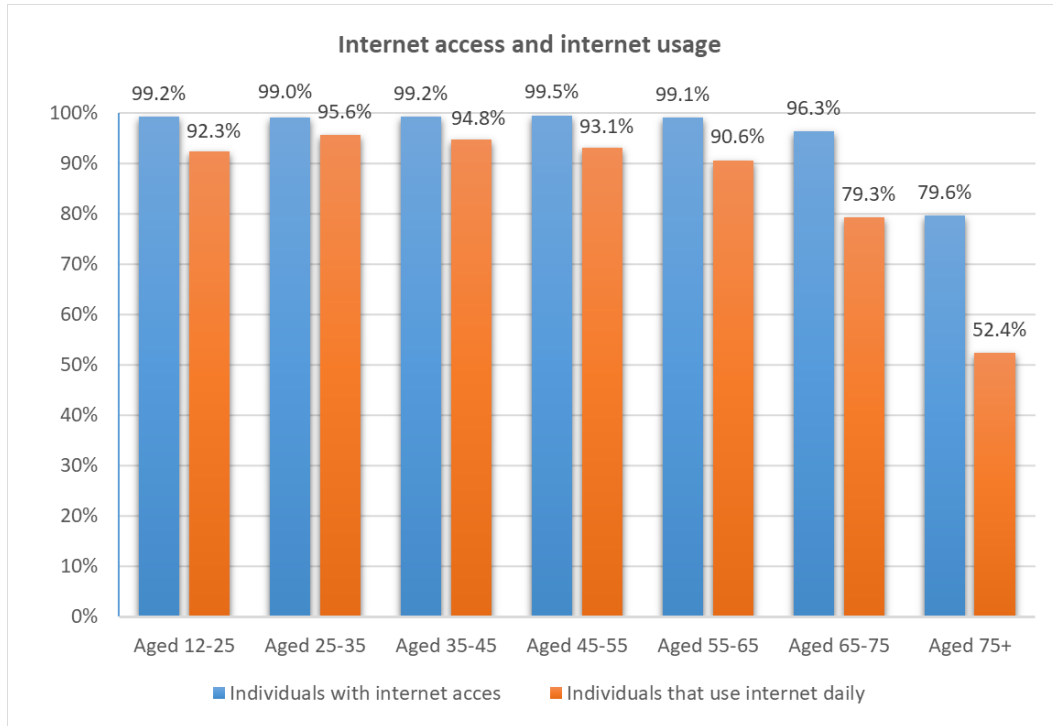


Figure 3: Percentage of individuals with internet access and daily use of internet per age group in 2021 (CBS, 2022)

Also remarkable is the increase of social media usage among Dutch society in general, and even more strongly in the older people’s groups, as can be seen in figure 4, going from 64% in 2014 to 89% for the 55 o 65 years old, from 40% to 76% for the 65 to 75 years old, and finally the biggest increase going from 13% up to 40% for the people aged 75 or more.

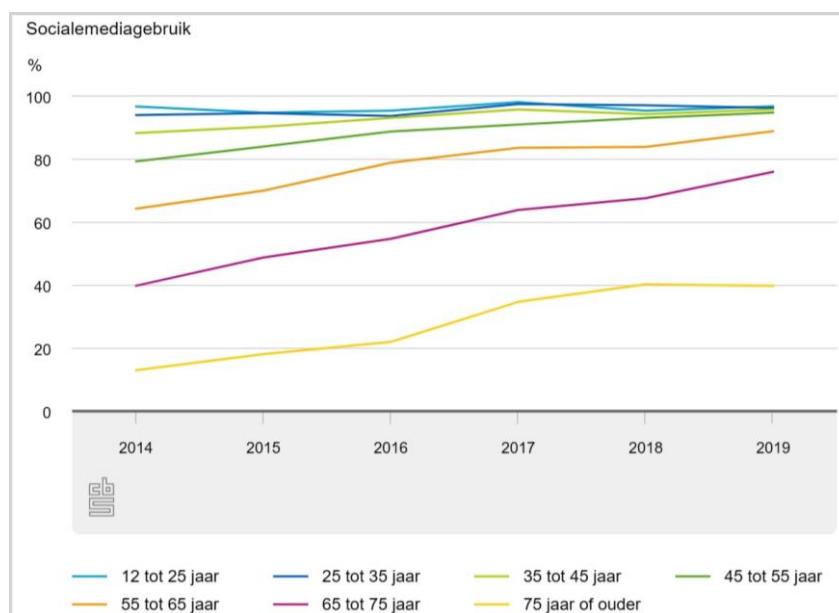


Figure 4: Development of social media usage from 2014 to 2019 (CBS, 2020)

When examining socio-economic status, further inequalities become apparent. As shown in figure 4, there is a clear correlation between digital proficiency and factors such as education, employment, place of residence, and country of birth. The most significant disparity is observed in education, where only 60% of individuals with low formal education (blue bar) have basic or above basic digital skills, compared to 93% of those with a high formal education (grey bar). The next significant disparities can be found under the employment and income socio-economic variables. Less disparity can be seen under the residential setting and place of birth variables.

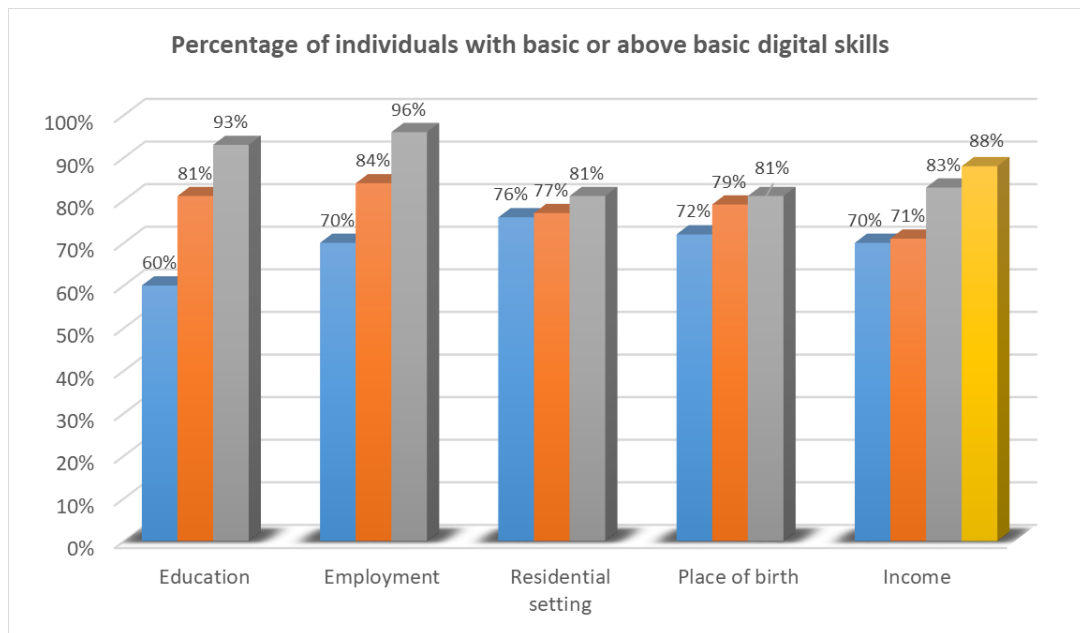


Figure 5: Digital skills per socio-economic variable in 2021 (education, employment, residential setting, place of birth) (Eurostat, 2022a) and 2019 (income) (Eurostat, 2022b)

2.2 Support structures regarding digital participation

There is a lot of attention in the Netherlands to support senior citizens to improve their digital skills and enable them to participate in society. On a national level there is a programme that is focused on financing libraries to provide citizens with courses to improve their (digital) skills. In total libraries receive about 60 million euros per year to develop and provide courses to improve different types of literacies including digital literacy. Some examples of activities that are provided by libraries in terms of digital literacy are the following:

- the program Klik & Tik, in which adults learn how to use the computer and the internet [overoefenen.nl/programmas/klik-en-tik-de-basis].
- the iPad or tablet café, where participants learn to do more with their tablet and can ask questions.
- Workshops in which adults can share digital knowledge and develop their digital skills. For example, by learning how to pay via the internet.
- the Digisterker (digitally stronger) programme, which helps adults deal with digital government [digisterker.nl].

- the Digital Government Information Point, where people who have difficulty with online government services are helped by a trained employee [[hetinformatiepunt.nl](https://www.hetinformatiepunt.nl)].

Some other national programmes include the Alliantie Digitaal Samenleven (alliance living together digitally) [[digitaalsamenleven.nl](https://www.digitaalsamenleven.nl)] and the coalition Digivaardig in de zorg (digitally proficient in healthcare) [[digivaardigindezorg.nl](https://www.digivaardigindezorg.nl)]. The first is an initiative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Kingdom Relations, the Number 5 Foundation and VodafoneZiggo to make the Dutch society more digitally inclusive by using a multiyear action- and learning programme. Their websites offer information and news to increase awareness on the topic, and links to projects and events. The coalition Digivaardig in de zorg is committed to improve the digital skills in the healthcare sector. They offer a platform with self-tests and learning material for healthcare professionals to improve their knowledge on digital technologies in their sector.

In addition to national programmes and activities, there are numerous other support structures available in the Netherlands to improve digital participation for older adults. Below we have presented a few:

SeniorWeb [[seniorweb.nl](https://www.seniorweb.nl)] SeniorWeb is a private association on national level where self-development and participation of older adults in the digital world is enhanced by offering courses online and at home. With this project, the digital world is being made understandable and accessible for older people by senior volunteers who provide seniors with classes on digital skills. We consider this initiative as an example of opportunities for digital participation, thus more information is given in chapter 2.4.

Allemaal Digitaal (Everyone Digital) [[allemaal-digitaal.nl](https://www.allemaal-digitaal.nl)] collects second-hand laptops, tablets, smartphones, desktops and monitors from industries and donates them to Dutch citizens that cannot afford digital devices. Businesses can contact the website if they have something to donate.

Oefenen.nl (Practicing) [[oefenen.nl](https://www.oefenen.nl)] is an online platform where people can practice and improve their language, calculating, computer, and internet skills, but also learn about things like how to have a healthy lifestyle, make sustainable choices, and make sensible financial decisions.

Steffie [[steffie.nl](https://www.steffie.nl)] is a cartoon character that explains complicated topics in an easy-to-understand way. The range of topics is very diverse and includes visiting the General Practitioner, using DigiD (the Dutch digital identification system), video calling, using a mobile phone, getting a health insurance, and much more. Even though the style may seem childish at times, Steffie is targeted at adults of all ages and is a very popular platform, with more than a million visitors per year.

2.3 Findings on the professionalisation of support of older people using ICT

Examples of educational offers and/or trainings for paid educators and volunteers within vocational training or adult education could not be identified. In addition, no national or regional policies focused on the training of paid educators or volunteers could be identified. When asked how they train their volunteers, some of the experts mention that their training method is straight away learning by doing instead of using any kind of formal educational training. Only one of the interviewed experts described using a self-developed training offer for new volunteers to train them in supporting others in terms of digital literacy. It was however mentioned in this interview that this training, which was presented as a written self-learning offer, was not very successful

and that volunteers did not seem to read or use it to prepare themselves for their volunteering tasks. This same expert did mention that they organize workshops and meetings for volunteers in which they can exchange experiences and gain new knowledge in terms of, for example, new technology. These workshops and meetings seem to be well visited and appreciated by volunteers because they can informally exchange expertise and experience.

In some of the other interviews with experts who do not use formal training to train their volunteers or educators, it became clear that there is a need for new training materials. This need will be discussed in more detail in section 2.5.

2.4 Examples of opportunities for digital participation of people 60+

2.4.1 SeniorWeb

The Netherlands

Area covered: Social participation

1. Short description

SeniorWeb is an association which focuses on providing digital training for older adults and thus, making the digital world accessible to them. The training courses are given in different levels (beginners and advanced) by teaching volunteers who are also seniors. The initiative provides both online and in-person training courses.

2. Implementation and objectives

The aim of the association is to make the digital world understandable for everyone and including older adults in the participation of digital society. The offer consists in small-scale courses, which are provided in person in different cities in the Netherlands and, if desired, a course called “Learning at home” is provided too. In that case, the needs of the participant are identified in forehand, so that a SeniorWeb volunteer can give a teaching class at the corresponding home, which is therefore adapted to the personal needs of the participant. Thus, the participant can learn at an own pace, choosing online courses accordingly or by talking to the teacher in person.

3. Key facts

The SeniorWeb association is active since 1996 and has 150.000 members and 450 teaching locations in the Netherlands, providing in person and online training courses.

The SeniorWeb training courses are offered by volunteers, who are seniors supporting older adults in gaining digital skills. Volunteers are also offered with regular training sessions by the association to enable a community update and exchange. Currently, 2.800 volunteers are teaching digital skills to older adults.

The courses are very affordable: for SeniorWeb members, online courses are for free, since they pay a membership fee of 18 euros for 2023, and free for volunteers. Regarding the training courses “Learning at home” the participants are asked to pay an allowance of 5 euros per hour with a maximum of 25 euros and since the volunteer

comes to the participants' home, in agreement with the teacher, the participant also takes over travel expenses of 21 cents per kilometre or the cost of public transport.

4. Results

The association has 150.000 members, 2.800 volunteers and offers courses in 450 teaching locations throughout the Netherlands. The number of online training courses has reached the number of 44. The format of small-scale courses has the benefit of being adaptive to the individual needs of the participants. Especially, in the one-to-one training session in the "Learning at home" modality.

In order to make the offer affordable, there is no fee for members to be paid for the online courses and there is also a reduction of fee for the in-person trainings (i.e., from 25€ to 20€ for a course of 5 sessions, 2 hours each). These training courses are suitable for beginner and advanced skilled participants.

5. More information

Website [seniorweb.nl]

Online courses [seniorweb.nl/cursussen/online-cursussen]

"Learning at home" courses [seniorweb.nl/cursussen/leren-aan-huis]

2.4.2 Leyden Academy on Vitality and Ageing: mini course on vitality and healthy ageing

The Netherlands

Area covered: Health promotion

1. Short description

The mission of Leyden Academy on Vitality and Ageing is to improve the quality of life of older people, and it offers various online courses on the topics of vitality and ageing. The three focus areas are vital, meaningful, connected, to which all offers are aligned. Examples on the topics of the courses are equal rights on women, silver starters, where they can learn about building their own business, and a course on mindfulness. There is also an interesting option of a Dutch train-the-trainer course that emphasizes on the importance of wellbeing and happiness of residents in care organisations, instead of primarily on care. Leyden Academy on Vital and Ageing additionally offers the option to absolve a one-year Master program on Vitality and Ageing, to educate the students on how to innovative care for senior citizens.

A free online mini course on vitality and healthy ageing can be found on the Dutch version of the website. In the course questions regarding ageing, exercise and diet are answered. The course consists of eight episodes. According to the website, each episode contains an interesting mix of videos, facts and figures, practical assignments and helpful tips.

2. Implementation and objectives

The mini course is carried out and developed by the knowledge Institute Leyden Academy on Vitality and Ageing. They offer to send mini courses for free to the e-mail address of the participants.

The mini course on vitality and healthy ageing focuses specifically on seniors and consists of the following eight episodes:

- How old am I actually?
- How much should I move?
- How do I ensure enough sleep and relaxation?
- What should I eat?
- How do I keep my muscles strong? How do I keep my gut healthy?
- Will there be an anti-ageing pill soon?
- How do I grow old vital, healthy, and happy?

There is also a mini course “Healthy Ageing in 6 Steps. Let your environment do the work!” available in English, which consists of 6 modules of 2-3 hours per week student workload and is offered for free.

Also, a series of 19 lectures called “Home Happiness” is offered for Dutch older adults on how to age in a healthy and happy manner. These lectures are accessible to all Dutch speakers since they are uploaded on their YouTube channel.

3. Key facts

The practice is carried out and developed by the private organisation Institute Leyden Academy on Vitality and Ageing. The offer is supported by a national fund which provided the financing for the development of the course. There actual costs of development are unclear. The course is available online for free. Seniors who want to participate in the course need a digital device.

4. Results

The Institute Leyden Academy on Vitality and Ageing does not only address older people, but also offer Lectures available for free online and Master to educate interested people on the topic of Vitality and Ageing. Thus, the organisation covers a broader target group, which includes older adults and also students, care givers and entrepreneurs and provides an extensive educational portfolio and learning material.

On the website the following testimonial of a participant was shared:

“The connection between new facts and what I already knew opened my eyes even more. This has led to a, hopefully lasting, change in both my diet and my exercise pattern.”

5. More information

Website [leydenacademy.nl]

Mini course on vitality and healthy ageing (Available only in Dutch)
[\[leydenacademy.nl/vitaalouder\]](https://leydenacademy.nl/vitaalouder)

Mini course “Healthy Ageing in 6 Steps. Let your environment do the work!”
(Available in English and Dutch) [\[leydenacademy.nl/healthy-ageing-in-6-steps-let-your-environment-do-the-work/\]](https://leydenacademy.nl/healthy-ageing-in-6-steps-let-your-environment-do-the-work/)

“Home Happiness” Lectures on YouTube [\[youtube.com/@LeydenAcademy/videos\]](https://youtube.com/@LeydenAcademy/videos)

2.4.3 Klup B.V.: social platform for networking

The Netherlands

Areas covered: Social participation and cultural participation

1. Short description

Klup B.V. is a company which created a social platform for people aged over 50 who are looking for a new social network. You can either log in to the platform through the Klup app or access it via their website [\[kluppen.nl\]](https://kluppen.nl). The app has three main functions. At Klup you will find the best activities, meet new people and view moments in your living area. In the Klup platform you create a profile and then you can explore the information provided by the app to meet, view different types of activities organized by other kluppers (members of the Klup platform) and meet them. More than 150 social activities are organized every week, varying from walking, cycling or going to the theatre to city trips and fun parties at the weekend.

2. Implementation and objectives

Klup was founded by Michelle Wolters and Michiel van den Berg. The idea of Klup arose when Michelle's father was left alone, and he moved from Brabant to Amsterdam. After some research, they found out that there was no contemporary and especially fun 'online' way to get to know new people which is why they set up the Klup app. The objectives of this practice are to support people aged over 50 to expand and strengthen their social network.

3. Key facts

The offer is run by the private company called Klup B.V. The investment costs are unclear, but people who want to use the app or the website need to get a membership that costs at least 4,99€ per month. There are no prerequisites to participating and using the app, but people do need a digital device to access the website or the app.

4. Results

On the website it is described that there are more than 100,000 registered kluppers (members), thousands of kluppers who use the app every day and a community that together organizes more than 400 activities per week. In addition, on the website, there are a few testimonials from participants such as:

“Klup has given my social life a huge boost! New friendships have been made and countless activities have been undertaken, such as drinks, walking, dancing, museums, too many to mention!”

The website and app are currently available and can be used by people aged 50 years and over.

5. More information

Website [kluppen.nl]

App [kluppen.nl/download]

2.4.4 Morgen Gezond Weer Op Kaart (Tomorrow Healthy Again Card): Map of the important health related aspects

Region of Eindhoven, The Netherlands

Area covered: Health promotion

1. Short description

With the Morgen Gezond Weer Op Kaart tool you have all your healthy related contacts in one place. As indicated in the Morgen Gezond Weer Op Kaart website, the users define who and what is important for their health. The tool can mainly be used to map out their own personal network, giving an idea of who could support them and with what.

2. Implementation and objectives

During a major flu wave in 2018 there was not enough care available for frail older people. To support frail older adults the municipality of Veldhoven has developed this tool to map the most important contacts of frail older adults. The tool consists of a map, that can be used online or offline, providing questions to be filled in by seniors. They have the option to do it on their own or together with a family member or friend, a volunteer or a healthcare provider. Based on the answers provided the tool gives tailored advice about which services could be of their interest and in which areas they may need support. The target group of this offer is (frail) older people.

3. Key facts

The offer was developed by the municipality of Veldhoven, which is a public body. It is unclear how much the investment costs were, but the offer can be used for free by seniors. A digital device is required and if they don't have it, they can also request the offline version of the tool or get the support of a family member or friend, a volunteer or a healthcare professional.

4. Results

The tool is now being used by three municipalities, Veldhoven, Son en Breugel and the neighbourhood Gestel from Eindhoven. There was a short study performed to evaluate the tool. According to the study the tool was appreciated, but older adults still found it difficult to use it in terms of the questions that were asked and what could be done with the information that the tool provided to them.

5. More information

Website [morgengezondweeropkaart.nl]

Morgen Gezond Weer Op Kaart (Tomorrow Healthy Again Card)
[\[morgengezondweeropkaart.nl/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/MGWOK-DRUKVERSIE.pdf\]](https://morgengezondweeropkaart.nl/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/MGWOK-DRUKVERSIE.pdf)

2.4.5 Stichting Gouden Dagen (Foundation Golden Days): Online Friendship Course 50+

The Netherlands

Area covered: Social participation

1. Short description

At all ages, friendships are a source of stimulation, fun and support. The online Friendship Course 50+ offers people aged over 50 the opportunity to reflect on their friendships and also actively get started with practical exercises. The course is run on a weekly basis and has a duration of six weeks, from which the first one consists of an introduction and the other five of lessons. The online Friendship Course 50+ is based on a successful friendship course by Prof. Dr. Nan Stevens.

2. Implementation and objectives

This practice is carried out by Foundation Golden Days (Stichting Gouden Dagen). Golden Days Netherlands is a charity for older adults. The foundation's objective is to combat feelings of loneliness among older adults. They do this by inspiring and supporting care centres and community centres in organizing activities for seniors. In this way they hope to reduce feelings of loneliness. The online friendship course is one of the activities offered by Golden Days and its objective is to support seniors in gaining new friendships and strengthening existing ones.

3. Key facts

The course is offered online; thus, the participants get provided the opportunity to join the 30-60 minutes course from home. Since it is a charitable practice that is supported by national funding, the participation of the course is for free. The only thing needed to join is a digital device and internet access.

4. Results

Due to a lack of resources, the online Friendship Course 50+ is currently not available anymore. Nevertheless, it is in planning to bring the course back online soon, so that it can be accessed by participants again.

5. More information

Foundation [\[goudendagen.nl\]](https://goudendagen.nl)

Friendship Course 50+ [\[goudendagen.nl/partners/online-vriendschapscursus\]](https://goudendagen.nl/partners/online-vriendschapscursus)

2.4.6 Dance Connects Foundation: online and in-person dance classes

The Netherlands

Areas covered: Cultural participation, health promotion

1. Short description

Dance Connects is a Foundation which makes contemporary dance accessible to everyone from 60 to 100+ by offering online and in-person dance classes. Online classes are published for free on the YouTube channel "Dans voor Thuis" (Dancing at home). Furthermore, information about the in-person classes can be found on their website.

2. Implementation and objectives

The classes are offered by the Foundation Dance Connects. As described on their website Dance Connects opts for contemporary dance classes because this dance form fits in very well with the diversity of an older target group due to the freedom in movement vocabulary and the space for individual interpretation. They describe that dance, and contemporary dance, is not just about steps or technique, but also appeals to everyone's imagination, creativity, and self-expression. The participants are addressed to their strengths and are given the opportunity to further develop their personal talents. The teaching method offers them the opportunity to be creative, to show more of themselves than just form and movement, to tell their own story. By looking and listening to each other, a form of intimacy, recognition and trust is created from which mutual contact can be built up. The specific target population is 60+.

3. Key facts

The dance classes are offered by Dance Connects. It is a foundation that brings the widest possible audience into contact with dance and other art forms, thereby creating connections between art and society. Since Dance Connects is a non-profit organization they are funded by public funds. Participation in specific in-person dance courses is offered for small money, otherwise can be accessed for free if the person doesn't have enough financial means. There are also 'Club Dance' sessions which are offered for free with the option to provide a donation of 5-10 euros. The free online classes can be found on YouTube. There are no requirements to participate in the online classes except that participants need a digital device to be able to access YouTube.

4. Results

The classes can be accessed online for free. Dance Connects has more than 650 followers on Instagram.

5. More information

Website [danceconnects.nl]

Online dance classes [youtube.com/playlist]

2.4.7 Apps to report issues: MeldR (Reporting in Rotterdam), Slim Melden (Smart Reporting), BuitenBeter (OutsideBetter)

The Netherlands

Area covered: Political/municipal participation

1. Short description

In the Netherlands, some municipalities have made available to their citizens different apps like MeldR (Reporting in Rotterdam) that they can use to report the different issues they face, such as being bothered by annoyingly parked bicycles or mopeds on your sidewalk. Or if the lamppost is broken. Is the waste container full or is there waste next to a container? All this can be reported to the municipality via the MeldR app.

There are also some private initiatives like Slim Melden (Smart Reporting), offered by Civity, or BuitenBeter (OutsideBetter), an app offered by the company BeheerVisie, who are fulfilling a similar purpose and have developed their solution in cooperation with municipalities.

2. Implementation and objectives

The municipality of Rotterdam carries out the practice of the MeldR having the citizens of the city as its target group. The app was developed to support the citizens in alerting the municipality about the issues they are facing. The app works in the following way:

- Citizens install the app in their mobile device and start it.
- Citizens can mark on the map where the problem is.
- They can choose a category that they want to make a complaint about (waste, green, lighting or one of the other categories).
- They can then choose a topic from the list that best fits the problem. They can also insert more information or a photo to describe it.
- When done, an overview of the entered information is displayed. They can enter their name, e-mail address and telephone number. They can also make an anonymous report, where no personal details are mandatory.
- The municipality immediately receives the report and keeps the citizen informed if and when the problem has been solved, in case of non-anonymous report.

In the case of the private initiatives, for example, Slim Melden considers local authorities, citizens and practitioners by accepting and processing their requests, which can be made anonymously if desired. This way the reporting is accessible to the public through the Smart App, where the spot of the regarding issue can be pinned on the map. Now, a case is open, and the user receives a case number, which ensures transparency of the process. It is then processed by a municipality for the service manager of the living environment, following the policy to contribute to a better and well-oiled community.

3. Key facts

The municipality of Rotterdam, being a public body and funded by public funds, carries out the practice of the MeldR app. The app is offered for free, with no further requirements apart from a digital device, e.g., a smartphone, to access it.

Slim Melden (Smart Reporting) is an app developed by Civity together with municipalities, each of which provides its own app. BuitenBeter is an app offered by BeheerVisie. It has been downloaded more than 100.000 times and its latest version

is from 27th of May 2023. Both provide a reporting service to the citizens of Dutch municipalities.

4. Results

The apps have been successfully implemented in different cities in the Netherlands. It makes reporting to the municipality accessible to the public and the municipalities respond, in some cases within a few days, on notifications to restore, clean, etc. The only thing needed to use the app is a digital device and internet access. In case of the Slim Melden app, it follows the transparency policy by working with open data. This means that the reports can be made available as an open dataset.

Quote from the municipality of Waterland, Netherlands: “It is now easier to clearly register and route damage and irregularities. With Slim Melden we can now handle reports faster and correctly.”

5. More information

MeldR: [rotterdam.nl/meldr]

MeldR App Store: [apps.apple.com/nl/app/meldr/id1524929423]

MeldR Google Play: [play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=nl.rotterdam.meldr]

Slim Melden - Civit: [civity.nl/en/slim-melden]

Slim Melden Web: [belcombinatie.slimmelden.nl]

Slim Melden App: [belcombinatie.slimmelden.nl]

BuitenBeter App: [apps.apple.com/nl/app/buitenbeter/id368667432]

BuitenBeter Google Play:
[play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.yucat.buitenbeter]

2.5 Recommendations for the DigitalScouts trainings

In this section the main results and lessons learned from the interviews held in The Netherlands with five experts and five (potential) volunteers within the field of digital literacy are presented from the perspective of potential digital scouts.

2.5.1 Main results from the perspective of (potential) digital scouts

To prevent older people from being excluded from the digital era due to the fear or ignorance of using digital tools, it is important to provide a corresponding training, adapted to their interests, capacities and learning styles. Also, a gamification approach has been suggested.

The (potential) digital scouts have not received any formal training before starting their work as volunteers in the field of digital literacy. Most of the volunteers have a professional background in ICT or personal interest in technology before becoming a volunteer. In addition, at the time of the interview most of the (potential) digital scouts have been already working as a volunteer for many years and thus are quite experienced in supporting older adults. They state that this hands-

on work experience is essential in being a capable supporter of seniors and that they do not consider further training as necessary for them.

In terms of important skills for (potential) digital scouts the participants mention empathy, patience, and the ability to ask well formulated questions. Although daily digital skills, such as using google, has been mentioned as relevant, the (potential) digital scouts do not mention digital skills as being essential for supporting seniors and rather highlight the importance of the social aspect in being a volunteer, since younger volunteers can have difficulties in empathising with older adults. According to the (potential) digital scouts, it is difficult to teach these 'soft skills' in a formal training and easier to acquire them through hands-on experience.

There has been one case in which the person would train older people by providing support for older adults in using the smartphone, but the person did not perceive himself/herself to have the trainer status with the necessary skills to formally train older adults in digital skills. This indicates a need to develop a(n) (online) platform and to build a community of digital scouts that can support each other, providing an exchange of experience and expertise. In line with this conclusion, the preferred format for training offers among (potential) digital scouts is blended learning, combination of remote and face-to-face training sessions, supported with video material.

The interviews also suggest that (potential) digital scouts appreciate exchanging experiences and expertise with other people who do similar work and that this may support them in gaining the necessary skills. In the case of SeniorWeb, regular training sessions and meetings are offered to the volunteers to promote the building of the community and foster the exchange and update of their skills. This is also supported by an intranet with access to teaching materials.

2.5.2 Main results from the perspective of experts

From the perspective of experts, it becomes clear that it is very rare to provide (potential) digital scouts with formal training before they start supporting seniors and teaching them digital skills. In addition, the interviews indicate that there is growing need for informal trainers who want to support seniors (and other citizens) in teaching digital skills as the demand in The Netherlands exceeds the availability of more formal educators. On the other hand, they also sometimes encounter seniors who would be interested to support other seniors. It was suggested to diversify the teaching profile in order to address the different needs and interests of older people, to support the growing demand and to attract new volunteers who may not have a background in ICT. The experts interviewed state that training materials are needed for these purposes in order to support these informal trainers. Additionally, it is mentioned that the training content should also contain in-depth training for volunteers, so that they can support older adults who have the need or interest to learn, not only basic skills, but also in-depth knowledge. Moreover, some of the participants mention the need to train volunteers in more rural areas of The Netherlands and neighbourhoods that, for example, do not have a local library offering courses on digital literacy.

One expert gained some experience with formal training by working in an organisation where such training was developed. Unfortunately, they did not have a good experience with this training. The training came in the form of a written manual that new volunteers were supposed to read and study on their own. However, this has not often been done, as volunteers weren't interested in this way of learning. From this expert's experience, volunteers are more open to learning by doing, exchanging expertise and experience with other volunteers and (physical) meetings about

new types of technology. In terms of essential skills for volunteers the opinion of experts is in line with that of (potential) digital scouts, as they most often mention empathy, active listening, respectful and inclusive communication, and being able to create a pleasant social environment for older adults and work together with them.

To summarize, from the perspective of experts we can identify a need for a training offer to support (potential) digital scouts in supporting seniors. This training should focus on teaching soft and pedagogical skills and on building a community (e.g., online platform) through which digital scouts can get in contact with each other and exchange hands-on experience and expertise.

2.6 Potential modules for further elaboration

To enhance the use of digital technology by older adults, barriers, such as lack of skills, motivation and cognitive impairments in later life must be taken into consideration. By developing a training for digital scouts, it is important to consider the needs of older adults, which might face impaired vision or hearing, or an impaired ability to remember. Even though dementia is not a part of natural ageing, particularly older people are affected. In the Netherlands, around 50 thousand people aged 90 and above were living with dementia in 2018 and the estimated number of people suffering from dementia will increase in the next years.

To ensure self-sustainability of people with dementia by using health-care technologies (e.g., eHealth, finance, or social applications) on their own, it is necessary to first provide training on basic everyday digital literacy. In the frame of DigitalScouts we have not the means of providing such training for each specific target group and therefore, we propose to address this in a later version of the DigitalScouts project.

2.7 Testimonials of interviewees

“We have never really worked with volunteers, but the demand right now is so high that we need to start engaging volunteers. I am very interested to follow this project to see how we can support our future volunteers.”

(Coordinator local library in Leiden)

“The social aspect of supporting seniors in digital skills is very important. Make sure there is a nice atmosphere and provide something nice to eat and a cup of coffee for example.”

(Potential digital scout)

“I think there are a lot of seniors who want to support other seniors, but that they might not know how to start doing so. I encounter these seniors in my job and it would be good if we could offer them some kind of basic training so that they can become volunteers and/or ambassadors for the digitalization of society”

(Coordinator technology House in The Hague)

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Annex: Lead questions used in guided interviews

1. Do you think digital participation of older citizens is important? Why?
2. Which barriers do you know that prevent older citizens from digital participation?
3. Which support structures and learning offers for older people in using ICT do you know?
4. Do you think there is a need to expand these support/learning offers? If so: Why? Which kind of offers are not available? What is missing in the current offers?
5. Do you think there is [also] a need to train people to support/train older people using ICT? If so: Why?
6. Which opportunities/offers are available [do you know] to be trained themselves (as trainers) in [country/region]?
7. Is there a need to expand these offers [trainings for trainers/supporters]? If so: Why? Which kind of offers are not available? What is missing in the current offers?
8. What are trainers for digital education of older people keen to learn? [Potential learners: What would you like to learn to be able to support/train older people?]
9. What are the most important skills/knowledge for supporters?
10. From your personal point of view, which skills/knowledge do the (potential) trainers/you lack?
11. In addition to contents, which format is attractive (duration, online/on-site/ ...) for you/trainers on digital skills?
12. Can you also recommend methods/media to be included in training offers for trainers?
13. Which examples of opportunities interesting for/targeted at older people in the digital area do you know, covering one of the following areas: health promotion, social participation, cultural participation, political participation/municipal services?