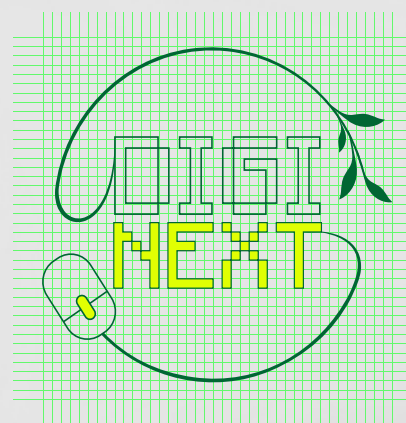




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# DIGINE#T MENTORSHIP TOOLBOX



## **DIGINEXT Mentorship Toolbox**

KA220-ADU – Cooperation partnerships in adult education

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PARTNERS:

**KMOP – Education and Innovation Hub  
die Berater**

**Asociatia Euro Adult Education**

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DIGINEXT

# Mentorship Toolbox



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# 1. Introduction: Rural Areas' Needs and European Perspective, European Vision and European Way of Life

The results of a comparative research process conducted in the DIGINEXT Project in rural regions of Austria, Greece, Italy, Romania, and Spain, was focused on digital inclusion, cultural management, training systems, and the needs of key rural target groups

The research targeted Local Action Groups (LAGs), adult education and training providers, older adults, and low-skilled individuals, aiming to identify challenges, opportunities, and strategic priorities for strengthening digital and cultural capacity in rural communities.

## Key Cross-Country Findings

A central finding across all participating countries is the urgent need to strengthen digital competences in rural areas, particularly among seniors and low-skilled adults. Many participants reported limited confidence in using digital devices, accessing online public services, conducting online banking, managing personal data, or identifying cybersecurity risks. Basic digital literacy – including smartphone use, email communication, social media navigation, and online safety – remains a fundamental training priority.

Beyond basic skills, advanced digital competences are increasingly required for LAG managers, adult educators, and community multipliers, including digital project management, online collaboration tools, content creation, data analysis, artificial intelligence awareness, and digital marketing. Strengthening these capacities is essential to ensure that LAGs can effectively design, manage, and promote community development projects, training initiatives, and cultural activities.

## Cultural Needs

The research highlights the strategic importance of cultural heritage, local traditions, and community-based cultural activities in maintaining rural identity and social cohesion. While there is strong public interest in cultural events – such as festivals, music, theatre, heritage activities, and community gatherings – LAG involvement in cultural programming remains uneven and often under-developed, especially in Romania and Spain.

The findings point to a significant opportunity to integrate digital tools into cultural management, including:

- Digital promotion of cultural events and heritage
- Online cultural archives and storytelling platforms
- Virtual tours, exhibitions, and community memory projects
- Digital platforms for citizen participation and local engagement

Digitalization is seen not only as a technical upgrade, but also as a means to revitalize rural cultural life, strengthen intergenerational exchange, and increase access to cultural resources for isolated or mobility-limited populations.

## Training System Needs

The analysis reveals that existing training systems often fail to fully address rural realities, requiring more flexible, accessible, and locally adapted learning formats. There is a strong demand for:

- Community-based digital learning centers and innovation hubs
- Mobile digital training units for remote areas
- Tailored courses for seniors and low-skilled adults
- Partnerships between LAGs, NGOs, schools, cultural institutions, and training providers
- Lifelong learning opportunities linked to local economic sectors, such as agriculture, tourism, crafts, and entrepreneurship

Participants across countries expressed a desire for practical, hands-on learning, rather than purely theoretical courses. There is also growing recognition of the importance of green skills, sustainability education, and digital tools supporting environmental awareness and smart rural development.



## **Adult Education and Training Providers**

Adult education providers require modernized training systems that better respond to the realities of rural communities. There is a strong need to upgrade digital infrastructure, teaching equipment, and digital learning methodologies. Educators must strengthen their digital pedagogical competences, including the use of online platforms, blended learning, and interactive digital tools. Training providers also need region-specific curricula, aligned with local economic sectors such as agriculture, tourism, entrepreneurship, and cultural industries. Additionally, providers require support to develop innovative learning formats, including mobile training units, community learning hubs, and lifelong learning pathways that attract seniors and low-skilled adults. Strengthening partnerships with LAGs, municipalities, NGOs, and cultural institutions is essential to expand outreach and impact.

## Local Action Group (LAG) Managers and Multipliers

LAG managers and multipliers play a key role in rural development, yet the report shows they require enhanced digital, managerial, and strategic competences. Their needs include training in digital project management, communication tools, content creation, data management, and online promotion of community initiatives. There is also a strong demand for capacity-building in cultural management, enabling LAGs to better support heritage preservation, cultural programming, and creative community projects. Moreover, LAG representatives need greater awareness of their educational and social role, particularly in fostering training initiatives, digital inclusion projects, and partnerships with education and civil society actors. Strengthening their strategic planning, funding acquisition, and community engagement skills is critical to maximizing their impact in rural territories.

## Rural Population – Older Adults and Low-Skilled Individuals

Older adults and low-skilled individuals represent the most vulnerable group in the rural digital divide. Their primary need is accessible, practical, and continuous digital literacy training, starting from basic skills such as using smartphones, computers, email, social media, and online public services. Seniors require training that supports daily independence, including online banking, e-government services, telemedicine access, cybersecurity awareness, and safe internet use. Low-skilled adults need digital competences that enhance employability, including job search tools, workplace software, digital communication, and vocational upskilling.

Both groups express a strong interest in cultural participation, community activities, and lifelong learning, but face barriers related to limited access, lack of information, low confidence, or insufficient local opportunities. There is also a need for support points, community mentors, simplified learning materials, and inter-generational learning models to ensure training remains inclusive, motivating, and relevant.

### Digitalization as a Driver of Rural Inclusion

The digital transformation can act as a catalyst for social inclusion, employability, access to public services, and community empowerment. Expanding broadband infrastructure, multimedia centers, public digital access points, and e-government platforms is considered essential to reducing inequalities between urban and rural areas.

For older adults, digital skills training contributes to greater independence, social connectivity, access to healthcare information, and improved quality of life. For low-skilled adults, digital competence is directly linked to employment opportunities, reskilling pathways, and economic participation. For LAGs and community leaders, digital tools enhance local governance, project coordination, transparency, and citizen engagement.

## Alignment with the European Union Vision and Strategic Priorities

The DIGINEXT findings strongly support the European Union's long-term vision for a digitally empowered, inclusive, and resilient Europe, contributing directly to several major EU policy frameworks.

### EU Digital Decade (2030)

The project aligns with the EU objective that at least 80% of adults should have basic digital skills by 2030, addressing the critical skills gap among rural populations. DIGINEXT contributes to ensuring that rural communities are not left behind in Europe's digital transformation, supporting equitable access to digital opportunities.

### EU Rural Vision 2040

The report supports the EU ambition for "stronger, connected, resilient, and prosperous rural areas", highlighting the importance of smart villages, digital infrastructure, community-led development, and innovation in rural territories. Strengthening LAG capacity and empowering local actors reinforces the LEADER approach and Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) model.

### European Pillar of Social Rights & Inclusion Agenda

By focusing on lifelong learning, adult education, skills development, and social inclusion, DIGINEXT advances the EU's commitment to equal opportunities, access to training, employability, and active participation in society, particularly for vulnerable groups such as seniors and low-skilled adults.

### EU Cultural and Creative Strategy

The project contributes to the preservation and digital promotion of cultural heritage, reinforcing the EU goal to protect cultural diversity, support creative ecosystems, and expand access to culture through digital means. DIGINEXT demonstrates how digital innovation can strengthen cultural identity while fostering community participation and intergenerational dialogue.

## 2. E-Rural Inclusion Specialist: Professional Profile

The DIGINEXT Professional Profile defines the key competences, skills, and knowledge required for professionals supporting digital inclusion, rural development, and lifelong learning, with a particular focus on older adults and low-skilled individuals in rural areas. It serves as a practical reference framework for trainers, Local Action Groups (LAGs), adult education providers, and community facilitators who work to strengthen digital skills, social participation, and access to cultural and learning opportunities.

The profile responds to identified skills gaps and training needs across partner countries, combining digital, pedagogical, communication, and community engagement competences. It is designed to support the development of targeted training programs, improve the quality of adult education interventions, and contribute to the European objectives for digital transformation, social inclusion, and sustainable rural development.

By offering a structured and adaptable competence model, the Professional Profile supports both workforce upskilling and the creation of innovative roles, such as e-rural inclusion specialists and local digital mentors, helping to build resilient, connected, and empowered rural communities.

### HOW TO USE THE DIGINEXT PROFESSIONAL PROFILE E-RURAL INCLUSION SPECIALIST

The **DIGINEXT Professional Profile** is a practical framework designed to help professionals support **digital inclusion, lifelong learning, and rural development**, with a special focus on **older adults and low-skilled people living in rural areas**.

If this is your first time using a professional profile of this kind, think of it as a **map**: it helps you understand *which competences are needed, why they matter, and how they can be developed through training*.

#### 1. What is the DIGINEXT Professional Profile?

The E-Rural Inclusion Specialist profile defines the **knowledge, skills, and attitudes** required to work effectively in rural digital inclusion contexts. It is not a job description, but a **reference framework** that can be adapted to different roles and local realities.

It is especially useful for:

- Trainers and adult educators
- Local Action Groups (LAGs)
- Community facilitators and digital mentors
- Organisations working in rural development and social inclusion

The profile responds to **real skills gaps identified during the DIGINEXT research phase**, combining:

- Digital competences
- Pedagogical and communication skills
- Community engagement and sustainability awareness



### Official Professional Profile (EN):

[https://diginextproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/DIGINEXT\\_D2.1\\_PP\\_EN.pdf](https://diginextproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/DIGINEXT_D2.1_PP_EN.pdf)

## 2. Why should you use this profile?

The Professional Profile helps you **design, deliver, or evaluate training activities** that are aligned with European priorities such as digital transformation, social inclusion and sustainable rural development.

In practice, you can use it to:

Identify which digital competences are needed in your context

Structure specific training programmes for adults in rural areas

Improve the quality and coherence of learning activities

Create or strengthen new professional roles (e.g. local digital mentors)



### Professional Profile Report (background & methodology):

[https://diginextproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/DIGINEXT\\_ProfessionalProfile-report.pdf](https://diginextproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/DIGINEXT_ProfessionalProfile-report.pdf)

## 3. Understanding the digital training needs

Before using the profile, it is important to understand the **digital needs it responds to**. According to the DIGINEXT research, key needs in rural areas include:

- **Basic digital literacy**  
(smartphones, computers, internet navigation)
- **Online administrative services**  
(e-government, online banking)
- **Digital communication tools**  
(email, social media, video conferencing)
- **Cybersecurity awareness**  
(online threats, data protection, safe use)
- **Advanced digital skills**  
(project management tools, digital marketing, data analysis)
- **Cultural management in the digital age**  
(promotion of local heritage and events)
- **Digital content creation**  
(for cultural promotion and preservation)

These needs explain *why* the competences in the profile are structured the way they are.



## 4. The 5 Professional Areas: how the profile is organised

The DIGINEXT Professional Profile is divided into **five Professional Areas**, each corresponding to a **training module**.

You should read these areas as **learning pathways**, not isolated topics:

### 1. Digital Literacy and Critical Thinking

Core digital skills based on the DigComp framework: searching, evaluating, and managing information.

### 2. Digital Public Services and Finances

Use of e-government, e-banking, digital identity, and fraud prevention.

### 3. e-Health

Accessing, understanding, and using digital health information.

### 4. Digital Sustainability

Environmental impact of digital technologies and sustainable practices.

### 5. Digital Engagement in Rural Areas

Community participation, local networks, and the role of LAGs.

Each area can be used independently or combined into a full training programme.

## 5. EQF and NQF: what level is this profile?

The profile is aligned with:

- **EQF Level 4**
- **National and/or Regional Qualification Framework Level 4**

This means that a learner using this profile is expected to:

- Have **factual and theoretical knowledge** in a broad context
- Apply a **range of cognitive and practical skills**
- Work with **autonomy and responsibility**, adapting to change

This is particularly relevant for adult learners, facilitators, and local professionals.

## 6. Competences: how to read and use them

The heart of the Professional Profile is the **list of competences**, based on **DigComp 2.2**.

Each competence includes:

- A **clear description** (what the competence is)
- **Expected abilities** ("I can..." statements)
- A reference to DigComp learning scenarios

Key competence areas include:

- Browsing, searching, and filtering information
- Evaluating credibility and reliability of digital content
- Managing data and digital content
- Managing digital identity and privacy
- Protecting devices, health, and well-being
- Identifying needs and technological responses
- Creative and collaborative use of digital tools
- Digital citizenship and community engagement

### 💡 Tip:

When designing training, select only the competences that are *relevant to your target group*. You do not need to use all of them at once.

## 7. From competences to training modules

The DIGINEXT Professional Profile is operationalised through **five training modules**, each linked to one Professional Area:

- **Module 1:** Digital Literacy and Critical Thinking
- **Module 2:** Digital Public Services and Finances
- **Module 3:** e-Health
- **Module 4:** Digital Sustainability
- **Module 5:** Digital Engagement in Rural Areas

Each module:

- Translates competences into learning outcomes
- Supports structured adult education pathways
- Can be adapted to local, regional, or national contexts

## 8. Assessment: how learning is evaluated

To support trainers and learners, DIGINEXT provides an **online assessment system**.

- Quizzes include multiple-choice and open-ended questions
- Each learning unit has its own evaluation
- The system helps measure both knowledge and practical understanding

 **Learning Unit Assessment:**

<https://diginextproject.eu/wp-content/course/en/story.html>

## Final note

The DIGINEXT Professional Profile is meant to be **flexible, practical, and user-centred**.

Whether you are a trainer, a policy maker, or a local facilitator, you can use it as:

- A **planning tool**
- A **quality reference**
- A **bridge between digital skills and rural community needs**

Start small, focus on your learners, and use the profile as a **living framework** rather than a rigid checklist.

## 3. E-Rural Inclusion Specialist Training Course

The **DIGINEXT e-Rural Inclusion Specialist Training Course** is designed to strengthen digital skills among **low-skilled adults and senior learners living in rural areas across Europe**, while also supporting trainers who deliver this learning through **LAGs**. The accompanying **Train the Trainer Manual** was developed specifically for trainers and facilitators running digital skills education in rural contexts and provides practical guidance for planning and delivering sessions that help learners participate confidently in an increasingly digital society.

The course addresses the risk of **digital exclusion in rural communities** by offering a highly practical, learner-centred approach that combines **intergenerational pedagogy** and a **circular learning model** that connects higher education institutions with rural communities. Its overarching aim is to help build **resilient rural communities** by improving **digital literacy** and **sustainability awareness**, enabling learners to access essential services, stay informed, and use digital tools effectively in everyday life.

### DELIVERY FORMAT AND LEARNING DESIGN

- The training course is available in **six languages (English, German, Greek, Italian, Romanian and Spanish)** <https://diginextproject.eu/wp-content/course/en/story.html>
- The **accompanying Train the Trainer Manual** is a comprehensive guide to help facilitate training sessions that empower learners to confidently navigate the digital world, focusing on essential competencies and skills. It can be accessed here: [https://diginextproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/DIGINEXT\\_Manual\\_EN.pdf](https://diginextproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/DIGINEXT_Manual_EN.pdf)
- The learning experience is designed to be interactive and engaging, with clear progression and practical tasks.
- The course is organised into **five modules**, each following a consistent structure: **(1) introduction and module overview, (2) learning objectives, (3) main content, and (4) summary.**
- A **Self-Assessment Tool** is provided at the end of the course so learners can review progress and check understanding across all modules.

## MODULES AT A GLANCE

**1. Digital Literacy and Critical Thinking:** Introduces core digital literacy skills, including effective searching and browsing, evaluating the credibility of online information, and managing digital content and files. A strong emphasis is placed on **critical thinking** and responsible handling of digital information.

**2. Digital Public Services and Finances:** Supports learners in accessing **e-government and digital public services** (such as administrative portals and online procedures) and understanding **digital identity** and basic security practices (including multi-factor authentication and data protection principles). It also covers **e-banking and e-commerce**, with a focus on safe payments, recognising scams, and avoiding fraud.

**3. e-Health:** Develops **digital health literacy** by teaching learners how to find, understand and evaluate health information online. It introduces health apps, telemedicine and electronic health records, while highlighting privacy, cybersecurity and safe handling of personal health data.

**4. Digital Sustainability:** Explains the environmental impact of digital technologies (energy use, e-waste and consumption patterns) and promotes **responsible digital practices** to reduce a personal digital footprint. Learners explore practical steps such as optimising device settings, extending device life, and disposing of e-waste responsibly, while also considering how digital technologies can support the green transition.

**5. Digital Engagement in Rural Areas:** Focuses on using digital tools to strengthen **social inclusion and community participation**. Learners explore how to network locally, stay informed about cultural and educational opportunities, and engage safely in online spaces. The role of **Local Action Groups (LAGs)** is highlighted as a key community resource for learning, connection and development.

## 4. Local Pilots: Partners' Experiences

This chapter presents the implementation experiences of the project partners involved in delivering the DIGINEXT local pilots across different national and rural contexts. Each partner tested and adapted the DIGINEXT training model to respond to the specific needs of their target groups, local communities, and institutional environments.

The local pilots focused on building digital competences among low-skilled adults and seniors, using the DIGINEXT curriculum and the cascade mentoring approach, in which trained local mentors support older learners in acquiring essential digital skills. While following a common project methodology, each partner tailored the training format, outreach strategies, and delivery methods to reflect local realities, including infrastructure, participant profiles, and community engagement practices.

By presenting these country-level experiences, this chapter highlights key implementation practices, challenges and impact across the five pilot sites. The comparative perspective offers valuable insights into the transferability, scalability, and sustainability of the DIGINEXT model, and provides evidence-based guidance for policymakers, educators, and community organisations seeking to promote digital inclusion in rural areas.

### 4.1 Spain – University of Seville / INCOMA

**“Capacity Building for Local Mentors in Spain”**, was jointly developed and delivered by the University of Seville and INCOMA. The activity combined two online training sessions held on 21 and 22 October 2025 with one in-person session in El Arahal (Seville). The sessions were specifically targeted at adults living in rural areas, with a particular focus on low-skilled adults, and were designed to strengthen their digital competences and mentoring capacity so that they could potentially act as local mentors in their communities.

Overall, 27 participants completed the evaluation questionnaire, indicating that at least 27 individuals were directly reached through the training activities, individual self-training, and subsequent evaluation process. Participants came from different rural localities in Spain, suggesting a reach beyond a single highly localised setting.

The activity therefore reached rural adults and young people, many of whom had no previous experience in mentoring or training roles, and provided them with structured online and face-to-face learning opportunities aimed at preparing them for future involvement in digital inclusion initiatives.

## Digital Training for Seniors

The training was implemented in two nursing homes located in Burguillos and Tomares. A total of 19 older people, aged between 70 and 93, participated in the sessions. Three trainers were present at each session, ensuring close support and facilitation.

The intervention focused on presenting the DIGINEXT project and delivering introductory content on basic digital literacy, digital public services and digital health. The methodology was adapted to the specific profile of the group, which was highly heterogeneous in terms of cognitive abilities, educational background and prior experience with digital technologies. A significant proportion of participants experienced reading and writing difficulties, and very limited access to digital devices was observed among the group.

In total, 19 institutionalised older adults were reached in two different municipalities, providing them with an initial awareness-raising and diagnostic experience regarding the use and potential benefits of digital tools in everyday life.

## Feedback from beneficiaries

Across both activities, beneficiary feedback points to the importance of designing learning that fits real profiles and contexts. In Capacity Building for local mentors, feedback gathered through questionnaires shows a very positive experience overall, with participants valuing the competence and support of facilitators and reporting that the training aligned well with their expectations. A key aspect of the feedback is motivational: participants did not simply report satisfaction with content, but also expressed a strong willingness to apply it, particularly by supporting older adults and contributing to rural digital inclusion, which suggests a pathway towards sustainability beyond the pilot phase.

In digital training for seniors, feedback could not be captured through written instruments, but the structured group discussion and trainer observation nevertheless provided strong qualitative evidence. Beneficiaries' reactions indicated that, despite limited device access and initial uncertainty, they were able to engage when learning was adapted to their capacities and delivered patiently with practical examples. The process itself generated valuable feedback: it highlighted that oral and participatory methods can be more inclusive than written formats for institutionalised older adults with literacy barriers, and that beneficiaries are more likely to connect with digital learning when it is explicitly linked to communication and health-related benefits.

## Challenges

The Spanish pilot faced a set of challenges that were particularly pronounced in the training for seniors but also relevant to the overall design of digital inclusion actions. The most visible barrier was the depth of the digital divide among older residents, which combined limited access to devices, very low levels of use, and low confidence. This was compounded by widespread reading and writing difficulties and the resulting inability to use standard evaluation questionnaires, requiring the team to redesign the feedback process in real time. Another important challenge was heterogeneity: trainers needed to accommodate participants with very different cognitive abilities and educational experiences, which made pacing, explanation style and support intensity critical. The pilot also underlined the importance of staffing: having three trainers present enabled individualised support and observation, but it also signals that scaled-up interventions of this kind require sufficient human resources to be effective.

For the local mentors, a more subtle challenge implied by the results is that most participants were new to mentoring roles. That is a success in terms of reach, but it also means future steps need to support these newly trained individuals as they transition from learning to actual mentoring practice, so that initial motivation becomes real, sustained community action.

## Impact

Taken together, the pilot produced impact on two levels. At community capacity level, the capacity building activity strengthened a pool of potential local mentors in rural Spain, building both digital competences and a clear sense of purpose around supporting others. The high satisfaction, lack of negative feedback and strong willingness to mentor older adults suggest the training model successfully created readiness for further dissemination of digital inclusion support within rural communities.

At beneficiary level, the local pilot delivered an initial diagnostic and awareness-raising intervention for older adults in residential care, a group facing compounded barriers to digital participation. The pilot demonstrated that engagement is possible when content is adapted and delivered in an oral, practical and supportive manner, and it produced concrete methodological learning about evaluation and training design for this profile. In project terms, the activity also generated evidence relevant by validating flexible, person-centred approaches and informing future improvements in accessible materials, progressive learning design and digital inclusion strategies aimed at increasing autonomy, wellbeing and social connection among older adults.



## **4.2 Austria – die Berater**

### **Short description of the local pilot**

The Austrian DIGINEXT piloting was mainly implemented in the LEADER/LAG Waldviertler Kernland (Lower Austria) and connected to existing regional support structures, including community-based initiatives such as DAVNE-Nachbarschaftshilfe. The pilot focused on strengthening local capacity to support seniors and low-skilled adults with practical digital skills in rural contexts.

## Summary

Capacity Building for Local Mentors (11.12.2025, on-site): A structured training session delivered by die Berater with a LAG officer, including a guided walk-through of all five DIGINEXT modules (Data Literacy; Digital Public Services & Finances; e-Health; Digital Sustainability; Digital Engagement in Rural Areas), peer exchange, and planning for local implementation with seniors.

Implementation of Local Pilots (on-site, 2 sessions): Tulln Senior Citizens' Fair where die Berater delivered an expert talk ("Digital Fit im Alter"), presented DIGINEXT and the interactive course, and ran an information booth. A facilitated DIGINEXT session with 9 participants (8 seniors + 1 local mentor), supported on-site by one die Berater representative in Ottenschlag (part of the LAG Waldviertler Kernland).

## Feedback from beneficiaries

Feedback was consistently positive: Participants rated the materials and support highly and reported strong confidence to apply the learning. Most valued practical, work-relevant applications, AI tools, and legal/rights-related aspects (including data protection). All respondents indicated they would recommend the workshops.

## Challenges

Key challenges related to time needs (request for longer sessions), rural infrastructure limitations (internet/broadband), and different starting levels, requiring more guided practice and differentiated pathways (beginner vs advanced). Organisationally, a change in regional funding priorities created capacity constraints and required handover and coordination, extending timelines.

## Impact

The piloting strengthened the ability of local mentors, LAG offices and organisational staff to deliver practice-oriented digital inclusion support and increased confidence to use DIGINEXT methods locally. For seniors and senior-facing stakeholders, it supported more secure engagement with digital tools and services, especially for everyday tasks and safe participation (rights/data protection), with good potential for scaling through local networks and peer recommendation.

## 4.3 Greece – KMOP

In the context of the DIGINEXT project, KMOP implemented three local pilots, one held online via Zoom and the other held in the Community Care Center for the Elderly of Kamatero. All pilots focused on strengthening the digital skills of the participants, many of whom had limited chances for formal training, by covering all five modules of the DIGINEXT curriculum.

### Capacity building for Local Mentors

KMOP delivered the DIGINEXT capacity building program through a single 6-hour online session via Zoom platform. The online approach brought together community members in a shared virtual space, creating meaningful interaction despite geographical distance. One additional event was organised at the Day Care Center for the Elderly of Kamatero, through which we presented the DIGINEXT curriculum to 10 LAG officers & mentors.

The program covered essential digital competencies such as information and data literacy, access to digital public services, e-health tools, digital sustainability, and opportunities for digital participation. The training featured practical demonstrations, step-by-step explanations, and simple, relatable examples tailored to the learners' needs.

The participants expressed very high satisfaction from the program, as well as strong interest in continuing digital learning and increased motivation to support older adults and other vulnerable groups in their communities.

### Digital Training for Seniors

The digital training for seniors took place in the Community Care Center for the Elderly of Kamatero. The training focused on enhancing the digital skills of seniors in rural areas in key fields such as digital literacy and critical thinking, access to digital public services, e-health tools, digital sustainability, and digital participation. The training applied the principles of intergenerational learning and featured practical demonstrations, step-by-step explanations, and simple, relatable examples tailored to the learners' needs.

Participants showed increasing confidence in using the DIGINEXT materials and strongly valued the practical, accessible way of delivery.

### Challenges

For mentors, the challenges identified had to do with the heterogeneity of the participants' skills, scheduling difficulties and the need for increased practical focus. For seniors, challenges included limited prior digital experience, varied learning pace and uncertainty about application.

## Impact

The DIGINEXT local pilots empowered individuals in using digital services and strengthened the infrastructure of rural support. Low-skilled adults and seniors experienced a significant surge in digital confidence and independence. LAG officers reported high satisfaction and increased confidence in their delivery, gaining a more nuanced understanding of local needs to better inform future development strategies. Finally, for the organizing bodies, the pilot validated the DIGINEXT approach as a sustainable and scalable model.

## 4.4 Italy – CESIE

### Capacity building for Local Mentors

The activity focused on capacity building for local mentors through one on-site training session lasting four hours. The activity involved one LAG facilitator and eight low-skilled young adults engaged in national civil service activities at Auser of Collesano, a small town in Madonie Park, in Sicily. Participants received training across all five DIGINEXT modules, covering digital literacy, public services, e-health, sustainability, and digital engagement in rural areas. The session combined theoretical inputs with practical reflection on community-oriented digital skills. Particular interest emerged around digital sustainability and critical digital literacy. Most participants reported satisfaction with the training and clarity of the materials provided. The activity strengthened participants' readiness to support future digital inclusion initiatives with seniors.

### Digital Training for Seniors

The training focused on the implementation of a DIGINEXT local pilot through one blended session lasting 2h30, involving one LAG facilitator, one Local Mentor, and senior participants from the Auser association of Petralia Sottana. The session addressed access to basic digital and e-health services, encouraging participants to reflect on their everyday digital practices. Seniors shared experiences in using tools such as Google, Gmail, WhatsApp, and Facebook, highlighting frequent daily use. Facebook emerged as a key channel for local news, initiatives, and social participation in the Madonie area. Participants ranged from simple users to active content creators. A dedicated discussion explored artificial intelligence, focusing on awareness, opportunities, and risks. Overall, the session fostered dialogue, digital awareness, and peer learning in a supportive environment.

## Challenges

One main challenge was the limited engagement of the LAG Officers in adopting DIGINEXT as a structured pilot for the territory. Participation of LAG digital facilitators in online meetings and follow-up activities was difficult. Institutional coordination channels proved less effective than expected. Most young adult participants had no prior experience as trainers, requiring additional facilitation support. Interest in digital topics was uneven, with some participants more motivated by social and environmental issues. Several participants requested more practical opportunities to apply skills in real-life mentoring contexts. A small percentage expressed uncertainty about their future role as local mentors. Moreover, adverse weather conditions (Cyclone Harry) prevented in-person attendance by CESIE staff, during the T4.2 activity, however, this constraint reinforced discussion on the importance of digital tools as practical alternatives.

## Impact

The piloting enhanced digital, social, and facilitation skills among low-skilled young adults. Participants reported increased confidence in using DIGINEXT materials and methods, and a strong community-oriented motivation emerged, with most aspiring to support seniors and local development. Digital skills were perceived as relevant for employability and personal development. Overall, the activity with young adults laid solid foundations for intergenerational learning and rural digital inclusion. The pilot strengthened seniors' digital skills, particularly in accessing public digital services and e-health tools. Participants reported increased confidence in online security, password protection, and smartphone use. Digital tools were recognized as means to access services, stay informed, and engage socially. Local mentors and facilitators reinforced dialogue on digital inclusion within small mountain communities. Overall, the activity contributed to reducing isolation and promoting active participation through digital channels.



## 4.5 Romania – ASOCIAȚIA EURO ADULT EDUCATION



As part of the DIGINEXT project, Asociația Euro Adult Education implemented a local pilot in Drajna and Izvoarele (Prahova County, Romania), aiming to improve digital skills, inclusion, and community participation among low-skilled adults and seniors.

The local pilot introduced an innovative cascade mentoring model: LAG officers trained low-skilled adults to become Local Mentors, who then supported seniors in learning how to use digital tools safely and confidently.

### Capacity building for Local Mentors

Two on-site training sessions were organized for low-skilled adults, reaching 18 participants (LAG officers and low-skilled adults) covering five key DIGINEXT topics, including digital literacy, online public services, e-health, sustainability, and digital engagement in rural areas.

Participants reported very high satisfaction, improved confidence in using digital tools, and strong motivation to help others in their communities. Many expressed a clear desire to support seniors and promote digital inclusion locally.

### Digital Training for Seniors

Local Mentors, supported by LAG officers, delivered training to 33 seniors aged 50–82, from Drajna and Izvoarele, using a mix of sessions at cultural centers from these villages and home-based one-to-one mentoring (this approach ensured accessibility, especially for seniors with mobility challenges).

Seniors learned how to: use smartphones and digital devices, access online public services and pensions, use e-health services, stay safe online and avoid scams and communicate with family and participate in community life online.

Feedback from seniors was extremely positive. Most reported increased confidence, greater independence, improved access to services, and a strong willingness to continue learning.



## Challenges

Challenges included uneven digital skill levels, technical limitations in rural areas, scheduling difficulties, and initial technology-related anxiety among seniors. These were addressed through personalized mentoring, adaptive teaching methods, simplified materials, and strong local stakeholder involvement.

## Impact

The Romanian experience confirms that intergenerational mentoring works and digital inclusion can transform rural communities. It helped reduce digital fear among seniors, strengthened community ties, and empowered local adults to become digital role models and community supporters.

The model has strong potential for scaling, sustainability, and replication in other regions, supporting lifelong learning, active ageing, and smarter rural development.

The course and methodology developed by the Diginext Project has already been distributed to the LAGs in the area of the cultural centers in Izvoarele and Drajna and to the social department at Drajna City Hall, which is the main development factor of the area.



## 5. Recommendations for Regional Policy Makers and LAG Officers

Regional policy makers and LAG officers should support recognition the importance of digital inclusion, lifelong learning, and active ageing strategies in the rural area. The DigiNext training should be embedded in existing adult education and community development programmes to ensure continuity and scalability.

### SPAIN

1

Promote digital inclusion and embed training in existing programmes: Regional policy makers and LAG officers should support digital literacy, lifelong learning, and active ageing initiatives across the country. DIGINEXT training should be integrated into adult education, community development, and senior support programmes to ensure continuity, relevance, and scalability.

2

Ensure practical, participatory, and locally co-designed training: Training sessions should involve LAGs from the outset and include real-life digital scenarios (e.g., healthcare, communication, administration). Sessions must be paced to participants' abilities, use hands-on practice, and provide ongoing support to enhance confidence, engagement, and autonomy among older adults and low-skilled adults.

### ROMANIA

1

Targeted awareness campaigns focusing on intergenerational mentoring and digital inclusion for seniors can serve as an effective measure to increase engagement and reinforce community support mechanisms.

2

LAGs should actively promote the DigiNext profile and training through local networks, municipalities, NGOs, and community centres.

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## GREECE



Allow more time and repetition: Training sessions addressed to low-skilled adults and seniors in rural areas should maintain a slow pace, with repeated explanations and hands-on practice, especially for more complex topics such as digital banking and online public services.



Implementation of practical & real-life scenarios: Training sessions addressed to low-skilled adults and seniors in rural areas should include more everyday examples (e.g., paying a bill, booking a medical appointment, communicating with family) to make the content more understandable to participants and connected to their daily needs.

## ITALY



Consider the involvement of LAGs in advance or provide for a co-design phase of activities at the start of the project, in order to share the objectives and implementation methodologies of the activities themselves with those responsible for and/or involved in communication and/or digital activities.



Co-designing with LAGs would also have allowed for the implementation of activities with practical scenarios, i.e. training sessions aimed at adults with limited digital skills and senior citizens, based on real needs and cases.

## AUSTRIA



For regional policy makers, the priority could be to establish and embed the e-Rural Inclusion Specialist as a recognised and resourced function within regional, LAG or LEADER region delivery structures, with clear mandates, protected staff time, and continuity measures. The Austrian pilots show that the main barriers were organisational and capacity constraints, rather than content-related issues. Moreover, a change in the regional funding scheme shifted priorities, reducing the LAG officer's ability to work with seniors as planned and requiring handover to colleagues, which extended implementation timelines.



For LAG officers, the roll-out should be designed as blended and highly supportive, combining the digital materials with guided, low-threshold facilitation. Respondents emphasised that the digital setup can still pose barriers to (educationally) disadvantaged groups unless it is paired with extremely accessible entry points, step-by-step guidance, and continuous reassurance. To encourage widespread adoption, the delivery should also include differentiated pathways (beginner vs. advanced) and stronger contextualisation of local realities. Practical support should also be provided, such as troubleshooting guidance and ongoing access to a contact person, to help LAG officers and local mentors work with seniors who might be hesitant to use digital tools.



## 6. Conclusions

The DIGINEXT Mentorship Toolbox represents a comprehensive and practical response to the growing need for digital inclusion in rural areas across Europe. By combining research-based insights, a clearly defined professional profile, a structured training programme, and real-life pilot experiences, the Toolbox offers a coherent framework to support digital transformation at community level.

## ADDED VALUE OF THE DIGINEXT MENTORSHIP TOOLBOX

One of the key strengths of the DIGINEXT Toolbox lies in its integrated and user-centred approach. It does not only provide training content, but also connects competences, methodologies, and implementation practices into a single, accessible resource. The introduction of the e-Rural Inclusion Specialist profile adds significant value by defining a new role that bridges digital skills, community engagement, and lifelong learning.

Moreover, the Toolbox promotes innovative learning models, such as cascade mentoring and intergenerational learning, which have proven highly effective in reaching vulnerable groups, particularly seniors and low-skilled adults. The strong emphasis on practical, real-life applications ensures that learning outcomes are directly relevant to everyday needs, increasing both motivation and long-term impact.

## TRANSFERABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF THE APPROACH

The experiences from the local pilots demonstrate that the DIGINEXT approach is highly transferable across different national and rural contexts. Despite variations in infrastructure, institutional capacity, and participant profiles, all partner countries were able to successfully adapt the methodology to local realities.

Key success factors for transferability include flexibility in delivery formats, adaptation to learners' pace and needs, and strong collaboration with local stakeholders such as LAGs, municipalities, and community organisations.

In terms of sustainability, the cascade mentoring model shows strong potential for long-term impact. By empowering local adults to become mentors and role models, the approach creates self-sustaining learning ecosystems within rural communities. Continued use of the DIGINEXT materials, combined with institutional support and integration into existing programmes, can ensure that the project results remain relevant and active beyond the project lifetime.



## **POTENTIAL FOR FUTURE ADOPTION AT REGIONAL AND EUROPEAN LEVEL**

The DIGINEXT Mentorship Toolbox has strong potential to be adopted and scaled at both regional and European levels. Its alignment with key European priorities – including the Digital Decade, lifelong learning, social inclusion, and rural development – makes it a valuable resource for policymakers, education providers, and community organisations.

At regional level, the Toolbox can support LAGs, adult education providers, and local authorities in designing and implementing targeted digital inclusion strategies. At European level, it can contribute to policy development, knowledge exchange, and the replication of good practices across countries.

To maximise its impact, future efforts should focus on institutionalising the e-Rural Inclusion Specialist role, strengthening partnerships between stakeholders, and ensuring continued investment in digital infrastructure and training.



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