

## Digital literacy as a prerequisite for thriving in the 21st century

More and more of learning content, information and our daily and professional interactions are moving online. Everything is faster and more convenient here. But is it safer? And is it easy to change (transform?) our usual skills into digital literacy skills? What does a 21st century citizen need to know in order not to get lost in the virtual world? What are the key competences that would improve the quality of their lives? And which competences would encourage them to become a more active citizen of their countries? And, more importantly, how to develop these competences?

These and other questions were addressed by adult educators from Finland, Latvia and Lithuania in the frames of the NordPlus project "Basic Skills of Digital Age". The aim of the project was to develop a modern curriculum called "Basic Skills for the Digital Age". The curriculum focuses on helping adult learners to learn or deepen their existing basic digital skills and to use them successfully, both for personal benefit and for more effective engagement in civic activities in their country.

The project combines best EU practices in digital education (e.g. DigComp 2.1. framework) and the unique andragogical experiences of the partner countries. The project partners had the objective of developing the frames of a curriculum that would benefit people with insufficient digital literacy skills. And they succeeded.

The curriculum developed focuses on three basic areas of competences, which the project partners identified as essential competences for a 21st century citizen:

- Information and data literacy;
- Communication and cooperation;
- Digital Content Creation.

During the development of the curriculum, the partners had many questions about the readiness of the students to participate in learning process about the basic digital skills, as the digital literacy of students is known to be highly variable. A lot of time was spent among project partners discussing what are the "most basic" skills to start with? Should the curriculum start with the question of how to choose the right digital device for your needs? Or how to know what functions it performs? Or how to switch it on? Or how to activate the different functions on it? After prolonged discussion, it was decided to add an additional "Introductory module" to the curriculum and to call it "Working with Devices". It has been kept as an optional part of the curriculum. This introductory section can be seen as a convenient base for the lecturers to use one or the other topic depending on the level of digital skills of the target group they are working with.

The content of the core part of the curriculum was not only discussed between the partners, but also tested with adult learners in each partner's educational institutions. Based on the feedback from the pupils, the curriculum was adjusted.

The content of the curriculum is essentially focused on practical skills that will be useful for any citizen in the 21st century: the choice and reliability of search engines; creating and storing information in virtual

space; communicating and sharing information using different digital tools; creating and managing digital identities; copyright issues; issues of cyber threats; etc.

Adults students who participated in piloting the curriculum said that although some of them are already familiar with the digital world, they have many information gaps to fill. They usually know little about how to protect themselves from cyber threats, not enough about how to use digital tools to engage in civic activities, and are not always familiar with the capabilities of even their own digital devices. This curriculum can help adult educators to provide a structured delivery of key (basic) knowledge about the opportunities and challenges of the digital world, while at the same time helping students to assess what gaps they have and what knowledge or skills they would like to improve, either on their own or in collaboration with adult educators.