# SAFE

# Seniors Anti-Fake Education



## Desk and action research

Transnational report – Executive Summary

November 2022

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# Executive Summary

Following **data of the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2020 report**, over the last four years it can be observed that: "the level of digital skills has continued to grow slowly, reaching 58% of individuals having at least basic digital skills, 33% with above basic digital skills and 61% of individuals having at least basic software skills. The skills indicators are strongly influenced by socio-demographic aspects. For example, 82% of young individuals (16-24), 85% of those with high formal education, 68% of employed or self-employed people and 87% of students have at least basic digital skills. By contrast, **only 35% of those aged 55-74 and 30% of the retired and the inactive possess basic skills.**"[1]
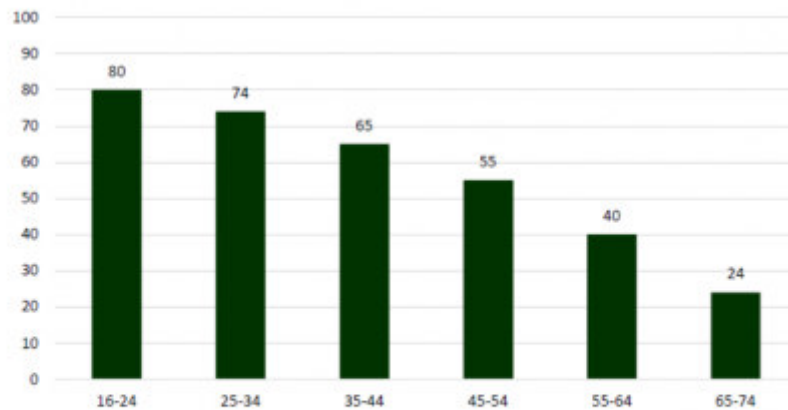


Source: Eurostat, isoc_sk_dskl_i (2021)

*Figure 1: Individuals who have basic or above basic overall digital skills by age groups, % of age groups, EC-27, 2019*

This high percentage of internet users aged 55+ with basic literacy skills also means that **many seniors have difficulties in looking for valid sources, often merely consuming information without critically engaging with.** They are not fully capable of distinguishing true from false information from the internet. **While people of all ages fall victim to fake news, numerous studies have shown that older adults are more vulnerable than young people to believe and**

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[1] https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-marktet/en/human-capital

**share fake news and digital misinformation.** While digital and media literacy has been increasingly addressed in the classroom to ensure pupils are conscious and critical recipients of information, we must **now rethink our approach to digital literacy for senior citizens (65+),** generations who have lived through the drastic shift from a print culture to a social media culture. Developing digital literacy skills should expand beyond the acquisition of basic capacities in operating smart devices into developing media literacy, critical thinking, and a proficiency to identify reliable online information. These findings are also consistent with the review of media literacy among older people by Rasi et al (2020)[2] and with the DESI 2020 report. They suggest to strategically plan and implement potential training to enhance older persons' digital competences and digital literacy by software skills and by internet use.

For this reason, the **SAFE (Seniors' Anti-Fake Education) project specifically targets seniors as they have different sets of dispositions in interacting with media as compared to young people.** The SAFE partners believe the challenges of today's internet and the **rapid development of fake news in the last decade require a new approach to digital literacy**. Therefore, **the SAFE project addresses the challenge of providing critical thinking skills to navigate potential pitfalls using online sources and social media in an elderly people education context** through provision of an **innovative Train-The-Trainer programme** (TTT) **for adult educators working with seniors**, a **workshop series for senior learners**, and an **online hub** for information and learning for both target groups.

In the transnational report, **media literacy** is understood as the "capacity to access, have a critical understanding of, and interact with the media" which "enables citizens of all ages to navigate the modern news environment and take informed decisions".[3]

The **term fake news** is more difficult to grasp. It is commonly described as "referring to a 'spectrum of information types'. This includes so-called 'low-risk forms' such as partisan political

[2] Rasi et. Al. 2020.

[3] Audiovisual and Media Services Policy. (2019): Media Literacy', Audiovisual and Media Services Policy (Unit I.1). https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/media-literacy.

discourse and click bait headlines. However, it also includes more high risk practices such as the use of malicious fabrications using automated amplification techniques that are used by different actors for example to infiltrate grassroots groups or to influence and undermine democratic processes in EU countries."[4]

**Competences** are understood as: "ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological attitudes, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development"[5]. Seniors are defined as the age group 65+.

This **transnational report** is based on six **national reports from Austria, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Italy and Slovenia which were produced during summer 2022**. It strives to combine the results from these six reports and to **reflect tendencies** within this framework. Building on this, it will offer suggestions for the development of a train-the-trainer programme for adult educators and a workshop series targeted at senior learners.

Since the state of digital literacy and the situation concerning fake news awareness among seniors varies from one country to another, it will not be possible to draw general conclusions from part I, as is the case for various chapters of part II. Instead, part I is intended to illustrate the diverse situations of digital literacy among senior citizens in the individual partner countries.

The full report is available on the project website.

## https://www.safeseniors.eu/

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[4] https://digitol.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/DIGITOL_Overall_Report_.pdf.
[5] European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2008.