

Slovakia: digital seniors – a game-changer?

The ‘Digital Slovakia’ component of the Recovery and Resilience Plan identified the need for investing in improving the digital skills of seniors and adults at risk. This strategic initiative is a direct response to the [DESI Country Report 2020](#). In 2019, the share of the population (aged 16 to 74) with at least basic (54%) and higher than basic digital skills (27%) lagged behind the EU-27 average (58% and 33% respectively). This prompts the question of why the creators of the RRP focused on improving the digital skills of seniors, and how this objective is to be accomplished.

Digital seniors project

Implemented by the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatisation (MIRRI), the project was designed to retrain a substantial number of 172 800 seniors and disadvantaged persons aged 65 and above. As an incentive to encourage the use of electronic services after successful completion of the training, participants were promised free tablets and 40 GB data package vouchers. Free training materials were developed in cooperation with the University of Pavel Jozef Šafárik in Košice (UPJŠ). The training, consisting of seven modules, each spanning three 45-minute sessions per week, continued for 5 weeks. The UPJŠ conducted a preparatory study that suggested two alternative training methods:

- participants completed the first four training modules on computers in cooperation with universities of the third age, and the fifth module was conducted on tablets;
- in cooperation with the Pensioners’ Union in Slovakia, participants were trained exclusively on tablets with Bluetooth keyboards connected to tablets.
- Within the pilot phase, 1 423 seniors and disabled persons were retrained at a total of 62 training locations across 52 districts out of a total of 79 districts in Slovakia.

Lessons learned

- The results of the satisfaction survey from the pilot phase of the project show that training is more beneficial and effective if carried out only on tablets.
- The ‘Mathew effect’ was confirmed showing that the most proactive and motivated people benefited more from the project. This underscores the need for additional outreach measures.
- In the early post-COVID period, improving digital skills was perceived as more urgent compared to a later phase when pandemic-related limitations subsided.

The MIRRI is convinced that digital seniors will be provided with better public services compared to the past, when elderly clients’ interactions with authorities were hindered by physical barriers. Digitisation of public services not only improve the quality of services but also their effectiveness. In the context of a rapidly ageing population, this initiative can also contribute to the creation of a new productive workforce: vital digital seniors and redirected future staff who would otherwise be needed in civil servant positions.

Further progression

The revised RRP, approved by the Government on 26 April 2023, addresses shifting challenges: the fading impact of the pandemic and the escalating impact of the war in Ukraine. Consequently, the plan includes a chapter reflecting the REPowerEU Plan, and a revision of some investment plans. Notably, the intended count of retrained people has been

reduced to 102 409 and the investment in digital seniors has been adjusted from the originally proposed EUR 65 074 777.27 to EUR 39 319 791.92.

Read more

- [Digital Seniors project web page](#)

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