



# DIGITALISATION

## *and Democracy*

### a context paper



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*PRESENTED BY EAEA*

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# Context Paper: Digitalisation and Democracy

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# Introduction

As the world is moving to a digital-first society, like relationships, institutions and workplaces are increasingly becoming mediated by technology, and digital technologies have the power to platform everyone, there is a lot of work to be done towards representativeness, openness and transparency. The digital gap has widened over the last two years, exposing a large group of the population with little or no basic digital skills, access and opportunities.

Developing alternative mechanisms and offers on how the internet can promote democracy, disseminate them and promote critical thinking as well as media literacy is of utmost importance. In this, a clear strategy needs to be developed on how Adult Education can contribute to the promotion of democracy with the help of digital media/internet and what preconditions must be created for this to develop concrete approaches to adult learners. The goal has to be to enforce the power of the people in public decision making and personal development, provide access to digital outlets, and create safe spaces for active engagement in international digital contexts.

Against this background EAEA, together with its partners, has not only dedicated the 2021 Grundtvig award to digitalisation and democracy but has invited different stakeholders to join a working group on digitalisation. The following paper is the result of extended research, workshops and discussions and reflects the current state of the conceptualisation of democracy and digitalisation and their representation in adult education and learning.

In the following chapters, we will have a closer look at the conceptualisation of democracy within the context of digitalisation, the power conditions and dynamics in the digital space, as well as digital politics and digitalisation in the public space. We will also discuss digital rights in Europe and address digitally excluded groups. In this, the authors are focussing on adult learners, teachers and educators, their digital competences and also the role of ALE in Democracy and Digitalisation.

Based on those insights, this paper closes with policy recommendations that EAEA produced, together with its partners from Dafni Kek, CPIP Romania, Associação Portuguesa para a Cultura e Educação Permanente (APCEP), the Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, the Arbeitskreis deutscher Bildungsstätten (AdB), the German Institute for Adult Education (DIE), and the Lernraum.Wien. We hope these recommendations can add to the discussion and help to include ALE more prominently in the public discourse on digitisation and democracy.

We are very grateful for their hard work on the paper and their input provided. A big thank you to Angeliki GIANNAKOPOULOU, Daiana HUBER, Dina SOEIRO, Helder TOUÇAS, Nils-Eyk ZIMMERMANN, Susanne LATTKE, and Thomas FRITZ.

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# 1 Democracy Conceptualisation in the premise of Digitalisation

In this first chapter, we will have a look at how digital space and the individuals moving within that space can be looked at and understood. We will mention the role of power dynamics and provide three models that hopefully provide a useful lens to look through when looking at digital spaces.

## 1.1 Power Conditions and Power Dynamics in the Digital Space

When considering the vast effect of digital communities in the neo-sense of democratic co-existence, recognising the quality and practical footprint of power dynamics in the digital public space is crucial. According to Burkholder and his associates (Burkholder, et al, 2015), Power dynamics are at play on at least four specific levels<sup>1</sup> between:

1. participants and society
2. researcher and researched
3. among participants themselves and
4. outreach.

Digital communities (online groups, subscribers, web-based fora, blog societies, mailing lists etc.) are intro-manifested through the social interactions of their members as well as the concepts that remain accessible to the non-participatory audiences (Nguyen, et al, 2006).<sup>2</sup> To better understand this dynamic we have to ask:

*How does digital coexistence interact with power dynamics?*

*How can we use digital methodologies to address unequal notions of power?*

To better understand this, we want to refer to Freire<sup>3</sup>. He uses a method of showcasing social, political and economic 'codifications'. This concept of codification can be understood as (visual and/or audible) representations of situations that would already be familiar to most people and as such codification is seen as a powerful tool. Agreeing with this approach, we are arguing that educators can act as an enabler for people to externalize codifications about themselves, the world and others in the digital space that they perhaps would not express under different circumstances.

Hooks<sup>4</sup> additionally recognizes visual artefacts as being produced and consumed through political lenses of e.g. gender, race and class and, therefore, adding the element of quality, which can be

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<sup>1</sup> (Burkholder, Makramalla, Abdou, & Khoja, 2015)

<sup>2</sup> (Nguyen, Torlina, Peszynski, & Corbitt, 2006)

<sup>3</sup> (Freire, Paulo, 1970)

<sup>4</sup> (hooks, bell, 1994)

especially interesting in terms of how digital space interferes with the dynamics of intersectional identities.

In digital space, the internal manifestation of the external community<sup>5</sup> is undergoing constant reform due to the interactions being, to some extent, possible by the click of a button. In simpler terms, the conditions online change continuously because of the low-threshold possibilities of its members to contribute and interact. Meaning interactions of the members of the cyber, online, or digital communities are, not bound by the inevitable coexistence of the physical space but rather the choice of sharing interests, conflicts, common practices and values. For this community building, however, visible or invisible participation, unapologetically communication and learning, anonymous participation and virtual identity, the freedom to join and leave the community at any time, no formal reporting system, deliverables, or deadlines, asynchronous communication, as well as the lack of communication cues (helpful in face-to-face interaction, such as body language and facial expression) are distinctive.<sup>6</sup>

The aforementioned easy access supports an increasing willingness of oversharing data and (at that) permitting access to, or even property of, capital and benefits. This in turn allows businesses and politicians to use this very data and access for political games and imposition of power (Zuboff, 2019). Consequently, this openly shared data is continuously studied on the premise of specific ideas or imaginaries then materialized in “big data” governance practice.<sup>7</sup>

In the grand scheme of things, however, we choose to tackle a thoughtfully selected set of ideas, as anything else would go beyond the possibilities and scope of this context paper.

The **market-led technology diffusion model** will be looked at within this paper. In this model, technological change in the digital world is emergent and unpredictable, while unequal distributions of resources are taken as a given. The social rights and obligations we have to each other are missing as an institutional authority, thus agency rests entirely with the unseen hand of the market.

As a variation of this, we want to mention the **state and market-led diffusion model**. Here state intervention in the market is imposed as social imaginary. This intervention is essential to enhance citizens’ welfare, meaning how rights and obligations are upheld, resulting in a state where the public has no room for collective citizen agency while companies are expected to turn traces of online activity over to security agencies. Consequently, digital technologies are symbolically, and often materially, implicated as weapons.<sup>8</sup> In this case, authority rests with companies or the state and citizens are not empowered.

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<sup>5</sup> (Nguyen, Torlina, Peszynski, & Corbitt, 2006)

<sup>6</sup> (Nguyen, Torlina, Peszynski, & Corbitt, 2006)

<sup>7</sup> (Mansell, 2016)

<sup>8</sup> (Mansell, 2016)

Thirdly, it would be interesting to consider the dynamics of a state respectively process model in which digital mediation is perceived in a generative collaborative way. In this case, the social imaginary is extended into civil societies and technical communities that ensure the rights and obligations we have to each other through governance generated by horizontal cooperation. This model is consistent with **Benkler and Nissenbaum's commons-based peer production model** where "collaboration among large groups of individuals, sometimes in the order of tens or even hundreds of thousands,"<sup>9</sup> leads to an effective corporation.

These models may act as useful lenses when considering topics tackled in this work and more specifically understanding and solidifying concepts around digital public space, digital rights and exclusion as well as the role of adult education in shifting narratives concerning these topics.

## 2 Digital Politics

### 2.1 Public Space, Digitalisation and Democracy

The very concept of space has undeniably transcended to include the complexity of the interconnected current reality between physical and digital space. In "Democracy and Public Space" John R. Parkinson<sup>10</sup>, argues on how digital access in shaping information and creating content while politicians increasingly are investing in their online presence has had a great effect on how we have extended the traditional sites of democracy-assemblies. In this context, it is quite interesting to review how this power shift has created actual digital public spaces, what kind of dynamics are created and maintained therein, as well as how democratic citizens are embodied, occupy space, struggle for access to physical resources, and perform democracy on physical stages at least as much as they engage with ideas in virtual space.

That being said, the analysis of the effects of digitalisation on democracy includes a variety of different indices, indicators and timeframes.<sup>11</sup> For instance, the Polity's Political Regime Characteristics, definitions of democracy vary from "*the most basic and literal definition of democracy –government by the people or, in representative democracy, government by the representatives of the people*" over "*government not only by but also for the people*"<sup>12</sup> to see "*political democracy as the extent to which the political power of the elite is minimised and that of the non-elite is maximised*"<sup>13</sup>.

Democracy is a state that a community, society and the political government can only reach in a process of constant challenges, and overcoming these challenges through development. This

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<sup>9</sup> (Benkler & Nissenbaum, 2006, p. 394)

<sup>10</sup> Parkinson, 2012

<sup>11</sup> (Parycek, Rinnerbauer, & Schosböck, 2017)

<sup>12</sup> (Lijphart, 1999, p. 1)

<sup>13</sup> (Bollen, 1980, p. 372)

development is to be based on the majority of the society agreeing on the routes to be taken and the actions to be undertaken along the way. Taking on this viewpoint, research on democracy shifts to measuring the quality of democracies rather than their sole existence.

Against this background, techno-optimistic views and studies on digitalisation are highlighting the creation of a digital agora and better participation opportunities for society (Le Blanc, 2020), as well as the general potential of the internet to enrich democracy by imaginative policy-making. Accordingly, grass-root approaches (Decidim, Citizen OS or adhocracy) aim to digitally organise and engage citizens in public discourses, emphasize Open Data and improve co-governance and participation.

Growing demand for more transparency in governance can be found throughout many areas changing through digitalisation and the continuously increasing creation and exchange of data. With this demand resulting in some government action and transnational reflection on information and data cultures<sup>14</sup> we are already moving towards an improvement of the digital agora, and the first beginnings of technology enhancing democracy. However, the use of data in the processes of developing digital communities raises serious concerns about how, and by whom, citizenship and participation in the digital age are defined.

At all times we must understand that public space, in any of its forms, may that be physical, virtual or relational, exists through the people that create and act therein. As it goes for a digital space to be credited as an effective public space we should consider how to enforce data transparency, access and security, and the building of a digital public space that includes and benefits its members and is critical towards the interests of exogenic capitals.

## 2.2 Digital Rights

### 2.2.1 Digitally excluded groups

A unique characteristic of the digital environment is that the digital ecosystem evolves at an insurmountable speed, compared with the speed of people's upskills, labour market refresh and support infrastructure updating.<sup>15</sup> As detailed in OECD's paper, we can understand the consequent digital divide as *"the gap between individuals, households, businesses and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard both to their opportunities to access information and*

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<sup>14</sup> (Dean, 2017)

<sup>15</sup> (OECD, 2001)



*communication technologies (ICT) and their use of the Internet for a wide variety of activities*<sup>16</sup>. Additionally, we can see these factors as the cause of said divide and generator of exclusion:<sup>17</sup>

- Access: both physical and financial - communication infrastructures, computer availability and Internet access, the standard of living (income)
- Motivation: including understanding or appreciation of the benefits, in connection with education levels and also age, gender, racial and linguistic backgrounds and location of the households
- Skills, knowledge and behaviours/attitudes: including available means of learning ICT skills, of practice, fears of fraud and online security.

Furthermore, we can understand the digital divide as reflecting the ever-increasing polarisation of society at large. On one hand, we can look at the accessibility gap from a context perspective, the existence of resources, support of appropriate infrastructure, availability of and access to information. On the other hand, we take into account the user gap, covering the above-mentioned motivation and overall competencies. Discussing the digital divide the risk of only taking into consideration one of the above, overlooking the other is imminent, so we must be wary. An interesting sneak-peek into European citizens' perception of digitalisation was captured by the 2017 survey on attitudes towards the impact of digitisation and automation on daily life and the 2020 Eurobarometer 503 Survey. On both occasions, around 6 in 10 respondents considered themselves sufficiently skilled to use digital technologies in their daily lives. However, this type of data could offer a false sense of comfort to the decision-makers, overlooking the remaining respondents left behind; also going beyond the average approach, a few countries are showing a significant decrease in the confidence level displayed by their citizens. On top of this, we would like to signal a slightly utilitarian biased approach, less inclusive of the liberal education than desired, focusing on the connection of digital skills, daily operations and the labour market. Looking at the socio-demographic analysis, again all potentially marginalisation factors are being present: men feel more confident than women, youth more than elderly, full-time educated more than partially educated, upper-class more than working-class, and large town residents feel more confident compared to rural area residents.<sup>18</sup>

Following on the path of knowledge, skills and attitudes, aggregated into competencies, one can look at the major policy statements of the European Union, guiding us to understand how to deal with digital exclusion.

The recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council have recognized already a decade ago eight key competencies for Lifelong Learning <sup>19</sup>: communication in the mother tongue; communication in foreign languages; mathematical competence and basic competencies in science and technology; digital competence; learning to learn; social and civic competences;

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<sup>16</sup> (OECD, 2001, p. 5)

<sup>17</sup> (OECD, 2001)

<sup>18</sup> (European Commission, 2020)

<sup>19</sup> (European Commission, 2018)

entrepreneurship; and cultural awareness and expression. Digital competence has been confirmed as a relevant priority for the European Commission in more recent policies, actions, and communications. Moreover, it is recognised that participation in society nowadays requires a set of competencies related to technologies, which have started over the last decade to be understood as "life skills", comparable to literacy and numeracy. They have therefore become both a requirement and a right.<sup>20</sup> The competencies and competence areas of digitalization are components of e-citizenship, thereby addressing the issue of the digital divide. It is recognised that participation in the digital domain is no longer a question of "have" or "have not", but rather an issue of competence. Nowadays, digital inclusion depends more on knowledge, skills and attitudes than on access and use. And just to make the conversation less abstract, we are looking at the all-encompassing "The Digital Competence Framework 2.0"<sup>21</sup> set up by the European Commission

Digital literacy is fundamental to participation in today's digital world. It encompasses the cognitive and technical abilities needed to use digital technologies for finding, evaluating, creating, and communicating information. This ever-developing skill set requires cognitive flexibility as the digital technologies and the literacies needed to navigate them constantly evolve. Being digitally literate plays a central role in the workplace and within social lives. Being online connects individuals to educational and employment opportunities, public services, healthcare, civic participation, and entertainment. It allows individuals to stay connected in a world where interactions among friends, family and acquaintances are often sustained digitally.

Several public services, destined for all citizens, are digital-first (only if the citizen fails several attempts on engaging digitally than the citizen is invited to a face-to-face situation) or digital-by-default (non-digital no longer an available option). This change in the public services is triggered by surveying/screening the "clients" capabilities, a complex and challenging starting point for this paper. Cities are going digital, with integrated access to transportation and all kinds of public services. In the long run, there is a real risk of the undermining of social rights due to the digitization of public services, of which most are not adapted to the digital skills level of vulnerable groups.

In general, the ongoing experiences with the digital as part of our culture and social life let us conclude that digital rights are not a new bundle of rights. Many discussions revolve around legal issues and efforts to rather extend fundamental rights and democratic principles to the digital sphere (or to consistently enforce them in this sphere). This is a different approach to defining "online rights". For instance: Not proper working prosthetics, robots or restricted access to public space through a biometric system are quite "analogue" rights violations - but with a strong digital component. Both dimensions are relevant.

Furthermore, we need to look at many more rights aspects than privacy or confidentiality. Aspects of inclusivity, non-discrimination, freedom from norms, surveillance, inclusivity, access, freedom of

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<sup>20</sup> (OECD, 2016)

<sup>21</sup> [The Digital Competence Framework 2.0 | EU Science Hub \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/science-hub/en/digital-competence-framework-20)

speech, autonomy, integrity (of services and devices), property (not only copyrights but also individual property rights related to data), or customer rights are related to the digital sphere too. Therefore, a concept of **Digital Citizenship**, like it has been developed in the Council of Europe with foundations in the CoE's Competences for a Democratic Culture, is extending digital competence further on the domain of Education for Democratic Citizenship/Human Rights Education. Digital citizenship includes engagement with digital technologies, participation through and lifelong learning with digital technology in a rights-sensitive way.<sup>22</sup>

However, adult learners are hard to reach because of the context they are in, where often the facilitation of digital competence focuses on skills or is taking place informally. Gaining an overview of the implication of digitalisation for society and the experience learners made in other roles than being a mere user is often not integrated into training. Nevertheless, they have the same right to access lifelong learning and quality adult education as any other adult in the European Union. Because so many aspects of work and social life depend on digital participation, adults who lack fundamental digital literacy skills are marginalized in terms of limited opportunities to take part in participatory democracy. Also limited are abilities to engage in educational experiences, find and use health care, find and use online information, find and keep a job, and engage with family, friends, and the community. Those who are low income, seniors, official language learners, immigrants, incarcerated, or who have limited educational experience are often those who lack digital skills and are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion.

Research in 2016 explained digital inequalities in a way that is quite relevant for educational policies, especially in understanding how best to serve adult populations in hard-to-reach and hard-to-serve contexts. In this, eight profiles of digital inequalities we recreated, explaining who is subject to digital exclusion, why and when, framed within a spectrum between deep exclusion and deep inclusion. It is important to understand that exclusion no longer comes exclusively from the socio-economic context/background of the learner but also depends on how much the learner is an autonomous and independent user, how much the learner masters the transversal skills.

Underlining the fact that digital exclusion is a gradient and not a binary reality, we have the research about the "5As"

- Availability – to whom is the technology (un)available?
- Affordability – for whom is the technology (un)affordable?
- Awareness – who is (un)aware of the technology?
- Abilities – who has the digital literacy to use the technology?
- Agency – who has the self-belief to use the technology

In this setting, we have to wonder what is the role of the adult educator? How can we create learning contexts that resonate with all our learners? Do we go no-tech, low-tech or high-tech? And how is andragogy supporting the professionals in delivering, when professionals themselves need to be on

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<sup>22</sup> The Council of Europe - Digital Citizenship Education (DCE). (2021)

an ever-changing learning pathway? We, as a professional body, for sure need to be at the forefront of these questions, translating research into practice, setting the body of knowledge having the propriety of terms and, most important, opening conversations in the public arena and setting a balanced agenda.

## 2.2.2 What has been promised for adult learners?

Looking at the Communication from the Commission on the Digital Education Action Plan we find out that *“digital technology allows citizens to be not just passive consumers, but also creators of value, for instance when creating and sharing digital outputs such as texts, visuals, videos, audio recordings and music, or apps and software. Digital technology facilitates problem-based and interactive learning and enables the personalisation of the learning experience. (...) Digital technology can improve results in education, in particular by enabling access to additional learning resources, and supporting disadvantaged students, such as those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, or with disabilities, or living in remote areas.”*<sup>23</sup>

The renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning is reflected in the lifelong learning offer made available for adult learners in corrections, and outlines a vision of how adult learning should develop in Europe by 2020 and sets the following specific priorities for the years 2015 - 2020<sup>24</sup>:

- Significantly increase the supply and demand for high-quality provision, especially in literacy, numeracy and digital skills
- Ensure effective outreach, guidance and motivation strategies to reach and assist adult learners
- Enhance the quality of adult learning by monitoring the impact of policies and improving the training provided to adult educators

Not only this, but we have also looked at the Upskilling Pathways and related Council Recommendations. There it is stated that:

*“Participation in lifelong learning by low-qualified adults remains four times lower than that by those with tertiary qualifications. Access to lifelong learning opportunities remains uneven across socioeconomic groups, and some groups of the working-age population, in particular third-country nationals, have less access. Encouraging wide and inclusive participation is, therefore, key to the success of upskilling measures.”*<sup>25</sup> Against this background, one of the recommended<sup>26</sup> efforts refers to *“appropriate learning settings in which qualified teachers and trainers apply adult-specific teaching methods and exploit the potential of digital learning.”* Accordingly, the European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens includes an EU reference framework, including digital competences and skills

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<sup>23</sup> (European Commission, 2018, p. 2)

<sup>24</sup> (The Council of the European Union, 2011)

<sup>25</sup> (European Council, 2016, §8)

<sup>26</sup> (ibid)

that are considered essential for citizens to actively make use of digital offerings and actively participate.

### 2.2.3 Adults within the criminal correctional justice system

Looking at potential learners within the criminal correctional justice system, they experience many disruptive challenges. Especially within the digital context, adults in prison are exposed to severe risks of marginalisation. The adult population entering prison have in general a big distance to education, with difficulties at re-engaging, lacking basic skills, key competencies and a severely altered sense of citizenship. Many times they are additionally having a migratory background, representing more often than not social cases rather than judicial cases. On top of this, institutionalised learners enter a digitally-detox environment that cuts them off from support networks and the incremental advancements of digital technologies. Bearing that in mind, imprisoned adult learners are a specifically hard-to-reach target group because of the context they are situated in and their surrounding circumstances and settings. This makes them one of the most relevant populations to look at, in a process of talking about digital impact in learning.

The good news is, that there is already a clear policy and legal basis for the promotion of education for prisoners in Europe. They stem from the European Prison Rules and the significant step taken by the European Council to recognise prisoners as a key target group for lifelong learning. The European Prison Rules state: *“28.1 Every prison shall seek to provide all prisoners with access to educational programmes which are as comprehensive as possible and which meet their individual needs while taking into account their aspirations.”*<sup>27</sup>

Additionally, the EU Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning (2011) invites the Member States to focus on: *“Addressing the learning needs of (...) people in specific situations of exclusion from learning, such as those in (...) prisons, and providing them with adequate guidance support”*<sup>28</sup>, depicting the first EU Council Resolution in the area of lifelong learning to explicitly embrace prisoners within its scope of relevant target groups, via a social cohesion and active citizenship lens.

According to Goal 4 of the 30 United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from 2015, all children and adults (physically challenged or not) are to be provided with education. (United Nations, 2021) Consistent with this declaration, and with the changes and demands of today’s information and technology-based society, every individual, irrespective of social boundaries, should be computer literate without exclusion. Therefore, the need for digital education for adults in correction, especially in developing countries where this is presently lacking cannot be ignored.

In the opening statement of the latest literature review on prison education, Mr Atchoarena, the director of the Unesco Institute of Lifelong Learning underlines that prison education *“is a*

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<sup>27</sup> (Council of Europe, 2006)

<sup>28</sup> (The Council of the European Union, 2011, p. 6)

*fundamental human right, of which prisoners should not be deprived (...) the right to education implies a right to lifelong learning. This includes providing access to quality education from the first day of incarceration to and beyond the day of release.”* (UNESCO, 2021, p. 9) So one could conclude that however education services change within society at large, learning provisions in prison need to change and keep pace.

Correction facilities are a siloed and fragmented industry by definition. Prison staff are tasked with controlling and directing, with a heightened potential to become hyper-vigilant in their attention to safety and security issues. Indeed progress has been made towards the desired concept of “*learning prison*” but there is still the challenge to keep up with the ever-updating of the learning outside in the society at large. There is the pressure of the prison staff to offer and create a learning environment without necessarily having the proper tools at hand, without professional competencies to support this demand and sometimes without coping mechanisms to understand the challenge.

This population of learners in prison also often has either dropped out or been expelled from their traditional compulsory. Some live with undiagnosed learning challenges and/or behaviour issues stemming from a stressful or abusive home environment; the majority hold negative associations with their conventional classroom experiences. This was also underlined in an article by Cormac Behan, current chairperson of the European Prison Education Association, explaining the motivation of adult learners in prison and how adult education is at the essence needs to be driven by andragogy, not criminology or modern penalty.<sup>29</sup> Digital awareness and education not only would allow these learners to engage with learning on a whole new plane, with no direct correlation back to those bad school memories, but it also allows access to a cadre of multidimensional tools that can be better individualized to meet a student’s particular learning needs. Individuals involved in the criminal justice system are also often caught in a cycle of poverty, homelessness, joblessness, and hopelessness which results in a revolving door into and out of prison. Access to meaningful educational resources can help to break this cycle.

One of the most eloquent cases portraying the digital challenges and risks related to adult education is the case of the correctional context, placing citizens in an environment that is quite special and unique for several reasons. Traditionally it is seen as punitive, restrictive and retributive in a way in the face of society. Yet, at the same time, education opportunities within correctional facilities are still places of connection, re-connection, re-engaging with norms, functional citizenship and lifelong learning. Thus learning is seen as the ultimate reformatory action, expected, desired and embedded in the “*daily business*” of a correctional setting. However, the learning of the citizens outside of the correctional space is progressing at a speed now unparalleled. And yet, correctional settings are still clinging to the restrictive approach.

In this, we have two groups of adult learners, one unseen from the perspective of its restrictions, the other equally unseen from the perspective of the profession. Both in equal rights of access to lifelong

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<sup>29</sup> (Behan 2014)

learning and the digital environment without discrimination. Both cut off from the digital environment and learning opportunities because of the context: adults serving a sentence and adults employed in correctional settings.

Against this background, we have to ask the following questions:

- How are our public policies serving adult learners and their educators?
- How are we supporting digital citizenship in the environments that are least convenient, accessible and constructed purposefully to be restrictive?
- Are we challenging this construct by stating that they need to be “*learning first*” - especially in a society that moves at a fast pace towards “*digitally first*”?

One of the leading European voices in the digitalisation process of correctional settings, Steve van de Steene, is omnipresent stating in his blog articles that now is the time and “*opportunity to reflect critically on the new frontiers of digitization in relation to prisons*”.<sup>30</sup> He brings into the discussion the principle of normality, stating “*that life under execution of sentences should resemble life outside as far as possible: the punishment is the restriction of liberty; no other rights have been removed by the sentencing court.*” (ibid) This is supported by the Council of Europe’s recommendation on Prison Rules (2006) part 1, number 2: “*Life in prison shall approximate as closely as possible the positive aspects of life in the community*” and by “*Mandela Rules*” statement that supports this principle: [...] *the prison regime should seek to minimize any differences between prison life and life at liberty that tend to lessen the responsibility of the prisoners or the respect due to their dignity as human beings [...]*.”<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand, keeping in mind what van de Steene underlined, researchers like Hopkins and Farley paint a grimmer picture by describing imprisoned learners as “*Perhaps the most disadvantaged and isolated of all non-traditional learners (facing) further formidable obstacles to study unique to the correctional centre environment.*”<sup>32</sup> According to Hopkins and Farley, additional obstacles include prisoners' dependence on the education officers for their access to the internet, approval and printing of resources. These obstacles become significantly higher in high secure units due to security measurements limiting the movement within the facility, time spent for learning arrangements and technology available for prisoners. Being hindered from accessing learning and education, prisoners with lower levels of (digital) literacy are at risk to be “*further isolated from and inadequately prepared for the digital economy and society during their period of incarceration. This period of digital disconnection, which for most prisoners is at least two years, thus further increases the inmate’s social marginalization and the resulting likelihood of reoffending.*”<sup>33</sup>

Even by academics or pedagogy specialists, relatively little is known about the everyday experiences of European incarcerated learners. Partially because prison is not seen as a learning environment and partially because to this date there are no recognised academic specialisation research points of the

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<sup>30</sup> (Knight & Van De Steene, 2020)

<sup>31</sup> (The Council of Europe, 2006)

<sup>32</sup> (Hopkins & Farley, 2015, p. 37)

<sup>33</sup> (ibid. p. 37f)

carceral pedagogy, having andragogy (or plain pedagogy) at the forefront of the discourse, opposite to the abundance of criminology and judiciary perspective. From the correctional specialists perspective, the digitalisation of education is moving at a speed far too great to be able to have research-informed policy recommendations, inspiring practices and standardised case studies, making isolation and disconnection a risk of amplification.

One other perspective in the discourse concerning digital marginalisation in correctional settings, a perspective even less researched, is that of the correctional staff. In 2021 an empirical research took place under the coordination of CPIP (RO) and the Bremen ministry of justice (DE), interviewing over 1020 correctional staff from five EU member states. One of the common themes stated by the interviewed professionals was how challenging it can be to support inmates in gaining digital skills and assist them in learning with digital support since the staff members themselves were often lacking digital skills and did not fully understand how digitalisation works in prison. This is a daunting insight, signalling that for sure we are missing some key pieces in understanding the digitalisation process and the public policy agenda needs to be reset a bit. And this is not an insular approach. We should ask educators working with migrants if they have the same question, as well as professionals supporting the labour integration of NEETS. The same silence, isolation and invisibility of adult learners in the e-learning age can be taken into consideration for adults in remote villages or adults that came out from the care of the state, or adults in protected shelters.

Why is the level of competencies of correctional staff relevant to the access or accessibility of digitalised learning for adults in corrections? Why could you consider this group as silent and invisible learners in the digital landscape? *“If you want to exist for others in an online environment, you have to make yourself heard or visible in one way or other. Otherwise, you might stay unnoticed or even forgotten, no matter how much guidance and support you might need.”*<sup>34</sup> So this should be food for thought when re-thinking our digitalisation strategies and understanding the implications of adult learning in environments where traditionally that was not the focus.

Lack of access, skills and usage opportunities of digital services that are essential to prepare for re-entry in society thus create even more obstacles in the reintegration process. At this point, we have the World Economic Forum<sup>35</sup> and the European Commission<sup>36</sup> stating that technologies appear and change on ever-shortening cycles and that triggers employed adults to be under-skilled (37%) and in need of re-training by next year (54%). In this setting, moving from the corrections context to the re-entry into the community makes prisoners feel unsure and insecure, and the digital gap only increases this feeling. And although a growing number of technologies and digital approaches are being implemented in prisons internationally their use to actively support rehabilitation strategies is still very limited or absent.

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<sup>34</sup> (Nordisk Netværk Voksnes Læring 2016)

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs-report-2018>

<sup>36</sup> <https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en>



*“Developing ethical principles is difficult without asking first of all the fundamental question: why should we? What is driving the idea of using technology and moreover, giving offenders access to digital services? is it good to use technology in corrections? Is it inevitable, a moral obligation?”*<sup>37</sup> This is a question we need to push into the public agenda and create an open conversation.

## 2.3 Data Politics

Data politics is determining the way how the Internet ecosystem as a whole is developing. As such, adult education needs to take a systemic perspective on net politics and, in particular in the EU digitalisation context, on (digital) market politics. The European aspiration is to create a European way of building a digital single market, currently visible in the negotiations about the Digital Market Act (DMA) and Digital Service Act (DSA). However, these efforts to redefine the rules of the game for platforms are widely ignored by education and also lack awareness in national discourses. How Europe defines and enforces the Next Generation Internet (Next Generation Internet Initiative) influences how free, decentralized, competitive, and accessible the Internet and digital single market inside and beyond Europe will be. (Katja Bego, 2020)

A more holistic perspective of education on the Internet as a (global) system enables us also to see the Internet as a diverse space with few big platforms, many smaller actors and even more very small and diverse participants, while public debates and perceptions are tending to overemphasize the role of the large global state or venture capital-driven mega-platforms and their questionable practices in regards to rights and personal data. Education might take up the finding of the Internet Health Report 2019: *“A healthy balance of power in our global internet ecosystem depends on a delicate interplay between governments, companies and civil society. We need effective competition standards and technical interoperability – between the products of different companies – to ensure that the internet grows and evolves in ways that accommodate the diverse needs of people around the world”* (Larsen, 2019, p.98)

On the one hand, education needs to acknowledge and understand how large companies often in collaboration with states partition users into insular and incompatible software, services and devices – where interoperability is only a wishful desire. Even worse: Whole societies are accessing the digital spheres only behind fenced networks in various regions of the world, which poses a global danger to free and unconditional access and usage of the Internet. Lacking net neutrality (limiting Internet traffic or blocking content), affordability (access to Internet and hardware), and interoperability (closing in of citizens in proprietary sub-ecosystems) are critical aspects already identified by relevant stakeholders and find in the by Shoshana Zuboff coined terms “surveillance capitalism” and “The Big Other” a prominently discussed description (Zuboff, 2015; 2019).

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<sup>37</sup> International Network for Criminal Justice webinar on Digitisation & Human Rights in Prisons, Victoria Knight and Steven van der Steen - <https://criminaljusticenetwork.net/in-cj-seminar-digitisation-and-human-rights-in-prisons/>

On the other hand, the Internet, its infrastructure, collaborative models and also business models are still (and more than many think) based on the idea of non-centrality and openness. *“From this perspective, openness is an important feature for alternative innovation to the growth models of proprietary platforms. Competitors strengthening and reinforcing the idea of openness are also a condition for balancing these two paths of digital transformation.”* (Zimmermann, 2020, p. 51).

In this sense, education needs to understand and recognize the systemic importance of a vivid Internet ecosystem for competition and also for democracy, strongly shaped by the principles of non-centrality, diversity and openness. It needs to promote standards and approaches such as Open Educational Resources, FOSS Software, Open Source (also by integrating these in their practice and educational organisations).

The focus of adult education and also civil society as a non-formal and informal learning space should shift from attention to specific digital platforms or services (and a mere user perspective) to the digital ecosystem and the impact of democracy and human rights in digitalisation. To provide support, UNESCO-defined ROAM-X indicators (UNESCO ROAM-X) provide a helpful tool for creating a digital transformation following human rights standards and enabling democratic governance. Citizens and CSOs must become active actors in providing an assessment of internet universality indicators in European countries. (UNESCO, 2019)

The past debates about European digitalisation were all related to rights. Privacy, information and confidentiality in the debates about the GDPR, copyrights, property rights and also censorship in the debates about the copyright directive or other media market regulations, human autonomy, non-discrimination, access or freedom to choose and to decide in the context of the regulatory discussions about Artificial Intelligence, biometry and platforms. Therefore, education could give rights-related approaches (again) more emphasis also inside European societies and also regarding adult learners.

### 2.3.1 Global Digital Competence

According to OECD PISA, *“global competence is the capacity to examine local, global and intercultural issues, to understand and appreciate the perspectives and worldviews of others, to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development”* (OECD PISA, 2018).

Applied to digitalisation this would imply that adult education needs to understand several dimensions of how Europe depends on global connectedness and also to instigate global civic engagement or civil engagement for global issues. One of these aspects related to digitalisation is energy hunger and the growing global demand for energy (Ferreboeuf, et al., 2019) Another is the availability of resources, especially critical raw materials (The European Commission, 2020 “Critical Raw Materials”), affordable hard- and software and infrastructure, or international governance of the whole Internet. Global learning can contribute to understanding the impact of digital transformation.

If Europe, as the European Commission has set itself the goal, a "European path" to digitalization, Europeans must also ask themselves what ecological and social global vision they share, and what global responsibility arises from this claim.

A European circular economy (The European Council, 2016. "*Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways*") and just and fair relations between the societies in the world with Europe requires also that Europe is taking responsibility for social and environmental standards outside Europe, for sustainable consumption and re-usage following the idea of a circular economy - or a fair and rights-sensitive usage of data which is produced also outside the EU (in example personal data of non-EU citizens and from non-EU countries used in Big Data models). Since the EU was developing several policy conceptions and initiatives leading in this direction, education and civil society need to critically accompany and support these by including these in learning offerings.

## 3 Democracy and Digitalisation: the role of Adult Education

### 3.1 ALE Organisations and Digital Democracy

Adult education institutions need to broaden their scope and offers in digital communication and support learners in their use of these for example when being obliged to use tools of e-government, for example for registration for Covid-19 vaccinations, this applies for the elderly but also - and perhaps foremost - for the socially disadvantaged, i.e. groups that are excluded from access to the net for economic reasons or because of their legal status.

An example of a positive activity of adult education institutions could be "outreach and low threshold" support for people living in social housing projects.

### 3.2 Democratising the digital gap through ALE

The Internet is regarded as a common space to which all persons should have access, but the reality is that many Europeans do not have adequate digital skills rendering digital citizenship unavailable to a significant percentage of the population which tends to increase economic and racial disparities.

According to the European Commission's Digital Economy and Society Index (2020), 4 out of 10 adults and one in every three people who work in Europe lack basic digital skills. The widespread adoption of technology is commonly perceived as a solution for all social challenges and barriers, but in reality, technologies are neither economically nor politically neutral.<sup>38</sup> Skills Panorama, a joint initiative by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion and the

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<sup>38</sup> (Feenberg, 2017)

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) points out the different use of digital skills in many European countries. In 2019, the share of people whose digital Skill use is above basic was as low as 13% in Romania and as high as 59% in the Netherlands.<sup>39</sup>

It is safe to assume that the predominant digital lifestyle comes with its own set of opportunities and challenges facing democracy, which is in turn impacted by other current global events rather than just digital transformation. The populist shift to more authoritarian systems seen in some countries suggests that the belief in democracy as the best political system is being challenged. The pandemic is having a troubling effect on democracy too. According to the Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, led by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) and co-funded by the European Union, more than half the countries in the world (61 per cent) had, by the end of November 2020, implemented "*restrictions that were either illegal, disproportionate, indefinite or unnecessary*" (International, 2020, Key findings section) in several areas of democratic freedoms.

Today, technology defines the way humans understand themselves, how they relate to others, interact with others, institutions and work. According to Feenberg's Critical Theory of Technology, "*technologies are not separate from society but are adapted to specific social and political systems and in their use promote and reinforce the values, beliefs, and truths of those systems*"<sup>40</sup>.

*"Digital citizens are not mere holders of important data or even users capable of operating increasingly complex digital systems. Digital citizens are ultimately humans who happen to interact extensively with other humans, digital systems and institutions through technology. Education towards democracy must, therefore, question the extent to which multiplying technologies and literacies serve simply to reproduce existing inequalities in the present, as we strategize the ways in which they might also produce conditions for a more vibrant democratic society in the future"*.<sup>41</sup>

In this perspective, citizens should better understand the digital systems and technology they make use of and should also critically reflect upon it, the same way we do reflect on all other aspects of society.

Paulo Freire's adult literacy work is too indissociable of a critical reflection about citizenship. Although Freire's main pedagogical concepts, such as problem posing, dialogue, praxis and conscientization, were developed in a pre-Internet era (Boyd, 2016), his work remains acutely relevant in today's technology-dominated world.

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<sup>39</sup> (CEDEFOP, 2020)

<sup>40</sup> (Boyd, 2016, p. 170)

<sup>41</sup> (Kahn & Kellner, 2007, p. 441)

Thus, the following key questions informed by the Critical Technology Theory<sup>42</sup> and Paulo Freire's perspective on the function and social role of education<sup>43</sup> must orient all educators working towards democratising the digital gap:

- What are the underlying values and beliefs embedded in our digital lifestyle?
- How can adult education identify and address digital citizenship issues and empower disenfranchised people towards full digital citizenship?

More than ever, multiple literacies are needed to “enable us to live well in our social worlds”<sup>44</sup> including digital literacy. Nevertheless, digital literacy education is not a mere exercise of mastering technology. It must engage learners and empower them to shape our common \*human-first\* digital society. To democratise the digital gap through adult education, educators must not be content with adapting individuals to the current digital society, where conditions responsible for the digital gap remain.

From a Freirean perspective, reflecting on the dominant values in the use of digital technology may empower educators and learners to co-design the learning goals in a way that the education becomes liberatory for those often marginalized by the digital disruption and creates conditions for equitable learning for all who participate in it.

To effectively bridge the digital gap while promoting democracy, learning must not only be cognitively engaging but foment concrete action. As per Freire's key concept praxis (2005), learning should involve critical dialogue about acting on and in the world one is aiming to transform.

Ira Shor, building upon the foundational work of Freire's Critical Pedagogy, further advocated for Critical Literacy, defending that educators must instead procure to understand reality from the perspective of the students and practice “*situated pedagogy*”<sup>45</sup> by collaborating, reflecting and ultimately transforming the very conditions that promote status quo, empowering all citizens to fully exercise their citizenship.

When considering what principles may guide education towards democracy and digital citizenship, it may also be helpful to investigate other relevant pedagogues such as the pragmatist John Dewey and how can his work inform “*the connections between education, technology and democracy, the need for the reconstruction of education and society, and the value of experimental pedagogy to seek solutions to the problems of education in the present day*”<sup>46</sup>.

In effect, Dewey viewed democracy as essential in education and the learning environment as a microcosm of society. Students and educators should learn from each other, unleashing all human

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<sup>42</sup> (Feenberg, 2017)

<sup>43</sup> (Shor & Freire, 1987)

<sup>44</sup> (Kahn & Kellner, 2007, p. 440)

<sup>45</sup> (Shor & Freire, 1987)

<sup>46</sup> (Kahn & Kellner, 2007, p. 440)

potentials by centring learning on experience and the exercise of the imagination. Democracy in education is viewed as a social process dependent upon the following dispositions<sup>47</sup>:

- all humans are moral equals,
- all persons are capable of reflection and formulating intelligent opinions,
- all persons can solve any problem by working together.

Drawing from Feenberg's Critical Theory of Technology, Freirean dialogic education and Dewey's democratic dispositions, it is proposed that digital literacy and democracy oriented practices should pursue engagement, representativeness, openness and transparency, by:

- following a participatory bottom-up approach, deeply rooted in the community;
- promoting cross-generational and diverse cohorts and creating conditions for youth and young adults to work together with older citizens and also citizens from diverse cultural backgrounds and different levels of education; enabling learners to identify which learning goals they consider important and co-design learning goals that both educators and learners can act upon.
- valuing and incorporating learners' skills and experiences into the learning process.
- including mechanisms for flexible and self-explorable learning that recognise micro-learning achievements, propose further learning opportunities and allow for the creation of individual learning pathways.

Lastly, by adapting Boyd's inter-related questions for practitioners of critical pedagogy who teach in the online learning environment (2007), it is possible to formulate four urgent and significant key questions educators and relevant stakeholders should consider when planning lifelong learning initiatives towards democratising the digital gap:

- How can stakeholders in Adult Education be encouraged to help build democratic learning settings where both learners and educators interact in the collaborative production of knowledge?
- How can educators help learners recognize and understand specific cyberculture(s), which itself implies certain values, beliefs and life principles?
- How can educators collaborate with learners to interrogate the status quo and pursue a more equitable and just society towards full digital citizenship for all?
- What creative methods can educators employ to help learners engage in critical thinking activities as part of their learning efforts?

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<sup>47</sup> (MacMath, 2008)

## 4 Target Audiences

### 4.1 Adult Educators

Educators are a very diverse group and show different attitudes to new media, some are coping well with the new challenges by adapting their teaching styles to the so-called new media and some are almost technology illiterate. Adopting the ways of teaching seems to be a great challenge for some teachers who simply adapt their classroom styles to the new media whereas some show innovative potential. Adult educators need both awareness of how learners can access technology and training in the use of technology in ways that are compatible with pedagogical and didactic principles applied in ALE courses in situ, i.e. principles of dialogue, participation, co-authorship of the learning process and a quasi equal standing in the classroom. Research into online courses, for example, carried out by VHS Vienna has shown that very often these principles are violated because of the insecurity of trainers with the media and because technological aids support behaviourist approaches to learning and teaching through the way they are designed, - and the foster an authoritarian approach, for example, the function of muting individual learners or whole groups provided by ZOOM and other tools.

### 4.2 Learners – a short description

Learners or potential learners are a very diverse group. They very often live in rather marginalized and excluded circumstances and face challenges participating in society for various reasons. Some, especially migrants, are excluded from democratic processes because of their citizenship which does not allow them to vote in general elections. Some are members of so-called minorities, such as Roma, and face, often, multiple discrimination both in their social lives, their job opportunities and their educational aspirations. Some are excluded because of their social status and their low incomes. All these reasons also apply to technological participation as most members of these groups lack the economic means to afford both the hardware and the costs of access. We are currently facing a divide based on a variety of differences: age, social standing, ability to use media in a wider context than the so-called social media.

In general, we can observe that learners do have diverse technological means to participate. Some (not many) use their personal computers and can follow media supported lessons without problems, yet some just use their mobile phones to attend classes and are thus limited in their possibilities as they cannot for example read chats or participate in breakout sessions, in zoom supported lessons. They are not used to technology apart from using social media and are thus not in a position to use the more traditional media such as e-mail, etc. but also learning platforms. Learners seem to need support in the use of media, - not only do they lack the hardware but they also have problems with the software. The fact that you need a valid email address also excludes some of the learners as they

do not know how to get one, and in some cases in which they are holding an email address, they do not know what to do with it - as is the case with some women, as a study showed, because the address was installed by their husbands or their children. Additionally, stocking up their credit with an internet provider very often involves having a credit card which they cannot get due to their economic situation.

Additionally, we can observe that for many learners who live in rather modest circumstances, i.e. parents and children sharing a small flat or house, which is made visible by online conference tools, especially when learners do not know how to change the background. And not only is this “invasive peeping” a fact - that might also apply to some trainers, it is also sometimes the lack of a quiet space to learn that makes it difficult for learners to participate - hence we can sometimes observe a mix of shame and intrusion of family members into the learning space.

Adult education has to inform itself of these problems, and trainers and providers have to look at their learning provisions from a learner's perspective. We cannot force learners to use technology as we imagine it to function best, we have to adapt and adjust.

## 5 Epilogue: Competence requirements in ALE for more democracy in digitalisation

Teachers have a crucial role to play when it comes to promoting democracy and participation with the help of digital media in the context of adult education. At the same time, teachers themselves need relevant specific competences for this. Familiarity with and confident use of digital media and technologies are a basic prerequisite. These technical competences must be meaningfully linked to the pedagogical requirements of working with adults. Theoretical-conceptual basic knowledge and methodological-didactic skills are just as necessary as a professional adult pedagogical attitude and adult pedagogical role awareness.

To be able to develop targeted further training options for adult educators in the area of digital democracy, competence requirements for teachers must be clearly defined. There are already various relevant competence models available that can serve as a starting point and inspiration, for example:

- 1) At the EU level, there is the **DigCompEdu** framework. (Redecker, 2017) This framework defines competence requirements for teachers in an increasingly digital world and teaching practice. The DigCompEdu refers to the teaching profession in general and does not take into account the specific circumstances of adult learning and adult education.
- 2) The German **GRETA** - “Grundlagen für die Entwicklung eines trägerübergreifenden Anerkennungsverfahrens von Kompetenzen Lehrender in der Erwachsenen- und Weiterbildung” (Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung (DIE), 2000, “Wofür steht



*Greta?*") model provides a comprehensive elaborated competence profile for teachers in adult education, specifically. The GRETA PortfolioPlus tool based on it allows adult educators to identify and make visible their level of competence development. GRETA refers to adult education competences in general. Digital aspects are integrated to a certain extent, but the model does not focus on them specifically.

- 3) The Erasmus+ project **FAVILLE** - Facilitators of Virtual Learning (Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung (DIE), 2000, "*Facilitators of virtual learning*") focuses specifically on competences for online teaching in adult education. The FAVILLE competence model and the validation framework based on it systematically link adult pedagogical competences with digital competences. FAVILLE refers to online teaching and online learning support for adults in general but does not specifically focus on the aspect of digital democracy promotion.

Drawing on and further developing the above (and other) examples, it would be possible to define more precisely which competences adult educators need to effectively combine the aspects of digitalisation and democracy promotion in their work for the benefit of their learners.

## 6 Policy Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the group discussions of EAEA's Working Group on digitalisation, on key issues raised in the elaboration of the Context Paper, in contributions from diverse experts in recent conferences about the theme (EPALE; UNESCO; etc.), in the [Manifesto for Adult Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: The Power and Joy of Learning](#); the [EAEA response to the Commission's consultation on the Digital Education Action Plan](#); the [EAEA Reaction the council's conclusion on improving the well-being of older persons in the era of digitalisation](#) and the [Manifesto for enhancing digital competences across Europe – ALL DIGITAL](#).

EAEA and its partners recognise the need to respond to digital shortfalls, including structural barriers, such as connectivity to the Internet, the costs of subscriptions as well as access to ICT equipment – both from the learner and the educational provider side. We acknowledge the need for improvement of access to Internet infrastructure and technological equipment and devices, their connectivity, the reduction of costs and improvement of the reach of rural, isolated and low-density areas. We are underlining the importance of decentralised digital learning and educational opportunities, that assure not only the right to connectivity but the right to education (Katarina Popovic, 2021), as well as the guarantee of digital inclusion for all. Thus we are pointing out the necessity to foster knowledge, skills and attitudes, promoting participation and empowerment of people and communities. Investment in education is one of the most essential actions to assure all learners and educational professionals have access as well as the capacity to access continuous education. We must focus on investing in human resources, review the EU and member states spending on adult education.

The policy recommendations can also be found in the video [here](#).

Against this background, EAEA and its partners are urging the European Commission and the European Parliament to:

1. **recognise and support the role of adult learning and education**, both formal and non-formal, in creating a human-first digital society, to **value ALE as a key strategy for more democracy** in digitalisation for Europe. For this, it is crucial to put a greater accent, support and recognition to informal learning contexts that support the acquisition of knowledge skills and behaviours in navigating both online and off-line, low-tech and high-tech situations.
2. **support adult education** not only to provide the necessary life skills to adapt to the world in uncertainty and rapid change but **to anticipate and shape future developments**, in a transformational mission to build a better world for all. To bridge the digital gap while promoting democracy, learning must not only be cognitively engaging but foment concrete action. Learning should involve critical dialogue about acting on and in the world one is aiming to transform.
3. **create synergies between literacy, digital skills and critical media learning and education**, providing inclusive and meaningful integrated technologies in literacy programmes, that assure lifelong and life-wide learning and education for all, responding to the challenge of not leaving anyone behind and beyond qualification for economic purposes.
4. **promote confident and critical use of digital technology** to support lifelong and life-wide learning and education, active citizenship, inclusion, employability and well-being. In this, develop alternative mechanisms and offers on how the Internet can promote democracy, disseminate them and promote critical thinking as well as critical media literacy.
5. **promote digital citizenship, which extends digital competence further on the domain of Education for Democratic Citizenship/Human Rights Education**. For this, all education should give rights-related approaches more emphasis also inside European societies and also regarding adult learners.
6. **fund and support learning and education in communities, fostering intergenerational learning**. For this, promote and support cooperation in Europe and with other parts of the world to promote digital education and learning for narrowing the digital divide.
7. Vulnerable and marginalised adults face a double disadvantage in present times and the future, so it is important to **ensure all adults have access to education and training for digital skills**, not just as users, clients or consumers in the digital world, but with critical thinking, **as citizens in the exercise of their active citizenship and participating to build democracy**. Considering the opportunities and potential risks for older persons in a digitalised world, there is a need to assure the learning and education of the elderly.
8. **promote in-service training, support and develop communities of practice** that allows educators to create and share knowledge that facilitates the integration of technology transversally in teaching and learning, not only as tools but as empowering instruments to promote andragogical innovation, **in a real perspective that technologies serve learning and**

**education, empowers learners and educators, not bureaucratic based-control centralised systems.**

9. **further align the professionalisation of educators/teachers through a European framework for adult education specialists**, acknowledging professional competencies deriving from initial training, continuous professional training, as well as skills gained from practice. Additionally, such a framework might also refer to attitudes and values (e.g., tolerance) of educators/teachers. Against the background of digitalisation, ALE professionals are required not only to be consumers of digital content but also generators. As the creation of digital and digitally supporting content for no-tech, low-tech and high-tech learning environments has been challenging, acknowledging this skill in a potential framework would heighten the public and political level of awareness.
10. **invest in research driven by pedagogy and andragogy**. For this, acknowledge and support the great variety of neuro-diversity in learners educators, as well as invest in researching how neuro-diversity is accentuated or diminished by the digital environments, reflected in the learning performance/teaching performance.
11. **enforce data transparency, access and security**, and the building of a digital public space that includes and benefits people and is critical towards the interests of exogenic capitals. In that digital literacy and democracy, oriented practices should pursue engagement, representativeness, openness and transparency. **Recognize the systemic importance of a vivid Internet ecosystem** strongly shaped by the principles of non-centrality, diversity and openness, that needs to promote standards and approaches such as Open Educational Resources, FOSS Software, Open Source, also by integrating these in their practice and educational organisations.

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