



DigIT

TRAINING BOOKLET

PROMOTING
DIGITAL SKILLS
AMONG ADULT
EDUCATORS OF
OLDER
GENERATIONS

MODULE 2:

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT
WORKING WITH SENIORS



Co-funded by
the European Union

#2 WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT WORKING WITH SENIORS

Objectives

This module aims to give an insight into the ageing process, exploring the changes and the positives of ageing. In fact, although sometimes the perception of age and ageing is predominantly negative, research shows that in many areas we improve as we age. The module also gives an overview of andragogy –the term used to describe a set of principles, methods, and practices for teaching senior learners.

Besides exploring the positives of ageing, this module also introduces the key principles of active ageing, defined by the European Commission as “helping people stay in charge of their own lives for as long as possible as they age and, where possible, to contribute to the economy and society”.

We will therefore explore the relevance of lifelong learning in ageing societies.

The module also aims to offer an overview of ageism, or rather, the stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination towards others or oneself based on age.

Structure of the Module

2.1 Understanding the ageing process

2.2 Active ageing: definition and strategies for promoting active ageing

2.3 Ageism on the digital era

Outcomes

- To be able to analyse the population structure and ageing in Europe
- To be able to understand the changes and the positives of the ageing
- To understand the changes and the positives of ageing
- To be able to investigate into the main principles of andragogy
- To be able to explore the principles of active ageing
- To be able to understand the role of lifelong learning in ageing societies
- To be able to discover the benefits of active ageing
- To be able to understand age discrimination
- To be able to understand the consequence of ageism for people's health and wellbeing
- To be able to understand the key barriers that ageism brings to the use of digital technology.

Understanding the ageing process

In this module, participants will be introduced to the ageing process and understand the changes the elderly experience, as well as the benefits that come with ageing.

At the end of this module participants should:

- Be able to understand the “ageing of Europe” demographic phenomenon
- Be able to explore the role of lifelong learning in ageing societies
- Be aware of the changes of ageing
- Be able to understand the positives of ageing
- Be able to identify the main principles of andragogy
- Be aware of the three major types of learning styles

The ageing of Europe, also known as the greying of Europe, is a demographic phenomenon in Europe characterized by low birth rates and higher life expectancy. According to Eurostat, these two factors “are transforming the shape of the EU’s age pyramid; probably the most important change will be the marked transition towards a much older population structure, a development which is already apparent in several EU Member States. Data presented in this article can also help assess if there has been an impact by the COVID-19 pandemic on the size and structure of the EU population”. Eurostat states that in 2021 more than one fifth of the EU population was aged 65 and over; Statista's 2021 data shows that Europe is leading in the proportion of the elderly population with 19%.

Age-related changes

What happens during ageing? The body changes with ageing because changes occur in individual cells and in whole organs. These changes result in changes in function and in appearance. The most typical age-related changes experienced by the elderly are:

- Physical and Sensorial Changes (Vision, hearing, smell, Motor function, balance, energy, and taste)
- Cognitive Changes (Attention span, memory, and processing speed/fluid intelligence, decline gradually over time.)
- Psychological Changes (Identity changes, integrity versus despair, stress, fear of die, less patience)
- Social Changes (Retirement, Grief, social isolation, less dopamine levels)

The challenges of population ageing have often been presented in a way that portrays old age as a problematic stage. However, it is important to focus also on the positives of getting older:

- Neuroplasticity doesn't stop at age 55, search shows that we become indeed wiser.
- Improved crystallized intelligence and ability to detect relationships between diverse sources of information, capturing the big picture, and understanding the global implications of specific issues.
- Vocabulary is resilient to brain ageing and may even improve with age, even with the difficulty of searching for words.
- New studies begin to show that with practice orienting skills improve about four to five times from middle age to older adulthood, whereas executive control increased up to the mid-to-late 70s.

- It might take a little longer than normal to complete tasks at work, but seniors can still finish them with quality and enterprises that have different generations working, have a better decision-making.
- Better mental resilience, emotional regulation, and stress management.
- More connection to spirituality, altruism, and creativity in later life when people have a positive image of ageing.
- Better mental resilience, emotional regulation, and stress management
- More connection to spirituality, altruism, and creativity in later life when people have a positive image of ageing.
- Happier and increased well-being (less depression).

Teaching older adults

Teaching seniors differs from teaching children and young people and understanding how seniors' access and process new information is crucial to provide meaningful and quality learning opportunities. Facilitators should indeed be experienced in applying effective adult learning strategies.

Andragogy refers to a set of principles, methods, and practices for teaching senior learners. Andragogy theory was developed by Malcolm Shepherd Knowles, an American educator. Unlike pedagogy that describes principles for teaching children and young learners, andragogy is the art and science of adult learning, thus andragogy refers to any form of adult learning (Kearsley, 2010).

Differences Between Children and Adults as Learners:

CHILDREN	ADULTS
Rely on others to decide what is important to be learned.	Decide for themselves what is important to be learned.
Accept the information being presented at face value.	Need to validate the information based on their beliefs and experience.
Expect what they are learning to be useful in their long-term future.	Expect what they are learning to be immediately useful.
Have little or no experience upon which to draw – are relatively “clean slates.”	Have much experience upon which to draw – may have fixed viewpoints.
Little ability to serve as a knowledgeable resource to teacher or fellow classmates.	Significant ability to serve as a knowledgeable resource to trainer and fellow learners.

From: Teaching Adults: What Every Trainer Needs to Know About Adult Learning Styles

Knowles suggested 4 principles that are applied to adult learning:

1. Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.
2. Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for the learning activities.
3. Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance and impact to their job or personal life.
4. Adult learning is problem-centred rather than content-oriented (Kearsley, 2010).

Conclusions and tips

Learners of all ages achieve more when they are motivated. It is indeed crucial to inspire, challenge, stimulate and motivate students. However, when teaching adults, developing insight into how seniors learn helps facilitators become more successful. Facilitators should therefore focus on understanding how seniors learn, taking into consideration their skills, experience and expectations when planning an educational experience.

To this end, besides being aware of the age-related changes experienced by the seniors, facilitators should be familiar with the three major types of learning styles:

- **Visual Learners** – Visual learners are those who generally learn best when information is presented in a written language format or in another visual format. They remember things best by seeing something.
- **Auditory Learners** – Auditory learners are those who generally learn by hearing and listening. An auditory learner depends on listening and speaking as a main way of learning. Auditory learners must be able to hear what is being said in order to understand and may have difficulty with instructions that are drawn but if the writing is in a logical order it can be easier to understand ([Wikipedia](#)).
- **Kinaesthetic Learners** – Kinaesthetic learners are those who learn best through touching, feeling, and experiencing that which they are trying to learn. They remember best by writing or physically manipulating the information. (Kelly,2010).

Below you can find some tips to better accommodate and encourage senior students learning:

1. Make learning relevant
2. Assess seniors' interests and experience
3. Use seniors' life experience as a resource
4. Let them explore on their own
5. Putting theory into Action
6. Tailor the activities to seniors' needs
7. Consider seniors' learning patterns and styles
8. Break up information to avoid cognitive overload
9. Provide educational material in an interactive and problem-based manner (e.g., quizzes, interactive activities, and discussions to involve the learners) Help students hear senior learners often have hearing loss. Facilitators should speak clearly and repeat.
10. Help students see senior learners often have poor eyesight. Facilitators should use a larger font, write clearly on the board.
11. Help students remember: Cognitive development, recall, and problem solving may show decline with ageing. Facilitators should help learners to integrate memory activities.

And above all...be flexible! It's important to structure your courses and plan the sessions in advance. However, being flexible is imperative: be ready to make some adjustment to your lesson plan to students' needs.

Active ageing: definition and strategies for promoting active ageing

This module aims to increase your understanding of the main principles of *active ageing* and the relevance of the strategies to promote it. Indeed, after the Pandemic, the need for a long-term strategy on active and healthy ageing is more evident than ever. “In order to counteract the impact of COVID-19 on older people, action is necessary in multiple aspects. Firstly, improving digital literacy for older people should become an even bigger priority: it is no longer an advantage, but a necessity to prevent loneliness. [...] A long term plan is needed. While the COVID-19 crisis came to our cities in an instant, the effects are here for the long term. European populations are still ageing, and the share of older people is expected to rise to 30% in until 2030. COVID-19 has made long term strategies on active and healthy ageing priority number one” Healthy and active ageing is more important than ever.

By the end of this module participants will:

- have an improved understanding of active ageing
- explore the benefits of staying healthy and active
- be able to recognise that active ageing is a result of interaction between an individual and his/her own environment
- be able to understand the relevance of adopting a long-term plan to promote healthy and active ageing

Active ageing: definition and principles

The Europe’s population is ageing fast and that in the past two decades, the proportion of people aged 65 and over has increased significantly. According to the European Commission, the only way that Europe will be able to meet the challenges of demographic change is through *active ageing*. In fact, the European Commission is promoting active and healthy ageing to “help people stay in charge of their own lives for as long as possible as they age and, where possible, to contribute to the economy and society” (European Commission). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines active ageing as “the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age”, while according to the International Council on Active Aging, it “promotes the vision of all individuals—regardless of age, socioeconomic status or health—fully engaging in life within all seven dimensions of wellness: emotional, environmental, intellectual/cognitive, physical, professional/vocational, social and spiritual”. With the aim to support governments and organisations to promote active ageing, the International Council of Active Ageing identified nine key principles:



From: Nine Principles of Active Ageing

Active ageing: a priority across Europe

Healthy and active ageing are high in the European policy agenda. Indeed, enabling seniors to stay healthy and seniors has become key for the sustainability of health and social policies in Europe. In that sense, the following issues can be considered keys to active ageing:

1. Promotion of psychical activity: according to the WHO, physical activities is one of the strongest predictors of healthy ageing. Regular moderate physical activity promotes mental, physical, and social well-being and helps to prevent illness and disability”.
2. Promotion of lifelong learning: there is growing need to promote lifelong learning in local and community settings and for all age groups. Lifelong learning plays indeed a key role in ageing societies, since it has a “central role in promoting well-being and a good quality of life in old age” (UNESCO, Embracing a culture of lifelong learning: lifelong learning in ageing societies: lessons from Europe). Lifelong learning is indeed the key tool that can support elderly people in remaining socially active and staying involved in the community.

At this point, we better explore the reasons why it is important to stay healthy and active as we age. From a healthcare point of view, active ageing contributes to promote healthy living, and hence extend life expectancy and quality of life. However, active ageing is much more than this. In fact, if we stay healthy and active as we age, we can maintain our mental and physical well-being, and this is crucial to ensure our active engagement with life and participation in society. It is therefore clear that healthy and active ageing can play a key role in facilitating active citizenship.

Conclusions and tips

The ageing of Europe, also known as the greying of Europe, poses challenges and opportunities that one should considered to build a more sustainable and more egalitarian society. In that regard, active and healthy ageing can play a major role in meeting the challenges of demographic change. The concept of *active and healthy ageing* is very broad and complex. since it involves different social and political domains: from the labour market participation, social participation and healthcare.

Considering that active ageing is about ageing better, and it refers to the well-being of individuals as they age, lifelong learning is a key element of the conceptual framework of active ageing. Indeed, senior learners can experience active ageing through participation in lifelong learning. Research shows that Lifelong learning is a catalyst for a healthier and more socially engaged life.

Lifelong learning can indeed support seniors to:

- Improve their health and psychological wellbeing
- Acquire/develop new knowledge and skills
- Enhance relations with same-aged or older/younger.

Below you can find some tips to promote active ageing in non-formal and informal settings:

1. Help senior learners to gain a better knowledge about three key dimensions: their social well-being, health, and civic participation.
2. Support them to expand their network by promoting interaction with other people.
3. Help them develop new interests.
4. Recognize their skills and knowledge.

Ageism on the digital era

This module aims to provide an insight into ageism that is stereotyping or discriminating against people based on their age. The World Health Organization calls for swift action to implement effective anti-ageism strategies, since ageist attitudes lead to poorer physical and mental health and reduced quality of life for older persons, costing societies billions of dollars each year [..]. Ageism seeps into many institutions and sectors of society including those providing health and social care, in the workplace, media and the legal system. Healthcare rationing based solely on age is widespread. A systematic review in 2020 showed that in 85 per cent of 149 studies, age determined who received certain medical procedures or treatments Ageism is a global challenge: UN.

Ageism can be also a barrier to the use of digital technology in later life and suggests recommendations to address it. Indeed, “in a rapidly digitalizing society, equal opportunities to access and use digital technology are essential for social inclusion and participation” AGEISM & DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY: Policy Measures to Address Ageism as a Barrier to Adoption and Use of Digital Technology.

After completion of this module, you will:

- To be able to understand age discrimination
- To be able to understand the consequence of ageism for people's health and wellbeing
- To be able to understand the key barriers that ageism brings to the use of digital technology.

Ageism: definition and impact

Ms Claudia Mahler, the UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, claims that “ageism manifests in stereotypes, prejudices and/or discrimination against older persons based on their age or on a perception that a person is *old*”.

Considering that, according to the half of the world's population is ageist against older persons, it is a priority to ensure that older people are protected against discrimination. According to the WHO “ageism refers to the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) towards others or oneself based on age. [..] Ageism is everywhere: from our institutions and relationships to ourselves. For example, ageism is in policies that support healthcare rationing by age, practices that limit younger people's opportunities to contribute to decision-making in the workplace, patronizing behaviour used in interactions with older and younger people, and in self-limiting behaviour, which can stem from internalized stereotypes about what a person of a given age can be or do. [..] Half the world's population is ageist against older people and, in Europe, the only region for which data is available on all age groups, younger people report more age discrimination than other age groups. Ageism can change how we view ourselves, can erode solidarity between generations, can devalue or limit our ability to benefit from what younger and older populations can contribute, and can impact our health, longevity and well-being while also having far-reaching economic consequences”.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Ms. Michelle Bachelet claims that “ageism is so pervasive in our society that it goes largely unrecognised and unchallenged. [...] To combat ageism, we must shift our mindsets and challenge the narrative of older people as frail, dependent and vulnerable”.

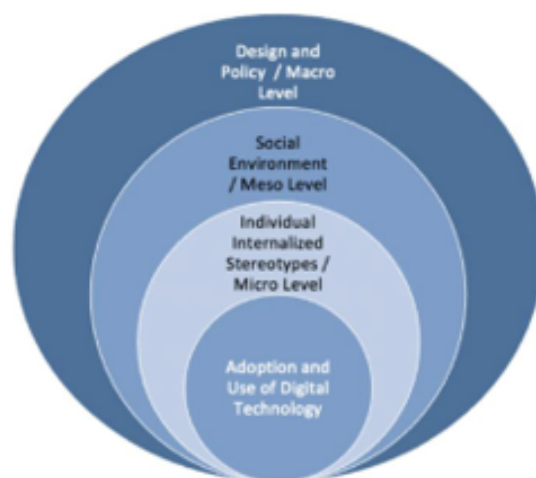
Which are the consequences on age discrimination?

- Ageism has a negative impact on physical and mental health. Ageism is also associated with increased social isolation and loneliness, greater financial insecurity, decreased quality of life and premature death. According to the WHO “ an estimated 6.3 million cases of depression globally are estimated to be attributable to ageism”.
- The UNGlobal Report on Ageism states that “ageism aggravates other forms of inequalities based on gender, disability, gender identity and sexual identity, ethnic origin, and other grounds. The report emphasises that to ensure older persons realise the potential of longer lives in dignity and equality, it is important to address how older age intersects with other “isms,” such as racism, sexism and ableism”.
- Ageism can be a disadvantaging factor that hinder equal access and technology adoption.

Ageism and the use of digital technology

The document AGEISM & DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY identifies three levels of ageism in the context of adoption and use of digital technology:

1. **The macro-level: Design & policy** – How stereotypes and exclusion of older adults (discrimination) shape the design of digital technology products and policies, and consequently our daily environment.
2. **The meso-level: Social and organizational environment** – How other people’s stereotypes (family, friends, service providers, healthcare professionals, etc.) influence the use of digital technology by older persons.
3. **The micro-level: The individual** – How age-stereotypes are internalized over the life course, and impact how people view their ability to use digital technology as they age.



With the development of new technology and the increasing use of ICT, older people are more likely to face social exclusion. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the digital divide has become more apparent than ever. Indeed, “in a rapidly digitalizing society, equal opportunities to access and use of digital technology are essential for social inclusion and participation. Older people are however often highly stereotyped regarding their abilities to use - and learn how to use digital technology. [...] Ageism can be a barrier to the use and adoption of digital technology and suggests recommendations to address this burning issue” (AGEISM & DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY: Policy Measures to Address Ageism as a Barrier to Adoption and Use of Digital Technology).

With the aim to combat all forms of ageism and age discrimination, there is need for a paradigm shift. According to Ms Claudia Mahler “human rights approach is needed to shift from the welfare paradigm to one recognising older people as rights bearers’ that have the same guarantees of dignity, equality, participation, autonomy, and independence during their entire life course [...]. More inclusive, equitable and age-friendly societies will be more resilient, sustainable, secure, and fair”.

Conclusions and tips

Despite a rapidly ageing world population, ageism is pervasive, and it is one of the most widely experienced form of discrimination across Europe. Ageism and age discrimination are so widespread in our society, and they go largely unrecognised and unchallenged.

According to the WHO, every second person in the world is believed to hold ageist attitudes – leading to poorer physical and mental health and reduced quality of life for older persons, costing societies billions of dollars each year, according to a new United Nations report on ageism.

Ageism can indeed discourage seniors from adopting digital technology. Therefore, there is a growing need to promote lifelong opportunities for older adults and encourage them to learn new skills, facilitate social interactions and enhance their active ageing.

Below you can find some tips to enhance digital literacy and increase use and adoption of digital technology among seniors:

1. Tackling digital technology related ageism through awareness-raising and training.
2. Engaging older people in the design and research process (for further information the co-design methodology, please see Module nr.3).
3. Supporting seniors to access and use digital technology in everyday life.
4. Promoting activities aimed to debunk age related stereotypes.
5. Encouraging the development of intergenerational activities.