

DIGITAL BRIDGES:
CONNECTING GENERATIONS THROUGH TECHNOLOGY PROJECT
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**THE DIGITAL BRIDGES INTERGENERATIONAL
MENTORSHIP PROGRAMME METHODOLOGY**



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1. Introduction

Purpose of the Methodology

The **Digital Bridges Intergenerational Mentorship Programme Methodology** was developed to provide a practical and transferable framework for supporting older adults in developing digital competences through volunteer-based intergenerational learning. This methodology is intended for NGOs, municipalities, adult education providers, senior organisations, universities and volunteer groups wishing to establish intergenerational digital mentoring programmes.

Rather than focusing solely on technical digital skills, the methodology recognises that successful digital inclusion depends on trust, confidence, motivation and continuous social support. The Digital Bridges approach therefore combines structured digital literacy training with personalised mentoring, creating meaningful learning relationships between older adults and young volunteers.

The methodology was developed through an evidence-based process. The partnership first conducted transnational Needs Analyses and National State of the Art Reports in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and Türkiye to better understand the experiences, barriers and learning needs of older adults. These findings revealed that many participants faced not only technical challenges but also psychological barriers, including fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence and anxiety when using digital technologies.

These insights shaped the mentoring model, placing empathy, patience, encouragement and practical guidance at the centre of the learning process. The methodology integrates digital competence development with digital well-being, intergenerational cooperation and active ageing, creating a holistic learning experience that extends beyond traditional digital skills training.

Designed as an open and transferable model, the methodology can be adapted by municipalities, adult education providers, NGOs, universities and community organisations wishing to promote digital inclusion through volunteer engagement and lifelong learning.

2. The Digital Bridges Mentorship Model

The Digital Bridges Mentorship Model is built on the principle that digital inclusion is achieved through supportive human relationships rather than technology alone. The model combines structured digital literacy education with personalised mentoring, enabling older adults to develop practical digital competences while building confidence, motivation and independence.

Unlike traditional digital training programmes, the model begins with understanding learners' individual needs and barriers. Based on the project's transnational Needs Analysis, volunteers are prepared not only to teach digital skills but also to provide encouragement, emotional support and patient guidance throughout the learning journey.

The mentoring process follows a continuous cycle. Young volunteers first establish trust with older learners, identify their learning goals and adapt support to their individual pace and experience. Learning is based on practical, everyday situations, allowing participants to

immediately apply newly acquired digital skills in their daily lives. Throughout the programme, volunteers provide continuous encouragement, reinforce learning through practice and help participants overcome technical and psychological barriers.

The model also recognises that successful digital participation depends on digital well-being. By addressing fear, anxiety and lack of confidence alongside technical learning, the methodology creates a positive learning environment that promotes self-confidence, social participation and lifelong learning.

Rather than ending with the completion of training sessions, the model encourages continuous community engagement and ongoing learning through local organisations, volunteer networks and open-access educational resources, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Digital Bridges approach.

3. Core Principles of the Mentorship Programme

The Digital Bridges Mentorship Programme is based on a set of guiding principles that ensure mentoring is inclusive, learner-centred and responsive to the needs of older adults. These principles were developed through the project's needs analysis, pilot implementation and continuous evaluation.

Learner-Centred Approach

Every older adult has different experiences, motivations and learning needs. Mentoring therefore begins by understanding the learner's individual goals, previous digital experience and preferred learning pace. Volunteers adapt their support accordingly, ensuring that learning remains relevant, practical and meaningful.

Trust Before Technology

Building trust is the first step in the mentoring relationship. Older adults are more willing to engage with digital technologies when they feel respected, listened to and supported. Volunteers create a safe learning environment where participants feel comfortable asking questions, making mistakes and learning at their own pace.

Learning by Doing

The methodology emphasises practical, hands-on learning rather than theoretical instruction. Participants practise digital skills through real-life tasks such as communicating with family members, accessing public services, managing photographs, using messaging applications and safely navigating the internet. Practical application strengthens confidence and promotes independent use of digital technologies.

Encouragement and Positive Reinforcement

Many older adults experience anxiety or lack confidence when using digital devices. Volunteers therefore use positive encouragement, patience and constructive feedback to celebrate progress and reduce fear of making mistakes. Small achievements are recognised throughout the learning process to maintain motivation.

Intergenerational Learning

Mentoring is viewed as a two-way learning experience. While older adults develop digital competences, young volunteers strengthen their communication, empathy, leadership and intercultural skills. This reciprocal learning process promotes mutual respect, challenges stereotypes and builds stronger community connections.

Digital Well-being

The programme recognises that digital inclusion extends beyond technical competence. Mentoring also addresses confidence, digital well-being and healthy technology use. Volunteers support older adults in developing safe, balanced and responsible digital habits while encouraging them to use technology to enhance communication, independence and social participation.

Lifelong Learning and Sustainability

The mentoring relationship does not end with the completion of the training sessions. Participants are encouraged to continue practising their digital skills, access the project's open educational resources and remain connected with local community organisations, ensuring long-term learning and continued digital participation.

4. Volunteer Recruitment and Mentorship Training Programme

The Digital Bridges Mentorship Programme begins with the recruitment of motivated volunteers who are willing to support older adults in developing practical digital skills through patience, empathy and respectful guidance. Recruitment is carried out through partner organisations, universities, youth organisations and community networks, with particular emphasis on communication skills, motivation and commitment rather than advanced technical expertise.

Following recruitment, all volunteers participate in the **Digital Bridges Mentorship Training Programme**, a structured **three-day non-formal education programme** designed to prepare them for their mentoring role. Rather than focusing only on digital competences, the programme develops the interpersonal, pedagogical and facilitation skills required to build supportive learning relationships with older adults. Throughout the training, volunteers learn through experiential learning, practical exercises, reflection, peer collaboration and simulated mentoring situations before working directly with participants.

Day 1 – Orientation and Foundations

The first day introduces volunteers to the Digital Bridges project, the principles of intergenerational learning and the mentoring methodology. Participants explore the barriers older adults experience in digital environments and develop essential mentoring competences, including empathy, active listening, respectful communication, patience and encouragement. Activities focus on building awareness, trust and understanding while creating a safe and participatory learning environment.

Day 2 – Curriculum and Practice

The second day familiarises volunteers with the Inclusive Digital Literacy Curriculum and the educational resources developed within the project. Through demonstrations, small-group activities and simulated learning situations, participants learn how to use the curriculum, training materials, digital tools and mentoring resources in practice. Particular emphasis is placed on learner-centred approaches, accessibility and adapting support to the individual needs of older adults.

Day 3 – Rehearsal and Certification

The final day focuses on practical mentoring. Volunteers participate in role plays, mentoring simulations, case studies and peer feedback sessions, allowing them to practise responding to realistic situations before supporting older adults. The programme concludes with self-assessment, facilitator feedback and mentor certification. Volunteers are then introduced to the participant matching process and the post-training support system, including continuous mentoring guidance and access to the Digital Bridges mentor community.

To ensure consistent implementation across all partner countries, the training is supported by a comprehensive set of educational resources, including the **Facilitator's Guide for the Mentorship Programme**, **Volunteer Mentoring Scenario Cards**, **The Mentor's Toolkit – Group Games**, and the **Inclusive Digital Literacy Training Curriculum**. Together, these resources provide volunteers with practical methodologies, facilitation techniques and interactive learning activities that strengthen their confidence before entering the mentoring process.

5. The Mentoring Process

Following the completion of the volunteer training programme, mentors are matched with older adult learners and begin the mentoring process using the Digital Bridges methodology. The programme is designed as a personalised learning journey in which mentors provide continuous guidance, encouragement and practical support rather than simply delivering digital instruction.

Step 1 – Building Trust

The mentoring relationship begins with getting to know the older learner, understanding their previous experience with technology and identifying their personal goals. Rather than immediately introducing digital tools, mentors focus on creating a welcoming, respectful and supportive learning environment. Establishing trust at this stage is considered essential for reducing anxiety and increasing learner motivation.

Step 2 – Identifying Individual Learning Needs

Each participant progresses at a different pace and has unique learning priorities. Mentors discuss everyday digital challenges with participants and identify the skills most relevant to their daily lives, such as communicating with family members, accessing online public services, using messaging applications or staying safe online. This learner-centred approach ensures that mentoring remains meaningful and practical.

Step 3 – Guided Practice

Learning takes place through practical activities based on real-life situations rather than theoretical instruction. Mentors demonstrate digital tasks step by step, encourage participants to repeat the activities independently and provide immediate support whenever difficulties arise. Mistakes are treated as a natural part of the learning process, helping participants gradually develop confidence alongside technical competence.

Step 4 – Reflection and Encouragement

Throughout the mentoring journey, volunteers continuously reinforce learning through positive feedback, reflection and encouragement. Small achievements are recognised and celebrated, helping participants overcome fear, build self-confidence and remain motivated to continue learning.

Step 5 – Independent Participation

The ultimate objective of the mentoring process is to enable older adults to use digital technologies independently and confidently in their everyday lives. By the end of the programme, participants are encouraged to continue practising their skills, access the project's open educational resources and remain connected with local community organisations that can provide ongoing support.

The mentoring process is supported throughout by the **Inclusive Digital Literacy Curriculum, Training Materials for Older Adults, the Facilitator's Guide, Volunteer Mentoring Scenario Cards, and the Mentor's Toolkit – Group Games**. Together, these resources provide a coherent framework that ensures consistency, quality and adaptability while allowing mentors to personalise learning according to each participant's needs.

6. Supporting Resources and Learning Tools

The Digital Bridges Intergenerational Mentorship Programme is supported by a comprehensive collection of open educational resources designed to ensure that mentors, educators and organisations can successfully implement the methodology in different learning environments.

Rather than relying on a single training manual, the programme integrates a range of complementary resources that support both mentors and older adult learners throughout the learning journey. These resources include the **Inclusive Digital Literacy Training Curriculum, Training Materials for Older Adults, Facilitator's Guide for the Mentorship Programme, Volunteer Mentoring Scenario Cards, The Mentor's Toolkit – Group Games**, video tutorials, presentations, worksheets, practical exercises, quizzes and additional learning materials on topics such as Artificial Intelligence, Accessibility and Digital Well-being.

All resources were developed using adult learning principles and are designed to be practical, learner-centred and adaptable to different educational contexts. Together, they create a flexible learning ecosystem that supports both structured training sessions and personalised mentoring activities.

To maximise sustainability and transferability, all educational resources are available as **open-access materials** through the official Digital Bridges project website:

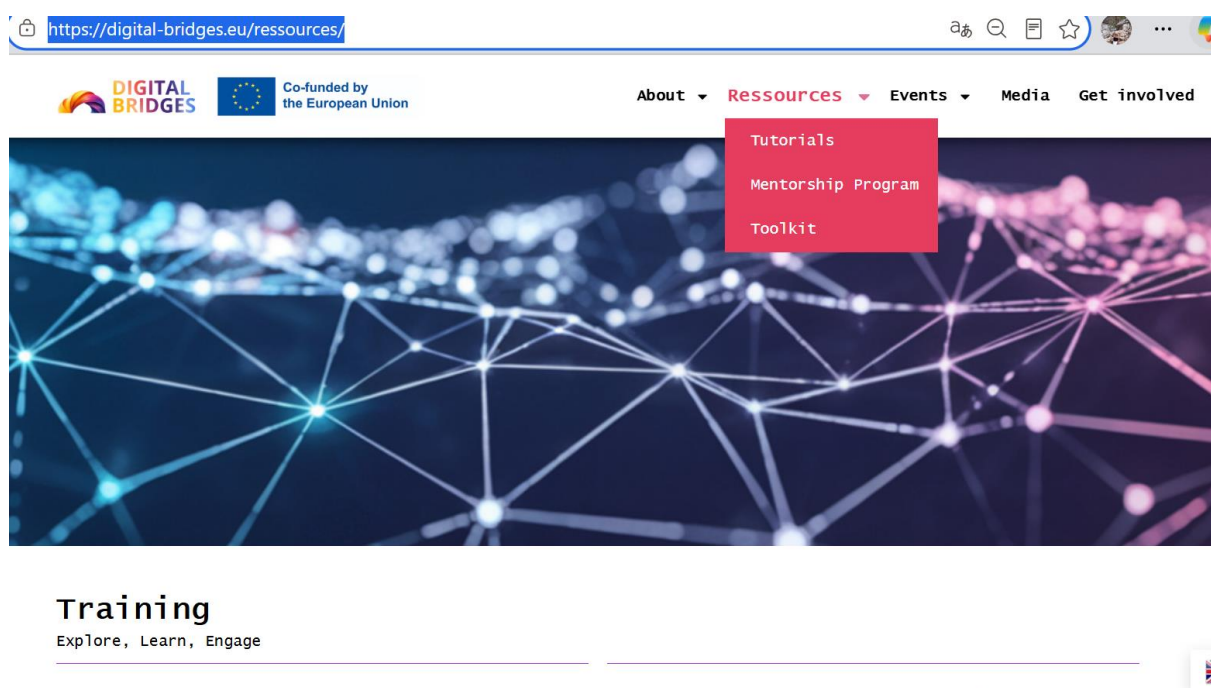
<https://digital-bridges.eu/ressources/>

The online resource library enables educators, municipalities, NGOs, community organisations and volunteer groups to freely access, download and adapt the materials for non-commercial educational purposes. By making all resources openly available, the partnership encourages the replication of the Digital Bridges methodology and supports wider digital inclusion initiatives across Europe.

7. Continuous Support, Monitoring and Improvement

One of the distinguishing features of the Digital Bridges Intergenerational Mentorship Programme is its commitment to continuous support beyond formal training sessions. Rather than limiting learning to face-to-face activities, the methodology encourages ongoing mentoring, self-directed learning and continuous access to educational resources, ensuring that older adults can continue developing their digital competences at their own pace.

To achieve this, the partnership established the **Digital Bridges Resources Platform**, an open-access online learning environment available through the official project website:



<https://digital-bridges.eu/ressources/>

The platform functions as a central European learning hub, providing free access to the complete collection of Digital Bridges educational resources in English, German, Dutch and Turkish. It includes the Inclusive Digital Literacy Training Curriculum, training materials, facilitator guides, mentor toolkits, Volunteer Mentoring Scenario Cards, video tutorials, presentations, worksheets, quizzes, practical exercises and additional learning resources covering topics such as Artificial Intelligence, Accessibility and Digital Well-being.

Beyond serving as a repository of educational materials, the platform enables participants to revisit learning content, reinforce newly acquired skills and continue practising independently after the completion of mentoring sessions. Older adults, volunteers and educators can therefore maintain their learning journey long after the formal training activities have ended.

To provide personalised support, the Resources Platform also includes an integrated contact function through which participants, volunteers and educators can submit questions or request additional guidance related to digital technologies or the educational materials. During the project, this communication channel strengthened participant confidence by ensuring that support remained available whenever needed. To ensure long-term sustainability, **Perspektive Vielfalt** has committed to maintaining the platform, coordinating user enquiries and ensuring that all educational resources remain freely available beyond the funded project period.

Continuous monitoring and quality improvement formed another key element of the methodology. Throughout implementation, mentors, facilitators and partner organisations collected feedback through participant questionnaires, volunteer reflections, observations, interviews and stakeholder consultations. Particular attention was given to participants' confidence, digital competence development, engagement and overall learning experience. Feedback gathered during the pilot implementation was systematically analysed and used to refine the curriculum, mentoring resources and educational materials before their final publication.

To strengthen community engagement, the consortium also maintains the official **Digital Bridges Instagram** page as an active online community where news, educational resources, participant stories and good practices continue to be shared. The platform allows older adults, volunteers and stakeholders to remain connected, exchange experiences and access ongoing information about digital inclusion initiatives.

Link of the Instagram Page: <https://www.instagram.com/digitalbridgesproject/>

Together, the Resources Platform, continuous communication channels, monitoring activities and active online community create a sustainable learning ecosystem that extends beyond the lifetime of the project. The methodology therefore supports not only the acquisition of digital skills but also long-term confidence, peer learning, intergenerational cooperation and lifelong digital participation.

8. Sustainability and Transferability

The Digital Bridges Intergenerational Mentorship Programme was designed as a sustainable and transferable model that can continue beyond the lifetime of the funded project. By combining volunteer mentoring, structured digital literacy education and openly accessible

educational resources, the methodology enables organisations of different sizes and capacities to implement the programme without requiring expensive infrastructure or specialised technology.

To ensure long-term sustainability, all educational resources are freely available through the Digital Bridges Resources Platform, allowing municipalities, NGOs, senior organisations, universities and adult education providers to access, adapt and reuse the methodology for non-commercial educational purposes. The multilingual curriculum, facilitator guides, mentoring resources, toolkits, scenario cards and video tutorials provide a complete implementation package that supports future replication.

The partnership has also established long-term cooperation with municipalities, senior organisations and community stakeholders interested in continuing digital literacy activities after the project. The Resources Platform will continue to be maintained by Perspektive Vielfalt, while the Digital Bridges Instagram community will remain active as a communication and networking space for learners, volunteers and organisations. These commitments ensure that the project's educational resources and mentoring model remain available and continue to support digital inclusion initiatives across Europe.

The methodology is flexible enough to be transferred to different educational contexts, including active ageing programmes, migrant integration initiatives, community learning centres, libraries, municipalities and lifelong learning institutions. Its emphasis on intergenerational cooperation, learner-centred mentoring and digital well-being makes it applicable far beyond the original project partnership.

9. Conclusion

The Digital Bridges Intergenerational Mentorship Programme demonstrates that successful digital inclusion is achieved through people rather than technology alone. By combining structured digital literacy education with intergenerational mentoring, continuous support and evidence-based educational resources, the methodology empowers older adults to become confident, independent and active users of digital technologies.

Developed through transnational cooperation, needs analysis, pilot implementation and continuous evaluation, the methodology integrates technical learning with trust-building, confidence, digital well-being and lifelong learning. The combination of multilingual educational resources, trained volunteers, practical mentoring tools and open-access learning materials creates a comprehensive and transferable model that can be adopted by organisations across Europe.

As an open and sustainable methodology, Digital Bridges contributes not only to improving digital competences among older adults but also to strengthening social inclusion, active ageing, community engagement and intergenerational solidarity. It provides a practical framework for future initiatives seeking to promote inclusive digital participation and lifelong learning in diverse educational and community settings.

Appendices

Appendix 1. INTERGENERATIONAL MENTORSHIP MODEL



Appendix 2. Digital Bridges Educational Resources

Resource	Purpose
Inclusive Digital Literacy Training Curriculum	Learning framework
Training Materials for Older Adults	Learning content
Facilitator's Guide	Guidance for trainers
Volunteer Mentoring Scenario Cards	Case-based mentor preparation
Mentor's Toolkit – Group Games	Interactive group activities
Video Tutorials	Practical demonstrations
Presentations & Worksheets	Learning support
Quizzes & Practical Exercises	Knowledge reinforcement
Policy Recommendations	Sustainability and policy guidance

All materials are available at <https://digital-bridges.eu/ressources/>

Appendix 3. Three-Day Volunteer Training Programme

Day	Main Theme
Day 1	Introduction to Digital Bridges, Intergenerational Learning, Mentoring Principles
Day 2	Curriculum, Digital Skills, Educational Resources, Facilitation Methods
Day 3	Scenario Practice, Role Plays, Reflection, Assessment and Certification

All materials are available at <https://digital-bridges.eu/ressources/>

Appendix 4. Digital Bridges Resources Platform

Official Resources Platform

<https://digital-bridges.eu/ressources/>

The platform provides free access to all Digital Bridges educational resources, including the curriculum, training materials, facilitator guide, mentoring resources, toolkits, video tutorials, presentations and additional learning materials in English, German, Dutch and Turkish.

Appendix 5. Community Support

Digital Bridges Instagram Community

<https://www.instagram.com/digitalbridgesproject>

The Digital Bridges Instagram page continues to function as an active community space where older adults, volunteers, educators and stakeholders can follow project updates, discover educational resources, share experiences and contact the partnership for further guidance.

Appendix 6. Good Practices from the Partnership

Country	Good Practice
Germany	Community-based mentoring through migrant organisations and senior associations
Austria	Digital literacy combined with cultural, social and well-being activities
Netherlands	Informal community learning, social events and continuous volunteer engagement
Türkiye	Municipal cooperation, nursing home activities and stakeholder networking

This methodology was developed within the "Digital Bridges – Connecting Generations through Technology Project". It is intended as an open and transferable resource to support organisations promoting digital inclusion, intergenerational learning and lifelong education for older adults across Europe.