

# Ageing in digital societies: enablers and barriers to older persons exercising their social rights

**Slovakia**

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# 1 Legal and policy framework

## 1.1 National legislation on digital public administration

In Slovakia, two main laws cover informatisation and digitalisation of public administration: the Act on Information Technologies in Public Administration<sup>1</sup> and the Act on eGovernment<sup>2</sup>. Neither of these laws contains sections guaranteeing equal access to digital public services. Furthermore, there is no list of vulnerable groups with specific needs, nor is there any commitment to guarantee special attention to be paid to vulnerable groups while providing digital services.

Older persons are not mentioned in the legislation at all.

However, the Act of eGovernment does contain certain provisions pertaining to people with disabilities. Pursuant to this act, public authorities must ensure that access points and functionalities of the common modules in their administration are built in a way that ensures accessibility of electronic communication also for persons with disabilities.<sup>3</sup> Central public administration portal must use a messaging format that is easy to be used in accordance with both accessibility requirements and assistive technologies for **persons with disabilities**.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.2 National policy, strategy or action plan on the digitalisation of public services or digital inclusion

In Slovakia, several strategies, action plans or documents have been adopted in recent years with regard to digitalisation in public administration.

**2030 Digital transformation strategy for Slovakia**<sup>5</sup> foresees support for lifelong learning in digital technologies. The state will create conditions and tools to protect its citizens, especially (but not only) the most vulnerable ones (children, young people and older persons), from the

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<sup>1</sup> Slovakia, The Act 95/2019 Coll. on information technologies in public administration ([Zákon 95/2019 Z.z. o informačných technológiách vo verejnej správe](#)), 18 April 2019

<sup>2</sup> Slovakia, The Act 305/2013 Coll. on eGovernment ([Zákon 305/2013 Z.z. o elektronickej podobe výkonu pôsobnosti orgánov verejnej moci – Zákon o eGovernmente](#)), 8 October 2013

<sup>3</sup> Slovakia, The Act 305/2013 Coll. on eGovernment ([Zákon 305/2013 Z.z. o elektronickej podobe výkonu pôsobnosti orgánov verejnej moci – Zákon o eGovernmente](#)), § 4, 8 October 2013

<sup>4</sup> Slovakia, The Act 305/2013 Coll. on eGovernment ([Zákon 305/2013 Z.z. o elektronickej podobe výkonu pôsobnosti orgánov verejnej moci – Zákon o eGovernmente](#)), § 5, 8 October 2013

<sup>5</sup> Slovakia, The Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatisation of the Slovak Republic (*Ministerstvo investícií, regionálneho rozvoja a informatizácie Slovenskej republiky*) (2019), '[2030 Digital transformation strategy for Slovakia](#)'.

negative consequences associated with the improper and disproportionate deployment and use of digital technologies. The **Action plan for Digital Transformation of Slovakia**<sup>6</sup> further elaborates this goals and suggests the lifelong learning measures and activities focusing on different age groups – including older persons.

**The National Concept of Informatisation of Public Administration 2021**<sup>7</sup> sets the vision that Slovakia should be a state **where everyone has equal chances**. One of the strategic priorities is "user oriented approach", which defines services that are accessible, comprehensible and simple. Digital services will also be fully accessible to **disadvantaged people**. Basic principles of the strategy foresee services that are accessible to people **with disabilities, older persons** and other disadvantaged groups at a level comparable to services provided to other citizens.

**Strategic Document for Digital Growth and Next Generation Access Infrastructure (2014 – 2020)**<sup>8</sup> contains specific chapter called **support of eInclusion**. Everybody should have access to the benefits of eGovernment even if they do not own state-of-the-art information and communication technologies or are unable to use it efficiently. Support for e-Inclusion should be seen as a wide range of solutions for life on-line: teleworking, applications and technologies for people with disabilities, simple focus on the most vulnerable groups living at the periphery who can greatly benefit from information technologies which will improve their lives and increase their mobility.

The main goals are:

- Promoting education in particular for older people and disadvantaged groups
- Simplifying services for disadvantaged groups
- Developing tools to promote inclusion

### **1.3 National recovery and resilience plans covering the digitalisation of public services**

The National Recovery and Resilience Plan includes component 17 - Digital Slovakia. The overarching goal is a functioning digital economy and a society prepared for the ongoing technological changes in the field of digitalisation. A prerequisite for achieving this goal is the

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<sup>6</sup> Slovakia, The Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatisation of the Slovak Republic (*Ministerstvo investícií, regionálneho rozvoja a informatizácie Slovenskej republiky*) (2019), [`The Action Plan for Digital Transformation of Slovakia`](#)

<sup>7</sup> Slovakia, The Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatisation of the Slovak Republic (*Ministerstvo investícií, regionálneho rozvoja a informatizácie Slovenskej republiky*) (2021), [`Národná koncepcia informatizácie verejnej správy`](#) .

<sup>8</sup> Slovakia, The Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatisation of the Slovak Republic (*Ministerstvo investícií, regionálneho rozvoja a informatizácie Slovenskej republiky*) (2014), [`Strategic Document for Digital Growth and Next Generation Access Infrastructure \(2014 – 2020\)`](#).

development of eGovernment, which will provide citizen-oriented services with a focus on improving the skills of different population groups, including, for example, **older persons**.<sup>9</sup>

The section „**Social Resilience**“ stipulates that development of digital services will be guided by the **principle of equal access for all** and with respect for **disadvantaged groups, especially older persons**. According to the plan, the IT systems developed must provide solutions that enable disadvantaged groups to access information and public services. Specific disadvantaged groups are not explicitly listed.<sup>10</sup>

Within the proposed reforms and investments, there is a separate sub-component dedicated to older people. Investment No.9 - **Improving digital skills of elderly** and distribution of senior tablets aims to "improve elderly' access to the digital services of the state, improve their digital skills, as well as remove barriers to social inclusion by using modern applications" (see below).<sup>11</sup>

## **2 Programmes and practices aimed at ensuring equal access to public services in the digital age**

Slovakia's Recovery Plan contains a Component 17 Digital Slovakia which foresees **Investition No. 9: Improving digital skills of older persons and distribution of “Senior-Tablets”**.<sup>12</sup> The nation-wide programme targets seniors above the age of 70 and, secondarily, also persons with disabilities and persons experiencing social exclusion. It is implemented by the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic.

The main objective of this program is to enhance digital skills of approximately 172 800 older persons above the age of 70 through in-person and e-learning workshops. It also aims to give out so called “senior-tablets” and other tools to older persons and socially disadvantaged persons to increase their motivation to use e-services and e-learning workshops. The programme further plans to give seniors and other disadvantaged groups access to special applications addressing their needs. The senior-tablets should contain applications enabling

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<sup>9</sup> Slovakia, Government of the Slovak Republic (*Vláda SR*) (2021), '[Recovery and Resilience Plan for the Slovak Republic](#)', [Component 17 – Digital Slovakia](#), adopted by the Government Resolution of 28 April 2021

<sup>10</sup> Slovakia, Government of the Slovak Republic (*Vláda SR*) (2021), '[Recovery and Resilience Plan for the Slovak Republic](#)', [Component 17 – Digital Slovakia](#), adopted by the Government Resolution of 28 April 2021

<sup>11</sup> Slovakia, Government of the Slovak Republic (*Vláda SR*) (2021), '[Recovery and Resilience Plan for the Slovak Republic](#)', [Component 17 – Digital Slovakia](#), adopted by the Government Resolution of 28 April 2021

<sup>12</sup> Slovakia, Government of the Slovak Republic (*Vláda SR*) (2021), '[Recovery and Resilience Plan for the Slovak Republic](#)', [Component 17 – Digital Slovakia](#), adopted by the Government Resolution of 28 April 2021; Slovakia, Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic (*Ministerstvo investícií, regionálneho rozvoja a informatizácie SR*) (2021), '[Vicepremiérka Remišová: Seniorom pomôžeme vstúpiť do digitálneho sveta vďaka bezplatným školeniam aj špeciálnym tabletom](#)', press release, 28 October 2021.

easy access to the internet, news applications, communication tools (email, text messages, calls) and health application (health diary, doctor's visits calendar and potentially also connection to actual health care databases). The senior-tablets should also enable their users to connect to selected state e-services addressing specific life situations of pensioners.

The programme started in the third quarter of 2021 by conducting a study to verify specific requirements and to assess physiological adequacy of the tools (tablet/smart phone/notebook) with respect to seniors and other disadvantaged groups. The programme should run until 2026. In August 2021, the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic announced launch of a new nation-wide National Project “**Improving Digital Skills of Older Persons and Other Disadvantaged Groups in Public Administration**” funded from ESIF.<sup>13</sup> The project targets public administration employees above the age of 55, older persons under 65 who claim invalidity pension, older persons above the age of 65 and persons with severe disabilities. The project will be implemented by the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic in partnership with National Coalition for Digital Skills and Professions<sup>14</sup>. The main objective is to improve digital skills of the above mentioned target groups by enabling them to access digital education on digital skills. The project also aims to increase the intensity of using digital services and digital education and to increase target groups' involvement in economic and social life in their localities thanks to their increase usage of IT. The project is ongoing.

### **3 Research and data focused on equal access to public services in the digital age**

As reported by the Office of Public Defender of Rights (Ombudsperson), they did not register any complaints related to discrimination on the ground of **old age** in the context of **access to public services**.<sup>15</sup>

We could not identify any research studies on experiences with discrimination/unequal access to public services undergoing or having completed digital transformation with respect to older

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<sup>13</sup> Slovakia, Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic (*Ministerstvo investícií, regionálneho rozvoja a informatizácie SR*) (2021), '[Vicepremiérka Remišová: Zlepšiť digitálne zručnosti seniorov a znevýhodnených skupín zamestnancov pomôže nový národný projekt](#)', press release, 2 August 2021; Slovakia, Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic (*Ministerstvo investícií, regionálneho rozvoja a informatizácie SR*) (2021), '[OZNAM: Výzva na pripomienkovanie národného projektu „Zlepšovanie digitálnych zručností seniorov a znevýhodnených skupín vo verejnej správe“](#)', press release, 22 April 2021.

<sup>14</sup> National Coalition for Digital Skills and Professions is an interest association of the Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic and Slovak IT Association.

<sup>15</sup> Information provided by the Office of Public Defender of Rights via telephone on 9 May 2022.

persons. We were only able to identify research on digital skills and use of information technology by older persons.

In 2020, Institute of Public Affairs published a research study exploring digital skills and adaptation on the use of information technology. The study is a result of a quantitative survey (N=1073). The sample was representative of age, gender, nationality, education, and region. The research revealed that adaptation to the use of information technology is more difficult for older people, people with lower education and lower socio-economic status. People above the age of 65 particularly have difficulties mastering new technologies and tend to resign on using them. For instance, only 8% of respondents from the age group 65+ said they adapt easily to the use of IT; 40% said their adaptation to the use of IT is difficult and 52% said they are not learning to use IT at all. Up to 76% of people above the age of 65 have not learned to use new hardware, software or IT service in the past year, 23% have learned it partially and only 2% said they learned it completely. Another 62% of people above the age of 65 did not use the internet at all. The research also revealed a very low digital literacy of people above the age of 65 measured as index of digital literacy. Older people only reached 0,13 points on the index while younger people (25-34 years old) reached 0,76.<sup>16</sup>

In 2021 Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic published a research report on the use of information and communication technology.<sup>17</sup> They contacted 5060 households in Slovakia (two staged stratified random selection) with a request to complete an online questionnaire. Online versions was chosen due to pandemic situation. The research explored the use of the internet for interactions with public authorities for private purposes. It showed that older persons use the internet for interactions with public authorities much less frequently compared to younger persons. For instance, only 45,2% of persons in the age group 65-74 use internet to get information from websites or applications of public authorities compared to 77,1% in the 16-24 age group. Women of the age 65-74 use it less than men (45,9% of women vs. 50,9% of men). Furthermore, only 20,9% of persons in the age group 65-74 use the internet for downloading official documents compared to 39,6% of persons aged 35-44. Again, women o aged 65-74 use it less than men (20,9% of women vs. 25,6% of men). And only 16,5% of persons aged 65-74 use the internet for submitting filled in forms compared to 32,7% of persons aged 35-44. There is, again, difference between women and men aged 65-74 (19,5% of women vs. 23,8% of men). The research further asked about reasons for not submitting electronically filled out forms to public authorities. The greatest difference between younger and older persons was recorded with respect to the option “lacking skills or knowledge” – 42,8% of persons aged 65-74 felt they lacked skills or knowledge to submit electronically filled out forms while it was only 12,9% of persons aged 25-34. Older women more frequently said they lacked skills/knowledge than older men (44,5% of women vs. 36% of men).

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<sup>16</sup> Velšic, M. (2020), [Digitálna gramotnosť na Slovensku 2020](#), Bratislava, Institute of Public Affairs.

<sup>17</sup> Vlačuha, R., Kubala, M., Hornáček, M. (2021), [Survey on Information and Communication Technologies Usage in Households 2021](#), Bratislava, Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.





## 4 State of digitalisation of selected public services

		Selected public services relevant for older persons			
		Access to health records	Public statutory pensions	Social benefits	Other (as relevant in your context)
<b>Stage of digitalisation</b>	Not digitalised (Y/N)	N (service is digitalised)	N (service is digitalised)	N (service is digitalised)	
	Information is available online (Y/N)	Y	Y	Y	
	Transactions are possible online (Y/N)	Y	Y	Y	
<b>Recognition of groups at risk of digital exclusion</b>	Service specific regulation recognises barriers to digital inclusion / vulnerable and disadvantaged groups (Y/N).	Y	N	N	
	<b>If yes, please list the barriers and groups that are mentioned.</b>	<a href="#">The service mentions older persons as those not having an eID which is necessary for accessing e-health records.</a> A transitional period was introduced lasting until 31 December 2021 during which older persons (above 65) could access their health records using only their regular ID or health insurance card at their doctor's office who could then open their health records. After this transitional period those who do not have an eID	N	N/A	

		cannot directly access their e-health records.			
<b>Multichannel access options</b>	<p><b>Telephone service (Y/N)</b></p> <p>If yes, please describe what kind of personalised services it provides.</p>	<p>Y</p> <p><a href="#">Call centrum providing help with accessing the e-health records</a> but does not enable access to health records.</p>	<p>Y</p> <p><a href="#">Information-consultation center of the Social Insurance Company</a> runs a free of charge phone line that only provides information but does not enable access to ones' records. For information on payment of one's pensions it is advised to contact one's local branch of Social Insurance Company.</p>	<p>Y – consultations on one's eligibility to claim social benefits</p>	
	<p><b>Physical administrative access points (Y/N).</b></p> <p>If yes, please specify the level of availability (local, regional, national), the opening days and hours.</p>	<p>N</p>	<p>Y – local branches of Social Insurance Company located in all disetRICT capitals.</p> <p>Opening hours:</p> <p>Mo: 8:00 – 16:00</p> <p>Tue: 8:00 – 14:00</p> <p>Wed: 8:00 – 17:00</p> <p>Thurs: 8:00 – 12:00</p> <p>Fri: 8:00 – 14:00</p>	<p>Y – regional offices of labour, social affairs and family, opening days and hours:</p> <p>Mo – Tue: 8:00 – 15:00</p> <p>Wed: 8:00 – 17:00</p> <p>Thu – closed</p> <p>Fri: 8:00 – 12:00</p>	

	<p><b>Specific locations</b> that facilitate <b>offline</b> access to the service (Y/N)</p> <p><b>If yes</b>, indicate the location(s).</p> <p>Please describe what kind of support is provided.</p>	<p>Y – health records can be access at relevant doctors' offices</p>	<p>Y</p> <p>Local branches of Social Insurance Company – providing information on one's pension, consulting all relevant processes (e.g. assessment of eligibility to a public statutory pension, application for the public statutory pension etc.)</p>	<p>Y</p> <p>Regional branches of the Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family</p> <p>- option to apply for social benefits in writing and submitting the application in person</p> <p>- consultations on one's eligibility to claim social benefits</p>	
	<p><b>Specific locations</b> that facilitate <b>online</b> access to the service (Y/N).</p> <p><b>If yes</b>, indicate the location(s).</p> <p>Please describe what kind of support is provided.</p>	<p>N</p>	<p>N</p>	<p>N</p>	
	<p><b>Other</b> – please indicate any other access channels to the service.</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>www.socpoist.sk – information on public statutory pensions</p> <p>esluzby.socpoist.sk – information on public statutory pensions</p>	<p><a href="http://www.slovensko.sk">www.slovensko.sk</a> – submitting e-application for social benefits</p> <p><a href="http://www.upsvr.gov.sk">www.upsvr.gov.sk</a> – information on available social benefits and on the application process,</p>	
<p><b>Other forms of support for online use</b></p>	<p>Please indicate any other <b>form of support to facilitate the use of the online service</b> for older persons such as easy-to-read</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p><a href="http://www.upsvr.gov.sk">www.upsvr.gov.sk</a> – information on available social benefits and on the</p>	

	versions, different language versions, etc.			application process, inc. information in English	
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