



E-HEALTH Literacy Report on Focus Groups



Erasmus+

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INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the findings of the analysis of the focus group discussions.

The focus groups were conducted in the partner countries of the project – Greece, Germany, Lithuania, Slovenia, Switzerland – in June and July 2022. Experts in the digital health sector and representatives of good practices were invited to join the focus group and discuss about:

- Latest developments in the e-Health sector
- Practical use of e-Health and its adaptation to the general public
- Education needs, fears and obstacles of users
- New technology and the future

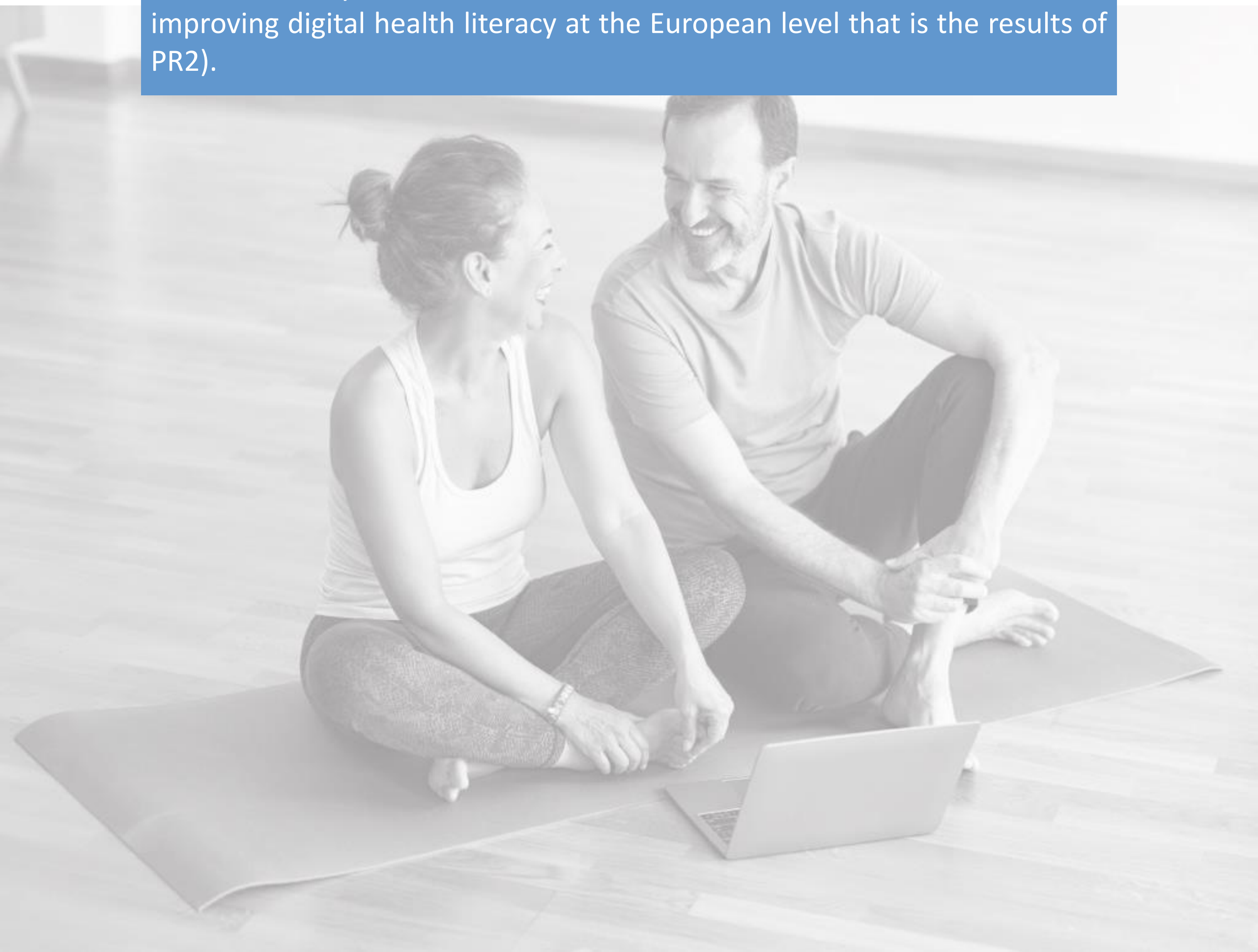
The results of the focus groups will be used as basis for the development of a online respository, a toolkit and a netiquette. Therefore, the partners have chosen a variety of experts from different fields: health policy experts, representatives of the competent ministry, application developers, non-governmental organizations active in the field of e-health, health workers, health insurance representatives, developers and providers of e-health services as well as users of these services. The focus groups in Switzerland and Greece emphasised on potential users (patients, doctors, health workers) of e-Health services. In Germany, Lithuania and Slovenia the experts consisted more of providers, educators and researchers.

The report was created as part of **the E-HEALth Literacy (HEAL)** project, which is financed by the strategic partnership Erasmus+ and is implemented in Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Switzerland and Slovenia.

The project aims to (1) reduce gaps in digital health literacy that can lead to social exclusion; (2) raising digital skills in the field of health literacy also for more vulnerable groups of the population of the European Union; (3) raising awareness of the importance of e-Health literacy, which can influence better social and health care; (4) raise awareness of the importance of security and information literacy (media, devices, e-Health services).

How will the focus group results fit into the project outcomes?

The focus group discussions are a part of the first project result (PR1) »The Digital Health Literacy Repository«. This is an open, online tool that strategically raises awareness of Digital Health Literacy, aiming to gather additional resources from across the EU and build a community of interest around the project. The repository will include materials that explain the latest developments in the field: resources that contribute to awareness of the importance of e-Health literacy, which would gather articles, websites, applications, resources for training, legal texts, leading practices across Europe in the field of e-Health literacy; creating a repository of best practices around which a community of practice can develop. The results of the focus group will indicate for the desk research to collect the resources. They will also feed into the modular blended course aimed at improving digital health literacy at the European level that is the result of PR2).



E-HEALTH

During the Covid Pandemic multiple contact apps for tracking were used in different countries. Those apps combine geo-data with health data and help to encounter the spread of the virus. However, reluctance, fear of data insecurity and a lack of media literacy stopped many citizens from using the apps. For example in Germany, around 26 million people downloaded the Corona Warn App which is only 31 % of the population (Statista, 2021), In Lithuania only 10% of citizens downloaded Corona Stop app. In Slovenia in the period from August 2020 and May 2021 477.752 citizens downloaded app “OstaniZdrav” (only 23% of all population). According to the Flash Eurobarometer 460, this trust is increasingly important, as eHealth has the potential to empower citizens to (1) better manage their health, (2) improve prevention efforts, (3) enable more accurate diagnosis and treatment, as well as (4) facilitate the communication between healthcare professionals and patients. However, in 2017, when the last survey was conducted, less than one in five respondents used health and care services provided online (18%). But, 52% of all respondents would like to have online access to their medical and health records. Over 75% of all respondents agree that the Internet is a good tool for improving their knowledge of health-related topics. Nine out of ten citizens who look for their health information online say that they are satisfied with the information they find and they would search for them again if needed.

According to the WHO, e-Health is the cost-effective and safe use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to support health and related fields.

E-Health includes a number of applications designed to monitor health-related data, applications and websites designed to facilitate the organisation of healthcare systems, interventions related to telemedicine, various devices, big data and new technologies such as AI, VR, etc.

"The role of eHealth is crucial in achieving overarching health priorities such as Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)," the WHO stressed.

<https://www.who.int/westernpacific/activities/using-e-health-and-information-technology-to-improve-health>)

Austrian MEP Karin Kadenbach (S&D) stressed that it is crucial to improve the health literacy of EU citizens, noting that low health literacy has a direct impact on the treatment of chronic diseases, productivity, mortality and health costs.

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/sl/headlines/society/20150701ST072927/e-zdravje-mobilno-zdravje-zdravstvena-pismenost-tehnologija-in-bolniki>)



FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS

E-HEALTH MODELS, THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE CURRENT SITUATION AND HOW E-HEALTH CAN CONTRIBUTE TO AN EFFICIENT HEALTH SYSTEM

- ✓ Each partner country research has concluded that in the field of e-Health there is a development of many lifestyle apps, apps to monitor our physical activities, apps related to COVID, as well as apps that support the health system (e-prescription, e-patient record, e-ordering, waiting lists, e-Health record, etc. While the telemedicine and e-care are only mentioned in certain partner countries.
- ✓ Digitalization in the field of organizational systems in medicine is progressing exponentially. This makes work easier and saves time for both medical staff and patients.
- ✓ Many people search for information about medical conditions online. In doing so, there is a possibility of spreading false information and unnecessary tension and stress.
- ✓ There is a need for more ICT trainings to promote more confident and independent ICT users.
- ✓ There is a lack of digital competences and poor knowledge of data protection, especially among the elderly and other vulnerable groups, who are also poorly informed about new developments in the field of medicine.
- ✓ A good strategy for the digitization of the health system is needed, with the help of all system stakeholders (contractors, patients, software companies and other stakeholders)

- ✓ The protection of personal data is compromised when there is no adequate communication system. The use of certificates, passwords, etc., to provide a layer of protection. Requires some knowledge of ICT use. This calls for urgent training in the use of ICT. Especially for the elderly.

»We lack a timetable to know where this train of development is going. Until we know where we are going, addressing other problems is less effective,» (Slovenia.)

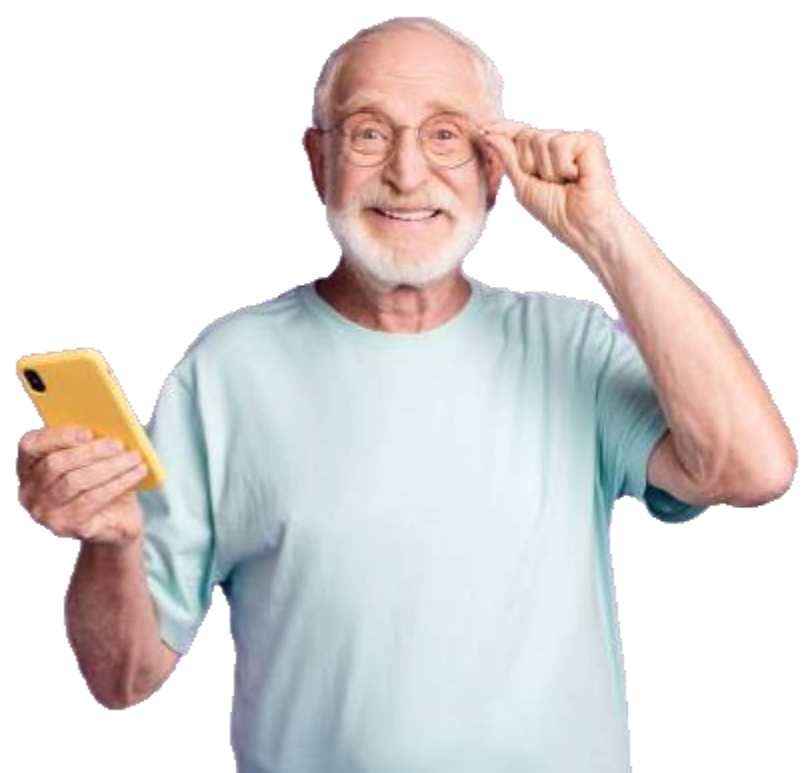
“While ICT is so useful and can provide innovative solutions, the usage of it in mental health is poor comparing to how we can actually apply those systems” said one of the participants of the FG partners from Greece. “Once we have some knowledge on this we can suggest improvements.” (Greece)

*"It's hard to optimise a simple login to a website because login details are important. For data protection reasons, you can't log in with just a password and a username."
(Lithuania)*



PRACTICAL USE OF E-HEALTH AND ITS ADAPTATION TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC

- ✓ A weakness in communication between medical staff and patients is the lack of available equipment (computers, tablets, smartphones, smartwatches, etc.) and the poor digital skills of patients.
- ✓ ICT is mostly used for archiving medical data.
- ✓ The use of e-Health elements will enable patients to participate more actively in their treatment, health care, etc.
- ✓ There is a lack of confidence in using e-Health services due to poor digital skills.
- ✓ There are already NGOs providing digital training in e-Health, but they are few and mainly attended by the older part of the population.
- ✓ Accessibility of e-Health services needs to be regulated in a way that is safe for data and yet easier for users to access; including those with poorer digital skills.



»The benefits are clearly in terms of time, and in terms of price comparisons for prescription medicines.« (Lithuania.)

»We are currently in a phase in which the patient is being made much more responsible and is more actively involved in many things. They can actively request digital health applications from their doctor, but the ePA also means that patients know more.«(Germany)

*“The effect is already there when the appointment is sent to me, I can fill out a questionnaire, and I am not asked everything again when I am in the practice.”
(Germany)*

“I also use some apps that allow me to visualize the human body in 3D and to explore some specific body parts like the muscles of the arm, or the ligaments of the knee.” (Switzerland.)

*“Without education everything seems impractical”
(Greece)*

E-HEALTH SERVICES, ETHICAL ISSUES, CRITICAL THINKING USER TRAINING (data protection, risks of use, why don't we use, level of use, training)

- ✓ The COVID situation accelerated the digitization of the healthcare system. And at the same time showed the importance of knowing how to work with digital services.
- ✓ Elderly people are often afraid of using services, as they lack digital competence and are worried that someone will abuse their data.
- ✓ It is important to emphasize the positive meaning of digitization and "benefits before risk".
- ✓ Through volunteering, donations and organised courses, we can help elderly and vulnerable groups acquire equipment and new skills that will enable them to cope more easily with health problems and the health system itself.
- ✓ Users of the health care system must be aware of who uses health care products and what role the insurance company plays in this.
- ✓ Transparent work in the highest interest of the users should be the first priority.
- ✓ E-health services must be accepted and approved by civil society, which tests the service prior to publication/use and confirms or refutes the appropriateness and usefulness of the service itself.

"The average user of technology should be aware enough to be able to monitor their health." (Germany)

*"Raising awareness is a matter for the state."
(Slovenia)*

"Data protection is a prerequisite before starting anything!" (Slovenia)

"Awareness of data protection is extremely high and does not need to be pointed out. The older generation in particular has the motto "you'll have to guess our data!" There, negative prejudices have to be reduced anyway and the advantages and added values have to be pointed out." (Germany)

"Sometimes they look for information in the wrong places or trust the wrong information and that makes our work harder." (Switzerland)

"What will the insurance companies do with this information?" (Switzerland)

"Not every attempt of digitization is good or useful in practice." (Slovenia)

NEW TECHNOLOGY AND THE FUTURE

- ✓ The partners who focused on the field of "mental health" emphasized the importance of VR in the treatment of anxiety, stress, depression, PTSD and ADHD.
- ✓ Technology improves the quality of the healthcare system.
- ✓ Telemedicine will enable the elderly to remain in familiar environments for as long as possible.
- ✓ The new technology will make the work of medical workers easier when processing a large amount of data and interpreting it. At the same time, doctors will have more time for patients due to the use of technology.
- ✓ E-Health is developing exponentially fast, and we must follow this trend with the training and education of users so that they can critically assess these new processes in healthcare. At the same time, we must ensure the maintenance of social contacts and relationships between staff and patients.




"Let's pull the medical staff away from keyboards and screens. The patient is the one who needs 100% attention" (Slovenia.)

"Not digitization at any cost." (Slovenia)

"Health professionals are exhausted, with no availability to see patients in a timely manner and no capacity to accept new patients." (Switzerland)

When it comes to the general population "people will always prefer to see a doctor than to work with their phone app." (Switzerland)

"I'm sure that all these will take place in the near future in the field of Mental Health (e.g Smart Shelters for Mental Health Users)" (Greece)



Based on desk research in partner countries and a discussion on e-Health, it can be concluded that a major problem in all countries is the lack of digital literacy, accessibility to appropriate equipment and fear of what the future holds. Our goal is to empower the 18+ population to use the systems that will support the healthcare system in the future. To introduce users to the many options available to monitor their health and to teach them to think critically to distinguish between true and false information.