

Examining how digitalization excludes older adults

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Technology developments mean that older adults are increasingly at risk of digital exclusion. Moreover, it is more difficult for them to make use

of the possibilities offered by technology in countries like Sweden, where the degree of digitalization is high. This is shown in a doctoral thesis on older adults and digitalization by Sofia Alexopoulou.

"Older adults in Sweden with no knowledge of digital technology are excluded from participating in society to a greater extent than older adults in Greece. The reason being that in Sweden, a majority of activities require [digital tools](#)," says Sofia Alexopoulou, who recently defended her [doctoral thesis](#) in [political science](#) at Örebro University.

In her thesis, she has analyzed and compared policies for digitalization in Sweden and Greece. She has also interviewed older adults in the two countries about their views on possibilities, skills and accessibility when it comes to digital technology.

"In Sweden, the BankID app, which is required for identification for numerous online services, is a good example of how digital technology may lead to exclusion. Not having a BankID is like living in the shadows, preventing you from participating in society on equal terms."

A welfare problem

The fact that older adults are at risk of digital exclusion is a welfare problem and according to Sofia Alexopoulou, policy measures are required.

"In this day and age, digitalization affects an ever-increasing part of our lives. The welfare of the older generation depends on them being able to exercise their citizenship without limitations. Which is why this needs to be brought up on the agenda by politicians and other [decision-makers](#)," she says.

Support from family

In Sweden, municipalities are responsible for organizing elderly care. But for older adults to be digitally active, they rely on the support from their families.

"Even in Sweden, with such a strong welfare model, it's most often the family that provides support to older adults in need of help with digital technology. That is somewhat surprising," says Sofia Alexopoulou.

Older adults in Sweden are, however, reluctant to ask family members for help—unlike their counterparts in Greece.

"Older adults in Sweden are very independent and proud, while older adults in Greece feel that they can turn to their children and grandchildren for help any time."

What type of measures can contribute to making older adults more digitally active?

"In Sweden, one solution might be to offer a small allowance to children and grandchildren to share their skills with their older [family members](#). In Greece, one way to go would be to offer free IT classes for older adults at a municipal level."

Not a homogenous group

Sofia Alexopoulou emphasizes that when we are talking about older adults we are not talking about a homogenous group. In research literature, there are a number of labels that describe the older generation's relation to digital technology: silver surfers, athletes, technophobes and non-users.

"In research literature, the negative descriptions are used more often than the positive ones. Naturally, the use of digital technology is on the rise also among [older adults](#), but with the ongoing development of [digital technology](#), the digital divide is still very much a reality."

More information: Thesis:
[oru.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1719956&dswid=5135](https://orcu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1719956&dswid=5135)

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