



EMPOWERING OLDER ADULTS TO APPLY AFFORDABLE
ECO- AND AGE-FRIENDLY SOLUTIONS TO AGE IN PLACE

AFECO

Training Implementation Manual



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

The AFECO project is co-funded by the European Union's Erasmus + KA220-ADU – Cooperation partnerships in adult education programme under grant agreement no. 2022-1-NL01-KA220-ADU-000086242. The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

About the AFECO Training Implementation Manual

This Manual provides an overview on the AFECO Learning Material and Learning Programme and a set of operational guidelines for their use. The Manual is one of the results of the validation process conducted within Work Package 5 of the Erasmus+ project AFECO – Empowering older adults to apply affordable eco- and age-friendly solutions to age in place (cooperation partnership in adult education, project number: 2022-1- NL01-KA220-ADU-000086242).

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1. Introduction

The primary aim of the AFECO Training Implementation Manual is to provide a series of guidelines and practical advice when using the AFECO Learning Place and Learning Materials. The Learning Place, the free-access digital platform developed within the project, and its informative and educational content, the Learning Materials, were designed to meet the needs of two categories of users:

- Older people and informal carers who are willing to adopt age-friendly and eco-friendly habits and make their living environment, or those of their loved ones, more sustainable and safer;
- Professionals working with older adults - such as healthcare practitioners, educators, psychologists, teachers and lifelong-learning trainers – seeking to incorporate eco-friendly and age-friendly principles in their training programmes and educational activities to raise awareness and promote the adoption of such principles by older people.

The Learning Place and the Learning Materials were therefore designed to be flexible, easy-to-access and use tools that remain comprehensive and consistent, in order to meet the needs of different users and fit multiple usage scenarios.

In Chapter 2, the Manual describes the Learning Materials, providing an overview of the topics covered, their structure, and their layout in the Learning Place. A brief description of the main features of the Learning Place follows. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce and guide the reader through these project results, describing a clear picture of their core characteristics.

Chapter 3 presents a set of tips and operational suggestions to adopt and use the Learning Place and the Learning Materials, tailored for the two categories of users: older adults/informal caregivers and trainers. In this case, the main objective is to provide insights and give advice to make the most of them when used autonomously or in a learning environment.

Finally, Chapter 4 is aimed at those interested in learning the theoretical foundation and the process that have led to the creation of the Learning Place and Learning Materials. An outline of the structured path that was followed by the project partners, along with their planning and subsequent development, is provided here.

2. The AFECO Learning Materials and the Learning Place: Organisation and Structure

Section 2.1 outlines the structure of the courses composing the Learning Materials, highlights the rationale behind their thematic subdivision and organisation, and provides fundamental information about their layout and their accessibility via the Learning Place. Section 2.2. “Overview of the Learning Place” describes the platform and its key features. The purpose of the chapter is to provide learners or professionals the orientation they need to evaluate the suitability

of the learning environment for their work and to decide whether to pursue the training independently.

2.1 Overview of the Training Materials

The Learning Materials were developed to be as practical as possible when teaching age- and eco-friendly principles to older adults (and other learners). They provide information on:

- Adaptations
- Technology
- Social monitoring
- Safety and security
- Health
- Finances

All these aspects were approached from an eco- and age-friendly perspective, taking into consideration both the public and the home dimensions. During the WP3 co-creation process, the best way to structure and present the materials was explored. The division between the public and the home dimensions, rather than between eco- and age-friendly relevance, was chosen because feedback from participants and internal consortium meetings indicated that this framing was more engaging and effective.

Illustrating how these dimensions often overlap and can reinforce each other, leading to more practical, concrete actions while avoiding redundancy is helpful. Altogether, there are nine modules covering Technology, Social monitoring, Safety, Health and Affordable adaptation. With the exception of the last one, the topics were developed in two modules, one for the “At Home” dimension and the other for the “Around the home” environment (see Image 1).

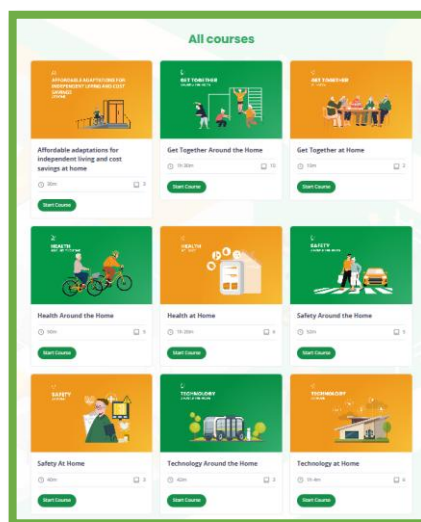


Image 1 – Overview of all courses

Each module represents a course, and is divided into lessons. In the “All courses” overview (Image 1), an indication of the duration of the different courses is given. Immediate access to the learning content from this page is possible by clicking on the green button “Start the course”. Otherwise, click on the course title for further information on the course, such as a short introduction to its content and the detailed Learning Programme, showing all the lessons included in the course (Image 2). An overview of the lessons included in each course (Image 3), which may vary from course to course, is also provided on the left side of the screen by clicking on “Start the course”.

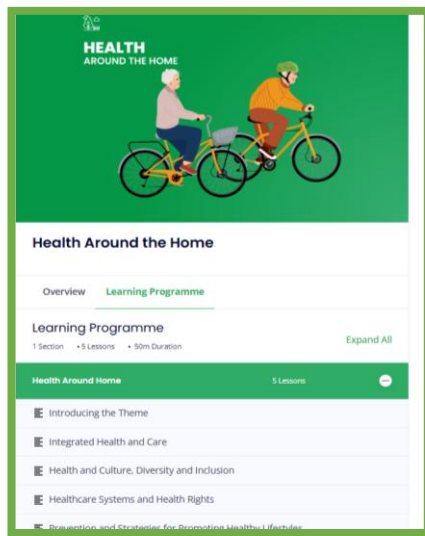


Image 2 - Overview of a course and its lessons

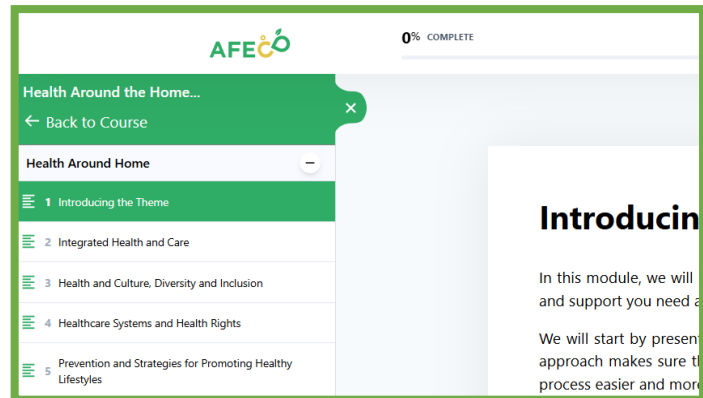


Image 3 – Overview of the lessons included in the course

Each course starts by introducing the theme, giving all the necessary definitions and explaining the main content. Examples and interactive elements to better understand the topic are comprised in every course, some within the text, such as videos and images (Image 4), and other such as the quizzes at the end of every course (Image 5), through “Alfi”, the Virtual assistant.

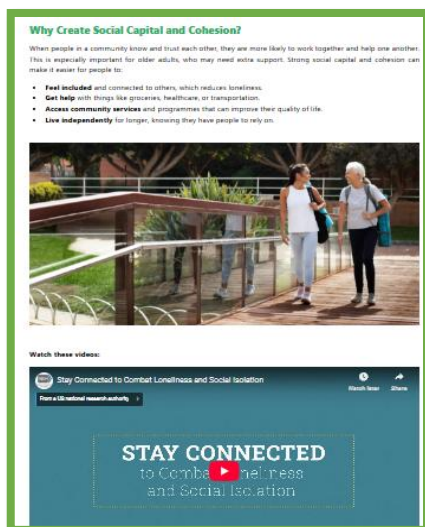


Image 5 - Snapshot of a lesson showing the layout of interactive elements

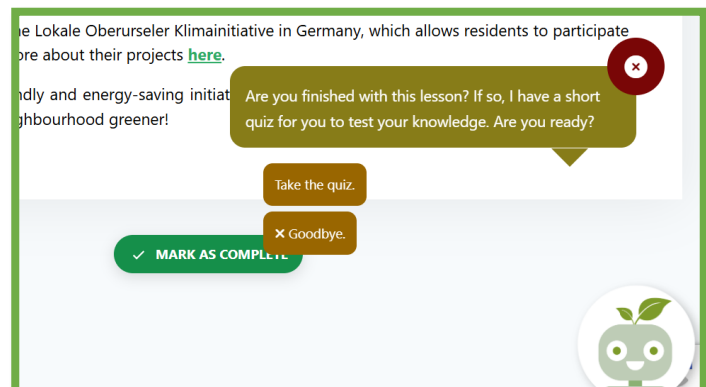


Image 4 – Alfi launching the end-of-the-course quiz

There is no set order for the courses. Users can choose one of the following solutions to set the order of their learning:

- 1) Take the initial survey and receive your courses' pathway according to your interests and needs;
- 2) Follow all the courses from “Affordable adaptation” and then in the order in which they are arranged;

- 3) Feel free to choose and, from time to time, let yourself be guided by the subjects you like best.

2.2 Overview of the Learning Place and its Main Features

The AFECO Learning Place can be accessed from the main menu of the AFECO website. Just click on the Learning Place and choose to: a) Enter as Guest, b) Register, c) Log in. By registering, you will be able to keep track of your progress, and you resume from where you left off. You can always register later on, or log in from the menu of the Learning Place on the left-hand side (see Image 6). Once inside the Learning Place, you can either:

- a) **“Begin your journey”** freely: you will see an overview of all courses and can choose any one to start; or



Image 8 –Top section of the Learning Place landing page

- b) to **“take the survey”** to find your pathway: answering a couple of questions and a learning pathway will be generated according to your needs and interests.

The **Age-Friendly Cities and Communities Questionnaire (AFCCQ)** was developed in 2020 by The Hague University of Applied Sciences, AFEdemy and Hulsebosch Advies on behalf of The Hague Municipality to find out from older people themselves how they perceive the age-friendliness of their city or community. The AFCCQ was adapted for the AFECO project and turned into a tool to investigate the needs and topics of interest of older adults based on how they experience their social or physical environment. Indeed, the survey findings on the AFECO Learning Place are based on personas developed through case studies.

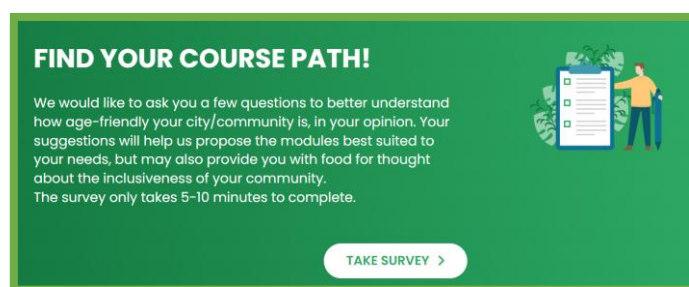


Image 10 – Snapshot of the Learning Place’s landing page – bottom of the page



Image 9 – AFCCQ survey

When starting a course, Alfi the Virtual Assistant will welcome you with a brief overview. Alfi remains at your side throughout the learning process to assist you, give additional information, suggest materials to further explore the topic and guide you through the final quiz. You can hide or summon Alfi at any time by simply clicking on its icon.

To ensure the best user experience when navigating the platform, an accessibility tool is always available on the screen. Clicking on its icon (Image 9) opens the accessibility menu (Images 10 and 11) to adjust the font size, enable the text reader, enlarge buttons and access other features.



Image 13 –
Accessibility
tool's icon

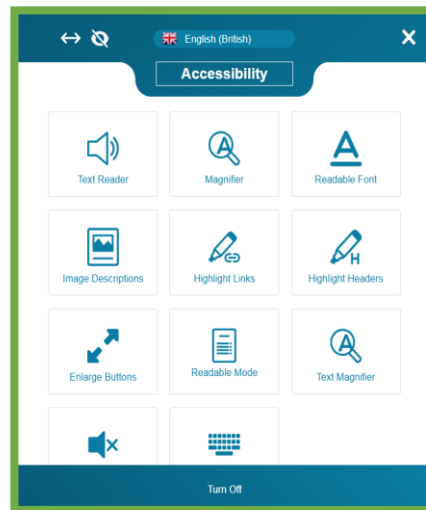


Image 14 – Accessibility menu part 1

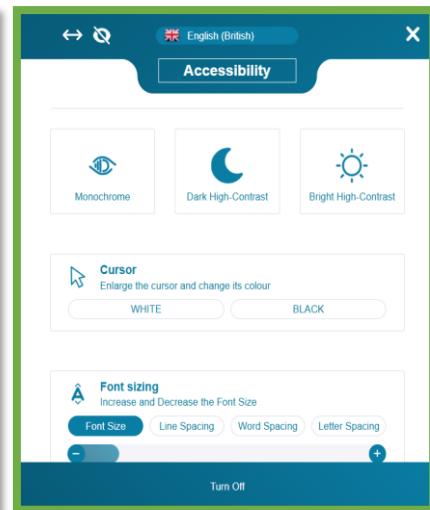


Image 15 – Accessibility menu part 2

For more detailed information on how to navigate the Learning Place, please refer to the illustrated user guide, which is available on the AFECO website [here](#).

3. How to use the AFECO Learning Material and Learning Place

This chapter offers valuable advice on how to make the most of the Learning Material and Learning Place. Most of the recommendations were collected during the second round of validation, conducted as part of Activity 3 “Testing of the e-learning platform”, within Work Package 5, “Validation and Guidance” (for more information on the validation results see the AFECO-Validation Report). Additional insights, albeit to a lesser extent, were drawn from the earlier co-creation phase under Work Package 3, “Curriculum”. This second validation round involved focus groups held in each project pilot site with older adults, informal and formal carers and professionals. Among the many aspects investigated, facilitators asked participants for their views and suggestions on how to promote the use of the Learning Place and related Learning Materials based on their professional and personal experience.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first is for trainers (formal carers, healthcare professionals, teachers and educators) and offers a series of tips on presenting and embedding the Learning Place and the Learning Material into educational settings and activities like

workshops, classes, seminars. The second session is primarily aimed at older adults and provides insights and recommendations to navigate the Learning Place and its content independently and enjoy a personalised and enriching experience.

3.1 Tips for Trainers to Maximise the Use of the AFECO Learning Materials and Learning Place

Below is a collection of suggestions gathered in the six countries involved in the pilot phase, which may be helpful for anyone wishing to adopt the AFECO Learning Place as a training tool.

- 1) **Organise at least an initial face-to-face session** to explain the Learning Place features and how to navigate it. This is one of the most important suggestions given by both learners and trainers.
- 2) **Emphasise the practical benefits**, such as improving quality of life, saving money, and making the living environment safer. This could motivate older adults to engage with the platform.
- 3) **Allow older adults to explore the platform independently** after the initial presentation. This is important to maintain autonomy and stimulate reflection on one's own situation.
- 4) In order to reach the targeted audience, **promoting the AFECO Learning Place** should be carried on with the endorsement of **local community centres, healthcare providers, social services and a well-know local association** to introduce the platform as a trusted resource.
- 5) The topics covered are sensitive to the local context, so **adding interactive elements that reflect the local dimension** (such as video highlighting local initiatives) **is encouraged**. Interactive elements are highly appreciated and considered useful to better understand the real-life application of the concepts presented.
- 6) Finally, some people suggested that **a printed version of the programme would increase its accessibility**. To stay true to its commitment to sustainability and ecological principles, the AFECO consortium opted not to print materials. However, based on your target audience, you might consider printing some of the materials.

3.2 Tips for an Independent Use of the AFECO Learning Materials and Learning Place

Below are some tips to guide and simplify independent use of the Learning Place. Like those in the previous section, they are based on suggestions that emerged during the focus groups and are intended as practical guidance for users who are not trainers, professionals or experts, but for citizens over 65 who are interested in learning some new aspect related to age- and eco-friendly principles. However, as you will see, this advice can be useful for users of any age or background.

- 1) Before starting your journey, review the [Learning Place User Guide](#) to familiarise yourself with its structure and features and make your experience navigating the content smoother and more enjoyable;
- 2) Even though the Learning Place is accessible on any device, it is designed to be explored via a laptop or tablet. If possible, choose one of these two devices to support your learning, so that you can have a better experience with the features of the Learning Place, read texts more easily, and watch videos in higher resolution;
- 3) The Learning Place has a **feature to improve accessibility**, to make it even more user-friendly. Click on the icon on the upper right of the screen and choose from the accessibility options;
- 4) Although **registering with the Learning Place** is not a mandatory step to access content, it will allow you to keep track of your progress. By so doing, you will always know where you are, how far you have come, and what you still need to explore. You can leave the Learning Place without worrying about finishing the course or marking the point you have reached. You can return at any-time and pick up from where you left off. This will make it even easier for you to follow your learning pathway at your own pace and according to your schedule and the available time;
- 5) Do not underestimate the usefulness of the **survey** on the home page of the Learning Place! Completing the questionnaire before embarking on your learning journey will help you identify the contents which might be of greater benefit for you based on your characteristics and life circumstances;
- 6) If you prefer not to complete the questionnaire, it is a good idea **take a look at the “All Courses” section** before starting the journey in the Learning Place. This section provides an overview of all the macro-themes and you can choose the ones that best meet your needs or interests. You can then build your personal pathway, choosing which courses to prioritise and which to save for later;
- 7) Additionally, when accessing a course, it is advisable to first **review the list of lessons** on the left side of the screen. This gives you a better idea of the topics, allowing you to decide whether to explore all the lessons or only some of them. Of course, you're warmly encouraged to go through all the lessons according to the order in which they are presented!
- 8) Explore **all the topics**! Some themes may not seem of great interest or relevance to you at first, or they may deal with subjects you already know. Don't stop at appearances and give a chance to less appealing courses too! You may uncover information and advice that you thought did not concern you, but which can make a significant difference to the quality of your life. In addition, lessons often include videos and in-depth materials through which you might discover new and unexpected information, even on topics you already know.
- 9) Make the most of **Alfi**, your virtual guide! In addition to providing useful tips for navigating the courses, Alfi is a precious source of extra information that will allow you to delve deeper into the topics and discover unheard of facts and insights.

- 10) Alfi also plays an important role when it comes to **quizzes**! At the end of each lesson, Alfi will ask questions to test your understanding. Don't be fooled by their simplicity! These questions are a simple but really effective way to reinforce key concepts or identify any gaps in your knowledge, giving you the chance to revisit and review.
- 11) As you go through the lessons, you will find **links to videos and materials** to explore the topic in greater depth. We recommend setting aside some time to explore them. Sometimes they will be of interest to you, others perhaps a little less so. In some cases, they may present solutions that are not applicable or feasible in your life context. This is normal because people have different interests and our living environment can be very different from that of other people. Therefore, not every suggestion will fit every situation! However, we encourage you to take videos and in-depth materials as a stimulus to broaden your knowledge on specific topics, or to discover other related topics by selecting based on your interests, your opportunities, and initiatives in the area where you live.
- 12) **Share and discuss what you learn with others.** It might sound trivial or think that other people don't care about it or you are already familiar with it. This is often not the case! Moreover, things that may not be new or useful to you, may be new and useful to others! Finally, sharing thoughts with others can lead you to discover new things, opportunities, and initiatives in your area that you did not know about.

4. Theoretical Background and Methodology: The Origins and Development of Learning Materials and the Learning Place at a Glance

This chapter provides a brief overview on the theoretical assumptions underlying the Learning Programme and the Learning Place and the methodology adopted to design them. The purpose of this section is not to dwell on these aspects, but to convey to readers the vision and mission that guided the project partners in their design and implementation. Although this is mainly intended to be an operational manual, we believe it is important for readers to be aware of these aspects to fully appreciate and understand them.

Readers are therefore invited to consult this chapter to gain insight into the guiding principles behind these tools and the partners' effort to make them as up-to-date, relevant to older people, inclusive and accessible as possible. For those interested in more detailed information on the theoretical aspects and methodological approaches of the AFECO project and its different phases, the text includes timely references to comprehensive documents, which are freely available in the "[Resources](#)" section of the AFECO project website.

4.1 Theoretical Background

The overall objective of the AFECO project is to promote the skills and competences of older adults enabling them to analyse and use affordable age- and eco-friendly principles in their living environment – both at home and in their community or neighbourhood). These two settings hold functional and ideological relevance, and should work together in a complementary and supportive way to create the right conditions to prioritise social inclusion, active ageing and ageing in place through an environmentally responsible lifestyle.

The AFECO Learning Materials and Learning Place are designed to raise awareness and educate older people, (in)formal caregivers and social workers about:

a) The application of age-friendly principles at home and in the neighbourhood as valuable tools for active ageing and ageing in place. Age-friendly environments can play a crucial role in empowering citizens to:

- Age with better physical and mental health
- Actively participate in society
- Remain independent and in good health for as long as possible

b) The cultural and behavioural change required to promote age-friendly environmental principles through their interaction with eco-friendly principles.

c) The new configuration and challenges posed on age- and eco-friendly physical environments by the continuous technological advance and assisted living systems for ageing in place

d) The role of age-friendly and eco-friendly environments – both at home and in the community or neighbourhood - as valuable tools in caregiving contexts that can compensate for the biological decline due to frailty or illness of older people requiring care.

4.2 Methodology

Built upon this theoretical background, the Learning Materials on eco-friendly and age-friendly principles and the Learning Place are the outcome of a process undertaken by the project partners. This process included extensive desk and field research and fieldwork activities.

Specifically, in order to identify relevant issues and needs based on real-life experiences of older adults in the six participating countries, the following activities were carried out within Work Package 2 titled “Comparative analysis and educational gaps”:

- A literature review on the state of the art of eco-friendly and ecological solutions;
- A collection of good practices from the partner countries;
- Focus groups and in-depth interviews with older adults and professionals to identify gaps, barriers to adopting age-friendly and eco-friendly principles, as well as facilitators and potential positive scenarios resulting from their application;
- The development of case studies to be used as a paradigm in designing learning content, to ensure that it reflects real-life needs and circumstances of older adults.

(For further information, see [AFECo-Overall-Assessment-Report](#) and [AFECo-Baseline-Report, AFECo – Comparative analysis of barriers and facilitators](#)).

Following this initial foundational phase, participatory methodologies and co-creation activities with older adults and professionals were undertaken within Work Package 3, titled “Curriculum”. The purpose of these activities was to define the specific content of the courses composing the Learning Materials, clarify the characteristics needed to make them suitable for older adults, and establish the main features of the Learning Place. As for the Learning Materials, the digital platform, designed and deployed within Work Package 4 titled “e-Learning platform”, was developed thanks to continuous input from the main target groups to ensure maximum accessibility and usability. To reach these objectives, the partners:

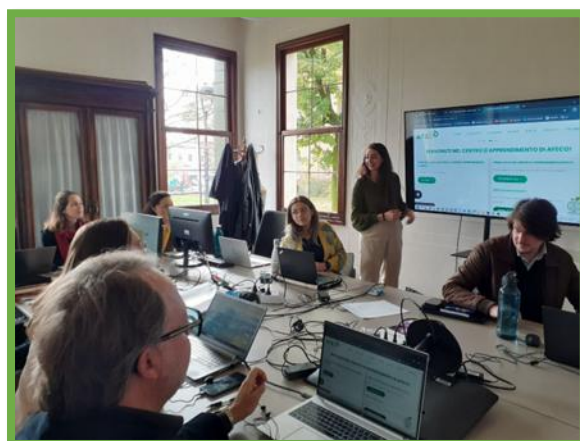
- Organised round tables to identify relevant cross-cultural issues related to the adoption of eco- and age-friendly principles;
- Managed national workgroups with older adults and professionals to better define specific learning needs, interests and effective learning approaches;
- Held 2 co-creation sessions in each project country to review some excerpts from the draft Learning Programme, and gathered feedback for its refinement and improvement.



Picture 1 – Co-creation with Older-Adults in Portugal



Picture 2 – Co-creation with Older-adults in Greece



Picture 3 – Co-creation with professionals in Italy

Following the finalisation of the Learning Materials, and in view of the final release of the Learning Place, a two-round validation process was conducted within Work Package 5, titled “Validation and Guidance”, with the aim of:

- Validating the accessibility of the training contents and their integration into and applicability to older adults’ living environment and daily lives;
- Validating the accessibility of the AFECO Learning Place;
- Validating the suitability of the Learning Materials for integration into training and educational programmes aimed at older adults in the framework of life-long learning;
- Validating the usefulness of the AFECO Learning Place as a training tool to be included in educational activities and training programmes addressed to older adults in life-long learning.

To this end, quantitative and qualitative data were collected at each pilot site, involving the two target groups - learners and trainers - through questionnaires and focus groups in each pilot country. The questionnaires, administered during the first validation round, aimed to gather feedback and suggestions from users to guide implementing minor revisions to the programme and fine-tune the platform, enhancing its accessibility and user-friendliness before its final release. Focus groups were used in the second validation round when the final version of the platform was presented, and qualitative experience-based data was gathered.

(For further information, see AFECO- Validation Report).



Picture 5 – Validation in Poland



Picture 4 – Validation in Germany



Picture 6 – Validation in Portugal



Picture 7 – Validation in Italy

5. Conclusion

Building on the foundational approach of the Learning Materials and the Learning Place, this Manual is intended to be both informative and practical as well as simple and accessible. Therefore, we hope that it has succeeded in the dual purpose of offering a comprehensive overview of these tools and their purpose, and providing suggestions in making the most of them.

Developed through a 30-month dialogue within an international consortium, the Learning Place and the Learning Materials aspire to reflect the plurality and diversity that characterise participating countries involved in the implementation of eco- and age-friendly principles. We are aware of the difficulties of adequately covering this diversity, which is of a social, cultural and economic nature. Equally difficult is to keep up with the technological, social and economic changes that stand at the core of the themes that were covered.

Nevertheless, we are confident that we have succeeded in identifying key cross-cutting issues. More importantly, we hope we have raised awareness of the importance of eco- and age-friendly principles for the well-being of older adults, and of the fact that everyone has to do something, however small, to adopt them in their own lives and living environments. Ultimately, this is the true goal of the AFE^{CO} Project.

Like the Learning Place and Learning Materials, this Manual describes usage scenarios and possibilities that build on the viewpoints, as well as the professional and life experiences of a wide and diverse group of international learners and trainers. We are aware that they do not encompass the full range of opportunities and potential for use, which, even in this case, are strongly influenced by local contexts and constant change. Nonetheless, we believe they can act as a stimulus, a starting point for a creative, versatile use, open to the evolving needs of autonomous learners and various educational and learning settings.