PROVIDING DIGITAL SKILLS FOR AN INCLUSIVE EUROPE

Position paper on providing digital skills for an inclusive Europe: the case of telecentres and their e-Facilitators

Authors: Bastian Pelka (TUDO), Christoph Kaletka (TUDO), Gabriela Ruseva (TE)

Editor: Gabriel Rissola (TE)

telecentre europe
digital community networking

tu technische universität dortmund
sfs Sozialforschungsstelle
Zentrale Wissenschaftliche Einrichtung

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

Providing digital skills for an inclusive Europe

POSITION PAPER ON PROVIDING DIGITAL SKILLS FOR AN INCLUSIVE EUROPE: THE CASE OF TELECENTRES AND THEIR E-FACILITATORS

BACKGROUND

The digital gap challenge remains, but good practice does exist

18% of EU population aged 16-74 has never used the internet[1]. This means a large group of adult citizens is excluded from services such as education, eHealth, wide parts of the labour market or eGovernment. A national comparison shows that this percentage is not set in stone: In some countries (Iceland, Denmark, Netherlands, UK, Finland, Sweden or Norway) only 1-8%% of adult persons never used the internet. In other countries (like Italy, Greece, Romania) more than 30% never used the internet[2].

The digital gap has a socio demographic aspect

While the overall target figures of the Digital Agenda Scoreboard might be reached[3], it is obvious that regional and national differences matter a lot. Digital exclusion seems to be a matter of socio demographic factors: correlations with socio demographic background of internet users and "offliners" indicate that vulnerable people are not only less active on the web[4] but do also draw less profit from their activities if they are online[5]. This group of "digitally excluded" persons is largely made up of people aged 65 to 74 years old, people on low incomes, the unemployed and the less educated[6]. "Bridging this digital divide can help members of disadvantaged social groups to participate on a more equal footing in digital society (including services of direct interest to them such as eLearning, eGovernment, eHealth) and to tackle their disadvantage through increased employability".

The digital gap hampers EU's innovativeness

On the other hand, the European economy "is hampered by a shortage of ICT practitioner skills[7]. "39% of the EU workforce has insufficient digital skills, 14% has no digital skills at all"[8]. This competence gap results in a growing deficit of ICT professional skills, forecast to reach 900,000 by 2020, which challenges EU development

[1] Eurostat (2015): Individuals who have never used the internet. Online:
http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tin00093&plugin=1
[2] Ibid.
[3] European Commission (2014): Digital Inclusion and Skills. Digital Agenda Scoreboard 2014. Online: http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/internet-use-digital-skills-and-online-content
[4] Ibid.
[5] Dudenhöffer, Kathrin/Michael Meyen (2012): Digitale Spaltung im Zeitalter der Sättigung. Eine Sekundäranalyse der ACTA 2008 zum Zusammenhang von Internetnutzung und soziale Ungleichheit. In: Publizistik, 1/2012, 57. Jahrgang: 7-26
[6] European Commission (2010): A Digital Agenda for Europe. Online: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52010DC0245R%2801%29&from=EN
[7] European Commission 2009: eSkills Monitor study. Monitoring eskills supply and demand in Europe. Online: http://www.eskills-monitor.eu/
[8] European Commission (2014): Digital Inclusion and Skills. Digital Agenda Scoreboard 2014. Online: http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/internet-use-digital-skills-and-online-content

targets related not only to inclusiveness, but also to innovativeness. The Scoreboard sustains this forecast on an Empirica draft study (2013). The final version says that in 2015 the unfilled vacancies for ICT practitioners are believed to amount to 509,000, and forecasted to be 913,000 in 2020[9].

The digital gap today is a competence gap

While policy on digital inclusion in the past decade focussed on providing ICT access, remarkable success can be seen in the spread of ICT access throughout Europe. Cheap digital devices (like smartphones, TV and tablets) and sinking connectivity costs lead to an increasing percentage of Europeans having access to digital means. The Digital Agenda Scoreboard indicates that those targets related to internet access (broadband subscriptions, regular internet use) will match their aim by 2015 while targets related to the competence of use (using e-government, using returning forms, buying online) are in danger to be failed. This raises the question of adequate means to mediate and multiply digital skills.

Learning spaces and the human factor

Telecentres are low threshold physical digital learning and empowerment spaces that provide ICT competences

Telecentres have placed themselves as providers of ICT access and digital competences in local communities. They cover the intersection of ICT based learning (for any purpose, such as employability or leisure, lifelong learning or personal development), ICT competences (learning how to use applications, how to surf the web or how to handle a tablet) and community building (local based communities or groups of interest like senior internet cafes or telecentres for migrants). EU Commission's IPTS acknowledges this by stating: "(…) digital inclusion and social inclusion actors such as Public Internet Access Points, public libraries, Third Sector organisations including NGOs as well as social workers, in a word, eInclusion 'intermediaries' play a crucial role, both in providing digital literacy to excluded groups as well as using ICT to support social inclusion of groups at risk of exclusion such as to acquire new skills (through eLearning platforms) or for employment."[10]

"There is a huge variety of eInclusion intermediary actors and roles. Most of these actors belong to the public sector (58%) and mainly consist of public libraries, municipal/local government organizations and government-run telecentres. Third sector organizations make up almost 40% of the universe and include associations, charitable organizations, or foundations and NGOs combined. The private sector (6%) is mostly represented by private training organizations and cybercafés."[11] Telecentres can be distinguished by the support they offer and the proximity to their target groups. A four level pattern has been developed[12]:

[9] Empirica (Ed.) 2014: ESkills for jobs in Europe: Measuring progress and moving ahead. Final report. Online: http://eskills-monitor2013.eu/fileadmin/monitor2013/documents/MONITOR_Final_Report.pdf

[10] Joint Research Centre, Information Society Unit: The role of intermediaries in eInclusion. Online: http://is.jrc.ec.europa.eu/pages/EAP/eInclusion/intermediaries.html

[11] Rissola, Gabriel/Maria Garrido (2013): Survey on eInclusion Actors in the EU27. Online: http://ftp.jrc.es/EURdoc/JRC84429.pdf

[12] Rissola G. /Diaz A. (2010), "European VET Solution for e-Inclusion Facilitators: Multi-country context analysis". Executive summary. Online: http://www.efacilitator.eu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Summary_WP4_VET4e-I_final_all_languages.pdf

Level 1: On demand assistance	Passive role; the telecentre only reacts to user's demand of help.
Level 2: Level 1 + Training	Provider of digital literacy training, the telecentre can also look for/attract the users and give a social orientation to his/her intervention.
Level 3: Level 2+ User empowerment	Provider of social inclusion services, the telecentre promotes the digital autonomy of the users and their achievement of personal goals taking advantage of the many resources available at the Information Society
Level 4: Level 3 + Active participation in community	Provider of community service-learning, the telecentre promotes the critical use of ICT and the engagement of the users with their local communities/social belonging groups through their active participation of community/social projects.

There are "almost 250,000 eInclusion organizations in the EU27, or an average of one eInclusion organization for every 2,000 inhabitants". Half of the responding organisations provide employability and a quarter entrepreneurship related services. More than a quarter of these institutions (25.8 % of the public and 28.4 % of the third sector funded institutions) are targeting individuals with physical disabilities 18.8 % of the public and 24.1 % of the third sector funded organisations are targeting individuals with mental disabilities[13]. Other target groups are disengaged youth (e.g. NEETs), long-term unemployed people, domiciliary carers, migrants, or housewives – making the telecentre a space of eInclusion for a broad variety of vulnerable or marginalised target groups at risk of digital exclusion. These institutions, predominantly publicly funded, operate with mostly less than 10 employees and a budget of less than 100,000 EUR per year – shaping the "physical" eInclusion support structure in Europe as widely spread, but consisting of small institutions.

Their local base and pedagogy are aiming at providing a low-threshold environment, empowering vulnerable people to access the digital world. This institutional setting seems a perfect match for targeting the socio economic dimension of the digital gap. Though, there is a constant need for further professionalization of eInclusion actors, as this is a quite new branch of social welfare. Existing institutions, networks, organisations and approaches need further reflection, improvement and recognition in order to expand their impact. Policy recommendations in the following chapter will prioritize actions to be taken to improve the e-inclusion situation of individuals and the supply of digital competences for the EU economy.

eFacilitators are key actors for providing digital competences for vulnerable people
The actual low-threshold space of the telecentre can be regarded as one key ingredient in providing ICT access and competences; the other one is the person that interacts with those seeking ICT access, competences or social activities – such as connecting and collaborating with peers. People who are disconnected from the digital world today show a multitude of disadvantage features: this group has little options to access the formal education system, so non-formal adult education becomes their unique option (apart from family and friends, i.e. informal learning) to get acquainted with e-skills and digital opportunities. This makes this target group a multi-faceted disadvantaged group that will need special support on their way to the digital society. Education staff with abilities in dealing with this target group is a key for providing digital competences.

eFacilitators are in need of further professionalization
Recent years have seen a constant rise in requirements towards educational staff working in telecentres. Telecentre staff meets challenges like reduced public funding, new labour market demands for employability concerning ICT qualifications and changing technological systems (tablets, cloud applications, apps). On the other side, end users are requesting new services (mobile devices, online job searching, certification of competences)

---

[13] Rissola, Gabriel/Maria Garrido (2013): Survey on eInclusion Actors in the EU27. Online: http://ftp.jrc.es/EURdoc/JRC84429.pdf

and new target groups are entering the digital world and face competence gaps. These developments lead to a demand for professional training for educational staff of telecentres.

Telecentre Europe (directly or through its members) has been involved in a strand of four EU financed development projects (Lifelong learning programme, 2011-2014)[14] aiming at supporting the professionalization of telecentres, their services and staff. One of the outcomes was the branding of the profile of the "eFacilitator" as a vocational profile of educational staff for ICT competences in telecentres. But more work has to be done: professionalization has to reach other countries, all levels of staff in telecentres and other welfare organisations that do not understand themselves right now as "telecentres".

It is difficult to estimate the number of persons working with end users in the field of eInclusion, but taking 250,000 organisations as a basis, it seems safe to argue that around 250,000-375,000 persons in the EU are working on digital competences of disadvantaged persons. Only tentative research has been done on the socio-demographic characteristics of this field of employment, but it seems to prevail a young, female and highly educated workforce with a high diversity of educational profiles[15]. This staff can be regarded as persons with high interest in social innovation and strong links between this group and social innovators could be traced through different social entrepreneurship organisations. This staff is in need of constant training and issues such as means to initiate and sustain fundraising, certification of competences and a regular crew change rate have to be tackled. Recent research and development activities are aiming at these issues by developing customized and certifiable curricula for telecentres' staff[16]. The aim of this on-going research and development activities is to support and secure professionalization within this new arising working field in order to make it more efficient for end users and more attractive for staff working on Inclusion issue.

Getting the profession officially recognised – either as a stand-alone profile or as specialization of an existing one – tends to multiply further formal training and mobility opportunities. Prospects for e-facilitators beyond telecentres range from advising schools or libraries on digital training to dynamising collaboration inside co-working spaces or providing ICT guidance to small business. While one of the main issues faced by the e-skills mismatch in the IT industry is the limited interest shown by females on IT careers. On the contrary, the eInclusion sector is attracting women on a higher degree (2 women every 1 man on average). Hence, a window to increase the number of women in IT can be opened if they can experiment the social dimension of IT by acting as e-Facilitator.

Challenges and policy recommendations

The situation described above is calling for a constant development of telecentres as low-threshold specialised providers of ICT competences as a permanent jigsaw piece in providing employment and welfare support in the digital society – either for personal wellbeing or for employability. With requirements both on the demand side (which competences are needed?) and on the individual side (which restrictions and options do users have?) telecentres are requested to constantly develop their efforts and approaches. This process can be understood as a feature of a constant professionalization process – monitoring needs and developing matching offers. The following policy recommendations are aiming at supporting this process towards a more sustainable, flexible and high quality ICT competence support infrastructure:

---

[14] http://www.efacilitator.eu, http://www.trans-efacilitator.eu, http://escouts.eu/, http://www.keycompetences.eu
[15] eFacilitator (Ed.) (2012): Results of a multi-country analysis: Context in four countries. Online: http://www.efacilitator.eu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/VET4e-i_Multi-Country_Context_AnalysisDEF.pdf
[16] see http://www.trans-efacilitator.eu

1. Although the spread of telecentres in EU is wide, local, regional and national differences are strong. The average of one telecentre per 2,000 inhabitants disguises the fact that ICT learning spaces are out of reach for many millions of Europeans. **More spaces should be provided** in regions with a weak infrastructure of these entities. These spaces could results from cooperation with existing organisations and "spaces" – such as employment agencies, cultural clubs or welfare system entities. Cooperation could actively be supported by policy.

2. Existing spaces need to be **publicly supported** to have a better reach, and existing infrastructures (public libraries, civic centers, even schools) can be equipped as telecentres to cover underserved areas.

3. The impact of telecentres could be increased by supporting the **professionalization of spaces**: Policy should support and initiate the development and spreading of learning content (for end users) and methodology (for telecentre staff), instruments for continuous training and evaluation, tools for awareness raising and managing, sustaining and enlarging telecentres.

4. The here-described movement is currently focussed on providing ICT competences to vulnerable people. But as shown the EU economy strives for ICT competent staff on all levels of expertise. With ICT gaining importance in different sectors that up to now offered employment possibilities for staff without ICT competences (like logistics, food or construction), ICT competences are required on low skilled or even unskilled occupational level. With progressing ICT use in those sectors there is a huge competence gap rising in EU workforce's ICT skills. Telecentres could play an important role in providing those competences to active staff, bringing in target group oriented approaches and methodologies and to combine these competences with approaches of innovation. Telecentres see themselves as providers of inclusion for vulnerable people and – at the same time – competences for ICT-using **industry**. But industry skill providers could be enlarged, bringing together the world of business/labour and the TC movement.

5. Opening new welfare structures for the "digital thought" will increase the impact of telecentres: hospitals, senior residences, cultural centres, workshops for disabled, kindergartens, libraries and other institutions have strong relations with "offliner" target groups. An important step in providing digital competences to vulnerable target groups would be to create an "*ecosystem of ICT competence supporting structures*" – bringing together target group specific spaces, staff and approached with ICT skills. This would need facilitation, active network building, exchange of experiences, approaches and ideas and a cooperative infrastructure.

6. Telecentres are local community infrastructures, specially valued in smaller communities (small towns, villages, etc.). They have strong relations to different target groups of end users, they have experience in the social sector and rely on well-established spaces as learning, meeting and socialising areas. These are key ingredients for actively supporting social innovation in their target groups and local communities. With support in further development, telecentres could be developed as **social innovation catalysts** – as regional digital social innovation incubators.

7. The **eFacilitator profile** is a key ingredient for approaching vulnerable target groups. This profile could be supported by professionalization of staff by formal and social recognition, transfer of innovation to other countries. As there is no such thing as a European recognition process valid for all countries, policy should support national or even regional procedures for recognition of this profile. This could be sustained by awareness raising means – for potential eFacilitators as well as for ICT using industry -, by disseminating good practices, by facilitating exchange of experts and the layer of practice or by research and consultation for telecentre actors. National or regional education authorities should foster

the recognition of this profile and should build links to existing profiles and employment possibilities. The overall aim would be to link the eFacilitator profile to the Digital Agenda and related eInclusion policy.

8. Telecentres provide effective education, training and certification measures outside of formal education systems. But support is needed to **accredit and certify** the competence acquired through non-formal learning to increase their employability prospects. It is important to recognise that digital competence should always be developed and assessed within a context and that the relevance of the context will differ according to the needs of the particular audience.

9. *Further research* **on target groups** could improve the function of telecentres as employment and welfare state instruments: Target groups are changing and so are their needs. Addressing their needs will need more qualitative data on "offliners" restrictions, ambitions, and potentials.

10. Telecentres and the need for providing ICT competences in EU should be supported by intense **awareness rising** – targeting on digital excluded persons, but also on industry and labour market actors in order to promote telecentres as adequate learning spaces for the digital society.

About Telecentre Europe

Telecentre Europe is a European non-for-profit organisation (NGO) and a member based association with a central office in Brussels, Belgium.

We represent publicly funded telecentres/telecentre networks, ICT learning centres, adult education centres and libraries across Europe where children and adults can access the Internet, learn the latest digital skills and keep up to date with technology and community developments.

We coordinate a number of projects, programmes and campaigns that empower people through ICT by finding new paths to employment, community life, relevant information and staying in touch with friends and family. All our members and partners believe that Information and Communication technology has an enormous potential to combat social exclusion and poverty.

Contact: contact@telecentre-europe.org | Rue du Méridien, 30 - 1210 Brussels Belgium | +32 (0)2 35 00 627