DIGITAL SINGLE MARKET STRATEGY NEEDS DIGITALLY-SKILLED EUROPEAN CITIZENS TO SUCCEED

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Telecentre Europe's position paper on Digital Single Market Strategy

Author: Gabriela Ruseva
Contributors: Mara Jakobsone, Manus Hanratty
Editor: Gabriel Rissola

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TELECENTRE EUROPE'S POSITION PAPER ON DIGITAL SINGLE MARKET STRATEGY

Where does Telecentre Europe stand?

Key messages:

- Europeans should be considered not only as consumers, but as digitally-active producers, workers and citizens.

- Development of e-government services should go hand-in-hand with development of skills.

- Entrepreneurs and micro, small & medium-size enterprise (SME) owners need up-to-date digital skills even more to remain competitive.

- The digital skills gap will grow among people (and countries/regions) with contrasting socio-economic backgrounds, if no suitable intervention is made. Digital literacy and skills development for social participation and employment (i.e. e-inclusion) should be a top priority, with a dedicated action in the Strategy Roadmap.

- A major initiative on Digital Skills for Jobs should be launched, building over initiatives such as the Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs, which should have a more prominent role and leadership in the Strategy.

- Digital skills for Jobs should become a priority on the national level. Targeted financial support should be designated for national and local coalitions for digital jobs.

It is important that every citizen has digital skills

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are everywhere, touching all areas of our lives, so digital competence has become essential for every individual.

- *For work:* ICT has spread throughout the work place and all jobs now require at least some digital proficiency (from SMEs to administration/clerical jobs, warehousing/materials handling, caregiving, etc.), if not higher digital skills.
- *For learning:* We are introduced to ICT technologies from our youngest years when we start to learn in school (and even before that) and they support life-long learning.
- *For participating in society and civic engagement:* A significant part of our communication and social interaction takes place online, we are using social media sites and blogs to find information, get involved and express our opinion.
- *In our private life:* ICT plays an ever-larger role in our private lives for leisure/entertainment, our health and wellbeing, keeping in touch with family and friends and providing greater purchasing choices.

To benefit from ICT in all these spheres of life, we need to know how. Still, according to the Digital Economy and Society Index 2015[1], 25% of Europeans have no digital skills, meaning that they are not able to perform online operations such as finding information, reading news, sending e-mails, communicating, job-searching, internet banking, etc. Furthermore, if we consider that to function effectively in the digital society one needs at least basic to medium level skills, almost half the European Union population (41%) do not attain this level. The Digital Single Market (DSM) Strategy estimates that "A Digital Single Market can create opportunities for new start-ups and allow existing companies to grow and profit from the scale of a market of over 500 million people"[2]. Without empowering those 41% with skills, the EU is missing out on half of its consumers.

The Digital Single Market Strategy promotes digital skills

Telecentre Europe welcomes a DSM strategy which promotes an inclusive e-society.

We support President Juncker that building a digital single market should *"go hand-in-hand with efforts to boost digital skills and learning across society"*. Under the inclusive society action, the Commission promises to ensure that every citizen has the necessary skills to benefit from e-services (e-government, e-justice, e-health, e-energy or e-transport, to name a few) or be fit for a job which requires a digital skills and participate in society.

Initiatives such as the Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs should continue and even expand their focus from ICT professions to a wider spectrum of jobs requiring a certain level of digital proficiency. "In the near future 90% of jobs - engineering, accountancy, nursing, medicine, art, architecture, and many more - will require some level of digital skills".[3]

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[1] Source: Annex – Structure of the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) including EU average data

[2] p. 3 of Commission Communication A Digital Single Market Strategy for Europe COM(2015) 192 final

[3] Lucilla Sioli, DG CNECT in her blogpost https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/blog/here-how-we-will-improve-digital-skills-and-create-more-jobs-europe-0

We are keen to support strong action to tackle the challenge of the digital gap[4]. We would like to stress that digital literacy is not only about equipping people with digital skills, it also means empowering them to become pro-active citizens and consumers in a digital society.

Digital skills for jobs & inclusion for all should be brought at the forefront of the Strategy

To strengthen the e-inclusive aspect of the DSM Strategy, people need to be considered as consumers and producers, workforce and citizens, because no individual category covers all groups of citizens in need of soft skills and digital skills. Education and training for jobs, digital skills and lifelong learning in a digital environment should be brought to the forefront.

Even though digital skills are mentioned in several places in the Strategy, it lacks focus on digital inclusion[5] and does not foresee concrete measures for boosting skills. The spotlight is on its economic aspects: telecom regulations, copyright, e-commerce, ICT infrastructure, cloud computing.

Better regulation alone will not automatically result in better online consumer protection. Citizens need to be equipped with the skills to protect themselves. More choice and greater access to content, goods and services from other countries will be a real benefit to all only if we work to include into the digital world those 18%[6] of EU citizens who have never used the Internet.

Europeans should be able to use a computer and mobile technologies for their daily interaction with the world around them in the broadest sense possible.

> **Telecentre Europe believes that to foster an inclusive digital society where citizens have the skills to seize the opportunities of the Internet and boost their chances of getting a job, a dedicated separate Key Action should be added to the Roadmap for completing the DSM Strategy on "mainstreaming all levels of digital skills for citizens as a key component to actions in education, training and innovation" and employment.**

The Riga declaration on e-Skills[7] needed for the digital single market, endorsed by more than 30 Pan-European organisations and many other national stakeholders, should be the starting point. It calls for addressing digital skills from basic to professional level through a holistic approach combining formal, non-formal and informal learning and for more and better investment in both digital technologies and skills.

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[4] By "digital gap" here we mean not the gap between supply and demand of professional ICT skills on the labour market, but the gap between those who possess crucial digital skills and those who do not

[5] Scottish MEP Catherine Stihler http://www.thedigitalpost.eu/2015/channel-digital-single-market/catherine-stihler-video-interview-the-dsm-strategy-needs-future-proof-policies

[6] Eurostat 2014: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/6343581/4-16122014-BP-EN.pdf/b4f07b2a-5aee-4b91-b017-65bcb6d95daa

[7] http://eskillsforjobs.lv/about-riga-declaration/

Digital skills and entrepreneurship

Linking grass-root social innovation with the digital telecentres foster the realisation of local initiatives and bring opportunities for digital creativity to everyone.

SME owners are among the most excluded in terms of digital skills, especially in more traditional sectors such as agriculture, construction, textile, etc. Many of them do not use online channels for promotion, while those who do have websites which often do not comply with consumer protection rules simply because they are not aware of them.

Telecentres are increasingly becoming local hubs for entrepreneurship and development of innovative idea[8]. They provide targeted support to local entrepreneurs in the creative and traditional sectors, especially to those from disadvantaged groups who need a more tailor-made and targeted approach – young entrepreneurs, women entrepreneurs or senior entrepreneurs. Grassroots entrepreneurs and initiatives are guided through the labyrinth of digital opportunities (e.g. registration, online promotion, compliance with legal requirements) by local telecentres that know their needs and context.

Telecentres as hubs for digital competences

The role of civil society organisations and public training centres in this aspect should be recognised. The trainings offered by telecentres are learner-centred and based on the participant's needs and interests as well as on employer needs.

The MIREIA survey[9] conducted for the EC in 2013 reveals that there are around 250,000 individual e-inclusion telecentre-type organisations around Europe, one per 2,000 citizens. They are locally entrenched and provide free access to computers and Internet, trainings in digital skills and other services to various, usually disadvantaged, groups. In 2014 Telecentre Europe members alone reached almost 2,000,000 end users[10] who accessed e-government, social and employment services and were engaged in shorter and longer term trainings. Their biggest advantage is that they are teaching digital skills in context – people go to telecentres with specific needs and courses are designed to respond to the local need. In addition, telecentres are developing as local innovation hubs with the rapid uptake of coding and robotics as core activities.

Each year Telecentre Europe runs its annual flagship campaign Get Online Week, key initiative of EC's eSkills for Jobs, to open digital skills and opportunities to more citizens. During one week in March telecentres across Europe run workshops, trainings and other activities – from basic trainings on using a computer and creating an e-mail to programming and online content management, e-marketing and e-security.

GOW can be a powerful dissemination tool for raising awareness among citizens of the different aspects of the DSM Strategy, such as cybersecurity, protection of personal data, smart cities and connected citizens.

On top of GOW, Telecentre Europe together with its members leads different Digital Skills for Jobs and e-Inclusion programmes and seeks to further share these best practices across all member states. Major initiatives

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[8] According to MIREIA survey one quarter of e-Inclusion organisations in Europe provide entrepreneurship trainings.

[9] http://is.jrc.ec.europa.eu/pages/EAP/eInclusion/MIREIA.html

[10] The full report from Telecentre Europe survey on members' impact is available for consultation upon request

like FIT4JOBS, based on a holistic process to up-skill in ICT and successfully place job seekers in employment with the active involvement of employers throughout the process, or E-UROPa, an e-Participation campaign encouraging citizens and civil society organisations to pro-actively adopt and co-create e-government services while developing their own civic platforms for a stronger e-democracy, are ready to be shared with other stakeholders committed to make the DSM become a reality.

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