

DIGITAL SKILLS AND YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY



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Digital skills acquired through non-formal
education boost youth employability



Telecentre Europe Position Paper



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Digital skills and youth employability

DIGITAL SKILLS ACQUIRED THROUGH NON-FORMAL EDUCATION BOOST YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY

This position paper addresses two pressing issues: the high levels of youth unemployment on one hand, and the low digital readiness of young people for the labour market on the other. It suggests that non-formal training providers (such as telecentres) have a key role in offering young people a range of alternative and flexible learning paths to acquire up-to-date digital skills. Telecentres can also play a role in helping young people gain their first work experience.

1. Young people's digital readiness to labour market needs

Young people have a higher level of computer and Internet skills than the population as a whole. In 2014, 90% young Europeans performed basic computer tasks – copying or moving files (89%) or copy pasting within files (87%). However, their computer skills cannot be taken for granted¹, especially when it comes to applying them in the workplace. Only 66% had connected and installed a device and 65% used basic formulae within a spreadsheet. More advanced competences were less widespread: only 19% of young people have the experience of writing a computer programme. The best performers are from Finland where 38% of young people have programming skills. Lower performance is found in Czech Republic, Romania and Bulgaria with a share of 7.8% and 10% respectively. As to Internet skills, 94% of young people use a search engine, 87% can send e-mail with attachments and 72% post messages online. However, just over half used the Internet for calling people (53%) and around one third (32%) used file-sharing services².

2. European policy initiatives

Skills, competences, and qualifications that people need change over time. The European Commission (with its various Directorates-DGs) has undertaken a number of initiatives in the recent years to increase young people's digital skills and interest in ICT careers. For example, DG GROW leads the *e-skills for Jobs campaign* and is known for its intense work around ICT professionalism and the e-competences framework for ICT professionals. Also worth mentioning is the *Digital Competence Framework* and other instruments for citizens to identify and assess their level of digital savviness, a framework promoted by DG EMPL.

¹ See also ECDL Foundation position paper "The fallacy of the Digital Native" <http://www.ecdl.org/media/TheFallacyofthe'DigitalNative'PositionPaper1.pdf>

² Eurostat "Being young in Europe today" 2015 edition (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/6776245/KS-05-14-031-EN-N.pdf/18bee6f0-c181-457d-ba82-d77b314456b9>)

The best-known initiatives are the [Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs launched](#) by DG CNECT and *Digital Single Market*³, the European Commission's latest strategy. Let us look at both in more details:

a. Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs

The THREE MOST relevant goals from “Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs” are:

- Training and matching for digital jobs – to offer training packages co-designed with the ICT industry so that the skills people get are the skills business needs;
- Awareness raising – to attract young people to ICT, which offers rewarding and enjoyable careers to both women and men;
- Coding - to raise awareness on the importance of coding skills

b. Digital Single Market Strategy

The THREE MOST relevant points from “Digital Single Market” strategy (4.3.1) are:

- Demand for digitally skilled employees is growing by around 4% a year. Shortages of ICT professionals in the EU could reach 825,000 unfilled vacancies by 2020 if no decisive action is taken.
- Digital skill levels need also to be raised among employees in all economic sectors and among job seekers to improve their employability.
- Change is needed in the way education and training systems adapt to the digital revolution.

Aside to that, a new overall **EU skills strategy** is under preparation by the European Commission and stakeholders will be consulted in early 2016. Digital skills should be a central part of this strategy. Therefore, it is a relevant moment to make the case for non-formal learning providers and recognize their role in the development of digital skills of young people. The momentum is further enhanced by the fact that the EU is currently reviewing its instruments for documenting and recognising skills, such as the well-known *Europass*, to make them more relevant to the labour market.

In light of these developments, Telecentre Europe would like to stress that non-formal training providers can offer young people flexible pathways for acquiring basic and advanced digital skills and help with gaining a first work experience in the digital field.

3. Challenges for telecentres

The trainings provided in telecentres, libraries and NGOs are learner-centred. They are also more flexible than those compared to formal education and are usually developed together with the learners and focused on their needs and on specific skills.

However, challenges exist for non-formal training providers to fulfil their potential as hubs for acquiring up-to-date digital skills relevant for the labour market. These challenges are outlined below and are linked to outreach, sustainability and capacity building of trainers.

³3.5. 'Promoting e-Society' Chapter and in particular under *Digitally skilled Entrepreneurs, workforce and consumers*

1. Challenges related to attracting the target group
2. Challenges related to ensuring that the trainings match labour market needs
3. Challenges related to facilitating trainees' further job placement
4. Challenges related to cooperation with other actors (public authorities, private employers, employment agencies, etc.) and sustainability of activity

Out of them, we find that the fourth challenge is the hardest to overcome. Indeed, telecentres are experienced enough in engaging new users from different backgrounds. The need to find a job has spontaneously attracted many unemployed people to telecentres. Therefore telecentres are now tackling the adequacy of training to labour market needs and further job placement through innovative digital job training paths (e.g. [FIT4JOBS](#) model). However, they face major challenges when it comes to aligning their efforts with those of the public policy sphere. More details about this challenge follow:

- a. When governments design measures for improving youth employability (including funding third-parties activities) they often ignore the concrete (digital) characteristics, needs and opportunities of the labour market. As a result, the priorities and conditions they define are not producing the expected results (e.g. Youth Guarantee implementation⁴). The experience of telecentres and other grass-roots intermediaries that support youngsters in their transition to the labour market, by filling the gap between their formation and employers' needs could be instrumental to achieve better results;
- b. Budgets for education in general and for the development of skills in particular, have been reduced all over Europe despite of current emphasis on the importance of skills for social and economic participation;
- c. (Inclusive) digital training is a transversal topic but it is many times fragmented across sectors and ministries, diluting its potential and positive effect to ameliorate the employment prospects of youngsters with diverse backgrounds;
- d. NGOs usually hesitate to demonstrate the social and economic impact of their activities to governments, even if this is much needed for policy making.

4. Our commitment

On behalf of its community of telecentre networks and service providers operating at national, regional and local level around the continent, Telecentre Europe is leading a number of flagship transnational initiatives aimed to foster youth employment and entrepreneurship by developing their digital skills for employability:

1. Partnership between Telecentre Europe and ICT leading companies (Microsoft, Liberty Global, Cisco)
2. European Get Online Week (with the tagline *Get empowered, Get Employed*), a campaign contributing to EC's *eSkills for Jobs* campaign by focusing on the unemployed;
3. Secretariat of the Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs, where top priorities include attracting youngsters to digital careers and modernising education

⁴ European Court of Auditors, *EU Youth Guarantee: first steps taken but implementation risks ahead*, http://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR15_03/SR15_03_EN.pdf

4. I-LINC, a European stakeholder platform to exchange knowledge on digital learning and inclusion aimed to increase youth employability
5. Skillage, a self-assessment tool aligned to DIGCOMP (EC's digital competence framework) and available in all European official languages that allows youngsters to determine their digital readiness to meet the labour market needs;
6. Promotion of devoted partner initiatives such as You Rock

On top of that, telecentres operating on the ground are running initiatives involving libraries and schools, organising meetings between school pupils and young ICT professionals to inspire them for ICT studies/careers, leading trainings on how to create one's own online professional profile and look for a job or trainings in digital and life skills based on the intergenerational learning. Instigated by Telecentre Europe, several members have established *Local Coalitions for Digital Jobs*, while innovative members' initiatives like *FIT4JOBS* - which combines training and job placement while partnering with digital employers - are being replicated in new countries thanks to the power of our network.

We are committed to do even more in the future to help youngsters find their way in the labour market by enhancing their digital profiles: more trainings in coding; expanding training offers; collaboration with higher institutions; volunteering opportunities for young graduates as trainers in telecentres and libraries; seeking partnerships with employers for joint projects and traineeship placements; partnership with employment agencies for better outreach and attracting unemployed youth amongst others.

5. Recommendations to policy makers

We represent an extended European community of NGO-run telecentres, municipal centres and public libraries with more than 20,000 community centres. Our commitment to tackle youth unemployment, which we consider one of the most serious and demanding social injustices nowadays in Europe, will be useless without political support. This is why we encourage policy makers to adopt a number of measures that we think will enable the employability of young people:

National and local governments

- a. Include digital skills as priority in the implementation of the Youth Guarantee at national level and actively involve NGOs in the implementation of youth guarantee measures
- b. Design (digital) employment and guidance services corresponding to young peoples' needs, in consultation with youth and in collaboration with the NGOs that work with youth in the ground. Ensure that young people are informed about these services
- c. Embed digital competences properly in the formal education curricula from an early age, including digital thinking, coding or productivity tools, to name a few key components. This should happen in collaboration with non-formal training providers such as code clubs (for the coding activities), since they already have extensive experience and skilled trainers
- d. Encourage links between employers and (digital) educators, including financial and other incentives
- e. Provide incentives for employers who actively collaborate with NGOs in increasing the digital skills of young people

- f. Mainstream digital skills in national funding programmes in the field of education and training, human resources development and employment
- g. Endorse the National and Local Coalitions for Digital Jobs and facilitate the achievement of their plans through direct funding, partnership or any other relevant mechanism.

European Commission

- a. Insist that Member states include digital skills as priority in the implementation of the Youth Guarantee at national level
- b. Mainstream digital skills in European funding programmes in the field of education and training, human resources development and employment
- c. Continue to support the work of the Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs, its pledgers and national/local coalitions who have proven results/impact
- d. Define a separate key action in the implementation of the digital single market strategy related to digital skills development for the digital economy, with focus on youth employability
- e. Adjust priorities of on-going funding programmes to better fit this purpose. For example, Erasmus+ current rules are restrictive in terms of composition of partnerships for Sector Skills Alliances, and not flexible enough to correspond to the reality of digital skills development - especially of those that impact all job profiles.

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.

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