



In response to: European Commission public consultation on the Europe 2020 strategy

**TITLE: Position paper on the Europe 2020 strategy and its further development**

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The **Europe 2020 strategy** attributes a key role to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in five of the seven flagship initiatives to promote growth and jobs in the European Union: the **Digital Agenda for Europe, An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs, Youth on the Move, European Platform Against Poverty and Social Exclusion**, and the **Innovation Union**.

All these initiatives promote the use of *ICTs for social and economic inclusion*, from young people using ICTs to improve life chances, through raising the skills and working conditions for workers, creating systems to support families to balance work with care for elderly, and to build industry capable of delivering solutions for the challenges of health and demographic change.

In this context, *digital inclusion and training of all citizens* (including facilitated access, skills/competences and usages of digital tools) are crucial for achieving the above social inclusion objectives, but also for modernising the economy and ensuring Europe has the world's most skilled and productive workforce in the digital age.

For Telecentre Europe (TE), it is particularly important to ensure *digital opportunities for all European citizens*, without forgetting the needs of vulnerable groups (low-skilled people, ageing population, unemployed youth, unemployed older workers, migrants) *as well as to address the mismatch between emerging demands of the Digital Economy across economic sectors and the skills available in the market place*. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century digital skills are indispensable to ensure full and active participation in economy (and social life), if we want the latter to be indeed smart, sustainable and inclusive.

### **Digital Agenda for Europe: Digital technologies & digital skills for smart, sustainable and inclusive economy**

The overall objective of the Digital Agenda for Europe is having everyone connected and empowered. Special challenges exist, however, regarding some societal groups.

While we appreciate that EU investment in state-of-the-art communication infrastructure is necessary to achieve high levels of productivity and growth, we believe that it alone cannot ensure this. *TE emphasises that this should go hand in hand with ensuring that citizens are equipped with the skills to take the most of ICT technologies.*

The Europe 2020 strategy should put *more focus on Pillar VI “Enhancing digital skills, literacy and e-inclusion”*. Indeed, according to the last Eurostat survey, 30% of Europe’s population has never used the Internet, partly because they are lacking basic ICT skills and affordable access. If the EU wishes to overcome this gap, there is a need for policy makers to *recognize and support the role and impact of organisations* acting as multipliers in support of the achievement of Europe 2020 economic and social goals. *eInclusion intermediary actors and digital learning providers* (notably third sector organisations providing access and ICT trainings) are playing a key role in achieving the goals of the Digital Agenda for Europe, particularly in two of its action areas: enhancing digital literacy, skills and inclusion; and ICT-enabled benefits for EU society.

Providing European citizens, particularly young people, with *learning opportunities* to acquire *digital skills and competences* will enable them to “*exploit*” *digital technologies adequately and effectively*, both at work and in their everyday lives.

To achieve digital inclusion and empowerment of all citizens, policy-makers at EU level should define the *provision of equal access and learning opportunities in digital skills* as an *explicit priority in EU funding programmes, namely Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020*. Particularly in the latest, a dedicated Coordination and Support Action call should be foreseen in its *work programme for 2016-2017* to ensure targeted support).

### **An agenda for new skills and jobs**

The number 900 000 (minimum) unfulfilled ICT jobs by 2020 is often cited in EC documents to illustrate the need to inform and motivate young people to choose ICT career.

Furthermore, the ability to use digital technology affects employability on a larger scale – it is foreseen that 35% of all jobs 2020 will be highly qualified, meaning that they will require a sufficient level of digital skills. Possessing these skills increases the probability of being employed and provides opportunities for life-long learning. However, digital skills relevant for the workplace are not necessarily acquired through formal education.

Non-formal digital learning providers– a role that is largely fulfilled by telecentres – can help filling this gap, both by trainings and awareness raising campaigns. Learning outside the formal education system becomes increasingly relevant, as it is more flexible and adaptable to rapid changes and learners’ needs.

Therefore, we call for more attention and greater public investment in “softer” measures such as *awareness raising and creating life-long learning opportunities*, accessible and targeted to the needs of all groups of learners, especially the young people, migrants, elderly, people with disabilities, women, etc., to ensure their inclusion and active participation in the digital economy.

In times of unprecedented youth unemployment rates, possessing the right digital skills can significantly increase youth employability. Young people are considered as “digital natives”, but our own research shows that this does not mean that they know *per se* how to apply their digital skills at the work place. In addition, a system should be set for the recognition

and validation of digital skills and competences acquired outside the formal education system, so that digital learning providers have a common framework for attesting skills based on EC's Digital Competences framework "DIGCOMP" (similarly to the reference framework for languages).

Multi-stakeholder partnerships and initiatives with a more direct impact on the ground, such as the Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs launched under the Digital Agenda for Europe and related National and Local Coalitions, should be sustained and explored further, inter alia, by backing them up by EU funding, in order to realize their full potential and ensure their sustainability.

### **Europe 2020 Targets**

Telecentre Europe seconds the recommendation of ECDL Foundation to *add target or specific goal related to digital literacy* given that digital technology is the cornerstone of any growth strategy. According to recent figures published by DG CNECT, half of EU citizens still have no or low computer skills and almost 50% have insufficient digital skills for the workplace, however Internet usage or broadband coverage metrics fail to provide sufficient information with regards to person's level of skills for productivity.

Integrating digital literacy and digital proficiency targets in Europe's growth strategy would help increase the level of digital competence across Member States, which is essential to ensure that all EU citizens can benefit from the opportunities brought by ICT.

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Telecentre Europe is the pan-European network of digital access and learning providers (telecentres) open to all citizens, currently representing 45 member organisations from 30 countries. Through our members we reach more than 20 000 individual telecentres in Europe.