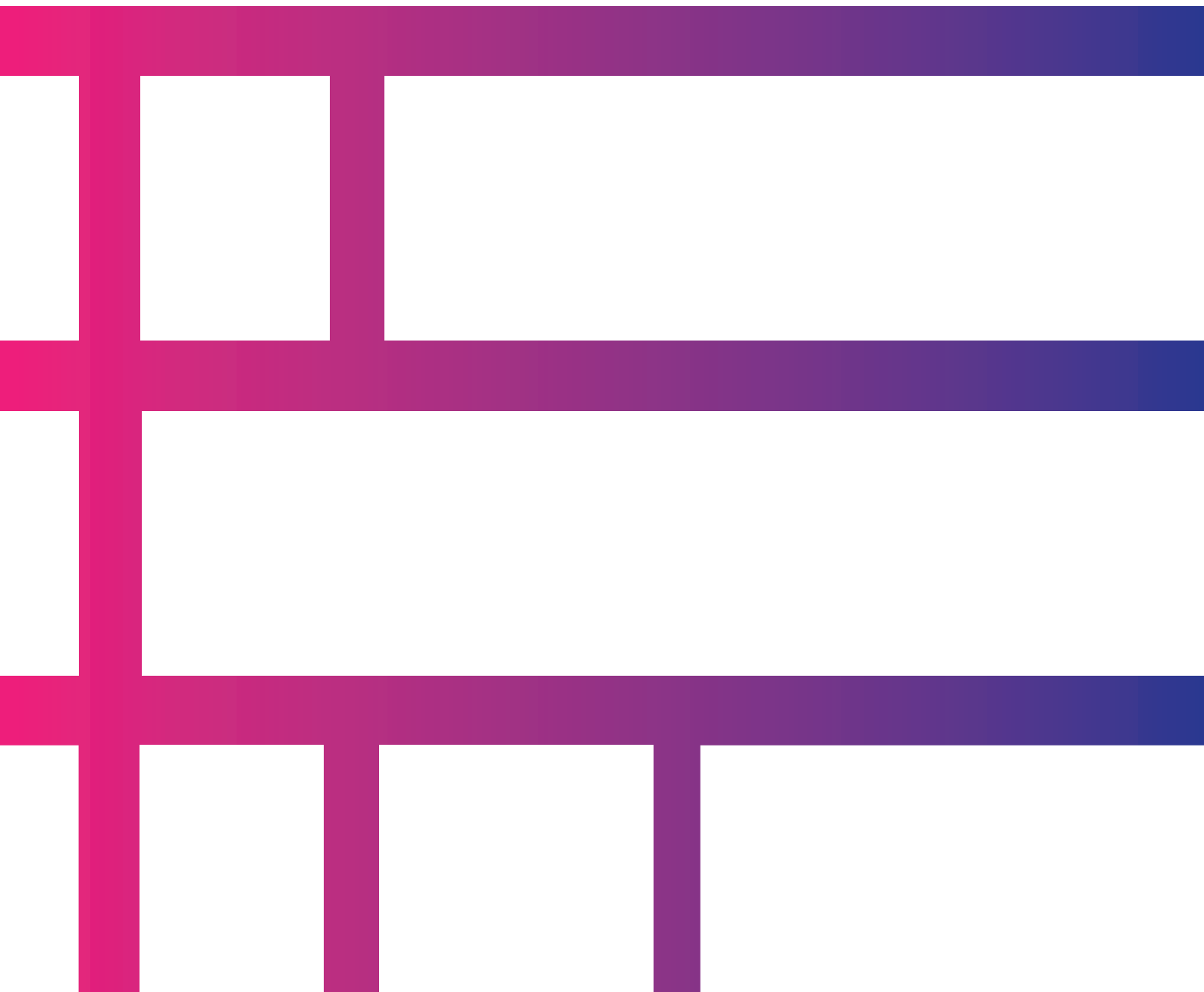




DCDS POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



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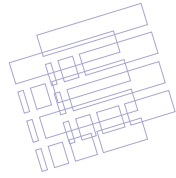


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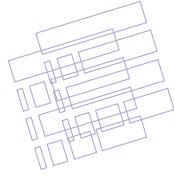


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CONTENTS

Introduction	5
European policymakers	7
National and Regional policymakers	10
Local authorities	16



INTRODUCTION

The [DCDS project](#) established a framework to provide low-digitally skilled adults with the basic digital and transversal competences needed for employment, personal development, social inclusion and active citizenship. The project developed an open, innovative multilingual Digital Competences Development System (DCDS) and used it to provide non-formal training to low-skilled adults in different European countries.

Being completely aligned with the European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens - Dig Comp 2.1, the project contributes to the promotion of its use by non-formal training providers and its adoption by European policy makers active on adult education and training, social and digital inclusion as well as employment policies.

The following document is the last deliverable of the DCDS project and thus is based on the work done by the DCDS partners in the project's lifespan.

The DCDS policy recommendations suggest clear policy objectives related to increasing the number of adults having basic digital skills and identify the changes needed to support this policy outcome.

The DCDS policy recommendations also provide effective proposals on how to include the DCDS project outcomes within the services addressed to adults with low digital skills and empower key stakeholders in formulating innovative integrated policies for developing and recognizing adult citizens' basic digital competence.

The policy recommendations address three main target groups: European policymakers, national and regional policymakers and local authorities. Providers willing to make a policy change in the digital competence development are free to use this document for their advocacy strategies. Please note that another DCDS deliverable can also support you in that: the DCDS policy toolkit.

You can find more information on the latter and on the other inspiring outputs of the project at: <http://www.dcds-project.eu/results/>

The DCDS policy recommendations are in line with and complementary to the recently published ALL DIGITAL manifesto¹, which contains a series of key principles and recommendations on how to maximise the impact of education and training, as powerful instruments towards a continuous development of digital competences for the European citizens.

“Digital competences are necessary in all aspects of life, whether they are social or personal, relate to labour or leisure, in any sector, public or private”

- ALL DIGITAL MANIFESTO (2019)

¹ https://all-digital.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Manifesto_online-viewing.pdf

European policymakers

1. Put basic digital competence for adults higher in the European political agenda

Digital competence empowers people with low levels of skills and qualifications to play an active part in society, to access and progress in the labour market², and to engage in further education and training in a lifelong learning perspective³. In the last years though, the European policies on digital competence seem to focus increasingly either on the acquisition of advanced ICT skills for professionals in the field or on the support of technology use and the development of digital competence in compulsory education. A renewed attention should be put on the need for basic digital competence of adults while designing policy proposals, adopting and implementing European policy initiatives as well as monitoring policies at the national level. The adoption of a benchmark at the European level should be considered.

More funding should be allocated for digital competence development in the next EU budget. Adults basic digital skills should be a priority of the next Erasmus+⁴ calls.

2. Formulate integrated policies for developing and recognising basic digital competence

Digital policies are nowadays quite fragmented, not only across geographical levels, but also within the same level of action. The European policies on digital competence are at the moment shared among three Directorates General within the European Commission (DG CONNECT⁵, DG EMPL⁶ and DG EAC⁷) and few agencies (CEDEFOP⁸, JRC⁹, etc.). Often this situation leads to parallel consultation processes (i.e. Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition and the Digital competence working group) or matching policies and initiatives (for instance, DigComp framework¹⁰, the Digital Education Action Plan¹¹ and the Upskilling Pathways initiative¹²). There are undoubtedly benefits in building synergies among those.

² COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 15 February 2016 on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32016H0220\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32016H0220(01)&from=EN)

³ Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)&from=EN)

⁴ https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus_en

⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/info/departments/communications-networks-content-and-technology/>

⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/home.jsp>

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/info/departments/education-youth-sport-and-culture_en

⁸ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en>

⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/departments/joint-research-centre_en

¹⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/digcomp>

¹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan_en

¹² <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1224>

Digital competence should also be taken into consideration while planning the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights¹³, not only of the article I.01 (Education, training and life-long learning), but also of the articles I.04 (Active support to employment) and III.20 (Access to essential services).

3. Promote a European narrative for and give visibility to practices on the DigComp framework

The European Digital Competence Framework for citizens (known as DigComp) defines the skills needed by all citizens to function in the digital society and thus is key in supporting policymakers and professionals to increase the digital basic competence of people in Europe. However, it is surprisingly little known beyond the digital education field, even though it started being used also in the business world and for employability purposes¹⁴. Raising awareness on this framework before the general public and the employers' representatives as well as providing visibility to practices using the framework can bring a much-needed common understanding of digital competence across sectors and perhaps a broader adoption at the national level.

An open and evidence-based collection of resources and practices on how to plan concrete actions could be foreseen in order to treasure existing experiences and inspire policymakers and professionals at different levels.

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4. Continue the harmonisation of validation systems in Europe and adopt a framework to validate digital competence based on DigComp

European validation systems need to be better structured and less fragmented. European policymakers should continue in their harmonisation work with the Member States and help them adopt validation arrangements which are accessible, transparent and meaningful for everyone. In order to facilitate the work of national policymakers, European policymakers could elaborate a common framework for validating digital competence based on DigComp, which will ensure clarity, transparency and transferability within and across European countries.

¹³ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights_en

¹⁴ See for instance the DigComp Stakeholders' consultation workshop on developing digital competence for employability: <https://www.ikanos.eus/jrc-workshop/>



The DCDS project developed a self-assessment tool (SAT) to be used by learners, in order to help them identify the level of their digital competence and the gaps. As this is based on the DigComp 2.1, it can be the basis for further work on a validation framework.

5. Support the ALL DIGITAL multi-stakeholder community of practice (CoP)¹⁵ on DigComp

There are many organisations in Europe capable and willing to make the DigComp framework usable, useful and used. Organisations having interest and expertise in promoting digital competence should be able to exchange, cooperate and work together as well as with the relevant European institutions. European policymakers should support and engage with the Community of Practice on DigComp launched by All Digital and endorse it among relevant stakeholders.

6. Sponsor evidence-based research on the benefits of digital competence acquisition for (low skilled) adults

Interesting pieces of research¹⁶ have been produced on the use of digital technologies in school education and others will be published on the impact and potential of digital technologies in primary, secondary, and higher education. More research needs to be carried out on the relation between (lack of) digital competence and social inclusion as well as on the impact of digital competence's acquisition for the professional and personal lives of adults.

7. Support Member States with mutual learning to improve the design and impact of their digital competence's development strategies in a lifelong learning perspective

The European Institutions have a key role to play in providing Member States with opportunities to improve their digital competence development strategies in a lifelong learning perspective. Working groups, conferences and events, peer learning activities are great tools to do that and should be continued being financed and organised in the years to come. An emphasis could be put on the quality of digital competence learning offer and on the funding schemes that learners can use for increasing their (digital) competences and skills.

8. Increase civil dialogue for lifelong learning

There is a need to increase the dialogue between different educational sectors in a real holistic lifelong learning perspective.

¹⁵ All Digital manifesto (2019). Should you want to join and/or support the CoP write to digcomp@all-digital.org

¹⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area/digital-education-action-plan-action-9-studies-on-ict-in-education_en

National and Regional policymakers

1. Prioritise and invest in digital competence development for people of all ages and backgrounds

Emphasis should be put on the fact that digital competence is necessary in all aspects of life, whether they are social or personal, relate to labour or leisure, in any sector, public or private¹⁷. Digital skills have become so pivotal in our societies that they should be given the same importance of reading and writing skills.

Digital competence learning strategies should be included into existing policies (on social inclusion, on employment services, etc.) in order to reach out to a biggest number of people in need of (basic) digital competence. Funding mechanisms should be adopted to make the learning offer free or very inexpensive for those who cannot afford it but still are in need of it.



The project FINALE monitored, analysed and improved adult education policies and mechanisms in funding adult education. The project consortium developed a series of indicators on the why and where to invest. The FINALE advocacy toolkit might help policy-makers to inform their decision-making and enable adult education professionals to do more effective advocacy for a better funding at the local, regional, national and European levels¹⁸.

2. Improve the digital competence of adults, especially those with low level of skills, by providing digital competence courses on the basis of the DigComp Framework

DigComp offers a tool to improve citizens' digital competence. DigComp was first published in 2013 and has become a reference for many digital competence initiatives at both European and Member State levels. However, more needs to be done to make digital competence courses in line to this very comprehensive and useful tool.



The methodology developed in the framework of the DCDS project is based on proficiency levels 1 and 2 (foundation level) across all 21 digital competences identified in DigComp.

¹⁷ ALL DIGITAL manifesto (2019): https://all-digital.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Manifesto_online-viewing.pdf

¹⁸ <https://eaea.org/project/financing-adult-learning-in-europe-finale/>

3. Encourage the learning of digital competence throughout people's lives in a lifelong learning perspective

A holistic perspective to lifelong learning is still missing in many countries in Europe. Adult education and basic skills should be part of the same educational strategies and national policymakers from different fields (education, labour market, social affairs, innovation and research) should work in cooperation to ensure a consistent approach to digital competence development. It might be useful to nominate a national coordinator (or a task force) on digital competences, so that systematic and coherent strategies and policies would be designed and adopted.

4. Support an accessible, learner-centred and tailored-made learning offer

Digital skills should be guaranteed as a universal right for all, in particular for people distant from learning and for learners with special needs. Policymakers should analyse and remove barriers that keep low skilled people from participating in learning opportunities and support providers that are active in reaching out to them and making their learning offers learner-centred. Furthermore, role models and innovative non-formal methodologies (e.g. hackathon for elderly people) should be fostered in order to increase learners' motivation.



The Citizens' Curriculum developed by the Learning and Work Institute¹⁹ is an innovative, holistic approach to ensure everyone has the English, maths, digital, civic, health and financial capabilities they need. This approach taps into what motivates adults to learn, through giving learners a voice in co-designing curriculum content and careful contextualization, ensuring that more people are learning skills which are relevant to their lives and their work.

Digital competence curricula should be designed by a wide range of stakeholders (including social partners, employers' representatives, etc.) and flexibility and modularity should be allowed in order to enable providers and trainers to adapt the course to the learners' needs.

¹⁹ <https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/our-work/life-and-society/citizens-curriculum/>



The Digital Competences Development System developed by the DCDS project provides learners with a personalised training based on their specific needs. This is possible through a self-assessment test that learners take at the beginning of the course and a recommender tool that combines information in the learner profile together with the outcomes of SAT in order to suggest to the teacher (and the learner) the learning paths that should be given a priority.

5. Valorise and support all kinds of learning offers, including non-formal and informal settings and regardless of the teaching technique (online, face-to-face, blended)

Due to their accessibility and flexibility, non-formal and informal learning are often an entry point for people distant from education or with bad experiences in formal education. These learning offers should be valorised more and supported through legislation, institutional development and continuous financing by policymakers and the general public. Teaching techniques need to be adopted on the basis of the target groups the courses aim to reach.



The DCDS project proposes a successful combination of face-to-face and online learning, which was evaluated as very appropriate in the project piloting. The DCDS consortium developed different learning paths (LP) composed of DigComp competences, which contain study material that complements what the teacher explains in each face-to-face lesson. Learning paths are structured from basic learning units aggregated into modules of variable duration.

6. Offer in-service training for teachers, trainers and volunteers

People providing digital competence trainings (despite their status) should constantly update their professional competences. High-quality initial education and in-services trainings should be available for them to be able to provide quality learning offers both on ICT issues and on the impact that digitalisation have on people's life (i.e. e-citizenship). National networks of educators committed in teaching digital competence should be supported.

7. Ensure quality learning offers

Policymakers should provide resources and build systems to ensure a high-quality learning offers in terms of content, methodology, delivery and usability. Not-burdensome tools should be available to measure and report on the quality of the learning offer.

8. Provide guidance opportunities to enable progression

When people are engaged in learning, they tend to be willing to continue progressing in their life/work/educational path. National policymakers should foresee guidance for learners attending digital competence course who wish to learn more.



Guidance for adults has been gaining ground within the lifelong learning sector in the Nordic countries. These services have grown out of public policy that in turn is responding to an increasing demand for a lifelong and individualised educational and vocational guidance of adults²⁰.

9. Modernise the education and training systems²¹

Education and training systems should be updated to prepare people to live in the digital age. Digital competence should be included at all levels of education and training in order to make the most of digitisation for learning, for work and for life. ICT specialists can be considered when it comes to accompany the transition of schools towards that direction.

10. Improve the validation arrangement of the country by including digital competence validation

The adoption and implementation of a comprehensive, inclusive and transparent validation arrangement is a key step to the achievement of a coherent lifelong learning strategy. This in turn will enables people to benefit from flexible learning pathways and progress in their personal and professional lives²². National policymakers should ensure the possibility for adults to validate their digital competence and provide a certification system for those, preferably adopting a framework based on DigComp. This will ensure clarity, transparency and transferability within and across European countries.

²⁰ Voices of users, promoting quality of guidance in the Nordic Countries (2011): https://nvl.org/Portals/0/DigArticle/72/voice_of_users_2011_eng.pdf

²¹ Digital Coalition's action plan: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/governing-board-digital-skills-and-jobs-coalition-adopts-action-plan-boost-coalition>

²² More information and suggestions are available in the AVA action plan: <https://eaea.org/project/action-plan-for-validation-and-non-formal-adult-education-ava/?pid=7478>



The self-assessment tool (SAT) developed in the framework of the DCDS project to help learners identify their level of their digital competence was indicated as one of the most useful tools, both from the trainers participating in the piloting.

11. Involve providers and/or their representatives in the policy design and monitoring

A lot is to be gained by increasing civil dialogue in the policy design process. The biggest asset is that the policy implementation will be more effective and efficient. Involving providers and representatives in the monitoring of policies can also be very enriching when it comes to meet the policy's objectives and reach out to target groups. Open public consultations, structured surveys or public hearings could be used for such a purpose.



National policymakers can benefit from the DCDS partners' expertise and the project's outcomes for their work with the national level but also with the implementation of some European initiatives, like the national digital agenda or the upskilling pathways initiative.

12. Foster cooperation among stakeholders working at different levels and in different fields

In order to boost a dialogue on the learning offer, on curricula and on the skills needs, national policymakers should create structures for cooperation among stakeholders working at different levels and in different fields (education, employment and digitalisation). The above-mentioned dialogue will certainly benefit the learners when it comes to transitioning in their carriers and accessing professional mobilities.



One Step Up²³ is a free information and referral service in Ireland run by AONTAS, the National Adult Learning Organisation. One Step Up signposts thousands of people every year towards accessing their education and training options, providing information about where to look for courses, funding supports, contact details for various services and much more. The One Step Up Advisory Group includes a diverse representation of stakeholders across the education sector.

²³ <https://www.onestepup.ie/>

13. Conduct skills forecasts and accurate measurement of digital competence as a basis for policymaking and the provision of active measures in education and training²⁴.

An accurate measurement of general/basic digital competence needs to be done regularly at national level. The yearly based measurement of digital competence currently done via the DESI report²⁵ refers only to work related activities and has a focus on ICT specialists; whereas the International Computer and Information Literacy Study targets a very specific age group²⁶. Skills forecasts initiatives could also be instrumental to design meaningful and forward-looking policies on the topic.

²⁴ A human-centric digital manifesto for Europe, BEUC- OS: <https://www.beuc.eu/publications/beuc-x-2019-053-a-human-centric-digital-manifesto-for-europe.pdf>

²⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/human-capital>

²⁶ <https://www.iea.nl/studies/iea/icils>

Local authorities

1. Support the spaces where people can improve their digital competence

Learning can happen everywhere, and people should be enabled to enjoy that opportunity. Local policymakers could support that by creating, increasing the funding for and improving the infrastructures of learning spaces in their area of action, especially if this is in rural and/or remote areas of the country. Learning spaces can vary according to the context, but a particular emphasis should be put on adult education centres, libraries and digital competence centres.



The DCDS consortium developed an innovative online learning platform with gamification features. Considering the final beneficiaries of the project - people in need of basic digital competence, the DCDE is used in a blended learning approach, which thus requires spaces for trainers and learners to meet.

2. Encourage participation by initiating targeted actions that encourage citizens to improve their digital competence

Considering the trends of digitalization of public services in Europe, local authorities have an interest in increasing digital competence of their residents. If clear information and support should be available to all citizens, participation in digital competence courses must also be increased in order not to leave anyone behind. This can be done through organizing (or supporting the organization of) awareness raising campaigns, sponsoring “open days” events at learning spaces or giving visibility to digital learner champions.

3. Reach out to underrepresented groups

In order to make digital competence courses accessible to underrepresented groups, local policymakers need to prioritize outreach strategies, support tailored-made learning offers and finance guidance for disadvantaged learners. An in-depth and evidence-based mapping of the potential target groups more in need of digital competence is necessary in order to make the above-mentioned initiatives meaningful.



Apart from people with disadvantaged backgrounds, the DCDS partners believes that the platform and methodology developed in the framework of the project could benefit the following target groups:

- *Young people who tend to overestimate significantly their digital competence*
- *Employed people who might not be motivated to learn further*
- *Old people in need of (digital) basic skills Residents of rural or remote areas who might not have the infrastructures.*

4. Facilitate networks of digital competence training providers

Exchange and collaboration of digital competence training providers will benefit the quality and sustainability of the learning offer. As such networks require structures, spaces and financing that providers often do not have, local policymakers should find ways to facilitate them.

5. Fund and support dialogue and cooperation between digital competence stakeholders from different fields (education, labour market, social services, etc.)

When people are engaged in learning, they tend to be willing to continue progressing in their life/work/educational path. Local policymakers should be prepared to accommodate this need by creating synergies among stakeholders from different fields. This can be done by fostering the dialogue between them, create cooperation opportunities or set up one-stop shop where different services can be offered by potential or actual digital competence's learners.



A Cité des Métiers²⁷ is a place managed in partnership by different stakeholder organisations, open to anyone in search of information to build one's professional future, according to principles of open access, and free of charge and anonymous use.

²⁷ <http://www.reseaucitesdesmetiers.com/eng/index.php>

Note

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