



# **The European Union must act immediately to improve the level of digital skills**

CEPIS DIGITAL SKILLS POLICY WORKING GROUP

## Europe needs a real improvement in the level of digital skills

To be able to cope with the challenges of the information society, it is necessary to master skills that have not been a requirement in the past. In the industrial society, general literacy was a prerequisite; at present digital literacy is a must. **CEPIS is worried about the slow progress of digital skills in several segments of EU Member States' populations:** children, older people, non-IT professionals, and, in particular, of the workforce, which faces the impact of new technologies the most and is the key factor to make a difference between success and failure.

We appreciate all that the European Commission has done so far, starting with the Bangemann Report and including initiatives, notably the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition, the Digital Education Action Plan, the New Skills Agenda for Europe, and providing respective funds. We also appreciate the development of European frameworks for digital skills, such as DigComp. Despite all the work and money invested over many years on European and national level, **the progress across Europe in raising digital skills levels is slow, as indicated by Digital Economy and Society Index and other EU data.** The picture is even more challenging because these indicators rely on self-assessment. In self-assessment, people overestimate their digital skills and there is no compensation for cultural differences.

Therefore, CEPIS expects that the recently inaugurated European Commission will set up goals and will initiate a real improvement of the level of digital skills in the next five years. It is not enough to target those with no or low digital skills; digital transformation requires higher levels of skills in the workforce and in society at large. We see the solution in two parts:

- i. To approve the European framework of digital skills based on DigComp 2.0.
- ii. To replace self-assessment with certification under quality standards, applying practical neutral and proven systems of training and certification of digital skills compatible with DigComp and mandatory in all European Member States.

It is not by chance that recent UNESCO analysis<sup>1</sup> identified the ICDL programme as covering the most of DigComp 2.0 from all investigated practical systems. It is an independent and vendor-neutral programme founded 20 years ago by CEPIS, being used world-wide with 16 million applicants, 75% of them coming from Europe. It also fulfils the quality assurance requirements of ESCO regarding certification of qualifications.

To be more specific we put forward the following recommendations.

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<sup>1</sup> A Global Framework of Reference on Digital Literacy Skills for Indicator 4.4.2, IP No. 51, June 2018

## 1. Create a Digital Skills Improvement Programme at European Level

CEPIS asks the European Commission to **launch a Digital Skills Improvement Programme** to include the following steps:

- i. To refine DigComp and approve it as the European digital skills requirements standard.
- ii. To substitute self-assessment with certification under quality standards as a principle in the measurement and improvement of digital skills.
- iii. To create a system in which practical digital skills training and certification programmes will be reviewed and accredited at European level in line with DigComp.
- iv. To adopt the implementation scheme from the EU level down to national and local levels, based on accredited training and certification systems supported by European funds in the frame of the Digital Europe programme.

## 2. Get Value for Public Money

CEPIS recommends a well-balanced approach to the development of digital skills across society, allocating **appropriate funding to each one** of the different policy targets:

- i. **digital skills for the workforce** – encouraging the workforce and SMEs to improve and certify digital skills according to job market requirements together with employees as indicated by the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition.
- ii. **digital skills for students** – enabling the larger deployment of digital technologies in formal and informal education, a high level of digital skills for educators, and a certified level of digital skills for graduates.
- iii. **digital inclusion of all citizens** – funding for programmes of practical skills enabling mainly the elderly to use the digital services and to close the digital divide.
- iv. **advanced digital skills** – funding for special programmes for professionals to acquire skills needed, especially for their specific jobs.

**European funding programmes must** define objective metrics and **simplify the application process** for projects fulfilling pre-defined quality criteria including also dedicated funding for raising digital skills, a centralised register of approved digital skills programmes to simplify the application/approval process, a trusted provider scheme to fast-track approval for recurring projects, and collation of data across Europe on number of people being certified annually.

## 3. Set Implementation Goals with the Member States

CEPIS recommends that the European Commission adopts the implementation scheme of the Digital Skills Improvement Programme together with the Member States with special focus on the following targets:

- i. To start implementation programmes for students in schools, in formal, and in informal education, with a special emphasis on the digital skills of teachers to be able to provide them to their students.
- ii. To find agreements with employers on the improvement of digital skills of the workforce financed partially by public money and employers, with the clear commitment of certifying, for example, 2% of the workforce a year.

- iii. To implement programmes for the improvement of digital skills in public administration from European to local levels.
- iv. To implement programmes improving the digital skills of the population at large.

**Member States to be required to allocate funds to be used exclusively for the purpose as defined in the above proposal.**

#### 4. Measure the Progress of the Improvement

CEPIS recommends measuring the progress of implementation of the launched programme by the following steps:

- i. To include the approved standard for digital skills together with certification in the European Qualification Framework and national qualification frameworks.
- ii. To include the approved standard in all statistical measurements carried out by national statistics institutions and by Eurostat.
- iii. To replace the specific part of DESI reports by data that are a realistic assessment of the level of digital skills of EU member states' populations.

*[The Council of European Professional Informatics Societies](#) (CEPIS) was established 30 years ago to represent European informatics professionals and to act as their voice. Our ambition is that informatics professionals' voice be heard and paid regard to. Being an institution of civil society, we care about the social impact of information technology and feel obliged to raise our voice when an issue is close to the content of our concern. Digital skills are doubtless one of such issues.*