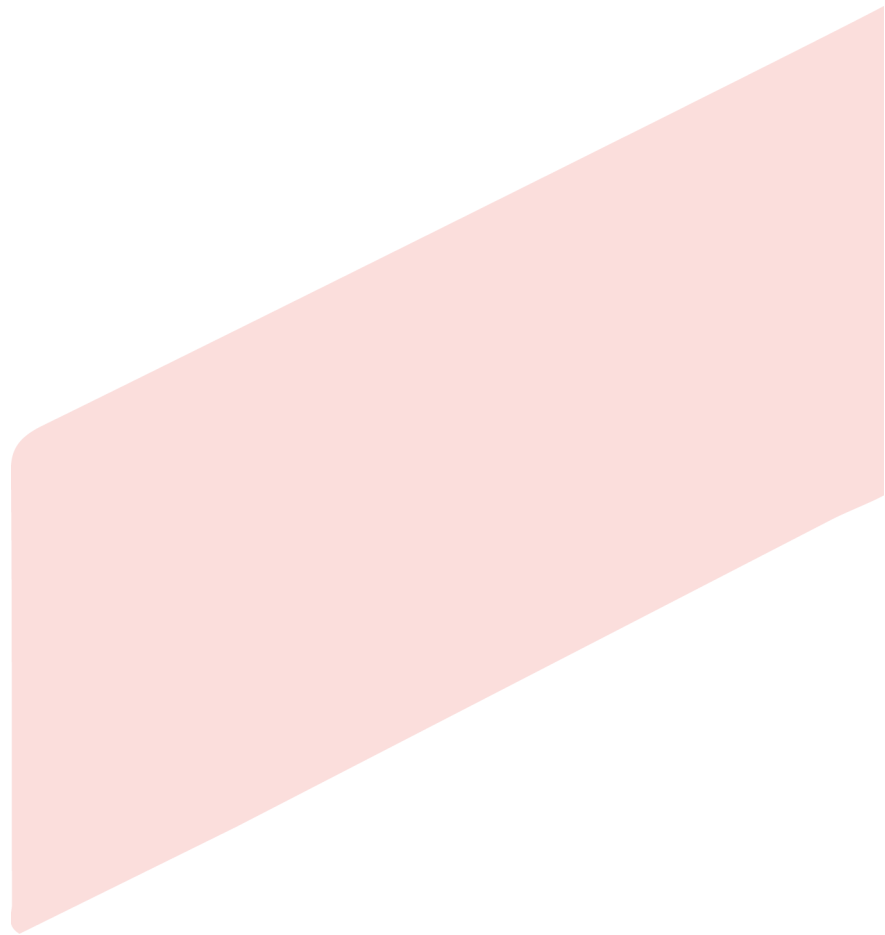




Policy recommendations – digital education in non-formal education and libraries

WP 7 – Del 7.1



Introduction

The [Digital Travellers](#) project curated a library of resources mapped to the European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp 2.1). The resources mapped aimed to tackle all five areas of competence determined under DigComp 2.1 to support vulnerable populations with the basic digital skills and competences needed for employment, personal development, social inclusion and active citizenship. Given the nature of the project and its focus on vulnerable populations, the focus was placed on the first four levels of competence. The project developed a training methodology for librarians to learn the skills required in digital education facilitation and used the skills and knowledge acquired to deliver workshops and other educational activities for their users.

In using both the DigComp 2.1 framework and the Digital Competence for Educators framework, the project contributes to the promotion of these tools in non-formal digital education by non-formal training providers and its adoption by policymakers at all levels active on adult education and training, and social and digital inclusion. Furthermore, the development of the database is an ongoing process and promotion will extend beyond the project's lifetime and require more funding in the long term.

The following document is the last deliverable of the Digital Travellers project and is based on the work done by the Digital Travellers partners over the course of the project.

The Digital Travellers policy recommendations suggest clear policy objectives related to fostering social and digital inclusion by helping adults have the basic digital skills needed to navigate their personal and professional lives. The policy recommendations also include proposals on how the Digital Travellers project outcomes can be integrated in digital education actions within a non-formal educational setting by key stakeholders and therefore support vulnerable populations and, more broadly, European citizens. Finally, the policy recommendations identify where further action needs to be taken at the European, national, regional, and local levels to ensure the bridging of the digital divide.

The policy recommendations address three main target groups namely European policymakers, national and regional policymakers and local authorities. These policy recommendations can be used by stakeholders beyond the project's geographic scope wishing to use this to inform their advocacy strategies around digital education. Please note that you can find more information about the project including its comprehensive library of resources at: <https://digitaltravellers.org/>

European policymakers

Ensure that the development of a high-performing digital education ecosystem includes non-formal digital education and librarians and non-formal training providers

In line with the Digital Education Action Plan's (DEAP) strategy and actions, digital education in all Member States must be high-quality and inclusive to ensure that European citizens continuously pursue the acquisition of digital skills. Additionally, as the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated and the growing shift to digital services in both the public and private sector, digital citizenship and digital skills are required more than ever by all citizens in order to actively participate in society. In order to achieve this, European policymakers should look to ensure that non-formal education is supported through capacity building measures, professional development of non-formal training providers including librarians, and investment in digital infrastructure for non-formal learning spaces including libraries under the DEAP. Furthermore, as the DEAP aims to ensure that no one is left behind through teaching and learning, the EU institutions should look to invest in basic digital education to ensure that digitally excluded citizens have access to a training ecosystem that matches their needs.

Sponsor a European database of resources that formal and non-formal educators and facilitators can use in their digital education practices

In order to boost resources available to both formal and non-formal training providers and further support the creation of a high-quality digital education ecosystem, European policymakers should investigate the creation of a European database of digital education resources collecting best practice resources and translating them in all EU languages. This would ensure that educators and facilitators have access to more high-quality resources that can support digital competence development from across the European Union. The creation of such a database would require:

- The creation of a database with high quality basic digital education resources
- The translation of both the DigComp 2.1 and Digital Competence Framework for Educators (DigCompEdu) and available in all EU languages to ensure that all training providers have access to frameworks that have cohesive translations and can be translated into digital education training opportunities.
- This database would need to ensure that basic digital skills resources designed for those facing the highest levels of digital exclusion are included to ensure that underrepresented populations have training that can be built upon.

Support and encourage Member States to build mutual exchange mechanisms to enhance the design and impact of digital competence development strategies and initiatives including lifelong learning approaches

The European institutions should support and provide opportunities for Member States to improve their digital competence development strategies in light of the impact of the

COVID-19 pandemic. Learners, including lifelong learners¹, need to have access to training that enhances their (digital) competences and skills. The European institutions should continue to finance working groups, conferences, events, peer learning activities over the next few years to ensure that Member States are able to build strong mutual exchange mechanisms in regards to digital competence development strategies.

Ensure national governments and private sectors provide training opportunities when digitalising their services

As private companies and national and regional bodies move towards online services and reduce their traditional service offers, EU policymakers should ensure that sufficient investment is made so that customers and users have the digital skills needed to access the relevant online services. This includes the development and delivery of adequate training as well as targeted and efficient communication towards users and customers to ensure that services are not denied.

¹ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/infographics/lifelonglearning/>

National and regional policymakers

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, related to labour or leisure, in any sector, public or private. As the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted, digital skills and competences are crucial in all aspects of life and those without struggle to connect with others and complete tasks related to their professions, education, and daily life. Additionally, as governments digitalise services and society moves at an increasing pace towards digital services, citizens are asked to be active participants in this digital age and require specific skills to navigate this.

Existing policies on libraries, social inclusion, employment, education and so on should include digital competence development strategies on all aspects of digital skills including media literacy. This will ensure the highest number of people in need of basic digital competence are reached through these policies. Learning offers should be covered by funding mechanisms to offer free or low-cost learning opportunities so that these are accessible to vulnerable segments of the population.

Encourage lifelong learning as a learning approach including digital competences and skills

Holistic learning perspectives need to be developed in the European Union countries so that citizens across all ages and backgrounds pursue lifelong learning. Educational strategies should include adult education, basic (digital) skills, and should foster a culture of lifelong learning and self-assessment of skills. National policymakers from different fields (education, labour market, social affairs, innovation and research) should collaborate to create a coherent and harmonised digital competence development strategy. If needed, a task force on digital competence and a coordinator may need to be nominated so that systematic and coherent strategies and policies can be developed and adopted.

Support accessible formal and non-formal learning opportunities

As highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, digital skills are needed in all aspects of life and must be guaranteed as a universal right for all, especially for people distant from learning and learners with special needs. Barriers that prevent low-skilled people from participating in learning opportunities should be analysed by policymakers and removed in a systemic and structural manner. Furthermore, providers of learning opportunities that reach out to underserved and underrepresented communities need to be supported so that their learning offers are up-to-date and focus on the learner's needs.

The digital competence curricula implemented need to be designed by a wide range of stakeholders including social partners, employers' representatives and more so that these reflect the skills needs of the labour market and society. Flexibility and modularity should be encouraged so that providers and trainers can adapt training and learning opportunities to best fit learners.

Offer in-service training and professional development opportunities for librarians and other non-formal digital education facilitators

People providing digital competence training should continuously update their professional competences and overall knowledge so as to ensure they have the relevant skills and knowledge. This requires high-quality initial education and in-service training and professional development so that training providers are able to offer high-quality learning opportunities that cover ICT issues, digital competence development, and the impact of digitalisation on daily life. These training offers for providers should also include training on the DigCompEdu approach and how providers can utilise it in their work and the DigComp2.1 and the key areas of digital competence needed for citizens. This would ensure that providers have a holistic and coherent approach in their training and cover a wide variety of areas of competence that are relevant in today's society.

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

In order to boost the 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 careers and accessing professional mobilities. Furthermore, this cooperation should be cemented through national networks that provide capacity for local authorities, among which libraries, to use in digital competence development.

Encourage public-private partnership to provide and promote formal and non-formal digital education

National and regional policymakers should analyse training opportunities developed and provided by private companies. Similar to the model of Digital SkillUp portal, part of the learning pillar of the Digital Skills and Jobs Platform, a catalogue of training opportunities developed by companies that support (basic) digital competence development should be created and promoted at a national level. Companies developing such resources or providing training to low-skilled customers & partners should be encouraged. National and regional policymakers need to ensure that training providers can access these resources and use them in their work to train citizens as well as ensure citizens have access to resources they can use independently. Costs associated with these training resources, if any, and barriers to access should be examined and policymakers should be removed systematically and structurally.

Local authorities

Support the spaces where people can improve their digital competence

Learning can take place anywhere and people should be encouraged and enabled to enjoy this. Local policymakers can ensure this by creating, increasing the funding for, and improving the infrastructure of learning spaces in their area of action, especially in non-urban areas of the country. Learning spaces can vary according to context and should be examined accordingly, however a particular emphasis should be put on adult education centres, libraries, community centres, after school initiatives such as homework schools, and digital competence centres.

Feedback from librarians involved in the Digital Travellers project indicated that access to funding to purchase the equipment needed (for example, computers with cameras, headsets with microphones and so on) to carry out digital education activities limited their abilities to carry out meaningful and impactful outreach and digital education activities.

Recognise the changing nature and responsibilities of libraries and non-formal learning spaces

Some librarians involved in the Digital Travellers project faced the difficulty of not having sufficient funding to carry out activities that interest them but are out of their scope. Local policymakers should recognise and legitimise the changing responsibilities of libraries, community centres, digital competence centres, and other non-formal learning spaces and support the development of strategies that allow libraries and other non-formal learning spaces to widen their scope of activity. Additionally, ensuring that libraries and other learning spaces have access to funding that supports human resources and other costs should be a priority for local policymakers to allow a shift in allocated resources to new activities.

Encourage citizens to improve their digital competences through targeted actions

The digitalisation of public services in Europe has been observed recently and the COVID-19 pandemic will likely drive more governments to digitalise their public services. Local authorities have an interest in increasing the digital competence of their residence to ensure that they can still access the relevant public services. Clear information and support must be available to all citizens as to how their access to public services may be impacted by digitalisation. Local policymakers should invest in support centres in libraries and other public spaces to support digitally excluded citizens in their communication with the government as well as sponsoring initiatives such as "open days" in libraries and other non-formal learning spaces, carrying out awareness raising campaigns and giving visibility to digital learning champions to drive participation in digital competence courses.

Additionally, as observed during the lockdowns stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, local policymakers need to develop digital strategies covering strategic and planned support to local organisations and libraries to fully enable them to offer digital education including digital skills and enabling the use of e-services, access to education and information etc. These strategies must also include ensuring access to fast Internet as well as use of the same software across institutions to lower costs of implementation and upgrades.

Reach out to underrepresented groups

Outreach strategies developed by local policymakers need to be prioritised so that underrepresented groups are aware of the accessible digital competence courses. This requires the coordination of various actors such as NGOs, libraries, cultural centres, community centres and other institutions and developing their strategies based on the information provided by various intermediaries.

Additionally, local authorities need to support tailor-made learning offers and finance guidance for disadvantaged learners. To make these initiatives meaningful, local policymakers should carry out an in-depth and evidence-based mapping of the potential target groups in need of digital competence development.

Facilitate networks of digital education facilitators and social partners

As seen in the feedback from partners in the Digital Travellers project, exchange and collaboration between training providers as well as social partners will enhance the number of underrepresented people reached due to the existing relationships other organisations may have with key target groups. This will promote the sustainability and impact of the learning offer as librarians will have a wider network and thus be able to reach more of their local community. These networks could be envisaged in two different ways within bigger local authorities bringing together NGOs and institutions and wider networks on a regional or national level to bring in capacity that local governments cannot develop. Building and maintaining networks like these requires structures, spaces, and financing that local and national/regional policymakers should find ways to facilitate.