# I-LINC MONITOR 2015
EU POLICIES ON DIGITAL INCLUSION AND SKILLS

The I-LINC Monitor presents an overview of important policies in 2015 focusing on the topics of digital inclusion and skills. It is meant to assist readers' understanding of EU level policies and strategies that are relevant to the work of stakeholders and that influence national level strategies.
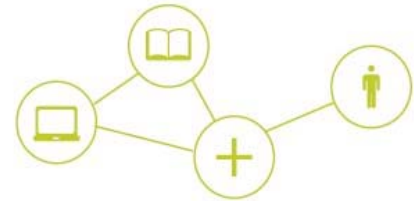
In the last few years, a significant improvement in digital skills has been registered within the EU. However, we are still very far from an ideal digital society: 18% of the EU population has still never used the internet and that's about 100 million people. About 40% of the EU population has an insufficient level of digital skills, while 22% has none at all[1]. The current situation still calls for an EU policy focus on digital inclusion and skills, which is present in a series of policies and strategies mentioned below.

The **Digital Agenda** (DAE) presented by the European Commission forms one of the seven pillars of the Europe 2020 Strategy which sets objectives for the growth of the European Union (EU) by 2020. The Digital Agenda proposes to better exploit the potential of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in order to foster innovation, economic growth and progress. There are clear links between the specific target areas of Europe2020 and the digital inclusion objectives within the DAE.

It forms one of the seven pillars of the Europe 2020 Strategy which sets objectives for the growth of the European Union (EU) by 2020. The Digital Agenda's main objective is to develop a digital single market in order to generate smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe, and it is made up of seven pillars.

The **Digital Single Market** (DSM) is the most important policy adopted by the European Commission on the 6 May 2015 that includes 16 initiatives to be delivered by the end of 2016. The DSM strategy is built on three pillars: 1. Access, 2. Environment and 3. Economy & Society. Under the third pillar, one of the

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[1] Digital Economy and Society Index, data collected at the beginning of 2015.

main priorities is to *support an inclusive digital society* where citizens have the right skills to seize the opportunities of the Internet and boost their chances of getting a job.
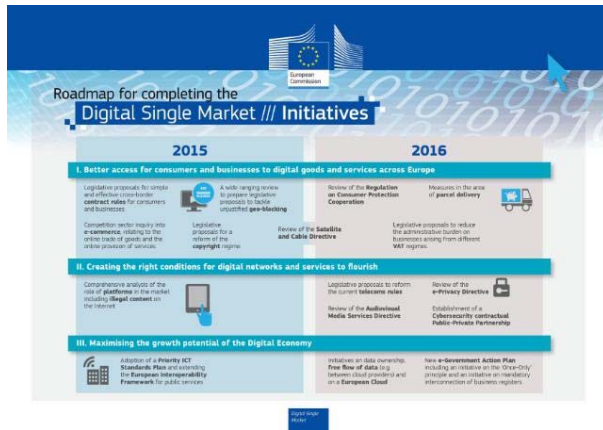
Even though digital skills are mentioned throughout the Strategy, the document lacks focus on *digital inclusion* and does not foresee concrete measures for boosting skills. The spotlight is on economic aspects: telecom, regulations, copyright, e-commerce, ICT infrastructure, cloud computing, but also on e-Government.

To strengthen the e-inclusive aspect of the DSM Strategy, people need to be considered as consumers and producers, workforce and citizens, because no individual category covers all groups of citizens in need of soft skills and digital skills. Education and training for jobs, digital skills and lifelong learning in a digital environment should be brought to the forefront.[2]

In relationship to the digital skills for jobs, amongst other initiatives, the European Commission coordinated the **Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs**, tackling the lack of digital skills in Europe and the thousands of unfilled ICT-related vacancies across all industry sectors. The initiative responds to the need for digital skills for nearly all jobs where digital technology complements existing tasks. In the near future 90% of jobs - in careers such as engineering, accountancy, nursing, medicine, art, architecture, and many more - will require some level of digital skills. *At the end of the day every citizen needs to have at least basic digital skills in order to live, work, learn and participate in society*. Here the element of inclusion is clearly highlighted.

More than 80 stakeholders, representing large and smaller companies, education providers and NGOs have made pledges - concrete commitments to act to reduce digital skills gaps. Likewise, National and Local Coalitions for Digital Jobs aimed to facilitate high-impact actions at local level have been launched.

The Grand Coalition helps to accelerate and intensify efforts initiated by European policies, such as the Europe 2020 strategy, the e-Skills Strategy, the Employment Package, the Opening up Education Initiative, the Rethinking Education Strategy, the Youth Opportunities Initiative, and the EU Skills Panorama.

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[2] Digital Single Market Strategy (TE's position paper)

In related policy documents, such as the **Social Investment Package** (SIP), two policy objectives regarding social innovation can be linked to digital literacy:

- "Preserving access to adequate social protection benefits, services, health, and long-term care." Access and digital skills to use the Internet effectively and in a sustainable way should be a priority, especially among the most vulnerable in society (i.e., those in need of care or benefits).
- "Access to more personalized services ('one-stop shop')." This relates to digital engagement, in particular to guarantee that content is available for particular vulnerable populations and targeted to the specific needs of those individuals.[3]

Adopted in 2009, the **Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training** (ET2020) sets the framework for cooperation in education and training at the EU level. In 2015, the EC performed a review of its implementation and has set new priorities for the next period (2016-2020). One of the new priorities addresses an *inclusive education, equality, equity, non-discrimination and the promotion of civic competences*.

This is further explained in the following terms in the framework: *Europe's low levels of basic knowledge and skills hamper economic progress and severely limit individuals in their professional, social and personal fulfilment. To enhance employability, innovation and active citizenship, key competences for lifelong learning, basic skills must go hand in hand with other key competences and attitudes: creativity, entrepreneurship and a sense of initiative, digital competences, competence in foreign languages, critical thinking including through e-literacy and media literacy, and skills which reflect growing needs, such as those in the green economy and in the digital and health sectors.*

Integration of migrants and refugees was also an important topic on the **EU policy agenda in 2015**. Digital technology is likely to play an increasingly pivotal role at every stage of refugee assistance, particularly as access to smartphones and the Internet becomes more affordable and widespread amongst both refugee and host populations. Therefore, it is clear that the digital inclusion aspect is crucial for a more rapid and efficient integration of the refugees.

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[3] Digital Skills in Europe: Research and Policy