Position Paper

Reviewing the Implementation of the Digital Education Action Plan

Introduction

Digital Education Action Plan DEAP 2021-2027 is a comprehensive framework to modernise European education and skills in the digital era. In June 2022, the European Commission published a bundle of related proposals.

As the European Commission is reviewing the implementation of the Digital Education Action Plan, this paper focuses on the positive and negative aspects of the recommendations. It provides actionable suggestions for their effective implementation.

ALL DIGITAL has been involved in the implementation of mainly five actions of the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027.

Action 1: Council Recommendation on Key Enabling Factors for Successful Digital Education and Training (find more detailed ALL DIGITAL's position here)

We welcome that the Commission has opted to delay the publication of the proposal from its original date in Q3 2022 to allow for a thorough and structured consultation process, which ALL DIGITAL sees reflected in the final proposal text. It is highly commendable that the proposal explicitly declares "**accessible, high-quality and inclusive digital education for all**" as its core aim and recognises that "successful digital education is about **creating more and better opportunities for learning and teaching for everyone in the digital age**". It rightly also acknowledges education as a basic human right, and "must be guaranteed and extended to the digital world". At the same time, ALL DIGITAL regrets that the proposal focuses exclusively on formal education, while informal and non-formal methods of education have been left out. This could hamper the broad inclusiveness that the proposal aims to achieve.

The proposal recognises that there are challenges in investing sufficiently in education and training, in the digital competence of teachers and educators, and in monitoring and assessing digital education methodologies. It advocates tackling these challenges using promoting inclusivity, and stakeholder involvement, and improving educators' digital competences through comprehensive career-long support.

We highly appreciate that the document repeatedly highlights the need to address inequalities, disadvantaged learners, and the digital divide. The call to involve all relevant stakeholders in Member States' initiatives is an important addition.

Recommendations of national goals, monitoring, and evaluation of education policies, along with engaging stakeholders comprising experts in all stages of formulation, have been included in the proposal. However, while it still calls out the crucial role of funding for digital tools and connectivity, at the same time it falls short of proper funding for capacity-building opportunities for teachers. This engagement also did not cover civil society actors.

Broadly, ALL DIGITAL is supportive of the proposed document but proposed several improvements regarding the recognition of informal education and involvement of civil society in stakeholder's cooperation and adequate funding for educator capacity building.

Action 7: Common guidelines for teachers and educators to foster digital literacy and tackle disinformation through education and training

The proposal mentions the **role of parents** and the necessity to provide more detailed guidance on how to actively involve them. To enhance the document, greater family involvement is essential. This includes organising workshops for parents to raise awareness about disinformation and providing tools for monitoring children's online activities. These meetings could address specific topics such as the safe use of social media and the critical evaluation of information sources. The creation of digital or printed educational materials for families would also be a valuable tool in raising awareness. Communication with parents can be improved through digital tools like WhatsApp groups and newsletters, fostering a support network between families and schools.

The proposal refers to the **use of digital tools to combat disinformation**, but it could be expanded to include emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning. The integration of AI and machine learning can aid in real-time detection and analysis of disinformation, automating fact-checking and personalizing educational strategies.

Another point that requires further attention is the **evaluation of the digital skills acquired by students**. Currently, the document offers some general guidance on how to monitor progress in digital literacy, but a more structured and comprehensive system is

needed. More specific guidelines could be introduced to assess students' digital skills and critical thinking using tools such as self-assessment tests, questionnaires, and teacher rubrics. These tools should measure not only the technical ability but also the ability to distinguish between true and false information, thus evaluating the effectiveness of the educational programme.

The concept of **gamification** and game-based learning is mentioned in the document, but it could be further developed with practical examples and concrete applications. Expanding the use of educational games, such as fact-checking simulations, can make learning about disinformation more engaging and effective.

Additionally, **continuous support and training for teachers less proficient in technology** is crucial, providing them with resources and ongoing professional development to improve digital literacy education. Not all teachers possess the technological skills necessary to effectively teach digital literacy and combat disinformation. The document could therefore be improved by including sections dedicated to continuous support and training for teachers who are less experienced in the digital field. Practical and easily accessible resources that teachers can use in their training, such as interactive guides or online tutorials, could also be created. Offering ongoing support to teachers empowers them to become leaders in digital education, ensuring more effective and inclusive teaching.

Action 8: Updating the European Digital Competence Framework to include AI and data-related skills

The **update of DigComp to include AI and data-related skills** has been largely achieved. However, to ensure that DigComp remains a relevant and effective tool, it is crucial to implement frequent updates that promptly incorporate the latest innovations. For instance, in the current version of DigComp 2.2 there is no specific reference to generative artificial intelligence. AI should be structurally integrated into the description of all 21 competences within the framework.

At present, references to AI in DigComp are limited to about 70 examples of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, that are not organised according to the proficiency levels outlined in the framework, and as explicitly stated, are not exhaustive.

Therefore, the current work carried out by the JRC DigComp Learning Outcomes project and the future update of DigComp's conceptual framework (defined almost 10 years ago)

must include a **comprehensive integration of AI into all areas and specific competences**, structured across proficiency levels, from basic understanding to advanced use in professional contexts. AI must be regarded as a transversal dimension that impacts all DigComp competences.

The experience of AD in the DigCompHub project, supporting the DigComp Community of Practice **with 1100 members from 80 countries**, shows an ever-wider use of the framework by all kinds of stakeholders in education and, increasingly, in the business world to address digital competence needs in the workplace. This creates a strong interest in the exchange of experiences and sharing of methodological and educational resources based on DigComp.

To facilitate and accelerate the deployment of actions towards the ambitious goal of 80% of citizens with at least basic digital skills by 2030, such resources (in particular, teaching materials and digital competence assessment tools) targeting educators and their (mostly adult) learners must be identified, selected, tagged using DigComp and other frameworks, translated and localised for different EU languages/countries, and made easily available. The DigComp CoP, possibly in cooperation with the Erasmus+ National Agencies and the National Coalitions for digital skills and jobs, might play an important role in carrying out such activities.

Action 9: European Digital Skills Certificate (EDSC)

The results of the **EDSC feasibility study**, carried out with significant involvement of hundreds of stakeholders through a consultation process and completed at the end of 2023, are still unpublished and any policy decisions stemming from them are unknown. This leaves much uncertainty about the value of digital competence certification and what to do about it, among certification service providers, the intermediaries (employers, educational institutions etc.) and final users/recipients (workers, students, and citizens in general) of those certificates.

As highlighted by the EDSC feasibility study, the effectiveness and feasibility of implementing the EDSC (even as a sort of 'quality/alignment label') should be closely tied to an update of the DigComp framework (started with the JRC DigComp Learning Outcomes project), ensuring that clear and consistent references to the digital knowledge and skills to be certified are available. The current DigComp version does not allow for an unequivocal approach in this regard, which can hinder the certification process.

An updated DigComp version should facilitate the precise identification of the digital competences to be certified, making it easier for training providers, certification bodies, and individuals to align their offer and skills with this European 'standard'. This would ensure that the EDSC is both a reliable and consistent tool for validating digital competences across different sectors and educational systems, enhancing its value and recognition within the European labour market.

An initiative to compare the new digital competence assessment systems - usually based on DigComp – which are under development by university networks thanks to European Next Generation EU funds (as in Spain and Italy), could be useful to provide an additional input to the envisaged DigComp update and to the JRC DigComp Learning Outcomes project, as well as to understand how these systems might contribute (or become an obstacle) to future EDSC developments.

In any case, the development of the EDSC might create the organisational conditions for a more structured and strategic management of the future development of the DigComp framework and for its wider promotion and adoption in Europe and beyond (where the interest in DigComp is growing).

ALL DIGITAL continues supporting the EDSC action by maintaining and moderating the Certification Community of Practice, which currently has more than 1200 members.

Action 10: Council recommendation on improving the provision of digital skills in education and training (find more detailed ALL DIGITAL's position here)

The College of Commissioners adopted a proposal for a Council Recommendation on improving digital skills in education and training. ALL DIGITAL welcomes this proposal and calls for a swift adoption from the Member States.

The proposal strongly endorses a lifelong learning approach. Thereby, it intends **to enhance the low level of digital skills among the population and labour force in Europe**. The proposed solutions include setting up national goals, inclusiveness of various sectors within society, the support for certification of digital skills, and the provision of adequate funding for the training in digital skills.

ALL DIGITAL fully endorses the recommendation for Member States to establish national objectives aligned with EU-level targets, accompanied by a rigorous and continuous evaluation and monitoring framework. Such measures facilitate a more targeted and efficient implementation, ensuring that no individual is left behind. We also welcome the

balanced emphasis on both cross-curricular approaches and the need for specialised teachers and trainers, recognising these as complementary components necessary to address the full spectrum of digital competences and proficiency levels.

Furthermore, we commend the decision to refrain from linking the recommendation on certification to any specific level of education or training, or exclusively to the labour market. The certification and recognition of digital skills stand to benefit all citizens, irrespective of age, employment status, disabilities, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, or socio-economic circumstances. We are particularly pleased that the recommendations encourage Member States **to support and promote the European Digital Skills Certificate**, a measure in which ALL DIGITAL plays a key role by facilitating the Digital Competence Certification Community of Practice. Additionally, the inclusion of references to micro-credentials and individual learning accounts is highly commendable.

With regard to overarching recommendations, the call for adequate funding to support digital skills development is of paramount importance. We consider this provision essential to the success of any policy framework or initiative. We welcome the European Commission's recognition of the various EU-level funding programs and support mechanisms available to Member States to assist in securing the necessary financial resources. It is particularly noteworthy that these recommendations adopt a life-long learning perspective in relation to funding.

ALL DIGITAL supports the majority of the sector-specific recommendations concerning education and training, which provide a comprehensive and well-structured framework for Member States to implement. Nevertheless, we express **concern over the limitations observed in the recommendations specific to the vocational education and training (VET) sector**. The role of VET providers should not be confined to the development of advanced and specialised digital skills - although these are undeniably important - at the expense of other equally critical aspects. Given the existing skills deficits, particularly at basic levels among European citizens and the labour force, VET providers play a pivotal role in fostering these skills among adult learners. The failure to acknowledge this broader function represents a missed opportunity within the recommendations.

The recommendations pertaining to adult learning are particularly positive, though with a notable focus on adults of working age. However, they are not exclusively limited to this demographic, and the inclusion of adults outside the labour market is implicit,

although a more explicit reference would have strengthened this point. We particularly highlight the importance of the recommendations advocating for targeted support for adults most in need and the emphasis on collaborative approaches involving diverse stakeholders. We also welcome the references to the Council Recommendation on Individual Learning Accounts and the call for the establishment of further local and regional Digital Skills and Jobs Coalitions.

Overall, ALL DIGITAL endorses the proposed Council Recommendation on enhancing the provision of digital skills in education and training and urges Member States to swiftly reach consensus on its adoption, coupled with a robust commitment to its implementation.

We remain committed to supporting the European Commission and Member States in their efforts to foster the inclusive and accessible development of digital skills for all.

Key recommendations

ALL DIGITAL sustains the European Commission's initiative and suggests continuing support:

- Initiatives that address the digital divide;
- Member States in setting and achieving national digital education objectives aligned with EU-wide goals, fostering a cohesive approach across Europe;
- Initiatives aimed at equipping all age groups with digital skills (Lifelong Learning approach);
- Teachers' Professional Development;
- Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector.

ALL DIGITAL proposes the following improvements:

- Expand the scope of DEAP to include informal and non-formal education.
- Increase civil society involvement in digital education initiatives.
- Promote gamified learning solutions to enhance engagement and retention.
- Accelerate the implementation of the European Digital Skills Certificate (EDSC).
- Provide comprehensive guidelines and resources for involving families in digital literacy efforts.
- Integrate emerging technologies, such as AI, to strengthen education on disinformation.