

Perception and reality: Measuring digital skills in Europe

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Our day-to-day lives are more and more dependent on digital technologies. Life without a computer, a tablet or a mobile phone has become unimaginable, and more people than ever have access to the internet. There are 134 mobile subscriptions per 100 people in the EU and 83% of households in Europe have access to the internet at home. These impressive numbers can create an illusion that, by having access to digital technologies, people automatically know how to use them. People tend to assume that if they own a digital device and know how to use certain applications, then they already have all the necessary skills for personal and professional life. A number of the National Operators of ECDL in Europe have carried out digital literacy studies to find out what the actual digital skills levels in their countries are. Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany and Switzerland are all considered to be digitally advanced countries – they appear at the top of various international digital development indexes (for example, the Digital Economy and Society Index developed by the European Commission). However, surveys conducted in these countries revealed that gaps exist between self-perceived and actual levels of digital skills. Even young people, who are falsely assumed to be ‘digital natives’, usually under-perform in practical tests. This paper provides an overview of the main findings of the five studies and discusses their implications for digital skills development on the national and European levels.

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