



The Digital Collective hosted an event for prioritising basic (digital) skills in the European Year of Skills

On June 7th, [The Digital Collective](#) (DigiCo) hosted the first episode of their Digital Inclusion event series Back to Basics: **“Let’s bring basic skills back in the European Year of Skills.”** This hybrid event took place in Brussels and reunited different key actors in the skills field towards a common objective: to prioritise basic skills - with an integrated approach that includes basic digital skills - in the European Skills Agenda. As this year has been declared the European Year of Skills by the European Commission, it is a fruitful context to work towards ensuring equity and inclusion. During the event, DigiCo emphasised the need to address basic skills as a prerequisite for this relevant year: the skills gap cannot be closed without addressing first individuals with low skills. In the same way, the digital divide cannot be bridged without addressing individuals with no to low digital skills first.

During his **opening speech**, Gori Yahaya - Co-Director and Co-Founder of DigiCo - highlighted how basic digital skills have become a necessity in today’s world, becoming a basic skill for individuals to be able to thrive in modern society. In this context, basic digital literacy is the first step towards integrating disadvantaged groups who currently have no to low basic digital skills and who risk being sidelined in the processes of upskilling and reskilling. “We can’t hope to bridge the skills gap without tackling the foundational issue - individuals equipped with basic skills. Today, I am here to challenge all of you, and myself - educators, policymakers, tech innovators. Let’s ensure that no individual is left behind in this digital transformation,” he stated.

Gori Yahaya then welcomed the first guest speaker of the event to the stage, Ana Carrero - Deputy Head of Unit for Cedefop at DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion from the European Commission. The first panel was called **“In Conversation with the European Commission: Where do basic skills stand in the European Year of Skills?”**. During her presentation, Ana Carrero highlighted strategic objectives and initiatives the European Commission is working on to ensure relevant skills learning pathways and sustainable growth in this European Year of Skills. She highlighted that: “We need everybody on board to reach these targets. We are working on raising awareness with communication campaigns, events and so on at the EU level - not only the Commission but other EU institutions. But we need Member States at all levels: public authorities, training providers, social partners, NGOs and so on to really identify bottlenecks at national, regional and local levels.”

The second panel of the event, **“Fireside chat: How can AI contribute to bridging the digital divide?”** was a conversation between Gerardo Franco - Philanthropies Lead Western Europe at Microsoft - and Silvano de Marte - Communications & Community Engagement Officer at DigiCo

- where Artificial Intelligence played a central role. The speakers first addressed AI and the changes it will bring about regarding the labour market, and then moved into AI and its potential to narrow the digital skills gap. In this respect, Gerardo Franco enumerated three aspects that need special attention: 1) address computer science education in young people, 2) handle the needs of workers today for reskilling and upskilling, and 3) put special attention to all those people who are not in those two categories (such as individuals from non-traditional backgrounds and underserved populations). He also highlighted that educators play a fundamental role in this transitional period, that AI literacy is crucial to make the best use of this new technology, and that soft skills such as critical thinking and empathy will be the skills that will help individuals use AI in the best and most positive way towards inclusiveness. "If your technology changes the world, you do bear responsibility to ensure that that technology is available to everyone, is used with responsibility and it doesn't leave anyone behind," he concluded.

The third panel of the event, "**Panel Discussion: European and Global best practices for tackling basic (digital) skills gaps**", welcomed three experts in adult education with different levels of governance: global, European and regional. Rakhat Zholdoshalieva - Team Leader and Researcher at UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) -, Viola Pinzi - Head of Projects at the European Association for the Education of Adults -, and Antra Carlsen - Head Coordinator at the Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL) - joined Léa Ichikawa - Program Manager at DigiCo - to discuss best practices for basic skills training. All three speakers gave their perspectives on solutions to reducing the basic skills gap and increasing the number of individuals that reach basic skills while sharing concrete examples and best practices within their governance. They also discussed lifelong learning and highlighted equity and inclusion as fundamental notions for policy, curriculum and training design. The event ended after Léa Ichikawa's **closing remarks**.

You can see the whole event on [The Digital Collective's YouTube channel](#).

About DigiCo:

The Digital Collective (DigiCo) is a Brussels-based non-profit organisation whose mission is to tackle the increasing digital divide that is not only creating an alarming distance to the labour market for individuals in vulnerable situations but also causing social exclusion as society moves into the digital age. One of the ways they do so is by supporting impactful training programs and fostering a common approach to assessing digital skills. With grant support from Google.org, they cooperate with private, public, and non-profit actors in a multi-stakeholder approach.