SKILL IT
digital pathways for youth work

POLICY BRIEF

SKILL IT FOR YOUTH

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HOW TO USE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY TO INCREASE EMPLOYABILITY CHANCES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION

This Policy Brief aims to summarise the key findings of the Skill IT for Youth Research report and to put forward proposals for improvement in this area.

APPROACH

The 'Skill IT for Youth – Integrating Digital and Future Skills into Youth Work' project's stated aim was to increase the quality and relevance of youth work through digitalization, resulting in increased opportunities for young people in the 21st Century. Initially, we conducted a literature review which was followed by an innovative piece of Research comparing the viewpoints of Young People, Youth Workers, Youth Services Managers, and employers: examining realities and perceptions around Digital Skills attainment levels, how digital learning occurs, what skills are required for employment today and in the near future, discrepancies around existing skills and required skills, and how the Youth Sector does and can help YP develop relevant digital skills. Over the course of the project, we hosted a week long International Youth Worker Training, and 2 national level Seminars, during which we collected further data and opinions from Youth practitioners, academics, employability experts, etc.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

EVERY AREA OF LIFE NOW REQUIRES A LEVEL OF DIGITAL SKILLS, IN PARTICULAR, EMPLOYMENT

Using digital technology is now unavoidable in most areas of life, and if young people are to be prepared for a balanced and healthy life, relevant digital learning at an appropriate level, is therefore absolutely essential.

Looking at employability then, it is estimated that 90% of jobs will soon need digital skills and 65% of students starting school today will have jobs that haven't been invented. This means that as well as Digital Skills per se, Young People need to be equipped with what is often termed Future Skills, and certain Soft Skills, such as flexibility, agility and resilience in the face of change.

FORMAL EDUCATION SYSTEM DOES NOT MEET THE CURRENT NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Digital skills contribute to the quality of life of citizens if they use new technology consciously and safely. For this reason, digital education is very important and should start as early as possible, because younger and younger children come into contact with the internet. The school system in Poland, however, cannot keep pace with progressive changes and does not provide adequate teaching of new skills. Most young people admitted in the *Skill IT for Youth* study that they acquire digital skills on their own. In addition, the school and education system in Poland is experiencing a deep crisis caused by the so-called education reform and low teacher salaries, which translates into a growing shortage of qualified staff. In this situation, the role of NGOs is increasing and they are forced to respond to the challenge of supporting young people also in this field.

CURRENT STATE OF PLAY OF DIGITAL YOUTH WORK IN POLAND

The *Skill IT for Youth* study showed that young people are fully aware of the importance of digital skills, and treat the internet as the main source of knowledge and communication. At the same time, they believe that school does not teach ICT well, they also point to deficiencies in equipment. The school staff is not qualified and has no authority among young people. They feel that they have to learn digital competences on their own.

Meanwhile, employers expect technology skills, while they point out that the most important is the ability to use digital technologies to develop one's own ideas and solve problems. The key universal competence is the ability to reach reliable information independently, including ready-made solutions that can be processed or copied. The skills of searching, filtering content, distinguishing information from entertainment are the common denominator for all workplaces.

The role of educational institutions should be to instill the habit of verifying information and forcing to greater cognitive effort in the context of using the internet. Especially that the Polish school does not teach critical thinking and there is no political will to change it. The curriculum focuses on history and native language, marginalizing communication skills, building relationships and mastering technology. Digital competences are horizontal and should be part of all subjects. The best way to learn about technology is to use it effectively in a variety of tasks. However, computer science in a Polish school is often more about learning about technology than about its practical application for solving problems.

In addition, school and parents do not seem to understand the benefits of using the internet; it is often treated as entertainment and young people are often prohibited from using the internet as a punishment. Education about the digital world is conducted mainly in the context of threats (cyber violence, data theft), not the benefits of using technology.

Young people know about programs for communication, creating memes, and posting video materials. They are less skillful at critical analysis, search engine principles, copyrights protections, hate recognition, are not aware of the consequences of their actions on the web, poorly protect their privacy. They rarely use proven sources of knowledge (for example, nobody in the study mentioned Wikipedia). Employers pointed out that young employees could not use excel or power point. Although they know the tools from ICT lessons, they are not able to use them practically.

The respondents indicated that non-governmental organizations are the entity that can support the development of digital competences. Security and the fight against the phenomenon of hate
on the web are examples of topics that NGOs are already dealing with successfully, albeit on a small scale. Organizations recognize the importance and value of digital skills in the development of young people. They also see their role in supporting and encouraging educators to use technology in youth work. The third sector is aware of the importance of the digital revolution, follows trends, trying to be ready for new opportunities, although it is limited by finances and a lack of system support from the state.

NGO leaders postulate a fundamental change in the way digital literacy is taught. The changes taking place globally in connection with the development of digital technology require a broader approach and are impossible to deal with in IT lessons alone. The public education system should take into account, among other things, issues related to democracy, social justice, critical media analysis, information management.

CONTEXT

The economic and labor market situation in Poland is favorable. The pace of economic growth, despite the decline in 2019, is still high and according to the data of the Central Statistical Office, reaches 4%. The unemployment rate is the lowest since the Transformation, 30 years ago, and amounts to 3.9%. Unfortunately, economic growth is not being followed by the growth in the ICT industry, which is three times lower and amounts to only 1.5%. The level of digital competence of citizens is low compared to other countries; in European and global research, Poles have been doing very poorly and taking places at the end of rankings for years. In 2019 DESI (Digital Economy and Society Index) Poland ranks low (among the last 4 countries) in all 5 dimensions: connectivity, human capital, use of internet services, integration of digital technology, digital public services.

The CSO data also shows that only 40.4% of people in Poland use online public administration services, although there was an increase of 4.9 pp. compared to 2018. When it comes to online shopping, it was made in 2019 by 53.9% of people aged 16-74, most among urban residents.

Although the spread of new technologies and full use of their potential is not possible without continuing to build digital competences, the education system is far from responding to these challenges. The Ministry of Digitization has been implementing the National Education Network (OSE) project in cooperation with the NASK State Research Institute only since 2018. It is to connect schools with fast and secure internet access and create a platform for creative exchange of ideas and experiences. Ultimately, by the end of 2020, it is planned to connect 19,500 locations and 30,000 schools. Currently in Poland, only about 23% of schools have access to high-speed Internet networks with a bandwidth of at least 100 Mb / s. The lack of universal access to high-speed internet is considered a barrier to the development of the intellectual potential of society and the maintenance of an effective competitive advantage of the economy.

In view of technological and structural challenges, the difficult situation in Polish education is of particular concern. It hits an entire generation of young people, most of all people with weaker potential and adult support, especially those threaten with social exclusion. Only 25% of people who took part in the survey of the project believe that young people have the necessary digital skills to first find employment and secondly be effective in a modern workplace.

CURRENT PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

THE EDUCATION SYSTEM CLEARLY CANNOT KEEP UP WITH CHANGES IN THE MODERN WORLD AND CHALLENGES OF THE NOWADAYS WORKPLACE

POLISH SCHOOL IS IN CRISIS AND DOES NOT EQUALIZE OPPORTUNITIES RELATED TO ACCESS TO KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION

LACK OF ADEQUATE DIGITAL EDUCATION IN THE CURRICULUM

THERE IS A NEED FOR A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO LEARNING HOW TO SEARCH INFORMATION, VERIFY IT, AND CRITICALLY ASSESS IT

THE SCHOOL IN POLAND DOES NOT TEACH CRITICAL THINKING, REFLECTION, MARGINALIZES COMMUNICATION SKILLS, DOES NOT TEACH ABOUT THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN PRACTICAL TASKS

EMPLOYERS COUNT ON NGOS TO SUPPORT THE ROLE AND DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL SKILLS

NGOS UNDERSTAND THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION AND ARE IN THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMING THEIR OPERATING METHODS, BUT ARE NOT YET READY TO SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE IN THIS AREA AND INCREASE THEIR EMPLOYABILITY CHANCES

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INNOVATION AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

During the project and consultation with stakeholders, a number of ideas and suggestions for solutions emerged. Most of the postulated changes refer to systemic solutions on the side of the state and educational institutions. The state should provide adequate infrastructure and system support for grassroots organizations and citizens. All respondents in the *Skill IT's* poll indicated that policymakers at EU, national and local level have a responsibility to implement a strategy, policy and framework that builds the potential of digital youth work.

1.
INTENSIFICATION OF DIGITIZATION OF THE STATE ADMINISTRATION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT SECTOR AS A FACTOR MOBILIZING THE DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL COMPETENCES AMONG CITIZENS

There is a need to modernize public administration using digital technologies to improve the state's efficiency, improve the quality of administration's relations with citizens and other stakeholders. Horizontal actions (across the departmental organization of ministries), development of competences in ICT areas and building a common state IT infrastructure are necessary. 83.4% of those surveyed believe that public investment in better infrastructure, such as equal access to broadband and devices, would help the youth sector to equip young people with the right level of digital skills.

2.
DEVELOP A NEW DIGITAL EDUCATION PROGRAM AT SCHOOLS

Since effective citizens and workers of the 21st century must be able to exhibit a range of functional and critical thinking skills related to information, media, and technology, the digital education program in schools should be adapted to this demand rapidly. It should cover all spectrum of Information, Media and Technology Skills as defined in P21s Framework for 21st Century Learning: 1. Information Literacy, (ability to access the information and evaluate it critically, use and management of information), 2. Media Literacy (analysis and creating media messages), 3. ICT Literacy (effective use of technology to solve problems, understanding ethical and legal issues related to the access and use of information technologies). Digital skills should be regarded as horizontal and used in teaching all subjects at school, with an emphasis on practical problem solving using available technologies.

3.
PROVIDING A SYSTEM OF GRANTS FROM LOCAL AND CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF DIGITAL COMPETENCES FOR THE NGO SECTOR, WHICH CAN COMPLEMENT EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS, ESPECIALLY FOR YOUTH AT RISK OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Non-governmental organizations do not yet have a sufficient level of digital readiness (both at the organizational and professional level). The third sector also feels the low level of digital skills of its specialists, and organizations need help to keep in touch with today's requirements regarding digitalization and the use of ICT. 80% of people who took part in the Skill IT poll believe that NGOs need support from state institutions, especially in terms of increasing the employability of young people.

4.
CREATING A COALITION OF NGOS WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AND TEACHERS TO CREATE A COMMON POLICY FOR DIGITAL COMPETENCES' DEVELOPMENT DIVIDED INTO AREAS OF EXPERTISE OF INDIVIDUAL ORGANIZATIONS

5.
BUSINESS COOPERATION WITH SCHOOLS AND DEVELOPMENT OF SCALABLE WAYS OF THIS COOPERATION

The respondents agreed that companies should appreciate and engage in the youth work sector and help shape future initiatives building young people's digital skills. Employers could cooperate with schools on a larger scale as part of patronage classes and workshops with young people, introducing them to the conditions of the modern workplace, and promoting new professions and jobs related to digitalization. Employers are already launching digital education initiatives, e.g. www.cyfrowedna.pl. The goal is to improve the digital competences of employees of Polish companies in the context of the requirements of an increasingly digitalized business, as well as to acquire new skills in such areas as Robotic Process Automation, data analytics and the implementation of digital innovations.

6.
CREATING THE ADVISORY GROUP ON RAPIDLY CHANGING WORKPLACE NEEDS DRIVEN BY TECHNOLOGY AND MEDIA

The resulting advisory board should be a kind of Think Tank consisting of experts from the most innovative business companies, scientists and NGO leaders. The role of this advice would be to identify priorities and anticipate trends in the development of digital competences so that young adults, especially those at risk of exclusion, could learn potentially key skills in advance.
The Council can support both the legislator (Ministry of Digitization, Ministry of Education) and NGOs creating innovative education/development programs.

7.
EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCE WITH THE GOVERNMENT SECTOR AND NGOS ON THE INTERNATIONAL FORUM (STUDY VISITS, CONFERENCES) AS AN INSPIRATION TO CREATE NATIONAL SOLUTIONS

Launching a program of exchanges and study visits of Polish representatives of the state and NGO sector with countries with clear achievements in the field of digital education will help to take advantage of the best practices and adapt them in Polish environment. It could be also an inspiration to build local educational strategies. The measurable results of effective actions in other countries are the best argument and incentive to transfer good and already proven solutions to Poland.

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