Increase Digital Competences to Promote Inclusion

InDiCo - Increase Digital Competences to Promote Inclusion

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Status quo of the EU DigComp framework implementation

Country Report
Greece

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1 Introduction

The European Commission's (2023) targets for the digital decade envisage that at least 80% of those aged 16-74 shall have at least basic digital skills by 2030. DigComp 2.2, the digital competence framework for citizens (Vuorikari et al., 2022), which allows the categorisation and comparability of digital skills on eight levels, plays a key role in the European Commission's digital strategy.

Although the DigComp framework includes basic digital competences at levels 1 and 2, and the digital strategy aims for 'digital skills for all', persons with learning difficulties are at risk of exclusion. In the InDiCo project we agreed on using the term 'persons with learning difficulties' instead of 'persons with intellectual disabilities' to describe persons who experience challenges in all areas of life due to intellectual difficulties.

'Learning difficulties' encompass a range of challenges with regard to learning arising from various factors which can be genetic, neurobiological, cognitive, motivational, affective, or socioeconomic factors. It includes both general learning deficits and specific disorders like reading, spelling, or arithmetic difficulties. Diagnosis and intervention must be tailored to the individual, with some factors being more modifiable than others. Terminology and policies surrounding learning difficulties vary widely across regions and educational systems. Contemporary definitions are largely descriptive, focusing on addressing the specific needs of individuals to facilitate their learning progress in all areas of life (Lenhard & Lenhard, 2013).

Often training programmes are inaccessible to them, or the adult learning and education staff who support and accompany persons with learning difficulties have low digital competences themselves. Against this backdrop, the InDiCo project aims for a clearer understanding of the competences required by persons with learning difficulties in their digital interactions, a competence-based approach for adult learning and education staff in the assessment and training of digital competences, and improved validation of digital competences in connection with the DigComp framework.

One step to reach these aims is to examine the current state of digital inclusion of persons with learning difficulties in relation to the DigComp framework, specifically in relation to proficiency levels 1 and 2. In six reports (for Austria, Germany, Greece, Portugal, and Spain, and the pan-European level) the extent to which 'digital skills for all' with regard to persons with learning difficulties has already been achieved is explored.

As an introduction to this report, DigComp is briefly explained and the central concepts of assessment and validation are introduced, followed by an explanation of the methodology.

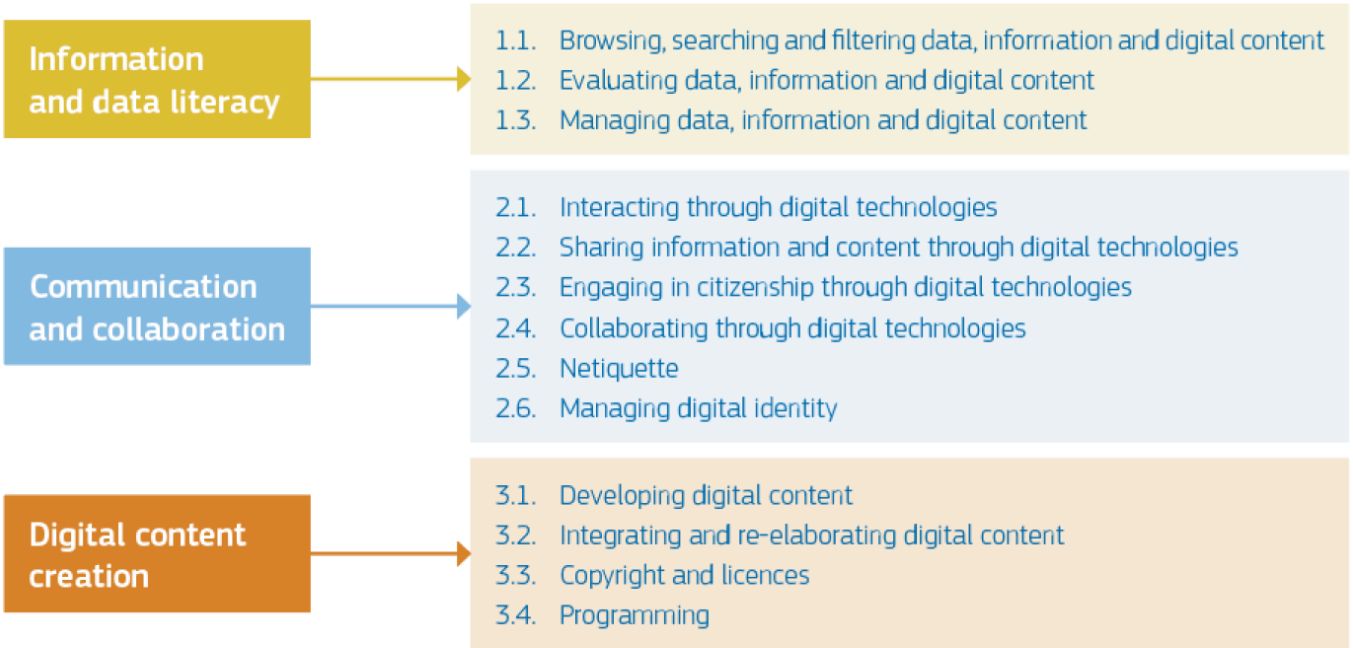
DigComp 2.2: The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens

The DIGCOMP framework, which provides a means of developing and understanding digital competence in Europe, was first published in 2013 (Ferrari, 2013). The European Union has

identified digital competence as one of the eight key competences for lifelong learning. Digital competence can be defined as the confident, critical and creative use of information and communication technology to achieve goals related to work, employability, learning, leisure, inclusion and/or participation in society (p. 2). The DIGCOMP framework is designed to facilitate the development of digital competence among individuals in Europe. It represents an attempt to allow for self-assessment based on five areas of digital competence and three proficiency levels. It also presents a detailed framework with an in-depth description of the different aspects of 21 digital competences.

The most recent iteration is DigComp 2.2, the digital competence framework for citizens (Vuorikari et al., 2022). The framework is a pan-European instrument designed to enhance citizens' digital competence, assist policymakers in formulating policies that facilitate digital competence development, and plan educational and training initiatives to enhance the digital competence of specific target groups (p. 2). The DigComp framework provides a common language to identify and describe the key areas of digital competence, namely information and data literacy; communication and collaboration; digital content creation; safety; and problem solving, in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (p. 3). The use of agreed vocabulary allows for the consistent application of the competence-based approach to instructional planning, assessment and monitoring (p. 4). Ultimately, it is up to the users, institutions, intermediaries or initiative developers to adapt the reference framework to their needs when tailoring interventions (e.g. curriculum development) to fit the specific needs of target groups (p. 4).

The DigComp 2.2 framework encompasses five competence areas, each comprising a total of 21 competences and eight proficiency levels (p. 4).



As previously stated, the InDiCo project places particular emphasis on proficiency levels 1 and 2, which are regarded as the fundamental levels ("foundation"). Proficiency levels 1 and 2 are distinguished by the degree of guidance required. The following example is derived from competence area 2, which is "Communication and collaboration," and is given for competence 2.4 "Collaborating through digital technologies" (p. 21).

FOUNDATION	1	At basic level and with guidance, I can:	• **choose simple** digital tools and technologies for collaborative processes.
	2	At basic level and with autonomy and appropriate guidance where needed, I can:	• **choose simple** digital tools and technologies for collaborative processes.

The framework provides examples of learning outcomes in the form of knowledge, skills and attitudes. It also presents examples of "use cases," which are scenarios that illustrate the application of the learning outcomes in either an employment or a learning context. For example, on pages 12 and 13, the framework presents a use case from each of these two contexts.

Assessment and validation of learning outcomes

Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) can be conceptualised as a powerful tool to support disadvantaged and vulnerable adults. It highlights the importance of introducing and advocating for alternative pedagogical approaches where the assessment and validation of prior and in situ learning is seen as a learning process (Andersson, 2017), rather than a policy-driven summative assessment and certification for capacity building purposes. VNFIL places the individual at the centre of the process (Villalba-García, 2021, p. 357).

With this in mind, and in view of the project's objectives, two key concepts need to be highlighted:

- Validation means a process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard and consists of the

following four distinct phases: identification, documentation, assessment, and certification (Cedefop, 2023, p. 9).

- Assessment is normally referred to as the stage in which an individual's learning outcomes are compared against specific reference points and/or standards. It needs to be designed to capture and assess the learning specific to each individual, so various tools need to be considered. In some cases, written tests will be sufficient; in other cases, demonstrations, practical tests and evaluation of other forms of evidence will be required (p. 16).

The InDiCo project considers the DigComp framework to be a pertinent standard for the assessment and validation of learning outcomes. However, we also intend to include the competences required by persons with learning difficulties in their digital interactions, thus prioritising the learner's voice and placing the individual at the centre of the process. Furthermore, we acknowledge the value of other pertinent frameworks, such as the UNESCO (2021) framework for media and information literacy.

Methodology

The research questions were derived from qualitative social research (Given, 2008) and addressed the digital inclusion of persons with learning difficulties as a social issue (Bloor, 2011). The data collection and analysis process was guided by these questions in order to gain an understanding of the current state of digital inclusion of persons with learning difficulties in relation to the EU DigComp framework, specifically in relation to proficiency levels 1 and 2. The findings are presented in six reports, one for each country included in the study: Austria, Germany, Greece, Portugal, Spain, and one at a pan-European level.

- How is the EU DigComp strategy implemented? Does a national DigComp framework exist or is it being developed? How is the national framework linked to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)? And: What is the current state at the pan-European level?

- Are there any gaps or challenges in the implementation of the DigComp strategy/framework at levels 1 and 2?

- What bottom-up initiatives are working towards the digital inclusion of persons with learning difficulties with a focus on promoting digital competences at levels 1 and 2?

The following data collection steps were taken:

- We conducted web searches for policy papers, reports, studies and information on policy-driven projects, as well as information on relevant bottom-up initiatives for persons with learning difficulties (project websites, evaluation reports and the like) based on relevant keywords, screened the content, and documented these materials (Prior, 2011, p. 95).

- We have used the following search terms, among others, and in various combinations: digital inclusion for all; digital competences; digital skills; digital literacy; digital initiatives for persons with learning difficulties; adult basic education; National Qualifications Framework; and validation of non-formal and informal learning;

- We surveyed the project's associated partners and identified key informants (Fetterman, 2008), in particular policy makers, digital strategy experts, persons with learning difficulties providers, and validation experts, through the web searches.

- Drawing on a question-based interview guide (Morgan & Guevara, 2008), we conducted interviews with selected key informants. Together we explored the effectiveness of (national) strategies for enhancing digital competencies, particularly focusing on initiatives for persons with learning difficulties, and delved into the challenges and (possible) key stakeholders to (further) promote digital inclusion, and explored issues of assessing and validating digital competencies for persons with learning difficulties and strategies to ensure their inclusion in digital environments.

In order to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the data, we selected the most pertinent documents that would enable us to gain a deeper understanding of the current situation. Furthermore, we included the recorded key informant interviews as the foundation for our analysis.

The method of qualitative content analysis (Julien, 2008) was employed, with a basic form of interpretation, the "summary", applied. The objective of such a "summary" is to "reduce the material in such a way that the essential contents remain, in order to create through abstraction a comprehensive overview of the base material which is nevertheless still an image of it" (Mayring, 2014, p. 64).

In order to provide answers to the research questions, the base material was analysed and the key messages that emerged from the documents and the key statements or comments that emerged from the interviews were identified. This report was then produced in order to shed light on the status quo of the digital inclusion of persons with learning difficulties in relation to the EU

2 Implementation of the EU DigComp strategy with regard to persons with learning difficulties

National Strategy

Greece has taken several steps to enhance digital competences and promote digital inclusion. First and foremost, the comprehensive **Digital Transformation Strategy** for the period from 2020 to 2025. This strategic document, also referred to as the 'Digital Transformation Bible' (Βίβλος Ψηφιακού Μετασχηματισμού), outlines priorities for the country's digital transformation and aims to develop digital skills across all age groups and levels of society. This paper is a guide to the necessary interventions in the technological infrastructure of the state, in the education and training of the population to acquire digital skills, and in the way our country uses digital technology in all sectors of the economy and public administration. Its' main role is to describe the vision, philosophy and objectives of the national strategy for the digital transformation of the country. In addition, it describes the guiding principles, the governance and implementation model, and the strategic axes of digital transformation. It describes more than 400 specific projects, categorised as short and medium term, horizontal and sectoral, which implement the Digital Greece. Briefly, the strategy focuses on several key objectives. The first one is safe, fast and reliable internet access for all, ensuring that everyone has access to the Internet. The second one is improvement of digital state services. The third one is digital skills development. The fourth one is supporting digital transformation in companies. The fifth one is promoting and encouraging innovation in digital technologies. The sixth one is effective usage of public administration data and the seventh one is integration of digital technologies across economic sectors. The Digital Transformation Bible also underscores specific implementation principles focused on accessibility and support for people with disabilities (PWD). These principles are focused towards fostering equality, accessibility, and digital inclusion of PWD across all sectors of society and the economy. Key among these principles is the promotion of Universal Design, advocating for the creation of products, services, and environments accessible to all, including individuals with disabilities. This means ensuring the accessibility of websites, applications, and other digital platforms. Additionally, it emphasises the active involvement of people with disabilities in decision-making processes, encompassing the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies, programs, and projects that impact them. Furthermore, the importance of education and awareness-raising is highlighted, aimed at enlightening the public, professionals, and public officials about the needs of people with disabilities and fostering understanding of best practices for accessibility (Hellenic Republic Government, 2020).

Greece has also established a **National Coalition for Digital Skills and Jobs**. The Coalition aims to enhance digital skills by addressing the digital skills gap across various sectors of the Greek economy and society. It focuses on digital skills for education, training, ICT professionals, and citizens. It also aims to disseminate EU policies on digital skills, through ensuring alignment with European initiatives. The Coalition is a collaborative platform involving entities from both the public and the private sector, committed to enhancing digital skills across Greek society. As of July 2019, the Ministry of Digital Governance oversees the organisation and functioning of the

Coalition at national, European, and international levels (Hellenic Republic - Ministry of Digital Governance, 2024).

Furthermore, the **National Academy for Digital Skills** in Greece is an initiative launched by the Ministry of Digital Government. Its primary goal is to provide free access to high-quality digital education services for all Greek citizens. The educational material is free to any citizen interested in improving their digital competences. The Academy was established during the COVID-19 pandemic. It aims to respond to the impact of national lockdowns and workforce and education disruptions. Currently, the platform offers more than 327 courses covering a wide range of digital skills. These courses cater to different levels of proficiency, from basic to advanced. Digital Skills for Citizens, with over 200 courses address the needs of citizens who require basic digital skills for daily life. Digital Skills for the Labor Force: courses that focus on skills relevant to the workforce, such as 'work from home' and 'office applications'. Digital Skills for ICT Specialists: Specialised courses for IT professionals working with cutting-edge technologies like Artificial Intelligence and cybersecurity. The educational content is provided by Greek academic institutions, international companies, banks, telecommunications providers and digital education organisations. Moreover, it encompasses a self-assessment tool, which enables citizens to assess their general digital skills and identify their level. The implementation approach is based on the European Digital Competences Framework DigComp v2.1. (Greek Government, 2022a).

In addition, Greece has developed and delivered digital literacy programmes for seniors. The Ministry of Digital Governance launched the '**3rd e-age initiative**' ("3η e-λικία") which aimed to digitally empower people aged 60+. The National Network of Infrastructures for Research and Technology - Hellas (EDYTE S.A. - GRNET), a body of the Ministry of Digital Governance, designed and implemented two actions. The first action: Operation of Digital Support Teams, the purpose of the action was to serve people aged 60+, who did not have the material-technical infrastructure, but neither the cognitive skills, to follow the pulse of "Digital Greece". At the same time, the personalised guidance provided by trained people, the Digital Assistants, had an educational character so that the participants could learn to use independently digital services provided by the public and private sector. The second action: Operation of Digital Corner, the purpose of which was the operation of digital literacy hubs for seniors called "Digital Corners" in municipalities' structures, where "Digital Assistants - Trainers" were located to support seniors in their digital learning and digital skills development journey. The Digital Corners were intended to teach digital skills to older people who wanted to learn, but could not have someone to help them acquire these skills. The digital literacy programmes for seniors were practised in four Greek Municipalities during the year 2022-2023. The programmes and actions will be repeated in the coming year (Greek Government, 2022b).

Moreover, the **Public Employment and Enterprise Service (DYPA)** provides in collaboration with the University of West Attica skills upgrading and retraining programmes for the unemployed. The two programmes are as follows; Basic Skills for Computer Usage and Introduction to Digital Educational Tools. Both programmes are free and participants have to meet a specific number of criteria. In the same direction are two other programmes: Basic ICT skills for unemployed women and Free AWS Cloud Practitioner Essentials training program.

In the first programme, unemployed women registered in the unemployment register of the DYPA can apply for the HUAWEI Training Programme "Basic Information and Communication Technology Skills". In the second programme, unemployed people registered in the unemployment register of the DYPA can apply for participation in the AMAZON online training program entitled "Cloud Practitioner Essentials AWS" (Greek Government, 2023).

The **National Centre for Training and Rehabilitation of the Blind (KEAT)** delivers courses titled 'New Technologies - Training & Certification in Computer Handling' ("Νέες Τεχνολογίες- Εκπαίδευση & πιστοποίηση στον χειρισμό Η/Υ). Both in Athens and in Thessaloniki there are Computer Learning Centres, where people with visual impairment are trained in the use of computers and new assistive technologies using modern equipment. The training places are equipped with assistive technologies for visually impaired people, which include modern technical aids (scanners, CCTV magnifiers, braille screens, braille printers) and computer programs (screen reader and magnifier, speech recognition - audio typing, speech synthesiser, etc.). In particular, at the KET's Annex in Thessaloniki, there is a certified Certification Examination Centre in computer operation for visually impaired persons. This Centre is the only one in Greece (The Centre for Education & Rehabilitation of the Blind and the Digital Governance Information Systems Secretariat, 2019).

Last but not least, it is important that we mention the ECDL, which is a tool used in the public domain sector as proof of digital skills qualification. The ECDL is officially recognized by the Greek State, the National Body for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (E.O.P.P.E.P.) and the Supreme Council for the Selection of Staff (A.S.E.P.) and is referred to as a valid certificate of basic IT skills in the notices of the Public Organisations and the A.S.E.P. It is worth mentioning that in all A.S.E.P. advertisements for recruitment to posts in public sector bodies only certificates issued by bodies certified by the E.O.P.P.E.P. are accepted. In addition, ECDL Europe has carried out an exercise of mapping the ICDL programme to DigComp, which has been identified as an implementation example by Joint Research Centre (ECDL European Computer Driving License, 2024).

Lastly, Greek public libraries also play a crucial role in promoting digital inclusion. They provide free access to computers, the internet, and digital resources.

Inclusion of Persons with Learning Difficulties

One key informant mentioned the **National Action Plan for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, and especially the Objective 23: Digital Accessibility focuses on several key areas, including the redesign, simplification, and digitisation of administrative procedures. This action aims to combat bureaucracy and reduce administrative burdens for all citizens. The plan involves implementing a central public policy, the National Programme for Simplification of Procedures (NSPP), to holistically improve services, particularly focusing on accessibility for people with disabilities. Programmatic Agreements or Memoranda of Understanding will be concluded with relevant bodies in accordance with the public policy field. Documentation will be eliminated in transactions with Ministries such as Infrastructure and Transport, Labour and Social Affairs,

Interior, and Health. This initiative includes simplifying and digitising procedures for justice and the acquisition of Greek citizenship. The timeline for this ongoing action is managed by the Ministry of Digital Governance (Greek Government, 2021a).

Another critical aspect is the implementation of the digital transformation of the thematic area for people with disabilities. The goal is to serve people with disabilities quickly and efficiently, enabling the extraction of public policies in the relevant field. This includes mapping the existing information systems serving the thematic area of persons with disabilities to choose the best way to implement digital transformation. The timeline for this ongoing action is managed by the Ministry of Digital Governance.

Furthermore, the plan aims to ensure accessibility across ministries' websites and mobile applications of public services. All Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) actions and projects planned from the outset will adhere to the principle of Universal Design. Technical features will be integrated into all websites and applications operating within the competences of the Greek Public Administration. The timeline for this ongoing action is managed by the Ministry of Digital Governance (Greek Government, 2021b).

Lastly, the plan ensures accessibility to the websites of the municipalities. New websites will be created, and existing ones will be upgraded by utilising the funding opportunities of the Special Development Programme for first and second-tier local authorities 'Antonis Tritsis'. This action is set to be completed by December 2023 and is the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior.

May 2024 signalled the onset of another Greece with All for All: National Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2024-2030. The ‘National Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2024-2030’ (Εθνικό Σχέδιο Δράσης για τα Δικαιώματα των Ατόμων με Αναπηρία) for Greece outlines objectives to enhance digital accessibility. Objective I.3 focuses on this aspect, aiming to improve the existing institutional framework, develop tools and guides, create accessible digital applications, and raise awareness through education and training. By 2030, key actions include implementing a matrix of actions to ensure digital accessibility, updating and disseminating accessibility guidelines, conducting compliance monitoring, extending accessibility in consular services, providing digital skills training for persons with disabilities, and training public administration staff. Monitoring indicators include the compliance of websites and mobile applications with accessibility standards, international benchmarking rankings, internet connectivity among people with disabilities, and the effectiveness of training programs (Greek Government, 2024)

Although this plan exists, two key informants highlighted that there is no single national strategy exclusively dedicated to persons with learning difficulties, but that Greece recognizes the importance of digital inclusion for this group and that many organisations strive to create accessible digital content, ensuring that websites and applications are usable by individuals with learning disabilities.

Link to NQF

The Greek National Coalition for Digital Skills and Jobs plays a pivotal role in connecting the DigComp with the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in Greece. The Greek version of DigComp 2.2 is part of the National Coalition for Digital Skills and Jobs. It is in harmony with Greece's national strategy for digital transformation, known as the Digital Transformation Bible. As DigComp provides a reference framework to improve the digital competence of European citizens, it also underpins national frameworks and strategies for digital skills. The NQF defines and classifies qualifications within the Greek education and training system. The Greek National Coalition ensures that digital competence aligns with the NQF. This integration allows for consistency and recognition of digital skills across different educational and professional contexts. The NQF maps digital competences (as outlined in DigComp) to specific qualification levels, making them transparent and transferable. When individuals acquire digital skills, their achievements can be recognized within the NQF, enhancing employability. In summary, the Greek National Coalition bridges the gap between DigComp (focusing on digital skills) and the NQF (which encompasses broader qualifications). This synergy ensures that digital competences are recognized, valued, and integrated into Greece's educational and professional landscape.

Relevant Stakeholders

Enhancing digital inclusion for persons with learning difficulties and their supporters in Greece can be achieved through several strategies.

The Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Digital Governance, the Academic Community, the bodies and associations of persons with learning difficulties could lead to the strengthening and implementation of the strategy and be key to digital inclusion for all, according to one key informant. It is an effort which requires the cooperation of all stakeholders and potential stakeholders, through joint actions, with the formation of a working group being of vital importance. The same working group should set up a specific system for assessing and validating digital competences for persons with learning difficulties. This is a difficult exercise but it is possible as digital technology provides the possibility of this customisation and specialisation, giving a truer picture of the validation of digital skills for all.

First, one key informant mentioned that developing targeted training programs focusing on digital literacy and skills, which are accessible, adaptive, and tailored to the specific needs of persons with learning difficulties and their supporters, is crucial. Collaboration with educational institutions, NGOs, and community centres to offer workshops, webinars, and hands-on sessions is essential. Secondly, all key informants agree that ensuring that digital tools, platforms, and websites are designed with accessibility features, including compatibility with screen readers, keyboard navigation, and adjustable font sizes, is paramount and that reliable internet is crucial to bridge the digital divide, especially in rural or underserved areas. Third, raising awareness about the importance of digital inclusion for persons with learning difficulties and their supporters, utilising media, social networks, and community events to spread the

information, can significantly contribute to this effort. Highlighting success stories and showcasing how digital skills positively impact persons with learning difficulties' lives are also key. Fourth, partnering with disability-focused organisations, advocacy groups, and self-advocates to create a network that supports persons with learning difficulties, and leveraging existing networks to promote digital inclusion initiatives, is essential. Fifth, making affordable devices (such as tablets, smartphones, and laptops) available to persons with learning difficulties and their supporters is crucial. Finally, encouraging government agencies, healthcare providers, and other service providers to offer online services that are accessible to persons with learning difficulties will ensure that they can access services and information vital to their well-being and participation in society.

3 Gaps and challenges in the implementation at levels 1 and 2 with regard to persons with learning difficulties

Digital inclusion in Greece is crucial for ensuring equal access to digital resources and opportunities. Several actors and stakeholders play key roles in driving the implementation and maintaining digital inclusion for all. As mentioned in section 2. 'Implementation of the EU DigComp strategy with regard to persons with learning difficulties, there has not yet been a coordinated effort in the digital inclusion of this sensitive population. As three key informants mentioned, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Digital Governance, the Academic Community, the Institute for Education Policy (IEP- participates in research activities, analyses policies and proposes improvements in digital education), as well as the bodies and associations representing persons with learning difficulties, could take the lead in strengthening and implementing the strategy, thereby becoming key contributors to digital inclusion for all. Achieving this goal requires the cooperation of all stakeholders and potential stakeholders through joint actions, with the formation of a working group being of vital importance. This working group should establish a specific system for assessing and validating digital competences for persons with learning difficulties. Although challenging, this task is achievable, as digital technology provides the possibility for customization and specialisation, offering a more accurate assessment of digital skills validation for everyone.

One key informant highlighted that to further address the matter, Government and policy makers, both at the national and local levels, are central to the process. The national government is responsible for establishing policies and regulations to ensure digital inclusion, as well as providing infrastructure and supporting digital literacy programs. Meanwhile, local governments are instrumental in implementing digital inclusion initiatives and providing resources tailored to the needs of their communities.

Moving on, all key informants agreed that educational institutions, including schools, universities, and vocational training centres, are vital in offering digital literacy programs. Ensuring that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background and abilities, have access to digital resources and education. In addition, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and community centres also play a crucial role. Digital inclusion organisations are actively involved in promoting digital literacy and advocating policies that ensure digital inclusion. Community centres, such as libraries and community hubs, provide access to technology and digital literacy programs for all, contributing significantly to digital inclusion efforts.

One key informant emphasised that the private sector, including technology and telecommunication companies, is pivotal in contributing to digital inclusion. Through corporate social responsibility programs, they provide access to affordable technology and facilitate digital literacy programs. Academic and research institutions, including research organisations and working groups, provide valuable data and insights that could drive policy and implementation. They contribute to the study of digital inclusion and provide guidance and policy suggestions for achieving it. Several actors and stakeholders could provide additional information. Special interest groups, technology communities, employers, and digital literacy program providers all

contribute significantly to driving the implementation and maintaining digital inclusion for all in Greece. Together, all these actors and stakeholders are essential in achieving digital inclusion.

4 Bottom-up initiatives working towards the digital inclusion of persons with learning difficulties

Despite the absence of a dedicated national strategy exclusively focusing on digital competences for persons with learning difficulties, recent developments signal a positive shift. The 'National Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2024-2030' introduces Objective I.3, which specifically targets digital accessibility. This objective aims to enhance the existing institutional framework, develop tools and guides, create accessible digital applications, and raise awareness through education and training. By implementing a set of actions, updating accessibility guidelines, and providing digital skills training, the strategy plans to address the digital divide and improve accessibility for persons with learning difficulties in Greece.

In Greece, there isn't a single national strategy exclusively dedicated to improving digital competences for persons with learning difficulties. The absence of such a strategy can be attributed to several reasons. Firstly, while there are overarching digital transformation strategies like the 'Digital Transformation Bible' and the National Action Plan for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, these plans lack a specific focus on digital competences tailored to the needs of persons with learning difficulties. Secondly, the decentralised nature of initiatives and efforts across various sectors and organisations contributes to a lack of coordination and coherence in addressing digital competences comprehensively. Thirdly, limited awareness and understanding of the specific challenges faced by persons with learning difficulties in accessing and utilising digital technologies may hinder the prioritisation of inclusive digital competence initiatives at the national level.

However, despite the absence of a dedicated national strategy, there are notable initiatives in Greece aimed at promoting digital inclusion for all, with a particular emphasis on persons with learning difficulties. These initiatives include the Digital Transformation Strategy, which underscores principles of accessibility and inclusion, though not exclusively focused on persons with learning difficulties. Additionally, the National Action Plan for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities includes objectives related to digital accessibility and simplification of administrative procedures, albeit lacking specific provisions for digital skills development for persons with learning difficulties. Moreover, efforts by NGOs, community centers, and educational institutions to provide digital literacy programs and accessible resources contribute to promoting digital inclusion for persons with learning difficulties, albeit on a smaller scale and often within localised contexts.

Overall, while there are ongoing efforts to promote digital inclusion in Greece, the absence of a centralised and comprehensive national strategy specifically targeting digital competences for persons with learning difficulties highlights the need for greater coordination, awareness, and advocacy to ensure equitable access to digital opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their abilities.

So far the Ministries and the Government of Greece have been responsible for aiding the population to smoothly transition into the digital age. Many guidelines and programmes exist and

are being delivered to the general population. In addition, national action plans are found for people with disabilities, however, there is no coordinated action to include persons with learning difficulties, according to a key informant.

Digital inclusion in Greece for persons with learning difficulties is progressing through various bottom-up initiatives. Despite the absence of a dedicated national strategy focusing exclusively on digital competences for persons with learning difficulties, recent developments indicate positive changes.

5 Conclusions

Digital inclusion is an imperative aspect of modern society, ensuring equitable access to opportunities and resources for all individuals, including those with learning disabilities. In Greece, efforts towards digital inclusion have been substantial, with initiatives spanning various sectors aimed at fostering digital literacy and skills development. However, despite commendable progress, several key conclusions and recommendations emerge from the implementation of the EU DigComp strategy, particularly concerning persons with learning difficulties.

First and foremost, the absence of a dedicated national strategy exclusively focused on persons with learning difficulties is evident. While Greece acknowledges the significance of digital inclusion for this demographic, the lack of a centralised approach poses challenges to achieving comprehensive and targeted support. However, existing frameworks, such as the National Action Plan for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Digital Transformation Strategy, offer foundations for incorporating persons with learning difficulties-focused initiatives. Thus, there is a pressing need to consolidate efforts and establish a coherent strategy tailored to the unique needs of persons with learning difficulties.

Moreover, while various stakeholders, including government bodies, educational institutions, NGOs, and private sector entities, contribute to digital inclusion, collaboration and coordination among these actors remain vital. Establishing a collaborative platform or working group, as suggested by key informants, could facilitate synergy and streamline efforts towards persons with learning difficulties digital inclusion. Such a platform could serve to align priorities, share resources, and develop standardised approaches for assessing and validating digital competences specific to persons with learning difficulties.

Additionally, addressing the digital divide necessitates a multifaceted approach that encompasses both infrastructure development and skills enhancement. Reliable internet connectivity, accessible devices, and user-friendly digital platforms are fundamental prerequisites for persons with learning difficulties' participation in the digital realm. Concurrently, targeted training programs and educational initiatives tailored to the diverse needs of persons with learning difficulties are essential for building digital literacy and confidence. By leveraging partnerships between public and private stakeholders, innovative solutions can be devised to bridge existing gaps and ensure equitable access to digital resources.

Furthermore, raising awareness and fostering a culture of inclusivity are integral components of promoting digital inclusion for persons with learning difficulties. Public awareness campaigns, media outreach, and community engagement initiatives can help dispel misconceptions, reduce stigma, and advocate for the rights of persons with learning difficulties in the digital space. Highlighting success stories and showcasing the transformative impact of digital skills on persons with learning difficulties' lives can inspire broader societal support and momentum for inclusive policies and practices.

In conclusion, while Greece has made large steps towards digital inclusion, particularly through the implementation of the EU DigComp strategy, concerted efforts are needed to address the specific needs of persons with learning difficulties comprehensively. By embracing a collaborative, inclusive, and holistic approach, Greece can foster a digitally inclusive society where every individual, including those with learning disabilities, can thrive and participate fully in the digital age. Through sustained commitment and collective action, the vision of digital inclusion for all can be realised, ensuring no one is left behind in the digital revolution.

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7 Annex

Key informants interviewed for this report

Name of the key informant	Organisation and/or area of expertise	Date	Duration	Setting
Anna Matsouka	Business Programme Manager and Digital Technology Activities, SEPE (IT and Communications Business Association of Greece)	03.04.2024	-	written
Evgenia Lokana	Head of the Digital Capabilities Directorate of EDYTE S.A. (National Network of Infrastructures for Research and Technology - Hellas and Research), a supervised body of the Ministry of Digital Governance with responsibility for The Ministry of Digital Infrastructure Development responsible for the implementation of the Ministry's strategy for the development of Digital Capabilities.		60 mins	Microsoft Teams
Anonymous Expert	Persons with Learning Difficulties Provider Expert	12.04.24	25 minutes	telephone
Anonymous Expert	Policy Maker	08.04.24	-	written
Anonymous Expert	Policy Maker	12.04.24	20 minutes	telephone
Katerina Kyprianou	Head of Digital Skills at E.D.Y.T.E. S.A. (National Network of Infrastructures for Research and Technology - Hellas and Research)	24.05.24	20 minutes	Microsoft Teams