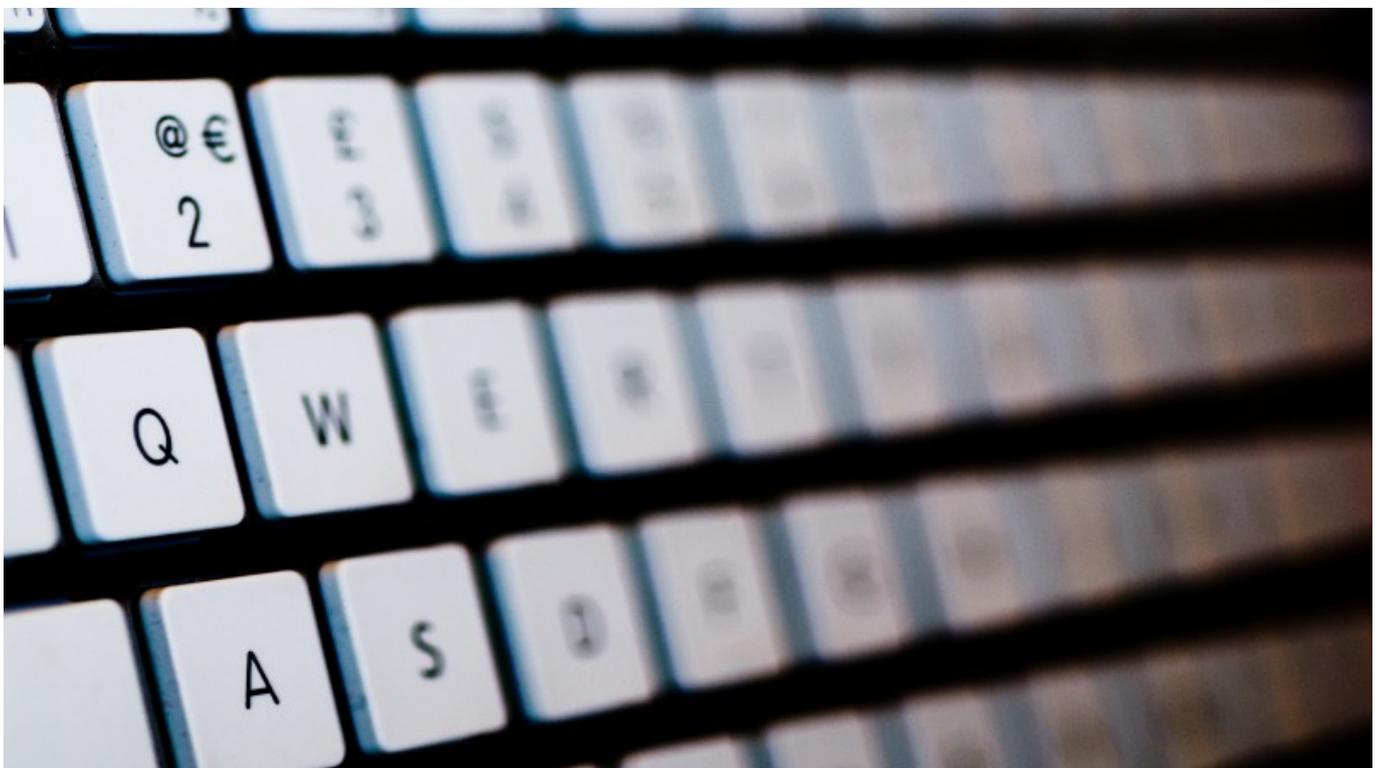


## Europe must close 'digital skills gap'

Written by Gerard de Graaf on 24 October 2014 in Opinion  
Opinion

The grand coalition for digital jobs offers an opportunity for governments, industry, educators and civil society to tackle unemployment together, says Gerard de Graaf.



As we recover from the economic crisis, 25 million Europeans are still without a job and young people are particularly affected - in some countries, more than half of them are unemployed.

To overcome this, we need policies and actions that support sectors that are particularly important for our economy, looking both at the demand and the supply side of the labour market. First, we have to invest in those critical sectors that create jobs, keep our communities thriving and build a strong economy for the future. We also need to stimulate entrepreneurship and innovation and support small businesses as well as start-ups for they account for a large part of job creation. Second, we need to make sure that Europeans have the right skills to meet the requirements of our modern businesses as it is no secret that several of the fastest-growing sectors are faced with profound skills gaps.

"As companies in all sectors embrace digital technology, information and communication

technology experts are in high demand and companies often have a hard time finding them"

As companies in all sectors embrace digital technology, information and communication technology experts are in high demand and companies often have a hard time finding them. There could be up to 900,000 unfilled jobs by 2020 if we don't take action. Today, more than ever, we need to draw lessons from these forecasts and turn this challenge into an opportunity for employment and growth.

It is instructive to observe how partnerships among all relevant stakeholders all over Europe can effectively strengthen local economies by closing skills gaps and putting more people back to work. This is why the European commission launched the grand coalition for digital jobs in March 2013. The grand coalition is a multi-stakeholder partnership that responds to the need for building a holistic platform where governments, industry, education providers and civil society come together. Our goal is not only to discuss and identify the underlying problems, but to take coordinated action and offer more ICT training co-designed with the industry and job placement programmes, more aligned degrees and curricula at vocational schools and universities, better awareness of the career opportunities that ICT offers and better worker mobility in the EU so that people are where the ICT jobs are.

So far about 80 stakeholders, representing large and smaller companies, education providers and NGOs have made pledges, such as concrete commitments to reduce digital skills gaps. Likewise, national coalitions for digital jobs aiming to facilitate high-impact actions at local level have already been launched in eight countries and many more are under formation. Moreover, the grand coalition enjoys large political support, including in the European council, as well as high-level stakeholder support, such as by CEOs of global companies.

The grand coalition has also raised awareness on the need to change the ways young people learn about digital technology skills such as coding, both at schools and during extracurricular activities. Several of the pledges make resources for coding available to students, teachers and parents and a number of member states are introducing more coding in their school curricula.

"We have to invest in those critical sectors that create jobs, keep our communities thriving and build a strong economy in the future"

Looking to the future, we will step up our efforts to broaden the grand coalition, bringing on board additional ICT and ICT-using companies, human resources managers' networks, business associations, public as well as private employment services, and many more. We will encourage more actions at national, regional and local level, strengthening existing national coalitions and facilitating the creation of new ones. We will work towards making better use of European programmes such as the youth employment initiative, the European social fund and Erasmus+ to support concrete actions, for example to fund additional training and internships.

This year's eSkills week conference is for all of us an opportunity to identify solutions and take concrete actions to close the digital skills gap. It is an equally important occasion to raise awareness with new stakeholders, for example from ICT using sectors, to include them in the ongoing discussions and harvest their views.

**About the author**

Gerard de Graaf is director of electronic communications, networks and services at the European commission's DG Connect.

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