

Digital Champions

Helping every European become digital

The Digital Champions are ambassadors for the Digital Agenda for Europe who are appointed by their Member States to help every European become digital. Each member state has defined their own Champion's role, but in essence it is to promote the role and use of information and communication technologies by connecting people, policies and sectors.

The Digital Champions have different profiles. Some work for government authorities or public bodies such as national libraries, others are entrepreneurs, academics or representatives of civil society. What is uniting them is their passion to help people take advantage of the digital Opportunities by actively working on and promoting digital inclusion, e-government, ICT education, digital skills and entrepreneurship, etc.

The initiative was launched by President Barroso and Vice-President Kroes in February 2012. It was inspired by the United Kingdom, which appointed Martha Lane Fox as UK Digital Champion and asked her to advise and challenge the government on how to make greater and faster progress to get people online. Since then 26 Member States have appointed their national Champions¹.

This leaflet showcases some of the major achievements of the Digital Champions over the past two years. For more information check out the Digital Agenda Website (<http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/digital-champions>) and follow #DigitalChampions on Twitter.

Opening Up Education

More than 60% of nine-year-olds in the EU attend schools which are still not digitally equipped. By 2020 around 90% of all jobs will require some digital skills. The Digital Champions look seriously at the mismatch between available skills and future jobs, and actively promote early adoption of digital technologies in schools and online education.

In **Ireland** the "Switch On" project – part of [Ireland's National Digital Strategy](#) – demonstrates the potential of digital in the classroom. *"We will show examples of what some forward-looking educators are doing, with the aim of encouraging more teachers and schools to emulate them – and thousands of students to benefit,"* said Lord David Puttnam, Irish Digital Champion.



Saskia van Uffelen, the Champion of **Belgium** works on several initiatives promoting the digital skills of teachers and digital literacy in education, giving special support to headteachers who develop digital visions for their schools.

¹ The Digital Champions are not paid by the European Commission.

"Establishing e-education is crucial. Innovative teachers prepare students for success emphasizing 21st century skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, creativity and collaboration," says Gergana Passy, the **Bulgarian** Digital Champion who promotes free wifi in schools and online education platforms for teachers to share teaching resources.



In **Slovakia** the Digital Champion Peter Pellegrini links digital skills with dance through the *School Dance* project. As he puts it *"The goal for the School Dance Project is to help create a generation of young people that are creative, skilled in ICT and well prepared for future employment. And at the same time they are having fun."* After getting 300 schools and kindergartens on board in Slovakia the project is now expanding to reach out to schools in the **Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland**.

In the **Czech Republic** and **Slovenia** the Champions work to help elderly people get online with the support of children. *"In Slovenia the idea is to create an intra-generational dialogue, provide an inexpensive year-long support to digital novices within their families, teach children about the advantages of their knowledge and bring them together with their older relatives. It would be one of the first systemic solutions to help bridge the digital divide,"* said Aleš Spetič.



In **Sweden, France, Germany** and **Hungary** efforts are being made to improve existing educational tools and curricula, as well as to stimulate closer cooperation between secondary schools and universities. As the German Champion Gesche Joost puts it *"... we have to update the curricula in schools and universities to unleash the potential of our digital society. We especially need to get girls and women on board – as they are part of our future generation of digital experts"*.

Coding

More and more jobs require digital skills, such as coding. But exposing kids to coding does not mean that they will necessarily become app developers or programmers. Understanding code is understanding the building blocks of our hyper-connected world and being more than "just" a technology consumer.

"One of the most important skills that kids have to master is coding: in an emerging digital society, it is necessary to learn this new language. Not every child needs to become a programmer, but they need to understand what will drive tomorrow's world; and also get their minds and thinking abilities used to this powerful 'reasoning grammar'," said Gilles Babinet, **French** Digital Champion.



He has, with the support of Agir Pour L'Ecole, launched a programming platform that will provide free, easy-access and powerful learning tools to let kids from all backgrounds learn to code. Together with Bibliothèque sans Frontières, Mr Babinet is also translating the coding platform [CodeAcademy.com](https://codecademy.com) to French.



Linda Liukas, the Digital Champion of **Finland**, co-founder of *Rails Girls*, works actively to overcome the gender divide in technology. *Rails Girls* gives women of all ages a first experience in coding upon which they can develop their own ideas. *Rails Girls* has spread all over the world and was picked up by the **Bulgarian** and **Slovenian** Champions, who organised events in their own countries.

"I want to make sure all young women see all the magical, radiant possibilities that technology will offer. Technology is the fastest way to change the world and I want to see more diverse people building products and companies", said Linda Liukas.

Digital skills and inclusion

Europe is an online continent – over half of all EU citizens use the internet every day, and three quarters of households have internet access. This brings unparalleled new opportunities for people of all ages, for businesses and society as a whole. However, many people still lack skills, confidence or access to digital technologies to reap the full benefit of these opportunities. To address this shortage, Europe has been implementing a comprehensive e-Inclusion policy which ensures that no one is left behind and the use of ICT to help improve employment opportunities, quality of life, social participation and cohesion.

The Digital Champions help different groups learn digital skills. The Champions of **Romania** and **Lithuania**, for example, bring free public access computers and the internet into public libraries and help fellow citizens to acquire basic ICT skills.

"I work in promoting digital inclusion and how to attract people who have never been online. One way is through the Biblionet programme, which has brought internet and computers as well as trained librarians to more than 2,200 public libraries in Romania," said Paul-André Baran, Romania's Digital Champion.



Work with disadvantaged groups is particularly important. The **Cypriot** Champion runs a project to help disabled people optimally use ICT in their everyday lives. **Hungary** started an initiative helping the integration of young Roma in schools which saw not only a sharp increase in students graduating from high schools but also better integration between Roma and non-Roma people. In **Germany** there are a number of [research projects](#) with inclusive design giving access to digital media to people with dementia, deaf or blind, or stroke patients. *"Including people with special needs in the development of new technologies is not only a question of fairness, but it is a great source of innovation for the digital age. We learn for example from deaf people how to communicate with gestures. They are experts in their modes of communication and we can transfer this knowledge to other domains of application in the ICT world."*

In **Austria** the *Digitalks* initiative has helped around 5,000 people get practical experience and skills in digital technologies by teaching them how to use wikis, blogs, social networks and mobile platforms.



In **Malta** the Digital Champion runs *ICTforALL* – a public-private partnership programme which targets the 30% of the adult population not using ICT. Similarly, the [BenefIT](#) initiative in **Ireland** is a national scheme providing basic digital skills run in partnership with community organisations. Since 2008, nearly 100,000 people have received basic digital training. In **Sweden** the Digital Champion together with the *Digidel* network only in 2013 managed to get 500,000 more Swedes online.



Last but not least the **UK** Digital Champion led the Race Online 2012 campaign, which helped millions of Brits get online and was the basis for the charity Go ON UK launched in 2013.

Skills for jobs and national grand coalitions

The level of unemployment in Europe remains a matter of great concern for all. Even more alarming is the level of youth unemployment. However, many ICT jobs remain unfilled due to a mismatch between the supply and demand of ICT skills. The demand for employees with ICT skills is growing by around 3% a year, while the number of graduates from computing sciences fell by 10% between 2006 and 2010. If this trend continues, there could be up to 900,000 unfilled ICT practitioner vacancies in the EU by 2020.

The European Commission tries to address this challenge at a European and national level through the Grand Coalition for digital skills and jobs – an initiative which brings together various stakeholders from business, civil society, the educational and public sectors with the prime goal to form broad alliances for more digital jobs. With the active support of Digital Champions national coalitions are already established in **Poland, Lithuania, Latvia** and **Romania**. **Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria** are soon to follow suit. The Digital Champions of the **Netherlands, Malta** and **Hungary** are also actively engaged with practical activities aimed at teaching digital skills and improving people's employability, with a special focus on unemployed and young people.

Promoting entrepreneurship and innovation

ICT and web entrepreneurs create new jobs for young people and their businesses help transform the economy and society. [Startup Europe](#) is the European Commission action plan aimed at strengthening the business environment for web and ICT entrepreneurs in Europe and contributing to innovation, growth and jobs.

The **Irish** [Trading Online Voucher Scheme](#) is an initiative that provides small government grants in voucher format to co-fund the work needed to get small Irish companies trading online. In Ireland alone there are 180,000 small or micro companies employing 900,000 people. From mid-2014 up to 2,000 of these companies will be offered the opportunity to make a business case for a voucher worth up to 2,500 EUR – matched with their own funds – to use to get trading.

The Digital Championship is an ICT innovation competition run by the **Cypriot** Digital Champion. It aims to promote the concept of digital innovation especially among students in secondary school and universities as well as startups. With a similar setup the *Malta Communication Authority*

Business Awards is an annual event and serves as a showcase for local entrepreneurs, innovation, investment and business in the e-business field steered by the Digital Champion.

The **Bulgarian** Champion has established an Advisory Board of young and successful ICT entrepreneurs. They work together to strengthen the startup community in the country and provide smoother communications between entrepreneurs and the European institutions.

The **Hungarian** Champion, István Erény, wants to enhance the economic environment in which high-tech start-ups and businesses operate. *"That is why we have launched a programme in which the government helps Hungarian start-ups to make their business more successful at home and abroad,"* he said. In **Slovakia** the Digital Champion, as State Secretary of the Ministry of Finance, has allocated one million Euro from the state budget to the Slovak startup ecosystem and internet economy



Safety online, data protection and privacy

Web-based attacks in the EU and around the world are becoming more and more frequent. Unsurprisingly, security against online accidents and crime has become central to consumer confidence and the online economy. The European Union is promoting cybersecurity on a number of fronts ranging from setting up a new cybercrime platform to awareness campaigns for the online safety of children.

The *Sheeplive* project in **Slovakia** focuses on safety for children and young people regarding the risks related to the use of the internet, mobile phones and new technologies. The project has produced a series of cartoons for children and an internet portal with games. In **Malta** similar efforts are made through the *BeSmartOnline* initiative as well as to establish a Safer Internet Centre in Malta and a helpline. In **Belgium** *Online Safety for kids* will distribute free material to schools for a one-hour class on safety on the internet. *"This way we will make it easy for teachers to integrate online safety in the education plan,"* said Saskia van Uffelen.

In **Austria**, Saferinternet.at is an initiative for awareness raising and teaching competencies related to using the internet safely, supported by the Digital Champion. The initiative has so far involved 210 schools and distributed 65,000 teacher handbooks. In total more than 100,000 people have participated in workshops.

Digital infrastructure

Tomorrow's digital services – from connected TV to cloud computing and e-Health – increasingly rely on fast, effective broadband connections. Such connections are also becoming critical to our economy and, it is estimated that a 10% increase in broadband penetration raises GDP by 1-1.5%.

Darko Parić, **Croatian** Champion said: *"In Croatia, we decided to start and concentrate on one big project: building optical networks. We need to catch up with the rest of the EU with regard broadband penetration and this is our main goal for the future."*

The **Bulgarian** and **Cypriot** Champions are focused on promoting free wifi zones. In the capital, Sofia, there are now nearly 4,000 wifi hotspots and the aim is to open 1,000 spots a year in cooperation

with local authorities. *"If we want everyone digital we need free wifi access. The target in Cyprus is to ensure that every community in Cyprus has free access to the internet by the end of 2014,"* said Stelios Himonas, Cypriot Digital Champion.

By 2020 there will be more than 30 times as much mobile internet traffic as there was in 2010. The



answer to this challenge is 5G. The **Luxembourg** Champion, Björn Ottersten is focusing on research projects in 5G under Horizon 2020. *"5G should bring mobile broadband services to all of Europe. My vision is seamless services over hybrid networks including satellite networks which are extraordinary in providing cost-efficient wide area coverage. Bringing satellite systems and terrestrial networks together to more efficiently use spectrum can bring vast benefits for Europe,"* he said.

Digital government

eGovernment uses digital tools and systems to provide better public services to citizens and businesses. Effective eGovernment can provide a wide variety of benefits including greater efficiency and savings for governments and businesses, increased transparency, and increased participation of citizens in political life. ICT systems are now at the heart of government processes, but efforts are still needed to ensure they continue to improve the delivery of government services.

Lars Frelle-Petersen, Head of the Danish Agency for Digitisation and the Digital Champion of **Denmark**, is pursuing the development of a digitalized postal system both for public institutions and private companies. The digital mailbox system makes the communication processes between public institutions and businesses faster, more efficient and secure and makes savings of around 270 million Euro every year. The goal is to have 80% of all written communication between public authorities and citizens and businesses digital in 2015.



The former **Italian** Digital Champion, Francesco Caio, was working to reform Italian public administration through the digitalisation of the resident registry, introducing e-invoicing and setting up e-identities. The aim is to simplify and improve the security of citizens' interactions with public administrations.

Ondřej Felix is the Chief Architect of eGovernment in the **Czech Republic** and the country's Digital Champion. He said his first priority is the improvement of the cross-border interoperability of e-government systems.

In **Portugal**, **Antonio Murca**, the Digital Champion has the fight against the parallel economy through digitalization as his top priority. *"ICT can be really successful in the fight against the black economy. In Portugal the hidden economy is estimated to be 26% of the country's GDP. The digital invoice system, just to give an example, could be a cheap way to combat this parallel economy,"* Antonio Murta said.



When she was a Digital Champion in the **UK**, Martha Lane Fox helped kick start the foundation of the British Government Digital Service and the move to a single domain of all government information. The digital transformation of transactional government services is well underway and gov.uk has won multiple awards.

"E-government and e-services in Austria are widely available and accepted, the main task right now concerns e-signature via mobile phones," said Meral Akin-Hecke, Austrian Digital Champion. She, therefore, supports the Austrian e-government initiative [Handysignatur.at](https://www.handysignatur.at) started by the platform Digital Austria. In **Slovakia**, Peter Pellegrini initiated the transformation of government services to a mobile platform by requiring, under a call for e-municipalities, that at least ten services be provided through a separate mobile application. He also called for the incorporation of an open data clause in all EU funding calls.



Picture gallery of the Digital Champions

Name	Member State
 Meral Akin-Hecke	Austria
 Saskia Van Uffelen	Belgium
 Gergana Passy	Bulgaria
 Darko Parić	Croatia
 Dr Stelios Himonas	Cyprus
 Ondřej Felix	Czech Republic
 Lars Frelle-Petersen	Denmark
 Linda Liukas	Finland
 Gilles Babinet	France
 Gesche Joost	Germany
 István Erényi	Hungary
 Lord David Puttnam	Ireland
 Reinis Zitmanis	Latvia
 Kęstutis Juškevičius	Lithuania
 Björn Ottersten	Luxembourg
 Godfrey Vella	Malta
 Tineke Netelenbos	Netherlands
 Włodzimierz Marciński	Poland
 António Murta	Portugal
 Paul-Andre Baran	Romania
 Peter Pellegrini	Slovakia
 Aleš Špetič	Slovenia
 Jan Gulliksen	Sweden
Not replaced	
<i>Francesco Caio</i>	<i>Italy</i>
<i>Alicia Richart</i>	<i>Spain</i>
<i>Martha Lane Fox</i>	<i>UK</i>