

# Chapter 3

## Opportunities and Risks of Digital Hyperconnectivity: The Importance of Promoting Digital Well-Being

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The rapid diffusion of technology is progressively reinforcing the exclusion of certain socially disadvantaged groups, particularly in terms of access and relevance of technology use. Data shows that where poverty rates increase, digital literacy is lower because poorer people have fewer opportunities to participate in literacy processes and acquire skills to interact with the digital world. While technologies can be a real opportunity for those at risk of digital poverty, they can also penalise them, creating digitally disadvantaged sub-groups. With the increasing digital integration of society, production, education, and daily life, we are witnessing unprecedented changes where the hyper-connectedness of young people is a risk factor with no small consequences. Through a systematic analysis of evidence literature, the work focuses on risk factors and conditions statistically linked to causes fostering digital inequalities, and on protective factors for inclusive educational interventions countries, governments, and institutions should provide to prevent perpetuating inequities.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The *Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027*, adopted on 30 September 2020, is a renewed EU policy initiative that sets out a common European vision for high-quality, inclusive and accessible digital education and aims to support the adaptation of Member States' education and training systems to the digital age. The *European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan* (2021) sets the target that by 2030 at least 80% of people aged 16-74 have basic digital skills and that 20 million ICT specialists are trained, with a convergence of men and women. The adoption of this act establishes the principle that the possession of basic digital skills is a right for all European citizens and that lifelong adult education must become a priority.

The NextGenerationEU recovery instrument also sets out the principles that basic digital skills are a right for all Europeans and that lifelong learning must become a priority. Basic digital skills (Koppel & Langer, 2020) for all citizens and the opportunity to acquire specialized skills for the workforce are prerequisites for active participation in the Digital Decade (European Commission, 2021). However, the Global Connectivity Report 2022 highlights the opportunities and risks of a hyper-connected generation (children and young people) and lists the efforts needed to achieve full digital inclusion. Beyond European initiatives, global frameworks such as the United Nations' Digital Cooperation Roadmap emphasize the need for inclusive digital transformation policies to mitigate inequalities and promote sustainable development. Connectivity and digital devices, fueled by the presence of disruptive technologies such as artificial intelligence and IoT, are, in fact, increasingly driving the need for skills. 71% of young people aged 15-24 who regularly use the internet will certainly benefit from an increasingly digitised world, where digital experience and skills are key to future employment prospects. However, access alone does not guarantee that young people will benefit from digital technologies, and the way this happens can also affect or exacerbate existing inequalities (DiMaggio et al., 2004).

The digital divide can be bridged through adequate digital literacy, which may be able to mediate the opportunities and risks of digital engagement.

The aim of this study is to show how long-term positive social change can only be achieved if all stakeholders in society work together to address the digital divide at multiple levels. Firstly, data such as those from UNICEF and ITU show that only 40% of school-age children have access to the internet at home, with large differences between income groups and regions (9 in 10 school-age children in high-income countries have access to the internet at home, compared to less than 1 in 5 in low-income countries). Secondly, it can be emphasized that access to the internet is not a value in itself for young people, but becomes so when digital literacy enables a balance between the risks and opportunities of ICT use. It is important for young people to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying issues that shape and drive

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