

Digital skills in times of crisis and their links with career success

Halyna Mishchuk

Pan-European University, Bratislava

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4520-3189>

Abstract. *The role of digital skills for university graduates in shaping their professional trajectories is investigated based on the European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens 2.2. The data are derived from a survey of 397 Ukrainian graduates under the age of 35, whose work experience ranges from one to more than ten years in Ukraine and abroad. The findings demonstrate that individuals with more advanced skills in digital data management, information assessment, digital communication, and the creative application of technologies are more successful in career.*

Keywords: *career, digital skills, employment, graduates.*

Pandemic restrictions and war have significantly changed employment attitudes and aspirations. Despite all negative consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, it causes the unprecedented changes in economic relations, particularly steed digital skills development. The advanced competencies were helpful not only in overcoming the pandemic's challenges and the sudden economic downturns caused by the common shock. In Ukraine the next social catastrophe occurred in 2022 and led to stops of many activities, risks for physical presence in regions near the war actions. Under the war circumstances developed digital skills allowed for keeping ties with the displaced personnel and those who work remotely due to constant threats.

Against this backdrop, universities and the labor market are confronted with a persistent structural skills gap. The rapid pace of technological advancement frequently surpasses the ability of higher education institutions to update and adapt their curricula, leading to discrepancies between the digital competences acquired during studies and those demanded in professional environments. This challenge has been consistently highlighted in both academic discourse and applied research. At the same time, digital competences are shown to provide substantial professional advantages, including increased productivity (Saeful & Ekhsan, 2024), enhanced employability prospects (Iwashita et al., 2021), and, ultimately, individual benefits such as higher income levels and improved competitiveness.

Considering the growing actuality of digital skills for Ukrainian citizens, especially graduates who are the main source for postwar recovery, this research is developed with the aim to investigate the role of digital skills in professional career. The methodological basis for the research is DigComp 2.2: The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens developed by the European Commission (Vuorikari et al., 2022). The dataset regarding the use of digital skills in professional activity is collected in sociological research held in August-September 2024. The sample covered 397 respondents. The graduates from one to more than ten years' experience of work were involved using the Google questionnaire. The sample error does not exceed 5% and therefore the responses were used in analysis.

To understand the differences in digital skills influence on career success, two main features of success were used: incomes and career position. As a result, it was found that there are some obvious peculiarities for graduates in managerial positions and the higher income groups (income is more than 2 times higher compared to average). Particularly, representatives of top managers have especially high differences in skills: Browsing, searching and filtering data, information and digital content; Evaluating data, information and digital content; Interacting through digital technologies; Collaborating through digital technologies; Netiquette; Copyright and licenses; Creatively using digital technologies. These skills were significantly higher developed compared with others group of respondents. Regarding the differences in income groups, it was found that the respondents with the highest incomes have significantly more developed skills in Copyright and licenses; Programming; Protecting devices; Protecting personal data and privacy; Protecting the environment; Solving technical problems; Identifying needs and technological responses. These results allow for conclusions about the prevailing role of data literacy, digital communication and collaboration and skills on ensuring safety in digital surroundings for those people who are aimed at achieving success in managerial position. Higher incomes are expected currently for those who work with IT and all other types of remote work where skills of digital communication and digital content creation are inseparable parts of work. Regarding the role of education, it is found that the greatest increase in competences occurs during studies, whereas skill improvement in professional settings progresses more slowly. The role of university education outweighs that of skill enhancement gained in the workplace.

The peculiarities of digital skills use and their deficit for certain position should be investigated constantly if organizations are trying to succeed through people. The results of monitoring may be used in career planning and human resource development.

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