

---

## Session 14A: Ensuring Well-being in the Digital Age

### The digital transformation creates both opportunities and risks for people's well-being

Digital technologies expand the boundaries of information available to people and enhance human productivity, but can also imply risks for people's well-being, ranging from job losses and cyber-bullying to risks to online security and privacy. The report *How's Life in the Digital Age?* presents evidence on the opportunities and risks associated with the digital transformation based on 33 indicators. It shows that countries that have harnessed the largest benefits can still be facing large risks. This implies that, through specific interventions, countries may help mitigate the adverse effects of digital technologies while allowing people to reap their benefits. Conversely, inadequate policies or lack of appropriate regulations may leave people exposed to the risks of the digital transformation without reaping its full benefits.

### A digital divide remains, which may increase inequalities in well-being outcomes

While more and more people in OECD countries have access to digital technologies, a digital divide in access to digital technologies persists. Inequalities in access and use of digital technologies by age, gender, education and other socio-economic markers imply that certain groups are better placed than others in harnessing digital technologies for achieving better well-being outcomes in many dimensions, such as jobs and income, health, work-life balance and social connections. For instance, almost one third of people aged 55-65 lack computer experience or have failed tests for assessing core information and communication technology (ICT) skills, as compared with 5% among people aged 16 to 24.

The risks of the digital transformation fall more heavily on people with lower levels of education and skills, and its opportunities may be for the benefit of a few. This is true, in particular, when considering jobs opportunities and earnings levels. While mobile phones have surely improved the living conditions of the world's poor (providing connections to people that had none before), the growth of large digital companies with high capitalization has also contributed to wealth concentration at the top. In the health field, use of expensive digital technologies by a limited few may also contribute to higher inequalities. While the digital transformation offers opportunities to people in terms of attaining higher levels of well-being, it also confronts societies with a risk of higher inequalities in many well-being outcomes.

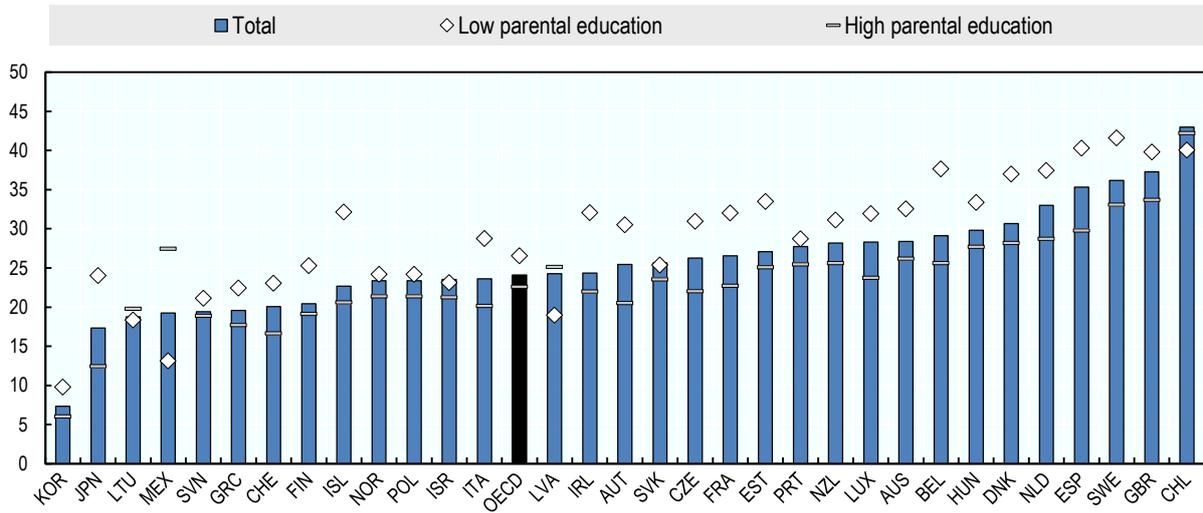
### To benefit from digital technologies people need the right skills

People need skills adapted to a digital world. Today only 31% of adults have sufficient problem-solving skills for operating in technology-rich environments. A wide range of skills is needed to succeed in the digital world of work: these include cognitive skills, information and communication technology (ICT) skills, complementary skills, specialist skills and the ability to cope with change and keep learning, including when out of work.

Emotional and social skills are especially important to fully benefit from digital technologies and safely navigate the online world. This "digital literacy" allows people to combine their digital and real lives, and to avoid mental health problems associated with abuses of digital technologies. The extreme use of the Internet (Figure 1) has been associated with a number of

mental health risks such as depression, anxiety, attention deficit, bipolar disorders and addictions especially among children and teenagers.

**Figure 1. Extreme Internet use by children based on parental background, 2015**



*Note:*. Households with high parental education are those where at least one of the parents has completed a tertiary degree. Households with low parental education are those where no parents has a tertiary degree, i.e. they all have attained an upper secondary school degree or less. The OECD average is population weighted.

*Source:* Based on OECD (2015), *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)* (database), [www.oecd.org/pisa/data/](http://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/).

## Digital technologies can improve people's social and civic lives, but also expose them to disinformation

The Internet and the smartphone have fundamentally changed the way people interact with each other. Evidence shows that online social contact typically complements offline interactions rather than replacing it; it may hence help people overcome loneliness and social exclusion. Governments have also used digital technologies to make public services more effective and efficient, and to ease access by users.

Moreover, social media have also exposed people to disinformation, limiting their exposure to competing viewpoints and contributing to a polarisation of political views. While the causal link from increased disinformation to lower trust in government is not clearly established, people living in countries more exposed to perceived disinformation also report, on average, lower trust in government.

**Q1 (Opportunities):** What is the potential for the digital transformation to improve people's lives within the next few decades?

**Q2 (Inequality):** Could digitalisation widen inequalities across a range of well-being dimensions? How can policy makers best ensure equal digital opportunities across all population groups in society?

**Q3 (Digital literacy and mental health):** Which skill policies can be more effective in empowering children and adults to make a proper use of digital technologies? Should preventive policies be used to limit the mental health risks associated with extreme use of the internet?

**Q4 (Disinformation):** How can disinformation best be limited? What are the pros and cons of regulation against disinformation?