

04.05.2021 – 09:00 Uhr

DIGITAL LEARNING GAP LEAVES EUROPEAN STUDENTS AT RISK OF ONLINE ‘INFODEMIC’, NEW OECD PISA REPORT REVEALS

Paris / London (ots) -

New pan-European digital education initiative from Vodafone’s Foundations to empower students in critical use of digital technologies.

European students are struggling to manage the flood of information provided by internet and digital services, according to a new OECD PISA-report ‘21st Century Readers: Developing literacy skills in a digital world’, co-funded by Vodafone Germany Foundation and released today.

Against the backdrop of a COVID-19 ‘Infodemic’ – a term coined by the World Health Organization to describe the flood of information disseminated about the health crisis – The report found that only half (54%) of European students are taught to recognise if online information is biased, and less than 1 in 10 can successfully distinguish fact from opinions.

Students’ access to digital technologies and training on how to use them also varies greatly between countries and socio-economic backgrounds. Students from Australia, Canada, Denmark and the United States are almost twice as likely to receive training on how to detect biased information than students from Israel, Latvia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Switzerland.

The report also highlights a further digital divide as students from disadvantaged backgrounds are falling behind in literacy skills. With the exception of Portugal and Hungary, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are significantly less likely to receive training on how to validate information successfully. In Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg and Sweden this difference was more than 15 percentage points, illustrating particularly unequal access to digital education.

Joakim Reiter, Chief External and Corporate Affairs Officer, Vodafone Group and Trustee, Vodafone Foundation, said: “As digital technologies have enabled the immediate spread of information, it is more important than ever that readers can distinguish fact from opinion, by learning strategies to detect biased information and malicious content like fake news and phishing emails.”

“Policy makers, education institutions, civil society and businesses must act now to ensure we meet the EU’s digital decade target of at least 80% of all adults having basic digital skills by 2030.”

Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, said: “I welcome the launch of the PISA report ‘21st Century Readers’. The report could not be more timely – in times where the screen becomes a window to the world, it is important to ensure that young people have the skills to navigate safely and responsibly in the sea of information and knowledge.”

“This is also one of the key goals of the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 – adapting education and training to the digital age and ensuring that young people have the necessary skills and competences to live and thrive in these circumstances. I truly believe that the report provides a valuable insight on how to best support our 15-year olds in their journey in the digital age, making them truly knowledgeable and enlightened readers, but also citizens in the digital 21st century.”

Recognising that digital education in Europe must be strengthened to enable young people to thrive in a digital society, Vodafone’s Foundations in Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Turkey have announced a new Pan-European education initiative to empower students and educators in the creative, critical and self-confident use of digital technologies.

By sharing best-practice examples, the initiative will provide educators from school and out-of-school settings with high-quality, ready-to-use learning and teaching material. Working closely with local partners the initiative ensures a tailored approach to foster innovative and equitable education in each country.

The initiative is part of a €20 million investment by Vodafone Foundation to empower 16 million learners across 14 European countries by 2025 to build the skills and confidence they need to experience the benefits of technology and thrive in a flourishing digital society. *

Notes for editors

*Vodafone Foundation uses a ‘Lives Improved’ methodology to assess its public benefit impact, which is annually assured by Dalberg. A conservative estimate for these digital skills programmes expects a minimum impact of 16 million direct beneficiaries by 2025.

About PISA and the report 21st-Century Readers

PISA is the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment. PISA measures 15-year-olds’ ability to use their reading,

mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges. PISA 2018 focused on reading in a digital environment. The report 21st-Century Readers: developing Literacy Skills in a Digital world, co-funded by the Vodafone Germany Foundation, provides an in-depth analysis on how students are developing reading skills to navigate the technology-rich 21st Century.

About Vodafone Foundation

Vodafone Foundation, established in 1991, is at the centre of a network of global and local social investment programmes, referred to as the local Foundations. Vodafone Foundation's Connecting for Good programme combines charitable giving and technology to address some of the world's most pressing problems. Vodafone Foundation is an independent UK registered charity, number 1089625.

For more information, please visit www.vodafonefoundation.org

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