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Digital Skills Champions Awarded As Report Warns of 2030 Shortfall In Critical Categories

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Commissioners Virkkunen & Mînzatu will present awards to projects building digital competence across the continent, as new data shows the bloc is on course to miss its own technology training targets by seven years.

Henna Virkkunen, the European Commission's Executive Vice-President for Technological Sovereignty, Security and Democracy, and Roxana Mînzatu, Executive Vice-President for Social Rights and Skills, Quality Jobs and Preparedness, will jointly present the European Digital Skills Awards 2026 at a public ceremony in Brussels on 30 June. The event is the centrepiece of the three-day Digital Skills EU Days, which runs from 29 June to 1 July at the SQUARE Brussels Meeting Centre.

Now in their third edition since being relaunched in 2023, the awards attracted 220 applications this year, with 25 finalists selected across five categories: Digital Upskilling at Work, Digital Skills for Education, Inclusion in the Digital World, Women in ICT Careers, and Cybersecurity Skills. Winners will be revealed at the ceremony, which is free and open to the public.

The same programme will mark the formal launch of three new Digital Skills Academies — covering quantum technologies, generative artificial intelligence and virtual worlds — designed to address critical talent shortages in advanced technology sectors. Funded under the Digital Europe Programme and complementing the existing Cybersecurity Skills Academy, each academy will bring together academia, industry and public institutions to develop specialised training frameworks in its respective domain.

The backdrop to the event is the Commission's own admission that Europe is falling behind its ambitions. The 2026 State of the Digital Decade report, published on 17 June, found that while more than 60 per cent of Europeans now possess at least basic

digital skills, the EU is badly off track on its workforce goals. Under the Digital Decade programme, the bloc has set itself the targets of equipping 80 per cent of adults with basic digital skills and having at least 20 million ICT specialists in employment by 2030. On both counts the picture is troubling. ICT specialists accounted for only 5 per cent of the total EU workforce in 2025 — half the 10 per cent share the target requires — and women made up fewer than one in five of those workers, a proportion unchanged since 2024. At the current rate of progress, the Commission projects that the 80 per cent basic skills target will not be reached until 2037.

"Digital skills can unlock the many opportunities created by tech — opportunities that should be open to everyone," Virkkunen said in a written statement. "We are investing in Europe's Digital Decade, but the digital transformation does not come without investing in people's digital skills."

The cybersecurity strand of the skills agenda carries particular weight given the scale of the threat. The ENISA Threat Landscape 2025, the annual report of the EU Agency for Cybersecurity, analysed approximately 4,900 incidents recorded between July 2024 and June 2025, with distributed denial-of-service attacks accounting for more than three quarters of the total. Separately, a formal application to establish a Cybersecurity Skills Coalition European Digital Infrastructure Consortium (CSC-EDIC) — intended to help member states upskill cyber professionals, particularly within small businesses and public administrations — was submitted in early 2026 by five member states: Greece, Cyprus, Austria, Croatia and Slovenia, with Poland and the Czech Republic joining as observers. The Commission confirmed in its accompanying staff working document on 17 June that the application remains under evaluation; it has not been approved or formally established.