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Inclusive digitalisation and basic digital skills:

Best practice examples from Romania and the European Union



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Project: Monitoring the National Digital Decade Plan



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I. Introduction

In 2025, only 31.8% of Romanians aged 16 to 74 had at least basic digital skills, while the EU average was 60.4% [see the *Digital Decade National Action Plan Romania* (pp. 68 - 69)]. Romania is therefore not only below the European average, but still a long way from the 80% target set at EU level for 2030. Romania's own national target is considerably lower, at 50% by 2030.

This is particularly important because, despite some progress in digital infrastructure, Romania continues to lag far behind in basic digital skills. While the country has made investments in connectivity and digital infrastructure, this progress has not been matched by equally strong efforts to ensure that people have the skills needed to use digital technologies confidently and effectively. The European Commission has repeatedly identified low levels of basic digital skills as a significant challenge for Romania, limiting people's ability to use digital public services and contributing to the country's wider digitalisation gap.

The policy response also remains limited. Romania's National Action Plan for the Digital Decade sets an ambition of only 50% of the population having at least basic digital skills by 2030, and provides limited analysis or projects focused specifically on achieving this objective. Moreover, the plan dedicates little to no attention to the most digitally vulnerable, focusing the majority of its initiatives on public sector employees. At the same time, a range of successful initiatives aimed at developing basic digital skills are being implemented by civil society organisations, private companies and a limited number of local authorities. These initiatives demonstrate that practical approaches to improving digital skills already exist in Romania, but they remain fragmented and have yet to be sufficiently recognised, supported or replicated at national scale.

This is where there is an opportunity to build on what is already working. Rather than starting from scratch, Romania can identify, showcase and support initiatives that are already helping people develop basic digital skills, particularly those reaching groups and communities that face greater barriers to digital participation. Documenting these examples and understanding what makes them effective can help make models easier to adapt and replicate elsewhere, turning isolated initiatives into a broader response to a clearly identified national need.

This means that policy efforts and practical projects need to focus directly on the large share of the population that still lacks basic digital skills. Programmes should be designed and scaled to reach the wider population without basic digital skills, while ensuring that those

facing additional barriers receive appropriate support. The priority should be to identify, support and replicate initiatives that can effectively reach this population and equip people with the practical skills they need to access public and private services, work, education, healthcare, banking and other essential aspects of everyday life that are increasingly moving online.

That is why, at the Romanian Center for European Policies (CRPE), we decided to look at what is already being done in Romania to improve basic digital skills. We paid attention to how existing initiatives identify and reach people at risk of digital exclusion, how they adapt their programmes to different needs, what kind of support they provide, who they work with locally, and what results they have achieved so far. We were particularly interested in how people are brought into these programmes in the first place, what makes them stay and what makes an initiative flourish in a particular community.

Additionally, we gathered examples from other EU countries to understand how they are addressing similar challenges. We selected initiatives from Austria, Belgium, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Sweden, looking at different approaches to outreach, training and local support, as well as different ways of involving municipalities, libraries, community organisations, volunteers and other actors already working directly with the people these programmes are trying to reach.

To analyze how digital inclusion programs reach and support target groups, this research mapped initiatives across Romania and six EU countries. We combined desk research with direct data collection, including 41 information requests to Romanian municipalities and a focus group with field practitioners to extract key implementation lessons.

The report looks at what can be learned from initiatives already being implemented: which approaches appear to work, what makes them accessible to people with limited digital skills, what allows them to reach vulnerable communities, and what would be needed to replicate or scale up some of these approaches in Romania.

Solutions already exist: what is needed is to connect, scale and sustain them. Across the EU, initiatives supporting basic digital skills are already being implemented by civil society organisations, private companies, public institutions and local authorities. These initiatives show that practical approaches can work when they respond to people's real needs and are delivered close to the communities they serve. The challenge is not to reinvent the wheel, but to better identify, coordinate and replicate what works. Romania is still missing this policy approach, and stronger partnerships between public authorities,

civil society, businesses and other relevant actors, combined with stable, long-term support that allows successful initiatives to move beyond short-term projects and reach more of the population that currently lacks basic digital skills are needed.

Several of the initiatives reviewed stood out for their approach:

The Digital Skills Passport, launched in 2017 by the Lisbon City Council, couples free digital workshops with a badge system, where completion of courses is awarded through “digital medals” that can then be used in professional contexts to certify digital skills. Lisbon understood the importance of certifying digital competences in an increasingly more online-dependent workplace and daily life, especially for women (which accounted for 66% of participants), people aged 65+ (16%) and persons with nine years of schooling or less (more than half).

Italy’s Digital Civil Service, a nationwide program launched by the Italian government in 2022, trains young volunteers who then help people learn basic digital skills and use digital services, reaching 290,000 citizens through 9,300 volunteers. The programme also trains the NGOs that host these volunteers, giving them the tools to organise digital inclusion activities and train and support volunteers themselves. This way, the programme builds a local network of organisations and young people that can continue providing digital support in their communities.

Digital Everywhere is a large-scale workshop programme launched in 2024 by Austria’s Agency for Education and Internationalisation aimed at people with little-to-none exposure to digital competences, training 45,000 participants in 4700 workshops between 2024 and 2026. Digital Everywhere brings short, free digital skills workshops to people across Austria, especially those with little or no digital experience. What makes it stand out is how it combines a national programme with local needs: trained “digital interpreters” work with municipalities and communities to choose the right topics, find trainers and organise workshops where they are most needed.

Greece’s 3rd e-age: Digital Empowerment of the Elderly brings basic digital support directly into familiar community spaces, particularly for older people in rural and urban areas. Launched by GRNET under the Ministry of Digital Governance, the programme uses trained “Digital Assistants-Trainers” to provide personalised, face-to-face help with smartphones, online communication and access to digital public and private services. More

than 1,400 people participated in over 7,000 support sessions, with more than 94% reporting high or very high satisfaction.

Descurcat Tech, launched as a joint initiative between AMAIS and the Orange Digital Center, helps people with visual and associated disabilities gain more independence in their day-to-day lives by teaching them how to use the screen readers and other accessibility features on their devices. Since 2021, the program has helped 516 people who are either blind, visually impaired or are progressively losing their sight.

II. Methodology

This report is a combination of desk research, direct information requests to public authorities and qualitative input from practitioners. The research focused on identifying and analysing digital skills and digital inclusion initiatives in Romania and other European countries, looking at how they are designed and implemented, who they reach, and what lessons or approaches may be relevant for the Romanian context.

The mapping focused on initiatives that seek to develop basic digital skills in practice, that provide direct support, training or learning opportunities to people with limited digital skills, rather than on digitalisation projects focused primarily on infrastructure, e-government or the digitalisation of organisations. The research included initiatives targeting the general population, and particularly groups that may face a higher risk of digital exclusion, such as older people, people with disabilities, people with lower levels of education or income, women, young people and people living in disadvantaged or rural areas.

The Romanian section outlines initiatives implemented by a range of actors, including civil society organisations, foundations, private-sector actors, public institutions, and libraries. The EU section looks at initiatives from other European countries that provide relevant examples of how basic digital skills can be supported through different delivery models, with the aim of being replicated in Romania.

For each initiative, the research sought to collect information across several dimensions: target groups and outreach strategies, types of digital skills addressed, delivery model and learning format, activities and available results, partnerships, funding, implementation period, and, where possible, the institutional or local context in which the initiative operates. Particular attention was paid to how people are reached and supported in practice, including the role of libraries, community centres, local authorities, trainers, volunteers, and other trusted intermediaries.

The research also deliberately includes initiatives at different stages of implementation.

Where available, established programmes are presented together with evidence of participation, outcomes or user feedback. At the same time, newer initiatives that are still being implemented or developed are included where their approach is relevant to the report's objectives. In these cases, the report distinguishes between planned activities, ongoing implementation and results that have already been documented, rather than treating expected outcomes as achieved results.

Finally, the examples from other European countries look at specific elements that may be relevant in the Romanian context. For example, bringing support into trusted local spaces, combining equipment with training, developing the capacity of trainers, providing low-threshold or free support, adapting training to specific groups, and connecting national or European funding with local delivery.

In order to map initiatives from other European countries, we conducted desk research using European-level and national sources, including official programme and project websites, national and local authorities, and EU platforms showcasing digital skills initiatives. The research started in particular from the European Commission's [European Education Area](#), including the [European Digital Education Hub](#)'s collection of inspiring practices, and the [Digital Skills and Jobs Platform](#), which includes a dedicated Good Practices section featuring digital skills initiatives and projects from regional, national and European stakeholders. These sources were used as starting points for identifying relevant initiatives, which were then further researched through the websites of the organisations and authorities responsible for their implementation. Where publicly available information was insufficient, follow-up questions were sent to the relevant local or national authorities and implementing organisations to clarify aspects such as the target groups, activities, implementation period, results, partnerships and funding.

As part of the mapping of digital skills initiatives in Romania, we also used Law 544/2001 on free access to information of public interest to collect information directly from local authorities. We sent 41 information requests to county-seat municipalities, asking about initiatives aimed at developing digital skills and digital literacy among the public, including information on activities, target groups, funding and partnerships. We received 35 responses.

These requests were used as a complementary source to the desk research, helping to identify initiatives that may not be prominently documented online, while also providing an indication of the extent to which county-seat municipalities are directly involved in digital skills provision. The findings should not, however, be interpreted as a comprehensive assessment of all local digital skills initiatives, as the responses depended on the information available and provided by each municipality.

Additionally, CRPE also organised a focus group with representatives of public and private organisations with experience in designing and implementing digital inclusion initiatives in Romania. The discussion was meant to complement the desk research with insights from practitioners, looking at what works and what does not, the main barriers they encounter, how they reach vulnerable groups and what is needed for initiatives to be replicated

or scaled up. The findings have been integrated in the report, in the textbox, and have also helped us draft some of our main recommendations.

The research was conducted in line with diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility principles. This was also reflected in the focus group, where we sought to ensure a balanced mix of participants. Particular attention was paid to bringing different experiences and perspectives into the discussion.

III. Digital inclusion initiatives for basic digital skills across the EU

ROMANIA

Initiatives	Theme, target group and outreach strategy	Activity and results	Partner-ships	Funding
<i>Hi Digital</i>	Free programme for people 65+, caregivers and organisations supporting seniors; outreach via partners, day centres and libraries.	Practical smartphone, online payments, shopping and digital safety workshops; 12,000+ beneficiaries in 135 locations, with 94% of seniors reporting increased confidence.	Libraries, day centres, residence centres.	RON 3.2 million (November 2023 - present), Vodafone Foundation Romania.
<i>Get online! National Campaign (Hai pe net!)</i>	National digital education campaign by EOS Foundation and Coalition for Digital Education.	Digital literacy and media literacy/ cybersecurity courses; 150,000+ people trained.	Schools, libraries.	EOS Foundation and partner support.
<i>Orange Digital Center</i>	Free digital education hub for adults and children, prioritising vulnerable people,	In-person courses (5-80 hours) as well as online sessions.	Orange Foundation, local NGOs.	Orange Foundation.

	jobseekers and low-income adults.			
<i>Descurcat Tech</i>	Digital skills for people with visual or associated disabilities, supporting independent living.	Individual and group sessions for the accessible use of the phone and computer.	AM AIS, Orange Digital Center.	Orange Foundation; EUR 50,000 for 2026.

In Romania, only 31.8% of 16-to-74-year-olds had basic digital skills in 2025 (with a target of 50% by 2030), with an annual progress of 7.2% and only 36% of the national targets being aligned with the EU 2030 targets, according to the [Digital Decade Country Report Romania 2026](#).

Despite Romania having a Digital Decade roadmap, the best practices observed from Romania came from the **civil space**, where organisations built up initiatives with the goal of teaching digital skills to vulnerable groups, be it through free educational courses, nation-wide digitalisation campaigns in schools, multi-purpose digital centers, career support, or digital-skills schooling for persons with visual disabilities. The following initiatives are therefore presented as civil society and private-sector-led practices that complement, rather than form part of, Romania's national digital skills policy framework.

Good to know: *The Digital Decade Roadmap*

Measure 3 from the Digital Decade roadmap aimed to **transform public libraries into local digital skills development centers** accessible to all citizens, including vulnerable groups by **modernising library spaces, providing technological equipment, and supporting digital skills training**. Actual implementation is slow and difficult to assess as public information available is limited. The targets were reduced to 560 renovated and equipped libraries (including 60 digital skills hubs) and 45,000 citizens trained in basic digital skills (from the initial objectives of 1,135 digitalised libraries, 1,100 trained librarians, and 100,000 community members trained by the end of 2025). Though reports from the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania (ADR) remark the targets were met, comprehensive implementation data on activities and outcomes is not yet available.

1. Hi Digital

Hi Digital is a non-formal educational programme that offers free courses and support catered to people over 65 years old, having trained over 12,000 beneficiaries across 135 locations in Romania, with a team of 525 volunteers and 297 trainers *[According to the response from the Vodafone Foundation]*. Launched in 2023 by the Vodafone Foundation, the programme's allocated budget is RON 3.217.000, with the main goal of facilitating digital inclusion and bridging the digital divide across generations. The target groups of the initiative are people over 65 years old; caregivers, friends, extended family, key community members and other people close to seniors; community and school libraries, day centers, and residence centers that offer support to seniors.

The main areas of intervention and activities are split into direct and indirect support for seniors:

- digital education workshops (several sessions amounting to 25 hours), where seniors learn to use their smartphone, applications, communication tools, online payments and shopping, and get acquainted with digital safety measures. The content of the workshops is based on a practical guide that participants can access during and after the course *[According to the response from the Vodafone Foundation]*;
- intergenerational digital workshops, where young people help seniors discover and use new technologies;
- e-learning platform with digital lessons for seniors;
- digital assistance in Vodafone stores, where seniors can receive direct support in using their mobile phone;
- training of trainers and mentoring sessions for digital instructors involved in the digital education of seniors;
- support for the organizational development of libraries, day care centers, residential centers and local non-governmental organizations selected for the program.

Participants are selected through public calls, recommended people from Hi Digital partners and requests from day centers and public libraries, based on local need for digital education, limited access to support, availability of Hi Digital trainers and volunteers, as well as support from authorities and local partners *[According to the response from the Vodafone Foundation]*.

The training of Hi Digital trainers is organized as a “training of trainers” (ToT) program, conducted in person over three days of learning and practice. The program presents the Hi

Digital methodology, educational content and how to organize face-to-face workshops for seniors and addresses aspects of communication with participants and safeguarding beneficiaries. After training, trainers benefit from ongoing mentoring and counseling sessions, both within organized meetings and whenever needed. Additional ToT sessions are organised every time new educational content is integrated. Hi Digital trainers transfer this knowledge and practices to volunteers in each community and, through workshops, to seniors *[According to the response from the Vodafone Foundation]*.

Feedback from participants reflects a positive impact of the program on seniors' digital skills, with 94% of seniors involved in the program saying they use their smartphones with more confidence, and 86% finding it easier to communicate with their loved ones through the internet. For each series of workshops, an initial assessment at the beginning of the course and a final assessment after the completion of the course is being done to observe the evolution of digital skills and participants' confidence in using technology. This data is complemented with feedback from Hi Digital trainers and volunteers, testimonials from seniors and direct observations made during the work sessions *[According to the response from the Vodafone Foundation]*.

***Takeaway:** Hi Digital recognises that seniors have different needs and levels of confidence when it comes to technology, and doesn't treat them like a homogenous group, but rather gives them different ways to learn, following their own pace or level. Moreover, training the trainers helps make this support sustainable in the long run, as the knowledge will stay in these communities, through the trainers.*

2. EOS Foundation for Digital Education

The **EOS Foundation for Digital Education** aims to reduce the digitalization gap in Romania by implementing digital education projects in two main areas: pre-university education system, by training teachers in the use of ICT and working with disadvantaged youth, and the wider community by working with IT and knowledge disadvantaged communities. Among its projects, *Hai pe net!* National Campaign is its longer term flagship initiative, while expanding on other short-term projects like the *DigiLib* initiative and *RiseWithTech*.

Get online! National Campaign (Hai pe net!)

Hai pe net! is a national-wide week-long digital education campaign implemented by the EOS Foundation in collaboration with Coalition for Digital Education, training over

150.000 people across Romania along the 12 editions. Hai pe net! operates as a local initiative under the umbrella of All Digital Week, a European initiative managed by All Digital. Organised annually since its launch in 2010, the campaign is largely targeted towards people that lack basic digital skills, by organising training sessions and workshops in schools, libraries, NGOs, and community centers.

The campaign has two main components: digital literacy courses and workshops for work-seeking individuals, through an online digital platform, CompetentDigital.ro, and in-school sessions for students, teachers, educators, and auxiliary personnel regarding media literacy and cybersecurity. The digital centers, supported by the online learning platform, offered intro sessions for basic digital skills, as well as info sessions for unemployed and socially assisted persons, and those interested in upgrading their professional qualifications. In schools, educators and other pedagogical personnel participated in info sessions and workshops on cybersecurity and media literacy.

The EOS Foundation also implemented an awarding ceremony for the best educational and informational activities organised by the digital centers, with the prizes consisting of sets of 5 tablets, equipped with keyboard and mouse, with the aim of helping the digital centers continue the training sessions on the online educational platform.

***Takeaway:** Hai pe net! campaign focuses on offering communities in need first contact with digital instruments and competences, operating on a large-scale nationally and targeting both students and teachers. While work-seeking individuals get a better look at consolidating their digital skills, as well as access to a learning platform, the curriculum in schools focuses on adapting and protecting the students and educators alike from online threats that become more visible day by day.*

3. Orange Digital Center

Orange Digital Center was launched in Romania in 2023 by the Orange Foundation as a free digital education hub with the aim of providing basic digital-skills courses for adults and children, with priority given to vulnerable people, jobseekers and adults with low incomes. Orange Digital Center functions as an umbrella for several types of digital education programmes, targeting different ages, needs and levels of digital experience. Its model includes three types of intervention: basic digital skills for digital inclusion (1), more advanced skills for upskilling and reskilling (2), and activities for the wider community (3). The programme started with a single training centre in Bucharest. In 2024, the Orange

Foundation announced that it would pilot centres elsewhere in the country, including in areas where access to educational opportunities is more difficult.

The consolidation of digital skills is implemented through (a) in-person courses ranging from 5 to 80 hours of course on topics like programming (web front-end development, programming introduction, software testing, programming workshops for children, Python development), AI (introduction course, how to use an AI assistant, cybersecurity in the era of AI), digital skills for people with eyesight impairment (editing, Microsoft Office package, usage of iOS devices), electronic course and (b) **online sessions** on topics like e-governance (how to use Ghişeu.ro and SPV), editing and animation in Canva and Tiktok, data collection and visualisation, data analytics, vibe coding and programming basics, ethical AI usage.

***Takeaway:** Orange Digital Center shows how different digital needs can exist even among people who are broadly considered at risk of digital exclusion. Support can mean learning to use an online public service, gaining skills for a new job or learning to use digital tools with a visual impairment.*

4. Descurcat Tech

Descurcat Tech aims to increase access to digital skills useful in everyday life for people with visual disabilities as part of the Descurcat program - an alternative school that teaches independent living skills for people with visual and associated disabilities. The school trains mobility guides and trainers, with the goal of creating a national network of allies and help increase the visibility of people with disabilities and dismantling prejudices about disability. Since the start of the program in 2021 to date, 516 people have benefited from the program's activities in 6 cities across Romania. The program is aimed at blind or visually impaired people, including those who are progressively losing their sight, as well as people who want to become trainers and provide support in their communities [According to the response from AMAIS].

The main areas of activity include:

- individual and group sessions for the accessible use of the phone and computer;
- familiarization with screen readers and other accessibility features;
- use of applications necessary in everyday activities, for communication, information, orientation or accessing various services;
- training new trainers;

- supporting and monitoring trainers after the course;
- developing and adapting learning methods and resources.

Beneficiaries are identified through the AMAIS community and network, through direct referrals and through collaboration with schools, disability organizations, NGOs, professionals and other organizations that come into contact with blind or partially sighted people, while participation opportunities are communicated through their own channels and partners.

The strategy aims to train people who live or work in communities where such services are needed, with support being provided locally and in the longer term, without depending exclusively on the interventions of the team in Bucharest. Communities are identified based on the needs reported by beneficiaries and local organizations, the limited access to assistive technology training services and the existence of motivated individuals who can become stable resources for the community.

The training of new trainers combines technical skills with practical exercises with invited blind people. Across 5 days, participants learn to use different assistive technologies, as well as to assess a person's needs, structure a session and explain information in a clear and adapted way. Trainers are selected based on motivation, willingness to work consistently with people with visual disabilities, relevant experience, communication skills, and the possibility of subsequently applying the knowledge in the local community, with continuation being an important component in the process. After the training, the trainers benefit from support, resources and monitoring, in order to be able to adapt the content to the situations encountered in practice.

Orange Digital Center is AMAIS' flagship partner and funder in this project, contributing to the promotion of the project and facilitating connections with other organizations. For this part of the program, between April 2026 and December 2026, the Orange Foundation has allocated a budget of EUR 50,000.

At the local level, AMAIS aims to collaborate with schools, organizations of people with disabilities, NGOs, authorities and other relevant institutions. Depending on the context, they can contribute by identifying beneficiaries and potential trainers, distributing information, providing spaces for training sessions,

Short term, AMAIS aims to optimize the training programs for wider reaching and easier implementation by testing various formats, from 1:1 sessions to group sessions with a practical or mobility component, or online seminars on cyber security or other digital topics of interest. The transformation of methodology involves simplifying and structuring

resources, adapting content to different levels of experience, developing practical tools for trainers and improving support and monitoring mechanisms. Long term, the goal is to strengthen a functional network of trainers that can respond to local needs and provide people with visual and related disabilities constant access to learning the technologies they use in their everyday lives.

Takeaway: *Descurcat Tech sheds light on an often overlooked vulnerable group, addressing the need for people with visual or associated disabilities to gain or strengthen their digital skills. The initiative places the people it aims to help at the center of its methodology, with training dedicated to work with and adapted to people with visual disabilities. The workshops equip participants with the necessarily base-level digital competences needed to gain more autonomy and independence in their daily life.*

Good Practices in Accessibility: Digitalisation as a solution for visually impaired people

For blind and visually impaired people, digital skills can mean greater independence in everyday life, from accessing information and communicating to using online services. The Romanian Association of the Blind (ANR) regularly organises training on assistive technologies and adapted digital tools, including the use of computers with speech synthesis software and other accessible learning resources. Some of this training is delivered by visually impaired people themselves, who can draw on their own experience of using these technologies. The example is also a reminder that digital skills programmes need to be designed with accessibility in mind from the start: people with disabilities may need adapted tools, training methods and support to benefit from digitalisation on equal terms.

Other Initiatives

RiseWithTech

RiseWithTech was an initiative implemented between 2023 and 2024 that aimed to empower 100 women interested in a career in the digital field by helping them develop their digital and soft skills. The project was financed by WIPRO, with a budget of RON 72.000, aiming to close the gender gap in the tech industry by providing women with online career

mentoring sessions, CV design, seminar on personal branding, and general support regarding starting a career in tech.

DigiLib

DigiLib is a cross-country Erasmus+ initiative (FRSI (Poland), PL2030 (Belgium), EOS (Romania), CSBNO (Italy), and Dot Beyond (Italy)) which aims to expand the role of public libraries to become digital learning hubs. The project runs from 2025 to 2027 and aims to create a platform for trainers (librarians, library staff and other relevant actors) and provides educational resources (courses, training), as well as a collaborative space for peer support.

Solidarity Fablab

Solidarity Fablab, part of the Orange Digital Center, is designed as a free programme for vulnerable youth in order to increase their employment opportunities, through digital manufacturing courses, as well as career counselling and network opportunities in the IT sector. In Romania, there are three active Solidarity Fablabs launched between 2020 and 2021 Iași, Târgu Ocna, and Oradea, in collaboration with NGOs, offering access to technical training, manufacturing techniques, and career counseling to 790 youth people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

An online micro-learning application, Play Everyday Orange Digital Center, was launched in parallel to make educational content available to people in isolated or disadvantaged areas and who have limited access to conventional training.

PORTUGAL

Initiative	Theme, target group and outreach strategy	Activity and results	Partnerships	Funding
<i>Digital Skills Passport (Passaporte Competências Digitais)</i>	Basic digital skills and inclusion for seniors, low-income/ low-education groups, unemployed people, migrants and people with disabilities; outreach via municipalities, parish councils and community organisations.	10 practical training areas through free 15-hour online/face-to-face courses, plus an 18-hour AI course. Between 2017–2024: 3,368 participants, 310+ courses/activities, 5,083+ digital badges and 40,782 participant-hours; 97.08% satisfaction.	Lisbon City Council, parish councils, libraries, local development associations, University of Lisbon, Universidade Aberta, Foundation for Science and Technology, INCoDe. 2030.	Lisbon municipal budget; EUR 92,900 for monitoring and management.

In 2025, 59.15% of people aged 16-74 in Portugal had at least basic digital skills, up from 55.97% in 2023 but still slightly below the EU average of 60.40%, with 92% of national targets being in alignment with the EU’s 2030 targets, according to the [Digital Decade Country Report 2026](#). This objective is reflected in [Portugal’s National Digital Decade Roadmap](#) and, more recently, in the [Digital Skills Pact Action Plan 2026-2030](#). The current national approach combines broad investment in digital skills with targeted measures for groups at greater risk of digital exclusion. The [Digital Skills Pact](#) covers basic, intermediate, advanced and emerging digital skills, with its basic-skills pillar targeting in particular people

aged 45-70, people living in rural or low-density areas, and people with lower levels of education [see Digigov.pt. 2026. [*The pact to qualify citizens, workers and companies.*](#)]. Planned measures include a network of Community Digital Agents, certified digital-skills training, actions targeting people with disabilities, local training initiatives in low-density areas and mobile digital-skills training units. The Pact aims to provide basic digital-skills training to around 1.9 million people by 2030. Its implementation began in the first half of 2026 and is planned to continue until the second half of 2030. Alongside these national measures, Portugal also has a strong record of locally led digital-inclusion initiatives. One such example is Lisbon's Digital Skills Passport, launched in 2017 by the Lisbon City Council as part of its Programme for Digital Inclusion and Literacy. The initiative provides free, practical and inclusive digital-skills training, particularly for groups at risk of digital exclusion, and uses a passport and digital badges to recognise learning. While it is a municipal rather than a national programme, its long-standing community-based approach illustrates how local initiatives can provide practical models for broader digital-skills policy.

The Digital Skills Passport

The Digital Skills Passport (Passaporte Competências Digitais) initiative is an ongoing municipal programme of the Lisbon City Council (Câmara Municipal de Lisboa), combining free workshops with a system of digital micro-certification. It was created in 2017 within the municipality's Digital Inclusion and Literacy Programme (PILD) [see European Commission. 2026. [*Digital Skills Passport: empowering citizens through digital learning.*](#)] in response to inequalities in access to, use of and benefits derived from digital technologies. Rather than focusing only on access to devices or connectivity, the programme aims to develop the knowledge, confidence and practical capacities needed for adults to use technology in their personal, civic and professional lives. It places particular emphasis on people who may face greater barriers to digital participation, including older people, people with lower levels of education or income, unemployed people, migrants and people with disabilities [According to the response from Lisbon City Council].

The current programme includes 10 activities, covering the following areas: using computers and the internet, browsing and searching the internet safely, communicating online with family and friends, public services and digital citizenship, digital creativity, writing and editing text documents, tables, graphs and budgets, multimedia presentations, CVs, social media and professional networks, and introduction to programming. Courses are generally structured as 15-hour activities, with an additional optional 18-hour AI course. The municipality reports that AI-related content has been incorporated into the training offer as part

of its ongoing curriculum updates, alongside areas such as cybersecurity and disinformation, illustrating how the training offer can evolve alongside technological change.

Participants complete digital-skills activities and receive “digital medals” based on the Open Badges standard, which certify the competencies acquired. The badges can then be added to participants’ CVs, allowing them to demonstrate the digital skills acquired through the programme beyond the training itself *[note: The Digital Skills Passport’s Open Badges should also be distinguished from Portugal’s national digital competence certification system. The municipality clarifies that the Passport is aligned conceptually and curricularly with DigComp and the QDRCD, but its municipal badges are not automatically equivalent to or convertible into the national Digital Competence Certificate (Lisbon City Council, 2026).]*.

The Passport was subsequently recognised through the INCoDe.2030 “Uma Ação INCoDe.2030” seal, an official recognition mechanism for initiatives contributing to Portugal’s national digital-skills objectives. Its digital competences are aligned with Portugal’s QDRCD (Quadro Dinâmico de Referência para a Competência Digital) and with the EU DigComp 2.1 framework.

The programme’s outreach is broader than online self-enrolment. According to Lisbon City Council, the initiative is promoted through municipal websites and registration channels, Lisbon City of Learning, municipal communication and social media, as well as local partners including parish councils, municipal libraries and neighbourhood and community organisations. Trainers and former participants can also help identify and encourage potential learners. Trusted local intermediaries can explain the value of the training, assist with registration and provide access to familiar community settings.

Regarding accessibility, the programme also uses accessible language, practical everyday activities, face-to-face access to computers and internet, and individual support from trainers to reduce barriers and anxiety around digital technologies.

The programme’s consolidated data for September 2017-December 2024 records 3,368 participants, more than 310 training courses and other activities, more than 5,083 digital badges and 40,782 participant-hours, with an overall participant satisfaction rate of 97.08% (Lisbon City Council, 2026). Women account for 66% of participants, 16% are aged 65+, and more than half have nine years of schooling or less. According to the programme’s own reporting, participants have ranged from their 20s to 97 years old, illustrating its capacity to engage learners across the life course *[see Digital Skills Passport | Passaporte Competências Digitais. 2024. Empowering Lisbon, one digital skill at a time: the story of the Digital Skills Passport. LinkedIn]*. Participants report greater confidence, critical thinking, awareness of AI and capacity for digital

civic participation. Earlier INCoDe 2030 reporting documented more than 100 training activities across Lisbon and more than 1,800 digital medals by 2022 (Lisbon City Council, 2026).

The programme is implemented and publicly supported by Lisbon City Council through the Department for Development and Training and PILD, with participation free of charge. According to the municipality, the programme operates through a mixed municipal resource model covering coordination and technical staff, trainers, facilities, equipment, digital services and educational resources, complemented by contributions from local and institutional partners (Lisbon City Council, 2026). Between 2017 and 2024, EUR 92,900 were spent on the monitoring and management of training activities (Lisbon City Council, 2026).

The municipality reports a delivery team consisting of one departmental director, two programme co-coordinators, 22 part-time trainers and one part-time administrative assistant. Trainers are expected to combine digital competence with adult-learning and pedagogical skills and to work with heterogeneous groups and participants experiencing digital exclusion. Their role goes beyond delivering content: they provide individual support, adapt activities to participants' prior experience, facilitate practical exercises and help participants build confidence and autonomy.

However, the municipality notes that it has not applied a standardised DigComp/QDRCD pre- and post-assessment to every participant since 2017, and there is no consolidated programme-wide dropout/completion rate or longitudinal follow-up tracking outcomes such as employment, income, long-term retention or sustained use of digital public services. This limits the extent to which the programme's longer-term impact can be measured (Lisbon City Council, 2026).

***Takeaway:** The Digital Skills Passport connects training directly to practical use. Participants learn skills they can apply in everyday and professional life, while the digital badges provide an original and standardised way to certify and showcase these skills, including on their CVs.*

AUSTRIA

Initiatives	Theme, target group and outreach strategy	Activity and results	Partnerships	Funding
<i>Digital Everywhere (Digital Überall)</i>	Large-scale, low-threshold digital upskilling for people with little/no digital experience; outreach via online channels, alumni, contacts and education-provider networks.	Free in-person workshops in 5 areas, with 3 teaching units; 43,000 participants trained in 4,500 workshops; 94.7% were at least rather satisfied, 78% very satisfied.	OeAD (Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation), Municipalities, local NGOs, local digital facilitators, other public institutions.	OeAD, with EUR 5,438,000 for the Digital Competences Office, part of DKO (Digitale Kompetenz-offensive).
<i>Digital Everywhere PLUS (Digital Überall PLUS)</i>	Similar target groups, with more complex support or deeper learning needs; includes additional support measures.	Free in-person/partly online workshops over several days; 840 workshops and ~7,600 participants.	OeAD (Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation), Municipalities, local NGOs, local digital facilitators, other public institutions.	OeAD, with EUR 5,438,000 for the Digital Competences Office, part of DKO (Digitale Kompetenz-offensive).

<i>She goes AI</i>	Organisations and women working or interested in AI; outreach mainly through word of mouth.	National platform offering free and paid networking, training, mentoring and career opportunities; 25 offers published to date.	Federal Chancellery; Federal Ministry for Women, Science and Research; AI Factory Austria, Thenew ITgirls, ABZ*Austria, Strukturaflow IT and others.	Implemented as part of the DKO.
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In Austria, 69.8% of 16-to-74-year-olds have basic digital skills in 2025 (with a target of 80% by 2030), more than 9 percentage points above the EU-27 average, with an annual progress of 3.9% and 92% of the national targets being aligned with the EU 2030 targets, according to the [Digital Decade Short Country Report Austria 2026](#). The digitalization measures are outlined in the [National Digital Decade Roadmap](#), Austria's main instrument aimed at obtaining a digitally qualified population, secure infrastructures and the digitization of economy and administration. Integrated as part of the Digital Decade Roadmap, the Digital Competence Campaign ([Digitale Kompetenzoffensive - DKO](#)), implemented through the '[Digital Skills Austria](#)' strategy, is the main framework dedicated to strengthening and expanding access to digital skills. The DKO is a cross-ministerial initiative (Austrian Federal Chancellery (BKA), Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs, Energy and Tourism (BMWET), Federal Ministry of Education (BMB), Federal Ministry for Women, Science and Research (BMWF) and Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection (BMASGPK)), managed by the OeAD (Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation) via a specialized office. [The campaign has received EUR 30 million in funding between 2023 - 2026.](#)

The initiatives examined below are therefore not private or civil-society practices, but form part of Austria's national digital-skills policy framework. In the National Strategic Roadmap's 2024 update, the flagship low-threshold training programmes *Digital Skills for All*, *Digital Everywhere* and *Digital Everywhere PLUS* are explicitly grouped under Measures 5-7, designed to increase basic digital skills among the population, particularly older people and people in rural areas. The *She goes AI* initiative complements this framework as a Federal

Government initiative under the Digital Skills Initiative, with a specific focus on strengthening women's participation and skills in artificial intelligence.

The flagship initiatives of the campaign are:

- *Digital Competences office at the OeAD* with a budget of EUR 5,438,000 between 2023 and 2026;
- *Digital Skills for All pilot workshop project* (Digital Everywhere & Digital Everywhere PLUS);
- *She goes AI* (opportunity and networking platform).

1. Digital Everywhere

The Digital Everywhere initiative is a nationwide workshop programme targeted towards individuals with little-to-none exposure to digital competences, with approx. 4500 educational workshops organised in 2024 and 2025, with more than 70 adult education providers involved. The programme is implemented by the OeAD, in collaboration with municipalities, educational providers and digital interpreters (*Digi-Dolmetscher*). The main goal is to provide initial contact with digital competences for participants, as the programme is designed to provide a low-threshold skills transfer, with workshops being free of charge, without prerequisites, and accessible regardless of experience or education. The workshops are open to everyone, especially for those who do not attend traditional learning centres.

The programme targets the expansion of digital skills for beginners in 5 areas (*digital education for seniors, online safety, digital public services, everyday digital life, and AI*) by offering a centralized pool of digital trainers who either pro-actively promote their workshops or are chosen by a municipality based on the local needs. The workshops are free and in-person, comprised of 3 teaching units (one unit being 50 minutes), each requiring a min. number of 5 participants.

The OeAD first pre-selects qualified education providers through a framework agreement (*based on the quality of the organisation, experience with the relevant subject and target groups, qualifications and experience of trainers, the quality of the proposed workshop concept, and the suitability of the teaching methods and materials*), after which municipalities and other local organisations can choose a suitable provider and workshop according to their local needs, with the help of Digital Interpreters. The local organiser (mainly the Digital Interpreter) is responsible for recruiting participants and, for group bookings, organising the venue, while the selected education provider supplies the trainer and delivers the workshop.

The OeAD then pays the provider. The workshops are organized through a dual booking system:

- In the *individual booking model*, adult education providers independently schedule and promote workshops.
- In the *group booking model*, municipalities select and host workshops tailored to their community, working in partnership with the providers. The municipality provides a suitable local venue and is responsible for communicating the offer to residents.

In order to register, citizens use a [search tool](#) where they can select and register for available workshops based on location, area of interest, target group, format (group/individual). Registration is also possible directly with the municipality or training provider by phone or email.

The initial implementation period was July 2024 to June 2025, with a new edition of the workshops to be launched in the autumn of 2026. The booking period for individual workshops through group booking was extended until 31 March 2026, and the possible implementation period was correspondingly extended until 31 May 2026.

Digital Everywhere has trained 45,000 participants through 4700 workshops (208 in Burgenland, 360 in Carinthia, 910 in Lower Austria, 756 in Upper Austria, 152 in Salzburg, 672 in Styria, 204 in Tyrol, 208 in Vorarlberg and 1,045 in Vienna) [*According to the response from Digital Everywhere*]. Reporting on the participant feedback, 94.7% of participants were at least rather satisfied, 78% were very satisfied, especially regarding the quality of trainers and relevance of workshop content, according to the [Digital Austria Report 2024](#).

Digital interpreters are the main liaison between participants and educational providers, being responsible for community outreach. They are designated by the municipality to organise the workshop with the support of the OeAD's Digital Competences office, with almost half of the 2.092 Austrian municipalities having taken part, [and around 530 digital interpreters](#) being involved. The digital interpreters select workshop topics with a focus on relevant local target groups, schedule appointments with educational providers, organize the venue, and communicate the workshop offerings with provided materials. Digital interpreters can, but do not have to, be part of the municipal office or the municipal council, and no specific training is required for this role.

To promote the initiative, the Digital Competence Office uses their online presence (e.g. website, social media), key interest groups (e.g. seniors, women etc.) as multipliers, as well as their contacts and network of education providers. In order to ensure the participation of

people with low or no digital skills, the office cooperates with key stakeholder groups like senior organisations, while also administering small-scale pilot projects to involve target groups (e.g. persons with visual or cognitive impairments, or migrant communities). However, participation mostly depends on promotion efforts by local authorities, varying broadly between municipalities. Additionally, the initiative also offers workshops held at regional adult education centers, where people can individually look for available workshops online and register directly to participate.

Data collection on participants' profiles and feedback is carried out through post-workshop online evaluation questionnaires, disseminated by the educational providers.

The questionnaires collect general and anonymous key demographic information about the participants (age bracket, gender, employment status, educational level, language preferences, urban or rural residency etc.) and also cover the topics about whether participants subjectively believe that they learned something new, whether they could improve their digital competences, if they would recommend the workshop as useful, if they would participate again in similar offers etc.

***Takeaway:** Digital Everywhere has found a way to deliver digital training at national scale without losing the local connection. OeAD works with a large pool of selected training providers, while municipalities can choose the workshops that best fit their communities and help bring in people who would not normally attend this kind of training. The Digital Interpreters are an interesting part of this process, acting as the link between municipalities, trainers and participants.*

2. Digital Everywhere PLUS

The Digital Everywhere PLUS (Digital Überall PLUS) initiative is a nationwide workshop programme, designed as an in-depth version of *Digital Everywhere*, with around 840 free educational workshops organised between April 2025 and June 2026, where they trained circa 7.600 participants. The programme, administered by the OeAD, is targeted towards similar groups to *Digital Everywhere* requiring more complex support or desiring a deeper learning experience in 4 areas of knowledge: digital senior education, digital official channels & security on the internet, living with increasing digitization & AI, digital products/content.

The PLUS version follows the same methodology as Digital Everywhere in terms of logistics, organization, outreach strategy, and evaluation, but the content and structure of the workshop differs, with longer training periods and possibility of hybrid sessions.

The workshops are free, in person or partly online, with each workshop having either 12 or 18 teaching units (one teaching unit is 50 min.), spread across multiple days (with max. 6 teaching units per day). For hybrid workshops, a maximum of 40% of the teaching units may be virtual; the remaining units must be face-to-face; the first session must always take place in person.

In addition to the workshop itself, the Digital Everywhere PLUS courses require the trainers to provide additional support measures (*Begleitmaßnahmen*), with additional funding being allocated for the implementation of these measures. Each workshop series must include at least one such measure, which can either help the provider reach and engage with the target group, or provide additional support to participants (measures included translation/interpretation services for different languages, technical support for digital devices used by participants, more detailed instruction materials, individual counselling sessions, allocation of two teachers for training courses etc.)

Both the Digital Everywhere and Digital Everywhere PLUS initiatives support Austria's alignment with Digital Decade 2030 goals, more specifically a digitally skilled population, where at least 80 % of those aged 16-74 have at least basic digital skills.

***Takeaway:** Digital Everywhere and Digital Everywhere PLUS were designed to engage with digitally isolated communities by supporting and encouraging local initiatives through a national-wide funding scheme. Workshops and training courses were especially thought out to be as easily accessible as possible, both by being free and introductory-level, but also through the widespread course offering opportunity and possibility for citizens to book courses either individually or access them through local community spaces. What stands out is the initiative's intentional effort to reach citizens most at risk of digital exclusion by engaging with Digital Interpreters: volunteers who act as intermediaries between participants and educational providers, who assess local needs, and promote the course offerings in their respective communities. Digital Everywhere PLUS, which acts as a follow-up, in-depth version of Digital Everywhere, also took note of differences in learning and digital challenges by making extra support measures, like individual sessions, translation services, multiple teachers, compulsory.*

3. She Goes AI

She goes AI is a free-access national platform launched on the 15th of June 2026, dedicated to providing networking & training opportunities for organisations and women working or interested in AI, implemented by the Federal Chancellery

(Bundeskanzleramt), working with the Federal Ministry for Women, Science and Research as part of the DKO initiative.

The main objectives of the platform are to encourage the development of AI skills from basic to expert level, promote more female AI experts and PhD scholarships for women, establish gender mainstreaming and a focus on women's priorities in administration and AI programs, build a network of women in politics, business, science and civil society, implement the European AI Act and protect women and girls online. The main channels employed to target these goals are training and career pathways, networking, the visibility of female experts and role models, and measures addressing gender bias in AI.

The flagship part of the initiative is an opportunity platform, with 25 offers posted to date, where women and girls can sign up for different activities (*networking events, meetings with expert speakers, educational or career opportunities, mentoring/coaching, workshops & trainings, materials for knowledge transfer, outreach (e.g. social media, newsletter), training for administration*), based on their knowledge and educational background, topic of interest, type of activity and focus group. The opportunities are organized by partner organisations (e.g. AI Factory Austria, ThenewITgirls, ABZ*Austria, Strukturaflow IT etc.), are either **free or fee-based** and range across 5 areas:

- She goes AI Connect – Events, Networking, Outreach
- She goes AI Learn – Educational offers, workshops
- She goes AI Experts – Role Models, Career and Training Paths, Mentoring
- She goes AI Fairness – Gender Bias, fair AI
- She goes AI Public – Formats for further education in administration

The outreach strategy consists mainly of word-of-mouth methods (making use of their network, contacting their members and sharing the initiatives through the partner organisations). The main existing partners of the initiative are Women in AI (global community of female experts in AI), WomeninICT (job opportunities & interest groups), She goes DIGITAL (certifications and networking events), and SheDigital (job opportunities and network access).

The platform was built to bridge the gap between women and opportunities in AI by facilitating access to these opportunities, but it does not offer a coordinated approach managed by the government. As such, it also does not have a centralized database on demographic information or the number of participants.

She goes AI supports Austria's alignment with **Digital Decade 2030** goals, more specifically a digitally skilled population, where at least 20 million ICT specialists are employed within the Union, while promoting the access of women to this field and increasing the number of ICT graduates.

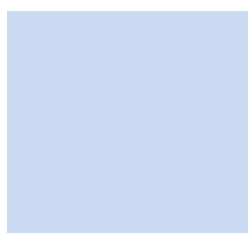
***Takeaway:** She goes AI is meant to be an access point for girls and women in the IT field or interested in a tech career, whether that looks like mentoring, coaching, professional opportunities, skill training, or networking events. It is not necessarily a government-led initiative in itself; rather the Federal Chancellery, together with the Federal Ministry for Women, Science and Research, pooled together existing or up-and-coming initiatives from partner NGOs, companies, or other organisations, making the opportunities easier to find, access, and apply to.*

For more information on best practices for expanding access to digital skills, please check the [National Digital Decade Roadmap](#). Other digital initiatives outlined in the general strategy include:

- *Digital School Portal - Eduthek* (educational resources);
- *Digital Competence Measurement - digi.check*;
- *Teaching programmes at universities* ([DigiFit4All](#), Teaching Digital Thinking).

GREECE

Initiatives	Theme, target group and outreach strategy	Activity and results	Partner-ships	Funding
<i>3rd e-age: Digital Empowerment of the Elderly</i>	Digital inclusion and basic skills for older people, including in rural areas; outreach through municipalities and Digital Corners, including 25 Friendship Clubs in Athens.	Personalised face-to-face support on smartphone use, online communication and public/private digital services, provided by Digital Assistants-Trainers; 1,400+ beneficiaries and 7,000+ sessions, with 94%+ reporting high/very high satisfaction.	GRNET, Ministry of Digital Governance, municipalities.	Publicly funded under Greece's National Academy for Digital Skills. .
<i>Digital Education & Empowerment of Older People and People with Disabilities</i>	Basic digital skills for people 65+ and people with disabilities; delivered through 120 Digital Empowerment Hubs and a government	Face-to-face training: 70 hours for older people and 80 for people with disabilities, covering devices, communication, safety, e-banking and gov.gr; target of 3,600 older people and 2,800	GRNET, Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family, municipalities, senior/community structures and	EUR 6.804 million, including EUR 5.696 million from the Recovery and



registration
platform.

people with
disabilities.

disability
organisa-
tions.

Resilience
Facility.

In Greece, 50.96% of people aged 16-74 had at least basic digital skills in 2025, below the EU average of 60.40%, with a negative rate of progress since the last assessment in 2023, and only 57% of national targets aligned with the EU's 2030 targets, according to the [2026 Digital Decade Country Report](#). The data also show significant disparities by education level, with only 22.62% of people with no or low formal education having at least basic digital skills in 2025. Greece's national digital skills measures therefore combine broad access to digital learning with targeted support for groups at greater risk of digital exclusion.

To address the low percentage of digitally skilled citizens, Greece has launched a comprehensive strategy to improve digital skills nationwide, following a two-fold approach: national digital skills infrastructure to boost skills development (1) and targeted programmes for vulnerable groups at risk of digital exclusion (2).

The [National Digital Decade Strategic Roadmap](#) sets out the general measures to strengthen citizens' digital competencies, including the development of [The National Academy for Digital Skills \(NADS\)](#), which provides the wider national infrastructure for digital-skills learning. Operated by the Ministry of Digital Governance, NADS serves as the overarching framework for access to digital-skills training opportunities and alignment with national goals. The [Citizen's Digital Academy](#) is the main citizen-facing online component of this system. It currently [provides more than 360 free courses, including self-assessment tools, with over 200 courses for citizens covering basic and advanced digital skills](#). Users can select topics according to their interests and adapt the difficulty level, making it primarily a broad, self-directed model of digital-skills provision (1).

Greece has complemented this general digital-learning infrastructure with more targeted interventions for people who may face greater barriers to independent online learning, such as older people and people with disabilities. The flagship targeted initiatives aimed at bridging the digital divide are the "3rd e-age: Digital Empowerment of the Elderly" pilot, which provides personalised assistance to older people, and the "Digital Education and Empowerment of the Elderly and People with Disabilities" programme, which delivers structured, face-to-face training through Digital Empowerment Hubs (2).

The initiatives examined below illustrate how this national framework has been translated into targeted interventions for groups at greater risk of digital exclusion. The earlier *3rd e-age*:

Digital Empowerment of the Elderly initiative was developed through the National Academy of Digital Competences, providing tailored support to people aged 65+ through Digital Assistants-Trainers and local delivery. More recently, the national *Digital Education and Empowerment of the Elderly and People with Disabilities* programme has expanded this approach through a publicly funded intervention under Greece's Recovery and Resilience Plan, establishing 120 Digital Empowerment Hubs for older people across 103 municipalities and 74 accessible hubs for people with disabilities.

The two initiatives therefore illustrate the development of a broader public approach to digital inclusion: from targeted, community-based support for older people to a nationally funded network of accessible digital-empowerment hubs.

1. 3rd e-age: Digital Empowerment of the Elderly

3rd e-age: Digital Empowerment of the Elderly was an assisted, face-to-face digital-skills initiative implemented by Greece's National Academy for Digital Skills, under the supervision of the Ministry of Digital Governance, designed to support seniors in using their own devices, accessing digital services, communicating online and carrying out basic digital tasks. It was first piloted in Kavala and Florina in June 2022 and subsequently expanded, running from November 2022 to July 2023 across six municipalities. **The initiative reached more than 1,400 beneficiaries, with an average age of 71.5, through more than 7,000 digital-skills sessions, including substantial participation from rural areas.** Implemented by GRNET (Greece's National Infrastructures for Research and Technology) under the supervision of the Ministry of Digital Governance, it targeted older people with limited digital skills or low confidence in using technology, including rural residents, by bringing support into familiar local spaces through specially trained Digital Assistants-Trainers [see [*Digital Skills and Jobs Platform*](#). 2023.].

The Digital Assistants-Trainers worked directly with participants and adapted sessions to their existing knowledge and individual needs, with support focused on smartphone use, online communication, access to digital public and private services, and creating and exchanging digital information. Sessions were interactive, encouraging older people to use technology with greater confidence, responsibility and safety. Participants could use their own devices, while equipment could also be provided where necessary, reducing practical barriers to participation. The activities correspond particularly to the [EU Digital Decade's basic digital skills indicator](#) for communication and collaboration, safe use of technology and problem solving, as well as the practical use of digital services.

Outreach was organised through municipal networks and physical “Digital Corners” located in familiar civic spaces. In Athens, for example, Digital Corners were established in 25 Friendship Clubs [see [City of Athens. 2023.](#)], allowing older residents to receive training in places they already used for community activities.

The programme reached more than 1,400 participants through more than 7,000 digital-skills sessions. The average participant was 71.5 years old, while 71.6% were women, 88.7% were retired and 91% were between 55 and 80 years old [see [Digital Skills and Jobs Platform. 2023.](#)]. Participation also extended beyond urban centres, including beneficiaries in rural areas. The reported evaluation points towards relatively strong positive participant feedback of the model: more than 94% rated their overall satisfaction as high or very high, while more than 89% reported increased use of digital applications and greater confidence. More than 90% stated that they would use the programme frequently if it became permanent [see [Digital Skills and Jobs Platform. 2023.](#)].

***Takeaway:** The main value of 3rd e-age lies in its assisted outreach and delivery model. Instead of relying on older people to independently find and complete an online course, the programme used municipal networks, familiar physical spaces and individual guidance to make digital learning more accessible. Its results suggest that this approach can increase both confidence and engagement with digital technologies. The model provides an important precursor to Greece’s later use of Digital Empowerment Hubs for more structured face-to-face training.*

2. Digital Education and Empowerment of Older People and People with Disabilities

Funded through Greece’s [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#), the [Digital Education and Empowerment of Older People and People with Disabilities](#) programme established [Digital Empowerment Hubs](#) as physical training centers where beneficiaries could access structured, face-to-face digital-skills training and support. Implemented from 2024 to 2026, it targeted up to 3,600 people aged 65 and over through 70-hour programmes and up to 2,800 people with disabilities through 80-hour programmes. Training focused on practical everyday uses of digital technology, including communication applications, electronic payments, social media and access to e-government services. Led by the Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family, with GRNET as the implementing organisation, the programme targeted two groups facing greater barriers to digital participation.

The Digital Empowerment Hubs were adapted to each group's needs. For older people, 120 Hubs were established across 103 municipalities, mainly using existing municipal social structures such as KAPIs (senior citizens' centres) and Friendship Clubs [see [Cosmos](#), 2026.]. The disability component relied on separate hubs hosted by specialised organisations and designed to accommodate accessibility needs. Eligible citizens can register through a dedicated government platform by selecting a municipality and available Digital Empowerment Hub [see [Greek Government](#), 2026.].

Participants received structured, face-to-face training, with older participants being offered 70 hours of training, while the programme for persons with disabilities was designed to be around 80 hours [see [GRNET](#), 2024.]. The curriculum focused on practical skills required for everyday digital participation, including the use of digital devices, online communication and social media, digital safety, electronic payments and e-banking, and access to gov.gr and other online public services.

The Hubs and NADS are complementary, with the former providing direct support needed to develop foundational skills, and the latter extending access to digital learning at national level. Educational materials developed through the *Digital Education and Empowerment programme* are also uploaded to NADS, allowing resources created for face-to-face training to contribute to the wider national learning offer.

A total budget of EUR 6.804.866,00, including EUR 5.696.017,00 financed through the Recovery and Resilience Facility, is listed in [Greece's 2026 Digital Decade Country Report](#). A separate procurement for face-to-face education in the 120 elderly hubs had an estimated value of **1.512 million euro**, covering training in 240 sections and support/supervision of the hubs [see [Greece 2.0](#), 2024.]. Collaboration is built into local delivery. Municipalities and their senior/community structures host hubs for older people, while disability organisations and specialised organisations are involved in the disability component. The programme combines central public funding and implementation with local public and civil-society/specialised intermediaries.

Takeaway: *The strong emphasis on digital safety and critical use of online information is valuable even though Greece performs better than the EU average on several indicators related to exposure to harmful or doubtful content. The programme recognises that digital inclusion is not only about getting people online, but also about helping them navigate the digital environment safely and confidently. Its inclusion of people with disabilities is equally important, because providing face-to-face, personalised support and adapting training to*

accessibility needs acknowledges that equal access to digital technologies sometimes requires human assistance, not just an online platform. In this sense, the programme is enabling people who might otherwise be left behind to participate more safely and independently in everyday digital life.

SWEDEN

Initiatives	Theme, target group and outreach strategy	Activity and results	Partnerships	Funding
<i>DigitalCenters (DigidelCenters)</i>	Digital inclusion and basic skills for the general population, especially people with limited digital experience; free, low-threshold support in familiar local settings, often libraries.	30 centres provide one-to-one guidance, drop-in support and workshops on devices and everyday online services, including BankID, healthcare and public services.	Municipalities, libraries, civil-society organisations, public authorities and local actors.	SEK 10.4 million in initial national funding (2018) supported centres in 15 municipalities; ongoing funding is provided by municipalities.

In Sweden, 69.99% of people aged 16-74 having at least basic digital skills in 2025, above the EU average of 60.40%, with an annual progress rate of 2.6% and 54% of national targets being aligned with the EU 2030 targets, according to the [2026 Digital Decade Country Report](#). To reach the target of 80% by 2030, the [National Digital Decade Roadmap](#) has outlined various measures aimed at enhancing digital competence in the country, including fostering digital skills in educational institutions, improving access to electronic communications for individuals with special needs, and promoting lifelong learning opportunities that allow the public to acquire digital competencies.

Additionally, the roadmap emphasizes the role of the [Digidelnätverket](#), a national network bringing together public authorities, municipalities and private organisations to promote the

use of digital services through events and campaigns. **The network is not a government department or a separate government programme; rather, it brings together different actors working on digital inclusion.** The broader Digidel initiative provides the framework for this work, while [DigidelCenters](#) represent its local, municipal delivery model, where residents can access technology, guidance and practical support with digital issues.

The example examined below therefore illustrates how Sweden's national digital-inclusion objectives are supported through a decentralised, multi-actor model, with municipalities providing the local infrastructure and services rather than through a single centrally delivered programme.

DigidelCenters

The first [DigitalCenters \(DigidelCenters\)](#) was established in 2017 at Motala Library, as an initiative of Internetstiftelsen, and the model was subsequently expanded to other municipalities. In 2018, the Swedish government provided funding to Internetstiftelsen (The Swedish Internet Foundation), an independent, non-profit organization that manages Sweden's national top-level internet domains, .se and .nu , to support the establishment of additional DigidelCenters [see Internetstiftelsen. n.d.. [Digital participation.](#)].

DigidelCenters are municipal, low-threshold, in-person digital support spaces where residents can receive free, practical support with digital technology and everyday online services. Residents can visit a centre when they need help with a specific digital task or service, without having to enrol in a formal course. Support is free and can include one-to-one guidance with computers, smartphones and tablets, help with digital public and private services, access to equipment and connectivity, thematic activities and short courses. Examples include assistance with BankID, 1177 healthcare services, government websites, online forms, email, digital payments and other everyday online tasks [see Internetstiftelsen. n.d.. [Digital participation.](#)]. The service is intended for the general population, with Digidel identifying residents of all ages, languages and different circumstances as target groups.

The model is locally implemented rather than nationally standardised, with municipalities operating the centers, often in public libraries or other accessible municipal service points, and deciding what forms of support they provide, while the national Digidelnätverket provides coordination, knowledge-sharing and a common framework. Municipalities can cooperate with libraries, civil-society organisations, public authorities and other local actors, and can organise activities according to the needs of their communities [see Raymond. 2018a. [DigidelCenter.](#)]. Residents can seek help with specific digital

problems rather than having to enrol in a formal training programme [see Raymond. 2018a. [DigidelCenter](#)].

In 2018, the Swedish government allocated SEK 9.6 million to Internetstiftelsen to promote and support municipalities in establishing DigidelCenter [see Raymond. 2018a. [DigidelCenter](#)]. Following strong demand, with 50 municipalities applying for funding, Internetstiftelsen provided an additional SEK 2.4 million, and a total of SEK 10.4 million was ultimately distributed among 15 municipalities [see Raymond. 2018a. [DigidelCenter](#)]. The funding supported the establishment and initial development of the centres, while their subsequent operation became primarily a municipal responsibility, with local authorities deciding how to organise, staff and finance the service.

Takeaway: *The strength of the DigidelCenter model is that it brings digital support to people rather than expecting people to find their way into a formal training system. Someone can walk into a familiar local space with a very specific problem and receive help that is adapted to what they actually need, whether that means using BankID, accessing a public service, understanding a device or simply learning how to navigate the internet more confidently. This flexibility makes the model particularly meaningful for people at risk of digital exclusion. It meets people at their own level and helps them with the digital challenges they encounter in everyday life.*

ITALY

Initiatives	Theme, target group and outreach strategy	Activity and results	Partnerships	Funding
<i>Digital Republic (Repubblica Digitale)</i>	Public-private coalition funding local digital initiatives for the general population and groups at risk of exclusion, including seniors, stay-at-home parents and people with disabilities.	ICT and digital skills training, media literacy, digital inclusion and online safety; ~300 organisations implemented 349 projects.	Ministries, regions, municipalities (ANCI), universities, research institutes, public institutions, industry and civil society.	EUR 350 million, government and Association of Banking Foundations (Acri).
<i>Digital Civil Service</i>	National network of young volunteers providing digital education to people at risk of exclusion; outreach through physical spaces, social media and the Facilita platform.	Training and support for NGOs and young digital facilitators; ~9,300 volunteers, 590,000 initiatives and 290,000 citizens reached.	Department for Youth Policies and Universal Civil Service, Department for Digital Transformation, local NGOs and volunteers.	EUR 60 million through the NRRP.

<i>Digital Facilitation Service Network (Punti Digitali Facile)</i>	Physical access points where trained young facilitators provide basic digital skills support, both in person and online.	4,000 active points supporting 2.5 million people; main participants aged 30-54 (42%), including employees (23%), unemployed people (16%) and pensioners (15%).	Department for Youth Policies and Universal Civil Service, Department for Digital Transformation, libraries, schools and community centres.	EUR 135 million through the NRRP.
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In Italy, 54.3% of 16- to 74-year-olds had basic digital skills in 2025 (with a target of 80.1% by 2030), roughly 6 percentage points below the EU-27 average, with an annual progress of 8.9% and 79% of the national targets being aligned with the EU 2030 targets, according to the [Digital Decade Country Report Italy 2026](#). The digitalization measures are outlined in the [Italia Digitale 2026 Strategy](#), adopted in 2023, with an implementation period of 3 years (2023 - 2026), and integrated as part of Italy's [National Recovery and Resilience Plan \(PNRR\)](#). The total budget allocated to Italia Digitale was 18 billion euros, with 0.4 billion euros dedicated to the enhancement of digital skills. The strategy, complemented by the [National Strategy for Digital Skills](#) (Repubblica Digitale), is Italy's main instrument aimed at consolidating digital infrastructure and online public services, cybersecurity, connectivity, digital healthcare services, enhancing digital skills, (particularly among vulnerable populations, and equipping workers with the necessary skills to take advantage of digital transition opportunities).

The initiatives examined below are therefore closely embedded in Italy's [national digital-skills policy framework](#). *Repubblica Digitale* provides the broader national strategy and coordination framework for digital skills, while the *Digital Civil Service* and *Digital Facilitation Service Network* translate this framework into large-scale public interventions. The two latter initiatives are explicitly implemented under the PNRR's Mission 1, Component 1, Investment 1.7 "Digital Basic Skills": *Servizio Civile Digitale* corresponds to Measure 1.7.1, while the [Rete dei servizi](#)

di facilitazione digitale corresponds to Measure 1.7.2. The three initiatives therefore illustrate different layers of the same national approach: *Repubblica Digitale* as the strategic and coordination framework, and the Digital Civil Service and Digital Facilitation Service Network as concrete mechanisms for delivering digital-skills support to citizens, including through local communities and public or third-sector spaces.

The flagship initiatives under the digital skills pillar are divided as follows:

1. Digital Republic Fund (Repubblica Digitale)
2. Digital Civil Service (Servizio Civile Digitale)
3. Digital Facilitation Service Network (Punti Digitale Facile)

1. The Digital republic Fund

Digital Republic (Repubblica Digitale) is a multi-stakeholder initiative bringing together public and private actors (businesses, municipalities, other public entities and NGOs) with the aim of bridging the social and cultural digital divide among the Italian population, fostering digital inclusion and promoting skill development for future jobs (increasing the percentage of ICT specialists and the development of e-skills throughout higher education). The initiative is implemented through the Italian Coalition for Digital Skills and Work, launched by the Department for Digital Transformation in April 2020, with 300 organisations involved and 349 projects launched to date. Interested organizations, public or private, must join the Manifesto for the Digital Republic with at least one relevant initiative. Out of the total number of projects, 148 are in the private sector, 82 in the public administration, and the rest of 119 in the NGO sector, while 53 are local projects, 26 regional and 273 are national projects. The project's 350 million euro budget is funded by a public-private partnership between the government and the Association of Banking Foundations (Acri), with contributions from banking foundations, which in turn receive benefits in the form of a tax credit.

The Coalition is led by the Technical Steering Committee of Repubblica Digitale, coordinated by the Department for Digital Transformation, and it has the task of developing a National Strategy for Digital Skills and its Implementation Plan, as well as monitoring the action progress and launching a communication campaign on the importance of digital skills. It is composed of representatives of Ministries, Conference of Regions, UPI, Anci, AgID, Unioncamere, representatives from universities (CRUI and the coordinator of the EU Code Week), research institutes (ConPER), RAI, Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), Anitec-Assinform, Asstel and citizens' association of the

National Coalition for Digital Skills. The Committee is supported by Osservatorio Competenze Digitali (AICA, Assintel, Assinter Italia), Osservatorio Università-Imprese (Fondazione CRUI), Osservatorio Agenda Digitale and Osservatorio Smart Working (Politecnico di Milano), CINI (Consorzio Interuniversitario Nazionale per l'Informatica), GII (Gruppo di Ingegneria Informatica) and GRIN (Gruppo di Informatica).

The National Strategy for Digital Skills is the core document underlining the objectives, actions and expected impact regarding the digital transition of Italy, with one of its four main pillars being digital skills of citizens. The digital skills section highlights 3 main priorities (*internet access for the working-age population with little-to-no digital skills or low level of education, digital literacy for the working age population already using the internet, digital inclusion of older people and disadvantaged groups*). The Operational Plan lays out 5 lines of intervention (13 actions):

- *Educational paths within schools* (ICT skills for citizens);
- *Training paths in the non-formal educational circuit* (resource portal on the Digital Republic website)
- *Street Route - training of skills on the territory* (Digital Civil Service, Digital Facilitation Service Network);
- *Communication paths* (media literacy regarding fake news, national prize for digital competences, exposure to digital terms through mainstream television)
- *Paths of digital inclusion* (funding for projects aimed at stay-at-home-parents, Piazza Wi-Fi Italia - free public app allowing internet access nationally in public spaces and institutions, community and home-based social and health services for people with disabilities to achieve independence, issuance of the International Certification of Digital Literacy, Digitalmentis - inclusionary participatory tool aimed at seniors at risk of digital exclusion, awareness and sensibilisation campaign against phishing, revenge porn, digital assistants, telemarketing, and profiling)

The intended impacts are measured by 3 metrics, monitored through the Monitoring Report (IV Rapporto di Monitoraggio, December 2025): the increase of citizens and active population with at least basic digital skills; the increase of disadvantaged individuals with at least basic digital skills; and the increased use of the internet, with particular reference to certain essential activities (including eGovernment services) and disadvantaged groups.

However, many of the larger, structural impacts remain undetectable by the current measurement systems. Broader aspects (improving individual digital skills and reducing the

regional digital divide, increasing the use of digital public services, transforming patterns of social inclusion) require a longer time frame to be detected and assessed.

***Takeaway:** Rather than a singular purpose initiative, Repubblica Digitale is a pledge to a common goal - bridging the digital and cultural divide among the Italian population, while allowing for a flexible, need-based approach. Instead of collaborating with one actor, its objective is to forge initiatives that bring together institutions and representatives of various groups of society. Repubblica Digitale is also not just a congregation of similarly-themed grassroots initiatives; it is intentionally structured, with clear objectives outlined in their strategy, a presiding committee leading the efforts and third-party partners whose purpose is to periodically monitor and evaluate progress.*

2. Digital Civil Service

Servizio Civile Digitale (Digital Civil Service) is a national network of young volunteers offering digital facilitation and education services to people at risk of digital exclusion. The programme is implemented by the Department for Youth Policies and Universal Civil Service and the Department for Digital Transformation, in collaboration with local NGOs and volunteers, and has received funds worth 60 million euros through the PNRR, according to Italia Digitale 2026 Strategy. The programme aims to expand the number of people who have basic digital skills, with training and assistance focused on different areas of day-to-day skills such as creating a digital identity, managing an email, booking a medical appointment, or enrolling in an online course.

The main goal is to train volunteers to help reduce the proportion of the population at risk of digital exclusion by holding 3 annual calls for digital service projects targeted at NGOs registered nationally; launching 900 projects under the three annual calls; offering training and field experience in digital civil service projects involving about 9,700 volunteers, as well as digital assistance and training for 2 million citizens. **Until this year, according to Digital Decade Country Report Italy 2026, the Digital Civil Service has mobilised around 9,300 volunteers and reached around 290,000 citizens.**

The initiative focuses on **NGO capacity building, volunteer training for the young digital facilitators, and tailored channels, online and in-person**, for beneficiaries of the digital intervention programs (especially vulnerable groups).

Firstly, the government (through the Departments for Youth Policies and Digital Transformation) issued annual calls (or cycles), launched in 2022, 2023, and 2024 respectively, where accredited organizations (NGOs, municipalities, universities) are asked to submit program plans for digital up-skilling. Each organization may submit only one program, which can contain one or multiple individual projects, and can fall in two categories: digital facilitation (helping people independently access essential digital services) or digital education (consolidating basic/advanced digital skills). Before the call for volunteers, the selected organizations follow a 10-hour pre-launch capacity building (five 2-hour webinars covering organization, digital competences framework and impact evaluation). The organizations also receive support during the project implementation phase (monitoring meetings, a special session for organizations setting up a digital point for the first time) and after the project completion (debriefing session and feedback for future programs).

Secondly, after the project and funding approval, a national public call is open for young people to apply to the selected digital intervention projects with local organizations in charge of the evaluation and selection of volunteers, followed by a joint volunteer training program. Selected applicants must complete:

- a local training of at least 12 hours, conducted by the local organization, on project scope and organization
- a centralized digital training conducted by the government bodies of a total of 38 hours comprised of:
 - digital facilitation services (15 hours of total: 8 hours of webinars and 7 hours of self-study): navigating public digital services, best practices for digital facilitation, volunteer role, privacy and data collection rules, presentation of National strategy for digital skills
 - DigiComp 2.1. European Framework competencies (19 hours in total: 8 hours of webinar and 11 hours of self-paced): information and data literacy, digital content creation, cybersecurity and digital safety, communication, problem-solving.
 - quarterly case studies: four 1-hour interactive webinars where volunteers analyze real-life facilitation challenges.

After the completion of local and centralized training, the volunteers receive accredited certifications, either from the local organisations or the departments in charge, in recognition of their digital skills. Volunteers also receive constant guidance from a designated Local Project Operator (*Operatore Locale di Progetto*). Each program should have min. 12 volunteers up to 30 volunteers for a project involving a regional/autonomous province or

multiple provinces or metropolitan cities within the same region; and 60 volunteers for a program involving an interregional area. Each project within the program must have a min. of 4 volunteers.

Thirdly, the outreach channels for citizens at risk of exclusion consist of traditional, physical and social media), promotion of services in relevant physical events or spaces for citizens, as well as a central search platform for individual facilitation and group initiatives (Facilita). The digital channels include social networks, institutional websites, as well as traditional media (e.g. local television and radio, etc.), physical materials (posters, flyers, etc.) and local networks. The framework is also promoted at events where digital skills may be useful and relevant(e.g. school registrations, requests for social benefits, tax returns, etc.).

Progress evaluation and demographic/feedback data collection is done through a mandatory, anonymous digital questionnaire directly on the central monitoring platform after every interaction with a citizen (either a group activity or 1-to-1 interaction). The digital form includes information on data relating to each access, the user's level of use of digital services prior to using the service, the type of service provided (e.g., facilitation/training), the topic addressed and the objective of the service provided, and satisfaction with the facilitation/training activities used.

For more information regarding The Digital Civil Service, please access the [official description of the program](#).

Takeaway: *The strength of Servizio Civile Digitale is that it manages to improve the civic space and promote digital inclusion on multiple plains: it strengthens NGO operational capacity and effectiveness, increases youth civic participation by building a national-wide network of young volunteers, and targets digitally vulnerable communities through these locally implemented grassroot initiatives. While the Department for Youth Policies and Universal Civil Service and the Department for Digital Transformation oversee national calls for NGO project application, provide training for selected volunteers and organisations, it stresses adaptation of initiative to local needs and communities by including a local organisation-led learning part as a mandatory section of volunteer training. The structure of the training also allows for continuity in project activity, instead of a short-term, deadline-based project. Its wide range of projects allows for people across*

the digital skills spectrum, from absolute beginners to citizens who want to boost their digital competences, to join individual or group activities.

3. Digital Facilitation Service Network

Digital Facilitation Service Network (Punti Digitale Facile) is a national network of physical access points, usually located in libraries, schools and community centres, where young digital facilitators (trained through the Digital Civil Service) provide citizens with training on both in-person and online digital skills in order to consolidate digital inclusion. The digital facilitation centers were created as part of the joint initiative between the Department for Youth Policies and Universal Civil Service and the Department for Digital Transformation, with 4,000 active facilitation points, according to **Digital Decade Country Report Italy 2026**. The facilitation points were funded through the PNRR, with an allocated budget of 135 million euros.

The facilitation points, together with the Digital Civil Service, provide support to approximately 2.5 million people to develop basic digital skills. Participants covered different target groups: mainly people aged 30-54 (42%), including employees (23%), unemployed people (16%) and pensioners (15%), usually with medium (36%) or low levels (29%) of formal education, according to the **Digital Decade Country Report Italy 2026**.

Takeaway: *Punti Digitale Facile facilitates the activity of young volunteers in the Servizio Civile Digitale by providing both the physical space and the necessary equipment for courses to take place.*

BELGIUM

Initiatives	Theme, target group and outreach strategy	Activity and results	Partnerships	Funding
<i>Digibanks (Digibanken)</i>	Digital inclusion and basic skills for adults at risk of exclusion, including people with low digital skills/literacy, older people and jobseekers; delivered through 54 local Digibanks and low-threshold Digipunten.	Combined access to devices, training and one-to-one support, including device lending/repair, computer and Wi-Fi access, digital government services and, in some locations, home assistance.	Local authorities, libraries, social and employment services, community organisations.	EU Recovery and Resilience Facility and Flemish Vlaamse Veerkracht; initial grants up to EUR 500,000, with extended grants of EUR 350,000-500,000 (EUR 22 million total).

In 2025, 61.22% of Belgians aged 16-74 had at least basic digital skills, slightly above the EU average of 60.40%, with an annual progress rate of 1.2% and 93% of national targets being aligned with the EU's 2030 targets. Although Belgium has made progress since 2023, the national average masks persistent inequalities in digital participation, particularly among people who are older, have lower incomes, are unemployed or have limited digital experience [see [European Commission, 2026a.](#)]. [Belgium's Digital Decade Roadmap](#) therefore supports the EU objective of reaching 80% of the population with at least basic digital skills by 2030, with 166 measures aimed at adult upskilling, reskilling and digital inclusion, worth a total of EUR 913.71 million. Within this framework, [Digibanken](#) was a Flemish regional initiative, running from 2022 to July 2026, and financed through the EU Recovery and Resilience framework [see [Digibanken, 2019.](#)] and the [Flemish recovery plan Vlaamse Veerkracht](#) [see [Flemish Government, 2021.](#)]. It therefore represents a regional public response to digital exclusion rather than a federal

Belgian programme. Through local partnerships, Digibanken translated broader digital-inclusion objectives into accessible support for people facing barriers to digital participation, illustrating how Belgium's multi-level governance structure allows national objectives to be delivered through regional and local initiatives.

Digibanks

Launched in 2022, Digibanks (Digibanken) was designed as a practical local response to digital exclusion where Flemish Government funded local partnerships in which municipalities and other organisations jointly provided digital support to people who might otherwise struggle to participate in an increasingly digital society. By January 2023, the programme had reached its full network of 54 Digibank projects, involving 200 Flemish and 19 Brussels municipalities, adding up to 219 municipalities in total [see [Digibanken. 2023.](#)]. The projects targeted people at risk of digital exclusion, including older people, people on low incomes, people with low literacy or limited digital skills, jobseekers and unemployed people, as well as newcomers and other groups facing barriers to digital participation [see [Flemish Government. 2025.](#)]. The programme had three main connected functions: first, improving access to digital technology, including through the provision and lending of devices; second, strengthening digital skills through training and knowledge sharing; and third, improving digital access to essential services through guidance [see [Kralj. 2026.](#)].

The model worked through physical, locally accessible access points called Digipunten, often with several Digipunten operating within one wider Digibank project. The partnerships brought digital assistance into places where people already interacted with local services and community organisations: depending on the location, a person could walk in or arrange support for a specific digital problem, attend a course or workshop, borrow a laptop, have a device repaired, use a computer or Wi-Fi, or receive help at home. The programme combined access to technology, opportunities to develop skills, and individual assistance with essential online services. Citizens can access the [official service map](#), which distinguishes between equipment lending and repair, computer and Wi-Fi access, digital-question support, training and even home assistance, to identify which service fits their needs best.

Support in *Digipunten* was delivered by [digihelpers](#), who provided practical, step-by-step assistance with everyday digital tasks (*creating a CV, searching for a training course, using a smartphone for video calls, installing itsme, applying for a benefit or other online allowance, buying a public-transport ticket through an app, or navigating digital government services such as Mijn Burgerprofiel and Tax-on-web*) [see [Digibanken. n.d.C.](#)]. Digibanken could help

someone log in, navigate and understand a digital service, but it was not intended to complete the service on the person's behalf.

From a funding perspective, Digibanken was a time-limited initiative financed through the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility (NextGenerationEU) and the Flemish recovery plan Vlaamse Veerkracht [see [Flemish Government](#). 2020.], with the initial implementation phase provided up to EUR 500,000 per Digibank project for a minimum period of 24 months, with the first projects starting in 2022 and the initial funding period running until the end of 2024. In 2024, the Flemish Government extended the programme for a further 19 months, from 1 January 2025 to 31 July 2026, specifically to give partnerships time to make their services more sustainable. 53 of the 54 projects applied for an extension, of which 47 were approved, receiving a combined slightly more than EUR 22 million [see [Digibanken](#). 2024.]. The renewed funding was linked to the level of outreach planned by each partnership: EUR 350,000 for up to 1,000 users, an additional EUR 100,000 for 1,001-1,500 users, EUR 30,000 for 1,501-1,750 users, and a further EUR 20,000 for more than 1,750 users, up to a maximum of EUR 500,000 per project [see [Digibanken](#). 2025.]. The extension was not intended to establish a permanent project-funded programme, but to give partnerships time to further develop their activities and embed them in existing local services, which the Flemish Government identified as crucial for the continuation of Digibanken once project funding ended. The Digibanken project therefore ended on [31 July 2026](#), although many local initiatives have continued beyond the project period [see [Flemish Government](#). n.d.].

The programme's [2025 impact evaluation](#), conducted between April 2023 and May 2025 by AP Hogeschool and the University of Antwerp, found that users valued the accessible, patient and non-technical support provided by digihelpers, particularly because informal sources of help such as family and friends were not always available or sufficient. At the same time, the evaluation found that Digibanken mainly reached people who already had at least some experience with digital technology. The most digitally excluded “absolute digistarters” [see [Flemish Government](#). 2025.], meaning people with no or extremely limited digital skills, remained difficult to reach, illustrating the limits of relying on such initiatives alone to reach people experiencing the most severe forms of digital exclusion.

***Takeaway:** The real value of the Digibanken programme is its flexibility. Rather than assuming that people just need a standard digital-skills course, it starts from the reality that digital services are now part of Belgian's everyday life, from applying for a benefit, accessing government services, making an appointment or using a smartphone, to just*

completing a form online. With 54 Digibanks and multiple local Digipunten, support is available through a wide network of places where people already interact with local services and communities. People can borrow a device, get one repaired, attend training, ask a specific digital question and receive one-to-one help, including at home. For some users, especially those with lower confidence or more limited digital experience, being able to sit down with someone face to face can make the difference between simply having access to a digital service and actually being able to use it. Digibanken therefore shows the value of treating digital inclusion not only as a skills problem, but as an ongoing support need that can be addressed flexibly and close to where people live.

IV. Focus Group on inclusive digitalisation in Romania: takeaways and recommendations

The following textbox summarises and analyses the main points raised during a focus group held with representatives of public and private institutions in Romania, all having implemented projects in inclusive digitalisation. The focus group aimed at discovering what the situation truly is like in Romania, and what the needs, necessities and obstacles are - but also at how these organisations identify, reach and plan projects for vulnerable communities.

One of the clearest points emerging from the focus group was that access to technology and digital inclusion are not the same thing. Lack of equipment remains a problem, particularly in rural areas, where people may acquire some digital skills but have no device on which to practise them. At the same time, connectivity and equipment alone do not solve the problem. More and more schools are connected and equipped with digital tools, but this does not necessarily mean that students know how to use them well, that teachers have the skills to integrate them into their work, or that students understand the technologies they are using. Participants pointed to gaps in digital skills among both students and teachers.

This also raises a broader question about what skills we are actually trying to develop. Participants stressed the need to look beyond the technology itself and pay more attention to pedagogy, methods, logic and critical thinking. Knowing how to use a tool is not necessarily the same as understanding its benefits, limitations and risks. The same applies to public services: the existence of a platform does not mean that everyone can access or use it. One problem identified at national level is precisely the lack of a clear user journey:

platforms and services are often developed without sufficiently considering who will use them, what skills they have and what support they will need along the way.

Moreover, points were raised regarding the fact that existing inclusion and accessibility rules do not always translate into practice. Participants pointed out that, for some vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, the legal framework is already in place, but its implementation remains uneven. Digital services can therefore remain inaccessible even where accessibility requirements formally exist.

Digitalisation can also create new forms of exclusions as more services and everyday activities move online, people who cannot use digital tools risk being left with fewer options, and there are even cases when they have to pay more to remain offline.

At the same time, participants stressed that fear or reluctance towards technology is not necessarily permanent. For vulnerable users, taking the first step often depends on trust. People are much more willing to try when support comes from someone they already know or trust in their community. According to them, this community effect appears to work particularly well in Romania and can be an important entry point for digital inclusion initiatives.

Another recurring issue was the fragmented nature of existing support. There are good initiatives, but they remain sporadic, while people need continuous support. There is also a strong geographical imbalance: many opportunities are concentrated in Bucharest or available only online, and existing capacity is far below the level of need across the country.

Participants also identified an important expertise gap. There is insufficient training for specialists, but also limited experience and expertise among some of those developing digital platforms and those providing support to their users. Technical expertise remains particularly scarce. At the same time, users from different backgrounds and vulnerable groups are still not sufficiently involved in the design of products, platforms and services intended for them.

Finally, Romania does not necessarily lack good practices that could be taken to scale. The difficulty is often how to scale them while maintaining quality. This requires both human and financial resources, as well as continuity beyond the duration of individual projects.

Recommendations emerging from the Focus Group

- The objective should not be for users to use digital tools to their maximum capacity, but to understand how to use them, what they are useful for, and what their limitations and risks are.
- Include parents when developing digital skills initiatives for children. In many vulnerable communities, parents themselves have limited digital skills, even though they are expected to help children navigate the digital environment safely.
- Maintain offline alternatives and physical points of contact. Digital access is increasingly important for exercising basic rights and accessing essential services, but some people (particularly older people) will continue to need offline options and human interaction. Public authorities should consider whether the end user can actually use a digital service, rather than focusing only on making that service available online.
- Combine digital platforms with human support in the community. People with limited digital skills need someone they can turn to locally. A platform alone is not enough; there needs to be a mix between the digital tool and a trusted person who can help users navigate it.
- Design services around a clear user journey. Digital platforms and programmes should start from the needs, skills and experience of their intended users. This requires clear specifications from the outset and the direct involvement of users from as diverse a range of backgrounds as possible.
- Build initiatives around the communities and target groups that institutions already know. Each institution should identify the groups it is best placed to work with, while local social actors should adapt interventions to the specific needs of their beneficiaries rather than applying the same model everywhere.
- Work with local public institutions. Where there is institutional openness and ownership, projects can be developed relatively easily at local level. Contributions from local authorities, including spaces, staff, co-financing and other resources, can make a difference.
- Plan for continuity from the beginning. Digital inclusion cannot rely on sporadic interventions. Initiatives should be designed with long-term support and sustainability in mind.

V. General Recommendations of the Study

1. Move from isolated projects towards a coordinated national approach, implemented locally.

As initiatives develop, they reveal new dimensions of the problem, new needs, but also new solutions, including solutions that can respond to several problems at once. Digital exclusion cannot be addressed through a single, time-limited project. This is particularly important in a field such as digitalisation, where technologies, services and the skills required to use them are evolving extremely quickly. Romania needs a coordinated national approach, with clear direction at central level but enough flexibility for implementation to respond to local realities and needs. Public-private partnerships can play an important role in such an approach.

2. Combine digital solutions with physical, human support.

Digitalisation cannot rely exclusively on platforms and online services. People who lack digital skills need physical points of contact and people within their communities who can help them access and use these services. In practice, this means developing a dual approach: a platform and a person, rather than assuming that making a service available online automatically makes it accessible.

3. Bring vulnerable groups to the negotiation table.

We often design digital services and inclusion measures based on assumptions about what a particular community needs. People who will actually use these services should have a voice in how they are designed, from identifying barriers and needs to testing solutions and providing feedback. This is particularly important when working with groups whose experiences may be very different from those of the people developing the service.

4. Think about accessibility from the beginning, rather than correcting it afterwards.

Accessibility and inclusion should be part of how a digital service or platform is designed from the outset, not something added once the product is already developed. This also means involving people with different needs early enough for their input to actually shape the final product.

5. Starting from scratch is not a necessity; instead, adapting and repurposing resources already in place can be a sufficiently good starting point.

Incorporating a digital skills component in volunteering training and making use of active associations or institutions already working with vulnerable groups at risk of digital exclusion (day centers, schools, libraries) can be a valuable asset in reaching and connecting with beneficiaries of digitalisation programmes. This can look like focusing on expanding the volunteer or staff capacity and supporting organisations in their transition to teaching digital competences.

VI. Conclusions

Romania still has a large digital-skills gap to close. The challenge is increasingly not simply whether people can get online, but whether they have the skills and support to use what is already there.

The initiatives analysed in this report show that there is no single model for doing this. A senior who needs help using a smartphone, a person with a visual impairment learning to use assistive technologies, a young person looking for employment and someone trying to access an online public service do not need the same type of support. Successful programmes recognise these differences and adapt their training, format and outreach accordingly.

One of our main findings is that digital inclusion works better when support is close to people. Libraries, municipalities, community centres, NGOs and other organisations that already know and work with a community can help reach the right people, in need of those basic digital skills. Austria uses local Digital Interpreters to connect communities with training providers, Greece has brought digital assistance into familiar community spaces and Sweden and Belgium provide face-to-face support through libraries and other local access points. Romania already has similar approaches, including through libraries, local organisations and programmes that train people within communities to provide support themselves.

Moreover a mix of both digital and physical approaches is needed. For people with limited skills or confidence, a platform or an online course will often not be enough. They may need someone to help them register, explain a service, practise several times or simply answer a specific question. The focus group conducted for this report reached much the same conclusion: digital services need to be accompanied by people who can help users navigate them.

The examples also show the value of making digital skills useful immediately. Training is easier to understand when it starts from what people actually need to do: make an appointment, use online banking, communicate with family, access a public service, apply for a job or use assistive technology.

Romania does not lack initiatives to build on. Libraries are being developed as digital hubs, programmes such as Hi Digital have reached thousands of older people, Hai pe net! has operated at national scale, while other initiatives work specifically with young people, women or people with disabilities. The bigger question is how to move from individual projects to support that is continuous, locally available and large enough to match the scale of the problem.

Closing Romania's digital-skills gap will therefore require combining national scale with local delivery, digital tools with human support, and investment in technology with investment in the people and organisations that help others use it.

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