

**SCIENTIFIC ANNEX //**

**DIGIREG**

Showcase of best policy practices aimed at reducing digital divide at regional and local level across Europe

Report // June 2026

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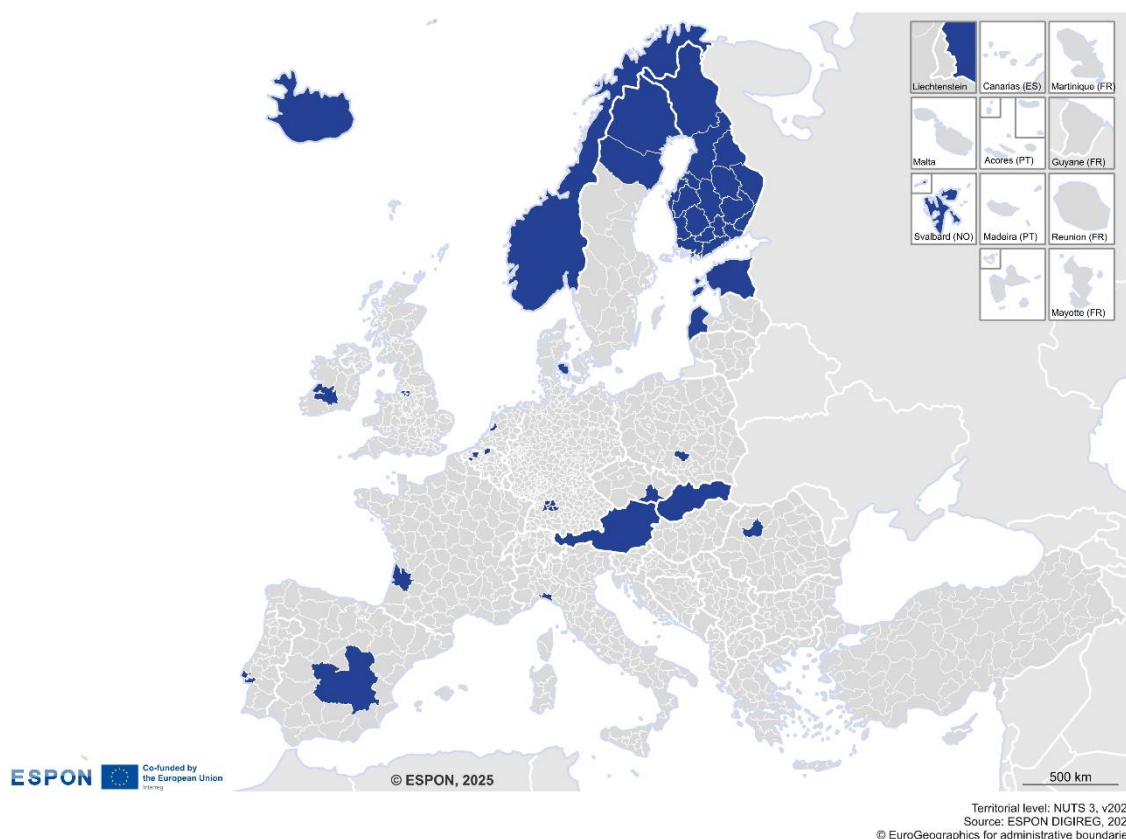
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# Introduction

This document is a catalogue of 21 showcases within Sub-task 4.3 of Task 4 in the ESPON project [DIGIREG ‘Territorial perspectives of digital transition in European regions’](#). Out of the 100 best policy practices (BPPs) aimed at reducing the digital divide and documented in the DIGIREG database, 21 were selected as showcases.

According to the methodological approach, each showcase builds on the information stored in the database and on insights derived from interviews with BPPs’ implementers. Interviews were designed to complement the information collected through desk research, focusing on the following aspects, where applicable: collaboration mechanisms and necessary competencies within the authority (e.g., in-charge departments, professional profiles); existing capacity-building measures for designing and implementing digital policies; cooperation approach with external stakeholders; opinions on success factors and challenges; considerations about the short-term results and long-term impacts; lessons learnt; and indications of sustainability and transferability potential.

Showcases were selected from the BPPs with high potential for transferability. Additional selection criteria included broad geographical coverage (i.e., the 21 showcases are from 21 ESPON countries, as illustrated in the map below) and a diverse combination of the digital divides addressed. The final list of showcases presented in this catalogue was determined by the implementers’ availability for interviews.



**Map of the 21 DIGIREG best policy practice showcases across Europe**

## List of the DIGIREG best policy practice showcases

| #    | Country | Showcase title                              | Involved public authority(ies)                                                                                                 | DD1 | DD2 | DD3 |
|------|---------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| SC01 | AT      | Digital Everywhere                          | National government, municipalities                                                                                            |     |     |     |
| SC02 | BE      | Digitally Inclusive Neighbourhood           | Municipality of Gent, Municipality of Antwerpen and Municipality of Kortrijk                                                   |     |     |     |
| SC03 | CZ      | Czechitas                                   | Municipality of Brno                                                                                                           |     |     |     |
| SC04 | DE      | Gigabit Programme                           | Stuttgart Region, the City of Stuttgart, and the five districts of Böblingen, Esslingen, Göppingen, Ludwigsburg, and Rems-Murr |     |     |     |
| SC05 | DK      | Digital boost of street-level businesses    | Municipalities of Svendborg, Faaborg-Midtfyn, Årø and Langeland                                                                |     |     |     |
| SC06 | EE      | Rahvaalgatus.ee: digital democracy          | National government, municipalities                                                                                            |     |     |     |
| SC07 | ES      | CapacitaTIC+55                              | Region of Castilla-La Mancha                                                                                                   |     |     |     |
| SC08 | FI      | Broadband Support Programme                 | National government, municipalities                                                                                            |     |     |     |
| SC09 | FR      | Aladdin                                     | Bordeaux Metropolitan Area                                                                                                     |     |     |     |
| SC10 | IE      | DIGICLARE local network of digital hubs     | Clare County                                                                                                                   |     |     |     |
| SC11 | IS      | Iceland Connected to Fibre                  | National government, municipalities                                                                                            |     |     |     |
| SC12 | IT      | CMGE Inclusion                              | Metropolitan Authority of Genova                                                                                               |     |     |     |
| SC13 | LV      | Ventspils Digital Centre                    | Municipality of Ventspils                                                                                                      |     |     |     |
| SC14 | NL      | Cyberbank                                   | Municipality of Amsterdam                                                                                                      |     |     |     |
| SC15 | NO      | Digital Help Programme                      | Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities                                                                        |     |     |     |
| SC16 | PL      | Addressing digital exclusion in rural areas | Local Action Group 'Northern Jura Partnership Association'                                                                     |     |     |     |
| SC17 | PT      | Digital Skills Passport                     | City Council of Lisbona                                                                                                        |     |     |     |
| SC18 | RO      | Digital Bridges                             | Municipality of Petrești de Jos, Cluj Metropolitan Area Inter-community Development Association                                |     |     |     |
| SC19 | SE      | DIGAD                                       | Västerbotten Region, Norrbotten Region, municipalities                                                                         |     |     |     |
| SC20 | SK      | Data Centre of Municipalities and Cities    | National government, municipalities                                                                                            |     |     |     |
| SC21 | UK      | Digital Inclusion Agenda                    | Greater Manchester Combined Authority                                                                                          |     |     |     |

# How the DIGIREG catalogue of showcases is structured

The 21 showcases are ordered alphabetically by the code of the country in which they are implemented (e.g., AT for Austria, DE for Germany). They are presented using a standard template.

Each showcase includes:

- A frontpage reporting:
    - o **the code of the country and the title of the showcase;**
    - o some of **the main elements of the showcase, in a nutshell** (i.e., involved public authorities, geographical coverage, implementation period, objectives of the policy intervention, target groups, type of policy intervention, information on funding);
    - o the reasons **why the policy intervention qualifies as a DIGIREG BPP;**
    - o **the addressed DIGIREG digital divides** and their BPP characterisation labels;
    - o information about **the representatives of the implementer who participated in the interview.**
  - A narrative description of the **showcase** with indications (if relevant) on:
    - o **the starting point, the framework and the enabling conditions;**
    - o **the collaboration mechanisms and involved competencies within the authority** (e.g., in-charge departments, professional profiles), **the existing capacity-building measures for designing and implementing the practice**, and **the cooperation approach with external actors;**
    - o **evidence about results and impacts** detailing **how they are measured and monitored;**
    - o information on the **sustainability and transferability of the practice;**
    - o **success factors, challenges and what could have been done differently;**
    - o **recommendations to other public authorities** explicitly mentioning the target governance level (i.e., national authorities, regional authorities, local authorities).
- Where relevant, **direct quotations from the interview** with the practice's implementer are included in the narrative description.
- Sources and further reading, including links to the **main sources** used to develop the showcase (including the summary of the DIGIREG interview available in D4.3.1) and to **additional material**.

According to the DIGIREG definition of BPP, BPPs address a digital divide only if there is evidence of their impact in bridging it. For example, many BPPs addressing DD1 (connectivity and digital infrastructure) also 'claim' to produce socio-economic benefits (DD3) at the community level, but without substantiating the claim with quantitative or qualitative evidence (e.g., impact indicators). In all these cases, the concerned BPPs are considered to address only DD1.

**In each showcase, the addressed DIGIREG digital divides** are indicated using the **icons** reported below, together with the BPP characterisation labels.

**Digital Divide level 1 (DD1). Connectivity and Infrastructures**



**Digital Divide level 2 (DD2). Capabilities**



**Digital Divide level 3 (DD3). Social and economic benefits**



# AT\_Digital Everywhere

## DIGIREG showcase

### In a nutshell

**Involved public authority(ies):** National government, municipalities.

**Geographical coverage (NUTS3):** AT111, AT112, AT113, AT121, AT122, AT123, AT124, AT125, AT126, AT127, AT130, AT211, AT212, AT213, AT221, AT222, AT223, AT224, AT225, AT226, AT311, AT312, AT313, AT314, AT315, AT321, AT322, AT323, AT331, AT332, AT333, AT334, AT335, AT341, AT342.

**Implementation period:** 2023-2025.

**Objectives of the policy intervention:** 1) Increase digital skills throughout the country.

**Target groups:** Individuals with little or no basic digital skills.

**Type of policy intervention:** Strategy, Programme.

**Funding:** Public (national budget).

### Why this policy intervention qualifies as a DIGIREG BPP

- The programme is presented as a good practice on the Digital Skills and Job Platform as it prioritises inclusivity, accessibility and long-term impact; offers free training workshops to vulnerable groups in even the most remote areas, thus ensuring that no one is left behind in the digital transition; is supported by the carry out of external evaluations that not only demonstrate its effectiveness in improving digital literacy but also provide guidance for improvements; and is appreciated by both citizens and adult education providers.
- In addition, the modality to appoint adult education providers leaves flexibility to draw on the teaching and subject expertise of these providers.
- All teaching offers are based on the Reference Framework for Digital Competencies.
- The programme is regularly assessed to inform follow-ups.

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Digital skills development**



**DIGIREG interview with:** Celine-Marie Roming, Project Manager, Sector Digital Skills Office, Department for Quality and Transparency, Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation (OeAD), 9 December 2025.

## Description

In 2023, Austria launched its 'Digital Skills Austria' strategy as part of the country's 'Digital Skills Offensive'. The strategy is based on a package of interventions, including low-threshold digital training. This is achieved through the 'Digital Everywhere' ('Digital Überall') workshop programme, which enables the delivery of basic digital skills to citizens across all municipalities.

After the positive evaluation of a pilot phase named 'Digital Skills for All', which was run from October 2023 to December 2023, the Digital Everywhere workshops started being implemented country-wise. Existing adult education organisations are responsible for providing the training. They are mobilised through calls for proposals launched by the Digital Skills Office of Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation (OeAD). The calls define the thematic, organisational, and financial framework conditions for carrying out the workshops, but leave participating educational providers the freedom to determine the conception, planning, and implementation of the workshops. All adult education providers in Austria had the opportunity to propose concepts for workshops in five selected topics. An innovative municipal booking system enables the delivery of workshops even in remote communities. Municipalities are invited to book up to three workshops for their communities through the booking system, which displays the training offers from education providers. Once municipalities have booked their workshop(s), they become responsible for providing a venue for implementation and for participant outreach and mobilisation.

Workshops usually include three teaching units, are low-threshold and free of charge for participants. They focus on one of the following five themes: E-Government, Digital Senior Education, Artificial Intelligence, Living with Increasing Digitalisation, and Internet Security.

### The starting point

“ *The programme was launched in response to the European strategy to improve digital skills, from basic to expert level. The Austrian Government is really committed to implementing this strategy across Austrian society to reach people nationwide, allocating budget and providing financial support to achieve these goals. The whole campaign is aligned with the European targets, and our programme is under the umbrella of the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition, of which we are a part.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

### Framework and enabling conditions

“ *The federal government was primarily focused on the targets set by the European Union in the Digital Decade framework and on the digital divide.... Our strategic work at the Agency for Education and Internationalisation is supported by federal government funds allocated to achieve these goals in Austria.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

For the Digital Everywhere programme, the Digital Skills Office of Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation (OeAD) works closely with the Federal Government (which sets initial goals and provides input) and consistently collaborates with beneficiary municipalities across Austria.

Furthermore, various types of collaborations are established, with adult education providers in charge of implementing the workshops, according to requirements and approaches specified in formal contracts; a citizens' support service provider, engaged to operationalise a hotline to answer questions from citizens interested in or joining the workshops; a booking platform provider, responsible for maintaining the web tool needed for both booking workshops and reporting data on the programme activities (e.g., the number of workshops held, the number of requests from municipalities, and the number and profiles of workshop participants); and an evaluation provider (i.e., the Austrian Institute of Technology, AIT), in charge of analysing the results of the programme in general and evaluating workshop participant satisfaction.

The Digital Skills Office team comprises 10 employees, including digital experts who provide input on digital content and competencies, as well as project managers. Former adult education trainers, as well as teachers for children's education within the team, provide expertise that is particularly helpful in defining effective course delivery. The team was responsible for evaluating proposed workshop concepts and selecting adult education providers, while the legal office handled the associated formal contracts. In addition, the Digital Skills Office offers support and clarification to adult education providers as needed.

## Evidence about results and impacts

A recent evaluation found that during March-June 2024, **54 educational providers** delivered workshops.

In April 2025, the programme is reported to have delivered **3,400 'Digital Everywhere' workshops** in over **700 municipalities across the country**, engaging some **33,000 participants**.

At the end of October 2025, **almost 5,000 workshops** had been held, reaching nearly **48,000 participants**, covering **all Austrian districts** and **more than one-third of municipalities nationwide**. According to the workshop evaluations, **95% of participants reported being satisfied or very satisfied**.

“ *These numbers tell us that the programme is effectively focusing on reducing the digital divide and that we are reaching the right targets, as most participants are elderly people... Overall, the federal government has established benchmarks for the Digital Austria strategy, and the outcomes of our training activities align with them. In general, Austria's federal government aims to fulfil the European Union's goals by targeting 80% of the population with basic digital literacy by 2030. Austria even goes one step further and aims to make all citizens digitally fit by 2030. This goal should be reached by the digital competence initiative, which includes several projects besides our Digital Everywhere workshops.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

**Measuring and monitoring results and impacts.** Results and impacts are formally assessed using quantitative and qualitative methods to incorporate as much feedback as possible from both workshop participants and adult education providers. The booking platform serves as the primary internal tool for monitoring activities and reporting quantitative data, including the number of workshops held by municipalities, participant counts, and the topics addressed. Further information, such as participants' background and satisfaction, is collected by an external evaluation team (from the Austrian Institute of Technology) to assess the quality of training. In addition, evaluation reports include feedback from adult education providers on open-ended questions (e.g., difficulties, enabling factors) to improve workshop settings.

## Sustainability and transferability of the practice

In April 2025, the training offer was scaled with the offer of 'Digital Everywhere Plus' workshops, addressed to individuals wishing to further develop their digital skills. Funding from the Federal Government has been secured for 2026, and, given the programme's success, the intention is to continue its implementation. The programme could be improved by expanding its coverage of topics (currently, five key topics), for example, by including artificial intelligence and fake news. However, details on its future implementation are not yet defined.

The Digital Skills and Job Platform further underlines that the programme design 'is in line with EU priorities and its structure can be easily adapted by other countries, making it a replicable and effective model for bridging the digital divide across Europe'. Notably, the transferability of the practice is bound to the presence all over the target territory of a sufficient number of education providers.

## Learning from this practice

- Success factor: **a dual booking approach using two contact networks to reach diverse target groups**. On one hand, adult education providers across Austria leverage their existing participant bases to recruit learners for the digital courses; on the other hand, municipalities directly enrol their citizens.

“ *...at the beginning of the programme, we conducted a pilot that relied solely on adult education providers' networks to identify workshop participants. We then added municipalities to increase the outreach capacity... Their involvement was essential, particularly for reaching the elderly and people in rural areas, which are the hardest groups to engage and key targets in our programme. Municipalities really know how to reach the people within their community... This approach enabled the programme to reach as many people as possible across Austria, particularly target groups with limited digital competencies.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

- Success factor: **openness for adaptation**. Feedback from various stakeholders has been consistently considered, and the approach has been adapted to emerging needs. Numerous adaptations were implemented throughout the programme. Operationally, for example, for the same topic, workshops in series were added to one-shot workshops.

- Challenge: **meeting the varied needs and preferences of diverse groups across the territory.** The ambition was to reach as many people and target groups as possible. The necessity to meet the needs and preferences of people in rural areas versus cities, the elderly versus younger people, and migrants versus those with Austrian backgrounds was addressed across various settings and by adapting the approach.

#### Recommendations to other public authorities

- (national authorities, regional authorities) **involve municipalities and civil society from the beginning.** They are essential to adopt a bottom-up approach.
- (national authorities, regional authorities, local authorities) **provide a variety of training formats and measures to reach a wide range of target groups.** This variety should include in-person, online, and hybrid formats, along with additional accompanying measures to support participants. The adult education providers proposed formats and measures during the application process, and the relevance of these was part of the evaluation of their offer.

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## Sources and further reading

Bergmann, N., Enengl, F., Hosner, D. (2024): [Evaluierung der „Digital Überall“-Initiative](#). Wien; [Booking platform](#); [Digital Austria website on the programme](#); [Digital Skills and Jobs Platform](#); [Digital Überall Programme's web page](#); [Federal Press Service news](#) dated 15/04/25; [Pilot](#).

**Summary of the DIGIREG interview** with Celine-Marie Roming, Project Manager, Sector Digital Skills Office, Department for Quality and Transparency, Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation (OeAD), 9 December 2025.

# BE\_Digitally Inclusive Neighbourhood

## DIGIREG showcase

### In a nutshell

**Involved public authority(ies):** Municipality of Ghent, Municipality of Antwerp, and Municipality of Kortrijk.

**Geographical coverage (NUTS3):** BE211, BE234, BE254.

**Implementation period:** 2019-2021.

**Objectives of the policy intervention:** 1) Create digitally inclusive districts within cities. 2) Share the experience gained on identified best practices with other cities and organisations.

**Target groups:** Digitally excluded residents of the target districts.

**Type of policy intervention:** Project, Partnership.

**Funding:** Private. Total budget: EUR 180,000. Grant to Digipolis Ghent from the ING fund for a more digital society, managed by the King Baudouin Foundation (KBS).

### Why this policy intervention qualifies as a DIGIREG BPP

- The project is based on an innovative approach, where three cities work together with the specific aim of identifying scalable and deployable actions for the digital inclusion of their residents. The project focuses on a level, the neighbourhood, that is easily identifiable in cities of any size, making the approach highly scalable within cities and transferable to other contexts.
- During the first phase of the project, pilots were run, continuously monitored and evaluated. Regular monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation enabled the identification of effective, actionable practices.
- Cooperation among the three cities for the implementation of the project was formalised through a written agreement.
- The project was awarded the 'All Digital Award' 2023 in the best digital resource category, where it was commended, among other aspects, for its practical approach, potential to inspire digital inclusion efforts in many contexts, and ongoing online presence. 'All Digital' is a European organisation annually rewarding three individuals or projects for their special merits in the field of digital inclusion.

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Digital devices provision**

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Digital skills development**



**DIGIREG interview with:** Josie Vranken, Digital inclusion project leader, District09 – Municipality of Ghent, 14 November 2025.

## Description

The project was coordinated by Digipolis Ghent, the non-commercial ICT company of the Municipality of Ghent, which entered into a cooperation agreement with the municipalities of Antwerp and Kortrijk to implement it. In practice, all cities had to contribute their expertise in e-inclusion to the project and then develop and implement e-inclusion actions in at least two of their neighbourhoods.

At the beginning of the project, expertise from the three cities was pooled to design the concept for a 'Digitally Inclusive Neighbourhood'. That was intended as a place where, by implementing a range of options, no resident of the neighbourhood would be digitally excluded. The concept is based on five pillars: access to digital devices and the internet, individual guidance, group support, digital practice opportunities, and coordination & communication.

Subsequently, the concept was tested by implementing 28 actions in the cities' neighbourhoods. These actions were continuously evaluated, resulting in a toolbox of 28 good practices. Good practices describe methods that other municipalities and organisations may implement at the neighbourhood or city level to combat digital exclusion. Practices include providing free access to digital devices and the internet; at-home hardware and internet access with tailored assistance; individual guidance in public locations; workshops and lessons on digital topics; and informal gatherings around a digital theme (e.g., Digicafé). In addition, they suggest ways to integrate digital practice opportunities into the operations of local organisations.

Each municipality contributed to the good practices, drawing on its own experience and the experience gained through the pilots. For example, on the provision of free access to digital devices and internet connection, Kortrijk made available public computers in all community centres and meeting places, as well as in the central library and its neighbourhood branches; Ghent provided public computers at 52 locations, in libraries and other locations that are usually visited by vulnerable individuals (e.g., homeless); and Antwerp provided public computers in all web points and libraries. For hardware lending, the good practice comes from Ghent, where a 'Digital Lending Service' distributed free hardware to organisations involved in low-threshold and e-inclusion projects. Kortrijk provided a good example of a neighbourhood-focused training programme for digital literacy among disadvantaged groups who face barriers to participating in structured digital lessons and workshops offered, for example, by libraries, training organisations, or community centres. Kortrijk also developed 'ICT meets NT2', a tailored programme for non-native speakers who are learning Dutch and want to learn more about computers and smartphones.

### The starting point

“ In 2018, the Digitally Inclusive Neighbourhood project was initiated based on an analysis of the state of the art by neighbourhood, and also thanks to the availability of budget from a non-governmental philanthropic fund called the ING Fund for a More Digital Society. During and after the COVID pandemic, funding sources and initiatives to address the digital divide increased... ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

### Framework and enabling conditions

“ In Ghent, each neighbourhood regularly collects data on the socio-demographic information of its inhabitants (e.g., age, education, poverty, levels of vulnerability) through recurring surveys. It was a very valuable starting point for the trajectory of digitally inclusive neighbourhoods. Although these data did not allow a direct assessment of citizens' digitalisation attitudes, they capture aspects that, according to recognised research on digital inclusion, are indicators strongly associated with higher levels of digital vulnerability. In addition, every neighbourhood in Ghent has a neighbourhood coordinator who connects residents with the broader network of municipality services, organisations and associations in the city. The coordinators' role is to capture signals from their neighbourhood and contribute to defining every trajectory for digital inclusion. ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

**The second phase.** The Digitally Inclusive Neighbourhood project started in 2018 and remains active, but its approach has evolved significantly over the years. Initially, it was a joint project of the City of Ghent, the City of Antwerp and the City of Kortrijk. The three municipalities investigated what an ideal digitally inclusive neighbourhood should offer to ensure that all residents can fully participate in the digital society. Each municipality explored the digital inclusion needs of their neighbourhoods.

In a second phase of the project, the digital inclusion team of District09 (the autonomous municipal company of the City of Ghent) became responsible for all digital-related activities for Ghent. Building on the

experience of the first phase, District09 has developed a structured roadmap, based on trajectories for its neighbourhoods, involving local organisations and urban support services. Although building on the original pillars of the first phase, the follow-up in Ghent focuses more on structurally embedding digital inclusion practices at the neighbourhood level, particularly near the historical city centre. These neighbourhoods, according to the available statistics, are highly vulnerable but also have a dense presence of urban support services and authorities that are essential to establishing collaborations and making the foreseen trajectories a reality.

The digital inclusion team has been active in Ghent since 2006 and has overseen a wide range of initiatives over the last two decades. The second phase of the Digitally Inclusive Neighbourhood project assigns District 09 a leading role, supported by one working group at the neighbourhood level. These groups comprise partners (e.g., associations, city authorities) who help achieve the roadmap's milestones by identifying signals, developing ideas, and implementing solutions.

“ *We learned from the first phase of the project that in order to reach our audience, we have to target the people in the street. Our digital support has to be very close to where the citizens live, such as senior homes, schools, working places, groceries, community houses, shelters for homeless people, etc. We started working at the street level in each neighbourhood or district to bring together people who needed to be digitally included and personnel from city services, such as library workers, school coordinators, social security officers, and volunteers supporting immigrants.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

Each working group has neighbourhood coordinators who are the interface with the city's digital inclusion team. They are asked to inform the team of observed concerns or issues related to the citizens' digital divide. While the situation varies by neighbourhood, each working group is committed to continuing actions that promote digital inclusion, even after the trajectory is complete.

#### Evidence about results and impacts

The toolbox was the main outcome of the first phase of the project. The **500 copies of the toolbox** physically made available by the project were all gone within one year. However, the toolbox is still available online and downloadable for free (in 2025).

In 2024, in the Municipality of Ghent, nearly **25,000 digital assistance requests** were answered, **636 devices** were deployed, and **2,220 Ghent residents received support in their digital skills**.

“ *After a few years, our trajectory has created many opportunities for exchange among the neighbourhood partners to reflect on the project's achievements. The local digital assistance offered in the neighbourhoods has for sure grown over time. In every neighbourhood where we have implemented the project, we have created more reference points where people can go to ask for digital assistance, as well as set up a network to relocate refurbished laptops. The collaboration between neighbourhood partners has strengthened, which is promising for future initiatives. The partners' knowledge and mindset regarding the relevance of our project evolved throughout the trajectory. They gained a better understanding of digital inclusion, the digital divide, what good practices are, what works and what does not, and ways to understand citizens' needs and engage them. Still, it is an ongoing process across the Ghent neighbourhoods.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

In November 2025, **15 of the 25 neighbourhoods in Ghent** have **successfully completed a Digital Inclusion trajectory**, with a particular focus on vulnerable areas and outer districts where municipal services are less present. Each neighbourhood comprises between 2,900 and 21,000 residents. Actions carried out for each neighbourhood trajectory included community engagement of social stakeholders (non-profits, associations, city services, police, etc.) to introduce the topic of digital inclusion; one follow-up workshop with 5 to 7 local partners to identify needs and define concrete actions; visits to approximately 10 to 15 organisations focusing on vulnerable groups, to understand their operations and the barriers they face; establishment of 2 to 3 “digipunten” (digital help points), collectively responding to around 15,000 support requests; and 3 to 5 initiatives per year including courses, information sessions, workshops, digital awareness campaigns, cross-neighbourhood initiatives, and deployment of refurbished devices.

**Measuring and monitoring results and impacts.** A study was commissioned to assess the project's impact on neighbourhood partners and to evaluate the effects of the concrete actions implemented for residents. One preliminary result indicates that the project increased participants' self-reliance, confidence, and ability to use digital technologies. For example, young mothers who learn to exploit digital opportunities to access childcare services become expert enough to teach other young mothers how to do the same.

### Sustainability and transferability of the practice

After the first phase of the project ended, the Municipality of Ghent continued to ground its digital inclusion policy in the Digitally Inclusive Neighbourhood approach: in 2022, District09 received a new grant of EUR 45,000 from the KBS for the project 'The ideal Digitally Inclusive Neighbourhood' aimed at designing and testing an ideal digitally inclusive urban district. In 2024, District09 received the Media Wisdom Award in the 'Inclusion' category. The award recognises strong media literacy initiatives deserving recognition and visibility, and acknowledges how *'the Digitally Inclusive Neighbourhood project encourages organisations and services in Ghent neighbourhoods to implement initiatives that increase the digital inclusion of their target groups. The result is a sustainable embedding of digital inclusion in the neighbourhood, supported by neighbourhood partners'*.

“ *Consolidation of the Digitally Inclusive Neighbourhood project is our dream goal.... At the end of our interventions, there was a discussion with the partners of the working groups... about the support they would have needed from us in the near future. They indicated the need to meet every six months to be supported in designing new actions, to ask for input or feedback... The idea is to keep the doors open. Local organisations that do not participate today, if kept updated on the activities, may be interested in contributing to digital inclusion actions tomorrow. Still, current activities in three neighbourhoods are not continuously running or expanding. There are times when it is better to reduce the amount of work in the field and times when plenty of activities are running. In the near future, we will continue to work to enrich the operational agendas of the three neighbourhoods through digital inclusion activities, meeting with the working groups every six months. For the fourth neighbourhood, we have to start the work on the field.* ”

(DIGIREG interview)

In terms of transferability, the toolbox developed in the first phase can provide guidance to other municipalities and organisations for tackling e-inclusion in their communities and cities. The practices are clearly explained in the toolbox and can be replicated in other European cities.

### Learning from this practice

- Success factor: **working at the field level.** All the actions have been initiated by organisations and urban support services that have direct contact with individuals in the neighbourhood, such as associations that work with people in poverty and local healthcare services. Local partners have worked with people who already know them. The project leaders of the digital inclusion team have provided guidance, good practices, and experience in digital inclusion, allowing neighbourhood partners to avoid sourcing these resources independently. These partners have provided a familiar and accessible environment for digitally vulnerable citizens, while project leaders have maintained a behind-the-scenes role.

“ *Nowadays, no organisation is not struggling with the digital divide. People on the street, as well as social workers and library employees, face digital gaps, but often lack the knowledge, means, or time to address them. We bring solutions that should be different, case by case, and where needed (e.g., for local authorities, NGOs). We are working in the field and very close to the people suffering from digital divides.* ”

(DIGIREG interview)

- Success factor: **very practical interventions.** Needs were mapped, networks established, and actions quickly implemented. For example, if many people in one neighbourhood lacked access to a digital device, the digital inclusion team sought to procure refurbished laptops. If many young mothers lacked the time to acquire digital skills, opportunities to learn how to digitally access childcare services were provided.
- Success factor: **a flexible and adaptable approach.** A crucial part of the roadmap in the City of Ghent is to review the actions implemented, considering what worked, what did not, and why. Some actions may work in one neighbourhood but not in another, or succeed the first time they are implemented and fail

the next. This has been part of the ongoing assessment of the practice. COVID-19 restrictions affected the project's first phase but also introduced flexibility and heightened awareness of the need for digital inclusion.

- ▶ Challenge: **understanding the opportunity to activate the project in a specific neighbourhood.** Projects of different natures, running simultaneously, may preclude active participation due to limited time among potential target groups. There has been a need for the digital inclusion team to monitor developments across all domains. The neighbourhood coordinators and the organisations of the working groups helped the project leaders determine whether there was a need for the Digitally Inclusive Neighbourhood approach intervention. However, it is possible that the digital divide faced by some community members went undetected.

#### Recommendations to other public authorities

- ▶ (local authorities) **embed the work at the field level to increase digital inclusion in neighbourhoods.** This also requires the mapping of who does what and what is already available in the neighbourhoods.
- ▶ (local authorities) **engage as many people and organisations as possible.** Digital inclusion issues should be addressed from diverse perspectives.

“ They wear ‘digital divide glasses’ that you might not have, and through these lenses, they can see and reach digitally excluded people... Our approach has also given the opportunity to bring together different actors in the city and co-create solutions addressing concrete needs.

(DIGIREG interview)

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## Sources and further reading

[Digitally Inclusive Neighbourhood project's website](#); [Cooperation agreement between the cities](#); [Online access to the toolbox](#); [Impact in Ghent](#); [Project's award announcement](#); [Project's award news by District09, 2024 award to Ghent](#).

**Summary of the DIGIREG interview** with Josie Vranken, Digital inclusion project leader, District09 – Municipality of Ghent, 14 November 2025.

## CZ\_Czechitas

## DIGIREG showcase

### In a nutshell

**Involved public authority(ies):** Municipality of Brno.

**Geographical coverage (NUTS3):** CZ064.

**Implementation period:** 2018-ongoing (in 2025).

**Objectives of the policy intervention:** 1) Empower women with IT skills and career paths. 2) Address gender imbalance in the Czech tech sector. 3) Promote diversity and innovation in the digital workforce.

**Target groups:** Adult women and girls.

**Type of policy intervention:** Strategic partnership agreement.

**Funding:** Private and public. Over the period 2018-2024, the Municipality of Brno contributed yearly with over EUR 32,000 from the municipal budget. In 2023, public funding represented 5% of Czechitas' total funding, with the rest coming from private sources.

### Why this policy intervention qualifies as a DIGIREG BPP

- Committed to making digital education accessible to everyone, Czechitas has created a collaborative funding model that allows keeping IT training programmes affordable while maintaining high quality and relevance. The model relies on a strong network of supporters, in which the partnership between the Municipality and the NGO plays a significant role, as it enables societal and institutional impact. Individuals' empowerment is, in fact, linked to public sector innovation, demonstrating how inclusive digital education can support smarter governance.
- Czechitas won the Skills Category of the EQUALS in Tech Awards 2022. The organisation was recognised for its social impact platform that creates and expands tech opportunities for women and girls in the Czech Republic by providing practical digital skills training. In addition, Czechitas won the Digitalisation & Skills Category at the 2021 edition of the EU Social Economy Awards for its work in motivating and educating thousands of women and children in the world of information technology.

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Digital skills development**

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Career opportunities, employability enhancement**



**DIGIREG interview with:** František Kubeš, Head of Department, Department of Strategic Development and Cooperation, Brno Municipality, 30 October 2025.

## Description

Czechitas is a non-profit organisation founded in 2014 to address the underrepresentation of women in the ICT sector. Its mission is to upskill women in tech, close the gender gap, drive innovation in companies, and boost the country's economy. The focus is on women aged 35 and above who are seeking a career change, re-entry into the workforce, or digital upskilling opportunities

Since 2018, the Municipality of Brno and Czechitas have cooperated based on a Strategic Agreement aimed at boosting digital inclusion and workforce development across the region. In this framework, the public administration provides institutional and annual financial support, as well as access to open municipal datasets, to implement training courses. The strategic agreement takes the form of concrete initiatives that contribute to Czechitas's core business. For example, since 2018, the Municipality, through its sub-department of Data, Analysis and Evaluation, has regularly provided topics and datasets to support the development of training courses of the Digital Academy: A Career-Change Programme for Women. Participants in the Digital Academy process the data, and the resulting analyses are used to further develop the city. Two-thirds of graduates find a job within 3 months after the training completion, and the city continues to improve its data portal. Another activity framed within the Strategic Agreement is the organisation of tech hackathons in cooperation with the Municipality, where participants are engaged in solving local challenges using public data (the 2022 and 2024 editions).

### The starting point

“...there were two main reasons behind the practice: first [and most important], the City of Brno wanted to support Czechitas, an organisation (NGO) considered important for bringing more women into the IT sector; given the general shortage of qualified human resources, especially women who can retrain and enter ICT professions. Second, the city aimed to gain benefits for its own work, particularly in terms of data analysis.”  
(DIGIREG interview)

### Framework and enabling conditions

“... the practice was based on a combination of the state of digitalisation of the territory and European, national, regional, and local policy frameworks... the cooperation with Czechitas was in line with municipal and broader policy objectives focused on supporting qualified people, attracting talent, and enabling a high-quality labour force. These are among the strategic targets of the City of Brno. Although the municipality does not have direct tools to achieve these objectives, collaboration with Czechitas served as an indirect means to contribute to them.”  
(DIGIREG interview)

The Strategic Development and Cooperation Department is primarily responsible for managing and coordinating the practice and for overall cooperation with Czechitas, including defining the city's needs, leading the negotiation process, and securing funding for activities. In addition, the sub-department for Data, Analysis and Evaluation (within the Department for Participation) is involved by using the outputs of Czechitas' Digital Academy for its data analysis and, in some instances, acts as a direct beneficiary (Czechitas' Digital Academy). Collaboration among the involved departments has been maintained informally.

Cooperation with Czechitas has been managed through formal mechanisms, in line with the procedures in place for organisations receiving financial support from the City of Brno. Initially, cooperation was conducted under a highly formalised framework that required official requests, documentation, and approval by the City Assembly, especially for larger financial contributions. In later stages, this approach was replaced by a simplified order system applicable to financial support below approximately EUR 20,000 per year. This system enables more flexible, targeted cooperation, focusing on specific activities such as the Digital Academy and according to the Municipality's needs. While the financial aspects of this cooperation follow formal administrative procedures, informal interactions have also taken place, including participation in meetings and events, which help maintain open communication and the partnership's continuity.

Different types of civil servants were involved depending on the phase and nature of the cooperation. Activities supporting and coordinating Czechitas as an organisation primarily involved administrative work without specific technical expertise. Civil servants in the Strategic Development and Cooperation Department were responsible for the procedures needed to obtain financial support, including drafting proposals, defining negotiating terms, and ensuring proper processing and final reporting. The Digital Academy activities involved technical profiles from the sub-department for Data, Analysis and Evaluation, specialised in data analysis and open-source

IT tools. Additionally, managers from several departments participated in an AI training delivered by Czechitas, primarily as participants and end users rather than implementers of the practice.

### Evidence about results and impacts

Since the beginning of the collaboration between Czechitas and the Municipality of Brno, **3,681 women from Brno have participated in Czechitas training programmes.**

A total of **342 women from Brno have transitioned into IT careers across** a wide range of roles, including testing, data analytics, development, and consulting.

“ ... the cooperation produced tangible short-term results. The city's support helped Czechitas promote its activities more widely and attract more women to its courses. For the Municipality, the effects have been more indirect. Participants in Czechitas programmes worked with real city data as part of their training, and the city piloted an initial AI training for managers. [However, it cannot be considered as a] clear direct improvement in internal digital skills at this stage and characterised the effort as a valuable pilot rather than a full-scale skills upgrade. Regarding the targeted digital divide... while the cooperation supported Czechitas' mission, engaging more women in IT, [there is no] specific quantitative evidence of divide reduction from the city's side. The impact is understood as contributory and indirect, pending further evaluation. ”

(DIGIREG interview)

**Measuring and monitoring results and impacts.** Formal assessment and monitoring mechanisms are in place. When support was granted via an agreement approved by the City Assembly, the cooperation included predefined indicators that Czechitas had to fulfil. These indicators, part of the agreement, were used to monitor results.

In the current phase, which uses a simplified specific-order system, monitoring is conducted through review meetings. There was an interim (mid-term) meeting in the summer, and an evaluation meeting is scheduled at the beginning of 2026 to assess effectiveness before deciding on support for the year. The city does not provide 'blank checks', and continued support depends on demonstrating outcomes against agreed indicators.

### Sustainability and transferability of the practice

Cooperation is expected to continue, with potential adjustments (e.g., a stronger focus on AI), pending the upcoming evaluation. As public money is involved, support is expected to be renewed annually based on agreed-upon indicators or performance evaluations.

The initiative is backed by a proven record of implementation actions across multiple cities (Brno, Prague and Ostrava), providing concrete examples of transferability. Czechitas offers a replicable model for policymakers seeking to harness the full potential of digital transformation while ensuring that no one is left behind.

### Learning from this practice

- ▶ Success factor: **the openness and quality of communication between the city administration and the organisation.** From the outset, both sides maintained a transparent, constructive dialogue, enabling them to align expectations and ensure smooth implementation of the agreed activities.
- ▶ Success factor: **the strong political willingness within the Municipality of Brno to support NGOs like Czechitas.** The political leadership recognised the relevance of the organisation's mission and the positive societal impact of increasing women's participation in the IT sector.
- ▶ Success factor: **the concreteness and visibility of results.** Results achieved by Czechitas reinforced the collaboration's success. The proven ability to attract and train women in digital and IT skills, which demonstrated the initiative's value, justified continued municipal support.
- ▶ Challenge: **the design of a cooperation model that served both sides.** The Municipality of Brno needed an arrangement that delivered tangible benefits for the municipality (e.g., the Digital Academy and initial AI training for staff) while also supporting Czechitas' organisational functioning. This was achieved by shaping the cooperation to include targeted activities that the city could use and by establishing the appropriate financial support mechanisms.

- Challenge: **the response to the fast-rising importance of AI.** AI was not a priority 2-3 years ago, but it has since become essential. The response, now, in the ongoing negotiations, is to concentrate more on AI in the next phase of support and cooperation.
- Challenge: **the integration of an NGO as a stakeholder into the city's innovation ecosystem.** Including Czechitas as an important partner alongside traditional actors (e.g., Chamber of Commerce, Innovation Centre - JIC, universities) in working groups and strategic documents (e.g., Regional Innovation Strategy, Brno city strategy - Brno 2050, integrated strategy for Brno Metropolitan Area) required broadening the partnership approach. This has been addressed by bringing Czechitas into these fora and treating it as a regular stakeholder in strategic planning.
- Something that could have been done differently: **a clearer explanation of the rationale and impact of the cooperation with Czechitas to gain political support and to obtain financial support from the City Assembly earlier.** The proposal for cooperation was initially not approved, largely due to prejudices and misconceptions, notably the perception that the IT sector was already well funded and did not require public assistance. Following this experience, the department undertook a more thorough analysis and communication effort, providing clear evidence of Czechitas' contribution to the city's innovation ecosystem, the need to support precisely this kind of activity, which is not profitable, and the concrete benefits of supporting such an organisation. This improved justification and transparency helped secure approval during a later session of the City Assembly.

#### Recommendations to other public authorities

- (local authorities) **start small, with focused and manageable actions, and gradually expand toward a more systematic framework, considering that successful partnerships take time to build.** The collaboration with Czechitas evolved gradually, from informal contacts and targeted workshops to a more structured and strategic cooperation formalised through agreements and financial support. This step-by-step approach allowed both sides to develop mutual trust, better understand each other's needs, and define clear, achievable objectives.
- (local authorities) **integrate external partners into strategic planning and policy-making structures.** It concerned the recognition of an NGO as an integral actor within the innovation ecosystem. Bringing Czechitas into Brno's network of innovation partners, alongside established stakeholders, proved to be as important as providing financial support. Its involvement in working groups and strategic documents strengthened the city's overall approach to digital development and inclusion.
- (local authorities) **maintain open communication channels and ensure monitoring and evaluation procedures of the outcomes.** Clear communication and evidence-based justification are essential for securing political support. Early in the process, the team underestimated the need to demonstrate the initiative's social and economic relevance, which initially delayed approval. Providing robust data and communicating the expected impacts more effectively helped overcome these obstacles.
- (local authorities) **establish adaptive partnerships guaranteeing mutual benefits and able to evolve in response to emerging priorities.** It is important to pursue mutual benefits in such partnerships. While the city aimed to support Czechitas' mission to empower women in IT, it also gained tangible value from using real city data in training and from piloting activities such as AI-related workshops. This dual perspective, which supported the organisation while delivering benefits to the administration, was seen as a critical factor in sustaining cooperation.

## Sources and further reading

[Czechitas website](#); [Czechitas 2023 Annual Report](#); [Czechitas YouTube channel](#); [EQUALS in Tech Awards 2022](#); [Example of activities implemented under the strategic partnership](#); Informative material provided by the City of Brno, April 2025.

**Summary of the DIGIREG interview** with František Kubeš, Head of Department, Department of Strategic Development and Cooperation, Brno Municipality, 30 October 2025.

# DE\_Gigabit Programme

## DIGIREG showcase

### In a nutshell

**Involved public authority(ies):** Stuttgart Region, the City of Stuttgart, and the districts of Böblingen, Esslingen, Göppingen, Ludwigsburg and Rems-Murr.

**Geographical coverage (NUTS3):** DE111, DE112, DE113, DE114, DE115, DE116.

**Implementation period:** 2019-2022.

**Objectives of the policy intervention:** 1) Provide high-speed internet access across the Stuttgart region. In particular, by 2025, provide FTTH/FTTB fibre-optic connections to all schools, all industrial/commercial areas and businesses, and 50% of households in the region. By 2025, 99% of the population will also be able to use mobile communications. The share of households with access to fibre-optic connections is expected to be 90% in 2030.

**Target groups:** Communities (citizens, businesses, public sector).

**Type of policy intervention:** Programme, Special Purpose Vehicle.

**Funding:** Public and private. A joint investment of EUR 1.6 billion is planned over the programme period, one-third from the public sector (state, regional and municipal funding) and two-thirds from the private sector (Deutsche Telekom).

### Why this policy intervention qualifies as a DIGIREG BPP

- The practice was selected for the finals (and ranked second) of the European Broadband Awards 2022, category 'Innovative model of financing, business and investment', as a successful example of joint venture cooperation between the municipalities, the State represented through the company Gigabit Region Stuttgart, and the private sector network and service operators.
- The process of broadband expansion across the districts is standardised to ensure efficient large-scale broadband expansion.
- The programme is based on extensive synergies and close cooperation between the public and private sectors at all governance levels. At the local level, civil works are facilitated by municipalities through the expedited permit release, the provision of communication and information to citizens, and coordination with other engineering works.
- The state capital of Stuttgart is amongst the best ten NUTS3 across Europe for the indicator 'Optic fibre over area'.

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Digital infrastructure enhancement**



**DIGIREG interview with:** Hans-Jürgen Bahde, Stuttgart Region Officer for Broadband Connectivity (appointed 2019), Verband Region Stuttgart (Stuttgart Regional Parliament) & Managing Director, publicly owned company Gigabit Region Stuttgart (GRS) GmbH, 30 October 2025.

## Description

Before the launch of the Gigabit programme, the state capital, Stuttgart, and the surrounding districts were already engaged in discussions and small projects to enhance the region's digital infrastructure, home to some 2.8 million people and 140,000 businesses. The turning point was in 2018, when a letter of intent was signed between the Stuttgart Region and Deutsche Telekom, laying the ground for the future Gigabit programme. In late 2018 and early 2019, special-purpose associations were established in the five districts of the Stuttgart region (Böblingen, Esslingen, Göppingen, Ludwigsburg, and Rems-Murr) to act as the primary point of contact for the districts' municipalities. A few months later, still in 2019, the Gigabit Region Stuttgart GmbH (GRS) was formally founded by these five special-purpose associations, the City of Stuttgart, and the Stuttgart Region Economic Development Corporation. Concurrently, a cooperation framework agreement between GRS and Deutsche Telekom was signed, marking the official start of the Gigabit programme.

GRS oversees fibre-optic FTTH expansion and monitors regional targets, develops uniform processes and technical standards, concludes framework and model contracts, and is responsible for management. The cooperation agreement signed with Deutsche Telekom is non-exclusive and was intended to ensure equitable expansion offers across diverse municipalities. In addition, tailor-made agreements with other market actors were finalised to help meet expansion targets and accelerate comprehensive fibre-optic rollout. Coordinated expansion plans have been agreed with the cities and the municipalities in the region. In these plans, the active participation of municipal utilities which have concluded a cooperation agreement with Deutsche Telekom plays an important role in the expansion process.

### The starting point

“ In 2017, the Stuttgart Region identified a significant undersupply of broadband infrastructure, with only 1.9% fibre-optic coverage available to the region's 1.5 million households and 140,000 businesses across 179 cities and municipalities. This revealed a substantial need to rapidly expand high-performance digital infrastructure to safeguard the region's competitiveness, attractiveness, and ability to undergo digital transformation as an innovative, industry-oriented high-tech hub. For decades, Germany had invested in a highly efficient and dense copper network. As this infrastructure was fully depreciated and remained profitable, the telecommunications industry was inclined to continue using it for as long as possible, delaying the transition to fibre-optic networks. To address this challenge, several key measures were undertaken in the Stuttgart Region. The Verband Region Stuttgart [the Stuttgart Regional Authority] commissioned a broadband coverage study in 2016/17 to establish the actual supply situation. In early 2017, the regional parliament appointed a Regional Broadband Representative to coordinate broadband activities across the region's five administrative counties [or districts] and 179 municipalities and to define a comprehensive broadband expansion strategy. At the same time, a Strategic Broadband Steering Committee was established. Its members included the Land Councils, the Mayor of Stuttgart, and regional management representatives. The committee was tasked with formulating fibre-optic expansion targets and defining a comprehensive strategy. The regional goals were set as follows: by 2025, 50% of the 1.5 million households are to be supplied with fibre-optic connections; by 2030, at least 90% of households are expected to benefit from the expansion. ”

(DIGIREG interview)

### Framework and enabling conditions

“ In 2017, broadband coverage in the region consisted of 98% copper infrastructure. The team conducted numerous studies examining topology, population density, business density, transportation networks, and existing infrastructure provision. These analyses revealed significant inequalities in access to high-speed internet across municipalities and counties [or districts], particularly where differing settlement patterns, socio-economic structures, and uneven mixes of urban and rural areas created disparities in digital connectivity. National subsidy programmes for fibre-optic expansion were also considered. However, according to regional estimates, only around 6% of households qualified for these subsidies, highlighting the limited applicability of public funding mechanisms for achieving large-scale broadband deployment. ”

(DIGIREG interview)

The implementation structure followed a two-stage model. During the first stage, the Gigabit Region Stuttgart (GRS) coordinated broadband expansion across the region and managed cooperation with Deutsche Telekom and other telecommunications companies. GRS also developed standardised processes, concluded framework and master agreements, and mediated conflicts between municipalities and telecommunications providers. In

the second stage, the five districts involved established their own special-purpose associations. Together with the state capital and the Stuttgart Region Economic Development Corporation, these associations form the broader GRS structure. They are responsible for advising and accompanying local authorities throughout the expansion process. An annual expansion plan, based on transparent and comprehensible criteria (such as existing bandwidth supply or projected expansion costs), determines where, when, and to what extent fibre-optic infrastructure is deployed across the 179 municipalities.

Several actors in the region have been involved in both stages. The Stuttgart Regional Authority (Verband Region Stuttgart) and the Regional Parliament appointed the Broadband Officer and provided political approvals. The Economic Development Corporation of the Stuttgart Region was involved in strategic design. Municipalities (179) participated in decision-making and local planning and adopted resolutions, while districts and the City of Stuttgart served as operational partners. Implementation of fibre rollout at the local level was the responsibility of the five special-purpose associations. The GRS organisation defined the strategic framework and overall conditions and, together with the special-purpose associations that were subsequently established, is responsible for the operational management of the broadband expansion programme. A Strategic Broadband Steering Committee was established as a formal instrument of cooperation, with participation by mayors, district leaders (Landräte), Stuttgart city representatives, and regional management.

Telecommunications companies (e.g., Deutsche Telekom) were formally involved in the programme through cooperation agreements related to investment commitments, shared planning processes, defined responsibilities, and transparent rollout criteria.

The programme engaged a staff of six employees in the central GRS company and approximately 20 resources across the district special-purpose associations. Profiles include senior experts in broadband technology, project managers, legal experts (e.g., dealing with state aid law, municipal law, competition law, subsidy law), funding/subsidy programme specialists, strategic planning experts, GIS specialists, and representatives of local authorities (e.g., mayors, district leaders). An ad-hoc pooling of experts was essential because individual municipalities lacked the capacity to hire specialists.

“ *The structure implemented by GRS and the special-purpose associations involved recruiting experienced broadband experts to advise and support counties [or districts] and municipalities throughout the expansion process. This approach ensured that smaller municipalities, in particular, did not need to develop their own internal teams, enabling the efficient use of synergies across the region.*

(DIGIREG interview)

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## Evidence about results and impacts

The expansion area targets the **179 municipalities of the five districts**.

**Average fibre-optic coverage in the Stuttgart region was approximately 39% at the end of 2024.** In 2024, a group of 30 municipalities belonging to the so-called ‘**Club of the Nineties**’ had already achieved the 2030 target of fibre optic coverage of at least 90% (with households and businesses being either already connected to the fibre optic network or being passed by the fibre cables).

Achievement of the **50% fibre coverage by the end of 2025**.

Establishment of a **full monitoring system** tracking progress in every municipality.

Creation of a **regional governance model recognised as an EU best practice**.

The **number of Internet Service Providers** has **increased**, including both national network operators (Deutsche Glasfaser and UGG) and more regionally oriented companies (e.g., NetCom BW and Wisotel).

“ [Long-term impacts include:] *a rising awareness and demand for fibre connections (from 12% to 37% household uptake); an acceleration of digital transformation for industry, SMEs, and households; a significant shift in territorial digital inequality. Contrary to expectations, rural areas now have better fibre coverage than large cities, due to simpler processes and fewer competing infrastructures. Thus, a major part of the digital divide has been reduced or, in some cases, reversed.*

(DIGIREG interview)

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**Measuring and monitoring results and impacts.** The monitoring approach in place is both quantitative (coverage, uptake) and strategic (awareness, economic development). The quantitative part is based on indicators of fibre rollout per municipality, district, and the entire region. It also allows tracking connection uptake and demand. Biannual expansion plans and progress reports also serve a monitoring purpose. More informally, governance bodies regularly discuss implementation status.

### Sustainability and transferability of the practice

The fibre-optic rollout is expected to be completed in time to meet the 2030 targets, ensuring the necessary infrastructure is fully in place. Its sustainability depends on the network's use by residents, businesses, and local authorities. This implies developing a 'smart-region approach' by engaging local governments, academic institutions, and industry partners to identify potential application areas across the region. These applications include, for example, public services and quality-of-life solutions such as e-health, e-learning, and e-government. Other application domains are environmental management, mobility and accessibility, digital economy and innovation, and governance and civic participation.

Regarding transferability, the governance structure of the partnership is quite complex to be replicated. The practice suggests the opportunity to create Special Purpose Vehicles to achieve specific targets, such as the coordinated deployment of fast broadband across a large area. One advantage of this governance structure is that it ensures the smallest municipalities have an equal voice as large cities.

### Learning from this practice

- ▶ Success factor: **unified regional approach for resources and expertise**, enabling negotiation power with large telecom companies and allowing municipalities to leverage synergies and the region to avoid duplication of effort.
- ▶ Success factor: **one-stop-shop structure** for telecom operators, reducing complexity and transaction costs. A single point of contact for broadband expansion (rather than 179 individual municipalities) facilitated public-private cooperation.
- ▶ Success factor: **strong private-public partnership with a proactive engagement of telecom companies**.
- ▶ Success factor: **non-exclusive agreement with Deutsche Telekom**, securing major private investment.
- ▶ Success factor: **clear rollout criteria and transparent planning**, increasing trust among municipalities.
- ▶ Challenge: **convincing 179 municipalities** to adopt a unified structure. Addressed via strong communication, extensive travel to each municipality, and guarantees of coverage.
- ▶ Challenge: **convincing telecom companies** to invest at scale. Addressed through regional aggregation of demand and simplified negotiation structures. The private sector saw opportunities for a large-scale, efficient rollout enabled by the regional approach.
- ▶ Challenge: **addressing competition between municipalities** (each wanting to be served first). Solved through a shared, transparent criteria catalogue approved by all.
- ▶ Challenge: **facing complex legal and state-aid frameworks**.

### Recommendations to other public authorities

- ▶ (regional authorities) **facilitate the aggregation of demand for broadband roll-out at the regional level**. The regional bundling of broadband activities and the exploitation of synergies can facilitate long-term private-sector investment across the territory. It secures the necessary negotiating power when dealing with large telecommunications companies and offers them a single point of contact. Intermunicipal cooperation, then, creates value for residents, households, businesses, and social institutions while conserving public resources and taxpayers' funds.
- ▶ (regional authorities) **support local authorities by pooling technical expertise**. Not every small municipality can afford the specialists or possesses the expertise required for digital transformation or infrastructure deployment. Central pooling of experts has been shown to be effective in initiating, de-

signing, and implementing broadband roll-out programmes at the regional level, including when problems arise.

- (regional authorities) **establish region-wide cooperation with the business community.** A shared understanding of the economic logic of broadband deployment and municipal needs reduces public expenditure and promotes the use of innovations and technologies that strengthen the long-term competitiveness and attractiveness of municipalities, districts, and the region as a whole.

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## Sources and further reading

[Gigabit Programme's website](#); [Deutsche Telekom web page on the Gigabit programme](#); [EC short description of the programme](#); [Deutsche Telekom web news](#) dated 24/05/19; [Gigabit Programme YouTube video for the European Broadband Awards 2022](#); [Gigabit Programme's news](#) dated 25/03/25; [Video gallery from the Gigabit programme](#).

**Summary of the DIGIREG interview** with Hans-Jürgen Bahde, Stuttgart Region Officer for Broadband Connectivity (appointed 2019), Verband Region Stuttgart (Stuttgart Regional Parliament) & Managing Director, publicly owned company Gigabit Region Stuttgart (GRS) GmbH, 30 October 2025.

# DK\_Digital boost of street-level businesses

## DIGIREG showcase

### In a nutshell

**Involved public authority(ies):** Municipalities of Svendborg, Faaborg-Midtfyn, Ærø, and Langeland.

**Geographical coverage (NUTS3):** DK031.

**Implementation period:** March 2017-November 2022.

**Objectives of the policy intervention:** 1) Create growth and increase productivity in large parts of the local retail trade through a digital skills boost.

**Target groups:** Street-level businesses. Often, they are small, owner-managed companies in which the owner also serves as an employee.

**Type of policy intervention:** Project.

**Funding:** Public (EU, regional and local). Total budget: DKK 19.7 million (approximately EUR 2.6 million). Co-funded by the ESF, axis for growth-oriented competence development, with DKK 9.7 million (approx. EUR 1.3 million). Contributed by the Southern Denmark Growth Forum and the participating municipalities.

### Why this policy intervention qualifies as a DIGIREG BPP

- The project was highly relevant in providing new development opportunities for small businesses through digital skills enhancement and tailored digitalisation of their business processes. Concrete, flexible and practice-oriented teaching and peer testimonials helped demystify digitalisation and made the intervention successful.
- It is an example of digital inclusion of underserved economic actors that, besides supporting individual businesses, also contributed to revitalising small settlements and increasing their attractiveness in the tourism economy.
- The project was independently evaluated by a third party. The evaluation conclusions emphasise the value of demand-driven, localised, modular programmes; the importance of building trust through practical, non-bureaucratic engagement; the strength of combining individual coaching with collective peer learning; and the model's replicability in other locations with minimal structural changes.
- The cross-cutting coordination throughout the project implementation ensured equal participation across the four municipalities and local ownership, achieving a well-distributed impact.
- In the 2021 report 'Recommendations from the Government's Seven Regional Growth Teams', a national-level exercise aimed at restarting the economy and creating jobs across the country in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is explicitly recommended to build on the good experiences from the project and to spread the project's concept throughout Funen.

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Digital skills development**

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Business viability enhancement, place attractiveness increase**



**DIGIREG interview with:** Jens Myrup Thomsen, Business consultant in the Business and Innovation Department, Svendborg Municipality, 14 November 2025.

## Description

The ESF grant recipient and day-to-day coordinator of the project was the Municipality of Svendborg, which engaged an external facilitator. The project was coordinated by a steering group that included representatives from the four participating municipalities (all of which are located on the island of Funen and its surrounding islands), local business associations, the Danish Chamber of Commerce, and the retail workers' trade union. The project goal was to support small businesses operating in areas with seasonal tourism economies and low digital uptake, which were traditionally under-represented in digitalisation efforts and national support schemes due to limited capacity, time constraints, or distrust of bureaucratic processes.

The initiative combined four key activity groups: co-creation of individual business action plans; implementation of competence development courses on digitalisation and e-commerce; mentoring support provided by digital and business experts; and local networking to foster cooperation and knowledge sharing across towns. The approach was demand-driven, and participants only joined activities they deemed relevant. Courses were modular, available at different experience levels and offered concrete, practice-oriented knowledge, also through the reliance on peer testimonials.

### The starting point

“ *The practice emerged in the context of profound changes in local shopping behaviour, which were accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic... small centrally located businesses and shops in Svendborg were under increasing pressure, as restrictions and changing consumer habits made it difficult to attract customers physically into shops, while many people came to prefer online shopping. This broader trend of increased digitalisation meant that many small shop owners, who often combine different roles (e.g. CEO, HR manager, marketing manager, maintenance) in one person, struggled to keep up with the demands of digital commerce. In response, the municipality sought to develop a practice that would provide very concrete tools for working digitally, including online shopping, marketing and communication. Previous national and regional initiatives to push the digital agenda had not produced strong effects locally, as they were not sufficiently adapted to the needs and realities of Svendborg's small businesses. The project was therefore designed based on extensive dialogue with local shop owners and in collaboration with the Danish Business Association, resulting in a tailored model that formed the basis of the ESF-funded project application. While COVID-19 was a key driver for launching the initiative... the underlying challenges around digital transformation would have arisen in any case and remain relevant today...* ”

(DIGIREG interview)

### Framework and enabling conditions

“ *... a mix of elements was considered in designing the practice, but the primary drivers were the local context and the availability of funding. The starting point was a clear local demand to support small central shops facing increasing pressure from online trade and changing shopping behaviour, with the overall objective of keeping the city centre economically and socially alive. Given the municipality's limited public budget, identifying suitable European funding opportunities was crucial. In this sense, European funds, particularly ESF, and the broader EU policy framework on business support and digitalisation played an enabling role, allowing the municipality to operationalise locally defined needs. The logic can be summarised as: funding possibilities; local context and demand; and alignment with EU opportunities and policies. While the practice was consistent with wider national and European digitalisation agendas, it was not primarily built on a formal digital divide study or on specific Digital Decade targets, but rather on concrete local challenges and the possibility to match them with available European funding.* ”

(DIGIREG interview)

The initiative to design and implement the practice was led by the Municipality's Business and Innovation Department. This department was responsible for developing the project concept in response to local business needs, preparing the project application, and coordinating concrete activities, including outreach to small shops, organisation of workshops and courses, and ongoing dialogue with participating businesses. The Financial Department was involved in a supporting role, particularly in the project's funding and administrative aspects. This included managing ESF co-financing, ensuring compliance with financial rules, and supporting budget management and reporting for the grant.

“ *A key characteristic of the initiative was precisely that the governance structure was not complicated: the project was very hands-on and relied mainly on direct action and direct relationships with the beneficiary businesses, rather than on complex internal coordination arrangements.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

The practice involved a project manager based within the municipality who also led some of the workshops, as well as private companies and external experts engaged to provide the specialised expertise needed for the workshops and project activities.

#### Evidence about results and impacts

By the end of the project, all targets were surpassed: **305 business action plans** were prepared (versus 230), **352 digital courses** were delivered (versus 250), **176 mentor programmes** were completed (versus 150), and **381 participants** were trained (versus 250). The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted networking events, preventing the achievement of the original target (150), but the **125 networking events** held were deeply valued and led to durable local partnerships.

**More than 95% of participants rated the programme positively.** Businesses appreciated the hands-on coaching model and the relevance of the tools offered, particularly social media marketing. Interviews revealed **improved digital and strategic literacy, stronger growth ambitions, and practical gains, including greater visibility on social platforms, new customers outside the region, and more structured business processes.**

“ *... the main short-term result of the practice was an increased belief among local businesses that the digital market is relevant, feasible and something they can work with. The project exceeded its initial target of 230 businesses, reaching 300 businesses and 380 participants, of which 84% completed the whole process... In the long term, the project led to the creation of 17.5 new jobs two years after its completion, [which is associated] with an improved local tax base and overall well-being... The initiative served as proof of success for a public project, strengthening trust, collaboration and openness between businesses and the municipality and reinforcing the perception of the municipality as a legitimate and competent collaborator. In this sense, the targeted digital divide has been partially reduced, as more local businesses have entered and remained in the digital market and improved their digital practices.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

**Measuring and monitoring results and impacts.** Results and impacts of the practice have been formally assessed through an external monitoring and evaluation process conducted by University College Lillebælt, a government-funded educational institution in Denmark. Professors and bachelor's students were involved in the process and completed the evaluation report as part of their professional practice.

#### Sustainability and transferability of the practice

A full replication of the practice is not currently planned due to resource limitations. An allocation of EUR 80,000 per year to the local Shopping Svendborg organisation is intended primarily to support events, marketing, and local awareness projects, but not specifically digital projects.

“ *However,... a repeat of the project would be desirable, as the underlying challenges tend to recur over time (not necessarily for the same participants), and new digital trends keep emerging... businesses need time and resources to continuously adapt and plan for the future, which argues more for repetition or continuation of similar initiatives than for a fundamentally different design.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

The project's design, built around four core components, is relatively simple because it does not require advanced technology; instead, it relies on practical digital tools such as social media and e-commerce platforms. It is adaptable to both rural and urban contexts.

The high transferability potential is further demonstrated by the 2020 launch of a similar initiative in Bornholm and by the 2021 Regional Growth Team report's recommendation of the project as a model to follow.

### Learning from this practice

- ▶ Success factor: **a continuous, hands-on learning process throughout the entire project duration.** Workshops and classes were organised on an ongoing basis, allowing participants to build knowledge step by step, test what they had learnt in their own businesses, and then return to develop their skills further. This applied learning approach enabled the development and use of personalised digital skills in practice, rather than relying only on one-off theoretical training.
  - ▶ Challenge: **commitment of businesses to participate and stay engaged over time.** Small shop owners found it difficult to free up time to participate in activities throughout the process. At the outset, there was uncertainty and a lack of visible evidence of success. The programme itself was designed to avoid discouraging participants. It was structured into small, manageable steps, with limited time commitments and small 'packages' of knowledge that built on each other.
- “ *Businesses were encouraged to apply what they learned in practice between sessions, so they could experience concrete progress and results. This staged, incremental approach helped reduce uncertainty and made participation more realistic for time-constrained entrepreneurs.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

### Recommendations to other public authorities

- ▶ (national authorities, regional authorities, local authorities) **involve stakeholders from the project development phase.** It is crucial to stay close to the people and other stakeholders. Similar practices should be developed bottom-up rather than top-down to ensure they are suitable for the local context and address actual local needs. This is especially important in rural areas and small towns, where local pride and distinct characteristics play a significant role.

## Sources and further reading

[Danish Business Authority web page on the project](#); Independent evaluation report: '[Strengthened business in the street plan final evaluation](#)' by COWI (2022); [Recommendations from the Government's seven Regional Growth Teams](#), May 2021 (p.33).

**Summary of the DIGIREG interview** with Jens Myrup Thomsen, Business consultant in the Business and Innovation Department, Svendborg Municipality, 14 November 2025.

# EE\_Rahvaalgatus.ee: digital democracy

## DIGIREG showcase

### In a nutshell

**Involved public authority(ies):** National government, municipalities.

**Geographical coverage (NUTS3):** EE001, EE004, EE008 EE009, EE00A.

**Implementation period:** 2020-ongoing (in 2025).

**Objectives of the policy intervention:** 1) Promote e-democracy by enabling citizens to digitally draft and send signed collective proposals to local governments as well as to the Estonian Parliament.

**Target groups:** Voting residents in municipalities.

**Type of policy intervention:** Initiative.

**Funding:** Public and private. The platform's costs and maintenance are funded through the state budget, but are also contributed to by private donations. Operational costs for 2023 were around EUR 47,000 (EUR 17,000 for maintenance costs and EUR 30,000 for digital signature). About EUR 33,000 were received in the form of donations. Occasionally, the platform's small developments have been funded by donors such as the National Foundation of Civil Society or EEA/Norway Grants.

### Why this policy intervention qualifies as a DIGIREG BPP

- The portal is designed to be user-friendly and easily accessible to all citizens, regardless of their technological expertise; it is integrated with existing e-government infrastructure, thus making, for example, identity validation of citizens easier; it is transparent, allowing to track the progress of citizens' proposals and monitor how these proposals are addressed; and it has demonstrated over time that public administrations consider citizens' feedback in the legislative process, thereby strengthening civic engagement and mutual trust.
- Civic engagement in the platform is continuously monitored and lessons learnt are used to improve not only the participation process, but, most importantly, democracy and governance.
- The 'Local Level of Rahvaalgatus.ee – People's Initiative' was among the finalist best practices at the Innovation in Politics Awards 2023 in the 'Democracy Technologies' category.

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Citizens' participation in local democratic processes**



**DIGIREG interview with:** Maarja-Leena Saar, Coordinator of Rahvaalgatus.ee, Estonian Cooperation Assembly (ECA), 13 November 2025.

## Description

Rahvaalgatus.ee is a portal that supports citizens' initiatives directed at public administration. A law in Estonia allows citizens to submit initiatives to the national parliament (i.e., Riigikogu) by collecting at least 1,000 signatures, or to local authorities by collecting signatures from at least 1% of the local authority's residents with voting rights. Rahvaalgatus.ee was created in 2016 by the Estonian Cooperation Assembly (ECA) to collect signatures for initiatives addressed to the parliament. Founded in 2007, ECA is an independent think tank funded by the Office of the President of the Republic's budget. In 2020, the functions of the Rahvaalgatus.ee portal were expanded to support the submission of citizen initiatives to local authorities.

The platform allows citizens to collect signatures for initiatives (addressed to the national parliament and local authorities), co-create initiatives collectively, submit them to the relevant public authorities, and follow the related proceedings. A map of Estonia on the platform shows a real-time state-of-the-art of local initiatives, specifying the phase they are in (i.e., co-creation, signature collection, under examination, archived). Information on past initiatives is publicly available by downloading the initiatives' dataset.

Examples of citizens' initiatives involving local authorities relate to the reorganisation of the local school network. In addition to economic and social pressures, local authorities began closing or reorganising local schools, often without properly consulting residents. This led to the launch of more than 10 citizens' initiatives in 2023. Finally, these initiatives converged into a nationwide initiative with 2,116 signatures of support. Following its submission to the Parliament, the Ministry of Education introduced a measure to subsidise rural municipalities for not closing small primary schools.

Since 2020, the platform has experienced a boost in citizen participation. Data from the platform indicate that people aged 25-34 are the most active in signing citizens' initiatives, and that women account for around two-thirds of signatures. The platform is available in Estonian, Russian, and English.

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### The starting point

*The rationale for the Rahvaalgatus.ee platform is based on findings on corruption and the role of participatory platforms... ECA was the main organiser of Estonia's largest citizen assembly in 2013, in response to a corruption scandal that shocked Estonian society. From this citizen assembly, a collective proposal to act was addressed to the Parliament. A law resulted from this process, and the ECA felt a moral obligation to facilitate its implementation. As Estonia is a highly advanced country in terms of digital accessibility, ECA proposed creating a digital platform to collect citizens' signatures for this law. This platform, operational for the last 10 years, can be considered a frontrunner in democratic innovation throughout this period.*

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(DIGIREG interview)

### Framework and enabling conditions

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*We developed a platform for a specific law targeting the Riigikogu (the Estonian Parliament) following a Citizen Assembly... Then we realised that people started collecting signatures for initiatives that should have been directed to the local governments.... We decided to understand why citizens target the Parliament for problems that are legally the responsibility of city governments. Some people have low levels of education and are not sufficiently aware of institutional processes to address their issues to the proper administration... We decided five years ago to create a platform page for initiatives targeting local governments.*

(DIGIREG interview)

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A council board, composed of up to 8 members, oversees the ECA's activities. ECA is operationally run by an office of five managers (who coordinate research and projects) and collaborates with an external network of experts in social domains.

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*... Our role also includes providing support to both sides (i.e., citizens and administrations) ... Rahvaalgatus.ee offers what no one else does: the opportunity to collect signatures for initiatives while providing telephone support to both sides regarding the process. This approach allows us to prevent some conflicts and reduce the exacerbation of others that are common in digital media. We are very successful with our digital platform, but our consultancy on how to use it properly is the activity that takes up most of our time and effort.*

(DIGIREG interview)

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## Evidence about results and impacts

**In 2023, 25,076 signatures** on Rahvaalgatus.ee supported **local citizens' initiatives**.

**Rahvaalgatus.ee** targets **public administrations at two governance levels** (i.e., the local level and the central level) and, through initiatives, has become a space for interaction between them.

“ *Now, on the platform, more than 200 initiatives targeting local governments are publicly available. Some in the signature phase, others elaborated by the pertinent government and some in the follow-up phase...*

*... We are trying to showcase types of initiatives which can be launched on the platform and highlight some good examples at the local level that could be impactful and considered innovations in democracy. For example, one initiative was launched to address a sudden, significant increase in road traffic in a village following the opening of a nearby quarry. The village's inhabitants form a citizens' group to find a solution to the problem of their kids no longer being able to cross the main roads safely. Therefore, the local authority also engaged the national authority, which has the administration of primary roads. This was an example of a local initiative that engaged multiple stakeholders, i.e., a group of citizens, the local authority, and the state administration. This collaboration could be considered a positive impact.*

(DIGIREG interview)

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Between mid-2024 and mid-2025, **15% of Estonians signed initiatives on Rahvaalgatus.ee**. **One in six adults** has found a topic to support with their **digital signature**.

**In summer 2025, one initiative** targeting Parliament and related to the issue of rising food prices **received 98,000 votes, or 10% of the electorate in Estonia**. Although the Parliament failed to address it, the participatory result attracted mainstream media attention, which then favoured a shift in the public debate on the topic and mainstream media began showing greater interest in the initiatives launched on Rahvaalgatus.ee.

**In November 2025, on Rahvaalgatus.ee, more than 900 discussions** were open, **more than 700 initiatives were created, and more than 1 million signatures were collected**.

“ *... sometimes we receive criticism for the fact that a system that lowers barriers to participation, allowing all to open initiatives, reduces the relevance of proposals or the quality of solutions... We consider them ordinary people telling their stories, not experts in specific domains... In our opinion, it is not possible to put any barriers to the creation of initiatives...*

*... considering our 10-year experience with initiatives targeting the Parliament, we have noticed that the language in which parliamentary committees currently publish documents has become more accessible to the general public. It is no longer for politicians or domain experts. The same thing applies to local governments as well.*

*Additionally, we consider the engagement of people who have never participated before to be a positive effect of our platform. Similarly, it is encouraging for us that some citizens have continued to use our platform over time. This is evidence of the penetration of our platform in the Estonian society, and we believe it also fosters waves of local initiatives. A similar issue can affect local communities, and our platform gives them visibility and the opportunity to join for raising it at a higher administrative level.*

(DIGIREG interview)

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**Measuring and monitoring results and impacts.** Currently, impact measurement in Rahvaalgatus.ee is based primarily on qualitative factors. There is an effort to identify initiatives that have had an impact, with the aim of promoting the platform's adoption as a tool for open participatory democracy. However, the primary goal is not to assess the success or failure of the initiatives themselves. The assumption is that citizens do not need legal preparation to propose an initiative, which can be accepted or rejected. If citizens have a specific need, the platform allows them to aggregate to find a solution. There is no monitoring of citizens' satisfaction with the obtained solutions, if any.

Still, there is monitoring of reputable national and international sources that reference Rahvaalgatus.ee, and related articles, studies, research, and papers are collected. A 2024 paper compared public-participation instruments in Finland and Estonia, where citizens can submit proposals to the national parliament, thereby influencing the agenda of political decision-making and public debate through digital infrastructure. The intention is to establish a research collaboration in the near future to further investigate the impact of Rahvaalgatus.ee's 10-year experience as a digital platform for civic engagement and democratic participation.

### Sustainability and transferability of the practice

Sustainability of Rahvaalgatus.ee depends on funding. The platform is financially supported by the national government but not fully institutionalised. The budget is negotiated every year. Given the significant achievements in recent years, there is a limited concern about public funding. However, as funding remains a key issue, diversification of sources is increasing, especially through donations of any size from people engaged in the signatory processes and through consideration of research, cooperation, and development projects at the European level.

Initiatives at the local level are expected to grow organically, whereas those at the national level require greater effort to reach more citizens and enhance civic literacy. The platform's growth capacity also depends on the quality of participatory processes, which are at risk of being affected by increasingly polarised opinions and disinformation campaigns.

The platform is replicable in any country, provided it aligns with national law provisions.

### Learning from this practice

- ▶ Success factor: **a user support service with an intermediary role.** Staff are trained to be empathetic toward all issues, whatever citizens bring, even if they react emotionally. The support service also addresses public administrators, explaining that they should engage in dialogue with citizens about the issues raised.
- ▶ Success factor: **independence of the platform.** Trust of citizens and administrations in Rahvaalgatus.ee as a digital tool for participatory democracy is key. Initiatives on the portal are bottom-up and cross-partisan. There are no algorithms or like-based ranking systems that select or prioritise them.
- ▶ Challenge: **misuse of the platform by victims of disinformation or misinformation.** The platform hosts initiatives on the same topic that take opposing positions. It is essential that people with different views understand the reasons behind diverse opinions. However, misuse is expected to increase not due to a lack of digital literacy, but rather to biased information circulating on social media.

### Recommendations to other public authorities

- ▶ (national authorities, local authorities) **give the right importance to civic education, also for adults, when using digital platforms for participatory democracy.** The effectiveness of these digital platforms relies on the quality of public information and citizens' ability to recognise it.

“ *We have the opportunity, and it could be the right time to build a new kind of public digital spaces.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

- ▶ (national authorities) **consider that the effectiveness of a large-scale democratic participatory mechanism is a long-term mission.** The implementation and institutionalisation of Rahvaalgatus.ee as a digital platform for a nationwide participatory mechanism have occurred over a 10-year period for initiatives targeting the Parliament and a five-year period for those targeting local authorities.

“ *It cannot be a revolution. Instead, it should be a lengthy, slow process. We implemented it, but for the final stage of institutionalisation, it is necessary to get clear who is the owner of participatory democracy.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

### Sources and further reading

[Rahvaalgatus.ee portal](#); [ECA 2023 activity and impact report](#); [The Innovation in Politics Institute's 'Best Practices Hub'](#); [Estonian Cooperation Assembly \(ECA\) on the impact of Rahvaalgatus.ee](#); [European Citizens' Initiative Forum on the success factors of Rahvaalgatus.ee](#); Huss O., (2024), [The social construction of anti-corruption technologies: Analysing the e-participation platform rahvaalgatus.ee in Estonia](#); M. L. Saar, O. Pekonen, M. Olesk, H. Hiilamo (2024), [Citizens' initiatives in Finland and Estonia](#); [YouTube video on Rahvaalgatus.ee](#).

**Summary of the DIGIREG interview** with Maarja-Leena Saar, Coordinator of Rahvaalgatus.ee, Estonian Cooperation Assembly (ECA), 13 November 2025.

# ES\_CapacitaTIC+55

## DIGIREG showcase

### In a nutshell

**Involved public authority(ies):** Region of Castilla-La Mancha.

**Geographical coverage (NUTS3):** ES421, ES422, ES423, ES424, ES425.

**Implementation period:** 2016-2023 & 2023-ongoing (in 2025).

**Objectives of the policy intervention:** 1) Improve the quality of life and employability of people aged 55+ through the learning of new technologies. 2) Overcome the lack of training and employment opportunities in rural regions. 3) Reduce isolation and exclusion.

**Target groups:** Individuals aged 55+, with particular attention to women.

**Type of policy intervention:** Programme.

**Funding:** Public. The total budget of the first edition is EUR 3.5 million. Co-funded (80%) by the ESF through the Regional Operational Programme ESF 2014/2020 of Castilla-La Mancha, Priority Axis 3 'Investment in education, training and improvement of professional skills and lifelong learning', and by the Government of Castilla-La Mancha.

### Why this policy intervention qualifies as a DIGIREG BPP

- The practice is characterised by a high dissemination among potential beneficiaries and the general public. It was based on a 'Communications and Outreach Plan' that envisioned the use of a wide variety of communication channels, media, and tools.
- The programme encompasses innovative elements such as the use of new technologies for dissemination and communication purposes as well as for implementation. For example, technological and employability counselling relies on a web-based tool that analyses beneficiaries' prior technological level, providing preliminary guidance on the most suitable training path.
- The practice was meant to contribute to addressing the increasing number of unemployed people aged 55+ (mainly women) recorded in the region by strengthening beneficiaries' digital skills, consolidating their self-esteem, and supporting their integration into employment and/or entrepreneurship. By doing so, it importantly developed collaborative synergies with other public instruments aimed at supporting the employment of senior individuals.
- In 2017, the programme received an award from the e-Learning Providers Association (APeL) in the category of 'Best Social Solution' for its user-friendly and intuitive e-learning platform.

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Digital skills development**

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Employability enhancement**



**DIGIREG interview with:** Eugenia Fernández Alonso, Director, INCISO Integración, 5 December 2025.

## Description

Promoted by regional Ministry of Work and Social Welfare, the programme kicked off in 2016 and was structured around the collaboration with over 200 organisations including social centres (providing community services and support, often serving as venues for training sessions), municipal libraries (providing computer labs), training centres (contributing with educational resources and expertise), women's associations, seniors centres and business associations/groups (representing local businesses and feeding the programme with analysis of the market needs and employment opportunities).

Key features of the initiative included the use of new technologies in the communication and dissemination plan; the design of a web-based technology and employability advisory tool for self-assessment and training guidance; and the development of an e-learning platform tailored to the training pathways, with highly interactive and intuitive content. Moreover, to achieve the specific goal of ensuring that everyone in the region could participate in the programme, 25 computerised mobile classrooms were deployed to reach the most remote areas.

The learning offer was free of charge and covered a wide variety of formats, including specialised workshops (e.g., smartphone use, online communication and interaction, e-government, job search, online banking, and online shopping) and basic computer training, both online and in person. An opening 3-hour 'masterclass' session is complemented by modular 'training pathways' tailored to each individual's background, deepening digital skills to align with personal ambitions and needs.

Because of the large response received by the programme at the territorial level, the regional government invested in a second edition 'NEW CapacitaTIC+55' within the framework of the new Regional Programme for Active Ageing, co-financed through the Castilla-La Mancha ESF+ Programme 2027.

“

### The starting point

*The initiative arose from the alignment of European, national, and regional digital literacy policies with the social reality of Castilla-La Mancha, a rural region with an ageing population and increasingly digitised public services. The digital divide was evident in terms of connectivity, resources, and skills. INCISO conducted a diagnostic phase through brief masterclasses to identify specific needs in each municipality.*

*... at the national level, Spain had a National Digital Literacy Strategy, identifying older adults, especially in rural areas, as a priority group and at the regional level, Castilla-La Mancha had its own strategies aligned with national and European goals, recognising the urgent need to train older people given the rapid digitalisation of public services.*

*Territorially, Castilla-La Mancha is large, predominantly rural, and significantly aged, with many essential services, from banking to public administration, becoming exclusively digital. This created a widening gap between the digitalisation of services and older people's digital abilities, reinforcing the urgency of the project.*

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(DIGIREG interview)

### Framework and enabling conditions

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*Several key aspects were taken into account: the state of digitalisation in the region, including low connectivity and limited equipment in many rural municipalities; the existing digital divides, identified both through INCISO's previous work and regional studies; the European, national and regional policy frameworks supporting digital training and inclusion; and the availability of ESF funding, which made it possible to implement a wide-reaching, multi-year initiative.*

*The project started with a diagnostic phase, conducted through short 'masterclasses' (2016–2017), enabling INCISO to map local needs in each territory and design flexible training itineraries.*

”

(DIGIREG interview)

The initiative relies on cooperation among multiple stakeholders. The Regional Government of Castilla-La Mancha funds the project through annual public calls for proposals. Its Directorate General for Older Persons (within the regional Ministry of Work and Social Welfare) provides strategic monitoring. Implementation of the initiative is based on annual agreements between the regional government and INCISO Integración, a social non-profit organisation operating across the region that, in collaboration with the Directorate-General for Older Persons, designed CapacitaTIC+55 in 2016. Within the programme, through territorial teams deployed in each province of the region, INCISO collaborates with municipalities through agreements for the use of public spaces, as well as with entities such as Chambers of Commerce, Women's Centres, vocational training centres, and provincial councils. Other stakeholders include local associations and community organisations, centres for older people and local media.

INCISO provides teachers qualified for adult education and training in digital skills; technical staff specialised in employment and training programmes; experts in project management for the administrative and financial aspects of ESF projects; and IT specialists. It also benefits from a large network of teachers across the region.

### Evidence about results and impacts

The programme trained **more than 11,000 individuals aged 55+** throughout the region, with **65% of beneficiaries being women**.

In terms of territorial coverage, **250 entities were reached**, of which **132 entities were engaged**. **All provinces were covered** with a special focus on ITI (Integrated Territorial Investments) zones (that cover some 35% of the territory). In practice, almost all the municipalities across the five provinces in the region were reached.

The programme is reported to have **created 125 direct jobs**.

“ *The short-term results [include] significant improvements in digital literacy among older adults; the strengthening of local public services ([e.g.,] some municipalities created digital service units or small ICT hubs for older citizens); [and] the reduction of isolation and increased confidence in using digital tools. [In terms of] long-term impacts, many participants have accessed the labour market thanks to digital skills that enable them to apply for jobs or complete online administrative procedures; others have returned to formal education or vocational training. The project not only educates but also integrates people back into active life, socially and economically.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

**Measuring and monitoring results and impacts.** The project is monitored through ESF indicators, including participant counts (those entering the job market and those accessing formal education), completion rates, and satisfaction levels. Annual reports combine quantitative evaluation with qualitative findings.

### Sustainability and transferability of the practice

The project is ongoing, and the programme's sustainability depends on the availability of a substantial budget and therefore requires a clear and strong political will and commitment from the regional government across programming periods. The programme's continuity over the years has gradually established trust among the local stakeholders and facilitated the implementation of the activities. For example, some municipalities have become more proactive, directly requesting training each year.

“ *.... the strategy cannot be discontinued, given the complete digitalisation of essential services (banking, digital identity, online appointments, etc.), and the vulnerability of older people, especially in rural areas, who risk exclusion if not trained annually.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

The implemented model is highly transferable to rural territories across Europe. Requirements for its transferability, as well as for its sustainability, include building an extensive stakeholder network, which, in turn, depends on implementing a comprehensive communication and dissemination plan.

### Learning from this practice

- ▶ Success factor: **an ambitious territorial reach**. The initiative has reached a very large number of municipalities, including the most remote ones.
- ▶ Success factor: **the deployment of a mobile training infrastructure**. The initiative physically brings equipment (computers, tablets), internet connectivity, projectors and screens to each municipality, setting up temporary classrooms in areas lacking digital resources.
- ▶ Success factor: **the implementation of an extensive communication and outreach strategy**. Communication channels include local radio, press, videos, and visits to each locality.
- ▶ Success factor: **the engagement of local trainers**. Hiring teachers from the territory increased trust, cultural proximity, and responsiveness.

- ▶ Success factor: **the combination of the social and digital dimensions.** Beyond digital skills, the initiative fosters socialisation, emotional support, and community cohesion, all of which are essential for older learners.
- ▶ Success factor: **a continuous adaptation of the initiative.** The programme changes every year. The regular evaluation processes involving learners, trainers, partners, and technical staff enable the identification of good practices, the detection of weaknesses, and the adjustment of training itineraries. The initiative evolves continuously rather than requiring a single major redesign.
- ▶ Challenge: **demanding annual training targets.** The European Social Fund rules require large numbers of learners and do not allow participant repetition.
- ▶ Challenge: **very diverse learning needs.** Learning needs range from using smartphones to securing digital identity, mastering office tools and accessing online banking. Short, modular training units called 'encapsulated training' have enabled participants to choose training based on their needs.
- ▶ Challenge: **ineffectiveness of e-learning for older people.** Face-to-face learning has been prioritised for older people, and online training modules have been offered only as complementary tools.
- ▶ Challenge: **limited digital connectivity in rural areas.** The initiative provides internet access directly where it is not available.

#### Recommendations to other public authorities

- ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **build on the real needs and expectations of older people.** Older people and municipalities should be consulted in designing training that addresses people's needs rather than ending with an intervention defined by political or technical assumptions. Training must be taken to the territory, not the other way around.
- ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **establish strong networks with local actors.** Proximity and empathy are key.
- ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **use flexible, modular training paths and ensure continuous evaluation and annual redesign of training programmes.** Successful implementation requires adaptability.
- ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **prioritise the human dimension.** Digital learning for older adults is not only technical but also social, emotional, and relational. Online training can complement but cannot replace in-person learning for this target group.

## Sources and further reading

[Website of the CapacitaTIC+55 programme](#), [CapacitaTIC+55 YouTube video](#); [EuropaSeSiente award](#), news dated 22/09/23; [European Parliament study 'Research for CULT Committee' \(2018\)](#).

**Summary of the DIGIREG interview** with Eugenia Fernández Alonso, Director, INCISO Integración, 5 December 2025.

# FI\_Broadband Support Programme

## DIGIREG showcase

### In a nutshell

**Involved public authority(ies):** National government, municipalities.

**Geographical coverage (NUTS3):** FI1DA, FI1DB, FI1DC, FI1D8, FI1D5, FI1D9, FI1D7, FI196, FI198, FI199, FI19A, FI19B, FI1C1, FI1C2, FI1C5, FI1C6, FI1C7, FI1B1.

**Implementation period:** 2022-2025.

**Objectives of the policy intervention:** 1) Support the building of fixed broadband networks in areas not sufficiently attractive for commercial operators. 2) Make high-speed broadband available to over 30,000 households.

**Target groups:** Municipalities with areas where commercial broadband will not be available before 2025.

**Type of policy intervention:** Programme, Public subsidies.

**Funding:** Public. Financed through the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). Total budget: EUR 32 million.

### Why this policy intervention qualifies as a DIGIREG BPP

- The country's consistent strategy of using public aid to fill the gaps where commercial investment is not viable (especially in sparsely populated and rural areas) is crucial in achieving widespread broadband access and preventing a digital divide between urban and rural regions. The predecessor project ('Fast Broadband Project') was assessed as successful in building broadband networks in rural regions (e.g., Lapland and North Karelia) and necessary to support municipalities in doing so. For example, Lapland, the largest and northernmost region of Finland, is amongst the top 10 NUTS3 across Europe for the indicators 'Optic fibre per capita' and 'Optic fibre over density'.
- The programme is based on a cooperative interaction of Regional Councils with municipalities.
- There is local ownership of the network construction projects as the municipalities are requested to contribute financially to them.
- In 2021, the government set by decree a minimum quality standard for newly built fast broadband networks, namely a speed of 300 Mbps for incoming traffic and 100 Mbps for outgoing traffic.
- The government is currently assessing the possibility of extending the support programme, given the positive impact achieved.

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Digital infrastructure deployment**



**DIGIREG interview with:** a representative of Traficom, 19 November 2025.

## Description

The programme was launched in 2022 upon the evidence that the implementation of the 'Fast Broadband Project' (2011-2021) (that led to the deployment of 27,500 km of optic fibre and the availability of broadband for over 130,000 households with a state contribution of EUR 60 million) had still left areas where fibre networks were not going to be constructed by commercial operators if not supported by state aid. Hence, the Broadband Support Programme targeted municipalities with only mobile network coverage, acknowledging that the upgrade was strategic with respect to both connection speed and energy efficiency, but that local authorities faced budget constraints in investing in the infrastructure. It was based on the enactment of a new Act on Support for Broadband Construction (1262/2020), which came into force on 1 January 2021.

The process for distributing aid required the submission of project proposals by Regional Councils. These project proposals were prepared in cooperation with concerned municipalities, as the government grant was conditional on municipalities' participation in the construction costs with a variable share (8%, 22% or 33%) depending on, among other criteria, population density and the municipality's financial capacity. The project proposals were subject to market analysis by Traficom, the Finnish Transport and Communications Agency, to confirm the areas' eligibility for state aid. Once the market analyses were completed, Regional Councils could arrange competitive tendering for broadband subsidy project areas to select network builders. The selected network builders would then request a subsidy from Traficom. The companies that received state aid under the 2022 programme are building fibre-optic networks and are responsible for operating them and providing broadband services to end users in those areas.

Geographically, the programme covered municipalities in Southern Savonia, Pirkanmaa, Northern Savonia, North Ostrobothnia, North Karelia, South Karelia, South Ostrobothnia, Central Ostrobothnia, Uusimaa, Päijät-Häme and Southwest Finland. The first network construction project was funded in 2022. Broadband construction activities for all projects granted state aid over the period 2022-2023 will run up to 2025.

### The starting point

“ Finland has a long history of promoting fast networks through state aid schemes, particularly in areas where there would otherwise be no incentive to build networks. Finland has a small population and extensive distances to cover. For this reason, there is not enough demand and building fast networks is very expensive. This programme was launched as a continuation of previous programmes to ensure access to very high-capacity networks around Finland. The first Broadband Support state aid scheme began over 15 years ago, following a political decision by the national government to support fast networks and give access to 100 Mbit/s networks to all households and companies. Since then, we have had various state aid schemes, and the latest Broadband Support Programme, supported through the Recovery and Resilience Fund, started in 2022 and is expected to end after this year [i.e., 2025]. ”

(DIGIREG interview)

### Framework and enabling conditions

“ Many factors have been considered in the programme's design and implementation, primarily national and European digitalisation policies, including the Digital Decade target requiring that everyone have a 1 Gigabit connection by 2030. These policies have impacted policy decisions in Finland. Still, implementing these policies has required funding. To ensure the continuation of the projects, the various Broadband Support Programmes have always required financing, either from the national budget or the EU budget. ”

(DIGIREG interview)

Most tasks related to implementing the programme are carried out by Traficom staff in the Digital Infrastructure and Communications Markets Unit within the Information and Future Connections Sector. Their work is supported by other units, such as the unit responsible for administrative issues. The implementation of the programme requires a range of expertise, primarily economic, technical, and legal expertise.

“ Mostly, the expertise comes from prior work already within Traficom. Because we have had various Broadband Support Programmes in place for many years, our expertise has developed through experience. But now, because the funding comes from the Resilience and Recovery Fund, there are specific rules and procedures that we have needed to learn, consider and adapt to. Otherwise, state aid processes are already familiar to us, so we are well acquainted with these rules and procedures in our daily work. ”

(DIGIREG interview)

At present, apart from Traficom, the most relevant institutional actors involved in the Broadband Support Programme are the Ministry of Transport and Communications, which oversees Traficom, the Ministry of Finance, which is responsible for national budgeting, and the Finnish State Treasury, which is responsible for the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) governance and reporting system. There is also close cooperation with the Finnish Food Authority, which is responsible for granting similar aid for broadband infrastructure development using Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) funds.

Municipalities are key stakeholders. They identify areas requiring broadband infrastructure and are responsible for tendering broadband projects. Municipalities are also importantly engaged in the initial and final phases of supported projects. The responsibilities of municipalities and Traficom are clearly defined in the Broadband Support Act.

### Evidence about results and impacts

**EUR 27 million** of the EUR 32 million government budget for fibre optic network construction was allocated to **40 projects**.

Funding was granted to **17 network builders in 11 regions and 32 municipalities**. Notably, several of these network builders are owned by municipalities.

Although not solely determined by the Broadband Support Programme, **the fibre-optic network was available to 61% of Finnish households at the end of September 2023** (+9 percentage points compared to the end of 2022). Traficom reports that fibre optic availability increased the most in the provinces of South Ostrobothnia (+19 percentage points) and North Karelia (+17 percentage points), and that increases of over 10 percentage points also occurred in Kainuu, Central Finland, Kanta-Häme, Lapland, and Central Ostrobothnia.

“ *As short-term results, we have new networks in areas where they would not otherwise have been built. In the long term, we have made further progress in bridging the digital divide in Finland, and through these new networks, we are enhancing digital equality across Finland. A study by the Association of Finnish Cities and Municipalities finds that the deployment of fibre networks promotes equality among residents and supports local business activities throughout Finland. It was found that high-speed connectivity networks across the country are very important.*

(DIGIREG interview)

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**Measuring and monitoring results and impacts.** The Ministry of Transport and Communications commissions the assessment of each broadband aid scheme. In 2023, Sitowise Oy conducted an ex-post impact assessment of the previous scheme on behalf of the Ministry, finding that it had a positive impact on the construction of fibre networks in sparsely populated areas, municipal vitality, and opportunities for teleworking and training. From a quantitative perspective, the former Broadband Support schemes enabled the construction of new fibre networks that serve over 130,000 households and companies in Finland. As the last programme is still underway, there is no public data on its results yet. However, Traficom expects to provide access to an additional 16,000 households and companies.

### Sustainability and transferability of the practice

While significant coverage has been achieved through various programmes supporting broadband deployment across the country, there are still many white areas. At the end of November 2025, there is no indication that the programme will continue. Its continuation depends heavily on dedicated funding, either from government budgets or from EU sources. A funding option to explore is the CAP, which provides funding through at least 2027.

The programme's implementation is closely linked to the country's governance structure and the financial and operational role played by municipalities in delivering digital infrastructure and solutions. Hence, its transferability to other countries would require adaptation.

### Learning from this practice

- ▶ Success factor: **long-standing experience in supporting broadband deployment at the territorial level.**
- ▶ Success factor: **clear roles for the institutional actors involved, defined by law** (i.e., the Broadband Support Act).
- ▶ Challenge: **bureaucratic processes and redundant reporting requirements** (such as the same aspects to be reported to different instances).

- Challenge: **strict timelines for complex projects.** Building broadband networks takes a long time, generally from two to five years. For example, the timelines set in the RRF make it difficult to deploy broadband in Finland, where deployment cannot occur in winter.

#### Recommendations to other public authorities

- (national authorities) **establish close cooperation with local stakeholders for sharing information about interventions at the territorial level.**

“ Notwithstanding the potential budgetary and legislative issues that are prerequisites for such aid schemes, we found that close cooperation with stakeholders is essential to ensure the success of such projects. For example, we at Traficom have extensive knowledge of the infrastructure deployed in Finland, but, in the end, citizens and companies located in territories lacking good digital infrastructure need to be active together with their municipality when aid programmes are available. This is necessary to allocate aid to the right areas. ”

(DIGIREG interview)

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## Sources and further reading

[Broadband Support Programme's website](#); [Ex-post evaluation of the Broadband Support Programme](#); [Ministry of Transport and Communication's news](#) dated 16/12/21; Ministry of Transport and Communications (2024), [Assessment study](#); [Press release of the Ministry of Transport and Communication](#) about the Sitowise Oy study dated 13/03/24; [Various online news](#) from Traficom website.

**Summary of the DIGIREG interview** with a representative of Traficom, 19 November 2025.

# FR\_Aladdin

## DIGIREG showcase

### In a nutshell

**Involved public authority(ies):** Bordeaux Metropolitan Area.

**Geographical coverage (NUTS3):** FRI12.

**Implementation period:** 2021-ongoing (in 2025).

**Objectives of the policy intervention:** 1) Reduce digital inequalities across the metropolitan area.

**Target groups:** Disadvantaged individuals, especially from deprived neighbourhoods.

**Type of policy intervention:** Project, Partnership, Public subsidies.

**Funding:** Public. Allocated EUR 150,000 per year.

### Why this policy intervention qualifies as a DIGIREG BPP

- The approach to combat digital exclusion is structurally built into the inclusion policy of the Bordeaux Metropolitan Area. In addition, the project acknowledges that digital inclusion is an important lever in the fight against poverty and is essential for accessing rights and services, both private and public.
- Aladdin became a flagship project of the Bordeaux Metropolitan Area, in particular to target vulnerable people living in poverty in the so-called 'Priority Neighbourhoods' of a public policy aimed at reducing social, economic, and urban inequalities.
- The project created a network of associations, companies of the social sector and public actors (libraries, digital public spaces, etc.) close to the target groups and capable of supporting them.

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Digital skills development**



**DIGIREG interview with:** Anna Lebey, Digital Inclusion Project Manager & Coordinator of the ALADDIN project, Digital Inclusion team, Directorate General for Digital Technology and Information Systems, Bordeaux Métropole; Marianne Massaloux, Co-manager & support for the coordination of the ALADDIN project, Cooperative Médias-Cité; Louise Prouteau, European project coordinator (joined after the launch of ALADDIN), Bordeaux Métropole, 12 December 2025.

## Description

The Bordeaux Metropolitan Area (MA) [or Bordeaux Métropole] is an intercommunal structure in the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region, home to nearly half of the Gironde department's population. Aladdin is a project implemented as part of the National Strategy for the Prevention and Fight Against Poverty and is framed by an agreement signed in late 2020 between the Bordeaux MA and the Prefecture of Nouvelle Aquitaine to combat poverty. The project aims to improve digital inclusion for the most disadvantaged groups, including individuals in precarious situations, vulnerable persons, excluded persons, refugees, and residents in neighbourhoods with specific needs. It seeks to familiarise these persons with digital technology (messaging tools, digital identity, security) and equip them with the skills and digital literacy needed to support greater autonomy and access to rights, employment, and social integration.

Through public calls, a network of 'e-inclusion entities' (e.g., local associations and organisations) was created across the metropolitan area to identify, guide and train the target groups. These entities received grants to deliver 8-hour workshops, divided into several sessions, for the target groups.

Within the Bordeaux MA, the practice is complemented by other initiatives aimed, overall, at building a territory of digital solidarity. Notably, the Bordeaux MA established a digital inclusion observatory to understand local realities and guide on-the-ground action.

### The starting point

“ *ALADDIN was developed in response to a growing awareness of persistent and profound digital inequalities, particularly affecting socially and economically vulnerable populations. While digitalisation is increasingly shaping access to public services, employment, and social participation, a significant portion of the population remains excluded from basic digital skills. The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst, highlighting how digital technology can exacerbate pre-existing social vulnerabilities and create new ones. For Bordeaux Métropole, digital inclusion has thus emerged not only as a technical or educational issue, but as a central social policy challenge, closely linked to access to rights, autonomy, and social cohesion. ALADDIN is also aligned with national policies, particularly the French strategy to combat poverty, implemented locally by the Prefecture. This framework explicitly recognises digital inclusion as a lever for reducing poverty and social exclusion. Bordeaux Métropole has been identified as a relevant local actor to address this issue, given its scale, institutional capacity, and the existence of a local ecosystem already engaged in these challenges.*

(DIGIREG interview)

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### Framework and enabling conditions

“ *Several key elements guided the design of this practice: the extent of the digital divide in the metropolitan area, particularly in terms of basic digital skills and trust in using online services; the orientation of national and European policies on digital skills, consistent with the objectives of the EU Digital Decade; the availability of targeted public funding within the framework of anti-poverty policies; the existence of a dense network of local actors already active in digital inclusion, although sometimes fragmented and unevenly resourced; the choice of the metropolitan scale as the level of action, allowing for both strategic coordination and proximity to local needs. ...rather than creating a new system, the practice was designed by building on existing structures and strengthening existing initiatives through a common framework.*

(DIGIREG interview)

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In addition to Bordeaux MA, the project implementation relied on the participation of Médias-Cité, responsible for territorial coordination and network management; Experteet, a training organisation supporting the skills development of social and digital mediators; and approximately 30 local organisations per year that directly deliver digital mediation services to end users. Collaboration with external actors has been established through formal frameworks, including public procurement contracts, grant agreements, and a network charter outlining reciprocal commitments. In parallel, long-standing informal relationships built on trust greatly facilitated cooperation and the initiative's adaptability.

Within Bordeaux MA, collaboration relied on formal mechanisms, including political approvals, management and administrative procedures, and interdepartmental coordination. The project was fully integrated into existing governance structures, ensuring its institutional legitimacy and continuity. The political and decision-making bodies were involved to formally approve the project and its objectives. The Digital Inclusion team of the Digital Department played a central coordinating role. The team was responsible for defining ALADDIN's stra-

tegic directions, managing relations with the central government, overseeing operational implementation, and monitoring results. Other departments provided support, including the Legal Department for drafting agreements, contracts, and grant mechanisms, and the Finance Department for managing public funding and budget monitoring.

The implementation of ALADDIN mobilised a diverse range of professional profiles: public officials specialising in digital inclusion and project coordination; project managers with expertise in social and territorial engineering; legal and financial managers involved in contractual arrangements; and trainers and digital mediators working within local organisations.

**About capacity building.** Bordeaux MA already possessed a certain level of institutional maturity in digital inclusion. Consequently, no large-scale internal training was required for its staff to deploy ALADDIN. ALADDIN significantly contributed to strengthening the network's capacity by providing targeted training for involved trainers and facilitators; encouraging the exchange of best practices and peer learning; and fostering the professionalisation and stabilisation of local practices through common tools and shared objectives. Beyond technical skills, the project required strong abilities in coordination, facilitation, trust-building, and a nuanced understanding of vulnerable populations.

### Evidence about results and impacts

Over the period 2021-2022, **30 'e-inclusion entities' trained around 1,000 individuals.**

In February 2025, **the number of trained individuals was over 3,000.**

“ *In the short term, ALADDIN has enabled more than 3,000 people to acquire basic digital skills, particularly in email use, digital identity, and online security. Participants expressed renewed confidence and a greater sense of security when using digital tools.*  
*In the longer term, the initiative has contributed to structuring and sustaining a local ecosystem of digital inclusion stakeholders; improving coordination and networking among organisations; [and] partially reducing certain targeted digital divides related to essential uses.* ”  
 (DIGIREG interview)

**Measuring and monitoring results and impacts.** The practice was monitored using a combination of quantitative indicators, such as the number of participants, workshops, and organisations involved, and qualitative elements, such as satisfaction surveys, interviews, and beneficiary feedback. Reporting methods were intentionally simplified and aligned with the existing tools of local organisations. Continuous monitoring allowed for adjustments to the implementation over time.

### Sustainability and transferability of the practice

The initiative was initially co-financed by the French government and Bordeaux MA over a three-year period. Having demonstrated its effectiveness and relevance since 2025, ALADDIN has been fully funded by Bordeaux MA and integrated into standard metropolitan policies, ensuring its continuation subject to annual budgetary decisions.

The project's approach can be implemented in neighbourhoods of big cities or in small cities. It implies the capacity to mobilise public and private stakeholders and to create networks of associations to reach the target audience.

### Learning from this practice

- ▶ Success factor: **a network approach that fosters collective intelligence.**
- ▶ Success factor: **stable and predictable funding.**
- ▶ Success factor: **a climate of trust between public authorities and community organisations.**
- ▶ Success factor: **a focus on human support rather than solely on technical tools.**
- ▶ Success factor: **the selection of an appropriate territorial scale.**

- ▶ Challenge: **relying on a decentralised, multi-stakeholder model was demanding as it increased the management complexity.**
- ▶ Challenge: **mobilising audiences that are very far away from digital technology.**
- ▶ Challenge: **managing the administrative complexity inherent in public programmes.**
- ▶ Challenge: **establishing large-scale communication to increase the project's visibility among targeted audiences.**
- ▶ Something that could have been done differently: **broader communication with the public would likely have further increased the initiative's reach.**

#### Recommendations to other public authorities

- ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **prioritise investment in human support rather than solely in technological tools.**
- ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **start from the real needs of the target audiences and local areas.**
- ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **rely on recognised and trusted local stakeholders.**
- ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **allow pedagogical flexibility to local organisations.**
- ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **rely on stable public funding, establish territorial coordination, and look for clear political commitment for the sustainability of initiatives.**

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## Sources and further reading

[Aladdin's website](#); [Bordeaux Métropole Council's document](#) dated 07/02/2025; [Bordeaux Métropole web page on digital inclusion](#).

**Summary of the DIGIREG interview** with Anna Lebey, Digital Inclusion Project Manager & Coordinator of the ALADDIN project, Digital Inclusion team, Directorate General for Digital Technology and Information Systems, Bordeaux Métropole; Marianne Massaloux, Co-manager & support for the coordination of the ALADDIN project, Cooperative Médias-Cité; Louise Prouteau, European project coordinator (joined after the launch of ALADDIN), Bordeaux Métropole, 12 December 2025.

# IE\_DIGICLARE local network of digital hubs

## DIGIREG showcase

### In a nutshell

**Involved public authority(ies):** Clare County Council.

**Geographical coverage (NUTS3):** IE051.

**Implementation period:** 2018-ongoing (in 2025).

**Objectives of the policy intervention:** 1) Support rural communities through the provision of local office facilities with high-speed broadband connectivity in rural locations. 2) Facilitate remote working in rural areas.

**Target groups:** Citizens, businesses, and communities.

**Type of policy intervention:** Initiative, within a strategy.

**Funding:** Public and private. County budget and financial contributions by the communities involved in the development of the hubs.

### Why this policy intervention qualifies as a DIGIREG BPP

- The digital hub model is based on the close collaboration of the county authority with the target communities. Buildings to be retrofitted are jointly selected, enabling the involvement of local stakeholders and adding value to unused public facilities.
- The mid-term review of the county's rural development strategy highlights the key contribution these communities gave in supporting the initiative *'including inter alia their own buildings and funds, successful funding applications, completing the tender process and engaging contractors'*.
- The initiative makes broadband infrastructure accessible in rural areas, hence enhancing their attractiveness to new business opportunities, including remote work. The established facilities use broadband and digital technology as key enablers of rural development.
- The socio-economic impact quantified for the Ennistymon Digital Hub demonstrates the benefits implied by the practice, both for the individual users and for the community as a whole.

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Digital hub establishment**

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Job creation, tax revenue generation, depopulation reduction**



**DIGIREG interview with:** Jackie Dermody, IS Analyst Developer, Digital Transformation Department, Clare County Council, 16 December 2025.

## Description

As envisaged in its 'Rural Development Strategy 2026', the county provided support to community-based and community-run social enterprises for the setup of multi-service centres where individuals and businesses, regardless of their activity sector, could get access to digital infrastructure, digital technologies and digital services (e.g., conferencing facilities and small-scale training). The establishment of these 'digital hubs' was also supported by the provisions of the 'Clare Digital Strategy', according to which enterprises, entrepreneurs and local inhabitants should have access to high-speed broadband in their own community.

The intervention model involves identifying an existing community facility (e.g., a national school building) that needs renovation and, afterwards, equipping it in cooperation with local organisations. Each digital hub offers desks, co-working spaces, and conference facilities at affordable prices.

The initiative started being implemented in 2018, and before the pandemic breakout, it established four digital hubs. Since 2020, the popularity of digital hubs has increased alongside a surge in demand for remote working facilities. In 2024, the network of hubs was still expanding across the county through the renovation of an existing building as part of a landmark regeneration intervention named 'Scariff Integrated Rural Regeneration Project'.

The county's 'Renewed rural development strategy 2030' points to DigiClare as the entity responsible for completing the digital hub network and integrating it with the Midwest network.

The focus of the initiative also aligned with the target areas specified under different funding strands, enabling access to funding under grant programmes provided by the national Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD), i.e., Town and Village Renewal Scheme, Rural Regeneration and Development Fund and funding provided by Connected Hubs, which is part of the Western Development Commission.

In addition, DigiClare was designed to align with DRCD's digital strategy, including Ireland's National Broadband Plan and the Digital Decade Programme, to foster inclusive, vibrant, and digitally connected rural communities by improving infrastructure and digital skills. Key actions involve developing rural enterprise hubs, promoting digital inclusion, and integrating smart technologies into services.

Most of DigiClare's financing came from the DRCD, with matched funding from Clare County Council in many cases. The main grant schemes utilised were the Town and Village Renewal Scheme and the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, which enabled connectivity in smaller towns and villages across the county. Participation in the WiFi4EU programme secured funding for free community Wi-Fi in the county's larger urban centres.

### The starting point

“ The DigiClare initiative was developed in response to the significant digital divide experienced in rural areas of County Clare. Many communities lacked reliable broadband access and suitable spaces for remote work, education, and digital engagement. This gap became even more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when connectivity and digital skills were essential for work, learning, and accessing public services.

Our mission is clear: to make sure everyone in County Clare can access modern digital services... We are committed to improving digital access and broadband infrastructure across the county, ensuring that rural communities are never left behind.

The context behind this practice is rooted in both social and economic needs. Clare is a largely rural county, and without intervention, residents risked exclusion from opportunities available in more urbanised areas. DigiClare addresses this by providing a network of digital hubs that offer high-speed connectivity, co-working spaces, and digital skills programmes.

(DIGIREG interview)

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### Framework and enabling conditions

“ Clare County Council assessed the county's digital infrastructure against national and EU benchmarks, including the Digital Decade objectives for universal connectivity and digital skills. As part of the process, Clare County Council devised a digital strategy in consultation with all stakeholders, including individuals, organisations, and representative bodies from all sectors of Clare communities. This highlighted the importance of access to high-speed broadband infrastructure for rural communities in Clare.

(DIGIREG interview)

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The intervention was devised, managed and implemented by the Digital & Broadband Department (now Digital Transformation) of Clare County Council, which led the initiative by identifying suitable hub locations, liaising with local community groups, and managing the overall design and functionality of the hubs. The same team also oversees the day-to-day operations of the hubs. Required professionals include the Head of Information Systems, the Broadband Office, the Procurement Officer, the Information Systems Analyst Developer, the Executive Chartered Building Surveyor, and the Clerical Officer.

**About capacity building.** All individuals involved participate in professional development programmes within Clare County Council, where relevant. These cover areas of design and build, ICT, contract and financial management, and procurement.

Resources from the General Design Office prepared architectural and technical plans for the hubs, ensuring compliance with accessibility, sustainability, and functionality standards. Other departments involved were Finance & Procurement. All the projects were managed and completed in-house from initiation, financial management, design, procurement and contract & building management.

Agreements are in place with Local Development Associations, who collaborated with the Digital & Broadband Department to identify suitable community buildings for the hubs. These agreements also address financial aspects and define details of the hubs' management.

### Evidence about results and impacts

As of late 2024, the DigiClare initiative has established **11 digital hubs across the county**.

The mid-term review of the Clare Rural Development Strategy highlights how the development of DigiClare Hubs is 'the most tangible manifestation of the strategy to date' and that 'the County has benefitted considerably from this welcome development, which was foreshadowed in the strategy.'

“ *In the short term, DigiClare provided high-speed connectivity and modern co-working spaces in rural Clare, enabling remote work, education, and business continuity. In the long-term, DigiClare is revitalising rural communities by attracting remote workers, fostering entrepreneurship, and reducing isolation.*

*Users report significant benefits, including improved work-life balance, enhanced mental health and wellbeing, and a stronger sense of belonging. The hubs also generate positive ripple effects for local economies—hub users frequent nearby businesses more often, and many identify the presence of a hub as a key factor in their decision to remain in or relocate to the area.*

*The targeted digital divide has been significantly reduced; people in rural Clare can now work for companies anywhere in the world without leaving their community. This helps sustain local populations and strengthen the community socially and economically.*

(DIGIREG interview)

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**Measuring and monitoring results and impacts.** The Digital and Broadband Department decided in late 2024 to engage a company to conduct a Social, Economic, and Community Impact Assessment of the **Ennistymon Digital Hub**. The assessment of the hub, which was established in 2019, provides evidence of the positive socio-economic effects of digital hubs. The hub, among other impacts, supports remote work for both local residents and visitors; enhances work-life balance by reducing commuting times; encourages tourism and economic activity in North Clare; contributes to town rejuvenation; enables **67% of users to either relocate to or remain in the North Clare area**; has created **76 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs** (direct and indirect); has an **annual economic impact of EUR 3.8 million**; generates **EUR 586,000 in tax revenue**; and encourages local spending, with **89% of users shopping locally more frequently**.

### Sustainability and transferability of the practice

The initiative defined an intervention model and replicated it across the county's communities, demonstrating the approach's transferability. In November 2025, the creation of a new digital hub was underway in Scariff, while an extension of the Ennistymon hub is planned for early 2026.

### Learning from this practice

- Success factor: **clear mission**. The initiative was built around a mission: ensuring that everyone in County Clare can access modern digital services.

- ▶ Success factor: **consistency of visual identity and standards.** All DigiClare hubs share the same quality standards and, when entering any hub, people immediately recognise it as part of the DigiClare network. This consistency reinforces brand identity, user trust, and a professional experience across all locations.
- ▶ Success factor: **community engagement.** Building strong connections with local communities and stakeholders was essential to gaining support and ensuring the hubs met real needs. Early engagement enabled the design and services to reflect residents' priorities, making the hubs truly community-driven.
- ▶ Success factor: **strategic location of hubs.** Careful selection of hub sites in rural towns and villages ensured accessibility for those people most affected by the digital divide. Locating hubs within existing community spaces also strengthened local ownership and trust.
- ▶ Success factor: **flexibility and resilience.** DigiClare evolved in response to changing needs, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when remote work and digital learning became essential. It became an essential service when areas of rural Clare lost power and connectivity during Storm Eowyn in 2025.
- ▶ Success factor: **accessibility for all.** DigiClare hubs are open to both residents and visitors, including tourists and remote workers passing through the county. They can be booked online at any time, even at the last minute if space is available, making them highly accessible. This promotes Clare as a remote-working destination and supports the local economy.

“ *The hub models have evolved in response to changing digital demands. While the original mission focused on closing the digital divide, the hubs have grown to become spaces for social inclusion and community engagement. Recognising Clare's status as a major tourism destination, DigiClare is now featured in Clare County Council's Tourism Strategy as a vital service for remote workers and digital nomads.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

- ▶ Success factor: **affordability.** DigiClare offers a diverse range of services, making digital hubs accessible to a wide range of users. Options include desks, private offices, and pods at competitive rates, ensuring affordability for individuals and businesses alike. To add extra value, there is also a '5 days for the price of 4' discount on desks and pods, encouraging regular use and supporting flexible working arrangements.
- ▶ Challenge: **infrastructure limitations in rural areas.** Many rural locations lacked the necessary broadband connectivity and physical infrastructure to support digital hubs. This was addressed by working closely with the National Broadband Plan rollout and by selecting sites where high-speed connectivity could be guaranteed, often using existing community buildings to reduce costs and speed up deployment.
- ▶ Challenge: **limited community engagement and awareness.** Initially, there was limited awareness among rural communities of the benefits of digital hubs. To overcome this, Clare County Council engaged local groups early in the process, held information sessions, and partnered with other local groups to market the hubs as part of Clare's remote-working and lifestyle offering.
- ▶ Challenge: **funding and resource constraints.** Securing sufficient funding for hub development and on-going operations is a challenge. Grant streams were researched and applications submitted. A cost-effective model was defined in community hubs. The community receives 80% of the annual income, with Clare County Council using 20% to cover heating, lighting, broadband, access controls, and related costs.
- ▶ Challenge: **rapidly changing digital needs.** The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated demand for remote work and digital services, requiring hubs to adapt quickly. DigiClare responded by expanding services, implementing health and safety measures, and introducing online booking systems.
- ▶ Something that could have been done differently: **A more structured marketing approach adopted at an earlier stage, and targeted also to tourists and visitors.**

#### Recommendations to other public authorities

- ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **engage communities to build trust and tailor services to their needs and invest in promotion from day one**
- ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **leverage existing infrastructure** where possible to reduce costs and speed up deployment.

- ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **align with broader policy frameworks** (national and EU) to access funding and ensure strategic relevance.
  - ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) provide support at the community level to **ensure facilities are managed and run to acceptable standards**.
  - ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **plan for the adaptability of digital hubs** to let them evolve with changing digital trends and needs.
  - ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) ensure that digital hubs **include youth educational and age-friendly programmes** to target specific users.
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## Sources and further reading

[DIGICLARE website](#); [The Clare Champion news](#) dated 08/08/20; [Clare County Council Monthly Management Report](#), March 2025; [Draft Renewed Clare Rural Development Strategy 2026](#); [Renewed Clare Rural Development Strategy 2030](#); [Mid-Term Review. Clare Rural Development Strategy 2026](#).

**Summary of the DIGIREG interview** with Jackie Dermody, IS Analyst Developer, Digital Transformation Department, Clare County Council, 16 December 2025.

# IS\_Iceland Connected to Fibre

## DIGIREG showcase

### In a nutshell

**Involved public authority(ies):** National government, municipalities.

**Geographical coverage (NUTS3):** IS001, IS002.

**Implementation period:** 2016-2021.

**Objectives of the policy intervention:** 1) Build a fibre optic network in rural areas outside market areas. 2) Provide at least 100 Mb/s wired internet connections.

**Target groups:** Private households and businesses.

**Type of policy intervention:** Programme, Public subsidies.

**Funding: Public.** Total budget allocated to the initiative is ISK 3.35 billion (around EUR 23 million).

### Why this policy intervention qualifies as a DIGIREG BPP

- This large initiative by the central government is built on multi-governance collaboration, where municipalities play a very relevant and active role in the deployment of the infrastructure. Municipalities are responsible for requesting grants and co-financing, planning, hiring contractors, and supervising construction work.
- According to broadband indicators, internet connection across Iceland is of outstanding quality across Europe. In particular, Landsbyggð, the part of Iceland outside the capital region, ranks among the top 10 NUTS3 regions in Europe for the indicators 'Optic fibre per capita' and 'Optic fibre over density'. Instead, the capital area ranks among the top 10 NUTS3 in Europe for the indicators 'Average upload speed of fixed broadband' and 'Average latency of fixed broadband'.
- An enhanced internet connection has importantly improved the living and working conditions of rural areas' residents.

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Digital infrastructure deployment**

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Quality of life improvement**



**DIGIREG interview with:** Ottó V. Winther, Project Manager, Department of Local Government, Digital Infrastructure and Regional Affairs - Ministry of Infrastructure, 2 December 2025.

## Description

Preparatory work began in 2014, but 'Ísland ljóstengt' kicked off in 2016 with the first grant allocation. Led by the national government through the Telecommunications Fund (TF), the programme aimed to provide broadband internet access to approximately 5,500 households and businesses in rural areas of the country that were not served by commercial providers. The programme, subsidised with public funding, rolled out the infrastructure by allocating grants to municipalities in rural areas through the TF. Municipalities had to apply for support (two calls were launched in 2016 and 2018) in order to receive the subsidies. In addition, they often provided matching funds or sought the collaboration with telecommunications companies to implement their local infrastructure projects. In fact, the initiative put emphasis on cost efficiency measures, synergies with other infrastructure projects, and cooperation with operators.

### The starting point

“ ... Iceland had a very uneven broadband landscape. Towns and villages were served with 50–100 Mb/s VDSL connections rolled out by the incumbent telecom infrastructure provider on fully commercial terms. In stark contrast, rural Iceland — approximately 6,000 homes, workplaces, and utility buildings located outside towns and villages — relied entirely on outdated technologies, including POTS, ISDN, 3G or early 4G. These technologies were insufficient for modern digital needs, including streaming, telework, cloud services, and digital public services. Market forces alone were not delivering solutions. Operators openly stated that they had no intention of investing in rural fibre infrastructure due to high costs and sparse population density. The regulatory environment reinforced this, as the incumbent had already made substantial investments in urban VDSL, leaving rural areas with no realistic commercial upgrade trajectory. At the same time, economic and social life in Iceland was becoming increasingly dependent on high-speed broadband. Rural households, farms, tourism operators, and remote businesses were expressing growing concern about being left behind. This created a clear territorial divide that threatened demographic sustainability, economic competitiveness, and equality of opportunity. In response, the national government commissioned a 2014–2015 engineering study to map rural buildings with a focus on registered dwellings and workplaces, design a point-to-point fibre architecture, calculate costs, and outline state involvement options. The study demonstrated that rural connectivity was technically feasible and provided a realistic cost framework. This technical foundation, combined with rising rural demand and clear market failure, formed the rationale for the rural phase of Ísland ljóstengt. ”

(DIGIREG interview)

### Framework and enabling conditions

“ Several elements shaped the design of the rural phase. [The] digital divide analysis [demonstrated that] rural areas had dramatically poorer connectivity than urban areas; the gap was clear and quantifiable. [In addition, an] engineering study demonstrated that fibre could be extended to essentially all rural buildings. EU/EEA state-aid rules [were also considered]. These required mandatory market consultation in every municipality and ensured that public funding only targeted ‘white areas’ where no operator planned to build within three years... Operators had no interest in rural fibre investment; thus, state intervention was essential and uncontroversial. [Still,] ...policy-makers decided not to support interim solutions such as VDSL. Only fibre was considered consistent with long-term national policy. [Other elements considered were:] fiscal limits: state funds were limited and spread across several years, requiring a competitive and prioritised allocation mechanism; municipal heterogeneity: municipalities varied widely in size, finances, and technical expertise [and] some required preparatory grants to be able to participate; regional development goals: rural fibre was [considered] essential for maintaining viable communities and supporting services, tourism, agriculture, and remote work. ”

(DIGIREG interview)

**The follow-up.** After the completion of the rural deployment phase, with fibre provided to over 80% of rural dwellings (4G coverage was over 99%), in early 2024, the Communications Regulator (Fjarskiptastofa) conducted a nationwide survey of operators' planned fibre deployments in all urban localities (defined as settlements with over 200 inhabitants) and smaller settlement clusters (50–199 inhabitants) for 2024–2026. Through this survey, 4,438 address points across 48 municipalities were found not to be included in any operator plans. These corresponded to over 5,600 registered dwellings with no fibre-upgrading trajectory, leaving uncertainty about whether and when these households would receive future-proof connectivity. A different type of connectivity gap became evident: small, scattered pockets of urban addresses had remained unconnected to fibre despite being located in towns or some settlement clusters. This represented

an inversion of the digital divide, with some rural areas enjoying better fibre availability than certain small towns.

In July 2024, the government decided on an acceleration in the achievement of the existing policy goal, i.e., all towns and villages with  $\geq 80\%$  fibre availability by 2028, and set a new ambition: 100% fibre availability for registered dwellings by the end of 2026 (with minor exceptions such as vacant dwellings, resident refusal, or cases where alternative high-speed access exists). The government's decision was taken considering the need to remove uncertainty for thousands of households; the strategic value of completing fibre infrastructure nationwide; the opportunity to capitalise on operator investments already underway; and strong political momentum driving cross-ministerial alignment.

Unlike the rural phase, which required full network design and cost estimation, the urban phase adopted a simple, fixed-grant model implemented by the TF. Each eligible address was expected to receive ISK 80,000 [around EUR 550 at 2026 exchange rate] to cover typical civil works costs (i.e., in line with the average trenching and ducting costs for a typical operator connection in urban markets).

Of the 4,438 eligible address points, 4,251 were targeted (approximately 96% uptake).

The rural phase of 'Ísland ljóstengt' required the involvement of several actors with specific roles. The Ministry responsible for electronic communications defined strategic objectives for universal high-speed broadband, commissioned the engineering study, and oversaw compliance with state-aid rules and national policy priorities. The TF designed the annual rural grant competitions, received and evaluated municipal applications, verified market consultation outcomes, allocated grants, monitored implementation, and adjusted funding conditions annually based on evolving realities. The Communications Regulator helped ensure compliance with EU/EEA state-aid principles by supervising market consultation processes conducted by municipalities and by providing technical and regulatory assessments. Municipalities were the main beneficiaries of 'Ísland ljóstengt'. They conducted market consultations in their territories, commissioned network design and cost estimates (often through consultants), managed the procurement of contractors and materials and, in many cases, acted as project owners and network owners. Municipal utility companies were involved in implementing the physical construction of passive fibre networks in many instances, and in operating and maintaining networks where municipalities opted for ownership. Telecommunication operators participated in tenders, broadband contractors were engaged through public procurement, and residents signed connection agreements.

Diverse professional profiles were engaged: policy officers, responsible for broadband and digital infrastructure; legal officers with expertise in state aid, public procurement, telecom regulation; engineers with competencies of telecom network design and civil works; project managers (at national and municipal level); financial analysts for cost modelling and municipal budgeting; procurement officers dealing with tenders for fibre and contractors; and local staff in charge of issuing permits.

### Evidence about results and impacts

A total of **57 municipalities in rural areas received grants to connect around 6,200 eligible locations** with fibre optic networks.

A social impact assessment of the programme concluded that **residents reported a positive impact on internet connectivity and quality**. This, in turn, improved their quality of life, particularly in terms of **employment opportunities**. The areas covered by the programme also saw an **increase in residential density**. Furthermore, residents in rural areas **reduced work-related commuting and driving**. Other positive effects noted for residents included **lower costs of living, a wider choice and range of goods, and improved access to culture and education**. Finally, the social impact assessment indicated that businesses surveyed were especially positive about the impact, with internet connectivity considered the most important aspect of their operations.

“ *A rapid deployment of rural fibre networks in the whole country, a strong uptake due to high resident willingness to participate and local pride of ownership in municipalities [can be considered as the main results in the short term]. It was no longer a question if fibre would be rolled out in rural areas, but when.*  
*[In the long term] rural digital divide [was] largely eliminated [and] rural areas... often [resulted in having] ... better connectivity than small towns still on VDSL. Municipal fibre networks have become valuable assets — some of which were acquired later by operators. [For citizens] digital opportunities, remote work, and service access have greatly improved.*  
 (DIGIREG interview) ”

**Measuring and monitoring results and impacts.** The initiative's monitoring was conducted using the following instruments: TF annual reporting, coverage and uptake tracking, state-aid compliance verification, and regular construction progress reports.

### Sustainability and transferability of the practice

The rural phase has been completed, and no further programmes are planned in rural areas. Its design principles informed the urban phase, whose scheme was designed as a time-limited measure, not to be extended beyond 2026.

The funding model, which uses national grants to support local broadband projects implemented by municipalities, is replicable in areas with sparse settlements where the implementation of standalone small projects is a reasonable solution. In addition, sparsely populated areas often have unique geographic characteristics that significantly affect the deployment process, making the use of ad hoc solutions necessary.

### Learning from this practice

- ▶ Success factor: **clear focus on rural white areas** with no commercial plans for broadband deployment, grounded on the strong technical foundation proven by the engineering study.
- ▶ Success factor: **definition of the municipal active engagement model.** Municipalities' participation was strictly voluntary. In addition, municipalities became the owners of the digital infrastructure. This created local commitment and simplified permitting and licensing work.
- ▶ Success factor: **strong cooperation between institutional actors and a clear definition of the roles of key stakeholders.** The central government, the Telecommunications Fund, and municipalities were the strategic actors. The national regulator was consulted and had certain roles, but was not in charge of programme development and its annual adjustment, while telecom operators were not consulted beforehand.
- ▶ Success factor: **adoption of a competitive grant scheme for municipalities for a limited number of years.** This approach encouraged cost efficiency. Importantly, TF was careful not to overwhelm the contractor market with excessive funding each year.
- ▶ Success factor: **high willingness among residents to pay connection fees.**

“ [A one-time (700–1,500 EUR equivalent)] fee was paid by building owners. The demand for connectivity was very high, and we allowed local governments to determine how they preferred to contribute to funding the deployment. For example, a small municipality that applied for grants from the Telecommunications Fund and received less than expected (due to a competitive mechanism) could fund the works in other ways. The municipality could have contributed funds itself or asked each building owner to pay a fee. We were a little concerned about this because we saw municipalities seeking a substantial amount from households. It was surprising, then, that everyone paid more or less, with no issues. Inhabitants were very happy to have access to fibre. It was a very demand-driven action. Nearly every household, every farm was asking for this connection. It made the whole project so much easier for everybody. We did not have to sell it... This made our project somewhat unique. In many places in Europe, demand is not so high; governments often seek to boost connectivity, but people are reluctant to adopt or pay for it. In Iceland, the opposite was true. People were asking for it loudly.

(DIGIREG interview)

- ▶ Success factor: **contractor incentives for rapid fibre deployment.**
- ▶ Success factor: **annual adjustments to funding rules.** Flexibility was required, especially when fewer municipalities remained to compete for funds.
- ▶ Challenge: **criticism at the beginning of the programme.** Addressed through communication and early visible success.
- ▶ Challenge: **potential incumbent dominance.** Prevented by empowering municipal ownership and requiring transparent tenders.

- ▶ Challenge: **unequal municipal capacity**. Mitigated by preparatory grants for smaller municipalities (also used to hire consultants). In the end, even the poorest and weakest municipalities prioritised spending in favour of fibre rollout.
- ▶ Challenge: **delays related to the seasonal/weather conditions**. TF allowed funds to roll forward when delays were **unavoidable**.

#### Recommendations to other public authorities

- ▶ (national authorities) **begin with a nationwide technical and economic study.**
- ▶ (national authorities) **adhere to state-aid rules and market consultation.**
- ▶ (national authorities) **allow municipalities to build and own infrastructure.**
- ▶ (national authorities) **use competitive, adjustable, and time-limited funding to drive cost efficiency.**
- ▶ (national authorities) **maintain programme flexibility for adapting to local realities.**
- ▶ (national authorities) **ensure strong formal and informal coordination between national authorities and municipalities.**

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## Sources and further reading

[ITU report](#) (2020); [Social Impact Report](#) (2021); [Example of implementation in the Municipality of Rangárping eystra](#); [Ministry of Infrastructure's web news](#) dated 12/10/17; [Telecommunications Authority's web news](#) dated 03/02/21; [Ministry of Infrastructure's web news](#) dated 12/05/21.

**Summary of the DIGIREG interview** with Ottó V. Winther, Project Manager, Department of Local Government, Digital Infrastructure and Regional Affairs - Ministry of Infrastructure, 2 December 2025.

# IT\_CMGE Inclusion

## DIGIREG showcase

### In a nutshell

**Involved public authority(ies):** Metropolitan City of Genoa (CMGE).

**Geographical coverage (NUTS3):** ITC33.

**Implementation period:** December 2023-April 2025.

**Objectives of the policy intervention:** 1) Provide assistive technologies and software to civil servants with disabilities to enhance their working conditions. 2) Raise awareness among civil servants on the need to improve accessibility to online public data and information, with particular attention to people with disabilities. 3) Reduce the number of error types in the online display of digital public service versus the standards set by the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.

**Target groups:** Public servants of the metropolitan government and of the 67 local authorities forming the metropolitan area.

**Type of policy intervention:** Project.

**Funding:** Public. Total project budget: EUR 576,900. Fully funded by the Next Generation EU through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), Mission 1 – Component 1, Sub-investment 1.4.2 'Citizen Inclusion'. The Metropolitan City of Genoa contributes with staff time and existing infrastructure.

### Why this policy intervention qualifies as a DIGIREG BPP

- Public servants' awareness and knowledge of accessibility aspects are essential in addressing the digital divide when digital services are designed and delivered. The project not only acknowledges this aspect but also recognises the importance of fostering a culture of digital inclusion among all public workers, irrespective of their role within public entities, and across the entire metropolitan area, including the most peripheral municipalities.
- Through a cross-sectoral governance structure and the adoption of a monitoring system based on a few clear indicators (coverage, error-reduction, training lessons volume), the project was accountable and achieved effective learning and upskilling to tackle the causes of inaccessible digital content.

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **E-services accessibility enhancement**

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Public servants' capacity building**



**DIGIREG interview with:** Flavio Rossi, Head of the Digitalisation and Information Systems Office, Metropolitan City of Genova; Laura Papaleo, Director of the Digital Strategies, ICT and European Funding Service, Metropolitan City of Genova; 22 October 2025.

## Description

The project aimed to raise awareness among the target group of the need to improve public digital services, not only from a technological perspective but also through the conscious use of digital tools. CMGE Inclusion was structured around three main areas: staff training, development and adaptation of web services, and purchase of assistive technologies for people with disabilities. CMGE Inclusion was designed through a multi-stakeholder governance approach that brings together the Metropolitan City of Genoa (CMGE) and the municipalities of the area, with oversight by the Agency for Digital Italy (AgID).

The training programme aimed to foster a digital culture among all public employees and focused on the accessibility and usability of digital services for all users, with special attention paid to people with disabilities. Structured into five modules (four of which were face-to-face lessons), the training covered topics such as accessibility regulations at the national and European levels, communication tools, creation of accessible documents, accessible web writing, and design of accessible multimedia content. The fifth and last module, delivered in a workshop format, offered the opportunity to design digital services in collaboration with participants with disabilities, who provided insights into the challenges they face. Training modules took different forms, depending on the target audience. At the metropolitan government level, three types of courses were delivered: a basic course for officials and administrative and technical staff; a specialist course for management; and a specialist ICT course for employees of the ICT and communications offices. Instead, in the metropolitan area's municipalities, training was delivered via webinars and in-person workshops held at multiple locations to ensure geographic coverage across the entire metropolitan area.

Within the second area, technical issues with two digital public service platforms (i.e., PRATICO, which provides digital access to e-forms and permits, and SEGNALACI, which facilitates civic reporting of public-realm issues) were resolved. Finally, CMGE Inclusion equipped civil servants with disabilities with assistive technologies and software to enhance their working conditions.

### The starting point

“ .... As early as 2004... [during the introduction] of the Stanca Law [setting] provisions to promote and simplify IT access for users, particularly those with disabilities,... the institution had already begun working on these issues. [...the Stanca Law] represented a turning point for digital accessibility, prompting... internal training activities and updates to institutional portals to make them more accessible and user-friendly. When AgID invited Metropolitan Cities to take part in this new project, the Metropolitan City of Genoa immediately joined, fully recognising the importance of the topic and building upon the strong sensitivity it has developed over time.

(DIGIREG interview)

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### Framework and enabling conditions

“ The first enabling factor for launching the initiative was the arrival of significant funding, which made it possible to implement several actions... Among these, training proved to be the most important component, serving as the real driving force of the project.

A second key factor was the awareness that, although the issue of accessibility had received considerable attention in the past, especially after 2004 with the introduction of the Stanca Law, which had forced many public bodies to quickly adapt their websites to avoid penalties, it had gradually lost centrality over time... This led to the decision to promote a training and support programme for municipalities, based on the belief that there was fertile ground to strengthen the culture of digital accessibility.

In addition to national legislation, the entry into force of the European Accessibility Act, although mainly aimed at the private sector, was helping to keep attention high on the topic. At the same time, the Three-Year Plan for ICT in Public Administration sets annual deadlines for updating websites and apps and also foresees possible sanctions for non-compliant entities.

...participation in the project was a natural continuation of a long-standing process.

(DIGIREG interview)

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In CMGE, the Digitalisation Service was the primary department involved in the project and played a central role in all its phases. It was responsible for overall project management and for coordinating relations with AgID, municipalities in the metropolitan area, and other stakeholders. Unlike other NRRP projects, cooperation with municipalities was based on informal collaboration mechanisms guided by voluntary participation and direct interest. The CMGE project opted for a flexible and informal approach, directly contacting municipalities in the metropolitan area to gauge their interest in participating in training and awareness-raising activities on digital accessibility.

The Digitalisation Service was also responsible for developing and adapting web services. For the first area of intervention (i.e., staff training), the Training Department was involved in defining the training plan, preparing materials, and providing the necessary documentation for the tender procedures. In fact, given the financial scale of the initiative (approximately EUR 240,000), CMGE had to manage the procurement process as the contracting authority. The Human Resources Office was required to identify employees with disabilities in compliance with privacy regulations, while CMGE's Disability Manager was consulted for inclusion-related matters. The Europe Office supported the NRRP reporting procedures, and the Finance Department was engaged for project accounting, payment handling, and administrative processes. From a political and institutional standpoint, the initiative was supported and monitored by a designated councillor and the Mayor of the Metropolitan City, ensuring consistent alignment between political direction and technical implementation.

To ensure effective, coordinated project management, an interdepartmental, cross-sector working group was formally established. It comprised staff with diverse roles and expertise, with managerial, technological, administrative, and accounting skills. After an initial phase, responsibility for the project was assigned to the head of the Digitalisation Service, while responsibility for the digital transition was assumed by the Head of the Digital Strategies, ICT and European Funding Service. A Project Implementation Director (i.e., the Head of the Training Department) was appointed to oversee the implementation of educational activities and monitor their results, with an officer dedicated exclusively to internal staff training. Collaboration was smooth and continuous. The project leaders worked in the same building and shared a well-established habit of cooperation, which facilitated day-to-day management and the timely resolution of any critical issues.

### Evidence about results and impacts

The **training package (5 modules)** was delivered in **23 training sessions**. A total of 805 hours were delivered through in-person lessons.

**371 people** were involved in the **internal training**, out of a total of **420 employees**, excluding only technical-operational staff and attendants. This means that **nearly all administrative personnel participated**.

Focusing on **municipalities** that expressed interest in the initiative, **a total of 161 people enrolled, of whom approximately 60 participated**. Several municipalities appreciated the initiative's quality and the opportunity to participate in dedicated training programmes.

**15 video pills**, i.e., short modules of 5–7 minutes summarising the main topics covered in the courses, were produced by a specialised local company.

Providing digital equipment to people with disabilities created an **opportunity to raise awareness and build sensitivity to digital accessibility issues** among CMGE's internal staff.

“...for example, it was discovered that seemingly simple tools, such as a high-contrast keyboard with enlarged keys, can be far more useful than technologically complex devices. Many people with disabilities tend not to express their needs openly, often due to a lack of trust or because they do not fully perceive themselves as entitled to specific rights. Only through dialogue and active listening was it possible to identify their actual needs and to adapt the proposed solutions accordingly... This experience led the team to rethink its design approach, developing greater sensitivity toward inclusion and real accessibility issues, to be taken into account from the earliest stages of all future initiatives.”

(DIGIREG interview)

Resolving technical issues on the PRATICO and SEGNALACI platforms made the metropolitan authority's e-government services **more accessible to all**.

“Even months later, many colleagues show greater attention to accessibility issues: for instance, a recent case involved CVs published online as simple scanned documents. As soon as the issue was reported, the staff immediately replaced them with accessible and readable versions, a sign of awareness that has now taken root....this is not a change that happens overnight: it is a gradual process, like ‘turning a ship’, which takes time but moves steadily forward.”

(DIGIREG interview)

**Measuring and monitoring results and impacts.** The project's main target was quantitative, aligned with AgID's objectives, and aimed to engage a specific number of participants in the training courses. The e-learning platform created for the project monitored participant activity. However, CMGE also introduced

qualitative evaluation tools, including two self-assessment questionnaires (one at the start and one at the end of the project) and a satisfaction survey on attainment and learning. This approach enabled both the measurement of participation and the understanding of the training's perceived quality. Feedback collection was identified as a crucial element for improving the quality and impact of future activities.

### Sustainability and transferability of the practice

CMGE implemented a professional e-learning platform to design and manage training courses, a strategic investment. The platform contains the full recordings of the courses and the video pills, making it possible to preserve and consolidate the knowledge developed over time, preventing it from being lost beyond the project end, and facilitating the training of new employees. Furthermore, CMGE is planning to periodically renew training on digital accessibility, taking into account both staff turnover and the evolution of digital technologies.

The project's approach is easily replicable. The dual intervention, combining capacity building and a revision of the technical accessibility of digital services, led to an integrated operational model that can be transferred to other contexts. The adopted reference guidelines for the accessibility revision of digital services are based on European regulations transposed into national law and are therefore applicable to other EU Member States. The developed training model is suitable for public authorities of different sizes and territorial structures.

### Learning from this practice

- ▶ Success factor: **the introduction of an internal incentive mechanism for managers.** Employee participation in the courses became a performance indicator tied to the achievement of managerial objectives. If employees did not complete the training, managers' individual performance evaluations would be negatively affected. Almost all the targeted employees participated, with very few exceptions.
- ▶ Success factor: **dedicated effort to raise awareness of employees about the initiative.** Many employees embraced the message; others participated more out of duty than conviction, but in any case, the internal training objective was fully achieved.
- ▶ Success factor: **deliberate intention to develop an innovative educational model.** CMGE moved beyond a purely lecture-based approach. The training plan included theoretical sessions, direct testimonies from people with disabilities sharing concrete examples of everyday use of digital services, and practical activities to foster a more experiential and inclusive learning process.

“ *This approach brought together a diverse group of employees, aged between 30 and 62, with very different professional profiles — from administrative staff who draft official documents to those responsible solely for communications or certified emails (PEC). Despite differences in skills and motivation, most participants recognised the practical value of the training, understanding how accessibility standards can concretely improve the quality of their daily work.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

- ▶ Success factor: **adaptation of AgID training material.** Materials were adapted to be more engaging and less focused on purely regulatory aspects. The focus was on the concrete meaning of digital accessibility and on understanding disability as an essential perspective to be recognised and integrated.
- ▶ Success factor: **territorial reach of the training offer.** The CMGE's coordinating role enabled smaller local authorities and territorial stakeholders to benefit from the training. Some municipalities proved to be highly cooperative and proactive, while others were more reluctant to engage. In any case, the project offered an opportunity to strengthen territorial cooperation while fostering a culture of digital accessibility.
- ▶ Challenge: **fighting against the perception of training as a burden.** Traditionally, within the public authority, training has rarely been perceived as an opportunity for professional growth. In the project, attending courses meant being away from the office for up to five days, which led to backlogged work and required dealing with topics sometimes considered not relevant to everyday tasks.
- ▶ Challenge: **involving the smallest local authorities.** Many municipalities have very limited staff, making it difficult to free up resources for a five-day training programme. Workload constraints and limited interest in the topics prevented some of these municipalities' staff from participating. To ensure full use of available resources, CMGE requested and obtained an exemption from AgID, allowing the training to be extended to other public entities such as hospitals and local health authorities.

- ▶ Challenge: **selecting professional trainers and ensuring training quality and effectiveness.** Since the courses involved multi-day sessions, trainers were supposed to be professional and able to keep participants engaged. Due to several concurrent projects involving ICT consultants at the local and regional levels, the tender for training services received only two bids, significantly limiting the selection pool. Furthermore, during the first edition of the ICT course, lessons were suspended after the first day, requiring the contractor to improve both the quality and relevance of the instruction.
- ▶ Something that could have been done differently: **making training even more hands-on and focused.** This aspect emerged as an area for improvement following internal reflection.
- ▶ Something that could have been done differently: **defining more structured and binding participation mechanisms.** The absence of formal mechanisms to ensure participants' attendance limited the programme's full implementation. The voluntary approach used to engage municipalities enabled the creation of an agile collaborative network, but also reduced commitment and continuity among participating entities.

#### Recommendations to other public authorities

- ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **continuously promote the topic of digital accessibility among public servants.** It represents an essential, often underestimated training area. Training CMGE's internal staff and local municipalities raised awareness of how to create and manage accessible documents and information, thereby strengthening the authorities' capacity to foster digital accessibility of public services.
- ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **define engaging training activities and select adequate trainers.** It is necessary to select trainers with specific expertise and strong communication skills who can clearly and engagingly explain complex topics such as digital accessibility. Public servants should be empowered to move from the role of knowledge recipient to that of active promoter of change.
- ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **create digitally accessible public services by design.** The project experience enabled CMGE to develop a broader, more strategic vision of digital accessibility, extending beyond staff training to encompass the design, implementation and management of digital public services. Accessibility cannot be regarded as an additional or corrective element, but rather as a core principle that must guide the choice of IT tools, the design of interfaces, and the structure of digital content. This approach entails specific costs and expertise that must be considered in advance in both technical and financial planning. The CMGE Inclusion project financed concrete improvements of two publicly accessible web services in accordance with AgID guidelines to address existing issues and ensure their full usability for people with disabilities.

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## Sources and further reading

[CMGE project's web page](#); [CMGE project time plan for the training sessions](#); Informative material provided by CMGE in early 2025.

**Summary of the DIGIREG interview** with Flavio Rossi, Head of the Digitalisation and Information Systems Office, Metropolitan City of Genova; Laura Papaleo, Director of the Digital Strategies, ICT and European Funding Service, Metropolitan City of Genova; 22 October 2025.

# LV\_Ventspils Digital Centre

## DIGIREG showcase

### In a nutshell

**Involved public authority(ies):** Municipality of Ventspils.

**Geographical coverage (NUTS3):** LV003.

**Implementation period:** 2003-ongoing (in 2025).

**Objectives of the policy intervention:** 1) Provide access to ICT for citizens and businesses. 2) Facilitate the development of necessary skills to stimulate the use of ICT. 3) Maintain and develop the Municipality's ICT infrastructure. 4) Implement the Municipality's ICT sector development strategy.

**Target groups:** Citizens, local authorities, and businesses.

**Type of policy intervention:** Institutional entity.

**Funding:** Public. Various sources (national budget, municipal budget, grants, co-funding from the EU), depending on the type of intervention or project. For example, the budget allocated for participation in the 'Development of digital skills of society' project over the period November 2024 – March 2026 was EUR 45,738 from the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF).

### Why this policy intervention qualifies as a DIGIREG BPP

- VDC has contributed to the digitalisation of the local business ecosystem as well as to the enhancement of the skills and technological competencies of its residents. The two achievements were pursued in parallel and accorded equal importance to the professional and personal spheres of digitalisation.
- Because of its institutional nature, VDC builds on existing resources and knowledge and involves relevant local actors such as Ventspils University and Ventspils High Technology Park.
- VDC represents a successful, locally-driven, and territory-embedded model for fostering digital literacy.
- Interreg Europe considers the VDC one of the territory's main drivers of innovation and economic growth across sectors.

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Digital skills development**



**DIGIREG interview with:** Egons Spalans, Deputy Executive Director, Municipality of Ventspils, 26 November 2025.

## Description

Ventspils Digital Centre (VDC) was founded in 2003 as an independent institution of the municipality. The Municipality operates the centre, focusing on developing the city's digital infrastructure, promoting digital literacy among citizens and enterprises, and advancing e-government adoption.

Training is delivered through meetings (on the use of digital tools for everyday life), non-formal education courses (on topics such as Microsoft Office programmes, website development, video/image processing), and informative events (such as those implemented during the Digital Week, Adult Education Days, and Scientists' Night initiatives). In 2022, VDC planned and financially supported (along with national funds) the establishment of the first Digital Transformation Centre in Latvia dedicated to adults' digital education for reskilling and upskilling, thereby expanding its capacity to run training courses focused on the employability of the target groups. The wide variety of capacity-building activities relies on surveys to understand the competencies needed and to tailor the VDC's training offer.

Besides digital training, VDC also plays a key role in supporting the digitalisation of SMEs by providing IT tools and services, as well as subsidies (on a competitive basis) for developing various ICT solutions.

In terms of infrastructure, VDC manages and develops the city's optical data transmission network and offers high-speed internet, server space, and cloud services to residents and businesses. It also maintains free wireless internet access points across the city.

Recently, VDC was one of the Latvian local entities implementing the national project 'Development of digital skills of society'. The project is funded under the RRF with a budget of approximately EUR 9 million and aims to provide digital training to 40,000 residents. Implementation is based on cooperation between the national government and municipalities. After the cooperation agreement was signed in November 2024, VDC had five of its staff trained as 'mentors' within the framework of the project, while training for residents aged 16+ began in early 2025. Training attendance is free, organised into three levels based on participants' existing knowledge, and certified at the end of the course.

### The starting point

*“ We digitally progressed by developing e-services, but we recognised that these services could not be used by citizens without the necessary digital skills. For this reason, we thought of a public place where everyone could walk in, like a library, and get assistance, have learning opportunities, or access technologies such as scanners to digitise documents. Some people used to have paper documents in their hands, but now they are required to have digital copies or submit them digitally... We investigated citizens' digital skills in the initial phase of setting our digital transformation strategy, and we continue to run surveys to monitor their digital skills... we aimed to bridge the digital skills gap. We were aware that we had citizens with varying levels of digital literacy, including those who are very digitally active and those who are not active at all in the digital world. We also understood that somehow the municipality has to bridge this gap.*

(DIGIREG interview)

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The competencies of VDC personnel are strictly related to the two strands of activities of the centre. ICT professionals, such as system administrators, are responsible for maintaining all the ICT architecture and infrastructure in Ventspils, while training experts are responsible for the distinctive aspect of the Ventspils Digital Centre, i.e., the lifelong education offer. Staff handling legal and administrative matters are also part of the VDC team.

Given its mission, VDC also collaborates with other city institutions that provide educational services. Among them are the state-owned vocational school in Ventspils and the lifelong education department at Ventspils University College, where VDC participates in the Education Board that oversees the school's offerings.

### Evidence about results and impacts

In terms of digital accessibility, VDC provides free connection in over **300 free wireless internet access points**.

Focusing on the business dimension, VDC annually supports approximately **30 SMEs across various sectors**.

The digital education offered by the VDC has both short-term results and long-term impacts. Ventspils has around 33,000 inhabitants, and **3,000-4,000 people attend digital skills courses or training each year** in various educational events, both at a professional level and for use at home. Approximately 700 (out of 4,000-4,500) **school-age children** participate yearly in digital educational classes, roughly once a week, from September to May. There are about **50 digital classes** covering a wide range of ICT topics, from YouTube to robotics.

For example, under **the national project 'Development of digital skills of society'**, in July 2025, VDC had already trained 233 individuals (versus a target of 700 by the end of March 2026) and issued 552 certificates.

“ *However, it takes years for people to grow up digitally and use the skills they acquire in their careers. Only a few years ago, we had a girl who started our digital skills classroom when she was in 5th grade, and after completing Ventspils University College, came back to the Ventspils Digital Centre to teach the next generation. This is a long-term impact for us.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

**Measuring and monitoring results and impacts.** Approximately every three years, a survey matching the framework of the 'Quality of Life in European Cities' report is outsourced to a local research company. The objective is to evaluate Ventspils alongside other European municipalities using the same survey criteria.

### Sustainability and transferability of the practice

The VDC has evolved into a modern digital hub serving the surrounding area. The most transferable element of this practice is its holistic approach to addressing the digital divide across the three dimensions of civil society, the public sector, and the business community.

Furthermore, VDC has a growing potential to scale its services and activities to support other Latvian municipalities. One area of expansion relates to the deployment and management of ICT solutions. The VDC already provides desk service and infrastructure to other Latvian municipalities, i.e., around 200 local installations with more than 1,000 users of the related digital systems. The second area of expansion concerns lifelong digital education. Other municipalities could benefit from VDC's training experience, which specifically targets both school students and adults.

### Learning from this practice

- Success factor: **openness of the centre and cost-free services**

“ *You can literally walk in and take advantage of its [VDC] offer. For example, if you are a schoolchild and asked to draw a chemical formula, you may not know which software to use, or if you do, there is no reason to buy this software just for one exercise. You can just come to the Digital Centre and walk in. You state your problem, and you will get support. We will get the software for you, show you how to use it, and, at the end, you can print the results or send your work directly. Still, if you are a construction builder who needs to change something in your building drawings, you need costly CAD software at your office, or simply come to the Digital Centre, use this software, print your drawings with our professional printers or digitalise all your drawings with our scanners. All support is free, except for consumables costs, such as when printing. This is how the Ventspils Digital Centre works, and I think it is also its major success factor.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

- Challenge: **addressing rapid ICT evolution and evolving digital skills.**
- Something that could have been done differently: **starting earlier with the digital skill offer.**

“ *Right now, we have developed a digital skills curriculum that starts in pre-school and extends through high school until the PhD level. We started adopting this comprehensive curriculum only 10 years ago, and I think we should have adopted it from the beginning of the Centre's operations.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

### Recommendations to other public authorities

- (local authorities) **establish physical places where citizens can walk in and receive assistance with any type of digital technology, even basic ones.** Ultimately, this increases municipalities' digital maturity and boosts citizen adoption of digital services by ensuring they feel supported by their local government.
- (local authorities) **actively contribute to citizens' digital education, not only targeting schoolchildren but also individuals across all age groups.**

## Sources and further reading

[VDC website](#); [Ventspils Integrated Action Plan](#); [Interreg Europe good practice](#); European Commission (2023), [Intelligent City Challenge: Ventspils](#) (2023); [LSM+ web news](#) dated 09/09/22; [Presentation of the VDC](#) (2025); [Report on the Quality of life in European cities](#).

**Summary of the DIGIREG interview** with Egons Spalans, Deputy Executive Director, Municipality of Ventspils, 26 November 2025.

# NL\_Cyberbank

## DIGIREG showcase

### In a nutshell

**Involved public authority(ies):** Municipality of Amsterdam.

**Geographical coverage (NUTS3):** NL329.

**Implementation period:** 2021-ongoing (in 2025).

**Objectives of the policy intervention:** 1) Bridge the digital divide by providing affordable, refurbished laptops to low-income residents. 2) Enhance digital literacy by offering support and training to beneficiaries, ensuring they can effectively use their devices. 3) Promote sustainability by refurbishing donated laptops and reducing electronic waste. 4) Foster social inclusion by enabling low-income groups to access online services, education, and employment opportunities.

**Target groups:** Semi-literate people, people with a low level of education, slightly mentally impaired people, people living in poverty, more generally, individuals holding the Amsterdam Stadspas (a city pass giving discounts on events and facilities, food and utilities).

**Type of policy intervention:** Project.

**Funding: Public and private.** Government budget (70%) and private donations (30%).

### Why this policy intervention qualifies as a DIGIREG BPP

- The final report of the City Digital Agenda 2019-2022 defines the Cyberbank initiative as a success, acknowledging that the distribution of laptops to low-income residents – combined with free training and skills support – is an effective measure contributing to facilitating their participation in the digital society.
- The municipality anchors policy and funding, while a non-profit operator and corporate donors supply devices, expertise, and labour. This shared-value structure turns what could have been a small municipal subsidy scheme into a city-wide circular-economy and digital-inclusion system.

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Digital devices provision**

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Digital skills development**



**DIGIREG interview with:** Ilona Kemps, Project Leader for the “Digital Inequality” theme within the Digital City Agenda, Digitalisation and Innovation Department, Municipality of Amsterdam, 3 December 2025.

## Description

In 2021, to combat digital inequality among its residents, the first Cyberbank opened in the Amsterdam East district, marking the start of an initiative aimed at providing affordable, refurbished laptops and digital support to low-income residents.

Initiated by Cybersoek, a digital learning centre in Amsterdam providing free support to people in need, in collaboration with the Municipality of Amsterdam, the project developed in response to the growing digital divide, which became more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Cyberbank services include free support for its users, from installing the devices together with the participant to basic training courses.

The foundation of the Cyberbank concept is the donation of used laptops from individuals, companies and public institutions. Laptops are refurbished through a partnership with a social company (ICT Vanaf Morgen), whose core activity is to reduce electronic waste by engaging young people with limited access to the labour market. Donated digital devices are made available for a second life after undergoing a quality check and obtaining the appropriate licenses. The project also collaborates with the Amsterdam Public Library (OBA) network to make spaces available as distribution points and, more recently, with Fulpra, a company that provides a last-mile mobility system that enables the team to sustainably transport laptops and other items between locations.

The Municipality of Amsterdam plays a pivotal role in supporting the Cyberbank initiative. In addition to being a major donor, providing 1,200 laptops per year since 2023, it contributes to the project's success through policy support and strategic integration into its broader digital inclusion strategy. In addition, it provides financial assistance to help the initiative scale up, including the refurbishment process, the digital skills training, and the overall infrastructure enhancement, from new distribution points to support for rent, fit-out and operating costs. Finally, the Municipality actively promotes Cyberbank through its communication channels, raising awareness among residents about the availability of refurbished laptops and digital skills support.

Given the success of the first Cyberbank, the City of Amsterdam invested in a second location in the public library of Amstel in the West district in 2024. Six more locations have been planned for 2025 (three in the Nieuw-West, Noord and Zuidoost districts) and 2026 (three in the West and Zuid districts, and in the Weesp urban area). The new distribution points are expected to be financed by the Municipality.

### The starting point

“ *During the pandemic, many children and adults lacked access to proper devices. They initially started with large-scale device donations, like many cities. But it soon became clear that a structural approach was needed. Cyberbank is an initiative of Cybersoek and appreciating its value, the Department decided to support it and scale it up city-wide. Amsterdam already had arrangements for children to access devices, but almost none for adults. Cyberbank fills this gap: adults with low incomes who hold the Stadspas (the municipal social benefits card) can borrow a laptop for a 20-euro deposit. They began in Amsterdam East and expanded because demand was extremely high...* ”

(DIGIREG interview)

### Framework and enabling conditions

“ *The initiative did not start because of a specific EU or national digitalisation target, but rather out of urgent need during COVID-19... The choices were also guided by studies and evidence showing the scale of digital inequality in Amsterdam.* ”

(DIGIREG interview)

Two departments of the City of Amsterdam are responsible for the initiative. The Digitalisation and Innovation Department, responsible for the scaling strategy, partnerships, sourcing devices, and most of the budget and the Social Department, responsible for verifying eligibility via the Stadspas system and contributing with funds for devices. Collaboration between the two departments is mostly kept informal, except when formal approval is required for additional budgets.

To maintain a lean setup, only a few municipal staff are involved: an Alderman (or city executive) responsible for the portfolio, who helps secure political and financial support; a project leader, responsible for rollout and coordination; accountancy staff, who oversee financial structures; and some additional civil servants.

Collaboration between the ICT contractor and the device-handling city department is currently informal, though the aim is to formalise it. Usually, operational agreements are made via email. The interactions between the City of Amsterdam and the other actors involved are defined within the device refurbishment chain: the city's ICT contractor collects all decommissioned devices; devices are securely wiped as required by law; suitable devices

are sent to ICT Vanaf Morgen for refurbishment; and, finally, devices are distributed. The device refurbishment chain remains the entry point for additional actors willing to contribute to the initiative. For example, national ministries have begun donating their second-hand devices, and thousands have been allocated to Cyberbank in Amsterdam and other cities.

### Evidence about results and impacts

Initially, the project distributed **150 laptops per month**. In 2024, the number rose to **300 laptops per month**. The increase resulted from doubling the number of distribution points. The goal is to reach **500 laptops per month in 2025 and 2026**.

**Within the initiative, 1,600 laptops were received as donations and refurbished, and 1,560 were distributed.**

By extending the lifespan of donated laptops by approximately three years, the project has a **positive environmental impact**. Clients are asked to return the laptop if it no longer works or is no longer needed. If they return it within three years, they obtain a refund of EUR 20. Returned laptops are recycled within the EU. So far, this has occurred only for 15–20 laptops per year.

Based on several surveys, **approximately 25% of Cyberbank clients** return to Cybersoek for digital support, and **approximately 10% enrol in a basic digital skills course**.

“ The short-term results of the project include a growing citywide awareness of Cyberbank; increased demand for digital support, not just devices; a better understanding of target groups and their needs; and a reduction in immediate device shortages among low-income adults. The primary expected long-term impacts are a rollout across all seven city districts by 2026 (currently three active); a significant reduction in waiting times (to reach the goal of no more than four weeks); a positive contribution to reducing the access-based digital divide; and a circular use of devices with consequent future environmental benefits. ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

**Measuring and monitoring results and impacts.** An approach for measuring and monitoring results is currently in place. It relies on quantitative indicators of volumes and flows, such as the numbers of donated, refurbished, and distributed devices, as well as the number of applicants (e.g., statistics on waiting lists). Further aspects to be measured and monitored are under development. They include, for example, usage patterns (e.g., frequency, purpose), indications of whether devices help users achieve personal goals, and the need for additional support. No information has yet been collected on indirect impacts, such as e-waste reduction or quality-of-life improvements.

### Sustainability and transferability of the practice

The Cyberbank will continue and expand as demand remains extremely high. The Department is still considering whether and how to provide phones (particularly useful for homeless residents) and tablets (preferred by the elderly and required for two-factor authentication). There are sustainability concerns, including the lack of fully secured long-term funding, the need for the Social Department's input, and the risk that political uncertainty may affect future budget decisions.

Cyberbank's model can be adapted to different city sizes and demographics, as evidenced by the Municipality's planned scaling-up process (from 1 to 7 locations). Cities aiming to enhance digital inclusion can replicate the model by partnering with local organisations, securing device donations, and providing digital literacy training. Notably, partnerships are crucial for the implementation of the project, and so are the institutional and financial support provided by the local authority.

### Learning from this practice

- ▶ Success factor: **allocation of dedicated funding**. It is from the Digital City Agenda.
- ▶ Success factor: **adoption of an already existing Cyberbank model**. It has been simplified and scaled.
- ▶ Success factor: **existence of a clear and fair eligibility criterion to determine the target groups**. The Stadspas system has been essential.
- ▶ Success factor: **leverage on existing widespread locations for distribution**. Libraries and partner organisations' facilities allowed people to collect devices locally without opening new municipal sites.

- ▶ Success factor: **inclusion of human support.** Cyberbank offers workshops and help desks, both of which are critical to the digital empowerment of end users.
- ▶ Challenge: **need to clarify responsibilities and roles within the city administration.** During the design phase, it was discussed which department (i.e., the Digitalisation and Innovation Department or the Social Department) should lead the project. During the implementation phase, an internal debate concerned who should finance long-term scaling.
- ▶ Challenge: **uncertainty over Cyberbank's capacity to meet demand for refurbished devices.** Especially in the design phase, it focused on capacity for repairs, help desk support, and logistics.
- ▶ Challenge: **shortage of devices to be distributed.** This problem concerns both the quantity and the quality of devices. It occurred despite refurbishing and national donations. In addition, the situation worsens as the number of older devices increases. They have shorter lifespans and cannot always run modern software.
- ▶ Challenge: **harder budget negotiations due to political uncertainty.** It is a consequence of shifts in local and national politics.
- ▶ Challenge: **use of lotteries to assign devices instead of waiting lists.** It implies that some eligible residents may never receive a device.

#### Recommendations to other public authorities

- ▶ (local authorities) **engage the ICT department.**
- ▶ (local authorities) **plan for long-term funding and procurement cycles from the beginning.**
- ▶ (local authorities) **consider different sources to obtain the devices to be refurbished.** Reuse of municipal devices, as well as corporate social responsibility donations of devices from the private sector, significantly help scaling.
- ▶ (local authorities) **create strong partnerships with refurbishment organisations early.**
- ▶ (local authorities) **ensure political backing and cross-departmental alignment from the start.** A single, unified structure works better than multiple fragmented initiatives.
- ▶ (local authorities) **combine device distribution with training and individual support.**
- ▶ (local authorities) **diversify device distribution points and ensure their presence on the territory.** Do not rely exclusively on libraries, as some residents feel uncomfortable there.
- ▶ (local authorities) **use a transparent eligibility system** (like Amsterdam's Stadspas).

## Sources and further reading

[Cyberbank website](#); [City of Amsterdam Stadspas](#); [Cyberbank YouTube video](#); [Cybersoek website](#); [City of Amsterdam's Digital City Agenda 2019-2022](#); [City of Amsterdam's Digital City Agenda 2023-2026](#); Information provided by the Cyberbank project in May 2025.

**Summary of the DIGIREG interview** with Ilona Kemps, Project Leader for the "Digital Inequality" theme within the Digital City Agenda, Digitalisation and Innovation Department, Municipality of Amsterdam, 3 December 2025.

# NO\_Digital Help

## DIGIREG showcase

### In a nutshell

**Involved public authority(ies):** National government, Association of Local and Regional Authorities, and municipalities.

**Geographical coverage (NUTS3):** NO020, NO060, NO071, NO074, NO081, NO082, NO091, NO092, NO0A1, NO0A2, NO0A3, NO0B1, NO0B2.

**Implementation period:** 2017-2026.

**Objectives of the policy intervention:** 1) Provide advice and guidance to municipalities that want to help and guide citizens with low or no digital competence. 2) Contribute to achieving the national target on digital inclusion.

**Target groups:** Municipalities and citizens, with a focus on municipalities' residents with low or no digital skills.

**Type of policy intervention:** Programme, Public subsidies.

**Funding:** Public. National budget. At the renewal in 2022, the grant scheme supporting the implementation of Digital Help was increased from NOK 2 million to NOK 8 million (approx. EUR 680,000).

### Why this policy intervention qualifies as a DIGIREG BPP

- The initiative is part of a broader government effort to significantly reduce the percentage of citizens with insufficient digital skills. The focus is on addressing and preventing digital exclusion by ensuring all citizens, particularly the elderly and immigrants, can access essential public services and participate fully in society. The Digital Help programme and the grant scheme are aligned with the national Action Plan for Increasing Inclusion in a Digital Society, applying from 2023 to 2026. The programme contributes to achieving the Open Government Partnership commitment 6.2 on 'Digital inclusion' (i.e., reduction of the share of citizens with insufficient or weak basic digital skills from 14% in 2021 to 10% in 2025).
- The initiative provides a flexible framework and support for municipalities. First, participation by municipalities is not made compulsory; second, it adapts the guidance and financing to local needs and conditions. This flexibility makes support more accessible and effective for municipalities dealing with diverse local contexts. On the other hand, municipalities receiving a grant are asked to have a plan for continued operations and financing after the grant period to ensure the sustainability of the training offer.
- The programme has been extended over time, and the total budget allocated to grants has been increased by four times, reflecting the institutional commitment to close the digital skills divide among all citizens through the mobilisation of municipalities in the delivery of local, low-threshold guidance.

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Digital skills development**



**DIGIREG interview with:** a representative of the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS), 27 November 2025.

## Description

In 2017, a collaboration programme 'Digital Help' between the central government, the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) and other representatives from both the municipal and state levels was initiated. KS's role in this framework is to provide advice and assistance to municipalities that wish to offer digital enhancement services to their citizens. Within the programme, the knowledge base developed by KS over the years is made available to inform municipalities on the best way to arrange their guidance offer. For example, municipalities are recommended to provide at least a physical place where residents can receive support, and qualified human resources (i.e., employees with digital competence and guidance experience in the use of digital tools and public services at a basic level). In terms of content, municipalities are recommended to focus their guidance on the use of devices for accessing the internet and of online municipal and national services such as taxation. Furthermore, local authorities are advised to provide simple tips to citizens to make safe, good choices online and to understand the basics of online security and protecting personal data privacy. The support provided by KS is accessible through the Digihjelpen online platform. The repository also showcases examples of initiatives undertaken by municipalities. In 2022, the 'Digital Help' collaboration agreement was extended by KS and the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development until 2026.

The programme runs in parallel with the provision of national grants to municipalities for the establishment of a permanent digital training and guidance offer for citizens. Grants are awarded through calls for applications, in which municipalities are encouraged to apply jointly or in collaboration with voluntary organisations. The last call was launched in 2025 and had a minimum grant request of about EUR 8,500. Examples of support activities funded through the grant scheme include the engagement of tutors, competence development for those responsible for operating the guidance services, marketing of the offers, and support to ensure that target residents can access the training logistically (e.g., arranging their transport or paying their transport costs). Municipalities receiving grants to establish a training and guidance service for digital competence are invited to take advantage of support from KS through the Digital Help programme.

### The starting point

“ *One of the main reasons for establishing the Digihjelpen programme was to reduce digital exclusion among citizens. Many people lack basic digital skills, which probably prevents them from accessing public digital services, for instance. So, we wanted to support and guide municipalities in creating services and understanding how to tackle the problem of digital confidence.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

### Framework and enabling conditions

“ *...the municipalities I work with receive funding from the Norwegian Digitalisation Agency for digital-related interventions. Our primary goal is to support municipalities in this area.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

Within the Digihjelpen programme, key actors are the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) with some of its departments, which are responsible for offering various forms of support to municipalities; the Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, with which KS holds a broad collaboration agreement; and the Norwegian digitalisation agency, which grants funding to municipalities.

“ *We offer 1:1 meetings, webinars on different topics, both physical and digital meeting arenas for sharing experiences and best practices. For example, when they [i.e., the municipalities] start doing a project, we organise different webinars to share experiences. We do not offer individual training; rather, we provide meeting opportunities for municipalities... For example, in October, we held a large gathering with all the municipalities that received funding and also other municipalities that offer services to residents with little or no digital competence, to share best practices and challenges related to their strategies and plans, and to discuss updates at the national level.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

## Evidence about results and impacts

In March 2022, **more than 120 municipalities** were reported to have **received grants to establish digital training and guidance services since 2017**.

According to a 2024 survey, it is estimated that **nearly 90% of large municipalities** (i.e., municipalities with over 20,000 inhabitants) have established a **permanent guidance service**. The share is **57% for small municipalities** (with less than 5,000 inhabitants). The same investigation specifies that *“The service is often designed as a drop-in service and/or physical course with several participants and is largely aimed at the elderly and minority language speakers. The content of the guidance is varied and is guided by the needs of those who use the service. The service is often located as part of the municipality's service/information service, the public library or in a volunteer centre, and is carried out by municipal employees and through efforts from the voluntary sector”*.

At the national level, the indicator ‘**share of population with at least basic digital skills**’ passed from 75% in 2016 to **79% in 2022**.

“ *Creating a highly inspirational network for communities and delivering high-quality consulting services are undoubtedly short-term outcomes. It is also an opportunity for people in our network to meet face-to-face, even though municipalities organise these meetings differently. Still, a network of municipalities focused on a specific theme and aware of scientific progress... is very important... especially when the theme concerns rapidly evolving areas such as digitalisation. Often, there are few resources dedicated to a specific theme within a municipality, so having colleagues in other local authorities working on the same could be highly beneficial. For example, this approach enables municipal staff in even the smallest local authorities to access best practices to reduce the digital divide among older adults.*

*Overall, I think the programme has provided help in the digital domain. It is difficult for us to measure whether individuals are becoming more digital. Still, we believe that providing the municipality with this support, guidance, and tools is the right approach to reduce the digital divide.*

(DIGIREG interview) ”

**Measuring and monitoring results and impacts.** A study conducted with Menon Economics aimed to investigate and assess the programme's results and impacts through a survey. It offered an overview of the municipalities involved.

### Sustainability and transferability of the practice

This is a nationwide initiative targeting all municipalities, although participation in the programme is not compulsory. The intervention model is designed to be highly replicable across the country. However, it is also transferable to other countries and entails the establishment of a support programme for municipalities that runs in parallel with a grant scheme, providing local authorities with the necessary funding to act.

“ *We hope to continue the programme. We have an agreement with the Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development for the programme. The first agreement between KS and the Ministry of Local Government was signed in 2017, and it has since been renewed several times. The current one, which has lasted for the last four years, is going to end. We are discussing with them how to proceed further, but it is still too early to understand how it will be implemented in practice. We know this is a very important topic at the moment.*

*... Since the beginning of the programme, we have focused on older adults, as we considered them one of the target groups needing more digital help in terms of competencies and device use. We are now considering focusing on other target groups, such as migrants and young adults. Still, we are discussing which other aspects we need to develop further and what comes next.*

(DIGIREG interview) ”

### Learning from this practice

- ▶ Success factor: **sharing experiences among municipalities.** Municipalities vary widely and operate differently, but by sharing experiences, they can inspire one another.
- ▶ Success factor: **collaborating with voluntary organisations embedded in the territory.** This type of cooperation promotes social inclusion as well as digital inclusion.
- ▶ Success factor: **adapting training and guidance to user groups.** Involved municipalities consider one-to-one counselling with people lacking digital skills very effective, especially for older adults.

- ▶ Challenge: **limited municipal resources and capacity.** Municipalities highlight that key constraints include insufficient human resources, limited time, and, sometimes, a lack of priority, as these activities are not statutory obligations.
- ▶ Something that could have been done differently: **Stable and predictable funding would have yielded greater results and a more significant impact.** Funding on an annual basis hinders long-term perspective.

#### Recommendations to other public authorities

- ▶ (local authorities) **facilitate collaborations at the local level to foster social inclusion together with digital inclusion.** For example, it can be done involving voluntary organisations.
- ▶ (local authorities) **adapt training and guidance activities to the local needs.** Municipalities as well as target users vary widely, and actions must be adapted to local contexts.
- ▶ (national authorities, regional authorities) **inspire and facilitate municipalities' exchanges of practices.**

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## Sources and further reading

[‘Digital Help’ online manual](#); [2025 national call for grants](#); [Eurostat online data on individuals having at least basic digital skills](#); [Fifth Norwegian Action Plan: Open Government Partnership \(OGP\) 2024-2027](#); [Government’s action plan for increased inclusion in a digital society](#); [Menon Economics report](#) for KS (2025); [Norway in the Digital Economy and Society Index](#); [Norwegian Digitalisation Agency \(Digdir\) website](#).

**Summary of the DIGIREG interview** with a representative of the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS), 27 November 2025.

# PL\_Addressing digital exclusion in rural areas

## DIGIREG showcase

### In a nutshell

**Involved public authority(ies):** Local Action Group 'Northern Jura Partnership Association'.

**Geographical coverage (NUTS3):** PL224.

**Implementation period:** 2017-2018 & 2020.

**Objectives of the policy intervention:** 1) Offer digital education and technical devices to people aged 50+ lacking digital skills and experience using the computer and/or accessing the internet. 2) Raise awareness among the local communities and stakeholders of the need to invest in digital training and lifelong learning opportunities to overcome the isolation of specific groups of the population.

**Target groups:** Residents aged 50+ of the nine municipalities represented in the Northern Jura Partnership.

**Type of policy intervention:** Project.

**Funding:** Public. EU, national and regional budgets. Total budget for the first edition: EUR 10,394. Total budget for the second edition: EUR 11,300. Co-financed through the EAFRD under sub-measure 19.2 of the Rural Development Programme for 2014-2020.

### Why this policy intervention qualifies as a DIGIREG BPP

- The project is considered a good practice by the European Network for Rural Development and was runner-up of the Rural Inspiration Award 2019, in the category Social Inclusion. It is a good example of a simple yet effective initiative that enhances participants' digital skills and strengthens the territory's cooperative capacity, thereby increasing the rural area's social capital.

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Digital skills development**

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Quality of life improvement**



**DIGIREG interview with:** Jerzy Motłoch, Director, Local Action Group Northern Jura Partnership Association, 16 December 2025.

## Description

Since 2004, in the rural region of Częstochowa County, the Local Action Group 'Northern Jura Partnership Association' (LAG PPJ) has brought together the public sector (municipalities of Janów, Koziegłowy, Lelów, Mstów, Niegowa, Olsztyn, Poraj, Przyrów and Żarki), local entrepreneurs, farmers, and the social sector (residents and NGOs). This initiative was designed and implemented in the framework of the community-led Local Development Strategy. Data from the strategy assessment indicated that residents aged 50+ experienced digital exclusion due to limited basic digital skills. As a result, the LAG PPJ staff, with support from an expert, designed specific training sessions and developed the thematic content for the modules. Each partner municipality hosted workshops delivered in two editions of the project: one conducted in 2017-2018 and one replicated in 2020.

Participants, organised in small groups, received attentive, individualised supervision. They learnt to search for information online, make electronic payments, explore job opportunities, and create email accounts, among other essential digital skills. Training sessions were organised in public libraries and local cultural centres, providing an opportunity to visit and use the nine local institutions and to learn about the mission and scope of the public facilities in the area.

Tablets were distributed to participants and remained with them after the training, contingent on their full attendance and successful completion of the final test. This arrangement enabled them to continue practising and developing skills at home.

### The starting point

“ *The practice was developed in response to a clearly identified digital divide affecting rural communities in the Northern Jura area. Many residents, especially seniors, had limited access to digital tools and lacked basic digital skills. This situation hindered their social inclusion, access to public services, and participation in the labour market. People over 50, especially in this territory's rural areas, have very limited knowledge of how to use computers and access the internet. This causes a significant number of problems in their daily life as they cannot take advantage of simple online services, e.g., to make online payments, shop online, or access various sources of knowledge and information. People who are not up to speed with technological progress are often afraid to use a computer, and they often do not have the financial means to purchase one.* ”

(DIGIREG interview)

### Framework and enabling conditions

“ *The following aspects were primarily considered [when designing the initiative]: (1) the state of digitalisation and digital exclusion in rural areas of residents over 50, identified based on local experiences and needs analysis, and incorporated into the Local Development Strategy (for the period 2014-2020). The Local Development Strategy for 2014-2020 diagnosed problems related to the digital exclusion of seniors and, consequently, their low level of social activity. Older people often feel digitally excluded, and with the current galloping technological progress, they are unable to cope with the computerisation and digitisation of many areas of their lives. (2) local development strategies of the Northern Jura Partnership, focusing on equal opportunities and community development. (3) European and national policies on digital inclusion, in particular the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, Priority VI: Sustainable Territorial Development. Promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction, and economic development in rural areas. Measure: 'Support for local development under the LEADER initiative'. And (4) availability of European funds, in particular rural development funds, such as the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, the LEADER initiative, and the 2014-2020 financial perspective.* ”

(DIGIREG interview)

The LAG operates through a small office employing five staff members. The Director of the office was responsible for the overall supervision of the project, ensuring its proper implementation, coordination, and final settlement in line with funding requirements, with support from an accountant to ensure timely payments, effective financial management, and accurate accounting of all project costs. The Director was also responsible for hiring trainers for the workshops. The office staff members were responsible for information and promotional activities, including publishing articles about the project on the PPJ Association website; the recruitment of participants for the project; cooperation with local stakeholders to promote the project (municipalities, municipal cultural centres, village leaders); the identification of appropriate venues for the workshops, close and easily accessible to senior participants; procurement of training materials and equipment (tablets); the smooth organisation of the workshops (e.g., catering, attendance lists); and contact management with participants.

“ *The instructor conducting training on the basics of tablet use, email, online shopping, and electronic banking had to combine soft skills with technical knowledge. ...genuine patience in repeatedly explaining instructions and empathy... allowed recognition of participants' fears about technology. The instructor created an atmosphere of safety in which mistakes were a natural part of learning... [using] simple, jargon-free language and adjusting the pace to the group's capabilities. Respect for seniors permeated every interaction... He possessed solid technical knowledge and [was able to understand] the specific difficulties seniors face with touchscreen devices... Thanks to the team's competencies, the project was efficiently implemented and settled, and seniors who initially feared technology completed the workshops with the ability to independently use email, online shopping, and digital communication. This was real social change made possible through a combination of professionalism, empathy, and respect for participants.* ”

(DIGIREG interview)

The combination of formal and informal collaboration mechanisms has been considered crucial for efficient project management, rapid problem-solving, and the smooth organisation of workshops implemented across nine partner municipalities. Formal cooperation with external partners was considered a key element, given the project's rural, territorially dispersed nature. Municipalities supported the organisation of workshops at the local level, facilitated access to community facilities, and helped identify and reach senior participants. Local cultural centres, libraries, and community centres provided venues for workshops and acted as trusted local intermediaries. Externally contracted trainers ensured high-quality delivery of workshops adapted to the needs and learning pace of senior citizens.

The long-term trust developed through previous community-led initiatives implemented by the PPJ Association facilitated informal collaboration with local stakeholders, such as municipal staff, village leaders, and community representatives, and was particularly effective in building trust and ensuring high participation rates. Local NGOs and grassroots organisations working with seniors helped tailor the workshops' content and approach.

#### Evidence about results and impacts

Driven by high demand and strong community feedback, **a second edition of the training was launched in the same format**, confirming the practice's success. The initiative also received highly positive local assessment from municipalities and local partners.

The initiative successfully delivered a cycle of **three-day workshops in nine partner municipalities of the PPJ Association**. Over the two editions, **180 people aged 50+ acquired or improved their digital skills and 54 training sessions** (27 per edition) were delivered. In both editions, all registered participants attended the full programme and passed the final test.

Interviews with participants revealed that the workshops improved their **quality of life** across a wide range of domains. Providing computer skills not only enabled participants to gain confidence in using digital tools but also **removed barriers to accessing digital technologies**, thereby increasing their social activity within the community.

“ *This collaborative model proved particularly effective in the context of working with senior citizens and delivering activities across a geographically dispersed rural area. In the short term, the main result of the practice was the improvement of basic digital skills among participants, particularly in the use of tablets, internet browsing, information searching, and performing simple online tasks. Participants acquired practical skills necessary for everyday functioning in a digital environment, which directly led to an increase in their confidence when using digital technologies. Another important short-term outcome was the reduction of psychological barriers related to fear of new technologies. Thanks to the friendly learning environment, small group work, and an individualised approach, participants began to perceive digital tools as helpful and accessible rather than intimidating. In the long term, the practice contributed to a tangible reduction of digital exclusion in rural areas, especially among senior citizens.... A further long-term impact was the increased social participation and independence of seniors, who became more active in their local communities, maintained social connections more easily, and made greater use of online educational and cultural resources.....the targeted digital divide has been noticeably reduced, although it remains a challenge that requires continued and scaled-up initiatives...* ”

(DIGIREG interview)

The project's positive spillovers included **improved intergenerational communication** and **increased entrepreneurial initiative** within the target group. These results extended beyond the participants, thereby building greater social capital across the region.

**Measuring and monitoring results and impacts.** Both quantitative and qualitative indicators were used, supported by ongoing monitoring throughout the implementation period. Quantitative indicators included the number of workshops delivered, the number of participants involved, and the number of municipalities where the training sessions were implemented. Direct feedback and opinions from participants after the workshops; observations by trainers and office staff on participants' progress and engagement; and follow-up phone calls and contacts with participants about similar future training opportunities offered by the PPJ Association after the training were the main sources of information for the qualitative assessment. The monitoring approach was based on regular participant contact, attendance tracking, responsiveness to needs identified during the workshops, and sustained interest in digital topics after the project ended.

### Sustainability and transferability of the practice

Given the success of the first edition (2017-2018), the LAG continued its mission of improving digital literacy in rural areas with a follow-up initiative (2020). Looking ahead, the initiative is likely to be replicated and further developed in the coming years, though not necessarily in the same organisational format. Its continuation and scaling are primarily planned through the implementation of similar initiatives within the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). The Northern Jura Partnership Association plans to act as a supporting and coordinating body, enabling projects addressing digital exclusion among older people to be implemented by local grant beneficiaries operating within the PPJ area and the Local Development Strategy.

Conditions for the sustainability and scalability of the practice are the dissemination of the proven implementation model; the transfer of experience and know-how gained by the PPJ Association; the engagement of local grant beneficiaries with an in-depth knowledge of community needs; and long-term partnerships with municipalities, cultural institutions, and organisations supporting senior citizens.

Considering the initiative's format, required resources, and impact, some elements of the practice are easily transferable. In fact, soon after its implementation, it became a model for a local NGO to introduce children and young people to basic coding and the use of innovative robots. However, a clear vision and a political commitment are required to achieve the necessary synergic and strategic cooperation.

### Learning from this practice

- ▶ Success factor: **alignment with the real needs of local communities, particularly senior citizens living in rural areas.** The project addressed a clearly identified gap in basic digital skills, resulting in strong interest and high participation among the target group.
- ▶ Success factor: **practical and senior-friendly approach to training.** The workshops were based on hands-on exercises, delivered in small groups, at a calm pace, and with an individualised approach for each participant. This helped participants overcome psychological barriers to using digital technologies.
- ▶ Success factor: **active involvement of local communities and partners, including municipalities, local cultural centres, libraries, and village leaders.** These actors facilitated outreach to seniors, strengthened trust in the initiative, and ensured the availability of appropriate local facilities for workshop delivery.
- ▶ Success factor: **engagement of experienced and competent training staff.** It was crucial to combine technical expertise with strong soft skills, including empathy, patience, and the ability to communicate clearly with older learners.
- ▶ Success factor: **flexibility in the implementation of the practice.** This included adjustments to schedules, workshop content, and learning pace to match participants' skills and expectations. It ensured accessibility, relevance, and a positive learning experience for all participants.
- ▶ Challenge: **low initial confidence of participants.** Especially at the beginning of the project, many senior citizens had little or no prior experience with digital technologies and were afraid of making mistakes. A supportive and safe learning environment resolved this challenge.

- Challenge: **wide variation in digital skill levels among participants.** Some seniors were complete beginners, while others already had basic experience. Small-group workshops and an individualised approach allowed the trainer to adapt the training to participants' needs.
- Challenge: **lack of access to appropriate digital equipment among senior participants.** Many older people did not own a computer, tablet, or smartphone, which limited both their participation in the workshops and their ability to continue developing digital skills independently.

“ *For many seniors, purchasing such equipment was not financially feasible, as they often have to prioritise basic expenses such as medication, housing costs, and food due to low pension incomes. To address this challenge, a decision was made to purchase tablets as training materials, which were used during the workshops. Providing the same equipment to all participants ensured equal learning conditions and enabled a fully practical, hands-on training approach. Importantly, the tablets were not used only during the workshops themselves. Participants were able to continue practising and developing their digital skills after the training sessions, reinforcing the knowledge acquired during the workshops. This solution not only removed the equipment barrier but also contributed to the long-term sustainability of the project's results by increasing seniors' digital independence.* ”

(DIGIREG interview)

- Challenge: **complex logistics of delivering workshops across a geographically dispersed rural area,** involving several municipalities. Close cooperation with partner municipalities and local institutions, which supported the identification of accessible venues close to participants' places of residence, enabled to effectively manage workshop logistics.
- Something that could have been done differently: **a larger number of training sessions or a longer cycle of workshops.** It would have enabled more digitally excluded seniors in rural areas to participate, where the number of seniors in digital need exceeds the capacity of a single project.

#### Recommendations to other public authorities

- (regional authorities, local authorities) **start with a thorough assessment of the needs and barriers of the target group.** Effective actions to combat digital exclusion require a clear understanding of participants' digital skill levels, equipment gaps, financial constraints, and psychological barriers. Bottom-up, locally adapted solutions prove to be more effective than standardised approaches.
- (regional authorities, local authorities) **involve local partners from the early design stage.** Cooperation with municipalities, cultural institutions, libraries, and local community leaders significantly increases outreach, improves the recruitment of participants most at risk of exclusion, and strengthens the sustainability of results.
- (regional authorities, local authorities) **prioritise practical, workshop-based learning formats and small group work, and ensure flexibility in implementation, allowing adaptation to participants' pace and abilities.** Hands-on, practical learning is far more effective than theoretical teaching. Workshops based on practical exercises, repeated tasks, and direct use of digital devices enabled participants to retain knowledge more effectively and apply their skills independently after the project ended. A trust-building, friendly, safe learning environment is essential for overcoming fear of technology and encouraging active participation of the elderly.
- (regional authorities, local authorities) **plan initiatives with a long-term perspective, including opportunities for continuation or replication.**

## Sources and further reading

[ENRD good practice](#); [LAG PPI Local Development Strategy for 2014-2020](#); [Northern Jura Partnership Association, Project description](#); [Project's description by the Agricultural Advisory Centre in Brwinów](#), Warsaw Branch; [Project's description in MEDICI database](#); [YouTube video of the Northern Jura Partnership Association's Workshop to combat digital exclusion in rural areas](#).

**Summary of the DIGIREG interview** with Jerzy Motłoch, Director, Local Action Group Northern Jura Partnership Association, 16 December 2025.

# PT\_Digital Skills Passport

## DIGIREG showcase

### In a nutshell

**Involved public authority(ies):** Municipality of Lisbon.

**Geographical coverage (NUTS3):** PT170.

**Implementation period:** 2017-ongoing (in 2025).

**Objectives of the policy intervention:** 1) Empower people through digital training to fully exercise their citizenship.

**Target groups:** All citizens aged 18+, with a focus on the elderly, marginalised people, unemployed individuals and people facing social problems.

**Type of policy intervention:** Programme.

**Funding:** Public. Municipal budget. There is no specific budget line for the programme, which is implemented using internal resources.

### Why this policy intervention qualifies as a DIGIREG BPP

- Digital training was considered since the inception as a tool and not as the scope of the programme. The scope is much wider and aims to empower the target individuals.
- The practice is not based on a centralised approach but is grounded in collaboration with local actors that are closer to the target audience.
- The programme was fully developed in-house and has a modest cost (indicated in the range of EUR 50,000). It is deployed using internal resources, and even the trainers are in-house public servants from different departments within the Municipality who have completed a capacity-building course.
- The approach is innovative, based on the co-design of the learning path, and the deep engagement of participants with various techniques.

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Digital skills development**



**DIGIREG interview with:** Hélder Touças, Digital Inclusion and AI Literacy Program Coordinator, Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, 9 October 2025.

## Description

'Digital Skills Passport' is Lisbon City Council's digital inclusion and digital literacy programme. The programme was created in 2017 and is structured around two main activities: digital skills enhancement and promotion of a 'passport to inclusion'. The programme is grounded in a conceptual framework comprising five principles and ten digital skills (ranging from internet safety to coding fundamentals). The five principles are: 1) co-designed learning (participants are engaged to decide what they want to learn); 2) empowerment of every adult (aged 18+); 3) gamified learning; 4) creation of a safe learning space (through the setup of mixed groups of learners where a helping spirit and key values such as respect, empathy and availability are shared); 5) celebration of achievements.

The programme is implemented through workshops focused on one of the ten digital skills in the conceptual framework. Each workshop comprises five sections, each lasting 3 hours. Every trainer in the programme comes from the various departments of the City Council. Once these civil servants sign up for the programme, they allocate some of their working hours to it. They are offered a very small financial incentive to participate in the programme and must complete a 50-hour capacity-building course that, in addition to technical training, covers learning techniques and social aspects.

The achievements of the programme's beneficiaries result in the award of open badges. In these badges, included in a digital passport, the skills gained are described and can be shared on social media, on the web, or in a CV, thereby potentially enhancing individuals' employability. Courses are free and certified. Competencies are based on the DigComp 2.1 - European Reference Framework for Digital Competencies and research by the Lisbon University's LIDIA Project.

### The starting point

“ *The genesis of the Digital Skills Passport lies in a pressing and paradoxical reality we observed in Portugal. On one hand, our country, and Lisbon in particular, boasts excellent digital infrastructure, with near-universal broadband coverage. However, this infrastructural modernity was masking a deep societal divide. A significant portion of our population was being left behind in the digital transition. The data was alarming. In 2017, when we began, studies from the European Commission indicated that nearly half of the Portuguese population lacked basic digital skills to use the internet effectively, and a staggering 30% had no digital skills at all. This risk of digital exclusion was, and remains, particularly acute for our most vulnerable groups: seniors, citizens with low incomes, the unemployed, and those with lower educational qualifications. This was not just about accessing technology... In an era when public services, job opportunities, social connections, and civic participation are increasingly moving online, this digital gap represented a profound threat to equality and the whole exercise of citizenship.* ”

(DIGIREG interview)

### Framework and enabling conditions

“ *Our approach was holistic and evidence-based, considering several key factors.... We were acutely aware of Portugal's digital asymmetry. While we ranked high in connectivity infrastructure, we were significantly below the EU average in human capital and digital skills. Our programme was designed to directly address this gap, aligning perfectly with the goals of national strategies like INCoDe.2030 and, more recently, the European Union's 'Digital Decade 2030' targets, which aim for at least 80% of the population to have basic digital skills... We conducted a thorough diagnosis. Even within the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, which had the best regional digital index in the country, the divide was stark. Data showed that 18% of individuals aged 16 or older in our region did not use the internet, and 13% had never used a computer. This proved that the problem was not just geographical but deeply social, existing even in our most developed urban centres... The programme was designed from the ground up to be in full alignment with key policy frameworks. The structure of our ten competences is directly mapped to the European DigComp 2.2 framework, ensuring our certification is relevant and recognised. Furthermore, the program's objectives are in perfect harmony with the national strategy for digital skills, INCoDe.2030.* ”

(DIGIREG interview)

The programme was conceived and designed entirely by the Department of Development and Training of the Lisbon City Council. The department is also responsible for the management and complete lifecycle of the initiative, which includes the strategic design, based on identified needs and taking into account the alignment of the programme with municipal and national policies; the curriculum development for the 'Digital Skills Passport' framework, based on ten training courses, the gamified 'Digital Challenges' and the Open Educational Resources;

the recruiting, training, and coordination of internal trainers; the management of partnerships with local and national partners; and the courses' implementation and evaluation.

A dedicated and highly specialised team of 26 civil servants is responsible for the programme. It includes one Department Director responsible for strategic oversight and alignment with the broader municipal vision; two co-coordinators with academic qualifications in adult education and extensive experience in digital technologies, responsible for the day-to-day management of the programme, instructional design, curriculum development, and the continuous training and mentoring of facilitators; 22 specialised trainers selected for their expertise in digital inclusion and their alignment with the department's human-centred pedagogical values; and one administrative assistant providing support for logistics, registrations, and communication to ensure the smooth operation of the programme.

**About capacity building.** A prerequisite for all Digital Skills Passport trainers is holding the national Pedagogical Skills Certificate, which provides a solid foundation in teaching methodologies. A distinctive element of the programme is its pedagogical methodology, which has evolved from REDE (Respect, Empathy, Availability, Enthusiasm) to LEAP (Learner-Centred, Engaging, Adaptable, Participatory). Each trainer undergoes intensive, programme-specific training in this methodology, delivered by the programme coordinators. This training focuses not just on technical skills, but on the crucial soft skills needed to create an inclusive, safe, and motivating learning environment for diverse participants in the programme.

Key implementation partners of the Department of Development and Training of the Lisbon City Council are the Lisbon Public Library Network and local parishes, which provide essential physical spaces for workshops, serve as crucial outreach channels within communities, and help connect with citizens who most need the Digital Skills Passport programme. In addition, collaborations with NGOs help reach specific vulnerable groups (e.g., the 'Clínica Psiquiátrica de São José', which supports the adaptation of the methodology for people with intellectual disabilities).

### Evidence about results and impacts

Between 2017 and 2024, the programme empowered **3,368 citizens** through more than **310 courses**; recognised their achievements by issuing over **5,000 Open Badges** (i.e., shareable digital micro-credentials); achieved a **global satisfaction rate of 97.08%**; and **increased participants' digital confidence and ability to perform essential daily tasks online**, from communicating with family to accessing public services, and protecting themselves from disinformation.

“ The long-term impact goes to the very heart of our mission and has significant societal implications [in terms of] reducing the Digital Divide in Lisbon: the programme is a direct and effective tool in closing the digital skills gap. By successfully reaching the most vulnerable populations—seniors (16% of participants are over 65), those with low educational attainment (53.3% have 9th grade or less), and the unemployed—we are actively building a more equitable digital society; empowering active and autonomous citizenship: we are not just teaching clicks and swipes, we are enabling citizenship. The high demand for the 'Online Public Services' course shows that we are empowering people to interact with the state, claim their rights, and participate civically in ways previously inaccessible to them. We are also promoting gender equity in technology. With women comprising 66.4% of our participants, the programme is making a significant contribution to reducing the gender gap in digital skills and empowering women to fully participate in the digital economy and society. Then, we are fostering social cohesion and intergenerational dialogue: our workshops are vibrant, cross-generational spaces where participants aged 21 to 97 learn side by side. This interaction fosters mutual understanding, breaks down stereotypes, and strengthens the social fabric of our communities.

(DIGIREG interview)

**Measuring and monitoring results and impacts.** Evidence-based practice and formal assessment are considered a critical part of the programme's continuous improvement cycle. The primary instrument is the comprehensive evaluation report covering the period from 2017 to 2024. This report was conducted internally by the Department of Development and Training and combined quantitative and qualitative methods to evaluate the programme's impact. Using data from all 3,368 participants, demographic profiles and learning patterns were analysed. A statistical analysis of 1,762 valid satisfaction questionnaires measured satisfaction across dozens of indicators, ranging from trainer quality to content relevance. A rigorous thematic

content analysis of thousands of open-ended responses to the questionnaires submitted to participants enabled the systematic identification of the programme's main strengths and areas for improvement.

The adopted evaluation approach is inspired by Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Training Evaluation Model. It considers reaction through satisfaction surveys; learning through the successful completion of the practical "Digital Challenges" required to earn an Open Badge; behaviour through follow-up surveys and qualitative feedback on how participants apply their new skills; and results through the broader, long-term impacts on citizenship and inclusion. The department is continually working to strengthen this approach, particularly by implementing more objective skill assessments, as recommended in the latest evaluation report.

### Sustainability and transferability of the practice

The Digital Skills Passport is going to be continued and actively scaled. The programme's long-term sustainability is guaranteed by its funding model: it is a permanent, strategic initiative of the Lisbon City Council, fully integrated into and financed by the municipality's annual budget. This stems from a firm and enduring political commitment to digital inclusion as a core public service for Lisbon's citizens. Future developments are expected to consider recommendations from the latest evaluation report, such as integrating emerging topics, including Artificial Intelligence and cybersecurity, into the training programme.

There is also a clear strategy to scale the programme's impact beyond city limits. In November 2020, the Lisbon City Council signed a landmark formal agreement with the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) / IN-CoDe.2030, Portugal's national agency for digital skills. This partnership has officially recognised the Lisbon Digital Skills Passport as a national best practice and has established a framework for its nationwide replication. Under this agreement, the Lisbon City Council is responsible for overseeing the national rollout and training facilitators in other municipalities, thereby scaling its proven model nationwide.

“ Furthermore, we believe in sharing our model to build capacity beyond Lisbon. We have designed and delivered "Training of Trainers" courses to empower facilitators in other municipalities, often rural, across Portugal to replicate the Digital Skills Passport in their own communities. This demonstrates our commitment to scaling our impact through systemic capacity-building. ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

In addition, the project is replicable in municipalities outside Portugal due to its low funding requirements and reliance on internal resources. The approach and methodology can also be easily replicated elsewhere. An example is the partnership with the Fundação GENTIS in Catalonia, Spain, which aims to share best practices and explore international replication.

### Learning from this practice

- ▶ Success factor: **the human factor**. Trainers have consistently been the most highly praised aspect of the programme, with satisfaction scores averaging above 4.9 out of 5. Their technical competence, combined with the empathy, patience, and enthusiasm fostered by the adopted REDE/LEAP methodology, has created a safe and motivating learning environment.
- ▶ Success factor: **an effective and inclusive pedagogy**. The learner-centred, gamified, and experiential approach is a radical departure from traditional, rigid training. Using 'Digital Challenges' based on real-life situations makes learning relevant and engaging for a diverse audience.
- ▶ Success factor: **high relevance of content**. The programme's content has been practical and directly applicable to participants' daily lives. The most popular courses, e.g., 'Using online public services', 'Browsing the internet safely', and 'Using a computer', aim at addressing immediate needs, from communicating with family to interacting with the state. The immediate utility has been a powerful motivator.
- ▶ Success factor: **a strong local partnership network**. Collaboration with libraries, parishes, and local associations has been fundamental. This network has given unparalleled reach into the communities most at risk of exclusion.
- ▶ Success factor: **proven ability to reach vulnerable groups**. The programme's design and outreach have been remarkably successful in attracting the target audience, i.e., those who are often left behind, with 16% of participants aged 65 or older and over 53% with a 9th-grade or lower education level.

- ▶ Challenge: **growing demand for advanced digital content.** As participants gained confidence, they requested additional digital skills training. The department is strategically developing new intermediate and advanced learning pathways, such as the 'Futuro Digital' (Digital Future) and 'IA para Todos' (AI for All) initiatives.
- ▶ Challenge: **insufficient course duration for complex topics.** Participants have reported that, for some more complex subjects, the course duration has been too short to allow sufficient practice and consolidation. The department is currently reviewing the structure and duration of several workshops to better balance scope and depth.
- ▶ Challenge: **inconsistent technical infrastructure.** Relying on partners' venues has led to issues with internet connectivity quality or computer equipment obsolescence. To address this, the department has established minimum technical requirements for all new training locations and is working with existing partners to upgrade their infrastructure wherever possible.
- ▶ Challenge: **overcoming initial resistance and fear.** For many participants, especially seniors, technology can be intimidating. The department has overcome this initial fear and resistance not through technology, but through a human-centred methodology. The empathy and patience of trainers, and the non-formal, welcoming atmosphere of the workshops, have been the primary tools for building confidence and transforming anxiety into curiosity.
- ▶ Something that could have been done differently: **a multi-tiered curriculum from the very beginning.** The department initially underestimated how quickly participants would develop their skills and how strong the demand for advanced content would become. Looking back, they would have planned 'Level 2' and 'Level 3' pathways from the outset, rather than developing them reactively.
- ▶ Something that could have been done differently: **a more robust and objective impact assessment framework from day one.** While satisfaction surveys have provided invaluable qualitative and quantitative feedback, the latest evaluation report highlights the reliance on self-perception. More objective measures, such as practical skills tests or portfolio assessments, from the start would have provided a more rigorous, longitudinal measure of behavioural change and long-term impact.
- ▶ Something that could have been done differently: **more standardised technical and logistical guidelines for partners' venues earlier on.** This would have helped prevent some of the infrastructure inconsistencies faced and ensured a higher-quality experience for all participants across all locations.

#### Recommendations to other public authorities

- ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **build a local ecosystem of partners.** Community organisations are on-the-ground assets. Strong, formal partnerships with local libraries, parishes, and NGOs help bridge with the community and are essential for outreach, logistics, and building trust.
- ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **adopt a human-centred, flexible pedagogy.** One-size-fits-all curricula should be avoided in favour of a flexible, non-formal educational model which puts the learner at the centre of the learning process. Training should start with what people already know and are interested in, building confidence and making learning meaningful. It should address practical challenges that participants can relate to in their daily lives and adapt to their needs.
- ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **invest heavily in facilitators.** Trainers should be viewed as mentors, motivators, and community builders. Empathy counts as much as technical skills. Continuous training should provide them with inclusive adult education methodologies.
- ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **implement a continuous feedback loop.** Feedback from day one can be collected through simple, regular satisfaction surveys or ad hoc channels to gather participants' thoughts. These insights should inform the adaptation and improvement of the training programme.

## Sources and further reading

[Digital Skills Passport programme's description in the MEDICI database](#); [Digital Skills Passport programme's website](#); [Digital Skills Passport YouTube video](#).

**DIGIREG interview** with Helder Touças, Digital Inclusion and AI Literacy Program Coordinator, Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, 9 October 2025.

# RO\_Digital Bridges

## DIGIREG showcase

### In a nutshell

**Involved public authority(ies):** Municipality of Petrești de Jos, Cluj Metropolitan Area Inter-community Development Association.

**Geographical coverage (NUTS3):** R0113.

**Implementation period:** 2021-2022.

**Objectives of the policy intervention:** 1) Provide fibre to the home (FTTH) connectivity to every dwelling in two villages. 2) Increase the quality of life of unserved rural areas lacking digital infrastructures. 3) Document the model so that other remote villages can replicate it.

**Target groups:** Inhabitants of the rural villages of Plaiuri and Livada, in Petrești de Jos municipality.

**Type of policy intervention:** Memorandum of Cooperation.

**Funding:** Public and private. Prysmian Group (a private company) invested in building internet infrastructure. County and local budgets covered the civil works.

### Why this policy intervention qualifies as a DIGIREG BPP

- The project was the result of a successful partnership between the private sector (the Prysmian Group), the local authority (Petrești Municipality), and a regional entity (Cluj Metropolitan Area Inter-community Development Association). This collaboration was necessary for the public sector to ensure isolated areas inhabited by an ageing population had access to fast broadband infrastructure.
- The public-private model successfully leverages the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) commitment of a leading company in energy and telecommunication cable systems, and serves as a proof of concept for replication in other disadvantaged rural communities across Romania.
- The deployment of an FTTH network provides a quality, future-proof, and high-speed connection that is considered among the best available. It opens socio-economic opportunities that have the potential to revitalise the target communities.
- The collaboration addressed a primary need. The project was deployed in an area where even basic mobile phone coverage was unreliable. The new infrastructure addressed not only high-speed connectivity but also the vital issue of reliable communication.
- The initiative successfully achieved its goal of mitigating the digital divide between urban and rural populations. This outcome is critically important in Romania and aligns with broader European objectives for a more equitable society.

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Digital infrastructure deployment**



**DIGIREG interview with:** Bogdan Stanciu, Communication Manager, Cluj Metropolitan Area Intercommunity Development Association (CMA), 19 December 2025

## Description

Plaiuri and Livada are two small villages in the municipality of Petreștii de Jos, in Cluj County. Through the 'Digital Bridges' initiative, they have been connected to high-quality and high-speed internet through an FTTH (Fibre To The Home) optic network. The switch was installed at the town hall in Petrești, which became the owner and administrator of the new infrastructure, while operations were passed on to private companies following a public bidding process.

'Digital bridges' was implemented as part of the Rural/Urban Hub project – bringing together local authorities (Cluj-Napoca, Ciurila and Petreștii de Jos), the Cluj Metropolitan Area Inter-community Development Association (CMA), and the C-edu Education Cluster to help bridge the gap in living standards between urban and rural Romanians. The private company 'Prysmian Group', specialised in energy and telecom cables systems, was invited by the Cluj Metropolitan Area Inter-community Development Association to become a strategic partner in the Rural/Urban Hub and deploy broadband infrastructure in rural villages as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) actions. This collaboration was framed by a Memorandum of Cooperation.

### The starting point

“ *The primary background was the major digital divide between the urban environment (Cluj-Napoca) and the nearby rural areas. The village of Plaiuri (Petreștii de Jos commune) was a 'Here be dragons' space, in terms of communications, geographically isolated (positioned behind a hill that blocked signals), where residents lacked access even to stable mobile telephony, let alone the internet. This isolation affected access to education, health services, and economic opportunities, contributing to depopulation. Same for the village of Livada (Petreștii de Jos commune). Moreover, the villages are too small and poor to ensure a return on investment (ROI) for commercial operators.* ”

(DIGIREG interview)

### Framework and enabling conditions

“ [Four elements have been primarily considered:] *state of territorial digitalisation, by identifying disadvantaged rural areas (Plaiuri and Livada) that required urgent intervention to stop social exclusion; regional policies, i.e., the Cluj-Napoca City Hall and CMA's 'Rural/Urban Hub' philosophy, which aim to equalise living standards between villages and the city through ethical and sustainable mechanisms; a public-private partnership approach based on the opportunity to collaborate with Prysmian Group for a technical solution (FTTH - Fibre to the Home) that brought high-speed broadband internet to a difficult area; [and] cohesion objectives, by connecting rural citizens to the same resources and opportunities as those in urban environments to increase cohesion in the European space.* ”

(DIGIREG interview)

Key actors of the initiative have been the Cluj-Napoca City Hall, which initiated and supported the rural-urban collaboration concept, acting as a catalyst for attracting private partners; the Prysmian Group, which provided all the funding through a Corporate Social Responsibility programme; the Cluj Metropolitan Area Intercommunity Development Association, with a strategic coordination role aimed at facilitating the partnership between the Prysmian Group and local authorities and aligning the project with the metropolitan development strategy; and the Petreștii de Jos Commune Hall as the direct beneficiary that provided locally logistical support and facilitated access to the community.

The collaboration among the involved entities was based on regular communication among the CMA, the Petreștii de Jos administration, and Prysmian Group, ensuring the political and administrative support necessary for the rapid implementation of the infrastructure. A memorandum of cooperation was signed between CMA and the Prysmian Group. Furthermore, there was close collaboration between Prysmian Group and the international law firm Tonucci & Partners for the legal assistance required for implementation.

The project involved regional development experts and project managers from CMA, public relations and communications officers, as well as local administration representatives (e.g., the mayor, councillors), who managed direct relationships with citizens.

**About capacity building.** There were no formal capacity-building measures; instead, the project functioned as a ‘learning-by-doing’ process. The public administration learned to manage partnerships with large multinational companies (i.e., the Prysmian Group) and to approach technical and bureaucratic obstacles in a “think outside the box” manner.

### Evidence about results and impacts

#### 100 % of about 400 households were FTTH-connected.

Representatives of the municipality of Petreștii de Jos and the Cluj Metropolitan Area Inter-community Development Association report that **the FTTH network solution has brought significant change to the villages, unlocking access to e-services, remote education, and new business opportunities** in a context severely challenged by depopulation.

“ [The main short-term results have been] *connecting households to high-speed internet and tackling mobile signal issues (enabling voice calls via the new infrastructure) ... [Among] long-term impacts, the creation of opportunities for small local businesses to emerge, and for young families/freelancers to move from Cluj to the villages to work remotely... [the digital divide was obviously reduced] ‘from zero to hero’. The connectivity speeds exceed those in many urban areas, effectively removing the barrier. ... The project is a brick in the wall that CMA is building to stop the depopulation of Romanian villages and transform them into viable alternatives to urban congestion.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

### Sustainability and transferability of the practice

The public-private cooperation approach was deployed with the aim of becoming a replicable model for thousands of remote and small Romanian villages that lack investment attractiveness for telecom operators.

“ *The pilot project at Plaiuri and Livada has been successfully completed and now serves as a ‘show-case’. The intention is clearly to replicate this model in other villages within the metropolitan area and the country, using the ‘manual’ resulting from this project. However, this depends on future funding. Sustainability is guaranteed by the commercial interest of operators to take over an already viable infrastructure and by the expected social impact.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

### Learning from this practice

- ▶ Success factor: **the innovative public-private model.** The Prysmian Group's involvement as a strategic partner committed to social responsibility and innovation was crucial. At the metropolitan level, this represented a major breakthrough for the country.
- ▶ Success factor: **the adoption of the FTTH technology.** It brought fibre optics directly into homes (a premiere for such an isolated area) and ensured superior service quality.
- ▶ Success factor: **the integrated vision.** The project was not just about laying cables; it was about connecting remote communities to essential e-services such as education and health, as well as to new economic opportunities.
- ▶ Challenge: **the red tape.**

“ *We came across long-time bureaucratic issues that had to be surmounted. For example, an electric pole used for the cable is owned by the power grid company, but the land on which it stands is privately owned, and the owner is reluctant to allow access. The solution was local diplomacy.* ”  
(DIGIREG interview)

- ▶ Challenge: **the complex geographical context.** The village of Plaiuri is located in a hilly area where standard solutions had previously failed due to signal interference and distance. The solution was technical: using state-of-the-art cables and technologies of the Prysmian Group to tackle the challenging terrain.

- Something that could have been done differently: **a digital literacy campaign should have been started before infrastructure deployment.**

#### Recommendations to other public authorities

- (local authorities) **Involve the private investors.** Local administrations cannot solve the ‘white areas’ problem alone and without the technical expertise of the private sector.

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## Sources and further reading

[Cluj Metropolitan Area Inter-community Development Association PPP](#) (2023); [EUDIGIT collection of best practices](#) (2023); JRC (2024), ‘[Entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystems in rural areas: Startup Village example](#)’; [Memorandum of collaboration](#); [Prysmian Digital Bridges - Transforming Rural Romania YouTube video](#).

**Summary of the DIGIREG interview** with Bogdan Stanciu, Communication Manager, Cluj Metropolitan Area Intercommunity Development Association (CMA), 19 December 2025

# SE\_DIGAD

## DIGIREG showcase

### In a nutshell

**Involved public authority(ies):** Västerbotten Region, Norrbotten Region, municipalities.

**Geographical coverage (NUTS3):** SE331, SE332.

**Implementation period:** January 2019-July 2021.

**Objectives of the policy intervention:** 1) Raise digital competence in line with the DigComp framework. 2) Increase motivation and self-confidence to lead digital transformation. 3) Promote equal access to digital training for women and men. 4) Support municipalities in building capacity for sustainable digitalisation. 5) Strengthen democratic participation and reduce vulnerability to digital exclusion.

**Target groups:** Administrative personnel and first-line managers in 15 small and medium-sized municipalities.

**Type of policy intervention:** Project.

**Funding: Public.** The total project budget was EUR 898,835, of which EUR 422,304 was co-funded through the ESF. The remaining budget was covered by the participating municipalities, primarily through in-kind contributions of staff time, facilities, and coordination.

### Why this policy intervention qualifies as a DIGIREG BPP

- The project is supported by an evaluation system that allowed the production of a comprehensive final report outlining results, challenges, and participant feedback. The report provides evidence of municipal-level impact, with qualitative follow-ups and descriptions of how learning was transferred and applied within local administrations. Furthermore, the impact was rigorously measured using indicators aligned with the DigComp framework. Participants completed self-assessments before and after training, and the project team conducted both quantitative and qualitative evaluations.
- DIGAD reduced inequalities in access to digital training between urban and rural municipalities and created regional peer-learning networks, which are instrumental to narrowing the territorial digital divide.

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Public servants capacity building**



**DIGIREG interview with:** Malin Bergvall, Coordinator Digitalisation and Innovation Management, Region Västerbotten; Kaj Backman, Coordinator Digitalisation, Region Västerbotten; Mats Johansson, Coordinator Media Centre, Region Västerbotten, 21 October 2025.

## Description

DIGAD stands for 'Digital Competence for Administrative Staff and First-Line Managers'. It was initiated to address a combination of challenges, including an ageing population, limited resources in sparsely populated municipalities, growing demand for e-services, and the need for inclusive, equitable approaches to public-sector digitalisation. By focusing on those at the front lines of administration and leadership, DIGAD positioned itself as a bottom-up complement to national and regional digital strategies.

The core of the project was an 18-month modular learning programme based on six thematic areas: digitalisation, democracy, gender equality, communication and creation, safety and security, and future and sustainability. Additional modules focused on 'leadership' and 'digital collaboration'. Learning was delivered through a combination of workshops held in the 15 municipalities and peer-learning activities on a dedicated digital platform. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all training was moved online after the first two sessions. This situation accelerated the project's impact by exposing participants to digital tools and platforms under real working conditions.

Workshops encouraged collaboration between staff across departments and municipalities, often using breakout rooms and digital whiteboards to facilitate group work. Discussions were documented and shared to support ongoing learning and inter-municipal exchange. External experts were invited to deliver keynotes and participate in workshops.

Participants assessed their own digital competence both before and after the training using the DigComp 2.1 framework, and their feedback informed continuous improvement of the training content and delivery model. In the spring of 2020, a mid-term evaluation was conducted, highlighting the need for additional practical knowledge and leading to further adjustments.

### The starting point

“ ... the initiative originated from Region Västerbotten's long-standing collaboration with municipalities, where it became evident that knowledge development and capacity building are essential to achieving real change. Many municipalities, especially the small and sparsely populated ones in Västerbotten (some with as few as 3,000 inhabitants), lacked the resources to provide their own training in change management and digital skills for staff. Administrative employees often had broad roles but limited opportunities to develop specific digital competencies. Therefore, there was a clear need to strengthen the digital skills and capacities of municipal employees, particularly in administration and first-line management.  
[In addition,] ...e-services are even more critical in sparsely populated areas, where physical access to public services is limited. The programme was thus designed to empower staff and ensure that municipalities could meet citizens' expectations for modern, digital public services.  
... this inclusion [can be described] as a form of empowerment for employees, allowing them to take a more active role in driving digital change within their organisations, regardless of their formal position.”

(DIGIREG interview)

### Framework and enabling conditions

“ ...the starting point for the initiative was the state of digitalisation across the municipalities, which Region Västerbotten already knew well due to its long-standing collaboration and coordinating role with them....., even without conducting a formal study.  
...the work was closely linked to the Digital Decade targets, particularly in relation to digital skills for public employees and using those skills to empower change and support digital transformation in public services. The DigComp framework was adopted as a reference tool to assess skills before and after training and to structure the learning modules.  
...at the time of the project, Västerbotten had a Regional Digitalisation Agenda, which, although not yet a formal strategy, provided a guiding framework and understanding of regional needs. In its current version, the regional strategy includes digital competencies as one of five focus areas for digital transformation, reflecting the continuity of priorities from the DIGAD project period.”

(DIGIREG interview)

The project was carried out using Region Västerbotten's internal resources, primarily from the regional development team, with no other departments formally involved. In addition, reference persons in each participating municipality served as intermediaries between the regional team and course participants, helping to spread information, invite participants, and engage local staff in the learning activities. This formal collaboration be-

tween the municipalities and the regional authority took place as part of the region's longstanding coordination and capacity-building efforts across the territory.

“ ...it would have been impossible to gather staff for the learning activities if you did not have someone in the organisation who could spread the word and invite people to join.

(DIGIREG interview)

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External experts and academic researchers were involved in developing the learning concept. Their insights helped design training content that addressed different dimensions of digitalisation, including equality and security. In addition, lecturers were engaged to deliver training sessions, benefiting from both their specialist knowledge and their capacity to bring ‘energy to the room’.

**About capacity building.** No specific capacity-building measures were implemented for the regional development team members. Instead, those involved in the DIGAD drew on their prior experience and professional background as teachers and trainers. Some also had extensive experience with digital competencies and learning management systems (LMS) and relied on their existing networks and external contacts to develop the concept and design the learning activities.

### Evidence about results and impacts

The project trained **1,043 participants** (784 women and 259 men), **exceeding the target of 645**.

The results were measured using the DigComp framework. Self-assessment results indicate **an average 17% increase in digital competence** across all areas. Furthermore, **10 out of 24 competence indicators increased by 20% or more**. The biggest improvements were achieved in **IT security**. For example, ‘I can protect digital equipment from unwanted access’ recorded a +32% and ‘I can identify fraudulent emails or websites’ recorded a +26%. Finally, **70% of trained participants reported increased motivation to contribute to their workplace's digital development**.

“ ...women tended to have lower self-esteem and confidence in their digital skills before the training, but this improved significantly after participation. The same positive change was observed in both employees and leaders across this and later projects. The self-esteem and confidence in digital skills were also lower for groups that had worked 20 years or more, but they also had a significant improvement, reducing the differences in self-measured digital competence between groups, men and women, younger and older.

...employees became more proactive and engaged, with some participants even coming forward with new proposals and ideas following the training.

... the project [had] a clear positive impact on reducing the targeted digital divide, particularly by strengthening participants' confidence and their ability to contribute actively to digital development in their workplaces.

(DIGIREG interview)

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DIGAD also served as **a testbed for new digital formats**, helping municipalities build local expertise with tools such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Padlet, and Mentimeter. These tools, once unfamiliar, became standard parts of workplace communication and training.

The impact of DIGAD extended beyond the individuals who attended the training. **Several municipalities formed local digitalisation groups**, used project material in **wider staff training**, and integrated **lessons from DIGAD into their strategic planning**.

“ ... in the later round of the DIGAD project, participation expanded beyond administrative staff to include employees from schools, kitchens, and cleaning services. This extension stemmed from a request by one of the participating municipalities, which recognised the value of including a broader range of employees after experiencing the project's earlier phase.

(DIGIREG interview)

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**Measuring and monitoring results and impacts.** During the project, monitoring and evaluation were conducted using the DigComp framework and surveys aligned with the project's goals. Additional measures, such as “digital training Fridays,” were introduced as adjustments to support learning outcomes and address emerging needs. Direct communication channels with the regional development team were established to enable training participants to raise technical or programme-related questions. The support mechanisms were an important part of the monitoring process and helped to improve the project's implementation and results.

### Sustainability and transferability of the practice

The project's sustainability depends heavily on continued funding for this type of learning activity and on the trust built with the municipalities over the years.

The approach developed in DIGAD has become an ongoing practice, having been used in several follow-up initiatives, including DIGILO (focusing on the digital competence of administrative staff within municipal workplaces), DIGILEJ (focusing on the digital competence of managers and leaders in larger coastal municipalities), and those for leader training, such as Digitala Västerbotten 2023 (DV 2023) and Digitala Västerbotten I Samverkan (DVIS). These examples confirm the practice's high transferability, facilitated by a modular design that makes it adaptable to various administrative contexts.

“ ... the digital competence perspective has been integrated into other activities as well, such as digital security, service design, business development, and architecture. The team continues to identify which digital competencies are needed to take the next step in strengthening digital capacity and then develops learning approaches, accordingly, sometimes applying a ‘learning by doing’ method within [the] development processes. [However,] to ensure the sustainability of learning, it is necessary to have someone responsible for keeping learning resources up to date, as well as maintaining internal skills and securing financial support. ”

(DIGIREG interview)

The use of widely available digital platforms (Teams, Zoom, Padlet) and the public availability of online learning materials make DIGAD a scalable and replicable approach for regions with limited resources but ambitious digitalisation goals. The Learning Management System (LMS) ([digitalkompetens.samarbeta.se](https://digitalkompetens.samarbeta.se)), where learning resources are collected, has recently been expanded to include a self-assessment tool and learning recommendations, making the approach transferable to other contexts, including in Europe.

### Learning from this practice

- ▶ Success factor: **the long-lasting collaboration between Region Västerbotten and its municipalities.** This existing cooperation created a strong foundation of trust and made it easier to engage municipalities in the project.
- ▶ Success factor: **a mixed pedagogical model.** The developed model, which combined structured workshops with flexible online learning on a custom digital platform, enabled participants to repeat learning activities independently, even without a teacher.
- ▶ Success factor: **the adoption of the DigComp framework to measure learning and digital self-confidence.** Adopting a standard framework enabled the team and participants to measure progress, including the growth of participants' digital confidence.
- ▶ Success factor: **the engagement of qualified experts.** Referring to competencies and experience involved, having the right people from the regional authority, as well as reputable external experts, has made the difference.
- ▶ Success factor: **the attention paid to attendance and participation aspects.** For example, each workshop was organised three times so that participants who could not attend one session could join another. Later, workshops were offered twice, and all sessions were also recorded and made available online through the platform. In addition, to keep the three-hour online workshops engaging, organisers included frequent breaks and engaged a variety of speakers and experts to make the learning sessions more dynamic.

- Challenge: **reporting the participation hours.** Given the large number of participants and sessions, the administrative work required to report participation was demanding.
- Challenge: **matching the participants' expectations.** Some participants initially expected the training to focus on technical tools, such as Teams, Excel, or Word. However, the training content was broader, focusing on digital competencies and a comprehensive understanding of digitalisation, which required adjusting participants' expectations.
- Challenge: **structuring the web platform to make it accessible for users with lower digital skills.** Many participants had limited experience with digital tools, so the team created a voluntary 'digital training' module to cover basic tasks, including Teams, email, calendars, and the learning platform. This additional training helped lower the barrier to learning and reduced the time spent troubleshooting technical issues during the workshops.
- Something that could have been done differently: **the project itself was a learning process with continuous adjustments.** Over time, small adjustments were made based on experience, for example, changing the duration of specific sections and practical exercises. Although these adjustments were made along the way, the overall concept worked well from the start. However, in follow-up projects, such as DIGILEJ, Digitala Västerbotten 2023 and Digitala Västerbotten I Samverkan, an improvement was adopted by separating the leadership-related content in DIGAD into two distinct learning tracks, one for employees and another for leaders, given the different skill sets and focus areas of the two target groups.

#### Recommendations to other public authorities

- (regional authorities, local authorities) **engage an organisation with the right training experience and local contacts.**
- (regional authorities, local authorities) **establish trustworthy and long-standing relationships with municipalities and their leaders,** which make effective collaboration possible.
- (regional authorities, local authorities) **define a goal that goes beyond the project itself.** A shared vision of what should be achieved together with municipalities.
- (regional authorities, local authorities) **build on agile planning, flexibility and active engagement in training activities,** allowing for changes during the process and maintaining continuous communication and interactions with participants to sustain interest and commitment. During the pandemic, on-site workshops in municipalities were moved online. Online formats have been shown to be highly effective when properly adjusted, such as by incorporating more frequent breaks and practical exercises to maintain participant engagement.
- (regional authorities, local authorities) **facilitate competencies self-assessment and continuous up-skilling.** The self-assessment tool developed on the 'Digital Competencies' learning platform is based on DigComp 2.0 and allows users to test their competency levels as well as access learning materials suited to their needs.
- (regional authorities, local authorities) **capitalise on competencies gained.** Municipalities and other organisations are encouraged to develop their own plans to leverage the new skills, ensuring that learning contributes to each organisation's journey of change.

## Sources and further reading

[All learning resources and self-assessment tools](#) accessible through the Learning Management system 'Digital Competencies'; [DIGAD description](#) by Region Västerbotten; [DIGAD description](#) in Kohesio; Further projects based on DIGAD: [DIGILO](#), [DIGILEJ](#), [DV 2023](#) and [DVIS](#); Information provided by the Digitalisation Coordinator Region Västerbotten in August 2025, including the PDF of the final report of the project; [Regional digitalisation strategy for Västerbotten 2022–2030](#).

**Summary of the DIGIREG interview** with Malin Bergvall, Coordinator Digitalisation and Innovation Management, Region Västerbotten; Kaj Backman, Coordinator Digitalisation, Region Västerbotten; Mats Johansson, Coordinator Media Centre, Region Västerbotten, 21 October 2025.

# SK\_Data Centre of Municipalities and Cities

## DIGIREG showcase

### In a nutshell

**Involved public authority(ies):** National government, municipalities.

**Geographical coverage (NUTS3):** SK010, SK021, SK022, SK023, SK031, SK032, SK041, SK042.

**Implementation period:** 2015-ongoing (in 2025).

**Objectives of the policy intervention:** 1) Make available and improve the provision of e-services to citizens at the regional and local government level.

**Target groups:** Local governments and their employees.

**Type of policy intervention:** Project.

**Funding:** Public. State budget and co-financing from the ERDF. The first phase of the project was co-funded under the Operational Programme Informatisation of Society. An extension of the project was co-funded under the Operational Programme Integrated Infrastructure 2014 – 2020. A third stage (2022-2023) was co-funded under the Integrated Infrastructure Operational Programme. The total budget for this last stage was around EUR 10 million.

### Why this policy intervention qualifies as a DIGIREG BPP

- The project is meant to support the implementation of national legal obligations by local governments through the creation of a level playing field for all municipalities, regardless of their size and resources.
- DEUS, the implementer of the project, is an association co-established by the Association of Towns and Municipalities of Slovakia, thus a trustworthy stakeholder for local governments to interact with. This association also provides training and support for local governments to adopt the information system, recognising that making digital infrastructure (hardware, software, information systems) available is not always sufficient to ensure its use.
- The several extensions granted to the practice and DCOM widespread uptake across the country confirm the success of the approach.
- The project is considered a good practice by the Digital Coalition of Slovakia. In 2024, it received the Digital Unit award from the Coalition in recognition of its contribution to Slovakia's digital transformation.

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Information system deployment, online services accessibility enhancement**



Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Public servants' capacity building**

**DIGIREG interview with:** Jana Červinková, Business and Communications Manager, DataCentrum elektronizácie územnej samosprávy Slovenska (DEUS), 27 November 2025.

## Description

In 2013, the national government passed an Act on e-Government setting the obligation for municipalities and cities to provide electronic services to their citizens starting from 1 November 2016. The Data Centre of Municipalities and Cities (DCOM) project was launched in 2015 to support local governments, particularly the smallest ones, in complying with this new obligation. The project was first tested in three municipalities (Horný Hričov, Nesvady, and Santovka), then expanded nationwide over two programming periods in the following phases: pilot, expansion phase 1, expansion phase 2, and modernisation.

DCOM is an information system for local governments that provides for electronic services and integration with public registers and databases. The use of the system implies compliance with the eGovernment Act and the Anti-Bureaucracy Act. The DCOM is operated by the DEUS (DataCentrum elektronizácie územnej samosprávy Slovenska) association, jointly established in 2011 by the Ministry of Finance and the Association of Towns and Municipalities of Slovakia, to serve local governments in information technology. DEUS not only operates the system but also monitors legislation, implements changes, ensures GDPR compliance, and provides other services, including training public servants through webinars and consultations.

Connection to DCOM by local governments is free, and participation includes hardware and software. However, local governments must contribute to DCOM's operational costs in proportion to their resident populations. For example, local governments with up to 14,000 inhabitants have a yearly contribution of EUR 1 per inhabitant.

### The starting point

“ *When digitalising local administration, it is essential to start from reality: 95% of Slovak municipalities have fewer than 5,000 inhabitants, often only one or two employees, and very limited financial resources. Such municipalities could not individually invest in IT solutions, registry integrations, or specialised personnel. In addition, municipalities faced the following challenges: varying levels of digital maturity; duplication of data requirements from different national authorities; high administrative workload; [and] fragmented systems and processes. DCOM was therefore created as a centralised solution designed to eliminate the digital divide between cities and small municipalities. The objective was to ensure that even the smallest municipality could access the same level of digital tools as larger local authorities — without building their own IT solutions. Digitalisation in local government should not mean more work; its purpose is to enable public servants to perform the same tasks faster, more accurately and with less administrative burden.* ”

(DIGIREG interview)

### Framework and enabling conditions

“ *The following factors were considered when designing the solution: the level of digitalisation and the identified digital divide between types of municipalities, the objectives of EU digital policy frameworks, the need for a unified, centralised approach rather than fragmented local solutions, the availability of EU funding, and legislative requirements for electronic public administration.* ”

(DIGIREG interview)

Cooperation between DEUS and municipalities is based on contractual agreements. Apart from DEUS, several stakeholders were engaged in the design and implementation of DCOM: ministries and central government authorities, mainly for legislation and registry integrations; the Association of Towns and Municipalities of Slovakia (ZMOS) as the representative body of municipalities (representing 96% of all municipalities in Slovakia); municipalities as end users; and contracted IT suppliers. Cooperation with national authorities and experts was conducted through working groups organised by the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatisation (MIRRI SR). Regional associations and other relevant institutions also participated.

To ensure the solution aligns with municipalities' actual administrative practices, different profiles were engaged across organisational and functional levels: mayors, chief municipal officials, office staff, IT staff and technical support staff.

**About capacity building.** Capacity-building activities were an essential part of implementation for municipal personnel. They included webinars and video tutorials; remote support (telephone consultations); on-site and online training; customer support services; and the provision of methodological guidelines and documentation.

## Evidence about results and impacts

Ten years after its introduction, the DCOM system is used by **over 70% of local governments** in the country, representing **more than 2,000 municipalities and cities**. Overall, they make it available to some **2.2 million residents**.

There are **approximately 10,000 system users**, and 98% are satisfied with DCOM services.

In 2024, DEUS reported having trained **approximately 13,000 municipal and city employees** on a regular, long-term basis to improve their digital skills.

“ *DCOM has significantly reduced the digital divide between municipalities. The system is used voluntarily by more than 70% of all municipalities, demonstrating trust in the solution. The transformation occurred in two dimensions: public servants strengthened their digital competencies; administrative processes transitioned from paper-based workflows to structured digital workflows.*

(DIGIREG interview)

”

**Measuring and monitoring results and impacts.** Usage analytics, service support feedback, and periodic satisfaction surveys are the tools used to measure and monitor results and impact.

## Sustainability and transferability of the practice

DCOM has been in continuous operation for more than 10 years. Its sustainability is ensured through central system management. However, legislative changes and technological developments imply system updates, interface modernisation, performance improvements, and ongoing functional enhancements.

As a country-wide project targeting all municipalities, the intervention model is designed to be highly replicable across the country. It is transferable to other contexts, provided that the proposed information system is sufficiently flexible to integrate with existing systems. In this way, the new system is also potentially suitable for municipalities that are already digitalising their services independently.

“ *DCOM demonstrates that digital transformation of local government is possible even in a country with a large number of small municipalities — provided a centralised, unified and legislation-aligned model is chosen.*

*Slovak municipalities are now considered leaders in digital public service delivery, and the model is gaining international attention.*

(DIGIREG interview)

”

## Learning from this practice

- ▶ Success factor: **broad voluntary participation of municipalities in need of a technological boost, with over 13,000 active users.**
- ▶ Success factor: **availability of public services to approximately half of the Slovakian citizens.**
- ▶ Success factor: **full legislative compliance with the integration of 10 national registries.**
- ▶ Challenge: **diverse levels of digital readiness among municipalities** (addressed through strong methodological support and continuous user training).
- ▶ Challenge: **frequent changes in legislation** (addressed through a centralised technical model).
- ▶ Something that could have been done differently: **to design legislation that supports digital processes from the beginning** rather than replicating traditional paper workflows.

## Recommendations to other public authorities

- ▶ (national authorities, regional authorities) **see centralisation as key for ensuring equal access to digital public services.**
- ▶ (national authorities, regional authorities) **facilitate digital transformation driven by user needs, not by technology.**

- ▶ (national authorities, regional authorities) **consider that small municipalities require both technological solutions (a system) and technical assistance (ongoing support).**
  - ▶ (national authorities, regional authorities) **define solutions with a long-term perspective, scalable and aligned with legislation.**
  - ▶ (national authorities, regional authorities, local authorities) **implement digitalisation processes that do not replicate paper practices, but simplify them.**
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## Sources and further reading

[Association of Towns and Municipalities of Slovakia's project description](#); [Digital Coalition of Slovakia's good practice](#); [Digital Coalition of Slovakia's award](#); [Impact of DCOM](#); [Project's website](#).

**Summary of the DIGIREG interview** with Jana Červinková, Business and Communications Manager, DataCentrum elektronizácie územnej samosprávy Slovenska (DEUS), 27 November 2025.

# UK\_Digital Inclusion Agenda

## DIGIREG showcase

### In a nutshell

**Involved public authority(ies):** Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA).

**Geographical coverage (NUTS3):** UKD33, UKD34, UKD35, UKD36, UKD37.

**Implementation period:** 2020-ongoing (in 2025).

**Objectives of the policy intervention:** 1) Address the inequalities caused by digital exclusion. 2) Make Greater Manchester a 100% digitally-enabled city region.

**Target groups:** Citizens, organisations, and policymakers.

**Type of policy intervention:** Agenda.

**Funding:** Public. The Greater Manchester Digital Inclusion Agenda is funded by the 10 local authorities in the Greater Manchester area.

### Why this policy intervention qualifies as a DIGIREG BPP

- The practice is a collaborative and holistic approach that brings together a wide range of partners from across the public, private, and voluntary sectors. This includes, for example, industry leaders, local governments, community groups, and healthcare organisations. The collaborative model ensures that efforts are coordinated and address both connectivity and capacity barriers.
- It relies on data from the Digital Exclusion Risk Index (DERI) to target interventions. This tool, created by the GMCA, maps areas at highest risk of digital exclusion by layering information on factors such as deprivation, demographics, and broadband access. Besides identifying the most vulnerable groups, it allows tailoring interventions. For the development of the DERI tool, GMCA received the Royal Geographical Society Awards 2022 (the award yearly recognises outstanding contributions in geographical research, fieldwork, teaching, policy, and public engagement).
- Also, the practice focuses on sustainability and community-based solutions by embedding support in existing structures and empowering communities to lead the interventions. This not only builds local capacity but also ensures that the initiatives are directly responsive to the needs of the people they serve.

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Digital connectivity enhancement**

Addressed DIGIREG digital divides: **Digital skills development**



**DIGIREG interview with:** Beena Puri, Digital Equity Senior Principal, Greater Manchester Combined Authority; John Duncan, Connected Places Lead, Greater Manchester Combined Authority; Tim Lawrie-Carruthers, Senior Communication & Engagement Officer – Digital, Greater Manchester Combined Authority; Christopher Pope, Senior Principal – Research (Data), Greater Manchester Combined Authority, 14 November 2025.

## Description

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) is a city-region made up of ten councils (Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, Wigan). In October 2020, it launched the Greater Manchester Digital Inclusion Agenda to tackle a major digital divide, as evidenced by a report by the Good Things Foundation, and further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the report, up to 1.2 million residents in Greater Manchester were potentially digitally excluded. In December 2020, the Greater Manchester Digital Inclusion Taskforce was established to deliver the agenda. It is supported in its delivery work by a Digital Inclusion Action Network (focusing on the exclusion of youth (under 25 years) and the elderly (over 75 years), as well as disabled individuals) and a Digital Champions Network of volunteers. The Digital Exclusion Risk Index (DERI), developed by GMCA in collaboration with local and regional governments across the UK, was launched in October 2021 as a guidance tool to identify where digital inclusion initiatives were needed most.

As a result of the public sector's networking and cooperation with residents, businesses and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) groups, many digital inclusion initiatives and projects were implemented in each of the ten councils, from connectivity support (e.g., SIM card distribution, provision of devices) to digital skills enhancement (e.g., training courses and sessions). Notably, among the projects, Manchester City Council piloted Digital Health Hubs to improve access to healthcare management through digital tools. By collaborating with local community centres and libraries, staff were trained to support residents in the use of the National Health Service (NHS) application.

### The starting point

“...digital exclusion had long been a challenge in Greater Manchester, but the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the scale and urgency of the issue... many residents (children, adults and older people) found themselves excluded from education, public services, and everyday activities due to a lack of devices, connectivity, digital skills or support... the GM Tech Fund was created initially as an emergency response to provide devices to students, but this evolved from ‘putting out fires’ into a more strategic and collaborative long-term approach. National statistics significantly underestimated the problem: while official data suggested around 200,000 residents were digitally excluded, GMCA’s own analysis indicated that up to 1.2 million people (around a third of residents) faced at least one form of digital exclusion.

... several initiatives emerged directly from political leadership, focusing on groups identified as most affected: children and young people, older adults (+75), and disabled residents... 20% of Greater Manchester’s population lives in social housing, where around 60% experience some form of digital exclusion, primarily connectivity-related... although many improvements had been made in digital infrastructure, significant access and affordability challenges remain... the core driver behind the practice was the need to improve quality of life through connectivity, with all infrastructure planning developed to be ‘inclusive by design’.

... GMCA had just launched its Digital Blueprint in February 2020, only weeks before the pandemic. This meant that the ‘Empowering People’ priority had to be rapidly reframed in response to the crisis. The pandemic accelerated the shift toward a digital-first society and exposed structural inequalities such as poverty, health disparities, and geographic variation, which made digital inclusion a fundamental requirement rather than an optional policy area.

(DIGIREG interview)

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### Framework and enabling conditions

“... GMCA assessed the state of digitalisation in the territory by mapping factors associated with digital exclusion. This included understanding inequalities between and within local authorities, such as differences between urban areas, deprived inner-urban areas, and social housing.

... GMCA developed its own tools and studies to understand the local digital divide. This included creating the Digital Exclusion Risk Index (DERI), conducting local research, collaborating with universities and charities, mapping the supply and demand of digital support, and identifying priority cohorts such as under-25s, over-75s, and disabled people.

... the UK has no National Digital Inclusion Strategy and no national definition of digital exclusion. GMCA therefore positioned its work within the UK Digital Strategy, and aligned its digital inclusion agenda with the Greater Manchester Strategy and the GM Digital Blueprint...

... There was no national funding and no national priority for digital inclusion. GMCA ‘worked with nothing’ at the start and pooled available resources, including social value contributions from partners. Funding later came through competitive bids and internal commissioning, such as £1.2M place-based commissioning and £1M central government funding for pupil-premium children, as well as contributions from telecom companies (devices, SIMs, volunteering).

(DIGIREG interview)

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Cross-departmental coordination at the GMCA level brought together seven teams to design and implement the practice. The Digital Policy Team led the strategy and overall coordination of the digital inclusion agenda. The Connected Places Team was responsible for digital infrastructure and connectivity aspects supporting the practice. The Research Team led the development of data, indicators, and analytical tools (e.g., mapping digital exclusion and understanding levels of need). The Communications & Engagement Team supported outreach, awareness-raising, campaigns, and events, including the regional Digital Inclusion Summit. The Education, Work & Skills Team contributed to the alignment of digital inclusion activity with digital skills programmes and education pathways. The Public Service Reform Team helped integrate the practice into wider public service reform and inequalities agendas. The Housing Policy Team engaged in work on digital connectivity in social housing and relevant pilot initiatives. Although a governance structure exists, much of the work relied on an informal, collaborative matrix model across departments to ensure day-to-day coordination and alignment with evolving priorities. Across the 10 Greater Manchester local authorities, implementation also involved local Digital Inclusion Leads (DIL), often based in libraries, adult education services, ICT teams, or community services. Monthly network meetings with the Digital Inclusion Leads were held to coordinate and solve problems.

The practice required bringing together people with different professional profiles such as digital policy officers, leading strategy and coordination of the digital inclusion agenda; digital infrastructure specialists, responsible for connectivity and related policy; data analysts and researchers, working on data analysis, indicators and mapping tools; communications and engagement officers, supporting awareness campaigns, events, outreach and engagement; skills and adult education staff, contributing to digital skills alignment and delivery; library and community hub staff, often acting as local DIL in the 10 local authority areas; housing officers engaged in work on social housing connectivity; and public service reform officers, supporting integration of digital inclusion into wider inequalities agendas. Across all these profiles, the competencies needed included co-design, data literacy, cross-sector coordination, understanding of social inequalities, and community-centred approaches.

Collaboration with stakeholders outside the public authority was primarily organised through informal yet structured mechanisms, supported by a regional model that involved all ten local authorities. Although each local authority operates differently, they collaborated closely through a shared framework that ensured collective ownership of the digital inclusion agenda. A central element of this collaborative approach was the Digital Inclusion Taskforce, an informal cross-sector group bringing together around 240 members from a wide range of organisations, including the ten local authorities, voluntary and community sector organisations, the health sector, telecom operators and technology companies, as well as academia and charities. This structure enabled open participation and continuous dialogue, without relying on formal binding agreements.

Community groups played a particularly important role in delivering on-the-ground support, following the principle of using 'trusted faces in trusted places' to reach residents most affected by digital exclusion. The overarching emphasis was on developing long-term, meaningful engagement rather than isolated or short-term corporate social responsibility actions.

### Evidence about results and impacts

In 2023, **26,000 residents in the GMCA region** received digital support. Web resources from the centralised entry point 'Get Online GM' (set up to help identify the most suitable support) were accessed 12,200 times.

Still in 2023, examples of impact at the council level include: a) in Manchester, **350 residents** were supported through **a dedicated inbox and text line**; **3,000 residents** benefitted through **the Greater Manchester Databank**; **500 devices** were provided to community organisations and charities; and **the use of the NHS app** to order prescriptions recorded **a 22% increase**, meaning increased access to digital health services. b) In Oldham, **25 Digital Champions** were trained to deliver digital skills support; **1,042 residents** were assisted to boost **online confidence**; a device lending scheme was launched, and **903 free mobile data SIMs were distributed**. c) In Rochdale, **639 residents** were supported with **187 devices**, **67 digital support offers** and **172 free SIM cards**; **168 people** were supported at **4 weekly digital skills sessions**; and **12 local community organisations** secured **funding to run digital skills programmes**.

The **DERI tool** was used to inform **Sunderland's Digital Inclusion Plan**, published in March 2023; also, it was used by local authorities such as **Essex County and Liverpool City Region** to help identify where the risk of digital exclusion was, and by the **Trust for London** to assess wider poverty and deprivation.

“ *In terms of long-term impacts, the practice has supported the movement of residents along the digital inclusion spectrum, from non-users to low-use and then to more confident users. This has been associated with better access to health services, education, and employment opportunities, as well as reduced isolation among older and more vulnerable people. The practice has also reinforced the ability of local authorities to integrate digital inclusion into policy and commissioning processes. Moreover, the practice has contributed to national influence, including policy change in the telecom sector and GMCA's role in a national parliamentary group, while social housing connectivity improvements and IoT pilots are informing national standards. As regards the reduction of the digital divide...initial evidence from commissioning programmes shows positive shifts. However,... the problem remains large and structural, so while progress has been made, the targeted digital divide has not been fully overcome.* ”

(DIGIREG interview)

**Measuring and monitoring results and impacts.** GMCA has adopted a monitoring approach that combines quantitative indicators with qualitative evidence to capture the breadth of digital inclusion outcomes across the ten local authorities. On the quantitative side, the DERI serves as a core measurement instrument, enabling the authority to identify and track areas and populations at higher risk of exclusion. This is complemented by mapping tools that compare the supply of digital support with the geographical distribution of demand, helping to guide commissioning and resource allocation. Additional quantitative indicators include the number of participants in digital skills sessions and the volume of devices and SIM cards distributed. Qualitative monitoring, considered essential for understanding outcomes that cannot be captured by quantitative indicators, includes resident surveys, feedback from community organisations, case studies illustrating changes in education, health management, and social isolation, and personal stories reflecting shifts in confidence, social participation, or access to essential services.

### Sustainability and transferability of the practice

Digital inclusion has become an established priority within Greater Manchester, and the agenda continuation is supported by strong political commitment from the mayor and the 10 local councils. The Digital Inclusion Taskforce also creates an ecosystem that sustains collective ownership beyond individual projects or funding cycles. Sustainability is further reinforced by the shared tools and data developed by GMCA (e.g., the DERI) that are embedded in local decision-making processes, providing a consistent evidence base across the region. Moreover, increasing buy-in from partners in health, housing and the community and voluntary sector contributes to the practice's durability, as digital inclusion has been increasingly integrated into mainstream service delivery.

The approach is complex and articulated, seeking collaboration and coordination with a wide range of actors. Still, some of the individual interventions implemented within the framework of the agenda may serve as examples to be replicated. In addition, the DERI tool, principles, and approaches of the Digital Inclusion Agenda are already used by other public authorities in the UK. As DERI was nationally recognised for responding to local governments' needs and adapting to local circumstances, it was compiled to cover England, Wales and Scotland. It is also regularly updated and publicly available online.

### Learning from this practice

- ▶ Success factor: **strong political commitment.** A key enabling factor was the commitment of the Greater Manchester Mayor and the collective buy-in of all ten Greater Manchester councils, which ensured that digital inclusion was treated as a regional priority rather than an isolated initiative.
- ▶ Success factor: **creation of a broad and active cross-sector task force.** Bringing together local authorities, community organisations, the health sector, telecom operators, tech companies, and academia allowed the practice to draw on expertise from multiple fields and design interventions that reflected real needs on the ground. The DERI and regional mapping dashboards further contributed to success by giving all partners a shared evidence base for action.
- ▶ Success factor: **active engagement of the ICT Industry.** Telecom and technology partners contribute devices, SIM cards, staff time, and policy insight.
- ▶ Success factor: **strong community-based delivery.** Place-based commissioning and co-design with residents and local organisations allowed to work with 'trusted faces in trusted places' and ensured that interventions were locally anchored and accessible to those most likely to experience digital exclusion.

- ▶ Success factor: **ability to ‘do a lot with nothing’**. In the absence of dedicated national funding, GMCA and its partners relied on resource pooling, social value contributions, and an ecosystem approach that avoided fragmented projects. This collaborative and flexible way of working enabled GM to build a comprehensive digital inclusion programme, even within financial and structural constraints.
- ▶ Challenge: **coping with the absence of a national digital inclusion strategy and dedicated funding**. GMCA had to create its own framework based on broad partnerships, pooled resources, and mobilised social value contributions from industry and community organisations.
- ▶ Challenge: **facing the capacity constraints within local councils**. Competing priorities and limited staff resources were an issue. GMCA responded by coordinating and sharing tools, and by reducing the administrative burden on local authorities through collaborative structures.
- ▶ Challenge: **overcoming siloed working arrangements**, both within GMCA and across the ten local authorities. This was managed by establishing regular mechanisms that built trust, encouraged joint problem-solving, and aligned work across digital, housing, health, skills, and community sectors.
- ▶ Challenge: **adapting to the fast-moving landscape**. It included developments in AI, the digitalisation of health services, and the cost-of-living crisis. A flexible and iterative approach, continuous needs assessments, and the ability to adjust priorities helped maintain relevance and responsiveness.
- ▶ Challenge: **addressing the uneven capacity of the community and voluntary sector**. As it played a central role in delivering digital inclusion support, GMCA introduced place-based commissioning, enabled flexible funding models, and valued the qualitative feedback of volunteer-led groups.
- ▶ Challenge: **facing barriers to digital accessibility**. Connectivity alone is not sufficient to ensure meaningful digital inclusion. To address barriers such as affordability, skills, confidence, or motivation, GMCA combined infrastructure investment with training and personalised support.

#### Recommendations to other public authorities

- ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **establish shared governance structures** before drafting a strategy, ensuring clarity of roles and collective ownership. Without clear leadership, a strategy for digital inclusion risks becoming everyone’s responsibility and no one’s priority.
- ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **build a cross-sector taskforce early in the intervention process**. It is crucial to understand what already exists locally. Mapping community organisations, informal support networks, device schemes, and skills provision enables the avoidance of duplication, the recognition of gaps, and the identification of the places and groups most in need of targeted action. Digital inclusion can only succeed through ecosystem thinking. Co-design is a non-negotiable principle: interventions work best when they are shaped with communities, not for them.
- ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **provide support that is accessible within communities**. It should be within a short travel distance of those most at risk of exclusion.
- ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **develop reusable tools**, such as data models or mapping frameworks, to support consistency across territories and enable replication elsewhere. However, data alone are insufficient. Qualitative insights from residents and frontline organisations are equally vital for understanding lived experiences and designing meaningful solutions.
- ▶ (regional authorities, local authorities) **treat digital inclusion as a fundamental enabler of social and economic participation**. Recognising it as a basic right, rather than a discretionary add-on, can help embed it more firmly across policy areas and deliver more equitable outcomes.

## Sources and further reading

[DERI tool](#); [Get Online GM](#); [GMCA Social Impact Report \(2023\)](#); [GMCA web article](#) dated 15/05/24; [GMCA website on the agenda](#); [GOV.UK Policy Paper - Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps \(2025\)](#); [Trust for London on DERI](#).

**Summary of the DIGIREG interview** with Beena Puri, Digital Equity Senior Principal, GMCA; John Duncan, Connected Places Lead, GMCA; Tim Lawrie-Carruthers, Senior Communication & Engagement Officer – Digital, GMCA; Christopher Pope, Senior Principal – Research (Data), GMCA, 14 November 2025.



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