

Recommendations for the draft National ICT Strategy 2021-2025 and the accompanying Action Plan related to digital inclusion

(Recommendations are given based on the Digital Agenda Observatory – Report **Country Report and Roadmap for Digital Agenda advancement in North Macedonia** from **2020** and **2021**, and in the context of digital inclusion)

- Although efforts are made to place all e-services from the institutions on the [National e-Services Portal](#) (Portal), certain e-services are provided independently by the institutions. It is recommended that **all state e-services offered by the institutions at the national and local level, be centralized in one place, i.e. be offered through the Portal**. Furthermore, within the Portal, it is advisable to provide a unified database with all data on e-services (information on the number of registered users segregated by legal entities and individuals, information on the most requested or most used services by citizens and companies, information on the number of delivered e-services, data resulting from measuring customer satisfaction, etc.). This database can be further used by institutions, civil society, the business community, etc. in terms of decision making, creating in-depth research and strategies, as well as creating innovative IT solutions.
- The DANM (Digital Agency of Northern Macedonia) initiative will gradually introduce end-user services to major life events by integrating service delivery from different data owners, with the help of the existing Interoperability Framework. By the end of 2025, at least five such services will be operational. This is a big step in a good direction. At the same time, it is recommended to establish a **transition plan, i.e. full digitalization of precisely defined services, with precisely defined deadlines** in which the counter option for that service will be gradually limited, towards its complete abolition. At the same time, it is necessary **to give intensive support to the citizens in that direction**.
- When introducing **innovations**, it is recommended that the institutions strive to ensure their **sustainability and practicality after a certain period**, due to which it is necessary to provide proper care for their **continuous functionality**. In that direction, it is necessary to **strengthen the cooperation with the civil sector in the field of “Research and Innovation”**.
- Regarding the **awareness building for the e-Government and e-services portal**, and the commitment “by 2022 a coherent communication strategy and action plan should be adopted, to increase the visibility of the e-services available to the citizens”, it is recommended that the **civil sector**, which is a bridge between the citizens and the institutions, and that best understands the needs of the citizens, **be included in the creation of these strategic documents**. Furthermore, it is recommended that the implementation of the strategy be supported by a strong marketing team to make it easier to raise collective awareness of the Portal and thus reduce scepticism about e-services. In the same direction, it is recommended that the Government appoint a **spokesperson** who will regularly report on progress in the implementation of the Digital Agenda (DA) and related activities, and who will be recognized by the citizens in that



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context. This is also necessary to **raise public awareness of the benefits of DA, as well as to bring it closer to the citizens**. In that direction, it is necessary to promote the activities and cooperation under ISA2, i.e. the results of the implementation of DA to be directly related to the future membership of the Republic of North Macedonia in the European Union (EU).

- The commitment to **strengthen digital skills in public spaces** by providing access to ICT (connectivity, equipment, but also human resources to support the citizens) in public infrastructure and space is also underway and is moving in a positive direction. This is achieved through developing the role of public libraries to Improve digital inclusion, managing 18 internet clubs across the country and exploring the role that the future network will have for one point of service, as well as developing ICT services in public spaces so that every citizen of RNM can have available tools and ways to upgrade their digital skills. Concerning the **provision of digital devices for vulnerable categories of citizens and the collection and renewal of digital distribution devices** to persons eligible for such assistance, it is advisable to consult initiatives that performed this role voluntarily during the COVID-19 pandemic. (e.g. [Donate a computer](#)) in terms of sharing experiences and synergy opportunities.
- Regarding the bridging of the digital gap that exists between a part of the population and the society that already lives in the digital world as well as those who do not have any digital equipment, it is recommended to ensure the **capacity building of civil society organizations and media for informing and educating citizens about the Digital Agenda and its benefits**. CSOs, as the main points that work directly with the citizens and are already familiar with their needs, can further play the role of multipliers where they, with institutional and financial support from the institutions, will be able to spread digital literacy among the population and work directly with citizens to **develop their digital skills**.
- Within the development of digital skills of all citizens, it is necessary to plan the **development of an educational program at several levels (primary, secondary, advanced) that would communicate appropriately to the age, mental capacity and expertise of citizens in all areas**. In addition to developing digital skills through formal education (preschool, school, high school, faculty education), it is advisable to create lifelong learning programs to include citizens who are not part of formal education.

We emphasize that digital inclusion must evolve along with the evolution of new technologies, which also means investing in reducing and removing historical, institutional and structural barriers to accessing and using technologies.