



Subject: Study on the solutions to promote digital education for young people and to ensure their protection from online threats

1. What are the main challenges that young people in your country face in accessing digital education? Please consider the specific situation of marginalized young people and those in vulnerable situations in your response.

Digital education is essential to support resilient, accessible, quality and inclusive education and training systems and to enable learners to engage in today's digital decade. In this context, the access to digital education highlights a series of challenges and inequalities between those who have access to digital technologies and those who do not (including those from disadvantaged backgrounds), between the digital infrastructure of education and training institutions, between the teacher training and required digital skills in order to use digital technologies.

In Romania, these issues require a coordinated national effort to support the education and training system in addressing the challenges young people face in accessing digital education. This involves investing in the digital infrastructure of educational institutions and developing the digital skills of students and teachers.

The challenges underpinning reforms and investments for inclusive and resilient education and its digital transformation have been identified as follows: (1) a heterogeneous school network, with a strong digital divide between schools; (2) low levels of digital skills to organise teaching-learning effectively online; (3) low access to technology and low internet connectivity; (4) reduced opportunities for families to support education beneficiaries, pupils and children; (5) difficulties in ensuring participation in online lessons. Also, not all tools or content were accessible during the pandemic and students with disabilities faced particular challenges; lack of digital skills and lack of computers for children from disadvantaged groups increased the risk of poverty and widened inequalities in education and training; lack of equipped computer labs led young people to fail to see the potential of information technology in addressing social challenges.

These challenges have led to the implementation of legislative measures to: desegregate and integrate children from vulnerable groups; support families with low economic opportunities to prevent pupils from dropping out of school; equip schools with high-performance digital equipment; develop digital skills of teachers and pupils and increase digital skills of young people.



2. What steps is the Government taking to ensure the digital education, accessible and promoted among young people? Please provide examples of specific laws and regulations, measures, policies and programmes directed at ensuring young people universal access to digital education.

The Romanian Government is making significant investments to ensure quality and accessible digital education for students, with focus on digital transition and sustainable development.

From September 2023, the Law on pre-university education no. 198/2023 includes a section for the digital transformation in education and training. This section envisages measures on initial and continuous teacher training for inclusive and digital education; piloting new curricula for the development of digital competences for students; setting up a monitoring mechanism for specific interventions to improve the digital competences of the teachers and students in schools; <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/271896>.

Also, the new Law of higher education no. 199/2023 foresees the implementation of the National Programme for Supporting the Learning in the fields of Science, Engineering, and Mathematics (PNSTIM) designed to enable students to develop STEAM skills towards the digital future; new strategies for the digitization of higher education institutions; a revision of the occupational standards by including digital skills in the university curricula or adult training programmes and investments in advanced digital infrastructure and research. <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/271898>.

Other legislative measures include: (1) updating the educational profile of pre-university graduates with digital competences and cybersecurity tools in learning (in primary, secondary and upper secondary education), according to the Order of the Minister of Education No. 6731/6 December 2023; <https://legislatie.just.ro/public/DetailsDocument/277019>; (2) 21 new programmes with an important digital dimension in school based curriculum from 2023/2024 (e.g.: *EduGaming* - aimed at 5th/6th grade students, the optional aims to develop responsible and safe online gaming behaviour; the option includes learning activities, valid for digital and board games; *Safety at Risk* - aimed at 6th/7th grade students, the optional aims to develop prevention and response skills in risk/emergency situations and provides intervention models/actions and institutions/authorities with a role in interventions; the option also includes an important component on developing children's resilience after events with negative impact on health and safety).

Using the European Regional Development funds, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan and the public budget mechanisms, a number of projects have been implemented in order to develop the digital skills of teachers and provide access to digital education for all.



In this regard, the *Curriculum Relevant, Open Education for All* (CRED) project, implemented by the Ministry of Education in the period 2018-2023 and funded by the European Social Fund (ESF), has significantly contributed to supporting access to digital education. CRED's e-learning experts created educational content and provided technical assistance for the installation and use of online educational platforms in schools. Webinars were organised to develop teachers' digital skills and help them use free educational platforms (G Suite for Education and Microsoft Office 365 A1). At the same time, more than 2,500 students benefited from educational services and 25 schools from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds successfully implemented individual support programmes with a digital component. The project also includes a platform with free digital resources and useful information for educational activities <https://digital.educred.ro>. The project had a total budget of 42 million euros.

In addition, the project "*Professionalisation of Teaching Careers*, implemented by the Ministry of Education in partnership with 4 universities and 11 Teacher Training Centres, has also supported the development of digital skills of 28,000 pre-university teachers, including the development of digital literacy and an online platform www.eprof.ro, for free using of educational resources. The project was implemented between April 2021 and December 2023 and funded by the ESF Human Capital Operational Programme 2014-2020 with a budget of 28 million euro.

An important programme supporting the access to digital education is the national pilot programme *School After School*, which includes remedial learning activities to prevent school failure and dropout school. The programme *is aimed at primary and secondary school pupils, with a particular focus on pupils belonging to vulnerable groups such as Roma children, rural children, children with special needs and is* financed by the Human Capital Operational Programme 2014-2020, with a total budget of 30 million Euro; <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/237118>.

A significant project dedicated to the digitisation of education was the Digital Platform with Open Educational Resources - EDULIB (Virtual Library). The main objective of the project was to develop an integrated digital platform for students and teachers (www.roedulib.ro), accessible from any device, including: access to lessons in digital format; an intelligent learning assistant; self-assessment of students' literacy skills; digital adaptation of 3,000 existing secondary school lessons and the content of 700 new lessons; training of 5,400 pre-university teachers in digital pedagogy. The project also had an important infrastructure component, based on equipping 5,400 secondary schools with a package of 3 pieces of equipment: a laptop; a video projector with projection screen; a STEM kit for the physics/computer/robotics lab. The project was implemented by the Ministry of Education, in partnership with the Agency for the Administration of the National Informatics Network for Education and Research in the period 2019-2023, and co-financed from the European Regional Development Fund through the Competitiveness Operational Programme 2014-2020, worth €46 million.



As a brief overview of ongoing projects for access to digital education, the following are mentioned:

(1) From May 2023, the Ministry of National Education is implementing the project on the provision of furniture, teaching materials and digital equipment for pre-university educational establishments. Expected results include: equipping at least 5,200 schools with new technological resources for computer labs; at least 3,600 schools with IT equipment for open educational resources; 75,000 pre-university classrooms and 10,000 science/robotics/mathematics labs equipped with technological equipment; 909 vocational training units equipped with digital infrastructure and teaching tools. The project is funded by the €1 billion National Recovery and Resilience Plan. https://www.edu.ro/apel_pnrr_dotare_mobilier_echipamente_digitale.

(2) In January 2024, the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitisation launched a call for projects for libraries to become hubs for the development of digital skills under the NRP C7 "Digital Transformation" component, with a budget of 16 million euros. The investment aims at reducing the digital divide between rural and urban areas, based on 3 priorities: renovating (including extension) and equipping with computers and technical equipment 60 rural, municipal, county or city libraries, which will be transformed into digital literacy development hubs; changing and upgrading IT equipment in 650 libraries; developing basic skills for 100,000 Romanians from disadvantaged communities. <https://www.mcid.gov.ro/programe-europene/c7>.

A key component of access to digital education for all is the protection of children from online threats. In this respect, the new legislative framework in the field of education (Law No 198/2023 on pre-university education and Law No 199/2023 on higher education) includes specific provisions on preventing and combating psychological violence, including online threats, at all levels and in all forms of education.

From September 2023, the Ministry of Education has defined a *Procedure for the management of cases of violence against pre-school/primary school children/pupils and school staff, as well as other related situations in schools and suspected violence against children outside the school environment*, according to the Order of the Minister of Education No. 6235/6 September 2023; the procedure defines *cyberbullying* as a form of online bullying and provides support measures for pupils. <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/274669> .