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POLICY BRIEF: DIGITAL INCLUSION IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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Current Situation in the Country

Bosnia and Herzegovina lacks a unified national strategy dedicated to digital inclusion, and the term itself is rarely referenced in legislative or strategic documents. Rather than being recognized as a clear reform priority, digital inclusion is addressed in a fragmented manner through sectoral and entity-level strategies, primarily focusing on infrastructure development, e-services, and basic digital skills. While certain documents such as the Development Strategy of the Federation of BiH 2021–2027 and strategies of the Brčko District, acknowledge the needs of vulnerable groups, the measures are often underdeveloped and not systematically linked to a clearly defined concept of digital inclusion. National policies are only partially aligned with European frameworks such as the DigiComp Framework and the European Declaration on Digital Rights, with no formal integration of these standards into strategic and planning documents. The lack of coordination, political will, and an operational definition of digital inclusion, coupled with limited monitoring mechanisms, further hampers its development as a comprehensive, cross-sectoral, and socially inclusive concept.

Vulnerable Groups and Factors of Vulnerability

Persons with disabilities: limited access to assistive technologies, inaccessible digital platforms, and lack of tailored training opportunities.

Older persons (65+): low digital literacy, limited experience with technology, and insufficient access to training.

Rural populations: inadequate infrastructure and geographic distance from educational and support centers.

Economically disadvantaged and socially excluded persons: inability to afford devices and internet, combined with limited access to training and digital services.

Unemployed persons: reduced opportunities for training and development of digital skills.

Women in rural areas and women with disabilities: multiple discrimination and absence of targeted support measures.

BASIC INDICATORS



Children and youth in rural areas: unequal access to internet connectivity and digital equipment in schools.



Children and youth with developmental disabilities: lack of accessible learning materials and assistive technologies.



Unregistered migrants: complete digital exclusion due to lack of legal status for accessing e-services.



Persons with mental and developmental disabilities: insufficient support for the use of digital tools.



Youth from institutional care: lack of access to devices and internet, as well as insufficient support for developing digital skills.

Long-term unemployed without internet access: total exclusion from digital society.

Main Challenges

The main challenges in Bosnia and Herzegovina stem from the lack of a unified national strategy and a clear operational definition of digital inclusion, resulting in fragmented responsibilities, weak coordination, and overlapping activities. Current policies are primarily focused on infrastructure development and e-services, while measures aimed at vulnerable groups remain limited. Alignment with European frameworks, such as the DigiComp Framework and the European Declaration on Digital Rights, is only partial. There is no dedicated budget, and implementation largely depends on short-term donor-funded projects. Monitoring mechanisms are inadequate, with no disaggregated data for vulnerable groups. Access to infrastructure and training is uneven, and functional digital literacy remains low particularly in rural areas and among persons with disabilities due to inaccessible platforms and the lack of assistive technologies. A further challenge is the absence of targeted programs for “invisible groups” such as unregistered

migrants, youth from institutional care, and the long-term unemployed without internet access.

Addressing these challenges requires the adoption of a national strategy aligned with EU standards, the establishment of a dedicated coordinating body, the creation of a national digital inclusion fund, the development of a national digital competencies framework, and the introduction of participatory monitoring involving civil society. For vulnerable groups, this should include targeted training programs, equipment subsidies, accessible public platforms, mobile digital hubs in rural areas, the integration of digital inclusion into social protection and employment programs, and specialized support for those entirely excluded from the digital society.



Good or promising policy example

The Akelius Digital Language Course represents a significant national-level initiative aimed at improving access to education for children, with a particular focus on Roma children and children on the move in Bosnia and Herzegovina, through their inclusion in the formal school system. The program combines online and offline learning methods, using interactive and gamified content to develop language skills essential for educational inclusion.

- Main activities
- Development and implementation of a multilingual digital platform with tailored content
 - Training of teachers and school staff
 - Cooperation with families to ensure continuity of learning at home
 - Installation of the Akelius application on devices that can be used offline, with the support of parents/guardians
 - Provision of tablets and internet access for students without equipment
 - Continuous monitoring and adaptation of content

Implementing bodies Akelius Foundation in partnership with ministries of education and with the support of UNICEF Bosnia and Herzegovina

- Impact
- Enabled more than 1,500 Roma and migrant children to acquire basic and intermediate language skills necessary for successful school integration
 - Increased the digital competencies of both students and teachers
 - Created a replicable model that combines digital tools and inclusive pedagogy, applicable to other marginalized groups in the country