Digi-Inclusion Network

IAȘI
Integrated Action Plan

Contents

Section 1: City Context & Vision
1.1. Overall Theme

The Digi-Inclusion network addresses one of the most pressing challenges of modern urban development: the **digital divide** and its impact on social exclusion. As cities across Europe advance with digital transformation strategies to improve economic growth and service delivery, significant portions of the population risk being excluded, deepening existing inequalities.

The digital divide encompasses three interrelated dimensions:

1. Access divide: lack of access to infrastructure, devices, or connectivity (e.g., broadband internet).

2. Use divide: deficiencies in digital skills and knowledge to navigate and use technologies effectively.

3. Usability divide: limited ability to leverage digital opportunities to participate fully in society due to barriers like service design, literacy, and motivation

URBACT Network Topic

The Digi-Inclusion network focuses on **bridging the digital divide to reduce social exclusion**. The challenge is not merely technological but social, as digital exclusion exacerbates vulnerabilities among already marginalised groups, including older adults, people with disabilities, migrants, and those with lower educational or economic backgrounds.

The overarching objectives of the network include:

- Addressing existing gaps in **digital access** and skills.

- Promoting the **inclusive design** of public e-services to ensure equity for all citizens.

- Embedding **digital inclusion** as a central pillar of local policies to ensure long-term sustainability and avoid creating new exclusionary barriers during digital transitions.

Key Overarching Challenges

The cities in the network face common challenges rooted in their local contexts:

1. **Lack of strategic frameworks for digital inclusion**: While many cities have digital transformation strategies, digital inclusion remains underdeveloped, leading to ad hoc initiatives rather than systemic approaches.

2. **Resource limitations and prioritisation**: Digital inclusion is often not a core policy priority, resulting in limited funding, fragmented efforts, and uncoordinated actions.

3. **Insufficient data on the digital divide**: Reliable and granular data on who is excluded, why, and how remains a significant gap. Cities lack systematic approaches to identify target groups and measure the impact of inclusion efforts.

4. **Complex needs of vulnerable populations**: Many excluded groups face multiple forms of exclusion, such as economic, educational, or social barriers. Addressing digital exclusion requires tailored interventions that respond to these interconnected challenges.

5. **Motivation and digital literacy**: A significant barrier to digital inclusion is not merely access but **trust and motivation**. Many individuals do not recognise the value of digital tools or struggle to adapt to rapid technological changes

The URBACT Digi-Inclusion Network Contribution

The Digi-Inclusion network aims to empower cities to tackle these challenges through a structured, collaborative, and integrated approach. By leveraging transnational learning and exchange, cities can:

- Develop **Integrated Action Plans (IAPs)** that address the digital divide systematically.

- Test and refine actions that target access, skills, usability, and motivation gaps.

- Mainstream digital inclusion as a key consideration in local governance and policymaking.

The network promotes **people-centred policies**, ensuring that digital tools and services become enablers for social participation, not barriers. This approach aligns with broader European goals outlined in the **Digital Decade 2030** and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reinforcing the principle of **leaving no one behind.**

Digi-inclusion Partner Declaration on Digital Rights

The September 2024 Digi-Inclusion event under the URBACT IV Programme was a significant milestone for our city. As part of this initiative, mayors and representatives from European cities, regions, and institutions co-authored the Digi-Inclusion Partner Declaration on Digital Rights. The declaration emphasizes a shared commitment to a digital transformation that is inclusive, just, and beneficial for all citizens.

Key highlights include:

Inspiration from EU Principles:

The declaration aligns with the European Union's vision of digital transitions that leave no one behind, focusing on people-centered digital rights and principles. It promotes solidarity, inclusion, freedom of choice, citizen empowerment, safety, and participation in the digital public space.

Addressing Inequalities:

It recognises the existence of a digital divide, not just as a technical issue but as a social and economic challenge. This divide manifests in unequal access to technology, skills gaps, and the ability to fully benefit from digital transformations.

Digital Inclusion as Participation:

True digital inclusion goes beyond online transactions; it enables citizens to confidently engage in society through digital platforms—learning, working, socialising, creating, and participating in community and democratic processes.

Collaborative Learning:

By sharing experiences across cities, the declaration encourages critical reflection and co-creation to integrate digital inclusion as a cross-cutting theme in all digital transformation strategies.

Impact for Our City:

Participation in this event has been highly valuable for our city. It has strengthened our commitment to bridging the digital divide, ensuring that all residents—including vulnerable and marginalised groups—can benefit from digital opportunities, and fostering a more inclusive, empowered, and digitally confident community.
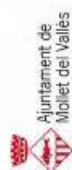
**Signed in Iasi (Romania)
September 24, 2024**

Political signatories

Mr. Franco Cima,
Deputy Councillor for Digital Agenda, Urban
and Metropolitan Agriculture - Metropolitan City of
Bologna (Italy). Councillor of the Municipality of Bologna

Ms. Mireia Dionisio Calé,
Mayor of Mollet del Vallès (Spain)
Represented by Mr. Ferran Segarra Sánchez,
Councillor responsible for Digitisation.

Mr. Ioannis Zampoukis,
Mayor of the Municipality of Alexandroupolis (Greece)
Represented by Ms. Evanthia Valasidou,
Deputy Mayor of Education, Lifelong Learning,
Animals Welfare and Friendship Clubs

Ms. Irina Dolgova,
Vice Chairman of Jelgava Local Municipality (Latvia)
Represented by Ms. Dina Taurina,
Jelgava Local Municipality Councillor

Ms. Laura Rodrigues,
Mayor of Torres Vedras (Portugal)
Represented by Ms. Sílvia Silva,
Head of Social Development Office

Ms. Aleksandra Dulkiewicz,
Mayor of the City of Gdańsk (Poland)
Represented by Mr. Jarosław Pawłowski,
Thematic Leader of the Development Programme
Digital City and Smart City (Poland)

Mr. Mihai Chirica,
Mayor of Iasi Municipality
(Romania)

Ms. Đenana Čolaković,
Head of Department for Development/permanent
member of Commission for European Integration
(Bosnia and Herzegovina)
Represented by Mr. Salih Alispahić,
Expert Advisor for International Projects
in Department for Development

Mr. Frédéric Cuvillier,
Mayor of Boulogne sur mer (France),
president of Boulogne District council (la CaB)
and president of BDCO
Represented by Ms. Lucie Maillard,
vice president Boulogne sur mer councillor, in charge
of communication and digital strategy. CaB councillor,
in charge of digital strategy and innovation

Digi-inclusion Partner Declaration on Digital Rights

We, the mayors and official representatives of the European cities, regions and institutions participating in the Digi-Inclusion network under the URBACT IV Programme, have co-authored this declaration and mutually agree on the following:

We are inspired by...

- *The importance the European Union attaches to aiming for digital transitions that are just and give benefits to all citizens, leaving no one behind*
- *The European declaration on digital rights and principles, and how it puts people at the center of digital transformation*
- *The idea of a set of digital rights that strives for solidarity and inclusion, freedom of choice, participation in the digital public space, digital safety and security, and empowerment of citizens.*

The commitment at the EU level to a digital transformation that leaves nobody behind and the aim that it should benefit everyone, achieve gender balance, and notably include elderly people, people living in rural areas, persons with disabilities, or marginalised, vulnerable or disenfranchised individuals and those who act on their behalf, as well as promoting cultural and linguistic diversity.

We recognize that...

1. *A digital divide exists in our territories and societies and that this is a social and economic problem, not merely a technical one;*
2. *This divide is characterized by inequalities in the access to digital technologies, in the skills that are essential to use that technology, and in the ability to capitalize on this to gain full value from digital transitions in our society;*
3. *Digital inclusion is about bridging this divide and is about more than online transactions and being an online consumer;*
4. *Being fully digitally included is about participating in society via the digital space – being confident in interacting, working, playing, learning, creating, socialising, consuming, and participating in our communities and democratic process and discourse.*

We believe that...

By sharing our experiences we can better understand our individual contexts. Through a process of critical reflection and co-creation, we can explore how digital inclusion can be better incorporated as a cross- cutting theme in all digital transformation planning and implementation activities.

We define that successful digital inclusion policies should be aimed at:

- *Ensuring everyone can access the digital world and that the digital world offers them the services they need*
- *Enabling citizens to acquire and maintain core digital skills for now and the future*
- *Helping citizens gain digital capital, to enable them to make the best use of their digital skills and access, hence being empowered to get best value from the digital world*
- *Offering opportunities and value that motivates citizens to engage in the digital world*
- *Enabling citizens to operate safely in the digital world, with a sense of trust digital public space and awareness of their own security responsibilities and limitations*

We commit to...

- *Promote core digital rights and principles for all our citizens*
- *Support the implementation of Integrated Action Plans aimed at enabling digital inclusion in our territories*
- *Bring together relevant stakeholders and actors of civil society to promote these local policies and supporting their participation in actively defining, implementing and monitoring those actions*
- *Promote in our cities, regions, countries and the whole European Union the results of our common work and lessons learned, contributing in particular to strengthening the transnational work of digital inclusion in small and medium sized cities and rural communities*

1.2. Context and Background of IAȘI

Population Statistics and Demography

Iași, located in northeastern Romania, serves as the county seat of Iași County and stands as the country's third-largest city. As of the 2021 census, the city proper had a population of 271,692. The broader Iași metropolitan area, encompassing the city and 19 surrounding communes, had a population of 423,154. Additionally, the functional urban area, defined by Eurostat, had 500,668 residents as of 2018, making it the second most populous in Romania after Bucharest.

The city of Iași is renowned for its educational and cultural significance. It hosts over 60,000 students across five public universities, including the oldest Romanian university.

Iași, like many other cities in Romania, has an aging population, but it also hosts a significant proportion of young people. However, the aging population trend is notable, with a growing number of elderly people, which reflects national trends in Romania.

The city has a mixed economy with strong sectors in education, research, IT, healthcare, and manufacturing. This influences the demographic in terms of employment and migration, with a growing number of people employed in the IT sector and other services.

Ethnically, the population of Iași County is predominantly Romanian, comprising 97.61% of the population. Minority groups include Romani (1.55%) and Lipovans (0.39%). Religiously, the majority identify as Eastern Orthodox Christians, with smaller communities of Roman Catholics and other denominations.

Iași experiences both internal migration (from rural areas to the city) and some international migration. The city's role as a regional economic and educational hub attracts people from across the country and beyond.

In recent decades, there has been some outflow of people to other countries for work or educational opportunities, a trend seen across Romania due to the broader context of economic migration within the EU.

Industrial/Economic Composition and Employment Statistics

Iași has a well-balanced economy with strong sectors in IT, manufacturing, healthcare, education, and tourism. The city has benefited from the growth of the tech sector and foreign investment, contributing to low unemployment and rising wages in certain industries. However, it faces challenges such as brain drain and the need for infrastructure improvements to support its growing population. Despite these challenges, Iași's economic future looks promising, particularly with its position as a regional hub for innovation and education.

Key sectors:

IT and Software Development: Iași is a major tech hub in Romania, with companies like Accenture, Continental, and Nokia driving the growth of the IT sector. The tech industry provides high-skilled jobs, attracting professionals in software development and IT services.

Manufacturing: Key industries include automotive parts, with companies such as Continental and Valeo. The textile industry has declined, but food processing remains significant.

Tourism and Retail: The city's rich cultural heritage drives tourism, supporting hotels, restaurants, and cultural venues. Retail has also grown, boosted by malls and proximity to Moldova and Ukraine.

Employment: Iași has a highly educated workforce, particularly in IT, healthcare, and education. Salaries are lower than in Bucharest but rising, especially in tech.

Unemployment Rate: Typically between 3-5%, with IT and healthcare sectors offering stable employment.

Social Challenges and Inequality

Iași, like many cities in Romania, faces several social challenges and inequalities, which are shaped by economic, educational, and technological factors. These challenges impact various groups in society, leading to disparities in access to resources and opportunities. Below is a detailed look at some of the major social challenges and issues related to inequality, including the digital divide and social exclusion.

1. Digital Divide:

Access to Technology: While Iași is a tech hub with a growing IT sector, there are disparities in access to technology, especially in rural areas and lower-income households. Many people, particularly the elderly and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, face challenges accessing digital devices and the internet. The digital divide is evident in education, where students in poorer neighborhoods may struggle to attend online classes or access digital learning resources, limiting their educational opportunities.

Internet Connectivity: While urban areas, particularly in Iași city, have relatively good internet infrastructure, rural areas and some urban poor neighborhoods often lack stable or affordable internet access. This creates a barrier to accessing online services, remote work opportunities, and digital education.

Digital Skills: There is also a gap in digital literacy, particularly among older adults and lower-income groups. This lack of skills can hinder access to job opportunities in the increasingly digital economy. Although Iași has a strong educational sector, the emphasis on digital skills may not reach all segments of the population equally.

2. Social Exclusion:

Despite the growth of the IT sector and higher income levels in certain industries, economic inequality persists. While many in the tech and healthcare sectors enjoy higher wages, the manufacturing, retail, and agricultural sectors often offer lower-paying jobs with limited opportunities for advancement.

Rural-to-urban migration also exacerbates inequality, as people moving to Iași from rural areas often face challenges in integrating into the city's workforce due to a lack of skills or qualifications. This leads to underemployment and informal work for many migrants.

Some areas in Iași, particularly peripheral neighborhoods, experience poverty, which is compounded by limited access to education, healthcare, and quality employment opportunities. Families living in poverty are often excluded from essential services, such as healthcare or quality education, reinforcing cycles of poverty.

Location and Territorial Context

Iași is located in northeastern Romania, near the border with Moldova. It is the capital of Iași County and one of the largest cities in the region. The city lies along the Bahlui River and is part of the Moldavia historical region. Iași is well-connected to other parts of Romania and neighboring countries via road and rail, with European Route E583 passing through it. It is approximately 300 kilometers north of Bucharest and about 150 kilometers west of the Moldovan border. The city is also a key regional hub due to its educational, cultural, and economic significance.

1.3. Problem Framing

Local Needs and Challenges

Iași faces several challenges related to digital inclusion, social exclusion, and economic disparities. These issues impact various demographics, including elderly people, people with disabilities, rural populations from the metropolitan area and other types of vulnerable groups. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive understanding of the local context and targeted interventions.

The identification of local needs and challenges in Iași is rooted in a comprehensive analysis conducted through stakeholder engagement and local diagnostics. This process aimed to uncover the barriers that hinder digital inclusion and equity within the municipality. By gathering insights from the stakeholders and examining local conditions, the analysis highlighted critical gaps, including generational disparities in digital skills, limited access to technology and the exclusion of vulnerable groups from essential services and opportunities. This approach ensures that the identified challenges directly inform and shape the Integrated Action Plan, targeting the root causes of digital exclusion with tailored interventions.

1. Digital integration for vulnerable groups

In Iași, the digital integration of vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities, remains a significant challenge. Despite efforts to improve digital accessibility, several barriers hinder full inclusion.

People with Disabilities:

Digital Accessibility: There is a lack of accessible digital tools and websites for people with disabilities. Websites, public services, and educational platforms are often not adapted to the needs of individuals with visual, auditory, or mobility impairments.

Assistive Technology: While some advancements have been made in assistive technology, the availability and affordability of these tools are still limited in Iași, especially in public institutions and social organizations.

Public Services: Digital public services are often not designed with accessibility in mind. This creates significant barriers for people with disabilities to access important resources, like healthcare and legal services, online.

Elderly Population:

As part of the generational digital divide, the elderly face additional challenges, especially those with physical disabilities. Limited digital literacy and lack of tailored user-friendly interfaces for this group hinder their participation in the digital world, increasing their vulnerability. A national study on digital inclusion and exclusion in Romania highlights that digital skills are closely linked to education level, income, and occupation, suggesting that older adults may face significant barriers to digital engagement. As a result, many senior experience social isolation and limited access to essential services and opportunities, exacerbating their exclusion

Low Digital Literacy:

Vulnerable groups, including those with disabilities and elderly residents, often face challenges in acquiring digital skills due to limited access to training, resources, or support. This exacerbates social exclusion, as they are unable to access essential services or opportunities that require digital engagement. Limited digital literacy and inadequate infrastructure create barriers, particularly for vulnerable groups. The absence of user-friendly, inclusive digital services increases inequalities, preventing many residents from accessing municipal resources and support systems

2.Poverty and Social Exclusion:

Iași, like the broader North-East Development Region of Romania, faces significant poverty rates, particularly in rural areas and certain urban neighborhoods. These economic disparities contribute to social exclusion, where poorer residents struggle to access quality education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

The link between poverty and digital exclusion is particularly evident, as many low-income families cannot afford internet access or digital devices, further limiting their participation in the digital economy and access to essential services.

3. Education and skills:

While Iași is home to major universities, there is still a skills gap between the educational offerings and the demands of the digital labor market. Many students

graduate without the specific digital skills required in high-demand fields such as IT, software development, or digital marketing. Additionally, there is a need for improved vocational training and adult education to equip individuals with the digital skills needed for the modern workforce.

4. Access to Digital Public Services:

Limited Accessibility: While there have been efforts to implement digital public services in Iași, limited digital literacy remains a major obstacle. Many residents, particularly in older or lower-income demographics, struggle to navigate online public services like tax filing, public health information, or municipal resource access.

The lack of inclusive digital services with user-friendly interfaces exacerbates social inequality, as vulnerable groups are unable to benefit from the convenience and efficiency of online services.
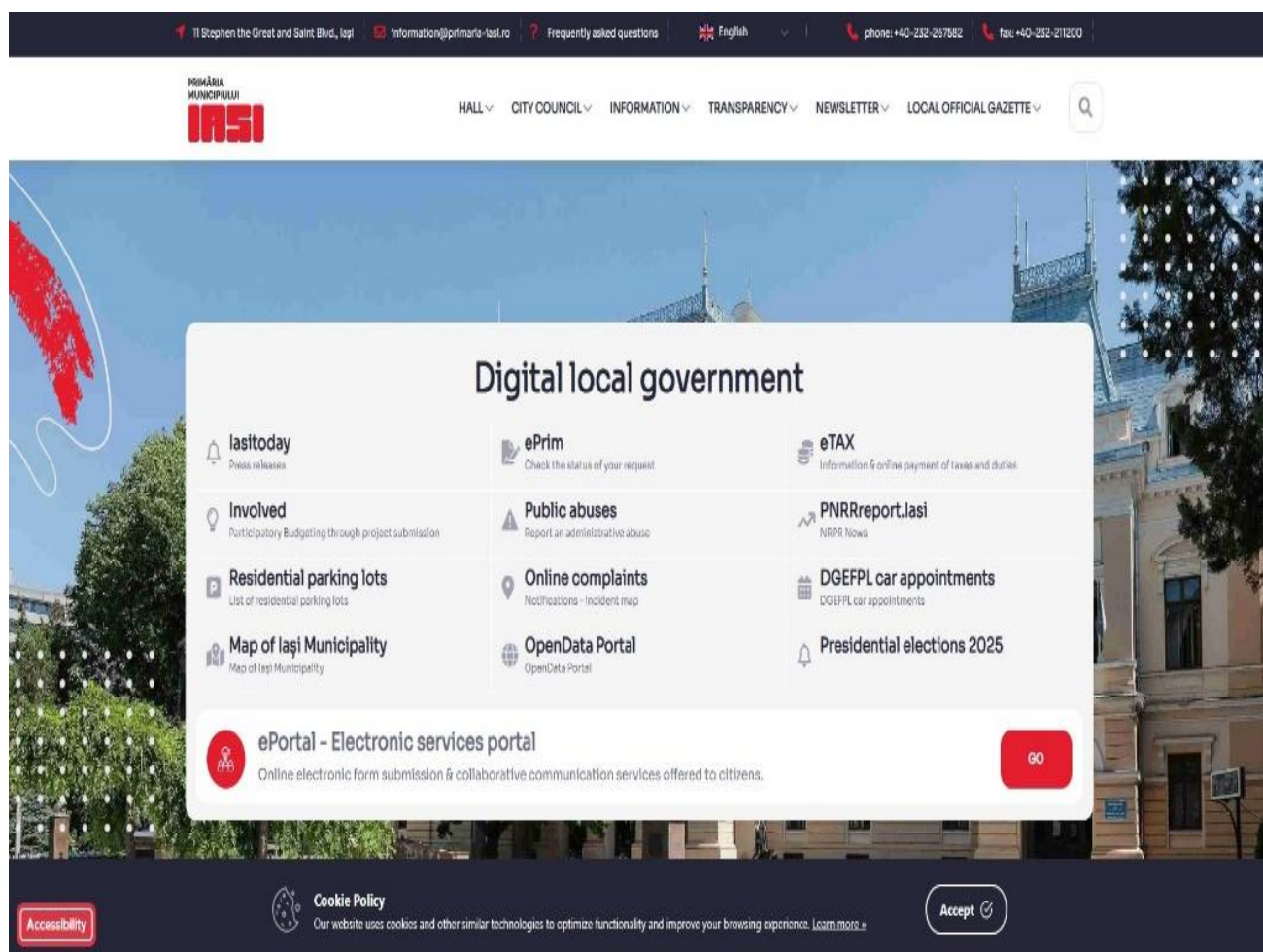
ULG Stakeholders

The URBACT methodology foresees the creation of a Local Group (ULG), adding a set of entities to strategically think the city centre, resulting in an articulated intervention. For the constitution of the Digi-Inclusion Local Group, the Iasi project team identified the entities that considered as related with the policy issue and asked them officially to join the ULG. The interaction with all partners was always done through an official representative, making the communication more fluid and certifying the presence in the meetings of the ULG.

The URBACT Local Group (ULG) in Iași includes representatives from:

1. Municipality Departments:
- Technical and Development Directorate
- Digital Transformation and Smart City Implementation Directorate
- Public Relations and Decision-Making Transparency Directorate
- Community Relations and Public Policy Department
- Financial Department
- International Relations Service
- Human Resources Department
- Environmental Office
- Social Assistance Directorate

2 Local organisations/agencies/educational and research institutions:
- Romanian Academy - Iasi Branch;
- Faculty of Economics and Business Administration - UAIC Iasi;
- Foundation Alături de Voi;
- ACCES Iasi Association;
- Association Empowerment of Children with Special Educational Needs Iasi,
- Intercommunity Development Association of the Iasi Metropolitan Area;
- Destination Iași and Moldova Region Management Association (Destination Iași)
- National Association for Children and Adults with Autism in Romania - Iasi Branch.
- Sf Constantin si Elena Senior s Center
- Sf Cuvioasa Parascheva Senior s Center

Over the course of the two-and-a-half-year Digi-Inclusion project, numerous meetings of the Urban Local Group (ULG) were held, providing a structured platform for discussion, collaboration, and decision-making on key aspects of digital inclusion. These meetings addressed a variety of topics, all thoroughly examined, reviewed, and formally approved by the participants.
They served as an opportunity to exchange experiences, share best practices, and co-create strategies to ensure that digital transformation initiatives are inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the diverse needs of the community.

Key activities and outcomes of the ULG meetings included:

o **Roundtable Discussions:**

Identification of needs, weaknesses, and challenges related to digital socialization and the elimination of digital exclusion, as well as clarifying ULG members' expectations for the project.

o **Problem Tree Analysis:**

Group work to map and identify the core issues surrounding the project's policy focus.

o **Vision and Strategic Planning:**

Discussion and consensus on the city's vision for the project, using the Newspaper of Tomorrow tool, and the strategic objectives of the Integrated Action Plan (IAP).

o **Action Planning:**

Examination of the Action Tables and preparation for upcoming pilot actions.

o **Pilot Action Implementation:**

Presentation, evaluation, and review of the first pilot action targeting the elderly, followed by planning and discussion of the second pilot action focused on social research for seniors.

o **Integrated Action Plan Development:**

Agreement on the rationale, vision, objectives, and initial actions of the IAP, including evaluation of the first pilot and detailed discussion of the second pilot action.

o **Consensus Building:**

Final evaluation of the second pilot action and agreement on the content of the Action Tables.

Through these structured sessions, the ULG played a central role in shaping the project's strategic direction, ensuring that all actions were carefully tailored to promote digital inclusion across the city.

Situation Analysis

This part provides a comprehensive understanding of the current landscape in Iasi regarding digital inclusion. By identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, this analysis forms the foundation for strategic interventions within the Integrated Action Plan. It ensures that existing resources and capabilities are leveraged effectively while addressing critical challenges and mitigating risks.

Strengths

Digital Maturity & Infrastructure:
- Strong national performance in e-Services.
- Fast internet and integration of digital aspects into urban projects (e.g. e-tickets).
- Public Wi-Fi and smart city solutions implemented.
- Presence of fab labs, co-working spaces, and innovation hubs like Palas Campus.

Open Governance & Civic Tech:
- Open data portals made by city hall.
- Digital tools using this data (e.g. transit apps).
- Volunteer networks contributing to civic engagement.

Weaknesses

Digital Inclusion Gaps:
- Digital access issues among low-income and older populations.
- Cost barriers to acquiring advanced skills or digital devices.
- Lack of detailed data on digital divide.

Awareness & Communication:
- Ineffective marketing and broad communication – lacks targeting.
- Low motivation and skills among older people.

e-Administration & Infrastructure Challenges:
- e-Government services still underdeveloped.
- Infrastructure bottlenecks (e.g. roads) hinder big industry investment.

Opportunities

Digital Inclusion & Upskilling:
- Use local/national funding to bridge digital gaps.
- Promote digital skills as a pathway to better jobs.
- Engage associations already working with vulnerable or excluded groups.

Tech & Data Advancement:
- Leverage AI and open data for innovation and service optimization.
- Gather local knowledge and grow institutional know-how.

Threats

Widening Digital Divide:
- Risk of polarization if some groups are left behind.
- Inability to identify and support excluded populations.

Technological Disruption:

- AI might displace jobs despite training efforts.
- Rapid tech changes require continuous adaptation.

External Risks:
- Geopolitical instability (e.g. war) could disrupt progress.

Local Priorities

The local priorities were defined based on the identified strengths, challenges, and stakeholder input. These priorities represent targeted areas of intervention that address the most pressing needs while leveraging existing opportunities. They aim to provide a clear roadmap for achieving digital inclusion and equity through actionable and strategic measures. The following priorities were identifyed:

1. **Enhancing digital literacy** among seniors and vulnerable citizens to promote social inclusion and reduce social divide.

2. **Improving access to inclusive and user-friendly public services** that address the needs of vulnerable groups.

3. **Promote interaction and knowledge exchange between generations** to bridge the digital divide.
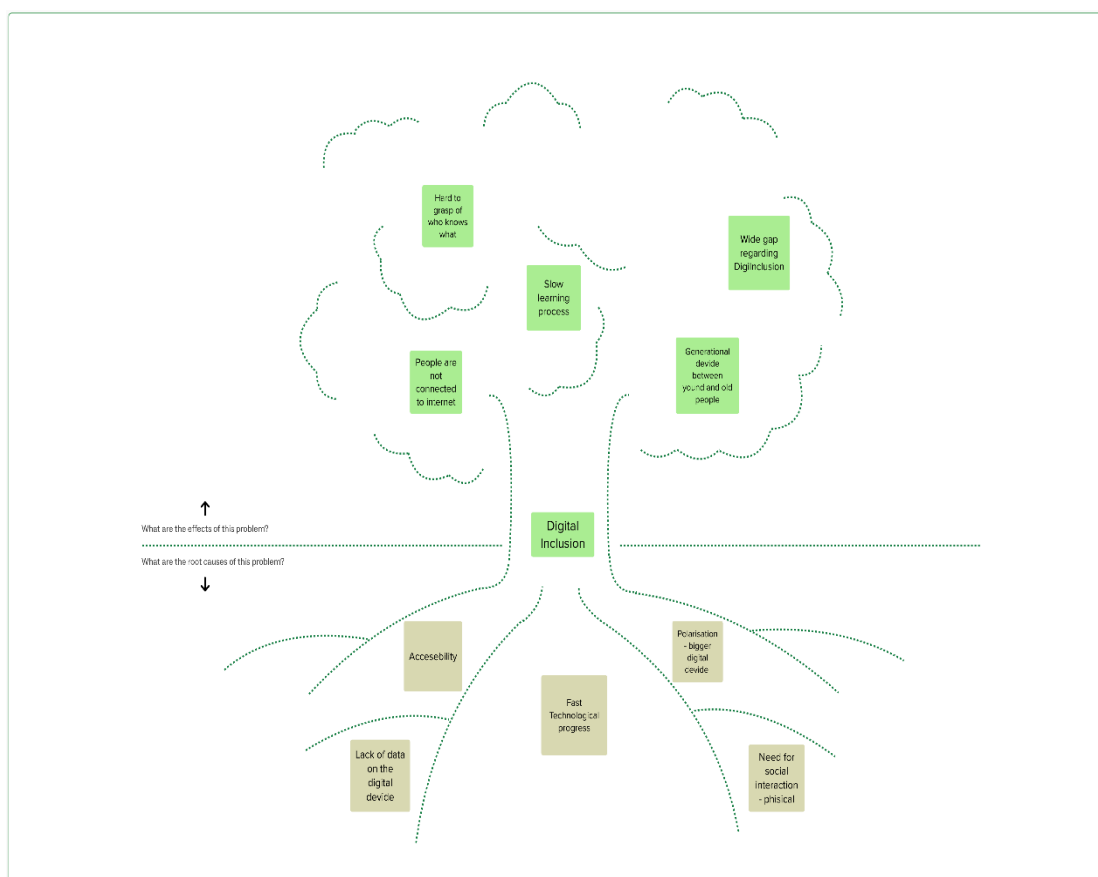
Chosen Areas of Focus

Following all of this assessment, the **chosen areas of focus** were carefully selected to address the root causes of digital exclusion identified in Iasi. These focus areas aim to tackle the critical gaps by prioritising interventions that align with the needs of vulnerable populations and the municipality's overarching goals. Each focus area directly corresponds to specific challenges, such as lack of accessibility, insufficient skills and ensuring a targeted and integrated approach.

1. **Empowering vulnerable groups through digital skills training**

   o Implementing tailored training programmes for seniors and other type of vulnerable groups to equip them with the necessary skills to confidently use digital tools and services, enabling greater independence and social inclusion.

2. **Improving digital public services**

   o Developing and implementing inclusive, user-friendly, and multilingual public digital services to ensure all residents, including those with limited digital literacy, can effectively access municipal resources.

3. **Promote interaction and knowledge exchange between generations**

   o Supporting elderly people directly by involving them in intergenerational digital literacy programs, where younger generations assist them in developing digital skills. These programs encourage mutual learning, reduce the digital divide, and empower older adults to confidently use technology for communication, accessing services, and staying informed.

Section 2: Overall Logic & Integrated Approach

2.1. Vision

Iasi Municipality has chosen to offer high level social services to its inhabitants and improving the quality of life and social inclusion for all citizens is a priority.

Considering the structure of the population of Iași, the changing needs and the integration of Romania into the European Union, it is important that all social services in Iași meet the necessary quality standards. This implies investments in the development of social services in direct relation to the size of the city, and the integration of social services can contribute to a more efficient organisation and administration.

Special attention must be paid to senior citizens who face social and economic isolation, and people with disabilities for whom social integration is an essential condition for a fulfilled life. Having this situation, as well as the legal competences of the municipality in this field, it is necessary to find new and efficient ways to provide social services so that a number of citizens who are entitled to these services and who are in need of they can also benefit from them through digitised services also.

Given the diversity of the target groups and the objectives of the respective services, it is important to ensure common access to databases so that services can be delivered in an integrated manner. This will avoid, for example, situations where citizens have to fill in five different forms at five different departments in the city asking for the same information.

The vision for **Iași's Integrated Action Plan** reflects the city's commitment to overcoming digital exclusion and fostering a more inclusive, equitable community. Based on the identified needs, challenges, and priorities, this vision provides a forward-looking framework that unites all stakeholders around a shared goal: All citizens of Iași are digitally included, with equal access to digital technologies, and possess the necessary skills to fully engage with digital services. We aspire to a community where digital solutions are universally accessible, adaptable, and inclusive, reflecting the cultural and generational diversity of Iași. In this vision, digital transformation is viewed as a powerful tool to promote equity, improve well-being, and enhance the overall quality of life for all residents.

We aspire to a community where digital solutions are universally accessible, adaptable, and inclusive, reflecting the cultural and generational diversity of Iași. In this vision, digital transformation is viewed as a powerful tool to promote equity, improve well-being, and enhance the overall quality of life for all residents.

2.2 Strategic Objectives

The vision is broken into three key strategic objectives:

1. **Enhance Digital Accessibility and Literacy:** Ensure citizens can access and effectively use digital tools and technologies and promote interaction and knowledge exchange between generations

2. **Tailor Digital Solutions for Vulnerable Populations:** Create targeted interventions for groups with specific needs, such as seniors and people with disabilities.

3. **Improve Digital Public Services:** Strengthen digital tools and methodologies to improve accessibility and inclusiveness.

Specific objectives:

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 1: Enhance the digital literacy and skills of citizens to effectively navigate and utilize available public digital services, fostering greater accessibility and inclusion.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 2: Facilitate increased engagement and collaboration among local stakeholders within the digital ecosystem to support targeted training initiatives aimed at specific minority groups, thereby promoting social inclusion and sharing best practices.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 3: Improve the quality and accessibility of digital services offered by municipal authorities by developing support activities for the citizens of Iași Municipality within the Citizen Information Centers in the city's districts to increase digitization and access to online public services.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 4: Support digital training and promote knowledge exchange

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 5: Promote interaction and knowledge exchange between generations to bridge the digital divide

2.3 Pilot Action

Pilot Action no.1
Title: Technology as a Link: Supporting Elderly People in Communicating with Family
25 participants from "St. Pantelimon" Eldery Center
01.08.2024

Context:
In Romania, a significant number of young people and individuals of working age have migrated abroad in search of better economic opportunities. According to statistical data, this migration has led to an increase in the number of elderly people living alone or with limited access to family support. These individuals often experience feelings of isolation and loneliness, and they need solutions to stay connected with their family members who have moved abroad.

Need:
In the digital age, technology provides efficient solutions to reduce physical distances and facilitate communication. However, many elderly people face difficulties in using modern devices and platforms due to a lack of technical knowledge and limited access to proper training. Our project aims to address these needs by offering elderly people the opportunity to learn how to use technology to stay connected with family and friends.

Pilot Action objectives:
- Training the elderly in using technological devices: Providing hands-on training sessions on the use of smartphones, tablets, and laptops.
- Encouraging the exploration and use of various communication apps (WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger).
- Facilitating communication with family and friends: Demonstrating the necessary steps to initiate and maintain video and audio calls.
- Explaining how to use social networks and other online communication platforms.
- Creating a continuous support environment: Training center staff to offer ongoing technical support.

Pilot Action no.2
Title: Survey – Technology Use by Seniors
150 participants from Iasi Eldery s Center
May 2025
Context:
1. Context of the Survey
This survey was conducted in Iași, Romania, in response to the growing number of elderly people left behind as younger generations migrate abroad. Many seniors face isolation and limited contact with family, which has increased the importance of digital communication tools. In today's increasingly digital world it is essential to understand, at the city level, the specific needs of older adults in the area of technology use. This knowledge helps ensure they are not left behind in a society that relies more and more on digital tools for daily communication and access to services.

Need for the Survey
Despite the availability of technology, many older adults lack digital skills, confidence, or access to proper training. The survey was necessary to better understand their current use of digital devices, challenges they face, and references for learning, in order to design effective support programs.

Pilot Action objectives:

- **Assess Digital Inclusion Among Seniors**
  To evaluate the current level of access to and use of digital devices and online communication tools by elderly residents in Iași.

- **Identify Barriers and Support Needs**
  To understand the main challenges older adults face when using technology, including technical difficulties, lack of confidence, or limited access to training and support.

- **Inform Future Training and Support Programs**
  To gather insights that will guide the development of targeted digital literacy courses and ongoing support services tailored to the real needs and preferences of the elderly population.

The sociological research was conducted using a questionnaire between May and June 2025 in the municipality of Iași.

The research population consisted of beneficiaries from three day care centers for the elderly in Iași:
- ❖ Sf. Pantelimon Day Care/Home Care Unit
- ❖ Vovidenia Day Care Center for the Elderly
- ❖ Pensioners' clubs in the central area of Iași

The sample included 170 respondents, all pensioners. A convenience sampling method based on voluntary participation was used. Respondents were informed that their answers would remain anonymous, and no personal data (such as national ID numbers, email addresses, or other personal information) were collected.

Data collection method: Face-to-face questionnaires administered at the respective institutions.

Conclusions:

- The need for digital training for the elderly is evident and clearly highlighted in European policy documents. Many countries are already implementing substantial programs for digital education (see the example of Austria in the text).

- There is a need to deepen sociological research with qualitative examples that illustrate the vulnerable points faced by elderly people in using digital devices.

- Respondents showed a clear openness to attending digital education courses and seminars. Such programs will likely need to be adapted according to the educational background of the beneficiaries.

- Trainers working with elderly people must enjoy a high level of trust from them—hence the greater openness toward family members as potential facilitators.

- There is noticeable reluctance to use digital devices for financial transactions due to obvious technical challenges. Fear of errors often leads seniors to complete simple online operations physically at service counters (some of which paradoxically require online appointments).

- The willingness of many elderly people to learn independently should not be underestimated; therefore, targeted support services (for instance, a dedicated helpline) could be developed.

- The creation of training groups should take into account several variables such as the participants' place of residence and available time. Only after this should groups be reorganized for effective learning.

- Training courses should also include explanatory components on cybercrime to increase awareness and prevention.

- An important question arises as to the extent to which "younger seniors" can support "older seniors" in overcoming digital challenges.

2.4 Integration

As highlighted in the preparation of the project's Baseline Study, Iași must align its local initiatives with regional and national initiatives in the digital ecosystem and public services, particularly with the limited funding available. National and regional funding mechanisms are mostly centralized, and aligning local projects with these larger initiatives will help Iași leverage available resources and support from higher levels of governance to effectively implement its strategies.

In addition, cooperation with neighboring municipalities from the broader Moldavia region is critical for addressing issues and challenges that extend beyond municipal boundaries. For example, integrating digital tools for local and regional transportation, addressing daily environmental issues, and promoting economic development across the region are important areas where collaboration will be essential. Iași's strategic plans consider these regional dynamics to ensure coherent and complementary development.

Iași integrates various infrastructure projects with initiatives aimed at building strong human capital. The city is working towards increasing targeted investments in smart city technologies and social programs designed to promote digital inclusion, especially for vulnerable groups of citizens.

The city's engagement in the Digi-Inclusion project also highlights Iași's commitment to integrating gender perspectives into urban planning. The municipality has implemented policies that promote gender equality, focusing on safe and accessible public spaces for all genders and increasing women's participation in the digital sector and broader digital ecosystem.

Digital transition is among Iași's future challenges and will be a cornerstone of the city's development. The city aims to foster an inclusive digital environment that addresses the needs of all its citizens, ensuring equitable access to digital opportunities for a more resilient and sustainable urban future.
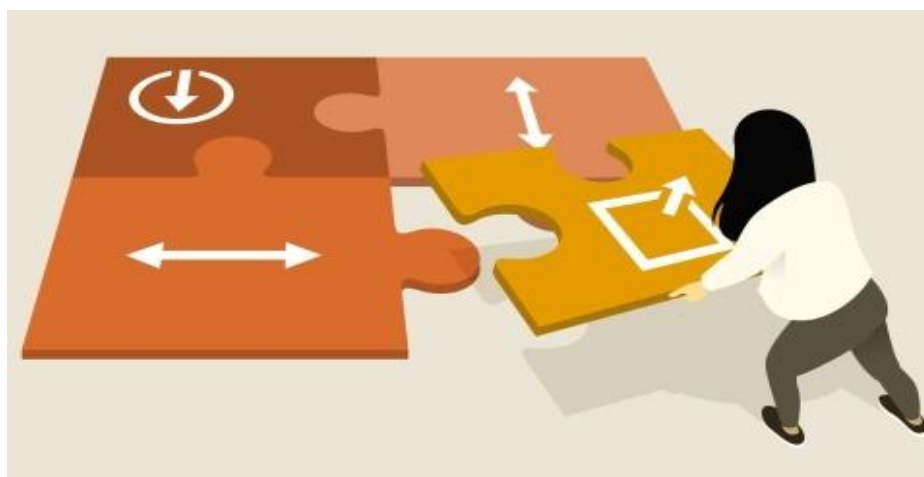
Section 3– Action Planning Table

	SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 1: Enhance the digital literacy and skills of citizens to effectively navigate and utilize available public digital services, fostering greater accessibility and inclusion.				
ACTION	IMPACT	Resources / Assets	Lead Agency	Key partner	Timescale
Training for seniors – using digital networks to communicate with families	■ increasing the number of seniors that are using digital tools for communicating with families ■ reducing the digital divide between the generations ■ increasing the trust in digital tools	■ related experts ■ partnerships with seniors' centers ■ physical infrastructure	■ Iasi City Hall ■ ADI-ZMI	Local stakeholders	2024 - 2027
Annual Digital Literacy Assessment for Seniors	Develop and distribute a user-friendly digital literacy questionnaire specifically designed for seniors. Conduct the survey annually (once every year) through multiple formats (online, in-person, phone) to ensure accessibility. Use the results to identify skill gaps and adapt the training content accordingly.	■ related experts ■ partnerships with institutions that are addressing persons with disabilities (adults with autism) ■ physical infrastructure	■ Iasi City Hall	Local stakeholders	2025 - 2027
Signing collaboration agreements with the local stakeholders	■ strength the collaboration between the local stakeholders to reduce digital divide ■ signed protocols with local stakeholders	■ formal document of collaboration ■ physical infrastructure	■ Iasi City Hall ■ Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi	Local stakeholders	2026-2027

ACTION	Outputs	Resources / Assets	Lead Agency	Key partners	Time scale
Promoting the available digital public services of Iasi Municipality	■ increasing the number of people that are using digital public services in Iasi ■ increasing the efficiency in accessing and offering the public services	■ communication and dissemination of the available public services ■ physical infrastructure ■ digital tools/instruments ■ experts for facilitating communication between the local authorities and citizens	■ Iasi City Hall ■ ADI-ZMI ■ Local communication departments ■ Press and media	Local stakeholders	2025-2027

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 2: Facilitate increased engagement and collaboration among local stakeholders within the digital ecosystem to support targeted training initiatives aimed at specific minority groups, thereby promoting social inclusion and sharing best practices.					
ACTION	**Outputs**	**Resources / Assets**	**Lead Agency**	**Key partners**	**Time scale**
Stakeholders' workshops for best practices sharing	■ improved collaboration among stakeholders ■ development of targeted training initiatives for vulnerable groups	■ experts in digital inclusion ■ digital tools/instruments ■ physical infrastructure	■ Iasi City Hall	Local stakeholders	2026-2027

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 3: Improve the quality and accessibility of digital services offered by municipal authorities by developing support activities for the citizens of Iași Municipality within the Citizen Information Centers in the city's districts to increase digitization and access to online public services.					
ACTION	**Outputs**	**Resources / Assets**	**Lead Agency**	**Key partners**	**Time scale**
Establish digital services support in Citizen Information Centers	■ increased digitization of municipal services- ■ enhanced access to online public services for citizens	■ trained staff ■ digital tools and platforms ■ physical support infrastructure	■ Iasi City Hall	Local stakeholders	2026-2027

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 4: Support digital training and promote knowledge exchange					
ACTION	**Outputs**	**Resources / Assets**	**Lead Agency**	**Key partners**	**Time scale**
Volunteer-led digital training for targeted groups	■ increased digital literacy among targeted groups ■ strengthened volunteer engagement	■ volunteers from Faculty of Economics and Business Administration ■ training resources ■ digital tools and platforms ■ physical support infrastructure	■Faculty of Economics and Business Administration	Local stakeholders	2026-2027

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 5: Promote interaction and knowledge exchange between generations to bridge the digital divide, facilitating mutual understanding and empowerment across different age groups.					
ACTION	**Outputs**	**Resources / Assets**	**Lead Agency**	**Key partners**	**Time scale**
Organize intergenerational workshops for digital skill exchange	■ improved understanding and collaboration between generations ■ reduced digital exclusion	■ workshop venues ■ digital tools and instruments ■ facilitators ■ physical support infrastructure	■ Iasi City Hall ■ Faculty of Economics and Business Administration	Local stakeholders	2026-2027

Section 4 Implementation Framework – Municipality of Iași

Beyond the specific planning details of the individual actions already described, this section finalizes the Integrated Action Plan (IAP) by setting out the overarching considerations for its implementation in Iași. The Implementation Framework defines the key structures, mechanisms, and resources that will support the delivery of the IAP and ensure that the actions achieve a lasting impact for the community. To guarantee the successful execution of the plan, the framework addresses governance, funding, stakeholder engagement, timeline, risk management, and monitoring activities, with a focus on the local realities of Iași.

Governance and Project Management

- **Governance Structure:** The Municipality of Iași will establish a dedicated coordination body responsible for steering, monitoring, and updating the IAP implementation beyond the URBACT support period. This body will work in close collaboration with local decision-making entities (City Council, Social Services, IT Department, Cultural Directorate, etc.) to ensure coherent integration into municipal strategies.
- **ULG Continuation:** The Urban Local Group (ULG) will continue to play a central role, with stakeholders from public institutions, universities, NGOs, senior associations, IT companies, and community representatives actively involved. Their responsibilities will include co-designing initiatives, ensuring transparency, and maintaining the participatory approach promoted by URBACT.
- **Monitoring Framework:** A local monitoring and reporting system will be put in place, with progress evaluated against indicators linked to the strategic objectives of the IAP. Reports will be shared annually with the City Council and key stakeholders, ensuring accountability and continuous improvement.

Implementation

- **Context and Resource Allocation:** The Municipality of Iași will allocate both financial and human resources to guarantee the effective roll-out of the IAP. The implementation will follow a clear schedule with milestones and deadlines, illustrated in a Gantt chart, ensuring transparency and predictability. Local public institutions, in partnership with private actors and NGOs, will contribute to resource pooling and project delivery.
- **Funding Strategy:** The funding approach will combine municipal budget allocations, national programs (such as those supporting digital inclusion and social services), and European funds (e.g., ESF+, Digital Europe Programme, Horizon Europe, and Erasmus+ for training initiatives). Partnerships with local IT companies and universities will also be explored for co-funding and in-kind support.
- **Risk Analysis:** Potential risks such as limited digital skills among elderly citizens, insufficient financial resources, or delays in project implementation will be assessed. Mitigation strategies will include flexible training formats (face-to-face and

online), phased implementation, and partnerships with trusted local organizations. Special attention will be given to ensuring continuity of digital inclusion efforts even in the face of unforeseen challenges (e.g., public health crises, budget constraints).

Local Added Value

The implementation of the IAP in Iași will build on the city's strong academic environment (with over 60,000 students in universities), its growing IT sector, and the active network of social services and community centers. These assets provide a unique opportunity to foster intergenerational learning, strengthen trust between institutions and citizens, and ensure that no one is left behind in the city's digital transformation journey.

ULG Continuation

To ensure that the Municipality of Iași adopts and maintains the participatory approach promoted by URBACT, the continuity of the Urban Local Group (ULG) is essential throughout the IAP implementation phase.

The ULG in Iași should include the following **core members** during the implementation stage:

- ✓ **Municipality of Iași** – lead governance, political leadership, and integration of IAP objectives into city-wide strategies.
- ✓ **"Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași** – academic expertise, applied research, and collaboration in digital skills training.
- ✓ **Social Assistance Directorate** – facilitators of social digital skills and direct engagement with target groups.

Ongoing Stakeholder Engagement Plan

The IAP Implementation Team and ULG members will meet annually to assess progress, review outcomes, and define goals for the upcoming year. In addition, smaller working meetings will be organized whenever necessary to address specific implementation issues.

Annual ULG meetings will be scheduled for the next three years, providing opportunities to:

- Evaluate the progress of IAP actions;
- Share updates on digital inclusion policy issues;
- Identify challenges and risks, while proposing corrective actions;
- Explore new opportunities for collaboration, funding, and innovation.

This governance model combines **strong political commitment**, **technical expertise** and **broad community participation** to ensure that the participatory approach initiated under URBACT remains embedded in Iași's local governance culture.

Monitoring and Reporting

The successful implementation, sustainability, and long-term impact of the Iași Integrated Action Plan (IAP) depend on a well-structured and participatory monitoring and reporting framework. Throughout the implementation phase, the Municipality of Iași will adopt a transparent and inclusive monitoring approach that ensures accountability, openness, and continuous learning, while also reflecting the local context and needs of the community.

The monitoring process will oversee data collection and evaluation. When clarifications are needed for specific actions, core stakeholders—such as universities, senior centers, NGOs, and local IT partners—will be consulted to ensure accuracy and alignment.

A set of **qualitative and quantitative indicators** will be developed and refined according to the final design of each IAP action. These indicators will track progress in areas such as:

- Involvement of elderly citizens, students, NGOs, and community groups in digital inclusion initiatives;
- Uptake and effective use of municipal digital services;
- Number of digital training sessions, workshops, and participants;
- Improved digital confidence and skills among vulnerable groups (e.g., seniors, unemployed, people with disabilities);
- Levels of intergenerational collaboration in digital learning

Key Elements of the Monitoring Framework

- **Annual Progress Reviews:** Each year, the Municipality of Iași—through the responsible departments—will lead a structured review of milestones, achievements, and challenges. These reviews will include public reporting to strengthen transparency and civic trust.

- **Stakeholder Involvement Monitoring:** Active ULG members, such as representatives from universities, senior clubs, NGOs will provide regular updates on their activities, outcomes, and challenges in implementing specific tasks. This will ensure balanced participation and accountability across all actors.

Through this framework, Iași aims to build a **dynamic and adaptive monitoring system** that does not simply measure progress but actively supports **learning, innovation, and citizen engagement**, ensuring that the IAP achieves its long-term goals of digital inclusion and community empowerment.

Conclusion

The Integrated Action Plan (IAP) for the Municipality of Iași represents an important step in the city's commitment to digital inclusion and equal opportunities for all citizens. The plan was developed through a participatory process with the Urban Local Group (ULG) and a wide range of local stakeholders—public institutions, universities, NGOs, senior clubs, IT representatives—who worked together to build a solid foundation for future action. The principles of the Digi-Inclusion Declaration on Digital Rights signed by all project partners are clearly reflected in this plan.

The IAP is not only a roadmap for digital transformation, but also a tool for creating a more inclusive city. To turn this vision into reality, Iași must:

- ✓ integrate digital inclusion goals into local policies and strategies;
- ✓ consolidate partnerships with local institutions and community actors;
- ✓ strengthen governance and stakeholder engagement;
- ✓ ensure continuous monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation.

The Municipality of Iași will also work to align the IAP with other key local strategies, such as the Urban Development Strategy, the Social Inclusion Strategy, and the Smart City Agenda, while also ensuring coherence with regional, national, and European policies. This alignment will create stronger synergies and open access to new funding opportunities from EU programs and national funds.

The ULG will continue to play a central role, ensuring that the voices of citizens and local institutions are heard and that the city remains responsive to emerging digital challenges and opportunities.

By fostering collaboration, innovation, and trust, Iași will continue its journey towards becoming a more digitally inclusive and resilient city.