Policy Recommendations – Implementing IDEU Citizen & Expert Recommendations for Inclusive Digitalisation in Bulgaria

Submitted by:	ProInfo Foundation
Based on:	427 citizen contributions made under the crowdsourcing project IDEU Bulgaria+ Expert consolidation (Education, AI & Innovation, Digital Policy)
Target institutions:	Bulgarian Government, Municipalities, European Commission, DG CONNECT, DG EMPL, DG EAC
Time horizon:	2026–2030

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1. Digital Skills, Education & Lifelong Learning

1.1.Target Outcome

A functional and permanent national system for digital and AI literacy across all ages and social groups.

1.2. Who Must Act

Ministry of Education and Science (BG)
Municipalities
European Commission – DG EAC, DG CONNECT
Universities and Teacher Training Institutions

1.3. What Must Be Done

- Introduce mandatory digital competence standards for all teachers.
- Reform teacher education programmes to include applied digital pedagogy and AI literacy.
- Create a national adult digital literacy programme, delivered through municipalities and local community centres.
- Deploy mobile digital trainers for small towns and villages.
- Introduce national monitoring of training outcomes, not only attendance.
- Use existing community centres (читалища), pensioners' clubs and village clubs as permanent digital training locations.
- Conduct regular practical trainings (1–2 times per year) focused on:
  - o paying local taxes and fees,
  - o checking social security status,
  - o accessing e-health records,
  - o requesting certificates and local services.

- Prioritise elderly people in small settlements as a specific target group for training.

1.4. Result

Digitally competent teachers, work-relevant student skills, and continuous access to learning for adults and vulnerable groups.

2. Human-Centred Digital Public Services

2.1. Target Outcome

Public e-services that work for real users, including elderly and low-skill citizens.

2.2. Who Must Act

Council of Ministers (BG)
Ministry of E-Government
European Commission – Interoperable Europe Board
Municipal Administrations

2.3. What Must Be Done

- Make real-user testing legally mandatory before launch of any e-service.
- Include elderly and rural citizens in mandatory usability testing of key public e-services. Ensure that services are:
  - written in plain Bulgarian,
  - usable with minimal digital steps.
- Enforce the Once-Only Principle across all administrations.
- Implement the "State as a Platform" model with shared databases and APIs. (treating the state digital infrastructure not as many isolated databases and websites, but as one digital system that others can safely access and build on)
- Ensure full alignment with eIDAS 2.0 and the Interoperable Europe Act. (ensuring that Bulgaria's digital services are secure, cross-border ready, and interoperable by design, so citizens and institutions can interact digitally anywhere in the EU without barriers.)
- Create local user support points in municipalities and community centres.
- Guarantee that citizens can still access services through assisted local support, not only individually online.

2.4. Result

Simpler, faster, trust-based public services with reduced administrative burden for citizens and SMEs.

3. Digital Inclusion & Access

3.1. Target Outcome

No citizen excluded from digital life due to poverty, age, disability, or geography.

3.2. Who Must Act

Ministry of Labour & Social Policy
Municipalities
European Commission – ESF+, Digital Europe Programme

3.3. What Must Be Done

- Guarantee free access to devices and internet for vulnerable households.
- Establish permanent digital help desks in libraries and community centres.
- Fund targeted inclusion programmes for Roma communities, elderly citizens, and rural populations.
- Modernise and maintain existing village digital centres instead of creating new parallel structures.
- Guarantee free WiFi and shared devices in community centres.
- Use mobile digital teams to reach remote villages and elderly people with limited mobility.

3.4. Result

Reduced digital exclusion, higher use of e-services, and real access to rights and opportunities.

4. Women in Technology & Equal Access

4.1. Target Outcome

Achieve sustainable and structural gender equality in digital education and digital employment.

4.2. Who Must Act

Ministry of Education

Ministry of Economy & Innovation
European Commission – Gender Equality Strategy

4.3. What Must Be Done

- National mentoring programmes for girls and women in IT/STEM.
- Scholarships and reskilling grants for women entering digital professions.
- Gender targets in EDIH, startup funding, and public AI projects.

4.4. Result

Increased female participation in digital professions and innovation.

5. Digital Capacity of Public Administration

5.1. Target Outcome

A digitally competent, efficient, and user-oriented public administration.

5.2. Who Must Act

Council of Ministers
All Ministries
National Institute of Public Administration

5.3. What Must Be Done

- Introduce mandatory digital competence requirements for civil servant recruitment.
- Make digital capacity a formal performance criterion for institutions.
- Provide continuous AI and data training for public officials.
- Train municipal clerks in small settlements to actively assist citizens in using:
    - local e-services,
    - tax and social security platforms,
    - health portals.
- Measure not only system deployment, but how many citizens were actually assisted in real digital transactions.

5.4. Result

Faster services, fewer errors, lower administrative costs.

6. Education–Business–Innovation Link

6.1. Target Outcome

Education that leads directly to employability and digital innovation.

6.2. Who Must Act

Ministry of Economy
Ministry of Education
Business Associations
European Commission – EDIH Network

6.3. What Must Be Done

- Mandatory mentorship and project-based learning with companies.
- Transparent monitoring of programmes such as "Business Teaches".
- Early introduction of computational thinking and applied digital skills.

6.4. Result

Reduced skills mismatch and stronger digital economy pipeline.

7. Governance, Participation & Trust

7.1. Target Outcome

Permanent citizen participation in digital policy design.

7.2. Who Must Act

Council of Ministers
Parliament
European Commission – Digital Decade Governance

7.3. What Must Be Done

- Institutionalise citizen co-design panels for digital policy.
- Formalise the role of civil society in digital governance.
- Link national planning to the Digital Decade Governance Framework.
- Organise local public discussions with journalists in rural areas on:
  - how to recognise fake news,
  - how to avoid online financial scams,
  - how to check reliable health information.
- Use these formats to build trust in digital participation, not only in services.

7.4. Result

Higher legitimacy, trust, and public ownership of digital reforms.

8. EU Innovation Instruments and Bulgarian Integration

8.1. Target Outcome

Real economic and social impact from EU digital investments.

8.2. Who Must Act

Ministry of Innovation
European Commission – DG CONNECT
EDIH & EDIC Structures

8.3. What Must Be Done

- Ensure Bulgaria participates in at least one EDIC (European Digital Infrastructure Consortium).
- Convert EDIH (European Digital Innovation Hubs) outputs into real national pilot infrastructures.
- Define measurable national KPIs for innovation hubs.

8.3. Result

Faster technology transfer to SMEs and public services.

Strategic Conclusion for Policymakers

The IDEU process demonstrates that Bulgaria's digital transformation challenge is not primarily technological, but **human, institutional, and organisational**. The 427 citizen contributions, consolidated by experts, consistently point to the same conclusion: digitalisation delivers results only when people have the skills to use it, public institutions have the capacity to support it, and services are designed around real user needs.
Across all thematic areas, citizens prioritise **practical digital skills, accessible public services, local support, and trust** over the mere availability of online systems. Persistent gaps in digital education, adult skills, and public sector qualifications continue to limit participation in the digital economy, restrict access to public services, and weaken confidence in digital governance—particularly among elderly people, rural communities, and vulnerable groups.
For industry and SMEs, the recommendations highlight the need for a **reliable pipeline of digitally skilled workers**, stronger links between education and business, and public

administrations that function efficiently in digital environments. EU innovation instruments can only generate economic and social impact if they are matched by national capacity, clear performance criteria, and integration into real public and business processes.

The policy actions proposed under IDEU therefore place **education reform, lifelong learning, and qualification of public employees** at the core of inclusive digitalisation. Equally central is the requirement that public electronic services be **usable and accessible for all citizens**, supported by assisted access and tested with real users before deployment. Between 2025 and 2030, progress will depend on coordinated action at local, national, and EU level: local structures that provide access and support; national reforms that strengthen education, public services, and governance; and EU frameworks that align funding, standards, and digital policy objectives. Inclusive digitalisation will be achieved not through technology alone, but through **sustained investment in people, skills, and trust**, with citizens and the economy as the starting point of digital policy design.