



Policy Brief Advancing Digital Inclusion for Roma Youth through Non-Formal Education

Prepared by: Amrita OBK Association (Hungary) with the contribution of the project partners

Project: DigiFast – Fast-Tracking Digital Inclusion

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Executive Summary

The DigiFast project, implemented by Asociația Roma Entrepreneurship Development Romania, Asociația Roma Entrepreneurship Development Serbia, VšĮ Inovaciju biuras Lithuania, and Amrita OBK Association (Hungary), has successfully piloted non-formal digital education bootcamps for Roma youth aged 16–30. These bootcamps provided tailored learning experiences through interactive workshops, team-based learning, mentorship, and digital content creation. Beyond training, the project produced video tutorials, micro-credential pathways (YouthPass), and adaptable teaching toolkits, creating a replicable and inclusive model for digital literacy education.

Project Highlights & Impact: The following country-level highlights summarize the unique contributions and outcomes from each partner's implementation of the DigiFast bootcamps.

HU Hungary – Amrita Bootcamp

Focus: Mobile video editing, Google Workspace, Canva, Microsoft Office, internet safety

Methods: Daily group video creation, interactive visits, practical exercises

Outcomes: Enhanced digital skills linked to employability and social inclusion; peer support fostered motivation

Challenges: Topics were dense; follow-up mentoring and refresher sessions recommended

RO Romania – Bootcamps in Bucharest and Cluj

Focus: Digital marketing, video editing, social media campaigns

Outcomes: Increased self-confidence and readiness for freelance work

Tools: Tutorials in Romanian and Romani languages

RS Serbia – Bootcamps in Belgrade and Niš

Focus: Visual storytelling, mobile content, branding basics

Approach: Peer learning, teamwork, content planning simulation

Impact: 90%+ reported improved self-esteem and skill clarity

Focus: Digital communication, safe online behavior, basics of AI tools (ChatGPT, Gemini)

Innovation: Adapted for youth with special needs, heavy use of visuals and role-play

Outcomes: Practical AI use for emails, CVs; increased digital confidence

Educational Materials Developed in Digi-Fast

12 tutorial videos on TikTok, Canva, ChatGPT, Instagram

Visual guides on digital safety, CV writing, email communication

Facilitator toolkit for community-based non-formal learning

YouthPass templates validating informal digital skills

All materials are freely accessible on the DigiFast website. These materials collectively support scalable, inclusive, and community-centered digital learning for Roma youth.

Key Challenges Identified

Based on these key challenges, we formulated the following policy recommendations to guide more effective and inclusive digital education strategies.

Access gaps: Up to 60% of participants lacked consistent internet and devices

Language & literacy: Need for Romani and visual-based materials to overcome barriers

Trust & engagement: Culturally sensitive, community-rooted approaches critical for participation

Amrita OBK Association (Hungary):

“Community-based education is the key. The motivation of Roma youth increases when learning is informal, visual, and embedded in their local realities.”

VsI Inovaciju biuras (Lithuania):

“Introducing AI tools early helps overcome fear and builds digital confidence, even for those with low literacy.”

“Non-verbal methods like visuals, video, and play are essential when working with Roma youth in remote areas.”

Asociatia Roma Entrepreneurship Development (Romania):

“The entrepreneurial mindset among Roma youth is strong, give them the tools, and they will use them to uplift their communities.”

Asociatia Roma Entrepreneurship Development Serbia:

“Micro-practices and simulations help youth feel competent. YouthPass certification further validates their success.”

Policy Recommendations: The DigiFast project’s experience clearly demonstrates that inclusive, non-formal digital education has the power to reach marginalized Roma youth and effectively build their digital confidence. Based on the lessons learned, we recommend the following actions for policy and decision-makers:

Integrate Non-Formal Digital Education into National Strategies:

National education policies should incorporate community-based, non-formal digital education models, especially those already piloted and shown to be effective. For example, the DigiFast bootcamps in Hungary and Romania created hands-on learning spaces in underserved areas, combining teamwork, visual tools, and local relevance to engage Roma youth who are often excluded from mainstream digital programs.

Address Digital Access Gaps:

To ensure equitable participation, investment is needed in providing Roma communities with reliable internet access and digital devices. In the bootcamps, up to 60% of participants lacked consistent access, which limited their ability to continue learning beyond the sessions. Access must be paired with localized, culturally relevant content to increase retention and engagement.

Build Roma Mentorship Networks:

Long-term success requires role models and peer support. In several countries, Roma digital professionals were engaged as mentors during and after the bootcamps, helping participants stay motivated and reinforce their skills. Institutionalizing such mentorship networks can significantly increase digital inclusion.

Introduce AI and Digital Tools Early:

Fear of technology is a barrier for many. In Lithuania, youth used ChatGPT to write CVs and emails, showing how early exposure to AI tools builds confidence even among learners with low literacy. Making these tools part of early digital education ensures broader relevance and faster upskilling.

Support Micro-Internships with Real Projects:

Bootcamps in Romania and Serbia incorporated simulation exercises and content creation for real-world use. Expanding such micro-internships with local businesses or NGOs helps participants apply their skills in practical ways, increasing employability.

Issue Recognized Micro-Credentials:

Participants across countries highly valued the YouthPass certificate as validation of their efforts. Recognized micro-credentials support further education and employment by formally acknowledging informal digital learning.

Produce Multilingual and Visual Content:

Language and literacy remain barriers. The DigiFast materials included video tutorials and Romani-language guides, which proved essential for understanding and retention. Future content should continue to prioritize visual formats and translations into minority languages.

Establish Community Digital Hubs:

To make digital learning sustainable, local hubs offering free internet access, devices, and ongoing workshops should be established. These hubs could be hosted by Roma organizations or local schools, as was piloted in Hungary through community-based learning centers.

Train Educators in Inclusive Digital Pedagogies:

Educators need training in trauma-informed and adaptive methods. Several bootcamps used visual storytelling and role-play to support engagement among youth who had negative experiences in formal education. Teacher training should include such inclusive digital strategies.

Include Roma Youth in Policy Design and Monitoring:

Finally, Roma youth must have a voice in shaping the policies that affect them. Involving them in the development and evaluation of digital inclusion strategies ensures that programs are relevant, respectful, and effective.

The DigiFast project shows that culturally responsive, community-based digital education can greatly strengthen the digital skills, confidence, and inclusion of Roma youth. Through visual, interactive, and locally tailored learning with strong mentorship, it removed access barriers and empowered over 100 young people across four countries. To advance digital equity, we urge policymakers and educators to scale these flexible, evidence-based approaches across national and European levels, ensuring marginalized communities — including Roma youth — are not left behind in the digital transition

