



Policy Brief: Building VET Pathways to Digital Employment for Roma Youth — Lessons from the DigiFast Project

Prepared by: REDI Network & DigiFast Consortium

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Executive Summary

Roma youth across Europe face significant barriers to participation in digital education and employment. The DigiFast project piloted a practical, employment-oriented VET model combining digital skills training, mentorship, and internship pathways in **Romania, Serbia, Lithuania, and Hungary**.

Across the partnership, DigiFast delivered:

- We produced 48 videos for the online training course and 12 platform tutorials. Each video was created and dubbed in four languages (EN, LT, HU, RO)
- **200 Roma youth** trained through national bootcamps.
- **39 completed internships** (all unpaid): LT 14, RS 11, HU 10, RO 4.
- A digital learning platform with **65 active users, 590+ unique learners**, and +/- **15,000 learning interactions**.

The project confirms that **short-format, modular digital VET**, when combined with mentoring and partnerships with SMEs, can strengthen the employability of Roma youth. At the same time, DigiFast highlights persistent systemic barriers—including low recognition of non-formal learning, structural discrimination, and employer reluctance—that must be addressed to enable long-term impact.

1. Background and Context

Despite progress at EU level, Roma youth continue to experience unequal access to education and employment. Early school leaving, limited digital literacy, and discrimination restrict their participation in the rapidly growing digital economy.

The DigiFast project responded to these gaps by developing:

- an **8-hour video-based curriculum** on digital marketing and content creation;
- an interactive, multilingual online learning platform;
- hybrid bootcamps to support hands-on learning;
- a mentorship and internship pathway linking training to labour market experience.

Implementation across **four diverse national contexts** generated valuable comparative insights into digital inclusion strategies for Roma youth.

2. Key Achievements Across Partner Countries

2.1 Skills Development & Training Delivery

- **200 Roma youth** completed national DigiFast bootcamps:
 - Lithuania: 32
 - Serbia: 32
 - Romania: 44
 - Hungary: 31
- Curriculum covered: digital content creation, image & video editing, social media strategy, analytics, branding, and entry-level job orientation.

2.2 Digital Learning Platform Performance

Analytics confirm the platform's sustained reach:

- **65 active registered users**
- **590+ unique learners**
- **15,000 learning interactions** (+/-) (Sept 2024–Nov 2025)
- Users from **40+ countries**, demonstrating strong dissemination beyond the consortium.

2.3 Internship Pathways

39 internships were successfully completed:

1. **Lithuania: 14**
2. **Serbia: 11**

3. Hungary: 10

4. Romania: 4

Internships were **unpaid**, but provided essential work exposure in SMEs, NGOs, and digital agencies.

2.4 Video-Based Curriculum

- 114 instructional videos and tutorials produced.
- All content fully translated/dubbed in English, Lithuanian, Hungarian, and Romanian.

2.5 Capacity-Building for Educators

- Youth worker training conducted in all partner countries.
- Adoption of visual-first, modular teaching methods increased engagement among low-education participants.

3. Cross-Country Challenges and Structural Barriers

DigiFast generated a realistic picture of the constraints that limit Roma participation in digital employment pathways. These should inform future programme design.

3.1 Challenges Present in All Countries

Employer Engagement

Large companies rarely responded or lacked interest in hosting Roma interns.

Different expectations of employer and intern. Employers expect that interns have job experience in the field and have high level capacities to deliver given tasks.

Some companies cooperate with interns and met interns expectations, some companies gives strict tasks without considering interns' interest and skills of the intern. Also, companies expected initiative from interns and, in opposite, interns expected a direction-given manner of the tasks.

Low Recognition of Non-Formal Learning

Employers often prioritise formal diplomas.

YouthPass and micro-credentials were useful but **not widely understood** by companies, weakening job transition prospects.

Structural Discrimination

Roma youth continue to face biases during candidate screening and recruitment.

Even when skills were demonstrated, **callbacks were inconsistent**, reducing motivation.

Rural Mobility Constraints

Youth in rural areas encountered transportation barriers for training, interviews, and internships. Online Internships helped to avoid these arising problems.

3.2 Country-Specific Observations

Lithuania

- Benefited from a **highly motivated youth group** and experienced local educators.
- Strong placement results: **14 internships** completed.
- One intern was informed about continuous collaboration with the company with an official job contract.
- Main barrier: interns' existing misconceptions about the Roma background, combined with low self-esteem.

Serbia

- Long-standing engagement with Roma youth facilitated recruitment and retention.
- Strong internship performance (**11 placements**).
- Main barrier: Serbian's partners were only able to place interns because of the previously established relationships with the industry partners

Hungary

- Significant difficulty securing internship hosts due to employers' lack of time and structural constraints.
- Digital motivation is relatively strong, but youth face **high socio-economic stress**.

Romania

- The most challenging environment in terms of youth engagement.
- Many participants faced **exam schedules, seasonal work**, or low confidence in digital tasks.
- Only **4 internships were completed** despite strong efforts.

4. Lessons Learned

1. **Motivation and trust-building require long-term investment**, especially in contexts with stronger socio-economic pressures.
2. A previously established relationship with the industry partners is required, in most cases.
3. **SMEs are more open to hosting Roma youth, but require structured support, and clear expectations and instructions.**
4. **Project-based, visual, modular learning** works best for learners with low educational attainment.
5. Early-stage **career counselling and confidence-building** significantly improve learning outcomes.
6. Creating matchmaking events (maybe facilitated by governments) or job fairs where employers, employees and organizations working on employment can develop partnerships.
7. Skills are valued not only based on one's background but also on one's ability to perform tasks and
8. personal qualities.

5. Policy Recommendations

Based on the consortium's experience, the following measures are recommended for **EU, national, and local authorities**, as well as VET providers.

5.1 Strengthen Inclusive Digital VET Provision

- Ensure materials are available in **multiple languages** and adapted for low-education learners.
- In some cases, individual support should be provided in order to involve all young people in the learning process.

5.2 Create Structured and Protected Internship Frameworks

- Introduce **standardised hosting guidelines** and mentoring protocols for employers.
- Provide **micro-grants** to SMEs to offset the cost of hosting interns.

5.3 Recognise Non-Formal Digital Competences

- Expand use of **micro-credentials, digital badges, and YouthPass** within national qualification systems.
- Promote employer awareness of competency-based recruitment.
- Promote online internship possibilities to young people.

5.4 Address Discrimination in Recruitment

- Introduce **targeted anti-discrimination measures**, including diversity pledges for companies in public tenders.
- Support mediation services to accompany Roma youth through recruitment processes.

5.5 Invest in Rural Digital Infrastructure & Mobility

- Create **local digital hubs** with access to devices, software, and high-speed internet.
- Subsidise transport for youth participating in training or internships.

5.6 Provide Core Funding to Roma & Grassroots NGOs

- Adjust eligibility criteria and simplify applications for small organisations.
- Ensure operational funding, not only project-based grants, so NGOs can reach segregated communities.

6. Conclusion

The DigiFast project demonstrates that **Roma youth can succeed in digital employment pathways** when provided with relevant skills training, mentorship, and real-world opportunities. The project achieved several meaningful steps forward:

- strengthened digital competences among 200 young people,
- created internship pathways in all partner countries,
- developed a high-quality multilingual curriculum and platform,
- built new partnerships between Roma communities, NGOs, SMEs, and youth workers.

DigiFast shows that structural barriers remain and no single project can solve them; lasting change needs coordinated, well-funded, equity-focused VET systems. Scaling inclusive digital VET for Roma youth is both feasible and essential for their full participation in Europe's digital society and labour market.

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