



# 2030 DIGITAL DECADE

**Annex  
Bulgaria**

**REPORT ON THE STATE OF THE DIGITAL DECADE 2023**

# Digital Decade Country Report 2023: Bulgaria

**Bulgaria has scope to improve its performance in the digital transition and to contribute to the collective efforts to achieve the EU's Digital Decade targets.** While Bulgaria continues to perform well in connectivity both on very high-capacity network (VHCN) and fibre to the premises (FTTP), the uneven distribution of digital infrastructure in rural areas requires further attention. Furthermore, the uptake of digital public services is still low and targeted measures are needed, in particular to minimise the administrative burden placed on companies. Significant efforts should be made in the promotion of digital skills.

Bulgaria is collaborating with other Member States in exploring the possibility to set up a **European Digital Infrastructure Consortium (EDIC)** on Genome, to enable effective and secure cross-border access to repositories of personal genomic datasets.

## DIGITAL SKILLS

Only around one third of the Bulgaria's population aged between 16 and 74 has at least basic digital skills. Only 8% of Bulgaria's population have above basic digital skills.

Bulgaria is expected to contribute positively to the Digital Decade target on ICT specialists. Although Bulgaria has a low share of ICT specialists (3.8% vs. the EU average of 4.6%), it is the EU country with the highest share of women working as ICT specialists (28.9% vs. the EU average of 18.9%). The share of ICT graduates in the country is 4.9%, above the EU average of 4.2%.

**Bulgaria should significantly step up its efforts in the area of digital skills.** In particular, Bulgaria should ensure a whole-of-government approach to coordinate more effectively and efficiently the development, implementation, and evaluation of digital education policy and strengthen the involvement of relevant stakeholders. It should step up upskilling and reskilling of the labour force, including by mobilising EU funds or by using the European Technical Support Instrument to develop, deliver and evaluate programmes addressing specific adult learning needs.

## Digital Decade Country Report 2023: Bulgaria

### DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Bulgaria has made very good progress in fixed broadband connectivity. Fibre to the premises connections have significantly improved even compared to the last year's performance (from 81% to 86%), which was already higher than the EU average of 56%. However, the uptake of gigabit connectivity remains very low at 0.8%. Mobile 5G roll-out has started to take-up and coverage increased in 2022 to 67%. Regarding the 5G pioneer spectrum bands enabling improved performance, spectrum assignment was completed in December 2022 for the 700MHz and 800MHz bands, which complement the 3.6 GHz and 26 GHz bands licences that were previously issued to mobile network operators. Bulgaria also participates in multi-country projects, notably in the 5G Seamless Roaming for the Greece-Bulgaria Cross-Border Corridor (5G SEAGUL).

Concerning other digital infrastructure, Bulgaria already created an expert working group on semiconductors to exchange good practices and share expertise for the preparation and implementation of public policy in the field of microelectronics. Bulgaria is actively participating in a project for the design of a national plan in quantum communications infrastructure (QCI) in the context of the EuroQCI.

**Bulgaria should accelerate its efforts on connectivity infrastructure**, in particular by taking measures to incentivise the take up of gigabit connectivity and accelerate 5G rollout.

Measures taken by Bulgaria in the field of semiconductors and quantum computing should continue in order to help the EU become a strong market player in these areas.

### DIGITALISATION OF BUSINESSES

The digital transformation of businesses in Bulgaria lags significantly behind other EU countries and therefore the country needs substantial efforts to contribute to reaching the Digital Decade target. The share of enterprises using cloud computing services has been one of the lowest among the EU countries, but the adoption of AI and big data has recently increased. The Programme 'Competitiveness and Innovation in Enterprises 2021 – 2027' set strategic goals to provide innovation funding to businesses and support innovation, competitiveness, and the digital and green transition. The programme is structured around three priorities: (i) innovation and growth, (ii) the circular economy, and (iii) digital connectivity. In 2022, Bulgaria implemented strategic measures to support the digitalisation of SMEs with the national Economic Transformation programme.

**Bulgaria should significantly step up its efforts in the area of digitalisation of businesses**, in particular, it should take further action towards increasing overall digital intensity in SMEs as well as the adoption of cloud computing services, big data and artificial intelligence.

### DIGITALISATION OF PUBLIC SERVICES

Bulgaria performs below the EU average for most of targets in the area of digitalisation of public services. The progress on digital public services both for citizens and businesses remains low. The percentage of e-Government users is lower than the EU average. But access to e-health records is above the EU average (77 vs. 72). In January 2023, the upgrade of the Single portal for access to electronic administrative services was completed. The main functionalities of the new portal will ensure that public services are aligned with the European Commission's interoperability framework. A contract to issue a national eID scheme in compliance with the eIDAS Regulation was concluded and will replace the old scheme. Bulgaria also participates in a cross-border project, funded by the Connecting Europe Facility programme, to establish generic trans-border service for electronic healthcare.

**Bulgaria should accelerate its efforts to digitalise public services.**

In particular, it should raise awareness of its public services being available online to all internet users.

### DIGITAL IN BULGARIA'S RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN (RRP)

The Bulgarian RRP amounts to EUR 6.27 billion. 25.8% of it (EUR 1.6 billion) is devoted to the digital transformation, of which EUR 1.01 billion is expected to contribute to the Digital Decade targets<sup>1</sup>. In the context of the first payment request, Bulgaria has achieved 11 milestones and targets. Several of them were related to measures in the digital area, such as reducing spectrum fees, legislative changes implementing recommendations under the Connectivity Toolbox, and awarding contracts to develop the TETRA system and radio relay network. Regarding the second payment request, Bulgaria is expected to achieve 66 milestones and targets out of the 346 in total in the Bulgarian plan.

<sup>1</sup> Based on Annex VII of the RRF Regulation. Furthermore, a qualitative assessment of the data took place to allow for an estimation of the possible contribution of RRF measures to the Digital Decade targets and the remaining part is also supporting the general objectives of the Digital Decade. This applies to all descriptions of the RRFs included in this Annex. The information provided refers to the Recovery and Resilience Plan as adopted by the Council before 1 September 2023, without prejudice to potential ongoing revisions of the plan.