

**Press release:**

**»From privatisation to democratisation of Slovenia's digital transformation for people and communities«**

**Ljubljana, 15 November 2024** – Non-governmental organisations Institute for Electronic Participation, Youth Council of Slovenia, City Association of Pensioners of Ljubljana and members of civil society organized the press conference »Digital transformation of Slovenia tailored to the market, bureaucracy and technology or to people and communities?«. Media event presented a shadow report on the implementation of the measures of the National Strategic Roadmap for the Digital Decade, pointing to the unclear effects of the implementation of measures in the field of digital skills, Slovenia's slower progress in providing digital infrastructure in rural areas, and the unrealistic strategic planning of Slovenia's measures contributing to the achievement of the European Union's digital objectives. Based on the findings of the shadow report, NGOs called for a stronger focus on measures to protect digital rights, strengthening quality of life in a digital society and democratising public policy on digital transformation. They were also critical of the digital transformation paradigm, which sees people as mere labour force, services consumers and parties to administrative processes<sup>1</sup>.

**Slovenia is still not making overall progress in digital transformation**

The shadow report<sup>2</sup>, prepared by the Institute for Electronic Participation (INePA), confirms the European Commission, which, based on a review of the National Strategic Roadmap for the Digital Decade and an analysis of the achievement of the digital goals<sup>3</sup> notes that, despite the implementation of measures, Slovenia has not yet achieved overall progress and impact in the area of digital transformation. The Institute INePA also pointed out that Slovenia is below the EU average in most of the indicators (23 out of 35) of the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2023<sup>4</sup>. In the area of digital skills, Slovenia is below average in five out of six indicators and faces challenges in other areas of digital inclusion, such as the provision of digital infrastructure in rural areas and access to user-friendly digital public services.

**Less than €1 billion to implement actions to achieve the 2030 Digital Goals**

Slovenia's total budget for the actions in the National Roadmap 2023-2030 is estimated at just under €1 billion. A good third of the funds (€377 million) are earmarked for actions for the digital

1 The full press release is available at <https://www.inepa.si/2024/11/15/od-privatizacije-k-demokratizaciji-digitalne-preobrazbe-slovenije-po-meri-cloveka-in-skupnosti/>.

A video of the press conference is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UntGjoyVDWA>.

The statements of the speakers at the press conference are available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aD63H3p72Bj>.

2 Reference: <https://www.inepa.si/2024/09/15/sencno-porocilo-o-doseganju-ciljev-digitalnega-desetletja-slovenije-na-podrocju-digitalne-vkljucenosti/>.

3 Reference: <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/dae/redirectation/document/106696>.

4 Reference: [https://digital-decade-desi.digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/datasets/desi/charts/desi-indicators?period=desi\\_2024&indicator=desi\\_dsk\\_bab&breakdown=ind\\_total&unit=pc\\_ind&country=AT,BE,BG,HR,CY,CZ,DK,EI,EU,FI,FR,DE,EL,HU,IE,IT,LV,LT,LU,MT,NL,PL,PT,RO,SK,SI,ES,SE](https://digital-decade-desi.digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/datasets/desi/charts/desi-indicators?period=desi_2024&indicator=desi_dsk_bab&breakdown=ind_total&unit=pc_ind&country=AT,BE,BG,HR,CY,CZ,DK,EI,EU,FI,FR,DE,EL,HU,IE,IT,LV,LT,LU,MT,NL,PL,PT,RO,SK,SI,ES,SE).

transformation of business sector, followed by actions in the areas of digital infrastructure (€197 million), digital competences (€193 million), and digital public services (€117 million). The rest of the funds are earmarked for actions relating to the general objectives and for multi-country projects.

### **Slower progress on digital infrastructure**

The urban-rural connectivity gap in Slovenia remains a structural problem and the EU average progress in fibre coverage is faster in the last decade than in Slovenia. The shadow report highlights the European Commission's warning that much of the funding for fibre connectivity projects in the National Plan comes from the 2014-2020 period, which is now closed. The National Strategic Plan also foresees significant private investment, which is not present to the same extent in any other objective of the National Plan and contributes to around half of the budget for gigabit connectivity measures.

### **Mismatches between the supply and use of digital public services**

77% of public services for citizens in Slovenia is digital which is close to the EU average of 79.4%, but the country is facing a gap between the public e-services offered and their use. The share of e-government users in 2023 who have used websites or applications to communicate with public administrations in the last 12 months has decreased from 81.3% to 78.4%, but remaining above the EU average (75%). The European Commission recommends Slovenia to continue its efforts to digitise public services. In light of the mismatch between the supply and use of digital public services, Slovenia should pay particular attention to co-creative development (e.g. incorporating user feedback) and user-friendliness of e-services.

### **Unclear impact of actions on digital skills**

The Ministry of Digital Transformation has launched 10 public procurement and tendering procedures in the period 2023-2024 in relation to the target of 80% of the population aged 16-74 with at least basic digital skills, worth just under €26 million (including Digi info points). According to the Ministry's data, 5,200 young people and 29,000 adults and seniors were involved in various programmes to develop digital competences in 2023<sup>5</sup>. The shadow report of the Institute for Electronic Participation notes that the publicly available information on the implementation of the Ministry's actions only provides quantitative data, but not qualitative data on the impact achieved in terms of improving digital competences. One such example is the Mobile Heroes action, about which the Ministry for Digital Transformation published news stating<sup>6</sup> that more than 5,000 older people who took part in the four-hour training courses significantly improved their digital skills, without providing concrete data to prove the actual improvement.

### **Unreal strategic planning (governance) and risks of uneconomic implementation of measures**

Slovenia is the only EU country that has fully aligned its National Strategic Plan for the Digital Decade with the EU's 2030 Digital Agenda, and the European Commission points to the real potential to achieve the targets given Slovenia's modest starting position. The share of Slovenia's population with at least basic digital skills declined by 3% to 46.7% in the period 2021-2023, while the EU average increased by 1.5% to 55.6% over the same period. The shadow report of Institute for Electronic Participation concludes that Slovenia will need to increase the share of the

5 Reference: <https://www.gov.si/novice/2024-08-30-svetovni-dan-pismenosti-digitalno-opismenjevanje-za-digitalno-vkljucevanje/>.

6 Reference: <https://www.gov.si/novice/2023-12-29-5533-starejsih-ima-zaradi-mobilnih-herojev-bolise-digitalne-spretnosti/>.

population with at least basic digital skills by 4.76% per year to reach the target of 80% of the population with at least basic digital skills. The shadow report also notes that only two EU Member States (the Czech Republic and Hungary) have managed such an yearly increase in the period 2021-2023, and that this will require adequate organisational and human resources capacity on the part of the government ministries as well on the private contractors of public funded digital literacy programmes. Otherwise, there will be risks of ineffective implementation of measures and uneconomic use of public funds. The importance of realistic strategic planning and implementation of actions in the governance of public policies is highlighted in the Lessons from the 2023 OECD Trust Survey in Slovenia study, which concludes that fair and evidence-based decision-making processes, as well as clear communication of reforms and policies, are key drivers of trust in national government<sup>7</sup>.

### **Insufficient focus on protecting digital rights and quality of life in a digital society**

The European Commission proposes that Slovenia provides more information in its National Strategic Roadmap on the implementation of digital rights and principles and the overall objectives of the Digital Decade, including which national actions contribute to this. In this context, it highlights in particular the issues of child online safety, control of personal data and hate speech online. The Institute for Electronic Participation's shadow report highlights additional suggestions identified by the Slovenian Political Science Association's interdisciplinary expert panel on Slovenia's inclusive digital transformation<sup>8</sup>:

- ensuring the Internet as a public infrastructure and a public good;
- increasing public investment in digital accessibility and inclusion of vulnerable groups at local level
- mainstreaming IT and computing in all school subjects;
- protecting human rights and values from digital feudalism and digital surveillance;
- regulating and taxing the data capitalism of tech corporations and multinationals;
- enshrining the right to disconnect from digital devices in the country constitution;
- systemically preventing digital addiction relating to usage of digital devices;
- enacting the right to analogue access to key public services;
- strengthening the use of digital technologies to support democratic processes;
- democratising decision-making on digital transformation.

Slovenia's track record in achieving the goals of protecting and empowering people and society could also be improved by raising the profile of the Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles<sup>9</sup>. The European Commission highlights as an example of good practice the civil society project "Co-designing Digital Policies in Slovenia (CODIS 2)"<sup>10</sup>, which aims to monitor and strengthen the implementation of the National Strategic Plan for the Digital Decade.

### **NGOs' proposals to update the National Strategic Roadmap**

Based on the findings of the shadow report of Institute INePA, the European Commission's analysis and the civil society workshop<sup>11</sup>, NGOs and civil society representatives presented at the press

7 Reference: [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/lessons-from-the-2023-oecd-trust-survey-in-slovenia\\_261ac7b2-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/lessons-from-the-2023-oecd-trust-survey-in-slovenia_261ac7b2-en.html).

8 Reference: <https://www.inepa.si/2024/10/03/zakljucki-interdisciplinarnega-strokovnega-panela-o-vkljuccioci-digitalni-preobrazbi-slovenije/>.

9 Reference: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/SL/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32023C0123\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/SL/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32023C0123(01)).

10 Reference: <https://www.inepa.si/2024/05/15/co-creating-digital-policies-in-slovenia-phase-ii-codis-2-project-information/>.

11 Reference: <https://www.inepa.si/2024/10/30/spletna-delavnica-dopolnitev-nacionalni-strateski-nacrt-za-digitalno-desetletje/>.

conference the following updates to the existing actions and proposals for additional actions in the National Strategic Roadmap to achieve the EU's digital objectives:

➤ 80% of 16-74 year olds with at least basic digital skills

1) Better target information and inclusion of specific and hard-to-reach population groups in existing digital skills actions.

2) Ensure quality acquisition of digital skills tailored to the target population groups and their needs.

3) Complete the description and timeline of implementation and to start immediately the implementation of Action No 9 Digital literacy aiming at the train the trainer digital skills.

4) Systematically integrate the principle of technological neutrality in the implementation of existing measures for the acquisition and development of digital skills, which implies the user freedom of the population to choose the most appropriate hardware and software for digital literacy according to their needs.

5) Systematically integrate digital literacy measures with digital skills, which relate to strengthening the digital sovereignty of the population in relation to the authorities, the market and technologies (learning to use digital technologies critically and responsibly).

6) Revise the national baseline of the proportion of the population with at least basic digital skills in line with official statistics from the current 50% to 46.7%, and a correspondingly adjust the existing national timeline and the number of people involved in order to reach the target.

7) Implement comprehensive and independent external evaluation of the results and impacts of digital skills actions and related measures such as Digi info points, relating to the target of 80% of the population aged 16-74 with at least basic digital competences.

➤ Chapter 4: Policies, actions and activities contributing to the overall objectives - Digital citizenship.

8) Introduce a new measure to strengthen democratic processes and decision-making through digital technologies (development and use of e-participation and i-voting tools).

9) Include of a new action in the National Strategic Roadmap on a systemic approach to co-creative development with people and user-friendliness of digital public services.

10) Introduce a new systemic action to address the poor state of digital accessibility of public websites and mobile applications.

11) Introduce a new systemic measure to restrict the use of mobile devices during school hours in primary and secondary schools.

12) Introduce a new measure to equip pensioners' associations and social institutions with computers, in line with the Law on the Promotion of Digital Inclusion.

13) Introduce a new measure to support the digital transformation of the NGO sector in line with the NGO Act and the Act on the Promotion of Digital Inclusion.

- Chapter 4: Policies, measures and activities that contribute to the overall objectives - Supporting leadership and sovereignty.

14) Introduce a new measure to increase the use of open formats and open source solutions in public and government administration.

- Chapter 5: Cooperation at European level - Other multi-country project

15) Complete the timeline and launch of Action 84 European Digital Commons Infrastructure Consortium (EDIC Digital commons).

### **What kind of a human being are we envision at the heart of digital transformation?**

At the end of the press conference, representatives of NGOs and civil society stressed the need for greater integration of ethical and human rights considerations into digital skills measures. They also expect a significant improvement in governance (strategic planning, implementation of actions, public involvement and dialogue with stakeholders) in the area of digital transformation policies. As a society, we also need to critically ask ourselves what kind of a human being we imagine to be at the heart of Slovenia's digital transformation and what public policy measures will support such a vision. The dominant paradigm of digital transformation sees the human being as a mere labour force, services consumer and party to administrative processes.

### **Concluding statements from the NGOs representatives and civil society members**

**Kristijan Tkalec** (*representative of the NGO Network for an Inclusive Information Society in the Government Council for Digital Transformation*): Education for digital skills must be based on an understanding of how digital technologies work, not just how to use a particular computer programme. We lack a serious approach to introducing computing in schools. There is also a need for a change in the understanding of adult and youth education as mere consumers. A broader group of experts needs to be involved in the planning of educational measures, while keeping the focus on the human being.

**Sabina Belc** (*Youth Council of Slovenia*): Involving NGOs and target groups in planning digital transformation actions is important. The same applies to the development of digital solutions and addressing digital challenges, which must respond to trends and needs on the field. We need to listen to the organisations that perceive these needs.

**Andrej Jus** (*City Association of Pensioners of Ljubljana*): We need responsibility for leading and coordinating Slovenia's digital transformation. We have a government ministry, but we do not know who is actually leading the activities, who is responsible and whom to talk to in addressing the problems highlighted today. We as NGOs are an important part of this society and we expect to be involved in the decision-making that concerns our activities. This is the only way society can

move forward.

**Sabina Janičijević** (NGO Digital Hub initiative): *Too often, NGOs are either only informed of decisions taken or given too short deadlines for participation. We need to approach the digitisation of the NGO sector in a comprehensive, transparent way, in line with the values of the NGO sector. In the area of web accessibility, we need a wider awareness that users are taken into account when building websites and applications. It is not enough to pass laws on accessibility, but these laws must also be implemented.*

**mag. Simon Delakorda** (Institute for Electronic Participation): *Digital transformation is not just about ticking Digital decade goals, but also about how we achieve them and the processes behind them. This raises the issue of democracy and co-design of public policies, where Slovenian government and line ministries face a number of challenges. There is a greater need to involve stakeholders and to respect the standards of democratic debate. In this way, particular interests, which too often blur the broader public interests of society in the digital transformation, will be overcome.*

### **Call for deliberative public debate on the update of the National Strategic Roadmap**

NGOs and civil society representatives called on the Ministry for Digital Transformation to hold an open and deliberative public debate on the National Strategic Roadmap update in line with the European Commission's recommendations on promoting the involvement and effective participation of citizens and civil society organisations in public policy-making processes<sup>12</sup> and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development guidelines on public participation<sup>13</sup>. This will ensure a much more democratic process of public involvement than was the case in the preparation of the National Strategic Roadmap for the Digital Decade in 2023, according to the speakers at the press conference<sup>14</sup>.

### **Contact for further information on the press release**

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12 Reference: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=PI\\_COM:C\(2023\)8627](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=PI_COM:C(2023)8627).

13 Reference: [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-guidelines-for-citizen-participation-processes\\_f765caf6-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-guidelines-for-citizen-participation-processes_f765caf6-en.html).

14 Reference: <https://english.sta.si/3228649/ngos-not-entirely-happy-with-countrys-digital-decade-roadmap>.

15 Reference: Institute for Electronic Participation (INePA) is non-governmental organisation with granted public interest NGO status in the field of information society development <https://www.inepa.si/english/>.