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EU4Digital

An accelerated digital transition for the Western Balkans

Context

The Western Balkan (WB) economies—Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia—are on a path toward European Union (EU) accession. As either candidates or potential candidates, the Western Balkans must strengthen regional cooperation and advance key reforms to meet EU membership requirements. The EU's Growth Plan for the WB underscores the digital transition as a cornerstone of economic development and regional integration, yet significant challenges persist, particularly regarding digital infrastructure and cross-border cooperation.

Key obstacles include limited broadband access, particularly in rural areas, and inadequate digital skills. Although mobile phone usage is nearly universal, fixed broadband penetration and high-speed internet services still fall short of EU standards. Additionally, progress in regional cooperation on digital identity, data management, and e-government services are needed.

EU4Digital

Project name	EU4Digital
Commissioned by	Co-funded by the European Union and Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Beneficiaries	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia
Funding	16.150.000 EUR (15.000.000 EUR of EU funds; 1.150.000 EUR of BMZ funds)
Duration	2024-2027

*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

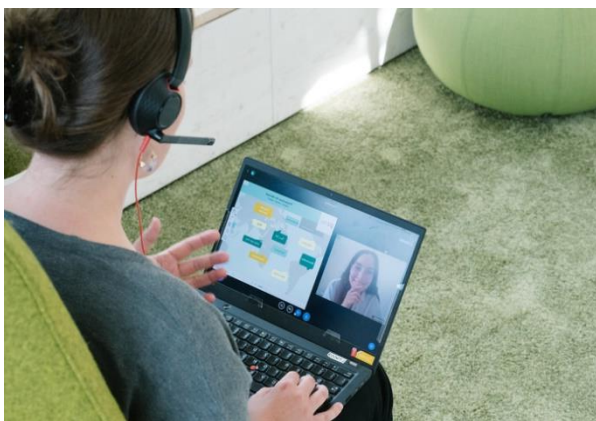
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The Growth Plan for the Western Balkans emphasizes addressing these challenges, underlining the importance of digital integration and capacity-building to advance the region's connectivity with the EU. Closing these gaps will not only strengthen the region's digital landscape but also promote economic growth, reduce the digital divide, and support the broader objective of joining the EU's Digital Single Market.

Objective

The initiative's primary objective is to enhance digital connectivity and accelerate the digital transformation of the Western Balkans, facilitating their integration into the European Union's Digital Single Market.



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Approach

The EU4Digital initiative was launched to address the region's pressing need for digital transformation and enhanced connectivity. It is aligned with the EU's Growth Plan and aims to achieve its objectives through the following actions:

1. Developing secure and sustainable digital infrastructure – Through the WiFi4WB initiative, the project will provide free public Wi-Fi at the municipal level and install Wi-Fi access points in select public locations, increasing internet availability for residents and visitors. Additionally, it will support governments in establishing pipelines of digital infrastructure

investments, with a focus on improving connectivity in rural and underserved areas to ensure wider access to digital services across the region.

2. Enhancing interoperability and e-governance

The project will facilitate bilateral and regional agreements to recognize trust services, streamlining cross-border transactions and communication. It will support a pilot for interoperable e-services, showcasing their benefits and encouraging cross-border data exchange through the adoption of e-governance solutions within the region and in alignment with the EU.

3. Supporting the digitalisation of businesses

To foster business digitalization, the project will promote the application of EU standards across the region. It will lay the groundwork for introducing electronic Freight Transport Information (eFTI) in the WB, driving digital transformation in transport and logistics. Furthermore, the initiative will strengthen the provision of expertise and assistance to micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) by strengthening the network of European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs) throughout the six WB, facilitating closer integration with the EU's digital ecosystem.



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Contact Gudrun Kramer, gudrun.kramer@giz.de

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