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Digital Decade 2030: From Access to Use

What young people see on the ground, and what public policy can learn from it

Policy Brief

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

France has adopted an ambitious digital roadmap, but it has yet to win the battle of use. Its infrastructure and online public services rank it among the most advanced countries in Europe. Yet only 65.7% of French people have basic digital skills, far from the EU target of 80% by 2030. Moreover, 61% reported difficulties with online administrative procedures in 2025, up from 39% in 2016. The challenge is no longer access: it is everyone's autonomy in using digital services.

Work conducted in 2026 by the *Human Development Research Initiative* (HDRI) under the *Youth-Led Monitoring for a Resilient Digital France* (YLM-RDF) project, with the support of the European Citizen Action Service (ECAS), identifies **three weaknesses** in the implementation of France's national Digital Decade roadmap: **territorial gaps** that training provision alone cannot close; **little-known support services**, at the very moment their resources are shrinking; and **top-down governance** that deprives the State of feedback from the ground, particularly on artificial intelligence, which young people have adopted massively without clear guidance.

65.7% of French people have basic digital skills. EU target for 2030: 80%.	**−2.2 pts** in digital skills for young people living in rural revitalisation zones (ZRR), all else being equal (0–12 index).	**43.5%** of young respondents know of no digital support service.
78% have received no clear guidance on AI, although 97% use it.	**€62m → €14m** State funding for digital advisers (Conseillers numériques) between 2024 and 2026.	**0 out of 56** secondary school students surveyed had heard of the Digital Decade.

These findings underline the need to strengthen digital inclusion through concrete measures, better adapted to local realities and co-designed with the people concerned (including young people and residents of ZRR), built around the following recommendations.

FIVE RECOMMENDATIONS	
1	Create a **French Digital Inclusion Guarantee**, backed by multi-year funding for digital support.
2	Establish a **national framework for civil society participation** in steering the roadmap.
3	**Territorialise** objectives and indicators, with dedicated monitoring of fragile rural areas.
4	Accompany every measure with **systematic monitoring of its social impact**, including AI.
5	Make **support visible where young people are**: schools, universities, youth employment centres.

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1. THE CHALLENGE: MAKING DIGITAL WORK FOR EVERYONE

The European Digital Decade sets a twofold target for 2030: 80% of adults with basic digital skills, and public services accessible to all, as part of a "human-centric" transformation. The European Commission considers France's roadmap ambitious, but estimates that only half of its 2025 trajectories have been met (*State of the Digital Decade 2026*).

For 16–24-year-olds, the stakes are immediate: education, employment, housing, health and access to rights now all go through a screen, and AI has become embedded in their academic, personal and professional lives. This brief addresses one question: **how can French digital policy deliver effective inclusion for young people, particularly in rural areas?**

Three studies, one citizen monitoring method

- **Citizen monitoring of the roadmap (March–June 2026).** ECAS methodology: 20 of the 33 measures scored from 1 to 5, cross-referenced with the Commission's *Digital Decade* reports and interviews (young people, education stakeholders, local authorities).
- **Mapping digital exclusion in ZRR (April–June 2026).** Survey of 147 young people aged 16 to 24 (72 urban, 66 rural outside ZRR, 9 in ZRR, i.e. rural revitalisation zones), interviews, focus groups and workshops in secondary schools. Two indices developed for the project: skills (0–12) and opportunities (3–18).
- **Youth Declaration on Digital Resilience (September–October 2026).** More than 100 young people gathered at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, at the Maison de l'Étudiant in Paris and online ("Beyond the Algorithm" hackathon).

Scope of the findings: as the ZRR sub-sample is small (n = 9), the gaps observed are exploratory signals. They are consistent with national data and call for statistical confirmation on a larger scale (Recommendation 3).

2. FIVE KEY FINDINGS

The work conducted under the YLM-RDF project highlights several findings which, without calling into question the overall quality of the French strategy, point to the need to strengthen how it is implemented.

Finding 1 – France leads on infrastructure but lags on skills

Citizen monitoring of the French roadmap reveals a mixed picture across the pillars of the Digital Decade:

Pillar	2030 trajectory	Assessment
Infrastructure	**On track**	France is among the most advanced Member States (fibre: 91.7% of households). Remaining challenges: *standalone* 5G, last mile.
Digital public services	**Partly on track**	High-performing services (FranceConnect, France Identité, Mon Espace Santé), but uneven take-up: 72/100, against 84.6 for the EU.
Digital transformation of businesses	**Partly on track**	European leadership in AI, but insufficient uptake among SMEs and outside major cities.
Digital skills	**Off track**	One in three French people lacks basic skills. 80% among 16–24-year-olds, 64% in rural areas, 41% among people with low qualifications.

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The gaps are driven primarily by age and education. Basic skills reach 80.4% of 16–24-year-olds, but only 48.2% of 55–74-year-olds and 41.2% of people with low qualifications. The rural average is only 2 points below the national average, but it masks marked pockets of vulnerability, such as in ZRR.

Finding 2 – In ZRR, with equal opportunities, young people have weaker skills and poorer connectivity

Provision is comparable; outcomes are not. Living in a ZRR is associated with a skills score around 2.2 points lower, for equivalent age and digital opportunities. Increasing the number of training programmes will therefore not be enough: the decisive levers are **connection quality**, **local digital support** and services that are **accessible by design**.

Indicator (HDRI survey, 147 young people)	Urban	Rural outside ZRR	ZRR
Digital skills index (0–12)	9.0	8.9	**6.9**
Digital opportunities index (3–18)	10.88	10.75	10.44
Perceived connection quality (1–5)	3.94	3.53	**2.78**
Perceived school preparation (composite score)	2.24	2.07	1.97

Connectivity is a territorial issue; service design is a national one. No respondent in a ZRR describes their connection as "very good". This is consistent with national data: 5G is actually available only around 13.5% of the time in rural areas, compared with 22% in urban areas. Conversely, administrative obstacles are not territorial: the average number of obstacles per procedure is almost identical (1.32 in urban areas, 1.30 elsewhere) and stems mainly from the design of the services. This second lever must be addressed at national level.

Finding 3 – Support exists, but young people do not see it, while its resources are shrinking

A lack of outreach. Young people know Pix, the national digital skills certification used in schools (85.7%), but 43.5% know of no digital support service (France Services, digital advisers, Aidants Connect), wherever they live. Each young person encounters on average more than one obstacle per online procedure and turns to family and friends rather than to support services.

A risk of a double setback. State funding for digital advisers falls from around €62m in 2024 to €14m in 2026. A service that is both little-known and weakened loses on both counts: raising its profile requires securing its capacity, first and foremost in the places young people frequent (secondary schools, youth employment centres, student services).

Finding 4 – AI has taken hold without a framework

Widespread use, limited guidance. 97% of respondents use AI, both to find information and to study. Yet 36.7% have received no guidance from their institution, 41.5% only partial guidance, and just 21.8% a clear framework for using AI. Teachers observe that pupils adopt AI faster than they learn to assess its outputs; young people themselves cite reliability and ethics as the main challenges.

The AI divide is a divide in guidance, not in access. It affects skills (responsible use of AI is one of the six dimensions of the HDRI index) and extends beyond school: AI is already used to screen job applications and to prepare public decisions. Hence the demand, voiced by young people, for oversight and explanation of automated decisions (Declaration, Articles 11 to 13).

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Finding 5 – The people concerned remain outside governance

A roadmap steered without structured user feedback. The roadmap is designed and implemented in a top-down manner. The documentary review found no regular consultation mechanism attached to it, and neither the young people nor the local stakeholders we met were aware of any. None of the 56 secondary school students surveyed had heard of the Digital Decade. Given the pace of technological change, the State is thus depriving itself of the signals that would allow it to adjust measures along the way.

Expertise is available, but there is no channel for it. When offered a framework, young people take it up: more than 100 of them produced sixteen structured articles, brought together in the 2026 Youth Declaration on Digital Resilience, of which Articles 14 to 16 call for their effective involvement in decision-making. As with support services, the problem lies less in a lack of tools than in their visibility.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS: GUARANTEEING USE, NOT JUST ACCESS

The three studies converge: effective inclusion relies on **human support**, **local connectivity**, **simple procedures** and the **participation of the people concerned**. Each recommendation sets out measures, lead bodies, monitoring indicators and a timeframe. Targets are indicative.

RECOMMENDATION 1 · Create a French Digital Inclusion Guarantee	
Objective	Make digital autonomy an effective right, beyond access to equipment. *Addresses Findings 1, 3 and 4.*
Measures	• Define a guaranteed baseline for everyone: equipment and connectivity, local human support, and training in basic skills, including the responsible use of AI. • Ring-fence multi-year funding for digital support, including digital advisers, starting with the 2027 Finance Act. • Provide every school and higher education institution with a clear framework for the use of AI: rules, critical assessment of content, data protection. • Strengthen training and reskilling capacity for digital professions.
Lead bodies	Minister Delegate for AI and Digital Affairs, DINUM (Interministerial Digital Directorate), ANCT (National Agency for Territorial Cohesion), Ministries of Education and Higher Education, regions, Parliament.
Indicators	• Basic digital skills rate: 65.7% today, 80% targeted by 2030. • Share of young people with clear guidance on AI: 21.8% in the HDRI survey. • Funded digital support capacity (digital adviser posts) stabilised over three years.
Timeframe	2027 Finance Act for funding; guarantee operational in 2028.

RECOMMENDATION 2 · Establish a national framework for civil society participation	
Objective	Give the roadmap a regular channel for user feedback, so that it can be adjusted continuously. *Addresses Finding 5.*

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Measures	• Publish a consultation framework for drafting and updating the roadmap: objectives, participants (young people, associations, rural areas), methods, and rules for taking contributions into account, with reasoned responses. • Convene a citizens' convention on artificial intelligence at the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE), tasked with making proposals on the use of AI in public services, work and education. • Hold an annual public review of the roadmap, including a youth component and drawing on existing citizen monitoring initiatives. • Raise young people's awareness of the Digital Decade through existing school channels.
Lead bodies	DINUM, Minister Delegate for AI and Digital Affairs, SGPI (General Secretariat for Investment), CESE, Prime Minister (referral), ANCT, in liaison with the European Commission.
Indicators	• Publication of the framework; number of consultations held and share of contributions that received a reasoned response. • Awareness of the Digital Decade among 16–24-year-olds: 0 out of 56 secondary school students in the HDRI survey.
Timeframe	Framework published at the next roadmap update; first public review in 2027; referral to the CESE in 2028, convention conclusions in 2029.

RECOMMENDATION 3 · **Territorialise digital policies**	
Objective	Steer policy as close as possible to actual gaps rather than on the basis of national averages. *Addresses Finding 2.*
Measures	• Publish roadmap indicators at département level, with specific monitoring of fragile rural areas (ZRR, now the France Ruralités Revitalisation zoning). • Measure actual quality of service (real 5G availability, last mile of fibre), not just theoretical coverage. • Direct a share of digital inclusion funding to the areas lagging furthest behind; strengthen existing rural schemes. • Conduct a representative survey of rural young people to confirm the signals identified in this study.
Lead bodies	ARCEP (telecoms regulator), ANCT, Ministry of Agriculture, regions.
Indicators	• Skills gap between urban young people and those in ZRR: 9.0 versus 6.9 on the HDRI index. • Actual 5G availability in rural areas: 13.5% of the time, compared with 22% in urban areas.
Timeframe	First département-level dashboards in 2027.

RECOMMENDATION 4 · **Establish systematic monitoring of social impact**	
Objective	Ensure that every measure also benefits those most at risk of exclusion. *Addresses Findings 1, 2 and 4.*
Measures	• Attach disaggregated indicators to every roadmap measure: young people, women, rural areas, vulnerable groups, people with disabilities. • Assess the impact of AI and automated decision-making systems used by public administrations: transparency, explainability, avenues of redress, in line with the EU AI Act. • Monitor the usability of online procedures as a performance indicator in its own right.
Lead bodies	DINUM, relevant ministries, CNIL (data protection authority), Defender of Rights, European Commission.

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Indicators	• Share of measures with disaggregated indicators. • Share of users reporting administrative difficulties: 61% in 2025; average number of obstacles per procedure: 1.3 in the HDRI survey.
Timeframe	From the next roadmap update; generalised in 2028.

RECOMMENDATION 5 · **Make support visible where young people are**	
Objective	Promote existing services before creating new ones. *Addresses Finding 3*.
Measures	• Use the places young people frequent (secondary schools, universities, student services, youth employment centres) as gateways to France Services, digital advisers and Aidants Connect. • Use Pix, already known to 85.7% of young respondents, as an entry point to support services. • Build a systematic referral to the nearest human support into online procedures.
Lead bodies	ANCT, DINUM, Ministry of Education, local authorities.
Indicators	• Share of young people who know of at least one support service: 56.5% in the HDRI survey; indicative target of 80% by 2028. • Use of France Services by 16–24-year-olds.
Timeframe	Start of the 2027 school and academic year.

4. PROPOSED IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

Timeframe	Proposed decisions and milestones
Immediate – 2027 Finance Act	Secure a multi-year funding baseline for digital support (R1). Launch the campaign to raise young people's awareness of support services (R5).
2027	Publish the national participation framework and hold a first public review of the roadmap (R2). Publish the first département-level indicators (R3). Roll out an AI use framework in every institution (R1).
2028	Digital Inclusion Guarantee operational (R1). Systematic disaggregation of social impact indicators for all measures (R4). Referral to the CESE on AI (R2).
2030	EU target of 80% basic digital skills achieved, with a measurable reduction in territorial gaps.

CONCLUSION

By 2030, the success of the Digital Decade will depend less on new deployments than on the capacity of public action to adapt to the experience of those who use it. This feedback from the ground already exists: young people and local communities are able to identify obstacles and put forward precise solutions. Giving it a lasting place in steering the roadmap would make digital inclusion a condition for the success of the national strategy, rather than an objective that remains outside it.

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DELIVERABLES ACCOMPANYING THIS BRIEF

- **Citizen monitoring of the national roadmap**: assessment of 20 of the 33 measures, pillar by pillar.
- **Mapping digital exclusion among young people in ZRR**: survey, indices and interviews.
- **2026 Youth Declaration on Digital Resilience**: sixteen articles adopted by more than 100 young people.

HDRI is available to government departments for a **detailed presentation** of the findings, **sharing of the data and indices** developed for the project, and a **contribution to the design** of a youth consultation mechanism.

Sources

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