



## Lesson 2: Policy frameworks

### Key frameworks and the role of institutional policies

ALL DIGITAL



# Content

- **International initiatives promoting digital equity:** overview of main policies and guidelines
  - Digital Education Action Plan (2021 - 2027)
  - European Universities Initiative
  - UNESCO's Open Educational Resources (OER) Recommendation
  - UNESCO Futures of Education Initiative (2021)
  - UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021)
  - The Web Accessibility Directive
- **The role of institutional policies in promoting digital equity**



# Key frameworks and initiatives

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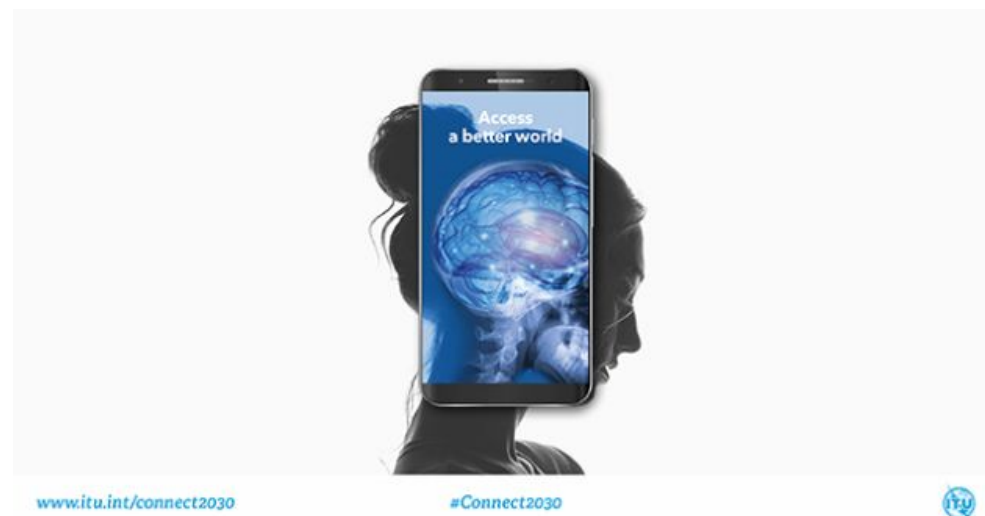


# Introduction

- The promotion of digital inclusion in higher education has emerged as a global priority, underscored by international initiatives and frameworks.
- Organisations such as the European Commission and UNESCO continuously put efforts to ensure inclusive and connected higher education
- From 2020 to the present, many international initiatives have prioritised promoting digital inclusion in higher education
- These initiatives focus on improving connectivity, access to digital tools, fostering digital skills, and creating equitable policies.
- In this lesson, we will explore main initiatives and guidelines and how they are supporting digital inclusion in higher education.



# Examples of initiatives:





# UNESCO's Open Educational Resources (OER)

## Recommendation

- OERs are “learning, teaching and research materials in **any format and medium that reside in the public domain or are under copyright that have been released under an open license**, that permit no-cost access, re-use, re-purpose, adaptation and redistribution by others” (UNESCO Recommendation on OER (UNESCO, 2019).
- If harnessing digital learning is key to achieving significant progress towards SDG4 **beyond constraints of infrastructure and place, OERs are the crucial component**, which ensures that the learning provided is focused on the real needs of the learners.
- Want to know more? Check out the full report : <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000386083.locale=en>



# International Telecommunication Union (ITU) - Connect 2030 Agenda

- ITU is the United Nations specialised agency for ICT
- ITU collaborates with UNESCO to implement broadband connectivity projects for universities in underserved regions and supports the development of affordable technologies and solutions to bridge digital divides in higher education
- Want to know more? Find more information here:  
<https://www.itu.int/en/mediacentre/backgrounders/Pages/connect-2030-agenda.aspx>



# UNESCO Futures of Education Initiative (2021)

- Focused on reimagining education systems, including higher education, to adapt to a digital-first world.
- It encourages the integration of emerging technologies like AI, AR, and VR into higher education curricula.
- It advocates for lifelong learning and equitable access to digital resources for students.
- It promotes inclusive and sustainable digital transformations in higher education institutions.
- Want to know more? Find more information here: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379707>





# UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021)

- Objective: Provide ethical guidelines for the use of AI in education, including higher education.
- Aims to ensure equitable access to AI-driven learning technologies in HEI.
- Addresses biases in AI systems that may disadvantage certain groups of HEI students.
- Encourages universities to adopt AI responsibly to reduce inequalities.
- Want to know more? Find more information here:

<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/recommendation-ethics-artificial-intelligence>



# Digital Education Action Plan (DEAP) (2021–2027)

- Objective: Foster digital skills and infrastructure to ensure equitable access to digital learning in Europe.
- European Digital Education Hub: A platform to collaborate on digital transformation initiatives.
- Support for connectivity and infrastructure: Funding for universities to build digital classrooms and access high-speed internet.
- Encouraging the use of Open Educational Resources (OER) and digital teaching materials.
- Promoting innovative teaching methods, such as blended and hybrid learning, to ensure inclusive access for diverse student groups
- Full document is available here: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52020DC0624>



# European Skills Agenda (2020)

- Aims to ensure that all students acquire the digital skills needed for equitable participation in higher education and the job market.
- Emphasises digital literacy programs for students and faculty in HEIs
- Supports HEIs in adopting AI and data-driven technologies to personalise learning and address equity gaps
- Full document available here: <https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2020-07/SkillsAgenda.pdf>



# The Web Accessibility Directive

- The Web Accessibility Directive has been in force since 22 December 2016 and provides people with disabilities with better access to websites and mobile apps of public services
- The Directive requires:
  - an accessibility statement for each website and mobile app, stating non-accessible content and alternatives as well as contacts;
  - a feedback mechanism so users can flag accessibility problems or request information published in a non-accessible content;
  - regular monitoring of public sector websites and apps by Member States, and reporting on the results to the Commission every three years.
- More information available here: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/web-accessibility>



# UNESCO (2022): Beyond limits: new ways to reinvent higher education

- This document proposes a roadmap to reinvent higher education in the upcoming years.
- First, it identifies the evolving landscape of HED institutions and systems, including the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- It recognises the challenges and opportunities associated with global threats faced by humanity and the planet as well as major changes in HE in the last decade
- It aims to promote equitable access to digital resources for underserved communities, encourages the adoption of open educational resources to reduce costs and expand access and supports digital literacy programs for students, educators, and administrators.



# OECD (2023) Digital equity and inclusion in education

- The paper explores the themes of digital equity and inclusion, and maps some of the policies and practices adopted in OECD countries for the equitable and inclusive use of digital tools in education.
- It highlights the importance of inclusive design and implementation of digital technologies
- More information available here:  
[https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/digital-equity-and-inclusion-in-education\\_7cb15030-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/digital-equity-and-inclusion-in-education_7cb15030-en.html)





# The role of institutional policies in promoting digital inclusion

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# Institutional policies in promoting digital inclusion

- The digital inequality in higher education affects both instructors and students.
- At the EU level, institutional policies promoting digital inclusion have been instrumental in reducing financial burdens for individuals and communities
- Examples:
  - EU's Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027)
  - Open Educational Resources (OERs) and Platforms
  - Erasmus+ Programme
  - Horizon Europe



# The role of policies and examples

- **Expanding access to digital tools and resources:**
  - HEIs providing loaner programs for laptops: Technological University Dublin Laptop Loan Scheme: <https://www.tudublin.ie/for-students/student-services-and-support/financial-support/laptop-loan-scheme/>
  - Offering free or discounted access to licensed software (e.g. Microsoft Office, Adobe Suite)
  - Ensuring campus-wide free Wi-Fi and creating digital learning hubs for underserved students
- **Ensuring digital accessibility:**
  - Requiring compliance with web accessibility standards (e.g., WCAG) for digital platforms, course materials, and learning management systems
  - Providing assistive technologies such as screen readers
  - Offering alternative formats for content, including braille, audio, or simplified text



# The role of policies and examples

- **Promoting inclusive digital learning**
  - Supporting multilingual platforms and course materials to address linguistic diversity
  - Creating flexible learning options (e.g., hybrid or asynchronous courses) to accommodate varying student needs
- **Enhancing digital literacy and skills development**
  - Offering free workshops and certifications on digital tools, cybersecurity, and data literacy
- **Facilitating flexible and resilient learning models**
  - Ensuring offline accessibility for course materials through downloads or physical copies
  - Developing hybrid and online learning policies that accommodate students with limited digital access



# Challenges in implementing digital inclusion policies

- **Funding limitations:** Institutions may face budgetary constraints in implementing comprehensive digital inclusion measures.
- **Resistance to change:** Faculty and staff may need time and support to adapt to new policies and technologies.
- **Systemic inequities:** Broader socioeconomic disparities may hinder the effectiveness of institutional policies.



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