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**Digitalization of Romania's National Documentary Heritage: Impacts on
Education and Public Administration in the Context of Digital Equity and
Social Inclusion**

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Abstract: In the context of promoting digital equity and preventing exclusion, Romanian public institutions follow the European strategic direction regarding the digitalization and the free and equitable online access to the digitized heritage of public administration, while complying with legislation on the protection of personal data and classified information. The article analyzes how the digitalization of public-interest documents supports education by providing information of practical value or scientific documentation, while also modernizing the Romanian public administration through efficiency, institutional transparency, and digital equity. Specialist studies identify the benefits of digitalization, but the risks of digital exclusion, generated by inadequately adapted functionalities to users' needs, are not systematically addressed. The research method consists of a critical analysis of the implementation of national and European Legislation in the field of digital access to the Romanian documentary heritage, complemented by an examination of relevant initiatives concerning digitalization in support of Romanian education. The results of the study consist in providing strategies to prevent the exclusion of vulnerable or marginalized social groups who do not have equal access to digital services in education. The study's originality lies in correlating heritage digitalization with digital equity, driving modernization and inclusion.

Keywords: digitalization; equity; inclusion

1. Introduction

The integration of the digitization of Romania's documentary heritage into the global public digital ecosystem brings significant benefits to the educational environment, public administration, and the Romanian state. Romania follows European strategic directions regarding digital governance, ensuring free and non-discriminatory access to electronic resources, while complying with legislation on the protection of personal data and classified information. Through user-friendly online platforms that provide open access to digitized heritage, researchers and students worldwide are able to access

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databases through advanced search functionalities without compromising the physical integrity of the documents.

According to a Eurostat study based on a survey conducted in EU countries on the use of ICT in households and by individuals, the following is noted: In 2025, 71,9% of people in the EU aged 16-74 used websites or apps of public authorities, an increase of 1.9 percentage points compared with 2022, when data collection began. The EU countries with the highest uptake of e-government services were Denmark (98% of people used public authority websites or apps), the Netherlands (96,2%), Finland (96,1%) and Sweden (96,0%). By contrast, Romania (24,1%), Bulgaria (36%) and Italy (57,7%) recorded the lowest shares (EUROSTAT, 2026). Romania's digital infrastructure is developing at a slower pace than in Northern European countries. What occurred differently in EU countries compared to Romania? The answer is that EU member states have treated digitization as a long-term, nationally driven project and invested early in integrated systems, conceived as networks in which platforms are interconnected, rather than as separate institutional entities.

Responsible and diligent behavior by providers of intermediary services is essential for a safe, predictable and trustworthy online environment and for allowing Union citizens and other persons to exercise their fundamental rights guaranteed in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, in particular the freedom of expression and of information, the freedom to conduct a business, the right to non-discrimination and the attainment of a high level of consumer protection (Art. 3, Regulation (EU) 2022/2065).

The digitization of Romania's documentary heritage can be understood as a process of democratization, particularly in light of the fact that modern digital infrastructure provides users with rapid and efficient access to digitized documents, regardless of gender, ethnicity, age, social category, income, education, or disabilities. The real value of digitized documents lies in direct relation to the user's capacity to access them, grounded in scientific evidence.

In their work, Frances G. Burwell and Jörn Fleck highlight the importance of regional cooperation in the field of digitalization:

EU funds for infrastructure have played an important role in the region's economic ascent. As economies and societies adapt to digital transformations, the potential of smart public funding from EU, regional, and national sources should be considered. Private investment capital and public-private partnerships should be leveraged in a concerted way to address key challenges, such as retraining and reskilling, as well as the adoption of digital technologies by small and medium/sized businesses. At the same time, political and other decision-makers will have to make the case for the economic benefit of such financial cooperation within national political arenas. What specific areas of the digital economy should be the focus of this effort? If Central and Eastern Europe is to succeed in this venture, it will require prioritizing certain sectors of the digital economy. Countries of the region should focus on areas where they have the biggest needs, but also the strongest comparative advantages. As discussed above, individual nations with existing strengths in specific areas could help lead clusters of CEE countries to advance regional cooperation in these fields (Burwell & Fleck, 2020, p. 5).

The article explores the idea that the digitalization of documents that help the educational process is not yet sufficiently developed and could be significantly expanded. The public institutions, museums, libraries, the county structures of the National Archives, scientific research centers, non-governmental organizations, and educational organizations need to make a greater effort towards digitalization in order to ensure citizen's access to important documents. These institutions have digitized the documents they

considered essential and relevant for their activities. But how can we know whether one document is more important than another? Each record retains its importance depending on the context.

In what concerns education, the digitization of the documentary heritage facilitates research and stimulates users' digital skills. In contemporary public administration, the implementation of digital public services leads to easier access for citizen to informations and the outcomes of public institution' services. Metaphorically speaking, the digitized document becomes an image of an original source material. The digital form preserves the essence of the original, the visual details and the integrity of the informations. This form of interaction helps to avoid secondary interpretations, encouraging the development of analytical thinking in education. In other words, rather than receiving pre-processed information, the user is placed in the position of independently interpreting data and information of practical or documentary-historical value. In order to evaluate digital content, users develop their critical thinking skills. Once digitized, documents in electronic format can be accessed by beneficiaries without the need for physical travel, through online access to institutional digital platform databases. Thus, geographical barriers are eliminated, and physical distance no longer constitutes a significant obstacle to accessing resources. Digitization also ensures the protection of fragile materials and the long-term preservation of original documents. The risk of information loss in the event of natural disasters or accidents is significantly reduced. Among the main pillars of digitization strategies implemented in Romania are accessibility and connectivity; IT ethics, with due respect for cybersecurity and the protection of personal data; innovation; and the continuous creation of open educational resources.

2. The Digitalization of Romania's Documentary Heritage

The Authority for the Digitalization of Romania (2023) developed the National Action Plan for the Digital Decade for Romania, drafted in accordance with Decision (EU) 2022/2481, in which it acknowledges the country's comparatively lower position relative to other European Union Member States. Enhancing Romania's visibility is pursued through increased competitiveness in research and innovation within the global digital ecosystem. Although the Romanian ICT sector has experienced positive growth over the past decade, current EU statistical rankings still place the country among the lowest positions. The areas in which Romania demonstrates relatively strong performance include connectivity and the number of IT specialists (The Authority for the Digitalization of Romania, 2023). The National Action Plan for the Digital Decade for Romania is strategically revised every two years. It aims to guide national investments in order to accelerate progress in the implementation of public administration digitalization.

In line with the recommendations from the Digital Decade 2025 Country Report, Romania must accelerate digitalization, as follows: Digital public services: continue to dedicate the necessary resources (finance, project management, ICT specialist) for digitalization of public services, including after the initial set-up (maintenance and support). Streamlining of the multiple existing projects that have been promoted as 'single point of contact' could also be envisaged. Basic digital skills: Continue to integrate basic digital skills as a core component of the education process, both for teachers and students. Make upskilling, particularly of employees in the private sector and older population, a priority (European Commission, 2025).

National Archives Law No. 16/1996 of Romania - republished, with subsequent amendments and additions, defines the National Archival Fonds of Romania as comprising documents created over time by state authorities, public and private organizations - economic, social, cultural, military, and religious - as well as by authorized natural persons, professionals operating under special legislation, and private

individuals. These documents are granted special protection by the state under the provisions of the present law (Art. 1, Law No. 16/1996 on the National Archives - republished). In essence, the national documentary heritage or treasury consists of documents with permanent retention value that possess historical or scientific significance. Within the meaning of the law, documents forming part of the National Archival Fonds of Romania include official and private records, diplomatic and consular documents, memoirs, manuscripts, proclamations, appeals, posters, plans, sketches, maps, cinematographic films, and similar testimonies, seal matrices, as well as photographic, video, audio, and digital records of historical value, produced within the country or by Romanian creators abroad (Art. 2, Law No. 16/1996).

Romanian documentary heritage is a component of the national cultural heritage and represents a piece of the broader European puzzle in terms of preserving a shared historical and administrative memory. In this sense, it can be stated that digitalization both safeguard and enhances the historical record and the cultural identity of Europe. In the past decade, the digitalization of online documents in Romania has developed significantly. A number of institutional digital libraries with valuable documentary, historical, and cultural content may be accessed, including: the Digital Library of Romania; the National Digital Library of Romania; the Digital Library of Bucharest; Digital Library of Transilvania University of Braşov, The Digital Library of the “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu; Central University Library in Cluj-Napoca; the ASTRA Digital Library of the Sibiu County Library; the “Alexandru D. Xenopol” Digital Library in Arad; the Digital Library of Iaşi; the “G. T. Kirileanu” Neamţ County Library in Piatra Neamţ; the Library of the University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Science and Technology in Târgu Mureş; the Eurocarpatia Digital Library; the National Institute of Heritage, Academy of Economic Studies of Bucharest Library, Digital Library of Bucharest, Romanian-American University Library of Sibiu, Digital Platform of the Carol I Central University Library, Mihai Eminescu Central University Library of Iaşi, Cluj Central University. These online platforms of Romanian public libraries provide users worldwide with tens of thousands of scanned books (including volumes on history, theology, ethnography, demography, sociology, management, memoirs, monographs, prose, and poetry), millions of historical documents in digital format, as well as digitized photographs. Libraries could benefit from trained volunteers to assist in the digitization of documents.

Florina Ciure emphasized in her work that, in Romania, progress has been gradual and that, for the time being, the country has not yet reached the level attained by other states in the field of digitization. Nevertheless, the Digital Library Project was established with the aim of enhancing and expanding access to, as well as ensuring the preservation of, books, manuscripts, and photographic collections of relevance to research.

The National Digital Library comprises collections created through the digitization of documents preserved in the Special Collections of the National Library of Romania, providing access to the following materials: within the Historical Archive, 2,566 resources and 265 documents; manuscripts and incunabula from the collections of the Batthyaneum Library, including 149 incunabula; 707 early Romanian periodicals; 740 resources of early and bibliophile Romanian books; 2,794 Romanian and foreign photographs, postcards, and albums; 977 manuscripts; 1,182 resources of early foreign books; 384 old maps; 1,521 musical scores; 94 ex libris items; 107 Japanese prints; 32 Romanian drawings, 21 engravings, 5 art albums, and 9 reference materials; 789 documents presented in the collection *Romania in the First World War*; 320 documents selected from the Cartography and Photography Departments within the Special Collections; and 1,026 resources presented in virtual exhibitions (Ciure, 2022, p. 563).

In 2026, by examining the data presented on the official website of the National Library of Romania, it can be observed that the institution holds 1,779 manuscripts, 30,000 books dating from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, 35,561 books from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries, 575 incunabula, 9,733 musical items, 17,171 items in the historical archive, and 26,241 items in the modern archive. Therefore, we consider that a broader digitization of documentary materials is necessary, given the immense volume of documentary resources.

The National Archives of Romania, which hold more than 37.000 fonds and document collections, have distinguished themselves through the implementation of a significant project aimed at digitizing all medieval documents dating from before 1600. The project entitled “Digitalization of Medieval Documents from the National Archives of Romania” was supported by the University of Bucharest, the Babeş-Bolyai University and the National Archives of Norway.

With regard to the digitization of photographic documents from the period 1947–1989, the National Archives of Romania, in partnership with The Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile, have made available on their digital platform the photo archive of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers’ Party (renamed in 1965 as the Romanian Communist Party). This collection includes propaganda photographs, images from party congresses, scenes from the private and public lives of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and the dictator Nicolae Ceauşescu, as well as portraits of leaders of Romanian communism.

With European financial support, the National Archives of Romania implemented the project “Towards Digital Governance: Electronic Civil Status within the National Archives of Romania.” Civil status registers - comprising records of deaths, births, and marriages - were digitized, covering the period from December 1965 back to 1920, for all county capitals and major cities across the country. Employees of the territorial branches of the National Archives photographed hundreds of thousands of civil status documents and subsequently applied specialized software to render the electronic records in a format optimized for user accessibility.

The Romanian Academy has digitized its valuable collections and made them available on e-acad.bibliacad.ro, organized by fields of interests: culture, art, civilization, economy, philosophy, ethics, the interwar period, political-diplomatic history, literature, minorities, illustrated press, local and regional press, foreign-language publications, bilingual publications, publications for children and youth, women’s publications, fashion, religion, the 19th century, leisure, entertainment, general press, and publications from the interwar period. Old Collections of documents containing manuscripts with medieval seals from the time of great rulers must be digitized with particular care. Before any professional digital photography is carried out, cracks in the wax or the condition of the parchment or paper support must be checked, taking into account tears or possible flaking. Side lighting of seals is important because it highlights the inscriptions, the coat of arms, and the relief of the matrix field. A resolution of 400 dpi for entire documents and 600 dpi for seals and details, when dealing with documents written in paleography, is very appropriate. The pace of digitalization is slow, but this activity is essential and must be carried out. After the fire at the National Museum of Brazil, when thousands of manuscripts and historical documents were lost, including records of extinct indigenous languages and thousands of ethnographic pieces, the issues of preventive digitization has become very serious worldwide. Digitization preserves memory and information, not the artifact itself.

3. Standardization, Interoperability and Open Access

First, a distinction should be made between digitization and digitalization. Digitization refers to the conversion of information from a physical format into a digital one through scanning or photographing processes. Digitalization further enables, through its implementation, the automatic retrieval of digitized documents by the user via keywords, metadata, and automatically processed indexing. Thus, digitalization preserves the original document in new digital formats, and through this process, documents can be identified more easily and quickly, making them more accessible and useful for researchers. Comparing the two, it becomes clear that digitalization is impossible without digitization.

With a view to ensuring long-term access, the standardization of metadata constituted a primary concern. When dealing with thousands of linear meters of digitized archival material, the existence of a coherent digitization strategy becomes essential. For the inclusion of metadata, the standards used are general International Standard Archival Description ISAD(G). In the absence of such a strategy, digitization risks generating fragmented electronic archives that are difficult to use and not readily accessible. Accordingly, the indexing of records in dedicated templates was designed to capture, for each individual document, the following metadata: the register reference code in SIIAN format, the page number, the type of event (birth, marriage, divorce, death, adoption), the document or entry number, the year of the record, the date of the event, names and surnames with diacritics preserved, the place of residence (recorded in Romanian according to inventory standards), and the automatically generated image/TIFF number. At present, thousands of users rely on the archival search engine provided by the National Archives (descopera.arhivelenationale.ro) to identify civil status records for the purpose of constructing genealogical trees.

Only 10 % of the thousands of analog magnetic tapes of the Romanian Radio Broadcasting Society Romania, stored in the archival deposits at Jilava, have been transferred to digital media. Digitalization of the Romanian Television archive remains an ongoing process. Both institutions preserve political history, the cultural sphere, propaganda and journalism, live moments that were broadcast live and can never be recreated, and for which professional preservation systems are needed: servers, RAID systems, linear tape libraries, and internal cloud systems. The digitization of magnetic tapes requires several steps: cleaning dust and mold, repairing breaks, playback on old equipment that is no longer manufactured, specially calibrated playbackheads, digital capture in standard formats, image stabilization, color correction, removal of video noise, audio restoration to eliminate distortions and background noise, metadata, keywords for retrieval, codes and archival references. These technical archive repositories, in which sounds and images are stored, require conversion and restoration. They contain direct testimonies of history, real events, revolutions, elections, crises, the everyday life of an era, speeches, and interviews with prominent figures. So, if archives are considered the books of history, then the TVR and radio archives are the film and the real sound of history.

In recent years, several museums in Romania, custodians of invaluable documentary heritage, have developed online databases in collaboration with various universities in order to make their collections accessible to the general public. Among these are the Museum of the Romania Peasant, the ASTRA Museum, the University Bucharest Museum, and the Brukenthal Museum. The pace of digitization work is uneven and, in most cases, these initiatives have been funded through European projects.

4. Building an Inclusive Digital Documentary heritage Repository through Education and Access

Professor Cristina Elena Popa Tache of Danubius International University in Galați, Romania, argued in her work that, first of all, the chaotic synonymy between consumer, user and recipient of services must be repaired through clearer specifications regarding from where and until where the consumer is also a user or the user can also be a consumer. Even if much remains to be done regarding the differences and definitions of what it means to be a user or a consumer, DSA 2022, represents a reference legislative framework for the protection of human and consumer rights in the digital age, offering opportunities and challenges for investors interested in this sector international. Compliance with the rules of the “game” and responsible attention to the protection of users’ rights and interests will contribute to the creation of a safe and transparent digital environment, favorable for innovation and sustainable development, useful and fair for all actors (Popa Tache, 2023, p. 130).

In the Digital Services Act (DSA) 2022 it is stated that the concept of “dissemination to the public” should be understood as the making available of information to a potentially unlimited number of persons. This entails taking measures to ensure that the information is easily accessible to service recipients in general, without requiring any additional action on the part of the recipient providing the information, regardless of whether those persons actually access the information in question. Consequently, where access to information requires registration or admission to a group of service recipients, such information should be considered as disseminated to the public only if recipients wishing to access it are automatically registered or admitted, without any human decision regarding which recipients are granted access or any selection among them (Art. 14, Regulation (EU) 2022/2065).

Viewed more simply, the development of digital competencies should be understood as the result of distributed governance, meaning that multiple actors are involved in this process. As a key architect of public policy, the state is responsible for defining the legal framework, financing digital infrastructure, and ensuring access to digitized resources. Marginalized or excluded social categories - such as prisoners, homeless individuals, persons with disabilities, elderly individuals unable to navigate digital platforms independently, and users without internet access in economically disadvantaged areas - are all entitled to access digitized public resources. Paradoxically, while accessibility increases for the majority of users, the vulnerability of others deepens, a phenomenon known as the “digital divide”, which refers not only to internet access but also to digital skills.

Alexandra Dobre considered in his work: Education levels are also an important factor for digital inequities amongst seniors. Traditional literacy abilities decrease as age progresses. Reading and writing skills may also contribute to the digital inequities, since elder internet users with higher education are more engaged in cognitive improvement activities like reading news and briefs and therefore the ability to access and use internet medium ranges, depending on education statuses (Dobre, 2022, p. 4).

The phenomenon known as “digital shame” occurs when older adults refuse to ask for help in accessing digitized documents in order not to appear as people who have only recently discovered the digital environment. An innovative solution for Romania would be the introduction of digital assistants in public institutions, meaning specialized staff who would support citizens in accessing documents.

Therefore, digitizing documents alone is not sufficient if there are no mechanisms for educating individuals who lack basic digital literacy and who, due to generational factors, cannot access online platforms. To ensure the inclusion of vulnerable groups, it is necessary to identify solutions that facilitate access for persons with various disabilities, such as audio and visual alternatives, increased text size, or high-contrast interfaces for individuals with visual impairments. Given the dynamics of digitalization,

within the Romanian educational curriculum, it is essential that, alongside digital competencies, pedagogical practices adapt to the requirements of modern society, especially since technology influences every domain of life. With the support of technology and digitalization, learning can become adaptive and personalized, competence-oriented, while the role of teaching staff can be redefined, the teacher becoming a guide in the development of critical and reasoned thinking.

Professor Corneliu Andi Pușcă of Danubius International University in Galați - Romania, argued in his work: Moreover, digital platforms can host virtual study groups and peer tutoring sessions, allowing students to support each other's learning. These peer interactions are crucial for reinforcing understanding and building confidence. Students can ask questions, share resources, and provide explanations, creating a supportive learning environment that extends beyond the classroom. Digital platforms also facilitate communication between students and instructors. Tools such as messaging apps, video conferencing, and online office hours make it easier for students to seek help and clarification from their teachers. This accessibility helps address questions and concerns promptly, keeping students engaged and on track. Additionally, digital platforms host various multimedia resources, including videos, podcasts and interactive simulations, catering to different learning styles and preferences. This diversity of resources helps keep students engaged and motivated, providing multiple avenues for exploring and understanding the content (Pușcă, 2004, p. 36).

The digitalized Romanian public administration can support the education of various users, regardless of age, provided there is coherence in institutional collaboration policies. In support of education, various cultural institutions have digitized the documentary heritage they hold or have created over time, from their establishment to the present. These documents, important for institutional history, possess documentary, scientific, and practical value. In Romania, not all users have the same level of digital literacy. Education should not be understood as a stage limited to childhood or youth, but as a continuous process that unfolds throughout a person's entire life. Social life, work, and civic participation all involve digital education. Thus, digitalization becomes, often unconsciously, a foundation of modern informal learning, connecting school, university, vocational training, and adult education into a shared ecosystem.

It is well known that young people adopt technology more rapidly, while working adults also need it in their professional activity, including retraining and learning new methods of accessing digital platforms or digitalized resources. In Romania, if no special attention is paid, elderly people are at risk of digital exclusion. Many of them fear technology, feeling that they are too old to access an online database. Yet learning has no age limit. In other words, digital education must be designed as an inclusive system, adapted to diversity in age and experience. In this regard, it would be ideal for investments to target age-specific digitalization programs in public access spaces (libraries, community digital centers). Thus, children would learn how to use technology, not merely consume it; working adults would learn how to easily access and make use of information from digitized documents; and elderly people would be able to learn how to use computers, both online and offline, in order to access public service information.

Without the involvement of local public administration, all these objectives would remain merely theoretical. At present, these initiatives are not coordinated between institutions, and there is no common strategy. Therefore, the way in which information is disseminated and explained determines whether digitalization remains a purely technical modernization that produces exclusion or not. Measures aimed at reducing inequalities in access to digitized documentary heritage include expanding digital infrastructure in rural and disadvantaged areas; increasing the visibility and number of national digital literacy programs for all age groups; and establishing more community digital centers in libraries or town halls. Digital public services and access to documentary heritage should be simplified, where

necessary, so that these online platforms can also be used by individuals with lower levels of digital skills.

The digitalization process in education is complex, as it involves the careful selection of relevant teaching materials, followed by their preparation for use (scanning, photographing, audio-video conversion, corrections, adaptation to various complex online platforms, as well as verification and validation of the quality and accuracy of the resulting data).

Professor Cristina Elena Popa Tache of Danubius International University in Galați, argued in her work: We've seen the many human rights that have to do with digitization. But how many ways is security in the same context? We can say that for each right there is a specific security measure. Paradoxically, security has its limits, which can be seen when situations arise in which there may be conflicts between security measures and human rights. Excessive monitoring of online communications or restricting access to certain online content can have a negative impact on freedom of expression or the right to privacy. Global digital inequalities, with certain groups or communities having limited access to technology or digital resources, can create inequalities in the protection of human rights in the digital environment, with some people being more vulnerable to security threats or violations of their rights online. Somehow, security seems to demand some sort of priority over digital human rights, and economic, political or security interests often influence policies and decisions, leading to trade-offs or prioritization of certain interests over human rights protections (Popa Tache, 2024, p. 15).

5. Conclusions

The digitalization of Romania's documentary heritage generates significant modern effects on the way public administration interacts with its citizens. Providing documentary resources in digital format facilitates research and supports the transmission of knowledge, contributing to a diverse and inclusive educational system. In Romania, however, the impact of access to digitalization and administrative digital flows remains uneven. Due to significant disparities between urban and rural areas in terms of internet access, IT equipment, and digital skills, certain social categories are excluded from the benefits of digitalization. These include elderly people, individuals with disabilities, vulnerable communities, and those with low levels of digital literacy.

Digitized documents with historical, documentary-scientific, legal, or administrative value serve as sources for research and most often support education. By using as many digitized documents as possible, the Romanian school system would transform into a modern school, more focused on culture and national identity, based on processes of logical and analytical thinking. Through careful monitoring by teachers, the risk of creating a "scrolling school" disappears. In practice, the same document, through digitization, acquires two forms of existence. Research becomes faster, but also fully dependent on technology. If systems fail, access to memory may be affected, and we are left with the original document. Certainly, the digitization of documentary heritage provides greater access compared to the earlier period, when digitization did not exist. Documentary heritage is thus protected, but new forms of dependency and inequality still emerge. The success of digitalization lies not how quickly it is implemented, but in the level of inclusion it achieves. Digital equity means adaptability. For example, the interface should be adapted to the user, not the other way around.

Only through digital inclusion policies targeting vulnerable groups can social cohesion be strengthened and structural inequalities reduced: by ensuring IT infrastructure across all regions of the country and by supporting free access to public online services that provide the necessary digitized documents for

beneficiaries. For Romania, the main challenge in the digitalization of documentary heritage is not only the need to accelerate the process of operationalizing digital technologies, but also the effective implementation of measures that ensure equity and social inclusion.

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