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Recommendations for Improving Regional Digitalization Policies in Montenegro

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Based on the identified challenges, the improvement of regional digitalization policies in Montenegro should focus on strengthening institutional capacities, developing human capital, ensuring a more inclusive approach to business support, and improving the management of digital transformation. The key recommendations are as follows:

1. Strengthening Digital Skills and ICT Workforce Development

Recommendations:

- **Align educational programmes with labor market needs**, especially in areas such as AI, data science, cybersecurity, cloud technologies, and software architecture.
- Establish **regional digital competence centres** in the northern, central, and coastal regions to reduce territorial inequalities.
- Develop a **voucher system for adult reskilling and upskilling**, particularly for employees in traditional sectors such as tourism, agriculture, and manufacturing.
- Strengthen cooperation between universities, vocational schools, and businesses through dual education models and internships in companies.
- Create programmes for **retaining ICT talent** through tax incentives, start-up grants, and support for the return of professionals from the diaspora.

Expected impact:

Increasing the domestic pool of specialists, reducing dependence on imported expertise, and strengthening the competitiveness of the regional economy.

2. Establishing a Strong Monitoring and Evaluation System

Recommendations:

- Develop a **unified national digital transformation dashboard** with clear Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for all relevant strategies.
- Introduce mandatory monitoring of indicators such as SME digital maturity, e-commerce growth, number of innovation projects, level of private R&D investment, and regional coverage of support programmes.
- Strengthen institutional capacities for data analytics and policy evaluation.
- Establish regular annual policy evaluations with publicly available reports.
- Align indicators with EU methodologies to improve preparation for accession funds and negotiation chapters.

Expected impact:

More efficient management of public investments, greater transparency, and evidence-based policymaking.

3. Greater Inclusion of Micro-Enterprises and Rural SMEs

Recommendations:

- Simplify application procedures for grants and digital vouchers through a “one-stop-shop” approach and minimal administrative burden.
- Reduce co-financing requirements for micro-enterprises and firms from less developed municipalities.
- Establish **mobile and regional advisory teams** for digitalisation that actively work with rural businesses.
- Design dedicated programmes for traditional sectors such as agrotech, smart tourism, digital crafts, and local production.
- Ensure a more balanced geographical distribution of support beyond Podgorica and coastal centres.

Expected impact:

Reducing regional disparities, increasing the inclusion of micro-enterprises, and extending the benefits of digital transformation across the entire economy.

4. Encouraging Private Sector Investment in Research, Development, and Innovation

Recommendations:

- Introduce **tax incentives for private R&D investment** and additional support for collaboration with universities.
- Develop innovation voucher programmes for small businesses investing in new products and services for the first time.
- Strengthen technology transfer mechanisms between universities, the Science and Technology Park, and businesses.
- Promote a culture of innovation through regional innovation hubs and demonstration projects.

Expected impact:

Greater private sector participation in innovation, higher productivity growth, and a transition toward a higher value-added economy.

5. Strengthening Inter-Ministerial and Multi-Level Coordination

Recommendations:

- Establish a **permanent inter-ministerial body for digital transformation** with a clear mandate, budget, and accountability for policy implementation.
- Introduce formal cooperation mechanisms between the national government and local governments through regional digital coordinators.
- Integrate the work of key support institutions (Innovation Fund, Investment and Development Fund, SME Directorate, Chamber of Commerce) through joint programmes and unified communication with beneficiaries.
- Develop joint action plans for green and digital transition.
- Strengthen municipal capacities for preparing and managing EU-funded digitalisation projects.

Expected impact:

Greater institutional efficiency, reduced policy overlap, and stronger implementation of development strategies at the regional level.

Conclusion

Regional digitalisation policies in Montenegro must move from a fragmented approach toward an integrated development model that connects education, innovation, SME support, local development, and institutional governance. Special attention should be given to inclusiveness—ensuring that digital transformation reaches not only major urban centres but also micro-enterprises, rural regions, and traditional sectors.

Only such an approach can enable digitalisation to become a true driver of regional competitiveness, sustainable development, and the acceleration of Montenegro's European integration.