

Pushed by pandemic, Germany seeks to boost technology use

January 27 2021, by Frank Jordans



In this Friday, March 13, 2020 file photo the slogan 'It's Corona Time' is written on the chalkboard of an empty classroom of a high school in Frankfurt, Germany. The German government on Wednesday agreed on a strategy to boost the use of data for commercial purposes and signed a deal with state education authorities to fund laptops for teachers who have to work from home because of the virus lockdown. (AP Photo/Michael Probst, file)

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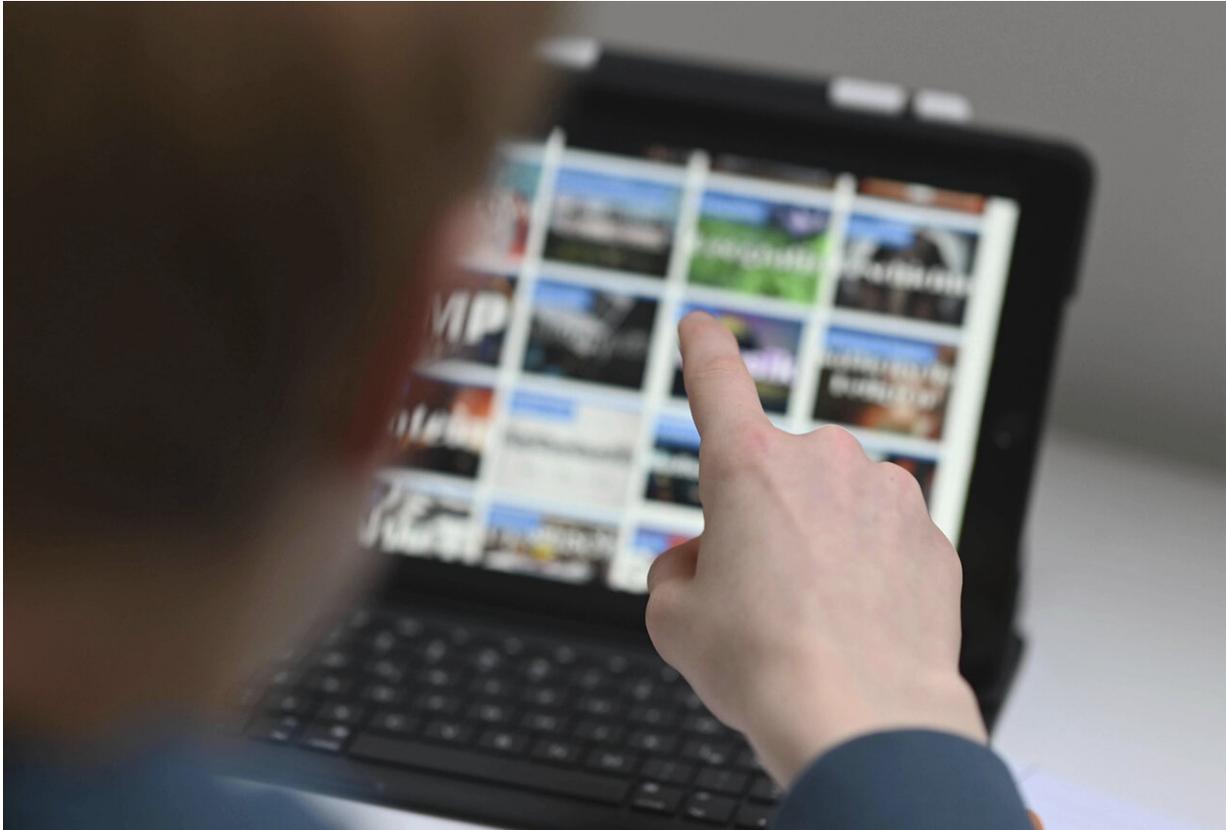
The measures are part of a drive to boost digitalization in a country that has fallen behind many of its peers due in part to concerns about privacy and [data protection](#).

Officials in the country often refuse to communicate with citizens by email, but Germans were nevertheless surprised to learn last year that many labs were still transmitting coronavirus test results by fax.

Hesitant about accessing their [personal data](#), some authorities in Lower Saxony state recently sent vouchers for free masks for the elderly to people based on how old-fashioned their names were—prompting amusement from parents of toddlers called Fritz or Helga who had received the vouchers.

Chancellor Angela Merkel acknowledged the country's digital shortcomings this week, telling participants in a virtual meeting of the annual World Economic Forum that Germany "didn't look good" when it came to linking up the country's over 400 regional health agencies, or in the use of IT for [distance learning](#).

"We need to get better and faster here," she said Tuesday. "We know we have to catch up."



A person points on a tablet computer in Karlsruhe, Germany, Wednesday, Jan. 20, 2021. The German government on Wednesday agreed on a strategy to boost the use of data for commercial purposes and signed a deal with state education authorities to fund laptops for teachers who have to work from home because of the virus lockdown. (Uli Deck/dpa via AP)



In this Thursday, Aug. 13, 2020 file photo students of the Robert-Koch vocational college get advise by their teacher, wearing face masks in the classroom, during computer science lessons in Dortmund, Germany. The German government on Wednesday agreed on a strategy to boost the use of data for commercial purposes and signed a deal with state education authorities to fund laptops for teachers who have to work from home because of the virus lockdown. (AP Photo/Martin Meissner, file)

Education Minister Anja Karliczek announced that the [government](#) is providing 500 million euros (over \$600 million) to help pay for the purchase of laptops for teachers in the country's 16 states. Many teachers have been forced to use their own computers to conduct online lessons after schools were largely closed down before Christmas to help curb the spread of COVID.

The [federal government](#) has already agreed to spend a further 1 billion euros on laptops for poor students and to fund the hiring of IT staff to administer school networks.

Separately, the German Cabinet on Wednesday approved a package of more than 240 measures to promote the use of data as a resource for new business models.

The measures include the creation of a nationwide cancer database and funding for supercomputing networks. The government said it also wants to set a good example by making available more data held by public institutions.

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