

Deliverable D5.2

Policy Recommendations

Prepared by:

Laura Armayones (EUT)
Lluc Segura (EUT)
Jeanne Bretécher (SOGA)

cosmedigiset@gmail.com

June 2026



Co-funded by
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or EISMEA. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Project number : 101167934

Content

1) List of Acronyms	3
2) Introduction	4
3) Methodology	5
4) Current EU Policies and Mechanisms	6
4.1) About national strategies for social economy advancement	9
4.2) About relevant European funding Mechanisms	10
4.3) Financial envelops per program (EU MFF 2021-2027)	14
5) Findings and Insights from DIGISET Project	15
5.1) Needs of Social SMEs and SEOs	15
5.1.1) Needs of Social SMEs	16
5.2) Qualitative feedback based on the workshops and events organised by DIGISET	20
5.2.1) Biggest takeaways	20
5.2.2) What could be improved	22
6) Lessons learnt from the consortium	23
7) DIGISET Policy Recommendations	27
8) Conclusions	36
9) References	37
10) Annexes	39

1) List of Acronyms

Table 1: List of acronyms

Acronym	Description
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AMIF	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
CERV	Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme
COSME	Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
DIGITAL	Digital Europe Programme
DigComp	Digital Competence Framework for Citizens
DigCompEdu	Digital Competence Framework for Educators
DigCompOrg	Digital Competence Framework for Organisations
DigCompSat	Digital Competence Self-Assessment Tool
DSI	Digital Social Innovation
EDIH	European Digital Innovation Hub
EDSC	European Digital Skills Certificate
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF+	European Social Fund Plus
ESG	Environmental, Social and Governance
EU	European Union
EURES	European Employment Services
FSTP	Financial Support to Third Parties
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HE	Horizon Europe
HPC	High-Performance Computing
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
MS	Member State
NEB	New European Bauhaus
NGI	Next Generation Internet
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OP	Operational Programme
OSPO	Open Source Programme Office
R&I	Research and Innovation
REACT-EU	Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe
RIS3/RIS4	Regional Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation
SALTO	Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities
SE	Social Economy
SEAP	Social Economy Action Plan
SEO	Social Enabling Organisation
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
SMP	Single Market Programme
SSE	Social and Solidarity Economy
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WP	Work Package

2) Introduction

This Deliverable (D5.2) presents a set of policy recommendations developed on the basis of the evidence, insights, and lessons learnt throughout the implementation of the DIGISET project.

The deliverable has been developed within Work Package 5 (WP5), *Financial Empowerment and Policy and Future Strategy Initiatives*. It contributes to the objectives of Tasks 5.3 and 5.4 by supporting the uptake and sustainability of project results beyond the project's lifetime. In particular, it aims to share the knowledge generated during DIGISET with current and future projects, public authorities, social economy support organisations, and social economy SMEs, while providing policy recommendations at European level that address both financial and non-financial support mechanisms for digitalisation.

The document is structured as follows:

- **Introduction**, presenting the scope and objectives of the deliverable.
- **Methodology**, describing the approach and evidence-gathering process used to develop the policy recommendations.
- **Overview of European Union (EU) policy frameworks and support mechanisms**, examining the main European initiatives that support the digital transition of social economy organisations.
- **Findings and Insights from Digiset Project**, summarising the evidence collected throughout DIGISET, including the results of WP 1 and the feedback gathered from organisations participating in the project's activities.
- **Lessons learnt**, highlighting key reflections and experiences shared by consortium partners during the implementation of the project.
- **DIGISET policy recommendations**, presenting the final recommendations and distinguishing between financial and non-financial measures.
- **References**, presenting the documents reviewed.
- **Annexes**, containing additional data from the transcription of the workshop.

As a result, **14 policy recommendations** have been formulated for European, national, and regional policymakers.

3) Methodology

The methodology combines desk research with the review of EU and regional and local policy documents, and the collection of evidence, experience and feedback generated throughout the DIGISET project. This mixed-method approach enabled the analysis to connect policy frameworks with the practical needs, experiences and lessons emerging from social Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), Social Enabling Organisations (SEOs), main key actors of the project, and the DIGISET consortium partners. The analysis is structured around three main components.

First, a systematic review of relevant EU policies and funding instruments was carried out. The review distinguishes between the EU policy framework supporting the digital transition of the social economy and the funding instruments available to implement these objectives. The funding analysis differentiated between structural funds and directly managed EU programmes. Where relevant, the EU-level analysis was complemented with regional and local policy documents to better capture territorial specificities and framework conditions affecting social SMEs and SEOs.

Second, the study incorporates the main insights gathered during the **implementation of the different activities** carried out within the DIGISET project. This evidence includes the needs identified through WP1, as well as additional information emerging from regional and local analyses. Together, these sources provided a comprehensive understanding of the current state of digitalisation in the social economy. The analysis also integrated feedback collected after project activities and events, allowing the identification of major takeaways, areas for improvement and practical lessons regarding the design and implementation of activities targeting social SMEs and SEOs. In addition, a collection of DIGISET best practices was reviewed to identify successful approaches and transferable elements.

Third, an **in-person participatory workshop** led by Eurecat was organised on the 4th June 2026 in Amsterdam with consortium partners to reflect on the project experience and consolidate the evidence collected throughout DIGISET. The 90-minute session was designed as a structured co-creation and brainstorming exercise, encouraging open discussion and collective reflection among participants. The workshop combined individual reflection, small-group exchanges and plenary discussions supported by the use of post-it notes to capture ideas, experiences and recommendations. It began with a “time-travel” exercise in which participants were invited to revisit the start of the project and reflect on what they would change, maintain or approach differently based on their current knowledge. Participants then identified and discussed lessons learnt across three thematic areas: stakeholder engagement, the design and implementation of activities, and broader project management and ecosystem-related issues. Building on these reflections, participants reviewed the existing policy landscape, identified policy gaps, opportunities and limitations, and collaboratively developed an initial set of policy recommendations. For each recommendation, participants considered the most appropriate governance level (European, national, regional or local) and the expected impact. The workshop therefore served both as a validation exercise for the findings emerging from previous project activities and as a participatory mechanism for co-developing the final DIGISET policy recommendations.





Figure 1: Lessons learnt workshop (04/06/2026, Amsterdam)

4) Current EU Policies and Mechanisms

The following table provides an overview of the main European policy frameworks, strategic programmes and practical instruments that support digital skills development, digital transformation, social economy ecosystems and Digital Social Innovation (DSI). It adopts a three-level approach, distinguishing between overarching EU policy frameworks (Level 1), the corresponding implementation roadmaps and strategic programmes (Level 2), and specific tools, funding mechanisms, competence frameworks and support instruments available to stakeholders (Level 3). This mapping illustrates how European initiatives translate broad policy objectives into concrete actions and resources that can be mobilised by social economy organisations, educational institutions, public authorities and other actors involved in digital and social transitions.

Table 2: Current EU Policies and Mechanisms

Level 1 – EU policy frameworks (Digital skills / social economy / DSI)	Level 2 – Declined roadmaps / strategic programmes	Level 3 – Tools, instruments, frameworks (examples)
EU Digital Strategy & Digital Decade Policy Programme (2030 Digital Compass: “The European way for the Digital Decade”)	Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030 (targets for basic digital skills, ICT specialists, connectivity, digitalisation of businesses and public services); National Digital Decade strategic roadmaps	Digital Skills & Jobs Platform ; national coalitions for digital skills and jobs; Digital Europe Programme funding for advanced digital skills (AI, data, cloud, cybersecurity); European Digital Skills Certificate (EDSC)
EU Digital Education policy (including Digital Education Action Plan)	Digital Education Action Plan 2021–2027 (vision + 14 actions); 2030 Roadmap on the future of digital education and skills (Union of Skills deliverable); European Digital Education Hub	DigComp (citizens); DigCompEdu (educators); DigCompOrg (educational organisations) ; DigComp-based assessment tools (DigCompSat, Digital Skills Indicator); guidelines on digital education content; informatics teaching guidelines
European Skills Agenda & Union of Skills (linked to European Pillar of Social Rights)	Pact for Skills; European Year(s) of Skills ; sectoral skills partnerships and “transition pathways” for industrial ecosystems (including proximity & social economy)	Europass; Skills Panorama ; EURES; sectoral skills blueprints; skills forecasting tools; competence frameworks used in skills partnerships (DigComp for digital, GreenComp for green skills, EntreComp for entrepreneurship)
Social Economy Action Plan (SEAP) & EU Social Economy and Inclusive Entrepreneurship policy	SEAP implementation roadmap ; Council Recommendation on social economy framework conditions; transition pathway for the proximity & social economy ecosystem; national/regional social economy strategies	EU Social Economy Gateway ; European Competence Centre for Social Innovation; funding calls for social economy digital transition and capacity building: guidance and toolkits for social economy digitalisation and data use such as European Data sharing code of conduct for Social Economy (2024)
EU policy on Digital Skills & Jobs (part of EU Digital Strategy)	Digital Skills & Jobs Coalition ; national coalitions; Digital Europe Programme advanced digital skills actions; coordinated AI and data strategies (AI Act, European data strategy)	Digital Skills & Jobs Platform ; micro-credentials development and portability mechanisms; training schemes in AI, data, cloud, cybersecurity funded through Digital Europe; EdTech ecosystem support; common European data space for skills
EU transformation & digital transition in education, training and youth (Erasmus+ / European Solidarity Corps)	Erasmus+ & European Solidarity Corps 2021–2027 priority on “digital transformation”; SALTO Digital Resource Centre; thematic	Use of DigComp, DigCompEdu and DigCompOrg across Erasmus+ projects; repositories of digital transformation



	roadmaps on integrating digital in non-formal education and youth work	good practices; SALTO Digital tools and resources for youth organisations and project developers
Digital transition of the social economy & SMEs (Single Market Programme – COSME strand)	Calls such as “Boosting the digital transition of social economy enterprises and SMEs (SMP-COSME-2023-SEED)” ; support actions for transition pathways of industrial ecosystems	Capacity-building projects for social economy digitalisation ; promotion of DSI as a lever for social, ecological and collective impact; toolkits, mentoring schemes and peer-learning platforms
EU policies on DSI and social innovation in cohesion policy and European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)	Integration of social innovation and DSI into ESF+, ERDF and REACT-EU programmes ; national operational programmes including social innovation & DSI priorities; social innovation action plans	Social innovation competence centres; incubators and labs for DSI ; evaluation and measurement frameworks for social innovation; guidance documents for integrating DSI into EU-funded projects and territorial strategies



4.1) About national strategies for social economy advancement

Across the EU, all Member States have been invited to develop a national strategy for the social economy, following the EU Social Economy Action Plan and the 2023 Council Recommendation encouraging clear national frameworks within 24 months.

In practice, progress is uneven: a few frontrunner countries, such as Spain, already have consolidated national social economy strategies and dedicated governance structures, while others rely on existing laws, action plans or sectoral measures that are now being aligned and reframed in light of the European agenda. France illustrates a more “work-in-progress” situation, with a broad consultation process and several postponements, and its national social economy strategy now expected around mid-2026 instead of the initial end-2025 target, placing it among the Member States that are behind the indicative EU timeline.

Overall, the picture across the EU-27 is a patchwork of mature strategies, evolving frameworks and partial measures, rather than a fully harmonised landscape, which has direct implications for how European initiatives on social economy, digital transition and skills are implemented on the ground.

Table 3: National strategies to promote the social economy

Country	Status of the National Social Economy Strategy	Progress and Related Initiatives
Belgium	Regional and federal frameworks for social economy; towards a more explicit national strategy.	Strong regional policies (especially in Wallonia and Flanders) are being consolidated into a more coordinated national framework.
Bulgaria	National action plan on social economy.	Existing action plans provide the basis for developing a broader national strategy in line with the Council Recommendation.
France	Strategy under preparation, publication delayed to September 2026.	A national strategy is under development following a broad consultation launched in 2025; publication is now expected in September 2026.
Greece	National action plan on social economy and social enterprises.	Existing action plans are expected to evolve into a more comprehensive national strategy.
Italy	Existing policy framework and action plans for the social economy / third sector; adaptation to the EU Recommendation ongoing.	Long-standing legislation and policy frameworks are being aligned with the SEAP and the 2023 Council Recommendation.
Luxembourg	Recognised social economy sector; partial strategies and support measures.	Existing support measures may evolve into a more comprehensive national strategy.
Netherlands	Strong practice-based ecosystem; work in progress on a formal national strategy.	A well-developed ecosystem is supported by innovation initiatives, with discussions underway on a more explicit national strategy.
Portugal	National plans and programmes for the social economy; moving towards an integrated strategy.	Existing plans are being reframed into a national strategy aligned with the SEAP and the Council Recommendation. (CASES, 2026)

Poland	Policy measures and pilot programmes; encouraged to adopt a full strategy.	Existing support measures for social enterprises are expected to be consolidated into a national strategy.
Romania	Measures and programmes; towards a more structured national strategy.	Current support measures provide the basis for a more coherent national strategy in line with EU priorities.
Spain	Adopted / consolidated strategy (pre-existing and strengthened after the SEAP).	Spain is considered a frontrunner, with an established national strategy and dedicated governance structures.
Other EU Member States (e.g. Germany, Austria, Nordics, Baltics, Central and Eastern Europe)	Mix of policy frameworks, sectoral measures and early-stage work towards dedicated national strategies.	Progress varies across countries, ranging from established frameworks to pilot initiatives and commitments under the Council Recommendation.

4.2) About relevant European funding Mechanisms

Based on the European Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027, Table 4 provides an overview of the main EU funding programmes that can be mobilised to support the digital transformation of the social economy across five key dimensions: digital skills, digital innovation (including Digital Social Innovation), digital inclusion, digital transition and digital democracy.

It shows, programme by programme how social economy actors can concretely plug into each instrument, whether as beneficiaries of skills and inclusion projects (ESF+, ERDF, cohesion policy), as partners in research and innovation consortia (Horizon Europe (HE)), as users and co-developers of advanced digital and data/AI infrastructures (Digital Europe), or as recipients of social investment and blended finance (InvestEU, SMP).

By reading the table horizontally, you see the specific opportunities for social economy in each programme; by reading it vertically, you see how the different digital ambitions can be combined and sequenced across the EU funding architecture.

Table 4: EU Funding Programmes Supporting the Digital Transformation of the Social Economy

EU funding programme / instrument	Digital Skills (for social economy)	Digital Innovation (including DSI)	Digital Inclusion (incl. vulnerable groups & territories)	Digital Transition (of social economy, SMEs, territories)	Digital Democracy & civic participation
Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL) [digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu]	Funds advanced digital skills (AI, data, cybersecurity, HPC), including Master programmes and specialised training; social economy organisations can be partners or beneficiaries in skill-building projects and via European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs).	Core programme for deploying digital technologies into the market; supports pilots, data spaces and AI testing facilities where DSI projects and impact-oriented social enterprises can participate.	Supports broad deployment of digital technologies and EDIHs that can host digital inclusion services and experimentation for underserved groups, though inclusion is not its primary focus; can complement ESF+/ERDF inclusion projects.	Explicitly aims to “bring digital technology to businesses, citizens and public administrations” and accelerate digital transformation; social economy enterprises and cooperatives can access EDIHs, pilots and calls.	Funds actions under the European Democracy Shield (fact-checking, disinformation resilience, online safety) and other calls where civic tech, democratic platforms and media literacy projects—potentially led by social economy actors—are eligible.
Horizon Europe (esp. digital-related clusters)	Supports R&I on digital competences, AI literacy, human-centred tech , and new learning models; social economy actors can join consortia on skills for green & digital transitions and on competence frameworks (DigComp, AI literacy, etc.).	Major programme for digital innovation R&I , including AI, data spaces, human-centred digital transformation, and Digital Social Innovation solutions; social enterprises and NGOs can be partners in projects.	Supports research and pilots on digital inclusion, accessibility and reducing digital divides , with social economy organisations co-designing and testing solutions, particularly in Cluster 2.	Supports experimentation on digital transition pathways , smart communities, platform cooperativism, data-driven social services, etc.	Finances projects on digital democracy, civic tech, trustworthy information ecosystems , and combating disinformation, often with multi-stakeholder consortia including civil society and social economy organisations.



European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)	Strong role in basic and intermediate digital skills for workers, jobseekers and vulnerable groups, often aligned with DigComp; social economy organisations can deliver training and upskilling programmes.	Supports social innovation projects that integrate digital tools (platforms, data, AI) to improve employment and social inclusion services; social enterprises are typical implementers.	Key instruments for digital inclusion of minorities and disadvantaged groups (migrants, low-income, people with disabilities, older people), funding tailored training, mentoring, and community-based inclusion initiatives often led by social economy actors.	Funds capacity-building and organisational change within social economy entities as part of employment and inclusion projects, including adopting digital tools in service delivery.	Can support participatory digital tools in social inclusion, youth and community projects (e-participation, co-design platforms), strengthening democratic engagement of under-represented groups.
European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)	Finances digital training facilities, FabLabs, local innovation hubs where social economy organisations can organise digital skills programmes.	Major source for territorial digital innovation , SME digitalisation, living labs and DSI hubs; social enterprises and cooperatives can be key stakeholders in regional innovation ecosystems.	Funds digital public access points, community centres, connectivity and inclusive digital services in deprived areas and regions, with frequent involvement of social economy structures in delivery.	Supports digital transition of territories (smart cities, e-government, smart specialisation RIS3/RIS4) including social economy participation in local digital strategies and infrastructures.	Can co-finance local e-participation platforms , digital tools for citizen engagement and co-production of public policies, where social economy actors act as intermediaries or facilitators.
InvestEU – Social Investment & Skills window	Provides financial instruments (guarantees, loans, equity) for skills infrastructure projects , including digital skills academies, social enterprises offering training, and impact-oriented training providers.	Finances digital innovation projects with social impact (AI for inclusion, data-driven social services, digital platforms for social economy) through social investment vehicles and blended finance structures.	Can support large-scale digital inclusion initiatives where they are structured as social infrastructure investments (community centres, platforms, inclusive digital services).	Enables major digital transformation investments by social economy organisations (platforms, IT infrastructure, data capabilities) under social investment portfolios.	May support digital democracy platforms and civic tech initiatives when structured as social investment projects with measurable social outcomes (participation, trust, resilience to disinformation).
Single Market Programme (SMP) – Social Economy & SME strands	Funds capacity-building and skills development for social economy and SMEs, including managerial and digital competences via dedicated calls and support actions.	Supports innovation and competitiveness of social economy enterprises and SMEs, including adoption of innovative digital solutions and DSI approaches.	Indirectly contributes to digital inclusion when calls target social economy services for underserved populations using digital channels.	Funds digital strategies , tools and organisational transformation for social economy enterprises and SMEs through dedicated calls.	Can support online participation platforms and networks that strengthen voice, representation and co-decision of social economy actors in EU governance and the single market.



Erasmus+ Education, Training and Youth	Supports DigComp-based skills, digital pedagogy and learning platforms across formal and non-formal education, with social economy organisations as partners or leaders.	Funds digital innovation in education (EdTech, open resources and collaborative platforms) across formal and non-formal learning sectors.	Funds youth and adult education projects targeting digital inclusion of disadvantaged learners , often with social economy organisations running training and mentoring schemes.	Supports digital transformation in education organisations , including cooperatives and NGOs	Promotes digital participation and e-citizenship for young people through platforms, campaigns, and media literacy, with social economy coordination.
Cohesion Policy – National and Regional Operational Programmes (ESF+/ERDF)	Across OPs, funds territorial digital skills strategies , local training ecosystems and cross-border skills initiatives, often engaging social economy actors as trusted intermediaries.	Supports regional digital innovation ecosystems , living labs and cross-border DSI projects, where social enterprises and cooperatives are core participants.	Key lever for digital inclusion policies at national and regional level (e.g. national digital inclusion action plans, local hubs), strongly involving social economy and NGOs.	Leads digital transformation in territories , including cross-border regions, with social economy organisations.	Can finance territorial e-democracy tools and participatory platforms as part of governance and community-building priorities.
Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV)	Supports media and digital literacy projects that build citizens' capacities to navigate digital information spaces; social economy NGOs often lead these.	Finances civic tech and digital rights initiatives that innovate in how communities organise and advocate using digital tools.	Focuses on inclusion of minorities and vulnerable communities in rights and participation, often using digital tools to reduce barriers and improve access.	Indirectly supports digital transition in civil society by modernising advocacy, services, and organisation through digital platforms.	Core instrument for digital democracy, civic participation, rights-based platforms, anti-disinformation work , typically led by civil society and social economy organisations.
Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)	Funds digital skills and literacy programmes for migrants and refugees , often delivered by social economy organisations.	Supports innovative digital tools for integration with social enterprises as providers.	Focused on digital inclusion within integration policies , ensuring migrants can access services and rights via digital channels.	Can support digital transition of integration services managed by social economy actors.	Can include digital civic education and participation components for newcomers as part of integration projects.



4.3) Financial envelopes per program (EU MFF 2021–2027)

To help assess the scale and strategic weight of each funding instrument, the table is complemented with indicative figures for the total EU budget allocated to the main programmes over the 2021–2027 Multiannual Financial Framework. These envelopes show where the largest financial capacities lie for supporting digital skills, digital innovation, digital inclusion, digital transition and digital democracy in the social economy: from the massive people-centred resources of ESF+, through the research and innovation engine of HE, to the targeted digital capacities of the Digital Europe Programme and the investment leverage of InvestEU.

The largest envelope corresponds to the **ESF+ with around €142.7 billion**, confirming its central role as the main EU instrument for employment, skills, social inclusion and capacity-building. This makes ESF+ particularly relevant for supporting basic and intermediate digital skills, digital inclusion measures and organisational capacity-building among social economy actors.

HE, with approximately €95.5 billion, represents the second major financial capacity and is especially relevant for research, innovation and experimentation. For the social economy, this means opportunities to participate in projects related to human-centred digital innovation, AI, data-driven services, digital social innovation and inclusive technologies. However, access to HE often requires strong consortium-building and proposal-writing capacities, which may limit the direct participation of smaller social economy organisations.

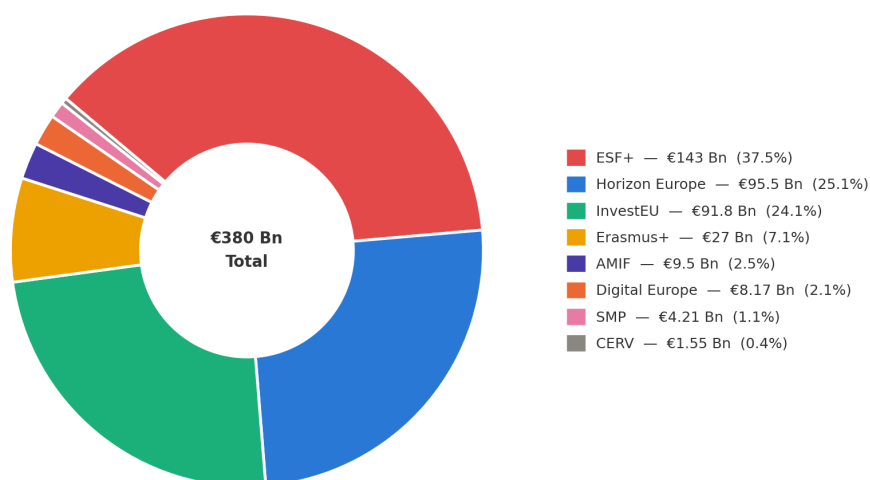
b presents a different type of financial capacity. Rather than operating as a direct grant programme, it provides an EU **guarantee of around €91.8 billion**, expected to mobilise more than €372 billion in investment. Its relevance lies in its potential to leverage private and public investment for social enterprises, skills infrastructure and digital transformation projects. Nevertheless, social economy organisations may require intermediary support to access these instruments, as repayable finance and investment-readiness requirements can be difficult for smaller or less mature organisations.

The **Digital Europe Programme, with €8.168 billion**, has a smaller envelope compared with ESF+, HE or InvestEU, but it is highly strategic because it directly targets advanced digital capacities, including AI, cybersecurity, data, high-performance computing and advanced digital skills. For the social economy, its importance is not only its budget size, but its potential to connect social economy actors with European Digital Innovation Hubs, experimentation facilities and specialised digital expertise.

Other programmes have smaller but complementary roles. The **Single Market Programme, with around €4.208 billion**, is relevant for SME competitiveness, market access and dedicated calls supporting the digital transition of social economy enterprises. Erasmus+, with an indicative envelope of around €26 billion, can support digital education, training materials, cooperation partnerships and lifelong learning. **CERV, with approximately €1.5–1.6 billion**, is more targeted but relevant for digital democracy, civic participation, rights-based digital tools and media literacy. AMIF, with around €9–10 billion, can contribute to digital inclusion and skills development for migrants and refugees, often through civil society and social economy organisations.

Overall, figure 2 shows that the digital transformation of the social economy cannot rely on a single funding instrument. Large-scale programmes such as ESF+, HE, InvestEU and Cohesion Policy provide the main financial capacity, while more targeted programmes such as Digital Europe, SMP, Erasmus+, CERV and AMIF provide specialised entry points for digital skills, innovation, inclusion, democracy and integration. The main challenge is therefore not only the availability of EU funding, but the ability of social economy actors to navigate, combine and access these instruments in a coherent and realistic way.

Financial Envelopes per Programme EU Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027



Indicative EU budget totals. InvestEU figure reflects EU guarantee (~€91.8 Bn); mobilised investment >€372 Bn.

Figure 2: Financial envelopes per programme (2021-2027).

Own elaboration, data extracted from European Commission. *Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027.*

5) Findings and Insights from DIGISET Project

5.1) Needs of Social SMEs and SEOs

The information collected on the needs of social SMEs and SEOs is based on several complementary sources of evidence. First, it draws on the findings generated within WP1 of the DIGISET project at the initial stage of the project, November 2024. It provided an initial understanding of the digitalisation needs, barriers and opportunities faced by the target groups. This evidence was complemented with additional regional and local documents, allowing the analysis to capture territorial specificities and contextual factors affecting social economy ecosystems.

Finally, the needs assessment also integrates feedback collected after each project activity or event, ensuring that the analysis reflects the direct experiences, expectations and practical challenges expressed by participants throughout the implementation of the project.

5.1.1) Needs of Social SMEs

In general, social SMEs express a strong need for practical support to adopt digital technologies in their day-to-day operations. Many Social SMEs are still at an early stage of digital transformation and require gradual, mission-aligned support to adopt digital tools in a useful, sustainable and realistic way.

In this sense, the six main needs identified are:

1. **Lack of time and internal capacity:** Social SMEs often lack the time and internal capacity to explore technological innovation while maintaining their regular activities. As a result, digital transformation is frequently perceived as an additional burden rather than as an integrated strategic priority.
2. **Lack of coherent digital strategy and leadership:** Many social SMEs reported that their organisations do not have a coherent digital strategy. In many cases, there is also no specific person responsible for leading digitalisation efforts. This makes it difficult to define priorities, coordinate decisions and ensure consistent use of digital tools across the organisation.
3. **Overload of digital tools and difficulty selecting the right ones:** Social SMEs face an overload of available digital tools, which makes it difficult to decide which tools to use and how to use them effectively. As a result, many tools are not used consistently. Furthermore, there is a lack of stable technical assistance and guidance to ensure that these tools are properly adapted to the needs and capacities of each organisation.
4. **Limited investment:** Many social SMEs operate with limited resources and often do not invest in digital tools, partly due to cultural barriers and uncertainty about the real benefits of digitalisation. They therefore need tools and methods to evaluate cost-effectiveness before investing in digital solutions. Smaller organisations may also face difficulties in accessing adequate digital infrastructure, which limits their ability to experiment with or implement new technologies. In some cases, dependency on external developers also makes digitalisation more costly and less accessible.
5. **Need to demonstrate tangible benefits to internal stakeholders:** Social SMEs need support in demonstrating the tangible benefits of digital tools to internal stakeholders. This includes showing how digital solutions can improve efficiency, support decision-making or improve the formulation of organisational problems. The experience of social SMEs showed that achieving small “quick wins” can be an effective starting point to build confidence within the organisation.
6. **Need for user-friendly, inclusive and accessible tools:** Social SMEs require solutions that take into account the digital skills gaps of their users. Digitalisation cannot be addressed only from an internal organisational perspective; it must also consider the capacities and needs of the people these organisations serve. This reinforces the importance of user-friendly, inclusive and accessible tools that are aligned with the values and social mission of the social economy organisations.

Figure 3: Six main needs – Social SMEs

WP1 identified a set of key digital needs among social economy SMEs through a survey involving 102 organisations. The results provide an overview of the results of the main challenges related to digital skills, digital transformation and the adoption of innovative digital solutions within the social economy sector.

As shown in Figure 4, the most significant need relates to digital infrastructure and technology adoption (38.0%), highlighting the importance of access to digital tools, platforms and technological solutions to support organisational development. Business process transformation and optimisation emerged as the second most important area (18.5%), reflecting the growing demand for more efficient and digitally enabled ways of working. Other relevant needs include digital strategy and ecosystem support (13.0%), financial support and strategic resources (10.9%), and both digital skills, competences and talent development (9.8%) and cybersecurity, data privacy and risk management (9.8%). These findings underline that the digital transformation of social economy SMEs requires a holistic approach that combines technological investment, organisational change, skills development, financial support and stronger ecosystem collaboration.

Digital Needs for Social Economy SMEs

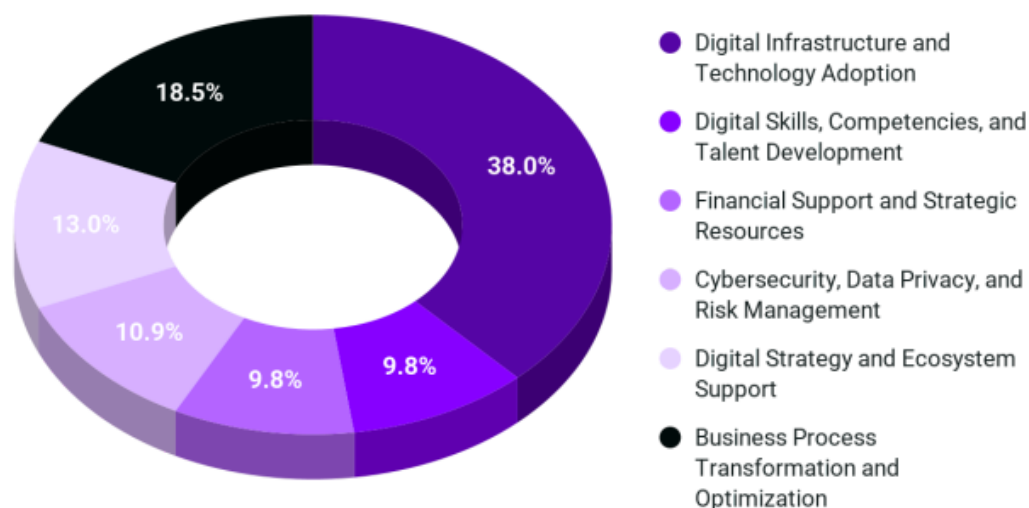


Figure 4: Digital Needs for Social SMEs

The Blueprint, developed under WP4, also supports these results, as it identifies the following **main digital needs**:

- **Information and data literacy:** to articulate information needs, to locate and retrieve digital data, information, and content.
- **Communication and collaboration:** To interact, communicate and collaborate through digital technologies.
- **Safety:** To protect devices, content, personal data, and privacy in digital environments, corresponding to cybersecurity, data privacy and risk management. **In activities were fragile citizens data on care, social work, migrations are managed, these needs are crucial.**

- **Digital Fundraising:** To use digital technologies, platforms, and data-driven approaches to mobilise resources, engage donors, and support fundraising activities.
- **Digital content creation:** To create and edit digital content

Social SMEs' perspectives on AI:

Social SMEs see AI as a tool that can help them save time and reduce repetitive work. A lot of time is currently taken up by management and administrative tasks, which limits their ability to focus on their core social mission activities. AI could help reduce this burden by supporting tasks such as administration, the search and preparation of public tenders, translation, planning, scheduling and report writing. AI can also improve productivity and help organisations explore new creative formats. In general, AI is seen as useful when it supports people and makes their work easier.

At the same time, social SMEs are concerned about several risks. These include data protection, GDPR compliance, bias, dependency on AI tools, and the increasing economic cost of AI solutions, as rising prices may make their long-term adoption financially unsustainable for many organisations. Some organisations also feel guilty about using AI because of its environmental impact or because they are unsure whether it aligns with their values.

Another important concern is the lack of basic digital skills. Some people feel they do not have enough time, budget or knowledge to learn how to use AI properly. This can make AI feel overwhelming rather than helpful. These concerns also explain why some organisations are reluctant to use AI, especially when they are not sure how to apply it in a responsible way.

Furthermore, a strong concern is the fear that AI could replace certain jobs or reduce the value of professional roles. They see that AI could help with support tasks, but they are also worried that it could threaten their work. However, the feedback also shows that AI could be useful if it helps professionals focus more on human skills.

"AI is seen by social SMEs as a promising tool to reduce administrative burdens and free up time for their social mission, but its adoption requires clear guidance, digital skills and safeguards to ensure that it is used ethically, safely and without undermining human roles."

5.1.2) Needs of SEOs

SEOs highlighted a stronger need for ecosystem-level support, capacity building, and shared spaces for reflection and collaboration.

Basically, their role in the digitalisation of Social SMEs is to guide, support, and connect social SMEs and other organisations across the SSE ecosystem.

As a result, their needs are closely linked to knowledge transfer, network strengthening and the development of common resources:

1. **Training on sustainable technology practices**, including examples of successful implementation. SEOs need to understand how digital tools can be adopted in ways that remain aligned with social economy values. This includes avoiding technology-driven alienation and ensuring that digital transformation continues to respond to community priorities rather than being led only by technological trends.
2. SEOs also need **tools and methodologies to support organisations with varying levels of digital maturity**. This includes resources on data management, design thinking, mapping, network management and collaborative problem-solving. Training should not be limited to technical skills, but should also strengthen the capacity to analyse needs, facilitate organisational change and support strategic decision-making.
3. SEOs emphasized the **importance of stronger networks between support organisations and social economy actors**. Collaborative spaces are needed to share knowledge, test small-scale solutions, exchange good practices and develop sector-specific tools. There is particular interest in digital commons and open, affordable technological systems that reflect the principles and values of the social economy.
4. **Need for long-term financing** for organisations that support the social economy. Without stable funding, enablers may struggle to provide continuous support, maintain shared infrastructures, develop training resources or accompany smaller organisations through digital transformation processes.

Figure 5: Four main needs – Social SMEs

Social SEOs' perspectives on AI:

SEOs see AI with **interest**, but also with **caution**. They do not reject AI, but they believe its use must be ethical, critical and aligned with Social Economy values. One of their main concerns is the possible loss of human relationships, autonomy and creativity. SEOs fear that AI could contribute to dehumanisation, isolation, job loss or the replacement of human judgement. For this reason, they stress that AI should support people, not replace them. SEOs are also concerned about the dominance of private companies in AI development and the lack of public regulation. They believe that, without clear rules, AI may serve commercial interests rather than the common good, especially in sensitive areas such as education, care and social services.

In this context, **access to clear and trustworthy guidance on AI and data use** emerges as an important need. SEOs and support organisations require neutral and accessible resources that help them understand both the opportunities and risks associated with AI, including its ethical implications and practical applications. As a suggestion, some participants highlighted the idea of **creating spaces for dialogue and peer learning**, such as informal forums and communities of practice, where organisations can collectively reflect on the social implications of AI and develop a shared understanding across different levels of digital literacy.

At the same time, SEOs recognise that AI can be useful when applied to concrete organisational challenges. In particular, it may **help streamline routine administrative tasks**, such as reporting, internal coordination or communication. This could free up time and resources, **allowing organisations to focus more on service delivery, care activities and their social objectives**. Nevertheless, participants emphasised the importance of building the necessary skills and knowledge to engage with AI in an informed way. Beyond learning how to use specific tools, they

expressed a **need to better understand issues related to privacy, data management, algorithmic bias and the risks associated** with relying on commercial digital platforms.

Taken together, the needs identified across social SMEs and SEOs point to a consistent and urgent conclusion: digitalisation is not a peripheral or aspirational goal for social economy organisations, it is a core condition for their competitiveness, sustainability and social impact. Support mechanisms must therefore be designed with this reality in mind, prioritising accessibility, practical relevance, and alignment with the real capacity constraints of these organisations.

“SEOs see AI as a useful tool to address concrete organisational challenges, but only if it is guided by clear ethical principles, public-interest safeguards and a strong commitment to preserving human relationships, autonomy and Social Economy values.”

5.2) Qualitative feedback based on the workshops and events organised by DIGISET

5.2.1) Biggest takeaways

The feedback collected from the different workshops and events shows that participants valued both the practical knowledge gained and the opportunity to exchange experiences with peers. Across the responses, several recurring takeaways can be identified and grouped into five main clusters.

The five main takeaways of the events, are:

1. **Practical tools and applicable knowledge:** The different workshops helped participants discover new tools, methodologies and approaches that they could use in the future, particularly in relation to AI and impact measurement.
2. **AI awareness, experimentation and ethical reflection:** Participants became more aware of the potential of AI tools, but also of the risks and ethical dilemmas associated with their use. They highlighted issues such as bias, responsible use, digital maturity and the need to apply human judgement when integrating AI into daily work.
3. **Networking, peer learning and community building:** A strong recurring takeaway was the value of networking and peer exchange. Participants appreciated meeting people from other organisations, exchanging good practices and learning from the experiences of organisations that had already submitted projects or accessed funding. The workshops were also valued as spaces for building future collaborations. Participants mentioned the importance of shared experiences, group discussions and being surrounded by capable people from different sectors. This peer-learning dimension helped participants better understand the challenges faced by other Social SMEs.
4. **Improved understanding of funding opportunities for digitalisation:** Increased awareness of European funding opportunities available to support digitalisation projects. Participants highlighted that they gained a clearer understanding of EU funding instruments and how these resources could support digital transformation and sustainable growth.
5. **Motivation for organisational change and future action:** Finally, many participants expressed that the workshops increased their motivation and confidence to act. They felt more equipped to apply what they had learned. Some participants also highlighted that the workshops could help their organisations become more efficient, improve internal management and mainly advance in their digital transformation journey. The fact that participants felt part of a broader community was also perceived as valuable, as it created continuity beyond the event itself.

Figure 6: Takeaways from workshops & events

5.2.2) What could be improved

The feedback on what could be improved shows that participants (both Social SMEs and SEOs) were generally satisfied with the workshops, but some recurring suggestions emerged after the events:

1. **Reinforcement of practice-oriented learning approaches:** Participants expressed a clear interest in moving beyond theoretical explanations and applying the concepts directly during the sessions. This includes guided exercises and hands-on activities with practical case studies, opportunities to test tools in real time, and dedicated moments to apply the content to their own organisation. Although this practical dimension had often been planned and, in many cases, successfully implemented, participants indicated that there was sometimes not enough time to fully carry it out.
2. **Integration of case-based learning and demonstrative examples:** Another relevant improvement relates to the integration of more concrete case studies, successful experiences and real-world examples. Participants highlighted that practical examples can help social SMEs better understand how other organisations have addressed similar challenges, implemented digital or AI-based solutions, and translated general concepts into concrete examples. Case-based learning can also make the sessions more relatable and actionable, as it allows participants to identify practices, approaches or pathways that could be adapted to their own organisational context.
3. **Optimisation of session design, duration and pacing:** A further area for improvement concerns the overall design, duration and pacing of the sessions. Several participants felt that the workshops were too short, particularly considering the amount of content covered and the need for practical experimentation, discussion and reflection. Future activities could therefore benefit from longer formats, better-balanced agendas and more time allocated to questions, open discussion and practical work. In some cases, formats such as full-day or one-and-a-half-day workshops could be considered.
4. **Promotion of peer learning, interaction and ecosystem networking:** Participants also valued the interactive components of the workshops and suggested further strengthening opportunities for peer learning and exchange. Considering more group discussions, open debates and spaces to share doubts, experiences and challenges. These elements were closely linked to networking, as participants also expressed interest in meeting other organisations, exploring potential collaborations and better understanding how they could work together.
5. **Differentiation of learning pathways and continuity mechanisms:** Finally, future activities could be better adapted to different knowledge levels and supported by stronger continuity mechanisms. Some participants felt that certain sessions, particularly those related to AI, were too introductory, while others considered this level appropriate. This suggests the need to differentiate learning pathways, for instance by offering introductory and advanced sessions. In addition, several participants suggested organising similar events on a more regular basis, reflecting an interest in continuity, follow-up activities and sustained learning beyond the end of the DIGISET Project.

Figure 7: Potential improvements

Overall, the qualitative feedback gathered from DIGISET workshops and events points to a consistent and coherent picture. Participants valued the opportunity to connect with peers, gain practical knowledge and reflect collectively on the challenges and opportunities of digital transformation in the social economy. At the same time, the feedback revealed recurring gaps in the design and delivery of activities: insufficient time for hands-on experimentation, limited differentiation by knowledge level, and a need for stronger continuity mechanisms beyond individual events.

6) Lessons learnt from the consortium

This section presents the lessons learnt by the different partners involved in the project. During the workshop conducted, these lessons learnt were classified into three main categories to facilitate the identification of actionable insights.

The first category, **Engagement**, includes lessons related to the relationship and experience with **social SMEs** and **SEOs** throughout the project. It focuses on how these organisations were engaged, the level and quality of their participation, the challenges encountered in maintaining their involvement, and the approaches that proved most effective in promoting active and meaningful engagement.

The second category, **Type of activities and real needs**, gathers lessons related to the design, organisation and implementation of the different project activities, including **national events, transnational events, online events and training activities**. This category reflects on the practical experience of organising these activities, the suitability of the formats used, and the extent to which they responded to the actual needs, expectations and capacities of the participating social SMEs and other relevant stakeholders.

Finally, the third category, **additional key lessons learnt**, includes broader and cross-cutting lessons that do not fall directly under the previous categories but are nevertheless relevant for the project. These may relate to consortium coordination, internal communication, project management, methodological aspects, or other transversal issues that can inform and improve the implementation of future similar initiatives.

A) ENGAGEMENT

The key lessons learnt on stakeholder engagement show that, while the focus groups conducted at the beginning of the project successfully identified the digitalisation needs of social SMEs, future initiatives should also assess participants' operational needs when designing engagement activities. Practical aspects such as event format, duration, timing and delivery methods should be considered from the outset to maximise participation and ensure that activities are accessible and compatible with organisations' day-to-day operations.

The experience also demonstrated that practical, interactive and modular activities generated greater participation and impact than traditional lecture-based sessions. Participants particularly valued hands-on content and peer-to-peer learning opportunities, which enabled them to exchange experiences, discuss common challenges and identify practical solutions that could be applied within their own organisations.

Finally, networking and partnership-building emerged as one of the programme's most valued outcomes. Beyond strengthening digital skills, participants appreciated the opportunity to connect with other organisations, share knowledge and explore future collaborations. This highlights the importance of designing engagement activities that foster lasting relationships and contribute to the development of stronger social economy ecosystems.

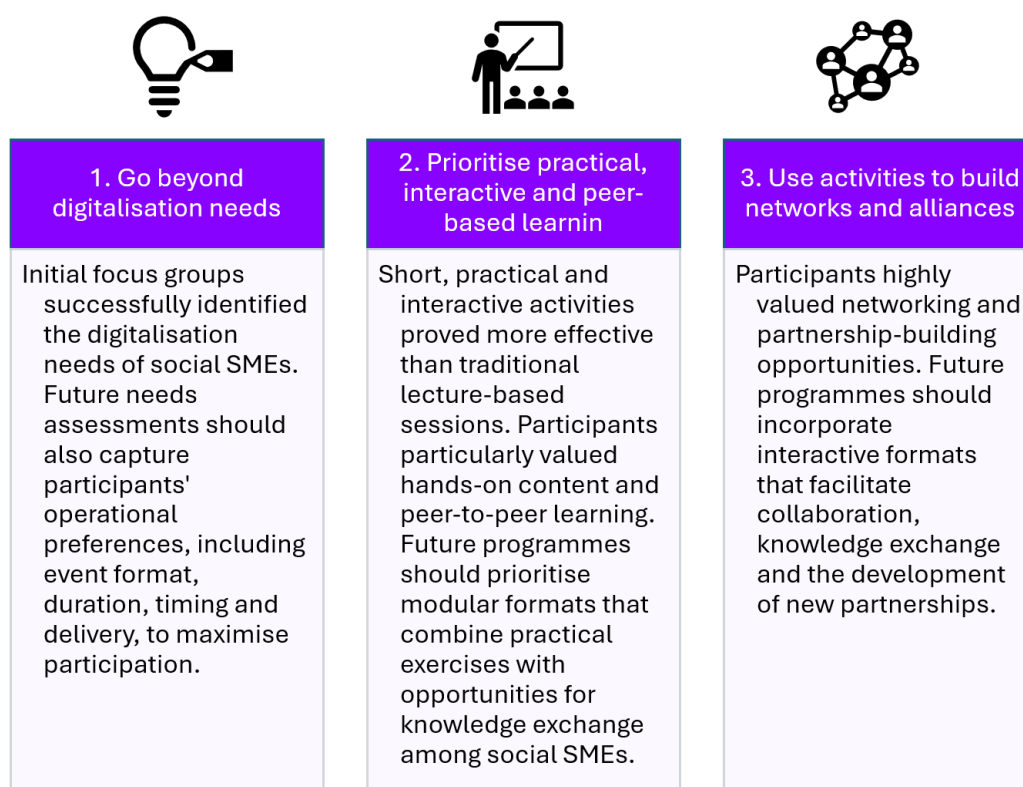


Figure 8: Lessons learnt related to engagement with key actors

B) TYPE OF ACTIVITIES

The key lessons learnt highlight the importance of involving stakeholders from the beginning of the project and designing activities around the real needs, capacities and priorities of social economy organisations. User-centred principles and co-design approaches should be considered as a methodological foundation for future initiatives, as they help ensure that activities are relevant, practical and aligned with the lived realities of participants.

The DIGISET experience showed that co-designing solutions based on identified needs, combined with collective upskilling through practical project-based activities, was particularly effective. Workshops that enabled participants to work together on concrete challenges, rather than only receiving expert-led content, supported peer learning, knowledge exchange and a stronger sense of ownership over the digital transformation process.

Engaging SEOs from the outset also proved particularly effective. Understood as social economy networks, federations, umbrella organisations or intermediary support structures, SEOs acted as trusted connectors between the project and social SMEs. They facilitated access to organisations, encouraged participation and supported knowledge sharing across the ecosystem.

The experience also showed that personalised outreach based on trust, direct contact and communication in local languages was much more effective than generic mass communication. Social SMEs were more likely to participate when activities addressed concrete challenges, including organisational, social, democratic, governance-related and digital challenges, and when the practical value of the activity was clearly demonstrated.

Finally, creating connections within the social economy ecosystem was one of the project's main

strengths. Bringing together organisations that needed digital expertise with those able to provide it encouraged collaboration, peer learning and partnership-building within the social economy itself. This approach reinforced digital transformation while respecting the core values of the social economy, including cooperation, democratic governance, solidarity, inclusion and responsible data sharing, in line with the EU Data Sharing Code of Conduct for the Social Economy.



Figure 9: Lessons Learnt from the Activities Organised

C) ADDITIONAL KEY LESSONS LEARNT

The key lessons learnt highlight the importance of defining clear and realistic programme objectives, eligibility criteria and KPIs that are aligned with the intended outcomes of the programme. Programme success should be assessed not only by the number of grants awarded, but also by its wider impact, including stakeholder engagement, the creation of new partnerships and the strengthening of the social economy ecosystem.

However, the Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTPs) enabled organisations with limited resources to participate in training, networking and collaborative activities that would otherwise have been difficult to access. Beyond financial support, participants highly valued the European networking opportunities and the collaborations created through the programme.

The experience also showed that stronger collaboration across the European social economy ecosystem can significantly increase programme impact. Greater cooperation with sister projects, supported by appropriate coordination mechanisms and incentives, would help avoid competition for the same target groups and promote synergies. At the same time, local and national networks proved essential for reaching, engaging and mobilising social economy stakeholders. Future initiatives should therefore combine strong European coordination with locally driven engagement to maximise participation and ecosystem development.

Finally, the project demonstrated the value of identifying and promoting European digital solutions that respond to the needs of the social economy. Prioritising European technologies, including open-source solutions where appropriate, can strengthen digital autonomy, reduce dependency

on non-European platforms and better align the digital transformation of the social economy with the EU's strategic priorities on technological sovereignty.

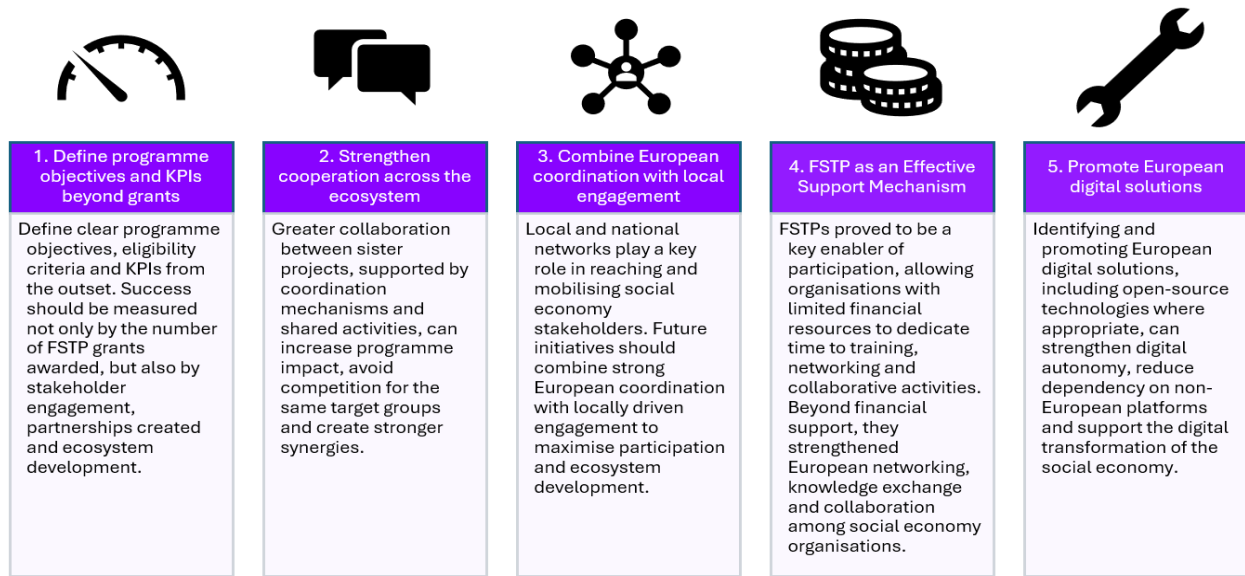


Figure 10: Other Key Lessons Learnt

7) DIGISET Policy Recommendations

Building on the needs identified among social SMEs and SEOs, as well as on the lessons learnt gathered from the consortium, the following section presents the final DIGISET policy recommendations. These recommendations reflect the three main areas of learning identified throughout the project. Together, these insights show that the digital transformation of the social economy requires support mechanisms that are practical, inclusive, locally grounded and aligned with the real capacities and values of social economy organisations. The recommendations therefore aim to provide guidance for policymakers and support organisations on how to design more effective measures to strengthen digitalisation, AI adoption and ecosystem collaboration within the SSE.

Table 5: Recommendation 1

Recommendation 1	Harmonise definitions and classifications of social economy actors across the EU
	Support the consistent application of the EU framework for defining and classifying social economy entities across Member States. Although the SEAP and the Council Recommendation on developing social economy framework conditions have established a common reference framework, differences in national implementation continue to create uncertainty regarding the eligibility of social economy actors in EU-funded programmes. As experienced in DIGISET, varying interpretations of eligibility criteria for social SMEs created barriers to participation and reduced consistency across countries. Greater alignment between EU guidance and national strategies would improve policy coherence and facilitate access to funding opportunities.
Authority	EU/National
Result / Impact expected	More consistent application of EU definitions and eligibility criteria across Member States, improved comparability, reduced administrative uncertainty, and stronger policy coherence in the design and implementation of support programmes targeting social economy actors. This recommendation supports the implementation of the SEAP and the Council Recommendation on developing social economy framework conditions by promoting a more consistent application of the existing EU framework across Member States.

Table 6: Recommendation 2

Recommendation 2	Ensure the structured representation of the Social Economy in EU digital policymaking
	The digital transformation of the Social Economy requires not only access to technologies and funding, but also meaningful participation in the governance of EU digital policies. While Social Economy organisations are increasingly recognised as beneficiaries of digital initiatives, they are not consistently represented in the spaces where digital priorities, regulatory frameworks and funding programmes are designed.

To address this gap, the European Commission should establish a dedicated focal point for the Digital Social Economy within DG CNECT, working in close coordination with DG EMPL and other relevant Directorates-General. Social Economy and civil society representatives should also be systematically included in expert groups, stakeholder consultations and advisory bodies related to digital policies, AI, data governance, digital skills, cybersecurity, digital infrastructures and EU funding programmes. Strengthening the institutional participation of the Social Economy would help ensure that EU digital policies better reflect the needs, values and capacities of social SMEs, Social Economy organisations and civil society, contributing to a more inclusive and human-centred digital transition.	
Authority	EU
Result / Impact expected	Stronger institutional representation of the Social Economy in EU digital policymaking, improved coordination between digital and Social Economy policies, and greater alignment between EU digital strategies and the needs of social SMEs, SEOs and civil society organisations. By embedding the Social Economy in the governance of digital policymaking, this recommendation would contribute to more inclusive, human-centred and socially driven digital policies, supporting the objectives of the Social Economy Action Plan, the Transition Pathway for the Proximity and Social Economy Ecosystem and the Digital Decade Policy Programme.

Table 7: Recommendation 3

Recommendation 3	Foster participatory and co-creative approaches to policy design
Foster more participatory and co-creative approaches to policy design by actively involving SSE actors, communities, researchers, and public authorities in decision-making processes. The DIGISET experience demonstrated that activities co-designed with social SMEs and SEOs generated significantly higher engagement and relevance than those designed top-down.	
Authority	Local / Regional / National
Result / Impact expected	Greater stakeholder engagement, increased policy relevance, and stronger social legitimacy of support initiatives targeting the social economy. It also reinforces the participatory governance approaches promoted by the Transition Pathway and the Social Economy Action Plan.

Table 8: Recommendation 4

Recommendation 4	Strengthen synergies, coordination, and knowledge exchange among EU-funded projects
	Strengthen synergies, coordination, and knowledge exchange among EU-funded projects through peer-learning activities, collaborative platforms, and regular interaction mechanisms. The DIGISET project identified that competition dynamics among sister projects, driven by overlapping KPIs and shared target groups, limited the realisation of potential synergies and duplicated outreach efforts.
Authority	EU
Result / Impact expected	Increased collaboration among funded projects, reduced duplication of efforts, and stronger dissemination and scalability of results across the social economy ecosystem. This would maximise the impact of EU funding instruments such as ESF+, Erasmus+, Digital Europe and the Single Market Programme by increasing complementarities and reducing fragmentation.

Table 9: Recommendation 5

Recommendation 5	Establish differentiated digital support pathways based on digital maturity
	Establish differentiated digital support pathways based on the digital maturity level of social SMEs and SEOs, moving away from one-size-fits-all approaches. Feedback from DIGISET workshops consistently highlighted the need for introductory and advanced learning tracks, as participants arrived with very different levels of digital knowledge and experience. To support these pathways, policymakers should promote common frameworks, assessment tools and monitoring mechanisms specific for the SE to evaluate digital maturity, identify capacity gaps and track progress over time.
Authority	EU / National
Result / Impact expected	More effective and relevant support for organisations at different stages of digital transformation, reducing dropout and increasing the actual uptake and sustained use of digital tools. The recommendation supports the objectives of the Digital Decade Policy Programme and DigComp 3.0 by enabling more tailored and effective digital capacity-building pathways.

Table 10: Recommendation 6

Recommendation 6	Strengthen the role of SEOs as recognised digital intermediaries
	Strengthen the role of SEOs as recognised and funded digital intermediaries, acknowledging their function as trusted bridges between policy and social SMEs. The DIGISET experience confirmed that engaging SEOs first was the most effective strategy for reaching social SMEs, and that one-to-one, trust-based outreach significantly outperformed generic communication approaches. To better connect digital transition support for the Social Economy with emerging Social Economy-oriented digital models, future EU initiatives should strategically align capacity-building, mentoring and investment schemes with the Open Internet Stack, EuroStack and the Digital Commons EDIC as complementary pillars of a democratic and sovereign European digital ecosystem. In practice, this means ensuring that Social Economy organisations are not only supported to adopt digital tools, but are also enabled to access, test, contribute to and govern open, interoperable and reusable digital commons, including open-source 3C building blocks, shared data infrastructures, community-governed platforms and public-interest digital services that reduce dependency on proprietary providers and better reflect Social Economy values.
Authority	National / Regional
Result / Impact expected	More effective outreach and engagement of social SMEs, stronger local ecosystem activation, and better alignment between policy design and the practical realities of the social economy. This aligns with the Social Economy Action Plan and the Council Recommendation, which recognise the importance of intermediary organisations in strengthening social economy ecosystems.

Table 11: Recommendation 7

Recommendation 7	Develop accessible, modular and SSE-specific AI literacy resources
	Develop accessible, modular and SSE-specific AI literacy resources that address both the opportunities and the ethical risks of AI adoption, tailored to the values and capacities of social economy actors. Participants in DIGISET workshops expressed a mixed but genuinely open attitude towards AI: they see clear potential for reducing administrative burdens and supporting their social mission, but require guidance to engage with AI in a safe, ethical and informed way.
Authority	EU / National
Result / Impact expected	Increased informed and responsible AI adoption within the SSE, while aligning between AI use and the values and mission of SE organisations. It contributes to the objectives of DigComp 3.0, the AI Continent Action Plan and the Digital Europe Programme by promoting responsible, inclusive and trustworthy AI adoption.

Table 12: Recommendation 8

Recommendation 8	Integrate digital transformation support into long-term, stable funding frameworks
	Integrate digital transformation support into long-term, stable funding frameworks for social economy actors, moving beyond project-based logic towards sustained ecosystem investment. The DIGISET experience highlighted that the knowledge, networks and trust built during the project lifecycle risk being lost once funding ends, particularly when SEOs lack the resources to maintain continuity.
Authority	EU / National / Regional
Result / Impact expected	Continuity of support beyond individual project lifecycles, stronger long-term impact, and prevention of the loss of knowledge, relationships and infrastructure built during funded initiatives. This would reinforce the long-term effectiveness of ESF+, InvestEU and other EU instruments supporting the digital and social transitions.

Table 13: Recommendation 9

Recommendation 9	Support the development, maintenance and adoption of Digital Commons for the Social Economy
	Create dedicated financial instruments and support programmes to develop, maintain, govern and scale Digital Commons for the Social Economy, including open-source software, shared digital infrastructures, interoperable tools, collaborative platforms and community-governed digital services. Current digital support schemes often prioritise short-term technology adoption, while providing limited support for the long-term sustainability of shared digital resources. As a result, many open and collaborative digital solutions struggle to secure maintenance, governance, interoperability, user support and continuous improvement, limiting their adoption across the Social Economy ecosystem. EU and national funding programmes should therefore establish dedicated pathways for Digital Commons within Social Economy support schemes, facilitating the development, adoption and scaling of EuroStack-aligned European solutions. The Digital Commons EDIC should be leveraged as a practical vehicle for cross-border cooperation, shared governance and the long-term stewardship of strategic open technologies. Strengthening Digital Commons would provide social SMEs and Social Economy organisations with affordable, trustworthy and values-based digital solutions, reducing dependency on proprietary platforms while enhancing digital sovereignty, interoperability and collaboration across the Social Economy ecosystem.
Authority	EU / National
Result / Impact expected	Greater availability and adoption of affordable, ethical and interoperable digital solutions for the Social Economy, supported by sustainable

	governance and long-term maintenance models. This recommendation would reduce dependency on proprietary platforms, strengthen Europe's digital sovereignty and foster shared digital infrastructures aligned with the Social Economy Action Plan, the Digital Europe Programme, the Transition Pathway for the Proximity and Social Economy Ecosystem and broader EU digital sovereignty objectives.
--	--

Table 14: Recommendation 10

Recommendation 10	Raise awareness of the environmental and social impacts of AI adoption
Promote awareness-raising and capacity-building actions on the environmental and social impacts of AI adoption within the social economy. These actions should help social SMEs, SEOs and support organisations understand not only the opportunities offered by AI, but also its potential consequences in terms of energy consumption, environmental footprint, working conditions, social inequalities, dependency on commercial platforms and risks of dehumanisation. This is particularly relevant for the social economy, where technology adoption must remain aligned with principles of sustainability, inclusion and social value creation.	
Authority	National / Regional
Result / Impact expected	Increased awareness of the wider environmental and social implications of AI, more responsible decision-making among social economy actors, and stronger alignment between AI adoption, sustainability objectives and the social mission of organisations. It complements the AI Continent Action Plan by promoting a human-centric, ethical and sustainable approach to AI deployment.

Table 15: Recommendation 11

Recommendation 11	Strengthen collaboration between EDIHs and social economy organisations to support digital experimentation, co-financing and mentoring
Strengthen the role of EDIHs as strategic partners for social SMEs and SEOs by facilitating access to specialised digital resources, low-risk experimentation environments, co-financing opportunities and continuous expert mentoring. The evidence shows that collaboration with EDIHs can help social economy organisations test advanced technologies, such as AI-driven analytics, without requiring major upfront investments. It can also support the identification of suitable grants and joint funding applications, reducing financial barriers to digital transformation. In addition, ongoing hands-on guidance from digital experts can help organisations move from awareness to implementation and accelerate their digital maturity.	
Authority	EU / National

Result / Impact expected	Improved access of social economy organisations to advanced digital infrastructures and expertise, reduced financial barriers through co-financing and joint funding applications, and faster, more practical adoption of digital technologies through continuous mentoring and experimentation support. This recommendation directly supports the objectives of the Digital Europe Programme and the Digital Decade by improving access to digital innovation infrastructures, experimentation facilities and specialised expertise.
---------------------------------	---

Table 16: Recommendation 12

Recommendation 12	Support social SMEs in identifying relevant and realistic digital and AI use cases
	Develop targeted support programmes to help social SMEs identify the most relevant, realistic and value-adding digital or AI use cases for their specific needs. Many organisations struggle not because they reject digitalisation, but because they do not know where to start, which tools to prioritise, or how to translate broad technological trends into concrete organisational improvements. Support should therefore include needs diagnosis, use-case mapping, prioritisation tools, peer examples and expert facilitation to help organisations focus on practical applications linked to their mission, capacity and business model.
Authority	National / Regional
Result / Impact expected	Better alignment between digital support and real organisational needs, reduced risk of adopting unsuitable or outdated solutions, clearer investment priorities for social SMEs, and more effective use of public and private support resources. It contributes to the practical implementation of the Digital Decade, the Transition Pathway and the AI Continent Action Plan by helping organisations translate policy ambitions into concrete digital transformation actions.

Table 17: Recommendation 13

Recommendation 13	Develop a Data and AI Governance Framework for the Social Economy
	Design a shared Data and AI Governance Framework for social economy entities to ensure that digital transformation remains aligned with social economy values and participatory governance principles. The framework should provide practical guidance on ethical AI adoption, data governance, transparency, privacy protection, human oversight, bias mitigation, cybersecurity, and responsible data sharing.

Authority	National / Regional
Result / Impact expected	Increased responsible and trustworthy adoption of data-driven and AI-enabled solutions across the social economy. Stronger alignment between digital transformation and social economy values, including inclusion, participation and social impact. Improved organisational capacity to manage data and AI risks, while fostering collaboration, innovation and evidence-based decision-making.

Table 18: Recommendation 14

Recommendation 14	Strengthen mutualised cybersecurity support and resilience for Social Economy organisations
Develop dedicated and mutualised cybersecurity support for Social Economy organisations, particularly micro and small entities managing sensitive data or delivering essential services. Rather than relying solely on individual organisational capacity, public authorities should promote shared cybersecurity services that make specialised expertise, tools and support accessible across the Social Economy ecosystem. DIGISET already identifies cybersecurity, data privacy and risk management as a key need for social SMEs, alongside digital infrastructure, digital skills and organisational support, and highlights that “safety” – the protection of devices, content, personal data and privacy – is critical for organisations working in care, social work, migration and other activities involving fragile citizens’ data. In a context of rising geopolitical tensions and multiplying cyberattacks, these organisations are particularly exposed because they combine limited resources and skills with high responsibility for vulnerable populations, while the rapid and insufficiently controlled use of generative AI further increases risks related to data protection, compliance, dependency and secure digital practices. This priority is also consistent with the French national ESS strategy, which identifies data security, team training, cybersecurity and responsible AI use as core conditions for a just, inclusive and sovereign digital transition of the ESS. Public authorities should therefore co-invest in shared and commons-based cybersecurity support systems for the Social Economy, combining prevention, training, diagnostics, incident preparedness and trusted technical support, in partnership with specialised intermediaries and inspired by models such as Cyber for Good (France, Latitudes & Share It)	
Authority	EU / National / Regional
Result / Impact expected	Improved protection of sensitive data and greater resilience against cyber threats across Social Economy organisations, particularly those delivering essential services to vulnerable populations. Better access to affordable cybersecurity expertise, shared tools and practical support through mutualised mechanisms adapted to the needs of social SMEs and SEOs. Safer and more responsible use of AI and digital technologies, strengthened trust among users, partners and public authorities, and greater alignment with European digital sovereignty objectives

8) Conclusions

The work carried out through DIGISET confirms that the digital transformation of the Social Economy extends far beyond the adoption of new technologies. While digital tools can improve efficiency, innovation and service delivery, sustainable transformation also depends on organisational capacity, digital competences, access to appropriate funding, enabling policy frameworks and effective collaboration across the ecosystem.

The review of European policies, funding programmes and regulatory initiatives shows that the European Union has established a solid foundation to support this transition. Initiatives such as the Digital Decade Policy Programme, the Social Economy Action Plan, the Transition Pathway for the Proximity and Social Economy Ecosystem, together with programmes including ESF+, Digital Europe, Horizon Europe and the Single Market Programme, offer significant opportunities for Social Economy organisations. However, the evidence gathered through DIGISET indicates that many organisations still face difficulties in translating these opportunities into practice. Limited organisational capacity, digital skills gaps, fragmented access to funding, cybersecurity concerns and the shortage of tailored support continue to constrain digital uptake, particularly among smaller organisations.

The practical experience gained over the two years of the project reinforces these findings. Working directly with Social SMEs and SEOs has shown that digital transformation is more effective when accompanied by trusted advisory services, practical guidance, peer learning and opportunities for collaboration. The project has also highlighted the important role of intermediary organisations (SEOs) in supporting social SMEs to assess their digital needs, share good practices, build internal capabilities and adopt technologies that remain aligned with their social mission and organisational values.

The recommendations presented in this report reflect both the policy analysis undertaken and the practical experience generated through DIGISET. They respond to challenges identified across different countries, while recognising that no single measure is sufficient on its own. Instead, they propose a set of complementary actions covering governance, funding, capacity building, intermediary support, ethical AI, Digital Commons and cybersecurity, with the shared objective of creating more favourable conditions for the digital development of the Social Economy.

For this reason, these recommendations should be considered as part of a coherent policy agenda rather than as standalone actions. Their successful implementation will require coordinated efforts across all levels of governance, bringing together European institutions, Member States, regional and local authorities, intermediary organisations, support providers and Social Economy organisations. This will also require stronger alignment between digital, social, industrial and innovation policies, underpinned by sustained investment, long-term commitment and continuous monitoring of progress. Such a coordinated approach will be essential to ensure that these recommendations deliver tangible improvements, enabling Social Economy organisations to strengthen their digital capacity while remaining aligned with their social mission and values.

9) References

CASES – Cooperativa António Sérgio para a Economia Social. (2026). *Results of the consultation with the social economy sector: Public consultation for the National Strategy for the Social Economy*. https://cases.pt/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/ENG_CASES_Report-Public-Consultation.pdf

Cosgrove, J., & Cachia, R. (2025). *DigComp 3.0: European digital competence framework – Fifth edition* (JRC144121). European Commission, Joint Research Centre. https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/digital-competence-framework-digcomp_en

Council of the European Union. (2023). *Council Recommendation of 27 November 2023 on developing social economy framework conditions*. Official Journal of the European Union, C. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32023H1201\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32023H1201(01))

DIGISET Project. (2024, November). *Deliverable D1.1: Comprehensive list and needs of social economy organisations*.

DIGISET Project. (2025, February). *Deliverable D4.1: DIGISET Blueprint*. European Union, SMP-COSME Programme.

Drafting Committee of Social Economy Experts. (2024). *EU Code of Conduct for Data Sharing in the Social Economy*. European Commission (supporting organisation).

ESS France. (2025). *Stratégie nationale de développement de l'ESS: Position d'ESS France*. ESS France.

European Commission. (2018). *Blueprint for sectoral cooperation on skills*. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1415>

European Commission. (2020). *European skills agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience* (COM(2020) 274 final). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0274>

European Commission. (2021). *2030 Digital Compass: The European way for the Digital Decade* (COM(2021) 118 final). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0118>

European Commission. (2021). *Building an economy that works for people: An Action Plan for the Social Economy* (COM(2021) 778 final). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0778>

European Commission. (2021). *Digital Europe Programme*. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/activities/digital-programme>

European Commission. (2021). *European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)*. <https://ec.europa.eu/european-social-fund-plus>

European Commission. (2021). *Horizon Europe*. https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en

European Commission. (2021). *The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan* (COM(2021) 102 final). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0102>

European Commission. (2021). *Updating the 2020 New Industrial Strategy: Building a stronger Single Market for Europe's recovery* (COM(2021) 350 final). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0350>

European Commission. (2022). *The transition pathway on proximity and social economy*. Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs. https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/proximity-and-social-economy/transition-pathway_en

European Commission. (2022). *Transition pathway for the proximity and social economy ecosystem*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/52015>

European Commission. (2023). *2023 European Year of Skills*. <https://year-of-skills.europa.eu/>

European Commission. (2023). *Council recommendation on developing social economy framework conditions*. EU Social Economy Gateway. https://social-economy-gateway.ec.europa.eu/council-recommendation_en

European Commission. (2024). *EU Code of Conduct for Data Sharing in the Social Economy*. EU Social Economy Gateway. https://social-economy-gateway.ec.europa.eu/eu-initiatives/code-conduct-data-sharing-social-economy_en

European Commission. (2025). *A competitiveness compass for the EU* (COM(2025) 30 final). https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/10017eb1-4722-4333-add2-e0ed18105a34_en

European Commission. (2025). *AI continent action plan* (COM(2025) 165 final). https://commission.europa.eu/topics/competitiveness/ai-continent_en

European Commission. (n.d.). *Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund*. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/funding/asylum-migration-and-integration-fund_en

European Commission. (n.d.). *Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme*. <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/funding/citizens-equality-rights-and-values-programme>

European Commission. (n.d.). *European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)*. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/funding/erdf_en

European Commission. (n.d.). *InvestEU Programme*. <https://investeu.europa.eu/>

European Commission. (n.d.). *Single Market Programme*. https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/single-market-programme_en

European Parliament & Council of the European Union. (2022). *Decision (EU) 2022/2481 of 14 December 2022 establishing the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030*. Official Journal of the European Union, L 323. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2022/2481>

Impact Hub Amsterdam. (2025). *Green at Heart: Practical ESG tools for SMEs*. <https://amsterdam.impacthub.net/green-at-heart-public-article/>

TechBloc4. (2026). *Informe sobre els reptes del cooperativisme i el rol de la tecnologia per abordar-los*. TechBloc4.

10) Annexes

Below, the transcription of the post-its from the 4th of June Consortium Workshop is collected.

A) Lessons Learnt

ENGAGEMENT

- Initial focus groups could have been planned to ask what kind of activities and how they should be
- The regulation on Social SMEs delays progress
- Construct a value proposition to interact with the Social SME / SEOs
- Do you experienced that SEOs link to social ones?
- Leave months at the beginning to "activate" governance structures
- Good to engage the SEO first
- Use of local language very important
- 1-1 is key
- Co-create engagement mechanisms with Social SMEs networks
- Challenge is implementation, not awareness
- SMEs engage around business problems, not around a topic "digitalisation" – forums, functioning, impact measurements
- Social SMEs are difficult to get at events. Mobilisation is better one by one, personal touch and trust help reach more Social SMEs. Personal emails and telephone calls are needed to "reach more social SMEs"
- Scouting instead of communication → best practice: Green at Heart project
- We could have worked more closely with SEOs
- Events with real added value are needed to mobilise Social SMEs

TYPE OF ACTIVITIES / REAL NEEDS

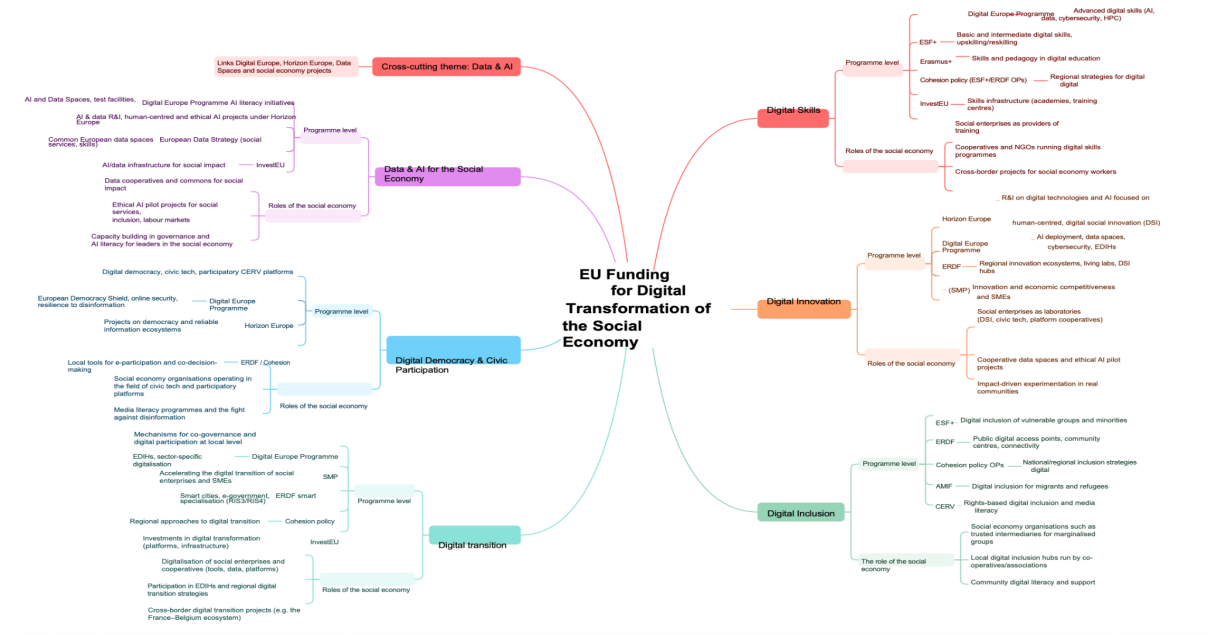
- "Construct" a value proposition to interact with the Social SME / SEOs
- Initial focus groups could have been planned to ask what kind of activities and how they should be. Needs assessment before events.
- Tech is changing too fast, it is difficult to choose one topic to work on. Forums & Launch
- Leave months at the beginning to "activate" governance structures
- Co-create engagement mechanisms with Social SMEs networks
- Peer comments outperform expert content / presentations
- Create the case for Social SMEs on AI-related digital society
- Organise more specific content sessions, adapted to SSE / More specific topics for activities (workshops, AI)
- Practical ready-to-go templates are more appreciated. Short, practical, modular format works better than long lectures
- Alliance building → good for Social Economy SMEs. Round table SEO first, SMEs next. People really want to meet and network more than follow a course or training → a good scope from our project
- Implementation requires support of a big transformation tree (roles, skills, etc.)
- Financial incentive is not enough
- Digital is (still) ahead of time → many laptops → needs to do more

- Social SMEs & SEOs are typically underfunded – working together, funding workshops were well
- I could mobilise people around the idea of working together for NEB projects – "Funding workshop"

OTHERS

- Adapt the goals and KPIs to each kind of organisation in the consortium. Some are more close to social SMEs than others.
- More flexibility to study national / regional differences
- Micro (social SMEs) vs Macro (system)
- Improve the relationship with sister projects (mandatory events under the call?)
- Beware of context / cultural differences of national & regional ecosystems
- Shared calendar with sister projects
- EU: more ecosystem activation / local forces → local/national activation
- Not much interest with sister projects
- Lack of connection between national events. "Desconnection" between countries.
- Collaboration between different EU projects
- Focus on competitiveness instead of distribution
- Insufficient synergies between sister projects
- Horrible KPIs: grants instead of participants
- Sustain periodic meetings at the end → good could be excellent
- Sister projects don't want to cooperate
- Set up a panel for sister projects
- Expectation management and clear definition of what we are (not) suitable for
- National incentives for partners only (framework conditions...)
- FTSP KPIs only – no SEOs (COSME)
- Participants would not like to have the FSTP even though they were eligible

B) SCHEME POLICY MECHANISMS



Supported by:

