

Horizontal Priorities: Digital Transformation

In this briefing sheet, written and published by the CLEAR+ LTA, we focus on *digital transformation*, as one of four horizontal priorities for the Erasmus+ programme, and consider how this should be addressed when assessing a funding application or final report for a Small-Scale Partnership (KA210) or Cooperation Partnership (KA220). This briefing sheet was developed in collaboration with [European SALTO Digital Resource Centre](#) and builds on information and guidance provided in the *Erasmus+ Programme Guide*, *Guide for Experts on Quality Assessment*, *Handbook on the Lump Sum Funding Model* and [Erasmus+ and ESC Digital Strategy - Implementation Guidelines](#).

Setting the Scene

Digital transformation is especially important as a systemic process of change where technology is used to enable new processes and methods, with the goal of increasing quality and inclusiveness of education and training. The purposeful use of digital, AI and other emerging technologies can provide new learning and communication possibilities, enhance information access, and allow for modern pedagogical approaches to enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

To support successful digital transformation and address challenges such as AI and disinformation, Europe needs education and training systems that are fit for the digital age. In line with the Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) and the two Council Recommendations of 2023 (see below), [Erasmus+](#) supports citizens of all ages in acquiring the digital skills and competences they need to live, learn, work, participate, access online services, communicate, and critically consume, create and disseminate digital education content.

The [Digital Education Action Plan \(2021-2027\)](#), sets out sets out common vision for high-quality, inclusive and accessible digital education in Europe. It aims to help national education and training systems adapt to the digital age. The Action Plan is structured around two strategic priorities and a series of underpinning actions to support change. Objective 1 focuses on fostering a high-performing digital education ecosystem, including structured dialogue, high-quality and inclusive digital content, improved digital equipment and connectivity, and ethical guidelines for the use of AI. Objective 2 focuses on enhancing digital skills and competences for digital transformation, including guidelines to foster digital literacy and updates to the European Digital Competence Framework.

The European Union's [Union of Skills \(2025\)](#) strategy highlights the importance of building skills for quality lives and jobs and will pilot a *Basic Skills Support Scheme* - so that every young person has strong reading, maths, science and digital skills - and a *STEM Education Strategic Plan* that aims to improve skills in science, technology, engineering, and maths and to prepare people for digital and clean-tech transitions.

The [Council Recommendation on the Key Enabling Factors for Successful Digital Education and Training \(2023\)](#) details four specific recommendations for Member States centred on: instilling coherent strategies for digital education, skills and competences that are aligned with the *Digital Education Action Plan*; promoting synergies and coordination and aspiring to a whole-of-government and multi-stakeholder approach towards digital education and training; encouraging digital training and capacity-building for leaders, as well as teaching and support staff; and promoting equitable and impact-focused investment in high-quality, resilient and inclusive digital education and training.

The [Council Recommendation for Improving the Provision of Digital Skills and Competences in Education and Training \(2023\)](#) emphasises that digital skills and competences are vital in almost every sector of society, and a cornerstone of social inclusion, wellbeing, active citizenship, employability and growth, whilst going on to provide a series of recommendations that include: developing relevant digital competences with pre-primary pupils; strengthening digital skills and competences in primary and secondary education; improving digital education in initial teacher training; aiding the development of advanced and specialist digital skills in VET; developing the digital skills of adults; promoting recognition and certification of digital skills; and using skills forecasting to assess future needs for digital skills.

The [European Digital Competence Framework or DigComp 3.0 \(2025\)](#), describes what is needed to be digitally competent in today's society, and provides a framework for developing digital competence among learners of all ages. DigComp 3.0 presents five competence areas (information search, evaluation, and management; communication and collaboration; content creation; safety, wellbeing and responsible use; and problem identification and solving) and 21 core competences mapped to learning outcomes statements across four proficiency levels. Whilst DigComp 3.0 focuses on digital competences for individuals, the [European Digital Competence Framework for Educators \(2017\)](#) provides a reference framework for developing educator-specific digital competences, describing 22 competences across six distinct areas (professional engagement; digital resources; teaching and learning; assessment; empowering learners; facilitating learners' digital competence).

The [AI Literacy Framework for Primary and Secondary Education](#) is set for release in 2026, through a joint initiative between the European Commission and the OECD, under the heading of *Empowering Learners for the Age of AI*. Following a short introduction to AI and AI Literacy, the framework goes on to consider learning personas, the role of educators, and the four domains of AI Literacy (engaging, creating, managing, designing) prior to listing 21 competences and the related knowledge, skills and attitudes.

A dedicated [Digital Strategy \(2024\)](#) introduces the policy framework for digital transformation, highlighting key challenges as well as ambitious targets for digital skills development, whilst underlining ambitions to increase the quality and inclusiveness of education, training and youth work. Key development policies and tools are introduced - many of which referenced in this briefing sheet - as well as confirming the underlying goals of the *Digital Strategy* for strengthening quality and impact in Erasmus+, promoting uptake of the horizontal digital priority, supporting the development of a monitoring approach, and helping to empower participants to actively contribute to and shape the digital transition. The strategy goes on to provide examples of opportunities for embedding digital and emerging technologies into Erasmus+ (and ESC) mobility and cooperation projects, during preparation, implementation and follow-up.

[European SALTO Digital Resource Centre](#) acts as a knowledge hub between policy and practice, seeking to raise the quality of digital education and youth work, and collaborating with Erasmus+ National Agencies in all countries. SALTO Digital has additionally developed a [Rubric for Identifying Good Practices on Digital Transformation](#), outlining five dimensions and three levels (emerging, developing, advanced) of digital transformation activity, which can be a useful resource for assessors not wholly familiar with this important priority.

Application Stage

SMALL-SCALE PARTNERSHIPS aim to widen access to the programme for small-scale actors and less experienced organisations. When assessing applications under this action, it is important to respect the principle of proportionality, ensuring that the proposed actions are consistent with the targeted aims, while recognising that these are smaller projects with limited funding and often more modest ambitions.

COOPERATION PARTNERSHIPS are larger projects with higher levels of funding, targeting transformation and change at individual, organisational and/or sectoral levels, including improved quality of work and practices, and strengthened capacity to work transnationally and across sectors.

Both partnership types require applicants to address at least one horizontal and/or relevant sectoral priority and, for the former, this includes the priority for *digital transformation*. Additionally, for both partnership types, applicants are encouraged to take into account all horizontal aspects of the programme (inclusion and diversity; environmental sustainability; digital dimension; participation and civic engagement) when preparing their application for funding.

In terms of how projects might implement the digital transformation priority, the following options exist:

- projects which select the digital transformation priority and which directly address this topic;
- projects where digital transformation helps in achieving other horizontal or wider programme priorities;
- projects which incorporate digital tools and methods into plans for delivering their activities.

The insights presented below, for the four core assessment criteria, should help in your assessment of the digital dimension at the point of application.

Under **RELEVANCE**, you should consider:

- how effectively the project addresses *digital transformation*, where selected as a priority.
- how convincingly the selected priority aligns with wider project objectives, target groups, their needs and plans for their engagement, and ambitions for innovation.
- whether the proposal includes credible and well-planned activities that can effectively address the selected priority (for example, comparative testing of technology-enhanced educational practices; multi-country exchange on benefits and risks of specific AI systems for teachers; collaborative development of digital education strategies).
- the extent to which transnational cooperation offers added value in the targeted activities, including through collaboration, co-creation and an exchange of practices.

Under **QUALITY OF PROJECT DESIGN**, you should consider:

- how clearly the proposal integrates the *digital transformation* into its methodology and expected results.
- whether efforts to build knowledge-skills-capacity-awareness in support of digital transformation are clear, credible and achievable, being designed to meet the needs of key target audiences and having clear plans for their engagement.

- whether actions centred on the development and testing of tools-platforms-frameworks-resources to support digital transformation are clear, credible and achievable, being designed to meet the needs of key target audiences, and having clear plans for their engagement.
- the extent to which the project includes plans for embedding digital tools (including Erasmus+ digital platforms) and learning methods that are sufficient, credible and achievable.

Under **QUALITY OF THE PARTNERSHIP**, you should consider:

- whether the required capacity and expertise exists to support digital transformation and related development and/or capacity-building actions.
- whether partner networks and outreach capacity is sufficient to reach the targeted individuals, networks and communities, including those being targeted for capacity-building and digital transformation.

Under **IMPACT**, you should consider:

- the adequacy and sufficiency of the targeted actions, both during and beyond the project lifetime, to achieve positive and sustainable impact on individuals-organisations-systems-society and deliver change that can help to advance *digital transformation* in the targeted region-country-sector-domain.
- how changed attitudes, practices and capacities for digital transformation are to be specifically measured and reported.

Final Reports for Small-Scale Partnerships

At the final report stage, Small-Scale Partnerships are judged against the same criteria used at the point of application (relevance, project design, partnership, impact) yet with a focus on results.

The insights presented below, for the four core assessment criteria, should help in your assessment of the digital transformation dimension at the final report stage.

Under **RELEVANCE**, you should consider:

- the extent to which the project effectively addressed *digital transformation*, where selected as a priority.
- the extent to which transnational cooperation added value to project delivery, including through collaboration, co-creation and an exchange of practices related to digital transformation.

Under **QUALITY OF PROJECT DESIGN**, you should consider:

- the extent to which planned methods-actions-results centred on *digital transformation* were actually delivered.
- the extent to which plans to build knowledge-skills-capacity-awareness in support of digital transformation were effectively achieved, meeting the needs of key target audiences and with evidence of active engagement.

- the extent to which plans to develop and test tools-platforms-frameworks-resources in support of digital transformation were effectively delivered, meeting the needs of key target audiences, and with evidence of active engagement.
- the extent to which the project made effective use of digital tools (including Erasmus+ digital platforms) and learning methods.

Under **QUALITY OF THE PARTNERSHIP**, you should consider:

- the extent to which partner staff and networks were engaged as a means of reaching and effectively engaging the targeted individuals and communities, supporting digital transformation through the targeted development and/or capacity-building actions.

Under **IMPACT**, you should consider:

- the extent to which the targeted actions were sufficient to achieve positive impact on individuals-organisations-systems-society and for delivering change that can positively impact *digital transformation* in the targeted region, country, sector or domain.
- the extent to which changed attitudes, practices and capacities for digital; transformation were effectively measured and reported.

Additional insights into scoring bands and thresholds for SMALL-SCALE PARTNERSHIPS can be found in the [Expert Briefing Sheet for KA210 Final Reports](#).

Final Reports for Cooperation Partnerships

At the final report stage, Cooperation Partnerships focus solely on Work Packages defined at the point of application, and on the quality and extent of achievement of all planned tasks and deliverables.

As a guiding principle, your assessment should focus on *the extent to which the project was implemented in line with the approved grant application*, as per Annex 2 of the beneficiary agreement, including reflections on horizontal priorities as a part of the overall assessment.

Efforts to address the *digital transformation* in any aspect of project delivery, should be predominantly addressed under **WORK PACKAGE 1**, reflecting holistically on eventual project implementation and comparing this to the original project proposal. Where a beneficiary has selected *digital transformation* as a named priority at the point of application, it is especially important to reflect on the extent to which project delivery actively contributed to this priority, according to insights presented in the final report.

You might also reference this in **OTHER WORK PACKAGES**, where relevant actions were integrated into the original project design. In such cases, it is important to focus on the nature, extent and quality of task and output delivery, highlighting significant changes as well as positive aspects of project, task and output delivery that merit recognition.

Additional insights into scoring bands and thresholds for COOPERATION PARTNERSHIPS can be found in the [Expert Briefing Sheet for KA220 Final Reports](#).