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Final Report Theme 2 "*Evaluation of digitalisation interventions for the benefit of citizens, businesses and governments*"

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APPENDICES

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ANNEX 1. LIST OF DOCUMENTS ANALYSED

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Strategic framework and programming documents

European documents

1. Digital Compass 2030 – a strategic document of the European Commission defining the EU's targets for digitalisation:
    - developing basic and advanced digital skills;
    - secure and high-performance infrastructures;
    - digitisation of enterprises (SMEs, start-ups, industry 4.0);
    - interoperable digital public services.
2. Digital Agenda for Europe and the Commission's Communications on the Green and Digital Transition – the general policy framework for the ERDF, ESF+ and cohesion funds.
3. Digital Europe Programme – an EU financial instrument for the development of advanced digital capabilities (AI, HPC, cybersecurity).
4. Agenda for a smarter and greener Europe (2021–2027) – strategic guidance for investments in digitalisation, closely linked to the STEP initiative – Strategic Technologies for Europe.
5. Digital Skills Agenda

National documents

1. Romania-EU Partnership Agreement 2021–2027, approved by *EC Decision C(2022) 5132* – framework document for the programming of European funds, including the digital component (ERDF and ESF+).
2. National Strategy on the Digital Agenda for Romania 2020 – reference document for the digital development directions (e-government, e-commerce, e-health).
3. National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2030 – includes the digitalisation of the administration and technological innovation as pillars of sustainability.
4. National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) – Pillar II, Component 7 "Digital Transformation": databases, government cloud, digital skills.
5. The Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3) of the Centre Region – defines the regional priority digital areas.
6. Centre Regional Programme 2021–2027, Priority 2 "A Digital Region" – direct basis of the evaluation.

Regional Documents

1. Performance framework of the Centre Regional Programme 2021–2027 – result and impact indicators.
2. The evaluation plan of the Centre RP – approved by *the Monitoring Committee Decision no. 16/2023*.

Applicable regulations and rules

European legislation

1. Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 – on the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund.
2. Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 – common provisions for the Structural Funds (ERDF, ESF+, CF, JTF).
3. Commission Regulation (EU) 2023/2831 of 13 December 2023 – on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid.

4. Commission Regulation (EU) 2023/2832 of 13 December 2023 – on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid granted to undertakings providing services of general economic interest (SGEI).
5. Delegated Regulation (EU) 240/2014 – European Code of Conduct on Partnership.

National legislation

1. GEO no. 133/2021 – financial management of European funds 2021–2027.
2. GEO no. 122/2020 – streamlining the decision-making process on non-reimbursable external funds.
3. GD no. 873/2022 – rules for eligibility of expenses in the 2021–2027 programmes.
4. GD no. 936/2020 – institutional framework for coordination, management and control.
5. Law no. 277/2021 – approval of GEO 122/2020.

Methodological documents and evaluation guides

1. Guide for the elaboration of the Cohesion Policy Evaluation Plans 2021–2027 (MEF, June 2022).
2. EVALSED – Evaluating Socio-Economic Development (European Commission) – methodology for evaluating process, result and impact.
3. EVALSED Sourcebook – tool for qualitative and quantitative evaluation of interventions.
4. EIB (European Investment Bank) Handbook – Digitalisation and Competitiveness in the EU (2023) – benchmarking for SMEs.
5. Centre PR Evaluation Plan 2021–2027 – official document of the Centre RDA.

Studies, analyses and thematic evaluations

European and International Studies

1. DESI (Digital Economy and Society Index) 2023–2024 report – measures the progress of EU digitalisation.
2. EIB Report 2023 – *Digitalisation in Europe 2022–2023: Evidence from the EIB Investment Survey*.
3. OECD Digital Government Index 2023 – assessment of the digitalisation of public administrations.
4. WWF and Greenpeace Romania (2023–2024) – analyses on digital infrastructure and sustainability.
5. European Commission – "Shaping Europe's Digital Future" – reference for SO 1.2.
6. EU Data Strategy (2020) – foundation for the interoperability of public systems.

National and regional studies

1. EIB analysis (2023) – the Romanian SMEs level of digitalisation (38% use advanced technologies).
2. The study "Digitalisation of SMEs in Romania – An assessment of the level of digitalisation" (EIB, 2023).
3. National Strategy for the development and support of Digital Innovation Centres in Romania 2024–2027 (MCID).
4. Report on the implementation of the Digital Compass in Romania (EC, 2024).
5. National Digital Skills Plan – MRID, 2023.

ANNEX 2. SOCIO-ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

1. ANALYSIS OF THE STATISTICAL DYNAMICS OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND DIGITAL CONTEXT – CENTRE REGION (2018–2024)

1.1 Background

At the time of the elaboration of Priority 2 – "A Digital Region", the programming base was supported by the results of the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process (EDP) and the preparatory studies related to the Smart Specialisation Strategy of the Centre Region 2021–2027 (RIS3 Centre), as well as by the specific analysis on human resources for smart specialisation and digital skills. Both documents provide key landmarks for understanding the structural needs that led to the formulation of the current objectives of Priority 2.

According to the Smart Specialisation Strategy of the Centre Region (RIS3 Centre, developed in 2020–2021), the digitalisation of the economy and the business environment is one of the strategic pillars of regional development, being identified as a condition of transversal competitiveness for all areas of specialisation (manufacturing, health, green energy, tourism, agriculture and creative industries). The document highlights that technological progress based on IoT, cloud, data analytics, artificial intelligence and robotics are transforming production structures and services, generating completely new value chains.

In the context of the Centre Region, the IT sector and the creative industries are recognised as areas of excellence, due to their direct connection with innovation, content creation and the application of digital technologies. The region already has solid initiatives, such as the digital hubs in Brașov and Sibiu, but these require expansion and integration into broader collaborative ecosystems – an idea later taken up and reinforced in the Centre Regional Programme 2021–2027 (p. 66), where it is emphasised that the success of digitisation programmes depends on the "territorial proximity of the digital innovation hubs (DIH) connected to the target market. At the same time, the RIS3 Centre signals vulnerabilities related to the human factor. The theme of human capital was a recurring one during the entrepreneurial discovery meetings, with all the actors in the quadruple helix (administration, business, universities and civil society) highlighting the lack of qualified personnel in emerging fields and the urgent need to adapt the educational system. At the time of the strategy, the Centre Region had one of the lowest rates of adult participation in continuing education (below 7%), and the technical educational infrastructure was insufficiently correlated with the demands of the digital labour market.

In addition, the study "*Human resources for smart specialisation – the needs and supply of digital skills in administration and economy" (Centre RDA, 2021)* provided a detailed diagnosis of the degree of digitalisation of the local public administration and the business environment. It showed that, in 2020, only about 30% of companies in the region had a clear digitisation strategy, and in the local public administration the level of use of digital platforms was low, especially in communes and small towns. The study identified several concrete needs: the lack of digital skills among civil servants, the low degree of interoperability between IT systems and the reliance on manual processes in document and data management.

At the same time, the analysis highlighted structural deficiencies in the digital education and training offer. Only 6% of companies in Romania offered ICT training to employees (compared to 20% EU average), and in the Centre Region, digital training programmes were concentrated almost exclusively in the university environment, with a limited connection with the requirements of companies. The level of basic digital literacy was also low: only 31% of the adult population had basic digital skills, compared to 56% at EU level.

Based on these findings, the regional programming documents have integrated into the structure of Priority 2 a few measures aimed at addressing these shortcomings. These include:

- financing investments in digital equipment and applications for SMEs and public institutions;
- supporting staff training in digital skills (including by aligning with the European DigComp framework);
- the creation of a regional pilot platform for open innovation and Smart City solutions;
- operationalisation of regional digital hubs (Digital Innovation Hubs) in Brașov and Sibiu, acting as an interface between the public, private and academic sectors.

The analysis presented in this annex provides a detailed picture of the evolution of the economic, social and digital context of the Centre Region in the period 2018–2024. It has the role of substantiating the assessment of the relevance of the objectives of Priority 2 – "A Digital Region" – within the Centre Regional

Programme 2021–2027, in relation to the dynamics of the main macroeconomic, demographic and digital transformation indicators. The information comes from official sources such as the National Institute of Statistics (NIS), Eurostat (EDGAR, ESTAT and EU-LFS databases), as well as from the European Commission's 2024 Country Report (Annex 17), complemented by internal analyses and data collected during studies and interviews with beneficiaries.

1.2 Economic evolution

Economic evolution (2021–2024)

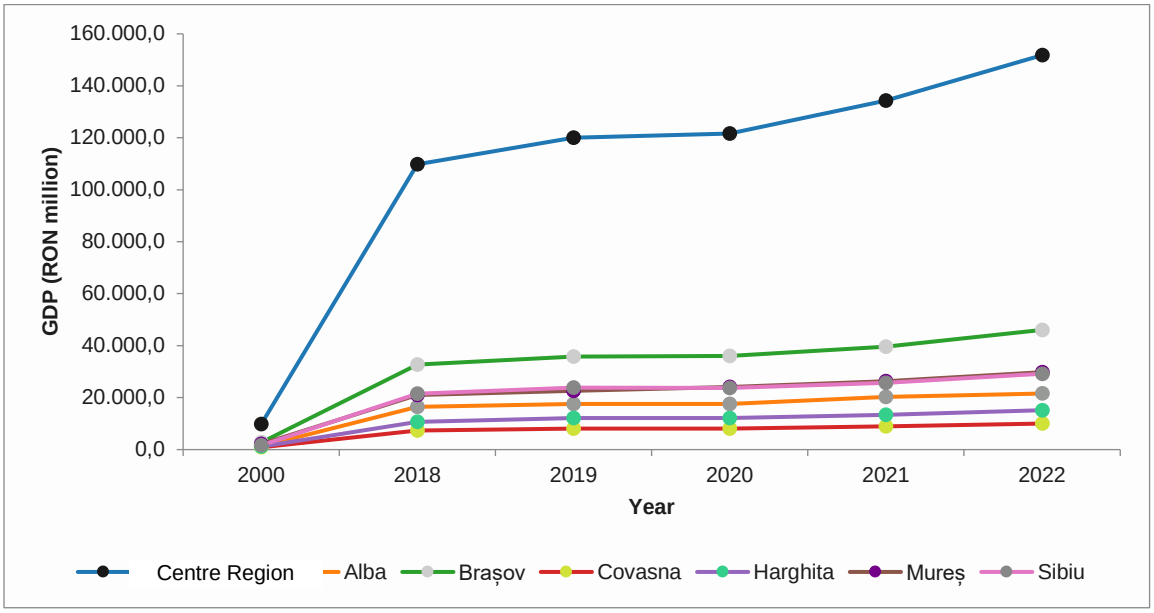
The Centre Region has recorded solid economic growth in recent years, supported by competitive industries and the consolidation of the Brașov–Sibiu–Mureș economic poles. Regional GDP increased from **€23,552 in 2018** to **€34,805 in 2023**, equivalent to around **71% of the EU average** and **75% of the Romanian average**. This dynamic confirms the resilience of the regional economy and its ability to adapt to post-pandemic structural changes. At the same time, steady economic growth supports the maintenance of a **favourable framework for digitalisation** but **does not reduce territorial differences** in digital infrastructure and technological skills.

Table 1. GDP evolution 2018 - 2023

Year	EU	Romania	Centre Region
2018	13,557,078.03	206,201.18	2,355.64
2019	14,114,688.41	224,767.37	25,272.06
2020	13,571,010.83	221,075.46	25,124.22
2021	14,794,354.79	242,260.45	27,257.14
2022	16,143,762.56	281,761.4	30,419.08
2023	17,193,780.19	324,368.57	34,804.61

Source: Eurostat Gross domestic product (GDP) at current market prices by NUTS 3 region

Figure 1. GDP evolution in the Centre Region and component counties



Source: INS TEMPO (CON103I) – GDP in current prices

The most dynamic counties in the region are Brașov, Sibiu and Mureș, which together generate almost two-thirds of the regional GDP value, followed by Alba, Harghita and Covasna. In 2022, Brașov reached a GDP

of 46 billion lei, Mureș 29.8 billion lei, and Sibiu 29 billion lei. On the other hand, Harghita and Covasna remained at levels of approximately 10–15 billion lei, which confirms the persistence of intra-regional gaps.

The analysis of the submitted projects shows that counties with a solid and diversified economic structure such as Brașov, Mureș, Harghita, Alba and Sibiu dominate in terms of the number of applications and the total eligible value. Brașov is in first place, with 79 projects and a cumulative value of approximately 88.3 million lei, followed by Mureș with 71 projects (78.9 million lei) and Harghita with 52 projects (79.9 million lei). Alba submitted 46 projects (75.7 million lei), Sibiu 42 projects (64 million lei), and Covasna – 18 projects (30 million lei). This distribution faithfully reflects regional economic realities: areas with intense industrial activity, developed infrastructure and high density of small and medium-sized enterprises have shown a greater capacity to initiate and manage digitisation projects.

Figure 2. Distribution of projects by counties - Centre Region

Source: Centre RDA

The analysis also highlights that counties with lower GDP submitted fewer projects, mainly due to limited administrative capacity and more modest resources available for the development of financing applications. However, the growing interest in digital transformation is found in all counties, signalling a trend of gradual expansion of digitalisation at regional level.

The private sector, represented mainly by small and medium-sized enterprises, submitted 212 projects, with a total eligible value of approximately 160 million lei. These projects aim to digitise internal processes, automate workflows, introduce management software solutions and expand the digital presence of companies. In parallel, the public sector submitted 127 projects, worth a total of over 256 million lei, focused on modernising the IT infrastructure, developing electronic platforms and increasing the degree of interoperability between institutions.

The results confirm a direct correlation between the level of economic development, the density of SMEs and the ability to participate in funding calls. Areas with higher economic performance have not only more solid financial resources and technical skills, but also a local administration that is more active in attracting European funds. At the same time, separate calls for the private sector and the public sector have allowed for a wider coverage of regional needs, helping to reduce the digitalisation gap and strengthen the regional innovation ecosystem. Overall, the distribution of projects reflects a dynamic region, where economic growth and digitalisation are mutually supportive, but which still needs differentiated measures to balance the participation of all counties in the digital transformation process.

This correlation demonstrates that economic development supports and accelerates the digitisation process, transforming the Centre Region into an area where private and public investments together contribute to strengthening competitiveness and reducing territorial gaps.

Regional disparity indicators (2022–2027)

According to data from the National Prognosis Commission (Macroeconomic forecast in territorial profile 2023–2027), the Centre Region remains slightly above the national average, with a GDP per capita equivalent to approximately 94–95% of Romania's average over the entire analysed period.

Table 2. GDP/capita Centre Region

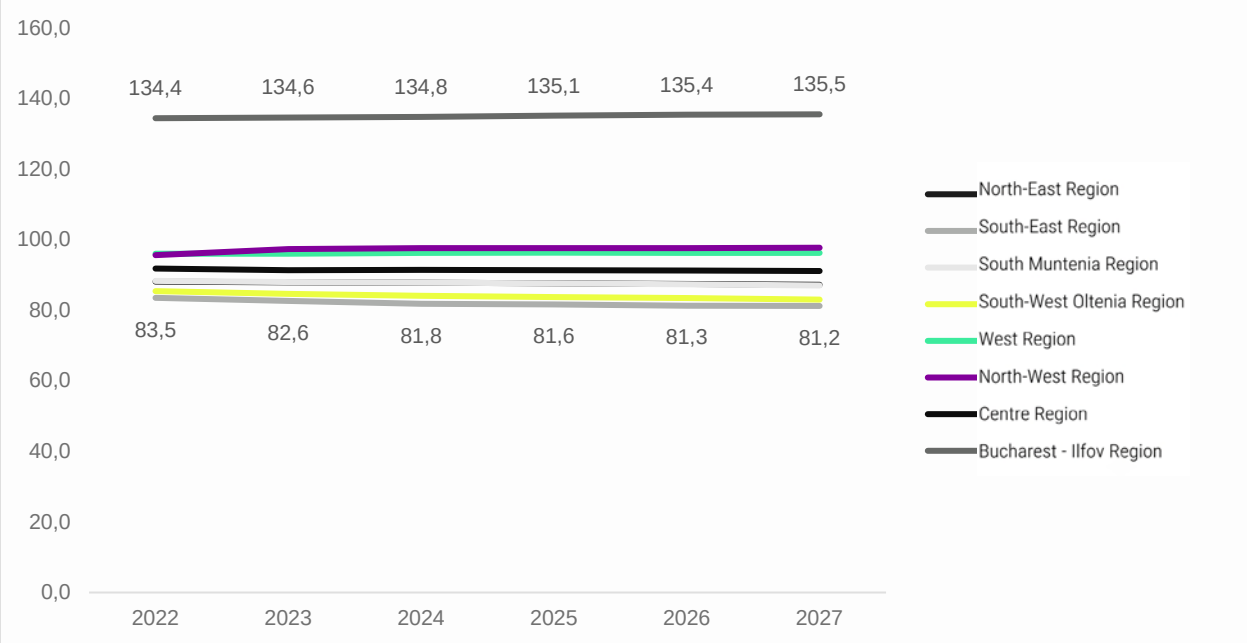
Year	Centre Region – GDP/capita (% of national average)	Centre Region – Net monthly salary (% compared to the national average)
2022	94.2	91.8
2023	94.9	91.3
2024	94.8	91.4
2025	94.7	91.3
2026	94.6	91.2
2027	94.6	91.1

Source: National Prognosis Commission – Macroeconomic forecast in territorial profile 2023–2027 (autumn edition, 2024)

The disparity indicators show that the Centre Region maintains a stable level of development, ranking immediately after the West and North-West regions. The projected GDP/capita for 2027 represents 94.6% of Romania's average, which confirms a mature economy, but with a moderate pace of convergence. At the same time, the average net monthly wage (91% of the national average) indicates a slight undercompensation of the workforce in relation to economic performance, specific to an economy based mainly on manufacturing industry and not on digital services.

Figure 3. Disparity indices

Note: Disparity Index projections. Average net monthly salary earnings, 2022-2027 (Romania = 100%)



Source: National Prognosis Commission – Macroeconomic forecast in territorial profile 2023–2027 (autumn edition, 2024)

The relative stagnation of economic convergence highlighted by these indicators can be explained by the low digital maturity of SMEs, low innovation and insufficient digital skills of the workforce, themes detailed in the following sections. Therefore, reducing regional disparities cannot be supported only through

economic growth, but also by **accelerating digital transformation and constant investments in education and innovation** – directions that are found in the objectives of Priority 2 of Centre RP.

Demography and the labour market

Demographic data show that the Centre Region is experiencing a **moderate but persistent population decline**, a trend common to most regions of Romania. According to **NIS – Tempo Online data (POP107A, 2021),** the gross rate of change of the population was, on average, **–4.1‰ in the period 2013–2021**, compared to **–5.6‰ at the national level**, which indicates a demographic decline lower than the country average.

The depopulation trends are more pronounced in the peripheral counties (**Harghita, Covasna and the rural area of Alba County**), being determined by external migration, the ageing of the population and the decrease in the birth rate. On the other hand, the large urban centres – **Brașov, Sibiu and Târgu Mureș** – register a relative demographic stability, supported by the economic, university and high value-added jobs attractiveness.

This development has **direct implications for the labour market**, especially in digital and innovative sectors, where there is already a shortage of young and skilled workers.

*Against the background of a slight demographic decrease, the Centre Region remains among the regions with **the lowest level of unemployment in Romania**, according to **Eurostat and** **NIS data – Tempo Online (FOM107A).***

Table 3. Unemployment rate (%), 2019–2023

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
European Union (EU27)	4.2	4.7	4.5	3.8	3.8
Romania	1.6	2.2	2.1	1.7	1.6
Centre Region (RO12)	3.9	5.3	3.9	3.6	3.3

Source: Eurostat – Unemployment rate by gender, age, education level and NUTS 2 regions (%)

The unemployment rate in the Centre Region ranged between **3.3% and 5.3% between 2019–2023**, remaining consistently below the **European Union average (≈4%)** and **close to the national average**. The temporary increase in 2020 (5.3%) reflects the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market, followed by a rapid return to stable levels of **around 3.6–3.3%** in 2022–2023.

This **low unemployment rate** confirms **the resilience of the regional economy**, but also **the structural pressures on the available workforce**, especially in the technical and digital sectors. While the large urban centres – **Brașov, Sibiu, Mureș** – manage to attract and retain qualified personnel, the peripheral areas (**Harghita, Covasna, rural Alba**) face **external migration, demographic ageing** and **shortage of technical skills**.

Therefore, to support **the digital transformation of SMEs and the regional economy**, it is essential **to link employment and training policies** with digitalisation strategies. They should cover:

- **development of STEM skills**,
- **training young people in digital and technological fields**,
- **attracting qualified human resources** from other regions or from the diaspora.

At the same time, partnerships between the educational and business environments are essential for adapting university and professional curricula to the real needs of the regional labour market.

Dynamics of the number of SMEs and local units active in the Centre Region (2008–2023)

According to **NIS – TEMPO Online (INT101U)** data, the number of active local units in **the Centre Region** has steadily increased in the last 15 years, from **68,001 in 2008** to **84,105 in 2023**, marking an **increase of about 24%.**

Table 4. Evolution of the number of active local units in the Centre Region and component counties (2008–2023)

Year	Centre Region	Alba	Brașov	Covasna	Harghita	Mureș	Sibiu
2008	68,001	8,270	20,287	4,734	8,585	13,989	12,136
2017	64,343	8,161	19,801	3,996	7,343	13,630	11,412
2018	67,087	8,536	20,696	4,155	7,504	14,209	11,987
2019	70,080	9,110	21,484	4,329	7,804	14,711	12,642
2020	73,958	9,745	22,763	4,517	7,979	15,490	13,464
2021	77,142	10,221	23,810	4,589	8,174	16,062	14,286
2022	79,104	10,416	24,563	4,655	8,272	16,361	14,837
2023*	84,105	10,996	26,260	4,900	8,735	17,284	15,930

*Source: National Institute of Statistics – TEMPO Online, indicator INT101U**Provisional data (NIS, 2023)

The evolution of the number of active local establishments in the period 2008–2023 shows a **clear upward trend**, despite the economic fluctuations and pandemic effects of 2020. This dynamic reflects the strengthening of the regional entrepreneurial base and the region's ability to maintain a steady pace of new business creation, especially in urban areas.

At the county level, the data indicate a **polycentric economic profile**, with marked differences between developed and peripheral counties:

- **Brașov** remains the main economic pole of the region, with **26,260 active units in 2023**, representing over **30% of the regional total**.
- **Mureș** and **Sibiu** follow, contributing together with about **40%** of the total regional enterprises.
- **Alba** has a moderate growth, remaining around 11–13% of the regional total.
- **Harghita** and **Covasna**, although they registered a slight numerical increase (below 9,000 active units each), continue to show a low entrepreneurial density, reflecting a less diversified local economy.

Overall, the Centre Region is distinguished by high **economic resilience** and stable **entrepreneurial capacity**, supported by the industrial and logistics infrastructure developed around Brașov, Sibiu and Târgu Mureș. The increase in the number of active local units, in parallel with the maintenance **of a low unemployment rate (3.4–3.7% in 2023**), indicates a **tight labour market** and an **increased demand for digital and technical skills**.

Although the data presented refer to the total number of active local units, their structure is overwhelmingly dominated by **small and medium-sized enterprises (≈99.7%),** according to the NIS methodology (*Analysis of Innovation-Based Entrepreneurship*, 2021). Therefore, the positive dynamics observed at regional level directly reflect **the evolution of SMEs** and **their ability to adapt** to the economic and technological changes of the last decade.

Compared to the resident population (≈2.9 million inhabitants in 2023), the density of active local units in the Centre Region is approximately **29 units per 1,000 inhabitants**, a level higher than in 2021 (≈27.5) and comparable to the national average. This points to a **dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem**, but also **increasing pressures on the skilled labour market**, especially in the technical and digital sectors.

In conclusion, **the development of SMEs and the digitalisation process** in the Centre Region are **closely correlated with the level of local economic development** and the sectoral structure. The urban areas concentrated around **Brașov and Sibiu** act as **nuclei of the digital transformation**, benefiting from infrastructure, skilled workforce and diversified entrepreneurial ecosystems. On the other hand, the counties in the east of the region (**Harghita and Covasna**) require **additional support measures** – investments in digital skills, innovation and support services – to reduce territorial gaps and strengthen the competitiveness of SMEs.

The correlation between the dynamics of SMEs and the intensity of digitalisation

The steady increase in the number of active local units in the Centre Region, from **68,001 in 2008** to **84,105 in 2023** (NIS, TEMPO Online), confirms the strengthening of the regional entrepreneurial base and a dynamic economic environment. However, **the quantitative increase of SMEs does not automatically translate into a proportional increase in the intensity of digitalisation**.

According to the report *"Digitisation of SMEs in Romania"* prepared by **the European Investment Bank (EIB, 2023),** the level of digitisation of small and medium-sized enterprises in Romania remains substantially below the European Union average. Only **38% of SMEs** use at least one advanced digital technology (such as cloud computing, Internet of Things or artificial intelligence), compared to **the EU average of 61**%, and only **6%** of them have implemented solutions based on AI or big data (EIBIS, 2021). The EIB report also highlights a **marked regional polarisation**: "The degree of digitalisation of SMEs is positively correlated with the degree of economic development and the available digital infrastructure. SMEs in more developed regions, especially large urban centres, are more likely to use advanced technologies such as ERP, CRM or cloud' (EIB, 2023, pp. 18–19).

The same report shows that **the North-West, Centre and Bucharest–Ilfov regions** are significantly more digitalised compared to the **North-East** and **South-West** (EIB, 2023, p. 22), and Chapter **4** states that: "SMEs in the West, Centre and Bucharest–Ilfov regions report a higher level of integration of digital processes, while firms in the North-East and South-West remain at low levels of digitalisation" (EIB, 2023, p. 35).

These findings are in line with **NIS data (2021),** according to which the Centre Region had **79,171 active local units**, of which **99.7% are SMEs**. Most of them are concentrated in the counties **of Brașov (≈31%), Mureș (≈21%)** and **Sibiu (≈19%),** which generate over 70% of the regional economic activity. Harghita **(≈11%)** and **Covasna (≈6%)** counties maintain a more traditional economic structure and a lower density of SMEs.

Overall, the Centre Region is characterised by a **diversified industrial base** (production, IT, business services) and a **digital maturity higher than the national average**, but **intra-regional gaps** remain visible. Companies in more developed counties (Brașov, Sibiu, Mureș) have started to adopt **integrated solutions for digitising processes** (automation, ERP, CRM), while in Harghita and Covasna **counties operational investments** (equipment, hardware, infrastructure) still predominate.

According to the EIB (2023, p. 37), the main **barriers** to the digitalisation of SMEs are **high implementation costs (73%), lack of internal digital skills (66%)** and **low interoperability** of public and private infrastructure (42%). Also, only **a quarter of Romanian SMEs (25%)** have invested in research and development or innovation, and the percentage of those that have made investments in energy efficiency is **25%,** compared to **the EU average of 37%** (EIBIS 2021).

For the Centre Region, these trends are similar to the national average, but the internal gaps between counties are visible.

- **Brașov** and **Sibiu** – the counties with the highest density of SMEs and a diversified industrial base – are also the most advanced in the adoption of digital technologies.
- **Mureș** maintains a positive dynamic, but with a mixed profile between industry and digital services.
- **Harghita** and **Covasna**, although they recorded an increase in the number of companies (8,735 and 4,900 active units in 2023), remain below the regional average in the adoption of digital solutions, reflecting a more traditional economy and a reduced capacity for innovation.

Thus, **the intensity of the digitisation of SMEs** in the Centre Region is **correlated with the degree of economic and urban development** rather than with the absolute number of companies. Areas with mature entrepreneurial ecosystems and high-performance digital infrastructure (Brașov, Sibiu) generate a higher concentration of innovative SMEs, while rural and mountainous areas in the east of the region continue to show **a slow pace of digital transformation**.

This discrepancy confirms the need for **differentiated policies**: support for innovation and emerging technologies in urban centres and **digital literacy measures and IT&C infrastructure** in low-density counties.

Productivity, competitiveness and employment

According to Eurostat – EDGAR data, the Centre Region reached a productivity level of 85.9% of the European Union average in 2022, above the Romanian average (80.7%), but the economic structure remains oriented towards low value-added industries. The Regional Competitiveness Index (RCI 2.0) places the region at 52.5 points out of 100, an intermediate position that reflects a significant growth potential through innovation and digitalisation.

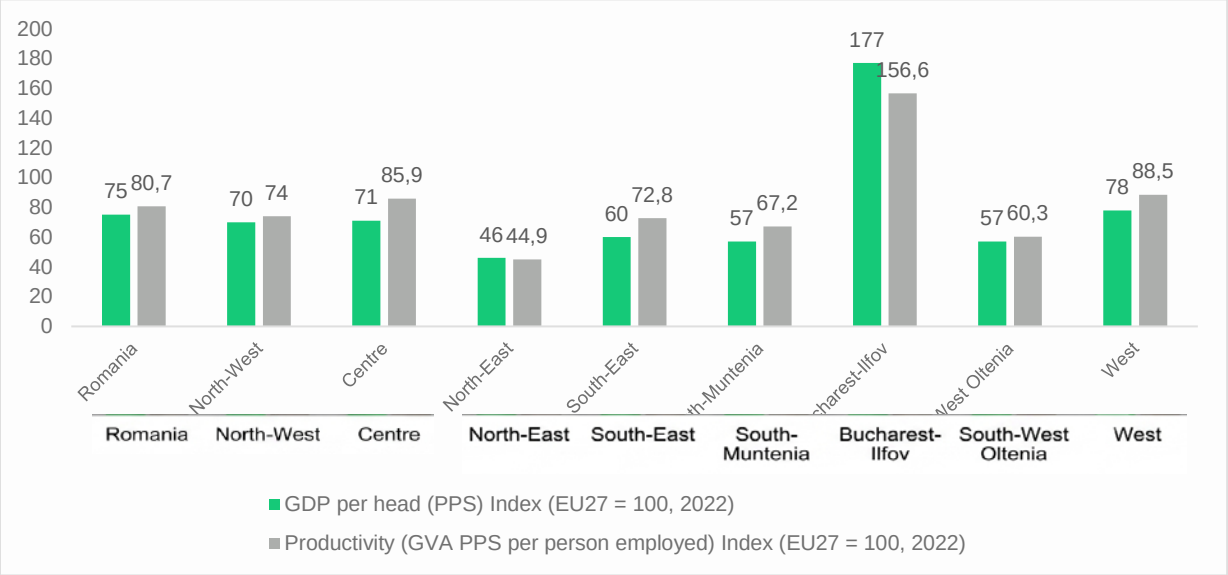
Table 5. Regional Competitiveness Index Centre Region

Indicator (2022)	EU27 = 100	Romania	Centre Region
GDP/capita (PPS)	100	75	71
Productivity (GVA/employee)	100	80.7	85.9
GDP growth per capita 2013–2022	1.4%	4.1%	2.9%
Regional competitiveness index (RCI 2.0)	100	56.5	52.5
Employment in high-tech (% of total employees)	4.9	3.4	2.3

Source: Eurostat – EDGAR, Country Report 2024

The Centre region has **a productivity above the national average**, but **an economic structure still dependent on traditional industries**. Only **2.3% of the workforce** works in high-tech sectors, below the EU average (4.9%), which explains the strategic need to invest in digitalisation, research and innovation. At sectoral level, Eurostat employment data in high-tech industries and knowledge-based services show a slightly positive development over the period 2020–2024. The number of employees in these areas increased from 21.5 thousand in 2020 to 27 thousand in 2024, but their share remains modest – about 7–8% of total industrial employment and only 2.3% of total employees, compared to the EU average of 4.9%. The Centre Region contributes about 10% to the national total of employees in the high-tech sectors, ranking third after Bucharest–Ilfov and North-West.

Figure 4. Regional disparities in GDP/capita and labour productivity 2022



Source: Eurostat

This growth, while significant, is not enough to reduce the gap with the European average and confirms that the structural transformation towards an innovation-based economy is still in its infancy.

According to **NIS and NAE data**, the unemployment rate in the Centre Region remained at a consistently low level in 2021–2023, between **3.4% and 3.7%,** well below the national average (≈ 5.5%). This low level

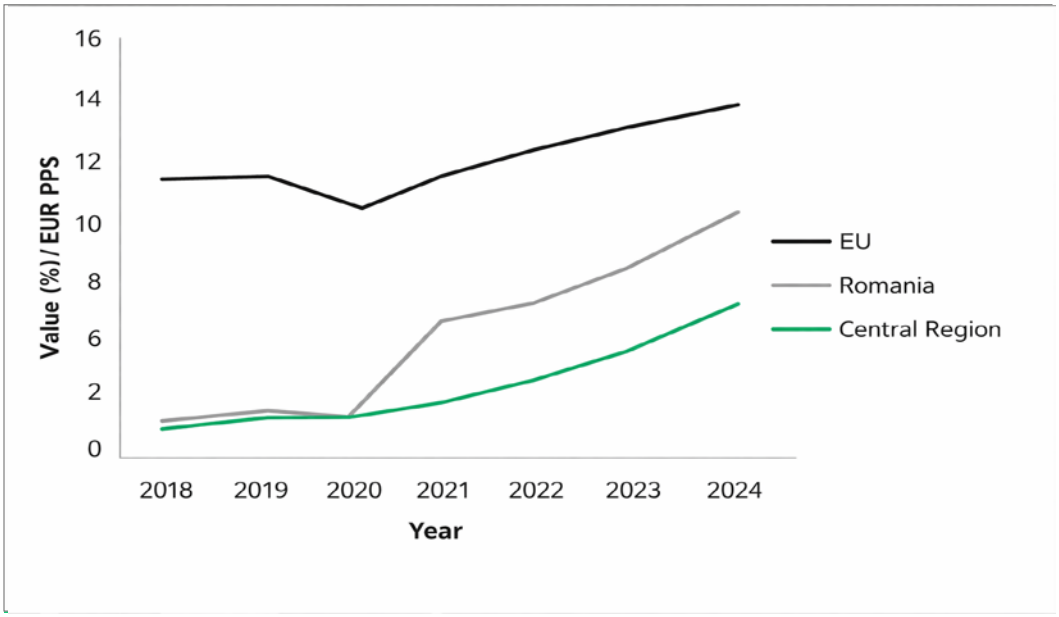
of unemployment indicates a **steady demand for labour** and a high degree of absorption of the working population, but also implies structural **pressure on the labour market**, especially in the technological and digital sectors, where specialised skills are lacking.

The density of SMEs increased slightly, reaching **28.3 SMEs per 1,000 inhabitants** in 2023, a sign of a dynamic regional economy, but with strong territorial differences between urban centres (Brașov, Sibiu) and rural areas (Harghita, Covasna).

Human capital, education and training

Adult participation in education and training in the Centre Region has increased significantly in recent years, from **0.7% in 2018 to 5.6% in 2024**, according to **Eurostat data (trng_lfse_04).** The more than eightfold increase in a six-year period reflects a significant post-pandemic improvement, amid the expansion of digital training offer and the integration of online platforms into adult education programmes.

Figure 5. Adult participation in education and training (2018–2024)



Source: Eurostat, trng_lfse_04 – participation in education & training (last 4 weeks)

However, the region remains **around 3 percentage points below the national average (8.9%)** and more **than twice below the European Union average (13.5%),** indicating a structural need to strengthen digital skills and manage change among the working population.

This trend is confirmed by **the study "Human Resources for Smart Specialisation" (Centre RDA, 2021)** and the **Centre Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3 Centre 2021–2027),** which identifies **the digital skills shortage** as one of the main constraints in the digital transformation process of the regional economy.

Digital skills and the use of technologies in the workplace

A key indicator for the level of digitalisation of the regional economy is the proportion of employees who use the internet for professional purposes. According to the Eurostat database, only 34.8% of employees in the Centre Region use the internet at work, compared to 41.8% at national level and 61.3% at European Union level.

Table 6. Employees who use the internet for professional purposes (2023)

Region	% employees with internet access
EU27	61.3
Romania	41.8

North-West	39.4
Centre	34.8
North-East	31.9
South-East	23.7
South-Muntenia	28.4
Bucharest–Ilfov	62.7
South-West Oltenia	22.5
West	36.7

Source: Eurostat – Use of computers and the internet by employees, by NACE Rev.2 activity and NUTS 2 region

These data confirm a low level of digitalisation of the workforce in the Centre Region, which is well below the European average and even below the national average. Bucharest–Ilfov is the only region with values close to the EU average, which accentuates the intra-national digital divide.

The lack of modern ICT infrastructure and advanced digital skills limits the ability of SMEs in traditional industry and services to adopt emerging technologies (cloud computing, AI, RPA). According to the RIS3 Centre (2021–2027), this level reflects a "reduced digital maturity of the business environment and a lack of incentives for deep transformation."

In local public administration, around 40% of institutions offer basic digital services (online payments, e-portals, digital forms), but interoperability between systems remains low. The municipalities of Brașov, Sibiu and Alba Iulia stand out as examples of good practices, while many communes have remained at the level of informative digitisation.

In conclusion, the digitalisation of the regional economy remains an uneven and fragmented process, and the interventions foreseen under Priority 2 – A Digital Region continue to be fully justified, especially for increasing digital skills, supporting SMEs and accelerating the transition to automated services and processes.

Perception of beneficiaries

To complement the documentary and statistical analysis, the evaluation team carried out an **online survey addressed to applicants for funding under Priority 2 – "A Digital Region" between August and September 2025**. The survey aimed to capture the perception of current and potential beneficiaries (both **local public authorities – LPAs** and **small and medium-sized enterprises – SMEs**) on the relevance of the interventions, the clarity of the guidelines and the anticipated impact of the funded projects.

Sample structure

- Total number of respondents: 67 out of how many?
- Of which: **35.8%** of respondents come from **local public authorities** (county, municipality, city or commune), **14.9%** represent **partnerships between ATUs**; **31.3%** are **small or medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); 17.9%** are **micro-enterprises.**
- Geographical distribution: all 6 counties of the Centre Region, with a higher concentration in Brașov, Sibiu and Mureș.

Key results

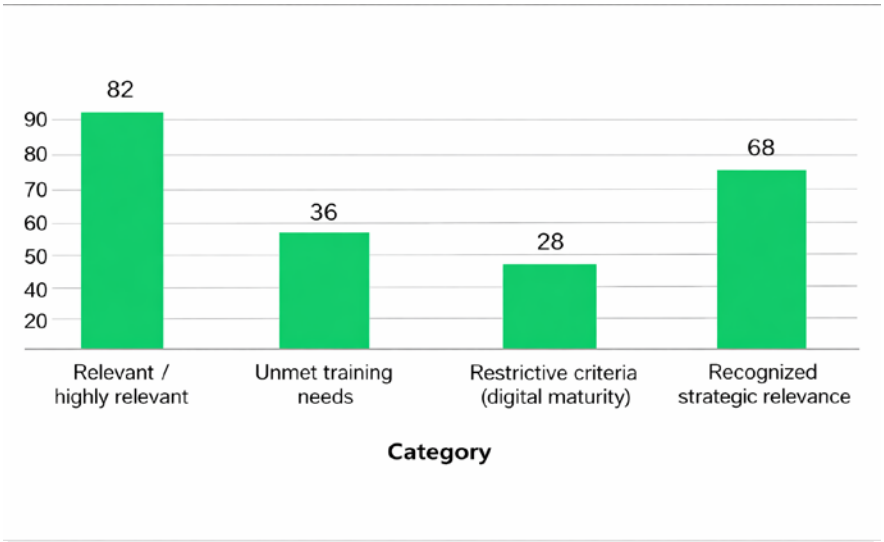
1. Relevance of interventions:

- Over 82% of respondents believe that the calls for projects launched under Priority 2 were relevant or very relevant to their digitalisation needs.
- In the case of LPAs, the relevance is perceived above all in relation to the digitisation of public services and interaction with citizens.

- SMEs mainly mentioned the need for financing for equipment, management software and automation solutions (ERP, CRM).

The results show that most respondents (around 82.1%) consider that the funding provided through Priority 2 was relevant or very relevant to the needs of their organisations. In the case of local public authorities (LPAs), the relevance is especially associated with the possibility of modernising the interaction with citizens and the digitisation of administrative processes (implementation of online payment platforms, electronic portals, digital registers). In the case of SMEs, the relevance is focused on the digitisation of internal processes, the acquisition of equipment, ERP/CRM software and production flow automation solutions.

Figure 6. Perception of the relevance of the intervention



Source: Online survey of applicants for funding under Priority 2 – 'A Digital Region'.

However, around 36% of respondents believe that the calls did not fully cover their digital training and skills needs, and 28% believe that the eligibility criteria for digital maturity have limited access to companies at an early stage of the digitalisation process. These results confirm the general alignment of the interventions with the needs of the beneficiaries, but also indicate a need to diversify the types of support, by:

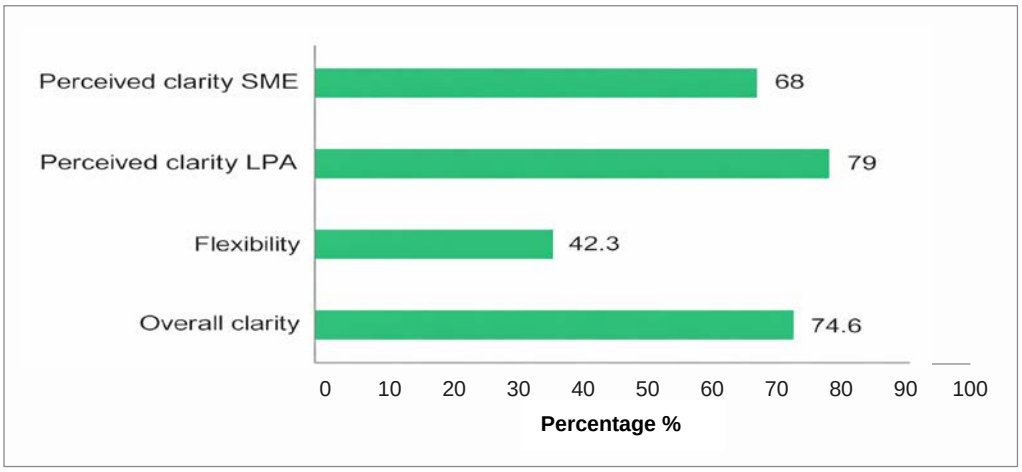
- funding for the development of internal digital skills,
- support for interoperability and integrated services,
- flexibility of access criteria for small SMEs and public entities in rural areas.

The conclusion of the survey is that the strategic relevance of Priority 2 is recognised by more than two-thirds of beneficiaries (≈ 68%), but the perceived impact could be amplified by a more differentiated approach to local and sectoral needs.

2. Clarity of guidelines and criteria

- 74.6% of respondents consider that the guidelines were clear, but only 42.3% appreciate them as flexible in relation to the specifics of each type of beneficiary.
- The most frequently mentioned difficulties relate to the 'interpretation of the digital maturity criteria' and the 'proportionality of administrative requirements'.

Figure 7. Clarity of guidelines and criteria



Source: Online survey of applicants for funding under Priority 2 – 'A Digital Region'

The results show that the majority of respondents (around 75%) appreciate the clarity of the funding documentation but also highlight the fact that only a part of the beneficiaries consider that the guides have managed to adapt sufficiently to the diversity of eligible organisations.

Among LPAs, clarity is perceived as higher (79%), due to administrative experience and familiarity with procedural language. In contrast, for SMEs, only 68% consider the guidelines clear enough, citing difficulties in interpreting the technical conditions and digital maturity requirements.

3. Estimated impact of the projects:

- 85% of the beneficiaries estimate an improvement in the internal efficiency of the activity through the implementation of projects;
- 72% anticipate an increase in the quality of digital services offered to the public;
- 69% of SMEs say that the project will contribute to increasing competitiveness.

The results confirm that interventions funded under Priority 2 are perceived as having a tangible impact on organisational performance, both in the public and private sectors. In the case of LPAs, the focus is on modernising the IT infrastructure and interoperability with other institutions, and for SMEs, the main benefits are process automation, cost optimisation and innovation capacity development.

4. Barriers identified:

- Lack of internal digital skills – mentioned by 52% of respondents;
- Lack of local providers of adequate solutions – 43%;
- Long duration of the administrative evaluation and clarification process – 39%.

These barriers are more pronounced among rural SMEs and small local authorities, where human and technical resources dedicated to digitalisation are limited. The results highlight the need for complementary training programmes and local partnerships for IT services, which facilitate the sustainable implementation of investments.

5. Suggestions from beneficiaries:

- Simplification of reporting procedures and clarification of indicators;
- Introduction of funding lines dedicated to 'digital literacy' and 'integrated services';
- Increasing the transparency of the evaluation process and ensuring continuous technical assistance;
- Reducing the duration of the clarification stages and adapting administrative requirements to the specifics of smaller beneficiaries.

Conclusions:

The results of the survey confirm a generally positive perception regarding the relevance and direction of the interventions funded by Centre RP – Priority 2 but also underline the need for a differentiated approach by categories of beneficiaries.

Digitalisation is perceived as a real priority, but the pace of implementation and administrative capacity differ significantly between urban and rural areas, respectively between LPAs and SMEs. Overall, the survey supports the conclusions of the desk review: the digital transformation is evolving, and future success depends on strengthening digital skills and increasing absorption capacity at regional level.

Correlation with regional, national and European strategic documents

The objectives of Priority 2 – *"A Digital Region"* – remain in full line with the development directions set at European, national and regional level, reflecting a clear vertical coherence between the Digital Compass 2030, the Country Specific Recommendations (RST 2024), the Centre Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3) and the Centre Regional Programme 2021–2027.

According to **the Mid-Term Report Analysis (MTR, March 2025),** the country-specific recommendations for Romania in 2024 did not introduce new challenges compared to those considered in the programming, but underlined the need **to accelerate the implementation of cohesion programmes**, strengthen **administrative capacity** and **capitalise on the STEP initiative – "Strategic Technologies for Europe"** to increase industrial and digital competitiveness. MTR shows that Centre RP responds to most of these recommendations, contributing directly to the European 2030 objectives through digitalisation, innovation and balanced territorial development measures. In this context, the Centre RP proposed the inclusion of a **new priority dedicated to STEP technologies** and the adjustment of calls to support emerging sectors (digital technologies, AI, energy efficiency and biotechnologies), thus strengthening the link with European initiatives on technological sovereignty and the green and digital transition.

In terms **of alignment with the Digital Compass 2030**, the interventions of Priority 2 contribute directly to the achievement of the objectives regarding:

- increasing the share of the population with basic digital skills to 80%;
- digitisation of at least 90% of SMEs;
- development of interoperable digital infrastructures at the level of public administration.

At the regional level, **the RIS3 Centre 2021–2027** defines digitalisation as **a cross-cutting condition of competitiveness** for all economic sectors – manufacturing, health, green energy, tourism, agriculture and creative industries – highlighting the need for digital skills and innovation in business and administration. **The Centre Regional Programme** takes over these directions and operationally transposes them through Priority 2, aiming at "accelerating the adoption of digitalisation in the public and private sectors" and imposing **digital training of staff** as a mandatory component of the funded projects (Centre RP, p. 66).

Also, **the Applicant's Guides** for the two calls – *Action 2.1.1 (Digital Communities)* and *Action 2.2 (Digitisation of SMEs)* – faithfully reflect this strategic vision.

- Guide 2.1.1 supports platform interoperability, development of AI, IoT and cloud applications for smart and transparent public services;
- Guide 2.2 is based on the conclusions **of the European Semester** and the **DESI reports**, aiming to reduce the digital divides of SMEs and stimulate the adoption of advanced solutions in business processes.

Thus, from the perspective of the programming documents and CSR 2024, **the objectives and implementation mechanisms of Priority 2 are fully aligned with the European and national agenda for digitalisation and competitiveness**. The Centre RP contributes directly to achieving **the twin transitions – green and digital –** and to strengthening regional administrative and entrepreneurial capacity, confirming vertical **(EU-national-regional)** and **horizontal (between complementary calls) coherence**, according to the MTR conclusions.

The objectives of Priority 2 – *'A Digital Region'* – are fully in line with the main programmatic and strategic documents guiding digital development at regional, national and European level.

At the regional level, the directions of intervention reflect a clear continuity with the Smart Specialisation Strategy of the Centre Region 2021–2027 (RIS3 Centre), which defines digitalisation as *a "transversal condition of competitiveness"* for all areas of smart specialisation (manufacturing, health, green energy, tourism, agriculture, creative industriesRIS3 explicitly underlines the need to:

- development of digital skills in administration and economy;
- increasing the interoperability of IT systems;
- strengthening digital innovation ecosystems (regional hubs, DIHs, public-private partnerships). These directions are taken over and strengthened in the Centre Regional Programme 2021–2027, which emphasises *"accelerating the adoption of digitalisation in the public and private sectors"* and establishes *digital skills training as a mandatory element* of supported investments (p. 66).

At European level, the objectives of Priority 2 are aligned with:

- The Digital Compass of the European Union (Digital Compass 2030), which aims to:
  - increase the share of digitised SMEs to at least 90% by 2030;
  - ensure that at least 80% of the adult population has basic digital skills;
  - make public administrations '100% digital' by 2030;
- the Digital Europe Agenda and the Digital Single Market Strategy, which promote interoperability, cybersecurity and investment in digital infrastructure as pillars of European competitiveness;
- Cohesion Policy 2021–2027, through the Smarter *Europe (PO1) strategic objective*, where digitalisation is recognised as a driver of innovation and productivity.

Analysis of the strategic direction of funding – Guidelines for calls 2.1.1 and 2.2

The analysis of the two calls for projects launched under Priority 2 confirms the coherent transposition of these strategic guidelines into the funding mechanisms:

- Action 2.1.1 – Digital Communities It aims to increase the capacity of ATUs to provide integrated digital public services. The Applicant's Guide provides:
  - investments in e-government platforms and applications (document management, front-office/back-office systems, mobile applications, electronic portals);
  - the adoption of emerging technologies – AI, voice recognition, IoT sensors, smart energy monitoring systems;
  - prioritising interoperability and cybersecurity;
  - correlating projects with local digitisation strategies, IUDS or LDS, avoiding isolated interventions and ensuring strategic coherence.

The targeted results (e.g. ≥96,000 users of new or optimised digital services, ≥30 beneficiary ATUs) reflect the orientation towards the direct impact on citizens and the quality of public services.

Action 2.2 – Digitisation of SMEs Promotes the digital transformation of non-IT enterprises, by:

- investments in software and advanced digital systems (ERP, CRM, RPA, IoT, AI, VR/AR, cloud computing);
- the obligation to develop a Digitisation Plan, with initial diagnosis, vision and measurable indicators;
- supporting collaboration with Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs) and digital skills training within the company.

Through these requirements, the call contributes to achieving the Digital Compass targets and favours real digital transformation, not just the purchase of equipment.

1.3 Conclusions

The socio-economic and digital developments in the period 2021–2024 confirm that **the initial objectives of Priority 2 – A Digital Region – remain fully relevant** in relation to the current needs of the Centre Region. The increase in GDP and productivity confirms the economic stability of the region, but territorial and sectoral gaps remain significant. The low share of high-tech sectors, the gaps in the digitalisation of SMEs, the low level of digital skills and the limited participation of adults in vocational training highlight structural vulnerabilities that affect the region's ability to harness the potential of digitalisation. Progress in digital skills and the use of ICT remains below the European average, and investment in research and innovation is insufficient to support a sustainable transition to a knowledge-based economy

At the social level, the high school dropout rate and the decrease in the active population reduce the ability of the labour market to adapt to new technologies. On the economic front, insufficient investment in research, innovation and digital skills hinders productivity growth and the widespread adoption of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, automation or data-driven solutions.

Priority 2 was built in full accordance with the strategic directions defined in the *Smart Specialisation Strategy of the Centre Region 2021–2027* and in the *study "Human Resources for Smart Specialisation".* The RIS3 Centre identified digitalisation as a **cross-cutting vector of competitiveness** and proposed support measures for the development of ICT infrastructure, digital hubs and advanced skills. At the same time, the study on human resources highlighted **the shortage of digital skills** and **the need for training adapted to areas of smart specialisation** (manufacturing, health, tourism, green energy, creative industries). Therefore, the developments observed in the period 2021–2024 confirm **the continuity of these needs** and **the timeliness of the intervention directions in Priority 2**, which aim to accelerate the digital transformation and strengthen human capital in areas with regional competitive potential.

In this context, the funding and support directions offered by Priority 2 – *digitalisation of SMEs, development of digital skills, interoperability of public administration and support for innovation through advanced technologies* – continue to respond directly to the challenges identified at regional level. Therefore, supporting SMEs in the adoption of digital technologies, the modernisation of public services and the development of digital skills are directions of action perfectly aligned with the structural needs of the Centre Region and with the objectives of the European Union's Digital Decade 2030.

Thus, the analysis confirms **the continued relevance and strategic necessity** of the interventions within the Centre RP, demonstrating that the initial objectives remain consistent with the current development needs and with the vision of the Centre Region to become a competitive and digitised pole of Romania.

SWOT Summary Analysis – Continued relevance of Priority 2

This analysis integrates the results of the socio-economic diagnosis (Annex 1), the available statistical data (NIS, Eurostat, EIB, Centre RDA), as well as the information from the survey and interviews conducted among beneficiaries and institutional actors. The aim of the analysis is to synthesise the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats influencing **the relevance and timeliness of the interventions** under Priority 2 – "A Digital Region".

1. Strengths

(internal elements reinforcing the relevance of the intervention)

- **Economic performance above the national average:** GDP/capita of €34,805 (2023), equivalent to 95% of the Romanian average and 71% of the EU average, confirming a solid economic base.
- **Diversified and polycentric economy:** Brașov, Sibiu and Mureș concentrate over 65% of the regional GDP and act as poles of digitisation and innovation.
- **Growing entrepreneurial density:** +24% active local units in the last 15 years (from 68,001 in 2008 to 84,105 in 2023).
- **Stable labour market:** Consistently low unemployment rate (≈3.3–3.7% between 2021–2023), a sign of high labour demand.

- **Clear and coherent strategic framework:** RIS3 Centre, Centre RP 2021–2027 and Digital Compass 2030 converge on digitalisation, innovation and training objectives.
- **Well-targeted funding mechanisms:** Calls 2.1.1 (Digital Communities) and 2.2 (Digitalisation of SMEs) directly transpose the European and regional strategic objectives, making investments conditional on the existence of a digitalisation plan and training actions.
- **Emerging innovation ecosystems:** The Digital Hubs (DIH) in Brașov and Sibiu create premises for public-private-academic collaboration.

2. Weaknesses

(internal factors limiting the effectiveness of the intervention)

- **Digital skills shortage:** Only 33% of the adult population has basic digital skills (DESI 2023), well below the EU average (56%).
- **Low participation in continuing education:** 5.6% adults involved in education and training programmes (2024), below the national average (≈9%) and well below the EU average (13.5%).
- **Low degree of digitalisation in the business environment:** Only 38% of SMEs use at least one advanced digital technology (compared to 61% EU – EIB average, 2023).
- **Low interoperability of public systems:** Only around 40% of LPAs offer basic digital services, most of which are limited to online payments and electronic forms.
- **Major territorial differences:** Brașov and Sibiu concentrate the most digitised SMEs, while Harghita and Covasna remain at an operational level (hardware, equipment).
- **Unequal institutional capacity:** differences between large LPAs and small municipalities in accessing funds and managing digital projects.
- **Predominantly industrial orientation of the economy:** only 2.3% of the workforce works in high-tech sectors, below the EU average (4.9%).

3. Opportunities

(external factors favourable to strengthening the relevance of the intervention)

- **Favourable European strategic context:** The Digital Compass 2030 sets concrete targets (80% digital skills, 90% digitised SMEs) that support the Centre RP's priorities.
- **Emerging technologies:** AI, IoT, cloud computing, big data and RPA – explicitly supported in the applicant's guides – can generate productivity leaps.
- **Strengthening regional DIHs:** the opportunity to transform the hubs in Brașov and Sibiu into testing and innovation centres for enterprises.
- **Complementary funding:** possible synergies with the NRRP, Horizon Europe, Digital Europe and future Interreg funds (RO-HU, RO-BG) programmes.
- **High demand for local digital solutions:** 82% of respondents in the survey consider digitalisation a key priority for community development.
- **Increased interest in educational partnerships and STEM training:** the universities of Sibiu, Brașov and Târgu Mureș are developing digital courses applied to the needs of the market.

4. Threats

(external factors that may reduce the relevance or impact of the intervention)

- **Negative demographic trends:** average decrease of –4.1‰ in population (2013–2021), with emphasis on peripheral areas (Harghita, Covasna).
- **Tight labour market:** high demand for technical and IT skills in conditions of low supply.
- **Fragmentation of digitalisation:** the risk of developing siloed solutions without inter-institutional interoperability.

- **Dependence on external resources:** project implementation depends on consultants and private suppliers, which can affect sustainability.
- **Persistent urban-rural divides:** small communes lag significantly behind in the adoption of digital solutions.
- **Economic volatility and high costs:** inflationary fluctuations and IT equipment costs can delay project implementation.

5. SWOT Conclusions

The analysis confirms that **Priority 2 – 'A Digital Region' – remains strategically relevant** for the Centre Region. External strengths and opportunities provide a solid framework for strengthening regional competitiveness, but the success of interventions depends on **linking hard investments (equipment, platforms)** with **soft measures (training, change management, interoperability).** Demographic pressures and territorial gaps require differentiated approaches, and digitalisation must be understood as a systemic process, not just a technological one.

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Strong economic and urban poles (Brașov, Sibiu, Mureș) that act as nuclei of the digital transformation. • Increasing entrepreneurial density (+24% active units 2008–2023). • Low unemployment rate (≈3.3%) and resilient regional economy. • Well-targeted calls (2.1.1 and 2.2) with mandatory digitisation and training plans.	• Insufficient level of digital skills among the population (≈33% compared to 56% EU average). • Low degree of interoperability between public information systems. • Unequal digital maturity between SMEs and between counties in the region. • Still modest participation in continuing education (≈5.6% adults).
Opportunities	**Threats**
• Integration of emerging technologies (AI, IoT, cloud computing, RPA) in calls for projects. • Strengthening the regional digital innovation hubs (EDIH/DIH) in Brașov and Sibiu. • The Digital Compass 2030 targets – 80% basic digital skills, 90% digitalised SMEs – provide a framework for convergence.	• Negative demographic trends (–4.1‰ gross rate of change). • Pressure on the skilled workforce, ageing of the working population. • Risk of fragmentation of digital processes without increasing interoperability between systems. • Persistent territorial disparities between urban centres and

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ANNEX 3. INTERVIEW MINUTES

1. **MINUTE INTERVIEW EVALUATION – CONTRACTING DEPARTMENT – EVALUATION AND SELECTION SERVICE**

Date: 2025

Location: online

Participants: Representative of the Evaluation – Contracting Department of the Evaluation and Selection Service and representatives of the Association formed by CIVITTA Strategy & Consulting SA (leader) and Lideea Development Actions SRL (partner)

Calendar and call launch

The implementation of the Priority 2 calls was affected by delays compared to the initial timetable, caused by legislative, institutional and organisational factors. Among the main reasons were:

- the need for clarification of some legislative and regulatory aspects;
- protracted discussions with the European Commission;
- internal difficulties in institutional coordination and adaptation.

However, the activity has advanced significantly with the launch of calls:

- Call 2.1.1 – LPA registered a particular interest, generating a very large number of funding applications;
- Call 2.2 – SME reached about 84% of the allocation, the contracting process being completed;
- A new call for the use of the non-contracted allocation difference is envisaged.

A relevant observation is that, among SMEs, the major interest has focused on investments in production, to the detriment of those strictly oriented towards digitalisation. This shows a still low level of awareness of the importance of digital transformation, probably influenced by similar calls under Priority 1 and the NRRP, perceived as competing alternatives.

Quality of funding applications and digitalisation plans

All applications submitted under Priority 2 included digitalisation plans, as required by the Applicant's Guide. The quality of these plans was overall good to very good, with many demonstrating a coherent approach and a clear understanding of the needs and solutions targeted.

The differences in quality between the projects were mainly due to:

- the degree of involvement of the beneficiary's management (mayor, administrator);
- previous experience in implementing projects with European funding;
- the use of consultants for the elaboration and argumentation of projects.

In the case of SMEs, the most solid plans were those in which the proposed investments were correlated with the company's core activity, avoiding isolated technological acquisitions lacking strategic coherence.

Duration and organisation of the assessment process

The evaluation process was significantly influenced by operational and institutional factors. The use of external evaluators, combined with the lack of predictability regarding their availability (including periods of suspension of collaboration), has led to:

- increased dependence on internal teams, which ensured consistency and control;
- but also, to capacity pressures, especially for call 2.1.1, where the volume of projects was very high.

The internal teams of Centre RP MA have shown a sustained effort to maintain the pace and quality of the evaluation, despite the limitations of the available resources.

The changes brought by GEO 23/2023, which require all applications to go through the Feasibility Testing Stage (FTS) before eligibility verification, have generated:

- load peaks and additional pressure on the evaluators and the Centre RP MA;

- increasing the demand on applicants, as strict adherence to the criteria becomes essential – even minor errors can lead to the rejection of the project.

The overall quality of the applications was assessed as good, especially where:

- specialised consultants were involved, and
- there was direct involvement from the beneficiary's management, reflected in solid justifications and a clear strategic vision.

FTS stage and misperceptions regarding simplification (GEO 23/2023)

Frequent confusion was observed among applicants regarding the interpretation of FTS results. Many of those who obtained high scores (e.g. 89 points) misunderstood that this stage is equivalent to the final acceptance of the project, without realising that the eligibility check is also coming.

This erroneous perception led to the rejection of some projects for minor reasons, which could have been corrected if they had been flagged in time. It is therefore recommended to improve communication with applicants, by:

- automatic warning messages in MySMIS;
- additional guidance materials on the differences between FTS stages, eligibility and contracting.

Application of horizontal principles and DNSH requirements

Compared to the 2014–2020 period, there has been a significant improvement in the application of horizontal principles, especially among LPAs. Positive examples include:

- implementation of green solutions and applications dedicated to people with disabilities;
- digitised rooms for blind people;
- innovative digital inclusion initiatives.

On the other hand, for SMEs, the application of these principles has often been formal, without their effective integration into the project logic. The DNSH list (Annex 8) was, however, correctly understood and applied by the majority of applicants, in particular regarding:

- eco-friendly solutions,
- digital accessibility,
- avoiding negative environmental impact.

It is still important to verify the realism and applicability of the measures taken, in order to prevent the mere formal "ticking" of the criteria. Also, the project monitoring plan, included in the application, is a valuable tool for effectively monitoring compliance with horizontal principles – provided that its implementation is actively monitored.

Sustainability and involvement of beneficiaries' management

The degree of involvement of the applicant's management proved to be a determining factor in the quality of the project. In many cases, financial sustainability – by ensuring digital maintenance in the case of SMEs or dedicated human resources in the case of LPAs – has been a criterion between similar projects.

To consolidate long-term results, it is recommended to:

- stepping up assistance and guidance to beneficiaries with low administrative capacity;
- promoting a strategic and sustainable approach that goes beyond the logic of one-off investment and pursues real digital transformation.

2. MINUTE INTERVIEW DEPARTMENT OF REGIONAL POLICIES, PROGRAMMES – SMART SPECIALISATION SERVICE

Date: October 10, 2025

Location: online

Participants: Representative of the Smart Specialisation Service and representatives of the Association formed by CIVITTA Strategy & Consulting SA (leader) and Lideea Development Actions SRL (partner)

Context and purpose of the discussions

The meeting aimed to clarify the aspects related to the programming and implementation logic related to Priority 2 – "A Digital Region", with a focus on interventions dedicated to the digitisation of local public administrations and small and medium-sized enterprises. The discussions also focused on the attractiveness of the calls, the application of the DESI criteria, the restrictions imposed by the European Commission, as well as the difficulties encountered in the process of evaluating and contracting projects.

Issues discussed

It was mentioned that, at the time of the discussion, for the component for local public administrations (LPAs) there are no contracted projects, although several have been approved, which makes it difficult to measure the progress and efficiency of the interventions. Regarding the call for SMEs, thirty-eight projects under implementation were registered, but the level of access was below the initially anticipated level, around eighty percent of the total allocation.

The premises of the initial programming were reiterated, according to which the interventions for LPAs aimed at the digitisation of local public services and the development of Smart City solutions, and those for SMEs aimed to increase competitiveness by digitising internal processes. The reference framework used was set by the European Commission, which imposed the application of the DESI criteria to demonstrate the contribution to the European digital transformation objectives. The indicators and the reporting year were established at EU level, and Romania took as a reference the DESI 2019 set, applied uniformly in all Member States.

It was specified that the DESI criteria measure the presence of digital technologies, not their use. In practice, this has generated the perception that the indicators are partially outdated. However, they have been maintained to ensure methodological consistency and comparability of data. During the discussion, it was mentioned that certain consulting companies with technical specialisation managed to frame modern technologies – such as process automation, data analysis or artificial intelligence – in the sections corresponding to the DESI criteria, while other companies, with a generalist profile, encountered difficulties in applying the grid.

Regarding the call for LPAs, it was mentioned that the guide was considered clear and accessible, including targeting communes and small towns. For communes, the projects focused on basic digitisation – the implementation of electronic registers, document management systems and administrative management applications. Municipalities have turned to Smart City projects, aiming at integrating digital technologies into local public services. In many cases, authorities have turned to providers who have offered standardised solutions, adapted to the local level of digital maturity, but with a low degree of innovation.

For the SME call, the general perception was that the evaluation grid is restrictive, especially in relation to the DESI criteria, which describe the presence of technologies rather than the capacity for innovation or advanced use. Many consultants pointed out that the indicators did not reflect current technological realities, and the scoring criteria were considered difficult, especially for small firms.

The issue of eligibility of expenses, especially subscriptions and subscriptions for cloud services, was also discussed. In the initial phase, these expenses were excluded according to the ERDF rules, but in the summer of this year, the European Commission issued an interpretation allowing their inclusion as eligible in future calls, which was no longer applied to the active call in 2024, as it was already closed.

As for the evaluation and contracting process, it has been reported that its duration is very long, often exceeding one year. As a result, many projects have found situations where the equipment and software versions mentioned in the initial applications have become outdated or unavailable in the meantime. Additional addenda and procedures were required for the equivalence of the equipment, which generated additional delays. In some cases, beneficiaries took out loans and hired staff while waiting for purchases, which led to operational bottlenecks.

The need to introduce flexibility mechanisms to allow for the updating of technical specifications between evaluation and contracting, as well as the rapid notification of equivalences during implementation, was

stressed. In the opinion of the participants, these adjustments should be based on the desired result and not strictly on the technical characteristics of the equipment initially proposed.

At the same time, the opportunity to orient the evaluation towards measurable results was discussed, by introducing result indicators that reflect the real impact of digitalisation – improving efficiency, productivity and the quality of the services offered. In this regard, the usefulness of developing interpretative guides on the application of the DESI criteria, as well as the organisation of information sessions dedicated to beneficiaries and consultants, prior to the launch of the calls, was appreciated.

It has been clarified that the evaluation grid does not require the use of specific social networks, and interpretations of this type are unfounded. The wording in the guide is general, and the way to demonstrate the digital presence is at the discretion of each applicant. It was also confirmed that the threshold of seven DESI criteria was maintained as a benchmark for high digital intensity, with the specification that it is not eliminatory in nature but only influences the score.

During the discussion, the topic of subjectivity of qualitative criteria was also taken up. It has been shown that they are indispensable to capture the coherence and relevance of the projects, and the assessment is based on the consistency of the justifications and the clarity of the vision on the digitisation process.

Reference was made to the plans to relaunch call 2.2, expected by the end of the year, with an initial allocation of approximately four million euros. The allocation may be supplemented depending on the funds left uncontracted. The new call will include the expenses with subscriptions and cloud subscriptions, and the grid will keep the reference of the DESI 2019 criteria.

During the discussion, the need to adapt administrative processes to the accelerated pace of technological evolution was underlined. It has been shown that digitalisation advances much faster than the programming, evaluation and contracting cycles, and the lack of flexibility mechanisms risks leading to the financing of solutions already outdated at the time of implementation. Accordingly, it was agreed that a balanced approach between procedural rigour and technical adaptability is essential to ensure the efficiency and relevance of investments.

Conclusions

The discussions confirmed that the structure and logic of the programming of Priority 2 complies with the requirements of the European Commission, but the technical complexity and slow pace of administrative processes generate difficulties in implementation. The DESI 2019 criteria, although considered partially outdated, remain the benchmark used at European level, ensuring comparability between Member States.

In the context of the mid-term evaluation, the need for adjustments to allow a better correlation between market dynamics and the procedural framework was highlighted, as well as to orient funding towards concrete, measurable and relevant results for the digitalisation process. It is recommended to strengthen the capacity of beneficiaries through information sessions, clarify the interpretation of the DESI criteria and simplify technical update procedures.

It was also stressed that the success of future calls depends on the ability of the implementation system to maintain a balance between compliance, flexibility and impact orientation, so that investments effectively contribute to the modernisation of public services and to increasing the competitiveness of the business environment.

3. MINUTE INTERVIEW PROJECT MONITORING DEPARTMENT

Date: October 16, 2025

Location: online

Participants: Representative of the Centre RDA, Project Monitoring Department and representatives of the Association formed by CIVITTA Strategy & Consulting SA (leader) and Lideea Development Actions SRL (partner)

Context and purpose of the discussions

The meeting aimed to clarify aspects related to the monitoring process of projects funded under Priority 2 "A Digital Region", with a focus on mechanisms for tracking progress, management of notifications and addenda, as well as identifying implementation risks for categories of beneficiaries (SMEs and LPAs). The discussions focused in particular:

- the current state of implementation of the contracted projects and the main deviations from the initial planning;
- the functioning of the monitoring plan and how it is used to identify projects at risk;
- the type of notifications and the common causes that led to the need for changes (e.g. updating of technical specifications as a result of technological developments);
- the tools and practices used by RDA to track milestones and maintain communication with beneficiaries;
- difficulties encountered by beneficiaries in complying with procedural deadlines and administrative requirements.

Issues discussed

State of play of project implementation at P2 level, Action 2.2

At the time of the interview, there were 58 contracts signed under Priority 2. Compared to July, when only 38 projects were contracted, there was a significant increase in the contracting rate, but the implementation stage remains predominantly early.

Thus:

- About 35% of projects are in the early stages,
- About 20 projects were started during 2024,

Most are halfway through the implementation period, with ongoing activities starting from spring – summer 2025. Only 2 projects reported a higher degree of achievement, between 80% and 95%, while the rest are still in the procurement or early implementation phase.

In total, 58 notifications were submitted, of which 37 were approved, with the following distribution:

- 15 notifications regarding the update of the monitoring plan,
- 7 bug fixing notifications,
- 1 notification regarding the change of the project team,
- 8 notifications related to purchase plans.
- 9 addenda were registered, of which:
    - 3 aims to change the implementation location, and
    - 5 concern the update of the monitoring plans.

The role of the Monitoring Plan as a new management tool and the management of notifications and addenda

The monitoring plan is perceived by the Centre RDA as a useful and necessary tool, even if it represents a novelty element for the beneficiaries and is not yet fully understood by all. Although the financing contracts include a specific provision for this instrument, for many beneficiaries it has meant the introduction of new reporting requirements, in particular on milestones.

From the perspective of the Centre RDA, the procurement milestone is an essential element for monitoring progress, along with the progress report.

These tools give monitoring officers the opportunity to identify challenging projects in time and intervene preventively. In practice, the Centre RDA has shown flexibility in applying the rules regarding the fulfilment

of the first milestone, namely the completion of the acquisitions within 3 months from the signing of the contract.

Thus, based on an internal decision, it was established that the suspension of reimbursement requests would apply only to beneficiaries who did not start procurement procedures or send notifications, nor to those who made partial progress of at least 50% in carrying out public procurement. Therefore, the Centre RDA approach was a constructive one, meant to support the further implementation of the projects, avoiding administrative bottlenecks in cases where progress was visible.

The statistical analysis of the notifications confirms that most of them were based on changes in the monitoring plan, determined by the need to update the technical specifications of the equipment, as a result of the technological developments that occurred between the moment of submission of the project and the actual start of the implementation.

Consequently, most of the addenda were also aimed at updating the monitoring plans, reflecting the adaptation of the projects to the current technical conditions and new market requirements.

The notification approval process is generally fast and smooth, with no significant bottlenecks identified. However, specific cases were reported that highlighted the lack of experience of some beneficiaries or the lack of understanding of the specific requirements of European projects — for example, situations in which procurement was made and uploaded to MySMIS, but the update of the monitoring plan was not submitted.

At the same time, the monitoring plan is a management tool that allows the identification of projects at risk. When submitting a claim, the system automatically checks whether the milestones are met. If they are not, the monitoring team contacts the beneficiary to clarify the causes. An example provided was that of a beneficiary who omitted to report this indicator, considering that simply uploading purchases to MySMIS was sufficient.

Vulnerabilities and risk factors in implementation depending on the type of beneficiaries

Public beneficiaries (LPAs) are considered more vulnerable, due to constraints related to public procurement legislation (longer deadlines, possible appeals). Some ATUs are better administratively prepared, but others, smaller, depend heavily on consultants.

Private beneficiaries (SMEs) manage simplified procedures and can carry out purchases much faster on the fonduri-eu.ro website but sometimes face cash-flow difficulties or lack of qualified internal staff and a lack of a culture of European projects and understanding of the rigors of the system.

Support measures and good practices identified

The Managing Authority, through the Centre RDA, has maintained a proactive approach in the relationship with the beneficiaries, the focus being on preventing blockages and providing constant technical support. Concrete measures include:

- Organising regular online sessions dedicated to both existing and potential beneficiaries, with the aim of clarifying aspects regarding procurement plans and monitoring plans. Relevant examples are the sessions organised separately for SMEs and LPAs, where, although participation was not very high, key topics on the timing of procurement, interpretation of milestones and reporting requirements were discussed. For example, during these sessions, some practical aspects were clarified, such as the possibility of submitting several successive monitoring plans for a major procurement (e.g. at the thresholds of 50% and 80% of the purchase value), in order to demonstrate the phased progress.
- Publication of presentations and support materials on the Centre RDA website, ensuring the subsequent access of all beneficiaries to the information discussed;
- Maintaining a constant and personalised communication between the monitoring officers and the beneficiaries, by email, telephone and individual meetings, for the prompt resolution of the problems arising in the implementation;

These measures contribute to increasing understanding of implementation requirements, improving collaboration between RDA and beneficiaries and preventing delays in achieving milestones.

Simplifications and lessons compared to the 2014–2020 period

Compared to the previous period (2014–2020), significant progress has been seen in simplifying administrative flows and improving communication with beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries. Key positive developments include:

- Linking financial checks with monitoring checks, which were previously separate processes with significant gaps between them;
- Introduction of simplified costs, such as the unit cost of 500 euros for training activities;
- Faster and more efficient communication with beneficiaries, through online platforms and dedicated monitoring officers.

4. MINUTE INTERVIEW REGIOCONSULT SRL

Date: October 8, 2025

Location: online

Participants: consultant RegioConsult SRL and representatives of the Association formed by CIVITTA Strategy & Consulting SA (leader) and Lideea Development Actions SRL (partner)

General context of the discussions

The discussions aimed to identify the main difficulties encountered in the process of evaluating, contracting and implementing digitisation projects financed through the programmes dedicated to local public authorities (LPAs) and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), from the perspective of consulting firms. Aspects related to the duration of the procedures, the technological relevance of the proposed solutions, the coherence of the evaluation criteria, the degree of transparency of the selection process and the sustainability of the funded interventions were analysed.

The main objective of the discussions was to formulate findings and observations on how to conduct the digitisation calls, as well as to identify possible directions for improving the procedural and methodological framework.

Duration of the evaluation process and effects on the relevance of projects

A significant extension of the project evaluation period was found, which in many cases exceeds one and a half years between the submission of the application and the signing of the financing contract. This extended duration is mainly determined by the application of the provisions of Ordinance no. 23/2023, which makes the verification of eligibility conditional on the complete finalisation of the sessions and the establishment of the final ranking.

The effects of prolonging the evaluation process are reflected in the loss of timeliness of the proposed technical solutions. The specifications set at the time of submission often become technologically outdated by the time of implementation, affecting the relevance and efficiency of investments.

The situation described is considered a structural problem, with an impact on the opportunity and quality of digitisation projects. It highlights the need to reduce the duration of the evaluation phases and to introduce more flexible verification mechanisms, allowing for a better correlation between the time of approval and the time of implementation.

Technological adaptability and specification update

It was noted that the accelerated evolution of technologies determines substantial changes in the market for digital equipment and solutions between the design of the project and the moment of contracting. In the absence of provisions that allow the justified adjustment of the technical specifications, the beneficiaries face difficulties in implementation and risk using obsolete equipment or applications.

It was considered necessary to introduce the possibility of updating the technical specifications in justified situations, provided that the objectives and results initially assumed were maintained. Such a mechanism would help to maintain technological relevance and adapt investments to the market context.

It was also stressed the importance that the evaluation process should not be limited to the verification of administrative compliance, but should include a technical coherence analysis, focused on the achievement of the results and the functionality proposed by the project.

Differentiated approaches between urban and rural areas

Clear differences were observed between the design and substantiation of digitisation projects in urban and rural areas. In rural areas, projects were mainly oriented towards concrete needs, such as the digitisation of public services, the modernisation of administrative processes and the creation of basic digital infrastructures.

In the urban environment, and especially at the level of large municipalities, projects have been built around strategic visions of local development, oriented towards smart cities, urban mobility and integrated digital services. They were subsequently detailed and adapted in accordance with the eligibility requirements of the funding guidelines.

It was noted that, in the absence of dedicated calls, a significant part of the administrations would not have their own resources to make such investments, digitisation being perceived as a secondary priority in relation to physical infrastructure investments.

Evaluation of the criteria and transparency of the selection process

It was found that objective criteria were generally clear and easy to apply, while subjective criteria gave rise to difficulties of interpretation, leading to uneven assessments. In the absence of concrete application examples, different interpretations may lead to differences in scores for similar projects.

The lack of transparency regarding the publication of the intermediate and final scores was mentioned. Currently, the detailed results are not accessible to applicants, which makes it difficult to understand the positioning of the projects and leads to the submission of additional appeals.

It was considered that the full publication of the scores would contribute to increasing confidence in the selection process and to reducing the volume of administrative correspondence associated with appeals.

Relevance and applicability of the DESI criteria

The use of DESI (Digital Economy and Society Index) criteria in calls for SMEs was analysed. It emerged that, although these criteria provide a reference framework at European level, their strict application does not always correspond to local economic realities.

The DESI criteria were perceived as having a high degree of complexity and low relevance for small enterprises at the beginning of the digitalisation process. Because of this, the related criteria may discourage the participation of entities with real potential for digital transformation.

It was considered appropriate to simplify and adapt the DESI-based criteria so that they more accurately reflect the real level of digital maturity of companies and are easier to apply in the assessment. It was also proposed to supplement the guides with examples and methodologies of interpretation, in order to ensure uniformity in application.

Coherence of the evaluation process and the technical skills involved

As regards the organisation of the evaluation process, there have been differences in approach between development regions. These differences are explained by the varying degree of institutional experience of the structures involved in the evaluation and by distinct interpretations of the technical criteria.

The importance of strengthening technical skills at the level of evaluation structures was stressed, especially for calls in the field of digitalisation, where technological complexity requires an in-depth understanding of the proposed solutions. It was also highlighted that some procedural constraints and limitations on the eligibility of expenditure stem from negotiations at the level of the European Commission, and not from local or regional decisions.

Sustainability and use of implemented solutions

It was highlighted that the sustainability of digitisation projects directly depends on the degree of integration of the solutions into the current activity of the beneficiaries. In the absence of a clear vision of how to use

the applications after the funding is completed, there is a risk that investments will not be realised to their full potential.

The importance of a strategic approach to digitalisation was highlighted, which ensures the continuity and maintenance of the implemented solutions, as well as the need to train human resources capable of managing these systems in the long term.

The innovation dimension and the role of emerging technologies

It was noted that the current level of digitalisation of public administrations and the business environment requires, in the first instance, the consolidation of the basic infrastructure, and the innovation elements will be gradually addressed. It was considered useful to create, in the future, distinct calls dedicated to digital innovation, to support the development of advanced solutions, complementary to fundamental digitisation processes.

In relation to the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in evaluation and implementation processes, its potential for automating objective checks and reducing the duration of administrative processes was appreciated. However, it was considered that the final decision should remain within human competence, in order to ensure the accuracy of interpretation and accountability of the evaluation. The application of AI technologies was considered appropriate only to the extent that it is carried out gradually, with stages of constant testing and human control.

General conclusions

Following the discussions, it was concluded that the process of evaluation and implementation of digitisation projects requires a substantial adjustment in terms of duration, coherence and ability to adapt to technological developments.

Current procedures, while administratively compliant, fail to strike a balance between formal rigour and practical relevance. The excessive duration of the evaluation stages, the rigidity regarding the updating of technical specifications and the complexity of the DESI criteria affect the efficiency and attractiveness of the calls.

At the same time, the lack of transparency of the scores and the unevenness of interpretations at regional level influence the perception of the fairness of the process. Strengthening technical skills, increasing transparency and orienting evaluation towards results and functionality are key directions for improvement.

There is also a need to distinguish between basic digitalisation interventions and those dedicated to innovation, so that funding instruments are linked to the level of digital maturity of beneficiaries and the dynamics of the technology market.

5. MINUTE INTERVIEW ATU MIERCUREA CIUC AND LELICENI COMMUNE

Date: 9 October 2025

Location: Miercurea Ciuc City Hall

Participants: representatives of ATUs and representatives of the Association formed by CIVITTA Strategy & Consulting SA (leader) and Lideea Development Actions SRL (partner)

Project "Development of an integrated facial recognition system (at the entrance to the institution) and videoconferencing solutions for official meetings and interactions with citizens"
SMIS code: 337181
Total value: 2,482,593.10 lei
Non-reimbursable amount: 2,432,941.23 lei
Status: FTS admitted project

The discussion aimed to present and analyse the way in which the project proposed by the Miercurea Ciuc and Leliceni Commune was conceived, substantiated and prepared, regarding the implementation of an integrated facial recognition system and videoconferencing solutions for both official meetings and interactions with citizens.

The institution's representatives explained that the idea of the project emerged as an internal need, identified before the launch of the funding call, in the context of the desire to modernise administrative processes and digitise internal activity. Inspired by a similar system implemented at the Sfântu Gheorghe City Hall, the management considered that the facial recognition solution represents a natural step to streamline employee access and to automate the recording of working time. At the same time, the videoconferencing component was designed as a useful tool for holding the meetings of the Local Council and for increasing administrative transparency.

The consultant played a key role in formulating the project proposal, helping to adapt the initial idea to the specific requirements of the P2.1.1 call under the Digital Region programme. In the drafting process, the technical content of the project was preserved in its original form, the adaptations being aimed exclusively at compliance with the applicant's guide. The preparation of the funding application was a fast and efficient process, completed in a period of approximately one week, which reflects the high degree of accessibility of the call for administrative-territorial units of the size of Miercurea Ciuc and Leliceni.

As for the technical part, the proposed system will fully automate the process of recording and drafting the minutes of the meetings, with simultaneous translation into Romanian, English and Hungarian. Also, the minutes will be automatically published on the mayor's website, increasing the level of transparency in the relationship with citizens. The facial recognition solution will eliminate the need for access cards and simplify staff attendance management.

This project complements the digitisation initiatives already implemented through a previous ACOP project, which aimed at the digital archiving of city hall documents, the implementation of a document management system and the development of a portal for citizens. Therefore, the new investment represents a natural step in continuing the administrative modernisation process.

The interlocutors stressed that the applicant's guide was clear, the result indicators easy to understand, and the collaboration with the consultant proved to be effective. It provided support in defining the need, developing the budget and drafting the financing application, and the IT provider will be selected later, most likely among the partners who have collaborated with the institution in previous projects.

Among the expected results are the reduction of document processing times, the efficiency of meetings, the increase of administrative transparency and the improvement of communication with citizens. The project also includes staff training activities and a maintenance plan supported from the local budget, which guarantees the long-term sustainability of the investment.

In conclusion, the initiative concretely contributes to the broader objectives of digitisation of public administration and digital transformation of the Centre region, providing an example of good practice that can also be replicated for other administrative-territorial units. The representatives appreciated the clarity of the call and the simplicity of the procedure, mentioning that only two minor clarifications were necessary in the dialogue with the Centre RDA.

6. MINUTE INTERVIEW ATU ÎNTORSURA BUZĂULUI AND SITA BUZĂULUI COMMUNE

Date: October 14, 2025

Location: the headquarters of the Întorsura Buzăului City Hall

Participants: mayor and deputy mayor of the ATUs and representatives of the Association formed by CIVITTA Strategy & Consulting SA (leader) and Lideea Development Actions SRL (partner)

Project "Innovative solutions for sustainable communities in the city of Întorsura Buzăului and Sita Buzăului Commune"
SMIS code: 340923
Total value: 2,487,972 lei
Non-reimbursable value: 2,438,213 lei

The digitisation project proposed by the Întorsura Buzăului City Hall, carried out in partnership with the Sita Buzăului City Hall, aims to modernise internal administrative processes and improve citizens' access to public services, through the implementation of an integrated IT platform. During the discussion, the stages

of project design, collaboration with the consultant, perception of the financing process and expectations regarding implementation were addressed.

How the idea of the project came about

The idea of the project was formulated at the level of the mayor's office, starting from a real need, observed in the current activity of the administration. As of 2020, the institution had several digital applications, used separately by different departments, without an interconnection between them. This way of working made it difficult to process information and manage documents. Out of the desire to streamline internal flows and create a common database, it was decided to collaborate with a software company that would ensure the integration of all existing applications into a unitary system.

The main goal was for citizens to have quick and easy access to the services of the city hall, through a single platform, which allows the submission of applications and the obtaining of documents in electronic format. The digitisation project was thus conceived as a natural stage of the modernisation process already started at local level.

How the need was formulated with the consultant

After defining the objectives internally, the City Hall collaborated with a specialised consultant to adapt the idea to the requirements of the P2.1.1 call – "A Digital Region". The consultant had an important role in drafting the technical-economic documentation and in structuring the funding application, so that the project complies with all the eligibility conditions. There was no need for significant changes to the initial concept, but only formal adjustments to fit the requirements of the applicant's guide.

The collaboration with the IT company was an important advantage, as it already knew the digital infrastructure of the institution and could directly contribute to establishing the technical specifications and architecture of the proposed solution.

Issues and limitations identified

The main problems that the project aims to solve are the lack of an integrated platform for document management, the difficulties of access to the old archive and the need for complete digitisation of administrative flows. The project is structured in three main directions: **digitisation of internal processes, digitisation of the physical archive** for electronic access to information and implementation of a **GIS application** for the management of public heritage.

These measures aim to reduce working times, simplify the document circuit, improve internal communication and facilitate citizens' access to information. Although the project is mainly focused on internal processes, it will also generate significant benefits for the general public, through quick access to documents and the possibility of obtaining services without going to the counter.

Integration into the local digitalisation strategy

The project is part of a broader local digital modernisation strategy, which started a few years ago. Although there is no formal document called a "digitisation strategy", the city hall follows a coherent vision towards the gradual digitisation of all services. The project integrates into already existing systems, in particular the CityOn and ghișeul.ro platform, and is designed to be able to be expanded later.

Also, the proposed solutions are interoperable and can be replicated in other localities, including at the level of the direct partner, the Sita Buzăului City Hall, which ensures the sustainability and added value of the investment.

Funding through Priority 2 – perception and process

The call for funding under Priority 2 – "A Digital Region" was found out from public sources, and the project idea existed before the launch of the call. Thus, the funding represented an opportunity to implement a solution already outlined at the local level.

The Applicant's Guide was considered clear and easy to apply, with well-defined indicators and reasonable technical requirements. The possibility of including various activities such as digitisation, archiving, process automation and interoperability components was perceived as an advantage.

The preparation of the financing application went relatively smoothly thanks to the efficient collaboration between the city hall team, the consultant and the IT provider. However, a major difficulty was highlighted

in the evaluation phase: the **very long duration of the analysis process**. The project has been under evaluation for a considerable period of time, without further answers or clarifications.

This delay is felt even more strongly in the context in which the Întorsura Buzăului City Hall currently has **six projects submitted to the Centre RDA**, which are in different stages of evaluation. These include projects for the thermal rehabilitation of apartment blocks, the modernisation of a school, urban mobility projects (bicycle lane, bike-sharing system) and initiatives in the social field. For some of them, clarifications have been received, but none has yet been contracted. The situation confirms that the slow pace of the evaluation process is one of the biggest difficulties encountered by local administrations.

Another important challenge discussed was the one related to **updating the technical specifications**. In the IT field, technological developments follow one another rapidly, and the products and equipment provided for in the financing application may become obsolete or unavailable by the time of contracting. This complicates the procurement stage, as changing specifications risks leading to ineligibility of expenditure. It was mentioned that a similar problem was encountered in projects financed by the Environment Fund Administration (EFA), where the rigidity of technical requirements generated major difficulties. A concrete example is the project for the installation of electric charging stations, in which the 50 kW equipment initially specified was no longer on the market at the time of implementation, and updating the technical requirements was difficult. Thus, the need for a **more flexible approach on the part of the managing authority was underlined**, which would allow the adaptation of the technical specifications to the realities on the ground.

Expected results and sustainability of the project

The implementation of the project will lead to the simplification of administrative flows, the reduction of document processing times and the increase of internal efficiency. The digitisation of the archive will allow quick access to documents, and the automation of processes will eliminate a large part of manual activities. For citizens, the project will mean faster access to information, the possibility to request documents remotely and the reduction of physical interactions at the counter.

After the financing is completed, maintenance and updates will be ensured through continuous collaboration with the IT company that manages the digital infrastructure of the city hall. The costs will be covered from the local budget.

Contribution to regional digitalisation and recommendations

The project contributes directly to the region's digital transformation goals, providing a concrete example of good practice for small local governments. The implementation of an integrated platform will increase transparency, streamline internal activity and improve the relationship between the institution and citizens.

For future calls, it is recommended to maintain the clarity of the guidelines and to introduce flexible mechanisms that allow for the technical updating of projects during implementation. At the same time, it is necessary to shorten the evaluation stages in order to allow for the rapid implementation of investments. Finally, it was stressed that the digitisation of local administrations should be coordinated at national level through a single platform managed by the Ministry of Digitalisation, which would ensure the interoperability of databases and the standardisation of the way of working in all mayoralties.

ANNEX 4. QUESTIONNAIRE-BASED SURVEY REPORT AMONG CURRENT AND POTENTIAL BENEFICIARIES

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This survey was carried out within **the thematic evaluation dedicated to Priority 2 – "A Digital Region"** of the Centre Regional Programme 2021–2027, with the aim of supporting the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the implementation of the funded interventions.

The main purpose of the survey was to obtain direct feedback from **beneficiaries with projects contracted under the Priority 2 calls for funding, in order to substantiate the answers to the evaluation questions on relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, implementation factors and integration of horizontal** principles. In this respect, the complete questionnaire, which covers all evaluation criteria, has been designed and applied exclusively to this category, the only one that has direct implementation experience.

Complementary to the main survey, a **limited set of questions was addressed to all applicants in** order to gain a broader perspective on the attractiveness of the calls, the project preparation process and the application experience. The results of this additional survey were mainly used for the analysis of the relevance criterion, without substantiating conclusions on the implementation or performance of the interventions.

The results obtained through this tool complement the literature review, case studies and interviews, contributing to a thorough and coherent understanding of the beneficiaries' experience and to the formulation of conclusions and recommendations based on concrete evidence.

1.2 Survey Aspects and Limitations

The survey was carried out with the aim of collecting quantitative data relevant to inform the analysis of the evaluation, in particular to answer questions regarding **the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of interventions** under Priority 2 – 'A Digital Region'.

The tool used was an **online questionnaire**, with a total number of **36 items**, structured on the analysis dimensions of the assessment. **The full questionnaire was addressed exclusively to beneficiaries with contracted projects**, while a limited set of questions was applied to the other applicants. The questionnaire was distributed through the **SurveyMonkey platform**.

The survey was conducted between **August 2025 and January 2026** and targeted two distinct sub-samples of the target population related to Priority 2 – "A Digital Region":

- **beneficiaries with contracted projects**, under implementation (**N = 20 at the evaluation reference date – 30.04.2025; N = 38 at the time of the survey launch, in August 2025**);
- **all funding applicants** who submitted projects under the calls dedicated to digitalisation (**N = 339**), included in an **additional survey**, with a complementary role.

The questionnaire was structured differently depending on the stage of the project. **The first section**, common to all respondents, focused on the perceptions regarding **the relevance, clarity and attractiveness of the calls for projects**, corresponding **to evaluation criterion 1**. **Subsequent sections**, which include detailed questions on **implementation, operational efficiency, difficulties encountered and integration of horizontal principles**, were addressed **exclusively to beneficiaries with contracted projects**.

At the end of the collection period, **96 valid responses were obtained**, of which **40 come from beneficiaries with contracted projects**, representing **the main survey of the evaluation**. Compared to **the universe of contracted beneficiaries at the reference date of the evaluation**, this result ensures **the full coverage of the relevant population** and the fulfilment of the methodological requirements regarding the robustness of the analyses related to implementation and performance.

In addition, the reporting of the **96 responses** to the total universe of applicants (N = 339) corresponds to a **response rate of approximately 28%,** appropriate for **descriptive and comparative analyses on the criterion of relevance**, given the general nature of the questions included in the first section of the questionnaire and the additional role of this sub-sample.

Compared to the **number of projects contracted at the evaluation reference date (N = 20),** this result corresponds to a **response rate of 100%,** ensuring full coverage of the relevant universe for the implementation analysis. Compared to the universe of projects under Priority 2 at the time of the analysis (N ≈ 38), the number of responses collected from the contracted beneficiaries (N = 40) ensures full coverage of the relevant population. The numerical difference can be explained by the dynamics of the contracting process and the continuous updating of the project portfolio.
Under these conditions, the coverage level allows to achieve a margin of error of approximately ±3% for the analysed indicators, giving a very high degree of robustness and representativeness to the conclusions regarding the implementation, efficiency and performance of the financed projects.

The analysis of the responses was based on **descriptive statistical methods**, including frequencies, percentage distributions, correlations and central trend indicators (mean, median, mode), in order to capture the main trends, convergences and differences between the categories of respondents. The results achieved provide a **well-founded picture** of how interventions funded under Priority 2 are perceived, implemented and leveraged at regional level, supporting the formulation of conclusions and evaluative recommendations.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS OF THE OPINION POLL

2.1 Respondents/types of organisations

The survey was sent to **all 339 applicants** who submitted projects under the TE2 actions, as a **complementary tool** to capture the general perceptions regarding the attractiveness of calls and the profile of applicants. At the end of the collection period, **92 valid responses** were recorded, which were used **exclusively for descriptive analyses** on the relevance criterion and respondent characteristics.

However, the main survey of the evaluation is the one addressed **to beneficiaries with contracted projects**, a relevant sub-sample for the analysis of the criteria related **to implementation and performance**. For this sub-sample, **coverage was complete at the reference date of the evaluation**, including for SME beneficiaries, allowing **for the full application of the questionnaire** and the analysis of all the evaluation criteria concerned.

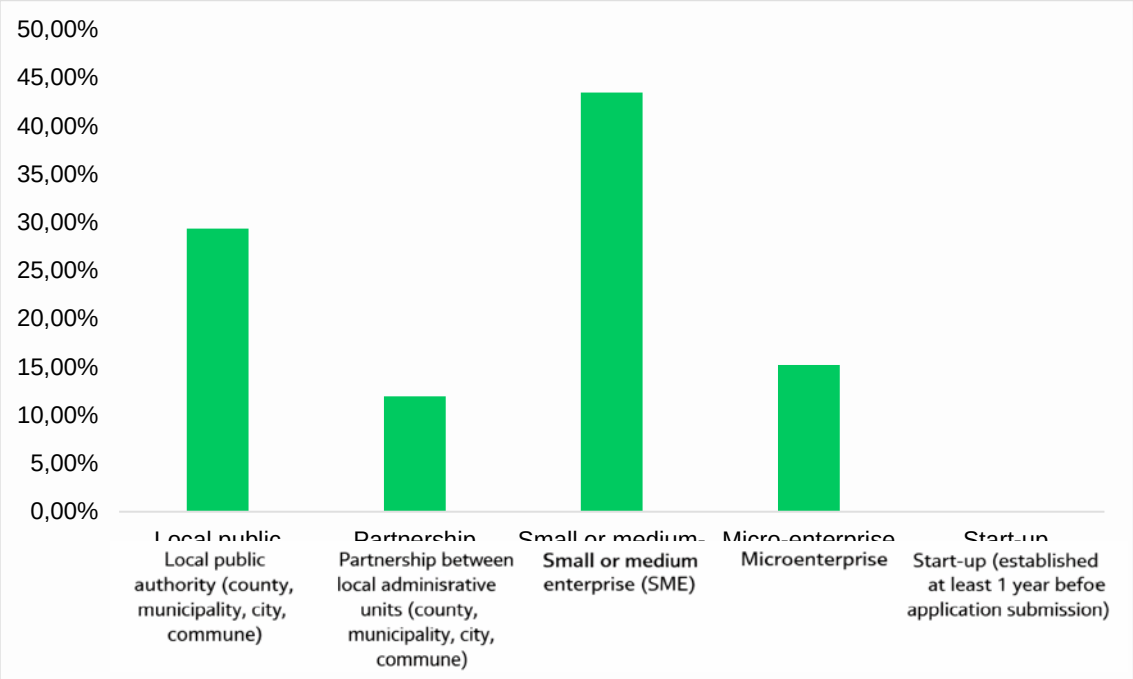
The distribution of responses according to the category to which they belong indicates a **majority share of the private sector**, at the same time as a significant presence of the local public sector, reflecting the diversity of the types of beneficiaries interested in the interventions financed by TE2:

- **44.5% of respondents** are **small or medium-sized enterprises (SMEs),** representing the largest category;
- **15.2%** are **micro-enterprises**, indicating a relevant interest from the small entrepreneurial environment;
- **29.4%** of respondents come from **local public authorities** (county, municipality, city or commune);
- **12.0%** represent **partnerships between ATUs**, suggesting the existence of collaborative approaches at local level;
- **No responses were recorded** from **start-ups**.

From an evaluative perspective, **the focus of the analysis is on SMEs**, as **the beneficiaries with contracted projects – the only ones for which the implementation and performance dimensions**

can be fully analysed – come exclusively from this category, while the projects submitted by local public authorities were not in the contracting stage at the date of the evaluation.

Figure 8. Organisation type



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

This structure confirms that **TE2 calls have mainly attracted established institutional actors and already consolidated companies**, suggesting a **high maturity of the target audience** and a **pragmatic orientation towards the implementation of digital solutions**.

2.2 Participation in Priority 2 calls

The majority of respondents included in **the complementary survey** had a **direct involvement in the funding calls related to Priority 2**, which confirms the relevance of this set of responses for the analysis of perceptions regarding the attractiveness and accessibility of calls. Thus, **96.7% of respondents** said that they submitted at least one project within the launched calls, while only **3.3%** mentioned that they had not yet submitted a project, but analysed the available calls, indicating a potential interest in participating in the future stages.

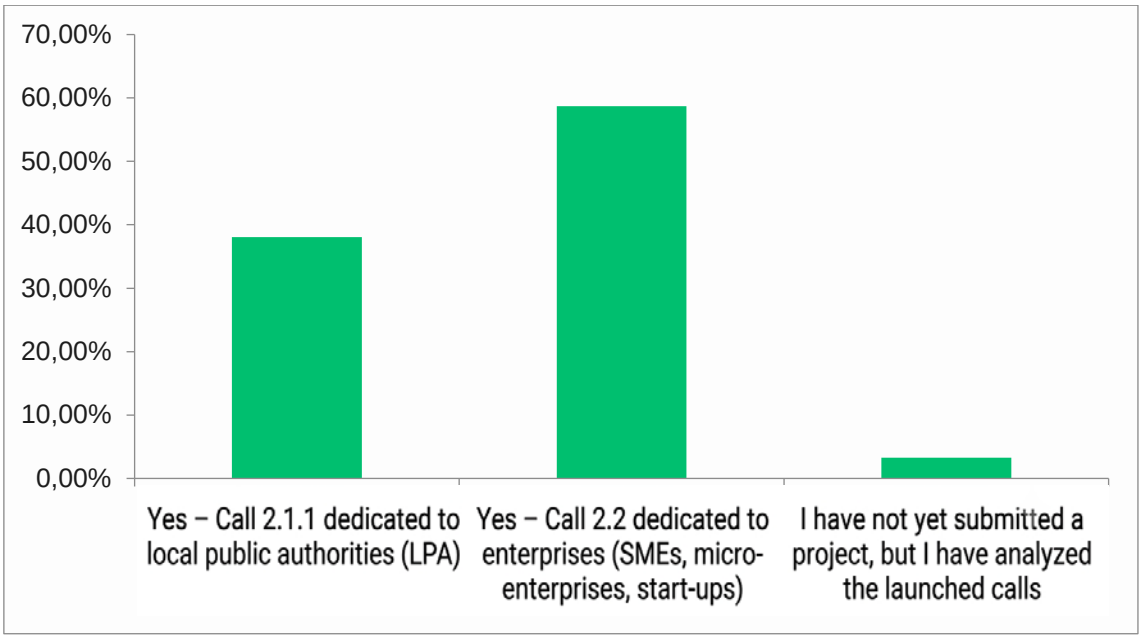
The distribution of responses highlights a **predominance of applications submitted under the call for the private sector**, reflecting the current structure of the contracted projects and the relevance of this segment for the evaluation:

- **58.7% of respondents** applied under **Call 2.2**, intended for enterprises (SMEs, micro-enterprises and start-ups);
- **38.0%** submitted projects under **Call 2.1.1**, addressed to local public authorities (LPAs);
- **3.3%** have not yet submitted a project but have analysed the calls launched.

From an evaluative perspective, it is important to emphasise that **the main survey of the evaluation — for which the margin of error of ±3% is reached — is the one addressed to beneficiaries with contracted projects**. They come **exclusively from SMEs**, being the only category for which the dimensions related to **implementation, performance and operational difficulties** can be fully analysed. Consequently, the conclusions on these dimensions are mainly based on the experience of

the beneficiaries of **Call 2.2**, while the responses from LPAs are mainly used for the analysis **of the relevance and attractiveness of the calls**, in the complementary survey.

Figure 9. Projects submitted on calls



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

The distribution of the responses in **the complementary survey** indicates a **substantial involvement of both the public and private sectors**, with a **predominance of the entrepreneurial environment**, reflected by the higher share of applications submitted under **Call 2.2**. This structure is relevant from an evaluation perspective, especially in the context in which **the main survey of the evaluation — addressed to beneficiaries with contracted projects — targets SMEs only**, the only category in the implementation stage at the date of the evaluation.

At the same time, **the very low proportion of respondents who only analysed the calls, without submitting projects (3.3%),** suggests a **high level of mobilisation** among potential beneficiaries. This result indicates that the TE2 calls generated a **concrete interest and an effective capacity for application**, and the call documentation was **clear enough to support the actual submission of projects**, which is relevant for the analysis of the relevance criterion.

2.3 State of play of projects submitted under Priority 2

The distribution of the responses from **the complementary survey**, addressed to all applicants, indicates that **the evaluation and contracting process is still ongoing** and the data collection took place at an **intermediate point**, located between the submission phase and the actual implementation phase. This context is relevant for the interpretation of the perceptions expressed by respondents, in particular with regard to **the clarity of the guides, the accessibility of the calls and the experience of the selection process**.

Thus:

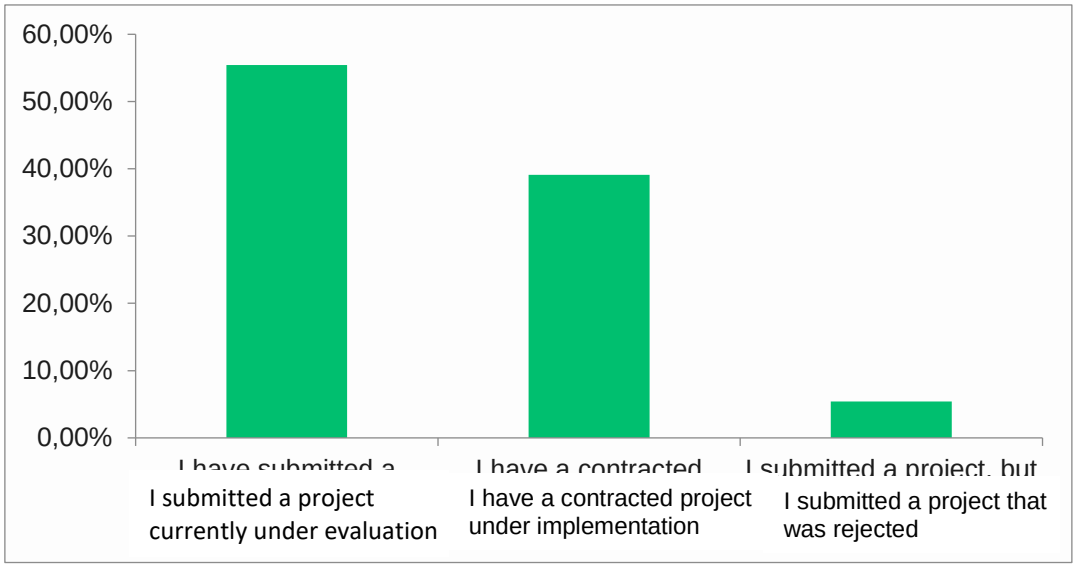
- **55.4% of respondents** said that the submitted project is **in the evaluation stage**;
- **39.1%** have **contracted projects under implementation**;
- **5.4%** mentioned that the **submitted project was rejected**.

Compared to the initial stage of the evaluation, there is a **significant increase in the share of contracted projects**, reflecting the progress of the selection process and the gradual transition to

implementation. However, the fact that **more than half of the respondents are still in the evaluation phase** indicates that the majority experience captured through this survey is related to **the submission and evaluation stages**, rather than implementation and concrete results.

Consequently, the interpretation of the results related **to the relevance, clarity of documentation and accessibility of the process** must consider this context. At the same time, **the main survey of the evaluation**, addressed to beneficiaries with contracted projects — for which **the margin of error of ±3%** was reached — allows the formulation of **solid and well-founded conclusions** on **implementation, performance and operational difficulties**, especially in the case of projects carried out by **SMEs**, the only category under implementation at the time of the evaluation.

Figure 10. Status of submitted projects



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

RELEVANCE AND ATTRACTIVENESS

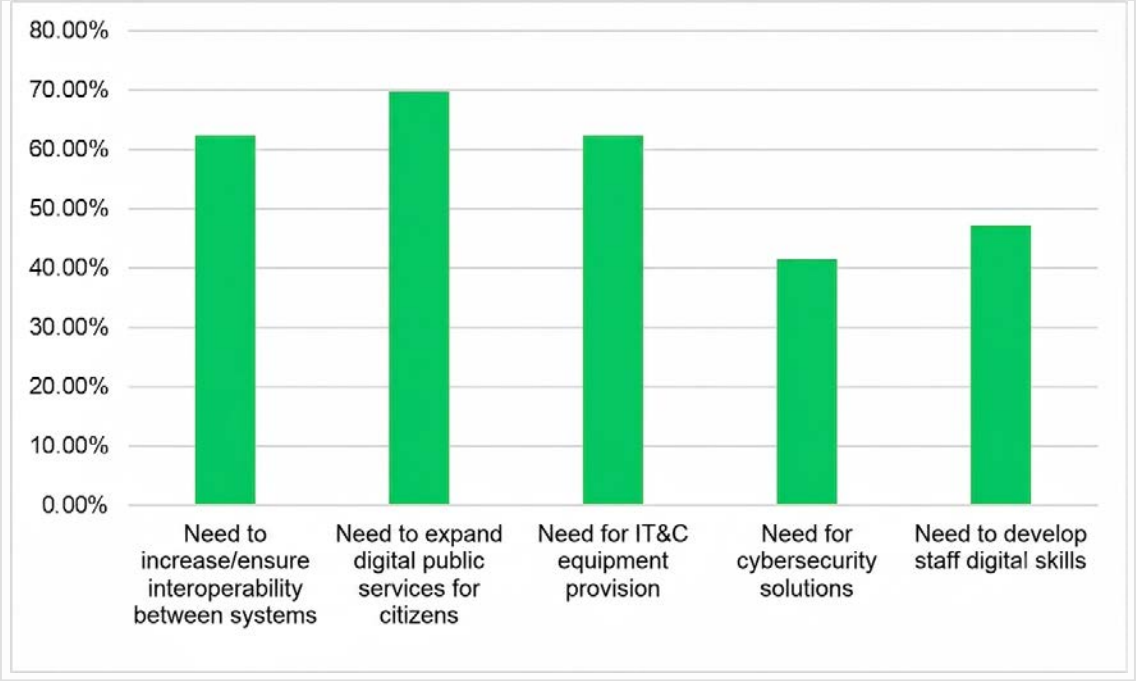
2.4 Development needs identified at the level of local public authorities (LPAs)

The responses from **the complementary survey addressed to local public authorities (LPAs)** highlight a **wide and interconnected range of digital development needs**, reflecting both the technological and organisational dimensions of the digital transformation process. The most frequently mentioned needs are:

- **the expansion of digital public services for citizens**, indicated by **69.8% of respondents**, confirming a high pressure to digitise the administration's interaction with the public and increase the accessibility of services;
- **increasing and ensuring interoperability between systems**, mentioned by **62.3%,** signalling persistent difficulties in connecting databases and internal platforms, both between departments and between levels of administration;
- **the provision of IT&C equipment**, also reported by **62.3% of respondents**, suggesting that technical infrastructure remains an essential condition for supporting digitisation processes, especially in the case of smaller administrative-territorial units;
- **the need to develop the digital skills of staff**, indicated by **47.2%,** highlighting the importance of human capital in the effective use of new digital solutions;
- **the need for cybersecurity solutions**, mentioned by **41.5%,** reflecting concerns related to data protection and the security of information systems.

Overall, the results confirm that **the digital transformation of local public administrations is a multidimensional process**, which involves simultaneously addressing the needs related to **citizen-oriented services, interoperability, technical infrastructure, digital skills and cybersecurity**.

Figure 11. Development needs of the region (LPA)



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

2.5 Development needs identified at the level of small and medium-sized enterprises

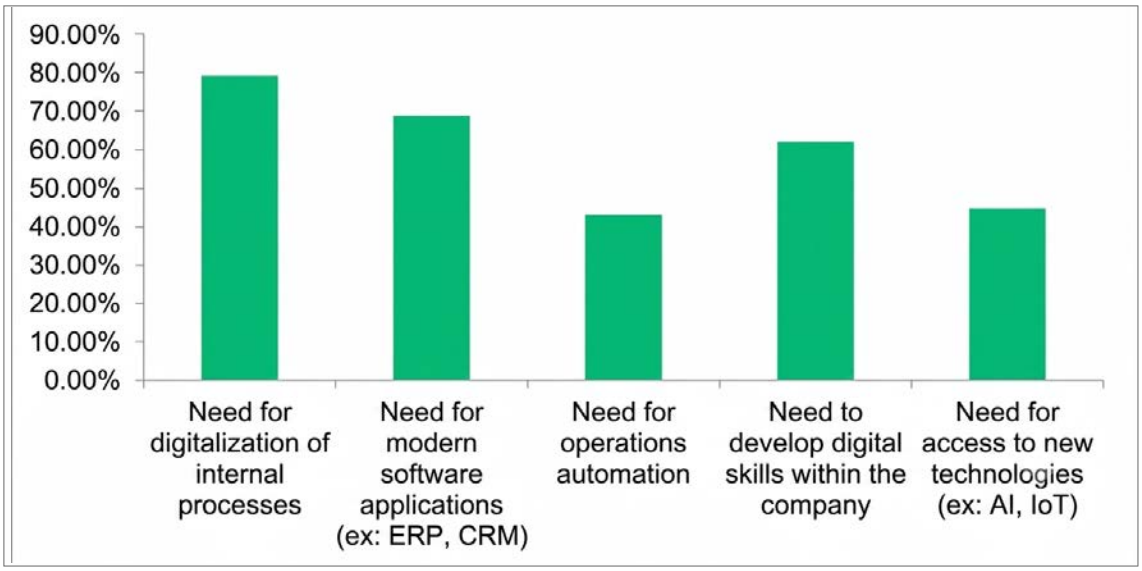
The results **of the main survey addressed to SME beneficiaries with contracted projects** show that the participating companies identified **clear and well-defined needs for digitisation and modernisation of activities**, confirming the existence of a consistent demand for digital transformation solutions in the private sector. The structure of the responses suggests that most SMEs are in a **phase of consolidation and optimisation of internal processes**, rather than an early phase of digitisation.

The most frequently mentioned needs are:

- **digitisation of internal processes**, indicated by **79.3% of respondents**, which confirms this dimension as the main priority for SMEs;
- **the adoption of modern software applications** (e.g. ERP, CRM), mentioned by **69.0%,** highlighting the need for integrated solutions for operational management and customer relations;
- **the development of digital skills within the firm**, indicated by **62.1%,** highlighting the importance of human capital for the efficient use of new technologies;
- **access to new technologies**, such as AI or IoT, mentioned by **44.8%,** which indicates a significant, but still selective, interest in advanced digitisation;
- **Automation of operations**, reported by **43.1%,** suggesting that some SMEs are already aiming to move from basic digitisation to optimising workflows and increasing productivity.

Overall, the results indicate that SMEs in the region, in the implementation of funded projects, show a clear orientation towards internal efficiency and professionalisation of processes, with an increased interest in software solutions and the development of digital skills. In this context, the adoption of emerging technologies and advanced automation appears as a next step in the digital maturation process, approached gradually and according to organisational capacity and available resources**.**

Figure 12. Development needs of the region (SMEs)



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

The results show that SMEs no longer perceive digitalisation only as a technical tool, but as a **strategic component of competitiveness**, with a focus on process optimisation, integration of digital solutions and adoption of emerging technologies. At the same time, the need for digital skills suggests that **investments in human resources remain a critical success factor** for the sustainability of the digital transformation.

2.6 The extent to which the calls funded through the Centre RP respond to the identified needs

The results obtained through **the main survey addressed to the beneficiaries with contracted projects**, complemented by the answers from **the complementary survey addressed to all applicants**, indicate a **very high level of appreciation** regarding the ability of the calls financed through the Centre RP to respond to the real needs identified at the level of the beneficiary communities and organisations.

Thus, at the level of all respondents:

- **48.8%** consider that calls contribute **"to a very large extent"** to covering the identified needs;
- **37.0%** appreciate a contribution **"to a large extent"**;
- **12.0%** indicate a **"moderate" contribution**;
- Only **2.2% of respondents** (2 people) believe that calls respond **"to a small extent" or "to a very small extent"** to existing needs.

Therefore, **about 85% of respondents** express a positive (high and very high) assessment of the relevance of calls. This assessment is **particularly confirmed in the main survey**, carried out among beneficiaries with contracted projects — **mainly SMEs,** the dominant category of projects under implementation at the date of the evaluation. Responses from the public and from applicants at other stages complete this picture, being used mainly for the analysis **of the relevance criterion**.

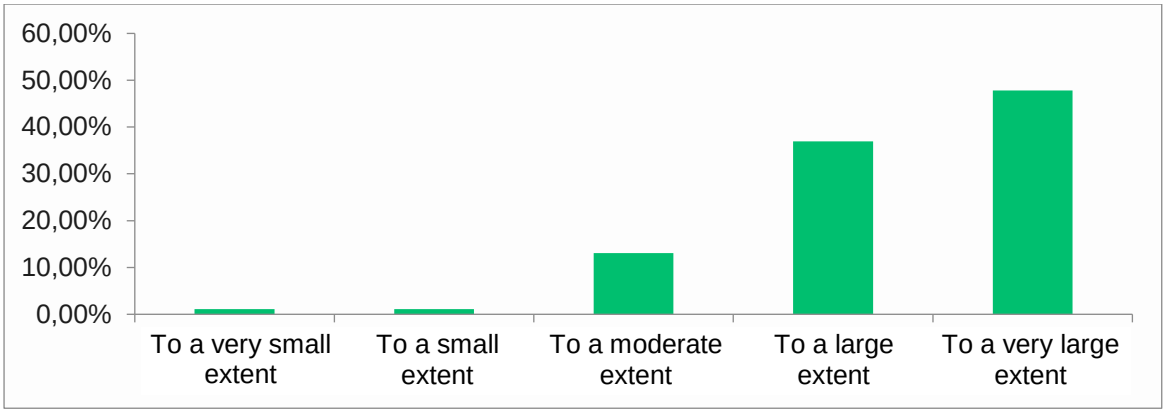
The open-ended responses provided by respondents who selected the **"small" or "very small"** variants suggest that the perceived limitations **do not address the relevance of the calls themselves**, but are rather related to:

- **Eligibility restrictions** for certain types of spending (e.g. **purchasing subscription-based software solutions)**

- **the size of the available budgets**, considered insufficient in relation to the scale of the needs identified.

Overall, the data confirms that **the calls under TE2 were perceived as relevant and well-calibrated**, and the structure of the interventions managed to cover the main directions of digital development. This conclusion is **robustly supported by the main survey**, for the implementation and performance dimensions, and **complemented by the complementary survey** for the aspects of overall attractiveness and relevance, substantially contributing to the assessment of the region's digital transformation goals.

Figure 13. Needs covered by funded calls



Source: Survey authors' processing

2.7 Needs not covered by existing funding calls

Although the majority of respondents appreciated that the calls within the Centre RP respond **to a large and very large extent** to the needs of digitalisation, **the open responses collected through the main survey and the complementary survey** highlight the existence of **complementary areas of intervention** that were not sufficiently covered by the current funding lines.
The qualitative analysis of the open responses indicates a number of **recurrent trends**, relevant both from the perspective **of beneficiaries with contracted projects (SMEs)** and applicants **in other stages**, these findings having a **complementary role** in substantiating the evaluation recommendations.

1. Additional technical investment needs

The most frequently mentioned elements concern:

- **IT&C equipment** and equipment or fully ineligible equipment (e.g. more advanced hardware infrastructure, workstations, specialised equipment);
- **upgrading existing systems**, including replacing old equipment with newer, more efficient solutions;
- **the purchase of subscription-based software solutions** (e.g. cloud ERP/CRM, SaaS solutions), which were not eligible in the analysed calls.

2. Limitations in the area of eligibility

Several respondents, both from **SMEs** and **local public authorities**, reported restrictions such as:

- **the lack of funding for collaborative solutions** between public institutions and non-governmental organisations, with the potential for impact at territorial level;
- **ineligibility of recurring expenses** such as software subscriptions.

3. Strategic development needs and skills

Some of the responses, in particular from **the main survey of beneficiaries with contracted projects**, underline the importance of:

- **developing the digital skills of the staff**, for the efficient and sustainable use of the implemented solutions;
- **funding of pilot phases and testing of digital solutions**, prior to their scale-up;
- **strengthening data infrastructure and interoperability** between systems as a precondition for advanced digitalisation.

4. Specific cases

Among **local public authorities**, the responses also included examples of specific needs, such as:

- digital solutions for **capitalising on tourism heritage** (e.g. QR codes, promotion applications);
- **modernisation of public utility services**, including the implementation of SCADA systems for water and sewerage.

Overall, these results indicate that, although **TE2 calls are perceived as relevant and well-calibrated**, there are **complementary needs** related to **investment sustainability, eligibility flexibility and digital maturation**, which can be considered in adjusting future interventions. These findings are **robustly supported by the main survey** and **complemented by the insights gathered through the follow-up survey**, contributing to the formulation of substantiated evaluative recommendations.

2.8 Perception of the relevance of P2 calls to the real needs of applicants

The results obtained through **the main survey addressed to beneficiaries with contracted projects**, complemented by the perceptions collected through **the complementary survey addressed to all applicants**, confirm a **very positive overall perception** regarding the relevance of P2 calls in relation to the real needs of funding applicants, both in the public and private sectors.

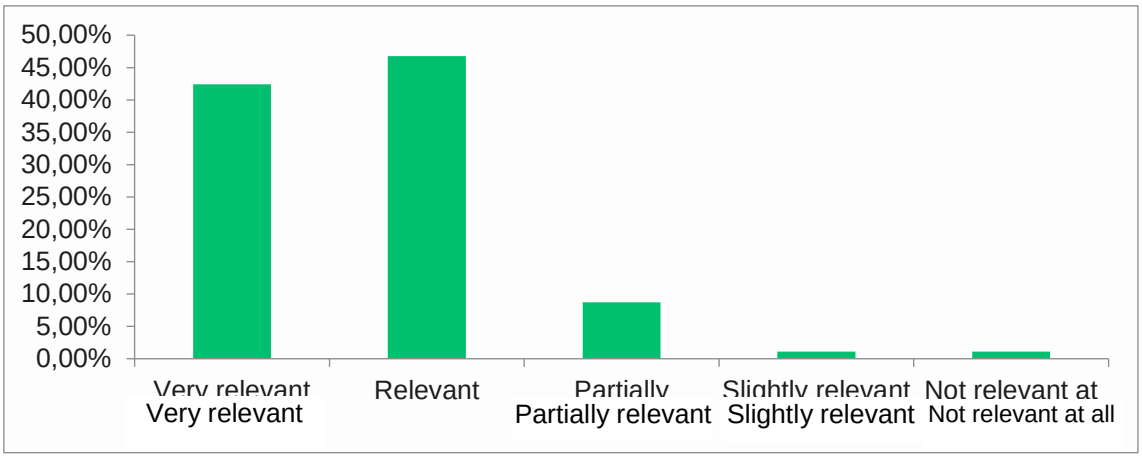
Thus, at the level of all respondents:

- **42.4%** rate calls as **"very relevant"**;
- **46.7%** consider them **"relevant"**;
- **8.7%** consider them to be **"partially relevant"**;
- Only **2.2%** of respondents rate them as **"poorly relevant"** or **"not at all relevant".**

In total, **about 89% of respondents** express a positive assessment (relevant or very relevant) of P2 calls, which indicates a **high degree of adequacy of the design of interventions** to the needs identified at the level of beneficiaries. This conclusion is **robustly supported by the main survey**, carried out among beneficiaries with contracted projects — predominantly **SMEs**, the relevant category for the implementation and performance analysis — and is **complemented by the perspectives of applicants at other stages**, mainly used for the analysis of the relevance criterion.

The result suggests a **good alignment between the thematic strands funded, the eligibility conditions and the level of financial support offered**, compared to the funding alternatives available at the time of launching the calls. The open-ended responses, analysed in correlation with the previous questions, support this conclusion: the critical comments made by the respondents **do not refer to the lack of relevance of the calls**, but are rather related to **specific technical or financial limitations**, such as the ineligibility of certain types of expenditure, budgetary constraints for complex investments or the absence of components dedicated to training and maintenance.

Figure 14. Perception of the relevance of calls in relation to needs



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

Thus, the general perception is that **the P2 calls were well calibrated towards the strategic needs of the beneficiaries**, contributing to strengthening the capacity for digitisation and interoperability at local and economic level.

2.9 Recent trends identified by local public authorities (LPAs)

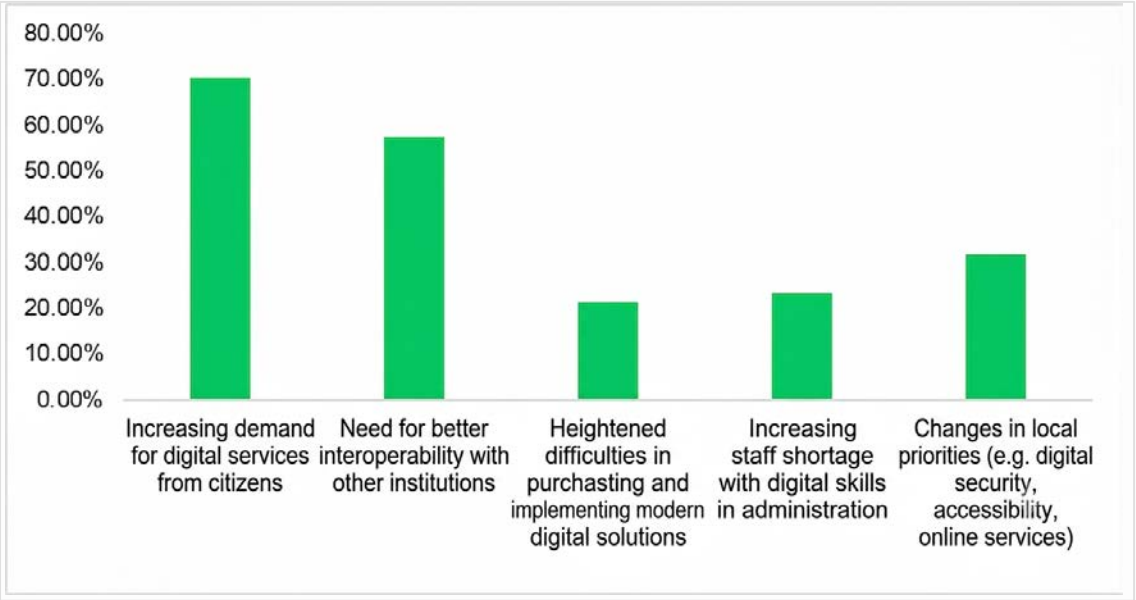
The results obtained from **the complementary survey addressed to local public authorities (LPAs)** indicate that they perceive **clear changes in the regional and sectoral context**, with an impact on the typology of the proposed projects and on the conditions for the implementation of P2 interventions. These trends are particularly relevant for **the analysis of the criterion of relevance and strategic orientation of the calls**, given that, at the time of the evaluation, LPA projects were not yet at the implementation stage.

The main trends identified are:

- **the increase in citizens' demand for digital services**, mentioned by **70.2% of respondents**, confirming the growing shift towards accessible and user-centric digital public services;
- **the need for better interoperability with other institutions**, reported by **57.5%,** reflecting persistent difficulties in the exchange of data and in the functioning of interconnected IT systems;
- **changes in local priorities**, such as a greater focus on digital safety, accessibility and the expansion of online services, indicated by **31.9% of LPAs**;
- **the increase in the shortage of staff with digital skills in administration**, mentioned by **23.4%,** highlighting an emerging challenge at the level of human resources;
- **increased difficulties in the acquisition and implementation of modern digital solutions**, reported by **21.3%,** suggesting that, although persistent, they are not the main barrier for most LPAs.

Overall, the results indicate that **external pressures** (citizens' demand for digital services, the need for interinstitutional interoperability) are **more strongly felt than internal constraints**, suggesting a **gradual maturation of administrative capacity** in the field of digitalisation. In this context, the adjustment of the types of eligible projects and funding conditions could mainly aim **at supporting integrated, interoperable and user-oriented digital services**, together with measures to **strengthen digital skills** in local public administration.

Figure 15. Trends identified in the region (LPAs)



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

These findings support the idea that **LPAs are at a maturation stage of the digitalisation process**, and the growing demand for **digital services and interoperability** should be reflected in the adjustment of future funding calls – with an increased focus on **system integration**, strengthening **digital skills** and developing **citizen-oriented solutions**.

2.10 Recent trends identified by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

The responses collected through **the main survey addressed to SME beneficiaries with contracted projects** confirm the existence of a **highly dynamic economic and technological context**, in which digital transformation has become an **essential condition for maintaining competitiveness** and adapting to the accelerated pace of technological change and market expectations. The data reflect the direct experience of SMEs in the implementation of funded projects, being relevant for the analysis of the dimensions related to implementation and performance.

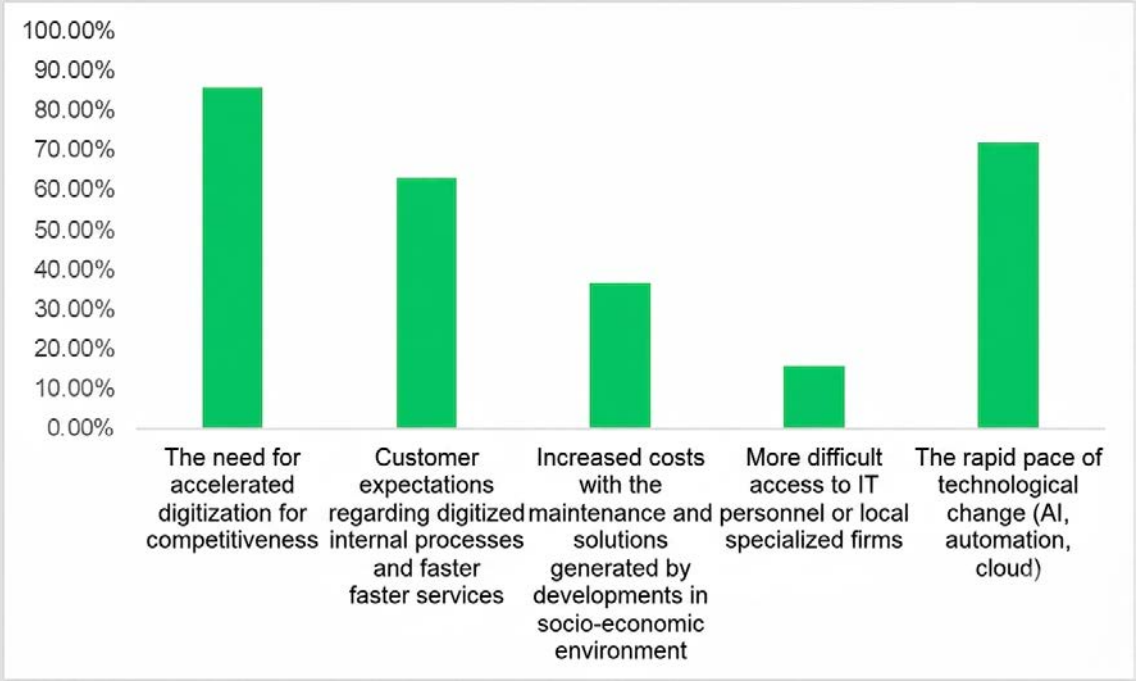
The main trends and changes identified are:

- **the need for accelerated digitalisation for competitiveness**, mentioned by **85.25% of respondents**, representing the strongest trend reported;
- **the rapid pace of technological change** (AI, automation, cloud), indicated by **72.13%,** with a direct impact on investment priorities and strategic planning;
- **the increase in customer expectations for digitised internal processes and faster services**, mentioned by **63.2%,** which increases the pressure on SMEs to optimise their operational flows;
- **the increased costs of maintaining and updating IT solutions**, reported by **37.70%,** in the context of rapid technological developments and economic constraints;
- **more difficult access to IT staff or local specialised companies**, mentioned by **16.39%,** indicating a relevant problem, but not dominant at the level of the sample.

Overall, the results highlight that SMEs implementing funded projects are under double pressure: on the one hand, the need to keep up with rapid technological developments, and on the other hand, the need to meet the increasingly high expectations of customers. In this context, P2 interventions are perceived as relevant insofar as they can support flexible, efficiency-oriented investments, automation

and the uptake of emerging technologies, while reducing the costs and risks associated with the digital transformation.

Figure 16. Trends identified in the region (SMEs)



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

2.11 Perception of clarity of eligibility guidelines and criteria (I11)

The results regarding **the clarity of the funding calls**, obtained both through **the main survey addressed to beneficiaries with contracted projects**, and through **the complementary survey addressed to all applicants**, indicate a **predominantly positive perception** of the way in which the conditions for accessing funding were formulated and communicated.

At the level of all respondents:

- **11.96%** rated the calls as **"very clear"**;
- **58.70%** considered them **"clear"**;
- **26.09%** appreciated them as **"partially clear"**;
- Only **3.26%** of respondents rated them as **"unclear".**

Overall, **more than 70% of respondents** express a positive (clear or very clear) assessment of the calls, suggesting that the funding documentation was generally **clear enough to support the preparation and submission of projects**, both among beneficiaries who have reached the implementation stage and applicants at other stages.

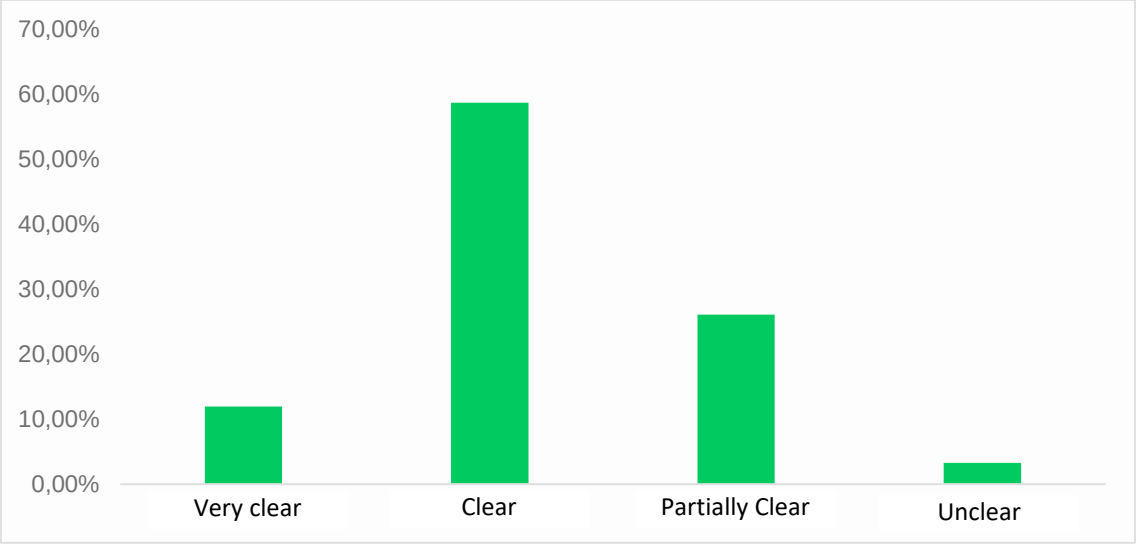
At the same time, **the share of responses indicating only a partial degree of clarity (26.09%)** highlights the existence **of areas of complexity or ambiguity**, perceived especially by applicants with limited experience or in the case of projects with a higher technical grade. These aspects are particularly relevant for the analysis **of the criterion of relevance and accessibility** and are captured in particular by the complementary survey.

From an evaluative perspective, it is important to underline that **the main survey addressed to beneficiaries with contracted projects**, for which **the margin of error of ±3%** is reached, confirms that, despite these specific difficulties, **the level of clarity of the calls was sufficient to allow the**

contracting and implementation of the projects, in particular in the case of SMEs, the dominant category of projects under implementation at the date of the evaluation.

Overall, the results confirm that **the communication and support mechanisms** offered at **the call launch stage** were **effective**, but also that **future guides** could benefit from **applied examples**, **clarifications** on the evaluation criteria and **frequently asked questions** sections adapted to each type of beneficiary (LPA/SME).

Figure 17. Perception of the clarity of the guidelines and eligibility criteria



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

2.12 Factors that facilitated the preparation and submission of projects

The results of the survey (main and complementary survey) indicate that **the preparation and submission of projects under Priority 2** was mainly facilitated by **specialised external support** and the **existence of minimum organisational prerequisites for digitalisation**, rather than the simplicity of administrative procedures.

At the level of all respondents (main and complementary survey), the following key elements were identified:

- **The support of an external consultant with expertise in digitisation projects**, mentioned by **77.17%** of respondents, is the factor with the highest weight. This result confirms the high reliance on external expertise to navigate the technical and administrative requirements of calls, especially in the context of highly complex digitalisation projects.
- **The existence of obvious and well-documented digitisation needs within the organisation,** indicated by **51.09%,** suggests that the access to P2 calls was, in many cases, based on a prior internal analysis and on the clear identification of problems that required digital interventions.
- **The organisation's previous experience in attracting European funds**, mentioned by **39.13%** of respondents, underlines the role of institutional capacity and familiarity with funding procedures in facilitating the application process.
- **The acceptable level of own contribution/co-financing**, indicated at **36.96%,** highlights the importance of financial sustainability and co-financing capacity as a decision-making element in project preparation.
- **The involvement of the organisation's management in the preparation of the project**, mentioned by **34.78%,** reflects the importance of managerial support for the strategic validation of the project and the mobilisation of internal resources.

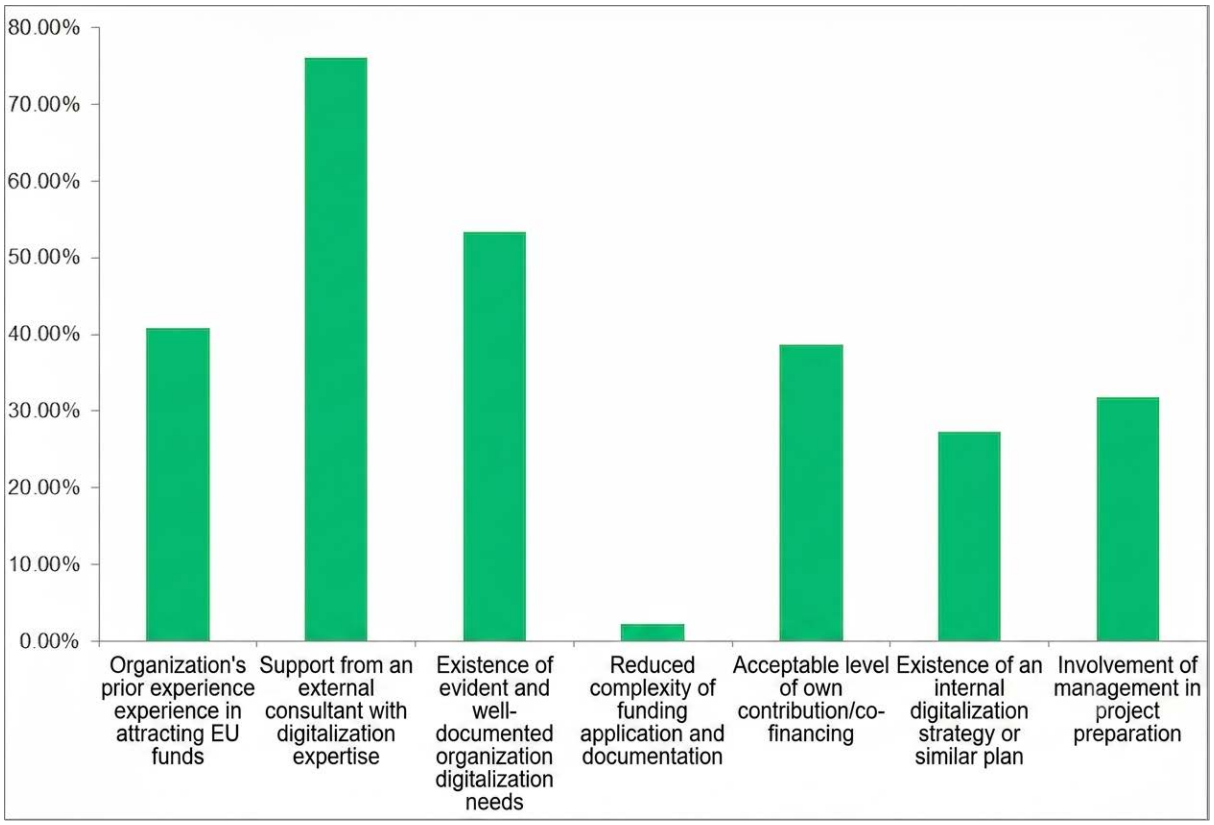
- **The existence of an internal digitisation strategy or similar plan**, indicated by **26.09%,** suggests that only a part of organisations have formal strategic documents, although digitisation needs are frequently identified.
- **The low complexity of the funding application and documentation** was mentioned by only **2.17%** of respondents, indicating that the procedures were perceived as relatively complex, even if manageable with adequate support.

From an evaluative perspective, these results show that **the success of the P2 project preparation and submission process depended on factors such as**:

- access to external expertise,
- the existence of real and well-defined needs,
- and, to a significant extent, the applicants' experience and organisational capacity.

In the case **of beneficiaries with contracted projects (main survey),** these factors allowed the procedural complexity to be overcome and the digitalisation intention to be transformed into concrete projects under implementation, especially among **SMEs,** the dominant category of contracted projects at the date of the evaluation.

Figure 18. Factors that facilitated the preparation and submission of projects



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

2.13 Difficulties encountered in preparing the financing application

The results of the cumulative survey (main and complementary survey) indicate that, although most respondents managed to complete the application process, **project preparation was perceived as a demanding process**, marked by difficulties related to the interpretation of requirements, identification of suppliers and management of available time.

At the level of all respondents (main and complementary survey), the main difficulties reported are the following:

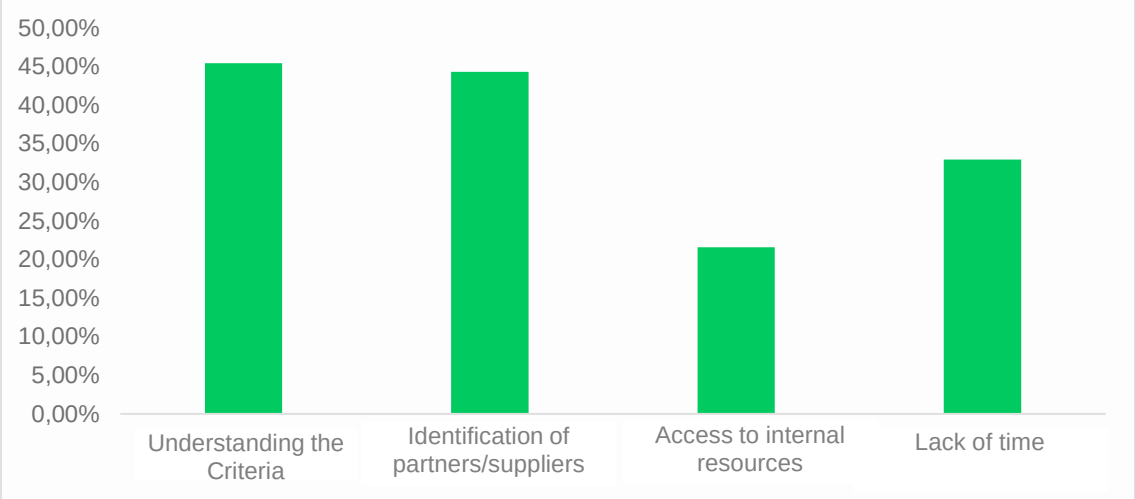
- **Understanding the evaluation criteria**, mentioned by **46.67%** of respondents, is the most frequently indicated difficulty. This result suggests that, although the guidelines were assessed as largely clear (according to the results presented above), certain technical and eligibility criteria or requirements required further interpretation or external support.
- **The identification of partners or solution providers**, reported by **46.67%,** highlights difficulties especially for projects that involve specialised IT solutions, interoperability or outsourced services, in a market context characterised by heterogeneous offer and variable levels of technological maturity.
- **The lack of available time**, indicated by **31.52%** of respondents, reflects the pressure generated by correlating the organisation's current activities with the process of developing financing documentation, especially in the case of organisations with limited administrative resources.
- **Limited access to internal resources**, mentioned at **20.65%,** indicates difficulties related to the availability of internal staff, technical skills or administrative capacity to support the project preparation process.

In addition, specific difficulties were reported in the open responses, such as:

- the rigidity of certain administrative procedures, perceived as difficult to adapt to the specifics of projects or organisations;
- difficulties in communication or coordination in relation to support structures (e.g. EDIHs) in the project preparation phase, which limited access to preliminary technical assistance.

From an evaluative perspective, these results indicate that the **application process was manageable but complex**, requiring significant administrative and technical effort. The difficulties reported do not reflect a lack of interest or capacity on the part of applicants, but rather the **need for a high level of expertise and coordination** for the development of projects in line with the requirements of the calls for digitalisation.

Figure 19. Difficulties encountered in preparing the financing application



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

2.14 Assistance provided by the Centre RP Managing Authority

The respondents' responses (main and complementary survey indicate a **mixed, but mostly positive, perception** of the assistance provided by the Centre RP Managing Authority in the process of preparing and submitting projects related to Priority 2.

Thus:

- **39.13%** of respondents said they had fully benefited from assistance from Centre RP MA;
- **32%** received **partial** support, indicating access to specific clarifications, background information or information sessions, but without continuous or personalised support;
- **26.09%** mentioned that **they did not benefit** from assistance from the MA at all.

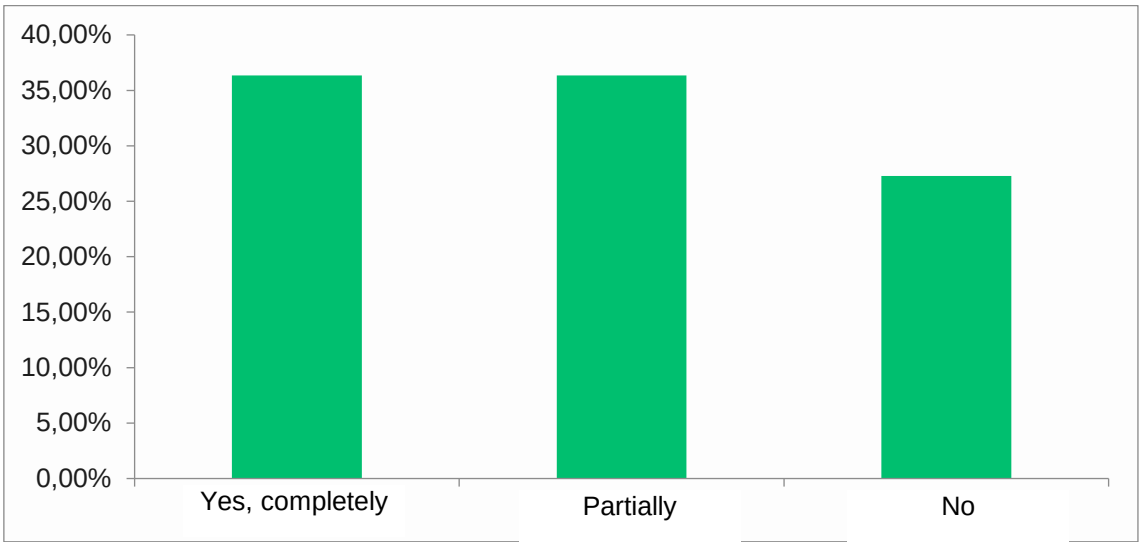
This distribution suggests that support mechanisms have been used by a significant proportion of applicants, but perceptions of **the degree of access and intensity of support** have varied. The support provided by the MA seems to have been more effective in the initial stages of the calls (through guides, public clarifications and information sessions), being perceived as more limited in the phases that required individual clarifications or support applied to specific situations.

From an evaluative perspective, the results are consistent with the difficulties previously reported by respondents at the project preparation stage, in particular in terms of interpreting the criteria and managing the complexity of the documentation. The relatively high share of those who received only partial or no assistance indicates **the need to strengthen support instruments**, especially for applicants with limited administrative resources.

In this context, the results of the survey suggest the opportunity to:

- develop **more interactive and faster communication channels** (e.g. thematic clarification sessions, regularly updated FAQs, dedicated helplines);
- tailor the support according to **the type of beneficiary and the level of digital maturity** (SMEs vs. LPAs);
- ensuring **continuity of assistance** not only in the call launch phase, but also during the evaluation and subsequent implementation of projects.

Figure 20. Perception of assistance from the Centre RP



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

2.15 Overall evaluation of the TE2 funding process

This section presents a summary assessment of the main dimensions of the funding process under Priority 2 – "A Digital Region", based on the responses collected through the questionnaire, within the two components of the survey: the main survey, addressed to beneficiaries with contracted projects, and the complementary survey, addressed to funding applicants.

The evaluation is **perceptual** in nature and concerns aspects that can be appreciated both by the beneficiaries with contracted projects and by the applicants in other stages (evaluation or rejection),

such as the relevance of the calls, the clarity of the documentation, the institutional communication or the transparency of the process. Consequently, **the analysis is based on the aggregate responses from the main survey and the complementary survey** and is appropriate for this type of indicator.

Calculation methodology

For each indicator, respondents were asked to score on a **Likert scale from 1 to 5**, where:

- 1 = very weak
- 2 = weak
- 3 = moderate
- 4 = good
- 5 = very good

The weighted average score was calculated as the arithmetic average of the values assigned to each response, weighted by their frequency, relative to the total number of valid responses for each indicator. This method allows a numerical synthesis of respondents' perceptions and is used exclusively for general evaluation dimensions, not for the analysis of the actual implementation of projects.

On a scale of 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good):

Evaluated indicator	Weighted average score	Synthetic interpretation
The relevance of the call to the needs of the organisation	**4.32**	Very good – confirms the alignment of calls to real needs
Clarity and accessibility of guidelines and procedures	**3.75**	Good – generally positive perception, but in need of clarification
Quality of communication with Centre RP MA	**4**	Good – cooperation appreciated, but with variations between beneficiaries
Efficiency of administrative processes (evaluation, selection, contracting)	**3.33**	Moderate – perceived as slow and bureaucratic
Transparency of the evaluation process	**3.51**	Moderate to good – requires more clarity on the criteria
Relevance and feasibility of sustainability requirements	**3.8**	Good – the criteria are considered realistic, but sometimes difficult to apply

Overall, weighted average scores are between **3.3 and 4.3**, indicating an **overall level of satisfaction above average** (about **3.8/5**). The best assessed dimensions are **the relevance of the calls** and **the quality of communication with the Managing Authority**, confirming that the strategic direction of the interventions is well calibrated in relation to the needs of the beneficiaries.

In contrast, **the efficiency of administrative processes** and **the transparency of the evaluation** score more moderately, reflecting recurrent perceptions of the length of procedures, the complexity of the evaluation steps and the need for clearer communication on selection criteria and decisions.

It is important to emphasise that this assessment reflects **the aggregate perception of respondents**, mainly from the perspective of the experience of application and institutional interaction. The detailed analysis of project implementation and performance is distinctly based on the **main survey addressed to beneficiaries with contracted projects**, which fully meets the methodological robustness requirements of the evaluation.

2.16 Attractiveness of the P2 call for applicants (I16)

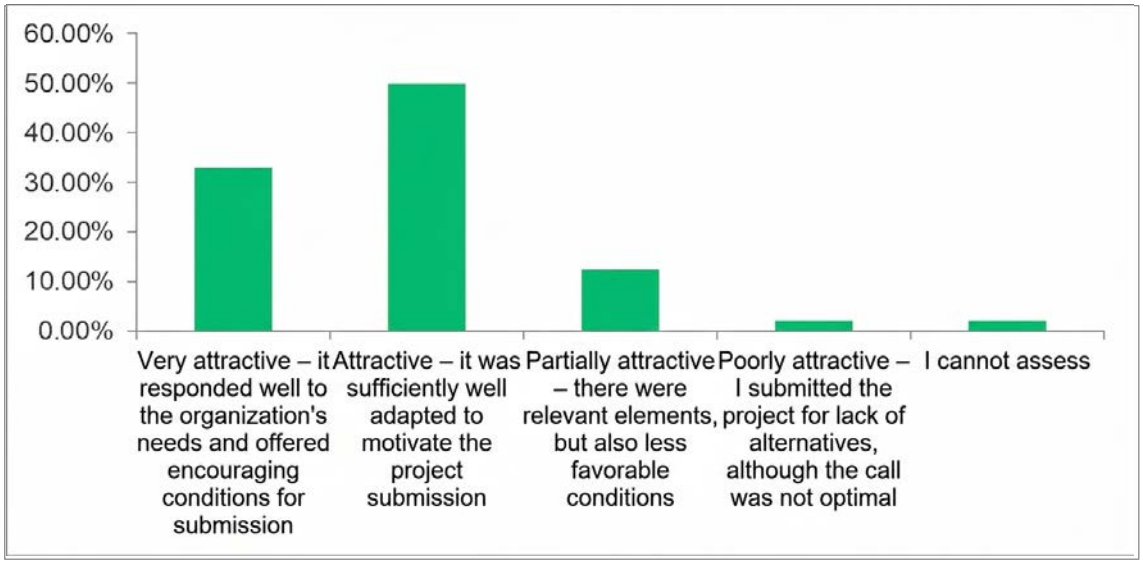
The attractiveness of the calls launched under Priority 2 – 'A Digital Region' was assessed on the basis of the responses collected through the questionnaire, both in **the main survey addressed to beneficiaries with contracted projects** and in **the complementary survey applied to funding applicants**. Given the nature of the question, the analysis reflects the respondents' aggregate perception of the financing conditions, the proposed theme and the available budget, being appropriate for both components of the survey.

The results indicate a **predominantly positive perception** of the attractiveness of P2 calls:

- **47.83%** of respondents assessed the call as *attractive*, considering that it was sufficiently well adapted to motivate the submission of the project;
- **35.87%** appreciated it as *very attractive*, appreciating that it responded well to the needs of the organisation and offered encouraging conditions for participation;
- **11.96%** considered the call *partially attractive*, citing the existence of less favourable conditions (e.g. restrictive eligibility criteria or budgetary limitations);
- only **2.17%** assessed the call as *unattractive*, indicating that they applied in the absence of alternatives;
- **2.17%** of respondents mentioned that they cannot appreciate the attractiveness of the call.

In total, **around 83% of respondents** (attractive + very attractive) express a positive assessment of the attractiveness of P2 calls, confirming their competitive and suitability in relation to the needs of beneficiaries and the funding options available at the time of launch.

Figure 21. Perception of call attractiveness



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

At the same time, 'partially attractive' perceptions signal that, for some applicants, **the complexity of the requirements or the conditions of co-financing** may be a disincentive.

2.17 Suggestions for improvement for future calls (I17)

The suggestions made by the respondents, collected both through **the main survey addressed to beneficiaries with contracted projects** and through **the complementary survey applied to funding applicants**, highlight a coherent set of proposals oriented mainly towards **optimising administrative and procedural processes**, rather than redefining the theme or objectives of the calls.

Overall, there is a common perception that Priority 2 calls are **strategically relevant and well-designed**, but **the length of the processes, procedural complexity and bureaucratisation** affect the overall efficiency of the funding mechanism.

Reducing the duration of the evaluation and contracting process

The most frequently mentioned suggestion (indicated by more than half of the respondents) concerns **the long time between the submission of projects and the signing of contracts**, which, in some cases, exceeded one year.

The main proposals formulated are:

- compliance with the indicative deadlines provided in the guides and ensuring a **predictable calendar** of the evaluation-selection-contracting stages;
- **automation and digitisation of evaluation flows**, to reduce administrative times;
- regular and structured communication on **the status of the projects** under evaluation.

Simplification of procedures and documentation

A significant number of respondents pointed out **the excessive complexity of the documentation** and the formalistic nature of the application requirements.

Recurring suggestions include:

- removing redundant requirements (e.g. resubmitting declarations or documents already available to the authorities);
- reducing the volume of annexes and requirements for business plans or long-term financial projections (e.g. N+5);
- **Proportionality of administrative requirements** according to the value and complexity of the project, in order to avoid disproportion between the administrative effort and the stake of the investment.

Procedural clarity and improved technical support

Respondents highlighted the need for clearer and more applied support at the project preparation stage, by:

- more explicit funding guidelines, complemented by **concrete examples of eligible and ineligible activities**;
- increased availability of RDA staff for timely clarifications in the submission phase;
- organising **thematic information sessions and webinars**, focusing on frequently problematic technical issues.

Adapting funding conditions to the diversity of beneficiaries

Some respondents proposed adjustments to the financing conditions, aimed at increasing the accessibility of calls:

- reducing the level of co-financing or relaxing restrictive conditions (e.g. those on the number of employees);
- adapting the criteria for service firms and innovative projects;
- introducing **preliminary 'pre-project' phases**, allowing digital solutions to be tested or piloted before large-scale deployment.

Other relevant proposals

Other specific suggestions made by respondents include:

- simplifying reporting and procurement procedures at the implementation stage;
- clearer targeting of funding towards **functional and sustainable digital solutions**, not just pilot projects;
- dedicated support for the development of digital skills and **clarification of the role of EDIH** in the support ecosystem for beneficiaries.

2.18 Additional comments and recommendations from applicants

The majority of respondents did not make any further comments, but those who provided feedback indicated recommendations that converge around the same recurring dimensions identified in the previous questions: **the efficiency of the process, the clarity of the procedures, the professionalism of the institutional interaction and the predictability of the evaluation and contracting stages**.

The need to speed up the evaluation and contracting process

Many participants reiterated concerns about the **extended duration of the evaluation process**, mentioning situations where projects are under review for long periods. This situation is perceived as having the following effects:

- the emergence of **gaps between the initial planning and the implementation context**, in particular in the field of digitalisation, characterised by rapid technological developments;
- diminishing **the timeliness and relevance of the proposed solutions**, especially in the case of software applications with short life cycles.

In this context, respondents stressed the importance of having a **public estimating timetable**, as well as respecting the indicative deadlines set out in the guides, together with more **constant communication** on the status of the assessment.

Simplification of the application process and clarification

Another consistent set of recommendations aims to **optimise the procedures for submitting and clarifying documentation**, with a focus on:

- reduction of redundant steps and a more intuitive structuring of the application process;
- clearer and more solution-oriented communication in the relationship with the Managing Authority, especially in the clarification phase;
- avoiding repeated requests for documents or information already submitted.

These suggestions reflect the need to make the process more **efficient and easier to navigate** without affecting the rigor of the assessment.

Adapting calls to digital market dynamics

Some respondents highlighted the need for future calls to be better aligned with **the accelerated pace of technological change**. Among the specific proposals are:

- the possibility of financing IT solutions that require **frequent updates** (e.g. cloud-based applications, AI or SaaS models);
- adjusting the rules on the duration of use and depreciation of equipment and software solutions, in order to more accurately reflect the technological reality;
- adequate treatment, from a budgetary point of view, of the implementation costs associated with IT equipment (installation, integration, configuration).

Additional punctual recommendations

Other suggestions include:

- maintaining the partnership as an option, not as an implicit requirement;
- ensuring **consistency and transparency** in the clarification process, including by avoiding successive requests for the same documents;
- supporting the continuity of the digitisation process by **periodically launching calls dedicated** to both SMEs and local public authorities.

SME EFFECTIVENESS (MAIN SURVEY)

2.19 Status of contracted and implementing projects

The sections dedicated to assessing the effectiveness of Priority 2 interventions are based exclusively on **the main survey**, addressed to beneficiaries with **contracted and implementing projects**, as only this category can provide relevant information on the actual implementation of the projects, the initial results and the difficulties encountered in implementation.

In the questionnaire, respondents were explicitly filtered according to the status of the project. Thus:

- **46.65% of respondents (40 people)** stated that they have a contracted project under implementation and were directed to **sections C and D** of the questionnaire (implementation and results);
- **54.35% of the respondents (50 people)** did not have at the time of filling out the questionnaire, a contracted project and did not go through these sections.

Compared to **the universe of contracted projects**, this result indicates an **almost complete coverage of the relevant beneficiaries for the effectiveness analysis**:

- at the **reference date of the evaluation (30.04.2025)** there were **20 contracted projects**, all related **to Call 2.2 – SMEs**;
- at the time of the survey launch (August 2025), the number of contracted projects had increased to **38**;
- The number of **40 respondents with contracted projects** who went through the implementation sections thus corresponds to a **response rate of 100% compared to the updated universe**, ensuring that **the margin of error of ±3%** was reached for this subsample.

This coverage gives a **very high level of robustness and representativeness** to the analyses on the effectiveness of interventions, allowing the formulation of well-founded conclusions on:

- the way the projects are carried out;
- progress towards the objectives undertaken;
- operational difficulties encountered in implementation.

At the same time, the distribution confirms that **the projects under implementation come exclusively from SMEs**, while the projects submitted by the local public authorities were still in the evaluation or pre-contracting stages at the time of the evaluation. Therefore, **the effectiveness analysis justifiably focuses on SME interventions**, which are the only category for which concrete initial results and effects can be assessed.

2.20 Previous experience in the field of digitalisation

This analysis is based exclusively on the responses collected in **the main survey**, addressed to beneficiaries with **contracted and implementing projects**, mainly **SMEs**, the only category for which dimensions related to effectiveness and initial results can be assessed.

The results indicate that most of the beneficiaries were, prior to accessing the funding, at a **low level of experience in the field of digitalisation,** which confirms the entry-level nature of the calls under Priority 2 – "A Digital Region".

The distribution of responses is as follows:

- **57.5%** of respondents said they **had no previous experience** in the field of digitalisation;
- **30.0%** mentioned limited **experience**, consisting of one to two minor initiatives;
- **12.5%** indicated a **medium experience**, having already implemented one or two relevant projects;
- **None of the respondents** reported a **solid experience** in the field (multiple projects implemented, including with external funding).

This structure confirms that the P2 calls mainly attracted **SMEs at the beginning of the digital transformation process**, which is fully in line with the objective of the intervention to expand the base of beneficiaries capable of adopting digital solutions and increasing their digital maturity.

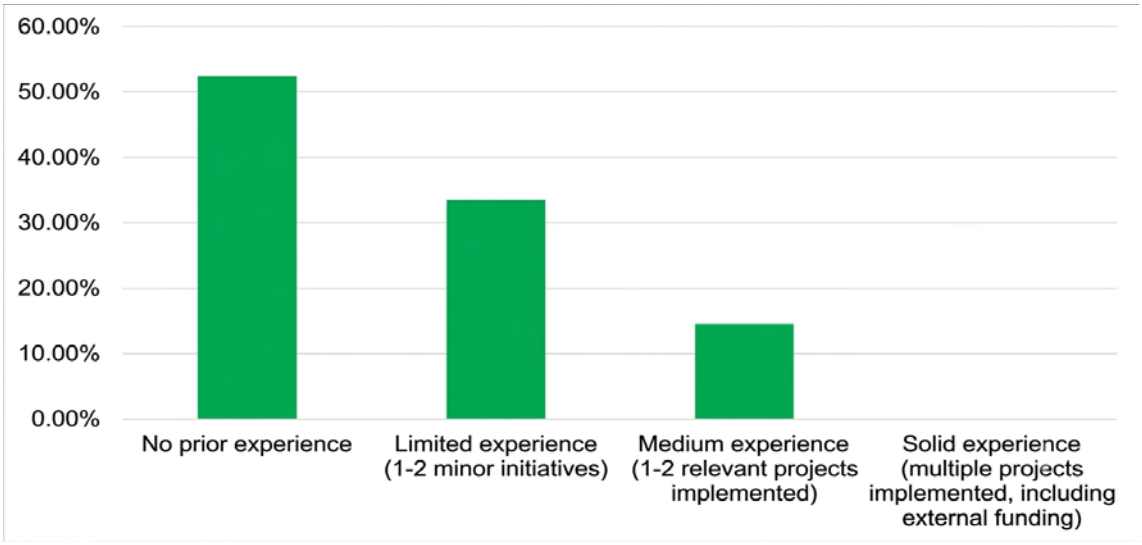
At the same time, the results suggest that, for a significant proportion of the beneficiaries, **the funded project represents the first structured digitisation initiative**, which involves:

- a **steep learning curve** in the implementation phase;
- an **increased need for technical support, guidance and procedural clarity**;

- the importance of the assistance provided by the Managing Authority and other supporting actors (e.g. consultants, EDIH) during the implementation of the projects.

In this context, the low level of previous experience also explains some of the difficulties reported by beneficiaries in implementation and underlines the relevance of maintaining tailored support mechanisms for SMEs in the early stages of digitalisation.

Figure 22. Experience in the field of digitalisation before project implementation



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

2.21 Satisfaction with the progress of the project in relation to the assumed objectives

This analysis is based on the responses collected from beneficiaries who have **contracted projects and are in implementation**, a category that allows the assessment of the degree of satisfaction with the actual progress of the projects.

The results indicate a **very high level of satisfaction** among the beneficiaries with the progress made so far, compared to the objectives assumed by the funding application.

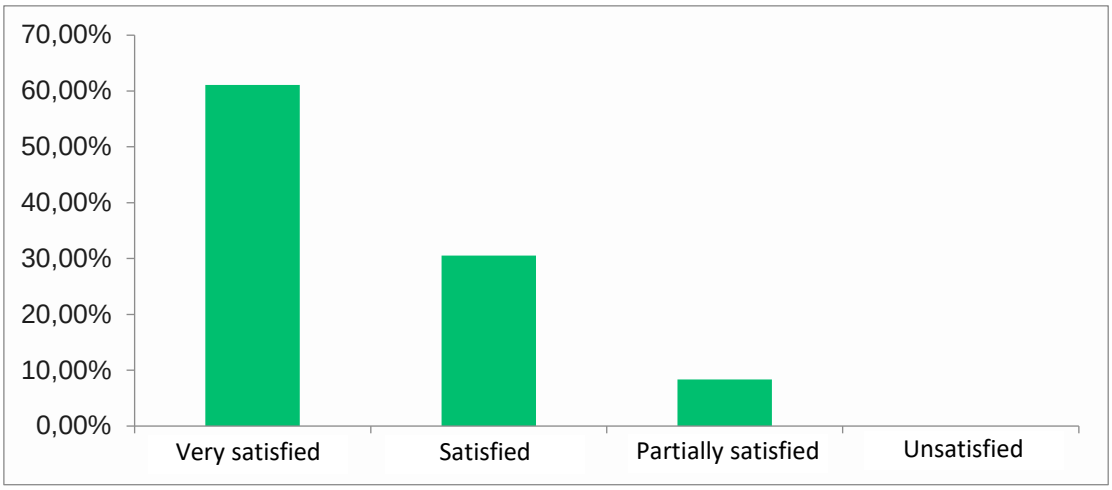
The distribution of responses is as follows:

- **65%** of respondents said they were **very satisfied** with the progress of the project;
- **27.5%** said they were **satisfied**;
- **7.5%** indicated a partial level of satisfaction;
- **No respondent** said they were **dissatisfied**.

In total, **over 92% of the beneficiaries** express a positive assessment (satisfied or very satisfied), which suggests that, in most cases, the projects under implementation evolve according to the planned and assumed objectives.

This favourable perception must also be interpreted in the context of the profile of the beneficiaries: a significant proportion of SMEs are at the **first structured digitalisation initiative**, and the intermediate results – such as the digitalisation of internal processes, the introduction of software applications or the first operational benefits – are perceived as relevant progress in the modernisation of the activity.

Figure 23. Beneficiaries' perception of project progress



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

2.22 Difficulties encountered in project implementation

Although the general level of satisfaction regarding the progress of the projects is high, the results of the survey show that a significant part of the beneficiaries with contracted and implementing projects encountered **punctual difficulties** that influenced the pace of the activities.

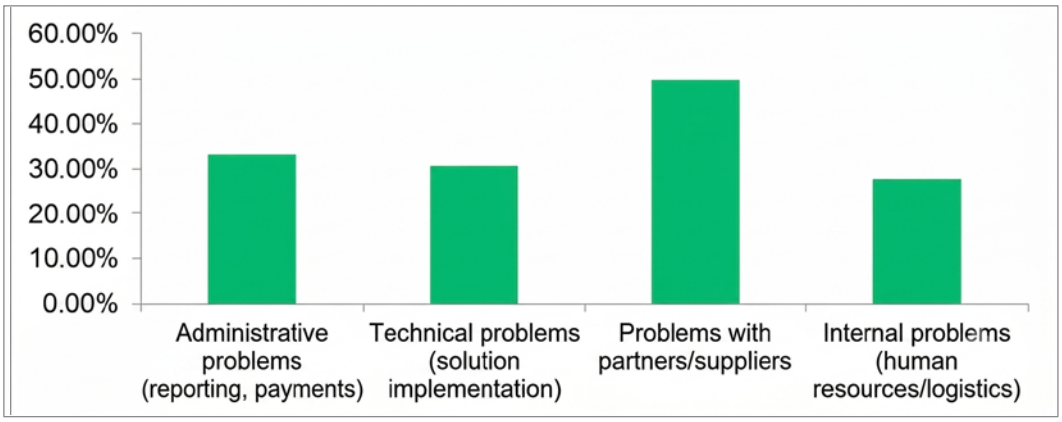
The most commonly mentioned types of difficulties are:

- **problems with partners or suppliers**, indicated by **50.0%** of respondents, reflecting difficulties related to meeting deadlines, contractual coordination or adapting IT solutions to specific project requirements;
- **administrative problems** (reporting, verifications, payments), reported by **35%** of respondents, which confirms the perception of the high administrative effort associated with the implementation of the funded projects;
- **technical problems related to the implementation of digital solutions**, mentioned by **30%,** in particular in terms of integration with existing systems, application configuration or lack of internal technical skills;
- **internal organisational organisational problems** (human resources, logistics), reported by **27.5%,** indicating constraints related to the availability of staff or the operational capacity of the beneficiaries.

In addition, a small number of respondents mentioned **other specific obstacles**, such as the need for repeated clarifications at the reporting stage, financial planning difficulties caused by delays in making payments or adapting to the detailed technical requirements in the implementation guides.

Overall, the results suggest that the difficulties encountered in implementation are not structural or systemic in nature, but rather **operational and procedural**, appearing in particular at the interface between beneficiary, providers and the administrative requirements of the programme.

Figure 24. Factors influencing progress



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

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2.23 Degree of confidence regarding the completion of the project within the contractual deadline and according to the approved budget

The results of the survey indicate a **very high level of confidence** on the part of beneficiaries with contracted and implementing projects in terms of completing the investments undertaken under Priority 2.

Thus:

- **85% of respondents** declare that they will complete the **project in full**, within the contractual term and within the approved budget;
- **15%** anticipate the completion of the project **with minor adjustments**, mainly operational or calendar;
- **No respondent** estimates significant risks leading to the non-completion of the project.

This distribution reflects a solid project planning and management capacity on the part of the beneficiaries, supported by a high degree of realism in defining the objectives and resources necessary for implementation, as well as by the clarity of the financing framework and by a functional communication with the Centre RDA during the contracting and implementation stages.

The adjustments anticipated by some of the beneficiaries do not indicate major malfunctions, but rather **normal adaptations** in an implementation context involving digital solutions, external providers and complex administrative processes.

Overall, the results confirm that the projects under implementation are perceived as **feasible and well-sized**, and the beneficiaries show a high level of ownership and control over their development. This is in line with the positive assessments of the progress of the projects and supports the conclusion that the interventions under P2 have been structured in a way that allows for a realistic and sustainable implementation.

2.24 Anticipated effects of digitalisation projects on SMEs

The results of the survey applied to SMEs with contracted and implementing projects indicate a **clearly positive anticipation** of the impact of digitalisation projects, with a predominant focus on operational efficiency, cost optimisation and modernisation of internal processes. Respondents' assessments suggest that digitalisation is perceived primarily as a pragmatic tool to improve current performance, but also as a factor to align with European standards and strengthen organisational resilience.
The most strongly anticipated effects are:

- **Increasing operational efficiency**, assessed as having a *very high* or *high impact* by **90.6%** of respondents (77.78% "very high"), confirming that digitalisation is directly associated with increasing productivity and optimising internal flows;

- **Decrease in operating costs through digitalisation,** anticipated as a *very high* or *high effect* by **66.67%** of SMEs, mainly by reducing execution times and streamlining the use of resources;
- **Automation of internal processes** (e.g. accounting, production, HR), considered a *very high* or *high effect* by **91.6%** of respondents, highlighting the orientation of projects towards the modernisation of the basic functions of organisations.

Another important level of impact concerns the structural and compliance dimensions:

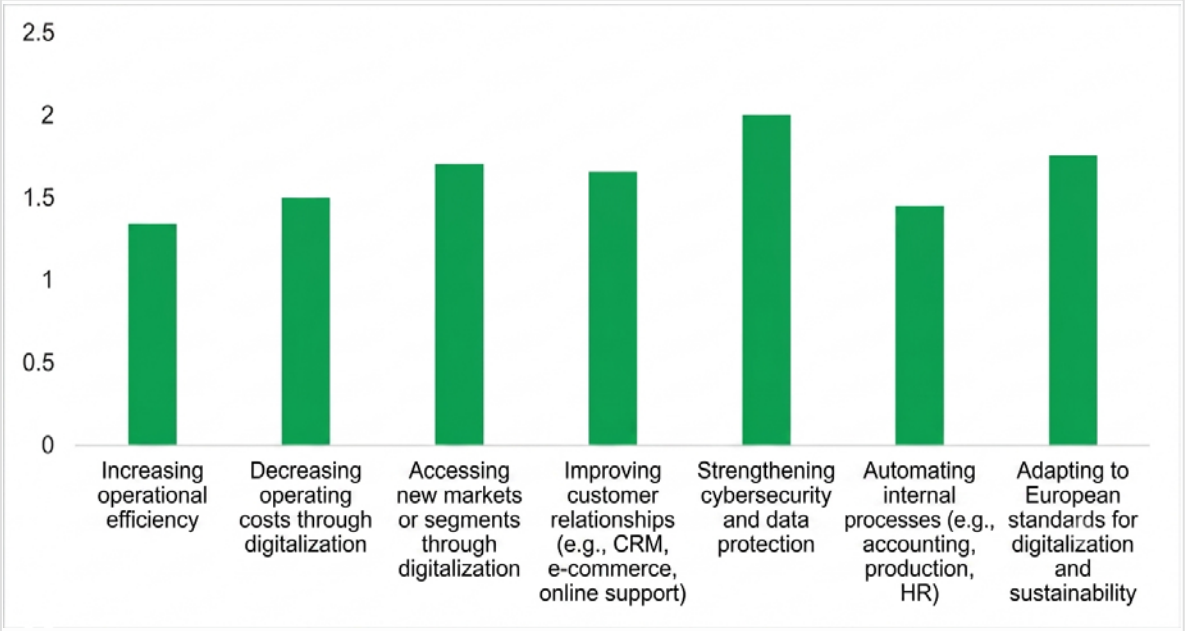
- **Strengthening cybersecurity and data protection**, perceived as having a *high* or *very high impact* by **80.56%** of respondents, reflecting an increased concern for the security of digital infrastructure and compliance with data protection requirements;
- **Adaptation to European digitalisation and sustainability standards**, assessed as *a high* or *very high effect* by **91.6%** of SMEs, indicating a clear alignment of the funded projects with the requirements of the European market and with the objectives of the digital and sustainable transition.

In terms of market size and customer relations:

- **The improvement of the relationship with customers** (through CRM, e-commerce, online support) is anticipated as having a *very high* or *high impact* by **80.55%** of respondents;
- **Accessing new markets or segments through digitalisation** is perceived as a *very high* or *high effect* of **81.3%,** but with a higher share of mid-term ratings, suggesting that these benefits are considered rather **medium-term results**, dependent on the maturity of the implemented digital solutions.

Overall, the results show that SMEs associate interventions funded under Priority 2 with **immediate and tangible operational benefits**, complemented by structural effects related to security, compliance and sustainability. This perception confirms **the relevance and effectiveness of the P2 measures**, in line with the objectives of the EU Digital Strategy and with the orientation of cohesion policy towards increasing economic competitiveness through digital

Figure 25. Anticipated effects of project implementation (SMEs)



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

2.25 Anticipated effects of digitalisation at the level of local public administrations (LPAs)

The results of the complementary survey applied to local public authorities with contracted projects and under implementation indicate a **predominantly positive anticipation** of the impact of digitisation projects, with a focus on improving the quality of public services, streamlining administrative processes and increasing institutional transparency.

It should be noted that **the number of respondents is limited (N = 4 LPAs),** corresponding to the early stage of contracting LPA projects at the time of data collection. In this context, the results provide **relevant qualitative indices**, but do not allow statistical generalisations at the level of the entire LPA population.

The main anticipated effects are:

- **Increasing the quality of public services offered to citizens**, assessed as having a *high* or *very high impact* by **75%** of respondents, confirming that digitalisation is perceived as a central tool for modernising the administration-citizen relationship;
- **Increasing the level of interoperability with other public institutions**, anticipated as a *high* or *very high effect* by **75%** of LPAs, which reflects the importance of data exchange and integration of information systems in the provision of public services;
- **Reducing response time and bureaucracy**, perceived as having a *high* or *very high impact* on **50%** of respondents, with an additional share of *average ratings*, suggesting realistic expectations regarding the pace of materialisation of this effect.

Also, the dimensions related to internal governance and information security are assessed favourably:

- **Improving internal administrative processes** and **increasing the security of data managed by the institution** are considered very *high effects* by **75%** of respondents, indicating a clear concern for efficiency, traceability and protection of information;
- **Increasing transparency and citizens' access to public information** is assessed as having a *very high impact* of **75%** of LPAs, which underlines the role of digitalisation in strengthening institutional openness.

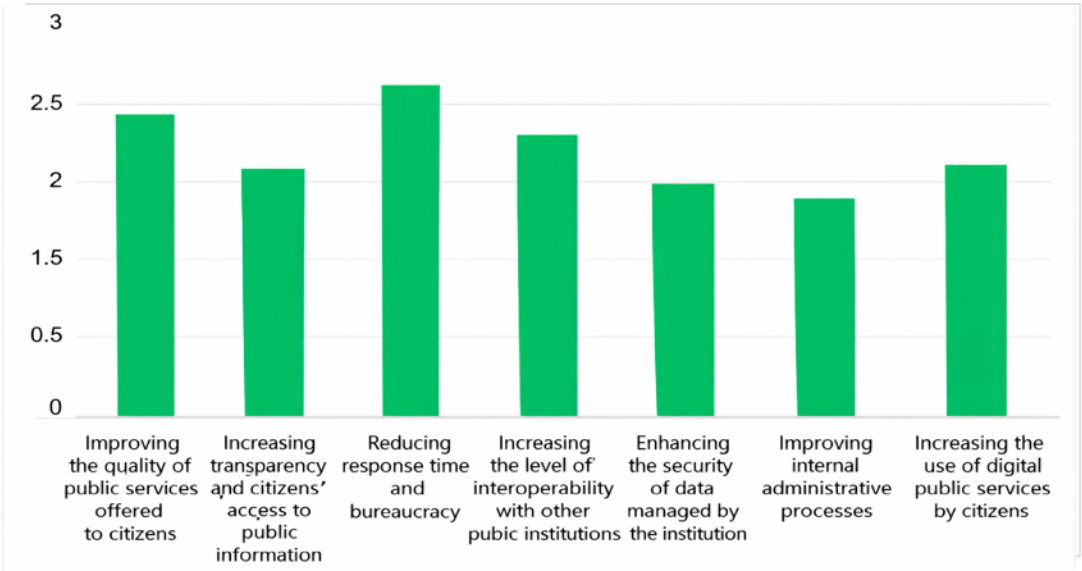
Regarding the **increase in the use of digital public services by citizens**, **75%** of respondents anticipate a *large* or *very high impact*, suggesting a positive expectation regarding the adoption of digital solutions, but conditioned by the level of digital literacy and the quality of the services offered.

In conclusion, even if the response base is narrow, the results indicate a **clear alignment of LPA projects with the objectives of Priority 2 – "A Digital Region",** in particular as regards:

- increasing the quality and accessibility of public services,
- streamlining and simplifying administrative processes,
- strengthening interoperability and data security,
- promoting transparency and the digital relationship with citizens.

These findings are consistent with the strategic directions of the programme and with the role of digitalisation as a vector for the modernisation of the local public administration.

Figure 26. Anticipated project implementation effects (LPAs)



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

2.26 Sustainability of the results of digitisation projects at the level of SMEs

The results of the main survey indicate a **predominantly positive perception** of the sustainability of investments made through digitalisation projects.

Thus, **60% of respondents** believe that the results of the projects will be sustainable **without major difficulties**, which reflects a high level of confidence in the ability of organisations to maintain and capitalise on digital investments in the medium term, from an operational and financial point of view.

At the same time, **30% of SMEs** anticipate **specific difficulties**, mainly related to:

- providing financial resources for maintenance and updates,
- the availability of human resources with digital skills,
- adapting the implemented solutions to future technological developments.

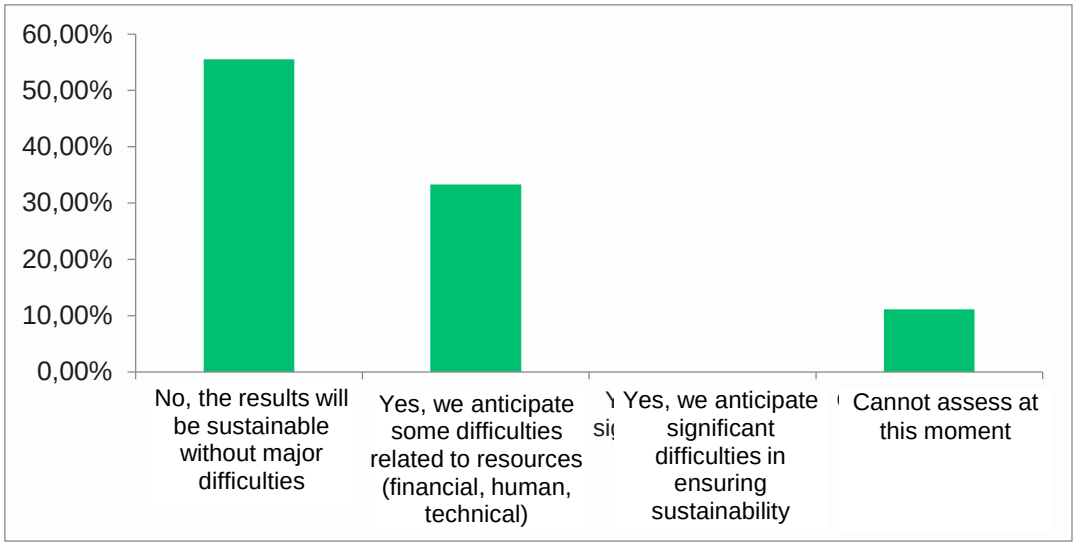
It is relevant to note that **no respondent reported significant difficulties** that would call into question the sustainability of projects, suggesting that any challenges are perceived as **manageable** and operational, not structural.

Also, **10% of respondents** indicated that **they cannot assess the** sustainability of the results at this time, a situation that can be explained by **the still early stage of implementation** for some of the projects, in which the long-term effects are not yet fully visible.

Overall, the data confirm a favourable assessment of the sustainability of the investments made under Priority 2, while highlighting the need to:

- post-implementation support measures,
- guides and best practices on the maintenance and updating of digital solutions,
- strengthening the internal competences of the beneficiaries, to ensure that long-term results are maintained and capitalised.

Figure 27. Sustainability perspective of funded projects



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

2.27 Factors influencing the success of the implementation of digitalisation projects (SMEs)

The analysis of the responses provided by SME beneficiaries with projects under implementation indicates that **the success of the implementation is mainly determined by internal factors and the quality of collaborative relationships**, while contextual and external factors play an important but secondary role.
The evaluation of the factors on a scale from 1 (minimum influence) to 5 (maximum influence) highlights the following results:

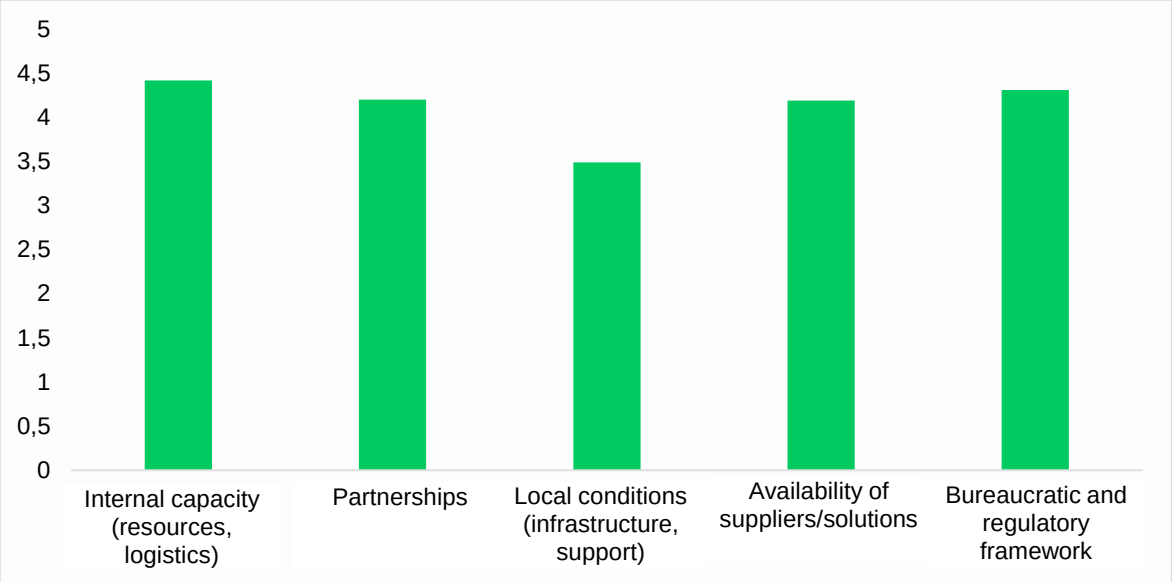
- **The internal capacity of the organisation (resources, logistics)** registers the highest weighted average score (**4.42**), being considered the factor with the greatest influence on the success of the implementation. This result underlines the essential role of available human resources, internal skills, logistical organisation and project management capacity.
- **The bureaucratic and regulatory framework** achieves a high average score (**4.31**), indicating that administrative procedures, compliance requirements and reporting rules significantly influence the pace and efficiency of implementation. Although not an internal factor, this element is perceived as having a direct impact on the progress of projects.
- **Partnerships** (with IT solution providers, consultants or other stakeholders) have a weighted average score of **4.20**, confirming the importance of cooperation and the quality of contractual relationships for delivering digital solutions as expected.
- **The availability of providers and digital solutions** is also assessed as a highly influential factor (4.19), reflecting the dependence of SMEs on the IT solutions market, the ability of providers to deliver on time and their adaptability to the specific needs of beneficiaries.
- **Local conditions (infrastructure, local support)** have the lowest weighted average score (**3.49**), being perceived as having a more moderate influence on the success of implementation. However, this result suggests that, in certain territorial contexts, issues such as connectivity, access to technical support or the local ecosystem may generate specific difficulties.

Overall, the results confirm that the successful implementation of digitalisation projects depends primarily on:

- organisational maturity and internal capacity of SMEs,
- the quality of the partnerships and suppliers involved,
- and a predictable and coherent administrative framework.

This finding is in line with the European literature and practices on the digital transformation of SMEs, which highlight the decisive role of internal leadership, organisational skills and collaboration with specialised actors to achieve sustainable results.

Figure 28. Factors influencing implementation



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

2.28 Digital technologies implemented by SMEs in TE2 projects

The responses collected from SMEs with contracted and implementing projects indicate a **clear orientation towards technologies with a direct impact on operational efficiency, internal management and production processes**, while the adoption of emerging technologies remains limited.
The most frequently mentioned types of technologies purchased or planned for implementation are:

- **Software for design, simulation and modelling (CAD/CAM, etc.)**, indicated by **75%** of respondents, reflecting a strong focus on the digitalisation of technical and production processes, especially in SMEs in the industrial, manufacturing or engineering sectors.
- **ERP/ CRM/ SCM solutions**, mentioned by **63.89%** of respondents, confirming the high interest in integrating internal flows, optimising resource management and improving customer relations.
- **E-commerce platforms and online sales solutions**, reported by **47.22%** of SMEs, indicating the adaptation of business models to digital marketing channels and online market requirements.

To a lesser extent, SMEs opted for:

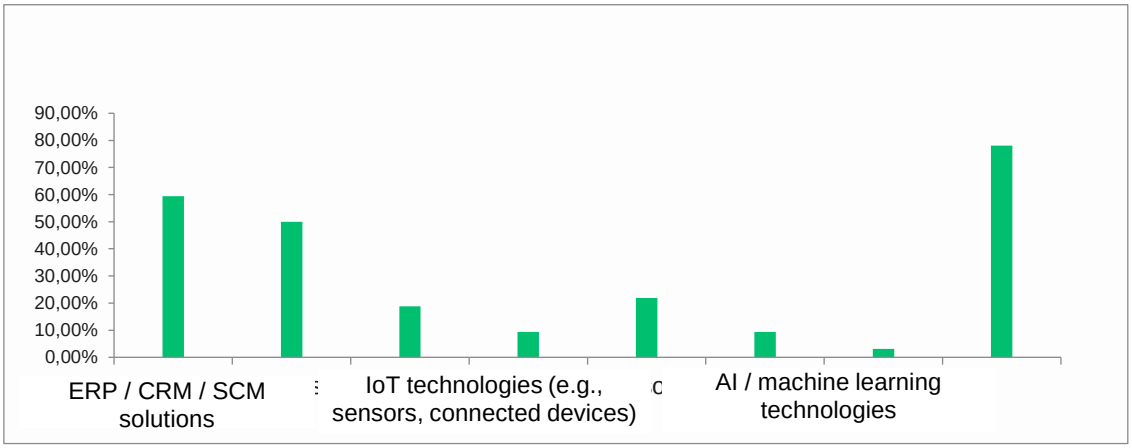
- **Cloud computing solutions**, mentioned by **19.44%** of respondents, suggesting a moderate openness to scalable infrastructures and outsourcing of IT services, but without widespread adoption;
- **Process automation (RPA, BPM),** indicated by **16.67%,** reflecting a punctual interest in optimising repetitive flows, especially in areas such as accounting, administrative or production;
- **Advanced data analytics/Business Intelligence applications** and **IoT technologies**, each mentioned by **11.11%** of respondents, indicating limited use of data-driven solutions and advanced connectivity.
- **AI/machine learning technologies**, reported by only **2.78%** of SMEs, highlighting a very low level of adoption of emerging technologies.

Overall, the investment structure confirms that SMEs implementing TE2 projects are predominantly in a **stage of operational digital maturity**, geared towards:

- streamlining internal processes,
- integration of management systems,
- digitisation of core activities and production.

The adoption of advanced technologies (AI, BI, IoT, extended automation) appears as a **further step**, still limited, which is consistent with the results on the low or medium level of previous digital experience of the beneficiaries and with the focus on immediate and tangible results.
This finding supports the relevance of P2 interventions for strengthening the digital base of SMEs but also points to the opportunity for future calls to progressively stimulate **the transition to advanced digitalisation**, through support mechanisms tailored to the maturity level of beneficiaries.

Figure 29. Implemented digital technologies (SMEs)



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

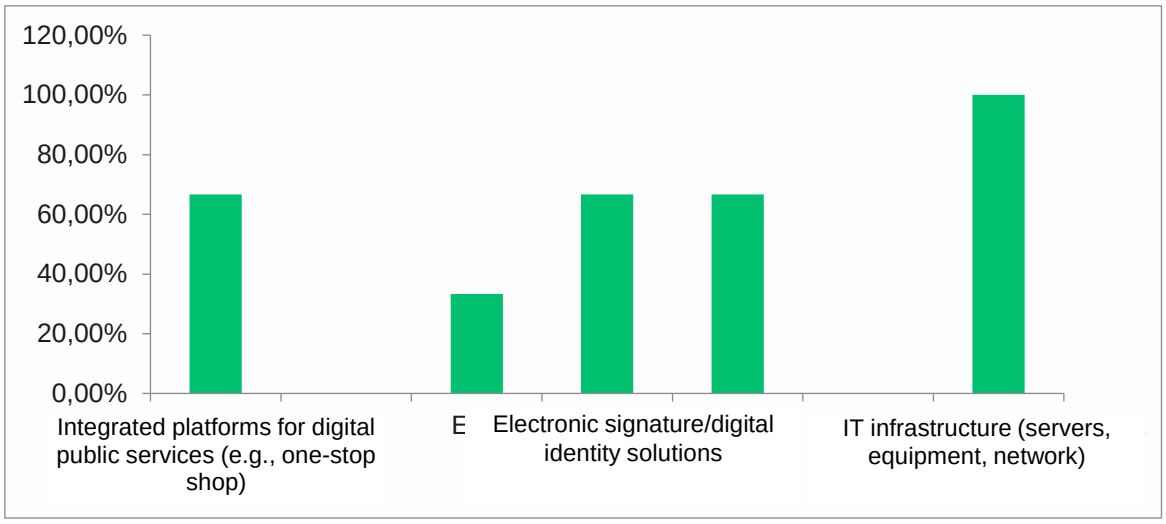
2.29 Digital technologies and solutions implemented by LPAs

Although the number of LPA respondents in the complementary survey is limited, the data provide clear clues on **the priorities of digital investments in local public administrations**. The most frequently mentioned solutions aim at **digitising administrative processes and strengthening technical infrastructure**, confirming an orientation towards **creating the functional foundations of digital transformation**:

- **Electronic signature and digital identity solutions (100%),** indispensable for the implementation of fully digital internal flows and electronic interaction with citizens.
- **IT infrastructure (servers, equipment, network – 100%),** which represents the technical foundation of the digitisation processes, reflecting the need to modernise existing equipment.
- **Integrated platforms for digital public services (50%)** and **document management systems (50%),** aimed at streamlining the relationship with citizens and digitising administrative documents.
- **Cybersecurity solutions (50%),** which shows an **increase in awareness of data protection and digital resilience**.

In contrast, **interoperability solutions and GIS systems** were not mentioned, indicating that **the current stage of the digitalisation of LPAs is predominantly infrastructural and administrative**, without yet achieving advanced data integration or systemic interoperability between institutions.

Figure 30. Digital technologies implemented (LPA)



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

This result confirms that **the TE2 calls have supported in particular basic digitalisation** at the level of local authorities, providing the essential infrastructure and tools for future stages of development – including connection to national platforms and inter-institutional digital services.

COHERENCE - INTEGRATION WITH OTHER PROJECTS, GOOD PRACTICES FROM OTHER PROGRAMMES

2.30 Taking over good practices and experiences from other programmes

The results of the main survey indicate a **low level of capitalisation of good practices and experiences from other funding programmes or similar initiatives** among beneficiaries with contracted and implementing projects.

Thus, only **10% of respondents (4 beneficiaries)** said that they took over good practices from other programmes, while **90%** mentioned that they did not use such examples or models in the design and implementation of their digitalisation project.

The open answers provided by those who indicated the takeover of good practices suggest a **punctual and limited transfer**, mainly materialised by:

- the use of **models of specifications** or similar technical documentation, without indicating a structured adaptation of previously tested solutions, architectures or functional models.

This situation indicates that **learning and re-using experience gained at regional or national level is still under-leveraged** and projects are largely conceived as individual initiatives, rather than as extensions or replications of already validated models.

From an evaluative perspective, the results suggest:

- a **lack of systematic mechanisms for dissemination and transfer of good practices** between programmes and beneficiaries;
- an **increased dependence on ad-hoc solutions**, strictly adapted to the context of each organisation, without consistent references to relevant previous experiences.

In this context, there is a need to strengthen **tools for the exchange of experience and collective learning**, including through:

- thematic databases with completed digitisation projects and validated functional solutions;
- peer learning *sessions* between beneficiaries (SMEs and LPAs);

- Explicitly integrating examples of good practice into funding guides or technical assistance activities.

Such measures could help to increase the coherence of interventions, reduce implementation risks and maximise the impact of investments in digitalisation under Priority 2 – 'A Digital Region'.

2.31 Integration of projects with other regional initiatives

The results indicate a **low level of uptake of good practices among** beneficiary SMEs, with only **2.5% of respondents with contracted projects** mentioning that they have used experiences or models from other funding programmes or similar initiatives.

The majority of SMEs (97.5%) stated that they did not capitalise on existing examples, which suggests that, in the case of this type of beneficiaries, digitisation projects are mainly designed and implemented **autonomously**, without systematic reference to previous experiences or validated models. The only concrete mention offered refers to the taking of examples **of specifications**, indicating a punctual transfer of technical tools, but not a structured approach of *learning from peers* or capitalisation of good practices.

It is important to underline that this trend reflects **the specificity of SMEs**, characterised by a limited capacity to explore and adapt external experiences, and **cannot be generalised to all TE2 beneficiaries**, especially in the case of LPAs, where institutional learning and inter-institutional exchange mechanisms are generally more developed.

These results indicate the opportunity to strengthen **dedicated support mechanisms for SMEs**, such as:

- thematic guides with examples of good practices,
- libraries of validated projects and solutions,
- experience exchange sessions adapted to the specifics of the private environment, that could facilitate the replication of functional solutions and increase the efficiency of future investments in digitalisation.

2.32 Aligning projects with the regional development vision

Out of the total **40 respondents with contracted and implementing projects**, **10% (4 respondents)** indicated that their project is part of a regional development vision, while **90% (40 respondents)** said that the project is not integrated into such a regional strategic framework.

This result should be interpreted in **the specific context of the calls under Priority 2 – 'A Digital Region'**, where **most of the projects analysed belong to SMEs**. For this category of beneficiaries, the applicant's guide **did not impose a formal obligation to integrate into a regional development vision**, but mainly aimed at digitising internal processes, increasing operational efficiency and strengthening economic competitiveness at company level.

Therefore, **the low level of declared alignment with a regional vision (10%) does not indicate a lack of strategic coherence of interventions** but reflects **the predominantly individual and operational nature of projects**, designed to meet the specific needs of beneficiaries, in particular SMEs.

At the same time, the existence of a limited number of projects that explicitly claim a regional vision suggests that **the link between digitalisation interventions at micro level and wider territorial objectives is currently an indirect one**, achieved through the cumulative contribution to the economic and administrative modernisation of the region rather than through formal integration into a common regional strategic framework.

This finding highlights a **potential area of development for future calls**, in particular by:

- stimulating the linkage of projects with thematic regional initiatives,
- encouraging projects with the potential for scaling or replication,
- or the definition of optional mechanisms to anchor individual investments in regional digitalisation objectives.

SME EFFICIENCY

2.33 Perception of the justification of the resources invested

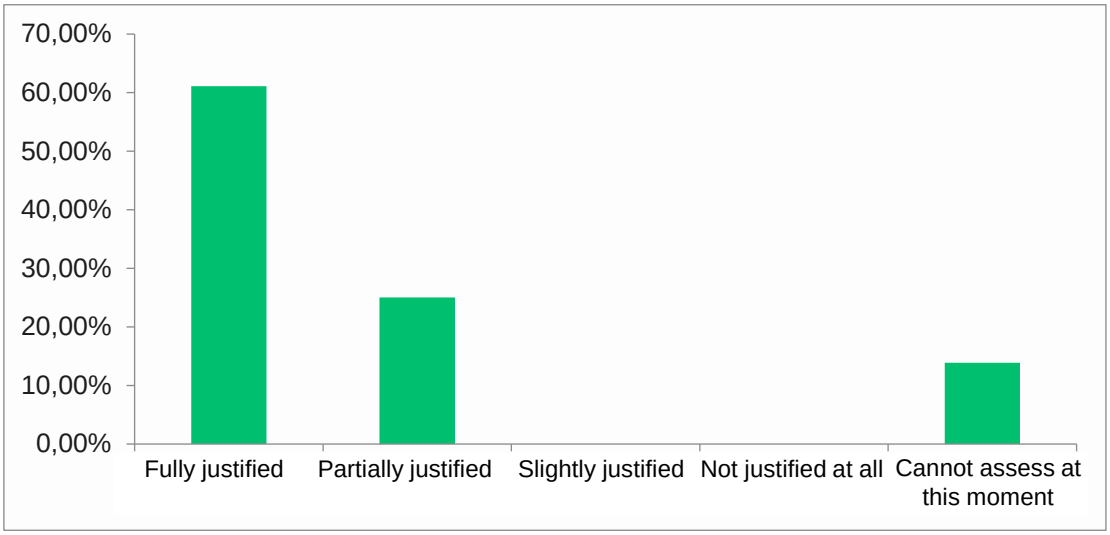
The majority of respondents (**65%)** consider that the resources invested in the project are **fully justified** by the results obtained so far or by those expected, and **22.5%** consider that they are **partially justified**. No beneficiary assessed the investment as 'poor' or 'not at all' justified, indicating an **overall positive perception of the cost-benefit ratio** of the projects financed by TE2.

At the same time, **12.5% of respondents** mentioned that they cannot yet assess the justification of the investment, a situation that can be explained by **the early stage of implementation** for some of the projects, especially in the case of the recently contracted ones.

Overall, the results confirm a **high level of trust of the beneficiaries in the relevance and usefulness of the investments made**, even in the absence of complete completion of the projects. For **SMEs**, this perception reflects the emergence **of early operational benefits**, such as streamlining internal processes, automating activities and better resource management. For **LPAs**, although the sample is limited, the responses indicate **positive expectations regarding the modernisation of public services, the digitalisation of administrative flows and the improvement of institutional capacity**, results that naturally materialise gradually.

These findings support the conclusion that interventions under Priority 2 are perceived by beneficiaries as **relevant, appropriate and proportionate to the investment effort**, reinforcing the prerequisites for the sustainability of results in the medium term.

Figure 31. Ratio of invested resources to results obtained



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

2.34 Evaluation of the cost-benefit ratio of projects

Although most of the projects were, at the time of applying the questionnaire, in **intermediate stages of implementation** – predominantly in the acquisition of equipment and technological solutions – the beneficiaries offered a **predominantly positive assessment** of the cost-benefit ratio of the investments made.

In total, **80% of respondents** rate the cost-benefit ratio as **good or very good**, which confirms a favourable perception of the efficiency of the use of funds:

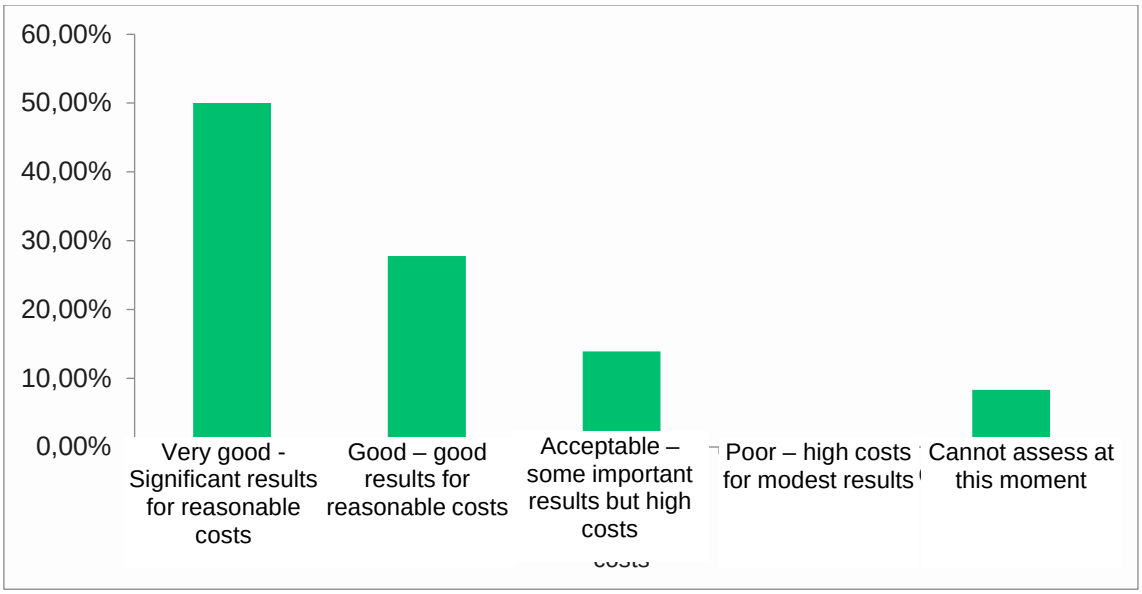
- **55.0%** consider the ratio **to be very good**, considering that the projects generate significant results for reasonable costs;
- **25.0%** assess it as **good**, indicating adequate results in relation to the level of expenditure.

Another **12.5% of respondents** consider the report to be **acceptable**, mentioning the existence of important results, but associated with higher costs, and **7.5%** say that they cannot yet assess the cost-benefit ratio, a situation that can be explained by the early stage of implementation for some projects. None of the respondents assessed the cost-benefit ratio as poor or indicated that there were costs disproportionate to the results.

These results must be interpreted in the context that **the final effects of projects (e.g. increased operational efficiency, digital maturation, improved services or interoperability of systems)** are not yet fully measurable. The positive evaluations mainly reflect **satisfaction with the technological relevance of the investments, the functionality of the selected solutions and the coherence between the objectives assumed and the resources allocated**.

For **SMEs**, the responses indicate a high level of confidence in the future impact of digitalisation on productivity and competitiveness.

Figure 32. Cost-benefit ratio



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

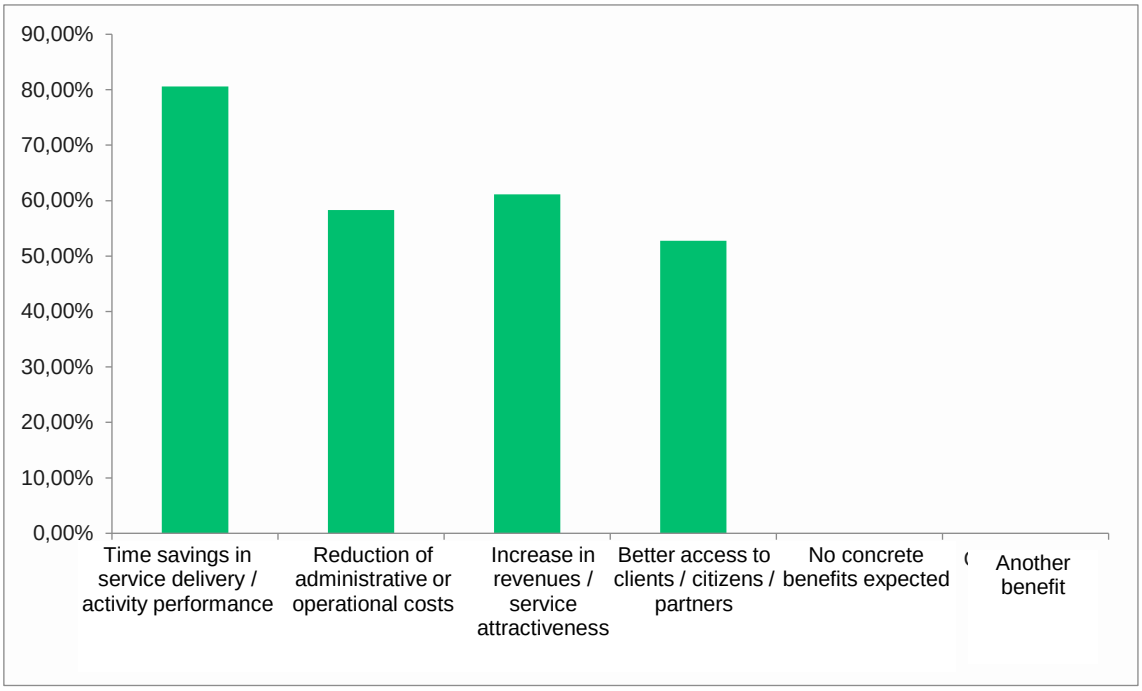
2.35 Concrete benefits anticipated from the implementation of the projects

The overall perception of beneficiaries indicates **clear and consistent expectations regarding the generation of tangible benefits** from the implementation of TE2-funded projects, in particular in terms of operational efficiency, cost reduction and improvement of the relationship with final beneficiaries.
This question was completed by **36 respondents**, corresponding to beneficiaries who have contracted projects or are in advanced stages of implementation, which provides a sufficiently solid basis for identifying the main trends.
The main anticipated benefits are:

- **Time savings in providing services or carrying out current activities** – mentioned by **82.5%** of respondents, confirming the role of digitalisation as a direct tool for streamlining processes;
- **Increase in revenues or attractiveness of the services offered** – indicated by **60%,** which suggests positive expectations regarding the impact of the projects on the competitiveness and added value generated;
- **Reduction of administrative or operational costs** – anticipated by **60%,** reflecting the potential of digital solutions to optimise resources;
- **Better access to customers, citizens or partners** – mentioned by **55%,** indicating relevant external effects, related to improving interaction with end users.

It is relevant that **no respondent indicated the absence of concrete benefits**, which confirms an **unanimously positive perception** of the potential of projects to generate tangible effects for organisations and institutions.
However, these results must be interpreted in the context **of the current stage of implementation**: for some of the projects, the mentioned benefits represent **estimates or expectations based** on the solutions purchased and on the first intermediate results, not yet fully measurable effects. However, the coherence of responses and the focus on operational benefits indicate a **good alignment between project objectives, types of investments made and anticipated results**, supporting the relevance and potential effectiveness of TE2 interventions.

Figure 33. Perception of the project's internal benefit generation



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

2.36 Previous experience in digitisation projects (e.g. NRRP, PoCIDIF)

This question was completed by **40 respondents**, corresponding to beneficiaries who have contracted and/or implemented projects from the main survey, providing an adequate basis for the analysis of previous experience in the field of digitalisation.

The results indicate a **very low level of previous experience** in implementing other funded digitisation projects:

- **7.5% of respondents (3 organisations)** said that they had previously or in parallel implemented other digitisation projects, financed through programmes such as **NRRP or PoCIDIF;**
- **92.5% of respondents (33 organisations)** indicated that the TE2 project represents **the first major digitisation initiative** implemented by their organisation.

Only **two responses** included concrete details on other projects, confirming the punctual and limited nature of previous experience in this area.

This distribution is **consistent with the results presented in section 2.20 on previous experience**, where the majority of beneficiaries – in particular SMEs – reported having no or limited experience in digitalisation. In this context, TE2 calls functioned predominantly as **an entry mechanism into the digital transformation process**, rather than as a scaling tool for already digitally mature beneficiaries.

Therefore, the results confirm that TE2 interventions have contributed to **expanding the base of new beneficiaries in the field of digitalisation**, which is relevant from the perspective of public policy objectives on reducing digital maturity gaps and increasing the capacity of organisations to adopt digital solutions in a structured way.

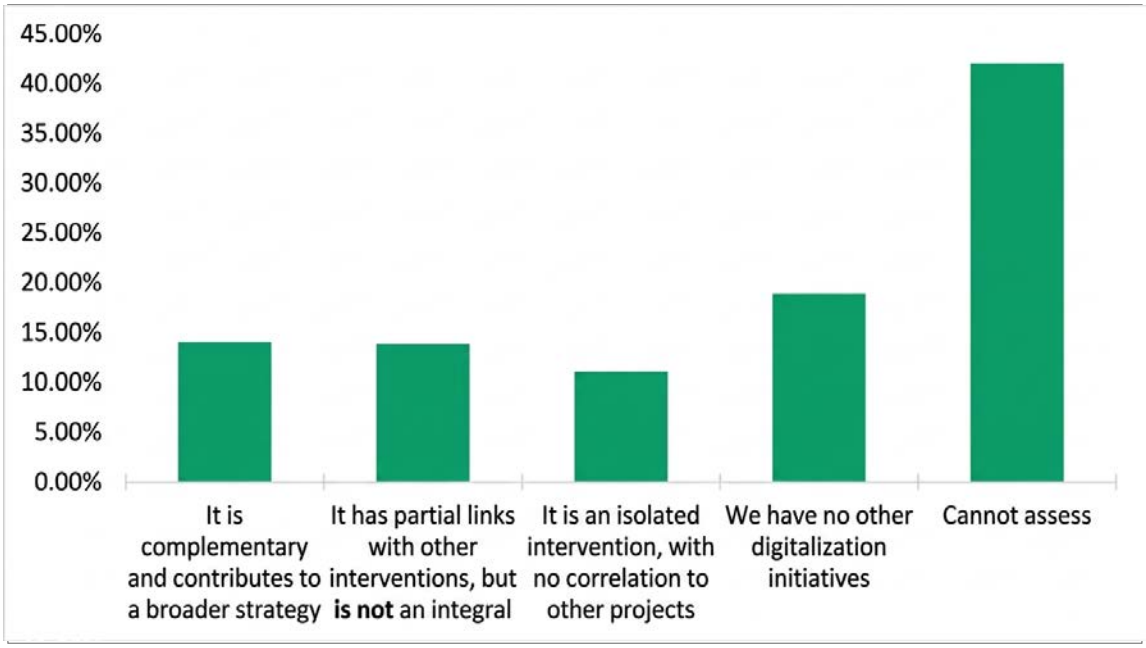
2.37 Degree of integration of digitisation projects within beneficiary organisations

This question was completed by **40 respondents**, corresponding to beneficiaries with contracted and/or implementing projects, providing an adequate basis for analysing the degree of integration of digitisation projects at organisational level.
The results indicate a **moderate to low level of strategic integration**, with significant differences between beneficiaries and a high degree of uncertainty regarding the positioning of the project in the set of digitisation initiatives:

- **25% of respondents** consider that the project implemented through P2 is **correlated with other initiatives**, either as a complementary part of a broader digitalisation strategy (12.5%) or partially linked to other interventions, without being part of an integrated portfolio (12.5%);
- **10%** describe the project as **an isolated intervention**, with no correlation with other projects or digitisation initiatives;
- **17.5%** indicate that **they have no other digitisation initiatives**, which suggests that the P2 project represents the first and only structured intervention in this area;
- a significant percentage, **47.5% of respondents**, say that **they cannot appreciate** to what extent the project correlates with other initiatives, reflecting either the early stage of implementation or the lack of a clearly formalised strategic vision at the organisational level.

Overall, the results suggest that for a relevant part of beneficiaries – in particular SMEs – projects funded by P2 are **predominantly operational in nature**, geared towards the digitalisation of specific processes, rather than integration into a coherent and formalised medium- and long-term digital transformation strategy.
At the same time, the high share of "cannot appreciate" responses confirms previous observations regarding **the low level of digital maturity and strategic experience**, as well as the fact that for many beneficiaries the P2 project is a **first stage of learning and testing**, not the result of enhanced digital planning.

Figure 34. Degree of integration of funded projects



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

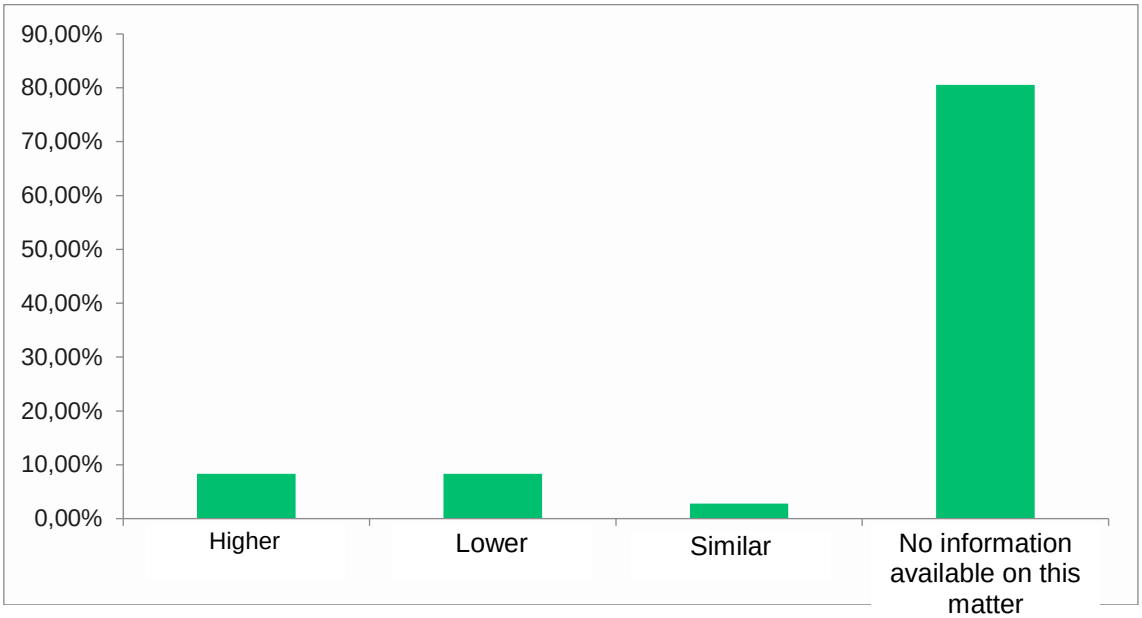
2.38 Perception of the savings generated compared to other similar programmes (e.g. NRRP, PoCIDIF)

This question was completed by **40 beneficiaries with contracted and/or implementing projects**, providing a sufficient basis for the analysis of comparative perceptions, with the mention that the interpretation of the results is limited by the low level of previous experience in similar programmes.
The results indicate a **very high degree of uncertainty** in the comparative assessment of the savings generated by P2-funded projects compared to other digitalisation programmes:

- **82.5% of respondents** say that **they do not have sufficient information** to assess whether the current project will generate higher, smaller or similar savings compared to programmes such as NRRP or PoCIDIF;
- **7.5%** believe that the project will generate **greater savings**;
- **7.5%** believe that the savings will be **smaller**;
- **2.5%** perceive the savings as similar.

This distribution reflects, first of all, the **low level of comparative experience of the beneficiaries**, also confirmed by the previous results, according to which more than 90% of respondents did not implement other major digitisation projects financed by similar programmes. In the absence of concrete benchmarks, most beneficiaries cannot make an informed assessment of the relative efficiency of their investments.
At the same time, the results must be interpreted in the context **of the early stage of the implementation** of TE2 projects, in which the economic benefits are still predominantly estimated, not actually measured. Thus, the absence of a clear comparative perception does not indicate a low efficiency of the projects, but rather a **lack of a benchmark and consolidated data on the final results**.

Figure 35. Perception of project savings



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

SME ATTRACTIVENESS

2.39 Motivations for participating in P2 calls

This question was completed by **40 beneficiaries with contracted and/or implementing projects**, providing a relevant basis for analysing the motivations for participating in the calls under Priority 2 – *A Digital Region*.
The results indicate that the decision to apply was driven by a **combination of financial and strategic factors**, with a lower weight of procedural or calendar elements.
The main factors identified are:

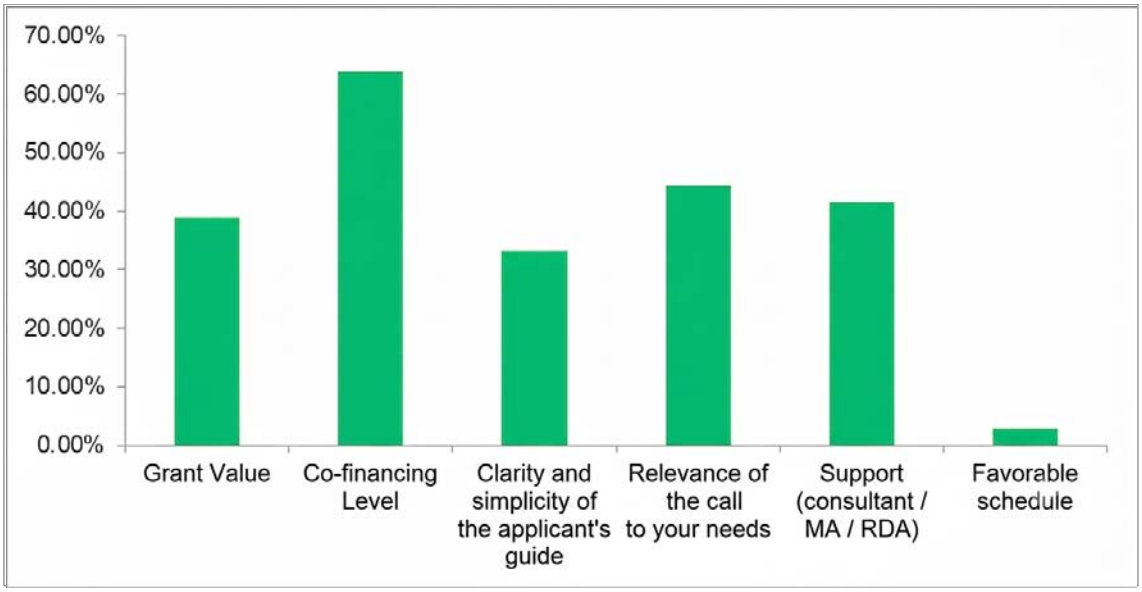
- **The level of co-financing**, mentioned by **62.5% of respondents**, which confirms the importance of the financial balance between the grant and the own contribution, especially for SMEs;
- **The relevance of the call for the needs of the organisation,** selected by 40**%,** indicating that the theme of the call was perceived as well adapted to the real needs of digitalisation;
- **The support received (consultant/ MA/ RDA),** mentioned by **40%,** highlighting the important role of external assistance in the decision-making process and preparation of applications;
- **The value of the grant**, indicated by **40% of respondents**, especially in the case of projects that involve significant investments in equipment or digital solutions.

Secondary influencing factors include:

- **The clarity and simplicity of the applicant's guide** (**37.5%),** which, although relevant, was not a determining criterion for the majority of beneficiaries;
- **The favourable timing**, mentioned marginally (**2.5%),** suggesting that the timing of the call had a limited role in the application decision.

Overall, the results show that **the motivation for participation was predominantly substantial and content-oriented**, based on the relevance of the intervention and financial conditions, rather than on considerations of temporal or exclusively procedural expediency. This motivation profile is in line with the character of P2 calls, oriented towards concrete investments in digitalisation and operational modernisation.

Figure 36. Motivations for participating in the call



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

HORIZONTAL THEMES

40 beneficiaries with contracted projects completed the questions on the horizontal themes, providing a representative picture of how these principles were understood and applied in SME projects.

2.40 Integration of horizontal themes into funded projects

The question on the integration of horizontal themes was completed by **40 beneficiaries with contracted and/or implementing projects**, providing a sufficient basis to analyse how these principles were addressed in the projects funded by Priority 2 – *A Digital Region*.

The results indicate that **horizontal themes were mainly integrated to comply with the minimum requirements of the call**, with a lower level of voluntary initiative from beneficiaries:

- **65% of respondents** explicitly stated that measures on horizontal themes were included **as required by the call, without exceeding the minimum threshold set out in the guide**;
- **40%** included **sustainable development** measures, especially related to energy efficiency and reducing environmental impact;
- **37.5%** targeted **equal opportunities and non-discrimination**, through adapted access or inclusion measures;
- **35%** mentioned **gender equality**, mainly through the balanced involvement of women and men in project teams;
- only **7.5% of respondents** indicated that the project provided for **additional measures compared to the minimum requirements** in the call.

Overall, the data show that **the integration of horizontal themes is perceived as a compliance obligation rather than as an area of innovation or added value**. The approach is functional and procedurally correct, but with little voluntary deepening, especially in the case of SMEs.

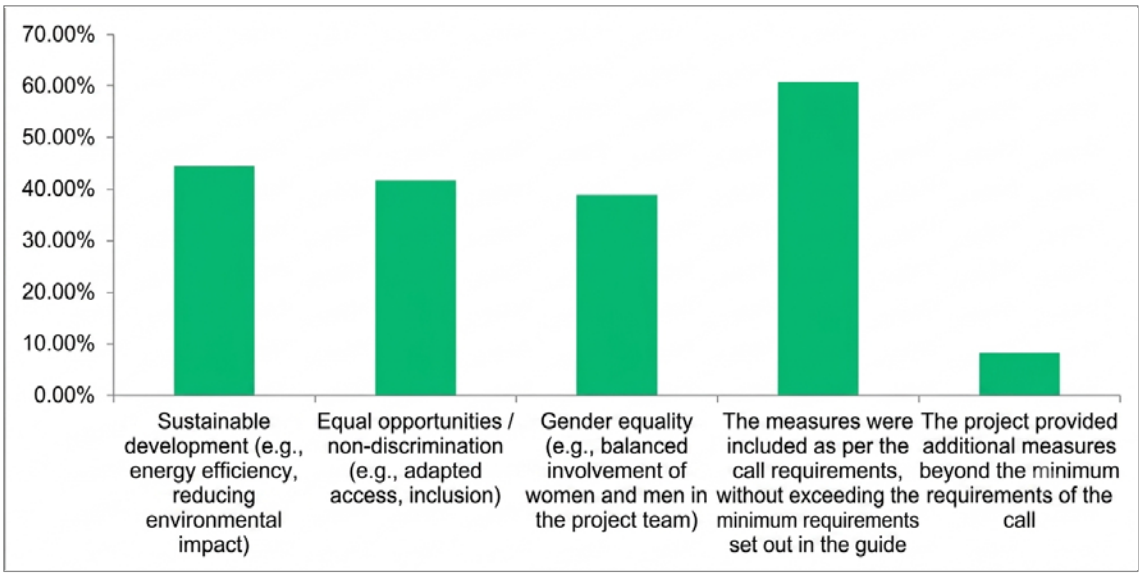
This trend can be explained by:

- the predominantly **operational and investment** nature of digitisation projects;
- focusing beneficiaries on immediate technical results;
- the lack of incentives or evaluation criteria explicitly encouraging the exceeding of the minimum requirements for horizontal themes.

For future calls, these results suggest the opportunity to:

- clarifying how horizontal themes can concretely contribute to the objectives of digital projects;
- the introduction of examples of good practices or evaluation criteria that stimulate the substantial, not just formal, integration of these principles.

Figure 37. Horizontal themes integrated into projects



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

In conclusion, SME projects funded by Priority 2 demonstrate **a moderate to high level of integration of horizontal principles**, with a clear prevalence of the theme of **sustainable development**, followed by inclusion and gender equality.

2.41 Relevance and ease of integrating horizontal themes

Beneficiaries' responses indicate that, in most cases, the horizontal themes – sustainable development, equal opportunities and gender equality – were perceived as relevant and relatively easy to integrate into P2-funded projects.

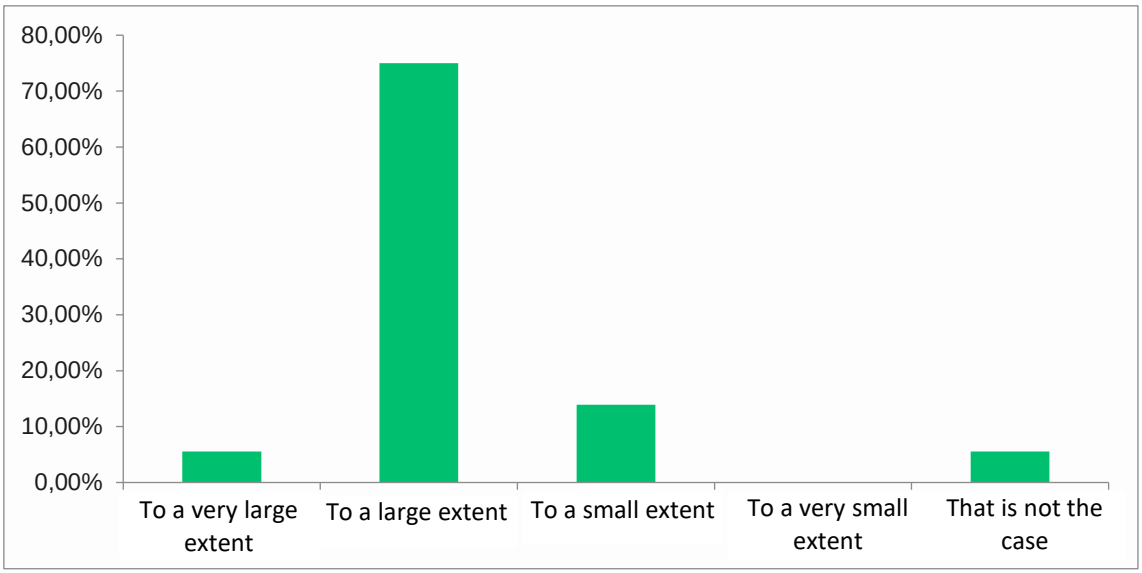
Concrete:

- **77.5% of respondents** believe that these topics have been largely integrated;
- **5%** appreciate that the integration has been achieved **to a very large extent**;
- **12.5%** indicate a **small integration**;
- **5%** mention that **this is not the case** for their project.

In total, **over 83% of the beneficiaries** appreciate that the horizontal themes could be integrated without major difficulties, in a manner proportional to the nature and objectives of the digitisation projects. The limited integration reported by some respondents mainly reflects the technical and operational nature of some projects (e.g. IT procurement, production software), where the extensive application of these principles is less relevant.

Overall, the results confirm that the requirements for horizontal themes have been formulated in an appropriate way, allowing beneficiaries to apply them **pragmatically and without disproportionate administrative burdens**, in line with the specifics of the investments made under Priority 2 – "A Digital Region"

Figure 38. Relevance and ease of integrating horizontal themes



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

2.42 Difficulties in integrating horizontal themes

The results indicate a **balanced distribution of perceptions** of the difficulties encountered in integrating horizontal themes, suggesting that for a significant part of the beneficiaries, this process involved a moderate effort.

Concrete:

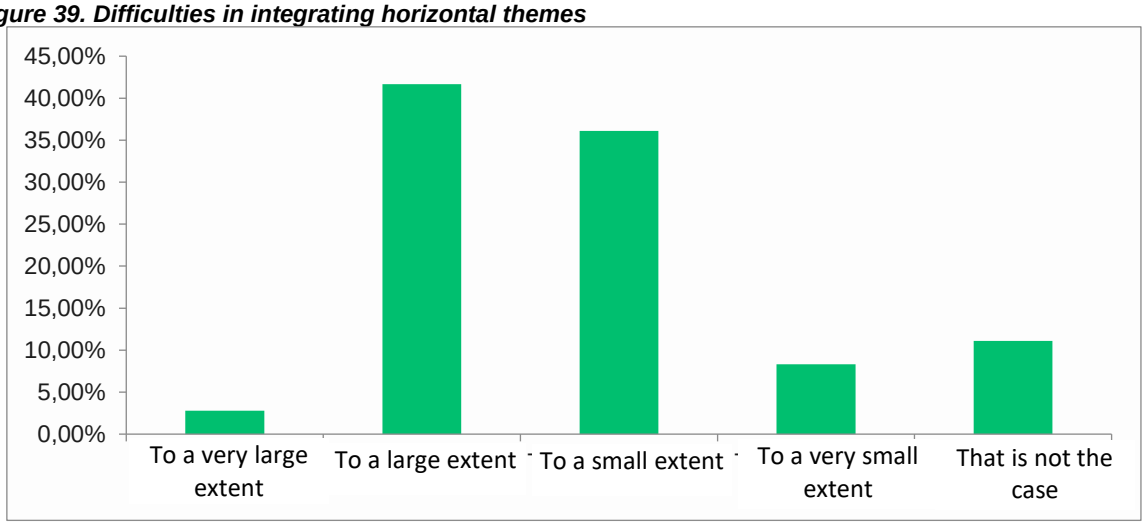
- **50% of respondents** consider that the difficulties were **to a large** or **very large extent** (47.5% "to a large extent" and 2.5% "to a very large extent");
- **40%** consider that the difficulties were **to a small** or **very small extent**;
- **10%** mentioned that **this was not the case**, indicating that horizontal themes were not relevant or did not generate constraints for the type of project implemented.

This distribution shows that, although for about half of the beneficiaries the integration of horizontal themes did not raise significant problems, **a comparable proportion encountered more pronounced difficulties**, especially at the stage of formulating and justifying them in the project documentation.

From the qualitative responses it emerges that the difficulties were not related to the rejection of the principles themselves, but rather to:

- **formal justification** of the applicability of horizontal themes in the case of technical or highly specialised projects;
- **correlation of horizontal requirements with technical specifications and procurement**, especially when solutions have been adjusted during implementation;
- **additional documentation requirements**, perceived as disproportionate to the size or object of the investment.

Figure 39. Difficulties in integrating horizontal themes



Source: Processing of survey authors applying for funding

These situations confirm that the difficulties identified are **administrative and formal compliance**, not substantive, and do not significantly affect the ability of beneficiaries to comply with the horizontal principles imposed by P2 calls.

3. CONCLUSIONS

3.1 Relevance

The cumulative results of **the complementary survey** (addressed to funding applicants) and the **main survey** (addressed to beneficiaries with contracted projects) indicate a **high level of relevance of the P2 calls** in relation to the real digitisation needs of organisations in the Centre Region.

From the perspective of the applicants, the calls were perceived as well aligned with the needs of operational modernisation, both in the private sector and in the local public administration. The reasons for application were mainly related to the adequacy of the theme of the appeal to one's own needs, the financial conditions considered accessible and the possibility of making concrete investments in functional digital solutions.

Among beneficiaries with contracted projects, the relevance of the calls is confirmed by positive evaluations on the justification of the investments and the usefulness of the results obtained or anticipated. For SMEs, the funded projects directly respond to clear operational needs (efficiency, automation, cost control), and for LPAs, they represent concrete steps in initiating or strengthening the digitalisation of public services.

Although the applicant's guides were generally assessed as clear and structured, the complementary survey highlights the existence of specific difficulties, in particular in the case of LPAs, related to the interpretation of the eligibility of certain IT equipment, interoperability and correlation with other public systems. These aspects reflect differences in digital maturity and administrative capacity at local level, but do not affect the overall relevance of the intervention.

Overall, the P2 is perceived as a relevant and well-positioned tool that responds to real and concrete needs, with a clear added value for beneficiaries.

3.2 Attractiveness and degree of integration

From **the perspective of the main and complementary survey**, P2 calls proved attractive, especially for organisations with no previous experience in publicly funded digitalisation projects. The data indicates that P2 has managed to attract a significant number of new beneficiaries, expanding the base of actors involved in the digital transformation at regional level.

This attractiveness is also confirmed in **the main survey**, where the majority of beneficiaries assess the financing conditions, theme and level of support as appropriate for initiating relevant digital investments. The calls were accessible enough to allow some organisations at the beginning of their journey to enter the digitisation zone.

At the same time, the analysis highlights a **low level of strategic integration** of projects. Funded projects are rarely linked to other regional initiatives, programmes or thematic networks and, especially in the case of SMEs, are not explicitly part of a regional development vision. This is explained by the nature of the call and the predominantly operational orientation of investments, focused on internal processes and competitiveness at the firm level.

Also, the capacity to capitalise on good practices from other programmes is limited, especially among SMEs. The takeover of external experiences occurs punctually and informally, without systematic mechanisms of learning or knowledge transfer. In the case of LPAs, although the number of respondents is small, there is a slight greater openness to linking with broader strategies or initiatives, but without yet outlining an integrated framework for cooperation.

In conclusion, P2 is attractive and inclusive, but it works predominantly through individual interventions. The level of inter-project integration and cooperation remains an area of potential for future calls.

3.3 Effectiveness of interventions

The analysis **of the main survey**, addressed to beneficiaries with contracted and implementing projects, indicates a **high level of perceived effectiveness** of P2-funded interventions.

The beneficiaries assess the progress of the projects as being in line with the assumed objectives, and most anticipate their completion within the contractual term, with possible minor adjustments to the calendar or procedure. No major risks were identified affecting the achievement of project objectives.

In terms of anticipated effects, SMEs mainly highlight improving operational efficiency, reducing costs, automating internal processes and increasing the attractiveness of services or products. For LPAs, the benefits are mainly focused on the quality of public services, transparency, data security and streamlining of administrative processes.

Even though many projects are still in the intermediate stages of implementation, the general perception is that they will generate tangible and relevant results. For a significant part of the beneficiaries, the project funded by P2 represents the first structured digitalisation initiative, which amplifies the perceived impact of the intermediate results.

These results confirm that investments financed through P2 contribute directly to strengthening the operational capacity of SMEs and, to a lesser extent, LPAs. In the case of local public administrations, the anticipated benefits focus in particular on increasing the quality of public services, transparency and interoperability between institutions.

Although the projects are still in a relatively early stage of implementation, the general perception is that they will generate **tangible and measurable results**, confirming a high degree of effectiveness of the intervention. For many organisations, these projects mark an important step in the transition to a digital operating model, and for local administrations — the beginning of a structural change in the provision of services to citizens.

3.4 Efficiency and sustainability

The results **of the main survey** show a positive assessment of the efficiency of the use of resources allocated through P2. The beneficiaries generally consider that the investments are justified by the results obtained or anticipated, and the cost-benefit ratio is assessed as favourable.

Cost-benefit assessments reflect an appropriate financial structure of projects, with no signs of disproportionate costs or significant inefficiency. Even if the final effects are not yet fully measurable, beneficiaries' express confidence in the impact of investments on organisational performance.

In terms of sustainability, most beneficiaries anticipate that results will be maintained in the medium term without major difficulties. However, some respondents point to possible challenges related to the resources needed for maintenance, updating and technological adaptation, especially in the case of short-life IT solutions. These issues are not perceived as structural risks, but as manageable operational challenges that can be mitigated through post-implementation support measures.

3.5 Influencing factors and horizontal themes

The success of the implementation of P2-funded projects is mainly influenced by **the internal capacity of the beneficiaries** and the **quality of the partnerships**. Human resources, digital skills and project management capacity are key to maintaining the pace of implementation, especially for SMEs.

Partnerships with specialised suppliers, consultants or, in the case of LPAs, with other public institutions and support structures, play an important role in overcoming technical and administrative difficulties. At the same time, the bureaucratic and regulatory framework remains an ambivalent influencing factor: it contributes to transparency and compliance, but also generates administrative pressure, especially in the evaluation, contracting and reporting stages.

As for the horizontal themes, they were consistently integrated into the funded projects, mainly to comply with the requirements of the applicant's guide. Most beneficiaries included measures related to sustainable development, equal opportunities and, to a lesser extent, gender equality. The integration of these principles was perceived as relevant and generally easy to achieve.

However, for some beneficiaries, in particular SMEs with highly focused technical projects, difficulties have arisen at the level of formal justification of the applicability of the horizontal themes, rather than at the level of actual implementation. This points to the need for a more proportionate and type-specific approach in future calls.

Overall, projects funded by P2 demonstrate good alignment with cohesion policy principles, and their success is mainly driven by internal factors and specialised support, rather than external structural constraints.

ANNEX 5. WORKSHOP/FOCUS GROUP REPORT

1. WORKSHOP REPORT/FOCUS GROUP INTENDED FOR BENEFICIARIES FROM SME(S)

Date: October 10, 2025

Location: online

Participants: 6 beneficiaries from SMEs and representatives of the Association formed by CIVITTA Strategy & Consulting SA (leader) and Lideea Development Actions SRL (partner)

General context

The workshop for beneficiaries from small and medium-sized enterprises took place online on October 10, 2025. The event brought together beneficiaries of the funding granted through the call 2.2 – Digitisation of SMEs, together with representatives of the association providing programme evaluation services. The invitation to participate was sent to 192 entities, **6 project managers** accepted the invitation and participated in the workshop, representing SMEs with funded projects.

The meeting was moderated by the evaluation team, who explained that the workshop is part of a broader evaluation process at regional level. The aim of this approach is to provide a realistic picture of how funding under Priority 2 of the Centre Regional Programme contributes to the digital transformation of the entrepreneurial environment. The workshop aimed to collect the views and experiences of the beneficiaries, to identify the obstacles encountered in the implementation of the projects and to formulate recommendations for the improvement of future calls for funding.

Relevance and timeliness of Call 2.2

Participants appreciated call 2.2 as timely and necessary, providing support at a time when digitalisation had become essential for the survival and development of SMEs. The beneficiaries showed that through this financial instrument they had the opportunity to make integrated investments, purchasing ERP systems, management and design software, online platforms and other modern technological solutions.

These investments had direct effects on the optimisation of internal processes, increased productivity and improved customer relations. Many participants stressed that the call came "on time", offering a real chance to adapt to the rapid transformations in the economic environment. In some cases, the projects represented the first concrete step towards digitalisation, and in others a consolidation of the processes already started.

Beneficiaries' experience in the submission and implementation process

Beneficiaries reported several difficulties encountered at the project submission stage, in particular in the interpretation of the Applicant's Guide and the DESI criteria on digital maturity. The eligibility criteria were perceived as ambiguous or restrictive, especially in terms of investments in custom software solutions, cloud applications and automation systems.

The participants considered that the DESI methodology used as a reference was not sufficiently adapted to the current technological realities, as some components were already outdated. In overcoming these obstacles, an important role fell to the digitalisation consultant, described by most of the participants as the "key to success" at the submission stage. He supported companies in interpreting technical requirements, structuring investment plans and avoiding administrative errors.

A frequently reported aspect was the long duration of the evaluation and contracting process. In many cases, almost a year has passed between the submission of the application and the signing of the contract. During this time, technology has changed, prices have changed, and some equipment has become unavailable. The beneficiaries were thus forced to draw up addenda to update the technical specifications, which prolonged the implementation process and generated dissatisfaction.

This situation was considered one of the main weaknesses of the current financing system, as the procedures were too slow compared to the dynamics of the technology market.

Regional relevance and impact of the intervention

The participants recognised the important role of call 2.2 in accelerating the digitisation process at the level of the Centre Region. The funding has enabled companies to modernise their digital infrastructure, streamline their activities and build a solid foundation for sustainable economic growth.

Most projects focused on modernising internal processes, digitising workflows, and automating tasks, rather than developing innovative digital products or services. This limitation was attributed to the relatively rigid framework of the DESI guidelines and criteria, which, although aligned at European level, did not sufficiently reflect the local technological context.

However, the impact of the projects was visible. Beneficiaries reported optimising internal flows, reducing working times, improving data traceability and strengthening customer relationships. In cases where companies had a clear digital transformation strategy, the results went beyond the operational sphere and generated new business models and complementary digital services.

Financing alternatives

An additional theme addressed during the workshop was that of alternatives to financing. The participants mentioned that, although non-reimbursable funds are the main source for digitisation, the process of accessing it is difficult and time-consuming. In the absence of fast financing, some SMEs have turned to bank loans to support their investments, assuming additional costs. However, European funds were considered the safest and most sustainable long-term solution for the development of companies.

Recommendations for future calls

Based on their own experiences, the participants made recommendations for improving future calls. It was stressed the need to update the DESI criteria, which should only be used as a guideline, and to complement them with emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, process automation, Internet of Things and machine learning.

Participants also proposed an assessment approach based more on results and performance indicators – such as increased productivity, cost reduction and market expansion – and less on formal compliance with the applicant's guide. Another important recommendation was to digitise the administrative steps in the evaluation and contracting process, in order to shorten the time between the submission of applications and the signing of contracts. At the same time, it was proposed to simplify the procedures for project amendments and addenda, in order to allow faster adaptation to market changes.

Conclusions

Call 2.2 – *Digitisation of SMEs* was perceived as a valuable support tool, with real benefits for the business environment in the Centre Region. However, the experience of the beneficiaries highlighted the need to modernise the procedural framework, to reduce the evaluation time and to better adapt to the rapid pace of technological evolution.

The participants appreciated the openness to dialogue and expressed the desire to continue the collaboration in the consultation and evaluation processes, so that future calls better respond to the real needs of SMEs and offer a more predictable, fast and adapted path to the realities on the ground.

2. WORKSHOP REPORT DEDICATED TO CONSULTANTS, ON THE IMPLEMENTATION SYSTEM OF CENTRE RP

Date: October 13, 2025

Location: online

Participants: 8 consultants and representatives of the Association formed by CIVITTA Strategy & Consulting SA (leader) and Lideea Development Actions SRL (partner)

General context

For the organisation of the workshop, invitations were sent to the consultants who have ongoing projects in the Centre Region. The selection criterion of the participants focused on their experience in managing the projects financed through Centre RP and the relevance of their activity for the analysis of the implementation process. Of those invited, eight consultants confirmed their participation and were present at the event.

The main objective of the workshop was to analyse the functioning of the implementation system of the Centre Regional Programme (Centre RP) from the perspective of consultants. The discussions aimed to identify the positive aspects, the difficulties encountered in carrying out the projects and to formulate proposals for improvement regarding the procedures, the relationship with the RDA and the efficiency of the administrative processes.

Elements that work well

The participants appreciated the digitisation of processes through the MySMIS platform and the use of electronic correspondence, which considerably reduced the bureaucratic burden and document transmission times.

It was positively mentioned that the verification of eligibility before contracting, introduced by GEO 23/2023, provides greater clarity and predictability.

Another appreciated aspect is the increased autonomy of regional RDAs, especially the Centre RDA, which allows for faster and more efficient communication with beneficiaries. Examples were presented where the collaboration between evaluators and beneficiaries in the clarification phase led to the effective resolution of problems.

There was also an increased interest of beneficiaries for various calls, which reflects a maturation of the institutional environment and the culture of projects financed by European funds. At the same time, it was noted the availability of the RDA to dialogue and adjust the procedures according to the feedback received.

Areas for improvement

Even though the system has taken important steps, participants have reported several recurring difficulties.

Project evaluation and scoring grids are still considered too bureaucratic, with interpretable wording and insufficient differentiation between well-founded projects and only formally complete ones.

Technical criteria (FTSs) are applied unevenly, and there is no uniform guide to ensure consistency between evaluators.

The lack of predictability of calls makes it difficult to plan and prepare complex documentation.

Unequal administrative and financial capacity between small and large ATUs or between micro-enterprises and SMEs leads to difficulties in complying with the same procedural requirements.

Payment flows are slow and financial pressure on SMEs remains high.

The reports are redundant, the information being repeatedly requested in different documents.

Insufficient technical feedback from RDAs sometimes leads to cost underestimates and procurement resumptions.

Contracts with designers are often weak, with no liability clauses for errors, which transfers the risks to the beneficiaries or consultants.

The instability of the teams in the ATUs, especially after the elections, affects the continuity of the projects.

The institutional culture is still oriented towards compliance and risk avoidance, not performance.

In general, there was a major difference in approach between the private and public sectors, which generates different perceptions of bureaucracy and responsibility.

Recommendations and directions of action

Simplification and proportionality

The participants propose a differentiated approach to administrative requirements, depending on the size and capacity of the beneficiaries:

- simplified procedures and standardised forms for small and micro-enterprises;
- more detailed requirements for SMEs and large ATUs.

It is recommended to apply the principle of proportionality in reporting, control and verification, as well as an eligibility framework adapted to the rural/urban context.

Simplified payments and costs

It is proposed to revise the 7% percentage for simplified costs so as to reflect actual expenditure. For SMEs, it would be useful to introduce more flexible payment mechanisms – advances, interim tranches

or temporary guarantees. In the public environment, a hybrid system of nationally validated reference costs, based on successful models used by RIFA, would be beneficial.

Strengthening administrative capacity

It is necessary to professionalise the teams in city halls, through training and certification in the management of European projects and public procurement. For small ATUs, the creation of shared services is recommended, and RDAs should provide active technical support in implementation. Contracts with designers should also include clearly defined liability clauses and the roles of consultant-designer-beneficiary should be better defined.

Results-oriented

The system should evolve towards results-based contracts, where funding is linked to the achievement of indicators, not just the justification of expenditure. It is recommended to fully digitise administrative processes and integrate RDA IT systems with central platforms. RDAs should strengthen their role as partners of beneficiaries, not just control entities.

Relevant good practice

RIFA's model for investments in fruit growing was highlighted as an example of effective simplification. It uses scientifically established standard unit costs and reference price databases, providing flexibility to beneficiaries and reducing the risk of abuse. Participants believe that a gradual adaptation of this model to the public environment could bring similar benefits.

Conclusions

The workshop highlighted a general agreement on the need to simplify procedures, improve administrative capacity and orient the system towards performance and results. For the next period, the participants consider the following directions as a priority:

- Strengthening local capacity;
- Real administrative simplification;
- Empowering technical actors;
- Digitalisation and orientation towards measurable results.

3. WORKSHOP REPORT / FOCUS GROUP INTENDED FOR BENEFICIARIES FROM LPA(S)

Date: December 3, 2025

Location: online

Participants: 7 beneficiaries from among LPAs and representatives of the Association formed by CIVITTA Strategy & Consulting SA (leader) and Lideea Development Actions SRL (partner)

General context

The workshop dedicated to local public authorities (LPAs) was organised in online format, as part of the evaluation process of digitisation interventions financed by the Centre Regional Programme, Priority 2 – Digitalisation. The activity was part of Evaluation Theme 2, aiming at analysing the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of interventions that support the digitisation of public administration for the benefit of citizens, the business environment and public governance.

The workshop had a consultative and participatory character, bringing together representatives of communes, cities, municipalities and county councils that submitted projects under call 2.1.1 – Digitisation of LPAs, as well as members of the evaluation team.

Participants were encouraged to contribute actively, to report both the positive aspects and the difficulties encountered, and to provide concrete examples from the process of preparing, submitting and evaluating projects. It was stressed that the opinions expressed will be integrated into an independent evaluation report, with a support role for the improvement of public policies and financing mechanisms.

Clarity of guidelines and eligibility criteria

The discussions during the workshop showed that in general, the Applicant's Guide was perceived as understandable and coherent in terms of the objectives of the call and the proposed direction of intervention. The participants acknowledged that the structure of the guide allowed to understand the

purpose of the financing and the types of investments pursued, and from this perspective the documentation was not considered inaccessible.

However, when the discussion moved from the general level to the concrete application, many specific difficulties were pointed out. The most frequent problems have arisen in relation to the interpretation of technical terms specific to the field of digitalisation. The participants pointed out that notions such as hardware, software, digital equipment, IT infrastructure, interoperability or IT solutions were used in a predominantly technical language, which generated confusion among the staff in the ATUs, especially where there are no IT specialists.

Several participants mentioned that they had difficulty understanding exactly what types of equipment or solutions were eligible and under what conditions. For example, the delimitation between eligible equipment and inventory items was perceived as insufficiently explained, and the limits on the inclusion of hardware equipment in the project budget were not always clear without external support. In the absence of concrete examples, applicants had to interpret the provisions of the guide based on their own assumptions or to resort to specialised consultants.

This situation was accentuated by the fact that the guide had to comply with the normative framework established by Ordinance 23, which, although it had the declared objective of simplifying the procedures, failed, from the perspective of the participants, to really reduce the complexity of the documentation. On the contrary, in some cases, the regulatory framework has led to rigid wording and the demand for a high volume of supporting documents, which has increased the administrative effort, especially for small ATUs.

An element considered essential to improve the clarity of the guides was the need to expand the glossary of terms. Participants stressed that there is no need to eliminate technical terminology, but to explain it in a more accessible language that allows administrative staff to understand exactly the meaning and implications of each term. A detailed glossary, complemented by examples of use and explicit references to the types of eligible expenditure, would significantly reduce the uncertainties at the project preparation stage.

In this context, the role of consultants has been described as essential. The participants acknowledged that the support provided by consultants, especially those with IT expertise, was decisive for understanding the technical requirements and for the correct structuring of the funding applications. At the same time, this dependence on external consultancy was perceived as a structural disadvantage, especially for ATUs with limited financial resources, which do not always afford such services.

In conclusion, although the guides were appreciated as clear in terms of intention and objectives, their practical application highlighted the need for further clarifications, concrete examples and support tools to translate the technical requirements into a language adapted to the administrative realities of the ATUs.

The attractiveness of digitising calls

The discussions during the workshop clearly highlighted the fact that call 2.1.1 – Digitisation of the ATU was perceived as the most attractive of the calls launched under Priority 2. The very high level of over-contracting, which far exceeded the available financial allocation, was interpreted by the participants as a direct indicator of the real and acute need for digitalisation existing at the level of the local public administration.

The participants stressed that the motivation for submitting the projects was not a conjunctural one but resulted from structural pressures felt at the level of the ATUs. Digitalisation is perceived as a necessary condition for the functioning of local administration, in the context of reduced human resources, increasing administrative workload and increasing expectations from citizens and the business environment.

Participants repeatedly mentioned that digitalisation directly contributes to reducing bureaucracy, eliminating redundant paper-based circuits and streamlining internal workflows. In this sense, digitalisation is not only seen as a technological tool, but as an administrative reform mechanism, which allows the staff of city halls to allocate more time to value-added activities.

A concrete example mentioned was the intention of some ATUs to develop digital applications dedicated to citizens, through which they can send notifications or requests in real time, including by uploading photos or documents. Such solutions are perceived as having a direct impact on the quality of public services and on the relationship between the administration and the community.

The attractiveness of the call was also supported by the relatively low level of co-financing, which allowed access to financing including for ATUs with limited financial resources. At the same time, the participants appreciated the fact that the call was also addressed to ATUs with no previous experience in digitisation projects, allowing them to address basic needs, such as the digitisation of documents, the implementation of document management systems or the development of simple online service platforms.

However, the participants pointed out that the high attractiveness of the call also generated an extremely fierce competition, in which the score obtained became a critical factor. In this context, the small differences in scores had a significant impact on the chances of financing, which amplified the pressure felt by the ATUs in the project preparation phase.

Evaluation and selection process

The evaluation and selection process was described by the participants as the main vulnerable point of the intervention. The very long duration of the evaluation, which in many cases exceeded one year from the time of submission of funding applications, generated a heightened sense of uncertainty and lack of predictability.

Participants reported situations in which projects with high scores, including projects that went through the appeal stage and obtained the maximum score, remained for long periods without clear information on the status of the evaluation or the estimated timing of contracting. This lack of intermediate communication affected the beneficiaries' confidence in the process and made it difficult to plan the internal implementation of the projects.

A recurring issue mentioned was the difficulty of the self-assessment process. Participants felt that certain scoring criteria are formulated in an overly general or subjective manner, making it difficult to give a realistic score at the submission stage. In particular, criteria related to impact, efficiency or expected results were perceived as difficult to quantify objectively, in the absence of detailed examples or grids. Participants reported difficulties in the self-assessment stage of the score, some criteria being perceived as subjective and difficult to quantify. It was noted that the formulation of more objective, standardised and easily measurable criteria would facilitate both self-assessment and the assessment process itself.

It was pointed out that, in practice, the ATUs comply with the requirements of the guide and submit the projects within the established deadlines, but the bottlenecks appear later, in the evaluation stage, which is not related to the capacity of the beneficiaries, but to the functioning of the internal evaluation mechanisms. The participants clearly expressed the opinion that the main problem is not the quality of the submitted projects, but the excessive duration and complexity of the evaluation process.

During the discussions, the shortage of evaluators was also mentioned, as well as the dependence on external evaluators, which can affect the pace and coherence of the evaluation. The lack of sufficient training of evaluators on the technical components of digitalisation has been identified as an additional factor contributing to the large number of clarifications requested.

Participants suggested that the digitalisation of the assessment process, including the use of IT tools for the automatic verification of quantifiable criteria, could help reduce the duration of the assessment. Also, the simplification of the guides and the standardisation of the forms were considered essential measures to speed up the selection process.

The evaluation and selection process was identified as the most problematic aspect of the intervention. Participants described this process as excessively time-consuming, complex, and unpredictable. In many cases, almost a year has passed between the submission of the application for funding and the receipt of a final response.

This long duration has generated uncertainty and frustration among the beneficiaries, affecting their ability to plan the implementation of the projects. The lack of interim information on the status of the evaluation was perceived as a major shortcoming, contributing to a decrease in confidence in the process.

It was considered that simplifying the guides, reducing the number of documents requested and digitising the administrative steps could significantly contribute to shortening the duration of evaluation and contracting.

Administrative capacity of LPAs and the issue of partnerships between ATUs

The discussions during the workshop highlighted significant structural differences in administrative capacity between administrative-territorial units (ATUs), especially between municipalities, cities and small communes. The participants stressed that these differences directly influence the capacity of ATUs to prepare, submit and implement digitisation projects.

Small ATUs frequently face a lack of specialised personnel, especially in the field of IT and project management. In many cases, digitalisation-related tasks are managed by staff with multiple responsibilities without specific technical training, making it difficult to understand the advanced requirements in the funding guides. This situation leads to a high dependence on external consultants, both in the preparation phase of funding applications and in the implementation phase.

For some small communes, even the costs associated with consulting or their own contribution can be a significant obstacle. The participants mentioned that, beyond the value of the co-financing, the administrative effort required to prepare the project is perceived as disproportionate in relation to the resources available at local level. In this context, digitalisation is sometimes perceived as a secondary necessity, competing with other needs considered more urgent at the community level.

Partnerships between ATUs – perceptions, difficulties and limitations

A topic widely debated during the workshop was that of partnerships between ATUs. In principle, participants recognised that the association between ATUs can be a useful tool for sharing financial and human resources, transferring expertise and ensuring the interoperability of digital solutions.

However, real-world experiences have shown that achieving partnerships is difficult and, in many cases, daunting. Among the main difficulties mentioned are the complexity of the decision-making process, which involves successive approvals in several local councils, as well as the need to convince a large number of local decision-makers about the usefulness of investments in digitalisation.

The participants pointed out that, especially in small communes, there is reluctance to allocate funds for digitisation projects, given that the benefits are not perceived immediately or are considered less relevant for certain categories of population. In this regard, the perception that investments in digitalisation do not meet the needs of elderly citizens or those in isolated areas has been frequently mentioned, which makes it difficult to obtain local political support.

Another important obstacle identified was related to the sharing of costs, including consultancy. In the absence of clear mechanisms for the distribution of financial responsibilities, some ATUs preferred to abandon the idea of partnership and apply individually. It was stressed that partnerships should not be perceived only as a tool for obtaining an additional score, but as a real mechanism for cooperation, based on concrete and clear benefits for all parties involved.

The participants also pointed out the lack of functional models of partnership governance. The absence of examples of good practice on the roles and responsibilities of each partner, how to make decisions and manage common digital solutions has contributed to the reluctance of ATUs to partner.

In this context, the potential role of county councils or large ATUs in supporting smaller municipalities was highlighted, including by assuming part of the financial contribution or by coordinating the implementation of common digital solutions. Participants considered that such models could reduce the fragmentation of digitalisation and facilitate interoperability between systems but stressed that in the absence of clear incentives and a well-defined framework, such partnerships remain difficult to achieve.

Effectiveness and efficiency of interventions: expected results and benefits

Participants expressed confidence that digitalisation projects will generate significant benefits, even in the context of delays in the evaluation process. Among the expected results are the efficiency of internal circuits, the reduction of document processing times and the improvement of the quality of public services.

Digitalisation is perceived as an irreversible process, with the demand for online services constantly increasing. The participants mentioned that, in the medium and long term, the benefits will go beyond the initial implementation efforts, contributing to increasing transparency and citizens' trust in the public administration.

Preliminary conclusions

The workshop confirmed the major relevance of digitisation interventions for the local public administration in the Centre Region. Although the call was appreciated as necessary and well oriented,

the experience of LPAs highlighted the need for procedural simplification, reduction of the evaluation time and better adaptation to the administrative and technological realities in the territory.

Preliminary recommendations

Based on the detailed discussions held during the workshop, the concrete experiences reported by the representatives of the administrative-territorial units and the recurring problems identified during all the topics analysed, a set of recommendations was outlined, aimed at substantially improving the design and implementation of future digitisation calls dedicated to local public administration.

First of all, the participants considered it essential to improve the clarity of the funding documentation, not by oversimplifying the requirements, but by adapting the technical language to the administrative realities of the ATUs. In this respect, the extension of glossaries of terms and the explicit description of the IT concepts used in the guides would significantly contribute to reducing ambiguity and reducing dependence on external consultants. Such an approach would allow the staff of the ATUs to better understand the technical and financial implications of the proposed projects.

A second major direction of recommendation concerns the evaluation and contracting process, which was unanimously perceived as too slow and insufficiently predictable. Participants stressed the need to reduce the assessment time by simplifying administrative steps, standardising the required documents and using digital tools to allow the automatic verification of quantifiable criteria. At the same time, better interim communication on the status of the evaluation would help to increase the trust of beneficiaries and to better planning the implementation of projects.

As for the scoring criteria, the recommendation to formulate them in a more objective manner and easier to self-assess was outlined. The introduction of clear self-assessment grids, accompanied by explanatory examples, would reduce differences in interpretation between applicants and evaluators and help to increase the transparency of the selection process.

Another important element discussed was the need to differentiate funding calls according to the size and level of digital maturity of the ATUs. The participants appreciated the idea of calls dedicated to small ATUs, focused on basic digitisation needs, as well as separate calls for ATUs with higher administrative capacity, which can implement more complex solutions. Such an approach would allow the requirements and expectations to be adapted to the realities on the ground.

In particular, the discussions highlighted the need for a clearer and more stimulating framework for achieving partnerships between ATUs. Participants stressed that in the absence of functional governance models and clearly articulated concrete benefits, partnerships remain difficult to achieve. In this context, it was recommended to promote cooperation models in which large ATUs or county councils can play a coordinating and supporting role, including by facilitating the interoperability of digital solutions and reducing fragmentation at regional level.

Last but not least, the participants considered it useful to set up support mechanisms before the submission of projects, which would allow the ATUs to discuss the project ideas and their eligibility with specialists from the managing authorities or intermediate bodies. Such mechanisms, complementary to private consultancy, could contribute to increasing the quality of submitted projects and reducing the number of clarifications requested later.

Overall, the recommendations reflect the need for a more flexible, results-oriented approach that is better anchored in the administrative realities of ATUs, so that future digitalisation interventions produce sustainable and coherent effects at the level of local public administration.

Closing session – questions and answers

In the final session, participants reaffirmed the need to speed up the evaluation process and stressed that the main problem is not the lack of compliance of the beneficiaries, but the duration and complexity of the internal evaluation procedures. LPAs expressed their willingness to participate in future consultation processes and to provide case studies, including examples of difficulties encountered, to support the improvement of future interventions to be funded.

ANNEX 6. EXPERT PANEL REPORT

1. PANEL REPORT INTENDED FOR EXPERTS AND CONSULTANTS IN DIGITALISATION

Date: October 15, 2025

Location: online

Participants: 6 experts and consultants in digitalisation and representatives of the Association formed by CIVITTA Strategy & Consulting SA (leader) and Lideea Development Actions SRL (partner)

General context and purpose of the panel

The panel of experts and consultants was organised within the evaluation process of Priority 2 – *"A Digital Region",* with the aim of validating preliminary findings and collecting qualified opinions from professionals directly involved in the preparation and implementation of digitisation projects, carried out by both SMEs and local public authorities.

The event was attended by **6 experts and consultants in digitalisation,** with relevant experience in the development, submission and implementation of digital transformation projects, as well as in the evaluation of public policies and regional development. The selection of participants was made on the basis of their professional experience and involvement in digitisation projects in the Centre Region, which reflects their level of expertise and knowledge of the regional specificity of the interventions under Priority 2.

The panel participants were consultants and technical experts with consistent experience in managing projects financed by European funds, who constantly interacted with the beneficiaries and the managing authorities. Therefore, the discussions provided a realistic picture of the challenges on the ground and how the current rules influence the quality and feasibility of projects.

The purpose of the meeting was to analyse, from a practical perspective, the elements that worked well, the difficulties encountered and the possible directions of simplification and reform. The discussions focused on identifying concrete solutions that would contribute to improving the financing framework, increasing the efficiency of evaluation processes and strengthening the sustainability of digital investments.

Conduct and methodology

The meeting was structured in a participatory and interactive format. The objectives of the evaluation and the main preliminary findings were presented, and the invited experts complemented with concrete examples, lessons learned and suggestions for reformulating the support mechanisms.

The debate was organised around a number of main themes: the relevance of the interventions, the effectiveness of the evaluation process, the administrative efficiency, the institutional coherence and the sustainability of the implemented solutions. Each theme was addressed openly, with a focus on first-hand experiences and practice-based observations.

Relevance and adequacy of interventions

Experts confirmed that Priority 2 is a necessary and timely intervention that responds to real digitalisation needs at regional level. However, the degree of adaptation of the financing mechanisms to the specifics of the beneficiaries was considered insufficient.

A clear difference was noted between the calls dedicated to SMEs and those intended for public authorities. While calls for LPAs were perceived as more flexible and easier to apply, guidelines for SMEs were described as overly technical, bureaucratic and difficult to correlate with economic realities.

A constant point of discussion was the use of the DESI criteria, introduced at the request of the European Commission. Although their purpose is to ensure comparability at Community level, their rigid application has led to distortions. The consultants pointed out that many applicants had to "write for the score", introducing artificial elements that did not reflect the real needs of digitisation.

Participants advocated for a more realistic and contextualised approach, in which the criteria serve as a guideline, not as a formal condition. At the same time, the need for a predictable calendar of calls was highlighted, allowing for proper planning and a coherent preparation process.

The issue of excluding CANE codes from the sphere of trade was also mentioned, a decision perceived as restrictive. In the view of experts, online commercial activities are a key area of modern digitalisation, and their elimination limits the impact of the programme on the real economy.

Effectiveness of the evaluation process

The duration of the evaluation process was considered the main structural obstacle. In many cases, the evaluation exceeded 8–10 months, which affects both the technological relevance of the projects and the financial planning of the beneficiaries.

The experts pointed out that, in a dynamic field such as the digital one, such delays cause the proposed solutions to lose their timeliness, change in prices and, sometimes, the withdrawal of suppliers. To remedy this problem, it was proposed **to fully digitise the evaluation process**, by automating checks, integrating electronic scoring platforms and introducing a transparent mechanism for tracking the status of applications.

Another conclusion concerned **the lack of consistency between the evaluators**, caused by divergent interpretations of the same criteria. In the absence of unitary interpretative guidelines and specialised training, evaluation was often inconsistent. The consultants supported the professionalisation of the body of evaluators and their specialisation in the IT and digitalisation field, so that decisions are based on a real understanding of the proposed solutions.

It was also insisted on the need for **prior consultations between authorities and experts**, before launching calls, in order to prevent ambiguous interpretations and to increase the coherence of the implementation framework.

Administrative efficiency and operational issues

In terms of implementation, the participants pointed out significant difficulties generated by bureaucracy and rigidity of procedures. The three-month deadline imposed for the completion of the acquisitions was considered unrealistic for complex projects, which involve interconnected solutions and successive stages of technological configuration.

A major obstacle was the lack of predictability of payments. Frequent delays in the settlement of claims have discouraged suppliers and affected the financial stability of projects. Consultants suggested setting up a **more flexible payment mechanism**, including partial pre-financing, phased payments and a digitised approval flow.

The uneven approach of regional authorities in interpreting procurement rules was also discussed. While some regional centres showed professionalism and availability, others were excessively rigid, focusing on details that were irrelevant to the legality or quality of the process. The general recommendation was that checks should be based on the essential principles of procurement – transparency, competition and proportionality – and not on administrative formalities.

Coherence and coordination between programmes

Experts pointed to the lack of a unified approach between the different digitalisation funding programmes and suggested the need to simplify the existing technical guidelines so that there is a common base of minimum standards, inspired by government cloud legislation, but presented in an accessible and regionally applicable way.

Sustainability of digital investments

The panel repeatedly highlighted the risks to the sustainability of projects. The lack of funding for maintenance and updates, combined with the shortage of IT staff, jeopardises the long-term operation of the developed solutions.

Participants proposed that future calls should explicitly include eligible costs for maintenance, upgrades and technical training. They also suggested the introduction of a mechanism to adjust technical specifications during implementation, so that solutions can be adapted to the rapid evolution of technologies.

Prospects for improvement and strategic directions

The discussions led to a common vision: the current financing system for digitalisation needs to be transformed from a model centred on procedural compliance to a **model based on results and impact**.

The consultants advocated an assessment focused on the functionalities and measurable results of the projects, not on the technology used. What is essential is not the tool, but its effect – for example, reducing working time, increasing the efficiency of internal processes or improving public services.

The importance of differentiating calls according to the level of digital maturity of potential applicants was also highlighted. Start-up organisations need simple interventions, basic infrastructure and training,

while more advanced entities can be encouraged to develop integrated, interoperable and innovative systems.

At the institutional level, the participants insisted on strengthening the permanent dialogue between authorities and consultants, so that interpretations and requirements are uniform, and the decision-making process is more predictable and coherent.

General conclusions

The panel of experts and consultants reconfirmed the strategic relevance of Priority 2 – 'A Digital Region', but at the same time highlighted the limits of an excessively bureaucratic, slow and rigid system.

Experiences in the field show that digitalisation cannot be promoted through a formal control mechanism, but through a framework of trust, cooperation and shared responsibility between authorities and professionals. For investment results to be sustainable, a simpler, faster, more transparent and measurable results-oriented system is needed.

In conclusion, the panel stressed that the success of future calls depends on the ability of institutions to learn from current experiences and adapt the rules to the reality on the ground. An effective digitalisation policy requires not only technology, but also smart governance, flexibility and real collaboration between all parties involved.

ANNEX 7. CASE STUDIES

1. CASE STUDY NO. 1 – ACCESS, ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES WITHIN SC LOCAL GRID MEDIA SRL

Evaluation title: Theme 2 "*Evaluation of interventions targeting digitalisation activities for the benefit of citizens, businesses and governments"*

Project name: Access, adoption and implementation of digital technologies within SC LOCAL GRID MEDIA SRL

Beneficiary: LOCAL GRID MEDIA S.R.L., SMIS code 319271

Investment location: Alba Iulia Municipality, Alba County

1. OBJECT AND PURPOSE OF THE CASE STUDY

This case study aims to support the evaluation process of the interventions funded by the Centre Region Regional Programme, under Theme 2 "Evaluation of interventions aimed at digitalisation activities for the benefit of citizens, companies and governments".

The analyses and findings presented contribute to the formulation of the answers to the evaluation questions and allow comparisons to be made between the different types of interventions, investments and beneficiaries. These comparisons highlight the mechanisms by which available resources and those created within projects are used and capitalised, as well as how these factors, together with the elements of context, influence the implementation and results of interventions.

The case study also contributes to the assessment of the extent to which digitalisation interventions respond to the needs of target groups, provide effective solutions to socio-economic challenges in the Centre Region and support the relevant strategies and objectives of the programme.

The selection of the analysed project was carried out according to the criteria established in the evaluation methodology, taking into account **the type of intervention**, **the level of complexity** and **the stage of implementation**. The project is part of the sample **dedicated to SMEs,** thus ensuring the diversity of types of beneficiaries and the possibility of analysing how different institutional and economic contexts influence the digitisation process.

The methodology used combines the documentary analysis based on the project documents provided by the beneficiary **(the funding application, the digitisation plan)** with the interview with **the project manager**, ensuring a complete understanding of how the interventions contribute to the development and modernisation of the region through digitisation.

2. PRESENTATION OF THE CASE STUDY

Project name	**Access, adoption and implementation of digital technologies within SC LOCAL GRID MEDIA SRL**
SMIS Code	319271
Location	Alba Iulia Municipality
Beneficiary	LOCAL GRID MEDIA S.R.L.
Priority / Specific objective	P2. A digital region RSO1.2_Capitalising the benefits of digitalisation for the benefit of citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities RSO1.4_Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship

Project call/ Operation	Action 2.2 Digital Enterprises for an Advanced Economy – Smart Specialisation Sectors
Implementation period (start/end)	21.12.2024 – 20.12.2026
Project budget	725,370.72 lei total 580,151.51 lei non-reimbursable
Project context **Project justification**	In a digital age where technology is profoundly transforming the entertainment market and the way audiences interact with information, there are still traditional yet innovative ways to promote local tourist destinations. One of these is **the creation of puzzles and board games with a tourist theme**, which combine the educational and recreational component, stimulating interest in the cultural and natural heritage of the region. These products offer an interactive and immersive experience, through which users can visually and symbolically explore various tourist attractions – from historical monuments to natural landscapes. Each image rendered becomes an **implicit tourist promotion tool**, a "visual ambassador" of the beauty and authenticity of places. Once the puzzle or game is completed, the desire to actually visit the represented destinations increases, generating a positive impact on tourist flows and on the development of the local economy. **The involvement of local communities** in the design and promotion of these products contributes to strengthening cultural identity, increasing the sense of belonging and protecting tangible and intangible heritage. The activity proposed by **LOCAL GRID MEDIA SRL**, framed according to CANE 3240 – *Manufacture of games and toys*, is part of the value chain of the Tourism sector of excellence, identified by **the Smart Specialisation Strategy of the Centre Region 2021–2027**. The Centre Region benefits from a **high and diversified tourism potential**, based on natural resources, cultural heritage and local traditions, which allow the development of various forms of tourism: mountainous, spa, cultural and rural. At the same time, tourism is recognised as a **sector with significant innovation potential**, in which digitalisation can play a key role. The experiences of 2020, marked by the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, determined a **strategic reorientation of tourism operators towards innovative and digital solutions**, designed to ensure continuity, safety and sustainability. In this context, **LOCAL GRID MEDIA SRL** contributes to two of the three major innovation directions in the regional tourism sector: • **Widespread use of digital technologies**, through the digitisation of production processes, the integration of mobile applications and the use of VR technologies for the interactive promotion of tourist attractions; • **Development of innovative tourism products and services**, through puzzles and thematic board games, which combine cultural and historical learning with the playful experience.

	In addition, the proposed project supports **the transition to Industry 4.0**, in line with **the Strategy on Industrial Transition in Romania** and the related Plan of Measures. LOCAL GRID MEDIA SRL aims to: • promote **entrepreneurship and the involvement of the private sector** through the development of a modern enterprise, based on digital technologies and sustainable processes; • prepare **the workforce for the jobs of the future** by specialising at least three employees in digital marketing and social media; • expand **and disseminate innovation** by purchasing modern equipment equipped with IoT technologies to monitor and optimise production processes; • contribute to **reducing energy consumption and increasing resource efficiency** by adopting high-performance equipment with low environmental impact; • promote **the principles of equal opportunities and social inclusion**, including by employing people from disadvantaged categories. The digital maturity audit carried out with the support **of the DIH4Society Digital Innovation Hub provided the** necessary information on the current degree of digitisation of the company and identified the technical solutions to be implemented through the project. These measures will support **the company's complete transition to a smart and digital production model**, strengthening LOCAL GRID MEDIA SRL's position as an innovative player in the field of tourism promotion through creative and technological means.

3. OBJECTIVES AND LOGIC OF THE INTERVENTION

The purpose of the project implemented by **LOCAL GRID MEDIA S.R.L.** was the digitisation of the company's internal activities and the transformation of artisanal products into interactive digital experiences, through the use of modern technologies of scanning, modelling and three-dimensional rendering. The project proposes an innovative approach, through which the physical puzzle becomes a digital educational and tourism tool, capable of connecting the local heritage with the virtual environment.

The company started from the idea of creating a bridge between tradition and technology, between the physical object and its digital representation, transforming handmade puzzles into 3D models that can be explored online. These represent symbolic buildings and local objectives of interest, such as schools, churches, town halls, museums or other spaces with identity value for the community. The models are integrated into an interactive web application where they can be viewed, rotated and animated, providing users with a unique educational and cultural experience.

The project is directly aligned with the objectives of Priority 2 – "A Digital Region" of the Centre Regional Programme 2021–2027, contributing to capitalising on the advantages of digitalisation among SMEs. Through the investment made, the company has introduced modern digital technologies that support the transformation of the business model, increase competitiveness and diversify the product offering. The digitisation of internal processes, through the implementation of ERP, CRM and e-invoice IT solutions, allows a more efficient management of orders, customers and administrative flows, significantly reducing working time and operational risks.

The purpose of the intervention was not limited to technological modernisation but also had an educational and social dimension. The company wanted to offer local communities a cultural promotion tool, through which children, parents and teachers can discover in an interactive way the important objectives in their area. Thus, part of the digital content created within the project is offered free of charge, as an educational and tourism promotion resource.

The selection of interventions and the prioritisation of investments were based on the analysis of the real needs of the company, which operated in a restricted, competitive market with seasonal demand. The firm

has identified digitalisation as the only viable direction to expand and adapt to market trends. The investments were structured in three major directions:

- **High-performance equipment for 3D digitisation,** namely the purchase of a high-precision 3D scanner, a graphics workstation, a NAS system for data storage, as well as an UPS system with solar panels and off-grid batteries, to ensure sustainable energy consumption and reduce the carbon footprint.
- **Specialised software for modelling and digital management**, including 3D rendering and export programs, as well as applications for internal management (ERP, CRM, e-invoice), which contribute to the automation of processes and a better organisation of the activity.
- **Professional training of employees**, through digital marketing and social media courses, which ensure the development of the necessary skills for the use of new technologies and online promotion of products.

By combining these components, the project was conceived as an integrated intervention, bringing together the technological, economic and educational dimensions. The beneficiary has adopted a strategic approach, considering digitalisation not just a one-off goal, but an essential stage for the transition to an innovative, sustainable and competitive business model.

The intervention was adapted to the local specificities and the identified needs of the target groups. The products made – physical puzzles, 3D models and the online application – are aimed at children, teachers, tourists and local communities, offering an attractive tool for knowledge and promotion of heritage. Through this approach, the project contributes to the development of young people's digital skills, to stimulate interest in local culture and to strengthen community identity.

At the same time, the digitisation of internal processes has been adapted to the company's operational needs, facilitating the automation of administrative tasks, the tracking of orders and the improvement of internal communication. The beneficiary has also integrated principles of inclusion and sustainability: ergonomic equipment adapted for people with motor disabilities, software compatible with accessibility functions for visually impaired people and the use of green energy through its own photovoltaic system.

Through its results, the project contributes to increasing the economic competitiveness of a creative micro-enterprise in the Centre Region and to promoting local educational and cultural values through technology. The intervention is an example of good practice on applying the principles of digital transformation in a creative field, demonstrating how digitisation can generate both economic value and sustainable social impact.

4. PROJECT COMPONENTS

Activities	1 **Acquisition of tangible and intangible assets (Core business)** The activity aims to digitise the company's internal activities and production process through the acquisition of high-performance equipment and specialised software solutions. **Proposed IT equipment:** • 3 high-performance graphics stations for digital design and editing of the products; • 1 central server for data storage and management; • 3 professional monitors for high-resolution graphics; • 1 A3 colour multifunction printer for internal materials; • 1 professional A3 scanner for digitising drawings and layouts; • 1 professional router and 1 UPS for the stability and protection of the computer system.

Proposed production equipment:

- 1 professional plotter for printing large formats (board games, posters);
- 1 production colour printer for puzzles and graphic materials;
- 1 digital cutter-plotter for precise cutting and finishing;
- 1 professional laminator for protecting and finishing products.

Software and digital solutions:

- Graphics software package (Adobe CC or equivalent) for design and editing;
- ERP/CRM solution for order, production and customer relationship management;
- Cloud storage and IT security solutions;
- Licenses for archiving and electronic accounting.

Hiring staff

The activity provides for the creation of two new jobs within the company, for an indefinite period and part-time. One of these positions will be filled by a person belonging to a disadvantaged category, in accordance with the principles of equal opportunities and social inclusion. The new employees will support the production, digitisation and promotion of the products made.

2 **Staff training (Core activity)**

The activity aims at the professional training of the employed personnel, in order to acquire the digital skills necessary for the implementation and exploitation of new technological solutions. Accredited courses will be organised for a minimum **of 3 employees** in the field **of Digital Marketing / Social Media Specialist – Key Digital Skills**. The courses will include modules on online promotion, management of social media campaigns, use of digital platforms and modern marketing tools

3 **Final Digital Maturity Audit (Core Activity)**

The activity consists of carrying out the digital maturity audit at the end of the project implementation, with the support of a **European Digital Innovation Hub (EDIH).** The audit will assess the degree of digitalisation achieved, the level of integration of equipment and software, as well as the impact of the investment on internal processes.

4 **Information and publicity activities**

The activity will be carried out according to **the Centre RP Visual Identity Manual 2021–2027** and aims to ensure the transparency and visibility of the project. The following will be carried out:

- press releases and announcements at the beginning and end of the project;
- informative posters (at least one A3 poster at the company's headquarters);
- stickers applied to the purchased equipment (minimum 8 pieces);
- official website of the project and social media pages for public information;
- illustrative photo portfolio regarding the implementation stages.

5 **Project management**

The activity ensures the overall coordination, monitoring and reporting of the project. It includes administrative and financial management, relationship with the managing authority, verification of deliverables, monitoring of indicators and preparation of technical and financial reports.

Expected results	**Acquisition of tangible and intangible assets** Complete digitalisation of internal activities and the production process by: • implementation of an integrated digital flow of design, printing and finishing; • increasing the efficiency and productivity of the company; • reduce energy consumption by using the modern equipment purchased; • improving the quality of products (puzzles and board games). **Hiring staff** Creation of two new jobs, one of which is occupied by a person belonging to a disadvantaged category, contributing to increased operational capacity and social inclusion. **Staff training** Professional training of at least three employees in the field of digital marketing and key digital skills, with direct applicability in the online promotion of products and in the use of new acquired technologies. **Final Digital Maturity Audit** Conducting the final audit confirming the improvement of the company's digital maturity level and validating the effective implementation of digital solutions. **Information and publicity activities** Increasing the visibility of the project and ensuring the transparency of funding by implementing the communication measures provided in the Centre RP Visual Identity Manual 2021–2027 (press releases, posters, stickers, website and social media accounts). **Project management** Efficient, transparent and compliant implementation with contractual requirements, proper monitoring and reporting to the financing authority, achievement of all indicators provided for in the project.
Target group	The target group of the project is made up of **the staff employed by SC LOCAL GRID MEDIA SRL** and **the local communities that are indirect beneficiaries** of the products made **Company Staff** The project is aimed at current and future employees of the enterprise, involved in production, graphic design, marketing and management activities. By implementing the investment: • a minimum **of 3 employees** will benefit from **professional training** in the field of digital marketing and key digital skills, increasing their capacity to use new technologies; • two new jobs **will be created**, one of which **will be for a person belonging to a disadvantaged category**, thus contributing to social inclusion and equal opportunities. **Indirect beneficiaries** The indirect beneficiaries are represented by **kindergartens, schools and local public institutions** that will purchase the products made (puzzles, board games and personalised educational materials). They will use the products for educational purposes and to promote local identity.

	Also, **local communities and citizens** are targeted as indirect beneficiaries, by stimulating interest in cultural heritage, developing a sense of belonging and promoting local tourism. Through the project, the staff of SC LOCAL GRID MEDIA SRL will acquire modern digital skills, the company will become more competitive and efficient, and local communities will benefit from innovative products that contribute to children's education and the promotion of tourism heritage.

5. PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of the project carried out by **LOCAL GRID MEDIA S.R.L.** is at an advanced stage, with a high degree of achievement of the proposed objectives. By the time of the interview, the main purchases of equipment and software had been made, and the planned activities were carried out according to the schedule, with small adjustments generated by administrative and fiscal aspects.

All essential equipment has been purchased and put into operation. These investments ensure a complete, sustainable and energy-efficient technological flow, directly contributing to the achievement of the main objective – the digitisation of processes and the creation of the technical infrastructure necessary for the company's digital transformation.

Also, the planned software applications were purchased and installed and at the time of the discussion, they were already functional and were to be populated with internal data and fully configured with the support of the suppliers.

The training courses in digital marketing and social media were ready to start, and at the end of the implementation, the digital maturity audit will also be carried out, which will assess the progress and degree of integration of the implemented technologies.

The beneficiary appreciates that the objectives of the project are achievable in a proportion of over 90%, and the chances of fully achieving the set targets are very high. The project was well planned, and the activities were carried out at a steady pace, despite some punctual challenges.

Among the difficulties encountered are the management of tax issues and exchange rate differences, as some contracts were concluded in euros and payments made in lei. During the implementation period, the company became a VAT payer, which generated uncertainties regarding the eligibility of certain amounts and the need to recalculate some budget values.

Another challenge was the configuration and integration of ERP and CRM systems, processes that proved to be more complex than the initial estimate. Suppliers have requested additional hours of consulting for customisation, which has led to an increase in costs and an extension of actual operating times. To limit delays, the company decided to configure some of the modules internally and then request specialised support for complete optimisation.

At the administrative level, the process of acquisitions and technical clarifications was a laborious one, specific to European projects, but the support provided by the external consultant and the Centre RDA facilitated the overcoming of the bureaucratic stages.

In order to prevent possible delays, preventive measures have been taken, such as reviewing the planning of the calendar of activities, prioritising the delivery of equipment and adapting internal flows to the new fiscal conditions. The company has also established stable relationships with local suppliers, capable of providing rapid technical support, which has contributed to streamlining the implementation.

The beneficiary's perception of the project is positive. The implementation has already brought tangible results: modernisation of the digital infrastructure, optimisation of internal management processes and increased product visibility. The company began to experience the first effects of digitalisation – reduced administrative processing time, better order tracking and a clear structuring of customer relationships.

In the short term, an increase in product quality and accuracy, the development of new complementary digital products, and the diversification of revenue streams through the expansion of online presence are anticipated. In the medium term, the project will contribute to the consolidation of an active local community,

made up of children, parents, teachers and tourists, who will interact with the educational and cultural products developed by the company.

The beneficiary considers that the project has a high potential to respond to the needs of the target groups and the current socio-economic challenges. Through its free educational content, the project contributes to the development of children's digital skills, to the promotion of local heritage and to increasing the tourist attractiveness of the region. At the same time, the digitalisation of internal processes supports the company's competitiveness and economic sustainability.

The estimated final impact aims to strengthen a sustainable creative business, based on innovation and technology, which contributes both to the modernisation of the cultural and educational sector and to local economic development. In the long term, the beneficiary anticipates an increase in sales, the expansion of the customer base and the creation of new jobs, in parallel with maintaining the social and educational component of its products.

6. IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS (PROGRESS AND INTERNAL MECHANISMS)

The implementation process of the project carried out by **LOCAL GRID MEDIA S.R.L.** was rigorously managed and with good internal organisation. The beneficiary structured the activities in clear stages – procurement, software implementation, staff training and final audit – and maintained a permanent record of progress through a simple but effective internal monitoring system.

The monitoring was carried out by periodically updating an implementation plan, with deadlines, deliverables and responsibilities, as well as through regular meetings between the company's administrator, the project consultant and the suppliers involved. Communication within the team was constant, focused on verifying compliance with deadlines and immediately resolving technical or administrative inconsistencies.

The financial and reporting activity was carried out under the direct coordination of the administrator, with the support of the external consultant responsible for the preparation of payment requests, supporting documentation and correspondence with the Managing Authority. The beneficiary appreciated the support provided by Centre RDA, considering the communication with the project officers prompt and clear. Responses to requests for clarification were received quickly, and procedural flexibility allowed for the efficient correction of any inconsistencies.

Although the process went according to plan, there were some technical and administrative difficulties. The implementation of ERP and CRM systems was more complex than anticipated, requiring additional hours of consulting and training. Also, the transition of the company to the status of VAT payer and the exchange rate differences required a temporary recalculation of the budget and an adaptation of the financial flow.

The beneficiary reacted promptly to these challenges, applying corrective measures such as prioritising critical activities, recalibrating the internal calendar and directly involving management in the decision-making process. In addition, backup suppliers were identified for critical IT components, ensuring the continuity of the procurement process.

Among the elements that contributed decisively to the smooth running of the implementation are the direct involvement of the company's administrator, previous experience in project management, good collaboration with local suppliers and the support provided by the external consultant. The project team operated efficiently, relying on open communication, realistic planning and constant control of the stages.

Overall, the implementation of the project is characterised by careful planning, permanent monitoring and a high ability to adapt to challenges. The beneficiary demonstrated managerial maturity, good internal coordination and a preventive approach, which contributed decisively to maintaining the quality and coherence of the implementation process.

7. IMPACT ON BENEFICIARIES AND THE COMMUNITY

The project implemented by **LOCAL GRID MEDIA S.R.L.** is still ongoing, but the beneficiary already estimates positive effects in terms of digitising internal activities and modernising the way of working. The new IT equipment and software applications purchased – for 3D modelling, internal management (ERP,

CRM) and electronic invoicing – began to be used gradually, contributing to the streamlining of administrative flows and a better organisation of information.

Through the project, the company anticipates a significant increase in the degree of digitalisation of internal processes, which will allow for a clearer record of orders, centralised customer management and a reduction in working times. The beneficiary believes that digitalisation will also facilitate the expansion of creative activities, allowing the development of products that combine the physical component (puzzles) with the digital one (3D models and online applications).

At the local level, the impact of the project is expected to be visible by diversifying the products offered and by promoting the cultural and tourist heritage of local communities. Personalised puzzles and 3D digital versions will be able to be used for educational purposes, especially in kindergartens and schools, contributing to the development of knowledge about the places and symbols of the community. At the same time, the company aims to offer free access to some of the digital models, in order to stimulate the interest of children and teachers in heritage and technology.

From an economic point of view, it is expected that investing in digitalisation will increase the company's competitiveness, by modernising processes and by being able to access new customer segments. The beneficiary expects that in the medium-term effects such as improving product quality, optimising working times, expanding the market and strengthening the company's image as a creative and innovative producer will occur.

The risks identified in achieving these results are related to the pace of implementation and full adaptation to new technologies. Setting up ERP and CRM applications, training staff, and integrating data are time-consuming processes that can delay the appearance of visible effects. The company also operates in a niche market, where success depends largely on digital promotion and the degree of acceptance of products by educational institutions.

Despite these challenges, the beneficiary has a positive perception of the project's potential to contribute to local development. By combining digital technologies with educational and cultural components, the firm estimates that the project will generate not only economic but also social benefits – by promoting local identity and increasing interest in the cultural and historical values of the region.

8. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INTERVENTION (PRELIMINARY COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS)

The beneficiary perceives the cost-benefit ratio of the project as positive, even if the investment involved a considerable administrative and financial effort. Although the implementation is still ongoing, the purchased equipment and applications have already started to generate visible benefits in terms of internal efficiency, organisation of activities and preparation for an expansion of the business model in the digital environment.

Direct costs were allocated for the purchase of high-performance IT equipment, off-grid photovoltaic system and specialised software (for 3D modelling, ERP, CRM and electronic invoicing). The beneficiary appreciates that these investments represent a solid basis for the modernisation of the firm, ensuring a sustainable digital infrastructure that is adaptable to the evolution of the market.

Regarding indirect costs, the company mentioned the need to ensure staff training, adaptation of internal infrastructure and collaboration with external consultants for the configuration of software systems. These additional expenses, although totally ineligible, were considered necessary to achieve the project objectives and for the efficient use of the implemented technologies. Also, the complexity of the ERP and CRM configuration process generated additional consulting costs, which were absorbed through careful planning and the direct involvement of the company's staff in the technical process.

The beneficiary does not perceive the costs as disproportionate to the benefits obtained or anticipated. On the contrary, the project is seen as a long-term strategic investment, with the potential for economic growth and strengthening of the market position. Profitability is estimated through future savings resulting from reduced working times, increased productivity and expansion of sales to new customer segments. At the same time, the modernisation of internal processes and the integration of digital technologies contribute to better financial transparency and the reduction of operational risks.

From the perspective of the administrative effort, the beneficiary considers that the procedures related to the programme were manageable, although some steps – such as technical clarifications and VAT eligibility checks – required additional time and expert support. However, the overall experience was positive, and communication with the Centre RDA was described as efficient and constructive, which reduced the administrative pressure on a micro-enterprise with limited resources.

Compared to other available funding programmes, the beneficiary considers that Action 2.2 of the Centre Regional Programme has been better adapted to the real needs of SMEs, through the clear structure, realistic criteria and accessible eligibility conditions, suitable for the specifics of a small creative business.

Overall, the project is perceived as efficient and relevant for the company's development, ensuring a solid digital infrastructure, with economic and social benefits in the medium and long term, without administrative and financial efforts being considered excessive in relation to the anticipated results.

9. CONTRIBUTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL OBJECTIVES

The project **"Access, adoption and implementation of digital technologies within SC LOCAL GRID MEDIA S.R.L."** concretely integrates the horizontal principles of the European Union, while contributing to the environmental, social and economic objectives of the Centre Regional Programme 2021–2027. The beneficiary designed the project in compliance with the principles of equal opportunities, social inclusion, sustainable development, circular economy and environmental protection, according to the requirements of the **DNSH principle – "Do No** Significant Harm". Horizontal principles have been effectively integrated into the implementation process. From **a sustainability** perspective, the purchased IT equipment and UPS system run on power from off-grid photovoltaic panels, reducing energy consumption and carbon footprint. In terms **of equal opportunities and inclusion, the** company has purchased ergonomic equipment and software compatible with accessibility features, to ensure an adaptable and inclusive work environment.

⇒ **Equal opportunities and gender equality**

Ever since the project development stage, LOCAL GRID MEDIA S.R.L. has aimed to apply the principle of equality between women and men in all areas of activity – from recruitment to remuneration and professional training. The company ensures the full participation of every person, regardless of gender, age, ethnic origin, religion, disability or social orientation. The principle **of equal pay for work of equal value**, equal access to training, equal treatment in terms of social security, maternity protection, parental leave and non-discrimination of part-time employees shall be observed.

The company will also create new jobs, one of which will be for a person from a disadvantaged category, thus contributing to the consolidation of social inclusion and the concrete application of the principle of equal opportunities.

⇒ **Non-discrimination**

The beneficiary constantly applies **non-discriminatory** practices in the process of recruitment, training and professional promotion. The selection criteria focused on competence and experience, without any differentiation based on gender, age, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability. The company aligns with Romanian and European legislation on combating discrimination, ensuring an open, fair and inclusive work environment.

⇒ **Accessibility for people with disabilities**

LOCAL GRID MEDIA S.R.L. has implemented concrete measures to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities in the work process. Within the project, the following were purchased:

- an **electrically adjustable desk** to allow height adjustment according to the needs of employees with locomotor disabilities;
- an **ergonomic trackball mouse**, which facilitates the use of the computer for people with motor impairments;
- IT equipment configured with **software accessibility features** (text narrator, digital magnifying glass, increased contrast, colour reversal).

The company also provides the possibility of **teleworking** for employees who cannot travel, providing access to mobile equipment (laptop, tablet, etc.). These measures support the professional integration of people with disabilities, combat stigma and promote diversity and equity in the workplace.

⇒ **Sustainable development and the "Polluter pays" principle**

The project promotes sustainable development through concrete measures to reduce the impact on the environment. LOCAL GRID MEDIA S.R.L. has invested in **energy-efficient IT and production equipment**, partially powered by an **off-grid photovoltaic system**, thus reducing dependence on conventional energy and carbon footprint. The company adheres to the "polluter pays" principle by exclusively using modern electrical equipment, without polluting gas emissions or fossil fuel consumption. They also prefer **local suppliers**, which reduces transport distances, reduces CO_2 emissions and supports the local economy.

⇒ **Protection of biodiversity and ecosystems**

The project does not involve activities with an impact on the natural environment and is not located in biodiversity-sensitive areas. The production processes are carried out exclusively in an enclosed space, using natural raw materials (paper and cardboard), without toxic substances or plastics. Through the theme of the products made, puzzles and educational games that illustrate the local heritage and cultural values, the company indirectly contributes to the promotion of biodiversity and to raising awareness on environmental protection among local communities.

⇒ **Resource efficiency and circular economy**

LOCAL GRID MEDIA S.R.L. applies a production model based on efficiency and reuse. The wastepaper and cardboard resulting from the production process is shredded and reused in the packaging of the final products, thus minimising losses and storage costs. The company complies with the legislation on waste management (Law no. 211/2011, Law no. 249/2015) and collaborates with authorised operators for the recycling of used electronic equipment. By purchasing durable, long-lasting equipment with the possibility of refurbishment, the company reduces the generation of electronic waste and increases the degree of recovery and recycling.

⇒ **Disaster Resilience and Climate Change Immunisation**

The beneficiary carried out an analysis of natural risks (earthquakes, floods, storms) and operational risks (industrial accidents, pollution), identifying prevention and intervention measures in case of emergency. Although the project is not directly exposed to climate risks, the company has provided for internal protection procedures, evacuation plans and periodic training of personnel. Climate change immunisation is ensured through the adoption **of energy-efficient electrical equipment**, reducing emissions and using renewable energy. The risk analysis shows that the implementation area (Alba Iulia) is not exposed to major climate hazards, and the proposed activity has **a low degree of vulnerability** to climate change.

⇒ **DNSH principle**

According to Regulation (EU) 852/2020, the project fully complies with the DNSH principle, without affecting any of the six environmental objectives:

1. Climate change mitigation – the equipment is electric, energy efficient, without polluting emissions.
2. Adaptation to climate change – there are no activities or infrastructure exposed to climate risks.
3. Sustainable use of water resources – processes do not involve high water consumption and do not produce spills.
4. Circular economy – materials are reused and e-waste is recycled.
5. Pollution prevention and control – the activity does not generate significant emissions of dust, noise or toxic substances.
6. Protection of biodiversity and ecosystems – the activity takes place in a controlled environment, with no impact on natural habitats.

By respecting all horizontal principles, the LOCAL GRID MEDIA S.R.L. project contributes to the region's green and digital transition objectives. The company demonstrates that digitalisation, when correlated with

social responsibility and environmental protection, can become an effective tool for the sustainable, equitable and competitive development of local businesses.

10. CONCLUSIONS

The project implemented by LOCAL GRID MEDIA S.R.L. is a relevant example of a digitisation initiative adapted to the needs of a creative micro-enterprise in the Centre Region. The intervention was strategically designed, starting from the need to modernise internal processes and the desire to capitalise on the technological potential in support of educational and cultural activities.

The implementation of the project allowed the company to take important steps towards the digital transition, through the acquisition and integration of high-performance equipment and applications, capable of transforming traditional activities into a modern, automated and sustainable flow. By using digital technologies, the company is strengthening its position in the market and expanding its capacity to develop innovative 3D educational products and games that can contribute to the promotion of local heritage and the development of communities.

From an operational point of view, the implementation process was an efficient and well-coordinated one, based on realistic planning, management involvement and constant communication with the actors involved. The support provided by Centre RDA and the good collaboration with the suppliers and the external consultant contributed significantly to the fluidity of the project. Although there were challenges related to VAT, exchange rate differences and the configuration of software solutions, they were properly managed, without major impact on the overall calendar.

The beneficiary perceives the cost-benefit ratio as favourable, the investments made having the potential to generate economic and social effects in the medium term. The project contributes to improving internal efficiency, increasing digitalisation and strengthening the competitiveness of the enterprise, while the resulting products will have an educational and cultural value.

The anticipated impact on the local community aims to increase access to digital educational tools, promote cultural identity and stimulate interest in heritage. In parallel, by training staff and creating new jobs, the project supports the development of digital skills and contributes to social inclusion.

The beneficiary's experience in implementing the project confirms the importance of calls dedicated to the digitisation of SMEs and demonstrates that financial support, correlated with appropriate consultancy and training, can generate real and sustainable transformations. At the same time, the draft highlights the need to simplify administrative procedures and make the eligibility of expenditures more flexible, in order to facilitate the access and full implementation of digital solutions.

In conclusion, the project **"Access, adoption and implementation of digital technologies within SC LOCAL GRID MEDIA S.R.L."** contributes to the achievement of the objectives of the Centre Regional Programme 2021–2027, in particular those related to Priority 2 – 'A Digital Region'. It demonstrates that digitalisation, applied intelligently and adapted to the local specificity, can generate economic, educational and social value, becoming an important tool for the sustainable and innovative development of companies in the region.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

The beneficiary considers that the digitisation call under the Centre Regional Programme 2021–2027 was well structured and adapted to the needs of micro-enterprises, but there are some aspects that could be improved to increase the efficiency of implementation and the accessibility of funding.

A first recommendation aims **to clarify and make more flexible the eligibility of software-related expenses**. Within the project, part of the costs necessary for the configuration of the ERP and CRM systems, for the installation and training of the staff, were not eligible, although they had an important contribution to the functionality of the digital solutions. The beneficiary suggests that these services should be explicitly included in future calls, in order to avoid unforeseen additional costs and to support the full implementation of digitalisation.

The beneficiary considers it useful to introduce support components in the field of basic digital skills for SME staff, before the implementation phase, in the form of short training sessions, webinars or technical guides. This type of support would facilitate a better understanding of the technical requirements and reduce reliance on external consultants in the early stages of the project.

It is also recommended **to simplify the administrative and clarification process**, especially for micro-enterprises without specialised staff. The beneficiary appreciated the support provided by the Centre RDA but considers that a unified digital platform for the management of documents, payment requests and responses to clarifications would be useful, which would partially automate checks and reduce communication time.

Regarding the improvement of efficiency, the beneficiary proposes that in future guidelines more freedom be granted in allocating the budget by categories of expenses, depending on the specifics of the activity. For creative micro-enterprises, where digitalisation is combined with production, promotion and education, a more flexible budget structure would allow for adaptation to real needs and more efficient use of resources.

Overall, the company positively appreciates the implementation experience, considering that the investment in digitalisation was a real opportunity for modernisation. However, in order to increase the efficiency and accessibility of future calls, it would be necessary to better link technical support, staff training and simplify administrative procedures, so that the digitalisation process is faster, more coherent and more manageable for small and medium-sized SMEs.

1.1 Case Study Interview Minute – LOCAL GRID MEDIA S.R.L.

Date: August 8, 2025

Location: online

Participants: project administrator/manager LOCAL GRID MEDIA S.R.L. and representatives of the Association formed by CIVITTA Strategy & Consulting SA (leader) and Lideea Development Actions SRL (partner)

Context and purpose of the discussions

The main purpose of the interview was to understand how the beneficiary perceived the process of accessing financing, the experience of implementing the digitisation project and how the intervention contributes to the digital transformation and innovation of the business model.

LOCAL GRID MEDIA S.R.L. is a creative micro-enterprise, specialised in making handmade puzzles and three-dimensional educational objects, which started from an unusual idea: to transform the physical puzzle into an interactive digital experience, capable of combining education, tourism and technology.

The initiator of the project, with technical training as a geodesic engineer, aimed to create a new mindset and a niche in the market of interactive cultural products – a combination of manual work, technological precision and digital innovation.

The firm identified the need to adapt to a small and competitive market with a small customer base. In order to attract new audiences, especially young people and tourists, the company decided to digitise its products and offer an immersive visual experience, accessible online.

Action 2.2 – Digitisation of SMEs under the funding programme was considered an ideal opportunity ("came like a glove"), allowing investments in high-performance equipment and software for scanning, modelling and 3D rendering – essential technologies for the transition from a physical object to a virtual concept.

Description of the project and proposed objectives

The project is part of Priority 2 – "A Digital Region" and aims to digitise the company's non-productive activities, by creating a complete digital chain that connects the physical product with the virtual environment.

The declared goal is to create a bridge between the artisanal puzzle and the digital environment, by three-dimensional scanning of local objectives of interest (schools, churches, town halls, museums, symbolic buildings). The resulting 3D models are made available to the public free of charge, through an online application, turning the puzzle into an educational and tourist tool.

The project was conceived not only as a technological investment, but also as an educational and social concept, meant to promote the values of the local community.

Main stages of the project:

- 3D scanning of puzzles and physical objectives, using a high-performance scanner and a high-capacity computer.
- Digital modelling and optimisation of 3D images with the help of specialised graphics and rendering software.
- Integration of models into an interactive web application, where they can be explored, rotated and animated virtually.

In addition to the tourism component, the company has also developed an educational module for children, an interactive digital puzzle that combines play with learning, stimulating logical thinking, creativity and interest in heritage.

Part of the digital product will be offered free of charge to the local community, as a tool for cultural and educational promotion, combining the economic and social dimensions.

The project also includes the digitisation of internal processes, by implementing modern information systems – ERP, CRM and e-invoicing – to improve management, customer relations and internal communication.

Implementation progress

At the time of the interview, the project was at an advanced stage of implementation. The beneficiary purchased all the main equipment – the 3D scanner, the high-performance workstation, the NAS system for storage and the UPS system integrated with solar panels and batteries (off-grid) – thus ensuring a complete and sustainable technological flow.

At the same time, the necessary software applications were purchased:

- 3D modelling programs, which allow export to the free BIMx application, for viewing from your phone or tablet.
- Internal management applications – ERP, CRM and e-invoice.

At the time of the discussion, they were installed and are to be configured and populated with internal data. The company was preparing to start staff training courses in digital marketing and social media, and at the end of the implementation a digital audit is planned that will evaluate the progress made.

The administrative process was perceived as efficient, and the communication with the Centre RDA was characterised as "very good", the deadlines for processing payment requests and clarifications being, in general, less than one month.

Difficulties and challenges encountered

The beneficiary identified several challenges in the implementation of the project:

- Tax aspects: difficulties in managing VAT and exchange rate differences, as some contracts were concluded in euros and payments were made in lei. During the implementation, the company became a VAT payer, which generated uncertainties regarding the eligibility of certain amounts.
- Implementation of ERP and CRM systems: the configuration process has proven to be complex. Suppliers requested additional hours of consulting for customisation, which increased costs and delayed actual operation. The beneficiary tried to configure part of the functionalities internally and later requested specialised support.

- Market constraints: the activity has a small market, and educational products are purchased occasionally. Thus, the increase in sales depends significantly on the success of digital promotion campaigns and attracting a new audience.
- Technical adaptation: Processing large volumes of 3D data and integrating it into a unified platform involved a technical learning curve and a constant adaptation to the evolution of the software.

At the administrative level, the process of clarifying the technical specifications and conducting the tenders proved to be laborious, especially for a micro-enterprise with limited resources, requiring external advisory support.

Anticipated impact and expected results

The beneficiary has already reported visible effects of digitalisation, even before the completion of the project.

Through the acquisitions made, the company modernised its digital infrastructure and acquired the ability to manage internal flows more efficiently, reducing administrative processing time and improving order and customer records.

In the short term, the project will lead to:

- increasing the quality and accuracy of products;
- the possibility of developing complementary digital products;
- diversification of revenues by expanding into the online market;
- increasing brand visibility and commercial appeal.

In the medium term, it is expected to strengthen a local community of children, parents, teachers and tourists, who will be able to interact with digital and physical products. The free educational component contributes to the development of digital and cultural skills among the community.

From an economic point of view, the beneficiary estimates a gradual increase in sales with the consolidation of the online presence and a possible creation of new jobs, through the expansion of activities.

Horizontal principles and sustainability

The beneficiary has shown concern for compliance with the horizontal and sustainability principles imposed by the programme:

- in terms of equal opportunities, ergonomic equipment and adjustable furniture (adjustable desk, adaptive mouse) were purchased, also suitable for people with motor disabilities;
- the software used is compatible with accessibility features for the visually impaired;
- from the perspective of the DNSH principle – "Do No Significant Harm", the equipment is integrated into an off-grid photovoltaic system, contributing to the reduction of energy consumption and carbon footprint;
- The supply policy favours local suppliers, reducing environmental impact and supporting the regional economy.

Effectiveness of the intervention

Although investments in equipment and software have been considerable, the cost-benefit ratio is positive. Through the project, the company has ensured a sustainable digital infrastructure, which allows further development and expansion of the business model.

Products can be monetised and reused in physical and digital formats, which helps to increase the attractiveness and added value of services. At the same time, the investment has a direct social impact, through free access to digital educational content for children and locals.

Lessons learned and recommendations

Based on the implementation experience, the beneficiary formulated some useful conclusions:

- The preparation of digitisation projects must be more forward-looking, especially in defining technical specifications and software requirements.
- In creative projects, the balance between art and technology is delicate and requires constant interdisciplinary collaboration.
- Advisory support for micro-enterprises is essential, especially in the technical and administrative stages.
- It would be useful for funded software packages to include mandatory configuration and training services, in order to avoid hidden costs later.
- The beneficiary recommends launching calls that combine digitalisation with small production investments, allowing companies to directly integrate technology into the core business.

General conclusions

The project implemented by LOCAL GRID MEDIA S.R.L. is a positive example of the use of European funds for digitalisation among micro-enterprises in the Centre Region.

The beneficiary demonstrated a clear and creative vision of digital transformation, integrating 3D technology, education and local heritage into a unique concept.

The implementation is advanced, the difficulties encountered were manageable, and the estimated impact is favourable, both for the competitiveness of the company and for the community, through the educational and cultural component of the products developed.

2. CASE STUDY NO. 2 – DIGITALISATION OF B.F.R.-TOUR SRL

Evaluation title: Theme 2 "Evaluation of interventions targeting digitalisation activities for the benefit of citizens, businesses and governments"

Project name: Digitalisation B.F.R.-TOUR SRL

Beneficiary: B.F.R.-TOUR SRL., SMIS CODE 320886

Investment location: Sita Buzăului commune, Covasna County

1. OBJECT AND PURPOSE OF THE CASE STUDY

This case study aims to support the evaluation process of the interventions funded by the Centre Region Regional Programme, under Theme 2 "Evaluation of interventions aimed at digitalisation activities for the benefit of citizens, companies and governments".

The analyses and findings presented contribute to the formulation of the answers to the evaluation questions and allow comparisons to be made between the different types of interventions, investments and beneficiaries. These comparisons highlight the mechanisms by which available resources and those created within projects are used and capitalised, as well as how these factors, together with the elements of context, influence the implementation and results of interventions.

The case study also contributes to the assessment of the extent to which digitalisation interventions respond to the needs of target groups, provide effective solutions to socio-economic challenges in the Centre Region and support the relevant strategies and objectives of the programme.

The selection of the project analysed in this case study was carried out according to the criteria established in the evaluation methodology, taking into account **the type of intervention**, **the level of complexity** and **the stage of implementation**. The project is part of the sample **dedicated to SMEs,** thus ensuring the diversity of types of beneficiaries and the possibility of analysing how different institutional and economic contexts influence the digitisation process.

The methodology used combines the documentary analysis based on the project documents provided by the beneficiary **(the funding application, the digitisation plan)** with the interview with **the project manager**, ensuring a complete understanding of how the interventions contribute to the development and modernisation of the region through digitisation.

2. PRESENTATION OF THE CASE STUDY

Project name	**Digitalisation of B.F.R.-TOUR SRL**
SMIS Code	320886
Location	Sita Buzăului, Covasna
Beneficiary	B.F.R.-TOUR SRL
Priority / Specific objective	P2. A digital region RSO1.2_Capitalising the benefits of digitalisation for the benefit of citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities RSO1.4_Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship
Project call/ Operation	Action 2.2 Digital Enterprises for an Advanced Economy – Smart Specialisation Sectors
Implementation period (start/end)	11.02.2025 – 10.02.2027
Project budget	1,102,585.53 lei total 992,326.98 lei non-reimbursable
Project context **Project justification**	Considering the constant concern of B.F.R.-TOUR SRL to identify and capitalise on new development opportunities, correlated with the possibility offered by the call for projects related to Action 2.2 – Digital Enterprises for an Advanced Economy – Smart Specialisation Sectors, within the "Centre Region" Programme, the company aims to complete digitisation of the manufacturing activity of PVC joinery with double glazing, activity related to CANE code 2223 – Manufacture of plastic articles for construction. Digitalisation is an essential step to increase competitiveness and adapt to current market demands, where digital transformation is a determinant of performance and sustainability. Through the project, the company aims to implement advanced technologies and integrated IT solutions to ensure operational efficiency, reduction of production costs, superior product quality and compliance with environmental principles. **General objective of the project** The general objective of the project is the full digitalisation of the activity of B.F.R.-TOUR SRL, in order to increase the level of digital maturity, the efficiency of production processes and competitiveness on the market. By achieving this objective, the project contributes to promoting the uptake and use of digital technologies among SMEs in the Centre Region, supporting the transition to a knowledge-based, innovation and sustainability economy, in line with the objectives of Priority 2 – A Digital Region of the Centre Region Programme.

	Specific objectives of the project 1. Digitisation of internal production processes by implementing an integrated information system (ERP) that ensures efficient resource management, product traceability and workflow automation. 2. Increasing the level of use of digital technologies through the acquisition of IT equipment (desktop, server, storage system, tablets, monitor) and cloud computing (PaaS) services. 3. Development and implementation of a website with advanced features, which will improve the company's online presence, customer relations and access to information. 4. Training and training of staff for the efficient use of purchased digital equipment and solutions, ensuring a smooth transition to digitised processes. 5. Compliance with DNSH principles and energy efficiency, through the use of modern equipment, with low energy consumption and minimal impact on the environment. 6. Ensuring equal opportunities, inclusion and accessibility for all categories of people, including people with disabilities, in accordance with national and European legislation. The project is in line with: • Smart Specialisation Strategy 2021–2027, by promoting investments in digitalisation, innovation and advanced technologies; • Centre Regional Development Plan 2021–2027, supporting the transition to a knowledge-based regional economy; • The Industrial Transition Strategy in Romania, by integrating digital solutions at all stages of the production chain – from design to logistics and delivery; • The National Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2027 and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), through concrete accessibility and non-discrimination measures. By implementing the "Digitalisation of B.F.R.-TOUR SRL" project, the company will achieve a significant increase in performance and competitiveness, contribute to regional digitalisation objectives and generate added value for the local economy. The project also supports sustainable development and the transition to a modern, digitised and environmentally friendly industry.

3. OBJECTIVES AND LOGIC OF THE INTERVENTION

The purpose of the project "Digitisation of B.F.R.-TOUR SRL" is to increase the degree of digitisation and automation of production activities, by implementing an integrated information system (ERP) and acquiring the necessary hardware infrastructure (server, IT equipment, cloud services, licenses). Through this intervention, the company aims to modernise internal processes, integrate production flows, efficient inventory management and complete data traceability, ensuring automatic planning and real-time management reporting.

The project directly aligns with the objectives of Priority 2 – A Digital Region of the Centre Region Programme, contributing to:

- Increasing the degree of digitisation of SMEs by adopting modern digital technologies in their daily activity;
- Developing a competitive and knowledge-based regional economy;

- Improving productivity and economic performance through the use of integrated IT tools;
- Promoting digital transformation as a central element of industrial modernisation and sustainability.

Thus, the project contributes to the specific objective of the call "Digital Enterprises for an Advanced Economy" by adopting digital technologies in production and management activities, supporting the company's transition to a smart and competitive enterprise.

The proposed interventions were selected following an internal needs analysis, carried out before the launch of the call for projects, which highlighted the following problems:

- increasing the complexity of operational flows (supply, production, distribution, logistics);
- fragmentation of processes and the absence of a unitary management system;
- difficulties in the operational and financial control of the activity;
- the lack of a centralised database and a real-time reporting tool.

Based on these findings, the company has prioritised the digitisation of core processes, by:

- Implementation of an integrated ERP system, capable of managing all operational flows (purchasing, production, management, deliveries, invoicing, after-sales services);
- Acquisition of the necessary IT infrastructure (server, storage system, tablets, desktops and cloud services) to ensure the optimal functioning of the system;
- Staff training and instruction in the use of new applications;
- Creating a website with advanced features to improve customer relations and process transparency.

These investments were prioritised according to the direct impact on the company's operational efficiency, productivity and competitiveness, but also in terms of complementarity with the previous project financed through Priority 1 – Innovative Enterprises, focused on the modernisation of the technological line. Thus, digitalisation provides the necessary information structure for the efficient use of new equipment, logically complementing the investments already made in physical infrastructure.

The project was adapted to the local context and to the needs of the target group – the company's employees and customers – taking into account the following considerations:

- Size and local economic role of the company: B.F.R.-TOUR SRL is one of the main employers in the area, and digital modernisation contributes to maintaining jobs and increasing local economic stability.
- Increasing the digital skills of the staff: Through the trainings included in the project, employees will acquire relevant digital skills, contributing to the creation of a more competitive workforce adapted to the demands of the modern market.
- Accessibility and inclusion: The project respects the principles of equal opportunities and equal access for people with disabilities, ensuring the accessibility of the spaces and digital tools used.
- Customer impact: The ERP system and website with advanced features will allow customers direct access to information about orders, delivery times and after-sales services, increasing transparency and end-user satisfaction.

Thus, the intervention is not only aimed at digitising internal processes, but also improving the relationship with the external environment, creating benefits at the level of the local community and the regional economic ecosystem.

The logic of the project is based on an integrated approach to organisational modernisation:

- inputs are investments in digital infrastructure, software, equipment and staff training;
- processes (activities) are aimed at implementing the ERP system, training users, digitising flows and optimising processes;
- outputs consist of the operation of an integrated digital system, access to real-time data, reduction of errors and administrative costs;
- outcomes are reflected in the increase in productivity, competitiveness and sustainability of the company’s activity.

Through this logic, the intervention contributes not only to achieving the objectives of the project, but also to achieving the strategic objectives of the "Centre Region" Programme, namely: developing a digital regional economy, increasing the technological maturity of SMEs and strengthening regional economic resilience.

4. PROJECT COMPONENTS

Activities	Activity 1: Procurement of digital equipment, applications and solutions This activity aims to completely digitise the company's internal processes through the acquisition of IT equipment, software applications, digital services and infrastructure necessary for the integration and automation of production, management and administration activities. The proposed investments include: • Desktop system – 1 piece. It will be used by administrative and management staff for the operation of ERP and management applications. It provides the processing capacity necessary for data analysis and coordination of information flows. • Monitor – 1 piece. It is intended for working with ERP applications and reporting systems, facilitating the visualisation and analysis of data at the production and management level. • Tablets – 7 pieces. They will be used in the production and logistics departments for the direct collection of data (orders, consumption, stocks, daily operations). These devices help eliminate physical documents and increase the speed of information processing. • Storage system – 1 piece. It will allow the saving and archiving of data generated by production, accounting and logistics activity, ensuring the security and accessibility of information. • Server – 1 piece. It represents the central infrastructure on which the ERP system and other software applications will be installed. It ensures the connection of equipment, the management of databases and the continuity of IT activities. • Website with advanced features – 1 piece. A modern website will be developed, integrated with the ERP system, which will allow online order management, direct communication with customers, tracking the status of orders and promoting the company's products. • Cloud computing (PaaS) services – 1 service. These services will ensure the hosting of applications and databases in a secure and high-performance environment, with remote access, automatic backup and cyber protection. • ERP system – 1 piece. It is the central component of the digitisation process. The ERP will integrate all of the company's processes — sourcing, production, inventory, sales, invoicing, and after-sales services — allowing operations to be planned and monitored in real time. • Software licenses – 7 pieces. Licenses will be purchased corresponding to the systems and applications used (2× type 1, 2× type 2, 1× type 3, 2× type 4), necessary for the operation of the information infrastructure and security systems

	Through this activity, the company's integrated digital infrastructure is created, which will allow the automation of internal flows, improve operational control and increase economic efficiency. Activity 2: Digital Maturity Audit This activity aims to assess the degree of digitisation of the company before the implementation of the proposed solutions. The audit will look at the existing infrastructure, employee skills, workflows and the level of integration of IT processes. Based on this assessment, a report will be prepared that will substantiate the digital action plan and guide the subsequent implementation of the ERP system and IT equipment. Activity 3: Consulting services for project implementation The activity consists of providing consulting services for the technical, financial and administrative management of the project. The consultant will support the beneficiary in developing the necessary documentation, carrying out the procurement procedures, monitoring the implementation and preparing reports to the financing authority. Compliance with the requirements of the programme, compliance with the DNSH principle and the rules on equal opportunities and social inclusion will be ensured. Activity 4: Training and development of employees' skills The activity aims at the professional training of employees in areas specific to digitalisation, smart specialisation and industrial transition. Three employees of the company will participate in training programmes for the acquisition of digital and entrepreneurial skills, necessary for the operation of the implemented information systems. The courses will include elements of ERP application use, digital management, data security and industrial process optimisation. Activity 5: Information and publicity This activity has the role of ensuring the transparency and visibility of the financial support provided through the Centre Region Programme. Information and promotion actions will be carried out, consisting of press releases at the beginning and end of the project, informative posters at the company's headquarters and the application of stickers on the purchased equipment. Also, the information about the project will be published on the company's website and online, according to the requirements regarding the visual identity of the European funding. By carrying out these activities, the project "Digitisation of B.F.R.-TOUR SRL" will ensure the complete digital transformation of the enterprise, increase competitiveness and alignment with the objectives of Priority 2 – *A Digital Region*, contributing to the sustainable economic development of the Centre Region.
Expected results	The implementation of the project "Digitisation of B.F.R.-TOUR SRL" will generate a series of concrete, measurable and sustainable results, which will contribute to achieving the general objective of complete digitisation of the enterprise and to improving its economic and operational performance. Modern and functional IT infrastructure, composed of: o 1 fully equipped desktop system; o 1 high-resolution monitor; o 7 operational tablets used in production and logistics; o 1 high-capacity storage system; o 1 high-performance server for hosting digital applications.

	• Implementation of a fully integrated, functional ERP system that manages in real time all operational processes (procurement, production, inventory management, logistics, sales, invoicing and after-sales services). • Implementation and operation of a website with advanced functions, integrated with the ERP system, which ensures: o digital communication with customers, o increased online visibility, o the possibility of placing orders and tracking deliveries. • Contracting and operating a cloud computing (PaaS) service that ensures the storage and processing of data in safe and available conditions. • Purchase and activation of 7 software licenses (types 1–4), which support application operation and cybersecurity. • Creation of a centralised digital database, which allows full traceability of materials, products and operations. • Full digitalisation of workflows and elimination of paper support from internal processes. • Reduce work times and operational errors by automating recording and reporting processes. • Preparation of a Digital Maturity Audit Report, which provides: o the detailed assessment of the current state of digitalisation, o analysis of IT infrastructure and internal skills, o concrete recommendations to improve the digital maturity of the company. • Creation of a baseline for measuring the digital progress after the implementation of the project. • Correct, compliant and efficient performance of all project acquisitions and activities; • Complete and verifiable documentation, according to the requirements of the programme; • Technical and financial reports submitted on time and approved without corrections; • Continuous monitoring of indicators and compliance with the DNSH principle. • 3 employees trained and certified in: o advanced digital skills, o use of the ERP system, o entrepreneurship and smart specialisation. • Increasing the level of digital competence and the ability to operate new technologies; • Ensuring a modern working environment, based on digital skills and automated processes. • Preparation and publication of 2 press releases (at the launch and completion of the project); • Displaying an A3 poster at the company's headquarters, according to the visibility requirements;

	• Applying 3 stickers on the purchased equipment; • Publication of project information on the company's website; • Full compliance with the information and visibility requirements of European funding. • Efficient coordination of all project activities; • Compliance with the implementation schedule and the set objectives; • Timely submission of technical and financial reports; • Complete documentation of the implementation process; • Monitoring compliance with result indicators and the DNSH principle. Overall and impact results • Complete digitalisation of the production process related to CANE code 2223 – *Manufacture of plastic articles for construction*; • Increasing the level of digital maturity of the company; • Reduction of order processing times by more than 25%; • Increase productivity and operational efficiency by at least 15%; • Reducing material and energy consumption by optimising processes; • Increasing the company's competitiveness and profitability in the PVC joinery market; • Alignment with the Smart Specialisation Strategy 2021–2027 and Priority 2 – A Digital Region of the Centre Region Programme; • Direct contribution to the achievement of the objectives of the DESI Indicator on the uptake of digital technologies in SMEs.
Target group	The target group of the project "Digitalisation of B.F.R.-TOUR SRL" is mainly represented by the company's own staff, namely the employees involved in the production, logistics, management, administrative and management activity, as well as, indirectly, by the company's customers and partners. The main category of direct beneficiaries consists of the company's employees, who will use the equipment, applications and digital solutions purchased through the project. By digitising processes, they will benefit from modern, efficient and safe working conditions, the reduction of repetitive administrative tasks and a better organised workflow. Three of the employees will participate in the training programmes included in the project, acquiring digital and entrepreneurial skills in the areas of smart specialisation, industrial transition and the use of the ERP system. These skills will contribute to the professional development of the staff and to the increase of the company's overall productivity. Company management is also an important component of the target group. By implementing the ERP system, management will have access to centralised information, updated in real time, facilitating strategic decisions based on accurate data. This will allow for better resource planning, continuous performance monitoring, and effective control over costs and production. The indirect beneficiaries of the project are the company's customers, who will have access to an improved, more transparent and faster service. Through the website with advanced functions and the ERP system, customers will be able to track the status of orders, delivery times and will benefit from more efficient communication with the company. In addition, products made through a digitised process will have a higher level of quality, traceability and compliance with current industry standards.

	The company's partners and suppliers will benefit from the digitisation of internal processes by optimising supply flows, faster transmission of orders, documents and information, as well as by reducing processing times. This will generate more efficient collaboration in the supply and production chain. The local community is another indirect target group. By increasing competitiveness and profitability, the company will contribute to strengthening the local economy, maintaining and creating stable jobs and to the sustainable development of the Sita Buzăului area, Covasna County. Also, by reducing energy consumption and waste, the project has a positive effect on the environment and on the quality of life at the local level. In conclusion, the target group of the project consists of the employees and management of B.F.R.-TOUR SRL, its customers and partners, as well as the local community. The implementation of the project will produce direct positive effects on the efficiency of the internal activity and indirect on the economic and social environment in the region, contributing to the development of a digital, sustainable and competitive economy.

5. PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of the project "Digitalisation of B.F.R.-TOUR SRL" has made significant progress, corresponding to the stages planned in the execution schedule. The degree of achievement of the objectives is part of a favourable evolution, the indicators established by the financing application being mostly achieved or are in the advanced process of fulfilment.

Currently, the hardware component of the project is completed, the server has been purchased, installed and is functional, providing the necessary infrastructure for the implementation of the ERP system. The ERP platform has been configured and installed on the hardware infrastructure, and the testing and adaptation process is ongoing. This is followed by the stage of detailed analysis of internal processes, the training of personnel by departments and the parallel running of old and new systems until the complete stabilisation of the IT flows. Full integration and staff training are expected to be completed in the coming months.

The project is thus in an intermediate phase of implementation, in which the main acquisitions have been made, and the configuration, testing and training activities are active. The first tangible results are already visible: increased data processing speed, better traceability of operations and a reduction in manual errors in the recording of production flows. There is a visible improvement in internal communication between departments and greater clarity in inventory and order management.

The beneficiary appreciates the chances of achieving the objectives as high, in the context in which the major technical stages have already been completed. The general and specific objectives set by the project are considered achievable, and the projections regarding the efficiency of the activity and the increase of the company's competitiveness remain realistic. The implementation of the ERP system is seen as an essential stage in the organisational transformation process, and the beneficiary has a positive perception of the evolution of the project, despite the administrative and procedural challenges encountered.

Among the difficulties reported is the extended duration of the evaluation and contracting process, which led to gaps between the time of budgeting and the actual procurement. The rapid evolution of the IT equipment and solutions market has led to discrepancies between budgeted and actual values, requiring financial adaptations from the beneficiary. Communication with implementing authorities was also sometimes considered cumbersome, with the lack of a single point of contact leading to multiple requests for clarifications and longer response times.

In order to prevent possible delays and to ensure the full achievement of the planned results, the beneficiary has adopted a number of preventive measures. These include the direct involvement of the consultant in the technical and financial monitoring of the implementation, the review of the internal planning to correlate the procurement stages with the configuration stages, as well as the identification of alternative suppliers for digital equipment and services, so as to avoid bottlenecks. The beneficiary maintained a constant dialogue with the ERP system provider, ensuring a phased and flexible implementation.

Regarding the potential of the project to respond to the needs of the target groups and socio-economic challenges, the perception is positive. The employees involved in the use of the digital system already benefit from a more efficient and organised work environment, and the company's customers will soon have access to the online functionalities offered through the new website and the ERP module dedicated to orders. Thus, the project contributes not only to the modernisation of the internal activity, but also to the improvement of the quality of services offered to customers.

The beneficiary anticipates a significant impact in the medium and long term, both at organisational level and at the level of the local community. Internally, full digitalisation will allow real-time operations planning and control, reducing losses and increasing the efficiency of production processes. Externally, the project will contribute to strengthening the company's position on the PVC joinery market, increasing competitiveness in relation to regional producers and maintaining jobs in the area. At the same time, the investment has a positive effect on the environment, by reducing material and energy consumption and by better resource management.

In conclusion, the current stage of implementation of the project "Digitalisation of B.F.R.-TOUR SRL" is an advanced one, with clear prospects of completion as planned. The project responds to a real need for organisational transformation and demonstrates the company's ability to adapt to the demands of the digital economy. The beneficiary appreciates that the objectives will be fully achieved, and the impact of the investment will exceed the immediate results, contributing to sustainable development and strengthening the competitiveness of the company in the long term.

6. IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS (PROGRESS AND INTERNAL MECHANISMS)

In the implementation of the project "Digitalisation of B.F.R.-TOUR SRL", the activities were carried out according to the initial plan, with small calendar adjustments imposed by market conditions and the administrative process. There were no significant deviations from the implementation schedule, but certain activities, such as ERP configuration and testing, were slightly postponed correlating with equipment delivery times. These changes did not affect the objectives of the project but aimed at a coherent and phased implementation.

To track progress, the beneficiary uses an internal monitoring system based on monthly schedules, progress sheets and periodic reports prepared by the project consultant. Regular meetings are organised between the project manager, the technical team and the suppliers' representatives to analyse the status of the activities, any difficulties and proposed solutions. At the same time, there is permanent communication with the consultant responsible for project management, who centralises the data and maintains contact with the financing authority.

Communication with the Managing Authority and the intermediary structures was generally good, but the administrative process was sometimes difficult. Requests for successive clarifications and the lack of a single point of contact led to extensions of response periods. However, the clarifications received were useful, and the technical and methodological support provided, facilitated the development of the administrative stages and the compliance with the requirements of the programme.

Among the difficulties encountered are price fluctuations in the IT equipment market, variable delivery times of suppliers and the complexity of the process of integrating the ERP system into existing flows. Careful coordination between the current production activity and the implementation of new systems was also necessary to avoid operational interruptions.

To overcome these challenges, the company has applied preventive and corrective measures, such as maintaining contact with several suppliers for each procurement category, updating the internal planning, constant communication between the implementation team and the consultant, as well as directly involving management in the decision-making process. The flexibility and involvement of the internal team were essential to maintain the pace of implementation and meet the deadlines.

A positive aspect of the implementation process is the good collaboration between the project team, the consultant and the digital solution providers. The involvement of the management in the current activities, the team's experience in previous projects and the good internal communication contributed to the smooth running of the stages and to the achievement of results in line with the plan.

The implementation process is proceeding at a good pace, under controlled conditions, with an organised and balanced approach. The beneficiary carefully monitors the progress, adapts to the situations that arise and maintains constant communication with the actors involved, which provides solid premises for achieving all the set objectives and completing the project as planned.

7. IMPACT ON BENEFICIARIES AND THE COMMUNITY

The anticipated impact of the project "Digitisation of B.F.R.-TOUR SRL" is a positive and concrete one on the digitisation process at the level of the company and, indirectly, on the local community. By implementing the ERP system and related IT equipment, a significant increase in the degree of automation of internal processes and a visible improvement in operational efficiency are expected. Digitalisation will allow the integration of all supply, production, management, delivery and invoicing activity flows into a single system, with data available in real time.

At the SME level, the impact on digitalisation is major, the project contributing to the company's transition from a partially manual work model to a fully computerised one. This transformation will facilitate better production planning, full traceability of materials and products, as well as a reduction in errors generated by manual processes. At the same time, the introduction of an ERP platform will allow the rapid analysis and reporting of performance indicators, providing management with modern decision-making tools.

Regarding the concrete changes anticipated at the community level, the beneficiary estimates an increase in the efficiency and quality of the services offered to customers. The digital system will significantly reduce order processing times, allow tracking of the status of deliveries and improve communication with customers and partners. An increase in user satisfaction is also anticipated, through easier access to information and shorter reaction times in the business relationship. For the local community, the project also has an indirect impact component: ensuring the economic stability of the company, maintaining jobs and creating a positive example of adaptation to the digital economy in a predominantly industrial area.

From an economic perspective, the beneficiary estimates an increase in competitiveness on the PVC joinery market, by reducing production costs, making resources more efficient and eliminating operational losses. Automating processes will allow the company to handle a larger volume of orders, with the same number of employees, which will lead to increased productivity and more efficient use of resources. In addition, the digitalisation of internal flows helps to reduce bureaucracy, simplify documentation and better organise administrative activities.

In terms of risks and perceived barriers, the company believes that the main challenges are related to adapting staff to new digital tools and maintaining the pace of implementation in line with technological evolution. The beneficiary mentioned that there is a natural period of accommodation for employees, but this is managed through dedicated training and the gradual involvement of staff in the digitisation process. Also, possible price variations in the IT market and the duration of administrative procedures can influence the deadlines for completion, but do not jeopardise the achievement of the objectives.

The general perception of the beneficiary is that the project will have a real and lasting impact on the company's activity and on the local economic environment. Digitalisation will allow for better internal organisation, increased performance and rapid adaptation to market requirements, helping to strengthen the company's position in the PVC joinery production sector and modernise the business environment in the region.

8. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INTERVENTION (PRELIMINARY COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS)

The beneficiary of the project "Digitalisation of B.F.R.-TOUR SRL" considers that the cost-result ratio is favourable, despite the high administrative effort and the own resources involved. Although the implementation process involved a series of formalities, procurement procedures and frequent communications with the managing authorities, the anticipated benefits of using the ERP system and digital infrastructure are considered to outweigh the costs involved. The complete digitisation of internal activities and the automation of flows will generate significant time savings, reduction of errors and better use of resources, which justifies the investment.

The indirect costs associated with the project such as staff training; adaptation of the internal infrastructure and consultancy services were assessed as reasonable and necessary for the smooth running of the process. The beneficiary acknowledged that the transition to a complex digital system involves an adjustment period, in which employees need to familiarise themselves with the new tools. However, these costs are perceived as an investment in employee skills and the company's future efficiency. Consulting services played an important role in ensuring project compliance and managing administrative steps, reducing the risk of errors or delays.

In terms of the profitability of the intervention, the company anticipates clear economic benefits in the medium and long term. These include lowering operating costs, eliminating duplication of activities, optimising resources, reducing losses and increasing production capacity through better planning. The implementation of the ERP system will allow for more efficient inventory management and complete traceability of flows, leading to an estimated increase in productivity and implicitly in revenues. A significant reduction in internal bureaucracy and a simplification of administrative processes is also expected.

The beneficiary does not perceive the costs of the project as excessive in relation to the benefits obtained. The only difficulties reported concern the complexity of the administrative requirements and the procedural rigidity of the appeal, which prolonged the duration of the implementation and required the allocation of additional resources of time and personnel. Also, the differences between the budgeted values and the real prices in the IT market have imposed a higher own financial contribution, but the investment is considered justified, given the long-term effects.

At the same time, the company is running a complementary project under Priority 1 – A competitive region through innovation, digitalisation and dynamic enterprises, which allows an integrated approach to investments and an efficient use of resources in both directions of development. It was mentioned, however, that the valuation and contracting deadlines could be improved in order to avoid losing the technical relevance of the projects in relation to market dynamics.

Regarding the recommendations for optimising the cost-benefit ratio in future calls, the beneficiary considers that it would be useful to introduce flexible mechanisms that allow the justified updating of budget values and technical specifications, without the need for complex changes in the financing contract. Also, simplifying the verification steps and creating a single channel of communication with the implementing authorities would reduce administrative time and costs for beneficiaries.

In conclusion, the general perception is that the investment made through the digitisation project is efficient, sustainable and with visible economic and operational effects. Although the implementation involved a significant effort, the anticipated results of increased efficiency, cost reduction, complete digitisation of internal flows and improved competitiveness fully justify the costs and resources allocated.

9. CONTRIBUTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL OBJECTIVES

The project directly contributes to the achievement of the European Union's horizontal objectives on sustainable development, the green and digital transition, equal opportunities and social inclusion. Through the proposed activities, the project promotes the efficient use of resources, environmental protection, accessibility for all social categories, compliance with the principles "Do no significant harm" (DNSH) and "Polluter pays", as well as ensuring equal and non-discriminatory treatment for all participants.

⇒ **Equal opportunities and gender equality**

The project contributes to the promotion of the principles of equal opportunities and treatment between women and men, as well as to the prevention of any forms of discrimination, by applying objective criteria at all stages of implementation. Within the project activities, the principles of gender equality, diversity and inclusion are constantly respected, both in the recruitment process and in the training and involvement of staff.

During the implementation, the following shall be ensured:

- equal treatment for all persons involved in the project activities, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability or social category;
- equal access to information on the opportunities generated by the project (training, collaboration, participation in activities);

- applying transparent and objective criteria in the selection of staff involved in the project;
- integrating the principle of equal opportunities in all communication and dissemination activities, through the use of gender-neutral language and the balanced representation of women and men in all project materials and events.

⇒ **Non-discrimination**

The project actively promotes the principle of non-discrimination and equal treatment for all those involved.

As part of the implementation:

- all activities shall be carried out in accordance with the principles of transparency, objectivity and equal access;
- the recruitment of personnel, the selection of collaborators and the conduct of procurement procedures shall be carried out without discrimination, on the basis of professional competence and objective technical criteria;
- access to information on participation in project activities is ensured equally for all categories of interested persons and entities.

The project complies with Government Ordinance no. 137/2000 on the prevention and sanctioning of all forms of discrimination and contributes to strengthening a climate of equity, responsibility and transparency in the business environment.

⇒ **Accessibility for people with disabilities**

The project explicitly integrates the principle of accessibility for people with disabilities, taking into account the adaptation of the digital infrastructure and the working environment to their needs.

The implemented ERP system and the equipment purchased (including the server and software licenses) include integrated accessibility functionalities, such as:

- assistive technologies (screen reader, magnifying glass, voice commands, high contrast modes);
- compatibility with auxiliary devices (adapted keyboards, Braille displays, special indicating devices);
- Customisation options for the needs of users with vision, hearing, or mobility impairments.

Thus, the project supports the active participation of people with disabilities in the labour market, providing equitable access to technology and digital activities.

⇒ **Environmental protection and the "Polluter pays" principle**

The project contributes to the protection of the environment and the promotion of sustainable development, by reducing energy consumption, reducing waste and using resources responsibly.

In line with the "Polluter pays" principle, the project envisages:

- the use of modern, energy-efficient digital equipment that complies with European environmental standards (RoHS, Energy Star);
- reducing the carbon footprint by optimising internal processes and digitising workflows;
- responsible collection and recycling of e-waste resulting from the use of equipment;
- integration into the circular economy by extending the lifespan of IT equipment and reusing its components.

The impact on the environment is minimal, and in the long term the project contributes to reducing resource consumption, increasing energy efficiency and protecting the environment.

⇒ **Resource efficiency and circular economy**

By implementing the ERP system, the project has a direct contribution to optimising the use of resources and increasing the efficiency of internal processes.

Key benefits include:

- reducing paper and material consumption by digitising documents and automating administrative flows;
- decreasing energy consumption through the use of high-performance equipment;
- reducing losses of raw materials and materials through full traceability and real-time operational control;
- integration into the logic of the circular economy, by recycling and capitalising on IT equipment at the end of its useful life.

Thus, the project contributes to reducing the impact on the environment and adopting a sustainable and responsible business model.

⇒ **Compliance with the DNSH principle**

The project complies with the DNSH principle, in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2020/852 and the methodology related to the Centre Regional Programme 2021–2027.

By the nature of the activities (digitisation and automation, without construction works or interventions on the physical environment), the project does not generate negative effects on any of the six environmental objectives, as follows:

Climate change mitigation: the equipment purchased has low energy consumption and complies with European energy efficiency standards;

Adaptation to climate change: activities do not involve climate risks and do not alter the natural environment;

Sustainable use of water and marine resources: the project does not involve the use of water resources;

Circular economy: equipment is recyclable and reintegrated into the economic circuit at the end of its life;

Pollution prevention and control: activities do not generate emissions or hazardous waste;

Protection of biodiversity and ecosystems: the project does not affect natural, protected or sensitive areas.

By applying these principles, the project contributes to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, while strengthening organisational resilience and environmental responsibility.

10. CONCLUSIONS

The project "Digitisation of B.F.R.-TOUR SRL" is a relevant example of an effective and coherent intervention in support of the digital transformation of small and medium-sized enterprises in the Centre Region, directly contributing to the objectives of Priority 2 – *A Digital Region*. Its implementation confirms the need and positive impact of supporting SMEs for the uptake of modern digital technologies, strengthening their competitiveness and economic sustainability.

The project was designed based on a detailed analysis of organisational needs and internal processes, highlighting the need to integrate a unitary IT system, capable of ensuring efficient management, complete traceability and automated planning. Through the investments made in IT equipment, digital infrastructure, cloud services and an integrated ERP system, B.F.R.-TOUR SRL has taken a major step towards modernising and automating production and administration flows, adapting to the requirements of the digital economy.

The implementation has made consistent progress, with the hardware infrastructure already operational and the ERP system installed and configured. The stage of testing, staff training and full integration of digital processes is currently underway. The interim results confirm the efficiency of the intervention: increased data processing speed, reduced errors, better coordination between departments and more rigorous resource planning. Through these advances, the company demonstrates a solid ability to adapt, and a strategic vision oriented towards innovation and performance.

The cost-benefit ratio is favourable, the investments made being justified by the significant impact on efficiency, productivity and quality of activities. The full digitalisation of processes helps to reduce operating costs, eliminate redundant tasks, optimise production flows and increase transparency. The beneficiary

considers that the economic and operational advantages outweigh the administrative and financial efforts made in the implementation process.

An important aspect is **the complementarity of the project with a previous investment funded under Priority 1 – *A competitive region through innovation, digitalisation and dynamic enterprises*.** This strategic correlation allows an integrated approach to the company's development: if the project on Priority 1 aimed at modernising the equipment and production infrastructure, the current project completes the investment by digitising processes, integrating information flows and creating an intelligent management structure. Thus, the two projects support each other, generating a synergy effect that amplifies the economic, technological and social impact of the investments.

Also, the project brings direct benefits to the local community, by maintaining and creating jobs, strengthening the local economy and increasing the attractiveness of the Sita Buzăului area. The implementation of the ERP system and the launch of a website with advanced functions will improve the company's relationship with customers and partners, through faster communication, better traceability of orders and services adapted to market requirements.

On the social and environmental front, the project aligns with the European Union principles on sustainable development, green and digital transition, equal opportunities and social inclusion. By respecting the **DNSH** principle, using energy-efficient equipment, reducing resource consumption and integrating assistive functionalities for people with disabilities, the project contributes to the creation of a modern, accessible and environmentally responsible working environment.

The implementation process was rigorously managed, despite administrative and financial challenges caused by the extended duration of the evaluation procedures and the fluctuations of the IT market. The beneficiary managed to maintain the pace of implementation through careful coordination, direct management involvement, diversification of suppliers and constant communication with the consultant and funding authorities.

The representative of B.F.R.-TOUR SRL formulated useful recommendations for improving the implementation framework of the programme, highlighting the need for flexibility in updating technical specifications and budgets, without the need for complex changes to the contracts. It also stressed the importance of simplifying administrative procedures, reducing successive clarifications and introducing a single point of contact between beneficiaries and authorities, facilitating faster and more efficient communication. At the same time, closer coordination between funding priorities was recommended to support complementary investments and maximise the integrated effect of interventions.

In conclusion, the project "Digitisation of B.F.R.-TOUR SRL" is an example of good practice in the field of digitisation of SMEs, demonstrating that investments in technology, skills and computerised processes can profoundly transform the way a company operates and can significantly contribute to the sustainable development of the region.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

The representative of B.F.R.-TOUR SRL stressed that the main difficulties encountered in carrying out the project were not of a technical nature, but of a procedural nature. For this reason, the main recommendation for future calls is the introduction of more flexible mechanisms that allow **for justified updating of technical specifications and budget values**, without the need for complex changes to the financing contract. The beneficiary showed that, under the current conditions, the long duration of the evaluation and contracting processes may cause some of the budgeted equipment to be no longer available at the time of purchase, being replaced by higher, but more expensive models. The lack of a clear mechanism to adapt to these changes generates financial pressure on beneficiaries.

It was also recommended **to simplify administrative procedures and reduce the number of successive clarifications** at the evaluation stage. The beneficiary considers that a clearer communication system, based on direct meetings between representatives of the authorities and beneficiaries, would help to clarify inconsistencies quickly and shorten response times. At the same time, the existence of a **single point of contact** would facilitate the transmission of information and reduce the volume of correspondence.

Another aspect mentioned concerns better **coordination between funding programmes**, in particular between Priority 1 and Priority 2. The beneficiary simultaneously carries out projects on both axes and

highlighted that they are complementary: investments in digitalisation support the efficiency of the equipment purchased on Priority 1, and modern machinery provides the physical basis for the implementation of digital processes. In this regard, an **integrated approach to call planning has been** suggested, so that SMEs can more easily link investments in technology and digitalisation.

In terms of implementation efficiency, the company believes that **interaction with authorities should be more predictable and collaborative**. It was recommended to organise regular information and guidance sessions for beneficiaries, in which the administrative steps, document templates and reporting requirements should be concretely explained. Such activities would help to reduce errors and increase the quality of the documentation submitted.

In conclusion, the beneficiary recommends that future calls be characterised by **flexibility, clarity and direct communication**, in order to ensure a more efficient implementation, adapted to the economic and technological realities in the market.

2.1 Case Study Interview Minute – B.F.R.-TOUR SRL

Date: August 25, 2025

Location: online

Participants: project administrator/manager B.F.R.-TOUR SRL and representatives of the Association formed by CIVITTA Strategy & Consulting SA (leader) and Lideea Development Actions SRL (partner)

General context of the discussion

The discussion took place within the documentation process related to the case study on the implementation of digitisation projects financed by Priority 2, with the aim of objectively capturing the entire journey – from the identification of the need at the level of the organisation, to the current stage of implementation and the difficulties encountered along the way. At the same time, during the same conversation, elements of correlation with the investments made under Priority 1 were also analysed, which aimed at the acquisition of machinery and production equipment, in order to configure an integrated perspective on the modernisation and automation process at the enterprise level.

Conduct of the discussion and the main topics addressed

At the beginning of the discussion, it was clarified that the analysis aims to document a relevant case for understanding how digitisation processes are designed and implemented at the level of a production company with complex industrial activity. In this context, the existence of two ongoing projects was mentioned: one related **to Priority 2**, which has as its object the digitisation and automation of processes through the implementation of an ERP system and the acquisition of a server, and another related **to Priority 1**, oriented towards the modernisation of the technological line through the acquisition of high-performance machinery and equipment.

During the discussion, it was highlighted that the need for digitisation was identified amid the increase in the complexity of internal operations and the volume of activity. Managing supply, production, distribution and logistics flows had become difficult, with internal systems being fragmented and predominantly manual. It was found that it was impossible to have a unified view of the processes and to ensure operational and financial control without an integrated digital tool.

This need was recognised prior to the launch of the funding calls, the company already analysing the possibility of purchasing an ERP system from its own sources. The emergence of the call on Priority 2 was considered an opportunity to capitalise on an already prepared investment, adapting the existing technical documentation to the requirements of the financing guide. At the time of project submission, the preliminary analysis and the first discussions with the system provider were already carried out, which contributed to a more coherent implementation after approval.

The digitalisation project was perceived as an essential intervention for optimising internal processes. The proposed ERP system has the role of integrating all operational flows — from purchasing and procurement, to production, inventory management, delivery, invoicing and after-sales — ensuring full data traceability,

automatic planning and real-time managerial reporting. During the discussion, it was stressed that the system will also allow customers access to information on the status of orders and delivery times, contributing to increasing transparency and reducing the administrative burden.

It was also shown that the implementation of this digital project directly correlates with the investments made through Priority 1, which aims to improve production capacity through the purchase of modern machinery. The two interventions complement each other: digitalisation provides the information structure and control tools that allow the efficient use of equipment, while new machinery provides the physical basis for the full use of digital processes.

Duration and course of the evaluation and contracting process

It was noted that the proof of submission for the digitisation project dates back to April 24, 2024, and the financing contract was signed on February 11, 2025. The interval of approximately ten months between submission and contracting was considered reasonable compared to other similar calls, but it was noted that the extended duration of the evaluation process represents a structural risk, as the technical specifications and prices in the tender may become outdated in the meantime.

During the implementation, the server was purchased and installed, and the ERP application was configured on the hardware infrastructure. The next stage involves conducting a detailed analysis of internal processes, training staff by departments and running old and new systems in parallel until complete stabilisation. A period of approximately twelve months is estimated for the completion of the implementation, including the full inventory of stocks and the entry of data into the system.

Difficulties reported in implementation

It was found that the main difficulties do not derive from technical constraints, but from the procedural framework and the extended duration of the evaluation and contracting stages. In the period between the submission of the application and the signing of the contract, the market for IT equipment and solutions has evolved significantly, which has led to discrepancies between budgeted and actual values.

A relevant example was provided by the Priority 1 project, where a machine provided at the time of submission with a value of 1.1 million euros was no longer available at the date of purchase. The manufacturer introduced a superior model, with improved technological performance, but at a price of 1.6 million euros. The difference of approximately 400,000 euros must be covered by the beneficiary, under the conditions of a 50% co-financing.

It was pointed out that the lack of a flexible mechanism to allow for justified updating of technical specifications leads to situations where beneficiaries face significant constraints, without the possibility of adapting investments to market realities.

At the same time, the difficulty of communicating with the implementing authorities was noted. In the absence of a single point of contact, the correspondence was carried out through a large number of successive requests for additions and clarifications. It was appreciated that a more collaborative approach, based on working meetings between the beneficiary, the consultant and the monitoring staff, would contribute to reducing response times and to the preventive clarification of technical aspects.

Expected results and anticipated effects

The full implementation of the ERP system is expected to generate significant operational and strategic benefits. Anticipated effects include:

- full integration of procurement, production, logistics and distribution processes;
- increasing data accuracy and reducing manual errors;
- streamlining planning and decreasing response times;
- reduction of administrative costs and material losses;
- increasing transparency and customer satisfaction;
- improving the capacity for analysis and managerial decision-making.

The digitalisation project also contributes to strengthening the overall competitiveness of the company, in the context of a market characterised by highly competitive pressure and significant differences between

local producers and those in Central and Eastern Europe, where the level of automation is considerably more advanced.

On a socio-economic level, the investment has a positive impact on the area where the company operates, which is the main local employer. By ensuring business continuity and increasing automation, it contributes indirectly to job preservation and local economic stability.

Conclusions

The analysis of the discussion shows that the digitalisation process implemented through Priority 2 responds to a real and urgent need for organisational transformation. Digitalisation has become an essential condition for maintaining competitiveness, especially for medium-sized industrial companies, which have to manage large volumes of data and complex operational flows.

It was highlighted that the extended duration of the evaluation and contracting procedures leads to the partial loss of the technical and economic relevance of the projects, requiring a more flexible approach at the level of the managing authorities. The introduction of mechanisms that allow for the justified updating of technical specifications and budget values, without changing the project objectives, would help to maintain the efficiency of investments.

At the same time, it was considered that a more structured institutional communication, with the establishment of direct channels between the beneficiary and the monitoring authority, would reduce bureaucracy and speed up administrative processes.

Overall, the analysed digitalisation project is part of a coherent modernisation logic, which combines investments in digital infrastructure with those in physical equipment. The expected results include an increase in operational efficiency, better use of resources, a reduction in errors and a strengthening of the image of reliability in the market.

Through its integrative nature, this type of intervention demonstrates the importance of digitalisation not only as a technological tool, but as a factor of economic sustainability and organisational resilience.

3. CASE STUDY NO. 3 – DIGITISATION OF DART ARCHITECTS SRL

Evaluation title: Theme 2 "Evaluation of interventions targeting digitalisation activities for the benefit of citizens, businesses and governments"

Project name: Digitalisation Dart Architects SRL

Beneficiary: Dart Architects SRL, SMIS code 324574

Investment location: Brașov Municipality, Brașov County

1. OBJECT AND PURPOSE OF THE CASE STUDY

This case study aims to support the evaluation process of the interventions funded by the Centre Region Regional Programme, under Theme 2 "Evaluation of interventions aimed at digitalisation activities for the benefit of citizens, companies and governments".

The analyses and findings presented contribute to the formulation of the answers to the evaluation questions and allow comparisons to be made between the different types of interventions, investments and beneficiaries. These comparisons highlight the mechanisms by which available resources and those created within projects are used and capitalised, as well as how these factors, together with the elements of context, influence the implementation and results of interventions.

The case study also contributes to the assessment of the extent to which digitalisation interventions respond to the needs of target groups, provide effective solutions to socio-economic challenges in the Centre Region and support the relevant strategies and objectives of the programme.

The selection of the project analysed in this case study was carried out according to the criteria established in the evaluation methodology, taking into account **the type of intervention**, **the level of complexity** and **the stage of implementation**. The project is part of the sample **dedicated to SMEs,** thus ensuring the

diversity of types of beneficiaries and the possibility of analysing how different institutional and economic contexts influence the digitisation process.

The methodology used combines the documentary analysis based on the project documents provided by the beneficiary **(the funding application, the digitisation plan)** with the interview with **the project manager**, ensuring a complete understanding of how the interventions contribute to the development and modernisation of the region through digitisation.

2. PRESENTATION OF THE CASE STUDY

Project name	**Digitalisation of Dart Architects SRL**
SMIS Code	324574
Location	Brașov Municipality, Brașov
Beneficiary	Dart Architects SRL
Priority / Specific objective	P2. A digital region RSO1.2_Capitalising the benefits of digitalisation for the benefit of citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities RSO1.4_Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship
Project call/ Operation	Action 2.2 Digital Enterprises for an Advanced Economy – Smart Specialisation Sectors
Implementation period (start/end)	30.04.2025 – 30.04. 2027
Project budget	493,690.16 lei total 444,220 lei non-reimbursable
Project context **Project justification**	The need to make this investment in the digitisation of the activities of DART ARCHITECTS S.R.L. results from the conclusions of the digital maturity audit report carried out by the Transylvania IT Association, which highlighted a series of limitations and urgent modernisation needs. The audit showed that the company's level of digitalisation is medium, the company meeting only 5 DESI criteria, and the existing IT infrastructure is considered suboptimal. Currently, the organisation does not have any employed IT&C specialists, which makes it difficult to manage IT equipment, manage databases and implement effective digital solutions. In the absence of dedicated technical staff, infrastructure maintenance and updating activities are carried out occasionally, which leads to decreased productivity and an increased risk of vulnerabilities in information management. At the same time, it was found that the company does not have mobile phones registered in the Fixed Assets Register, and employees occasionally use personal devices for communication. This situation affects the safety and coherence of the internal information flow, but also the efficiency of collaboration between team members. The company's website, although functional, does not have all the necessary elements for a competitive digital presence. The online page only includes a general description of the services, without a price list, without advanced

	functionalities such as personalising offers, tracking orders or providing content tailored to returning visitors. There is also no integration with social media, although the firm has a presence on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram. The lack of social media buttons or widgets limits the company's visibility and interaction with the target audience. Currently, the company does not invest in online advertising and does not carry out e-commerce activities, which reduces the brand's exposure and ability to attract new customer segments. The company's activity is mainly oriented towards B2B services, and the absence of modern digital channels makes it difficult to expand the portfolio of collaborators. All these findings confirm the urgent need to modernise and integrate digital technologies into work processes. The implementation of this project will allow DART ARCHITECTS to increase its degree of digitalisation from 5 to 7 DESI criteria, through the acquisition of high-performance equipment, modern software and innovative solutions that will transform the way daily activity is carried out. Through this project, VR glasses will be purchased for interactive presentations offered to customers, a 3D printer for making architectural models and a plotter for the production of work plans. The company will also purchase 4 smartphones and 2 tablets, which will improve internal communication and contribute to increased productivity. Another essential element is the complete redesign of the website, which will integrate links to social media accounts, advanced presentation functionalities and modern content, adapted to market requirements. At the same time, DART ARCHITECTS will purchase an online advertising package on social media platforms, financed from its own funds, in order to increase brand awareness and strengthen its image in the digital environment. To ensure the sustainability of the investment, the company's management decided that an employee should participate in professional training courses – one in construction management and one in 3D modelling – in order to develop the internal skills necessary for the effective use of new technologies. The project is correlated with the Smart Specialisation Strategy of the Centre Region (RIS3 Centre), especially with the field of "IT Sector and Creative Industries" and contributes to the implementation of the Industrial Transition Strategy in Romania, through innovative investments, oriented towards digitalisation, energy efficiency and sustainable development. By adopting these modern solutions, the company supports the vision of the Centre Region, based on: • the use of state-of-the-art equipment and cutting-edge technologies; • continuous training of personnel; • the creation of high-tech jobs; • efficiency of the use of resources and reduction of environmental impact. Overall, the proposed project contributes to strengthening the position of DART ARCHITECTS S.R.L. on the market, by optimising the way of relating to customers, shortening execution times and increasing the quality of the presentations and services provided.

	Project objectives General objective The general objective of the project is to optimise the way of relating to customers and increasing the company's competitiveness through digitalisation, while contributing to the creation of a sustainable business environment and less aggressive towards the environment. By digitising internal processes and integrating innovative technologies, DART ARCHITECTS aims to strengthen its position in the market for architecture, design and technical consulting services. Specific objectives Digitising society through the acquisition of innovative and energy-efficient technologies, including VR glasses, 3D printer, plotter, smart phones and tablets, as well as modernising the website to increase online presence and connection to social media networks. Improving working conditions and increasing employees' professional skills, through training and training in relevant areas (construction management, 3D modelling), ensuring better adaptation to the requirements of a modern digital economy.

3. OBJECTIVES AND LOGIC OF THE INTERVENTION

The purpose of the project implemented by DART ARCHITECTS S.R.L. was the digital transformation of the company's internal activities by modernising workflows, automating processes and integrating innovative design, collaboration and presentation technologies. The project responds to the objectives of Priority 2 – "A Digital Region" of the Centre Regional Programme 2021–2027, which aims to increase the degree of digitisation of enterprises and the adoption of advanced technologies to increase economic competitiveness.

Through the investments made, the company aims not only to digitise its current activity, but also to strengthen its position in the market of architecture and design services, to reduce execution times, to eliminate human errors and to offer customers a modern and interactive experience based on 3D and VR technologies. This contributes directly to the regional objective of developing an economic sector based on innovation, efficiency and sustainability.

The proposed interventions were selected following the digital maturity audit carried out by the Transylvania IT Association, which identified the main vulnerabilities: the lack of IT&C specialists, the outdated technological infrastructure and the absence of a coherent digital presence. Based on this diagnosis, the company has built an investment plan focused on the acquisition of high-performance hardware equipment (3D printer, plotter, VR glasses, smart mobile devices) and the implementation of specialised software (CAD, ERP, CRM, online collaboration solutions).

The prioritisation of investments was carried out according to the direct impact on current activities and the ability of each component to generate efficiency and added value. Thus, priority has been given to equipment and applications that contribute to:

- automation of design processes, reducing working time and the risk of error;
- improving internal and external collaboration, through digital communication and remote working tools;
- increasing the quality of presentations by using virtual reality and 3D modelling;
- optimising resources and reducing material consumption, in line with sustainability principles.

This approach has been complemented by staff training measures to ensure an effective transition to new technologies and strengthen digital skills.

The project was designed taking into account the regional and sectoral specificity of the Centre Region, which includes a significant number of small and medium-sized enterprises in the field of creative industries and construction, with similar needs for digital modernisation. The intervention is thus adapted to the local

context, contributing to the objectives of the Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3 Centre), in the field of "IT and creative industries".

The direct target group is the DART ARCHITECTS team, made up of architects and design specialists, who will benefit from a digitised work environment, high-performance tools and access to professional training. Indirectly, the intervention is also addressed to the company's customers and partners, who will be able to interact through online platforms, receive 3D and VR presentations, and experience faster and clearer communication.

The adaptation to local needs was also achieved through collaboration with a European Digital Innovation Hub (EDIH) – Transylvania IT Association, which provided expertise in assessing digital maturity and contributed to defining the optimal solutions for the field of activity.

Thus, the proposed project is not just a one-off investment in equipment, but a strategic digital transformation intervention correlated with regional and national competitiveness, innovation and sustainability objectives

4. PROJECT COMPONENTS

Activities	Activity 1 – IT Audit This activity has the role of assessing the level of digitalisation of DART ARCHITECTS S.R.L. and establishing the concrete directions for the modernisation of internal processes. The digital maturity audit was carried out in two stages: an initial one, at the beginning of the project, to identify existing needs and vulnerabilities, and a final one, at the end of the implementation period, to assess the progress achieved. This approach aimed to obtain a clear picture of the IT infrastructure, the digital skills of the staff and the degree of integration of modern technologies in the current activity, representing the basis for all other investments of the project. Activity 2 – Acquisition of consulting and project management services This activity aimed to contract specialised consulting services for the development, implementation and monitoring of the digitisation project. The consulting services included the drafting of the financing application, the elaboration of the business plan, the preparation of the technical-economic documentation and the assistance throughout the project. Also, the management activity ensured the efficient coordination of all stages, the monitoring of technical and financial progress, compliance with the deadlines and assumed objectives, as well as the permanent communication with the Managing Authority and the partners involved. Activity 3 – Information and publicity In accordance with the visibility requirements of European funding, specific actions were carried out within this activity to inform and promote the project. DART ARCHITECTS S.R.L. produced information materials, published the announcements of the start and completion of the project and placed the permanent plate and the mandatory stickers on the purchased equipment. The purpose of this activity was to ensure transparency in the use of European funds and to inform the public about the support provided through the Centre Regional Programme 2021–2027. Activity 4 – Acquisition of IT equipment This activity aimed to purchase the IT equipment necessary for the digitisation of the company's internal activities. By equipping it with modern and high-performance equipment, the company improves its working capacity, optimises internal flows and increases the efficiency of design and communication processes. The purchased IT equipment will contribute to the implementation of modern software systems and the integration of digital tools at all stages of activity.

	Activity 5 – Acquisition of A0 printer As part of this activity, a professional large format printer (A0) was purchased, indispensable for the design and architecture activity. Through this investment, the company can produce its high-quality drawings and technical documentation in-house, reducing delivery time and costs associated with external printing services. The equipment also contributes to increasing the quality of the materials presented to customers and public institutions, strengthening the company's professional image. Activity 6 – Training This activity aims to develop the digital and professional skills of employees, in line with the equipment and technologies acquired through the project. Through the training programme, three employees of the company benefited from training in the field of 3D modelling, and one employee attended training courses in construction management. The main result of this activity is to increase the level of competence of staff and adapt them to the requirements of a modern digital economy. Activity 7 – Acquisition of design and modelling software The activity envisaged equipping the company with state-of-the-art software applications, intended for 3D design and modelling. By implementing these digital solutions, DART ARCHITECTS modernises its workflow, ensures increased accuracy in project completion, and improves collaboration between architects, engineers, and clients. The purchased software contributes to the automation of processes, the reduction of human errors and the increase of the company's competitiveness in the market of architecture and design services.
Expected results	Activity 1 – IT Audit • Full initial and final digital maturity report; • Identifying weaknesses and real digitisation needs; • Substantiation of investment directions for the modernisation of the company; • Confirmation of the progress made following the implementation of the project • Activity 2 – Acquisition of consulting and project management services • Complete and eligible funding application and project documentation; • Efficient implementation of activities according to the approved schedule; • Proper monitoring of the budget and performance indicators; • Increasing the administrative capacity of the company to manage European projects. Activity 3 – Information and publicity • Visibility ensured for ERDF financial support; • Informing the public about the objectives and impact of the project; • Promoting the company's image as a beneficiary of a European project; • Compliance with all advertising and branding requirements. Activity 4 – Acquisition of IT equipment • High-performance IT equipment purchased, installed and functional; • Improving working capacity and internal efficiency; • Increasing productivity and optimising activity flows; • Creating a modern infrastructure compatible with new software technologies. Activity 5 – Acquisition of A0 printer • A0 printer installed and used in design activities; • Reduction of costs and execution times for technical documentation; • Improving the quality of architectural drawings and presentations; • Increasing the operational independence of the company.

	Activity 6 – Training • Training of three employees in 3D modelling and one employee in construction management; • Increasing the digital and professional skills of staff; • Efficient use of purchased equipment and software; • Adapting the team to the requirements of the digitalisation process and the modern market. Activity 7 – Acquisition of design and modelling software • Implementation of 3D design and modelling software applications; • Automating design processes and reducing human errors; • Improving the quality and accuracy of the works; • Increasing the firm's competitiveness and ability to tackle complex projects.
Target group	The target group of the project is mainly represented by the employees of DART ARCHITECTS S.R.L., which will directly benefit from the implementation of investments in digitalisation. They work in the field of architecture, design and design, and their daily activity involves managing large volumes of technical data, complex projects and interdisciplinary collaborations. Through the equipment and training provided in the project, the staff will benefit from a modern, digitised work environment, which allows the activities to be carried out in a more efficient, faster and with a high degree of precision. The acquisition of high-performance IT equipment, 3D modelling and design software, as well as professional training will directly contribute to increasing digital skills and improving working conditions for employees. In addition to its own staff, another segment of the target group is represented by the company's customers and collaborators, who will indirectly benefit from the project results. The implementation of 3D and VR technologies will allow for more efficient communication with beneficiaries, a superior visual presentation of projects and a clearer understanding of the proposed solutions. Customers will have access to an interactive and innovative experience, adapted to modern standards in the field of architecture and construction. Also, the company's external partners and technical collaborators will benefit from the digitisation of processes, by facilitating collaborative online work, reducing documentation transmission times and quickly integrating feedback into the design stages. Indirectly, the project also contributes to the development of the local business ecosystem, by stimulating digitalisation in the creative industries and construction sector, areas that play an important role in the economy of the Centre Region. The increase in the level of digitalisation of DART ARCHITECTS S.R.L. will generate, in the long term, a multiplier effect, encouraging other SMEs to adopt modern technologies to increase competitiveness. Thus, the target group of the project includes: • the company's employees, direct beneficiaries of professional training and of the new technologies implemented; • clients and beneficiaries of DART ARCHITECTS services, who will interact with modern digital presentation and collaboration solutions; • external partners and collaborators of the company, who will work in an integrated and efficient digital system;

	• the local economic environment, which will indirectly benefit from increasing the competitiveness of a company in the creative industries sector.

5. PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTATION

At the moment, the digitisation project of DART ARCHITECTS S.R.L. is in an intermediate stage of implementation. The preparatory activities have been completed, and the project team has completed all the necessary steps to start the main procurements. The initial digital maturity audit was carried out; consulting and project management services were contracted and the supplier selection process for IT equipment and specialised software was completed.

The actual implementation of the investments encountered a temporary delay, caused by the need to update the technical specifications of the equipment. In the period between the elaboration of the financing application and the launch of the acquisitions, the technological market underwent significant changes, and some products provided for in the project were no longer on the market. Consequently, the beneficiary sent to the Centre RDA an official request to change the specifications, without impact on the total value of the project. Until the time of the interview, the official response was still pending, which generated a slight delay in the implementation schedule.

The degree of achievement of the objectives is currently partially related to the planned targets. The preparatory activities (audit, consulting, management) are carried out in a high proportion, while the main activities – the acquisition of equipment, software and staff training – are in the pre-implementation phase, to be carried out immediately after the clarification of the technical aspects. The beneficiary considers that the objectives set by the project can be fully achieved, provided that a flexible timetable and operative communication with the funding authority are maintained.

As for the chances of achieving the targets, the beneficiary's perception is realistic and optimistic. The company has the necessary resources – human, logistical and financial – to successfully complete the investment, and the project team is ready to accelerate activities immediately after receiving approvals. It is appreciated that, in the current context, the objectives can be fully achieved, even if some activities will be carried out at a pace adjusted to the one initially planned.

The main challenges anticipated relate to maintaining the technical relevance of equipment and software until the completion of administrative procedures, possible delays generated by official approvals and managing the financial pressure caused by the deferral of payments. Also, the limited capacity of the consultants involved – who manage several projects simultaneously – can generate punctual delays in the communication of documents.

In order to prevent possible risks, the beneficiary has adopted a series of preventive measures, including permanently updating the implementation schedule, identifying alternative suppliers for the main equipment, maintaining a constant dialogue with the Centre RDA and reviewing the procurement plan according to the evolution of the market. These adjustments were aimed at protecting the continuity of the project and ensuring compliance with the assumed objectives.

The beneficiary appreciates that the project concretely responds to the needs of the target group and to the current economic challenges. By digitising internal processes and implementing modern equipment, the company will improve efficiency, reduce human errors, and increase the quality of services provided to customers. In addition, VR and 3D technologies will allow an innovative approach to the relationship with beneficiaries and will support the development of a sustainable work model, based on digital collaboration and the reduction of resource consumption.

In terms of the final impact, the beneficiary anticipates a significant transformation of the way of working and a visible increase in the company's competitiveness on the market. In the long term, the project will contribute to strengthening the image of DART ARCHITECTS as an innovative firm, to the expansion of the client portfolio and to the sustainable development of the activity in accordance with the digitalisation objectives of the Centre Region.

6. IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS (PROGRESS AND INTERNAL MECHANISMS)

At the current stage, the project implemented by DART ARCHITECTS S.R.L. is in an intermediate stage of development. So far, the preparatory activities have been completed, namely the initial digital maturity audit, the selection of suppliers and the acquisition of consulting and project management services. The beneficiary also started the procedures for the acquisition of IT equipment and design software, but the actual implementation of these investments was temporarily postponed.

This situation arose as a result of the need to update the technical specifications for the equipment and applications provided for in the project. In the period between the elaboration of the financing application and the moment of launching the acquisitions, the market for IT equipment and software solutions changed significantly, and some of the products initially mentioned were no longer manufactured or were replaced by higher versions at similar costs. In this context, the beneficiary sent to Centre RDA an official request to change the specifications, specifying that these adjustments do not affect the total approved value of the project or the structure of the investment.

Until the date of the interview, the official response from the Centre RDA had been delayed for more than a month and a half, which generated the postponement of the implementation schedule and a series of chain effects on internal planning. Among the direct consequences were the postponement of some current projects that depend on large equipment (especially the A0 printer, necessary for the production of technical drawings), as well as the increase in financial pressure on the company.

The beneficiary mentioned that, in order to support its own contribution, the company contracted a bridge loan intended to cover ineligible expenses and co-financing. However, the delay in the start of purchases led to the partial consumption of this credit for other urgent needs, thus reducing the financial buffer available for the next stages. Despite this situation, the firm was able to maintain financial stability and avoid major disruptions by carefully managing cash flow and prioritising essential expenses.

To monitor the implementation, the company uses clear internal mechanisms, based on planning, control and permanent communication between the project team, consultant and administrator. Progress is tracked through internal progress reports, activity monitoring sheets and periodic weekly meetings, which analyse the degree of achievement of each activity, performance indicators and possible risks. The project manager keeps an up-to-date record of all supporting documents and follows the compliance with the reporting deadlines imposed by the funding authority.

The communication with the Centre RDA was appreciated as constructive and professional. The beneficiary highlighted the promptness of the RDA team in the evaluation and clarification phases but signalled a lack of procedural flexibility in the process of approving the technical changes, which delayed the implementation. However, the institutional relationship is considered a positive one, based on openness and availability for methodological support.

The main obstacles encountered in the implementation were of an administrative and financial nature. In addition to the delays generated by the approval process of the amendments, the beneficiary mentioned the complexity of the applicant's guide and the technical terminology specific to European funds, which required constant support from the consultant. In addition, the delay in the procurement schedule led to additional financial pressure, as some current costs had to be covered before the funds were repaid.

To overcome these challenges, the company has adopted a number of adjustment and adaptation measures, including:

- recalibration of the implementation schedule, in order to synchronise the remaining activities with the approval deadlines;
- identifying alternative suppliers capable of providing technically equivalent equipment;
- optimising the use of bridge credit and maintaining a minimum financial reserve for unforeseen expenses;
- constant dialogue with the Centre RDA for clarification of procedural aspects.

These measures made it possible to maintain control over the project and avoid the risk of failure to meet the objectives.

Among the positive elements that contributed to the smooth running of the project are the active involvement of the company's management, the efficient collaboration with the external consultant and the high degree of motivation of the internal team. The beneficiary stressed that the implementation process is based on permanent communication and collectively assumed decisions, which ensures coherence and responsibility in carrying out the activities.

In conclusion, the implementation process is carried out in an organised and responsible way, despite the administrative and financial challenges that have arisen. The beneficiary has demonstrated a high adaptability and a pragmatic approach, ensured the continuity of activities and maintained the strategic direction of the project. Overall, internal management mechanisms and efficient cooperation with the funding authority contribute to ensuring a coherent and sustainable implementation, in line with the objectives of the Centre Regional Programme 2021–2027.

7. IMPACT ON BENEFICIARIES AND THE COMMUNITY

The digitalisation project carried out by DART ARCHITECTS S.R.L. is in the process of implementation, and the beneficiary anticipates important changes in the company's way of working, as well as positive effects on the professional and economic environment to which it belongs.

Through this project, the company aims at a real transformation of the way internal activities are carried out, by introducing modern technologies of design, visualisation and digital communication. The beneficiary believes that once all investments are put into operation, the design and presentation processes will become faster, clearer and easier to manage.

The new equipment and software applications will bring a higher level of precision and efficiency, allowing the team to reduce work times and eliminate much of the repetitive manual tasks. The use of VR glasses will make it possible to present the projects in an interactive manner, through which customers will be able to visualise the designed spaces in detail, before execution. At the same time, the 3D printer will allow the rapid realisation of precise architectural models, providing a realistic image of the proposed concepts.

All these technologies will lead to clearer communication between architects, clients and collaborators, reduced errors and a significant increase in the quality of services. The beneficiary appreciates that the project will change the way of working within the company, by creating an integrated digital environment, in which the design, analysis and presentation will take place in a unitary and efficient flow.

From an economic point of view, the company estimates that the modernisation of the activity will bring an increase in competitiveness and an improvement in the ability to respond to market requirements. Digitalisation will allow the management of several projects simultaneously, the reduction of production costs and a better organisation of resources. In the medium term, these changes will contribute to increasing revenues and strengthening the firm's position in the architectural and design services market.

Locally, the beneficiary believes that the project will have positive effects on the community, by encouraging other companies in the creative industries to adopt similar digitisation solutions. DART ARCHITECTS can become an example of adapting to new technological requirements, demonstrating that investments in modern equipment and applications lead to a more efficient, cleaner and sustainable activity. Also, reducing the consumption of printed materials and optimising the use of resources contributes to protecting the environment and aligning the company with the principles of sustainable development.

In regard to the risks, the beneficiary considers them to be moderate and mainly related to possible administrative delays or rapid developments in the field of technology, which may require adjustments in the selection of equipment. However, the company has the ability to adapt, maintaining a constant dialogue with the financing authority and with the suppliers involved.

Overall, the beneficiary expects that after the completion of the project, the firm will become more competitive, more efficient and better connected to current trends in architecture and design. In the long term, the project will have a real impact not only on the internal activity, but also on the professional environment in the region, contributing to the modernisation and digitisation of the creative and technical sector in the Centre area.

8. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INTERVENTION (PRELIMINARY COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS)

The digitisation project of DART ARCHITECTS S.R.L. presents a balanced relationship between the costs involved and the anticipated benefits. Although the implementation required a considerable administrative effort, with a high volume of documentation and detailed planning, the intervention is perceived as necessary and effective for the long-term development of the company.

The planned investments — high-performance IT equipment, 3D design and modelling software, 3D printer and VR glasses — are justified by their potential to significantly improve internal design, collaboration and presentation processes. The related expenses are considered reasonable, given the complexity of the field of activity and the need to align with current standards in architecture and design.

From the perspective of economic efficiency, it is estimated that the investments will lead to a reduction in operational costs by automating work stages, reducing dependence on external services and decreasing the time needed to carry out projects. The purchased equipment will allow the internal processing of documentation, the printing of large technical drawings and the rapid production of 3D models, eliminating part of the recurring expenses previously incurred.

The cost-benefit analysis indicates that the medium and long-term benefits will exceed the value of the initial financial effort. In addition to the direct economic benefits, the project will generate significant intangible benefits, such as increasing the quality of the delivered products, improving the company's image and strengthening the market position. The implementation of digital solutions will also contribute to streamlining internal communication, reducing errors and better coordination between team members.

As for indirect costs, these include training staff in the use of new equipment and software, adapting internal infrastructure and working with consultants specialised in project management. A bridge loan was also contracted to cover its own contribution, which involves additional expenses with interest and bank commissions. However, these costs are assessed as justified and sustainable, given the technological and operational advantages achieved.

The preliminary analysis shows that the profitability of the intervention is high, especially in terms of the internal efficiency benefits and the potential for economic growth. Digitalisation is expected to lead to better use of resources, reduced turnaround times and increased productivity, thus contributing to the sustainable consolidation of the firm's business.

Compared to other funding programmes, the Centre Regional Programme is perceived as well structured and clear in terms of investment eligibility, but administrative procedures are more complex and lengthier. The long period between project approval and procurement launch can affect the efficiency of investments in technology, where equipment and applications change rapidly.

In order to optimise the cost-benefit ratio in future calls, it is recommended to simplify administrative processes, in particular with regard to the approval of technical changes, as well as to introduce shorter deadlines for responses to requests for clarification. It would also be useful to develop detailed guides and standardised examples of documentation, which would reduce the risk of different interpretations and the time spent preparing dossiers.

Overall, the intervention is considered effective, with a positive cost-result ratio. Even if the implementation involves a consistent administrative effort, the investments made will bring sustainable benefits to the company, by increasing performance, reducing costs and modernising the activity, while contributing to the achievement of the digitalisation objectives assumed at regional level.

9. CONTRIBUTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL OBJECTIVES

The project directly contributes to the achievement of the European Union's horizontal objectives on sustainable development, the green and digital transition, equal opportunities and social inclusion. Through the proposed activities, the project promotes the efficient use of resources, environmental protection, accessibility for all social categories, compliance with the principles "Do no significant harm" (DNSH) and "Polluter pays", as well as ensuring equal and non-discriminatory treatment for all participants.

Equal opportunities and gender equality

DART ARCHITECTS S.R.L. complies with all legal obligations regarding equal opportunities and treatment between employees, without any form of discrimination. Within the activities carried out, equal opportunities for employment and promotion are ensured, and the selection of personnel is carried out exclusively on the basis of the skills, knowledge and experience relevant to the activity carried out.

As regards professional mobility, advancement in positions is done objectively, taking into account performance, skills and level of professional training, without discriminatory criteria of gender, age, ethnicity, religion or political affiliation.

Within the project, the implementation team was established solely on the basis of skills and experience relevant to the proposed objectives. It consists of two males and one female, ensuring gender balance and a fair distribution of responsibilities.

Also, the principles of transparency and equal treatment are respected in the conduct of public procurement procedures. Access to information is ensured without discrimination to all potential bidders, and the selection process complies with the provisions of the Procurement Procedure applicable to private beneficiaries. Explicit obligations to prohibit any form of discrimination are included in job descriptions.

Non-discrimination and social mobility

The company promotes a work environment based on mutual respect, inclusion and equal opportunities. The selection of personnel, the establishment of the project team and the advancement in the career are carried out on objective criteria, exclusively according to skills, professional results and ability to adapt to the requirements of the project.

During the course of the project, national and European legislation on non-discrimination on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, religion, political orientation or disability is respected. The internal procedures and management activities include clear provisions on ensuring equal opportunities, and the implementation team operates according to the meritocratic principle.

Accessibility for people with disabilities

In addition to the legal obligations, the company will implement concrete measures to increase the accessibility of the website to people with disabilities.

Thus, the online platform will include:

- accessible content, through the use of descriptive alternative texts for images and multimedia elements, clear labels for forms and input fields, sufficient text dimensions and optimal contrast between background and content;
- easy navigation, allowing the use of the site via keyboard and quick access to menus;
- feedback functionality to collect suggestions from users with disabilities to continuously improve accessibility.

Also, the IT equipment purchased within the project will be compatible with the requirements of people with disabilities, this condition being included in the procurement documentation.

The company already has experience in the integration of people with disabilities, having employed a person in this category for whom the work schedule and the activity environment have been adapted accordingly. She will also participate in the training courses provided by the project, which demonstrates the company's commitment to professional inclusion and continuous training of all employees.

The "Polluter pays" principle

The company's activity does not generate significant emissions or waste. The only waste resulting is paper waste, in small quantities, which is selectively collected and handed over to the authorised operator. The company respects the "polluter pays" principle by implementing prevention and recycling measures, contributing to protecting the environment and reducing environmental impact.

Biodiversity protection

The project site is not located in NATURA 2000 protected areas and is not located in the vicinity of biodiversity-sensitive areas. The proposed activities do not involve construction works, but only the

purchase of modern, energy-efficient equipment, which does not require environmental regulation and indirectly contributes to the reduction of resource consumption and carbon footprint.

Efficient use of resources

All the equipment used runs on electricity and is certified in terms of energy efficiency. The plotter and 3D printer simplify the work process and reduce material consumption, optimising the delivery of services.

Climate change immunisation

The project does not include construction works and does not involve changes to the natural environment. The proposed activities are carried out in the same location as the existing activity (CANE code 7111 – architectural activities) and do not require environmental authorisation. The purchased equipment will indirectly contribute to the reduction of energy consumption and carbon emissions.

DNSH principle

The project fully complies with the DNSH principle, as the proposed activities do not have a negative impact on the environment. No construction works are planned, but only the purchase of high-performance and energy-efficient IT equipment, which contributes to reducing resource consumption and carbon footprint.

All equipment to be purchased operates exclusively on electricity and complies with European requirements on energy efficiency, restrictions on hazardous substances and waste management of electrical and electronic equipment (Directives 2009/125/EC, 2011/65/EU and 2012/19/EU).

The implementation of the project leads to a more efficient use of resources, through modern technologies that reduce material losses and optimise working time. The company's activity is carried out in the same field (CANE code 7111 – architectural activities) and does not generate emissions, hazardous waste or additional pollution.

The project site is not in protected or biodiversity-sensitive areas. Consequently, the project does not significantly harm the environment and aligns with the sustainability and energy efficiency objectives promoted at European level.

10. CONCLUSIONS

The project "Digitisation of DART ARCHITECTS S.R.L." is part of the objectives of Priority 2 – A digital region, contributing to increasing the degree of digitisation of enterprises and to the adoption of modern technologies in the current activity. Through the proposed investments, the company aims to modernise internal processes, streamline teamwork and increase competitiveness on the architecture and design services market.

The project has a clear structure and well adapted to the real needs of the company. The proposed activities – from the acquisition of IT equipment, 3D and VR design software, to staff training – form a coherent whole that supports the digital transformation of the company. The implementation of these measures will allow the automation of work processes, the reduction of execution times and the improvement of the quality of the services offered.

At the current stage, the project is proceeding according to the general plan, with small delays caused by the long duration of analysis and approval of technical changes. The beneficiary has demonstrated good management capacity, maintaining the pace of activities through careful planning and constant communication with the Managing Authority. Even though the rapid evolution of the IT market required adjustments, the company managed to adapt without affecting the value or objectives of the project.

The anticipated impact is positive, both internally and externally. For the DART ARCHITECTS team, the project brings a real improvement in working conditions, increases precision and efficiency in the design activity and strengthens collaboration between team members. For customers and partners, new technologies will allow for faster communication and more interactive presentations, helping to increase satisfaction and strengthen the company's professional image.

Economically, the cost-benefit ratio is balanced. The investments will generate savings in the medium term, by reducing dependence on external services and optimising workflows. Although the implementation involves a high administrative effort, the future benefits – efficiency, productivity and increased quality –

fully justify the investment. Indirect costs, including those related to training and bridge credit, are considered reasonable in relation to the benefits obtained.

The project complies with the horizontal principles of the European Union, including equal opportunities, accessibility for people with disabilities and environmental protection. The proposed activities do not produce negative effects on the environment, and the equipment purchased is energy efficient and compliant with European requirements.

Based on the implementation experience, the beneficiary formulated some recommendations for the improvement of future calls for projects. They aim to reduce the time taken to analyse and approve documentation, introduce a flexible mechanism to allow justified updating of technical specifications, clarify applicant's guides through standardised templates and simplify administrative procedures. The importance of better regulation of consultancy services by setting clear standards on deadlines and quality of documentation was also highlighted.

Overall, the project "Digitisation of DART ARCHITECTS S.R.L." is an example of a relevant investment to achieve the objectives of Priority 2 – A Digital Region. By adopting modern equipment, training staff and using innovative digital solutions, the company is taking an important step towards modernisation and efficiency. The results obtained and the experience gained will contribute to strengthening the digitalisation process in the regional business environment.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

The representative of DART ARCHITECTS S.R.L. said that the main difficulties encountered in carrying out the project were procedural, not technical. In this context, it was recommended to introduce more flexible mechanisms in future calls, allowing for justified updating of technical specifications and budget values, without the need for complex changes to the financing contract.

It was pointed out that the long duration of the processes of analysis, evaluation and approval of documentation can have direct effects on the progress of procurement. In the IT field, technological evolution is very fast, and the equipment and software applications initially planned can become obsolete or can be withdrawn from the market in a short period of time. In many cases, they are replaced by new models with superior performance, but also with different prices. In the absence of a clear mechanism that allows adaptation to these changes, beneficiaries are obliged either to redo the documentation or to bear the cost differences, which generates financial pressure and delays in implementation.

The need for a clearer and friendlier structure of the applicant's guide was also highlighted, especially for businesses with no previous experience in managing non-reimbursable funds. Technical language and the complexity of procedures can make the process of preparing and implementing projects difficult. In this regard, it has been proposed that future guides should include explanatory examples, detailed instructions and standardised templates for documents (applications, budgets, declarations), which would reduce the risk of errors and the time spent preparing the dossier.

Another aspect noted was related to the collaboration with consulting firms. While their involvement is essential for the design, submission and monitoring of projects, the level of involvement varies considerably. In some cases, the large volume of projects managed simultaneously by consultants causes delays in the submission of documentation and communication difficulties. In this context, it was recommended to establish minimum quality and accountability criteria for consultancy services, as well as to define clear standards on document delivery times and communication with beneficiaries.

At the same time, it was recommended to simplify the stages of reporting and verifying expenses, by completely digitising the process and reducing the number of supporting documents. A smoother procedure would reduce analysis times and reduce the administrative burden on beneficiaries, especially for SMEs that do not have specialised staff.

The beneficiary also proposed to provide additional support for small businesses, in the form of training sessions, explanatory materials and examples of good practices. This type of support would increase awareness, facilitate the implementation process and help reduce administrative errors.

In conclusion, the main recommendations made refer to:

- reducing the time for analysis and approval of documentation;
- the introduction of a flexible mechanism for updating technical specifications, justified by the rapid evolution of the IT market;
- clarifying and simplifying the guides through standardised templates and examples;
- clearly defining and monitoring the responsibilities of the external consultant;
- complete digitalisation of administrative and reporting processes;
- increasing support and training for start-up SMEs;
- improving coordination between funding programmes to maximise the complementarity and efficiency of investments.

3.1 Case Study Interview Minute – DART ARCHITECTS SRL

Date: August 14, 2025

Location: online

Participants: project administrator/manager DART ARCHITECTS SRL and representatives of the Association formed by CIVITTA Strategy & Consulting SA (leader) and Lideea Development Actions SRL (partner)

Context and purpose of the discussions

The main purpose of the interview was to document the beneficiary's experience in the process of accessing, contracting and implementing a digitisation project funded under Priority 2 – "A Digital Region" of the Centre Regional Programme 2021–2027. The discussion aimed to understand how the project contributes to the digital transformation of the enterprise, but also to identify the barriers and lessons learned to improve future calls.

Description of the project and proposed objectives

The project is part of the action dedicated to supporting SMEs for digitisation, under Priority 2. It is implemented by a design and architecture firm, active in the creative industries. The project is implemented by DART ARCHITECTS SRL, an architecture and design firm active in the creative fields, specialised in design, architecture and technical consulting services. The need for the project was identified as a result of the pressure to increase internal efficiency, reduce working times and human errors, but also to ensure competitive services in an increasingly digitised market. The company's administrator stressed that digitalisation "*is not a fad, but a condition for survival",* noting that without the adoption of new technologies, the risk of becoming irrelevant on the market is major.

The main objective of the project is the modernisation and automation of internal workflows through the acquisition of high-performance hardware equipment and specialised software (CAD, ERP, CRM applications, online collaboration solutions). The project also aims to improve digital collaboration between teams and external partners, increase the accuracy of the works, reduce errors and shorten delivery times.

A complementary objective is to increase the attractiveness of the services offered by implementing 3D and VR technologies, which allow the immersive presentation of projects to customers, an increasingly frequent requirement in the field. In the long term, the company aims to strengthen its position in the market and to be able to tackle larger projects, including outside the country.

Implementation status and main activities carried out

At the time of the interview, the project was in an intermediate stage of implementation. The beneficiary completed the supplier selection process and prepared the procurement documentation, but the actual performance of the contracts was temporarily blocked due to the need to update the technical specifications.

These changes have become indispensable because, between the moment of the elaboration of the financing application (over a year ago) and the acquisition phase, the **IT equipment and software market has changed** significantly. Many of the specifications included in the approved project no longer

correspond to the technological reality – either the equipment is no longer produced, or there are much better versions at similar prices.

Consequently, the beneficiary sent to the Centre RDA an official request to change the specifications, mentioning that the adjustments **do not change the total budget of the project**. However, at the time of the interview, the response had been delayed for over a month and a half, and the consultant and the project team were on hold, unable to launch the acquisitions without the official approval.

The beneficiary explained that the situation creates multiple difficulties: the postponement of internal planning, the postponement of current projects that depend on the respective equipment (e.g. A0 printer for large boards), as well as additional costs generated by the temporary use of external services. At the same time, the bridge loan contracted to finance the co-participation has been partially used in the meantime for other urgent needs, reducing the available financial buffer.

The beneficiary showed that, despite these delays, the collaboration with the Centre RDA was generally good, except for the syncope related to the approval of the amendments. The evaluation of applications and the processing of clarifications in the previous phases were carried out smoothly without major difficulties.

Difficulties and challenges encountered

The most important challenges reported relate to:

- **The complexity of the applicant's guide** – the technical language and terminology specific to European funds made it difficult to understand the requirements without the support of a specialised consultant.
- **Definition of technical specifications** – these were initially established without direct consultation with suppliers, which subsequently led to mismatches between the approved requirements and the reality of the market.
- **Duration of administrative processes** – the long time elapsed between the development of the project, and the actual moment of procurement has generated the loss of the "window of opportunity", a critical aspect in the field of digitalisation, where equipment quickly becomes obsolete.
- **Delay in responding to the change request** – the lack of a clear and fast procedure for updating specifications has caused bottlenecks in implementation and affects financial planning.
- **Financial pressure** – the loan contracted to support its own contribution began to be consumed before the launch of the purchases, due to successive postponements.
- **Reduced capacity of consultants** – the beneficiary mentioned that consulting firms manage a large number of projects simultaneously, which can lead to delays in communication and insufficient monitoring of procedural deadlines.

Anticipated impact and expected changes

The beneficiary described a series of anticipated positive effects, once the project is completed:

- **Streamlining workflows**: automating the design and documentation stages will significantly reduce work time and improve internal control.
- **Reduction of human errors**: the integration of software applications and the digitisation of repetitive processes will limit the risk of error, which is common in long-term projects.
- **Increased quality of service**: immersive 3D and VR presentations will provide a superior customer experience and strengthen the company's professional image.
- **Market expansion**: digitalisation will allow larger projects to be tackled, including internationally, without proportionally increasing staff.
- **Integrated digital collaboration**: the implementation of online platforms for collaborative work will facilitate real-time cooperation between architects, engineers and other partners, regardless of location.
- **Reduction of paper and resource consumption**: the adoption of digital solutions indirectly contributes to environmental protection by reducing the massive printing of workboards.

Application of horizontal and sustainability principles

In designing the project, the beneficiary took into account the principles of sustainability and inclusion. In the spirit of the DNSH principle, energy-efficient equipment and technical solutions compatible with the use of renewable energy sources have been provided. The beneficiary mentioned that, as far as possible, it will integrate the equipment into a photovoltaic system to reduce the carbon footprint.

In terms of equal opportunities and accessibility, the company has planned the purchase of ergonomic furniture and adapted equipment, as well as the training of staff in the use of software in a way that is accessible to all. Also, the selected software applications comply with accessibility standards for the visually impaired.

Evaluation of the funding process and guide

The beneficiary appreciated the availability and professionalism of the Centre RDA team, but noted that the financing guide, although well structured, is difficult for companies with no experience in European projects to follow. He highlighted that the call was well thought out from the point of view of purpose – supporting the digitisation of internal processes – but the degree of complexity discouraged a significant part of potentially interested SMEs.

At the same time, he mentioned that the long duration between the moment of submission and the signing of the financing contract had a negative effect on the technical timeliness of the projects, recommending the reduction of this interval in future calls.

Recommendations and lessons learned

Based on its experience, the beneficiary made a number of suggestions:

Simplifying the procedure for amending technical specifications, through clear deadlines and the possibility to quickly approve technological equivalences, especially for digitalisation projects.

Clarifying and exemplifying the requirements in the applicant's guide, through budget templates and practical examples on VAT eligibility, exchange rate and implementation scenarios.

Mandatory introduction of configuration and training services in the purchased software packages, in order to avoid additional costs later.

Creating blended calls, linking digitalisation with small investments in production, to support SMEs to integrate technology into core business.

Speed up evaluation and contracting procedures so that projects remain technologically relevant and do not miss the window of opportunity.

General conclusions

The analysed project eloquently illustrates the challenges and opportunities faced by creative SMEs in the digitisation process. The beneficiary has demonstrated a strategic vision and a clear motivation to transform its business, although the limited experience with European projects and the complexity of the procedural framework have generated difficulties in the process.

The implementation was affected by the rapid evolution of the technology market and the lack of a flexible procedure for updating the technical specifications, but, overall, the project remains relevant and with the potential for a major impact on the company's competitiveness.

4. CASE STUDY NO. 4 – DIGITALISATION OF ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA SA

Evaluation title: Theme 2 "Evaluation of interventions targeting digitalisation activities for the benefit of citizens, businesses and governments"

Project name: Digitalisation of the company ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA SA

Beneficiary: ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA S.A., SMIS code 324633

Investment location: Alba Iulia Municipality, Alba County

1. OBJECT AND PURPOSE OF THE CASE STUDY

This case study aims to support the evaluation process of the interventions funded by the Centre Region Regional Programme, under Theme 2 "Evaluation of interventions aimed at digitalisation activities for the benefit of citizens, companies and governments".

The analyses and findings presented contribute to the formulation of the answers to the evaluation questions and allow comparisons to be made between the different types of interventions, investments and beneficiaries. These comparisons highlight the mechanisms by which available resources and those created within projects are used and capitalised, as well as how these factors, together with the elements of context, influence the implementation and results of interventions.

The case study also contributes to the assessment of the extent to which digitalisation interventions respond to the needs of target groups, provide effective solutions to socio-economic challenges in the Centre Region and support the relevant strategies and objectives of the programme.

The selection of the project analysed in this case study was carried out according to the criteria established in the evaluation methodology, taking into account **the type of intervention**, **the level of complexity** and **the stage of implementation**. The project is part of the sample **dedicated to SMEs,** thus ensuring the diversity of types of beneficiaries and the possibility of analysing how different institutional and economic contexts influence the digitisation process.

The methodology used combines the documentary analysis based on the project documents provided by the beneficiary **(the funding application, the digitisation plan)** with the interview with **the project manager**, ensuring a complete understanding of how the interventions contribute to the development and modernisation of the region through digitisation.

2. PRESENTATION OF THE CASE STUDY

Project name	Digitalisation of the company ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA SA
SMIS Code	324633
Location	Municipality of Alba Iulia, Alba
Beneficiary	ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA S. A
Priority / Specific objective	P2. A digital region RSO1.2_Capitalising the benefits of digitalisation for the benefit of citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities RSO1.4_Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship
Project call/ Operation	Action 2.2 Digital Enterprises for an Advanced Economy – Smart Specialisation Sectors
Implementation period (start/end)	06.06.2025 – 05.06.2025
Project budget	885,861.46 lei total 708,600.58 lei non-reimbursable
Project context	The need to invest in digital solutions resulted from the desire of ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA SA to strengthen the level of internal digitalisation, in order to transform and improve its services to customers. The implementation of this digitalisation project aims to streamline
Project justification	

	operational processes, reduce time and resource costs, as well as increase economic competitiveness. In the end, the direct beneficiaries of this transformation will be the company's customers, who will experience faster, safer and higher quality services. The implementation location is the company's headquarters in Alba Iulia, 62 Ion Arion Street, Alba County. At the regional level, the project contributes to the revitalisation of the local economy, increasing productivity and increasing resilience to possible economic shocks, being aligned with the objectives of the Centre Region Development Plan 2021–2027. It aims to use the advantages offered by information and communication technology in the economy. In the context of the industrial transition processes that the region has gone through – similar to those in other areas of Romania and Europe – challenges such as deindustrialisation, the shortage of modern digital skills and the low level of productivity outside traditional sectors have been highlighted. Through the proposed investment, the company will develop and digitise the electrical installation works activity (CANE 4321), according to current market standards. This activity falls under the RIS3 Centre smart specialisation area – "Sustainable Built Environment", by integrating digital technologies into the sector-specific value chain. The main purpose of the project and the related substantiation study is to identify and implement the IT solutions necessary for the digitisation of technological processes. These include: • acquisition of IT equipment, communications equipment and software licenses; • implementation of integrated IT applications; • training staff in the effective use of new digital tools. The project thus contributes to industrial modernisation and to supporting the digitalisation of the economy and society, aligning with the strategic objectives of the Smart Specialisation Strategy of the Centre Region (RIS3 Centre) and the Strategy on Industrial Transition in Romania. Specifically, the project responds to the following strategic directions and actions: Action 2.3 – Supporting the industrial modernisation of SMEs; Action 2.4 – Supporting the digitisation of companies; Industry 4.0 – Digitisation of technological flows and process automation, in line with the industrial transition action plan. Specific objectives of the project OBJECTIVE 1: Harnessing the benefits of digitalisation Implementation of the company's digital transformation process through the acquisition of tangible and intangible assets (hardware and software) by the end of the implementation period, in order to optimise workflows and reduce the execution time of internal processes. OBJECTIVE 2: Meet digitalisation indicators ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA SA will achieve a high level of digital intensity, through the integration and use of 11 of the 12 digital technologies provided for in the programme, thus strengthening the performance and competitiveness of the enterprise.

	OBJECTIVE 3: Increase the digital skills of the staff Ensure the training of the staff in the use of new digital solutions and promote an organisational culture based on innovation, digitalisation and operational efficiency.

3. OBJECTIVES AND LOGIC OF THE INTERVENTION

The main goal of the project "Digitalisation of the company ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA SA" is to modernise internal processes, increase the efficiency of activities and integrate workflows into a unitary digital system. Through this investment, the company aims to improve its operational performance, reduce bureaucracy and increase the transparency and accuracy of the information used in decision-making.

The project is directly aligned with the objectives of Priority 2 – "A Digital Region" within the Centre Regional Programme 2021–2027, in particular with the specific objective of SO 1.2 – Harnessing the benefits of digitalisation for the benefit of companies and the regional economy. It promotes the uptake of digital technologies in economic activities and supports the transition to an economy based on innovation and knowledge.

In the context in which the electrical installations and renewable energy sector is increasingly competitive, digitalisation is a strategic necessity for the company, not just a technical modernisation. By introducing an integrated ERP system, purchasing high-performance equipment and implementing specialised software applications, the project contributes to:

- optimisation of production and management processes;
- automation of administrative tasks;
- increasing the quality and traceability of the services offered;
- adapting the company's activity to the requirements of the digital economy.

The project supports the major objectives of the Centre RP regarding the increase of the degree of digitalisation of enterprises and the implementation of the concept of Industry 4.0, by integrating information technologies into the company's current activities.

The interventions proposed within the project were chosen based on an internal analysis of the company's needs, carried out by the new management team, which identified the main difficulties:

- the large volume of administrative activities, managed manually;
- the lack of a unitary information system for tracking works and stocks;
- reliance on external services for design and topographic surveys;
- difficulties in communicating and planning activities between departments.

Based on these findings, three major investment directions have been established, in order of priority and economic impact:

- Implementation of a customised ERP system, adapted to the specifics of the electrical installation work activity. The system integrates modules for inventory management, work planning, financial accounting, CRM and fleet management. The goal is to automate data flows, eliminate duplication and ensure a clear and real-time record of operations.
- Acquisition of high-performance IT equipment and technical design software, intended for the internalisation of the design activity. Through this investment, the company reduces the costs generated by subcontractors, improves the quality of projects and ensures an increased ability to react in the relationship with customers.
- Equipping with a drone kit for topographic surveys, used especially in photovoltaic projects. The solution allows measurements to be carried out on their own, increases the accuracy of the works and reduces execution times, directly contributing to the economic efficiency of the activity.

The prioritisation of investments was made according to the immediate impact on efficiency and competitiveness, but also on the ability of each intervention to be integrated into a coherent digital system. All proposed investments complement each other and aim for a complete digital transformation – from the administrative part to the technical and execution processes.

The project was designed taking into account the realities of the local and regional market, but also the concrete needs of the company and its employees. The Centre region, in which the company operates, faces challenges common to the Romanian business environment: a shortage of qualified labour, low productivity outside traditional sectors and the need to adapt to modern digital technologies.

In this context, the digitisation project responds to these needs by:

- automation of work processes, which reduces administrative pressure on existing staff;
- optimising human resources, allowing employees to focus on higher value-added activities;
- training employees in the use of new digital tools, helping to increase professional skills;
- creating a modern working environment, more attractive for young specialists.

The direct beneficiaries are the company's employees, who will work in an integrated digital system, but also the company's customers and partners, who will benefit from faster and more transparent services. In the medium term, the project contributes to strengthening the company's position in the field of electrical installations and green energy and to increasing regional competitiveness.

The logic of the intervention is based on a clear cause-effect chain: the real needs for digitisation → investments in technology and training → increasing the efficiency and quality of services → strengthening the position on the market. The project is coherent, well-founded and fully aligned with both the objectives of the Centre Regional Programme and the region's economic and digital development strategy.

4. PROJECT COMPONENTS

Activities	Activity 0 – Project preparation activity / Digitisation plan This activity aims to develop the Digitisation Plan of the company ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA S.A., an essential document for substantiating the proposed interventions. It identifies the needs for digital transformation, the necessary IT solutions, as well as how to implement them in stages. The main result is the establishment of the digitisation directions and performance indicators that will be followed during the implementation of the project. Activity 1 – Information and publicity activity The activity has the role of ensuring the visibility and transparency of the project, in accordance with the requirements regarding the communication of funding from European funds. Information materials and actions will be carried out, such as the publication of the start and end announcements, the display of information panels, the labelling of the purchased equipment and the visual documentation of the progress of the project. The aim is to inform the public and partners about the objectives and results achieved. Activity 2 – Preparation of documentations for the acquisition, contracting and reception of digital equipment and solutions This activity includes the preparation of procurement documentation, the conduct of procedures according to the applicable legislation, the conclusion of contracts with economic operators and the reception of equipment and intangible assets provided for in the project. It includes the purchase of the ERP system, IT equipment, specialised software, and other necessary digitalisation solutions. The goal is the complete implementation of the company's digital infrastructure.

	Activity 3 – Preparation of a technical audit report This activity consists of the elaboration of a technical audit report, which confirms the implementation and use of the digital technologies assumed by the project. The audit is carried out by a provider specialised in the ICT field and has the role of validating the achievement of the digital intensity indicators according to the requirements of the DESI 2019 programme and standards. Activity 4 – Preparation and submission of claims and progress reports The activity involves the preparation, completion and transmission of financial and technical documentation to the managing authority, during and at the end of the project implementation. It includes the preparation of payment requests, reimbursement requests, as well as progress reports and the final report, in order to properly monitor the project. Activity 5 – Vocational training courses As part of this activity, professional training courses will be organised for the company's employees, with the aim of developing the digital skills necessary for the efficient use of the new implemented systems. The training has the role of facilitating the adaptation of staff to the digitised environment and ensuring optimal use of the technologies acquired through the project.
Expected results	Implementation of the digitisation project of the company ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA S.A. Its main purpose is to increase the level of digitalisation and competitiveness of the company, by adopting modern technologies and training staff in the digital field. The expected results are grouped into three major directions, in accordance with the objectives of the project and the assumed indicators 1. Harnessing the benefits of digitalisation Acquisition and implementation of 11 tangible assets (IT equipment, hardware systems, communication devices and digital infrastructure) and 5 intangible assets (software licenses, computer applications, ERP and design solutions). Creation of an integrated digital infrastructure, which allows the automation of internal flows and the unitary management of activities in the field of electrical installations and green energy projects. Reduction of execution times and manual workload, through the use of planning, management and reporting information systems. Increase data transparency and accuracy, thanks to the digitisation of workflows and real-time reporting. 2. Meeting project indicators and increasing digital intensity Achieving a high level of digital intensity, by using a number of 11 relevant digital technologies according to the DESI 2019 methodology. Full integration of work processes into the ERP system, which will include modules for management, accounting, logistics, planning, CRM and fleet management. Complete digitalisation of the design activity, through the use of specialised software and high-performance equipment. Increasing economic efficiency and productivity by reducing human errors and optimising resources.

	3. The impact of digital solutions on employees and users Training of at least 4 employees of the company in the use of new digital systems, in order to ensure an efficient transition to the digitised environment. Creating an organisational culture oriented towards innovation and performance, through the current use of digital technologies in daily activity. Increase the use of digital solutions, with a minimum of 10 unique users per year of the implemented applications (including partners, collaborators or customers). Improving internal and external communication through digital platforms and integrated customer relationship management systems. Increased employee and customer satisfaction due to streamlined processes and faster access to information. 4. Overall results and impact on the business environment Modernisation and digital transformation of the enterprise, according to the objectives of the Centre Regional Programme 2021–2027 – Priority 2 "A Digital Region". Strengthening the company's position on the regional market, by adapting to current digitalisation requirements and by offering modern and efficient services. Increasing economic competitiveness and responsiveness to technological and market change. Reduce dependence on external services and optimise operating costs by internalising design and surveying activities. Contributing to sustainable regional development by stimulating the transition to a digital economy and improving digital skills at local level.
Target group	The target group of the project is mainly represented by the employees of ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA S.A., who will be directly involved in the digitisation process and will use the implemented IT solutions. They come from all departments of the company – administrative, technical, logistical and financial – and have essential roles in carrying out the day-to-day activities of the company. The project is designed to improve the digital skills of existing staff and provide them with the necessary tools for a more efficient, automated and better organised work. At the same time, the resulting benefits will extend to the company's partners, collaborators and customers, who will interact with the implemented digital systems (platforms, applications, communication and reporting tools). Direct beneficiaries The direct beneficiaries of the project are: • The company's 13 employees, who will benefit from training in the use of new digital technologies and improving working conditions through process automation; • The management team, which will have access to modern digital tools for planning, control, analysis and financial reporting in real time; • The technical department, which will use specialised design software and high-performance equipment for carrying out electrical works and photovoltaic projects; • The administrative department, which will work in a digitised environment, with integrated document flows and simplified procedures.

	By training at least 4 employees in the field of digitalisation and by using IT solutions by at least 10 unique users annually, the project contributes to increasing the level of digital competence and modernising the internal way of working. Indirect beneficiaries In addition to the company's staff, the project will generate positive effects for other categories: • The company's customers and partners, who will benefit from faster, more accurate and more transparent services, thanks to the digitisation of processes and the implementation of the ERP system; • Suppliers and collaborators, who will be able to interact with society through modern digital means (electronic invoicing, exchange of documents, submission of offers); • The local community and the regional economy, which will indirectly benefit from increasing the competitiveness of the enterprise and strengthening the electricity and green energy sector in the Centre Region.

5. PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTATION

Currently, the project is in the early phase of implementation, after the signing of the financing contract on June 5, 2025. The general and specific objectives are maintained according to the funding application, and the activities are carried out according to the initial plan, with small adjustments at the level of procurement.

At this stage, the company is working on the preparation of the procurement documentation for the equipment and IT solutions provided for in the project, aiming at launching the procedures according to the applicable legislation. Although there are no tangible results from the implementation yet, the administrative progress is considered satisfactory, and the management team is actively involved in monitoring the milestones.

The project is in the preparatory phase of the actual implementation. The stages prior to the submission, evaluation and contracting of the project have been completed and the administrative and technical aspects have been clarified. The beneficiary started the process of revising the technical specifications for the proposed equipment, as a result of the changes that occurred on the IT market compared to the time of submitting the application. On the software side, the collaboration with the supplier is functional, and the ERP solution is already customised according to the company's requirements. It is expected that in the next period the acquisitions for the

The beneficiary considers that the chances of achieving the set objectives are high, despite the initial administrative delays. The management team has a realistic approach, based on constant monitoring and adaptation to the current technological context. Although some equipment initially planned is no longer available, the company estimates that the proposed equivalent solutions will perform the same functionalities and will allow the achievement of digitisation indicators. There is a general confidence that the project will produce the expected effects on operational efficiency, and the transition to the digital system will be achieved without major problems.

The main anticipated difficulties in further implementation are:

- The rapid evolution of the IT market, which determines the replacement of some equipment and the updating of technical specifications;
- Rigidity of verification and clarification procedures by the managing authority, which may lead to delays;
- The lack of IT specialists within the Centre RDA, which makes it difficult to evaluate and validate the proposed technical solutions;
- Errors in the initial technical documentation, coming from the project consultant, which required further corrections.

These challenges can lead to moderate delays, but do not significantly affect the overall implementation.

In order to prevent delays and ensure that results are achieved, the beneficiary has taken several concrete measures:

- Review and correct the technical documentation so that the specifications correspond to the equipment available on the market;
- Direct consultation with IT solution providers, to choose the most suitable products, without exceeding the approved budget;
- Careful monitoring of the acquisition stages and permanent collaboration with consultants and technical partners;
- Planning a transition period of approximately three months, during which the ERP system will work in parallel with current processes, to allow for the gradual adaptation of staff.

Through these measures, the company aims for a coherent implementation and without major hiccups. The Beneficiary appreciates that the project responds very well to the real needs of the company and employees, especially in the context of the lack of staff and the high volume of administrative tasks. Through digitalisation, employees will benefit from simplified, automated and clearer processes, and management will have digital tools for control, analysis and quick decision-making. The project also contributes to the professionalisation of the workforce and to the creation of a modern and efficient working environment, adapted to the current market requirements.

The beneficiary expects that, at the end of the project:

- the company's activity to be fully digitised, by implementing a functional ERP system interconnected with all departments;
- internal processes to be faster and more transparent;
- operational costs to decrease, by reducing dependence on external services (design, topography);
- employees to be better prepared for the use of modern technologies;
- the relationship with customers and suppliers to improve thanks to digital communication platforms;
- the company to strengthen its market position and be more competitive in the field of green energy and electrical installations.

The beneficiary believes that the final impact of the project will be significant, sustainable and visible, both internally, by modernising the organisation, and regionally, by contributing to the digitalisation of the local business environment.

6. IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS (PROGRESS AND INTERNAL MECHANISMS)

The implementation of the project is in the early stages, immediately after the signing of the financing contract. Preparatory activities are carried out at this stage, in particular the review of the technical documentation and the preparation of procurement procedures. Although the activities were carried out according to the general plan, certain deviations from the initial schedule were found, mainly caused by the long duration of the contracting process and the changes that occurred in the IT market between the moment of submission of the project and the actual signing of the contract. Some equipment and technical parts originally included in the project are no longer available, which required an update of the specifications and the identification of equivalent solutions that meet the same performance requirements.

The beneficiary managed these situations through a careful review of the documentation, in collaboration with the suppliers and consultants involved, so that the implementation continued without major delays. The company has also adopted a preventive approach, planning a transition period of about three months in which the ERP system will work in parallel with the current processes, to ensure a gradual and safe transition to the new way of working. This solution is meant to avoid possible bottlenecks and give employees time to familiarise themselves with new digital applications and procedures.

Internal monitoring of project progress is done through a simple but effective internal system. The management team regularly organises working meetings, in which it analyses the status of activities, identifies possible risks and establishes the necessary corrective measures. Internal progress reports are drawn up, which include information on the activities carried out, the status of purchases, the collaboration with suppliers and the administrative situations that have arisen. The beneficiary has the advantage of a management team with experience in the IT field, which facilitates technical communication and quick

decision-making. The direct involvement of management at all stages ensures good coordination and permanent control over the implementation.

Communication with the Managing Authority and the Centre RDA is constant, but has been described as sometimes cumbersome, especially in phases that require detailed technical clarifications. The lack of an IT specialist at the authority level hinders the process of validating equivalent equipment and prolongs the duration of official responses. However, the beneficiary mentioned that the administrative support provided was adequate, even if the procedures are relatively rigid. The relationship with the software provider went smoothly, as it offered a customised ERP solution, adapted to the company's activity, which contributed to maintaining the overall pace of implementation.

During the course of the project, the main obstacles were related to errors in the technical documentation prepared by the consultant, which combined specifications from several sources, leading to confusion about the eligible products. There were also administrative delays caused by the lengthy contracting process and the rigidity of the procedural framework, which does not allow for rapid changes depending on market dynamics. However, these issues were managed through good internal collaboration and the active involvement of the management team. The beneficiary has demonstrated the ability to adapt, revising the calendar of activities, maintaining constant communication with partners and updating the technical plan so as to maintain the assumed objectives and indicators.

Among the positive elements that supported the successful implementation is the involvement of the company's management, which has relevant IT skills and has a clear understanding of the purpose of digitalisation. Also, the efficient cooperation with the software provider allowed the ERP solution to be quickly adapted without major difficulties. The company's internal team adopted a constructive attitude, focused on solving problems and advancing the administrative stages, which helped to maintain the coherence of the project.

The project also complies with the horizontal principles promoted by European funds. The digitisation of processes contributes to the sustainability of the activity by reducing paper consumption, optimising resources and streamlining operations. Also, by training employees and involving all staff, regardless of age or level of digital competence, equal opportunities and professional inclusion are ensured. Management took care to provide support to employees less familiar with new technologies, ensuring a balanced transition and a stable working environment.

Overall, the implementation of the project is evolving at a proper pace, and the internal mechanisms adopted by the beneficiary ensure good monitoring and responsiveness. Even if there were administrative and technical challenges, the company demonstrated organisation, seriousness and adaptability, which provides solid premises for completing the project in good conditions and achieving the proposed objectives.

7. IMPACT ON BENEFICIARIES AND THE COMMUNITY

The anticipated impact of the project on the company and the local environment is significant, given that the digitisation of internal activities represents an important change for a company with a tradition in the field of electrical installations. The implementation of the proposed digital solutions will contribute to increasing efficiency and modernising the way of working, but also to a better integration of the company into the current trends of technological transformation in the energy and construction sectors.

By carrying out this project, the beneficiary estimates a **visible increase in the level of digitalisation at the company level**, which will be reflected in all internal processes. The introduction of the customised ERP system will allow the unitary management of stocks, works, planning, reporting and customer relations. This will lead to **a reduction in information processing times**, the **automation of administrative flows** and the **elimination of errors generated by manual procedures**. At the same time, the company will be able to provide faster and more transparent services to its partners and customers, helping to increase their satisfaction.

Another direct effect will be felt in the **reduction of bureaucracy** and in **the increase in the quality of managerial decisions**, thanks to the real-time access to accurate and complete data. The company's

management will be able to analyse costs, the evolution of works and the use of resources more easily, which will lead to better planning of activities and increased competitiveness on the market.

Economically, the project will have a **positive impact on the competitiveness of the enterprise**. Process automation will allow the company to carry out a larger volume of work with the same number of employees, thus increasing productivity and efficiency. By internalising technical design activities and using drones for surveys, the company will reduce costs and dependence on external services. This efficiency will be reflected in increased profitability and strengthening market position, especially in the field of green energy, where demand is constantly increasing.

At the level of the local community, the effects of the project will be manifested by **increasing the stability of existing jobs** and by **making the company more attractive to young specialists**. The modernisation of the activity and the introduction of digital technologies will create a more dynamic and safe working environment, in which employees can acquire new skills, adapted to the current market requirements. At the same time, the project indirectly contributes to the **economic development of the region**, by maintaining a competitive local company and by attracting new contracts and investments in Alba County.

The beneficiary also anticipates a **positive impact on the relationship with customers and partners**, by implementing digital channels of communication and collaboration. Customers will have faster access to information, offers and updates on contracted works. At the same time, employees and suppliers will benefit from simpler processes and efficient interaction based on integrated digital systems.

Although the final effects will be visible especially after the complete completion of the project, it is estimated that digitalisation will bring real benefits in the short term, by simplifying internal activities and optimising working times. In the long term, the company expects that these transformations will lead to an **increase in the quality of services**, a **better adaptation to market requirements** and the **strengthening of economic competitiveness** within the Centre Region.

The beneficiary considers that the risks of these expectations not being met are low but mentions some barriers that could influence the pace of implementation. These include **the unpredictable evolution of the IT market**, which can affect the availability of planned equipment, and **the rigidity of administrative procedures**, which makes it difficult to update technical specifications quickly. However, the company has demonstrated the ability to adapt and intends to manage these risks by carefully monitoring the procurement process, by constantly dialoguing with suppliers and by maintaining clear communication with the managing authority.

In conclusion, the anticipated impact of the project is a **positive and concrete one**, both for the company and for the local economic environment. The digitisation of activities will support the internal transformation of society, will contribute to increasing operational performance and will generate beneficial effects on the community, through a development model based on innovation, efficiency and adaptation to the digital economy.

8. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INTERVENTION (PRELIMINARY COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS)

The beneficiary, ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA S.A., considers that the relationship between costs, administrative effort and anticipated results of the project is balanced and justified. Although the process of accessing funding was long and demanding, the company believes that the benefits generated by digitalisation will outweigh the efforts made in the preparation and implementation phases. In the opinion of the management, the investment is a necessary and strategic one, as digitalisation is not only an option, but a condition for maintaining competitiveness in the field of electrical installations and green energy.

The general perception is that, despite the administrative complexity and the long time between the submission of the application and the signing of the contract, the project has a **favourable cost-benefit ratio**. Administrative costs and time invested in clarifications are considered inevitable for this type of funding, but the expected results – process automation, reduced bureaucracy and increased efficiency – justify the effort. The beneficiary also emphasises that the implementation of the ERP system and the acquisition of digital equipment will bring long-term savings, reducing expenses with external services and increasing internal productivity.

As for indirect costs, the company perceives them as reasonable and controllable. Adapting the internal infrastructure does not require major additional investments, and staff training is considered a natural step in the digital transformation process. Employee training will be carried out internally, with the support of the management team and the software provider, without incurring significant additional expenses. The technical and design consultancy, although it encountered some uncertainties at the beginning, was useful in structuring the processes and substantiating the digitisation plan.

Regarding the profitability of the intervention, ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA S.A. estimates clear benefits in the medium and long term. Automating tasks will lead to lower operational costs, more efficient use of resources, and an increase in the volume of work managed without staff expansion. Reducing reliance on subcontractors for design and surveys will generate considerable annual savings. In addition, access to accurate and up-to-date real-time data will contribute to better planning and an increase in the company's overall profitability.

The beneficiary does not consider that the project involves too high costs in relation to the anticipated benefits. The main difficulties were of a procedural nature and not financial. The rigidity of the technical checks and the long duration of the contracting process were perceived as administrative barriers, but not as major obstacles to the actual implementation. From the company's point of view, **the main real costs were not financial, but time and resources allocated to clarifications** and bureaucratic processes, which delayed the actual start of activities.

Regarding the comparison with other funding programmes, ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA S.A. considers that Priority 2 of the Centre Regional Programme is a well-structured instrument but considers that the procedures can be simplified in the future, especially in terms of technical evaluation and updating of specifications. Compared to other programmes, this call is perceived as more rigid and slower in processing technical changes. The beneficiary noted that the lack of an IT specialist within the implementing authority made it difficult to adapt to the dynamics of the IT market, which affected the overall efficiency of the administrative process.

However, the company believes that the funding obtained is essential and that, in relation to the value of the investment and the expected benefits, the project remains a profitable initiative. In the long term, the digitisation of the activity will lead to increased productivity, improved management and strengthened the company's position in the market. In addition, the experience gained in this project will make it easier to access other similar programmes in the future, in a faster and more efficient way.

In order to optimise the cost-benefit ratio in future calls, ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA S.A. recommends simplifying the evaluation and contracting processes, reducing the number of clarifications and introducing greater flexibility in updating technical specifications. It would also be useful to involve IT specialists in the assessment teams, to facilitate the validation of equivalent equipment and to shorten the implementation time. The beneficiary believes that a more pragmatic, results-oriented approach could significantly increase the efficiency of the programme and better support companies implementing digitalisation projects.

In conclusion, the project carried out by ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA S.A**.** It has a positive cost-benefit ratio, the efforts made being justified by the economic, operational and organisational benefits that digitalisation will bring. The company believes that the investment is sustainable and that the results will confirm the effectiveness of the intervention in the long term.

9. CONTRIBUTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL OBJECTIVES

The project directly contributes to the achievement of the European Union's horizontal objectives on sustainable development, the green and digital transition, equal opportunities and social inclusion. Through the proposed activities, the project promotes the efficient use of resources, environmental protection, accessibility for all social categories, compliance with the principles "Do no significant harm" (DNSH) and "Polluter pays", as well as ensuring equal and non-discriminatory treatment for all participants.

Equal opportunities and gender equality

ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA S.A. respects the principles of equal opportunities and gender in all stages of project implementation. In the formation of the implementation team, the selection was based exclusively on qualifications, professional experience and skills relevant to the proposed activities, without discriminatory criteria. The team is made up of both women and men, ensuring a balanced representation.

The company promotes a fair working environment, in which all employees benefit from equal treatment, regardless of gender. In this regard, the company has integrated the following measures:

- developing parental leave policies and flexible working hours so that both women and men can combine working life with family responsibilities;
- informing all employees about the conditions and benefits of paternity leave;
- avoiding any discrimination in the employment or promotion of women, including those from ethnic minorities;
- the use of gender-neutral language in recruitment announcements and job promotion materials;
- promoting diversity by maintaining a gender-balanced workforce;
- carrying out regular reviews of the level of remuneration to identify and correct any pay gaps between women and men in similar activities;
- ensuring equal opportunities for training, professional development and promotion;
- creating mentoring and coaching programmes dedicated to all employees;
- recognition and promotion of women in leadership and decision-making positions.

The company takes into account the different needs and aspirations of individuals, ensuring equal treatment and adequate conditions for all employees.

Non-discrimination

In the implementation of the project, ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA S.A. applies the principle of non-discrimination, ensuring equal treatment for all employees and partners involved. In this regard, the company will develop internal policies that provide for the prohibition of discrimination in the workplace on the basis of sex, religion, age, ethnic origin or social orientation.

The selection and hiring of staff are carried out solely on the basis of skills and professional experience, without taking into account non-performance factors. In the recruitment process, the company ensures that information is publicly distributed through various channels — local press, specialised websites, social networks and informative posters — so that access is equal for all interested persons.

The company also promotes diversity and inclusion within the implementation team so that it reflects the diversity of the local community. Employees will benefit from training and awareness on the prevention of any form of discrimination, harassment or exclusion. Internal policies provide for clear penalties for violating these rules.

Through these measures, the company ensures the application of the provisions of Ordinance no. 137/2000 on the prevention and sanctioning of all forms of discrimination, with subsequent amendments and completions, throughout the duration of the project.

Accessibility for people with disabilities

ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA S.A. recognises the right of persons with disabilities to an accessible and safe working environment. In accordance with Law no. 448/2006 on the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities, the company will ensure the elimination of physical obstacles and the adaptation of spaces to allow easy access to the implementation sites.

Ramps, dedicated parking spaces will be arranged and the thresholds that can limit movement will be eliminated. Information submitted through internal and public channels will be formulated in an accessible manner, including through user-friendly visual and electronic means.

The equipment purchased within the project, be it hardware or software, will comply with the accessibility requirements for users with disabilities. The company is committed to ensuring that all IT products and

equipment are compatible with assistive technologies and comply with current legal standards on accessibility.

Sustainable development

In the implementation of the project, ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA S.A. aims to protect the environment and the efficient use of natural resources. The company complies with the "Polluter pays" principle, according to GEO no. 195/2005 on environmental protection, assuming responsibility for preventing pollution and remedying any damage caused to the environment. In the event of damage, the company undertakes to bear the costs of restoration and to restore the environment to its original conditions.

At the same time, the beneficiary promotes the use of equipment with a high degree of durability and energy efficiency. All IT equipment purchases will comply with the green procurement criteria established at European level and will comply with ENERGY STAR standards. Selected manufacturers will have to ensure the availability of spare parts for a minimum period of two years in order to extend the life of the products.

The company will also comply with the applicable European directives in the field, including Directive (EC) 2009/125 on eco-design requirements and Directive (EU) 2011/65 on restrictions on the use of certain hazardous substances in electrical and electronic equipment. At the end of its useful life, the company will ensure the collection and recycling of equipment, according to Directive (EU) 2012/19 on waste electrical and electronic equipment.

DNSH principle

In application of the DNSH principle, ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA S.A. commits to implementing the project activities without harming the environment and in compliance with the sustainability requirements set out in Regulation (EU) 852/2020.

The company will require equipment suppliers to comply with the energy efficiency rules set out in Directive 2009/125/EC for servers, storage equipment and electronic displays. The company will also adopt measures to reduce energy consumption and the responsible use of resources, by promoting the circular economy, recycling and reuse of materials.

Simple and effective measures will be applied, such as:

- double-sided printing of documents and reducing the use of paper;
- electronic submission of tenders and contracts whenever possible;
- use of reusable storage media;
- ensuring the selective collection of e-waste generated by the project.

Through these actions, the company contributes to the protection of the environment, the reduction of pollution and the rational use of natural resources, ensuring a sustainable implementation of the digitalisation project.

10. CONCLUSIONS

The project "Digitalisation of the company ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA S.A." is a relevant example of strategic investment in the digital transformation of a company with a tradition in the field of electrical installations and green energy. The analysis carried out in this case study highlights a realistic, well-structured and results-oriented approach, in full line with the objectives of the Centre Regional Programme 2021–2027, Priority 2 – "A Digital Region". Through the nature of the proposed interventions, the project contributes both to increasing the degree of internal digitalisation and to strengthening the company's economic and technological competitiveness on the regional market.

The implementation of the project was based on a careful analysis of the organisational needs, clearly identifying the operational deficiencies that needed modernisation: cumbersome administrative processes, lack of an integrated information system, dependence on external services for technical activities and difficulties in the efficient coordination of activities between departments. The company's response to these challenges was coherent and adapted to the context: digitisation of internal processes, acquisition of modern equipment, implementation of a customised ERP system and staff training. All these components

converge towards a common goal – the complete digital transformation of the company, with a direct impact on the efficiency, productivity and quality of the services offered.

The anticipated results, presented in the project documents and confirmed by the efficiency analysis, indicate a favourable cost-benefit ratio. Although the process of accessing the financing was difficult, with an extended duration between the submission of the application and the signing of the contract, the beneficiary considers that the administrative efforts are justified by the long-term advantages. Automating processes will significantly reduce working time and human errors, improve traceability and operational control, and facilitate more effective communication with partners and customers. At the same time, reducing dependence on external services and internalising design and surveying activities will generate significant savings and strengthen the company's technological autonomy.

The project demonstrates a deep understanding of the role of digitalisation as a driver of competitiveness. ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA S.A. has transformed digitalisation from a simple technical modernisation into an organisational development strategy, oriented towards increasing performance and adapting to market requirements. By introducing an integrated ERP system, the company will have a complex planning and analysis tool, which will allow transparent, predictable and efficient administration. This step is essential in an area where quick reaction and precision of execution can make the difference between success and stagnation.

Another important element resulting from the analysis of the study is related to the impact on human resources. The project is not only about equipment and software, but also about the people who use them. Training employees, creating a digital culture and gradually adapting to the new system are determining factors for the success of the implementation. The beneficiary has demonstrated a responsible approach, supporting the transition of staff to the digitised environment through continuous training and assistance. This human component gives sustainability to the project and ensures the efficient use of the investment in the long term.

From the perspective of horizontal principles, the company has adequately integrated the aspects of equal opportunities, sustainable development and compliance with the DNSH principle. The concrete measures adopted in terms of gender equality, accessibility for people with disabilities and efficient use of resources show the beneficiary's concern for the responsible implementation of the project, in line with European values. These principles are not treated as mere formal requirements but are effectively transposed into organisational policy and the way current activities are carried out.

The analysis of the implementation process shows a solid management and adaptability on the part of the project team. Despite the difficulties encountered, in particular related to the long duration of the contract and the lack of procedural flexibility, the beneficiary maintained a constant pace and managed to manage any delays efficiently. Good collaboration with software providers, the team's experience in the IT field and the direct involvement of the management have been determining factors for the success of the steps taken so far. Effective risk management is noted, through the adoption of preventive measures and a well-structured internal monitoring system.

From a strategic point of view, the project has a multiple impact: internally, it modernises the company's activity and optimises resources; at the economic level, it strengthens the firm's position on the market and boosts the competitiveness of the sector; at regional level, contributes to the digitalisation of the economy and to the achievement of the objectives assumed by the RIS3 Centre and Industrial Transition strategies. By integrating digital technologies into its processes, the company becomes an example of smart adaptation to new economic requirements and a model of good practice for other SMEs in the region.

In conclusion, the project "Digitalisation of the company ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA S.A." is an efficient, relevant and sustainable intervention, which demonstrates how a local company can capitalise on the opportunities offered by European funds to modernise its activity and increase its performance.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

The beneficiary ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA S.A. considers that the experience of this project has highlighted a series of aspects that could be improved in future funding calls dedicated to the

digitisation of SMEs. Although the project has a solid foundation and a clear impact on the company's activity, the process of access and implementation was hampered by the procedural rigidity and the long duration of the administrative stages.

A first aspect underlined by the beneficiary is **the need to reduce the duration of evaluation and contracting**. In the case of this project, the period between the submission of the financing application and the signing of the contract exceeded one year, which led to the loss of the technical relevance of some of the proposed equipment and the need to update the specifications. In a field like IT, where technology is changing rapidly, this delay makes it difficult to maintain compliance with market requirements. Therefore, the company recommends **simplifying the administrative steps** and **accelerating the analysis process**, so that the beneficiaries can implement the projects in a current technological context.

Another important recommendation is **the introduction of clear mechanisms that allow for the justified updating of technical specifications**, without the need for complex re-approval procedures. The beneficiary considers that a more flexible approach would allow projects to adapt to the rapidly evolving IT market, in particular when the equipment originally planned becomes unavailable. The company proposes that these changes can be accepted by a simple notification to the managing authority, provided that the budget value remains unchanged and the technical performance of the new equipment is equal to or superior to the initial ones.

Also, ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA S.A. recommends strengthening **the technical expertise at the level of the Centre RDA**, by involving IT specialists who can correctly and quickly evaluate the equipment, software solutions and technical equivalences. The lack of specialised personnel was one of the main barriers encountered in the implementation, as many clarifications were unnecessarily prolonged due to the lack of technical understanding of the proposed products. The presence of experts would increase the quality of the evaluation and significantly shorten the response time to beneficiaries' requests.

In terms of support for future applicants, the company believes that **training and technical advice before submitting applications** would be extremely useful. It would be beneficial to organise clear information sessions, simplified explanatory guides and practical examples of projects already implemented. It would also be useful to have models of good practices, which would show concretely how digitisation projects can be structured and what types of solutions are eligible and effective. The beneficiary considers that such preparation would significantly reduce the number of design errors and help small businesses to make more substantiated claims.

Regarding the efficiency of the implementation process, the beneficiary recommends **clearer and faster communication between authorities, consultants and beneficiaries**. Under the current draft, the clarification process was slow, and some minor issues required several rounds of correspondence. A dedicated digital communication platform with clear deadlines and transparent document routing could significantly improve administrative efficiency.

In conclusion, ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA S.A. recommends for future calls a more flexible approach, based on trust and collaboration between beneficiaries and authorities. Reducing bureaucracy, updating equipment faster and involving IT specialists would lead to a more efficient implementation and optimal use of European funds for the digitisation of SMEs. The beneficiary appreciates the importance of these programmes and believes that through small procedural adjustments and more effective communication, future results could be even better, with a faster impact on the regional economy and the competitiveness of businesses.

4.1 **4.1 Case Study Interview Minute – ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA S.A.**

Date: 25 August 2025

Location: online

Participants: project administrator/manager ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA S.A. and representatives of the Association formed by CIVITTA Strategy & Consulting SA (leader) and Lideea Development Actions SRL (partner)

General context of the discussion

The discussion took place within the documentation process related to the case study on the implementation of digitisation projects financed by Priority 2. The meeting aimed to document the experience of ELECTROCONSTRUCȚIA ELCO ALBA IULIA in the process of accessing and implementing the digitisation project financed through the Centre Regional Programme. The purpose of the discussion was to understand how the need for digitisation was identified, what solutions were chosen, what were the main difficulties encountered and what are the expectations regarding the impact of the investment on the company's activity.

Company profile and motivation for digitalisation

Elco Alba Iulia was spun off in 1993 from the former Electrica and operates in the field of electrical installations. In recent years, the company has also turned to green energy projects, especially photovoltaic parks. The company recently went through a management change, and the new management team took over the digitisation project initiated earlier. Currently, the company has 13 employees, compared to over 200 in the 90s, and recruiting qualified personnel is difficult. The need for digitisation was driven by the lack of staff and the high volume of administrative activities, which affected operational efficiency. Digitalisation has been seen as a solution to reduce bureaucracy, automate processes and increase competitiveness in the market.

Purpose and structure of the project

The digitisation project aims to modernise internal processes and integrate workflows into a unitary IT system. It includes:

- **Implementation of a customised ERP system**, covering inventory management, logistics flow, work planning, financial reporting and customer relations;
- **Acquisition of equipment for technical design**, respectively high-performance workstations and specialised software for electrical installations, in order to internalise the design activity;
- **Equipping with a drone kit** for topographic surveys, useful in photovoltaic projects, meant to reduce dependence on subcontracted services and optimise costs.

The ERP was configured according to the specifics of the company's activity, integrating reporting, CRM and fleet management modules. The beneficiary, having IT experience, requested a flexible and scalable solution, which could be adapted later.

Stages taken and status of the project

The process from submitting the financing application to signing the contract took more than a year. The delay was caused by the need to change the CANE code to meet the requirements of the call. The financing contract was signed on June 5, 2025.

Currently, the project is in the early phase of implementation, respectively in the procurement preparation stage. Delays were reported due to errors in the technical documentation prepared by the consultant, which combined specifications from several offers, resulting in products that did not exist on the market. On the software side, the collaboration with the supplier went smoothly, customising the solution according to the beneficiary's requirements. On the other hand, on the hardware side, difficulties arose due to the rapid evolution of the IT market – some parts included in the project at the time of submission are no longer available.

Difficulties encountered

The main obstacles mentioned in the discussion were:

- **The long duration between deposition and contracting**, which led to the loss of technical relevance of some equipment;
- **Rigidity of technical checks**, which do not allow specifications to be updated according to market developments;
- **The lack of an IT specialist at the level of the Centre RDA**, who can quickly assess the technical equivalences and validate the proposed changes;
- **Errors in the consultant's documentation**, which required the resumption of some steps and generated delays;
- **Cumbersome communication between the** beneficiary, the consultant and the RDA, with multiple clarifications for minor issues.

The beneficiary stressed the importance of a more flexible approach by the authorities, allowing for the justified replacement of equipment with equivalent or higher variants, within the approved budget, without the need for additional complex administrative procedures.

Implementation and operational planning

The beneficiary estimates a transition period of approximately three months, during which the current system and the ERP will be run in parallel, and the new system will become fully functional in a period of approximately one year. A period of employee training and gradual adaptation to the new digital flows is planned. Although there is a slight reluctance among older staff, management believes that the transition will be made without major difficulties thanks to the support provided by the management team.

Benefits and expected impact

The project is expected to bring a number of significant improvements:

- streamlining internal processes and reducing working times;
- increasing the transparency and accuracy of data;
- real-time visibility of stocks and jobs;
- the possibility of full project management and automatic bidding;
- improving the relationship with customers and suppliers through a digital communication system;
- cost reduction by eliminating subcontracted services (design and surveying).

The beneficiary stressed that digitalisation is not only an efficiency measure, but also an essential condition for maintaining competitiveness on the market and attracting new contracts in the field of green energy.

Relationship with the Centre RDA and administrative aspects

It was noted that the lack of qualified technical staff at the level of the Centre RDA makes it difficult to evaluate the technological proposals. Also, the clarification process is often slow and rigid, and the lack of clear mechanisms for validating technical equivalences affects implementation.

The beneficiary mentioned that it would be useful to have explicit provisions in future guides, which would allow the justified updating of the technical specifications according to the dynamics of the IT market, without the risk of losing the eligibility of expenses.

General conclusions

The discussion showed that the company's digitalisation project has a solid foundation, based on real needs for efficiency and adaptation to market requirements. The main challenges are related to procedural rigidity and the lack of technical expertise in the implementation structures. In the medium term, the implementation of the ERP system and associated facilities will bring visible benefits in operational, financial and strategic terms. For future calls, it is recommended:

- reducing the duration of evaluation and contracting;
- the introduction of the possibility of technological updating of equipment;
- increasing the technical competence of RDA evaluators;

- improving communication and transparency in the verification process.

5. 5. CASE STUDY NO. 5 – DIGITALISATION OF FIX&GO CAR SERVICE SRL

Evaluation title: Theme 2 "*Evaluation of interventions targeting digitalisation activities for the benefit of citizens, businesses and governments"*

Project name: Digitalisation of FIX&GO CAR SERVICE SRL

Beneficiary: FIX&GO CAR SERVICE S.R.L., SMIS code 322855

Investment location: Brașov municipality, Brașov county

1. OBJECT AND PURPOSE OF THE CASE STUDY

This case study aims to support the evaluation process of the interventions funded by the Centre Region Regional Programme, under Theme 2 "Evaluation of interventions aimed at digitalisation activities for the benefit of citizens, companies and governments".

The analyses and findings presented contribute to the formulation of the answers to the evaluation questions and allow comparisons to be made between the different types of interventions, investments and beneficiaries. These comparisons highlight the mechanisms by which available resources and those created within projects are used and capitalised, as well as how these factors, together with the elements of context, influence the implementation and results of interventions.

The case study also contributes to the assessment of the extent to which digitalisation interventions respond to the needs of target groups, provide effective solutions to socio-economic challenges in the Centre Region and support the relevant strategies and objectives of the programme.

The selection of the project analysed in this case study was carried out according to the criteria established in the evaluation methodology, taking into account **the type of intervention**, **the level of complexity** and **the stage of implementation**. The project is part of the sample **dedicated to SMEs,** thus ensuring the diversity of types of beneficiaries and the possibility of analysing how different institutional and economic contexts influence the digitisation process.

The methodology used combines the documentary analysis based on the project documents provided by the beneficiary **(the funding application, the digitisation plan)** with the interview with **the project manager**, ensuring a complete understanding of how the interventions contribute to the development and modernisation of the region through digitisation.

2. PRESENTATION OF THE CASE STUDY

Project name	**Digitalisation of FIX&GO CAR SERVICE SRL**
SMIS Code	322855
Location	Brașov Municipality
Benefit	FIX&GO CAR SERVICE S.R.L.
Priority / Specific objective	P2. A digital region RSO1.2_maximising the benefits of digitalisation for the benefit of citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities

	RSO1.4_Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship
Project call/ Operation	Action 2.2 Digital Enterprises for an Advanced Economy – Smart Specialisation Sectors
Implementation period (start/end)	20.12.2024 – 19.12.2026
Project budget	1,323,299.39 lei total 991,151.24 lei non-reimbursable
Project context **Project justification**	The need for the project resulted from the analysis of the company's internal needs and the regional economic context. Before the implementation of the intervention, the activity of FIX&GO CAR SERVICE SRL was largely based on manual processes, with fragmented data management and difficulties in tracking appointments, works and customer history. The lack of an integrated IT infrastructure limited the company's ability to react quickly to market requirements and ensure complete transparency in the relationship with the beneficiaries. Therefore, the investment in digitalisation was designed as a strategic measure to modernise services, increase efficiency and strengthen competitiveness on the local market. The project also responds to a regional need for economic development through technological innovation, aligning with the objectives **of the Regional Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3 Centre).** It contributes to the **"Automotive and Mechatronics Industry"** field of specialisation, as the company's activity – classified under CANE code 4520, "Maintenance and repair of motor vehicles" – is integrated into the value chain specific to this sector. By implementing digital solutions, the company will be able to offer services aligned with modern industry standards, based on computerised diagnosis, automation and integrated information management. At the regional level, the project supports **the industrial transition and increased productivity** through the adoption of digital technologies. In a context marked by challenges such as deindustrialisation and the lack of digital skills, the FIX&GO initiative contributes to the adaptation of the local economy to the requirements of the new industry – Industry 4.0 – and to the development of the skills needed for the next generation of occupations. In addition, the project correlates with the objectives of the Industrial Transition Strategy in Romania, through the digitisation of the technological flow, the integration of modern equipment and the automation of processes. The investment has a dual role: on the one hand, it modernises the company's infrastructure, and on the other hand, it contributes to the consolidation of the regional economic ecosystem, stimulating the competitiveness and adaptability of the business environment in the face of rapid technological changes. **General objective of the project** The general objective of the project "Digitalisation of FIX&GO CAR SERVICE SRL" is to support the digital transformation of the company and to contribute to increasing economic competitiveness by modernising technological and organisational processes. By digitising the activities carried out, the project aims to streamline internal flows, optimise the relationship with customers and increase the quality of services provided in the field of car repairs and maintenance. At the same time, the intervention contributes to the development

	of the local business environment and to the improvement of living conditions in the community, by strengthening a sustainable, modern business model adapted to the current standards of the digital economy. The project is directly aligned with the specific objectives of the Centre Regional Programme (PRC) 2021–2027, Priority 2 – "A Digital Region", respectively **Specific Objective 1.2 – Harnessing the benefits of digitalisation for the benefit of citizens, companies and organisations**. In this regard, the project contributes to the development of an economy based on innovation and technology, by using digital solutions to increase efficiency, reduce working times and ensure an increased degree of transparency and accessibility in the relationship with customers and partners. **Specific objectives of the project** **Objective 1 – Capitalising on the advantages of digitalisation.** The project envisages the acquisition and implementation of tangible and intangible assets intended for the digital transformation of society. These investments are aimed at modernising the IT infrastructure, integrating activity management software applications, developing online platforms for interacting with customers and digitising operational flows. The aim is to create a solid technological base that allows for a more efficient operation and a greater capacity to react to market requirements. **Objective 2 – Fulfilment of digitisation indicators.** By implementing the project, FIX&GO CAR SERVICE SRL will achieve a high level of digital intensity, using at least 10 of the 12 digital technologies relevant to the automotive sector and its own business model. These technologies will cover areas such as digital order management, data integration with suppliers, online scheduling of services, automated communication with customers and the use of modern computerised diagnostic equipment. **Objective 3 – Increase digital skills.** An essential element of the project is the training of staff in the use of the implemented digital solutions. Employees will be trained to effectively use new software tools and IT equipment, which will lead to better resource management, reduced errors and increased productivity. At the same time, the training will facilitate a smooth transition to a digitised, integrated and sustainable work model.

3. OBJECTIVES AND LOGIC OF THE INTERVENTION

The purpose of the project carried out by FIX&GO Car Service SRL was to support the company's digital transformation process by introducing integrated technological solutions that would improve the internal activity and the relationship with customers. The initiative aligned with the objectives of the Digital Region priority, aimed at increasing efficiency, transparency and competitiveness among small and medium-sized enterprises. Digitalisation was not seen just as a simple purchase of equipment or software, but as a step towards modernising the way of organisation and work processes, in line with current trends in the field of automotive services.

The proposed interventions were selected following a clear analysis of the company's needs. Before the project, most operations were carried out manually, without a single database and without an efficient system for tracking work and customer history. Because of this, the response time was high, and communication with customers was difficult. Thus, it was decided to develop a complex digital system, consisting of two interconnected web platforms and a mobile application. The platform for customers allows online appointments, viewing the work history and receiving automatic notifications, while the internal platform supports the management of operational flows and the relationship with suppliers. The mobile application comes in addition, offering users the opportunity to organise their car documents and receive recommendations on preventive maintenance.

Although the project is not yet completed, the implementation is at an advanced stage. The purchases of IT and diagnostic equipment have already been made, the mobile application is functional, and the web platforms are in the testing and adjustment phase. The implementation process was based on a constant collaboration with the IT provider; an iterative method being adopted that allows the continuous adaptation of the solutions to the real needs of the company. This approach has ensured a flexible and coherent evolution, avoiding standardised solutions and favouring customisation according to the specifics of the activity.

The intervention was adapted to the particularities of the local market and of the customers in the Brașov area, where the company currently operates. The target audience is mainly people who require quick repairs and routine maintenance services, and digitalisation supports them through clearer communication, precise deadlines and cost transparency. At the same time, the developed solutions contribute to educating users about the importance of periodic reviews and increasing traffic safety.

In conclusion, the FIX&GO Car Service SRL project has a solid and coherent logic, being built around the need to modernise and streamline the activity. Even though the implementation is ongoing, the results so far show that the intervention responds in a realistic manner and adapted to the objectives of the programme, preparing the company for a digitised and sustainable operation.

4. PROJECT COMPONENTS

Activities	**Activity 1 – Procurement of IT equipment and digital infrastructure** This activity aims to equip the company with modern equipment, necessary to support the digitisation process and to ensure a high-performance technological infrastructure. Hardware equipment (workstations, servers, network equipment, peripherals, communication and storage equipment) will be purchased, as well as state-of-the-art automotive diagnostic devices, capable of ensuring a fast and accurate fault analysis. The purpose of this activity is to create a solid technological base, which will support the software applications to be implemented and contribute to the optimisation of work processes. **Activity 2 – Implementation of software solutions for management and digitisation of internal processes** Within this activity, the acquisition and installation of the computer applications necessary for the digitisation of the company's activity flows will be carried out. The software solutions will cover areas such as customer management (CRM), record of works and parts used, intervention planning, issuance of quotes and offers, as well as the integration of financial and logistical data. The digital platform will allow real-time tracking of work and facilitate communication between departments, significantly reducing response time and the risk of errors. **Activity 3 – Development of the online platform for customers** This activity involves creating a business-to-consumer web platform for the company's customers. Through it, users will be able to make online appointments, request offers, consult the estimates related to the works carried out and receive automatic notifications regarding the deadlines for revision and technical inspection. The platform will contribute to increasing transparency, improving communication with beneficiaries and building their loyalty through a modern and accessible digital experience. **Activity 4 – Development of the internal platform for operational management and communication with suppliers**

	This activity aims to implement an internal digital platform (business-to-business) that will integrate workflows and ensure efficient collaboration with the company's partners and suppliers. The platform will enable order management, inventory and delivery tracking, as well as quick identification of spare parts by interconnecting with supplier systems via APIs. This component will help reduce bidding times and optimise the procurement process. **Activity 5 – Development of the mobile application for end users** This activity will create a mobile application for the general public, which will allow any user to manage their own fleet. The app will include functionality such as storing vehicle documents, monitoring expenses, scheduling inspections and receiving notifications on maintenance deadlines. This component also has an educational dimension, helping to raise awareness of the importance of preventive maintenance and road safety. **Activity 6 – Training staff in the use of digital solutions** This activity aims to train the company's employees for the effective use of the new implemented systems. The staff will be trained in the operation of software applications, the use of IT and diagnostic equipment, as well as in the observance of digital work procedures. The objective is to ensure a smooth transition to the digitised operating model, by acquiring the necessary skills for the widespread use of the implemented tools. **Activity 7 – Project management and monitoring** This activity has the role of ensuring the coordination and supervision of the entire implementation process. It includes planning, progress tracking, documentation management and reporting to the managing authority. The project team will work continuously with the suppliers, consultants and partners involved to ensure compliance with the deadlines, budget and performance indicators set. **Activity 8 – Information and publicity** The activity aims to ensure the visibility of the grant and to inform the public about the benefits and results of the project. Informative materials, press releases and billboards will be produced, in accordance with the communication requirements of the funding programme. This component contributes to transparency and promoting the concept of digitalisation among SMEs in the region.

Expected results	**Expected results of the project** • Creation and implementation of a **web-based platform for customers (B2C),** which allows online appointments, requests for quotations, consultation of repair quotes and receipt of automatic notifications regarding revision and technical inspection deadlines. • Development of an **internal operational management (B2B) platform**, which ensures workflow management, order integration, inventory management and digital communication with suppliers through API interconnection. • Creation of a **mobile application** for end users, which allows them to manage vehicle documents, monitor expenses, plan revisions and receive periodic notifications. • Acquisition and installation of a **complete set of IT equipment** (workstations, servers, network, peripheral equipment) and **modern automotive diagnostic equipment**, compatible with the new implemented IT systems. • **Integration and use of at least 10 digital technologies** out of the 12 defined as the standard for a company's digital intensity. • **Training of the** company's staff in the use of digital solutions and IT and diagnostic equipment, so that all employees involved have the necessary skills to operate the newly implemented systems. • **Complete digitalisation of internal work processes** – from order taking to completing the work and invoicing – by eliminating manual flows and migrating to an integrated IT system. • **Reducing bidding and order processing times** by automating flows and centralising information in a single database. • **Increasing transparency and accessibility** for customers, by offering the possibility of real-time tracking of the status of the works and related costs. • **Improving communication and collaboration with suppliers**, through the electronic integration of offers and optimisation of the procurement process.
Target group	The target group targeted by the implementation of this project consists of: • **Employees of FIX&GO CAR SERVICE SRL**, who will be directly involved in the digital transformation process. They will benefit from specific training for the use of IT equipment, software platforms and implemented applications. The training aims to increase the digital skills of staff and adapt to new automated work processes. • **Current and potential customers of the company**, individuals and legal entities who use the car repair and maintenance services offered by FIX&GO. They will benefit from an improved experience through access to the online platform and the mobile application, being able to make appointments, track the works, receive automatic

	notifications and quickly access information related to costs and deadlines. • **The company's suppliers and partners**, who will be integrated into the internal B2B digital platform, benefiting from more efficient communication and a faster bidding and supply process, through the IT interconnection of the systems. • **The local community in the municipality of Brașov and the surrounding area**, which will gain indirectly by modernising the services offered, increasing the quality and promptness of interventions and promoting a culture of preventive maintenance of vehicles.

5. PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTATION

At the time of the interview, the FIX&GO Car Service SRL project was halfway through the implementation period, with a significant part of the activities already initiated and the first visible results. The purchases of IT and diagnostic equipment were completed, and the mobile application was in a fully functional phase. The two web platforms, one for customers and the other for internal workflow, were at an advanced stage of testing and adjustment, based on feedback received from the team and technical partners. The implementation was organised in stages, with weekly monitoring of progress and constant communication between the beneficiary and the IT provider, which allowed the continuous adaptation of the solutions to the real needs of the company.

The degree of achievement of the objectives can be appreciated as promising, in accordance with the planned schedule. Even if the project is not completed, the results obtained so far confirm the correct direction of the intervention: streamlining workflows, increasing transparency and improving the relationship with customers. The first tangible effects are felt in the reduction of the bidding time and in the optimisation of the way internal information is managed, as well as in the ease with which data on works and appointments can be accessed.

The beneficiary has a positive perception of the chances of achieving the set objectives, considering that the proposed targets are realistic and perfectly achievable in the current context. The close collaboration with the technical team and the constant pace of progress provide solid premises for the successful completion of the project. However, the company pointed out some challenges that may influence the conduct of future stages, in particular the rigidity of the administrative framework and the duration of the clarification and settlement processes. The rapid evolution of technology, compared to the bureaucratic pace of procedures, has led to situations in which the technical specifications included in the project have become partially outdated by the time of actual acquisition.

In order to prevent possible delays and ensure that results are achieved, the beneficiary has adopted a number of proactive measures. These include the careful monitoring of the implementation stages, the permanent adjustment of the technical planning and the maintenance of a constant dialogue with suppliers and the managing authority. Also, the iterative approach used in the collaboration with the IT team allowed quick adjustments to be made whenever an additional need or inconsistency between the developed functionalities and the operational requirements was identified.

In terms of impact potential, the project is perceived as having the capacity to respond directly to the needs of the target groups and the challenges of the local market. The digital solutions developed will contribute to a more efficient and transparent experience for customers, but also to a more rigorous internal organisation for the company. The beneficiary anticipates that the completion of the project will bring a significant improvement in economic performance, an increase in customer loyalty and a strengthening of its position in the automotive services market in the region. In the long term, digitalisation is expected to become a sustainable competitive advantage and provide a model of good practice for other similar companies.

6. IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS (PROGRESS AND INTERNAL MECHANISMS)

The project implementation process carried out by FIX&GO Car Service SRL took place at a constant and organised pace, being guided by a clear planning and careful monitoring of each stage. At the time of the interview, there were no significant deviations from the initial planning, but the beneficiary anticipated possible minor adjustments related to the final testing of the platforms and the calibration of the functionalities of the mobile application. These adjustments were treated as a natural part of an iterative development process, without affecting the overall implementation timelines. The calendar was respected, and the activities followed one another logically, from the purchase of equipment to the development of software components and their testing in real work environments.

The monitoring of progress was carried out through a well-structured internal mechanism, based on periodic evaluation meetings, progress reports and operative discussions with the IT provider. The beneficiary maintained permanent control over the work stages, requesting weekly updates and evaluating the results according to the set objectives. This constant involvement allowed for the quick identification of any problems and the adaptation of solutions before they affected the overall flow of the project. The collaborative approach, with a focus on open communication and decision-making flexibility, proved to be essential for the smooth running of the implementation.

Communication with the managing authority and the other actors involved was generally functional, although the beneficiary noted certain procedural rigidities and longer waiting periods in the processing of clarifications and payment requests. Although these aspects generated some punctual delays, the collaboration remained constructive, and the difficulties were overcome through constant communication and the willingness of the parties to identify pragmatic solutions. The beneficiary appreciated the support provided in interpreting the requirements and mentioned the need for greater flexibility in adapting the technical specifications to the rapid evolution of the technological market.

Among the main obstacles encountered are the differences between the initially approved technical specifications and the market realities at the time of purchases, caused by the rapid evolution of IT equipment. This was managed through a prudent approach, oriented towards functionally equivalent solutions, while respecting the eligibility requirements. The complexity of the administrative clarification process and the duration of the settlement circuit represented other important challenges, but they did not block the implementation but only prolonged some stages.

The beneficiary's ability to adapt has proven to be a key element of success. The small but well-coordinated team was able to react quickly to challenges, revise planning where necessary, and maintain overall project coherence. The direct involvement of management in monitoring progress, as well as constant collaboration with technical partners, ensured a high level of control over quality and delivery times.

Among the positive elements that contributed to the successful implementation are the professionalism of the project team, the experience of the IT providers and their willingness to adapt the solutions according to the real requirements. The iterative approach allowed functionalities to be tested as they were developed, which reduced the risk of major errors and ensured a constant alignment between the final product and the company's operational needs.

Overall, the implementation process was carried out in a controlled and coherent manner, with a balance between adherence to planning and the flexibility necessary to adapt to practical realities. FIX&GO Car Service SRL demonstrates a solid ability to manage the project and turn challenges into opportunities for improvement, thus confirming the organisational maturity and commitment to the set objectives.

7. IMPACT ON BENEFICIARIES AND THE COMMUNITY

The anticipated impact of the digitalisation project implemented by FIX&GO Car Service SRL is significant both at the company level and at the level of the local community. The project contributes directly to the digitalisation process of the SME sector, demonstrating how the adoption of modern technologies can improve the operational performance and quality of the services offered. By integrating the two web platforms and the mobile application, the company will be able to manage its activity much more efficiently, reduce processing times and ensure a coherent flow of information between the team, customers and suppliers. These digital tools are designed not only for internal use, but also to support a more transparent and predictable relationship with the final beneficiaries of the services.

Locally, visible changes are anticipated in the way customers interact with car services. The time needed to obtain quotes and plan the works will be considerably reduced, and access to information on costs, parts used and execution times will be much easier. The digitisation of the communication process will increase customer satisfaction, providing them with predictability and confidence in the services received. At the same time, through the mobile application, users will be able to benefit from automatic notifications regarding revisions or technical inspections, which contributes to a culture of preventive maintenance and, implicitly, to increasing road safety in the community.

At the economic level, the expected impact is related to the increase of the company's competitiveness and the strengthening of its position on the automotive services market. By streamlining internal processes and reducing execution times, FIX&GO will be able to take over a higher volume of daily work, which will be reflected in an increase in revenues and financial stability. Initial estimates indicate an increase in the customer retention rate of up to 50% in the medium term, suggesting not only economic development, but also a strengthening of sustainable business relationships. Also, the experience gained through the implementation of this project can be replicated by other SMEs in the region, thus contributing to the expansion of the digitalisation process at local level.

However, there are also certain perceived risks that can influence the degree to which these expectations are achieved. The beneficiary mentioned that the rigidity of the administrative framework and the duration of the approval or settlement processes can create delays, affecting the pace of implementation and adaptation to technological changes. At the same time, the rapid dynamics of the IT market may cause some developed solutions to require additional updates in the short term to remain competitive. However, due to the flexible way of working adopted by the team and the close collaboration with suppliers, these risks are considered manageable.

In conclusion, the impact of the project is perceived as profound and lasting. FIX&GO Car Service SRL not only transforms its own activity but also contributes to the modernisation of the business environment in the region. Digitalisation brings economic, social and educational benefits, providing a realistic and replicable model for integrating technology into the activity of an SME. The project has the potential to create a multiplier effect in the community by encouraging other businesses to adopt similar solutions, thus strengthening the transition to a more competitive and innovation-oriented regional economy.

8. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INTERVENTION (PRELIMINARY COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS)

The beneficiary's perception of the effectiveness of the intervention is a positive one, based on a realistic assessment of the ratio between costs, effort and benefits obtained or anticipated. FIX&GO Car Service SRL believes that the investment made through the project is justified, as digitalisation brings significant improvements in internal processes and in the relationship with customers. Although the project involved a considerable administrative effort and a high volume of documentation, the beneficiary considers that the results obtained compensate for these difficulties. The process was demanding, especially in terms of clarifications and compliance with administrative requirements, but it contributed to the development of a strategic vision of how technology can support daily work.

As regards indirect costs, they were perceived as reasonable and proportionate to the scale of the intervention. Training staff and adapting to the new digital tools required time and involvement, but the team was able to adapt quickly thanks to good internal collaboration and support from the IT provider. No major difficulties related to the technical infrastructure were reported, as the equipment purchases were planned in such a way as to ensure full compatibility with the new software solutions. The support of consultants has proven to be essential, in particular for managing administrative issues and maintaining compliance with the requirements of the funding programme.

The beneficiary anticipates a clear return on investment in the medium term, estimating an increase in internal efficiency and revenues, while reducing the costs previously generated by manual processes and the lack of data centralisation. The direct effects are already reflected in the decrease in bidding time and in the streamlining of workflows, and in the longer term, digitalisation will allow for more predictable activity management and increased customer loyalty. From the perspective of the cost-benefit ratio, the investment is perceived as a sustainable one, with tangible economic and organisational benefits.

Although the implementation process is not without challenges, there is no perception that the benefits would be disproportionate to the costs. The main difficulties mentioned relate to the bureaucratic aspects of the programme rather than to the financial value of the investment itself. Administrative requirements, the complexity of clarification procedures and the processing time of payment claims were considered the most resource-consuming, but they did not diminish confidence in the efficiency of the project.

The beneficiary of FIX&GO Car Service SRL considers that the intervention is efficient and with visible effects, even if the process of access and implementation involves a consistent effort. The project is seen as a strategic investment in the modernisation of the company, with clear benefits in terms of productivity, quality of services and customer relations. Profitability is not just about economic gains but also includes strengthening an organisational culture based on innovation and digitalisation, which ensures the sustainability of long-term results.

9. CONTRIBUTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL OBJECTIVES

⇒ Equal opportunities and gender equality

Within the project "Digitalisation of FIX&GO CAR SERVICE SRL", the principle of equal opportunities and gender is respected and promoted through a series of concrete measures, both in the implementation phase and in the current activity of the company. The formation of the project team was carried out on criteria of competence, professional experience and skills, without gender discrimination. The team includes both women and men, the selection being based solely on merit and the ability to perform the intended duties.

The company promotes an organisational culture based on mutual respect, equity and inclusion, ensuring equal access to training, professional development and promotion for all employees, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity or beliefs. In this regard, FIX&GO CAR SERVICE SRL applies the following measures:

- developing parental leave and flexible working hours policies that provide balanced support for both women and men in family responsibilities;
- ensuring a transparent, non-discriminatory recruitment process that provides equal opportunities for women, including those with children or from vulnerable backgrounds;
- the use of gender-neutral language in job advertisements and public materials;
- promoting diversity by maintaining a gender-balanced workforce;
- regular remuneration analysis to identify and correct possible pay gaps between women and men performing similar functions;
- providing equal training and professional development opportunities for all employees;
- encouraging the participation of women in leadership positions and promoting successful female role models capable of inspiring and motivating.

Through these measures, the company ensures that the project's activities contribute to the promotion of gender equality and the creation of a fair working environment, based on merit, competence and respect.

⇒ Non-discrimination

FIX&GO CAR SERVICE SRL is committed to preventing any form of discrimination, both in the project implementation process and in the current activity. The principle of non-discrimination is applied at all stages: recruitment, selection, training, promotion and collaboration with partners.

The concrete measures adopted include:

- developing and implementing internal policies and procedures on preventing and sanctioning discrimination, harassment or unfair treatment in the workplace;
- ensuring an employment process based exclusively on professional skills, experience and skills, without discrimination on the basis of gender, age, religion, ethnicity, disability or orientation;

- promoting diversity and inclusion within the work team so that it reflects the diversity of the local community;
- transparent and accessible information of all interested persons about employment opportunities, using various channels – local press, online platforms, public display;
- organising training sessions to raise employees' awareness of the principles of equal opportunities, diversity and mutual respect;
- ensuring equal opportunities for professional development, promotion and participation in the company's activities, without exclusions or preferential treatment.

By implementing these measures, FIX&GO CAR SERVICE SRL promotes a culture of respect, cooperation and inclusion, contributing to a balanced and safe working environment for all employees.

⇒ **Accessibility for people with disabilities**

Society recognises the fundamental right of persons with disabilities to have equal access to infrastructure, information and professional opportunities. In accordance with the provisions **of Law no. 448/2006 on the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities**, FIX&GO CAR SERVICE SRL is committed to ensuring a working environment and a space for carrying out the activity accessible to all.

The measures envisaged include:

- elimination of physical barriers by arranging access ramps, adapted parking spaces and spaces without thresholds in the project implementation location;
- adapting the purchased equipment so that it can be used by people with disabilities, complying with the technical and safety requirements in force;
- providing information in accessible formats (legible texts, clear digital channels, appropriate visual and auditory communication);
- ensuring an inclusive environment, which allows the equal participation of all employees in professional and training activities.

Through these actions, society contributes to the integration of people with disabilities and to the promotion of an organisational culture based on empathy, equity and respect for diversity.

⇒ **Sustainable development and environmental protection**

In the spirit of the "Polluter pays" principle, FIX&GO CAR SERVICE SRL assumes responsibility for protecting the environment and the efficient use of natural resources. The company undertakes to comply with the provisions of GEO no. 195/2005 on environmental protection, adopting practices that minimise the impact on the ecosystem.

Concrete measures include:

- the use of IT and electronic equipment that complies with **ENERGY STAR** energy efficiency standards and green public procurement criteria;
- the choice of equipment that complies with Directive (EC) 2009/125 on eco-design and Directives (EU) 2011/65 and 2012/19 on the limitation of hazardous substances and the management of electrical and electronic waste;
- prioritising equipment and components that are durable, easy to recycle, refurbish and reuse;
- compliance with the principle of producer and user responsibility, by assuming the costs for waste disposal and for repairing any damage to the environment;
- rational use of material and energy resources, with the aim of reducing the carbon footprint and increasing the energy efficiency of activities.

⇒ **Do no significant harm (DNSH) principle**

During the implementation of the project, FIX&GO CAR SERVICE SRL will fully comply with the DNSH principle**,** ensuring that the activities carried out will not have a significant negative impact on the environment. To this end, suppliers will be required to have clear technical requirements for energy efficiency, compliance with European environmental standards and compliance with eco-design and responsible resource management directives when purchasing equipment.

The company will continuously promote a sustainable approach to resource use, encouraging recycling, reducing energy consumption and adopting environmentally friendly technologies.

10. CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the experience of FIX&GO Car Service SRL reflects a concrete example of digital transformation applied with seriousness and vision, but also a realistic picture of how financing programmes can be improved to better meet the real needs of beneficiaries. The project demonstrated that digitalisation is not just about introducing modern technologies, but involves a change of mentality, an internal reorganisation and a constant adaptation to market requirements.

The company has managed, through a carefully planned approach and close collaboration with suppliers and consultants, to reach an advanced level of implementation, despite administrative and procedural challenges. The positive impact of the project is already visible, both at the operational level by reducing bidding times and optimising internal flows and in the relationship with customers, where transparency, predictability and quality of communication have been significantly improved. At the same time, the intervention has an important social dimension, contributing to raising awareness of preventive maintenance and road safety.

Beyond the technical and economic results, the project implementation process highlighted the company's organisational maturity and its ability to adapt. The beneficiary showed constant involvement, a clear understanding of the objectives and an openness to collaboration, which allowed a coherent pace of progress to be maintained. At the same time, the support of consultants proved decisive in overcoming bureaucratic challenges and in correctly interpreting funding requirements.

At the same time, the FIX&GO experience highlights some aspects to improve in future calls. There is a need for greater flexibility in updating technical specifications so that beneficiaries can purchase equipment that complies with the rapid evolution of the market, without compromising eligibility. Administrative procedures should be simplified and analysis and payment deadlines clearly defined, in order to avoid delays that may affect the progress of projects.

In conclusion, the FIX&GO Car Service SRL project confirms that investments in digitalisation can transform the way a company operates, increasing efficiency, quality of services and competitiveness in the market. At the same time, experience shows that the success of such an intervention depends not only on the financial resources available, but also on the quality of the procedural framework, the support provided to beneficiaries and the institutions' ability to respond to the dynamics of the economic environment.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

The representative of FIX&GO Car Service SRL pointed out that, in general, the experience with the project was positive, but the implementation process also highlighted a number of aspects that could be improved in future calls. One of the most important recommendations refers to the need **to make the administrative framework more flexible**, especially in terms of updating technical specifications and adapting solutions at the time of purchase. The beneficiary showed that the time elapsed between the submission of the financing application and the actual procurement stage was long enough for some of the equipment provided for in the project to become outdated. For this reason, it has been suggested to introduce mechanisms that allow the specifications to be adjusted according to market developments, while maintaining the approved budget and functionalities.

At the same time, the **high complexity of administrative procedures was noted**, especially in the clarification and settlement phase. The beneficiary mentioned that the verification process and the answers received from the managing authority were correct, but sometimes too slow in relation to the dynamics of

project implementation. In its view, better communication between the authority, the beneficiary and the suppliers would facilitate the swift resolution of any inconsistencies. It would also require clearer deadlines and a more operative approach in the analysis of payment claims, so that ongoing projects are not affected by delays.

Another aspect highlighted was **the role of consultants** in the smooth running of the project. The company's representative appreciated the support received from the consulting team, stressing that their expertise was a determining factor in maintaining the pace of implementation and understanding the administrative requirements. He considered that the involvement of an experienced consultant is essential especially for SMEs without specialised staff in the management of European funds. For future calls, it has been suggested that funding programmes should provide for the possibility of including consultancy and training costs in a more flexible way, recognising the real value of this type of support.

More direct communication, greater openness to adjusting procedures and better information on examples of good practice would increase the success of funded projects. From the perspective of FIX&GO Car Service SRL, future calls should combine administrative rigor with practical adaptability, offering beneficiaries not only funding, but also concrete methodological support throughout the implementation.

5.1 **5.1 Case Study Interview Minute – FIX&GO Car Service S.R.L.**

Date: October 7, 2025

Location: online

Participants: project administrator/manager FIX&GO CAR SERVICE SRL and representatives of the Association formed by CIVITTA Strategy & Consulting SA (leader) and Lideea Development Actions SRL (partner)

Context general

The meeting took place as part of the process of documenting the case studies related to the projects financed by the Regional Operational Programme Centre Region, priority axis "A Digital Region". The discussion aimed to analyse in depth how to conceive, implement and carry out a digitisation project at the level of an SME, as well as to identify the elements that contributed to the success of the implementation, the difficulties encountered and the relevant lessons for future calls.

Organisational context and activity profile

The analysed company operates in the field of automotive services, having as its main object the rapid repairs and routine maintenance of vehicles. The activity started in 2020, by setting up a car service in the city of Întorsura Buzăului. Subsequently, the extension to the municipality of Brașov was carried out, where the market is larger and more diversified. After a period of parallel operation, the activity was entirely concentrated in Brașov, the initial point in Întorsura Buzăului being closed.

The operational model is based on promptness, transparency and efficiency, with the aim of carrying out the repair work in a single day, so that the vehicle is handed over to the customer on the same day it is brought. The activity is supported by a small team, which requires an efficient internal organisation and optimisation of workflows.

Identifying the need for digitisation

The need for digitalisation has been driven by several converging factors. From an operational perspective, records were mainly managed manually, lacking a single database that would allow tracking customer history, appointments and work performed. The response time to requests for quotations was extended, and the process of identifying spare parts involved consulting several individual sources.

On the other hand, from the perspective of customer relations, there was a general lack of information on the need for periodic reviews and preventive work. Customers frequently only arrived at the service when a breakdown occurred, without prior maintenance planning, which generated additional costs and significant technical risks.

Digitalisation was designed as a solution that would simultaneously ensure the efficiency of internal processes and the development of a proactive communication platform with customers, through which they can be informed in a timely manner about the necessary works, deadlines and estimated costs.

Structure and content of the digitisation project

The digitisation project aimed to create a complete technological ecosystem, integrating software applications, online platforms and modern diagnostic equipment.

The main component of the investment consisted of the development of two web platforms and an interconnected mobile application. The first platform, business-to-consumer, is intended for customers and allows viewing the work history, requesting quotes, scheduling online, consulting estimates and receiving automatic notifications regarding revision and technical inspection deadlines.

The second platform, business-to-business, is used internally to manage the workflow, communication campaigns and integration with suppliers through APIs, facilitating the quick identification of spare parts and the automatic obtaining of price quotes.

The mobile application, available free of charge to the general public, allows any user to organise their vehicle documents, track annual expenses and receive recommendations on preventive maintenance.

In addition to the development of software components, the project included the purchase of IT and diagnostic equipment, including equipment from established manufacturers, with specialised technical assistance, which allow quick and accurate diagnosis of faults.

By implementing this set of digital tools, an increase in the speed of reaction, increased transparency in the relationship with customers and a significant reduction in bidding and execution times were targeted.

Implementation stages and project status

At the time of the interview, the project was halfway through the implementation period. The equipment purchases were completed, the mobile application was fully functional, and the two web platforms were at an advanced stage of development and testing.

The implementation process was structured in clearly defined stages, with weekly monitoring of progress. The collaboration with the IT provider was characterised by an iterative approach, based on permanent adjustments based on the results of the tests and the feedback obtained in the process of use.

This working method allowed the solution to be constantly adapted to the real needs of the company, avoiding the delivery of a standardised solution and favouring the achievement of a personalised, efficient result compatible with the initial vision.

Difficulties and constraints identified

During the course of the project, several difficulties were identified, the most significant of which was the rigidity of the administrative framework in relation to the accelerated dynamics of technological evolution.

The period between the submission of the financing application and the actual moment of procurement was approximately one year, during which time the technical specifications for part of the equipment provided for in the project became outdated. The evolution of the market has brought more performing alternatives, available at similar prices, but which could not be purchased due to the strict framing of the approved documentation.

Thus, the need to introduce flexibility mechanisms that allow the adaptation of equipment and software solutions at the time of acquisition was noted, in compliance with the principle of functional equivalence and the approved budget framework.

From a procedural perspective, the high complexity of the clarification process was also pointed out, as well as the processing time of payment requests. In one case, the settlement was delayed beyond the contractual term due to the internal approval circuit. The situation was subsequently resolved, but it demonstrated the need to maintain operative communication between the managing authority, the beneficiary and the suppliers.

Project impact and anticipated results

The implementation of the project generated visible results even before completion. At the operational level, there has been a considerable reduction in bidding time and a streamlining of the workflow. The digital integration of suppliers through APIs has enabled the rapid centralisation of parts and cost information, reducing reaction time to customer requests.

In the case of the relationship with the customer, the main effect is to increase the degree of transparency. Quotes are clearly presented, detailing parts and related costs, and communication during the repair process is continuous and predictable. This operating model helps to build customer trust and create a stable and predictable relationship.

Financial estimates indicate a possible increase in the customer recurrence rate of around 20% in the first year of full use of the system, with the possibility of reaching a retention rate of up to 50% in the medium term. At the same time, the digitisation of processes allows a greater number of daily jobs to be taken, which contributes to increased revenue.

Beyond the economic aspects, the project also has a social impact, by promoting preventive maintenance and raising awareness about road safety. The mobile app helps educate users and reduce the risk of major breakdowns through regular notifications and recommendations.

General findings and conclusions

The analysis of the discussion highlighted the fact that digitalisation, in this case, was not limited to the simple purchase of equipment or software but represented a process of complete organisational transformation. The project allowed the creation of its own digital product, with practical and social value, which supports both the company's activity and the public interest of the driving community.

The importance of the active involvement of the beneficiary throughout the implementation and of constant collaboration with technical partners was also highlighted. The choice of suppliers and consultant proved to be essential for the success of the project.

Based on this experience, it is recommended that technological upgrading mechanisms, procedural flexibility and clear deadlines for processing payment claims be considered in future calls.

The Fix&Go project is considered an example of good practice in terms of applying the concept of digital transformation in the automotive services sector, having a high potential for replication in other similar companies.

6. 6. CASE STUDY NO. 6 – DIGITALISATION LECOIMPEX SERV S.R.L

Evaluation title: Theme 2 "*Evaluation of interventions targeting digitalisation activities for the benefit of citizens, businesses and governments"*

Project name: DIGITALISATION OF LECOIMPEX SERV S.R.L

Beneficiary: LECOIMPEX SERV S.R.L SMIS code 324146

Investment location: Cristești commune, Mureș County

1. OBJECT AND PURPOSE OF THE CASE STUDY

This case study aims to support the evaluation process of the interventions funded by the Centre Region Regional Programme, under Theme 2 "Evaluation of interventions aimed at digitalisation activities for the benefit of citizens, companies and governments".

The analyses and findings presented contribute to the formulation of the answers to the evaluation questions and allow comparisons to be made between the different types of interventions, investments and beneficiaries. These comparisons highlight the mechanisms by which available resources and those created within projects are used and capitalised, as well as how these factors, together with the elements of context, influence the implementation and results of interventions.

The case study also contributes to the assessment of the extent to which digitalisation interventions respond to the needs of target groups, provide effective solutions to socio-economic challenges in the Centre Region and support the relevant strategies and objectives of the programme.

The selection of the project analysed in this case study was carried out according to the criteria established in the evaluation methodology, taking into account **the type of intervention**, **the level of complexity** and **the stage of implementation**. The project is part of the sample **dedicated to SMEs,** thus ensuring the diversity of types of beneficiaries and the possibility of analysing how different institutional and economic contexts influence the digitisation process.

The methodology used combines the documentary analysis based on the project documents provided by the beneficiary **(the funding application, the digitisation plan)** with the interview with **the project manager**, ensuring a complete understanding of how the interventions contribute to the development and modernisation of the region through digitisation.

2. PRESENTATION OF THE CASE STUDY

Project name	**DIGITALISATION LECOIMPEX SERV S.R.L**
SMIS Code	324146
Location	Cristești, Mureș
Benefit	LECOIMPEX SERV S.R.L
Priority / Specific objective	P2. A digital region RSO1.2_maximising of the benefits of digitalisation for the benefit of citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities RSO1.4_Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship
Project call/ Operation	Action 2.2 Digital Enterprises for an Advanced Economy – Smart Specialisation Sectors
Implementation period (start/end)	07.04.2025 – 06.04.2027
Project budget	1,124,826.64 total law 843,507.5 lei non-reimbursable
Project context **Project justification**	The need to invest in digital solutions derives from the desire of **LECOIMPEX SERV SRL** to modernise and optimise its activity by integrating digital technologies into all its internal processes. In an economic context where competitiveness is increasingly closely linked to the degree of digitalisation and the ability of companies to adapt to new technological requirements, the proposed investment becomes not only opportune, but also essential for maintaining and strengthening the company's position on the market. The company operates in a field that requires precision, operational efficiency and quick reaction to market requirements. In the absence of a high-performance IT infrastructure, the company's activity is affected by manual processes, lack of integration between flows and difficulties in monitoring performance. By implementing the proposed digital solutions, **the aim is to automate and digitise workflows**, reduce execution times, eliminate human errors and improve the ability to analyse and report.

	Digitalisation is also a **factor of resilience** in the face of economic and social disruptions, providing the company with modern tools for rapid adaptation and business continuity in various conditions (including in the context of economic or health crises). At regional and national level, the project contributes to the implementation of the objectives set out in the RIS3 Centre Smart Specialisation Strategy and the Industrial Transition Strategy in Romania, both documents aimed at accelerating the digital transformation of small and medium-sized enterprises and adopting the principles of Industry 4.0. From the perspective of regional development, the proposed investment is aligned with the specific objective of **using the advantages of information and communication technologies in the economy**, by adopting digital solutions that lead to increased productivity, quality of services and added value generated at the company level. At the same time, the project responds to current challenges at the level of the Romanian economy, such as: • the shortage of digital skills among operational and management staff; • low degree of automation in SMEs' internal processes; • the need to align with European standards for digitisation and data interoperability; • the need to increase energy efficiency and reduce costs by optimising digital flows. Through the proposed investment, LECOIMPEX SERV SRL will acquire **the necessary tools for the complete digitisation of the activity**, through the implementation of integrated computer applications, the acquisition of high-performance hardware equipment, specialised software licenses, communication systems and the training of personnel for their efficient use. The project is in full line with **the directions of action 2.3 and 2.4 of the RIS3 Centre**, namely: • *Supporting the industrial modernisation of SMEs*; • *Supporting the digitisation of companies*. Thus, the investment has a **direct impact on increasing economic competitiveness**, contributing to the modernisation of the mechatronics sector and the creation of a sustainable digital infrastructure, adapted to the requirements of Industry 4.0 **Project objectives** Scop general The general goal of the project is **to substantiate and implement an integrated digitisation system** that supports the digital transformation of LECOIMPEX SERV SRL's activity, through the acquisition of IT equipment, software applications and training of human resources, in order to increase the company's performance and competitiveness. Specific objectives **Digitisation of operational flows** by implementing integrated IT solutions (ERP, CRM, applications for document management, planning and tracking of activities), which ensure traceability, efficiency and complete control over internal processes. **Automation of mechatronic repair and maintenance activities (CANE 3312)** by introducing digital equipment and applications that facilitate rapid

	diagnosis, parts management, intervention planning and equipment performance monitoring. **Increase decision-making efficiency** by implementing a real-time data-driven reporting and analysis system that enables management to make quick and informed decisions. **Improving data security and integrity**, by purchasing specialised equipment and software to protect information and ensure business continuity. **Developing the digital skills of the staff**, by organising training sessions dedicated to the use of the implemented IT systems, ensuring an efficient transition to the new digitised way of working. **Increasing the economic competitiveness and adaptability of the company**, by integrating the principles of Industry 4.0 and adopting an operational model based on innovation and efficiency. Correlation with regional and national strategic objectives The project contributes to: **Industrial modernisation of regional sectors of excellence**, through investments in modern machinery and equipment; **Digital transformation of SMEs** in the region, in line with the smart development goals of the RIS3 Centre; **Implementation of the Industry 4.0 concept**, by digitising the technological flow and using data for process optimisation; **Strengthening the company's capacity to innovate and adapt** to current technological trends, by adopting scalable and interoperable hardware-software solutions; **Contributing to the digitalisation of the Romanian economy**, in line with the objectives of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) and the National Strategy for Competitiveness.

3. OBJECTIVES AND LOGIC OF THE INTERVENTION

The purpose of the project carried out by LECOIMPEX SERV S.R.L. was to increase productivity and operational efficiency by integrating digital technologies in the maintenance activity for agricultural machinery and industrial equipment. The company started from the need to respond faster and more accurately to customer requests, in a field where reaction time and diagnostic accuracy have a direct impact on beneficiary satisfaction and market competitiveness. Through digitalisation, the company aims to modernise work processes, optimise internal and external communication and create a unitary information management system.

The aim of the project is aligned with the specific objectives of Priority 2 of the Centre Regional Programme, which aims to support the increase of the competitiveness of SMEs through the adoption of digital technologies and the modernisation of production and service delivery processes. The intervention proposed by the company contributes directly to achieving these objectives, by creating a modern IT infrastructure, implementing specialised software for data analysis and management, but also by equipping the team with digital diagnostic equipment designed to reduce intervention times and increase the accuracy of the works. Essentially, the project is part of a broader framework of digital transformation of small and medium-sized enterprises, which aims to increase productivity, reduce costs and professionalise services.

The selection of interventions and the prioritisation of investments were carried out following an internal analysis of operational needs, so that all components of the project respond directly to the identified problems. The company has opted for an integrated approach, treating digitalisation not only as a financing opportunity, but as a strategic process, which ensures coherence between technological infrastructure, equipment and software applications. The investments were structured on three main directions: the

acquisition of digital equipment and diagnostic sensors for field activities, the modernisation of the IT infrastructure through servers and high-performance storage equipment and the implementation of ERP and Business Intelligence software solutions that allow the analysis and integration of data flows. Although certain software components were not eligible for funding, the company decided to purchase them from its own sources, considering that without them the digitisation process would not be complete. This decision reflects a long-term vision and a mature approach to investment, through which the project was seen as a tool for organisational transformation and not just as a one-off intervention.

In terms of adapting the intervention to local needs and target groups, the project was designed in close connection with the specifics of the company's activity and the market on which it operates. LECOIMPEX SERV S.R.L. operates in a field where the speed and precision of interventions are essential factors for success, and digitalisation responds exactly to these needs. The technical solutions introduced – from portable equipment and smart sensors to software applications – allow real-time diagnosis of failures, more efficient planning of works and clearer communication with beneficiaries. Also, the intervention has an important component of human resources development, by training existing staff and hiring new specialists after the completion of the acquisitions. Digitalisation is perceived not only as a technological innovation, but as an opportunity to strengthen internal skills, increase operational capacity and expand the services offered.

At the same time, the adaptation to local realities is also reflected in the choice of suppliers and partners involved, the company opting for collaboration with reliable companies, with experience on the local market and capable of ensuring continuity and long-term technical support. This approach contributed to the successful implementation of the project and to the creation of a sustainable digital ecosystem, based on collaboration, trust and professionalism.

The intervention proposed by LECOIMPEX SERV S.R.L. had a strategic character, integrating the objectives of the regional programme into the concrete reality of a local enterprise. The project was adapted to the specifics of the sector and managed to combine investments in technology with the development of human skills, thus contributing to the company's digital transformation and strengthening its competitiveness in the long term.

4. PROJECT COMPONENTS

Activities	Activity 1 – Project management The management activity ensures the efficient coordination of all stages of the project, the monitoring of progress and compliance with contractual requirements. It includes planning, supervision, reporting and budget control activities. The management team will aim to achieve the assumed indicators, good communication with the implementing authorities and compliance with the ERDF rules. The aim of this activity is to guarantee a coherent, transparent and efficient implementation of the project. Activity 2 – Information and publicity This work is intended to ensure the transparency and visibility of European funding. Public communication actions will be carried out, such as press releases and announcements, visual materials (posters, plaques, stickers) and online promotion on the company's website and social media channels. These actions aim to inform the public about the non-reimbursable financial support provided by the ERDF and to promote the results of the project, in accordance with the visibility requirements imposed by the managing authorities. Activity 3 – Procurement and implementation of digital equipment and solutions This activity involves the preparation of procurement documentation, the selection of suppliers and the actual purchase of the hardware and software equipment necessary

	for digitisation. It includes the delivery, installation and testing of IT systems, as well as their integration into the company's operational flows. Through this activity, the solutions proposed in the Digitalisation Plan will be implemented, aiming at automating internal processes, optimising activities and increasing the company's overall performance. Activity 4 – Staff training for digital skills development This activity aims to increase the digital skills of the employees involved in the use of the new technologies implemented. The staff will participate in dedicated training courses, designed to ensure the understanding and efficient use of the computer applications and equipment purchased. Staff training ensures the sustainability of the digital transformation and the full realisation of the investment in technology. Activity 5 – Preparation and submission of claims and progress reports This activity aims to prepare the financial and technical documentation related to the implementation of the project, for the settlement of eligible expenses. The beneficiary will prepare and submit payment requests, reimbursement requests and progress reports to the funding authority. The aim is to ensure rigorous financial management, in accordance with the contractual provisions and the ERDF rules. Activity 6 – Preparation of the final technical audit report At the end of the project implementation, an independent technical audit report will be carried out, which confirms the fulfilment of the assumed objectives and the use of technologies compliant with the DESI 2019 standards. The report will assess the degree of digitalisation achieved, the performance of the equipment and the impact of the implementation on operational efficiency. This document certifies the results of the project and ensures transparency in the use of European funds.
Expected results	1. Technical and Investment Results Acquisition and commissioning of **32 tangible assets** (IT equipment, communications equipment, servers, workstations, smart peripherals, etc.); Implementation of **14 intangible assets** – software applications, licenses and integrated IT solutions for the digitisation of internal flows (ERP, CRM, document management, data analysis, IT security); **Creating an integrated digital infrastructure**, compatible with the principles of Industry 4.0, which allows interoperability between internal information systems and communication platforms with partners; **Increasing the level of digitisation** of the enterprise, by automating operational and management processes, with a direct impact on the efficiency and quality of services. 2. Organisational results **Optimising internal workflows** through digitalisation, reducing processing times and operational errors; **Increasing productivity** and responsiveness to customer requirements by using modern IT applications; **Improving managerial decisions**, thanks to the implementation of an information system that provides real-time reports and analysis;

	Strengthening information security, through the use of data and communication protection equipment and applications; **Standardisation of processes and information flows**, ensuring complete traceability of the company's activities. 3. Human resources results **Increasing the digital skills of the staff**, by training and training employees in the use of the new technologies implemented; **Developing a digital organisational culture**, focused on innovation, efficiency and technology-assisted collaboration; **Creating a modern work environment** that promotes productivity and reduces repetitive tasks through automation. 4. Economic and strategic impact results **Increasing the economic competitiveness** of LECOIMPEX SERV SRL by streamlining activities and reducing operational costs; **Improving customer experience** through faster, more transparent and personalised services; **Increasing the company's resilience** to economic and technological change, thanks to the digitisation of essential flows; **Contribution to the objectives of the Regional Strategy for Smart Specialisation (RIS3 Centre),** by aligning the activity with the field of "Automotive and Mechatronics Industry"; **Integration into the European digital economy**, through the adoption of standards and tools compatible with the DESI 2019 model. 5. Measurable results (quantifiable indicators) Minimum **9 digital intensity indicators** achieved within the company, according to the DESI methodology; **100% of administrative and management processes digitised;** **At least 5 employees trained** in advanced digital skills; **Increase of over 50% in the degree of automation** in work processes compared to the initial level; **Reducing information processing times** by at least 30%; **Increase data security and integrity**, by implementing an integrated IT protection system. 6. Visibility and sustainability results Ensuring transparency through **information and advertising actions** (press releases, posters, online promotion), according to the ERDF rules; **Sustainability of the investment** by maintaining and using IT equipment and solutions for at least 5 years after the completion of the project; **Creating a basis for the continuous digitisation** of processes, by expanding the implemented information systems and adopting new emerging technologies.

Target group	The target group of the project is represented by the staff of **LECOIMPEX SERV SRL**, directly involved in the operational, administrative and managerial activity, who will use and manage the digital solutions implemented through the project. It includes employees who will be trained to acquire the digital skills necessary to use new computer equipment and applications, thus contributing to the digital transformation of the company. At the same time, the project is indirectly addressed to the company's customers and partners, who will benefit from faster, more efficient and transparent services, resulting from the digitisation of internal processes. By implementing the investment, the company will increase its level of digitalisation and ensure a modern working environment, adapted to current market requirements. The target group will have access to high-performance technological tools, an integrated IT infrastructure and professional development opportunities in the digital field.

5. PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of the digitisation project of LECOIMPEX SERV S.R.L. is at a fairly good stage, with the advertising and procurement preparation activities already completed. The suppliers of equipment and services have been selected, and the launch of the procurement procedures is conditioned only by the clarification of some administrative aspects related to the change in the VAT rate. The activities were carried out as planned, and the project management is ensured by efficient collaboration with an external consultant who manages the administrative part and reporting to the funding authority, while the beneficiary maintains direct control over the decision-making process.

The degree of achievement of the objectives is a good one, given that all the preparatory stages were completed according to the calendar. The specific objectives – increasing the accuracy and speed of machine diagnostics, optimising internal processes and reducing operational costs – are considered realistic and achievable in the current conditions. The beneficiary has shown a strategic approach, also investing from its own sources to ensure the coherence of the digitisation process, even for ineligible software components.

The beneficiary's perception of the chances of achieving the objectives is positive. The project is seen as a long-term investment, meant to increase the competitiveness of the company and the quality of the services offered. Digitalisation is seen not only as a technological modernisation, but as an operational transformation, capable of leading to better internal organisation, increased customer satisfaction and strengthening the company's reputation in the market.

In terms of challenges, the main difficulties are related to some administrative delays and the complexity of documentation, but these have not affected the overall pace of implementation. The issue of limited human resources was also mentioned, as the team was temporarily reduced to three employees. However, the company intends to replenish the staff once the acquisitions are completed and to hire new specialists, while organising training sessions for the use of digital equipment and applications.

In order to prevent delays or bottlenecks, the beneficiary has adopted several proactive measures: a constant collaboration with the external consultant, direct and clear communication with the project officer within the funding authority and a solid relationship with the selected suppliers. They understood the particularities of EU-funded projects and promptly responded to the requirements to update the offers, which contributed to the fluidity of the implementation process.

The beneficiary believes that the project really responds to the needs of the market and the target groups, providing modern diagnostic and rapid intervention solutions for agricultural and industrial machinery. New technologies will allow a more accurate analysis of the condition of the equipment and a more efficient planning of the works, thus contributing to the reduction of reaction times and the increase in the quality of the services offered.

The anticipated impact of the project is significant. In the short term, an increase in turnover, a reduction in operational costs and an improvement in customer satisfaction are expected. In the long term, the implementation of digital solutions will lead to the consolidation of the company's position on the market, to

the attraction of new partnerships and to the development of an integrated digital ecosystem, capable of ensuring the sustainability and competitiveness of the company in the field of industrial maintenance.

6. IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS (PROGRESS AND INTERNAL MECHANISMS)

Currently, the digitalisation project implemented by LECOIMPEX SERV S.R.L. is at an advanced stage of the preparation and procurement phase, the advertising and documentation activities being already completed, and the suppliers selected. The actual launch of the procedures is conditional on the clarification of some administrative aspects related to the change in the VAT rate, but the overall implementation process is proceeding according to initial planning, without major delays or significant bottlenecks. The beneficiary appreciates that the objectives of the project are perfectly achievable in the current context and that, once the acquisitions are completed, the first tangible results will appear quickly, materialised in increasing the productivity and efficiency of technical interventions.

The degree of achievement of the objectives is currently being assessed at the level of procedural progress, as the core activities (procurement and deployment of equipment and software) are not yet fully completed. However, the structure of the project and the way the team is organised indicate a high probability of fully achieving the planned indicators. The beneficiary is confident that the investments made will lead to a significant increase in operational capacity, to the improvement of internal communication flows and to the reduction of intervention costs, as provided for in the financing documentation.

The beneficiary's perception of the chances of success is positive, being supported by the rigorous management of the project. The efficient collaboration with the external consultant and the permanent communication with the Managing Authority contributed to avoiding bottlenecks and quickly clarifying administrative requirements. In this context, the company estimates that all planned activities can be carried out within the set deadline, and the final results will exceed the initial targets, thanks to the complete integration of the IT systems and the direct involvement of the internal team.

The main challenges identified so far are related to the complexity of administrative procedures and the need to adapt quickly to legislative changes (such as VAT adjustments), which can temporarily lead to delays in implementation. There was also a slight pressure in the planning of procurement activities, in particular due to the short deadlines for clarifying bids and validating documentation. These difficulties are managed through careful monitoring of the timetable and constant communication between the beneficiary, consultants and the contracting authority.

In order to prevent possible delays and ensure that the planned indicators are achieved, the company has adopted a series of proactive measures. These include flexible planning of activities, maintaining permanent contact with selected suppliers and regularly updating the implementation schedule. The beneficiary demonstrated the ability to adapt the procurement plan according to the context and to identify alternative solutions when some components were not eligible, financing them from its own sources in order to preserve the coherence of the process.

Regarding the project's potential to meet the needs of the target groups, the company believes that digitalisation will have a major impact on maintenance activities and on the way of interacting with customers. The introduction of digital diagnostic equipment and ERP applications will allow a much faster reaction to requests, a real-time analysis of faults and an increase in the quality of the services offered. In addition, the benefits will also extend to internal staff, who will have access to modern tools and training, which will contribute to increasing the competence and stability of the team.

The beneficiary's expectations regarding the final impact of the project are clearly positive. In the short term, the company anticipates a visible efficiency of maintenance activities and an improvement in communication between the team and customers. In the medium term, it expects to increase turnover, reduce operational costs and attract new contracts, due to increased credibility in the market. In perspective, digitalisation will lead to a profound transformation of the way the company operates, creating the premises for the development of a fully integrated digital ecosystem, based on automation, data analysis and personalised services. Overall, the project is perceived as an essential investment in the sustainable development of the organisation and in strengthening its role in the local economy.

7. IMPACT ON BENEFICIARIES AND THE COMMUNITY

The anticipated impact of the digitalisation project implemented by LECOIMPEX SERV S.R.L. is significant, both at the level of the company and at the level of the local community. The beneficiary estimates that, by modernising the IT infrastructure and integrating digital technologies into maintenance activities, there will be a profound transformation of the way of working, with direct effects on productivity, competitiveness and quality of the services offered.

Digitalisation will help to increase the digitalisation of the business environment in the region, for example by having an effect on other small and medium-sized enterprises operating in similar fields. By implementing ERP systems, Business Intelligence modules and digital diagnostic equipment, the company will demonstrate the concrete benefits of the transition to automated processes and intelligent data management. At the same time, the project will support the strengthening of digital skills at the level of employees, contributing to the creation of a modern organisational culture, focused on efficiency and innovation.

At the local level, the beneficiary anticipates a series of concrete changes, visible shortly after the completion of the implementation. The digitisation of the diagnostic process will considerably reduce intervention times, allowing a faster reaction to customer requests and better planning of the works. The communication between the team and the customers will be greatly improved, thanks to the integrated information systems, which will lead to an increase in the satisfaction of the direct beneficiaries of the services offered. In addition, the use of modern diagnostic equipment and specialised software applications will lead to greater accuracy in identifying technical problems, reducing the risk of errors and implicitly the associated costs.

In the medium and long term, the project is expected to generate a positive economic impact on the company and the community. Increasing operational efficiency and service quality will help strengthen the company's position in the market and attract new customers, which will lead to an increase in turnover. At the same time, by creating new jobs and developing the skills of the staff, the project will bring economic and social benefits at the local level, supporting the maintenance of the qualified workforce in the region. Indirectly, the project will stimulate collaborations between companies and encourage the expansion of economic networks based on innovation and digitalisation.

In terms of the broader impact on the economic environment, the company estimates that digitalisation will contribute to increasing the competitiveness of the SME sector in the area. With its example, LECOIMPEX SERV S.R.L. demonstrates that the adoption of modern technologies can lead to process optimisation and cost reduction, without compromising the quality of services. This approach has the potential to inspire other firms to invest in digital solutions and adopt similar streamlining models, thus accelerating the regional digital transformation process.

The risks identified by the beneficiary regarding the achievement of these expectations are minor, but still existing, in particular due to possible administrative delays and the complexity of procurement procedures. Another factor that could influence the pace of implementation is the availability of a digitally skilled workforce, given the need for training and adaptation to new technologies. However, the company expressed confidence that these barriers can be managed effectively through careful planning, continued collaboration with trusted suppliers and consultants, and active management involvement at all stages of the project.

The impact of the project is perceived as sustainable, contributing not only to the development of the company, but also to the transformation of the local economic environment into a more competitive one, digitised and adapted to the requirements of the modern market. The beneficiary believes that the investment will have long-lasting positive effects, by creating a solid digital infrastructure, forming a competent team and strengthening the confidence of customers and partners in the company's ability to offer modern and efficient services.

8. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INTERVENTION (PRELIMINARY COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS)

The beneficiary's perception regarding the efficiency of the intervention and the cost-benefit ratio is positive, and it is appreciated that the investments made through the project bring a significant gain in relation to the

administrative effort and the allocated resources. LECOIMPEX SERV S.R.L. believes that, although the application and implementation process was complex and required constant involvement from management, the expected results fully justify the costs and time invested. The company treated the digitisation project not only as a one-off financing opportunity, but as a strategic investment in the modernisation and professionalisation of its activity.

The indirect costs associated with the project, such as employee training, adaptation of the internal infrastructure and collaboration with the external consultant, were perceived as natural and necessary to ensure a coherent implementation. The beneficiary appreciated the support provided by the consultant in managing the administrative and reporting aspects, considering that this partnership contributed to the smooth running of the project. Staff training is also seen as a long-term investment that will generate sustainable benefits, helping to strengthen internal skills and adapt quickly to new digital technologies.

In terms of the profitability of the intervention, the company estimates that the project will bring clear economic benefits, by increasing productivity, reducing working times and optimising internal flows. The digitisation of the diagnostic activity and the integration of IT systems will lead to a decrease in operational costs and an increase in the efficiency of processes, aspects that will be directly reflected in the company's profitability. In the medium term, the beneficiary expects an increase in turnover, as a result of the possibility of taking over more complex works and offering higher quality services. At the same time, the investments made will allow for better planning of interventions, efficient management of resources and a significant reduction in losses.

The beneficiary does not perceive the costs of the project as disproportionate to the anticipated benefits. Although there were ineligible expenses incurred from own funds, especially for the acquisition of software licenses that were not financed, these additional costs were consciously assumed, precisely to ensure the coherence and full functionality of the implemented digital system. From this perspective, the company considers that the cost-benefit ratio is favourable, and the economic and operational advantages obtained fully compensate for the investments made.

However, the beneficiary considers that in order to optimise the cost-benefit ratio in future calls, it would be necessary to make administrative procedures more flexible and simplify the process of updating documentation, especially in the context of legislative or technical changes that have occurred along the way. The company also recommends the introduction of more flexible mechanisms that allow the adaptation of technical specifications to the rapid developments of the IT market, as well as a more flexible approach to the eligibility of certain complementary software components.

The effectiveness of the intervention is perceived as high, and the project is considered a good investment capable of producing long-term economic, operational and organisational results. The beneficiary LECOIMPEX SERV S.R.L. appreciates that digitalisation is not just a technological solution, but a transformation process that has already contributed to the modernisation of the company and will continue to generate sustainable benefits, strengthening its position on the market and creating the premises for competitive and sustainable development.

9. CONTRIBUTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL OBJECTIVES

⇒ Equal opportunities and gender

LECOIMPEX SERV SRL respects and will continue to respect the principles of equal opportunities and gender, both in its current activity and during the implementation of the project. Fundamental values such as equity, diversity, respect and equal treatment between women and men are promoted within the organisation, in accordance with the national and European legislation in force.

Concrete measures integrated into the project include:

- Developing flexible work and parental leave policies that support both male and female employees in family responsibilities;
- Constantly informing employees about the rights and benefits of paternity leave;

- Preventing discrimination against women in employment, especially those with children or from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- Use of gender-neutral language in all recruitment announcements and promotional materials;
- Promoting diversity by ensuring a balanced gender representation within the team;
- Periodic remuneration analysis to identify and eliminate possible pay gaps between women and men with similar duties;
- Providing equal opportunities for training, development and promotion, regardless of gender;
- Implementing mentoring and coaching programmes that support the career development of all employees;
- Promoting women in decision-making and leadership positions to encourage balanced representation in leadership positions.

All these measures contribute to the creation of a fair organisational climate, based on the recognition of competences, not on gender criteria.

⇒ **Non-discriminatory**

LECOIMPEX SERV SRL is committed to applying the principle of non-discrimination at all stages of the project, from recruitment and procurement to the implementation of activities and personnel selection.

The measures adopted include:

- Internal policies and procedures prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex, age, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, or social affiliation;
- Ensuring equal opportunities in the recruitment and promotion of staff, based on professional qualifications and competences;
- Total transparency in the selection process for the project team, without discrimination on personal criteria;
- Open and inclusive communication, using announcements and information channels accessible to all;
- Promoting diversity and inclusion within the work team so that it reflects the diversity of the community;
- Training and awareness on preventing discrimination, respecting human rights and building an organisational culture based on mutual respect;
- Equal opportunities for professional development and equitable access to benefits for all employees.

Throughout the duration of the project, the provisions of Ordinance no. 137/2000 on the prevention and sanctioning of all forms of discrimination will be observed.

⇒ **Accessibility for people with disabilities**

In compliance with the provisions of Law no. 448/2006 on the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities, LECOIMPEX SERV SRL ensures equal access for persons with disabilities to all project activities and to the company's infrastructure.

The measures adopted include:

- Adapting workspaces by installing access ramps and removing physical obstacles;
- Ensuring access to parking spaces and common spaces for all people;
- Transmission of information and documentation in accessible formats (readable text, audio, video);
- The IT equipment purchased through the project will comply with the accessibility requirements and will also be able to be used by people with disabilities;

- Purchase of Braille keyboards and computer voice applications to support the visually impaired.

Through these measures, the company ensures that all people, regardless of disability, have equal access to digital opportunities, services and resources.

⇒ **Sustainability – The Polluter Pays Principle**

LECOIMPEX SERV SRL complies with the provisions of GEO no. 195/2005 on environmental protection and applies the "polluter pays" principle, assuming responsibility for the environmental impact.

The measures include:

- Concluding a contract with an authorised operator for the selective collection and recycling of waste generated during the implementation of the project;
- Selection of suppliers and equipment that comply with environmental and energy efficiency criteria;
- Preventing pollution and reducing waste resulting from digitisation activities;
- Repairing any damage to the environment and restoring the initial conditions.

⇒ **Efficient use of resources**

The project promotes the responsible use of natural and energy resources, by:

- Procurement of energy-efficient IT equipment, compliant with ENERGY STAR standards and eco-design requirements (Directive 2009/125/EC);
- Preference for products with a long lifespan, recyclable components and spare parts available for at least 2 years;
- Compliance with the European directives on the restriction of hazardous substances (EU 2011/65) and e-waste management (EU 2012/19);
- Promoting the circular economy by refurbishing and reusing IT equipment where possible.

⇒ **'Do no significant harm to the environment' (DNSH) principle**

LECOIMPEX SERV SRL complies with the DNSH principle, according to Regulation (EU) no. 852/2020, ensuring that the project activities do not produce significant negative effects on the environment.

The application of the DNSH principle involves:

- Energy efficiency – the use of low-energy digital technologies;
- E-waste reduction – selective collection and recycling contracts;
- Pollution prevention – control of emissions and noise generated by equipment;
- Respect for social and labour rights, ensuring that digitalisation supports social inclusion and does not generate inequalities.

Through these measures, the project contributes to the European Union's sustainability goals and the transition to a green, efficient and inclusive economy.

10. CONCLUSIONS

The digitalisation project carried out by LECOIMPEX SERV S.R.L. is a relevant example of a well-founded intervention adapted to the real needs of a small and medium-sized enterprise in the field of technical services. The project was conceived with a clear vision on the modernisation of the activity, being treated not as a simple financing opportunity, but as an essential step in the process of organisational transformation and strengthening competitiveness.

The main purpose of the investment – increasing productivity and efficiency through the integration of digital technologies – proved to be in full line with the objectives of the Centre Regional Programme, Priority 2, aimed at the digitalisation of SMEs. By implementing digital diagnostic equipment, modernising the IT infrastructure and introducing ERP and Business Intelligence software systems, the company has laid the foundations for a sustainable process of operational optimisation and professionalisation of the services offered.

The implementation process was carried out in an organised way, under the coordination of careful management and a dedicated team, supported by the expertise of an external consultant. Effective communication with the Managing Authority and transparent collaboration with suppliers helped to maintain the planned pace and avoid major delays, despite the administrative challenges related to the change in the VAT rate. These aspects highlight a solid project management capacity, based on planning, adaptability and constant involvement from management.

The beneficiary demonstrated an integrated vision of the digitisation process, treating each technological, human and procedural component as part of a unitary system. The implementation of IT equipment and applications is correlated with the development of human resources, through the training of existing staff and the hiring of new specialists. In this way, the project is not limited to technological acquisitions but contributes to strengthening internal skills and creating an organisational environment oriented towards innovation and performance.

The anticipated impact of the project is significant and with multiple effects. In the short term, an increase in operational efficiency, a reduction in intervention times and an improvement in the quality of services are expected. In the medium and long term, digitalisation will lead to an increase in turnover, an expansion of the customer portfolio and the consolidation of the company's position on the regional market. At the same time, the positive effects will also be felt at the community level, by stimulating the demand for modern services, creating new jobs and encouraging other companies to adopt similar modernisation solutions.

The cost-benefit analysis reveals a favourable relationship between the investments made and the expected results. Although the company has borne the costs of some ineligible components from its own funds, these additional expenses are perceived as justified, as they ensure the coherence and efficiency of the entire digitisation process. The beneficiary considers that the administrative effort and resources involved are proportional to the economic and operational advantages obtained. In addition, the experience gained in project management has contributed to strengthening the company's institutional capacity and creating a solid foundation for future investments.

The LECOIMPEX SERV S.R.L. project also illustrates a good practice in terms of sustainability. Choosing reliable suppliers, fully integrating IT systems and carefully planning post-implementation activities guarantee that long-term benefits are maintained.

From the perspective of the lessons learned, the company's experience underlines the importance of a clear digitalisation plan, based on the analysis of real needs and correlated with the company's development strategy. The direct involvement of management, close collaboration with consultants and rigorous planning of activities were determining factors of success. At the same time, the beneficiary recommends that future calls for funding include more flexible mechanisms for technological adaptation, simplification of administrative procedures and promotion of continuous methodological support for beneficiaries.

The digitalisation project of LECOIMPEX SERV S.R.L. demonstrates a coherent implementation, a strategic vision and an efficient use of resources. The intervention directly contributes to the digital transformation of the regional business environment, to the professionalisation of human resources and to the increase of economic competitiveness.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

The beneficiary of the project, LECOIMPEX SERV S.R.L., formulated a series of recommendations based on the experience gained in the implementation process, in order to improve the future calls for projects aimed at the digitisation of SMEs. One of the main suggestions concerns **the need to adapt the financing guides to the realities and pace of evolution of the IT market**. The company believes that the current mechanisms should be more flexible, in order to allow the rapid updating of technical specifications and eligible equipment according to the innovations that occurred between the time of project submission and implementation. In the same sense, it is recommended to simplify the procedures for updating documentation, so that administrative changes can be made more quickly, without the risk of delays in the progress of projects.

Another important recommendation refers to optimising **the relationship process between beneficiaries and consultants**. LECOIMPEX SERV S.R.L. highlighted the fact that more careful planning of activities

and balanced distribution of tasks between the consultant and the beneficiary would reduce the pressure related to deadlines and prevent situations in which documents are signed urgently. In this regard, it would be useful for future calls to include project management support components and practical training in the administration of European funds, so that beneficiaries are better prepared to manage the complex requirements of the programmes.

The company also emphasises the importance **of maintaining a constant and efficient dialogue with the Managing Authority and project officers**. Their support has been important for understanding the requirements and avoiding administrative bottlenecks, and this good practice should be strengthened and extended.

In terms of improving the efficiency of implementation, the company suggests **introducing more streamlined reporting and monitoring mechanisms, focused on results and performance indicators, not just procedural compliance**. This would reduce the volume of documentation and allow beneficiaries to focus more on the actual implementation activities. It is also recommended to extend the training and advisory activities provided before and during implementation, in particular in the field of public procurement and administrative risk management.

Overall, LECOIMPEX SERV S.R.L. believes that **future calls should maintain the strategic direction of the digitisation of SMEs, but with a more pragmatic approach and more adapted to the constantly changing technological context**. Flexibility, clarity and continuous methodological support are the key elements identified by the beneficiary to increase the efficiency of the programmes and to ensure a real impact on the economic competitiveness and sustainable development of enterprises.

6.1 **6.1 Case Study Interview Minute – LECOIMPEX SERV S.R.L.**

Date: 22 August 2025

Location: online

Participants: project administrator/manager LECOIMPEX SERV S.R.L. and representatives of the Association formed by CIVITTA Strategy & Consulting SA (leader) and Lideea Development Actions SRL (partner)

Context and purpose of the discussions

The discussion aimed to document the beneficiary's experience regarding the preparation, implementation and first results of the digitisation project funded through the Centre Regional Programme. The main objective of the interview was to collect relevant information on how the call for projects responded to the real needs of the company, the difficulties encountered in the implementation process and the aspects that can be improved in the future.

The interview was structured on the main components of the project – the need and logic of the intervention, implementation, impact and lessons learned – aiming to highlight the good practices and challenges encountered along the way.

General description of the company and the rationale for the project

The company operates in the field of maintenance services for agricultural machinery and industrial equipment, having a consolidated experience on the market. The activity is based on fast and precise technical interventions, in which reaction time and diagnostic accuracy are critical factors for customer satisfaction and market competitiveness.

The digitalisation project was initiated out of the need to improve these processes, by adopting modern equipment and technological solutions that allow real-time diagnostics, a more accurate analysis of the condition of the equipment and a significant reduction in intervention times.

The funding provided the opportunity to modernise the IT infrastructure and introduce advanced digital tools to support the expansion and professionalisation of the company's activity.

Objectives and logic of the intervention

The main goal of the project is to increase productivity and operational efficiency by integrating digital technologies into the maintenance activity. The specific objectives aim to:

- Increasing the accuracy and speed of diagnosis of agricultural and industrial machinery;
- Optimisation of work processes and reduction of operational costs;
- Improving communication and data flow between the team and customers;
- Strengthening the competitive position on the market by offering modern and fast services.

The project was designed so that the digitisation of the diagnostic process is the basis for automating and streamlining the entire activity.

Investment structure and implementation

The investments made through the project cover three main directions:

- **Digital equipment and diagnostic sensors**, intended for field work;
- **IT infrastructure** – servers, storage equipment and high-performance computers for data analysis and management;
- **Specialised software** – ERP applications and complementary modules for Business Intelligence, intended for the analysis and integration of internal flows.

Some of the software components were not considered eligible, but the company decided to purchase them from its own funds, in order to maintain the coherence of the digitisation process. This decision reflects a strategic approach, whereby the project was seen as an integrated process, not just as a one-off funding opportunity.

At the time of the interview, the project was in the implementation phase, with the advertising and procurement preparation activities being completed. The suppliers have been selected, and the launch of the procedures is conditional on the clarification of the administrative aspects related to the change in the VAT rate.

Project management and relationship with the actors involved

The project management is carried out in collaboration with an external consultant, who manages administrative activities and reporting to the Managing Authority. The beneficiary monitors and validates all documents, actively involved in the decision-making process.

Although the documentation and application process were complex, the collaboration with the consultant was efficient and the support provided was essential for the smooth running of the procedural stages. However, the need for better planning in the relationship with consultants was signalled, in order to avoid crowding deadlines and signing documents urgently.

The relationship with the Managing Authority and the project officer was appreciated as very good, the communication being constant and clear. The officer in charge provides assistance in interpreting requirements and supports compliance with deadlines, which contributes to the smoothness of implementation.

Relationship with suppliers and internal success factors

A key element of the implementation is the stable and trusting relationship with equipment suppliers. The beneficiary has selected established partners on the market, capable of ensuring quality products and services in the long term.

This collaboration proved to be beneficial, as suppliers understood the particularities of EU-funded projects and promptly responded to requests for clarification or updating of offers. In some cases, the bids have been redone several times to comply with the requirements of the project, without this affecting the contractual relationship.

Internally, the implementation is supported by efficient management and an engaged team, which ensures the continuity of the current activity and the gradual adaptation to new technologies.

Human Resources and Internal Development

At the time of submitting the project, the company had four employees, their number being temporarily reduced to three. After the completion of the acquisitions, it is planned to reintegrate the team and hire at least two new specialists, as well as to organise training sessions for the use of the digital equipment and software implemented.

Digitalisation is perceived as an opportunity not only technological, but also to strengthen internal skills and increase the company's operational capacity.

Estimated impact of the project

The implementation of the project is expected to lead to a significant increase in operational efficiency and the quality of the services offered. The new equipment and applications will allow fast and accurate diagnostics of machines, reduction of intervention times and more efficient planning of works.

In the short and medium term, it is anticipated:

- increasing turnover by undertaking complex works;
- reduction of operational costs;
- increasing customer satisfaction;
- strengthening credibility in the market and attracting new collaborations.

In the long term, the project will contribute to strengthening the company's position in the field of maintenance services, by creating an integrated digital ecosystem, based on data accuracy and automated processes.

Efficiency of the intervention and sustainability of the investment

The beneficiary considers that the cost-benefit ratio of the project is favourable. Although there were additional investments incurred from own sources (for ineligible software licenses), the economic and operational advantages obtained outweigh these costs.

Digitalisation brings tangible benefits – increased productivity, decreased working times, optimisation of flows – but also intangible benefits, such as professionalisation of services, customer loyalty and strengthening of relationships with suppliers.

By choosing reliable suppliers and fully integrating IT systems, the company provides the prerequisites for high investment sustainability.

Lessons learned and recommendations

From the implementation experience, the company has learned a number of relevant lessons:

- the importance of a clear digitisation plan, correlated with the real needs of the activity;
- the need for direct management involvement in all stages of the project;
- rigorous planning of the relationship with the consultant and allocating adequate time for documentation;
- the inclusion in future guides of more flexible mechanisms for adapting technical specifications to rapid developments in the IT market;
- simplifying the procedures for updating documentation and the administrative process.

The company believes that digitalisation should not be seen only as an IT component, but as an integrative process, which combines fixed infrastructure (servers, website, software) with portable equipment and mobile tools used in the field.

Conclusions

The analysed project is part of the objectives of the Centre Regional Programme and demonstrates a strategic approach to digital transformation. The beneficiary managed to efficiently manage the implementation process, maintaining a good collaboration with the consultants, suppliers and authorities involved.

Although there have been administrative delays and ineligible expenses assumed, the anticipated impact of the project is significant, both operationally and commercially. Digitalisation offers the company the opportunity to increase competitiveness, expand its customer portfolio and ensure long-term sustainable development.

7. 7. CASE STUDY NO. 7 – DIGITALISATION OF TUTTO MOBILI SRL

Evaluation title: Theme 2 "*Evaluation of interventions targeting digitalisation activities for the benefit of citizens, businesses and governments"*

Project name: Digitisation of TUTTO MOBILI SRL

Beneficiary: TUTTO MOBILI SRL., SMIS code 324699

Investment location: Miercurea Ciuc Municipality, Harghita County

1. OBJECT AND PURPOSE OF THE CASE STUDY

This case study aims to support the evaluation process of the interventions funded by the Centre Region Regional Programme, under Theme 2 "Evaluation of interventions aimed at digitalisation activities for the benefit of citizens, companies and governments".

The analyses and findings presented contribute to the formulation of the answers to the evaluation questions and allow comparisons to be made between the different types of interventions, investments and beneficiaries. These comparisons highlight the mechanisms by which available resources and those created within projects are used and capitalised, as well as how these factors, together with the elements of context, influence the implementation and results of interventions.

The case study also contributes to the assessment of the extent to which digitalisation interventions respond to the needs of target groups, provide effective solutions to socio-economic challenges in the Centre Region and support the relevant strategies and objectives of the programme.

The selection of the project analysed in this case study was carried out according to the criteria established in the evaluation methodology, taking into account **the type of intervention**, **the level of complexity** and **the stage of implementation**. The project is part of the sample **dedicated to SMEs,** thus ensuring the diversity of types of beneficiaries and the possibility of analysing how different institutional and economic contexts influence the digitisation process.

The methodology used combines the documentary analysis based on the project documents provided by the beneficiary **(the funding application, the digitisation plan)** with the interview with **the project manager**, ensuring a complete understanding of how the interventions contribute to the development and modernisation of the region through digitisation.

2. PRESENTATION OF THE CASE STUDY

Project name	**Digitalisation of TUTTO MOBILI SRL**
SMIS Code	324699
Location	Miercurea Ciuc Municipality
Benefit	TUTTO MOBILI SRL
Priority / Specific objective	P2. A digital region RSO1.2_maximising the benefits of digitalisation for the benefit of citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities RSO1.4_Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship

Project call/ Operation	Action 2.2 Digital Enterprises for an Advanced Economy – Smart Specialisation Sectors
Implementation period (start/end)	31.03.2025 – 30.03.2027
Project budget	253,654.37 total law 228,288.93 lei non-reimbursable
Project context **Project justification**	TUTTO MOBILI SRL operates in the field of furniture production, a sector that, although traditional, is in an accelerated process of digital transformation at European level. The internal analysis highlighted a number of significant weaknesses: a low degree of digitisation, the lack of a corporate website, as well as limited digital skills among employees – only 41.67% of them use computers with internet access for business purposes. In this context, the proposed project responds directly to the need for digital modernisation and streamlining of the company's internal processes, correlating at the same time with the funding opportunity offered through the Centre Regional Programme, Priority 1 – A Digital Region, Action 2.2 – Digital Enterprises for an Advanced Economy. The implementation of the project contributes to the achievement of several objectives of the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI 2019), namely criteria 1, 5, 6, 7, 10 and 11. The project falls under the smart specialisation area 'Forestry, Woodworking and Furniture', part of the European strategic value chain for the low-carbon industry. Through the proposed investments, the company will reduce resource consumption, increase productivity and adopt energy-efficient IT solutions, thus contributing to the sustainable development goals General objective of the project The general objective of the project is the sustainable and inclusive economic growth of TUTTO MOBILI SRL by accelerating the digitisation process, by: • reorganisation of production processes and business model with the help of IT equipment and applications; • developing a website with advanced features, including an online store; • increasing digital skills for a minimum of 3 employees; • purchase of energy-efficient IT equipment; • creating a website accessible to visually impaired people. Specific objectives of the project Increasing visibility and market share by developing a web page with advanced functions and an online store for taking chipboard and countertop cutting orders. Innovative digital tools will be implemented, including 3D modelling and rendering software for realistic product presentation to customers. A task management module will be implemented for the efficient organisation of projects and monitoring of resources (time, budget, personnel). Reducing environmental impact by purchasing energy-efficient IT equipment and cutting optimisation software, which will help reduce waste and make more efficient use of materials.

	Developing green and digital skills by training an employee in the field of environmental protection, for sustainable resource management, collection and recycling of electronic waste resulting from the company's activity.

3. OBJECTIVES AND LOGIC OF THE INTERVENTION

The goal of the project carried out by TUTTO MOBILI SRL is to increase the degree of digitalisation within the company by implementing modern IT solutions and by training the digital skills of employees. The company operates in the field of custom and small series furniture production, and digitalisation was seen as a necessary step to optimise design, production and management activities. The project aims to improve productivity, reduce internal bureaucracy, integrate workflows and create a professional online presence, being in full line with the objectives of Priority 2 – "A Digital Region". Through the proposed actions, the initiative contributes to the transformation of a traditional company into a modern enterprise, oriented towards innovation, efficiency and competitiveness.

The interventions were selected starting from the concrete needs identified in the company's daily activity. Among the main challenges were the lack of efficient integration between work processes, the limited use of design applications and the difficulty of scaling them up due to high costs. In this context, the launch of the call for funding was a real opportunity to continue the modernisation process started previously. The investments were prioritised in order to ensure a correlation between the technical and training components: the development of an ERP system for production and order management, the purchase of 3D software for design, the creation of a modern web page, with promotion and digital communication functions, as well as the training of employees for the efficient use of these tools. This integrated approach allowed for a coherent implementation, in which each activity contributes to achieving the overall goal of the project.

The project was designed and adapted according to the real needs of a small company in the furniture production sector, where digitalisation is essential for development but difficult to achieve without external support. The target group consists of employees involved in production and order management activities, who will work on a regular basis with the new IT systems. Some of them showed a reluctance to change at first, but as they were involved in the training process and understood the advantages of the introduced technologies, the degree of acceptance increased. Thus, the intervention was not only adapted to the specifics of the company, but also implemented in a gradual way, which took into account the level of existing digital skills.

At the time of the interview, the project was at an advanced stage of implementation. Most of the activities were completed, and the purchases were made according to plan. The website was functional, to be completed with visual elements and additional content, and the development of the ERP system and staff training were underway. The implementation plan was followed without changes, and the monitoring of the activities was carried out through internal reports and automatic notifications. The first results are already visible, the IT systems are working, the website contributes to increasing visibility, and the staff is gradually integrating the new tools into the current activity.

Therefore, the project is in the process of achieving its objectives and continues to contribute to the digitisation of the activity of TUTTO MOBILI SRL. Although the implementation is not yet completed, the progress made so far confirms the relevance and logic of the intervention, as well as its alignment with the objectives of Priority 2 on developing a digital, efficient and sustainable economy.

4. PROJECT COMPONENTS

Activities	Activity I – Activities carried out before submitting the application **Elaboration of the Digital Maturity Audit Report**, which assessed the company's level of digitalisation and identified investment needs.

	Elaboration of the financing application and the digitisation plan, through which the objectives, types of acquisitions and expected results of the project were established. Activity II – Activities carried out after the submission of the funding application **Making the Core Investment** **Acquired intangible assets:** 1 **PipOp** licence – software for optimising the cutting of raw materials (chipboard, countertops), to reduce waste and streamline the production process. 2 PIPER **licenses** – 3D modelling and rendering software for realistic views of furniture. 1 **extension of the existing PIPER** – with updated databases (Egger, Kronospan, etc.) for the correct selection of materials. 1 **ERP application** – for project organisation, time tracking, resource and budget management, with Business Intelligence reports. 1 **modern website, with advanced functions and online store**, for taking orders and promoting the company's products. **Acquired tangible assets:** 5 **laptops** – for production, design and management staff. 2 **desktops** – for administrative and accounting activities. 7 **tablets** – used for communication, order monitoring and use of ERP applications. 5 **printers** – (1 monochrome multifunction, 1 colour, 3 monochrome laser, 1 matrix). 1 **professional camera** – for product photography, implementation documentation and promotion activities. **Activities related to the core investment** **Preparation of procurement documentation** and conclusion of contracts with suppliers. **Monitoring of procurement contracts** and implementation management. **Reporting on the progress of the project** and preparing reimbursement, pre-financing and payment requests. **Elaboration of the Digital Maturity Audit Report at the end of the project** A post-implementation audit report **will be drawn up**, which will assess the degree of digitalisation achieved and the impact of investments on the company's activity. **Staff training** **Training and results:** **2 employees (company administrators)** – will participate in courses organised by **FIT EDIH – Centre Region**, for the use of purchased digital tools, completed with a **training certificate (minimum 12 hours).** **1 employee (company secretary)** – will attend an **environmental auditor course**, for the development of green skills and sustainable management of electronic resources and waste. **Information and publicity activity** **A3 poster** placed at the company's headquarters.

	Stickers applied to the purchased equipment (minimum 3 pieces). **Posting project information** on the company's website and social media. **Press releases** at the beginning and end of the project. **Photo portfolio** documenting the stages of implementation.
Expected results	Expected results of the project The implementation of the digitalisation project at TUTTO MOBILI SRL will lead to the achievement of concrete, measurable results, which directly contribute to increasing the degree of digitalisation, efficiency and competitiveness of the company. Technical and Investment Results Implementation of a fully functional ERP system, capable of integrating all operational processes – order, production, resource and budget management. Purchase and use of five types of specialised software applications, which will improve the design, management and sales activity (PipOp, PIPER 3D, PIPER extension, ERP, website with online store). Development of a modern website, with advanced functions and online store, through which customers can view products, request offers and submit orders online, contributing to increasing the visibility of the company. Creating a modern IT infrastructure, by equipping the company with high-performance equipment (laptops, desktops, tablets, printers and cameras), which support the daily digital activity. Obtaining a digital product portfolio, resulting from the use of 3D modelling software and camera, used for marketing and commercial presentation purposes. Human resources and skills results Training of 3 employees of the company in the field of digital and green skills: 2 administrators trained in the use of digital tools (through FIT EDIH – Centre Region). 1 qualified employee as an environmental auditor, for the integration of the principles of sustainability and circular economy. Increasing the acceptance and use of digital solutions among staff, by familiarising them with the new technologies implemented. Organisational performance results Reduce lead times and errors in order and production management by automating processes and integrating workflows. Increased visibility and market share, through a strengthened online presence and a digital order taking channel. Optimising resource consumption and reducing waste through the use of Flow Optimisation Software (PipOp), contributing to environmental protection. Improving internal communication and decision-making, through quick access to integrated data and performance reports generated by the ERP system. Documentation and compliance results Post-implementation digital maturity audit report, which will assess the progress made and the degree of digitisation achieved. Visibility materials made according to the communication requirements: poster, stickers applied on equipment, press releases and photo portfolio of the project.
Target group	Project target group

	The target group of the project is represented by all the persons and entities that will directly or indirectly benefit from the implementation of investments in digitalisation, respectively from the use of IT equipment, specialised software and new work tools introduced within TUTTO MOBILI SRL. Direct target group The direct beneficiaries of the project are the employees of TUTTO MOBILI SRL, directly involved in production, design, administration and management activities. They will be able to use the implemented equipment, computer applications and digital systems on a regular basis, and their level of professional competence will be significantly improved by participating in training programmes. In total, the project aims to train three people, selected from the existing team, as follows: Two administrators of the company, who will participate in training programmes offered by FIT EDIH – Centre Region, for the use and administration of the acquired digital tools (ERP software, 3D applications, website and online platforms). They will acquire practical skills on the organisation of digital processes, the management of IT resources and the integration of new applications into the company's activity. An employee from the administrative department (secretariat), who will follow an environmental auditor course, obtaining green skills on sustainable resource management, e-waste recycling and the application of circular economy principles. Indirect target group In addition to employees, the project also has positive effects on a larger indirect target group of the company's customers, employees and business partners, as well as the local community. TUTTO MOBILI SRL customers will benefit from a modern website, with advanced functions and an online store, through which they can consult offers, send orders, request prices or view products through 3D simulations. Thus, the customer experience is significantly improved, and the relationship between the company and the consumer becomes faster, more transparent and more interactive. The company's partners and suppliers will interact with a modernised enterprise, which uses an integrated ERP system to manage orders, materials and production flows, which reduces response times and optimises collaboration. The local community and the regional economic sector will indirectly benefit from the results of the project, as the modernisation of the firm contributes to the development of a more digitised and sustainable local economy, creating opportunities for collaboration, innovation and market expansion.

5. PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTATION

At the time of the interview, the TUTTO MOBILI SRL project was at an **advanced stage of implementation**, with most of the activities carried out according to plan. The planned purchases have been made, and the website has already been completed and put into operation, with only minor adjustments to the visual content and presentation of the products. The ERP system and employee training activities were underway, and monitoring was constantly carried out, through internal reports and automatic notifications on deadlines.

The degree of achievement of the objectives is high, compared to the current stage. The company has managed to implement the essential components of digitalisation: IT infrastructure, specialised software and online communication and sales platform. The intermediate results are already visible, the IT systems are working, and employees have started to integrate them into their daily work.

The beneficiary's perception of the chances of achieving the objectives is positive. The company's representative believes that the project will be completed successfully, as all activities have evolved as planned, and the benefits are already felt by improving the workflow and increasing the company's visibility. In the current context, the proposed objectives are considered realistic and perfectly achievable, provided that the repayment process is carried out without further delay.

The challenges identified are mainly related to the bureaucracy related to the settlement stages. The Managing Authority frequently requested additional clarifications, even for low-value acquisitions, which generated delays and pressure on the company's financial flow. In order to cope with these difficulties, the company had to use its own resources and, in some cases, resort to bank loans to temporarily cover expenses, an aspect that affected the liquidity plan.

Regarding **the preventive measures**, TUTTO MOBILI SRL maintained a strict planning of activities, constantly monitored the deadlines and maintained a constant dialogue with the financing authority. The project team regularly reviewed the internal calendar, updated procurement plans and ensured effective communication with suppliers, thus avoiding delays in the delivery of equipment and software licenses.

From the perspective **of relevance for the target group, the** project responds directly to the needs of employees, who benefit from modern digital tools, but also to customers, who have access to improved services through the website and online applications. The digitisation of internal processes has already contributed to a better organisation of the activity, to the reduction of execution times and to a more efficient communication between departments.

The anticipated impact on the organisation is significant. In the short term, the company expects an increase in efficiency and productivity, a reduction in errors and a more efficient management of orders and resources. In the long term, the project will strengthen the company's image in the online environment, improve relationships with customers and partners and contribute to increasing competitiveness on the regional market. On the social front, the effects will be felt by developing employees' digital skills and stimulating the transition to a more sustainable and digitised economy.

In conclusion, the progress of the implementation is consistent, without major deviations from the initial plan. Although the administrative process is arduous, the beneficiary has demonstrated a good ability to adapt and manage the project efficiently. It is anticipated that the set objectives will be fully achieved, and the effects on the company and the community will be sustainable and visible both economically and organisationally.

6. IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS (PROGRESS AND INTERNAL MECHANISMS)

The TUTTO MOBILI SRL project is being carried out according to the initial plan, without significant deviations from the established schedule. The implementation has progressed at the planned pace, and so far, the main planned activities have been carried out. The purchases of equipment and software have been completed, and the website is functional, to be completed with additional content elements. The ERP system is being implemented, and the training activities are to be started within the period established by the work schedule.

The training activities provided for in the project aim to develop employees' digital skills and train an employee in the field of environmental protection, in order to obtain the environmental auditor certificate. Initially, the digital training was to be provided by **FIT EDIH – European Centre for Digital Innovation – Centre Region**, the only Centre of this type in the region, but the beneficiary stated that, after contacting the Centre, **she was informed that it could not organise the trainings for the company's employees**. This situation has led to uncertainty about how to carry out the training activities, as the applicant's guide does not provide sufficient clarification on the alternatives in case the regional EDIH cannot deliver the trainings. Currently, the company is analysing solutions to comply with the requirements of the project and ensure that the trainings are carried out according to the assumed objectives.

Monitoring of the implementation is carried out through an **internal progress tracking system**, based on periodic reports, work meetings and deadline checks. The beneficiary uses digital tools that send **automatic notifications** on the status of activities, thus ensuring effective coordination between the project team and the suppliers involved.

The communication with **the Managing Authority** was considered fair and professional, but the **bureaucratic process is cumbersome**, especially at the reimbursement stage. Numerous clarifications were requested, including for low-value purchases, which led to delays in the settlement process. To avoid bottlenecks, the company used its own funds and credit lines to temporarily cover eligible expenses, managing to maintain the pace of implementation without affecting the overall schedule.

The main obstacles identified were of an **administrative and financial** nature, related to the high volume of documentation required and the duration of the verification process. There were no technical, logistical or human resources problems. The beneficiary highlighted that the working procedures in MySMIS are complicated and require additional effort for uploading documents and managing clarifications, but the implementation team has adapted through rigorous planning and careful verification of each step.

As **adaptation measures**, the company maintained an updated internal calendar, organised regular coordination meetings and maintained permanent contact with suppliers and the financing authority. These actions helped to avoid delays and maintain consistency in implementation.

Among **the positive elements** that supported the implementation are **the direct involvement of the company's management**, the administrative experience gained in project management and **the ability to adapt to the requirements of the programme.** The beneficiary stressed that good planning, correctness in preparing documentation and constant communication with partners were essential for the smooth running of the activities.

As for **the horizontal principles**, they have been really integrated into the project. The company has purchased energy-efficient IT equipment, helping to reduce resource consumption, and the future training of an employee as an environmental auditor will support the application of green and sustainable practices. The developed website is accessible to people with visual impairments, and the selection and training process respects the principles of equal opportunities and non-discrimination.

In conclusion, the implementation process is **stable and well managed**, and the project is progressing according to plan. Although administrative difficulties and uncertainties regarding the collaboration with the EDIH Centre were encountered, they did not affect the overall pace of development. The beneficiary has demonstrated the ability to adapt, involve and professionalism, ensuring the necessary premises for the full achievement of the proposed objectives.

7. IMPACT ON BENEFICIARIES AND THE COMMUNITY

Although the TUTTO MOBILI SRL project is not yet completed, the anticipated impact of the investments made so far is consistent, with clear effects on the company's activity and the local environment in which it operates. The beneficiary stressed that the results are already being felt, especially in the way of internal organisation, in streamlining processes and in improving communication with customers.

Internally, the main impact is related to the **digitisation process of current activities**. The implementation of dedicated IT equipment and software applications allowed the optimisation of workflows and the reduction of manual, repetitive tasks. In particular, the introduction of the ERP system contributes to an **integrated management of activities**, centralising production, accounting and sales data. This reduces information processing time, improves order traceability, and eliminates errors previously generated by lack of automation.

Another notable effect is the increase in **transparency and managerial control**. The beneficiary explained that the new system provides a complete picture of the activity, allowing decisions to be made based on real and up-to-date data. At the same time, digitalisation has led to smoother communication between departments and more efficient use of resources, which is reflected in better planning of activities and a reduction in operational costs.

Externally, **the creation and operation of the website** had a significant impact on the company's visibility. The website has become an essential platform for presenting products, taking requests and promoting the services offered. The beneficiary said that, since the launch of the page, customer interest has increased, and interaction with them is more direct and faster. Through the website, customers can request information, submit orders or obtain details about debiting and design services, which contributes to increasing their satisfaction and loyalty.

From an economic perspective, digitalisation brings the premises for a **significant increase in competitiveness**. The implementation of modern technologies will allow the company to reduce downtime, optimise material consumption and improve production planning. The beneficiary believes that, through the efficient use of the new tools, the company will be able to manage several projects in parallel, with lower costs and with a constant quality of products. In the medium term, **an increase in turnover is anticipated**, due both to internal efficiency and to the attraction of a larger number of customers through the consolidated online presence.

The project also has a **positive impact at community and regional level**. The modernisation of a local enterprise in the furniture sector contributes to boosting the economy in the area, providing an example of good practice for other small and medium-sized companies interested in digitalisation. The company becomes a model of adaptation to current market trends, demonstrating that digitalisation can be a real factor of economic development and sustainability.

At the same time, investments have a social **and environmental impact component**. The purchase of energy-efficient IT equipment contributes to reducing resource consumption and limiting the carbon footprint. The planned training of an employee as an environmental auditor will ensure the application of environmentally friendly practices, such as responsible waste management and sustainable use of materials. Thus, the project not only modernises the company, but also promotes a **sustainability-oriented organisational culture**.

However, the beneficiary acknowledged the existence of risks **and barriers** that may influence the pace of achieving the expected impact. First of all, **the employee training process** is experiencing difficulties, as FIT EDIH – European Centre for Digital Innovation – Centre Region, designated for training, **has communicated that it cannot organise the planned** trainings. This situation has generated uncertainties about how the company will be able to provide the digital training provided for in the project. Also, **the initial reluctance of some employees towards the use of new technologies** remains a challenge, although the beneficiary showed that the adaptation process is evolving positively, as the practical advantages of digitalisation are understood.

Despite these obstacles, the overall outlook is optimistic. The beneficiary appreciates that the impact of the project will be **profound and long-lasting**, and the results will be consolidated over time, once the training activities are completed and the digital systems are fully integrated. The company estimates that, in the long term, digitalisation will contribute to **increasing economic performance, job stability and improving customer relations**, becoming a pillar of competitiveness in the furniture industry in the region.

In conclusion, the TUTTO MOBILI SRL project represents a **major stage in the company's digital transformation**, with a positive impact on both the organisation and the local community. Even if it is not yet finalised, the partial results confirm the correct direction of investments, and the anticipated benefits – increased efficiency, cost reduction, increased visibility and promotion of sustainability – outline a real and sustainable transformation of the way the company operates.

8. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INTERVENTION (PRELIMINARY COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS)

The beneficiary of the TUTTO MOBILI SRL project considers that **the cost-benefit ratio is, overall, balanced and justified**, given the results obtained and the positive impact of the investments on the company's activity. The digitisation of internal processes and the modernisation of the IT infrastructure have led to a visible increase in operational efficiency, and the costs incurred are considered proportional to the anticipated benefits.

However, the company's representative stressed that **the administrative effort is high**, and **the process of reimbursing expenses is difficult and time-consuming**. Excessive bureaucracy, multiple requests for clarifications and the long duration of verifications affect the company's financial flow and put pressure on internal resources. In that context, the undertaking had to resort to **bank loans to pay suppliers**, since late repayments did not allow the costs to be covered in time.

The beneficiary mentioned that **the interest on the loans is not eligible for settlement**, which generates **additional financial losses**. It therefore considered that the settlement mechanism should be **simplified**, in particular for low-value purchases, so that the administrative effort does not exceed the benefit obtained

from the investment. She pointed out that for SMEs, this can become a significant barrier, as administrative and financial resources are limited.

Regarding the **indirect costs**, the company highlighted the expenses related to internal training, adaptation of the digital infrastructure and the consultancy necessary for implementation. These costs are not considered unjustified, but they represent an additional burden for a small company. Despite these efforts, the beneficiary appreciates that **the return on investment will be good**, as digitisation contributes to reducing operational costs, shortening execution times and improving decision-making.

In the medium term, significant savings are anticipated **by integrating processes into a unitary ERP system**, which will allow for more efficient inventory management, reduction of material losses and better production planning. Also, the implementation of specialised software applications will lead to **increased accuracy in design and execution**, which will translate into increased customer satisfaction and consolidation of market position.

The beneficiary does not consider that **the costs are too high in relation to the benefits of the project** but stressed that **the bureaucratic effort and time consumed** can diminish the positive perception of the effectiveness of the intervention. In his view, the main difficulties stem from administrative procedures, not direct investment costs.

Compared to other funding programmes, the beneficiary appreciated that **the Regional Programme – Priority 2 is well structured and adapted to the needs of SMEs**, but **the volume of documentation and the complexity of reporting** are higher than in other calls. She highlighted that the MySMIS platform is more difficult to use than previous versions, leading to delays in the submission of documents and frequent system errors.

Overall, the beneficiary considers that **the intervention is effective**, and the investments made will generate **clear and sustainable economic benefits**: reducing internal costs, increasing productivity, improving the relationship with customers and strengthening the company's image. However, she stressed that, for small companies, the success of digitisation projects depends not only on the quality of the investment, but also on the **ability of the administrative system to support beneficiaries quickly and efficiently**.

9. CONTRIBUTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL OBJECTIVES

The company's representative stressed that the horizontal principles are fully respected and applied in a real way within the project, being part of the company's organisational culture. These values, equality, diversity, sustainability and accessibility are treated as fundamental elements of the way we work, not just as administrative obligations.

However, it was noted that, for smaller projects, the bureaucratic requirements and the volume of documentation required to demonstrate compliance with these principles may be disproportionate to the value of the investment. However, the application of these principles contributes significantly to ensuring a fair, ethical and sustainable implementation, while strengthening the image of a modern and responsible enterprise.

Equal opportunities and gender equality

The project promotes the principle of equal opportunities and gender both at the level of the implementation team and within the activities carried out. Women hold important roles in project coordination and management, reflecting balanced participation and equal access to decision-making positions. Also, one of the employees follows the training course for the acquisition of green skills, which contributes to professional development and the promotion of gender equality in the business environment.

The company supports an organisational culture based on professionalism, competence and merit, ensuring equal conditions for all employees, without discrimination based on gender, age, religion, social affiliation or personal beliefs.

Non-discriminatory

The principle of non-discrimination is observed throughout the implementation of the project. All procedures for the selection of suppliers, collaborators and service providers were carried out on the basis of transparent, objective and neutral criteria.

The company applies a policy of equal treatment for all individuals and entities involved, ensuring free and equitable access to the opportunities offered by the project. A climate based on mutual respect, open communication and collaboration is promoted within the organisation, in which each person is valued exclusively in terms of professional skills.

Accessibility for people with disabilities

The project integrates concrete measures to ensure digital accessibility for people with disabilities. The website developed within the project is designed to comply with the principles of web accessibility and to be easy to use by visually impaired people.

The web page includes essential functionalities such as alternative text to images, logical structure of the content, adequate visual contrast, the possibility of enlarging the text and the implementation of a **Text-to-Speech system**, which allows the audio playback of the content. Through these solutions, people with visual impairments can navigate effectively, understand content, and access information without barriers.

Accessibility is treated as a **fundamental right** of all citizens and as an expression of the company's ethical and social values, not just as a technical requirement. The beneficiary confirmed that the website already complies with accessibility standards, demonstrating a genuine commitment to digital inclusion and equal access to information.

Sustainable development and environmental protection (DNSH principle)

The project is implemented in compliance with the principles of sustainable development and the DNSH concept. The investments made, especially the purchases of IT equipment, were oriented towards energy-efficient products and compliant with European standards on environmental protection.

At the same time, it is planned to train an employee in the field of environmental protection, in order to acquire green skills and contribute to the implementation of responsible resource management and e-waste recycling practices. These actions support the reduction of the carbon footprint and the promotion of an economic model based on efficiency and sustainability.

The DNSH analysis attached to the Digitisation Plan confirms that the project does not generate negative effects on the environment and contributes to improving the environmental performance of the enterprise.

Resource efficiency and climate resilience

The project supports resource efficiency and the transition to clean and sustainable technologies. The equipment purchased has a low energy consumption and an extended lifespan, helping to reduce waste and lower operational costs.

The company applies internal measures for the selective collection and recycling of electronic waste, as well as for optimising the use of natural resources. Thus, the project strengthens the company's ability to adapt to the requirements of a green economy and the effects of climate change.

Social inclusion and demographic change

Although the project does not directly target demographic changes, its impact on the local community is positive. By maintaining existing jobs and developing the digital skills of staff, the project contributes to increasing the stability and attractiveness of the local business environment.

At the same time, the digitisation of activities and the promotion of a modern work environment support the integration of young specialists and the adaptation of the workforce to the requirements of an economy based on innovation and technology.

10. CONCLUSIONS

The project "Digitisation of TUTTO MOBILI SRL" represents a solid and relevant initiative to modernise a small company in the furniture industry, which is amid a digital transformation process. Although the project **is not yet completed**, the degree of implementation is advanced, and the results obtained so far confirm

that the intervention really responds to the needs identified at the company level and contributes to the objectives of the Centre Regional Programme – Priority 2 "A Digital Region".

So far, most of the technical and administrative activities have been completed. The purchases of computer equipment and applications have been completed according to schedule, the digital infrastructure has been installed and functional, and the company's website has already been launched, with only minor content additions to follow. The ERP system is undergoing full integration and is one of the essential components of the company's digital transformation, as it will allow the centralisation of all workflows from order management to production planning, cost control and real-time performance reporting.

These elements demonstrate a **coherent and well-coordinated implementation**, with partial results confirming the gradual achievement of the proposed objectives. The digital benefits are already visible: better internal organisation, reduced errors and increased transparency in the workflow. The website and online tools bring more visibility to the company and an openness to customers, strengthening the company's professional image in an increasingly competitive market.

From a human resources perspective, **the development of digital and green skills** is an important component of the project. The training activities have not yet started, but are planned for the next period, aiming at the training of three employees: two administrators in the field of the use of purchased digital tools and one employee in the field of environmental protection, who will obtain the certification of environmental auditor. The company's representative explained that, although the digital training had to be provided by FIT EDIH – Centre Region, the Centre communicated that it could not hold these sessions, which generated uncertainties regarding the concrete way of implementing the training activities. However, the company is in the process of identifying alternative solutions, so that it fully complies with its obligations assumed by the project.

These challenges did not affect the overall dynamics of implementation but only highlighted **the need for better methodological clarification** at the level of the guidelines and the role of EDIH Centres. So far, all other activities have been carried out as planned, without significant deviations from the schedule, and communication with the funding authority has been constant and constructive, even if the settlement process involved a significant administrative effort.

From an economic and operational **point of view**, the project has a clearly outlined positive impact. The digitisation of internal processes leads to a significant increase in organisational efficiency and a reduction in production costs. The implementation of specialised software, such as PipOp and PIPER, optimises the consumption of raw materials and improves the quality of finished products. The ERP system, which is in the final phase of integration, will ensure better management of time, inventory and budgets, directly contributing to reducing losses and increasing profitability.

The purchased IT equipment provides the necessary infrastructure for the efficient performance of digital activities. At the same time, the modern website and online store contribute to increasing the company's visibility, diversifying sales channels and improving the relationship with customers. This online promotion component is essential for adapting to the requirements of the current market and expanding the customer base beyond the local area.

On the social level, **the impact of the project is felt both on the employees and on the local community**. Employees benefit from a modernised work environment, based on new technologies, which simplifies their work and increases their efficiency. The initial reluctance to change, mentioned by the beneficiary, was gradually overcome through involvement and internal communication. At the community level, the modernisation of a local company active in a traditional sector is an example of good practice, with the potential to multiply positive effects for other SMEs in the region as well.

Administratively, the project is professionally managed, but the high bureaucracy and complexity of the reporting process are a constant challenge. The company's representative pointed out that the large number of clarifications and the long duration of verifications can temporarily affect the financial flow, and it is necessary to use own resources to maintain the pace of implementation. However, the project team was able to ensure rigorous monitoring and consistent planning, avoiding significant delays.

The preliminary **cost-benefit** ratio is favourable. The investments made are justified by the economic and organisational effects obtained: production efficiency, increased productivity and improved customer

services. In the medium and long term, the company anticipates a consolidation of its position on the market, an increase in turnover and a reduction in operating costs. The profitability is supported by the sustainability of the investments, which combines digitalisation with environmental protection and social responsibility measures.

In terms **of horizontal principles**, the project provides a positive example of real and balanced implementation. Equal opportunities, digital accessibility, environmental protection and resource efficiency have been concretely integrated into the project activities. The website is adapted for the visually impaired, the equipment is energy efficient, and the selection of suppliers and training participants complies with the principles of transparency and non-discrimination.

In conclusion, although the **project is not yet completed**, the progress made confirms the relevance of the intervention and the beneficiary's ability to efficiently manage the allocated resources. TUTTO MOBILI SRL has demonstrated a strategic approach, adaptability and professionalism, managing to overcome bureaucratic challenges and maintain the consistency of implementation. It is anticipated that once the training activities are completed and the ERP system fully integrated, the project will generate a significant impact on the internal efficiency, economic competitiveness and sustainability of the company.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the experience gained in the implementation of the project, the beneficiary formulated several recommendations aimed at improving the conduct of future calls and increasing the administrative efficiency of the funding process.

Firstly, the need **to simplify valuation and reimbursement procedures**, in particular for low-value direct procurement, was stressed. The current administrative requirements involve a high volume of documents and numerous clarifications, even for minor procurements, which makes it difficult to carry out projects and generates significant delays in the settlement of expenses.

The beneficiary also recommended **introducing the granting of an advance of at least 50%,** without requesting bank guarantees. Such a measure would reduce the financial pressure on small businesses, which frequently face cash bottlenecks due to long repayment terms. In the absence of sufficient pre-financing, companies are often forced to contract loans, and the related interest is not eligible for settlement, which causes financial losses and affects the implementation flow.

Another recommendation refers to **clarifying the role of EDIH centres** and establishing clear procedures for collaboration between them and project beneficiaries. In this case, the regional Centre could not organise the planned trainings, and the applicant's guide does not provide alternative solutions. A better definition of the tasks of these centres would make it possible to avoid bottlenecks related to vocational training activities.

At the same time, it was proposed **to optimise the MySMIS platform**, which in its current form is more cumbersome and less intuitive than previous versions. The beneficiary suggested improving the interface and simplifying the steps for uploading documents, as technical errors and multiple completion requirements consume additional time and can lead to unjustified delays.

Overall, the beneficiary noted that, although the framework of the programme is well built and adapted to the needs of SMEs, **the complexity of the administrative requirements is disproportionate to the value of investments** for small projects. It is therefore recommended to reduce the bureaucratic burden and adapt the reporting volume to the size of the project.

Last but not least, the importance **of training and methodological support** for beneficiaries was highlighted, especially in the preparation phase of funding applications. Simplified guides, examples of good practices and online training sessions would contribute to a better understanding of the requirements and increase the quality of the submitted projects.

In conclusion, the main recommended directions for improving future calls are aimed at:

- simplifying bureaucracy and reducing processing times;
- the granting of an advance of more than 30% as it is currently and without guarantees;

- clarifying the role of EDIH and diversifying training options;
- improving the functionality of the MySMIS platform;
- linking funding programmes at national and regional level;
- creating a mechanism of continuous support for beneficiaries.

These adjustments would facilitate companies' access to finance, accelerate the digitalisation process and increase the efficiency and impact of EU-backed investments.

7.1 Case Study Interview Minute – TUTTO MOBILI SRL

Date: October 15, 2025

Location: online

Participants: project administrator/manager TUTTO MOBILI SRL and representatives of the Association formed by CIVITTA Strategy & Consulting SA (leader) and Lideea Development Actions SRL (partner)

General context of the discussion

The discussion took place within the documentation process related to the case study on the implementation of digitisation projects financed by Priority 2, with the aim of objectively capturing the entire journey – from the identification of the need at the level of the organisation, to the current stage of implementation and the difficulties encountered along the way.

Objectives and logic of the intervention

The main goal of the project is to increase the degree of digitalisation within the company, by implementing modern IT solutions and by training employees' digital skills. The company operates in the field of custom and small series furniture production, and digitalisation is a natural step towards optimising design, production and management activities.

The company's representative explained that the need for digitisation was identified based on the daily challenges in the work process: the lack of efficient integration between activities, the limited use of design applications and the impossibility of expanding them due to high costs. The launch of the call for funding was perceived as a real opportunity to continue the modernisation process started previously, through the acquisition of design software and the development of the ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) system.

The project is fully in line with the objectives of the 'A Digital Region' priority, as it aims to improve productivity, reduce internal bureaucracy, integrate workflows and create a professional online presence through a dedicated webpage.

Structure and content of the project

The company's representative described the structure of the project as a balanced one, with activities that complement each other:

- acquisition and development of software applications, for the ERP system and product design;
- the development of a modern website, with the role of promotion and digital communication;
- training of employees in the field of digital skills, a component that contributes to the sustainability of the investment.

The targeted technologies are custom ERP applications; 3D design software and web presentation platforms. The direct beneficiaries are the employees involved in production and order management, who will work on a regular basis with the new IT systems.

The beneficiary mentioned that, at first, some of the employees were reluctant to change, but as they understood the benefits of the new tools, the degree of acceptance increased. The training activities provided for in the project aim to develop employees' digital skills and train an employee in the field of environmental protection, to obtain the environmental auditor certificate. Initially, the digital training was to be provided by FIT EDIH – European Centre for Digital Innovation – Centre Region, the only Centre of this

type in the region, but the beneficiary stated that, after contacting the Centre, **she was informed that it could not organise the trainings for the company's employees**. This situation has led to uncertainty about how to carry out the training activities, as the applicant's guide does not provide sufficient clarification on the alternatives in case the regional EDIH cannot deliver the trainings. Currently, the company is analysing solutions to comply with the requirements of the project and ensure that the trainings are carried out according to the assumed objectives.

Implementation progress

At the time of the interview, the project was at an advanced stage of implementation. Most of the activities were completed and the acquisitions had been made according to plan. The website was already up and running and needed to be fine-tuned, particularly in terms of visual content and product presentation.

The development of the ERP system and the training of employees were underway. The implementation plan was followed without changes, and monitoring was carried out through internal reports and automatic notifications announcing deadlines.

The intermediate results are visible: the IT systems are working, the website is already helping to increase the company's visibility, and the staff is starting to integrate digital tools into their current work.

The only significant difficulty mentioned relates to the bureaucracy at the repayment stage. The Managing Authority frequently requested additional clarifications, even for minor acquisitions, which delayed the settlement process and affected the company's financial flow.

Implementation management

The implementation of the project was carried out according to the initial plan, without major deviations. The beneficiary highlighted the role of rigorous planning and constant involvement from the project team. Internal monitoring was carried out through periodic reports, work discussions and checks on the execution deadlines.

The communication with the Managing Authority was assessed as fair, even if the bureaucratic process is considered too detailed. From the perspective of internal resources, the team gradually adapted to the new requirements and understood the advantages that digitalisation brings to daily activity

Estimated impact on the company

Digitalisation has a visible impact on the company's activity. By launching the website, the company expects an increase in sales volume and the consolidation of its image in the online environment. The implementation of the ERP system will allow a better organisation of production, reduction of errors and efficient management of resources.

Internally, digitalisation contributes to optimising processes, eliminating wasted time and increasing transparency. In addition, the company expects an improvement in customer and partner relationships through faster and clearer communication.

The only risk identified is the temporary reluctance of some of the employees, but the company's management intends to overcome this obstacle through constant training and motivation.

Effectiveness of the intervention – cost-benefit analysis

The beneficiary considers that the cost-benefit ratio is balanced. Investments in high-performance software and modern equipment are justified by the efficiency and accuracy they bring to internal processes. However, a problematic aspect is the delay in repayments, which forces the company to resort to loans to pay suppliers.

The interest on these loans cannot be settled, which generates financial losses. In the beneficiary's opinion, the settlement mechanism should be simplified, especially for direct low-value purchases.

In the long term, the company estimates clear economic benefits: cost reduction, increased productivity, data integration and improved managerial decisions.

Lessons learned and recommendations

From the experience gained, the beneficiary stressed the importance of detailed planning, correct documentation and constant collaboration with the financing authority. Among the recommendations made are:

- simplifying assessment and reimbursement procedures;
- introducing an advance of at least 50%, without bank guarantees, to reduce the financial pressure on beneficiaries;
- clarifying the role of EDIH centres and improving communication between the institutions involved;
- optimisation of the MySMIS platform, which in its current form is more cumbersome than the previous version.

Regarding the horizontal principles (equal opportunities, DNSH, non-discrimination), the company has applied them properly, although, for small projects, the complexity of the requirements seems disproportionate.

If she were to resume the project, the representative said that she would implement it in the same way, considering that the structure and approach were appropriate. The only aspect on which he would reflect is the workload assumed, given the administrative complexity of the process.

Conclusions

The project is a successful example of digitisation of a company in the manufacturing sector. The activities were carried out according to plan, and the results obtained confirm the achievement of the proposed objectives. Although the bureaucracy and the slow pace of repayments generated challenges, the beneficiary managed the project with professionalism, seriousness and a good ability to adapt.

8. 8. CASE STUDY NO. 8 – DIGITISATION OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESS IN LOCAL PUBLIC AUTHORITIES IN ALBA COUNTY

Evaluation title: Theme 2 "*Evaluation of interventions targeting digitalisation activities for the benefit of citizens, businesses and governments"*

Project name: DIGITISATION OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESS IN LOCAL PUBLIC AUTHORITIES IN ALBA COUNTY

Beneficiary: ALBA COUNTY, SMIS code 340918

Location of the investment: Alba Iulia Municipality, Alba County

1. OBJECT AND PURPOSE OF THE CASE STUDY

This case study aims to support the evaluation process of the interventions funded by the Centre Region Regional Programme, under Theme 2 "Evaluation of interventions aimed at digitalisation activities for the benefit of citizens, companies and governments". The analyses and findings presented contribute to the formulation of the answers to the evaluation questions and allow comparisons to be made between the different types of interventions, investments and beneficiaries. These comparisons highlight the mechanisms by which available resources and those created within projects are used and capitalised, as well as how these factors, together with the elements of context, influence the implementation and results of interventions.

The case study also contributes to the assessment of the extent to which digitalisation interventions respond to the needs of target groups, provide effective solutions to socio-economic challenges in the Centre Region and support the relevant strategies and objectives of the programme.

The selection of the project analysed in this case study was carried out according to the criteria established in the evaluation methodology, considering the type of intervention, the level of complexity and the type of applicant. The project is part of the sample **dedicated to LPAs,** thus ensuring the diversity of types of beneficiaries and the possibility of analysing how different institutional and economic contexts influence the digitisation process.

The methodology used combines the documentary analysis based on the project documents provided by the beneficiary **(the funding application)** with the interview with **the LPA representative**, ensuring a complete understanding of how the interventions contribute to the development and modernisation of the region through digitalisation.

2. PRESENTATION OF THE CASE STUDY

Project name	**Digitisation of the administrative process in local public authorities in Alba County**
SMIS Code	340918
Location	Alba Iulia Municipality, Alba County
Benefit	Alba County
Priority / Specific objective	P2. A digital region RSO1.2_Capitalising the benefits of digitalisation for the benefit of citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities
Project call/ Operation	Intervention 2.1.1 Digital communities for a smart region – digital solutions
Implementation period (start/end)	-
Project budget	Total non-reimbursable budget 2,167,965.8
Project context **Project justification**	The Alba County Council initiated the digitisation project in response to a series of structural and operational limitations common to local public administrations in Romania but amplified by the complexity of the county role. The main problem identified was the difficulty of building internally, coherently and professionally, an integrated vision of digital transformation, in the absence of specialised technical skills, a clear methodological process and a dedicated institutional role of "digital architect". In the absence of a structured approach, digitalisation risked remaining fragmented, with each department having a limited perspective on its own needs, without an overall understanding of institutional flows. This fragmentation was accentuated by the pressure of current activities, which consume administrative resources and reduce the institution's ability to build strategically in the medium and long term. In this context, CJ Alba concluded that the correct design of digitalisation cannot be carried out exclusively from within, without a professional technical assessment and without an integrated vision of the processes. A fundamental principle that underpinned the design of the project was the absolute priority given to the digitisation of internal processes. The Alba County Council considered that digital services for citizens cannot function efficiently in the absence of complete digitisation of internal workflows. The digitisation of the front office, in the absence of a digitised back office, would have generated bottlenecks, delays and inconsistencies, turning online solutions into a "façade" with no real impact. Consequently, the project was built starting from the

	digitisation of the internal document circuit, approval processes and interdepartmental collaboration. Following the internal analysis and digitisation audit, CJ Alba identified three critical areas of intervention: (1) the receipt and registration of documents through fully digital flows, with traceability and the elimination of paper support; (2) electronic signature and internal document circuit, through the use of qualified electronic signature, automatic approval flows and digital archiving; and (3) digitisation of internal work and collaboration between departments, including task management, shared documents and institutional processes. These components were considered fundamental for the sustainable functioning of any digital solution for citizens. On this internal basis, the project was extended to an external dimension, oriented towards citizens and the economic environment. CJ Alba has assumed a clear and measurable objective: at least 10% of the county's population to effectively use the digital solutions developed. This objective reflects the shift from an exclusively administrative to a user-centric one, with a real impact on everyday life. In this regard, two modules with major impact were defined: a module of digital identity and completely online interaction with public institutions, respectively a module dedicated to tourism, designed as a county digital ecosystem for promotion and interaction between citizens, tourists and service providers. The project was also conceived as a coordination tool at county level, through the involvement of the administrative-territorial units in the territory. The initial vision of CJ Alba was to create a common digital ecosystem for all 70 TAUs in the county, based on standardisation, interoperability and common architectures. Although this vision faced administrative and leadership limits at the local level, it remained an important strategic landmark, and the final partnership, even in a restricted formula, was built on functional and assumed bases. The context of the project is defined by the need for a real digital transformation, which goes beyond one-off IT acquisitions and approaches digitalisation as a lasting institutional process. The CJ Alba project responds both to the needs of internal efficiency and inter-institutional interoperability, as well as to the objectives of modernising the relationship with citizens, reducing bureaucracy and increasing access to digital public services, in a logic of sustainable development at county level.

3. OBJECTIVES AND LOGIC OF THE INTERVENTION

The digitisation project initiated by the Alba County Council has as its general objective to achieve an integrated digital transformation, which will go beyond punctual or fragmented approaches and lead to the real modernisation of the functioning of the county administration. The intervention aims to increase internal efficiency, improve the quality of public services and strengthen the relationship between the administration, citizens and the economic environment, through the coherent and sustainable use of digital solutions. Digitalisation is approached as a long-term institutional process, which involves the reorganisation of workflows, the standardisation of processes and the development of a common digital infrastructure, capable of supporting interoperability and the further expansion of solutions.

A central objective of the project is the complete digitisation of the internal processes of the Alba County Council, considered the foundation of any form of digital interaction with citizens. The intervention starts from the premise that online public services cannot function efficiently in the absence of a digitised back-office, in which documents are managed exclusively electronically, approval routes are automated, and responsibilities are clearly defined and monitorable in real time. Therefore, the project aims to eliminate

paper circuits and implement a unitary electronic document management system, covering their entire life cycle, from registration and classification to signing, approval and digital archiving. This transformation is intended to reduce processing times, reduce the risk of human error, and ensure full transparency and traceability of administrative work.

In close connection with the digitisation of internal flows, the project aims to modernise the way officials and management of the institution work, by introducing the qualified electronic signature and automatic validation and approval flows. This approach aims to increase the speed of decision-making, reduce the physical movement of documents and improve collaboration between departments. The digitisation of internal activity is seen not only as a technological change, but as a transformation of the organisational culture, which allows for better prioritisation of tasks, a more efficient distribution of resources and a clearer coordination of institutional activities.

On this internal basis, the logic of the intervention aims to extend digitalisation to the area of interaction with citizens and the economic environment, through the development of digital public services accessible entirely online. The project aims for citizens to be able to interact with the Alba County Council and partner institutions without unnecessary physical travel, through a single access point that allows the submission of applications, the transmission of documents, the making of payments and the tracking of the status of applications. An explicitly assumed objective is to achieve a minimum level of use of these services, namely the active involvement of at least 10% of the population of Alba County, an indicator that reflects the project's orientation towards real impact and effective use, not only towards the formal existence of digital platforms.

Another objective of the intervention is the development of a digital component dedicated to tourism, considered strategic for Alba County. Through this module, the County Council aims to create a digital ecosystem that integrates tourist information, service providers, events and routes, facilitating the direct interaction between supply and demand. This component goes beyond the role of a simple information platform and is designed as an economic development tool, which increases the visibility of the county, supports the local private environment and capitalises on the existing tourism potential through modern digital channels.

The logic of the intervention also includes a territorial dimension and interinstitutional cooperation. The project was designed as a first step towards building a county digital ecosystem, in which the Alba County Council would play a role of coordination and standardisation, and the partner administrative-territorial units would benefit from common architectures, unitary flows and technical interoperability. Although the initial partnership was constituted in a restricted formula, the strategic objective remains to create scalable solutions, which can later be extended to other TAUs, depending on their administrative capacity and level of digital maturity.

Overall, the intervention is built on a progressive and integrated logic, which starts from the internal reorganisation of the administration, continues with the digitisation of the relationship with the citizen and the economic environment and aims, in the medium and long term, to consolidate a common county digital infrastructure. Digitalisation is treated as a tool for institutional modernisation, increasing efficiency and improving the quality of public services, with a focus on sustainability, interoperability and real impact on the community.

4. PROJECT COMPONENTS

Activities	The activities related to the digitisation project of the Alba County Council were designed in a phased, integrated and oriented logic both towards strengthening the internal capacity of the county administration and towards the development of digital public services with a real impact on citizens and local communities. Even if the project is in the evaluation stage and is not yet contracted, the analysis of the documentation and its path allow a clear outline of the planned activities and their role in achieving the assumed objectives.

	A first category of activities aims at **the preparation and technical substantiation of the intervention**. This includes conducting the external digitisation audit, which had the role of assessing the existing hardware and software infrastructure, analysing the applications used by different departments and identifying the gaps and real needs of the institution. The audit formed the basis for defining the proposed digital architecture and selecting the priority modules, representing a key diagnostic and strategic planning activity. In addition, internal analysis activities were carried out, correlation of the audit conclusions with the existing administrative processes and integration of technical recommendations into a coherent project, adapted to the specifics of Alba County. A second category of activities is dedicated **to the digitisation of the internal processes of the Alba County Council**. These activities aim to implement electronic document management solutions, digitise document entry flows, classify and automatically distribute them to the responsible departments, as well as ensure full traceability of requests. In parallel, activities are planned for the introduction of the qualified electronic signature, the configuration of internal approval, validation and digital archiving circuits, as well as the implementation of automatic notifications and work deadlines. A distinct focus is placed on the digitisation of internal collaboration, through task management solutions, interdepartmental workflows, shared documents and collaborative workspaces, considered essential for the efficient functioning of the institution. A third category of activities is geared towards **the development of digital services for citizens and the economic environment**. These include the design and implementation of a digital identity and online interaction module, which would allow the submission of applications, the transmission of documents, the verification of the status of applications, the making of payments and electronic communication with public institutions. The activities related to this module involve integration with the internal systems of CJ Alba and institutional partners, ensuring data security and user authentication, as well as configuring a single access point for citizens. The aim of these activities is to reduce bureaucracy, eliminate unnecessary travel and increase the accessibility of public services. In parallel, the project includes activities dedicated **to the development of the digital tourism module**, considered a strategic tool for the promotion of Alba County. These activities aim to create an integrated digital platform that brings together information on tourist attractions, routes, events, accommodation options and related services, as well as to facilitate interaction between tourists and local service providers. Activities are planned to structure the content, integrate local suppliers, develop interactive functionalities and promote the digital tourism ecosystem, with an impact on both the visibility of the county and the local economy. Another important component of the project is the **cooperation and coordination activities with the partner TAUs**. These include consultations, working meetings, the presentation of digital solutions, their adaptation to local needs and the establishment of interoperability mechanisms between the County Council and the ATUs. The activities had the role of building a functional model of collaboration, ensuring the coherent use of digital solutions and facilitating the access of partner municipalities and cities to standardised digital infrastructures and architectures. In addition, the project provides **for management, coordination and monitoring activities**, aimed at ensuring the coherence of implementation and the achievement of the assumed objectives. These include organising the project team, defining responsibilities, tracking indicators for the use of digital solutions (especially the target of at least 10% of the county's population active users), as well as managing administrative and technical risks. Communication and information activities are also

	envisaged, necessary to increase the adoption of digital solutions among citizens and administrative staff. The project activities are conceived as a coherent whole, in which internal digitalisation, development of services for citizens, inter-institutional cooperation and strategic management support each other. The logic of the activities reflects the vision of CJ Alba on digitalisation as an institutional transformation process, not as a simple implementation of IT solutions, and creates the premises for a sustainable impact at the county level.
Expected results	The expected results of the digitisation project initiated by the Alba County Council are conceived as direct and indirect effects of a profound institutional transformation, which aims both at modernising the internal functioning of the county administration and at significantly improving the relationship between public institutions, citizens and the economic environment. These results are correlated with the assumed objectives and reflect the logic of the intervention, which starts from the digitisation of internal processes and leads to functional and effectively used digital public services. A first set of expected results refers to the **internal functioning of the Alba County Council**. The implementation of electronic document management solutions and digital flows will lead to the elimination of the physical circulation of documents between departments, the standardisation of internal procedures and the provision of full traceability of requests and documents. A significant reduction in processing times, a decrease in the risk of human error and an increase in transparency on the status of each document are expected. Officials will be able to work in a unitary, predictable and monitorable system, which will contribute to increasing administrative efficiency and better organising internal work. Another important result is **the modernisation of the decision-making circuit and approval processes**. The introduction of qualified electronic signatures, automatic validation circuits and digital archiving will reduce reliance on physical presence, speed up decision-making and provide a clear, real-time picture of internal flows. The institution's ability to meet legal deadlines, handle large volumes of documents, and respond more quickly to internal and external requests is anticipated. A distinct outcome is **the strengthening of internal collaboration between directorates and departments**. The digitisation of workflows, task management and collaborative workspaces will facilitate cross-departmental cooperation, reduce fragmentation of activities and allow for more efficient coordination of projects and processes. This outcome is essential for the coherent functioning of the institution and for supporting citizen-oriented digital services. At **the level of the relationship with citizens**, the expected results are substantial. The development of the digital identity and online interaction module will allow citizens to submit applications, submit documents, make payments and track the status of applications without physically going to the institutions' headquarters. A significant reduction in bureaucracy, waiting times and costs associated with interacting with the public administration is expected. Access to public services will become fairer, more flexible and more adapted to the real needs of the population. A key result, explicitly assumed within the project, is **the achievement of a level of use of digital solutions of at least 10% of the county's population**. This indicator reflects not only the technical existence of the platforms, but their actual and recurrent use by citizens. Reaching this threshold is likely to validate the relevance and usefulness of the developed solutions and to create the premises for their expansion and scaling over time. For **the economic environment**, the expected results include simplifying the relationship with the public administration, reducing the time it takes to obtain permits

	and documents, increasing the predictability of administrative procedures and facilitating electronic payments and communication. These effects are likely to support local economic activity, reduce administrative costs for firms and contribute to a more favourable investment climate. An important result is **increased interoperability between public institutions**. The digitisation of internal flows and the standardisation of processes will allow the electronic exchange of data and documents between the Alba County Council, partner ATUs and other public institutions. As a direct effect, citizens will no longer have to act as intermediaries between institutions, and the duplication of documents and requests will be significantly reduced. As **regards partner TAUs, the** expected results include access to standardised, interoperable and scalable digital solutions, without the need for large individual investments. The partner municipalities and cities will benefit from common digital infrastructures, unitary procedures and methodological support from the County Council, which will contribute to reducing IT fragmentation at local level and increasing their administrative capacity. A result with economic and social impact is the **development of the digital tourism ecosystem**. The platform dedicated to tourism will increase the visibility of Alba County, will facilitate tourists' access to integrated information and will create a direct promotion channel for local tourism service providers. An increase in the attractiveness of the county, a better capitalisation of the tourist potential and the stimulation of the local economy through digitalisation are expected. At a transversal level, the project will generate **an organisational culture oriented towards digitalisation, data and standardised processes**. Officials will acquire increased digital skills, and the institution will develop the capacity to use the data generated by digital systems for analysis, monitoring and decision-making. This result is essential for the long-term sustainability of the investment and for the further evolution of the county's digital ecosystem. The expected results of the project go beyond the simple technological implementation and aim to transform the way the county administration works and interacts with the community. Through internal efficiency, functional digital public services, inter-institutional partnerships and real use by citizens, the CJ Alba project has the potential to generate a structural and sustainable impact at the county level.
Target group	The target group of the digitisation project initiated by the Alba County Council is made up of several categories of direct and indirect beneficiaries, differently affected by the proposed intervention, depending on their role in the administrative and socio-economic ecosystem of the county. The first target group category is represented by **the employees of the Alba County Council**, respectively the civil servants and contractual staff involved in the internal administrative processes. They will use electronic document management solutions, electronic signature, digital workflows and cross-departmental collaboration tools. The digitisation of internal processes has the effect of reducing repetitive activities, increasing the clarity of responsibilities, improving the traceability of documents and increasing the efficiency of administrative activity. A second target group category is made up of **the employees of the partner local public administrations**, respectively the communes and cities in Alba County involved in the project. This group will benefit from access to standardised and interoperable digital solutions, developed at county level, as well as methodological support in their use. By participating in the project, partner TAUs can reduce the fragmentation of IT solutions and use common digital infrastructures, adapted to local administrative capacity.

	The citizens of Alba County represent a distinct category of target group, being the end users of the developed digital public services. The project gives them the opportunity to interact online with the public administration, submit applications, submit documents, make payments and track the status of applications without having to physically travel to the institutions' headquarters. The use target of at least 10% of the county's population reflects the project's orientation towards effective use and real accessibility. Within this category, a special focus is placed on **vulnerable people**, including the elderly, people with disabilities, people with reduced mobility and residents of rural or remote areas. The digitisation of public services reduces the access barriers generated by distance, mobility or the programme of the institutions, facilitating the relationship of these people with the public administration. **The local economic environment**, consisting of small and medium-sized enterprises, authorised natural persons and other legal entities interacting with the public administration, is another target group category. For this group, the project creates the premises for simplifying administrative procedures, reducing the time it takes to obtain documents and facilitating electronic communication with public institutions. These changes contribute to reducing administrative costs and increasing the predictability of the relationship with public authorities. A distinct category of target group is represented by **actors in the tourism sector**, including tourism service providers, economic operators in the field and tourists. The digital tourism platform allows the promotion of the county's tourism offer, facilitates access to integrated information and supports the interaction between suppliers and users, contributing to capitalising on the local tourism potential. An indirect target group is made up of **other public institutions that collaborate with the Alba County Council**, including decentralised institutions and public services in coordination or partnership. The interoperability of the digital systems developed within the project facilitates the exchange of data and documents, reducing administrative burdens and improving the coherence of inter-institutional processes. The structure of the target group reflects the integrated approach of the project, which aims to improve the functioning of the public administration, facilitate access to public services and support economic and social development at county level.

5. PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTATION

At the time of this case study, the digitisation project initiated by the Alba County Council is not in the implementation stage itself, but in the evaluation phase within Intervention 2.1.1 Digital communities for a smart region – digital solutions, Priority 2 – A digital region. In this context, the progress of the project cannot be analysed from the perspective of the technical results or the implemented deliverables, but from the perspective of the maturity of the design, the preparation of the intervention and the institutional capacity demonstrated up to this stage.

A first level of progress is represented by the crystallisation of the project idea and its transformation into a coherent and structured intervention. Although the need for digitisation has been discussed at the level of the institution for several years, the project has advanced significantly when the Alba County Council carried out an external digitisation audit, which allowed the transition from fragmented approaches to an integrated vision of digital transformation. The completion of the audit and its use as a basis for defining the objectives, solutions and architecture of the project is a major step forward compared to the initial situation.

Another relevant element of progress is the ability of the Alba County Council to prepare the project exclusively with internal resources, without the support of an external consultant. This indicates a high level of administrative maturity and a deep understanding of one's own processes, needs and constraints. The project was built based on an in-depth internal analysis, correlated with the audit conclusions and with the

information obtained from the interaction with IT solution providers, which allowed the definition of a realistic intervention adapted to the county context.

The progress of the project is also reflected by the high level of coherence between the self-assessment carried out by the beneficiary and the outcome of the formal assessment. The Alba County Council estimated a score of 85 points, and the score obtained from the evaluation was 88 points. This small difference indicates a good understanding of the requirements of the guide, the evaluation criteria and the logic of the intervention, as well as the quality of the documentation submitted. In the absence of contracting, this result is a relevant indicator of progress in the submission and evaluation process.

Important progress has also been made in interinstitutional partnerships. Although the initial vision of the Alba County Council was to create a digital ecosystem that would include all 70 ATUs in the county, the project advanced in a realistic formula, based on functional and assumed partnerships. The completion of the partnership agreements with five TAUs, despite the administrative and procedural difficulties associated with the signing process, is a concrete step forward and a necessary condition for the project to enter the implementation phase.

Progress is also visible in clarifying the intervention logic and digitisation priorities. The project was built around a clear principle, namely that the digitisation of services for citizens cannot be achieved without the complete digitisation of internal processes. Identifying the critical areas of intervention, defining the modules with a major impact and setting a usage target of at least 10% of the county's population reflect a mature approach, oriented towards impact and effective use, not just towards the delivery of IT solutions.

Overall, the progress of the project to the present stage is of a strategic, institutional and procedural nature. The Alba County Council has gone through the essential stages of identifying needs, defining objectives, structuring solutions, establishing partnerships and submitting the project in a competitive financing framework. Although the project is not yet contracted, this path provides relevant information for understanding the beneficiary's experience in the submission and evaluation process and constitutes a solid basis for subsequent implementation, in case of obtaining funding.

6. IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS (PROGRESS AND INTERNAL MECHANISMS)

In the case of the digitisation project initiated by the Alba County Council, the implementation process must be understood as an approach in a pre-operational phase, in which the emphasis is placed on defining the methodological framework, clarifying the internal mechanisms and the institutional preparation necessary for a coherent and sustainable implementation. At the time of the case study, the project is not contracted and is in the evaluation stage, which is why the analysed progress mainly concerns the way in which the institution built the premises for implementation, not the actual performance of technical activities.

A central element of the implementation process, as conceived by CJ Alba, is the recognition of internal limits in defining a digitalisation strategy in the absence of a professional and structured framework. The institution explicitly identified the difficulty of public administrations to build a coherent vision of digital transformation from scratch, in the absence of a methodology, a professional technical assessment and specialised skills. In this context, CJ Alba found that, without a structured external approach, each department tends to approach digitalisation fragmented, from a perspective limited to its own activities, which leads to misaligned priorities, disparate solutions and the lack of an integrated digital architecture.

As a mechanism to overcome this limitation, the Alba County Council used the external digitisation audit as a key tool to substantiate the implementation process. The audit functioned not only as a technical diagnostic exercise, but as a decision governance mechanism, providing an overview of the existing infrastructure, gaps and priority directions of intervention. Based on this, the institution managed to overcome the punctual approaches and build an integrated implementation logic, which correlates the technical, organisational and strategic dimensions.

A fundamental principle that structures the implementation process is the priority given to the digitisation of internal flows. CJ Alba treats this component as an "engine" of digital transformation, without which solutions for citizens cannot work efficiently. Consequently, the internal implementation mechanisms are designed starting from the reorganisation of the document circuit, the signature and approval processes and the internal way of working. The identification of the three critical areas – receipt of documents,

signature and internal circuit, respectively collaboration and interdepartmental activity – reflects a systematic approach to the implementation process, in which technology is subordinated to administrative processes and not the other way around.

The implementation process is also supported by internal coordination and decision-making mechanisms, even in the absence of a formal role of "digital architect". CJ Alba compensated for this lack by a clear internal organisation of the project team, by distributing responsibilities and by integrating the available technical expertise into the decision-making process. Although the institution does not have staff dedicated exclusively to digitalisation, it managed to mobilise relevant internal skills and manage the project preparation process in parallel with the current operational activities, which indicates a high level of administrative capacity.

Another important mechanism of the implementation process is the interaction with IT solution providers in the preparation phase. CJ Alba used this interaction not as a substitute for the strategic decision, but as a tool to validate the realism of the proposed solutions. The presentation of prototypes, functional examples and concrete implementation scenarios allowed the institution to better understand what is technically and administratively feasible and to avoid including theoretical or oversized solutions in the project structure.

As for the partnership with the TAUs, the implementation process is designed in a gradual and realistic logic. Although the initial strategic objective was to create a county digital ecosystem that would include all 70 TAUs, the internal implementation mechanisms were adapted to the administrative and political realities in the territory. The establishment of a small but functional partnership is used as a pilot framework for testing and validating solutions, with the prospect of further expansion. In this sense, the implementation process is conceived as an incremental one, not a maximalist one, based on real ownership and effective capacity.

Finally, the implementation process is significantly influenced by the procedural constraints identified in the preparation phase, especially those related to signatures and documentation. CJ Alba has integrated these limitations into the way of thinking about implementation, explicitly acknowledging that the current procedures can become a major blockage in the case of large-scale partnerships. This awareness is an institutional learning mechanism, which can influence the way in which the future stages of implementation are structured and the dialogue with the managing authorities.

Overall, the implementation process, as outlined at this stage, is characterised by a prudent, structured and sustainability-oriented approach. Although the project has not yet entered the technical execution phase, CJ Alba has built a coherent set of internal mechanisms – methodological, organisational and decision-making – that create the premises for an efficient implementation. This pathway provides a relevant perspective on how a public authority with high administrative capacity can prepare the implementation of a complex digitisation project, even before contracting.

7. IMPACT ON BENEFICIARIES AND THE COMMUNITY

The impact of the digitalisation project proposed by the Alba County Council must be analysed from a prospective and contextual perspective, given that the project is in the evaluation stage and has not yet been contracted. At this stage, the impact cannot be measured by actual results but can be assessed in relation to the identified needs, the structure of the intervention and the anticipated benefits for the different categories of beneficiaries. From this perspective, the project has the potential to generate significant changes at institutional, administrative, economic and social level, contributing to the modernisation of the relationship between the public administration and the community.

At the level of the Alba County Council, the anticipated impact is structural and organisational. The digitisation of internal flows is conceived as a mechanism to transform the way the institution operates, by eliminating paper circuits, standardising processes and introducing digital traceability throughout the life cycle of documents. A significant reduction in processing times and the risk of human error is anticipated, as well as a substantial improvement in internal coordination capacity. Fast access to documents, the ability to monitor the status of flows in real time and clarity of responsibilities can help increase predictability and decision-making coherence. From the perspective of civil servants, the impact translates into a more

efficient, more transparent way of working and less dependent on physical travel or repetitive manual interventions.

For the partner administrative-territorial units, the impact of the project is anticipated especially in reducing the gaps in administrative and technical capacity. Many TAUs, especially small municipalities, face difficulties in implementing complex digital solutions, due to a lack of financial resources, IT skills and purchasing and maintenance capacity. Through access to a common digital architecture, coordinated at county level, these ATUs could benefit from standardised, interoperable and scalable solutions, without having to develop their own systems from scratch. The anticipated impact includes a better integration of local and county administrative flows, reducing IT fragmentation and improving inter-institutional collaboration, with direct effects on the quality of public services provided at local level.

For citizens, the potential impact of the project is direct, visible and transformative in nature. The digitisation of public services is expected to significantly simplify the interaction with the administration, through the possibility of submitting applications online, making electronic payments, submitting documents and tracking the status of requests in real time. Reducing physical travel to the premises of public institutions is a major benefit, especially for people living in rural or isolated areas, for the elderly and for people with reduced mobility. Increased transparency on administrative processes can help reduce the uncertainty and frustration associated with interacting with the administration, strengthening citizens' trust in public institutions.

A distinct impact is anticipated on vulnerable people and disadvantaged communities. Digitalisation can reduce barriers to access to public services for people who have mobility difficulties or are dependent on intermediaries. The possibility to access public services online, to receive automatic notifications and to transparently track the status of requests contributes to increasing the autonomy of beneficiaries and reducing the risk of administrative exclusion. In this regard, the project has the potential to support social inclusion and increase equity in access to public services.

For the economic environment, the anticipated impact is linked to the creation of a more predictable, faster and more transparent administrative framework. The digitalisation of administrative flows and interoperability between institutions can reduce the time it takes to obtain the approvals, authorisations and documents necessary to carry out economic activities. This administrative efficiency is likely to reduce the indirect costs incurred by companies and improve the business climate at county level. In addition, the digital component dedicated to tourism is designed as an economic development tool, which can support the promotion of Alba County, facilitate the access of local tourism service providers to wider markets and stimulate demand through modern digital channels.

At community level, the project has the potential to have a positive impact on territorial cohesion and on the relationship between the administration and the community. By creating a county digital ecosystem, based on standardisation and interoperability, the project can contribute to reducing discrepancies between localities and providing more uniform and coherent public services. Strengthening the role of the County Council as an actor in coordinating and facilitating digitalisation can support the development of a common vision at the county level and create the premises for a more mature digital governance.

In the long term, the impact of the project goes beyond the immediate benefits and aims at the structural transformation of the county public administration. The creation of a common digital infrastructure, the development of a county electronic archive and the strengthening of institutional interoperability can be the basis for better informed public decisions, for the strategic use of data and for the development of integrated public services. From this perspective, the project contributes not only to digitalisation, but to the profound modernisation of the way in which the public administration responds to the needs of the community.

In conclusion, the anticipated impact of the project is multidimensional, positively affecting the county administration, the partner administrative-territorial units, the citizens, the economic environment and the community. Even if the concrete results can be evaluated only after implementation, the structure of the intervention and the assumed objectives indicate a high potential to generate sustainable changes, aligned with the objectives of the Centre Region – A Digital Region Programme and with the real needs of the Alba County community.

8. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INTERVENTION (PRELIMINARY COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS)

The analysis of the efficiency of the intervention proposed by the Alba County Council must be carried out in a preliminary logic, given that the project is in the evaluation stage and has not yet been contracted. At this stage, efficiency cannot be quantified by ex-post financial indicators but can be assessed by relating anticipated costs to estimated benefits, as well as by analysing how the project is designed to maximise impact and reduce risks of inefficiency in the medium and long term.

From a cost perspective, the project involves significant initial investments in integrated IT solutions, digital infrastructure, software licenses, cybersecurity, as well as costs associated with configuration, interoperability and institutional readiness. These costs are compounded by indirect costs related to adapting internal procedures, staff training and change management. However, the project is designed in a common and standardised infrastructure logic, which allows the distribution of costs across many users and beneficiaries and the avoidance of fragmented, redundant or incompatible investments between institutions.

A key element of the effectiveness of the intervention is the focus on the digitisation of internal flows, which generate recurring and cumulative benefits. The elimination of paper-based circuits, the reduction of processing times and the automation of administrative flows are anticipated to lead to significant operational savings, by reducing material consumption, the working time of employees allocated to repetitive activities and the logistical costs associated with the management of physical documents. These savings, although difficult to quantify exactly at this stage, have the potential to offset a significant part of the initial implementation costs in the medium term.

In terms of benefits for the administration, the efficiency of the intervention is also reflected in the increase of institutional capacity without a proportional increase in human resources. Digitalisation allows for the management of a larger volume of applications and documents with the same or even fewer resources, which is particularly relevant in an administrative context characterised by budgetary constraints and a shortage of qualified personnel. Thus, the project contributes to increasing administrative productivity and making more efficient use of existing public resources.

For partner TAUs, the preliminary cost-benefit analysis indicates a favourable cost-benefit ratio, in particular for TAUs with reduced capacity. By participating in a coordinated project at county level, these TAUs can avoid the high costs of individual procurement of IT solutions, as well as the risks associated with maintenance and interoperability. Access to common solutions reduces unit costs per beneficiary and increases the efficiency of the use of public funds, compared to the scenario in which each TAU would develop its own, fragmented and difficult to integrate solutions.

From the perspective of citizens and the economic environment, the economic benefits of the project are mainly manifested in the form of reduced indirect costs. The digitisation of public services is anticipated to significantly reduce the time and costs associated with trips to the counters, lost time, administrative delays and uncertainty regarding the status of requests. For the business environment, reducing document acquisition times and increasing administrative predictability can have a positive economic impact, even if these benefits are not directly reflected in the public institution's budget.

Another essential element of the effectiveness of the intervention is the scalability and reusability of the proposed solutions. The project is designed so that the developed solutions can be later extended to other TAUs in the county, without significant marginal costs. In addition, standardisation and interoperability reduce the risk of technological bottlenecks and allow solutions to be adapted to future developments.

The preliminary cost-benefit analysis must also take into account the costs of non-intervention. Maintaining an administrative model based on manual, fragmented and untraceable processes generates significant hidden costs, such as operational inefficiency, administrative errors, long response times and decreased citizens' trust in institutions. From this perspective, the digitisation project is not just an optional investment, but a necessary intervention to prevent these costs from increasing in the long term.

Overall, the preliminary cost-benefit analysis indicates a high effectiveness of the proposed intervention, especially when the benefits are analysed in the medium and long term and from a broad perspective, which includes both the public administration and citizens and the economic environment. Although the initial costs are significant, the structure of the project, the focus on the digitalisation of internal processes,

standardisation and interoperability, as well as the potential for scaling indicate a favourable cost-benefit ratio and justify intervention from the perspective of the efficient use of public funds.

9. CONTRIBUTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL OBJECTIVES

Equal opportunities and gender equality

In the process of preparing, implementing and ensuring the sustainability of the project, Alba County Council respects fundamental human rights and the provisions of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, actively promoting equal opportunities and gender equality. The project is designed and implemented in compliance with the national and European legislative framework in the field of equality between women and men, non-discrimination and social inclusion.

The applicant shall ensure equal treatment for women and men in terms of employment, assignment of responsibilities, access to training and equal pay for work. The establishment of roles and responsibilities within the project team is done exclusively on the basis of professional skills and job-specific duties, without discriminatory differentiation. At all stages of the project, the gender perspective is integrated, and the decision-making process is based on principles of responsibility, performance and ownership.

The project is gender-neutral and guarantees equal access for women and men to digital infrastructure and the benefits generated. The implementation aims to ensure a balanced representation of women and men in work teams, administrative processes and public consultation activities.

Non-discrimination and social inclusion

The Alba County Council constantly applies the principles of non-discrimination and equal opportunities, both through the internal regulatory framework and through current administrative practices. The project promotes the fair and equitable treatment of all people, without discrimination on the basis of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

These principles are also respected in public procurement procedures and in the selection of personnel involved in the implementation of the project, where the criterion of professional performance is decisive. In the event that, as a result of the implementation of the project, additional hires will be necessary, they will be carried out in compliance with the legislation in force, the participation of people from disadvantaged categories being encouraged.

The project supports the active participation of citizens through digital communication and consultation mechanisms, which are open to all social categories. The digital platforms developed allow the involvement of vulnerable and marginalised groups in the decision-making process, helping to reduce social exclusion and strengthen community cohesion.

Accessibility for people with disabilities

The digital solutions developed through the project are designed to be accessible to people with disabilities. The platforms' interfaces will follow inclusive design principles and include tailored functionalities, such as audio reading options for the visually impaired, compatibility with screen readers, and simplified navigation for people with motor difficulties.

Through these measures, the project facilitates equal access to digital public services and contributes to increasing the autonomy of people with disabilities in relation to the public administration.

Sustainable development and the "polluter pay" principle

The project does not generate a significant increase in pollutant emissions to air, water or soil. On the contrary, the digitisation of administrative processes leads to a reduction in physical travel, paper consumption and the use of traditional resources. In the implementation phase, energy-efficient equipment will be used, and the organisation of activities will take into account minimising the impact on the environment.

The purchased IT equipment will be selected based on sustainability and energy efficiency criteria, in compliance with European standards in the field. The management of the resulting e-waste will be carried out according to the national legislation on waste management, through selective collection and handover to authorised operators, in accordance with the principles of the circular economy.

Biodiversity protection

The project has an insignificant foreseeable impact on biodiversity, as the activities are exclusively digital in nature and do not involve construction works or interventions on the natural environment. The implementation takes place within the built-up area and does not affect Natura 2000 sites or other protected areas, according to O.U.G. no. 57/2007 and the relevant European directives.

By reducing paper consumption and material resources, the project indirectly contributes to protecting natural resources and reducing pressure on the environment.

Efficient use of resources

The project activities are oriented towards the efficient use of resources and the adoption of sustainable technological solutions. The IT equipment will be chosen in such a way as to ensure an optimal balance between performance, costs and energy consumption, with energy-saving functions and extended lifespan.

This approach helps to reduce long-term operating costs and limit environmental impact, in line with the principles of sustainable development.

Climate change immunisation

The project does not amplify the risks associated with climate change. By digitising administrative processes and reducing dependence on physical resources, the carbon footprint of institutional activities is reduced. Reducing travel and material consumption indirectly contributes to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the transition to a more sustainable public administration.

DNSH principle – "Do no significant harm"

The project complies with the DNSH principle by choosing solutions that do not cause significant harm to the six environmental objectives set at European Union level. The digitalisation of administrative processes, the efficient use of resources, responsible waste management and the reduction of emissions associated with administrative activities ensure that the intervention is compatible with environmental protection objectives.

The DNSH analysis and screening related to the Centre Region Programme confirm that the investments proposed under Priority 2 – Harnessing the advantages of digitalisation do not generate significant negative effects on the environment and contribute to the sustainable development of the public administration.

10. CONCLUSIONS

The experience of the Alba County Council in preparing the administrative digitisation project clearly shows that the digital transformation of the public administration cannot be treated as a one-off approach or as a simple exercise in compliance with the requirements of a call for funding. The process described reflects a long-term institutional evolution, in which digitalisation is approached as an integral part of the modernisation of the way the administration operates and its relationship with citizens, the economic environment and other public institutions.

The course of the Alba County Council demonstrates that internal discussions and intentions expressed over time are not enough to build a coherent digitalisation strategy. Although the topic was constantly present on the institution's agenda, the lack of a professional analysis tool kept the initiatives in a fragmented area. The completion of the external digitalisation audit was the moment when these intentions were transformed into a clear structure, based on data, objective assessments and realistic prioritisations. The audit allowed the transition from partial perceptions to a complete picture of the infrastructure, existing applications and real needs, providing a solid basis for the design of the intervention.

A defining element of the project is the focus on the digitisation of internal flows. The experience of the Alba County Council confirms that digital services for citizens cannot function efficiently in the absence of fully digitised internal processes. As long as documents are processed manually, approval paths are unclear, and archiving is fragmented, front-office solutions remain limited in impact. The digitisation of the receipt of documents, the internal circuit, the electronic signature and the collaboration between departments constitute the foundation of the coherent functioning of the administration. The approach adopted by CJ Alba reflects a mature understanding of digital transformation as a process that starts from within the institution and extends to the relationship with the citizen.

The role of leadership appears as a determining element throughout the process. The explicit support for digitalisation at the level of the County Council's leadership allowed the assumption of an ambitious vision and created the necessary framework for the administrative teams to take strategic decisions. Digitalisation was not treated as an isolated technical initiative, but as a direction of institutional modernisation, with implications on the way of working, the organisational culture and the relationship with institutional partners.

The relationship with the administrative-territorial units in the county highlights the difference between the declarative openness and the effective capacity for formal assumption. Although the idea of a county digital ecosystem was positively received verbally by a significant number of TAUs, the materialisation of partnerships was limited by factors such as lack of local political will, reduced administrative capacity and procedural difficulties. Experience shows that functional partnerships depend decisively on local leadership and the ability of each institution to support change, not just on the existence of a funding opportunity.

The process of formalising partnerships has revealed the limits of the current procedural framework. Even in a small partnership, collecting signatures and managing documentation consumed significant resources of time and energy. This situation highlights the real difficulty of implementing large-scale digitalisation projects under rigid administrative procedures that are not adapted to extensive interinstitutional collaboration.

The evaluation of the project also revealed a discrepancy between the formal scoring criteria and the functional reality of the partnerships. The penalty for the lack of a pre-existing legal form, despite the existence of a legal and operational partnership, raises questions about how initiatives built specifically for digitisation are appreciated. The formal existence of a structure does not automatically reflect the capacity for implementation, the digital vocation or the sustainability of an intervention. The experience of the Alba County Council shows that the evaluation should be more carefully oriented towards functionality, concrete role and real capacity, not exclusively towards the legal form.

The administrative capacity of the Alba County Council is a distinct element of this approach. The preparation of the project with internal resources and the high accuracy of the self-assessment demonstrate the existence of a solid institutional maturity. At the same time, this situation underlines the significant differences between the institutions. Many TAUs, especially small ones, lack sufficient data, technical expertise and human resources to replicate such a process without external support. This reality supports the need for differentiated support mechanisms, adapted to the level of administrative capacity.

The relationship with the Centre RDA is appreciated from the perspective of communication and procedural support, but the concrete experience indicates the need for a more applied type of support in the field of digitalisation. Guide clarifications are useful, but insufficient for complex IT projects. Access to functional examples, already implemented digital architectures and exchange of experience between beneficiaries could significantly contribute to increasing the quality of projects and reducing implementation risks, especially for institutions with limited experience.

A relevant aspect is the way in which the project is built starting from public services and real needs, not from abstract technological solutions. The Alba County Council has data, monitoring databases and sectoral responsibilities that allow a detailed knowledge of the realities in the territory. Digitalisation is envisaged as a tool to support the provision of public services, interoperability and reducing administrative fragmentation.

In the long term, the direction assumed aims to build an integrated county digital infrastructure, based on standardisation, interoperability and coherent use of data. The anticipated benefits include streamlining domestic work, supporting TAUs with limited resources, improving citizens' access to public services, and increasing transparency. Digitalisation is seen as a continuous process, requiring clear governance, maintenance and adaptability, not as a time-limited intervention.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

The experience of the Alba County Council in preparing and launching the digitisation project highlights, first of all, the fact that digital transformation cannot be built exclusively on the basis of administrative intention or institutional will. Although discussions about digitalisation existed at the level of the institution for over six years, they remained fragmented until the moment of a professional external audit. The audit

played a decisive role in structuring a coherent vision, providing an objective assessment of the hardware and software infrastructure, identifying technological gaps and prioritising investment directions. Without this external approach, the institution would have continued to operate with partial perspectives, limited to the level of each compartment, without an integrated digital architecture. **The main lesson is that digitalisation requires a solid technical foundation and a clear methodology, and this is difficult to build exclusively from within the administration.**

Another essential element resulting from this case study is the direct relationship between the digitisation of internal processes and the success of any citizen-oriented solution. CJ Alba emphasises that the digitisation of the front-office is not sustainable in the absence of complete digitisation of internal flows. As long as documents circulate on paper, approvals are made manually, and internal routes are not digitally traceable, online services for citizens remain limited or inefficient. Therefore, the digitisation of the back-office – document receiving, signing, processing and archiving – is not an optional component, but the foundation of real digital transformation.

In this context, the experience of CJ Alba also highlights the importance of post-implementation digital governance. Digitalisation does not end with the technical implementation of IT solutions, but requires the existence of clear mechanisms for coordination, administration and evolution of the developed systems. Especially in projects involving several TAUs, the lack of a governance structure can lead to uneven use, fragmentation or even gradual abandonment of solutions. The strategic lesson is that digitisation projects must be designed from the preparation phase with a post-implementation perspective, which includes clear institutional responsibilities, decision-making mechanisms and the ability to adapt over time.

The experience of the Alba County Council also shows that the existence of a high internal administrative capacity can lead to very good results, including in the absence of external consultancy, but this is an exception rather than a rule. The fact that the project was prepared entirely internally, with a self-assessment extremely close to the final score obtained, demonstrates a high level of institutional maturity. However, CJ Alba implicitly acknowledges that most small TAUs do not have the same resources, skills and experience, which makes this model difficult to replicate without dedicated technical support mechanisms.

This finding is complemented by a strategic lesson on differentiated paces of digital maturity. Public institutions start from very different levels of preparedness and capacity to absorb change. Not all ATUs can or must simultaneously implement complex digital solutions. A phased approach, allowing for basic interventions for low-capacity TAUs and advanced projects for more mature institutions, would reduce implementation risks and increase the inclusion of the digitalisation process at territorial level.

As regards inter-institutional partnerships, the case study highlights a significant gap between intention and actual capacity for formalisation. Although the initial vision of the Alba County Council was to build a county digital ecosystem that would include all 70 ATUs, the administrative reality led to a restricted partnership, consisting of only five ATUs. This path reflects the limits of local administrative capacity, the lack of political will in some cases and the difficulty of formalising partnerships in a short time. The lesson is clear: partnerships are essential for digitalisation, but they are not built automatically and depend decisively on local leadership.

The role of leadership appears as a determining factor throughout the process. Where mayors or public managers understood the importance of digitalisation and actively supported the initiative, partnerships materialised relatively easily. In the absence of this support, the administrative apparatus could not compensate for the lack of political will. At the county level, the firm support of the Alba County Council management allowed the teams to advance quickly and make strategic decisions. This experience confirms that digitalisation is essentially a leadership decision, not just a technical one.

The case study also highlights the procedural limits of the current implementation framework, in particular with regard to document signing requirements. Even in a limited partnership, collecting signatures from each mayor and generating a complete set of documents proved to be time- and resource-consuming. CJ Alba points out that, under the current conditions, a partnership extended to dozens of TAUs would have been practically impossible to manage. This indicates the need for more flexible procedural mechanisms adapted to large-scale partnerships.

An important strategic lesson refers to the scoring criteria associated with pre-existing legal forms, such as ADI or LAG. CJ Alba draws attention to the fact that the formal existence of such a structure does not guarantee the real capacity to implement a digitisation project. On the contrary, some associations are created exclusively for scoring, without having a clear digital goal, resources or technical skills. Experience shows that functional partnerships, built specifically for digitalisation, can be penalised in evaluation in favour of non-functional formal structures. Therefore, the evaluation criteria should reflect relevance and actual capacity, not just legal existence.

The structural differences between county councils and mayoralties are another major lesson. City halls manage a large volume of direct interactions with citizens, while county councils have coordination, planning and interoperability roles. These differences imply distinct digitalisation needs, which cannot be dealt with uniformly in a single call for funding. The experience of CJ Alba shows that calls should be calibrated differently, depending on the institutional role and the type of services provided.

In addition, the case study also highlights the strategic role of data as an institutional asset. The real value of digitalisation does not lie exclusively in the applications developed, but in the data generated, standardised and used coherently. Interoperability, evidence-based decisions and the efficiency of public services depend on data quality and governance. In this regard, county councils have a natural role in coordinating data standards and inter-institutional exchange, strengthening digitalisation as a process of institutional maturity, not just technological.

At the same time, CJ Alba emphasises that effective digitalisation must be built around integrated public services, not administrative organisational charts. Many public services – such as social services, community health, stray animal management or urban planning – cannot be efficiently provided by a single city hall. They require inter-community association, common infrastructures and interoperability. From this perspective, funding should follow the flow of the public service and encourage cooperation between the CJ and the TAUs, each with clearly defined roles.

A distinct dimension of the recommendations targets rural areas and vulnerable communities. CJ Alba highlights the fact that in many rural areas there is a lack of essential public services, especially in the field of health. Digitalisation, in this context, is not an end in itself, but a tool that must be combined with mobile solutions and integrated interventions, such as medical caravans digitally connected to county systems. This approach demonstrates that the digital transformation must be inclusive and adapted to territorial realities.

This approach also involves a lesson on the financial and operational sustainability of digitalisation. The initial investment in IT solutions is only the first step; the medium- and long-term operation involves recurring costs related to maintenance, licensing, security and technical support. Common infrastructure models coordinated at county level can reduce these costs and ensure coherence and continuity, being essential for the real sustainability of interventions.

In relation to the RDA, the Alba County Council formulates a series of recommendations aimed at strengthening the capacity of the beneficiaries before submitting the projects. The institution believes that the presentations of guides should be more applied, with a focus on the technical architecture, the logic of IT projects and the documentation required in the pre-application phase. It would also be extremely useful to involve beneficiaries who already have real implementations and technically validated providers, in order to provide concrete examples and lessons learned. The introduction of a preliminary verification stage, when the drafts are completed in a proportion of around 70%, would allow for early correction of errors and reduce the risk of rejection on formal criteria.

Overall, the lessons and recommendations resulting from the experience of the Alba County Council converge towards a clear conclusion: the digitisation of public administration is a complex process, which requires leadership, technical foundation, real partnerships and support tools adapted to the capacity of the beneficiaries. Future calls should reflect these realities through more nuanced criteria, funding lines geared towards integrated public services and support mechanisms that allow all TAUs, not just high-capacity ones, to effectively participate in the digital transformation.

8.1 8. Case Study Interview Minute – Alba County Council

Date: December 11, 2025

Location: online

Participants: representatives of the Alba County Council and representatives of the Association formed by CIVITTA Strategy & Consulting SA (leader) and Lideea Development Actions SRL (partner)

Context of the interview and general framework of the documentation process

The discussion with the representatives of the Alba County Council took place as part of the documentation process related to the realisation of a case study on the digitisation projects financed by Priority 2, with the main objective of understanding how the public institutions have gone through the stage of preparation and substantiation of the projects, even in situations where they have not yet been contracted and have not started the implementation. The representatives of the documentation team have specified from the beginning that the thematic evaluation they carry out cannot be considered complete in the absence of prospective analyses, which would capture the real path of the institutions in the project design phase, before the signing of the financing contracts.

In this regard, the focus of the discussion was not on the results or the impact of the implementation, but on the entire path that preceded the submission of the funding application, including the internal reflection processes, the identification of needs, the crystallisation of the vision, the collaboration with third parties, as well as the administrative and institutional difficulties encountered. The representatives of the Alba County Council were invited to describe, in an open and detailed manner, the way in which the digitisation project was designed, what factors influenced the decisions taken and what mechanisms were used to build a coherent proposal, adapted to the specifics of the institution.

It was emphasised that the purpose of this documentation approach is to capture as many institutional typologies and different levels of administrative capacity as possible, in order to understand if and to what extent the size of the institution, its role in the administrative architecture or previous experience in projects influences the process of preparing digitisation projects. In this context, the Alba County Council was considered a relevant case study, given its coordinating role at the county level, the functional relationship with the local administrative-territorial units and the different responsibilities from those of the town halls.

The discussion was deliberately oriented towards the project preparation stage, starting from the optimistic premise that the evaluation process will be completed within a reasonable time and that the project will enter the contracting and implementation phase. Even in the absence of this final result, the representatives of the documentation team considered that the analysis of the training path remains extremely valuable, as it highlights both the institutional effort made and the real constraints faced by public administrations in the digital transformation process.

The representative of the Alba County Council said that the idea of digitisation is not a recent one within the institution, the discussions on this topic being initiated about six years before the project was submitted. These discussions have been constantly resumed, amid the increasing focus on digital transformation at European and national level, but also as a result of pressures from public service beneficiaries, the economic environment and IT solution providers. However, for a long time, these discussions did not go beyond the conceptual stage, without materialising in a clear direction or in an assumed project.

An important stage in the evolution of these steps was the moment when, about four to five years before the project was submitted, the interviewed representative became directly involved in the institution's activity, noting that, although there is a general awareness of the need for digitisation, there is a lack of a coherent vision and a concrete action plan. The first steps that can be considered real steps towards preparing a digitisation project were taken about three years before the submission, when the discussions began to be structured more clearly around the idea of transforming administrative processes.

An essential role in this stage was played by carrying out an external diagnostic audit, carried out with the support of a specialised third party. This approach aimed to assess the existing situation at the level of the Alba County Council, both from the perspective of the available hardware infrastructure and from the perspective of the computer applications used at the level of the various departments. The representative

of the institution pointed out that the audit provided for the first time a coherent overview of the stage of digitalisation, described as a 'digital map' of the institution, which made it possible to identify strengths, limits and areas where intervention was needed.

In addition to analysing the existing situation, the audit also provided concrete proposals for directions of action, including technical, organisational and procedural recommendations. These recommendations were not limited to general aspects but also concerned possible modules and types of applications that could be implemented, as well as their impact on the way the institution operates. From the interviewee's perspective, this external approach was decisive for overcoming the internal blockage and for transforming the recurring discussions into a coherent plan, mature enough to be the basis for a funding application.

The interviewee explicitly pointed out that, in the absence of this audit and a form of external consultation, it would have been extremely difficult, even at the level of a county council, to simultaneously carry out an objective analysis of internal processes, a realistic identification of possible solutions and an integration of legal, economic and technical components into a unitary vision. Although the institution has staff with IT skills, digitisation has been perceived as a much more complex process than the simple acquisition of IT solutions, requiring a multidisciplinary approach and a synthesis capacity that goes beyond the currently available internal resources.

In this context, the preparation phase of the project was characterised as a dynamic one, in continuous adjustment, as the level of understanding and institutional experience increased. Even at the time of the discussion, the vision on digital transformation was not perceived as completely completed, but as an evolutionary process, built gradually, but the external audit and the resulting documents were the foundation that allowed the transition from intention to action and the assumption of a concrete digitisation project.

The strategic vision and motivation behind the digitisation project

Continuing the discussion, the representative of the Alba County Council detailed the vision behind the digitisation project, stressing that it did not arise as a result of the launch of a funding call, but as a result of a long process of institutional reflection. Digitalisation was perceived from the beginning as an inevitable necessity, driven both by developments at European and national level, as well as by the increasingly evident pressures coming from the beneficiaries of public services, the economic environment and institutional partners.

The interviewee explained that, on the one hand, the institution felt the need to meet the increased expectations of individuals and legal entities, who demand faster, more accessible and more transparent public services. On the other hand, the Alba County Council faced a constant influx of offers and presentations from IT solution providers, which highlighted the potential of digital technologies both for the reorganisation of internal processes and for improving the relationship with citizens and other public institutions. These interactions helped shape the belief that digital transformation can no longer be postponed and that maintaining predominantly analogue processes generates high administrative costs and limits the institution's ability to respond effectively to requests.

The vision of the Alba County Council on digitalisation was a broad one, going beyond the logic of punctual interventions or the simple acquisition of computer applications. The representative of the institution stressed that the project was designed as an institutional modernisation approach, which would target in an integrated way both the "internal kitchen" of the administration, namely the workflows, procedures and circulation of documents, as well as the interaction with citizens, administrative-territorial units and other public institutions. From this perspective, digitalisation was conceived as a process of transforming the way of working, not as an end in itself.

A central element of this vision was the idea of building a digital ecosystem at county level, in which the Alba County Council and the administrative-territorial units can use, as much as possible, compatible and interoperable solutions. The interviewee said that, in the initial phase, the institution had a macro approach, ideal from a conceptual point of view, which aimed at integrating all over seventy administrative-territorial units in the county into a common digital system. This approach was based on the functional relationship between the County Council and the town halls, a relationship of coordination and support, even if not one of direct subordination.

The reasoning behind this vision was that the use of the same types of applications and modules at the county level would facilitate the exchange of information, reduce the fragmentation of information systems and create the premises for a more efficient collaboration between institutions. From the interviewee's perspective, such a digital ecosystem would have allowed not only the simplification of administrative processes, but also a better coordination of public services, especially in those areas where the County Council has the role of approval, coordination or control.

At the same time, the representative of the Alba County Council stressed that this macro vision was tempered by the administrative and institutional realities in the territory. Although at a conceptual level the idea of integrating all TAUs was well received in the informal discussions, the process of concretising the partnerships proved to be much more difficult, which influenced the final way of configuring the project. However, the fact that this vision existed from the initial phase was considered relevant for the maturity of the project and for the way in which the architecture of the proposed solutions was thought out.

The motivation of the project was also closely related to the need to increase the internal efficiency of the institution. The interviewee explained that, in the absence of well-defined digital flows, a large part of staff time is consumed by repetitive activities, the management of paper documents and frequent interruptions caused by direct interaction with the public or other institutions. Digitalisation was thus perceived as a solution for optimising internal activity, by reducing processing times, increasing document traceability and better organising tasks.

At the same time, the project was motivated by the desire to improve the relationship with citizens and the economic environment, even if the County Council does not have the same direct address to the public as the town halls. The representative of the institution stressed that, although the interaction with citizens is less quantitatively, it is often more complex, involving processes of approval, coordination or provision of information necessary for local development. For this reason, digitalisation was considered essential to ensure faster and more predictable responses, both for citizens and for the administrative-territorial units that depend on the opinions and expertise of the County Council.

Another important element of the project's motivation was the desire to create a replicable model, which can later be extended to other administrative-territorial units in the county. Even though the submitted project included a limited number of partners, the representative of the Alba County Council stressed that the proposed solutions were designed so that they can be taken over and adapted by other mayoralties, as they will be prepared from an institutional and administrative point of view. In this regard, the project was perceived as a first step in a broader process of digital transformation at the county level.

In conclusion, the strategic vision and motivation of the digitisation project were built on the basis of a deep understanding of the role of the County Council in the administrative ecosystem, the need to modernise internal processes and the desire to contribute to the creation of a coherent and interoperable digital framework at the level of Alba County. The project was not conceived as an isolated intervention, but as part of a long-term strategy, which aims to increase the quality of public services and adapt the administration to the realities of the digital society.

The process of building partnerships, the difficulties encountered and the role of institutional leadership

During the discussion, special attention was paid to the process of building institutional partnerships, which is considered an essential element of the digitisation project, but also one of the most difficult stages of preparing the funding application. The representative of the Alba County Council explained that, from the moment the call was launched, the institution had an ambitious approach, aimed at carrying out a large-scale project at the county level, which would include as many administrative-territorial units as possible.

The initial vision was to create a common digital system, a true ecosystem at county level, in which the County Council and the county mayoralties would use the same applications and modules, thus facilitating interoperability and institutional collaboration. From this perspective, the ideal objective was to co-opt all the more than seventy administrative-territorial units in the county, or at least a significant majority of them, in order to ensure coherence and impact on a large scale.

In a first stage, the Alba County Council initiated informal discussions, of a verbal nature, with the representatives of the town halls, to test their openness to the idea of a joint digitisation project. According to the interviewee's account, these discussions initially generated an apparently positive response from a significant number of mayors, about half of whom expressed interest in participating in such an approach. However, when the process went from the declarative level to the formal one, respectively to the request for the adoption of local council decisions and the signing of the documents necessary for the establishment of the partnership, the number of administrative-territorial units that agreed to be effectively involved was considerably reduced.

In the end, the partnership resulted in a number of five administrative-territorial units, namely four communes and one city. The representative of the Alba County Council stressed that he does not intend to analyse or attribute precise reasons for the refusal of the other mayoralties but highlighted the fact that the difference between the verbal opening and the formal assumption of a project reflects a reality frequently encountered in the local public administration. From his point of view, participating in a digitisation project requires not only interest, but also administrative capacity, availability of resources and, above all, will at the level of the institution's management.

A central aspect highlighted in the discussion was the decisive role of institutional leadership in initiating and sustaining digitisation processes. The representative of the Alba County Council stressed that, in the case of the institution he represents, the support of the management was essential for the advancement of the project. The existence of a clear openness on the part of the President of the County Council, as well as the granting of real freedom of action to the team involved in the preparation of the project, were considered key factors that allowed the development of a coherent vision and the assumption of the necessary steps.

In contrast, in the case of administrative-territorial units where the management does not show a real concern for digitisation or does not perceive this process as a priority, initiatives of this type are difficult to sustain. The interviewee stressed that, in the absence of a clear assumption at the mayor's level, it is extremely difficult for specialised departments or technical staff to initiate and complete a digital transformation project. From this perspective, digitalisation cannot be a "bottom-up" process, based exclusively on the initiative of officials, but requires a strategic direction and a clear decision-making will.

The discussion also highlighted the fact that institutional partnerships, although encouraged by the evaluation criteria of the call for funding, generate a significant administrative burden. The representative of the Alba County Council described the difficulties encountered in the process of formalising the partnership, including the need to adopt local council decisions, obtaining the electronic signatures of legal representatives and synchronising administrative procedures between several institutions, each having its own rhythms and constraints.

Even in the case of a relatively small partnership of five administrative-territorial units, the process of applying for funding was perceived as cumbersome, in particular due to the procedural requirements for each partner to sign and upload documents. The interviewee pointed out that any changes requested at the clarification stage involved the resumption of this process for all relevant documents, which led to delays and considerable administrative effort.

This experience has led to the conclusion that, although partnerships are essential for the implementation of digitalisation projects with a broad impact, the current administrative mechanisms can discourage the involvement of a large number of partners. From the perspective of the Alba County Council, it would be necessary to simplify the procedures, including the possibility for the project leader to be able to centrally manage certain stages of the submission, based on an assumed partnership agreement, in order to avoid the bottlenecks generated by the need for individual signatures for each document.

At the same time, a reasoned criticism was expressed against the scoring criteria that favour pre-existing forms of legal association, such as inter-community development associations, to the detriment of partnerships established punctually for a project. The representative of the Alba County Council pointed out that, in the absence of previously existing associative structures with explicit digitisation objectives, many of these associations were formally created only to obtain additional points, without necessarily reflecting a real capacity for collaboration or a relevant previous experience.

From this perspective, the recommendation was made that future calls for funding should differentiate more clearly between associations with real experience and those established ad-hoc, so that the score reflects the effective institutional capacity and not just the legal form. The experience of the Alba County Council has highlighted the fact that institutional maturity and strategic vision can exist even in the absence of formal associative structures, and these elements should be recognised and valued in the evaluation process.

Overall, the process of building partnerships was perceived as a complex stage, marked by high initial ambitions, successive adjustments and significant administrative constraints. However, the experience gained has contributed to a deeper understanding of the realities in the territory and the crucial role that leadership, administrative capacity and institutional will play in the success of digitisation projects.

The relationship with the third parties involved, the evaluation process, the anticipated benefits and the conclusions resulting from the preparation phase

Continuing the discussion, the representative of the Alba County Council detailed the institution's relationship with the third parties involved in the project preparation process, as well as the interaction with the managing authority during the submission and evaluation of the funding application. An aspect repeatedly emphasised was that the institution did not call on an external consultant for the actual writing of the project, the approach being carried out mainly with internal resources, based on the documents and recommendations resulting from the diagnostic external audit.

This approach was possible due to the previous experience of the Alba County Council in the implementation of projects financed from European funds, experience that supported in particular the procedural and administrative component of the funding application. The representative of the institution specified that, although this experience did not directly cover the technical aspects specific to digitisation, it contributed significantly to structuring the documentation, to complying with the requirements of the applicant's guide and to ensuring a logical coherence of the project.

In the preparation process, the internal team used the documents resulting from the external audit as a basis for defining the digitisation directions, adapting them to the institutional specificity and administrative realities of the Alba County Council. The interviewee stressed that this approach involved a considerable effort of internal coordination, involving several people from the institution, who contributed to the drafting and revision of the documentation. Although the total number of people formally involved in the documents was high, the actual drafting and structuring work was carried out by a small nucleus with clear responsibilities within the project.

Regarding the relationship with the managing authority, the representative of the Alba County Council appreciated the openness shown in the clarification phase, mentioning that the institution formulated detailed and reasoned answers, demonstrating a good knowledge of the project and its logic. The high volume of clarifications submitted, accompanied by supporting documents and annexes, reflected the level of involvement of the team and the desire to respond completely and transparently to the requests received.

However, a number of constructive comments were also made during the discussion on how the process of preparing and evaluating digitisation projects could be improved. The representative of the Alba County Council highlighted the difficulty of building adequate technical solutions only based on the applicant's guide, stressing that digitalisation is a much more complex field than other types of public investments, such as those in infrastructure, where there are standardised technical projects and clearly defined estimates.

From this perspective, the need for better institutionalised support mechanisms for beneficiaries was expressed, from the design phase of the projects. The organisation of applied meetings, with the participation of beneficiaries who have already implemented digitisation projects, as well as the involvement of technical experts who can provide preliminary guidance on the architecture of the solutions, were mentioned as useful examples. Also, the idea of preliminary checks of the projects was put forward, before the official submission, which would allow the early correction of any inconsistencies or uncertainties.

Another aspect discussed concerned the administrative burden generated by the submission procedures, especially in the case of projects carried out in partnership. The representative of the Alba County Council stressed that, even with a small number of partners, the process of signing and uploading documents was time-consuming and resource-consuming, and any change involved the resumption of the entire

administrative circuit. This experience reinforced the conviction that, in order to foster real and functioning partnerships, there is a need to simplify procedures and make representation mechanisms more flexible, in particular by strengthening the role of the project leader.

Regarding the objectives of the project and the anticipated benefits, the representative of the Alba County Council stressed that the project was designed taking into account both the digitisation of internal processes and the development of interaction modules with citizens and other entities. An important objective was to reach a significant threshold of beneficiaries, estimated at least ten percent of the county's population, through the proposed digital services.

The project aimed to create a coherent framework for digital interaction, which would allow citizens and partner administrative-territorial units to access public services remotely, submit and track applications, submit documents and benefit from better traceability of administrative processes. At the same time, the digitisation of internal flows was considered essential to ensure the functionality of this system, underlining the need for the transformation to start from within the institution, by reorganising procedures, the document circuit and the way of working of the staff.

The anticipated benefits of the project were described both from the perspective of citizens, who would save time and resources by reducing travel and physical interactions, and from the perspective of the institution, by increasing internal efficiency, reducing processing times and improving coordination capacity. The potential impact on the economic environment was also highlighted, by facilitating the relationship with investors and by creating digital tools for promotion and information, including in the field of tourism, as part of a broader vision of county development.

The discussion was also extended to the long-term perspectives, the representative of the Alba County Council highlighting the fact that the submitted digitisation project represents only a stage in a broader effort to modernise public services. Future directions were mentioned, such as the development of integrated databases, the creation of electronic archives at county level and the exploration of digital solutions for complex public services, including in areas such as social assistance, health or tourism. These initiatives were presented as part of a strategic vision that aims not only to digitise the administration, but also to increase the quality of life at the level of local communities.

In conclusion, they summarised the main conclusions resulting from the discussion, stressing that the experience of the Alba County Council highlights the importance of having a clear strategic vision, assumed leadership and a solid internal capacity in the preparation of digitisation projects. It was also highlighted that, even in the absence of contracting or immediate implementation, the project preparation process generated institutional value, contributing to the clarification of development directions and the consolidation of organisational maturity.

9. 9. CASE STUDY NO. 9 – DIGITALISATION, EFFICIENCY, TRANSPARENCY FOR CITIZENS - DETC SĂSCIORI COMMUNE

Evaluation title: Theme 2 "*Evaluation of interventions targeting digitalisation activities for the benefit of citizens, businesses and governments"*

Project name: DIGITALISATION, EFFICIENCY, TRANSPARENCY FOR CITIZENS - DETC

Beneficiary: SĂSCIORI COMMUNE, SMIS code 336519

Location of the investment: Săsciori commune, Alba County

1. OBJECT AND PURPOSE OF THE CASE STUDY

This case study aims to support the evaluation process of the interventions funded by the Centre Region Regional Programme, under Theme 2 "Evaluation of interventions aimed at digitalisation activities for the benefit of citizens, companies and governments". The analyses and findings presented contribute to the formulation of the answers to the evaluation questions and allow comparisons to be made between the different types of interventions, investments and beneficiaries. These comparisons highlight the mechanisms by which available resources and those created within projects are used and capitalised, as

well as how these factors, together with the elements of context, influence the implementation and results of interventions.

The case study also contributes to the assessment of the extent to which digitalisation interventions respond to the needs of target groups, provide effective solutions to socio-economic challenges in the Centre Region and support the relevant strategies and objectives of the programme.

The selection of the project analysed in this case study was carried out according to the criteria established in the evaluation methodology, taking into account the type of intervention, the level of complexity and the type of applicant. The project is part of the sample **dedicated to LPAs,** thus ensuring the diversity of types of beneficiaries and the possibility of analysing how different institutional and economic contexts influence the digitisation process.

The methodology used combines the documentary analysis based on the project documents provided by the beneficiary **(the funding application)** with the interview with **the LPA representative**, ensuring a complete understanding of how the interventions contribute to the development and modernisation of the region through digitalisation.

2. PRESENTATION OF THE CASE STUDY

Project name	**DIGITALISATION, EFFICIENCY, TRANSPARENCY FOR CITIZENS - DETC**
SMIS Code	336519
Location	Săsciori Commune, Alba County
Benefit	Săsciori Commune
Priority / Specific objective	P2. A digital region RSO1.2_maximising the benefits of digitalisation for the benefit of citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities
Project call/ Operation	Intervention 2.1.1 Digital communities for a smart region – digital solutions
Implementation period (start/end)	-
Project budget	Total non-reimbursable budget 1,273,361.35
Project context	Within the Local Development Strategy of the Săsciori Commune TAU, this project is included in the list of priority projects, with the main objective of digitising some essential processes for the efficient organisation of the administrative apparatus. The project aims at digitising, managing and archiving documents and requests received from the citizens of the commune, as well as developing an online platform dedicated to improving local public services, such as paying taxes, issuing certificates, initiating online petitions and facilitating citizen participation through a chatbot. The need to improve and develop these processes was identified at the level of Săsciori commune within the Local Development Strategy, which highlights the low level of digitisation of administrative activities as one of the main challenges of the local public administration. The implementation of this project responds to this need, contributing to the modernisation of public services and increasing administrative efficiency.
Project justification	

	Social innovation is manifested in the creation and adoption of digital solutions that transform the relationship between citizens and local public administration, facilitating access to public services, increasing transparency and reducing the time it takes to resolve requests. Through the developed digital platforms, citizens will be able to submit applications, obtain administrative documents and make payments online, eliminating the need for physical travel and redundant bureaucratic interactions. The project also contributes to increasing civic engagement through the development of digital tools that enable citizens' active participation in local decision-making, through public consultations, surveys and feedback mechanisms. This approach supports strengthening participatory democracy and strengthening the relationship of trust between citizens and public administration. The innovative nature of the project is also supported by the measures dedicated to reducing the digital divide, namely by organising digital training programmes for administrative staff and by ensuring equitable access to technology for citizens. Adapting digital public services to the specific needs of the local community contributes to increasing social inclusion and the efficient use of public resources. Through the implementation of this project, the aim is to ensure a standard of living comparable to that in the urban environment for the citizens of Săsciori commune, by providing modern, accessible and non-discriminatory public services. This development direction is also supported by the complementarity of the project with other investments made or proposed at local level. In this sense, the project correlates with the municipality's sustainable development initiatives, such as investments in the production of energy from renewable sources, which contribute to the reduction of energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions. The digitisation of administrative processes will, in turn, lead to a reduction in paper consumption and the need to use printing equipment, through the implementation of electronic signatures and digital workflows. At the same time, the project is complementary to the investments made in the field of education, which aim at digitising the learning process and developing digital skills at local level, thus contributing to the creation of a coherent digital development environment for both the public administration and citizens. In local public administration, manual document processing leads to delays, high resource consumption and the risk of error. The implementation of an integrated digital system for document management will allow the automation of administrative flows, the reduction of processing times and the increase of the quality of services offered to citizens. The integration of electronic signature and digital communication will ensure an increased level of security, traceability and efficient archiving of documents. The project also provides for the development of an innovative digital chat-bot solution, which will allow citizens to obtain information and quick answers, as well as to send complaints or requests to the responsible departments within the city hall, thus contributing to the improvement of institutional communication and response times. For the effective use of the proposed digital solutions, it is necessary to develop the digital skills of administrative staff. In this regard, the project includes vocational training activities aimed at ensuring the appropriate use of the new systems and maximising the benefits of the digitalisation process.

	In addition, the proposed digital solutions will be interoperable both with existing systems within the city hall and with each other, to allow data synchronisation, automation of workflows and reuse of information, reducing the risk of errors and improving the administration's ability to respond quickly and efficiently to the requests of citizens and the business environment.

3. Objectives and Logic of the intervention

The objectives of the digitisation project initiated by the local public administration of the Săsciori Commune ATU resulted from a process of analysis of the functioning of the institution and the relationship between the administration and the citizens, as it emerged from the discussions held during the interview conducted during the preparation phase of the project. The project was conceived as an approach aimed at improving the administrative functioning and access to public services, based on direct observations on the difficulties encountered in the current activity.

The general objective of the intervention aims to increase the degree of digitalisation at the level of local public administration and the community, by developing accessible and easy-to-use digital solutions, which allow citizens to interact with the city hall in a simpler and more predictable way. From the perspective of local administration, digitalisation is approached as a way to reorganise workflows and reduce dependence on the physical presence of citizens at the institution's headquarters, without further complicating existing procedures.

The logic of the intervention starts from the situation prior to the project, in which most of the administrative activities were carried out in analogue format, with physical registers, paper documents and a fragmented circuit of applications between compartments. This organisation involved a high number of trips for citizens and a significant volume of repetitive activities for officials. In the absence of integrated digital tools, the follow-up of requests was difficult, and their resolution often depended on direct interactions and the physical availability of the staff involved.

In this context, one of the objectives of the intervention was to reorganise the registration and management flow of applications, through the use of digital solutions that allow electronic submission, automatic assignment of a registration number and internal routing of requests. This approach aims to reduce manual interventions and situations in which the citizen is involved in the management of the internal document circuit, the responsibility being transferred entirely to the institution.

Another objective of the project was to create the conditions for the development of an electronic archive, as an alternative to the physical archive previously used. From the perspective of the local administration, the lack of a digital archiving system made it difficult to access documents and involved a high time consumption for identifying the necessary information. The digitisation of documents and their organisation in an electronic system are seen as solutions to improve the institution's ability to manage information and respond to requests in a shorter period of time.

The intervention also envisaged the introduction of the electronic signature in administrative processes, in response to the difficulties generated by the exclusive use of the handwritten signature. In situations where certain persons with the right to sign were not available, administrative flows could be delayed. The use of the electronic signature is seen as a solution for streamlining processes, reducing waiting times and ensuring the continuity of administrative activities, both in the internal relationship between departments and in the relationship with citizens.

The logic of the intervention also includes the development of digital solutions oriented towards the relationship with the citizen, given the high degree of use of mobile devices at community level. These solutions have been designed to allow applications to be submitted, complaints to be submitted or communicated with the administration in a direct and simplified way. The emphasis was placed on ease of use and on reducing the number of steps required to access services, so that the digital environment does not reproduce the complexity of procedures previously carried out in physical format.

An important element in defining the objectives of the project is the internal needs of the local administration, in particular the management of a high volume of repetitive requests. Digitalisation is perceived as a solution

to reduce frequent interruptions in current work and to create a better organised working environment that allows officials to carry out their work in a more predictable way. By reorganising workflows, the administration aims to allocate available time and resources more efficiently.

Another aspect of the logic of the intervention is the integrated approach to digitalisation. Previous experiences have shown that the use of siloed digital tools does not lead to significant changes in the way the institution operates. To this end, the project has been designed to ensure that the proposed solutions are interconnected with each other and, where possible, with existing systems, so that information can be reused and workflows simplified.

Overall, the objectives and logic of the intervention reflect a pragmatic approach to the digitisation process, adapted to the local context and oriented towards improving the relationship between the administration and citizens. The project is designed as an initial stage in a broader modernisation process, which aims to gradually develop more accessible, coherent and better adapted public services to the needs of the community, through the use of digital solutions.

4. PROJECT COMPONENTS

Activities	The activities foreseen within the project are structured in a logical sequence, which reflects both the steps already taken and the stages to be carried out after the approval and contracting of the financing. In the project preparation phase, consultancy services were purchased and provided for the elaboration of the financing application. This activity aimed to substantiate the proposed intervention from a technical, administrative and strategic point of view. In this framework, the existing administrative processes at the level of the Săsciori Commune TAU, the level of digitisation, the needs identified in the relationship with the citizens, as well as the institutional capacity to manage a large-scale digitisation project were analysed. Based on this analysis, the proposed digital solutions were defined, the general architecture of the intervention was established, and the project objectives were correlated with the local strategic documents and the requirements of the call for funding. The consultancy activity led to the development of the documentation necessary for the submission of the project, including the description of the investment, the planning of the activities and the definition of the expected results. Throughout this period, the local administration ensures the availability for clarification of any requests made by the authority and aims to maintain the consistency of the submitted documentation. At the same time, this stage is used for the internal preparation of the implementation phase, by anticipating the calendar of activities, the procurement procedures and the coordination mechanisms necessary for the project to be carried out in optimal conditions, in case of approval of the financing. After the completion of the evaluation phase and the approval of the project, the signing of the financing contract will follow, which will mark the transition to the actual implementation phase. With the signing of the contract, the post-contractual activities provided for in the project will be started, in accordance with the assumed schedule. In the implementation phase, the acquisition of project management consulting services, procurement documentation development services, information and advertising services, as well as financial audit services will be carried out. These activities will ensure the overall coordination of the project, compliance with contractual requirements and applicable legislation, as well as transparency in the use of funds. The project management will follow the planning, monitoring and reporting of the activities, while the financial audit services will contribute to verifying the correctness and compliance of the expenses incurred.

	A central component of the implementation phase will be represented by the acquisition and provision of services for the development of the proposed digital solutions, as well as the services related to the training activities. Within this framework, the digital solutions provided for in the project will be developed and adapted, namely the electronic document management system, the CID application, the online platform for citizen services, the geographic information system, the digitisation of urban planning and construction services, as well as the chat-bot citizen participation platform. The development of these solutions will aim to digitise existing administrative processes, automate workflows and create digital channels for interaction with citizens, in an integrated and interoperable manner. In parallel with the development of digital solutions, training activities for local public administration staff will be carried out. These activities will aim to increase the level of digital skills of the City Hall employees and ensure the institutional capacity to efficiently use and manage the developed solutions. Staff training will help integrate the new systems into the institution's day-to-day work and reduce the risks associated with incomplete or inconsistent use of digital platforms. To support the development, testing and piloting phases of digital solutions, tangible and intangible assets will be purchased and delivered. Tangible assets, mainly IT equipment, will be used to test the functionalities of digital solutions in real use, and intangible assets, in the form of software licenses, will ensure their proper functioning. This stage will allow the compatibility and stability of the developed solutions to be verified before their widespread use. After the completion of the development and endowment stages, the project will include a community solution testing activity. This activity will involve the use of digital solutions by a sample of citizens from Săsciori commune, in order to observe the functioning of the platforms, the level of ease of use and the degree of adaptation to the real needs of users. The feedback collected from the testing will be used to fine-tune and optimise the solutions, before they are used by a larger number of citizens. During the implementation of the project, information and communication activities will be carried out, which will have the role of ensuring the visibility of the project and informing citizens about the existence and functionalities of the digital solutions developed. These activities will support the increase in the use of platforms and will contribute to achieving the assumed result indicators, namely the use of digital services by a significant part of the population of the Săsciori Commune TAU. The project activities reflect a phased and coherent approach, which starts from the preparation and evaluation of the intervention and leads, after contracting to the implementation and operationalisation of digital solutions aimed at improving the functioning of the local public administration and its relationship with citizens.
Expected results	The expected results are correlated with the objectives of the project, with the needs identified in the preparation phase and with the indicators assumed by the funding application. At the institutional level, an important result will be the development and operationalisation of an integrated set of digital solutions that will support the digitisation of existing administrative processes. By implementing the electronic document management system, the CID application, the geographic information system and the digitisation of urban planning and construction services, the local administration will have tools that will allow the electronic management of documents, the automation of internal flows and the reduction of dependence on paper-based processes. These solutions will contribute to a clearer organisation of the document circuit and to a more traceable record of the requests received from citizens.

	Another expected result is to improve citizens' access to local public services. Through the development of the online platform for citizen services and the digital components related to urban planning services, citizens will have the opportunity to submit applications, submit documents and make payments online, without having to physically go to the mayor's office. It is anticipated that this change will lead to a reduction in the time allocated by citizens to solve administrative problems and to a reduction in congestion at the institution's counters. In the relationship between the administration and the community, an expected result is the creation of a digital channel of communication and citizen participation, through the chat-bot platform. This solution will allow the rapid transmission of notifications, requests or suggestions from citizens and will facilitate their routing to the responsible departments within the city hall. The use of this tool will contribute to a better structuring of communication and to follow up on the status of solving the problems reported. At the level of human resources, an important result will be to increase the administrative capacity of the institution by training the staff involved in the use of new digital solutions. Through the training activities provided for in the project, the employees of the city hall will acquire digital skills adapted to the requirements of the new systems, which will facilitate their integration into the current activity and support their use in the long term. This result is expected to help reduce errors generated by manual processes and increase consistency in the management of documents and requests. From the perspective of the use of digital solutions by the population, it is expected to achieve the result indicator assumed by the project, namely the use of new or optimised public digital services, products and processes by at least 10% of the population of the Săsciori Commune TAU. This result will reflect the level of adoption of the developed digital solutions and will be a first indicator of the change in the way citizens interact with the local public administration. The project is also expected to generate better traceability of requests and documents, through the possibility of monitoring their status within digital platforms. This will help to increase the transparency of administrative processes and to better inform citizens about the stages of dealing with submitted applications. More broadly, the expected results of the project include the consolidation of a basis for the continuation of the digitisation process at the level of the local public administration. The developed solutions will be able to be used and extended over time, depending on the needs of the community and the available resources, contributing to the creation of a coherent framework for the modernisation of local public services. The expected results reflect the transition to a more digitised mode of functioning of the local public administration in Săsciori commune, with effects on internal efficiency, accessibility of public services and the relationship between the institution and citizens, in line with the objectives assumed by the project and its current status.
Target group	The target group of the project is made up of both direct and indirect beneficiaries, the proposed intervention having multiple effects on the functioning of the local public administration and on the community of the Săsciori Commune TAU. The main category of direct beneficiaries is represented by the local public administration of Săsciori commune, respectively the administrative apparatus that carries out current activities in direct relationship with the citizens. Currently, the management of documents, their archiving and the resolution of requests are mainly carried out through traditional procedures, on physical support, which involves a high consumption of time and resources. Also, the payment of taxes and taxes, as well as access to urban planning and construction services is mostly done at the counter. The implementation of the proposed digital solutions will contribute to the modernisation of the local administration's way of working, to the optimisation of internal flows and to

	increase transparency in the management of requests received from citizens. In this context, the project will support the administrative apparatus in adapting to a more efficient and better organised way of operating. Another important category of direct beneficiaries is represented by the inhabitants of Săsciori commune. They will have access to the online platform for citizen services, which will allow the payment of fees, the submission of documents, the request and issuance of certificates or the initiation of petitions in electronic format. By using these digital services, citizens will be able to interact with the local public administration in a simpler and faster way, without the need for frequent trips to the city hall. This will help reduce the time allocated to solving administrative problems and improve the overall experience of citizens in relation to the public institution. The development of digital solutions will also directly benefit vulnerable people in the community, especially the elderly and people with disabilities, who frequently face mobility difficulties or physical barriers in accessing public services. Being able to use online services will facilitate their access to information and administrative services, helping to increase their autonomy and improve their quality of life. In addition, the chat-bot citizen participation platform will provide a quick channel for transmitting complaints and problems identified at community level, facilitating communication with the local administration and monitoring their resolution. As for the indirect beneficiaries, the Săsciori Commune ATU will benefit from the streamlining of the administrative activity, in the sense of reducing the pressure on the counters and the need to supplement the staff to manage the volume of requests. By digitising processes, the institution will be able to manage existing resources more efficiently and will be able to allocate more time to planning and local development activities. Another category of indirect beneficiaries is represented by IT service providers involved in the development and implementation of digital solutions, which will have the opportunity to develop their expertise in the field of digital public services and contribute to the modernisation of local public administration. Even if not all citizens will directly use digital platforms, the entire community will indirectly benefit from improving the efficiency and quality of public services. Reducing bureaucracy, waiting times and the consumption of material resources, such as paper, will have a positive impact on the functioning of the administration and on the interaction between citizens and the public institution. In this way, the project contributes to the development of a more connected, inclusive and digitally oriented community.

5. PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTATION

At the time of this case study, the digitisation project initiated by the Săsciori Commune ATU is in the evaluation stage, and no actual implementation activities have yet started. In this context, the progress of the project can be analysed exclusively from the perspective of the preparation, planning and substantiation stages completed prior to the submission of the funding application. Although these steps do not imply tangible results at the level of infrastructure or functional digital services, they represent a relevant path for understanding the level of maturity of the proposed intervention and how the local government has approached the digitisation process.

A first element of identifiable progress is the clarification of the initial situation and structural problems of the local public administration. As part of the project preparation process, the administration carried out an analysis of the functioning of the institution, focused on administrative flows, the relationship with citizens and the degree of use of digital tools. This analysis was not formalised in the form of a technical audit but was based on direct observations and practical experience of the staff involved in the current work. Through this approach, the points where the existing procedures generated delays, overlapping responsibilities or a high consumption of resources were identified.

An important aspect of this process was the awareness of the limitations generated by the predominant use of paper documents and physical records. The functioning of the registry exclusively in analogue format, the existence of a physical archive that is difficult to access and the lack of a unitary system for tracking applications were recognised as elements that negatively influence both the citizens' experience and the internal activity of the institution. Identifying these limitations was a necessary step in defining the digitisation directions proposed by the project.

Another element of progress is the internal consultation process carried out within the local administration. In the preparation phase of the project, discussions were held with officials from different departments, especially those involved in the management of applications, documents and the relationship with citizens. These consultations were intended to gather information on the concrete way of carrying out daily activities, the difficulties encountered and the expectations related to the use of digital solutions. Although they were not organised in the form of formal consultation sessions, these discussions helped to shape a clearer picture of the internal needs of the administration.

In parallel, the project preparation process also included a reflection on citizens' needs, starting from their current interactions with the local administration. The observations regarding the high number of trips to the mayor's office, the difficulties encountered by citizens from the villages belonging to them and the repetitive nature of many administrative requests were the basis for defining solutions aimed at reducing physical interaction. This step can be considered progress in so far as it has brought about a change of perspective on the role of the administration, which is no longer seen exclusively as a physical space, but as a provider of services that can also be accessed remotely.

Another relevant element of the progress made up to the evaluation stage is the formulation of the project concept and the structuring of its objectives. Following the analyses and discussions, the local administration managed to outline a set of clear directions of intervention, focused on the digitisation of the application registration flow, the development of an electronic archive, the introduction of the electronic signature and the creation of digital solutions for the relationship with the citizen. These directions were not set arbitrarily but resulted from a process of correlation between the problems identified and the solutions considered feasible in the local context.

At this stage, a documentation was also made on the digital solutions available on the market and examples of good practice from other administrative-territorial units. The local administration analysed existing experiences, both in rural and urban areas, to understand what types of solutions can be adapted to their own context. This work did not result in the selection of a concrete technical solution but helped to define general functional requirements and avoid proposing solutions that were difficult to use or integrate.

The progress made in the preparation phase is also reflected in the analysis carried out on the possibility of establishing institutional partnerships. The local administration evaluated the option of submitting the project in partnership with other administrative-territorial units, analysing both the potential advantages and the difficulties associated with such an approach. Following this analysis, it was decided to submit the project individually, a decision based on the lack of direct benefits for citizens and on the administrative risks associated with managing a formal partnership. This analysis process can be considered a step forward in that it has made it possible to clarify the options available and to adopt a solution adapted to the existing administrative capacity.

Another element of progress is the collaboration with a consultant specialised in the development of projects financed by European funds. The involvement of the consultant contributed to the structuring of the funding application, to the clarification of the requirements of the call and to the formulation of the documentation in a coherent and compliant way. This collaboration was based on previous work experiences between the local administration and the consultant, which facilitated communication and mutual understanding of expectations.

Also, in the preparation phase of the project, the local administration interacted with the authority responsible for managing the call for funding, in order to clarify some procedural aspects. These steps were intended to reduce the risk of non-conformities in the submitted documentation and to ensure a correct understanding of the applicable requirements.

An important aspect to underline is the fact that, until the evaluation stage, no activities involving financial commitments or structural changes have been started within the local government. All the actions taken were limited to planning, analysis and documentation, in accordance with the stage of the project. This clear demarcation between the preparation and implementation phases reflects a prudent approach on the part of the administration, which avoided initiating activities that could have generated risks in the absence of a financing decision.

In conclusion, although the project has not yet entered the implementation phase, the progress made up to the evaluation stage consists of a structured process of preparation, analysis and substantiation. This process allowed the local administration to clarify existing problems, define the directions of intervention and strengthen its capacity to manage a digitisation project. Progress is not yet reflected in operational results, but it creates the necessary framework for an eventual coherent implementation adapted to the local context, in case of approval of funding.

6. IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS (PROGRESS AND INTERNAL MECHANISMS)

At the time of the interview, the digitisation project initiated by Săsciori Commune is not yet in the actual implementation phase, being in the evaluation stage. In this context, the analysis of the implementation process relates to the way in which the local public administration anticipated and prepared the internal mechanisms necessary for the development of the project, as well as to the progress made in the preliminary planning and organisation stage.

A first relevant aspect of the implementation process, in the sense of its preparation, is the clarification of internal responsibilities. From the discussions held during the interview, it emerges that the local administration has a team with experience in managing projects financed from European funds, made up of people with distinct attributions in the area of projects, development and implementation. This structure allowed the administration to anticipate the distribution of tasks related to the digitisation project, including the coordination of activities, the relationship with service providers and the monitoring of the progress of the project.

In the preparation phase, the administration carried out an informal assessment of the internal capacity to manage a digitisation project, taking into account previous experiences in implementing projects in areas such as infrastructure, education, social services or energy. This experience influenced the way the implementation process was designed, preferring a phased approach adapted to the available resources, without overloading the existing staff.

Another element of the implementation process, anticipated from the preparation phase, is the collaboration with an external consultant. Its role was mainly defined at the stage of developing the funding application, but the local administration considered continuing the collaboration during the implementation, especially to ensure administrative compliance and support in the relationship with the managing authority. This option reflects a practice already used in previous projects of the administration and has the role of reducing the risks associated with the management of procedures specific to projects financed by European funds.

The implementation process has been designed in close connection with the existing administrative flows. The interview shows that the local administration was concerned about avoiding digital solutions that work in isolation or that impose sudden changes in the way of working. In this regard, the anticipated internal mechanisms for implementation include a stage of gradual adaptation of the staff to the new solutions, as well as their integration into the current activity of the departments.

Another aspect of the implementation process is the planning of staff training activities. Although these activities have not yet started, the local administration has recognised the need to develop employees' digital skills for the effective use of the proposed solutions. In the preparation phase, this aspect was taken into account as an integral part of the implementation process, being seen as a condition for the coherent functioning of digital systems.

Regarding the internal coordination mechanisms, the local administration anticipated the need for constant communication between the compartments involved in the use of digital solutions. From previous experiences, the idea was outlined that the lack of clear coordination can generate difficulties in

implementation, which is why the process was designed so that responsibilities are clearly delimited, and communication flows are as simple as possible.

Another relevant element of the implementation process is the approach regarding the relationship with IT solution providers. Although a supplier has not yet been selected, the local administration considered the need for a collaboration that would allow the solutions to be adapted to the local specifics, not just the delivery of standard products. The interview shows a preference for solutions that can be configured according to the needs of the institution and for a constant dialogue between the administration and the supplier during the implementation.

The implementation process was also designed from the perspective of risk management. The local administration considered possible difficulties related to the adaptation of staff to new technologies, the interoperability of solutions or their acceptance by citizens. In the preparation phase, these risks were not formalised in a risk management plan but were discussed informally and taken into account in defining how to implement.

A distinct aspect of the implementation process is how the administration has planned to monitor the progress of the project. The interview shows that the monitoring would be based on mechanisms already used in other projects, such as periodic reporting, monitoring the fulfilment of the assumed activities and maintaining a constant relationship with the managing authority. This approach reflects a continuity in the way the administration works, adapted to the specifics of the digitisation project.

It is important to note that, until the completion of the evaluation phase, the local administration has not initiated structural changes or internal reorganisations dedicated exclusively to this project. The internal mechanisms described have been designed as extensions of existing structures, not as parallel structures, in order to avoid fragmentation of responsibilities and overlapping attributions.

Overall, the implementation process, as anticipated and prepared at the evaluation stage, reflects a prudent approach and adapted to the existing administrative capacity. Although there is still no measurable progress in terms of results or deliverables, the outlined internal mechanisms create the necessary framework for the project to run in the event of approval of the funding. The analysis of this process highlights the fact that the local administration has treated the implementation as a process that requires planning, coordination and continuous adaptation, not just as a succession of technical activities.

7. IMPACT ON BENEFICIARIES AND THE COMMUNITY

The analysis of the impact on the beneficiaries and the community is carried out, in the context of this project, from an anticipatory perspective, given that the digitisation project initiated by the Săsciori Commune ATU is in the evaluation stage and has not yet entered the implementation phase. At this stage, the impact can only be assessed at the level of expectations, expected changes and how the proposed solutions are intended to meet the needs identified in the project preparation phase.

The direct beneficiaries of the project are the citizens of Săsciori commune, who interact with the local public administration to solve current administrative problems, such as submitting applications, obtaining documents, paying taxes or submitting complaints. The interview shows that, before the initiation of the project, these interactions usually involved repeated trips to the mayor's office, waiting times and a high degree of dependence on the physical presence of officials. The expected impact of the project on citizens is mainly to reduce these constraints by providing digital channels for access to public services.

In particular, for citizens living in the villages belonging to the commune, where the distance from the town hall may involve additional logistical efforts, the proposed digital solutions are expected to lead to a decrease in the need for physical travel. This aspect is relevant in the context in which the interview highlighted the fact that most citizens go to the city hall exclusively to solve administrative obligations, not as a result of a voluntary interaction. Through the digitisation of services, a change in the way citizens perceive the relationship with the local administration is anticipated, becoming more predictable and easier to manage in terms of the time allocated.

Another expected impact on citizens is related to the simplification of administrative procedures. By digitising the flow of registration of applications and by the possibility of submitting them in electronic format,

it is estimated that the number of steps required to solve a request will be reduced. This change is particularly relevant in the context described in the interview, in which citizens were frequently directed between several compartments to obtain information or signatures. By reorganising administrative flows, the project aims to ensure that these internal interactions no longer involve the citizen, which can contribute to a more coherent and less fragmented experience.

The impact on direct beneficiaries is also anticipated from the perspective of access to information. The proposed digital solutions are designed to allow citizens to submit requests, track their status and receive responses in a more transparent way. Although these functionalities are not yet implemented, they are expected to reduce the uncertainty associated with administrative processes and reduce the need to request additional information by travel or phone calls.

In addition to citizens, another important group of direct beneficiaries is represented by the staff of the local public administration. The interview shows that officials face a high volume of requests, many of which are repetitive and time-consuming. The anticipated impact of the project on this group is to reorganise the way of working and to reduce the frequent interruptions generated by direct interactions with citizens. By using digital solutions, it is estimated that some of the current requests will be able to be managed in a more structured way, which could allow staff to organise their work more efficiently.

A relevant impact on local government is also anticipated in terms of document and information management. The creation of an electronic archive and the use of digital document management systems are expected to lead to a better organisation of information and a reduction in the time needed to identify documents. This has implications not only for the day-to-day work of officials, but also for the institution's ability to respond to requests from other institutions or authorities.

The introduction of the electronic signature is anticipated to have an impact on the way internal administrative flows are managed. From the perspective of the local government, this solution is seen as a way to reduce the dependence on the physical presence of people with the right to sign and to limit the delays generated by their temporary unavailability. The expected impact lies in greater continuity of administrative processes and a more balanced distribution of tasks between departments.

At the community level, the impact of the project is anticipated in a broader manner, beyond the direct relationship between citizens and the administration. Through the digitalisation of public services, it is estimated to contribute to reducing the rural-urban gaps in access to modern administrative services. Although the project does not directly target economic or social development, the proposed solutions can create a more favourable framework for interaction with the local business environment and for the management of the administrative relations of the companies operating in the commune.

Another anticipated impact at community level is related to the use of technology in everyday life. The interview shows that some citizens are already using digital tools, such as online payments, which suggests that there is a minimum basis of familiarity with these solutions. Expanding the use of digital services in relation to local government could help to strengthen digital skills at EU level, without entailing sudden changes or imposing solutions that are difficult to use.

The impact on vulnerable groups is also an aspect taken into account in the preparation phase of the project. Although the draft does not include measures dedicated exclusively to these groups, the proposed digital solutions are designed to be simple and accessible, precisely to avoid the exclusion of certain categories of citizens. In this respect, the anticipated impact lies in more uniform access to public services, provided that alternative channels are maintained for citizens who cannot use the digital environment.

At the institutional level, the impact of the project is also anticipated from the perspective of changing the way of working and the organisational culture. The interview shows that the project preparation process has already generated an internal reflection on the functioning of the administration and on the modernisation directions. Even before implementation, this process contributed to a better understanding of the existing limitations and to outline a vision on the use of technology as a support tool for administrative work.

Overall, the anticipated impact of the project on the beneficiaries and the community is closely related to the way in which the proposed digital solutions will be integrated into the current activity of the administration and the degree of their acceptance by citizens. Although the concrete results cannot be evaluated in the

absence of implementation, the analysis carried out on the basis of the interview indicates that the project has the potential to significantly influence the relationship between the local public administration and the community, by reducing administrative constraints, simplifying procedures and adapting public services to local realities.

8. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INTERVENTION (PRELIMINARY COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS)

The analysis of the effectiveness of the intervention is carried out at a preliminary stage, given that the digitisation project initiated by the Săsciori Commune has not yet entered the implementation phase and is, at the time of the interview, in the evaluation process. In this context, the cost-benefit analysis cannot be of an exhaustive quantitative or financial nature, but aims to highlight, in a qualitative manner, the relationship between the resources expected to be used and the anticipated benefits, as is apparent from the substantiation of the project and from the reasoning expressed by the representative of the local administration.

From a cost perspective, the intervention mainly involves the allocation of financial resources for the development and implementation of the proposed digital solutions, as well as the use of the internal resources of the local administration for the coordination and management of the project. The costs associated with the project are perceived, at this stage, as initial investments necessary to reorganise the way the administration operates and to create a basic digital infrastructure.

A relevant element in the cost analysis is represented by the administrative effort involved in the preparation of the project. The process of documentation, internal consultation, analysis of existing flows and elaboration of the financing application involved the allocation of time and resources from the local administration staff. This type of cost, although not directly reflected in the project budget, is important for understanding the effectiveness of the intervention, as it reflects the administration's ability to invest resources in planning and substantiation, before the actual initiation of implementation.

In addition to the direct financial and administrative costs, the preliminary analysis also takes into account the indirect costs associated with the change in the way of working. The interview shows that the introduction of digital solutions will involve a period of adaptation for local administration staff, as well as a gradual process of acclimatisation of citizens to the new tools. These transition costs are not quantified, but they are implicitly recognised in the way the project was designed, by emphasising simplicity, accessibility and avoiding difficult-to-use solutions.

From the perspective of anticipated benefits, the analysis focuses on the expected changes in the use of existing resources and in the organisation of administrative work. An important benefit identified in the interview is related to the reduction of the time allocated to the management of administrative requests. The digitisation of the application registration flow and the reorganisation of the document circuit are anticipated to lead to a decrease in repetitive activities and internal movements between departments, which can allow a more efficient use of the working time of officials.

Another anticipated benefit is related to document and archive management. In the situation prior to the project, the identification of a document involved manual searches in the physical archive, with a high consumption of time and resources. The creation of an electronic archive is perceived as a solution that can significantly reduce this type of effort, facilitating access to information both for the current activity of the administration and for solving requests from citizens or other institutions. This benefit has direct implications on internal efficiency, even if it is not easy to quantify in financial terms.

The preliminary cost-benefit analysis also takes into account the reduction of the use of paper documents. The interview shows that the local government operated largely on the basis of printed documents, which involved recurring costs for paper, printing supplies and storage spaces. Through the digitisation of processes and the use of electronic signatures, a decrease in these costs is anticipated in the medium term, as well as a reduction in the workload associated with the management of physical documents.

From the perspective of citizens, the anticipated benefits are mainly related to time savings and the reduction of indirect costs associated with travel to the city hall. The interview highlighted the fact that, for many citizens, interacting with the administration involves wasted time and, in some cases, interruption of professional activity. The digitisation of services is seen as a way to reduce these indirect costs, even if

they are not reflected in the local government budget. In the analysis of the effectiveness of the intervention, these benefits are relevant, as they contribute to a better use of resources at community level.

Another anticipated benefit is related to the continuity of administrative processes. The introduction of the electronic signature is perceived as a solution to reduce the bottlenecks generated by the temporary unavailability of people with the right to sign. From an efficiency perspective, this can lead to a more predictable planning of activities and to the avoidance of delays that, in the previous situation, generated dissatisfaction among both citizens and staff.

The preliminary analysis also takes into account the ratio between the initial investment and the medium and long-term benefits. From the way the project was based, it appears that the local administration did not approach digitalisation as a one-off intervention, but as a process that can generate cumulative effects over time. The proposed digital solutions are designed to be used in the long term, and the benefits associated with them are expected to increase as the degree of use increases and the staff adapt to the new workflows.

Another relevant aspect for the effectiveness of the intervention is related to the avoidance of future costs. The interview suggests that the local administration is facing a high volume of requests, many of them repetitive. In the absence of digitalisation, managing this volume could lead, over time, to the need to supplement staff or increase pressure on existing resources. By reorganising administrative flows and using digital solutions, the project aims to limit these pressures by making more efficient use of the resources already available.

In the context in which the project is in the evaluation phase, it is important to emphasise that this cost-benefit analysis is indicative and is based on expectations and reasoning formulated in the preparation phase. The described benefits cannot be empirically confirmed in the absence of implementation, and the final cost-benefit ratio can only be assessed later, based on concrete data on the use of digital solutions and their impact on the work of the administration and the community.

In conclusion, the preliminary analysis of the effectiveness of the intervention, based on the information from the interview, indicates that the digitisation project was designed as an investment aimed at optimising the use of existing resources, reducing indirect costs and improving the organisation of administrative activity. Even if the results cannot yet be measured, the logic of the intervention suggests a favourable relationship between the anticipated costs and the expected benefits, conditioned by the actual implementation of the project and the degree of adoption of digital solutions by the beneficiaries.

9. CONTRIBUTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL OBJECTIVES

Equal opportunities and gender equality

In the process of preparing, evaluating and, subsequently, implementing and ensuring the sustainability of the project "DIGITALISATION, EFFICIENCY, TRANSPARENCY FOR CITIZENS – DETC", the local public administration of Săsciori Commune respects fundamental human rights and the provisions of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, promoting equal opportunities and gender equality at all stages of the project. The project is designed in accordance with the national and European legislative framework applicable in the field of equal treatment between women and men, non-discrimination and social inclusion.

Within the local public administration, equal treatment is ensured in terms of access to employment, assignment of responsibilities, access to training, evaluation and remuneration for equal work. The structure of the administrative apparatus reflects a balanced representation of women and men, without discriminatory differentiation, and the determination of roles and responsibilities is carried out exclusively on the basis of professional skills and job-specific requirements.

These principles are also applied within the project, including in terms of setting up the implementation team, organising activities and decision-making. The gender perspective is transversally integrated, and the project is designed to be neutral from this point of view, guaranteeing equal access for women and men to the developed digital infrastructure and the benefits generated by it.

Non-discrimination and social inclusion

The local public administration of Săsciori Commune constantly applies the principles of non-discrimination and equal opportunities, both through the internal regulatory framework and through current administrative practices. The project promotes the fair treatment of all people, without discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnic origin, religion, beliefs, disability, age, sexual orientation or belonging to a disadvantaged category.

These principles are also respected in public procurement procedures and project management activities, where the criteria used are objective, transparent and based on professional performance. In the event that, during the implementation of the project, additional human resources will be needed, their selection will be carried out in strict compliance with the legislation in force, ensuring equal access to all interested persons.

Through the proposed digital solutions, the project contributes to increasing social inclusion, facilitating access to public services for all citizens, regardless of social situation or geographical location. The developed digital platforms allow interaction with the administration without physical or administrative barriers, supporting the active participation of citizens and reducing the risk of social exclusion.

Accessibility for people with disabilities

The digital solutions proposed by the project are designed to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities, in line with web accessibility standards and inclusive design principles. The interfaces of the platforms will be made in a clear and intuitive way, with functionalities adapted to various types of needs, such as compatibility with screen readers, the possibility of keyboard navigation and logical structures for presenting information.

Through these measures, the project facilitates equal access to digital public services for people with disabilities, contributing to increasing their autonomy in relation to the local public administration. At the same time, the proposed solutions are also adapted for other vulnerable categories, such as the elderly or those with reduced mobility, who can access services without having to physically go to the mayor's office.

Sustainable development and the "polluter pays" principle

The project does not generate significant increases in pollutant emissions to air, water or soil. On the contrary, the digitisation of administrative processes contributes to reducing paper consumption, the use of material resources and the need for physical travel of citizens and administrative staff. In the implementation phase, energy-efficient IT equipment will be used, and the organisation of activities will take into account the reduction of the environmental impact.

If, during the course of the project, there could be effects on the environment, the local public administration assumes compliance with the legal provisions in force and the application of the "polluter pays" principle, according to national and European legislation.

Biodiversity protection

The project has an insignificant impact on biodiversity and natural ecosystems, as the proposed activities are exclusively digital in nature and do not involve construction works, deforestation or interventions on the natural environment. The implementation of digital solutions is carried out in existing administrative spaces, without affecting natural habitats or protected areas.

By reducing the consumption of material resources and the use of paper, the project indirectly contributes to the protection of natural resources and to reducing pressure on the environment.

Efficient use of resources

The project promotes the efficient use of financial, human and material resources through the adoption of integrated digital solutions. The digitisation of documents and the automation of administrative processes reduce the need for physical archiving spaces, optimise workflows and reduce operational costs in the medium and long term.

The IT equipment used will be selected in such a way as to ensure a balance between performance, lifespan and energy consumption, contributing to responsible resource management and increasing the sustainability of administrative activities.

Climate change immunisation

The project does not amplify the risks associated with climate change and does not involve investments in physical infrastructure susceptible to such risks. By digitising processes and reducing dependence on physical resources and travel, the carbon footprint of local public administration activities is reduced. This approach supports the transition to a public administration adapted to the current climate change context.

DNSH principle – "Do no significant harm"

The project complies with the DNSH principle, being designed in such a way that it does not cause significant damage to any of the environmental objectives set at the level of the European Union. The digital nature of the intervention, the efficient use of resources, the responsible management of IT equipment and the reduction of emissions associated with administrative activities ensure the compatibility of the project with the objectives of environmental protection and sustainable development.

10. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the process of preparing the digitisation project initiated by the local public administration in Săsciori Commune highlights an approach built gradually, based on an in-depth understanding of the institutional functioning and the relationship between the administration and the citizens. The interview conducted within the case study provides a detailed picture of the initial context, the problems identified and the reasoning behind the definition of the directions of intervention, outlining a pragmatic approach to the digitisation of local public administration.

The situation that existed before the start of the project is described as specific to many small and medium-sized local public administrations, characterised by the extensive use of paper documents, the lack of integrated IT systems and the existence of fragmented administrative flows. The operation of the registry exclusively in physical format, the manual management of documents and the dependence on the traditional circuit of signatures have generated a high volume of repetitive activities, delays in solving applications and difficulties for both citizens and administrative staff.

The information resulting from the interview shows that the relationship between the citizen and the administration was marked by a large number of physical interactions, repeated trips to the mayor's office and a lack of predictability in terms of the duration of administrative processes. This situation was perceived as all the more problematic in the specific context of a commune with several villages, where the distances and logistical efforts associated with travel amplified the discomfort of citizens. These realities were the starting point for shaping the project idea and defining the digitisation objectives.

A central element that emerges is the fact that the digitisation project was not conceived as an end in itself, but as a tool intended to solve concrete problems. The focus was on reducing unnecessary physical interaction, simplifying procedures and reorganising administrative flows, so that the responsibility for managing applications lies with the administration, not the citizen. This shift in perspective reflects a redefinition of the role of the public institution, which is no longer perceived exclusively as a physical space for interaction, but as a provider of remotely accessible services.

The project preparation process involved a careful analysis of the internal needs of the local administration. The high volume of daily requests, the repetitive nature of many of them and the frequent interruptions caused by the constant flow of citizens have been identified as factors affecting the efficiency of administrative work. In the absence of integrated digital solutions, officials had to simultaneously manage routine administrative tasks and activities that required concentration and planning, which limited the institution's ability to engage in strategic local development initiatives.

From this perspective, digitalisation is seen as a means of reorganising internal work, by automating processes, reducing dependence on physical presence and creating clearer mechanisms for tracking requests. The introduction of an electronic document management system, the development of an electronic archive and the use of electronic signatures are presented as elements that can contribute to better continuity of administrative processes and to reduce bottlenecks caused by the temporary absence of persons with the right to sign.

Another relevant aspect highlighted is the way in which digital solutions for the relationship with citizens have been designed in relation to the level of use of technology in the community. The interview shows a constant concern for simplicity of use and for reducing the number of steps necessary to access a public service. The logic of "fewer steps, fewer clicks" influenced the design of the proposed solutions, reflecting an understanding that digitalisation should not reproduce the complexity of offline procedures, but simplify them.

The analysis of the project preparation experience also shows the importance of the process of learning from good practices. Existing models in other local administrations were used as sources of inspiration, being adapted to the specificity and institutional capacity of the commune. This approach indicates an openness to the exchange of experience and an orientation towards already tested solutions, without losing sight of the particularities of the local context.

The theme of partnerships provides a relevant perspective on how local governments assess the opportunity for formal cooperation. The analysis of the information shows that the decision to submit the project individually was the result of a pragmatic assessment, based on direct utility for citizens and the capacity for administrative coordination. Previous experiences influenced this decision, highlighting the importance of control over the pace and direction of projects.

An important element is the role of the project preparation stage as an institutional exercise. Even though the project is in the evaluation stage and has not yet entered into implementation, this approach has contributed to clarifying priorities, assessing administrative capacity and formulating a longer-term vision on digitalisation. The process of internal analysis, defining objectives and correlating the proposed solutions with real needs generated a better understanding of the possible modernisation directions.

The existing administrative capacity and previous experience in the implementation of projects financed from European funds have played a significant role in managing this process. The information from the interview indicates the existence of an experienced team, capable of managing several initiatives in parallel, which allowed the digitalisation approach in a structured and realistic manner.

Overall, the process of preparing the digitalisation project in Săsciori Commune exceeded the immediate objective of accessing funding, contributing to the consolidation of a coherent vision on the modernisation of the local public administration. Digitisation is approached as a phased process, adapted to the local context and oriented to the real needs of the community, both from the perspective of citizens and from the internal functioning of the institution.

Through the way it has been built and substantiated, this approach offers a relevant perspective on the challenges and opportunities of digitalisation in rural areas, highlighting the importance of contextual analysis, planning and adaptation of solutions to existing administrative realities. Even in the absence of effective implementation, the experience described contributes to the development of a strategic approach to digitalisation, which can inform future initiatives and support the process of modernisation of local public administration in the medium and long term.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

During the discussion, the representative of the local administration stressed the need for digitisation projects to be built starting from the real way of functioning of the institution and from the concrete interactions between citizens and the administration. From this perspective, digitalisation is seen as a process of reorganising administrative activity rather than as a simple introduction of technical solutions. The experience described shows that the use of isolated digital tools, without integration into existing flows, fails to solve the structural problems related to the document circuit and the relationship with the citizen.

The representative highlighted the importance of the integrated approach to digitisation, especially as regards the link between the registry, the internal document circuit and the archive. From his point of view, these components must be thought of as parts of the same system, so that the responsibility for following up on a request lies with the administration, not with the citizen. Such an approach would help eliminate situations where applicants have to move between multiple compartments to obtain the necessary information or signatures.

As for the solutions intended for the relationship with citizens, the representative insisted on the need for them to be simple and easy to use. In rural areas, where the level of familiarity with digital tools differs from one category of population to another, the excessive complexity of applications can become an obstacle in use. For this reason, emphasis has been placed on reducing the number of steps required to access a public service and on creating intuitive interfaces that do not require advanced digital skills.

Another aspect mentioned in the discussion refers to the impact of digitalisation on the internal activity of the administration. The representative described the high volume of repetitive requests as a factor affecting staff's ability to focus on more complex tasks. In this context, digitalisation is seen as a way to reduce frequent interruptions and organise working time more efficiently. For this to be possible, the solutions implemented must be adapted to the concrete way of working of officials and be supported by a reorganisation of administrative flows.

During the interview, the importance of electronic signatures in administrative processes was also discussed. The representative showed that the lack of it generates delays and blockages, especially in situations where people with the right to sign are not available temporarily. The integration of the electronic signature in the current activity is seen as a solution that can contribute to the continuity of processes and to the reduction of request resolution times, both in the internal relationship and in the relationship with citizens.

Regarding the electronic archive, the representative described the difficulties generated by operating exclusively on paper and stressed the need to digitise the relevant documents. Quick access to information and the possibility of consulting documents without physical travel are considered direct benefits, both for administration staff and for citizens. At the same time, it was stressed that this type of intervention requires careful planning and clear staging, given the large volume of existing documents.

The representative mentioned that the project preparation process was influenced by the analysis of examples of good practices, especially from other local administrations that have already gone through advanced stages of digitisation. These examples were used as a source of inspiration, not as models to be copied in full, being adapted to the specifics and capacity of the local administration. This experience shows the importance of exchanging information between administrations and learning from already tested solutions.

Regarding the structure of funding calls, the representative pointed out **the need for greater flexibility in the configuration of projects**. Communal administrations have different characteristics from urban administrations, both in terms of the volume of activity and the structure of the administrative apparatus. The possibility of adapting solutions and budgets to these realities would allow the implementation of projects better correlated with local needs and would reduce the risk of interventions that are difficult to sustain in the long term.

The discussion also touched on the topic of institutional partnerships. The representative pointed out that, in the absence of common services or interdependent administrative flows, formal partnerships between municipalities could lead to additional coordination difficulties. From this perspective, the additional scoring given to projects submitted in partnership should be more clearly linked to the existence of concrete benefits for citizens. At the same time, positive experiences were highlighted in existing cooperation structures, which can provide a more stable basis for future initiatives.

Another aspect resulting from the interview is related to the importance of dialogue with the managing authority. The representative appreciated the support received at the clarification stage, stressing the usefulness of constant communication to avoid errors and to correctly understand the requirements. From this experience, the need for communication mechanisms as clear and accessible as possible, which support local administrations in the process of preparing and evaluating projects, is outlined.

Last but not least, the representative stressed that the preparation phase of the project played an important role in clarifying priorities and strengthening a longer-term vision on digitalisation. Even though the project is in the evaluation stage, the process of needs analysis and definition of objectives has contributed to a better understanding of the modernisation directions and to the identification of possible future steps.

Overall, the recommendations reflect a pragmatic approach to digitalisation, geared towards real needs and adapted to the local context. The focus is on the integration of digital solutions into administrative flows,

on the simplicity of use for citizens, on supporting the internal work of the administration and on the flexibility of the funding framework, so that interventions can be sustained and developed over time.

9.1 Case Study Interview Minute – Săsciori Commune

Date: December 11, 2025

Location: online

Participants: representative of the commune of Săsciori and representatives of the Association formed by CIVITTA Strategy & Consulting SA (leader) and Lideea Development Actions SRL (partner)

Context of the interview and the situation of the local public administration prior to the initiation of the project

The discussion took place within the documentation process related to the case study on the implementation of digitisation projects financed by Priority 2. The interview was conducted in order to document the process of preparing and substantiating a digitisation project initiated by a common administrative-territorial unit, in the context of the call for funding dedicated to the digitisation of the local public administration. The main purpose of the interview was to capture how the real needs of citizens and local administration led to the shaping of the project idea, as well as how this preparatory approach generated a broader reflection on the functioning of the institution and on the future directions of modernisation. The discussion was held with a representative of the local administration directly involved in the project preparation process, having the role of advisor to the mayor and responsibilities in the area of projects and development. The interview had a narrative and analytical character, being oriented towards understanding the initial context**,** the problems identified**,** the institutional motivations and the reasoning that were the basis for defining the digitisation directions**.**

The situation of the digitalisation of the local public administration before the project

Before the start of the process of preparing the digitisation project, the local public administration operated in a predominantly analogous way, based on traditional procedures and the extensive use of paper documents. The interviewee described this situation as one common to many small and medium-sized local public administrations, where digitisation was limited to one-off initiatives, without an integrated system.

One of the most problematic aspects identified was the functioning of the registry**,** where the registration of documents was carried out exclusively in physical registers. Registration numbers were kept on paper, and the management of applications involved repeated trips between offices, both for citizens and officials. This fragmented document circuit generates confusion, delays and significant time consumption.

The interviewee pointed out that, in the absence of a digital system, the citizen had to move between several compartments to obtain information, opinions or signatures, being frequently sent from one office to another. This situation was perceived as difficult and frustrating, especially given that most citizens came to the city hall exclusively to solve their administrative problems, not on their own initiative.

In addition to the registry, the local government archive also functioned exclusively in physical format. Searching for a document involved moving around the archiving space and manually identifying files, a process described as arduous and resource consuming. This situation affects both the internal activity of the institution and the ability to respond promptly to requests from citizens or other institutions.

Specific digitisation elements existing before the project

Although the administration did not benefit from integrated digitisation, the interviewee mentioned the existence of specific initiatives that indicated an openness to the use of digital tools. These included the possibility of making online payments, which was already functional and used by some citizens, as well as the use of electronic mail to send applications or documents.

However, these tools were not integrated into a coherent digital flow. Applications received by e-mail still required printing and introduction into the classic paper circuit, which limited the real benefits of using digital channels. The interviewee highlighted the fact that, although these solutions represented a step forward, they did not solve the underlying problem related to the fragmentation of administrative processes.

This situation has generated the conviction that a broader approach is needed, not limited to the use of isolated tools, but aimed at digitising processes and reorganising workflows**.**

Citizens' needs as a starting point of the project

The interviewee repeatedly stressed that the idea of the digitisation project arose from the needs of citizens**,** not from an abstract initiative or the desire to access funding. In his view, the citizen does not come to the city hall "for the sake of it", but exclusively to solve a concrete problem. Every trip involves lost time, costs and, in many cases, interruption of professional activity.

This reality is even more relevant in the case of a commune with several villages belonging to it, where the distances to the town hall can be a few kilometres. For many citizens, going to the city hall involves significant logistical efforts, which accentuates the negative perception of interaction with the administration.

Based on these observations, the local administration concluded that digitalisation could significantly reduce the number of trips and facilitate citizens' access to public services. The interviewee summarised this idea through a suggestive formulation: the less citizens come to the mayor's office, the more efficient the respective administration is.

This perspective was the basis for the redefinition of the role of the city hall, which is no longer seen as a physical space where citizens must present themselves for each request, but as an institution that should offer remotely accessible solutions, adapted to current realities.

Internal needs of the administration and the impact of the volume of requests

In addition to the needs of the citizens, an important role in shaping the project idea was played by the internal needs of the local administration**.** The interviewee described a high volume of daily requests, many of them repetitive, which affected the ability of officials to focus on strategic or complex activities.

In the absence of digital flows, each application involved direct interaction, multiple signatures and successive verifications. The temporary absence of a person with the right to sign could block the entire process, which generated delays and dissatisfaction. The interviewee highlighted the frustrating nature of these situations, both for citizens and for the staff of the city hall.

Also, the frequent interruptions caused by the constant flow of citizens affected the institution's ability to carry out activities that required concentration, such as preparing projects or managing other local development initiatives. This reality has contributed to the awareness that digitalisation is not only a benefit for citizens, but also a necessity for the efficient functioning of the administration.

Substantiation of the project objectives

Following the analysis of the existing situation and the identification of the main difficulties encountered by both citizens and local administration, the need to initiate a digitisation project with clearly defined objectives was outlined. The interviewee stressed that these objectives were not formulated in an abstract way but resulted from direct observations on the way the institution operates and on the type of requests received from citizens.

The project was designed as a first step in a broader modernisation process, with the main purpose of reducing unnecessary physical interaction between citizens and the administration, simplifying procedures and increasing internal efficiency. The focus was not on digitisation as an end in itself, but on digitisation as a tool for solving concrete problems.

The interviewee formulated a key idea that guided the entire preparation process: the performance of a city hall can also be evaluated in terms of the extent to which citizens no longer have to physically travel to solve their administrative problems. From this perspective, the objectives of the project were structured around the concept of accessibility, simplicity and reduction of administrative effort.

Digitisation of the application registration flow

One of the central directions of the project, as it was conceived in the preparation phase, aimed at digitising the application registration flow. The interviewee explained that, at the initial moment, all applications were registered exclusively on paper, and this generated a cumbersome and fragmented circuit of documents.

Through the project, the administration aims to create the premises for a system in which applications can be submitted electronically, receive a registration number in an automated way and be routed internally

without the citizen having to intervene in this process. The aim was to eliminate the situations in which citizens are sent from one office to another to obtain information or signatures.

This direction of intervention was designed not only as a simple digitisation of a register, but as a reorganisation of the administrative flow, so that the responsibility for managing requests lies exclusively with the institution, not with the citizen.

Electronic archive – proposed objective of the project

Another important objective of the project, which is in the intention and planning phase, was the creation of an electronic archive. The interviewee described the difficulties encountered in the absence of such an archive, pointing out that identifying a document involved physically moving around the archive and manually searching for files.

Through the project, the administration aims to create the conditions for the digitisation of relevant documents and for their organisation in an electronic system that allows quick and efficient access. This objective was perceived as essential both for the internal activity and for the relationship with the citizen, in the context in which many requests involve consulting older documents.

It is important to emphasise that, at the time of the interview, the electronic archive did not exist, being an objective assumed within the project, with subsequent implementation, conditioned by the approval and implementation of the funding.

Introduction of the electronic signature in administrative processes

Another central element of the project, at proposal level, was the use of electronic signatures for certain key functions within the local government. The interviewee explicitly mentioned departments such as secretarial, accounting, urban planning and other areas where documents require multiple signatures.

The lack of an electronic signature was perceived as a major blocking factor, as the temporary absence of a person with the right to sign could significantly delay the resolution of a request. By introducing the electronic signature, the administration aimed to reduce these bottlenecks and ensure the continuity of administrative processes.

This measure was designed both in the internal relationship between the compartments and in the relationship with the citizens, especially for documents such as notices, certificates or other types of administrative acts.

Mobile application and digital solutions for the relationship with the citizen

In addition to the digitisation of internal flows, the local administration analysed the possibility of developing a mobile application or accessible digital solutions for the relationship with the citizen. The interviewee pointed out that this idea arose as a result of the finding that most citizens own mobile phones and are familiar with the use of applications.

The application was designed as a tool through which citizens can submit applications, submit complaints or send photos relevant to various issues in the community. The emphasis was placed on simplicity of use, as it was considered essential that digital solutions were not complicated or difficult to understand.

The interviewee mentioned that the administration did not intend to "invent" new solutions, but to be inspired by already existing and functional models, adapting them to the local specificity. This approach was perceived as pragmatic and effective.

Inspiration from good practice models

An important role in defining the objectives of the project was played by the good practice models identified by the local administration. The interviewee explicitly mentioned the commune of Ciugud as a reference example, considered a benchmark in the field of digitisation of local public administration.

In addition to Ciugud, the experiences of more developed administrations were also analysed, where the use of mobile applications, electronic signatures and digital communication with citizens is already a common practice. These examples have helped to strengthen the belief that digitalisation is not only possible, but also necessary, including in rural areas.

The interviewee stressed that the learning process from good practices was an active one, based on direct discussions with other administrations and IT solution providers, not just on theoretical documentation.

The logic of "fewer steps, fewer clicks"

An important conceptual element that was the basis of the project was the idea of extreme simplification of the interaction with the citizen. The interviewee explained that digitalisation should not reproduce the complexity and fragmentation of offline processes in the online environment but simplify them.

This logic was summarised by the analogy with the number of steps that a citizen must take in a city hall to solve a problem, transposed into the digital environment by the number of "clicks" required to obtain a document. The declared objective was that the citizen would have to register only once and be able to access the services with a minimum number of shares.

This approach influenced the way in which all the digitisation directions proposed within the project were designed.

Context of the analysis of the partnerships within the project

In the preparation phase of the digitisation project, the local administration also analysed the possibility of establishing an institutional partnership, mainly as a result of the structure of the call for funding, which awarded additional points to the projects submitted in partnership. The interviewee mentioned that this analysis did not start from a clearly defined operational need, but from the desire to maximise the chances of obtaining funding.

The local administration has initiated discussions with a neighbouring commune, considering the possibility of submitting a joint project. However, following the analyses and discussions carried out, it was found that the achievement of a formal partnership raises a number of practical and conceptual difficulties, which ultimately led to the decision to submit the project individually.

Practical difficulties in building partnerships between municipalities

One of the main difficulties identified was related to the lack of a clear and direct benefit for citizens, in the case of a partnership between two municipalities with a similar administrative profile. The interviewee pointed out that the citizen of one commune does not usually request administrative services from the municipality of another commune, which raises questions about the real usefulness of such a partnership.

In this context, it was considered that a formal partnership between two municipalities would have been difficult to justify from the perspective of the impact on citizens, in the absence of common services or interdependent administrative flows. This finding was one of the factors that contributed to the abandonment of the idea of partnership with a neighbouring commune.

Difficulties related to the financial and administrative organisation of the partnership were also mentioned, including issues such as sharing consultancy costs, establishing the role of project leader and assuming responsibilities by each partner. These elements were perceived as difficult to manage, especially given that the administrations involved had similar administrative capacities.

Partnerships with larger administrative-territorial units

During the discussion, the possibility of establishing a partnership with a higher-ranking administrative-territorial unit, such as a municipality or a larger mayor's office, was also addressed. The interviewee also expressed reservations about this option, arguing that, in the situation where a larger administration is already digitised or is in an advanced stage of digitisation, the benefits of a partnership for a smaller commune are not obvious.

From the perspective expressed, digitalisation should ensure equal access to services, regardless of the existence of a formal partnership. In this regard, it was considered that a citizen of the commune should be able to access the digital services of a larger town hall without the local administration being part of a formal institutional partnership.

This approach reflects a vision in which digitalisation is perceived as an autonomous process, which does not necessarily require formal collaborative frameworks to produce tangible benefits for citizens.

Previous experiences that influenced the perception of partnerships

The reserved perception of partnerships was also influenced by previous experiences of the local administration in relation to other institutions. The interviewee mentioned situations in which certain funding calls could not be accessed due to the fact that the administrative-territorial unit did not have the quality of project leader, being dependent on the initiative of another institution.

Concrete examples were provided of funding calls aimed at libraries or the valorisation of UNESCO heritage, in which the local administration could not submit projects due to the lack of documentation prepared by the institutional partners. These experiences have generated a certain reluctance towards projects that involve dependence on external decisions or actions.

The interviewee pointed out that these situations created frustrations and strengthened the conviction that, when possible, it is preferable to implement projects autonomously, in order to have control over their pace and direction.

Local Action Groups as a viable alternative

In contrast to the difficulties encountered in the case of punctual partnerships, the interviewee identified Local Action Groups (LAGs) as a functional and already consolidated collaboration framework. LAGs have been perceived as structures in which there are established cooperative relationships, clear functioning mechanisms and a high level of trust between members.

From this perspective, the interviewee suggested that future digitalisation initiatives could be more effectively developed within already existing partnerships, such as those within LAGs, than by creating ad hoc partnerships. This approach would make it possible to build on existing institutional relationships and reduce the risks associated with cooperation between entities that have not previously collaborated.

Lessons learned from the project preparation stage

The preparation phase of the project generated a series of lessons learned, relevant both for the interviewed local administration and for other administrative-territorial units in similar situations. One of the main conclusions was that institutional partnerships must be based on real and clear benefits, not exclusively on scoring criteria.

The interviewee also highlighted the importance of previous experience in project implementation and internal administrative capacity, which can make the difference between a realistic project and one that is difficult to manage. The project preparation process contributed to strengthening a more pragmatic vision on digitalisation, focused on solutions adapted to the local context.

This stage was perceived not as a failure, but as a learning process, which made it possible to clarify priorities and limits, as well as to identify more appropriate directions for future initiatives.

The project preparation process and the role of the consultant

In the preparation phase of the digitisation project, the local public administration collaborated with a specialised consultant, with previous experience in similar projects. The interviewee stressed that the relationship with the consultant was a good one, based on constant collaboration and on the phased clarification of the requirements of the funding call.

The consultant had an important role in structuring the funding application, in clarifying the technical and administrative aspects, as well as in adapting the project idea to the specific requirements of the call. The interviewee mentioned that the local administration worked with the same consultant in other funded projects, which facilitated communication and mutual trust.

The importance of the relationship with the Regional Development Authority was also highlighted, especially in the phase of clarifying the procedural aspects. The interviewee stressed that the open dialogue with the RDA was essential for the correct understanding of the requirements and for avoiding errors in the submitted documentation.

Administrative capacity and previous project experience

The local administration has a team dedicated to project management, consisting of several people with responsibilities in the field of writing and implementing projects financed from European funds. The interviewee mentioned that this team has experience in carrying out projects in various fields, such as infrastructure, education, social services or energy.

This previous experience was considered an important factor in the process of preparing the digitisation project, providing the local administration with the necessary confidence to address a relatively new field, but essential for the modernisation of the institution. The interviewee pointed out that although there were also mistakes in previous projects, they were treated as learning opportunities.

The existing administrative capacity has allowed the administration to manage several initiatives in parallel, including projects at different stages of implementation or sustainability, which has helped to strengthen an organisational culture geared towards development and adaptation.

The vision of digitalisation as an integrated process

Beyond the specific objectives of the submitted project, the interviewee presented a **broader vision of digitalisation,** seen as an integrated process that should go beyond strictly administrative limits. Digitalisation is perceived not only as a modernisation of the internal flows of the city hall, but as a tool that can connect other public services in the community.

Examples such as social assistance, health, education or community centres were mentioned, where digital solutions could contribute to better coordination and easier access for citizens, especially vulnerable people. The interviewee stressed that these directions are not part of the current project, but represent possible future steps, which could be addressed through other initiatives.

This integrated vision reflects the administration's desire to build, over time, a coherent digital ecosystem, adapted to the real needs of the community and capable of responding to technological and social developments.

Project impact expectations

Although the project was not implemented at the time of the interview, the interviewee expressed clear expectations regarding the impact that digitalisation could have on the community. First of all, a **significant reduction in the need for physical travel** to the city hall is expected, which would mean savings in time and resources for citizens.

Secondly, an increase in the internal efficiency of the administration is anticipated, by reducing frequent interruptions and simplifying administrative processes. This would allow officials to focus more on strategic activities and the development of other projects.

The interviewee stressed that digitalisation also implies a change of mentality, both on the part of the administration and on the part of the citizens. While this change may be gradual and may face initial resistance, previous experiences, such as the introduction of online payments, have shown that citizens adapt to new solutions over time.

Recommendations for other administrative-territorial units

Based on the experience gained in the process of preparing the project, the interviewee made some recommendations for other administrative-territorial units that intend to submit similar projects. These include the importance of identifying a competent consultant, checking their experience and maintaining constant communication with the managing authority.

The importance of addressing all uncertainties, no matter how minor they may seem, was also stressed, as well as the need not to avoid questions to the responsible authorities. The interviewee recommended that projects be built starting from real needs and be adapted to the local context, avoiding standardised solutions that do not respond to the specifics of the community.

Recommendations for managing authorities

During the interview, some suggestions were also made to the managing authorities, in order to improve future funding calls. These include the need to simplify the guidelines, clarify the evaluation criteria and reduce the duration of the evaluation process.

The interviewee underlined the usefulness of organising meetings or workshops that include the presentation of **real good practices**, implemented by other administrative-territorial units, considering that such examples can reduce reluctance and encourage the participation of other local administrations.

Final conclusions

In conclusion, the process of preparing the digitisation project was perceived as a valuable step, regardless of the final result of the evaluation. The interview highlights the fact that the project started from **the real needs of citizens**, was based on a careful analysis of internal processes and generated a coherent vision on the modernisation of the local public administration.

Even if the project was not implemented at the time of the interview, the experience gained contributed to strengthening administrative capacity, clarifying priorities and developing a strategic approach to digitalisation. This approach can be considered a relevant example of good practice in the project preparation phase, demonstrating the importance of planning, learning from previous experiences and focusing on the real needs of the community.

10. CASE STUDY NO. 10 – DEVELOPMENT OF AN INTEGRATED FACIAL RECOGNITION SYSTEM AND VIDEOCONFERENCING SOLUTIONS FOR OFFICIAL MEETINGS AND INTERACTIONS WITH CITIZENS IN MIERCUREA CIUC MUNICIPALITY AND LELICENI COMMUNE

Evaluation title: Theme 2 "*Evaluation of interventions targeting digitalisation activities for the benefit of citizens, businesses and governments"*

Project name: Development of an integrated facial recognition system and videoconferencing solutions for official meetings and interactions with citizens in Miercurea Ciuc Municipality and Leliceni Commune

Beneficiary: Miercurea Ciuc Municipality, SMIS code 337181

Location of the investment: Miercurea Ciuc Municipality, Leliceni Commune, Harghita County

1. OBJECT AND PURPOSE OF THE CASE STUDY

This case study aims to support the evaluation process of the interventions funded by the Centre Region Regional Programme, under Theme 2 "Evaluation of interventions aimed at digitalisation activities for the benefit of citizens, companies and governments". The analyses and findings presented contribute to the formulation of the answers to the evaluation questions and allow comparisons to be made between the different types of interventions, investments and beneficiaries. These comparisons highlight the mechanisms by which available resources and those created within projects are used and capitalised, as well as how these factors, together with the elements of context, influence the implementation and results of interventions.

The case study also contributes to the assessment of the extent to which digitalisation interventions respond to the needs of target groups, provide effective solutions to socio-economic challenges in the Centre Region and support the relevant strategies and objectives of the programme.

The selection of the project analysed in this case study was carried out according to the criteria established in the evaluation methodology, taking into account the type of intervention, the level of complexity and the type of applicant. The project is part of the sample **dedicated to LPAs,** thus ensuring the diversity of types of beneficiaries and the possibility of analysing how different institutional and economic contexts influence the digitisation process.

The methodology used combines the documentary analysis based on the project documents provided by the beneficiary **(the funding application)** with the interview with **the LPA representative**, ensuring a complete understanding of how the interventions contribute to the development and modernisation of the region through digitalisation.

2. PRESENTATION OF THE CASE STUDY

Project name	**Development of an integrated facial recognition system and videoconferencing solutions for official meetings and interactions with citizens in Miercurea Ciuc Municipality and Leliceni Commune**
SMIS Code	337181
Location	Miercurea Ciuc Municipality, Harghita County
Benefit	Miercurea Ciuc Municipality leader, Leliceni Commune partner
Priority / Specific objective	P2. A digital region RSO1.2_Capitalising the benefits of digitalisation for the benefit of citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities
Project call/ Operation	Intervention 2.1.1 Digital communities for a smart region – digital solutions
Implementation period (start/end)	-
Project budget	Total non-reimbursable budget 2,432,941.23
Project context **Project justification**	The municipality of Miercurea Ciuc and the commune of Leliceni are in an administrative and socio-economic context in which the digitisation of public administration is no longer an option, but a necessity to ensure a modern, efficient and transparent governance. In recent years, local public administrations in the Centre Region have faced recurrent challenges related to the complexity of administrative processes, the limited accessibility of public services and difficulties in communicating with citizens. These challenges are amplified in a region characterised by significant differences between urban and rural areas, where the lack of integrated digital solutions contributes to maintaining gaps in access to public services and civic participation. In this context, the digital modernisation of local government is essential to reduce bureaucracy, increase operational efficiency and improve the relationship between the administration and citizens. The Centre Regional Programme 2021–2027, through Priority 2 "A Digital Region" and Intervention 2.1.1 "Digital Communities for a Smart Region", provides the strategic and financial framework necessary for the implementation of digital solutions adapted to the real needs of local public authorities and the communities served. The justification of the project "Development of an integrated facial recognition system and videoconferencing solutions for official meetings and interactions with citizens in Miercurea Ciuc Municipality and Leliceni Commune" is based on the existence of concrete problems identified at local level. Today, access to public services and administrative information is often limited by cumbersome procedures, the need for physical presence at the institutions' premises and the use of traditional methods of managing documents and decision-making processes. Also, the lack of effective digital tools for communicating with citizens makes it difficult for them to participate in the decision-making process and reduces the transparency of the work of the public administration.

	Another problematic element is the fragmented or outdated IT infrastructure, specific to many local administrations, which generates delays, duplication of activities and operational inefficiencies. These dysfunctions affect both the administration's ability to respond promptly to citizens' needs and the quality of the internal decision-making process. In the case of the Municipality of Miercurea Ciuc, the proposed project does not represent an isolated intervention, but a natural continuation of a digitisation path started previously. The local administration has already implemented, through a project funded by POCA, an electronic archiving system for historical and current documents, which includes advanced OCR functionalities, document management and standardisation of internal processes, including according to ISO 9001 requirements. This existing digital base allowed the identification of the limits of the classic way of working and created the natural premises for a next step, oriented towards the digitisation of decision-making processes and the efficiency of internal functioning, not towards a fragmented digitisation. The idea of the project came from within the institution, in response to clearly identified operational needs, especially in terms of organising and conducting the Local Council meetings. Although they were already recorded, the associated workflow – drafting minutes, translating and publishing them – was time-consuming and time-consuming. The project proposes to transform this flow into a fully digitised process, integrating the automatic recording, transcription, translation and publication of documents, thus contributing to increasing administrative efficiency and decision-making transparency. Similarly, the facial recognition component was justified as a pragmatic access and evidence solution, inspired by an already functional model implemented in another local administration. This does not alter the existing security logic, but optimises it, reducing redundant administrative procedures and operational friction associated with classic card-based systems or attendance conditions. Although the main focus of the project is on the modernisation of internal processes, it also explicitly includes a component dedicated to the relationship with citizens, reflecting an integrated vision on digitalisation. The project provides for the development of a digital solution for communication with citizens, which would allow easy access to relevant information, the automatic publication of the minutes of the Local Council meetings and the creation of real premises for transparency and civic participation. In contrast to the previous situation, where access to this information was limited or difficult, the proposed solution contributes to a more open relationship between the administration and the community. In addition, the project supports participatory budgeting and public consultation mechanisms, through digital tools that facilitate information, engagement and education of citizens. The educational component of the project has an essential role, through the development of interactive and explanatory materials that help citizens understand the administrative and decision-making processes, the role of local institutions and the concrete ways of participating. This approach goes beyond simply publishing information and helps increase the administrative and digital literacy of the community. The project is fully correlated with the relevant strategic and programmatic documents. It contributes to the implementation of Romania's National Strategy for Digital Transformation, by promoting the digitisation of public services, interoperability and data security. It also aligns with Component C7 "Digital Transformation" of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, by introducing

	integrated digital solutions that bring direct benefits to citizens and streamline the activity of the public administration. Within the Centre Regional Programme 2021–2027, the project is complementary to Intervention 2.1.1 "Digital communities for a smart region – digital solutions", aiming to implement innovative applications adapted to the local context. At the same time, the project is aligned with the European Union Strategy for Digital Transformation and the Smart Specialisation Strategy of the Centre Region, by promoting equal access to digital services, the use of innovative technologies and increasing regional competitiveness. Last but not least, the proposed solutions comply with the relevant European legislative framework, including Directive (EU) 2016/2102 on the accessibility of websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies and Regulation (EU) 2016/679 on the protection of personal data (GDPR), ensuring accessibility, security and data protection. Therefore, the project is justified both from the perspective of the real needs identified at local level, and from the perspective of its alignment with regional, national and European strategic objectives, representing a coherent, mature and sustainable intervention in the process of digital transformation of local public administration.

3. OBJECTIVES AND LOGIC OF THE INTERVENTION

The general objective of the project is to increase administrative efficiency and the level of transparency in the interaction between local public authorities and citizens, by implementing an integrated system of digital solutions to support the modernisation of the functioning of the local public administration in Miercurea Ciuc Municipality and Leliceni Commune. The project aims to use digital technologies to optimise internal processes, reduce dependence on manual procedures and facilitate access to public information and services, in a coherent framework and adapted to the existing administrative capacity.

The intervention is part of a broader digitisation process previously started at the level of Miercurea Ciuc Municipality, through the implementation of electronic archiving and document management solutions. The experience gained from the use of these solutions has made it possible to identify some limits to the traditional way of working, especially in terms of organising recurring administrative activities, managing human resources and documenting decision-making processes. The current project is conceived as a further step in this journey, aiming to integrate and extend digitalisation to decision-making processes and the relationship with citizens.

The logic of the intervention starts from the identification of concrete difficulties encountered in the current activity of the local public administration. These include access and attendance procedures based on traditional methods, repetitive manual administrative tasks, cumbersome processes for drafting and publishing documents resulting from official meetings, and limited channels for communicating and consulting citizens. The project proposes to address these difficulties through a set of interconnected digital solutions, which operate in a unitary framework and are usable by both institutional staff and citizens.

In this regard, the intervention provides for the introduction of a facial recognition authentication system for access to the mayoralties' headquarters and the relevant administrative spaces. This solution is intended to simplify access and registration procedures, by eliminating the use of conditions or card-based systems and aims to reduce waiting times and streamline circulation in the institution. The system is designed to operate in accordance with personal data protection regulations and to integrate with the existing IT infrastructure, without entailing major structural changes in the way of internal organisation.

Correlated with this component, the project aims to implement a digital module for the automatic management of timesheets, vacations and attendance statistics. By using the data generated by the authentication system, the aim is to reduce the volume of administrative activities carried out manually, increase the accuracy of records and facilitate the centralisation of the information necessary for the

management of human resources. The module is intended for internal use and allows the generation of reports and statistics that can support planning and management activities, without introducing additional tasks for administrative staff.

Another central element of the intervention is the digitisation of decision-making processes, especially the way of organising and conducting the official meetings of the Local Council. The project foresees the use of technical solutions for the audio recording of the meetings and their automatic transformation into written transcriptions, which can later be translated and published. The integration of these steps into a unitary digital flow aims to reduce the time required for the drafting of minutes, limit manual intervention and ensure a coherent archiving of the documents resulting from the decision-making process.

The digitisation of official meetings is designed both as a solution for internal efficiency and as a technical basis for increasing transparency. By automatically publishing minutes and other relevant documents, citizens can have faster and easier access to information on decisions taken, agendas and debates. This approach helps to improve access to information of public interest and to strengthen a more open communication framework between the administration and the community.

In addition to the digitisation of internal processes, the project includes the development of digital communication channels for citizens. They are designed to facilitate the transmission of information, the clarification of some administrative issues and the basic interaction with the local administration. In this context, the project foresees the use of chatbot solutions to provide standardised information and to guide citizens to the relevant services. The purpose of these tools is to improve access to information and reduce the need for physical interactions for simple requests.

The intervention also aims to implement digital tools to support participatory budgeting and public consultation mechanisms. Through these tools, citizens can be informed about budget proposals, submit opinions or suggestions, and track how decisions are taken. The digitisation of official documents and meetings provides the necessary technical support for the functioning of these mechanisms, ensuring access to relevant information in a structured and easy-to-consult format.

To support the effective use of these tools, the project includes a component dedicated to informing and educating citizens. This involves the production of educational materials and the organisation of informative sessions explaining the local administrative and decision-making processes, the role of the institutions and the stages of the budgetary process. The materials will be designed in accessible language and will use visual and explanatory elements, with the aim of facilitating the understanding of public information and encouraging informed participation of citizens.

The educational component is integrated into the logic of the intervention as a support element for the functioning of digital channels of communication and participation. By increasing the level of information, the aim is to make more efficient use of the tools made available and to reduce the differences in access to information between different categories of citizens, including between urban and rural areas.

Overall, the objectives of the project are structured in such a way as to meet the needs identified in the current activity of the local public administration, through integrated digital solutions, which aim both to optimise internal processes and to improve the relationship with citizens. The logic of the intervention is based on the correlation of these objectives in a coherent framework, in which each component supports the functioning of the others, without introducing isolated or difficult to integrate solutions.

4. PROJECT COMPONENTS

Activities	The project "Development of an integrated system for the digitisation of public administration in the Municipality of Miercurea Ciuc and Leliceni Commune" is structured on a set of activities covering the stages of preparation, implementation and closure of the project. The activities are correlated in such a way as to allow the gradual implementation of digital solutions, depending on the time of contracting and the applicable procedural requirements.

	• Preparation and submission of the funding application In the pre-contractual stage, the preparation of the necessary documentation for submitting the financing application was carried out. The activity included the elaboration of the financing application and the annexed documents, the definition of the proposed digital solutions, the establishment of the structure of the partnership between the Municipality of Miercurea Ciuc and the Commune of Leliceni, as well as the assumption of the result indicators and the budget of the project. The documentation was developed in collaboration between the project leader, the partner and the consulting firm and was uploaded to the MySMIS information system, according to the requirements of the Applicant's Guide. This stage is completed, the project being selected for financing and awaiting contracting. • Project management After the signing of the financing contract, the project management activity will be started, which will be carried out throughout the implementation period. The management of the project will be provided by the beneficiary's implementation unit, with the support of an external consultant, and will include the coordination of activities, monitoring of physical and financial progress, preparation of progress reports and preparation of payment or reimbursement requests, in accordance with the contractual provisions and procedures of the programme. • Conduct of public procurement procedures An essential activity within the project is the development of public procurement procedures, which aim to purchase the equipment, endowments and information systems necessary for the implementation of digital solutions. At this stage, the award documentation will be developed, the procurement procedures will be organised and the contracts with the selected suppliers will be signed, in compliance with national and European legislation in the field of public procurement. The acquisitions will be structured in such a way as to ensure the implementation of the five digital solutions assumed by the project. For the digital access control component, facial recognition systems will be purchased that include surveillance cameras with adequate resolution, sensors and image capture devices, processing units and software dedicated to biometric authentication. This equipment will be installed in the access points of the administrative buildings and will work integrated with the internal attendance and timekeeping systems. For the human resources management solution, software licenses dedicated to the digital management of timesheets, vacations and attendance statistics will be purchased, as well as reporting and analysis modules. These systems will be integrated with the access control solution and will allow the centralisation of data on staff attendance, without the need for manual records or parallel systems. Within the solution for recording and documenting official meetings, the acquisitions will include audio-video equipment for capturing meetings, such as video cameras, microphones and sound systems adapted to administrative spaces. Software solutions for recording, storing and processing audio-video content will also be purchased, including automatic transcription and translation applications, which will allow the generation of minutes in a digital format. For the component of communication with citizens and participatory budgeting, web and mobile software platforms will be purchased to allow online interaction with citizens. These will include modules for sending information, email and SMS notifications, chatbots for providing automatic responses, as well as functionalities dedicated to participatory budgeting processes, through which citizens can propose and vote on projects. For the education and sustainable development solution, the acquisitions will target digital platforms that allow the publication of educational materials, online courses and explanatory content on administrative processes. These systems will be used to inform citizens and to carry out awareness-raising and training activities. In addition to the software solutions, the

	project will include the acquisition of the IT infrastructure necessary for their operation, such as servers or cloud services, network equipment, data storage systems and cybersecurity solutions. This equipment will ensure the availability, security and protection of data, in accordance with the legal requirements on the protection of information and personal data. • Supply, installation and configuration of equipment After the completion of the procurement procedures, the procurement equipment and information systems will be supplied. This activity involves the delivery, installation, configuration and testing of equipment and software applications at the level of Miercurea Ciuc Municipality and Leliceni Commune, so that the digital solutions can be used under normal operating conditions. • Staff training In order to ensure the correct use of the implemented solutions, the project includes the organisation of training activities for local public administration employees who will use the information systems. The training will focus on the operation of applications, data management and the integration of digital solutions into the current business. • Information and publicity During the implementation, the information and publicity activity will be carried out, in accordance with the requirements regarding the visibility of the support from European funds. This will include publishing information about the project, using the visual identity elements of the programme and informing the public about the support provided by the European Union. • Financial audit At the end of the project and during the implementation, the financial audit of the expenses incurred will be carried out. The audit activity will verify the eligibility of the expenses, compliance with the provisions of the financing contract and compliance with the applicable legislation.
Expected results	The implementation of the project "Development of an integrated system for the digitisation of public administration in Miercurea Ciuc Municipality and Leliceni Commune" is expected to lead to the achievement of a set of concrete, measurable results, which reflect both the modernisation of internal administrative processes and the improvement of the relationship between the local public administration and citizens. A direct result of the project is the support of two local public institutions – Miercurea Ciuc Municipality and Leliceni Commune – for the development and use of digital services, products and processes. This result is correlated with the RCO14 achievement indicator and reflects the fact that the two administrative-territorial units will benefit from integrated digital solutions, adapted to their operational needs and existing administrative capacity. At the institutional level, the project will lead to the digitisation of essential internal administrative processes, through the implementation of access control systems, human resources management, registration and documentation of official meetings. These solutions will allow the reduction of manual activities, the centralisation of information and the use of digital workflows, without changing the organisational structure or legal duties of the institutions involved. Another expected result is an increase in the use of digital public services by citizens. By implementing the citizen communication platform, web and mobile applications and public information and consultation tools, the project creates the premises for easier access to administrative information and for citizens' involvement in consultation and

	participatory budgeting processes. This result is correlated with the RCR11 result indicator, which targets users of new or optimised digital public services. It is estimated that the digital solutions developed within the project will be used by a significant number of unique users annually, including both local public administration staff and citizens of Miercurea Ciuc Municipality and Leliceni Commune. Access to digital information and services will be achieved through various channels, adapted to different categories of users. The project will also generate results in terms of developing the digital skills of local public administration staff. Through the training activities provided, the employees involved in the use of the IT solutions will acquire the skills necessary for their operation and integration into the current activity, contributing to the effective use of the implemented systems. An additional result of the project is the creation of a digital infrastructure that allows the subsequent expansion and adaptation of the implemented solutions. The modular architecture and integration with the existing infrastructure allow the future development of additional functionalities, depending on the needs subsequently identified by local administrations. The project is also expected to contribute to reducing the use of material resources, by digitising documents and administrative flows, as well as to reducing the need for physical travel of citizens and administrative staff. These results are indirect but correlated with the objectives of streamlining administrative activity and responsible use of resources. The expected results reflect the achievement of the objectives assumed by the project, namely the development of functional digital public services, used by the administration and citizens, and the creation of an administrative framework that supports the use of digital technologies in the current activity of the two administrative-territorial units.
Target group	The project aims to improve the interaction between the local public administration and the community, through the use of digital solutions that target both the internal processes of the institutions and the relationship with citizens. The target group of the project consists of several categories of direct and indirect beneficiaries, whose activities are influenced by the functioning of the local public administration. The main category of beneficiaries is represented by the citizens of Miercurea Ciuc Municipality and Leliceni Commune. They will have access to digital public services that allow information, communication and interaction with the local administration through modern channels, in a more accessible and transparent way. By using the digital solutions provided in the project, citizens will be able to access relevant information, participate in consultation processes and benefit from the reduction of the need for physical travel to the headquarters of public institutions. Another important category of the target group is represented by the local public administration staff within the Municipality of Miercurea Ciuc and the Commune of Leliceni. Employees will use the implemented digital solutions to carry out current administrative activities, manage documents, organise official meetings and communicate with citizens. The use of these tools will help to simplify workflows and centralise the information needed for institutional work. Also, the local business environment constitutes a category of indirect beneficiaries of the project. By digitising administrative processes and improving communication with local public authorities, economic agents will benefit from clearer procedures and easier access to information of public interest. This administrative simplification can support the relationship between public administration and the local economic environment, without involving direct interventions on economic activities.

	Through the integrated approach of the target group, the project contributes to the use of digital technologies in a coherent way, both within the local public administration and in its relationship with citizens and the economic environment. Thus, the implemented solutions are adapted to the needs of different categories of users and support the functioning of the local public administration in a more accessible and predictable way.

5. PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTATION

At the time of this case study, the project "Development of an integrated facial recognition system and videoconferencing solutions for official meetings and interactions with citizens in the Municipality of Miercurea Ciuc and Leliceni Commune" is in a stage prior to the actual implementation. The funding application was submitted under the Centre Regional Programme 2021–2027, Priority 2 "A Digital Region", Intervention 2.1.1 "Digital Communities for a Smart Region – Digital Solutions", and following the evaluation process the project was selected for funding. At the time of the interview and the elaboration of this case study, the financing contract had not yet been signed, the project being in the stage of finalising the administrative procedures prior to the contracting.

At this stage, the progress of the project cannot be analysed from the perspective of the technical implementation of the activities or the achievement of the indicators, but from the perspective of the maturity of the project preparation and the steps taken until the moment of selection for funding. From this point of view, the project presents a high level of clarity in terms of objectives, the structure of the proposed solutions and how to integrate them into the current activity of the local public administration.

During the period of preparation and submission of the funding application, the beneficiary went through the necessary steps to define the needs, establish the technical solutions and structure the project in accordance with the requirements of the applicant's guide. The previous experience of the Municipality of Miercurea Ciuc in the implementation of digitisation projects contributed to the formulation of a coherent funding application, based on needs identified in the current activity and on a realistic assessment of the implementation capacity. At this stage, the involvement of the beneficiary's internal team was ensured, as well as the collaboration with a consultant, whose role was oriented towards translating the project idea into the structure and language required by the call.

During the evaluation process, the beneficiary responded to the requests for clarifications submitted by the managing authority, providing the necessary additional information and documents. These clarifications concerned technical and administrative aspects, without implying substantial changes to the project concept or the proposed solutions. The interaction with the managing authority at this stage was punctual and oriented towards procedural compliance.

In parallel with the evaluation process, the beneficiary continued the internal preparations for the implementation phase, to the extent allowed by the legal and procedural framework. These preparations included clarifying internal responsibilities, analysing the administrative flows that will be affected by the implementation of digital solutions and maintaining dialogue with the IT providers with which the institution has previously collaborated. Although no procurement procedures or actual implementation activities were initiated, these preliminary steps were intended to ensure the most efficient transition to the implementation stage itself after the signing of the financing contract.

As regards the partnership with Leliceni Commune, the progress made so far consists in establishing and formalising the collaboration within the funding application, as well as in clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each partner. The partnership was built on the basis of a common understanding of the objectives of the project and the anticipated benefits for both administrative-territorial units. In the pre-implementation phase, the focus was on ensuring a functional collaboration framework, without yet involving technical or operational activities at the commune level.

The beneficiary also analysed the potential impact of the implementation of the project on internal activities, especially in terms of organising official meetings, human resources management and the relationship with citizens. These analyses aimed to identify any necessary adjustments to internal procedures and to prepare staff for the use of new digital solutions. At this stage, no formal training activities were carried out, but the training needs that will have to be covered in the implementation phase were taken into account.

A relevant aspect for the progress of the project is the long evaluation period and the lack of regular information on the status of the process. From the beneficiary's perspective, this stage was characterised by uncertainty related to the timing of the contract, which limited the possibility to plan the implementation activities in detail. However, the beneficiary maintained a level of internal training that would allow the project to start relatively quickly after the contract was signed.

Overall, the progress made so far is reflected in the successful completion of the application and evaluation phase, in the clarity of the project concept and in the existence of an administrative framework ready for implementation. Although the actual implementation activities have not yet been initiated, the project is at a stage where the premises for their start are outlined, and the risks related to the definition of objectives, solutions and partnership are limited.

The analysis of progress at this stage highlights the fact that, for digitisation projects, the pre-implementation period plays an important role in ensuring the coherence and sustainability of the intervention. In the case of Miercurea Ciuc Municipality and Leliceni Commune, this period was used to clarify the concept, strengthen the partnership and internal preparation, and the actual implementation will be initiated after the completion of the contracting procedures.

6. IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS (PROGRESS AND INTERNAL MECHANISMS)

At the time of writing the case study, the project is in the selection stage for funding, the preparation and application phase being completed, and the actual implementation will start after the signing of the financing contract.

In the preparation phase, the local public administration of Miercurea Ciuc Municipality, in partnership with Leliceni Commune, used the existing internal structures to coordinate the project development process. The preparation of the funding application was carried out based on a project idea already outlined at the institutional level, starting from needs previously identified in the current activity of the administration. The role of the internal team was essential in defining the objectives, the proposed digital solutions and the way of implementation, and the support of the external consultant was used to structure the documentation and ensure compliance with the requirements of the applicant's guide.

From the perspective of internal mechanisms, the beneficiary has relevant experience in managing projects with non-reimbursable funding, including in the field of digitalisation, which allowed the integration of the project into an already functional administrative framework. Internal structures responsible for projects are accustomed to the use of reporting information systems and the institutional relationship with the managing authority and the intermediary body, which reduces operational risks at the implementation stage.

In terms of progress so far, the activities carried out are limited to those related to the pre-contractual phase. The application for funding was developed and submitted, the clarifications requested during the evaluation process were provided, and the project was declared eligible and selected for funding. No acquisition or technical implementation activities have been started, these being conditional on the signing of the financing contract.

For the implementation stage, the internal mechanisms are already outlined at the procedural level. It foresees the establishment of an implementation team, with clear responsibilities in terms of project management, public procurement, monitoring progress and reporting to the funding authority. The project management will be carried out by the beneficiary, with the support of an external consultant, based on internal procedures already used in other projects.

The conduct of public procurement procedures will be a central element of the implementation process. The beneficiary has previous experience in organising procurement for projects financed by European funds, and the existing internal mechanisms allow for a clear separation of responsibilities between the departments involved. The procedures will be carried out in compliance with the applicable legislation and will be subject to verification by the funding authority, according to the standard procedural steps.

The monitoring of the implementation will be carried out through periodic progress reports, which will reflect the physical and financial status of the project, as well as through the supporting documents related to the expenses incurred. The beneficiary is already using internal project tracking tools, which will be adapted to integrate the specific requirements of this project.

In relation to the Centre RDA, the beneficiary mentioned the existence of a functional collaboration and known communication channels, used in the preparation and evaluation phase. The interactions aimed at clarifying the procedural and administrative aspects without significant difficulties. At the same time, from the beneficiary's perspective, the evaluation phase was perceived as one with low visibility in terms of the stage of the process, an aspect that does not affect the internal implementation mechanisms, but which has implications for internal planning.

Overall, the implementation process is based on existing administrative structures, previous experience in project management and already functioning internal mechanisms. Although the actual implementation has not yet started, the necessary organisational and procedural framework is already outlined, allowing the start of activities immediately after the signing of the financing contract.

7. IMPACT ON BENEFICIARIES AND THE COMMUNITY

The project is at a stage prior to the actual implementation, so the impact on the beneficiaries and the community cannot be assessed from the perspective of the concrete results obtained, but from the perspective of the anticipated effects, taking into account the objectives of the project, the proposed solutions and the local administrative context. The present analysis has the role of describing how the implementation of the project is expected to influence the activity of the local public administration and its relationship with the citizens of Miercurea Ciuc and Leliceni Commune.

As regards direct beneficiaries, the anticipated impact mainly concerns local public administration staff, who routinely use administrative processes based on manual or partially digitised procedures. The implementation of facial recognition authentication solutions and automated timesheet and leave management modules is expected to lead to the simplification of recurring administrative activities and the reduction of the volume of manual operations. By automating these processes, administrative staff could devote more time to activities that involve analysis, coordination and networking, at the expense of repetitive tasks.

Also, the digitisation of the way of organising and documenting official meetings is expected to influence the way of working of the staff involved in the preparation, conduct and documentation of the decision-making process. Automating the stages of recording, transcribing and drafting minutes could reduce the time it takes to complete documents and help standardise them. At the same time, faster access to documents resulting from meetings could facilitate internal work and communication between departments.

For the management of the institutions involved, the anticipated impact is linked to the availability of centralised and structured information that can support planning and management activities. The data generated by digital systems on attendance, organisation of meetings and administrative flows can be used for better internal organisation, without changing existing tasks or responsibilities.

As for the indirect beneficiaries, namely the citizens of Miercurea Ciuc Municipality and Leliceni Commune, the anticipated impact is mainly associated with improving access to information and diversifying communication channels with the local public administration. The automatic publication of the minutes of the City Council meetings and other relevant documents is expected to facilitate citizens' access to information of public interest, in a format that is easier to consult and in a shorter period of time than in the previous situation.

The development of digital communication channels, including chatbot solutions, is expected to help clarify some common administrative issues and reduce the need for physical travel for simple requests. By providing standardised information and guidance to relevant services, these tools can support citizens in their relationship with the administration, especially for people who use the digital environment frequently.

As far as civic participation is concerned, the project is expected to create the premises for the more active involvement of citizens in consultation and participatory budgeting processes. The digitisation of meetings and related documents provides the necessary technical basis for citizens to better understand the functioning of the local administration, the topics discussed and the decisions adopted. The digital tools proposed for consultation can facilitate the expression of opinions and the submission of proposals, within the limits of the existing legal and procedural framework.

A distinct anticipated impact is related to the educational component of the project. By developing informative and educational materials explaining administrative and decision-making processes, the project can contribute to increasing the level of information of citizens about the functioning of the local public administration. This strand is expected to support the effective use of the digital tools made available and reduce barriers to understanding that may limit civic participation, especially among sections of the population less familiar with administrative procedures.

At the level of the local community, the anticipated impact of the project is related to improving the relationship between the administration and citizens, by creating a more transparent and accessible framework for communication and information. Although the project is not conceived as an intervention with a direct economic impact, its implementation can indirectly contribute to increasing trust in public institutions and strengthening an administrative culture oriented towards openness and accountability.

In the case of Leliceni Commune, the anticipated impact is closely related to the transfer of experience and access to digital solutions already tested and adapted by the Municipality of Miercurea Ciuc. By participating in the project, the commune can benefit from the modernisation of some administrative processes without the need to develop complex own systems, which can support the alignment of administrative practices with those of the municipality and reduce the differences in capacity between the two administrative-territorial units.

The impact on the beneficiaries and the community is, at this stage, anticipated and conditioned by the effective implementation of the project. The proposed solutions are expected to influence the functioning of the local public administration and its relationship with citizens, by improving access to information, simplifying administrative procedures and creating communication and participation tools. The concrete impact assessment will be able to be carried out after the completion of the implementation and the effective use of digital solutions by administration staff and citizens.

8. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INTERVENTION (PRELIMINARY COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS)

Considering the current status of the project, the analysis of the effectiveness of the intervention is preliminary and is based on the information available from the funding application and from the interview with the beneficiary's representative. At this stage, efficiency cannot be analysed from the perspective of the strict financial relationship between costs and budgetary savings achieved, but from the perspective of how the proposed investment is expected to influence the use of existing administrative resources and the day-to-day functioning of the institutions involved.

From the data provided in the interview, it emerges that the project was not designed starting from an analysis of direct reduction of financial costs, but from the identification of areas of operational inefficiency that generate high consumption of time and human resources. The beneficiary has repeatedly stressed that, in the absence of digitalisation, a significant part of the administrative activity is occupied by manual, repetitive and fragmented processes, which do not bring added value, but are necessary for the functioning of the institution.

A relevant example is the way of organising and documenting the meetings of the Local Council. Although the meetings were already recorded, the drafting of the minutes, their translation and publication involved a considerable effort on the part of the staff, both in terms of the time allocated and the coordination between departments. The beneficiary indicated that this process represents a constant operational bottleneck, which delays the publication of information and consumes administrative resources. From this perspective, the cost of investing in automatic recording and transcription solutions is justified by the potential to reduce the working time allocated to these activities, even if this reduction does not immediately translate into quantifiable budget savings.

A similar logic can be found in the case of the components related to access to the institution and the management of timesheets and leaves. The interview shows that the use of classic procedures (conditions, cards, manual records) involves a constant administrative effort and generates operational dissatisfaction, without providing an additional level of control or security. The introduction of a facial recognition system was perceived by the beneficiary as a pragmatic solution, inspired by an already functional model, which can reduce administrative friction and simplify daily activities. From an efficiency point of view, the main

anticipated benefit is the reduction of the time allocated to these activities and the creation of a more coherent record system, not the elimination of direct budgetary costs.

As for the costs of the project, they are mainly concentrated in the implementation phase and are covered by grant funding. From the beneficiary's perspective, this aspect is relevant for the efficiency analysis, as it allows the implementation of digital solutions without generating significant additional pressures on local budgets. At the same time, the interview shows that the proposed solutions are designed to integrate into the existing IT infrastructure and to capitalise on the experience gained in previous projects, which reduces the risk of additional costs generated by technical incompatibilities or the need for organisational restructuring.

An important element in the efficiency analysis is the partnership with Leliceni Commune. From the beneficiary's perspective, the partnership was possible precisely because the proposed solutions are relatively simple from an operational point of view and can be used by an administrative-territorial unit with less administrative capacity. The joint implementation of the project allows the distribution of costs and avoids duplication of investments, given that the municipality would not have realistically had the capacity to independently develop and implement similar solutions. From this point of view, the efficiency of the intervention is also linked to the more rational use of public resources at local level.

The beneficiary also pointed out that the efficiency of the project is closely linked to the existing administrative capacity and previous experience in using IT solutions. This experience reduces learning and adaptation costs and increases the likelihood that the implemented solutions will actually be used in the current business. From a cost-benefit analysis perspective, this is relevant, as investments in digitalisation can become ineffective when solutions are not integrated into workflows or are not used at capacity.

As regards the citizen-oriented components, the anticipated benefits are mainly indirect in nature. The interview shows that the project does not aim to generate direct financial savings through these components, but to facilitate access to information, reduce individual requests and improve communication. The automatic publication of minutes and the existence of digital information channels can, over time, reduce the volume of requests addressed directly to the administration and contribute to a more efficient use of staff time. However, these benefits are dependent on the degree of use of the platforms by citizens and cannot be quantified at this stage.

From the analysis of the available information, it follows that the efficiency of the intervention is based on the rationalisation of administrative processes and on the reduction of the consumption of time and human effort, rather than on obtaining immediate budgetary savings. This approach is consistent with the nature of the project and the stage of development of the local government involved. The final efficiency assessment can only be carried out after the implementation of the project and after a period of effective use of the solutions, which will allow the collection of data on processing times, the volume of automated activities and the impact on the way of working.

In conclusion, the preliminary cost-benefit analysis indicates that the intervention has an economic logic based on the more efficient use of existing administrative resources, the reduction of operational frictions and the capitalisation of the institutional capacity already formed. At the current stage, the efficiency of the project must be understood as the potential to optimise the functioning of the local public administration, and this hypothesis will be confirmed or adjusted at the implementation and operation stage.

9. CONTRIBUTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL OBJECTIVES

Equal opportunities and gender equality

In the process of preparing, evaluating and, subsequently, implementing and ensuring the sustainability of the project "Development of an integrated facial recognition system and videoconferencing solutions for official meetings and interactions with citizens in Miercurea Ciuc Municipality and Leliceni Commune", the local public administrations involved respect fundamental human rights and the provisions of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The project promotes the principles of equal opportunities and gender equality throughout all stages of development, in accordance with the applicable national and European legislative framework in the field of equal treatment, non-discrimination and social inclusion.

Within the administrative apparatus of Miercurea Ciuc Municipality and Leliceni Commune, equal treatment is ensured in terms of access to employment, assignment of responsibilities, access to professional training, evaluation of activity and remuneration for equal work. The staff structure reflects a balanced representation of women and men, without discriminatory differentiation, and the establishment of roles and responsibilities is carried out exclusively on the basis of professional competences and the specific requirements of each position.

These principles are also applied within the project, including in terms of the constitution of the implementation team, the organisation of activities and the associated decision-making processes. The gender perspective is transversally integrated, and the project is designed as neutral from this point of view, guaranteeing equal access for women and men to the developed digital infrastructure and the benefits generated by it, both as employees of the administration and as citizens benefiting from public services.

Non-discrimination and social inclusion

The local public administrations involved constantly apply the principles of non-discrimination and equal opportunities, both through the internal regulatory framework and through current administrative practices. The project promotes the fair treatment of all people, without discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnic origin, religion, beliefs, disability, age, sexual orientation or belonging to a vulnerable category.

These principles are also respected in public procurement procedures and project management activities, where the criteria used are objective, transparent and based on professional performance. In the event that, during the implementation of the project, additional human resources will be needed, their selection will be carried out in strict compliance with the legislation in force, ensuring equal access to all interested persons.

Through the proposed digital solutions, the project contributes to increasing social inclusion, facilitating citizens' access to public information and services, regardless of social situation or geographical location. The digitalisation of meetings, the publication of documents and the development of online communication channels reduce administrative barriers and support civic participation, including for people who, for various reasons, find it difficult to interact directly with the public administration.

Accessibility for people with disabilities

The digital solutions proposed by the project are designed to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities, in line with web accessibility standards and inclusive design principles. The platforms and interfaces used will be made in a clear and intuitive way, taking into account compatibility with assistive technologies such as screen readers, keyboard navigation and logical structures for organising information.

Through these measures, the project facilitates equal access to digital public services for people with disabilities, contributing to increasing their autonomy in relation to the local public administration. At the same time, the proposed solutions are also adapted for other vulnerable categories, such as the elderly or those with reduced mobility, who can access information and services without having to physically travel to the institutions' headquarters.

Sustainable development and the "polluter pays" principle

The project does not generate significant increases in pollutant emissions to air, water or soil. On the contrary, the digitisation of administrative processes contributes to reducing paper consumption, reducing the use of material resources and reducing the need for physical travel of citizens and administrative staff. In the implementation phase, energy-efficient IT equipment will be used, and the organisation of activities will take into account minimising the impact on the environment.

In the event that, during the course of the project, effects on the environment could occur, the local public administrations assume to comply with the legal provisions in force and to apply the "polluter pays" principle, according to the applicable national and European legislation.

Biodiversity protection

The project has an insignificant impact on biodiversity and natural ecosystems, as the proposed activities are exclusively digital in nature and do not involve construction works, deforestation or interventions on the

natural environment. The implementation of digital solutions is carried out in existing administrative spaces, without affecting natural habitats or protected areas.

By reducing the consumption of material resources and the use of paper, the project indirectly contributes to the protection of natural resources and to reducing pressure on the environment.

Efficient use of resources

The project promotes the efficient use of financial, human and material resources through the adoption of integrated digital solutions. The digitisation of documents and the automation of administrative processes reduce the need for physical archiving spaces, optimise workflows and contribute to reducing operational costs in the medium and long term.

The IT equipment used will be selected in such a way as to ensure a balance between performance, lifespan and energy consumption, supporting responsible resource management and increasing the sustainability of administrative activities.

Climate change immunisation

The project does not amplify the risks associated with climate change and does not involve investments in physical infrastructure susceptible to such risks. By digitising administrative processes and reducing dependence on physical resources and travel, it contributes to reducing the carbon footprint of local public administration activities. This approach supports the administration's adaptation to the current climate change context.

DNSH principle – "Do no significant harm"

The project complies with the DNSH principle, being designed in such a way that it does not cause significant damage to any of the environmental objectives set at the level of the European Union. The digital nature of the intervention, the efficient use of resources, the responsible management of IT equipment and the reduction of emissions associated with administrative activities ensure the compatibility of the project with the objectives of environmental protection and sustainable development.

10. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the project "Development of an integrated facial recognition system and videoconferencing solutions for official meetings and interactions with citizens in Miercurea Ciuc Municipality and Leliceni Commune", based on the available documentation and the in-depth interview with the beneficiary's representative, highlights a gradual digitisation path, based on real administrative needs and supported by an already existing institutional capacity. Although the project is not yet in the contracting stage, the experience gained so far provides relevant information for understanding how local public authorities design and prepare digitisation interventions within the Regional Centre Programme 2021–2027.

A first element that emerges from this analysis is the fact that the project is not an isolated initiative, but a natural continuation of a digitisation path started previously. The implementation of an electronic archiving and document management system, carried out through a previous project, created a functional basis that allowed the identification of additional needs, oriented towards streamlining decision-making processes and internal activity. The analysed project is thus part of an incremental development logic, in which digital solutions are progressively extended and adapted, without breaking the continuity of existing administrative processes.

The objectives of the project reflect this gradual approach and are closely correlated with concrete problems encountered in the daily work of the administration. The digitisation of official meetings, the automation of the transcription and publication of minutes, as well as the introduction of more efficient access and record mechanisms have been designed as solutions to reduce the administrative burden and increase transparency. The facial recognition component, although it can be perceived as an advanced technological solution, has been integrated as a pragmatic response to existing operational difficulties, being inspired by already functional examples observed in other local administrations.

At the same time, the project goes beyond the strictly internal dimension of digitalisation and includes a component oriented towards the relationship with citizens. The automatic publication of documents, the

facilitation of access to information and the development of communication and participation tools are designed as natural extensions of internal digitisation. The integration of an educational dimension, aimed at explaining administrative and decision-making processes, indicates an understanding that transparency is not just about access to documents, but also about the ability of citizens to understand and use them.

The establishment of the partnership with the Leliceni Commune is another relevant element of the project. The collaboration was possible due to geographical proximity, already existing administrative relationships and a level of complexity of the solutions compatible with the partner's capacity. The experience of this partnership shows that functional collaboration formulas are those built on real needs and consolidated relationships, not those imposed exclusively by scoring criteria. At the same time, the difficulties anticipated in the case of wider partnerships underline the importance of adapting procedural requirements to the number and capacity of the partners involved.

The preparation and evaluation process of the financing application highlights both strengths and areas that can be improved. The beneficiary perceived the submission process as relatively clear, largely due to previous experience and the support of the consultancy, which had a predominantly procedural role. The relationship with the Regional Development Agency was described as a functional and open one, the requests for clarifications being clear and relevant. At the same time, the lack of regular information on the status of the evaluation has led to difficulties in internal planning, especially in the context of a long time between the submission of the application and the receipt of the selection decision.

Compared to other funding programmes, the beneficiary's experience indicates a positive perception of the mechanisms managed by the Centre RDA, in particular in terms of the stability and clarity of the MySMIS platform and the existence of known communication channels. This institutional relationship is appreciated, but the experience of the project suggests the opportunity to strengthen the information mechanisms during the evaluation, in order to increase the predictability and capacity of the beneficiaries to organise their resources.

Overall, the analysed project illustrates how the digitisation of local public administration can be approached as a continuous process, adapted to institutional capacity and oriented towards solving concrete problems. The experience of the Municipality of Miercurea Ciuc shows that the projects with a higher degree of coherence and sustainability are those built on existing foundations, supported by local leadership and integrated into a broader vision of administrative modernisation.

The recommendations made during the analysis, starting from the beneficiary's concrete experience, aim at the need to differentiate the funding calls according to the administrative capacity of the TAUs, support incremental approaches, simplify the procedures for extended partnerships and improve the information mechanisms during the evaluation. At the same time, the experience of the project underlines the importance of maintaining a close institutional relationship between beneficiaries and RDA, based on clear communication and procedural support.

In conclusion, even if the project is still in a pre-contractual stage, its path offers a relevant case study for understanding how local administrations approach digitalisation and the necessary conditions for these interventions to be functional and adapted to local realities. The conclusions drawn can contribute to adjusting future interventions and strengthening public policies dedicated to the digital transformation of local public administration in the Centre Region.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the beneficiary's perspective, the path of the analysed digitisation project highlights a number of aspects that can be useful for improving the way in which future interventions for local public authorities are designed and implemented.

A first element underlined by the mayor's office is the fact that digitisation projects are easier to design and implement when they are not isolated initiatives, generated exclusively by the opportunity of a call for funding, but continuations of previously started steps. In the case of Miercurea Ciuc Municipality, the existence of a previous project of electronic archiving and document management provided a clear basis for identifying the next steps. This experience leads to the recommendation that future calls explicitly allow

and encourage incremental approaches, in which administrations can build on already existing solutions, without having to propose completely new or very complex interventions from the beginning.

The representative of the mayor's office stressed that the idea of the project came from within the institution, as a result of concrete difficulties encountered in the daily activity. The digitisation of Local Council meetings, for example, was determined by the large amount of work required to draft, translate and publish the minutes, not by the desire to introduce new technologies in a demonstrative way. Similarly, the facial recognition solution was chosen as an alternative to administrative procedures perceived as cumbersome. From this perspective, the beneficiary considers that digitisation projects should start from real, clearly identified administrative problems, and funding guides could support this process through a more needs-oriented formulation and less towards lists of predefined solutions.

Another important aspect mentioned is the role of existing administrative capacity. The experience gained in the implementation of previous projects has significantly facilitated the preparation of the funding application and the understanding of the procedural requirements. At the same time, the beneficiary noted the big differences between administrations that already have this experience and those that are faced for the first time with tools such as electronic signatures or digital project management platforms. This experience leads to the recommendation that future interventions should take into account the level of administrative capacity of TAUs, by differentiating calls or introducing additional support measures for smaller administrations.

The representative of the mayor's office explicitly mentioned that, although the Municipality of Miercurea Ciuc is a small county seat, its administrative capacity is significantly higher than that of many surrounding communes. From this perspective, digitalisation projects with a higher degree of complexity are easier to manage by experienced administrations, while a more gradual approach is needed for small TAUs. The resulting recommendation is that funding calls should be more clearly differentiated according to the type and capacity of beneficiaries, so that the requirements are adapted to the actual level of available resources.

Another frequently mentioned element is the importance of support from the institution's management. In the case of the analysed project, the involvement of the secretary general and the support of the management facilitated the assumption of the project and its integration into the current activity of the administration. The beneficiary stressed that without this support, digitisation initiatives would be much more difficult to promote and implement, requiring an additional effort from technical staff. From this perspective, the beneficiary considers it useful that the information and training activities are also addressed to decision-makers within local administrations, not only to the execution staff.

As for the role of the consultant, the representative described her experience as a functional one, in which the consultant had the role of transposing an idea already clearly outlined in the requirements of the applicant's guide. The project was not designed by the consultant, but by the local administration, and this contributed to the coherence of the intervention. This experience leads to the recommendation that the role of consultants should be clearly defined as one of procedural and technical support, and not of substitution of the institutional vision, especially in the case of digitisation projects.

The experience of the partnership with Leliceni Commune is perceived as a positive one but conditioned by a series of specific factors. The geographical proximity, the already existing administrative relations and the functional interdependence between the two TAUs made the collaboration possible. At the same time, the beneficiary pointed out that extending the partnership to a larger number of TAUs would have been difficult to manage, in particular due to the electronic signature procedures and the large volume of documents. From this experience results the recommendation that partnerships be built on real relationships and common needs and that the mechanisms for stimulating partnerships be accompanied by simplified administrative procedures.

The representative mentioned the difficulties generated by the management of documentation in the case of projects with many partners, giving as an example other projects carried out within the NRRP. From this perspective, it is recommended that, for projects involving extended partnerships, procedural simplification solutions should be analysed, so that coordination between partners does not become a major obstacle in implementation.

The process of evaluating the funding application is perceived as procedurally correct, but the lack of regular information on the status of the evaluation was perceived as a difficulty. The representative of the mayor's office stressed that, during an interval of over a year, there was no clear visibility on the stages taken, which made it difficult to plan internally and prepare for the implementation phase. This experience has led to the recommendation to introduce simple mechanisms for informing applicants, which would provide status updates without affecting the assessment process.

As for the digital platforms used, the representative appreciated the functionality and clarity of MySMIS, in contrast to the difficulties encountered in using the platforms associated with the NRRP. From this perspective, it is recommended to maintain stable, user-friendly platforms supported by clear channels of communication with beneficiaries, in order to reduce administrative pressure on them.

From the perspective of the relationship with citizens, it is considered that digitalisation should not be limited to the internal processes of the administration. The publication of documents, the facilitation of access to information and the development of participation tools are seen as natural extensions of internal digitisation. At the same time, the importance of the educational component was underlined, noting that the mere publication of information is not enough in the absence of clear explanations on the functioning of the administration. This experience leads to the recommendation to integrate information and education components in digitisation projects, in order to support the effective use of the created tools.

Overall, from the beneficiary's perspective, the analysed project confirms that the digitisation of local public administration is a continuous process, which requires adaptation, support and coherence over time. The recommendations made reflect the concrete experience of an administration that has already gone through several stages of this process and can be useful benchmarks for improving future digitisation interventions addressed to local public authorities.

10.1 Case Study Interview Minute – Miercurea Ciuc Municipality

Date: January 13, 2026

Location: online

Participants: project representative of Miercurea Ciuc Municipality and representatives of the Association formed by CIVITTA Strategy & Consulting SA (leader) and Lideea Development Actions SRL (partner)

Context of the interview and the objective of the documentation

The interview was conducted within the evaluation process related to Priority 2 – A Digital Region of the Centre Region Programme, with the objective of analysing how digitisation projects are designed, prepared and developed at the level of local public authorities. The discussion took place at an advanced stage of the evaluation process, after the communication of the selection decision for funding, but before the signing of the financing contract.

The purpose of the interview was to deepen the previously collected information and to understand more clearly the project path from the beneficiary's perspective, with a focus on the initial motivation of the initiative, the local needs identified, the structure and logic of the proposed solutions, how to prepare the funding application, the establishment of the partnership, the experience of the evaluation process and the lessons learned relevant to the improvement of future funding mechanisms.

The analysed project, "Development of an integrated facial recognition system and videoconferencing solutions for official meetings and interactions with citizens in Miercurea Ciuc Municipality and Leliceni Commune", was selected as a case study due to its integrated character and the fact that it reflects a digitisation process built over time, based on a previous institutional experience, and not an isolated initiative determined solely by the existence of a call for funding.

Emergence of the project idea and identification of local needs

During the interview, the interlocutor clearly emphasised that the idea of the project did not arise as a direct response to the launch of the call for funding but represents a logical continuation of a digitalisation path started several years ago at the level of the Municipality of Miercurea Ciuc. The local administration previously benefited from a project financed by POCA, through which the first concrete steps were taken towards internal digitisation, namely the electronic archiving of older documents, the implementation of a document management system and the partial modernisation of the registry.

While these solutions are not considered fully functional or operationally satisfactory, they were an important starting point. The experience of using them has allowed the administration to identify both the advantages of digitalisation and the limitations of existing systems, generating a clearer understanding of what should be improved or expanded. In this context, the pandemic has acted as an acceleration factor, highlighting the need to digitise not only documents, but also decision-making and administrative processes.

Thus, the idea of the project started from the need to streamline internal activity, reduce cumbersome administrative procedures and create a more coherent framework for decision-making at institutional level. The digitisation of council meetings, the possibility of holding them online, the automatic generation of minutes and their publication were identified as concrete needs, with a direct impact on the functioning of the administration.

Substantiation of the proposed solutions and sources of inspiration

The interlocutor mentioned that some of the solutions included in the project were inspired by examples of good practice observed in other local administrations. A relevant example is the system of access to the institution based on facial recognition, observed in the Municipality of Sfântu Gheorghe. This solution has attracted attention with its simplicity and efficiency, eliminating the need to use access cards or sign the presence condition.

The choice of this solution was not motivated by the desire to implement advanced technologies as an end in itself, but by the need to reduce operational friction and simplify daily administrative processes. In the beneficiary's view, digitalisation must be oriented towards efficiency and functionality, and the chosen solutions must be easy to use and adapted to institutional realities.

Project structure and integrated logic of digital solutions

The project was conceived as an integrated system of digital solutions, covering both the internal dimension of the administration and the relationship with citizens. In addition to the implementation of the facial recognition system and videoconferencing solutions for official meetings, the project includes the digitisation of decision-making processes, the generation and archiving of minutes and their publication online.

A distinct component of the project is the one dedicated to communication and interaction with citizens. It aims to facilitate access to administrative information, increase decision-making transparency and introduce public participation tools, including participatory budgeting and educational materials explaining administrative processes. Although the interlocutor mentioned that the concrete impact of this component will be clearer in the implementation phase, its inclusion reflects an integrated vision on digitalisation, which is not limited to internal efficiency, but also aims to improve the relationship with citizens.

Preparation of the funding application and institutional experience

The process of preparing the funding application was perceived as relatively simple, mainly due to the institution's previous experience in managing the funded projects. The interlocutor stressed the importance of having a stable internal team, which knows the requirements of the funding programmes and has a clear understanding of the needs of the institution.

The external consultant involved in the preparation of the application had a limited role, focused on translating the project idea into the language and structure of the applicant's guide. The definition of objectives, solutions and activities was mainly carried out internally, with the support of the IT providers with which the institution had previously collaborated. This approach allowed for the formulation of a coherent funding application, based on real needs and an already tested implementation capacity.

Establishing the partnership with Leliceni Commune

The partnership with Leliceni Commune was established relatively quickly, being justified by the geographical proximity and the administrative relations existing between the two administrative-territorial units. The interlocutor explained that there is a clear functional interdependence between the municipality and the commune, a significant part of the inhabitants of the commune using municipal services.

The partnership was also motivated by the need to obtain the additional score provided by the call for funding, but also by the desire to support a commune that had no previous experience in digitisation projects. The Municipality of Miercurea Ciuc perceived this partnership as an opportunity to transfer experience and strengthen administrative capacity at local level. At the same time, the interlocutor stressed that extending the partnership to more TAUs would have significantly increased the administrative complexity and would have made the submission and implementation process more difficult.

Experience of the evaluation process and the relationship with RDA

The funding application was submitted in the autumn of 2024, and the requests for clarifications were received in the summer of the following year. The selection decision for funding was communicated later, after the end of the appeals period. The interlocutor appreciated the relationship with the Centre RDA as a good one, characterised by clear communication and availability at the stage of preparing the application.

However, the long duration of the evaluation process was perceived as a difficulty, especially in the absence of regular information on the status of the evaluation. The beneficiary mentioned that greater transparency and predictability at this stage would have facilitated the planning of internal resources and subsequent implementation stages.

Comparison with other funding mechanisms

During the discussion, the interlocutor made a comparison between the mechanism of the Centre Region Programme and that of the NRRP. The MySMIS platform was perceived as more transparent and user-friendly, while the NRRP mechanism was described as difficult to follow, with a low level of institutional clarity and difficulties in identifying relevant interlocutors.

Determining factors in the maturation of the project

A central element of the discussion was the role of administrative capacity and the support of local leadership in shaping and maturing the project. The interlocutor stressed that the support of the institution's management was essential for assuming the proposed solutions and for the continuity of the digitisation process. The project is the result of an incremental approach, built on previous experience and a realistic assessment of the available resources.

Anticipated benefits and development prospects

The beneficiary anticipates that the implementation of the project will lead to better internal organisation, streamlining decision-making processes and increasing administrative transparency. At the same time, it is considered that the project will generate new needs and development directions, confirming that digitalisation is a continuous process, which requires constant adaptation and updating.

10. 11.CASE STUDY NO. 11 – DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CITY HALL OF GHEORGHENI AND BĂLAN CITY FOR THE BENEFIT OF CITIZENS AND PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

Evaluation title: Theme 2 "*Evaluation of interventions targeting digitalisation activities for the benefit of citizens, businesses and governments"*

Project name: Digital development of Gheorgheni City Hall and Bălan City Hall for the benefit of citizens and public authorities

Beneficiary: Gheorghe Municipality, SMIS code 337086

Investment location: Gheorgheni Municipality, Bălan City, Harghita County

1. OBJECT AND PURPOSE OF THE CASE STUDY

This case study aims to support the evaluation process of the interventions funded by the Centre Region Regional Programme, under Theme 2 "Evaluation of interventions aimed at digitalisation activities for the benefit of citizens, companies and governments". The analyses and findings presented contribute to the formulation of the answers to the evaluation questions and allow comparisons to be made between the different types of interventions, investments and beneficiaries. These comparisons highlight the mechanisms by which available resources and those created within projects are used and capitalised, as well as how these factors, together with the elements of context, influence the implementation and results of interventions.

The case study also contributes to the assessment of the extent to which digitalisation interventions respond to the needs of target groups, provide effective solutions to socio-economic challenges in the Centre Region and support the relevant strategies and objectives of the programme.

The selection of the project analysed in this case study was carried out according to the criteria established in the evaluation methodology, taking into account the type of intervention, the level of complexity and the type of applicant. The project is part of the sample **dedicated to LPAs,** thus ensuring the diversity of types of beneficiaries and the possibility of analysing how different institutional and economic contexts influence the digitisation process.

The methodology used combines the documentary analysis based on the project documents provided by the beneficiary **(the funding application)** with the interview with **the LPA representative**, ensuring a complete understanding of how the interventions contribute to the development and modernisation of the region through digitalisation.

2. PRESENTATION OF THE CASE STUDY

Project name	**Digital development of Gheorgheni City Hall and Bălan City Hall for the benefit of citizens and public authorities**
SMIS Code	337086
Location	Gheorgheni Municipality, Bălan City, Harghita County
Benefit	Gheorgheni City Hall leader, Bălan City partner
Priority / Specific objective	P2. A digital region RSO1.2_Capitalising the benefits of digitalisation for the benefit of citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities
Project call/ Operation	Intervention 2.1.1 Digital communities for a smart region – digital solutions
Implementation period (start/end)	-
Project budget	Total non-reimbursable budget 2,434,584.78
Project context	Gheorgheni Municipality and Bălan City are two administrative-territorial units with different sizes and administrative capacities, but with convergent needs in terms of modernising the way public services are provided. Both localities face structural challenges specific to small and medium-sized local public administrations, characterised by limited human resources, administrative procedures predominantly based on physical support and a growing pressure
Project justification	

	to increase efficiency and transparency in the relationship with citizens and the economic environment. In this context, digitalisation is approached as a necessary tool to reduce administrative dysfunctions, improve internal workflows and facilitate interaction with citizens. The need for digitisation is determined both by concrete difficulties in the management of documents and administrative circuits, and by legislative and institutional developments at central level, which require the use of digital tools such as electronic signatures, electronic document management and communication through IT platforms. At the level of the Municipality of Gheorgheni, the digitisation process was initiated as a result of a reassessment of administrative priorities, being recognised that operating based on traditional procedures is no longer sustainable. In the absence of predictability regarding the access to non-reimbursable funds and given the long duration of the evaluation and contracting processes, the local administration has started the digitisation of some internal flows from its own funds. These steps were mainly aimed at the registration and management of documents, with the aim of streamlining the internal activity and creating the premises for the further development of digital services for citizens. In parallel, actions aimed at improving the relationship with citizens were initiated, by testing digital communication solutions and by optimising existing public information channels. These measures respond to the need to reduce travel to the mayor's office and facilitate access to basic administrative services, in a context in which citizens' demands for the speed and accessibility of public services are increasing. The partnership between the Municipality of Gheorgheni and the City of Bălan reflects both the need to meet the criteria related to the call for funding, and the existence of common needs, especially in terms of the lack of staff and the difficulty of managing the volume of administrative activity. For the City of Bălan, digitalisation is perceived as a means of compensating for reduced administrative capacity, by automating some processes and simplifying workflows. The two administrative-territorial units are members of an Intercommunity Development Association, which provides a framework for institutional cooperation and supports joint initiatives to modernise public services. This associative framework facilitates the coordination of interventions and allows to address common problems in a structured manner, including in the field of digitisation of public administration. The end users of the proposed solutions are the citizens of the two localities, the representatives of the local business environment and the employees of the town halls. At the level of communities, the degree of digital literacy is below the national average, which requires the development of easy-to-use solutions adapted to the level of digital competence of users. In this sense, digitalisation is not seen exclusively as a technical approach but also involves an effort to adapt organisational and train staff and end users. Overall, the administrative and institutional context of the Municipality of Gheorgheni and the City of Bălan justifies the need to implement digitisation solutions aimed at streamlining the internal activity, reducing bureaucracy and improving the relationship with citizens. The proposed project responds to real needs identified at local level and is part of an approach to modernise the public

	administration, adapted to the administrative capacity and specificity of the two administrative-territorial units.

3. Objectives and Logic of the intervention

The intervention proposed by the Municipality of Gheorgheni, in partnership with the City of Bălan, is built on the basis of a clear logic of intervention, oriented towards modernising the way local public administrations operate and improving their relationship with citizens and the business environment. The objectives of the project are formulated in accordance with the needs identified at the level of the two administrative-territorial units and with the priorities of the Centre Regional Programme 2021–2027, taking into account both the existing administrative capacity limitations and the need to adapt the local administration to the current digitisation requirements.

The general objective of the intervention is to increase the level of digitalisation of local public administrations in Gheorgheni Municipality and Bălan City, by implementing digital solutions that contribute to streamlining internal administrative processes, reducing bureaucracy and improving citizens' access to public services. The intervention aims to strengthen the institutional capacity of the two mayoralties, so that they can provide public services in a more coherent, faster and transparent way.

The specific objectives of the project reflect a structured approach to the digitalisation process, focused on the essential functions of local government. A first objective is the development and operationalisation of a digital portal for individuals and legal entities, which would allow online access to a significant proportion of the services offered by city halls. This objective aims to reduce the need to travel to the institutions' headquarters, simplify interaction with the administration and increase the use of digital public services.

A second specific objective is to implement an electronic document management system and an electronic registry, which would allow the unitary and traceable management of documents, the optimisation of internal workflows and the reduction of processing times of administrative requests. This objective is directly correlated with the need to improve the internal work of local administrations and is an essential condition for the efficient functioning of digital services for citizens.

Another objective of the intervention is to reduce the processing time of internal requests and requests addressed to the local administration, by automating some workflows and using digital tools. This measure aims both to increase administrative efficiency and to improve the quality of services offered to citizens, in compliance with the applicable legal framework.

The project also includes the development of digital tools for communication and interaction with citizens, including solutions to facilitate access to public information and services for people with different levels of digital competence. The focus is on developing user-friendly solutions adapted to the local context, given the fact that the level of digital literacy is below the national average in the two communities. In this regard, the intervention also integrates components of training and accommodation of users, both at the level of administrative staff and final beneficiaries.

A complementary objective of the project is related to supporting measures with an indirect impact on resource efficiency and on the reduction of paper consumption and unnecessary travel, thus contributing to a more rational use of resources and to reducing the administrative impact on the environment. These measures are integrated as part of a process of modernisation of the administration, without representing isolated goals in themselves.

The logic of the intervention starts from the premise that the efficient digitisation of local public administration must be built around basic administrative processes and the real needs of users, not around complex or difficult to manage technical solutions. In this regard, the project is structured in such a way as to first strengthen the internal functioning of local administrations, through document and workflow management tools, and subsequently extend digital services to citizens and the business environment.

The partnership between the Municipality of Gheorgheni and the City of Bălan contributes to this logic of intervention by capitalising on the complementarity between the two administrations and by efficiently distributing the available resources. For the City of Bălan, the intervention represents an opportunity to

compensate for the limited administrative capacity by using digital solutions, while for the Municipality of Gheorgheni the project consolidates a modernisation process already initiated.

The objectives and logic of the intervention are consistent with the administrative and institutional context of the two administrative-territorial units and with the priorities of the funding programme. The intervention is designed as a direct response to the needs identified at local level, aiming to achieve concrete results in terms of administrative efficiency, access to public services and institutional capacity, without introducing solutions that go beyond the real level of maturity and resources of the administrations involved.

4. PROJECT COMPONENTS

Activities	**Activity 1 – Project management** This activity aims at the overall coordination of the project throughout the implementation period, in accordance with the provisions of the financing contract. The organisation and functioning of the management team, monitoring the achievement of objectives, observing the calendar of activities and managing the relationship with the financing authority and other parties involved are taken into account. The activity includes technical and financial reporting, preparation and submission of reimbursement requests, formulation of responses to requests for clarification, risk monitoring and support in the preparation of monitoring visits. **Activity 2 – Consultancy and technical assistance services in digitalisation** Given the lack of internal technical expertise necessary for the implementation of a complex digitisation project, specialised consultancy services will be contracted. The activity includes conducting the IT technical audit, analysis of functional and technical needs, elaboration of technical specifications and specifications, support in the evaluation of technical offers, as well as assistance during the development, testing and acceptance of digital solutions. The consultant will include IT specialists with relevant experience in the digitisation of public administration in the team. **Activity 3 – Carrying out public procurement procedures** This activity involves organising and carrying out procurement procedures for IT equipment, IT solutions and services necessary for the implementation of the project. This includes the preparation of procurement documentation, publication of procedures, evaluation of offers, signing contracts with suppliers and archiving of related documentation, in compliance with the legislation in force and the requirements of the financing authority. **Activity 4 – Acquisition and installation of IT infrastructure** Within this activity, the IT equipment necessary for the operation of digital solutions will be purchased and installed, namely servers for hosting applications, storage systems for backup and archiving, cybersecurity equipment (firewall), as well as auxiliary equipment, such as laptops and racks. The equipment will be configured and integrated into the existing IT infrastructure, in compliance with security, energy efficiency and operational continuity requirements. **Activity 5 – Development and implementation of digital solutions for public services** The activity involves the development and implementation of digital solutions for the relationship with citizens and the business environment, including portals dedicated to individuals and legal entities, dynamic online forms, native mobile applications (iOS and Android), a platform for the management of projects financed by the TAU, as well as secure authentication mechanisms and electronic wallet documents. The solutions will allow online requests, real-time notifications and easy access to public services. **Activity 6 – Digitisation and optimisation of internal flows of city halls** This activity aims to modernise internal administrative processes by implementing the smart registry, automating internal workflows and document management, back-digitising existing

	documents, implementing human resources modules and developing a solution dedicated to the field of urban planning. The purpose of the activity is to reduce bureaucracy, increase efficiency and improve the traceability of administrative processes. **Activity 7 – Data analysis and reporting** Within this activity, a Business Intelligence platform will be implemented, which will allow the collection, analysis and visualisation of data generated by public services and internal flows. The work includes ensuring interoperability between existing systems, facilitating decision-making and increasing administrative transparency. **Activity 8 – Citizen education and awareness** This activity aims to increase the use of digital solutions and promote responsible behaviours by developing interactive educational materials, implementing an e-learning application, using an AI-based chatbot for assistance and accessibility, as well as running information and awareness campaigns on digitalisation, energy efficiency and sustainable development. **Activity 9 – Sustainable development and energy efficiency** The activity includes the implementation of digital modules dedicated to monitoring and optimising energy consumption, as well as informing citizens on the efficient use of resources. Personalised notification solutions, interactive maps, and analytics tools that support sustainable behaviours are provided. **Activity 10 – Information, advertising and communication This** activity ensures compliance with the communication and visibility obligations, according to the financing contract and the Visual Identity Manual. It includes the production of promotional materials, the publication of announcements of the beginning and end of the project, the updating of information on official channels and the collaboration with communication service providers.
Expected results	Within the Specific Objective RSO1.2 – *Harnessing the advantages of digitalisation, for the benefit of citizens, companies and public authorities*, financed by the ERDF – European Regional Development Fund, the main result of the project is the development and implementation of digital solutions at the level of Gheorgheni Municipality and Bălan City, with a direct impact on public services and administrative functioning. An expected result is **the implementation of new digital solutions for citizens**, which will allow online access to local public services, electronic transmission of documents, submission of applications and receipt of information on their status. The use of these tools aims to reduce physical interactions with the administration and facilitate access to services for individuals and legal entities. Another result is the **introduction of solutions to streamline the internal administrative processes** of the two mayoralties. The digitisation of the registry, electronic document management and automation of workflows will help reduce the volume of manual activities, better organise internal processes and improve the traceability of administrative operations. The project also includes **the development of an interactive solution for optimising energy consumption**, which will allow users to be informed about consumption and the possibilities of reducing it. The solution will be used both at the level of local administration and by citizens, as a support tool for the more efficient use of energy resources. An additional result of the project is **the identification of implementation models resulting from the territorial cooperation between the Municipality of Gheorgheni and the City of Bălan**. The joint implementation of digital solutions allows them to be tested in different administrative contexts and to document approaches that can also be used by other administrative-territorial units.

	Overall, the expected results reflect the application of digitalisation in the activity of local public administration, with effects on access to services, internal organisation and use of resources, in line with the objectives of RSO1.2.
Target group	**Citizens of Gheorgheni Municipality and Bălan** City The citizens of the two administrative-territorial units represent the main target group of the project. The project aims to serve at least 2,200 people, representing at least 10% of the cumulative population of the two localities. According to the 2021 Population Census, the Municipality of Gheorgheni has 15,884 inhabitants, and the City of Bălan has 5,414 inhabitants, the total population being 21,298 people. Beneficiaries will have faster access to local public services, including electronic submission of documents, payment of fees and obtaining administrative information, with reduced waiting time and travel costs. At the same time, the use of digital solutions will contribute to increasing transparency through easy access to information of public interest. **Employees of the partner administrative-territorial units -** The staff of the mayoralties of Gheorgheni Municipality and Bălan City are another relevant target group of the project. The implementation of digital solutions will support employees' activity by optimising workflows, reducing the volume of manual tasks and improving internal organisation. These changes will contribute to increasing operational efficiency and improving the quality of public services offered. **Representatives of the business environment -** The project also addresses the local business environment, providing simplified and faster access to the administrative services necessary for carrying out economic activities. By digitising processes, company representatives will be able to interact more effectively with the local public administration, reducing the time and resources needed to obtain documents and approvals, which supports a more predictable administrative framework for the development of economic activities. **Other public institutions -** The implementation of the project will also have effects on other public institutions that collaborate with the two mayoralties. The digitalisation of processes and the use of interoperable solutions will help to improve inter-institutional collaboration, reduce bureaucracy and streamline common workflows, supporting a more coherent and well-coordinated way of administrative functioning.

5. PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTATION

At the time of this case study, the project "Digital development of the City Hall of Gheorgheni and Bălan City for the benefit of citizens and public authorities" is not yet in the actual implementation stage, being in the process of going through the administrative stages related to the evaluation and pre-contracting. The funding application was submitted in February 2025, and the evaluation process took longer than initially anticipated, a situation that influenced the estimated timeline for the start of the funded activities.

Although the lack of a signed financing contract limits the possibility of starting formal implementation, the progress of the project cannot be evaluated exclusively in terms of the procedural stage. At the level of the Municipality of Gheorgheni, the process of digitisation of the local public administration was initiated prior to the submission of the financing application, by using its own funds for the digitisation of internal administrative flows considered essential for the functioning of the institution. These steps were mainly aimed at introducing electronic document management solutions, the use of electronic signatures and the reorganisation of internal work circuits, in order to reduce dependence on physical documents and streamline staff activity.

The implementation of these preliminary solutions involved a process of organisational adaptation, both at the level of management and at the level of the executive staff. City Hall employees have started to use the new digital tools in their current work, which has allowed them to identify practical difficulties, adjust internal procedures and clarify the responsibilities associated with the new workflows. This stage of accommodation

represents a relevant step forward from the perspective of the institution's preparation for the implementation of the funded project, as it reduces the risk of bottlenecks or delays in the initial phase of implementation.

In parallel with the modernisation of internal flows, the local administration has also tested digital solutions oriented towards the relationship with citizens. These include applications for reporting issues of local interest and improvements to online communication channels, including the institution's website. These solutions are used in a limited form and are subject to continuous adjustments, depending on the feedback received from users. While they are not a complete digital ecosystem, they provide local government with useful practical experience on how citizens interact with digital services and what the main barriers to use are.

As for the project partner, the City of Bălan is in a similar stage of preparation, with no funded implementation activities in progress. The limited administrative capacity of this administrative-territorial unit makes digitisation perceived as a necessary tool for simplifying internal work and managing workload more efficiently. The collaboration between the Municipality of Gheorgheni and the City of Bălan is maintained at the institutional level, with exchanges of information and coordination on the next stages of the project, in order to a coherent start immediately after the signing of the financing contract.

A relevant element for the overall progress of the project is the involvement of the Municipality of Gheorgheni in other initiatives with a digital component, including in projects in which it is a partner. Such a project, focused on smart city solutions, is in the pre-contracting stage and aims to digitise some components related to traffic management and urban services. The experience gained within these initiatives contributes to increasing the staff's familiarity with the specific requirements of digitisation projects and to strengthening the institutional capacity to manage technological interventions.

The lengthy evaluation and contracting process is perceived as a factor that negatively influences the pace of implementation, especially in the case of digitalisation projects, where technical solutions and market conditions can change in a relatively short time. This situation has led the local administration to adopt a prudent approach, by initiating measures that can be supported from its own budget and that are compatible with the objectives of the financed project. In this way, the proposed project is not conceived as an absolute starting point, but as a stage of consolidation and expansion of solutions already tested in practice.

From the perspective of administrative preparation, significant progress can be identified in terms of organising the project team, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and establishing working relationships with IT consultants and service providers. Although the actual implementation of the funded activities has not started, these elements of preparation are essential to ensure an efficient start of the project and to reduce the risks associated with the initial implementation phase.

Another relevant aspect of the progress is the increased level of awareness, at the level of local administration, on the importance of adapting digital solutions to the real usability of staff and citizens. The experience gained through the use of solutions implemented from own funds highlighted the need for digital tools to be user-friendly and accompanied by training and support activities. These lessons are taken into account in the planning of the future activities of the funded project.

At the same time, the lack of a signed financing contract generates a series of objective constraints. Procurement procedures cannot be started for the digital solutions provided for in the project, and the detailed planning of the activities remains conditional on the clarification of the contractual calendar. This situation limits the ability of the local government to commit additional resources and move forward with the implementation of the more complex components of the project.

However, the progress made so far indicates that there is a level of institutional readiness that can facilitate further implementation. The local government has demonstrated the ability to initiate and manage digitalisation projects in a context of limited resources, to collaborate with external consultants and suppliers and to adapt internal procedures to the new digital tools. These elements reduce the risk of the funded project encountering major difficulties in the implementation phase.

As for the estimated timetable, the implementation of the project is planned for a duration of 21 months, starting from the moment of signing the financing contract. The planned activities include the acquisition of consulting services, the development and implementation of digital solutions, their testing, user training and

information and reporting activities. The progress made so far at institutional level creates the premises for a smoother flow of these activities, insofar as the administrative procedures will allow them to start within a reasonable timeframe.

In conclusion, although the project is not yet in the formal implementation stage, there is real and relevant progress at the level of local administration, reflected by the initiation of digitisation measures from its own funds, organisational training and the accumulation of practical experience. This progress contributes to reducing the risks associated with the implementation and increasing the institutional capacity to manage a complex digitisation project, immediately after the signing of the financing contract.

6. IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS (PROGRESS AND INTERNAL MECHANISMS)

The implementation process of the project "Digital development of the City Hall of Gheorgheni and Bălan City for the benefit of citizens and public authorities" must be analysed in relation to the current status of the project, respectively the evaluation and pre-contracting stage, in the absence of a signed financing contract. In this context, the implementation cannot be evaluated in terms of the deliverables achieved or the physical progress of the activities, but by the way in which the administrations involved have prepared institutionally, procedurally and organisationally for the implementation of the project, as well as through the internal mechanisms activated or strengthened for future implementation.

At the level of the Municipality of Gheorgheni, the implementation process is preceded by a series of preparatory actions aimed at adapting the internal operating mode to the requirements of a digitalisation project. These actions were not initiated solely as a result of the application for funding but resulted from the practical need to improve the management of documents and administrative flows in a context characterised by a high volume of activity and limited human resources. Therefore, before the formal start of the project, the local administration started to use basic digital tools for registry and document management, which involved changes in internal procedures and a gradual adaptation of staff.

This process of internal adaptation involved clarifying the responsibilities of officials in the use of the new tools, establishing stricter working rules on the circulation of documents and introducing the electronic signature in the current activity. Although these measures are not formally part of the activities of the funded project, they represent a relevant step forward from the perspective of internal implementation mechanisms, as they reduce the risk of institutional bottleneck at the time of project start-up and facilitate the subsequent integration of more complex digital solutions.

In parallel, an administrative training of the institution was carried out for the management of a digitisation project, including by establishing an internal team with clear attributions in the field of projects and by strengthening the working relationship with external consultants. Given the lack of dedicated IT expertise at the level of the institution, collaboration with external consultants and suppliers is considered an essential mechanism for implementation. At this stage, the local administration has focused on clearly defining functional needs and understanding its own capacity limits, in order to avoid overloading the institution with solutions that are difficult to manage.

The implementation process is designed as a phased one, in which the first activities are aimed at strengthening the internal functioning, followed by the extension of digital services to citizens and the business environment. This approach is also reflected in the internal training mode, by prioritising those mechanisms that support the day-to-day administrative work. The use of digital solutions implemented from its own funds has made it possible to test the institution's ability to manage organisational change and to identify vulnerable points, such as resistance to change or difficulties in using it encountered by staff.

At the level of the project partner, Bălan City, the implementation process is influenced to a greater extent by the constraints related to the reduced administrative capacity. The lack of specialised personnel and the high volume of administrative tasks make the implementation of digital solutions perceived as a necessity for simplifying the current activity. At this stage, the internal mechanisms are focused on institutional preparation and ensuring effective coordination with the project leader, the Municipality of Gheorgheni, so that the implementation can be carried out in a coherent manner and adapted to the available resources.

The coordination between the two administrative-territorial units is carried out at institutional level, through information exchanges and alignment of the preparation stages. The common membership of an ADI type

associative structure facilitates this coordination and provides a formal framework for cooperation, which can also be capitalised on in the actual implementation stage. Although the funded activities have not started, the existence of this institutional framework helps to reduce risks related to communication and alignment of decisions.

An important element of the implementation process is the management of the relationship with IT solution providers. In the absence of a financing contract, procurement procedures cannot be started, but the local administration has already carried out a process of market consultation and dialogue with potential suppliers. This process was intended to clarify the technical options available, understand the operational implications of the different solutions and calibrate expectations in relation to budget and internal capacity. These preparatory activities constitute a relevant internal mechanism that can contribute to the more efficient conduct of procurement procedures after the contract has been signed.

From the perspective of project management, the implementation process is supported by a cautious, risk-oriented approach. The local government's experience with other funded projects has highlighted difficulties related to repetitive administrative requests, the length of procedures and the lack of flexibility in implementation. These experiences have led to increased attention to internal planning and process documentation, even before the formal start of the project. In this regard, the internal mechanisms include a close monitoring of the progress of the project in the pre-contracting phase and a constant update of the internal planning, depending on the available information.

Another relevant aspect of the implementation process is the preparation for user training and adaptation activities. Given the relatively low level of digital literacy in communities and the diversity of end-users, local administrations have become aware of the need for implementation to be accompanied by support and training measures. The experience of using already implemented digital solutions has highlighted the importance of intuitive tools and adequate support for users, aspects that are taken into account in the planning of future project activities.

The implementation process is directly influenced by the prolonged duration of the evaluation and contracting stages. This situation limits the ability of administrations to move forward formally but has at the same time generated an adaptation of internal mechanisms, by assuming measures that can be supported from their own budgets and that are compatible with the objectives of the project. Thus, the implementation is conceived not as a process that begins exclusively with the signing of the contract, but as a broader administrative modernisation approach, in which the financed project has the role of consolidating and integrating the solutions already tested.

From the perspective of institutional capacity, the internal mechanisms activated so far indicate a level of preparedness that can support the implementation of the project under relatively stable conditions. The existence of adapted internal procedures, the experience gained in the use of basic digital tools and the working relationships established with external consultants and suppliers contribute to reducing the risks associated with the initial implementation phase. At the same time, involvement in other projects with a digital component contributes to strengthening administrative skills and increasing familiarity with the specific requirements of this type of interventions.

The project implementation process is at a stage prior to formal implementation, characterised by institutional preparation, organisational adaptation and activation of relevant internal mechanisms. Although the funded activities have not started, the progress made so far indicates that there is a functional basis that can facilitate the efficient start of implementation after the signing of the financing contract. The internal mechanisms developed or strengthened at this stage contribute to increasing the administrative capacity of the two administrative-territorial units and to ensuring a coherent implementation, adapted to the context and available resources.

7. IMPACT ON BENEFICIARIES AND THE COMMUNITY

The assessment of the impact of the project on the beneficiaries and the community must be carried out taking into account the fact that the project is, at the time of elaboration of this case study, in the evaluation and pre-contracting stage, and the financed implementation activities have not yet started. In this context, the impact cannot be measured in terms of actual results or indicators achieved but is analysed in relation

to the already observable effects of the preparatory measures and digitalisation initiatives implemented from own funds, as well as in terms of anticipated changes, based on the administrative experience gained so far.

At the level of the direct beneficiaries, respectively the employees of the mayoralties of Gheorgheni Municipality and Bălan City, the impact is already visible in the form of changes in the way of working and in the organisation of administrative activity. The introduction of digital tools for document management and the use of electronic signatures has led to a reduction in reliance on physical documents and better traceability of internal flows. These changes have contributed to a better organisation of the work, even if the adaptation process is not without difficulties, especially for staff with a low level of digital competence.

The impact on employees is predominantly organisational and functional in nature, reflecting a transition to a more structured and digitally oriented way of working. This transition involves an effort of accommodation and learning, but at the same time creates the premises for increasing administrative efficiency and reducing repetitive tasks. In the absence of full implementation of the project, these effects are still limited, but the experience gained so far provides a relevant basis for expanding the impact once the funded activities start.

As far as the citizens of the two localities are concerned, the impact is so far indirect and punctual, manifesting itself through the use of digital solutions in the testing phase or limited use, such as referral applications and the improvement of online communication channels. These tools facilitated the transmission of requests and notifications without going to the mayor's office, contributing to faster and more accessible communication between citizens and the local administration. However, the degree of use of these solutions is influenced by the level of digital literacy of the population, which is below the national average, as well as by the degree of familiarity with the new tools.

For the local business environment, the current impact is limited, as most administrative services for economic operators are still managed through traditional procedures. However, existing experience indicates that the digitisation of internal flows and the development of digital channels of interaction can contribute, in the medium term, to reducing request processing times and increasing the predictability of the relationship between the administration and the economic environment. These effects are anticipated on the basis of recurrent problems identified in the current business, such as long resolution times and the need for repeated submission of documents.

The impact on the local community must also be analysed from the perspective of the accessibility of public services. In a context where a significant part of the population has limited digital skills, there is a risk that digitalisation will create new barriers to access, if it is not accompanied by adequate support and training measures. For this reason, the solutions already tested and those proposed by the project are designed to be as intuitive as possible and to allow gradual use, without completely excluding traditional channels of interaction. This approach helps to maintain a balance between the modernisation of services and social inclusion.

Another aspect of the impact on the community is related to administrative transparency. The use of digital channels for publishing information and communicating with citizens facilitates access to data of public interest and can help to increase trust in local government. Even if these effects are currently limited to certain functions and services, they indicate a potential to improve the relationship between the administration and the community, with the expansion of digital solutions.

The impact on Bălan City is conditioned to a greater extent by the reduced administrative capacity of this administrative-territorial unit. For this locality, digitalisation is perceived as a support tool for managing the volume of activity with limited resources. Even before the implementation of the funded project, the mere prospect of adopting digital solutions led to better internal planning and greater openness to change at the institutional level. The actual impact on beneficiaries in Bălan is currently limited, but the potential for improvement is significant, especially in terms of administrative efficiency.

At Community level, the impact of the project must also be analysed from the perspective of the use of resources. Reducing the volume of paper documents, reducing unnecessary travel and optimising administrative processes can contribute, in the medium term, to a more efficient use of public resources.

These effects are still incipient, but they are supported by the experience of using the digital solutions implemented so far.

It is important to note that the impact of the project is closely related to the pace and manner in which the implementation will be carried out after the signing of the financing contract. The delay in the evaluation and contracting stages currently limits the extent of the impact on beneficiaries and the community. However, the preparatory measures and the experience gained create the premises for a more efficient transition to digital public services, provided that the implementation is accompanied by adequate training and support activities.

In conclusion, the impact on the beneficiaries and the community is, at the moment, a partial and predominantly organisational and preparatory one. The concrete benefits for citizens and the business environment are still limited, but the experience gained points to a clear potential for improving access to public services, administrative efficiency and transparency, once the full implementation of the project starts. The future impact will directly depend on the ability of local governments to manage change, adapt digital solutions to the real needs of users and ensure the inclusion of all categories of beneficiaries.

8. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INTERVENTION (PRELIMINARY COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS)

The analysis of the effectiveness of the intervention is carried out in a preliminary framework, considering the fact that the project "Digital development of the City Hall of Gheorgheni and Bălan City for the benefit of citizens and public authorities" has not yet entered the actual implementation stage. In the absence of empirical data resulting from the implementation of the financed activities, the cost-benefit assessment is based on the analysis of the structure of the proposed budget, on the experience of local administrations with the solutions already implemented from their own funds and on the estimation of the anticipated administrative and operational effects, in relation to the real needs identified.

In terms of costs, the intervention involves a budget allocation mainly oriented towards the development and implementation of digital solutions, specialised consulting services and training and support activities for users. The structure of the budget reflects the existing constraints at the level of local administrations, in particular the lack of internal IT expertise, which makes it necessary to outsource some critical services for implementation. In this context, the costs of consulting and IT solution providers are not considered avoidable additional expenses, but essential elements to ensure the functionality and sustainability of the intervention.

The total eligible budget of the project is approximately 2.48 million lei, with a non-reimbursable financing rate of 98%, the co-financing being provided from the local budgets of the beneficiaries. From the perspective of financial efficiency, this high level of non-reimbursable financing significantly reduces the pressure on local budgets and allows investments to be made that would be difficult to sustain exclusively from own resources. At the same time, the relatively low financial contribution of beneficiaries requires increased attention to the efficient use of funds and to obtaining clear administrative benefits that justify public investment.

As for the anticipated benefits, they are predominantly operational and organisational in nature, aiming at streamlining the internal activity of local administrations and improving the provision of public services. The experience of using digital solutions implemented from own funds at the level of the Municipality of Gheorgheni indicates that the digitisation of internal administrative flows leads to better document management, reduced processing times and increased traceability of administrative decisions. These effects, although difficult to quantify in direct financial terms, generate indirect savings in time and human resources.

An important anticipated benefit of the intervention is the reduction of the administrative workload associated with the management of documents in physical format. The digitisation of the registry and document circuits can lead to a reduction in operational costs related to archiving, multiplication and internal transport of documents. Also, reducing the processing times of administrative requests can allow the redistribution of human resources towards higher value-added activities, contributing to a more efficient use of existing staff, in the context of a structural shortage of staff.

From the perspective of the external beneficiaries, namely the citizens and the local business environment, the anticipated benefits include reducing the number of trips to the mayoralties, simplifying the interaction with the administration and increasing the predictability of the resolution deadlines. These benefits translate into time savings and indirect costs for users, as well as a reduction in frustrations associated with traditional administrative procedures. Although these effects are not monetised in this preliminary analysis, they are a relevant element of the socio-economic efficiency of the intervention.

The cost-benefit analysis must also be related to the non-intervention alternative. In the absence of the project, local administrations would continue to operate on the basis of predominantly manual procedures, with punctual and limited investments in digitalisation, made exclusively from their own funds. This approach would most likely lead to a slow pace of modernisation, the maintenance of administrative dysfunctions and an inefficient use of available human resources. Compared to this alternative, the funded intervention provides a structured and coherent framework for the modernisation of the administration, with a relatively low cost for the beneficiaries.

Another relevant element in the efficiency analysis is the relationship between the complexity of the proposed solutions and the real capacity for implementation and use. The project is designed to avoid the introduction of overly sophisticated technological solutions, which would generate high maintenance costs and exceed the management capacity of local administrations. This approach contributes to increasing the effectiveness of the intervention, by aligning investments with real needs and available resources, reducing the risk of underutilisation of the implemented solutions.

In terms of financial sustainability, the recurring costs associated with the operation and maintenance of digital solutions are considered manageable in relation to local budgets, especially in the context of indirect savings generated by streamlining administrative work. The experience of using solutions implemented from own funds suggests that these costs can be absorbed without generating significant pressures on local budgets, provided that proper planning and efficient use of systems are made.

It should also be noted that the effectiveness of the intervention is influenced by the prolonged duration of the evaluation and contracting stages. Delaying the start of implementation can affect the cost-benefit ratio, especially in the context of technological developments and rising market costs. This risk is partially mitigated by the fact that the local government has already initiated digitalisation measures compatible with the project objectives, thus reducing the likelihood that the proposed investments will become inadequate at the time of implementation.

The preliminary cost-benefit analysis indicates that the proposed intervention has a favourable relationship between the costs assumed and the anticipated benefits, in particular from the perspective of administrative efficiency and improvement of public services. Although the benefits cannot be fully quantified in financial terms at this stage, existing experience and the structure of the intervention suggest that the investment is justified and proportionate to the identified needs. The final effectiveness of the intervention will directly depend on the pace of implementation, the capacity of local administrations to manage change and the adaptation of digital solutions to the actual use by final beneficiaries.

9. CONTRIBUTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL OBJECTIVES

Equal opportunities and gender equality

The project fully complies with the national and European legislative framework on equal opportunities and gender equality, integrating these principles into all stages of preparation, implementation and use of digital solutions. Access to the services developed is provided equally to all categories of people, without discrimination on the basis of gender, disability or other personal characteristics.

At the organisational level, the implementation team is constituted on the basis of professional skills, with the assurance of equal treatment and gender balance in the occupation of responsibility roles. The participation of women in the decision-making process is encouraged, both within the project team and as users of the developed digital solutions.

The project includes training and awareness-raising activities that promote equal opportunities, addressed to the staff involved and end users. The information materials and user guides are designed in an

accessible, clear and easy-to-understand format so that they can be used by people with different levels of digital competence.

The digital solutions developed comply with international accessibility standards (WCAG 2.1), integrating functionalities dedicated to people with disabilities, such as screen readers, adaptive contrast, text adjustment and intuitive interfaces. In addition, the project foresees the use of innovative tools, such as chatbots and extended accessibility functionalities, to facilitate interaction with the public administration.

Compliance with equal opportunities principles is monitored throughout the project, including by collecting gender-segregated data on the use of digital services and integrating user feedback into the process of continuous improvement of solutions.

Non-discriminatory

The project is implemented in strict compliance with the principle of non-discrimination, according to national and European regulations, ensuring equal access to benefits for all citizens, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability or other personal characteristics.

All platforms and applications developed are designed to remove access barriers and allow their use by all categories of users. International accessibility standards are consistently applied, and digital solutions are tested to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

Within the project team, the selection of personnel is carried out exclusively on the basis of professional competence, with the assurance of equal treatment and fair opportunities in labour relations. The beneficiary assumes the application of the principles of non-discrimination throughout the duration of the project.

The project promotes active social inclusion by developing functionalities dedicated to vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, the elderly or people with low incomes. Awareness campaigns are also planned to encourage the use of digital services by all citizens.

The project's activities are monitored to prevent any form of discrimination, and users benefit from transparent mechanisms for reporting any incidents.

Accessibility for people with disabilities

In accordance with Law no. 448/2006, the project ensures the complete accessibility of digital solutions and associated infrastructures for people with disabilities. All applications and platforms developed comply with WCAG 2.1 standards, being adapted for users with visual, hearing, motor or cognitive impairments.

Built-in functionalities include voice reading, high contrast, alternate navigation, and streamlined interfaces. The information materials are made available in accessible formats, including audio files and subtitled videos, and the user guides are tailored to the specific needs of users.

The project provides for the organisation of training sessions dedicated to people with disabilities, as well as the provision of specialised technical support to solve the difficulties encountered. User feedback is constantly collected, and regular accessibility assessments contribute to the continuous improvement of digital solutions.

Sustainable development – the "polluter pays" principle

The project complies with the "Polluter pays" principle, according to national and European legislation, without generating a significant negative impact on the environment. The project activities do not involve additional emissions of pollutants into air, water or soil and are carried out in full compliance with environmental protection requirements.

The digitisation of administrative processes contributes to a significant reduction in the consumption of paper and consumables, decreasing the use of natural resources. The IT equipment used is selected based on energy efficiency criteria, and the management of electrical and electronic waste is carried out according to the applicable legislation, in collaboration with authorised operators.

The project includes additional environmental awareness actions, such as educational apps on the circular economy and resource efficiency. Digital solutions are also provided to inform citizens about the use of renewable energy and local energy efficiency, helping to increase transparency and community involvement.

Biodiversity protection

The project activities are carried out exclusively in administrative and urban spaces, without affecting natural habitats, flora or fauna species and without involving interventions in ecologically sensitive areas. The use of digital solutions indirectly contributes to the conservation of biodiversity by reducing resource consumption and environmental pressure.

The equipment purchased complies with ecological standards and is managed responsibly, and the digital platforms include educational components that promote the importance of protecting biodiversity and ecosystems.

Efficient use of resources

The project promotes the efficient use of resources by digitising processes, eliminating printed documents and optimising energy consumption. The IT equipment used has higher energy classes, and the software solutions are developed to efficiently use the existing infrastructure, including through virtualisation technologies.

E-waste management is carried out responsibly, through recycling, reconditioning and reuse, including by donating functional equipment to institutions or organisations in the community. The project supports the circular economy through local partnerships and resource reuse initiatives.

Additional digital solutions are foreseen to educate citizens on energy efficiency and to facilitate the use of electric mobility infrastructure, including charging station location apps for electric vehicles.

Climate change immunisation and the DNSH principle

The project is aligned with the National Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change and complies with the DNSH Methodology, contributing to all six environmental objectives defined by Regulation (EU) 2020/852. The digitalisation of processes, the use of energy-efficient equipment and the reduction of material consumption contribute to climate change mitigation.

Adaptation to climate change is ensured by installing equipment in protected areas, using resilient technologies and developing continuity plans to maintain functionality in climate risk conditions. The project activities do not affect water resources, biodiversity or natural ecosystems and support the transition to a circular economy.

Through these measures, the project fully respects the principle of 'do no significant harm' and contributes to sustainable development in a coherent and environmentally responsible way.

10. CONCLUSIONS

The case study carried out for the project "Digital development of the City Hall of Gheorgheni and Bălan City for the benefit of citizens and public authorities" provides a detailed picture of how small and medium-sized local public administrations approach the digitisation process in an institutional context characterised by limited resources, administrative constraints and an accelerated dynamic of legislative and technological requirements. The analysis highlights the fact that digitalisation is perceived at the level of beneficiaries not as a punctual or opportunistic initiative, but as a structural necessity for the efficient functioning of the local public administration.

A first central element that emerges from this case study is the fact that the digitisation process was not triggered exclusively by the existence of a call for funding, but was initiated previously, through the use of the local administration's own funds. This approach indicates an institutional assumption of the need for modernisation, as well as the existence of a real pressure generated by administrative dysfunctions, workload and the growing expectations of citizens and the business environment. The project submitted under the Regional Centre Programme 2021–2027 thus appears as a continuation and consolidation of some steps already started, not as an artificial starting point.

The analysis of the objectives and logic of the intervention shows that the project is built around concrete and well-defined needs, especially those related to streamlining internal administrative flows and improving the relationship between administration and citizens. The focus on document digitisation, process automation and the development of digital channels of interaction reflect a realistic understanding of the

priorities of the local administration, avoiding overloading the project with technological solutions that could not be sustained in the medium term. From this perspective, the intervention is aligned with the current level of administrative capacity and digital maturity of the beneficiaries.

The current status of the project, which is in the evaluation and pre-contracting stage, limits the possibility of evaluating concrete results, but does not cancel out the existence of relevant institutional progress. The digitalisation measures implemented from own funds, the adaptation of internal procedures and the process of accommodating staff with the new digital tools are clear elements of progress, which can reduce the risks associated with the initial implementation phase. These steps indicate that the local administration did not adopt a passive attitude while waiting for funding but tried to respond to immediate needs within the limits of available resources.

The analysis of the implementation process, in relation to the internal mechanisms activated so far, highlights the importance of organisational preparation and procedural adaptation before the formal start of the funded activities. Clarifying responsibilities, working with external consultants and suppliers, and testing basic digital solutions help create a functional foundation for future implementation. At the same time, the case study shows that the lack of in-house IT expertise is a structural constraint for local administrations, which makes outsourcing services a necessary condition, not an optional one.

The impact on beneficiaries and the community is, at this stage, mainly indirect and preparatory. For the employees of the municipalities, the impact is manifested by changes in the way they work and by a process of adaptation to the use of digital tools. For citizens and businesses, the benefits are still limited, but the experience of using already tested solutions points to a clear potential to improve access to public services and reduce red tape. The study also highlights the need for digitalisation to be accompanied by training and support measures, in the context of a relatively low level of digital literacy at local level.

The analysis of the effectiveness of the intervention, carried out in a preliminary logic, suggests the existence of a favourable relationship between the assumed costs and the anticipated benefits. The structure of the budget and the high level of non-reimbursable financing allow investments to be made that would be difficult to sustain exclusively from local budgets. The expected benefits are mainly operational and organisational in nature, aiming at time savings, more efficient use of human resources and improved public service delivery. Although these benefits are difficult to quantify in direct financial terms, they are relevant from the perspective of administrative efficiency and the quality of the public act.

A cross-cutting element that emerges from the entire case study is the major influence of the duration of the evaluation and contracting processes on all subsequent stages. The delay in signing the financing contract generates uncertainty, affects planning and increases the risks associated with technological developments and market costs. This situation is perceived by the beneficiary as a structural vulnerability of the financing framework, with a direct impact on the efficiency of digitisation interventions. The case study thus highlights the need for more flexible mechanisms and more adapted to the specifics of technological projects.

The recommendations made by the beneficiary, integrated in this analysis, reflect relevant practical experience and a clear understanding of the limitations faced by local public administrations. They aim to differentiate projects according to complexity, simplify administrative procedures, reduce documentary redundancy and improve information and support activities for beneficiaries. From this perspective, the case study not only provides a description of a specific project but contributes to the identification of lessons with the potential for generalisation for future interventions in the field of digitisation of local public administration.

Overall, the case study of the Municipality of Gheorgheni and the City of Bălan highlights the fact that the success of the digitisation projects depends to a significant extent on the alignment between the real needs of the beneficiaries, the existing administrative capacity and the design of the financing instruments. Digitalisation appears as a necessary but complex process that requires time, organisational adaptation and constant institutional support. The analysed project illustrates a realistic and prudent approach, oriented towards solving the concrete problems of local government, and provides a relevant framework for reflection on how public policies can more effectively support the digital transformation at local level.

In this context, the general conclusion of the study is that the proposed intervention is justified in terms of the identified needs and the existing institutional capacity, and the progress made so far creates favourable premises for further implementation. However, the final impact and real efficiency of the project will directly depend on the speed of completion of the administrative stages, the flexibility of the implementation mechanisms and the ability of local administrations to manage the change in a coherent way adapted to the community served.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations presented in this section reflect the views, observations and suggestions made by the beneficiary's representative during the interview, in the context of the experience gained in the preparation of the project and in the interaction with the existing funding mechanisms. These recommendations are closely linked to the current status of the project, namely the evaluation and pre-contracting stage, and have as their main objective the improvement of the design of the calls, the evaluation processes and the implementation mechanisms, so that they are better adapted to the realities of local public administrations.

A first set of recommendations concerns the duration and predictability of the evaluation and contracting process. The beneficiary underlines that the very long interval between the time of submission of the financing application and the moment of signing the contract directly affects the ability of local administrations to plan and manage digitalisation projects. In the beneficiary's opinion, this situation is even more problematic in the case of projects with a technological component, where the proposed solutions can quickly become outdated and the costs can undergo significant changes. From this perspective, the need for mechanisms that allow the faster evaluation of projects with a low or medium degree of complexity is appreciated, so that local administrations can start the implementation in a reasonable timeframe.

The beneficiary also considers that a clearer differentiation between digitalisation projects geared towards core administrative functions and complex projects of the advanced digital ecosystem type would be useful. The application of the same evaluation criteria and deadlines for projects with different levels of complexity is perceived as disproportionate and difficult to manage for local governments with limited administrative capacity. From this perspective, a differentiated approach could contribute both to reducing the duration of the assessment and to better aligning the real needs of beneficiaries with the requirements of the calls.

Another aspect highlighted by the beneficiary refers to the rigidity of the implementation procedures and the redundancy of administrative requests. The beneficiary points out that, in the implementation phase of other funded projects, the same documents are requested and uploaded several times, even in situations where they are already available in the platforms used. This practice is perceived as excessively bureaucratic and contrary to digitisation objectives, generating a significant consumption of time and administrative resources. The beneficiary considers that a better reuse of the documents already submitted and a reduction of repetitive requests would contribute to the efficiency of the relationship between the beneficiaries and the Managing Authority.

As regards the applicant's guide, the beneficiary considers that the high level of technicality of the documentation represents an important barrier for local administrations with limited experience in digitisation projects. From the beneficiary's perspective, the guide should allow, from a first reading, a clear understanding of the type of eligible project, the level of complexity and the administrative capacity required to submit an application. In its current form, the beneficiary considers that it is necessary to involve a consultant even to understand if a project is relevant, which may discourage some local administrations from participating in calls.

The beneficiary stressed the importance of more applied information and support activities during the call launch period. In this regard, the usefulness of dedicated thematic sessions, focused on concrete aspects of the call, such as the types of eligible solutions, the differences between basic and complex projects, minimum technical requirements or result indicators, is appreciated. The Beneficiary considers that such sessions could include, in addition to representatives of the Managing Authority, consultants or IT providers with relevant experience, who would provide a practical perspective on the implementation.

Another recommendation made by the beneficiary refers to the formulation of funding applications based on functional requirements, rather than on rigid technical specifications. In the beneficiary's view, the very detailed description of the technical solutions in the implementation phase limits the ability to adapt further, especially in the context of delays in evaluation and rapid technological developments. A more flexible approach would allow solutions to be adjusted within clearly defined limits without affecting project objectives or compliance.

The beneficiary also highlighted the importance of recognising the administrative capacity limitations of small and medium-sized local governments. The lack of specialised personnel, especially in the IT field, is perceived as a structural constraint, which cannot be overcome exclusively by stricter administrative requirements. From this perspective, the beneficiary appreciates the need for real support mechanisms, including not only procedural compliance, but also practical assistance at the implementation stage.

As far as partnerships are concerned, the beneficiary considers that they can be useful not only from the perspective of the score obtained during the calls, but also as a tool to compensate for the limitations of administrative capacity. However, the beneficiary stresses that partnerships must be manageable from an administrative point of view, and their requirements must not generate a disproportionate additional burden in the submission and implementation phase.

Last but not least, the beneficiary draws attention to the need to align the financing and implementation mechanisms with the declared digitisation objectives. From the perspective of local government, digitalisation should not be associated with more bureaucracy, but with simplifying processes and reducing administrative burdens. Any discrepancy between public policy objectives and current administrative practices is perceived as a factor that can affect the trust of beneficiaries and the effectiveness of interventions.

In conclusion, the recommendations made by the beneficiary reflect a practical experience gained in the preparation and implementation of digitisation projects, highlighting the need for more flexible, faster processes and better adapted to the real capacity of local public administrations. These observations can contribute to improving the funding framework and increasing the relevance and efficiency of future interventions, in particular in the case of projects to digitalise local public administration.

11.1 Case Study Interview Minute – Gheorgheni Municipality

Date: January 14, 2026

Location: online

Participants: **project** representative of the Municipality of Gheorgheni and representatives of the Association formed by CIVITTA Strategy & Consulting SA (leader) and Lideea Development Actions SRL (partner)

Context and purpose of the interview

The interview was conducted as part of a case study related to the evaluation process of the digitisation projects submitted under Priority 2 – A Digital Region, with the objective of analysing the way in which local public authorities conceive, prepare and develop digitisation projects, as well as identifying the main difficulties encountered during the submission, evaluation and implementation stages. The discussion aimed to capture both the motivation behind the initiative and the concrete experience of the beneficiary in interacting with the financing mechanisms.

The origin of the project idea and the motivation for digitisation

During the discussion, it was emphasised that the idea of digitisation is not a new one nor specific exclusively to the analysed project, being a common need of all local public administrations. However, at the level of the Municipality of Gheorgheni, digitisation was not a strategic priority until the change of the institution's leadership. With the installation of the new mayor, the subject of digitalisation was explicitly brought on the agenda of the local administration, recognising the need to modernise the way of working,

both due to the existing dysfunctions in the internal administrative flows, and as a result of the pressures exerted by citizens and the economic environment for more efficient public services.

An additional factor contributing to this decision was the evolution of the legislative and administrative framework at central level, which requires the use of electronic signatures and digital documents, making it increasingly difficult to operate exclusively on paper.

Initial digitisation steps made from own funds

Before obtaining a non-reimbursable financing, the Gheorgheni City Hall started, from its own funds, the digitisation of some internal administrative flows. This decision was driven both by the belief that digitalisation can no longer be postponed and by the lack of predictability in terms of the duration of the evaluation and contracting process. Thus, an electronic document management and internal registry system was implemented, which is currently in a stage of current use by the institution's staff.

The representative of the mayor's office stressed that these steps were considered essential for improving the internal activity and reducing bureaucracy, even if it is recognised that its complete elimination is not realistic in the current context.

Digital services for citizens and community relations

In parallel with the modernisation of internal flows, the local administration has also initiated a series of actions aimed at improving the relationship with citizens. These include the testing of a digital application for reporting problems at the level of the municipality and the optimisation of the institutional website, in order to comply with the legal obligations of transparency and public information. These solutions are perceived as tools that can reduce the number of trips to the city hall and facilitate communication between citizens and the administration.

Objectives of the project submitted for funding

The project submitted under the Centre Regional Programme 2021–2027 aims to expand and strengthen the digitisation process at the level of local administration, with the main objective of streamlining the internal activity and improving the services offered to citizens. Among the objectives mentioned in the interview are to reduce the processing times of administrative requests, increase the traceability of documents and develop digital tools that allow online access to as many public services as possible.

The representative of the city hall mentioned the intention to significantly reduce the response time for administrative requests, compared to the standard legal deadline, by using the proposed digital solutions.

Partnership with Bălan City

The partnership with the City of Bălan was discussed as an important element of the project. The representative of the mayor's office mentioned that it was initially taken into account also from the perspective of the scoring criteria related to the funding call. Subsequently, however, a real common need was identified, especially in the context of staff shortages and difficulties in managing the volume of administrative activity. The decision on the partnership was taken at the level of the institution's management, based on the existing collaboration relations between mayors and the common belonging to associative structures.

Administrative capacity and previous experience

During the interview, it was highlighted that a large part of the staff involved in the projects is relatively new hired and does not have extensive experience in preparing funding applications, except for some projects carried out through the NRRP. This situation has led to the need to call on external consultants, both for drafting funding applications and for understanding the technical and administrative requirements specific to digitisation projects.

The consultancy is perceived as a necessary support to compensate for the limitations of administrative capacity, but also as a tool for training and knowledge transfer to the institution's staff.

Relationship with IT providers and lack of in-house technical expertise

The representative of the city hall underlined the lack of dedicated IT staff at the level of the institution; this situation being explained including by the impossibility of offering competitive salaries compared to the private sector. In this context, collaboration with external IT providers is considered inevitable. The

importance of market consultation and constant dialogue with suppliers was stressed, in order to avoid the purchase of solutions that do not correspond to the real needs of the administration or that are difficult to use by officials and citizens.

Experience in the evaluation and contracting process

A central topic of the discussion was the very long duration of the evaluation and contracting process. The representative of the city hall mentioned that the projects were submitted in February 2025 and that, at the time of the interview, some of them are still under evaluation or in the pre-contracting stage. This situation is perceived as problematic, especially for digitalisation projects, where technical solutions can quickly become outdated, and the lack of predictability affects the planning capacity of the local administration.

Difficulties encountered in the implementation phase of other projects

The interview highlighted difficulties encountered in the implementation of other funded projects, in particular with regard to the repeated request for the same documents in reimbursement requests and administrative clarifications. This practice is perceived as excessively bureaucratic and generates additional administrative burdens, especially for local administrations with limited resources. The situation is considered contradictory to the objectives of digitisation and efficiency of the public administration.

Relationship with RDA and changes compared to previous periods

The relationship with the RDA is appreciated as a good one, characterised by communication and availability for clarifications. However, an increase in the degree of procedural rigour compared to previous programming periods was observed, which can be explained by the RDA assuming the role of Managing Authority. This change is understood as necessary, but it is perceived as having a direct impact on the volume of documentation requested and the duration of administrative processes.

Perception of the applicant's guide and the information of the beneficiaries

The representative of the city hall expressed the opinion that the applicant's guides are written in too technical language, difficult to go through without the support of a consultant, especially in the initial phase of decision on the submission of a project. The need for more applied information formats, such as thematic meetings or presentation sessions, including concrete examples and case studies, was suggested to support beneficiaries in understanding the requirements and logic of calls.

The need to differentiate projects and evaluation mechanisms

At the end of the discussion, the need to clearly differentiate between digitalisation projects oriented towards basic needs and those with a high degree of complexity was underlined. The application of the same evaluation criteria and deadlines for all types of projects is perceived as disproportionate and difficult to manage by local governments with limited administrative capacity. The representative of the mayor's office believes that such differentiation could lead to faster assessments and a better alignment between the real needs of the beneficiaries and the available financing instruments.

ANNEX 8. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS TOOLS

APPLIED TOOL MATRIX

Methods and tools	Proposed in the initial report	Actually made	Comments on implementation and future actions
Desk review	Planned (exhaustive for all IE assessment questions)	Fully completed	Analysis of programme documents (Centre RP, applicant's guides, project portfolio databases, monitoring reports, funding applications, MTR Centre RP), as well as relevant strategic documents (Centre Region Development Plan 2021–2027, Regional Smart Specialisation Strategy, National Digital Transformation Strategy, Digital Agenda for Europe). Analysis of recent developments in the socio-economic context of the region (structure of the economy, level of digitalisation, competitiveness and smart specialisation), using statistical sources and specialised literature. The complete list of analysed documents can be found in **Annex 1** and the Socio-economic Analysis in **Annex 2**
Interviews with representatives of Centre RP MA, beneficiaries, LPAs and digitalisation consultants	-	Fully completed	Interviews with representatives of Centre RP MA (evaluation, programming, monitoring), 7 funding applicants, 2 digitalisation consultants and 2 LPA representatives. The full list and the related minutes are included in **Annex 3.**
Workshop with SME beneficiaries	1 workshop	Fully completed	The discussions focused on the main barriers encountered, the success factors and the proposals for improvement. The summary of the results is included in **Annex 5**.
Workshop with LPA beneficiaries	1 workshop	Fully completed	The discussions during the workshop focused on the analysis of the concrete experiences of the administrative-territorial units in the preparation and submission of digitisation projects, with a focus on the clarity of the guides, the attractiveness of the call, the difficulties of the evaluation process, the administrative capacity and the role of partnerships, as well as on the benefits and expected results of the funded interventions. The summary of the results is included in **Annex 5**.
Workshop with consultants	1 workshop	Fully completed	Issues related to administrative procedures, communication with RDA and simplification of implementation mechanisms were discussed. The summary can be found in **Annex 5**.
Panel experts and consultants in digitalisation	1 panel	Fully completed	The panel provided an applied perspective on barriers and solutions for improving the quality of projects. The conclusions are summarised in **Annex 6**.
Survey applied to applicants for funding	1 survey	Fully completed	**The survey** was carried out with the aim of collecting quantitative data relevant to inform the analyses of the evaluation, in particular to draw conclusions on the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the interventions funded by Priority 2 – 'A Digital Region'. The tool used was an **online questionnaire**, administered through the SurveyMonkey platform, structured according to the analysis dimensions of the assessment. The questionnaire comprised **36 items** and was designed in a differentiated structure, depending on the status of the projects: – a **restricted section**, addressed to all respondents, focused on perceptions regarding the relevance, clarity and attractiveness of the calls; – an **extended section**, intended exclusively for beneficiaries with contracted projects, which

			included all 36 items including detailed questions on implementation, operational efficiency, the difficulties encountered, the anticipated benefits and the integration of horizontal principles. In this context, the survey was implemented through **two distinct components**: • **The main survey**, addressed to beneficiaries with contracted and implementing projects, which included the entire set of questions (36 items). At the reference date of the evaluation (30.04.2025), the universe of this category was **N = 20 beneficiaries**, respectively **N = 38 beneficiaries** at the time of the launch of the survey; • **the complementary survey**, addressed to all applicants who submitted projects under the digitisation calls, which included a limited set of questions focused on the relevance and clarity of the intervention (**N = 339**). The survey was conducted between **August 2025 and January 2026**. At the end of the collection period, **92 valid responses were obtained**, of which **40 from beneficiaries with contracted projects**, corresponding to the main survey of the evaluation. Compared to the universe of contracted beneficiaries at **the reference date of the evaluation**, this result ensures **the full coverage of the relevant population** for the analysis of the implementation, efficiency and performance of the interventions (N=20 beneficiaries as of 30.04.2025). Even compared to the extended universe existing at the time of the launch of the survey (N = 38), the response rate fully covers the universe of beneficiaries, which corresponds to a margin of error of **approximately ±3% at a 100% confidence level,** giving a high degree of robustness to the conclusions related to the analysis of the effectiveness and efficiency of the interventions. The complementary component of the survey, compared to the total universe of applicants (**N = 339**), corresponds to a response rate of approximately 28% (96 responses), which represents an adequate level for descriptive and comparative analyses on the criterion of relevance, given the general and narrow nature of the questions and its supporting role for the interpretation of the results of the main survey. The analysis of the responses was based on **descriptive statistical methods**, including frequencies, percentage distributions and central trend indicators (mean, median, mode), in order to identify the main trends, convergences and differences relevant to the evaluation of the interventions under Priority 2. The results of the survey are presented in **Annex 4**
Case studies	10 (5 SMEs 5 LPAs)	Fully completed	11 case studies **were carried out** with beneficiaries of **Action 2.2 – Digitisation of SMEs**. Initially, **10 case studies** were planned (5 for SMEs and 5 for LPAs), but the number of those dedicated to SMEs was supplemented as the **LPA projects under this action were not yet contracted at the time of the evaluation**. In addition to these, **4 case studies were carried out with LPAs related to Intervention 2.1.1 – Digital communities for a smart region – digital solutions**, with an exploratory and illustrative role, in order to capture the institutional preparation, the identified needs and the expected approaches in the absence of contracted projects. The case studies are presented in **Annex 7.**

MA PR CENTRE INTERVIEW GUIDE

These interviews have the role of exploring and understanding the context of the P2 implementation. The aim is to obtain an in-depth qualitative perspective on **the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of the P2 Centre RP interventions,** as well as to identify challenges and good practices in the programming, evaluation, contracting and monitoring process.

Interviews (individual or group) will be held face-to-face or online (with audio-video recording), depending on the availability and preference of the participants. An interview can be attended, as the case may be, by several representatives of the MA from various departments (scheduling, evaluation and contracting, monitoring, etc.), and at the end an interview report will be prepared.

Topics for discussion - *indicative list*

	Guiding questions on the programming process
1.	How has the experience gained in 2014–2020 influenced the current P2 programming process? ▪ How was the identification of the needs of the P2 target groups carried out? What tools, data and sources of information were the basis for the programming decisions? – e.g. the study "Human resources for smart specialisation – the needs and supply of digital skills in administration and economics ▪ What were the concrete reasons for the study "Human resources for smart specialisation – the needs and supply of digital skills in administration and economy"? (e.g. lack of regionally relevant official data; need for direct survey among LPAs and SMEs) ▪ To what extent did the conclusions of the study influence the setting of the two specific objectives and the related financial allocation? ▪ What elements of the study directly influenced the definition of eligible actions? E.g.: dedicated calls for SMEs for digitalisation (to support competitiveness and innovation); calls for LPAs focused on front-office solutions and piloting (given the lack of a digital organisational culture and low deployment capacity); measures aimed at developing the digital skills of SMEs through SO 1.4 as a supporting objective (to reduce the gaps between the region and other more digitally advanced areas). ▪ How was this decision correlated with the regional strategic documents (Regional Development Plan, Smart Specialisation Strategy)?
2.	To what extent are the interventions of the Programme (MIA) relevant to the needs of the region in view of the new challenges? We refer to: changes in the regional, national and European socio-economic and political environment (accession to the Schengen area, the conflict in Ukraine and the country's defence policy, administrative reorganisation, others). Do you have internal mechanisms in place to adapt the P2 directions according to the evolution of the regional context?
3.	How do you evaluate the implementation of P2 to date? Are the objectives set reasonable in relation to regional resources and needs? Has the calendar of calls provided for P2 been respected?
4.	What were the criteria for allocating P2 funds between call types and beneficiaries? They took into account the results of the study in defining the eligible actions related to the 2 SOs and subsequently in developing the guidelines (e.g.: calls dedicated to SMEs for digitisation; calls for LPAs focused on front-office solutions and piloting; measures aimed at developing digital skills for SME employees).

	Do you consider that the budgetary structure realistically reflects the priorities of the region identified in the preparatory study and regional strategies? Are there any types of interventions or priorities that would have needed to be funded but were not included due to budgetary constraints or other reasons? If so, which one? How do you manage beneficiaries' expectations in relation to these allocation and prioritisation decisions?
	Indicative questions on the evaluation and contracting process
5.	How do you assess the progress of the evaluation and selection process in the P2 case, given the delayed launch of calls? • Did adjustments need to be made to the original schedule? • What factors (internal or external) influenced the pace of the process? • Are there any bottlenecks or delays identified at the evaluation stage (in particular for Action 2.1.1? • What are the main causes of delays (e.g. lack of staff, complexity of documentation, clarity of guides)? • How are these delays managed so as not to affect absorption? • Have improvements been made compared to the 2014–2020 period in terms of assessment and selection? • What changes have been applied? (e.g.: simplification of steps, digitisation of processes, clearer guides) • What could be improved next?
6.	P2 Call Launch Schedule: Looking Back, How Do You Assess SME vs. LPA Call Time Planning? How do you assess the level of interest shown by beneficiaries for the two calls launched? • Was the interest in the SME call as expected? • Why do you think that the available allocation was not reached at the SME call? (e.g.: competition with the NRRP, lack of information, overly restrictive criteria, lack of project preparation capacity, lack of financial capacity)
7.	How do you assess the quality of the funding applications for the two actions (LPAs and SMEs)? • What are the main shortcomings identified? (e.g.: incomplete documentation, lack of justifications, problems estimating costs) • To what extent do these shortcomings affect implementation? • Have measures been applied to improve the quality of the applications (e.g. information sessions, further clarifications)? Are there any types of beneficiaries who did not apply, although they were eligible? • E.g.: small TAUs in the case of LPAs, SMEs that are less digitised. • What do you think are the causes (e.g.: reduced administrative capacity, bureaucratic barriers, lack of information)? • What mechanisms could you propose to support the access of these beneficiaries?

8.	In the case of Call 2.1.1 (LPA), how do you assess the quality of the descriptions on the application of horizontal principles (sustainability, equal opportunities, gender equality) in the funding applications? • Have you noticed that the city halls / TAUs deal with these sections only formally, or do they also come up with concrete measures (e.g.: green solutions, digital inclusion)? • Are there examples of good practices already identified in the projects evaluated? For Call 2.2 (SMEs), how do you assess how firms deal with horizontal principle requirements? • Do SMEs manage to propose relevant elements, given their specificities (e.g. low environmental impact, accessibility)? • Have you identified differences in the quality of the answers depending on the type of company (e.g.: micro vs. medium company)? How would you appreciate the usefulness of the DNSH list in the guides, as a selection tool? • Is it clear enough for the applicant? • Is it useful in the evaluation process for your department? • What were the main challenges in applying this list in the two calls? How do you verify, during the technical and financial evaluation, whether the additional measures declared by the beneficiary (for scoring) are also realistic? • Have you encountered situations where measures were only formally checked, but were not supported by documentation? • Do you have examples of well-justified measures that increased the score? At the selection stage, do you think there is a risk that projects will formally tick the principles just for scoring? ▪ What mechanisms do you have to correct these situations? ▪ Would you need additional methodological support (e.g. guidance for evaluators)? How do you assess the differences between the two calls in terms of the application of horizontal principles? ▪ Is it more difficult to evaluate at LPAs or SMEs? Why? ▪ Are there any topics where beneficiaries clearly need more guidance?
9.	How is an effective relationship between the MA and the beneficiaries ensured during the project preparation and contracting period, in order to avoid delays and subsequent difficulties? ▪ During the public consultation period of the guidelines for calls 2.1.1 (LPAs) and 2.2 (SMEs), how did the MA support the clarification of the requirements (e.g. question-and-answer centraliser, public sessions, examples of good practices)? ▪ How was the support provided during the project submission phase perceived by the beneficiaries (e.g. consultation period, information sessions, helpdesk)? ▪ At the SME call (2.2), where +20 projects have already been contracted, what mechanisms did you use to support the correct preparation of the contract? (e.g.: specific clarifications, prior checks, direct communication) ▪ Have you noticed differences in response/capacity between SMEs and LPAs? Which category needed more support?

10.	What were the sustainability elements considered in the evaluation process? To what extent has the provision of medium and long-term costs for the functionality of the intervention been taken into account? For example: *At the SME call (2.2), how do you verify that companies can sustain the subsequent costs for maintaining the implemented digital solutions (e.g.: software maintenance, upgrades, continuous staff training)?* *At the LPA call (2.1.1), how is the capacity of TAUs to support the operationalisation of front-office solutions after implementation assessed? (e.g.: allocated local budgets, trained staff, complementary infrastructure)* *Were there any difficulties in meeting the criteria for financial sustainability or compliance with the DNSH principle? How did these criteria influence the eligibility and final score of the projects?* *Have you identified situations in which the score obtained in the sustainability criterion was a differentiating factor between projects with a similar technical quality and relevance?? What types of solutions could be proposed to strengthen this component in the future?*
	Guiding questions on the monitoring process
11.	What is the current status of the implementation of the projects contracted through P2, compared to the initial planning? What are the main deviations identified from the initial planning and how are they managed? At SMEs (where +20 projects have already been contracted), what are the first observations on compliance with planning? At LPAs (where applications are still under evaluation), how do you estimate the potential risks to implementation, taking into account the longer duration allowed?
12.	What are the most important risks that can affect P2 absorption and efficiency? SMEs: difficulties in accessing suppliers, cost increases, lack of internal resources? LPAs: complexity of the procurement process, extended calendar, administrative changes?
13.	What tools/methods does the MA use to track the implementation of the commitments made in the funding applications? For example, the project monitoring plan, introduced as a new management element, how do you think the implementation of P2 will help? • Is MA perceived as a useful and realistic tool? • Do beneficiaries understand how to use it to track progress and prevent bottlenecks? To what extent does the monitoring plan help the MA to quickly identify high-risk projects?
14.	What are, from an MA perspective, the positive and negative factors that can/could influence the implementation of projects and the generation of expected results within P2, both for the SME call (2.2) and for the LPA call (2.1.1)? We are interested in understanding what has worked well so far (e.g. the interest of LPAs in digitalisation, the technical support provided by MA, the coherence of the guidelines with other programmes or, in the case of LPAs, the correlation with local strategies, etc.), but also what has hindered or could hinder implementation (e.g. lack of administrative experience in small SMEs, co-financing problems, difficult access to suppliers, price increases or, for LPAs, the complexity of public procurement, lack of technical staff or local administrative risks). In addition, from your experience, which category – SMEs or LPAs – do you find more vulnerable in implementation and why? What measures do you think could help to maximise

	positive factors and reduce negative ones, either through MA's actions, or through adjustments to guidelines or support to beneficiaries? If you already have concrete examples of good practices encountered in the contracting or training stage, it will help us a lot to document them.
15.	What measures have been taken to simplify and reduce the administrative burden? Do you have any suggestions from beneficiaries on further simplification? Are they supported and or implemented?

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS AT REGIONAL AND COUNTY LEVEL

These interviews will be conducted with relevant stakeholders such as representatives at local and county level (large/small TAUs), consultants of beneficiaries, regional beneficiaries of similar programmes (NRRP, PoCIDIF), representatives of SMEs.

The interviews will be held face-to-face or online (with audio-video recording), depending on the availability and preference of the participants. Interviews can be individual or group.

Topics for discussion **-** indicative list. This will be complemented with other topics for discussion, if necessary.

	Indicative list of questions
Knowledge and participation in the programming and implementation process	
1.	Are you aware of the interventions funded by Priority 2 – A Digital Region? What do you think about the areas and types of projects supported?
2.	Have you been consulted in the process of developing these interventions? If not, do you think it would have been useful to be involved? Why?
3.	Did you know the beneficiaries of this funding in your Centre region/county/locality? Have you had collaborations with them?
Relevance of interventions to local and regional needs and coherence	
4.	To what extent do you consider that P2 interventions respond to the real needs of digitalisation in the Centre Region (local administrations, SMEs)?
5.	What other digitalisation needs have you noticed at local/regional level that are not addressed through P2 (e.g. digital training, interoperability, maintenance)?
6.	How do you assess the correlation of financial allocations with priority needs (e.g. supporting TAUs with a low degree of digitisation, SMEs in key areas)?
7.	How do you see the coherence of P2 interventions with other programmes and funding available in the region? (e.g. complementarities/overlaps with NRRP, local budgets, county digitisation strategies, local Smart City plans)? Example: do you think there is coherence between the projects financed by P2 and those in the NRRP, PoCIDIF or county/local initiatives? Where do you see overlaps? Where do you see uncovered gaps? Are there other local projects or active funding (e.g. local budget funds, other European sources) that overlap with the P2 or that could be complementary? → Example: interoperability projects, integrated local platforms, private-public initiatives in digitalisation, partnerships with universities or technology clusters.
Mechanisms for adapting interventions to the needs of target groups	

8.	What mechanisms or criteria do you think can contribute to a better adaptation of P2 interventions to the needs of the target groups?
9.	How could the collaboration between local and county institutions be improved for a better integration of digital interventions? Example: do you have any suggestions for the creation of county/regional working groups or mechanisms for the exchange of good practices between TAUs and SMEs? Would you find it useful to involve a third-party actor (e.g. chambers of commerce, IT clusters, specialised NGOs)?
10.	How do you assess the level of information and support offered to the beneficiaries of these interventions?
Effectiveness	
11.	Which groups do you think have managed/will be able to benefit best from this funding and which will encounter the greatest difficulties? (e.g. large vs. small SMEs, large ATUs vs. small municipalities, SMEs vs. ATUs) What types of results do you think will be noticed? (e.g. functional digital solutions, increased digital skills, better interoperability) How have the interventions been adapted to the needs of the target groups? Do you have concrete examples? Have you noticed requests from beneficiaries to integrate new technologies (e.g. AI, blockchain)? If so, how was these requests answered? How do you see the sustainability of the results: do you think the projects will have effects even after the financing is completed? If not, for what reasons?
Barriers in the implementation of interventions	
12.	From your point of view, what are the main barriers in the implementation of these interventions (legislative, administrative, financial, technical capacity)? Are there specific local factors that influence the success or failure of projects to a greater extent? (e.g. weak digital infrastructure, lack of political support, fluctuation of qualified personnel, difficult access to local suppliers).
13.	What solutions do you see for improving the implementation process and increasing the absorption of P2 funds? (e.g. simplified procedures, faster clarifications, personalised technical support, increased capacity of beneficiaries through dedicated training, stronger local/regional partnerships).
14.	Are there any regulations or procedures that prevent beneficiaries from accessing or effectively implementing funded projects? *rigidity of the procurement framework for complex digital components (e.g. difficulty in selecting innovative solutions or specialised local suppliers); uncertainties regarding the application of DNSH requirements to IT solutions; complex eligibility rules for auxiliary hardware equipment (sensors, servers, Smart City equipment); overlaps or contradictions between the P2 rules and those in other programmes (e.g. NRRP, PoCIDIF), which creates confusion at the level of eligibility and reporting; the lack of sufficient flexibility in the redistribution of funds between calls, depending on the degree of interest shown by the market (e.g. SMEs did not cover the available allocation, but there would have been additional demand in the LPA area).*
Evaluation of investment performance and efficiency	
15.	Do you use a performance framework or an efficiency measurement strategy for digital investments (in administration, SMEs)? If so, what indicators do you consider?

16.	What are the impact criteria that you consider useful to assess the effectiveness of P2 projects (e.g. accessibility, increased utilisation, reduction of processing time)?
17.	What measures should be prioritised to reduce the digitalisation gaps between large and small TAUs / between urban and rural TAUs? What types of interventions do you consider necessary to reduce the digitalisation gap between SMEs, in particular in terms of access to technologies and capacity to use?
Good practices	
18.	Through cooperation with other institutions similar to yours, have you identified good practices in the digitisation of public administration or SMEs financed in other counties/regions? → Example: what makes a good practice effective — is it the technical component, the way the project is managed, the support from the MA, the collaboration between partners?
19.	Have you received examples, guides or models from the central authorities (Ministry of Research/Digitalisation, Agency for the Digitisation of Romania, other national structures) regarding digitalisation? Which of these did you find useful and applicable at local level? Example: Have you used templates from DNSH guidelines, national Smart City strategies or national interoperability standards?
20.	There are successful digital projects in your area. (e.g. SMEs, public administration) that deserve to be scaled up or replicated at regional level? Example: Can you mention local initiatives that have had an impact and would deserve to be scaled up in other TAUs or economic sectors?
21.	What recommendations do you have for future P2 beneficiaries for an efficient and sustainable implementation?

GUIDE TO INTERVIEWING NATIONALLY RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS

These interviews will be conducted with relevant national stakeholders such as: MIPE for NRRP, MA PoCIDIF, Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation, etc. with the role of collecting information, perceptions and recommendations on the correlation, efficiency and relevant lessons for improving the interventions funded by the P2 PR Centre.

The interviews will be held face-to-face or online (with audio-video recording), depending on the availability and preference of the participants. Interviews can be individual or group.

Topics for discussion **-** indicative list. This will be complemented with other topics for discussion, if necessary.

	Indicative list of questions
Coherence and complementarity with other national interventions	
1.	How do you see the interventions in P2 PR Centre in relation to the strategies and programmes managed by your institution? (e.g. NRRP, PoCIDIF, national sectoral strategies)
2.	Do you identify complementarities or overlaps between P2 interventions and other national funding? If so, in what areas (e.g. digitalisation in administration, digital transformation of SMEs)?
3.	Are there mechanisms for coordination or exchange of information between Centre RP MA and your institution? If not, do you think it would be useful to create them?

4.	What are the main risks regarding the doubling of funding between P2 and other programmes (e.g. NRRP)? How could they be managed?
Efficiency	
5.	How do you assess the overall efficiency of the projects financed by NRRP and PoCIDIF in areas similar to those funded by P2 Centre RP (e.g. digitisation of SMEs, digitisation of public administration)? Examples: cost-benefit ratio, speed of implementation, challenges, success factors.
6.	Can you give examples of projects funded by NRRP/PoCIDIF that you consider having had outstanding results or could be relevant for comparison with regional interventions (e.g. P2 Centre RP)? Examples: innovative projects, effective partnerships, scalable solutions.
7.	From your experience, what are the main lessons learned from the development of NRRP/PoCIDIF calls and projects that could indirectly help to improve the efficiency and relevance of regional calls, such as those in P2 Centre RP? Examples: earlier consultations with the market, budget calibrations, administrative simplifications, more flexible monitoring mechanisms.
8.	How do the interventions in P2 Centre RP correlate with the current reforms and directions in the field of digitalisation promoted by your ministry? (e.g. National Digitalisation Strategy, NRRP priorities, sectoral strategies)?
Adapting to technological and scientific advances (for digitalisation SMEs/LPAs) and Barriers in the implementation of digitisation projects	
9.	How do you assess the integration of new technologies (e.g. artificial intelligence, big data, blockchain, cloud solutions, interoperability) in projects funded by NRRP, PoCIDIF compared to those funded by regional programmes - e.g. P2 Centre RP? Do you think these technologies are already being addressed in today's calls?
10.	What are the main challenges in the use of modern digital solutions by SMEs and LPAs (e.g. lack of in-house expertise, resistance to change, financial limitations, lack of specialised local suppliers)?
11.	From your perspective, what are the legislative, strategic or administrative barriers that affect the implementation of digitisation projects, including those financed through P2 PR Centre?
12.	To what extent are digital platforms, online services and automation solutions used in public administration and SMEs supported by NRRP, PoCIDIF and which will also be used by beneficiaries of regional programmes (e.g. P2 Centre RP)? Do you think these tools contribute to digital inclusion and accessibility?
13.	Are the beneficiary teams ready (in terms of digital skills) for the use of new technologies? Is additional support needed (e.g. continuous training, methodological guides, centralised technical support)?
Other	
14.	To what extent are SMEs and LPAs supported to ensure the sustainability of the investments made through NRRP, PoCIDIF but also P2 Centre RP (e.g. maintenance, technological updates, adaptation to new regulations)?
15.	What general recommendations do you have for improving regional calls (e.g. P2 Centre RP) to increase their efficiency, relevance and impact, based on the lessons from the NRRP/PoCIDIF?

WORKSHOP/ FOCUS-GROUP

It has the role of completing and deepening the information.

Target group	Number of workshops
Current beneficiaries (who have received funding) and potential beneficiaries (who have submitted projects or have not yet applied) under Priority 2 operations. Both SMEs and eligible public institutions will be targeted.	Minimum 2: one for SME beneficiaries and one for public beneficiaries

The workshop will have two main categories of participants:

- **Potential beneficiaries** (eligible, but who have not applied or contracted projects) – to identify the reasons for non-participation and possible improvements for future calls.
- **Current beneficiaries** (TAUs and SMEs) – to understand their experience in implementing projects

The workshops/focus groups aim to collect relevant opinions, experiences and suggestions on the interventions supported under Priority 2 – A Digital Region, both from the perspective of current beneficiaries (with contracted projects) and potential beneficiaries (who have submitted or not applications for funding). These contributions will complement the evaluation analysis, by validating preliminary findings and making recommendations on adapting P2 interventions to the real needs of eligible actors in the region.

Workshop / Focus-group

1. **Introduction** – Presentation of the objective of the workshop, the general framework of the evaluation and the establishment of the rules of conduct. The participants' consent will be requested for the audio recording of the discussions.
2. **Presentation of the context** – Brief information on the status of the implementation of P2 – calls launched, financial allocations, contracted projects.
3. **Thematic discussions** – Exchange of perspectives and experiences based on the previously submitted question guide. The dialogue will aim to cover the key dimensions relevant to the evaluation: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, coherence and sustainability. Participants will be encouraged to contribute examples and reflections from their own practice.
4. **Conclusions and next steps** – Recapitulation of the main conclusions, collection of suggestions on intervention adjustments, inter-institutional coordination issues and support for access in future calls.

Topics for discussion – indicative list

1. Prospects of potential/current beneficiaries – relevance, coherence

1. How do you assess the funding opportunity offered by P2 PR Centre in relation to the needs of your community? To what extent do P2 interventions (SME and LPA calls) respond to real local needs? Example: do you consider that the allocations reflect local priorities (e.g. poorly digitised TAUs, SMEs with potential)? Are there gaps within the region? What is the level of alignment with your needs? organisational?
2. Are there current digitalisation needs (training, interoperability, cybersecurity) that are not well addressed by P2 calls?
3. How do you see the correlation of P2 projects with other initiatives (NRRP, PoCIDIF, local projects)? Example: are there overlaps, complementarities? Would there be a need for more inter-institutional coordination?
4. To what extent are local and county strategies aligned with P2 priorities? Are there any overlaps or discrepancies?

5. How do you see the impact of these interventions on the modernisation of services and processes at local level?
6. What other types of investments would be needed to have a greater impact on digital development in the region?
7. How do you assess the relevance of the calls launched to local priorities in digitalisation?

2. Beneficiaries' experience – barriers in the application/contracting process

8. What difficulties did you encounter in the process of applying and implementing the projects? Example: lack of internal resources, bureaucracy, tight deadlines, difficulties in procurement, cost increases, suppliers difficult to find.
9. What worked well? Example: MA support, quick clarifications, information events, consultant support.
10. How do you assess the selection process and the eligibility criteria? What improvements would you suggest?
11. What were the biggest obstacles in the implementation of the projects (financial resources, administrative capacity, bureaucratic requirements, etc.)?
12. How was the support provided by the responsible authorities?
13. If you were eligible, but did not apply, what barriers did you identify (e.g. lack of co-financing, insufficient human resources, uncertainty regarding the eligibility of expenditure)?
14. If you applied, but the project was not contracted, what difficulties did you encounter in the evaluation or contracting process? Have you received any helpful feedback?
15. How do you assess the clarity and adaptability of the applicant's guides to the local context and the capacities of the beneficiaries?
16. Do you think that the P2 calls managed to attract enough interest? If not, what are the reasons? (e.g. too high financial thresholds, too restrictive technical conditions, uninteresting objectives)
17. What conditions would encourage you to participate in the next P2 calls?
18. What are your needs? in terms of technical and institutional support for the preparation of funding applications?

3. Efficacy (prospective)

19. What are the expected results of P2 projects (in SMEs and local governments)? Example: what could concretely change — faster processes, more accessible services, increased digital skills?
20. Under what conditions do you think the best results would be obtained? Example: type of project, beneficiary profile, local context (resources, partnerships, etc.)?
21. How did you perceive the connection between the funded activities and the expected results? Do the projects include innovative elements (AI, big data, green solutions)?
22. Do you think these results are sustainable in the long term (after the financing is completed)?

4. Efficiency (prospective)

23. How do you assess the effort/benefit ratio for beneficiaries? Example: how expensive (financially and in terms of human resources) is it to prepare and carry out these projects?
24. How do you assess the effort/benefit ratio for beneficiaries? Concrete example: How much effort (financial, human resources, expertise) is required for: preparing the application? the actual implementation? reporting and monitoring of indicators?
25. Do you feel that this effort is worth it in relation to the results and the financial support received?
26. What concrete benefits do you expect from P2 projects? Examples: reduction of working time / automation of processes; increasing the quality of services for citizens/customers: improving the

image of the institution/SME; Reducing long-term operational costs: increasing market competitiveness (for SMEs): increasing administrative and digital capacity (for LPAs)

27. Compared to other sources of funding (e.g. NRRP, local funds), how do you assess the efficiency of P2?→ Concrete example: is it simpler/more complicated? Do you offer more/less tailored support? Can these sources be combined effectively?

5. Alternatives to P2 financing

28. How do you manage to cover local needs in digital transformation in the absence of funding from P2?
29. Have you accessed other sources of funding for similar projects (NRRP, etc.)? What were the advantages and disadvantages of these alternatives?
30. What local or county support mechanisms could replace or complement the funding through P2?

6. Prospects for future calls for funding

31. What recommendations do you have for improving future calls for projects?
32. How could the application and implementation process be simplified to attract more beneficiaries?
33. How could this funding be better integrated with digital development strategies at local and regional level?
34. What measures could regional and central authorities take to better support SMEs and public institutions in accessing funds?

EXPERT PANEL

The panel will have the role of validating the preliminary conclusions of the evaluation and discussing possible recommendations.

Target group	Number of panels
Experts and consultants in digitalisation, with relevant experience in digital transformation projects, public policy evaluation and regional development	1

The discussions will focus on the analysis of Priority 2 interventions in relation to regional impact, integration into broader strategies and their sustainability.

Preparation stage

3–6 experts with experience in the field of digitalisation, public policy evaluation or regional development will be invited.

The experts will receive a set of preliminary findings from the evaluation team in advance to ensure an informative framework for the discussions.

The objectives of the panel and how the experts' contributions will be used in the evaluation will be clarified.

Stage

1. **Introduction** – Presentation of the purpose of the panel, the objectives of the evaluation and the role of the experts. Introduction of the participants and clarification of the procedure.

2. **Presentation of the evaluation findings** – The evaluator will present the logic of the interventions in Priority 2 and the preliminary conclusions of the evaluation on their effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, complementarity and sustainability.

Possible topics for discussion:

Relevance

- To what extent do P2 interventions respond to specific local and regional realities and needs? (e.g.: adaptation to the real capacity of SMEs and LPAs, the socio-economic specificity of the region)
- Have the types of funded interventions been correctly prioritised (e.g.: front-office solutions, digital skills, digital services for SMEs)?
- What current or emerging needs have not been covered so far? (e.g. interoperability, maintenance, technological innovation, specialised training)
- How were the lessons learned from the previous period and from other programmes (NRRP, PoCIDIF) taken into account?

Discussions on the specifics of digitalisation

- To what extent is the design of P2 interventions realistic in relation to the real capacity of the beneficiaries (SMEs and LPAs)?
- What are the main lessons from other programmes (NRRP, PoCIDIF) that can be transferred for the improvement of P2?
- How can technological innovation issues (e.g. AI, interoperability, blockchain) be better integrated into future calls and priorities?

Aspects of coherence and complementarity

- How do P2 interventions correlate with other funding (NRRP, PoCIDIF, local budgets)? Do we identify overlaps or synergies?

- What do experts propose for better inter-institutional integration, especially at regional and local level, so that interventions are coherent?

Validation of the potential to achieve results (effectiveness)

- To what extent do P2-funded projects (SMEs/LPAs) have the potential to effectively achieve the expected results (e.g. digitalisation of processes, increased use of digital services, skills development)?
- What are the key factors (internal or external) that influence success? (e.g.: capacity of beneficiaries, quality of solutions, local context, inter-institutional support)
- What types of adjustments or additional measures could increase the likelihood of success of these projects? (e.g.: continuous implementation support, local partnerships, adaptation of solutions to the real context)

Efficiency (potential)

- How do you assess the effort/benefit ratio in P2, in relation to the resources needed? (e.g. financial and human effort for implementation, co-financing challenges, administrative burden)
- Are there more effective alternatives to achieve the same results? (e.g.: public-private partnerships, inter-institutional collaborations, innovative models)
- How can future calls be improved to provide better value for money? (e.g. simplification of procedures, better targeted allocations, stimulation of innovation)

Sustainability aspects

- What concrete elements should be introduced in the future (e.g. maintenance support, continuous training, regular updating of digital solutions)?
- Are there major sustainability risks to P2-funded digital solutions? What would be the mitigation mechanisms?

Open-ended questions for validation of recommendations

- What recommendations should necessarily be included for future calls, so that they better meet real needs and attract more applicants?
- How can selection criteria and budget allocations be adjusted to ensure maximum impact, both among SMEs and local public administrations?

3. **Debate and validation** – We will structure the discussion on **sets of preliminary conclusions** formulated by the evaluation team, corresponding to the main criteria analysed:

Relevance

- The conclusions of the evaluation show the extent to which P2 interventions (SO1.2 and SO1.4) correspond to the real needs of SMEs and LPAs. Experts will be invited to confirm or comment: Whether the types of digital needs identified are correctly captured. Whether the priorities defined by P2 (calls, allocations, types of eligible activities) realistically reflect local and regional challenges.
- If there are emerging needs (e.g. interoperability, AI, blockchain, staff training) that are insufficiently covered.

Effectiveness (potential to achieve planned results)

- We will discuss the conclusions on the capacity of the projects to deliver the assumed results, taking into account: the context of SMEs and local administrations (administrative capacity, supplier market, availability of resources); the correlation between the size of the funding and the result indicators.

Efficiency (cost-effectiveness)

- The preliminary conclusions regarding:
- The ratio perceived effort/benefit from the beneficiaries.
- Justification of costs for SMEs and LPAs, compared to other programmes (NRRP, PoCIDIF).

Coherence and complementarity

- Conclusions will be presented on: The degree of correlation of P2 interventions with other active funding (e.g. NRRP, PoCIDIF, local budgets).
- Identifying overlaps, synergies or discrepancies.

Sustainability

- It will be discussed whether and to what extent the projects financed through P2 have real chances to be sustainable in the long term. Identified risks (e.g. lack of maintenance, lack of resources for regular updating, staff rotation) will be discussed: possible mitigation mechanisms.

4. **Conclusions and conclusion –** Summarisation of the key points of the debate and validation of the main conclusions. Confirmation of opportunities to improve the implementation of Priority 2.

Analysis and processing of results stage

The participating experts will be invited to express opinions and observations on the conclusions of the evaluation, to formulate further details/clarifications or to express agreement/disagreement on certain aspects presented.

The opinions and observations made in the panel will be processed and used to improve the conclusions and recommendations related to the evaluation questions.

Contributions to the discussions will be confidential and only general conclusions will be shared with the beneficiaries of the evaluation.

CASE STUDIES

The case studies were included in the evaluation methodology to investigate the effectiveness and **efficiency of the implementation**, **the mechanisms of the effects**, the differences between the interventions carried out under Priority 2 and how the context factors or the specificity of the applicant influence the efficiency, the causal chain and the results achieved.

They are intended to complement the quantitative analysis, providing a **qualitative and illustrative** perspective, so that the evaluation is not limited to statistical data, but provides a practical understanding of how interventions work concretely.

This approach will allow you to:

- reflecting the diversity of types of beneficiaries,
- comparison of the mechanisms and challenges specific to each category,
- identifying lessons and good practices applicable in the future.

The selection of projects will take into account the type of intervention, the level of complexity and the stage of implementation, being eligible only those projects that have actually started the activities by the time of evaluation. Each case study will use relevant documents (applications, progress reports, other supporting documents), in-depth interviews with beneficiaries' representatives and, where relevant, additional interviews with consultants or experts involved.

Selection of SMEs

The selection will be based on the **20 projects already contracted** under the call dedicated to SMEs, according to the situation available on **30.04.2025**.

Diverse projects will be selected in terms of:

- type of intervention (e.g. software development, solution implementation, digital processes),
- level of complexity (e.g. simple vs. complex projects, number of partners, type of technologies),
- implementation stage (projects that have actually started activities).

Selection of LPAs

For LPAs, the selection will be planned according to the evolution of the contracting process.

Indicative model case study:

1. OBJECT AND PURPOSE OF THE CASE STUDY
2. PRESENTATION OF THE CASE STUDY

Project name	
SMIS Code	
Location	
Benefit	
Priority / Specific objective	
Project call/ Operation	
Implementation period (start/end)	
Project budget	
Project context	
Project justification	

3. OBJECTIVES AND LOGIC OF THE INTERVENTION

What was the aim of the project and how does it align with the objectives of P 2?

How were the interventions selected and investments prioritised?

To what extent has the intervention been adapted to local needs and target groups?

PROJECT COMPONENTS

Activities	▪
Expected results	▪
Target group	▪

4. PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTATION
   - Degree of achievement of objectives (indicators – planned/achieved targets)
   - What is the current stage of implementation: have the activities started, are they in the preparatory phase or are there already first tangible results?
   - What is the beneficiary's perception of the chances of achieving the objectives set by the project (planned vs. achievable targets in the current context)?
   - What are the anticipated challenges in achieving the indicators (e.g. delays, administrative barriers, lack of resources)?
   - What preventive measures have already been taken by the beneficiary to ensure that the results are achieved? (e.g. planning adjustments, calendar revisions, identification of additional partners/suppliers)
   - How does the beneficiary assess the potential of the project to respond to the needs of the target groups and socio-economic challenges?
   - What are the beneficiary's expectations regarding the final impact of the project on the organisation and the community? (e.g. anticipated changes, direct/indirect benefits, long-term effects)
5. IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS (PROGRESS AND INTERNAL MECHANISMS)
   - Have deviations from the original plan been recorded/anticipated? If so, what type of adjustments/mechanisms will be considered (e.g. calendar recalibration, additional resources, team changes)?
   - What internal monitoring mechanisms are used by the beneficiary to track progress (e.g. monitoring plan, internal reports, regular meetings)?
   - How does the beneficiary appreciate the communication and support provided by the MA and other actors involved in the implementation phase? (e.g. clarifications, methodological support, procedural flexibility)
   - The main obstacles encountered in implementation (administrative, legislative, financial, technical, supplier-related, external context).
   - Solutions identified for overcoming challenges and the beneficiary's ability to adapt.
   - Positive elements that contributed to the good implementation of the project (e.g. dedicated team, own expertise, external support, efficient collaboration with partners).
   - How horizontal principles are reflected in the implementation of the project (e.g. concrete measures of sustainability, inclusion, equal opportunities)
6. IMPACT ON BENEFICIARIES AND THE COMMUNITY

(prospective, perceived analysis,)

   - What is the anticipated impact on the digitalisation of SMEs/LPAs (as planned and expected)?
   - What concrete changes do beneficiaries anticipate in their community/locality (e.g. reduction of processing times, increase of access to digital services, improvement of internal flows, increase of user satisfaction)?
   - What are the expectations regarding the economic impact (e.g. increasing the competitiveness of SMEs, reducing bureaucracy for LPAs)?
   - Are there any risks that these expectations will not be met? What barriers do beneficiaries perceive?
7. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INTERVENTION (PRELIMINARY COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS)

- What is the perception of the beneficiaries regarding the cost-result/benefit ratio (taking into account the administrative effort, the resources required, the time allocated)?
- How do beneficiaries assess indirect costs (e.g. need for internal training, adaptation of internal infrastructure, support of consultants)?
- What are the beneficiaries' expectations regarding the profitability of the intervention (e.g. future savings, improved internal efficiency, increased revenues, cost reduction)?
- Is there a perception of too high costs for anticipated benefits? If so, what would it consist of (e.g. too complex requirements, hard-to-reach eligibility thresholds, insufficient budget allocations)?
- How do the costs and efforts in P2 compare (from the point of view of the beneficiaries) compared to other programmes accessed (e.g. NRRP, PoCIDIF)?
- What recommendations can beneficiaries make to optimise the cost-benefit ratio in future calls?

8. RECOMMENDATIONS
   - What recommendations do the beneficiaries have for future calls? What adjustments to the guidelines, eligibility conditions, selection criteria would help improve access and efficiency
   - What kind of support (e.g. training, consultancy, best practice models) would make new calls easier to access and implement?
   - How could complementarity with other programmes and funding (NRRP, PoCIDIF, etc.) be improved?
   - What solutions could be implemented to improve efficiency?
9. CONCLUSIONS

QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY ADDRESSED TO P2 FUNDING BENEFICIARIES

Section A – Needs, clarity of guidelines (all respondents)

Q1. What category do you fall into?
(Select one of the options)

☐ Local public authority (county, municipality, city, commune)
☐ Partnership between TAUs (county, municipality, city, commune)
☐ Small or medium-sized enterprise (SME) – please specify the main sector of activity: _____
☐ Micro-enterprise – the main sector of activity will be specified: _____
☐ Start-up (established at least 1 year before the application is submitted)

Q2. Have you submitted a project under Priority 2? If so, which call did you apply to?
☐ Yes – Call 2.1.1 for local public authorities (LPAs)
☐ Yes – Call 2.2 for enterprises (SMEs, micro-enterprises, start-ups)
☐ We have not submitted a project yet, but we have analysed the calls launched

Q3. What is the status of your Priority 2 project?
(Select only one option)

☐ I have submitted a project that is **under evaluation**
☐ I have a contracted project **that is being implemented**
☐ I have a project **submitted, but it was rejected.**

Q4. What type of development or improvement needs existed in the community/organisation before the project funded by PR Centre?

(*Check all options*)

For LPAs:

☐ The need to increase/ensure interoperability between systems

☐ The need to expand digital public services for citizens

☐ The need for IT&C equipment

☐ The need for cybersecurity solutions

☐ The need to develop the digital skills of staff

For SMEs:

☐ The need to digitise internal processes

☐ The need for modern software applications (e.g. ERP, CRM)

☐ The need for operations automation

☐ The need to develop digital skills in the company

☐ The need for access to new technologies (e.g. AI, IoT)

Q5. To what extent does the call funded by Centre RP contribute to covering the needs identified in the community/organisation?(Select
the variant that best reflects your opinion.)

☐ To a very small extent
☐ To a small extent
☐ To a moderate extent
☐ To a large extent
☐ To a very large extent

If the answer is "to a small extent", please detail what are the existing needs that are not yet covered.

Q6. Compared to other TAUs/SMEs in the region, how acute were these needs in your area?
☐ Much more serious
☐ More serious
☐ As serious
☐ Less serious
☐ Much less serious

Q7. Have you noticed any trends or changes at regional or sectoral level that would justify an adjustment of the types of eligible projects or the financing conditions under P2 interventions?

(*Mark all relevant* variants)

For LPAs

☐ Increasing demand for digital services from citizens
☐ Need for better interoperability with other institutions
☐ Increased difficulties in purchasing and implementing modern
☐ digital solutions Increasing shortage of staff with digital skills in administration

☐ Changes in local priorities (e.g. digital safety, accessibility, online services)
☐ Other relevant changes: _____

For SMEs – small and medium-sized enterprises

☐ The need for accelerated digitalisation for competitiveness
☐ Customer expectations regarding digitised internal processes and faster
☐ services Increased costs with maintenance and updating of IT solutions generated by developments in the socio-economic
☐ environment More difficult access to IT staff or local
☐ specialised firms The rapid pace of rapid technological changes (AI, automation, cloud)
☐ Other relevant changes: _____

Q8. How do you assess the relevance of P2 calls to the real needs of funding applicants from your organisation's perspective? (the applicant's perception is taken into account, including in the context of the financing options available at that time).
☐ Very relevant
☐ Relevant Partially
☐ relevant
☐ Not relevant Not at
☐ all relevant

Q9. What are the main needs of your organisation? that were not covered by existing calls?
open-ended answer.....

Q10. How do you assess the clarity of the guidelines and eligibility criteria?
☐ Very Clear
☐ Clear Partially
☐ Clear
☐ Not Clear

Section B – Applicants with submitted projects

Q11. What are the main elements that facilitated the preparation and submission of your project? funding under P2 – A Digital Region?
(You can select more variants)

☐ Previous experience of the organisation in attracting European
☐ funds Support of an external consultant with expertise in digitisation☐
projects Existence of obvious and well-documented digitisation needs within the
☐ organisation Low degree of complexity of the funding application and documentation
☐ Acceptable level of own contribution/co-financing
☐ Existence of an internal digitalisation strategy or similar plan
☐ Involvement of the organisation's management in the preparation of the
☐ project Other elements (please specify): _____

Q12. What difficulties did you encounter in preparing the funding application?
☐ Understanding the criteria
☐ Identifying partners/suppliers
☐ Access to internal resources
☐ Lack of time
☐ Other difficulties: _____

Q13. Have you benefited from support from MA CENTRE PR?

☐ Yes, completely
☐ Partially
☐ No

Q14. Rate the following on a scale of 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good):

Rated Appearance	**1 2 3 4 5**
The relevance of the call to the needs of the organisation	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Clarity and accessibility of guidelines and procedures	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Quality of communication with MA PR Centre	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Efficiency of administrative processes (evaluation, selection, contracting)	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Transparency of the evaluation process	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Relevance and feasibility of call-level sustainability requirements	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Q15. How do you assess the attractiveness of the P2 call to which you applied, in relation to the funding conditions, the proposed theme and the available budget? (*Select only one option*)

☐ Very attractive – it responded well to the needs of the organisation and offered encouraging conditions for submission
☐ Attractive – it was well enough to motivate the submission of the
☐ project Partially attractive – there were relevant elements, but also less favourable
☐ conditions Poorly attractive – I submitted the project due to lack of alternatives, although the call was not optimal
☐ I cannot appreciate

Q16. What are the main things you would improve in future calls?

Open reply _____

Q17. Would you like to add additional observations or recommendations?

Open reply _____

Section C – Beneficiaries with contracted projects (effectiveness)

Q18. How would you describe your organisation's level of experience in the field of digitalisation before this project?
(Select only one option)
☐ No previous experience
☐ Limited experience (1–2 minor initiatives)
☐ Medium experience (1–2 relevant projects implemented)
☐ Solid experience (multiple projects implemented, including with external funding)

Q19. To what extent are you satisfied with the progress of the project in relation to the objectives assumed?

☐ Very satisfied
☐ Satisfied
☐ Partially satisfied
☐ Dissatisfied

Q20 What main difficulties did you encounter that influenced the progress of the project? (You can select more variants)
☐ Administrative problems (reporting, payments)
☐ Technical problems (implementation of the solution)
☐ Problems with partners/suppliers
☐ Internal problems (human resources/logistics)
☐ Other obstacles: _____

Q21. Will you complete the project within the contractually assumed deadline and according to the approved budget?
☐ Yes, completely
☐ Partial, with adjustments
☐ No, we anticipate problems

Q22. (SME) What are the main effects that you anticipate following the implementation of the digitisation project at the level of your SME?
(Select the perceived impact level for each of the following):

Intended effect	**Very high**		**Sea Environment**		**Mic**	**Not at all**
Increasing operational efficiency	☐	☐	☐		☐	☐
Lowering operating costs through digitalisation	☐	☐	☐		☐	☐
Accessing new markets or segments through digitalisation	☐	☐	☐		☐	☐
Improving customer relations (e.g. CRM, e-commerce, online support)	☐	☐	☐		☐	☐
Strengthening cybersecurity and data protection	☐	☐	☐		☐	☐
Automation of internal processes (e.g. accounting, production, HR)	☐	☐	☐		☐	☐
Adapting to European digitalisation and sustainability standards	☐	☐	☐		☐	☐

Q23. (LPA) What are the main effects you anticipate following the implementation of the digitisation project within the public institution (LPA)?

Intended effect	Very high	Sea	Environment	Mic	Not at all
Increasing the quality of public services offered to citizens	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Increasing transparency and citizens' access to public information	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Reduction of response time and bureaucracy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Increasing interoperability with other public institutions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Increasing the security of institution-managed data	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Improving internal administrative processes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Increasing the use of digital public services by citizens	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q24. Do you anticipate difficulties in maintaining the results of the project after completion (e.g. maintenance, updates, actual use)?
☐ No, the results will be sustainable without major difficulties Yes
☐, we anticipate some difficulties related to resources (financial, human, technical)
☐ Yes, we anticipate significant difficulties in ensuring sustainability I
☐ cannot assess at this time

Q25. What factors most influence the success of the project implementation?
(note 1–5, where 1 = minimum influence, 5 = maximum influence)

Factor Evaluated	1	2	3	4	5
Internal capacity (resources, logistics)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Partnerships	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Local conditions (infrastructure, support)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Availability of suppliers/solutions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Bureaucratic and regulatory framework	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other aspects (specify): _____	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q26. What digital technologies have you purchased or do you intend to implement in the project?
(you can select one or more variants)

For SMEs
☐ ERP / CRM / SCM

☐ Solutions E-commerce & Online Sales
☐ Platforms Process Automation (RPA, BPM)
☐ IoT Technologies (e.g. Sensors, Connected Devices)
☐ Cloud Computing
☐ Solutions Advanced Data Analytics/Business Intelligence
☐ Applications AI/Machine Learning
☐ Technologies Software for design/simulation/modelling (CAD/CAM, etc.)
☐ Other (please specify): _____

Q27. What technologies and systems have you purchased or intend to implement within the project? (you can select one or more variants)

For LPAs
☐ Integrated platforms for digital public services (e.g. one-stop-shop)
☐ Interoperability/data exchange solutions between institutions
☐ Document management systems/electronic
☐ archiving Electronic signature/digital
☐ identity solutions Cybersecurity and data
☐ protection solutions GIS systems and spatial databases
☐ IT infrastructure (servers, equipment, network)
☐ Other (please specify): _____

Q28. Have you taken over good practices from the Region or from other funding programmes?☐ Yes → Detailed: _____
☐ No

Q29. Your project Is it integrated with other projects or regional networks?
☐ Yes → Detailed: _____
☐ No

Q30. Do you think that your project is it part of a regional development vision?
☐ Yes → Detailed: _____
☐ No

Section D – Project Efficiency and Value for Money

Q31. The resources invested in your project are justified by the results achieved so far/expected?
☐ Fully justified
☐ Partially justified
☐ Poorly justified
☐ Not at all justified
☐ I can't assess at this point

Q32. How do you assess the cost-benefit ratio of the project implemented/will be implemented?
☐ Very good – significant results for reasonable costs
☐ Good – good results compared to costs
☐ Acceptable – some important results but high costs

☐ Poor – high costs for modest results
☐ I can't rate at this time

Q33. Do you estimate that the project will generate savings or concrete benefits for your organisation/institution?

(Select all applicable variants)
☐ Time savings in the provision of services / carrying out the activity
☐ Reduction of administrative or operational costs
Increase of revenues / attractiveness of☐ services
☐ Better access to customers / citizens / partners
☐ Other type of benefit: _____
☐ No concrete benefits are expected

Q34. Have you previously (or in parallel) implemented other digitisation projects through other programmes (e.g. NRRP, PoCIDIF)?☐
Yes
☐ No

If yes, please mention them (title / source of funding / type of intervention): _____

Q35. To what extent does the project implemented through P2 correlate with other digitisation projects or initiatives in your organisation?☐
It is complementary and contributes to a broader
☐ strategy It has partial links with other interventions, but it is not an integral part It
☐ is an isolated intervention, with no correlation with other projects
☐ We have no other digitisation initiatives I
☐ cannot appreciate

Q36. Will the digital solutions develop through the project reduce the time/money invested?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Q37. Will this project bring concrete savings compared to other similar programmes (e.g. NRRP, PoCIDIF)?

☐ Larger

☐ Smaller

☐ Similar

☐ I have no information in this regard

Q38. What most influenced your decision? to apply to P2 calls?

(*Maximum 3 options***)**
☐ Grant amount

☐ Level of co-funding
☐ Clarity and simplicity of the applicant's guide
☐ Relevance of the call to your needs
☐ Support received (consultant/ MA/ RDA)
☐ Favourable calendar
☐ Other reasons: _____

Q39. Your project Has it included concrete measures in the following areas of horizontal themes?
(*Check all the options that apply and fill in if desired*)
☐ Sustainable development (e.g. energy efficiency, reduction of environmental impact) → _____

☐ Equal opportunities / non-discrimination (e.g. adapted access, inclusion) → _____
☐ Gender equality (e.g. balanced involvement of women and men in the project team) → _____
☐ The measures were included according to the requirements of the call, without exceeding the minimum requirements set out in the guide
☐ The project provided for additional measures to the minimum requirements of the call

Q40. To what extent have the measures on horizontal themes (sustainable development, equal opportunities/non-discrimination, gender equality) been relevant to your project? and easy to integrate into the implementation (without major difficulties)?
(Select only one option)

☐ To a very large extent
☐ To a large extent
☐ To a small extent
☐ To a very small extent
☐ This is not the case.

Q41. To what extent did you encounter difficulties in integrating horizontal theme criteria into your project?
(Select only one option)
☐ To a very large extent
☐ To a large extent
☐ To a small extent
☐ To a very small extent
☐ Not applicable.

Q42. Please

Briefly describe the difficulties encountered, if any: