



# Insights into Digital Transformation in the Youth Field Supported by the EU Youth Programmes

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**SALTO**

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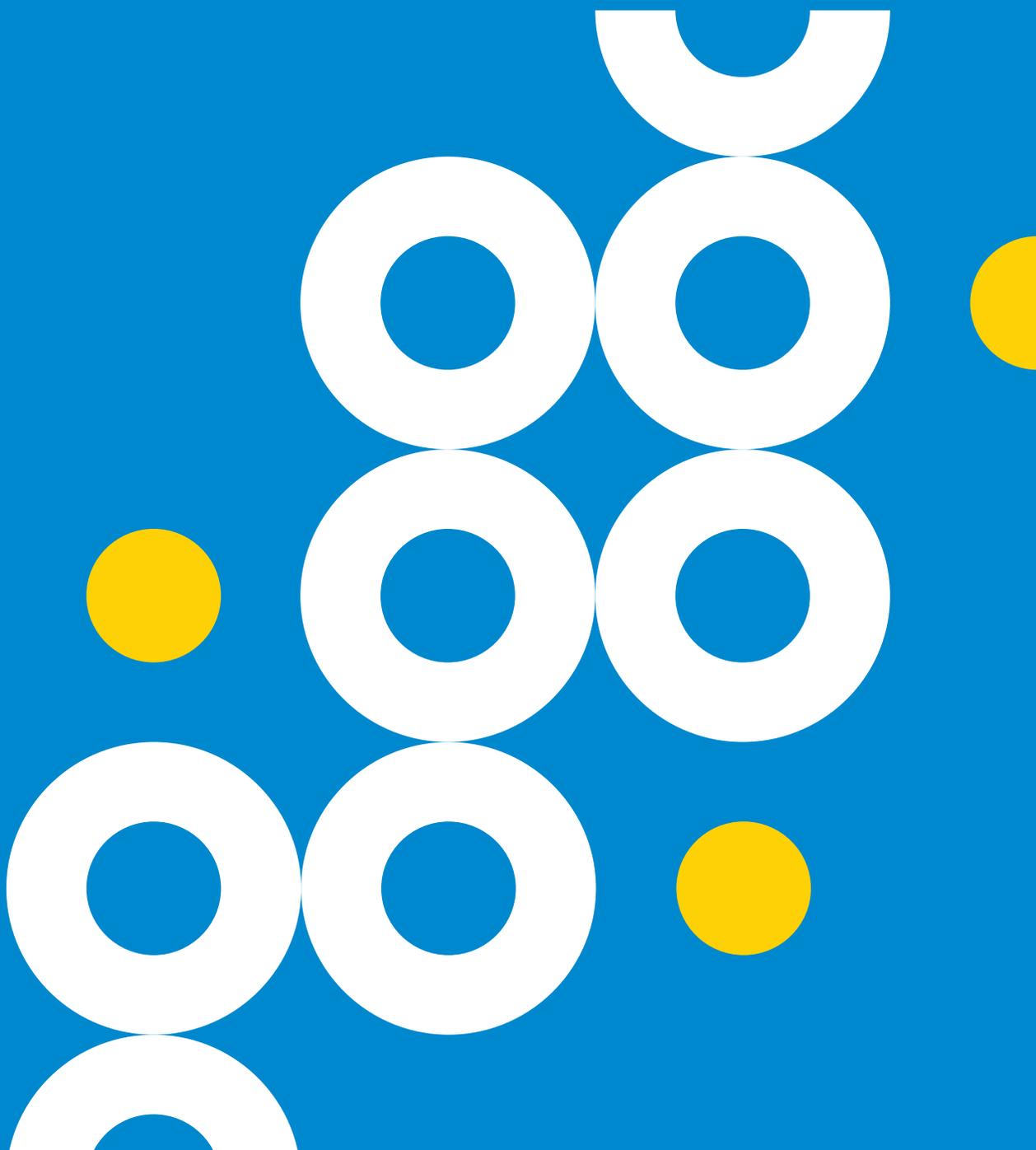
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# 1. Introduction and aims

In 2021, [digital transformation](#) became one of the horizontal priorities for the EU Youth Programmes (Erasmus+ (E+) and European Solidarity Corps (ESC)) for the 2021–2027 period and one of the new priorities at EU level. Digital transformation<sup>1</sup> is defined as an inclusive multi-stakeholder process encompassing the co-design, implementation, and utilisation of people-centred digital technologies with and by young people, youth workers, and other relevant stakeholders. On account of its rapid-paced and disruptive nature, digital transformation brings on novel opportunities and challenges for the European youth-work sector. Digital transformation is an important topic for the National Agencies, who play a crucial role in supporting the beneficiaries of the EU Youth Programmes. Currently, however, there is only quite limited information on what digital transformation means in the specific contexts of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes.

What is the current understanding of digital transformation in the European youth field? To what extent and in what ways has digital transformation been present in the EU Youth Programmes? What can we learn from the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps officers, beneficiaries, trainers, and youth workers about their experiences of digital transformation and the type of support they need for this part of their work?

*The aim for the report is to explore these questions and to provide new insights into how digital transformation can be fostered and supported in the EU Youth Programmes.*

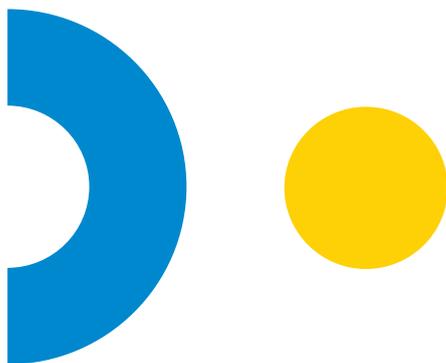
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<sup>1</sup> A full definition of digital transformation in the context of the European youth sector can be found [here](#).

## With these insights, we aim:

- ▶ To provide greater clarity on what is meant by digital transformation in the setting of the EU Youth Programmes
- ▶ To showcase how digital transformation has been present in these Programmes
- ▶ To support the National Agencies' programme officers in developing their understanding of digital transformation
- ▶ In the long term, to advance the creation and implementation of more, higher-quality projects connected with this topic that could be supported by the EU Youth Programmes
- ▶ To provide the European Commission with insights for the EU Youth Programme Guides (the Erasmus+ Programme Guide and European Solidarity Corps Programme Guide), thereby supporting digital transformation in and through the EU Youth Programmes

This report is the fruit of a collaborative effort between the SALTO Participation and Information Resource Centre (SALTO P&I) and SALTO Inclusion and Diversity Resource Centre (SALTO I&D). For more information about current digital transformation developments, please see the SALTO I&D webbased platform for [Inclusion and Diversity in Digital Youth Work](#) and the SALTO P&I Participation Resource Pool [digital transformation topics](#) and [resources](#).





## 2. Digital transformation: The general vision and policy context

In the European youth field, digital transformation is understood as a multi-stakeholder inclusive process encompassing the co-design, implementation, and utilisation of people-centred digital technologies with and by young people, youth workers, and other relevant stakeholders alike. Digital transformation changes the way most parts of the youth field operate. It is a far-reaching process of evolving integration of digital technologies into social, economic, and cultural processes and structures.

Digital transformation involves both practical changes in organisational functioning and society's evolving cultural and social norms. The application of digital transformation in practice might include the conversion or adaptation of traditional non-digital/manual processes into digital processes (e.g., going paperless). The evolution of cultural and social norms is already clearly visible in how digital technologies influence, for example, modes of self-expression, communication, and participation (e.g., with the use of social media for youth-led campaigns/projects). Young people, youth workers, and other relevant stakeholders require appropriate support (e.g., digital-literacy education) if they are to participate in, benefit from, and contribute to digital transformation in Europe.

Digital transformation is a dynamic process, so its definition cannot be fixed or static. The fast pace and disruptiveness of digital transformation dictate that most (if not all) areas of the youth field are influenced by the opportunities and challenges that digital transformation might usher in. Among the opportunities might be, for example, the formation of innovative and time-efficient cross-cultural digital tools and processes in the youth field. Challenges, meanwhile, might arise in relation to people's lack of digital access and/or skills, with potential to have a negative impact on democratic participation and civic space.

It is estimated that by 2030 nine in 10 jobs will require [digital competences](#) (European Commission: n.a.) and up to 30% of employers will have difficulties in finding candidates with suitable entry-level digital skills. The [European Commission](#) has set targets via its European skills agenda and the digital education action plan to ensure that 70% of adults have at least basic digital skills by 2025. These initiatives are aimed at reducing the number of 13–14-year-olds who under-perform in computing and digital literacy from 2019's level of 30% to 15% in 2030. However, digital transformation also requires a new set of cognitive and social skills, accompanied by an agile mindset. The new types of work flows and collaboration will require the employees of the future to adjust and respond to continually evolving digital transformation ([European Commission: n.a.](#)). Accordingly, there is an urgent need to offer training in digital competencies and lifelong education for all.

The COVID-19 crisis resulted in rapid digitalisation of youth services across Europe. This revealed existing digital inequalities related to access to digital devices, affordable Internet access, and training in digital skills (inclusive of those of young people, youth workers, and youth organisations). Meaningful digital inclusion is an essential element of youth participation. The importance of digital transformation has been highlighted in the [Digital Education Action Plan](#) (2021–2027), which emphasises the importance of novel pedagogy and learning implementations that ‘take place beyond the walls of the lecture hall, classroom or workplace, providing more freedom from the constraints of physical location and timetable’ (2020: 2). Thus far, non-formal learning environments (e.g., youth clubs and makerspaces) have played a crucial role in empowering young people to participate in the digital transformation in a meaningful, informed, and safe way. Many non-formal learning environments in Europe can be contextualised within the overlapping areas of [digital transformation and youth work](#) (e.g., digital youth work and [smart youth work](#)). The former entails proactively using or addressing digital media and technology in youth work<sup>2</sup>. The expert group set up under the European Union Work Plan for Youth for 2016–2018 specified [a set of policy recommendations, training needs, and examples of good practices](#) for youth workers and decisionmakers. In the recommendations, the group called for a holistic understanding of non-formal education in the context of digital transformation and argued that:

*“[it is important to] not only focus on the skills related to using digital media but look more broadly at the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to ensure an engaging and meaningful digital youth work experience. An agile mindset is crucial for youth workers to perform their work in our dynamic society (2018: n.a.)”*

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2 More information can be found at SALTO Inclusion and Diversity Resource Centre: [www.salto-youth.net/rc/inclusion/inclusionpublications/digitalinclusion](http://www.salto-youth.net/rc/inclusion/inclusionpublications/digitalinclusion).

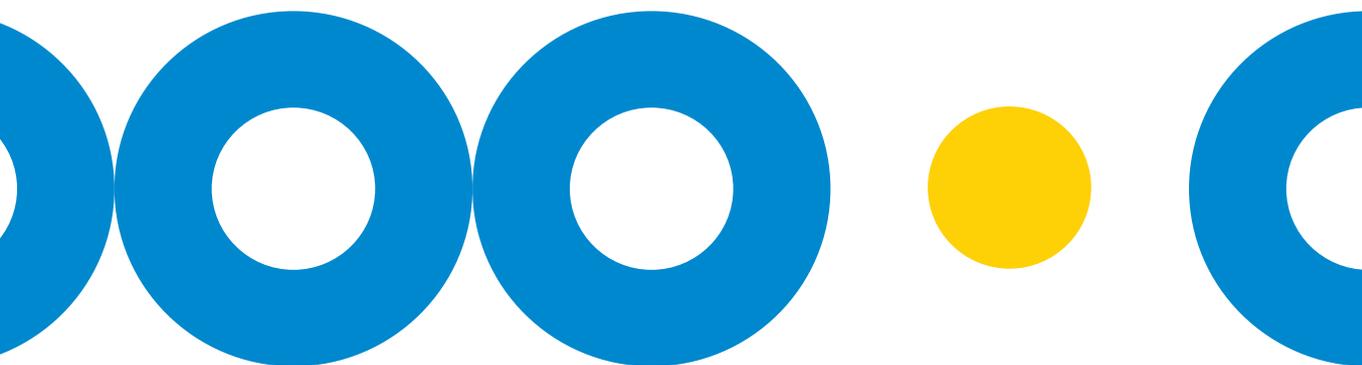


The importance of digital transformation in non-formal education is central to the second concept, smart youth work. Similarly, smart youth work builds upon the ethics, existing principles, knowledge, practices, methods, and other assets of youth work and harnesses the full potential of technological developments in the digital society.

The European Commission has acknowledged the importance and potential of digital transformation in the EU Youth Programmes. As is stated in the strategy for enhancing youth participation in democratic life through the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes:

*“the recognition of alternative forms of participation [including youth digital participation] has the potential to respond to the changing modes of engagement of young people, and to support innovation within the youth sector in order to improve quality (SALTO Participation and Information Resource Centre).”*

As this report highlights, the number of projects addressing digital transformation in the European youth field has been growing steadily since 2018. Out of all Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps projects, the following percentage can be considered related to digital transformation: 12.2% in 2018, 19.5% in 2019, and 24.6% in 2020. Despite its increasing importance, however, the Programme Guides provide limited information about digital transformation. Hence, this report was written to examine how digital transformation is understood among the National Agency programme officers and what type of support is needed in this area.



## 3. Methods and analysis

This report is based on analysis of the following data sources (see Appendix 1 for details of the methodology):

### 1. The Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps projects database

Mapping and analysis of the [Erasmus+](#) and [European Solidarity Corps](#) databases were performed for the funding years 2018–2020 (at the time of the collection of data, no data were available for 2021 in these databases, so the temporal scope was limited accordingly). In all, 16,964 Erasmus+ and 7,029 European Solidarity Corps projects were selected for analysis. The data analysis followed the above-mentioned definition of digital transformation and corresponding key areas for consideration<sup>3</sup>, such as these:

- ▶ Multi-stakeholderism and participation
- ▶ Digital skills and education
- ▶ Access and infrastructure
- ▶ Strategy
- ▶ Innovation
- ▶ Sustainability
- ▶ Ethics

### 2. The SALTO Inclusion and Diversity Resource Centre's conclusions about hybrid, blended, and online-learning mobility activities

Data were collected by means of a questionnaire circulated to the National Agencies, which focused on experiences from activities implemented in 2020 and 2021 by the beneficiaries or from experiences organised by NAs, programme beneficiaries, or other stakeholders since the onset of the pandemic. In addition, a group of 15 experts in digital youth work jointly produced a set of conclusions, published in a [report](#) titled 'Safe, Confident, Connected and Inspired – Learning Experiences of Hybrid, Blended and Online Mobility Activities'. All activities covered were situated in the Strategic National Agency Cooperation on Digital Youth Work environment ([SNAC – DYW](#)).

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3 The area categorisation has since been updated with an additional category, 'Digital Well-Being'. This category was not in use at the time of the data collection for this report. Detailed description of the categories can be found [here](#).

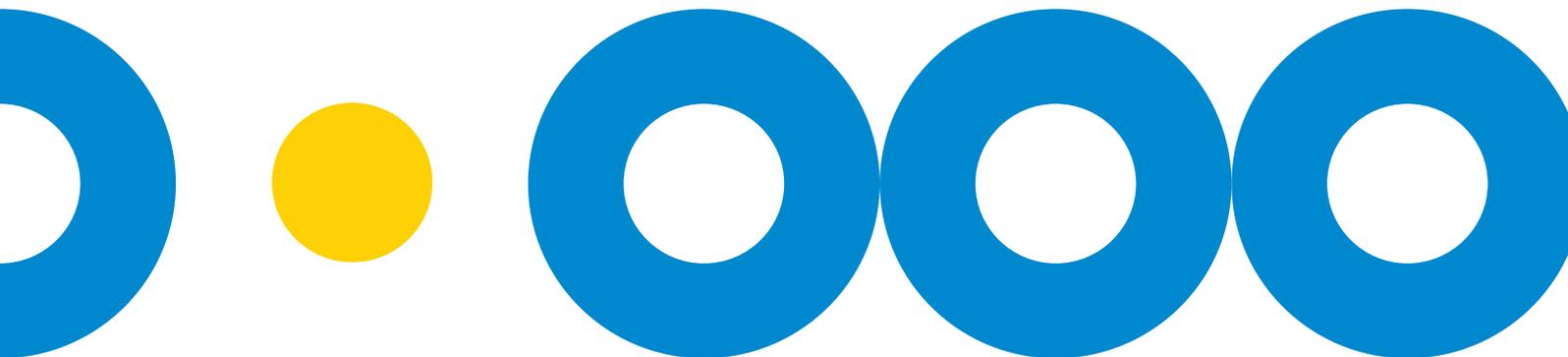
### 3. Focus-group work with the programme officers and the members of the SALTO Participation & Information Resource Centre Digital Transformation Advisory Board

Focus groups involving the Erasmus+ Key Action 1 and Key Action 2 officers, ESC officers, and the members of the [SALTO PI Digital Transformation Advisory Board](#) convened in February 2022.

The results of the overall analysis stemming from these data sources follows the lines of the categories listed below, in a typology partially informed by the existing Erasmus+ and ESC Programme Guides.

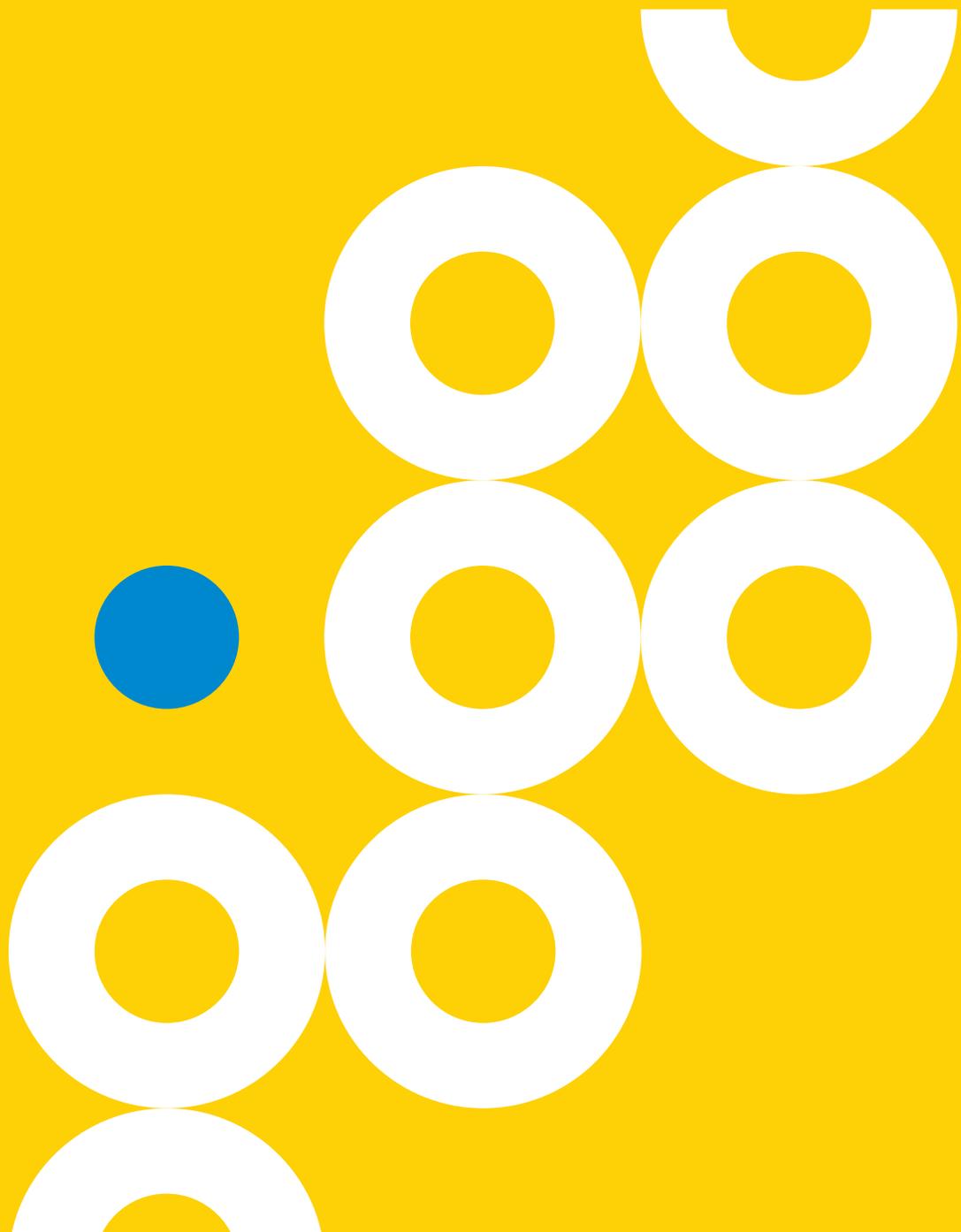
<i>Category</i>	<i>Description</i>
<b><i>Digital transformation</i></b>	Refers to digital transformation and the changes (challenges and/or opportunities) in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes
<b><i>Project planning, delivery, and evaluation</i></b>	Outlines aspects related to project planning, implementation, and overall management
<b><i>Application criteria</i></b>	Refers to the understandings of impact and quality criteria for projects addressing digital transformation
<b><i>Funding</i></b>	Involves matters related to how digital transformation related projects' funding is understood and distributed among projects

Table 1: *Categories employed in the analysis of findings related to digital transformation in the E+ and ESC Programme Guides*



## 4. Findings

This section covers the combined analysis of the quantitative aspects of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps databases (2018–2020); the SALTO Inclusion and Diversity Resource Centre's conclusions on hybrid, blended and online learning-mobility activities; and the focus-group work with Erasmus+ Key Action 1 and Key Action 2 officers, European Solidarity Corps officers, and the members of the SALTO Participation and Information Resource Centre's Digital Transformation Advisory Board.



## 4.1. Introduction to digital transformation in the European youth field as supported by the Erasmus+ Youth Programme

The general objective of the Erasmus+ programme is to support, through lifelong learning, people's educational, professional, and personal development through education, training, youth activities, and sport, in Europe and beyond, thereby contributing to bringing sustainable growth, high-quality jobs, and social cohesion; to driving innovation; and to strengthening European identity and active citizenship. The programme is seen as a key instrument for building a European Education Area, thus supporting the implementation of the European strategic co-operation in the field of education and training, with its underlying sectoral agendas. In addition, it is key in advancing youth-policy co-operation under the European Union Youth Strategy 2019–2027 and developing the European dimension of sport.

In the context of digital transformation, the Erasmus+ Programme is aligned with the Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027). The goal for the programme activities is to support this endeavour to engage learners, educators, youth workers, young people, and organisations on the path to digital transformation. The programme is designed to support the first area of strategic priority under the Action Plan, development of a high-performance digital education ecosystem, by building capacity and critically oriented understanding in all types of education and training institutions with regard to ways to exploit the opportunities offered by digital technologies for teaching and learning at all levels and for all sectors and to develop and implement digital transformation plans for education institutions.

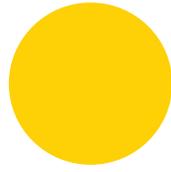
The Programme is aimed at supporting the second strategic priority identified in the Action Plan by supporting actions geared for enhancing digital skills and competence development at all levels of society and for everyone (including those young people with fewer opportunities, students, job-seekers, and workers). The focus is on fostering both basic and advanced digital skills, as well as digital literacy, which has become essential for day-to-day life and for enabling people to navigate a world full of algorithms and participate fully in civil society and democracy.

This report covers the following Erasmus+ Key Actions:

## KEY ACTION 1 – MOBILITY OF INDIVIDUALS

### Areas covered in this report:

- ▶ Learning mobility in the youth field, including
  1. mobility of young people, youth exchanges,
  2. mobility projects for youth workers,
  3. youth participation activities, and
  4. the DiscoverEU Inclusion Action
  
- ▶ Virtual exchanges in higher education and youth activities: online people-to-people activities that promote intercultural dialogue and soft-skills development between individuals from third countries not associated with the programme, Member States, or third countries associated with the programme (these take place in small groups and are always moderated by a trained facilitator)



## KEY ACTION 2 – PARTNERSHIPS FOR CO-OPERATION (IN THE YOUTH FIELD)

### Areas covered in this report:

- ▶ Co-operation partnerships – endeavours whose primary goal is to allow organisations to increase the quality and relevance of their activities, to develop and reinforce their networks of partners, and to increase their capacity to operate jointly at transnational level, thereby boosting internationalisation of their activities through exchanging or developing new practices and methods while also sharing and challenging ideas
- ▶ Small-scale partnerships, an action aimed at widening access to the programme with regard to small-scale actors and individuals who are hard to reach in the fields of school-based education, adult education, vocational education and training, youth activities, and sport – with a grant system that involves smaller grants for organisations, shorter duration, and simpler administrative requirements relative to the co-operation partnerships, this action is intended to reach out to grassroots organisations and newcomers to the programme and to less experienced organisations, reducing entry barriers to the programme for entities with smaller-scale organisational capacity



## 4.2. Insights related to digital transformation in the European youth field supported by the Erasmus+ youth programme

### KEY QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

The study found that Erasmus+ youth projects connected to digital transformation have been steadily growing in number since 2018. The total quantity of Key Action 1 and Key Action 2 projects connected with digital transformation was as follows: 715 in 2018, 994 in 2019, and 1,240 in 2020 (see Figure 1). This means that the percentage of Erasmus+ projects linked to digital transformation doubled from 12.2% in 2018 to 24.6% in 2020. The most prominent areas explored by these digital-transformation-related projects are multi-stakeholder/participatory orientation and attention to digital skills and education (see Figure 2).

### KEY ACTION 1: KEY QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

- ▶ There is a need for greater clarity and guidance on what digital transformation is and how to implement it across KA1 projects.
- ▶ Digital competencies training is needed.
- ▶ There is a need for training resources for programme officers with regard to projects' needs assessments, co-design, facilitation, and evaluation.
- ▶ Good-practice materials on digital transformation should be provided to inform beneficiaries about digital technologies and to inspire and motivate them to apply these in their projects.
- ▶ Additional funding (or more flexibility in the current funding) is essential for sparking exploration and implementation of digital transformation in KA1 projects.

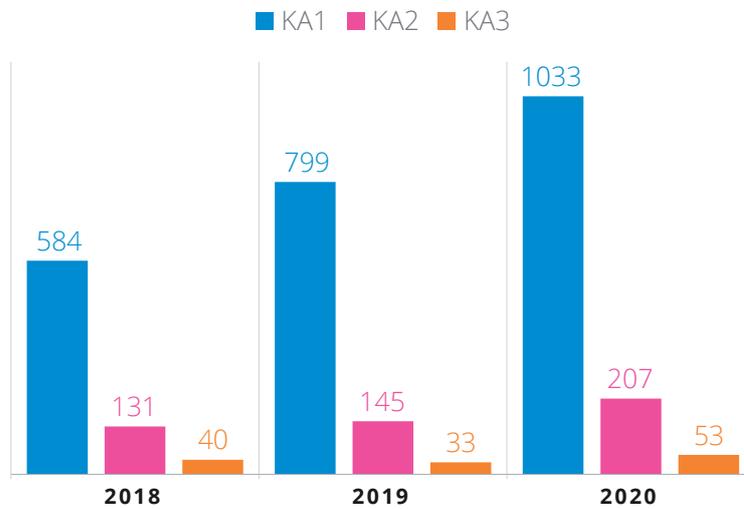


Fig. 1: The total number of non-formal Erasmus+ projects related to digital transformation

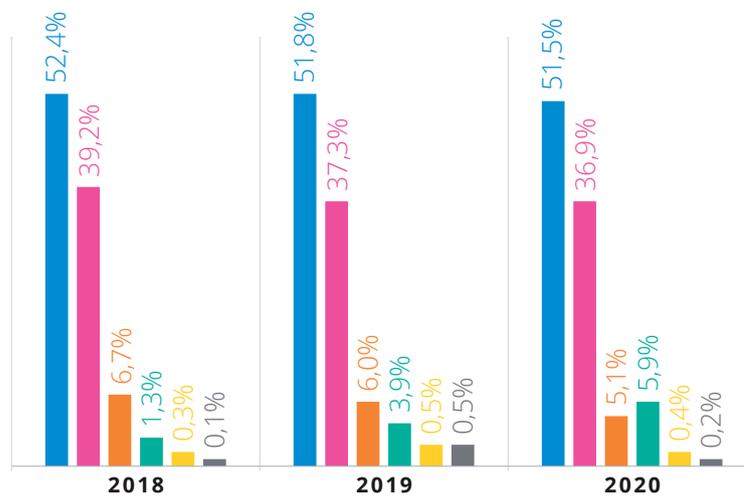


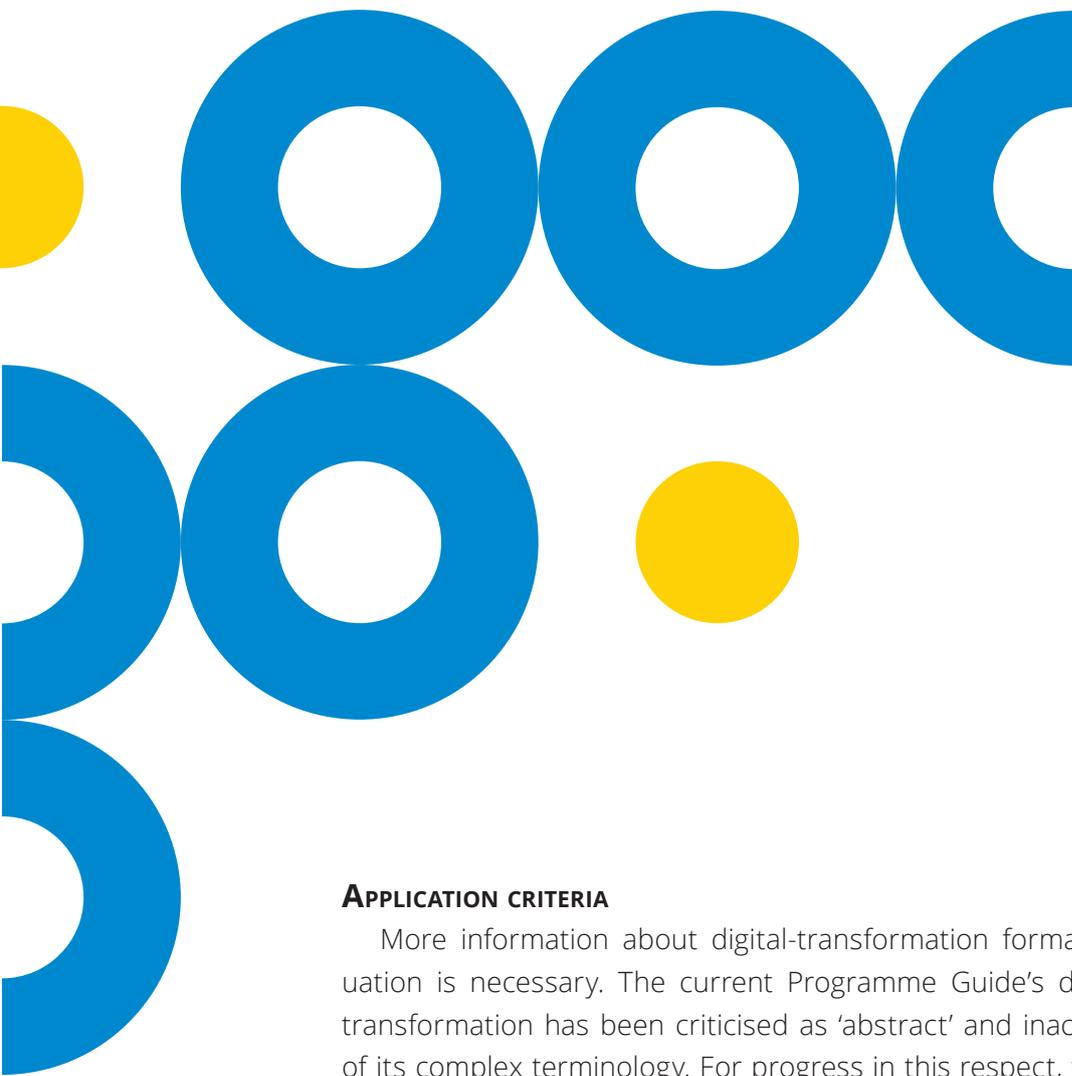
Fig. 2: The percentage of digital-transformation-related Erasmus+ projects by year and grouped by the aspects of digital transformation covered

## **DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION**

A clearer definition of the meaning of digital transformation in the EU Youth Programmes is required, as is more holistic analysis of how digital technologies affect KA1 projects. Digital transformation should be seen as not mere 'going virtual' or use of digital tools (e.g., Facebook groups) for communication but also use and/or exploration of digital technologies in multiple facets of projects (see the digital-transformation definition for examples). Very few KA1 projects take a more holistic approach by examining and addressing young people's and youth workers' digital competencies (such as media-literacy skills). Among the reasons for this might be limited understanding of the notions of digital competence and digital transformation, low interest and motivation, lack of digital competencies and funding, lack of examples from concrete projects, and lack of time. These factors could, in turn, lead to lack of engagement and to weak participation in digital activities. Digital transformation is at the same time seen as a positive force that could render KA1 more inclusive and participatory while also creating new forms of participation and mobility, with corresponding new definitions.

## **PROJECT PLANNING, DELIVERY, AND EVALUATION**

The guide should be improved with regard to accessibility (e.g., via use of plain language) and clarity. Such guidance should support general understanding of digital transformation and aid in motivating beneficiaries in their use of and experimentation with digital technologies. Beneficiaries must be supported and encouraged to learn *why* and *how* digital technologies can enhance KA1 projects. Strategic guidance and financial support are required if the use of digital technologies is to be seen as not just an 'add-on' activity. Considering how to achieve fuller guidance in designing, implementing, and evaluating digitally transformative projects in an inclusive and participatory manner, KA1 officers emphasised the importance of young people's safety, digital methods, and creation of engaging environments.



### **APPLICATION CRITERIA**

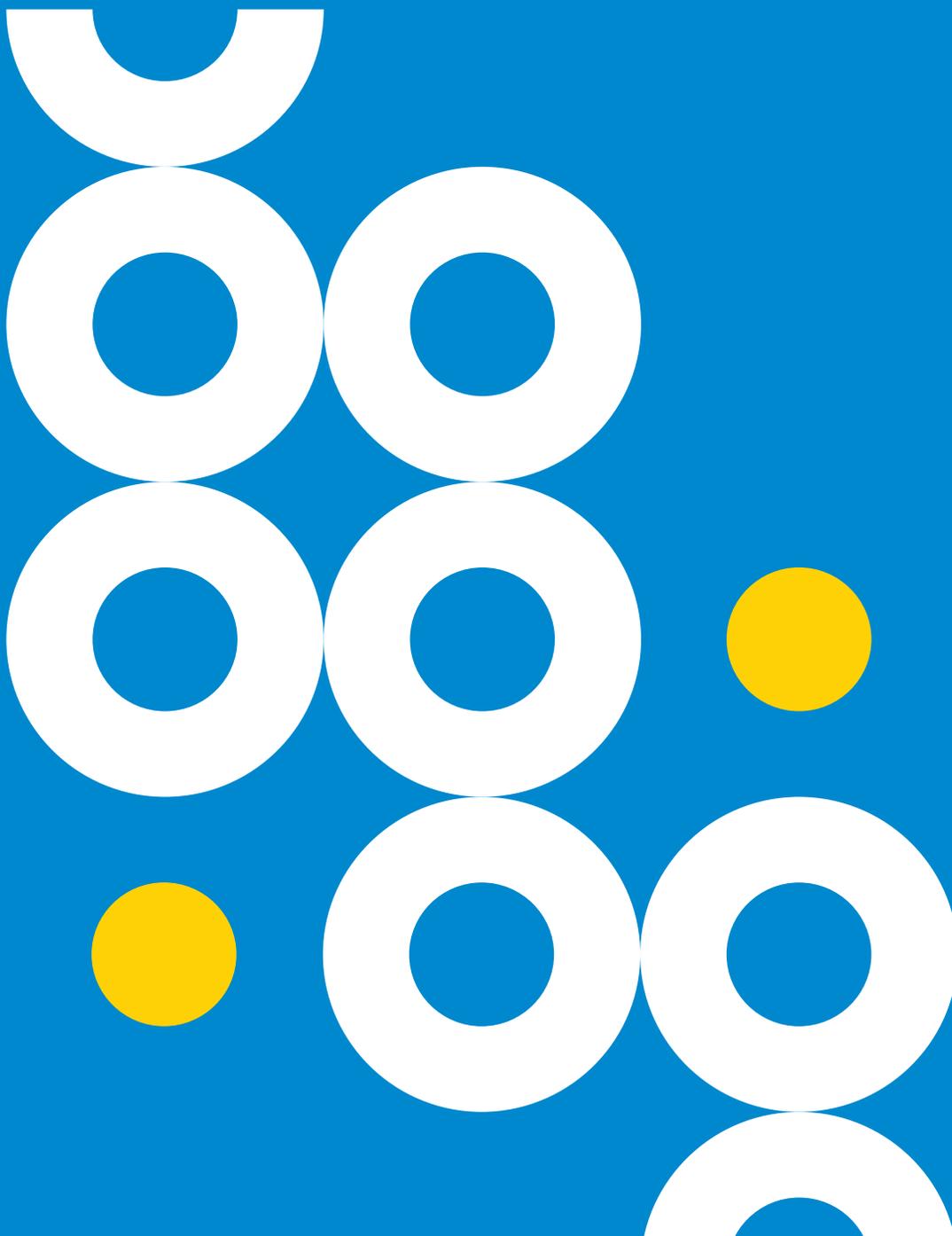
More information about digital-transformation formats, goals, and evaluation is necessary. The current Programme Guide's description of digital transformation has been criticised as 'abstract' and inaccessible on account of its complex terminology. For progress in this respect, the guide should be designed to clearly lay out what types of projects are eligible and what application criteria should be addressed. To aid in this process, participants argued, examples of good practices need to be readily accessible, to inspire, inform, and guide potential applicants. Future Programme Guides should allow some degree of flexibility in terms of programme delivery, as more flexible application criteria might provide more room for experimentation.

### **FUNDING**

Having little or no funding and the use of fixed and rigid funding criteria are seen as forming one of the key issues related to digital transformation in KA1 projects. Additional funding must be provided, or, if that is not possible, more flexibility in how the funds may be used should be provided (e.g., during COVID-19 lockdown, beneficiaries were allowed to reallocate their travel funding to online activities). There is also a need for an up-to-date budget structure that clearly outlines the funds available for digital transformation. This should be accompanied by examples of successful applications for funding.

## Examples of inspiring Erasmus+ Key Action 1 projects related to digital transformation

Next section provides examples of inspiring projects that showcase digital transformation.





## INSPIRING KA1 PROJECTS CONNECTED TO DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

This section provides examples of inspiring KA1 projects that tie in strongly with digital transformation.

*Project title:*

**FLOW – Facilitating, Learning, Organising and Welcoming!  
A Critical Training of Trainers**

*Link for the project:*

[erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/eplus-project-details  
#project/2020-2-BE05-KA105-003010](https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/eplus-project-details/#project/2020-2-BE05-KA105-003010)

**The project is connected with the following aspects of the digital-transformation framework:**

- ▶ Innovation
- ▶ Multi-stakeholder focus and participation
- ▶ Digital skills and education
- ▶ Access and infrastructure
- ▶ Ethics

**Brief summary:**

[FLOW – Facilitating, Learning, Organising and Welcoming! A Critical Training of Trainers](#) was a ‘training of trainers’ project with special focus on peace education and inclusion. It was composed of three elements: an online preparation phase, an online training course, and follow-up. The 26 organisations involved, from across Europe, took part in two training sessions, with 50+ participants attending in all. The participants were volunteers, staff, and activists with volunteer-oriented and youth organisations throughout Europe.

The project was originally planned for offline implementation; however, the pandemic necessitated moving the training online. Its project team used a variety of online tools to store and manage all documents related to the seminar, such as the data-protection-oriented tool CryptDrive, Padlet, Mails, and Zoom, to ensure smooth implementation. The team used e-mail and Zoom calls to talk to project partners about their feedback, ideas, expectations, and contributions to the activities.

**Why the project is inspiring:**

The FLOW project afforded critical and creative exploration of digital transformation in the processes’ context and content both. Although the primary focus of the training was on peace education and inclusion, the project provided an inspiring example of how digital communication tools (e.g., Zoom and Padlet) can be used to facilitate participatory and inclusive activities. Among the methods applied were the theatre method, the world cafe, and reflection walks involving listening to a podcast created by the trainers.

Alongside innovative methods, the FLOW project paid particular attention to ethical, inclusive, and safe approaches to online participation. For example, technical support was given through separate support sessions for ascertaining whether any participants needed Internet-related support or hardware access. The organisers took participants’ safety into account by using the data-protection tool CryptDrive. To ensure that participants felt safe and included, pronouns accompanied their Zoom names and, more generally throughout the project, the organisers and participants alike sought to maintain a high level of awareness of the varied backgrounds, needs, and experiences involved, agreeing on a word to use for requesting help or in case something had to be addressed for making sure the training was as inclusive as possible. In addition, attention was paid to technical netiquette – e.g. supporting participants who had a poor-quality Internet connection by being patient and via active use of the ‘reaction’ function of Zoom.

*Project title:*

## **Go OUT - Bring IN**

*Link for the project:*

[erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/eplus-project-details#project/2018-2-EL02-KA125-004331](https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/eplus-project-details#project/2018-2-EL02-KA125-004331)

### **The project is connected with the following aspects of the digital-transformation framework:**

- ▶ Innovation
- ▶ Multi-stakeholder focus and participatory orientation
- ▶ Digital skills and education
- ▶ Sustainability

### **Brief summary:**

The project is designed to empower minors and young adults with fewer opportunities, drawing them closer to non-formal learning and encouraging them to become active citizens and support their own initiatives. This is done through digital outdoor activities with a clear focus on the participation environment and sports as strategies for inclusion. Some activities take place in the digital environment, among them Web radio, social-media activities, and work with blogs and Web sites. Also, the project utilises digital communication tools to create online campaigns that promote the work of Erasmus+.

### **Why the project is inspiring:**

This project showcases how technologies can be used in the context of non-formal outdoor education. Activities included youth-centred trips in Athenias parks where topics such as nature and mindfulness were explored. Young volunteers learned how to employ social media effectively and proactively by creating campaigns, blogs, and other digital materials to self-organise and establish new opportunities for young people to become active locally and engage with their local communities (e.g., events to clean up parks and beaches). Digital technologies also helped them promote Erasmus+ activities. Thanks in particular to its international nature, the project serves as an inspiring example of how digital technologies can be applied in a meaningful way to enhance intercultural dialogue, non-formal education, mutual understanding, and solidarity.

## KEY ACTION 2: KEY QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

### KEY FINDINGS:

- There is a need for better understanding of digital transformation in the context of KA2 projects.
- KA2 projects should be seen as multidisciplinary initiatives that address multiple aspects of digital transformation – such as inclusion, innovation, sustainability, and education.
- The KA2 projects require improved guidance on digital-transformation application and quality criteria.
- In the EU Youth Programmes, there is need for a critical approach to objectives and outcomes, partnership work, and funding.

## **DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION**

Within KA2 projects, digital transformation is viewed as comprehensive implementation of digital technologies in multi-layered, critical, and people-centred ways. Existing KA2 projects feature examples of diverse uses of innovative initiatives focused on co-design, maker spaces, ethics, and privacy. However, many of these projects have failed to deliver meaningful and sustainable contributions to the youth sector (e.g., one outcome was an app that ended up being used by only 10 people, for only a short span of time). For true progress, there is a need for guidance on how to approach and assess possible KA2 partnerships such that they create meaningful, inclusive, and longer-term solutions. Said guidance should be aimed at enabling the exploration of new opportunities for cooperation and small-scale partnerships, the emergence of new forms of pedagogy and collaboration, and expansion to the definition of youth work via the involvement of new partners and experts in KA2 activities.

## **PROJECT PLANNING, DELIVERY, AND EVALUATION**

There is a lack of tools that could support programme officers' and beneficiaries' understanding of what needs (e.g., for digital-literacy training) and problems (e.g., lack of an affordable Internet connection) must be addressed in relation to digital transformation in the youth sector. Support is required for learning how to ground potential digitally transformative projects in the needs of young people (or of the youthwork sector) and realistically aim to address them. Therefore, additional guidance is needed in critically approaching projects' planning, implementation, monitoring, and impact evaluation. There is also need for systematic, long-term impact analysis addressing how digital transformation is manifested in the KA2 projects – and its results (both positive and negative).



### **APPLICATION CRITERIA**

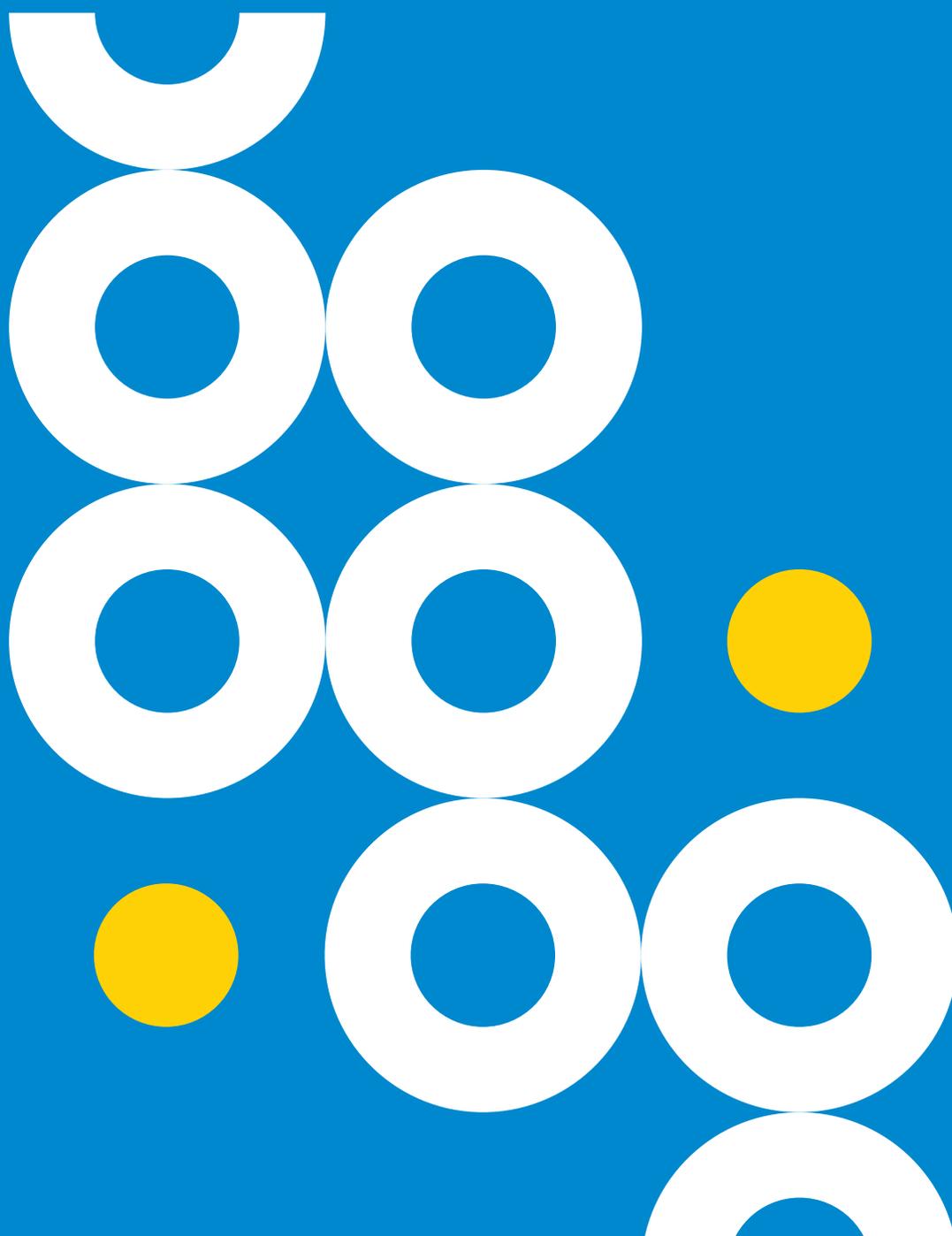
Improved digital-transformation-related application guidelines and quality criteria are needed for the KA2 projects. They require a clear definition articulating what a digitally transformative project is. What are the qualities of a good KA2 project that is also digitally transformative? How should we justify the use of certain technologies as opposed to others? What type of impact are we looking for? To address these questions, the Programme Guide should offer key information on how the applications' value or impact indicators are understood (the indicators might include projects' responsiveness to existing needs related to digital transformation, youth-centredness, sustainability, etc.).

### **FUNDING**

KA2 programme officers also require clearer guidance on how to justify and allocate (and reallocate) funding for digital activities. New funding streams and formats are necessary also, to motivate KA2 beneficiaries/applicants to implement digital transformation in their projects. Referring to the pre-2022 funding rules, programme officers indicated that, since digital transformation is not rewarding in monetary terms, there is no desire to approach the matter critically (e.g., to consider topics such as digital citizenship, digital governance, and digital sustainability). The KA2 project officers too require clearer guidance on justification and (re)allocation of funding for digital activities.

## Examples of inspiring Erasmus+ Key Action 2 projects related to digital transformation

Next section provides examples of inspiring projects that showcase digital transformation.





## INSPIRING KA2 PROJECTS CONNECTED TO DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Several projects can be cited as examples of inspiring KA2 work with a strong link to digital transformation.

*Project title:*

**NAURU GAME for Active Citizenship of Youth**

*Link for the project:*

[erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/eplus-project-details  
#project/2016-3-PL01-KA205-035320](https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/eplus-project-details/#project/2016-3-PL01-KA205-035320)

**The project is connected with the following aspects of the digital-transformation framework:**

- ▶ Multi-stakeholder focus and participation
- ▶ Digital skills and education
- ▶ Access and infrastructure
- ▶ Strategy
- ▶ Innovation
- ▶ Sustainability

### **Brief summary:**

[New Shores – a Game for Democracy](#) is a multiplayer online game with a strong emphasis on active engagement and direct communication between players. It is addressed mostly to middle- and secondary school students and those in higher education. The game was developed as part of a two-year project (NAURU GAME for Active Citizenship of Youth) with an aim of equipping educators with an interactive Internet-based game for greater youth participation in tackling the greatest challenges of our century (collaboration in pursuit of increased sustainability, climate-change mitigation, and respect for democratic values). Unlike traditional lecture-based approaches to education, it offered a playful environment for exploring the existing interconnections in complex global socio-economic and environmental systems.

The main priority of the project was to promote empowerment and active citizenship of young people (aged 13–30) by engaging them in an immersive Internet-based multiplayer game that requires critical thinking, active decision-making, and communication. Furthermore, the project was intended to promote open and innovative game-based education and related training for youth workers, embedded in the digital era. Overall, the NAURU GAME for Active Citizenship of Youth project can serve as an example of how a project may display various aspects of digital transformation and how it can strategically contribute to future developments in this area.

### **Why the project is inspiring:**

NAURU GAME for Active Citizenship of Youth provides an example of a project utilising digital technologies in a creative, critical, and playful manner. Firstly, through its use of a creative and playful elearning course, the project illustrates how digital technologies can aid in creating new solutions in the context of education. So far, New Shores – a Game for Democracy has been tested by 60 educators, from Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary. Moreover, 148 educators from the same countries have been trained during face-to-face events in how to prepare and organise game-based workshops in their classrooms.

The project offers an example of how digital transformation can be approached in an accessible manner. The NAURU game materials are designed to eliminate geographical/economic barriers and enable educators to learn how to use the New Shores game with their students in English, Polish, Slovak, and Hungarian. Digital transformation is framed here as a mechanism for participation and inclusion of educators and young people in Europe. The importance of learning and sustainability is showcased also in how the project aimed to expand its reach by means of training for future moderators (planned for Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary), to teach them how to prepare a game-based workshop and use the e-learning platform in their daily work with youth.

*Project title:*

## **Learning and Engaging with New Technologies: Digitally Agile Youth Work**

*Link for the project:*

[erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/eplus-project-details  
#project/2017-2-UK01-KA205-037028](https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/eplus-project-details/#project/2017-2-UK01-KA205-037028)

### **The project is connected with the following aspects of the digital-transformation framework:**

- ▶ Multi-stakeholder emphasis and participation
- ▶ Digital skills and education
- ▶ Access and infrastructure
- ▶ Strategy
- ▶ Innovation
- ▶ Sustainability

### **Brief summary:**

The aim of the [project](#) was to develop, deliver, and promote digital tools for youth workers and to keep policymakers and funders abreast of new trends and emerging ideas. The project Learning and Engaging with New Technologies: Digitally Agile Youth Work identified a need for innovation, training, and education for youth workers and young people who are not necessarily 'digitally literate'. The three key outcomes of the project were a collection of 36 good practices, training materials, and the European Guidelines for Digital Youth Work.

### **Why the project is inspiring:**

This project offers an inspiring example of how one can approach various facets of digital transformation in a youth-work setting. The project explored the importance of digital technologies in youth work by creating a range of accessible resources and activities, which included best-practice videos and JAM training. From the very beginning, the project has provided valuable skills that educators can pass on to thousands of young people, across Europe. Beyond taking innovative approaches to education (e.g., providing information on the use of virtual reality in youth work), the project explored such broader aspects of digital transformation as policymaking, multi-stakeholder focus and participation, and strategy. The resources co-created by the project team yield crucial insight with regard to how digital transformation is intertwined with youth work and offer practical resources to address any opportunities (e.g., for participatory learning) and challenges (e.g., connected with digital literacy or mental health) related to the process.

### **4.3. Introduction to digital transformation in the European youth field as supported by the European Solidarity Corps programme**

The European Solidarity Corps brings together young people to build a more inclusive society, supporting vulnerable people and responding to societal and humanitarian challenges. It offers an inspiring and empowering experience for young people who want to help, learn, and develop and provides a single entry point for such solidarity activities throughout the Union – and beyond. The Programme opens more and better opportunities in a broad range of areas, such as integration of migrants, environmental challenges, prevention of natural disasters, education and youth activities, preservation of cultural heritage, and humanitarian aid. It also supports national and local actors' efforts to cope with various challenges and crises facing society.

By extending its scope to cover volunteering-oriented activities in support of humanitarian aid operations, the European Solidarity Corps provides need-based emergency aid and helps to deliver assistance, relief, and protection where most needed. It thus helps address not only unmet societal needs in Europe but also humanitarian challenges in third countries. The activities of the European Solidarity Corps support the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy for 2019–2023, which encourages young people to become active citizens and agents of solidarity and positive change for communities across Europe, inspired by EU values and European identity.

The political guidelines of the European Commission have underscored the need for Europe to lead the digital transition. The ESC Programme can play a role by supporting Europeans, whatever their gender, age, and background, such that they can live and thrive in the digital age. The means for this are projects and activities oriented toward boosting digital skills, fostering digital literacy, and/or developing a good understanding of the risks and opportunities of digital technology. The European Solidarity Corps also promotes the use of virtual and digital components such as information, communication, and technology tools in all projects and activities.



## 4.4 Insights into digital transformation in the European youth field supported by the European Solidarity Corps

### KEY QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

The number of digital-transformation-related European Solidarity Corps projects has been growing in recent years (with 889 projects in 2018, 2,737 in 2019, and 3,417 in 2020); see Figure 3. This amounts to 1.9% growth, from 9.6% in 2018 to 11.5% in 2020. As Figure 4 indicates, the most prominent areas explored by the digital-transformation-related projects are Multi-stakeholder/participation focus and digital skills plus education.

### KEY QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

- ▶ There is a need for greater clarity and fuller guidance on what digital transformation is and how to implement it across ESC projects.
- ▶ There is need also for training resources related to projects' needs assessments, codesign, facilitation, and evaluation.
- ▶ Materials on good digital-transformation practices should be provided to inspire, inform, and motivate beneficiaries with regard to using digital technologies in their projects.
- ▶ Additional funding (or more flexibility in the current funding) is essential for spurring exploration and implementation of digital transformation in ESC projects.

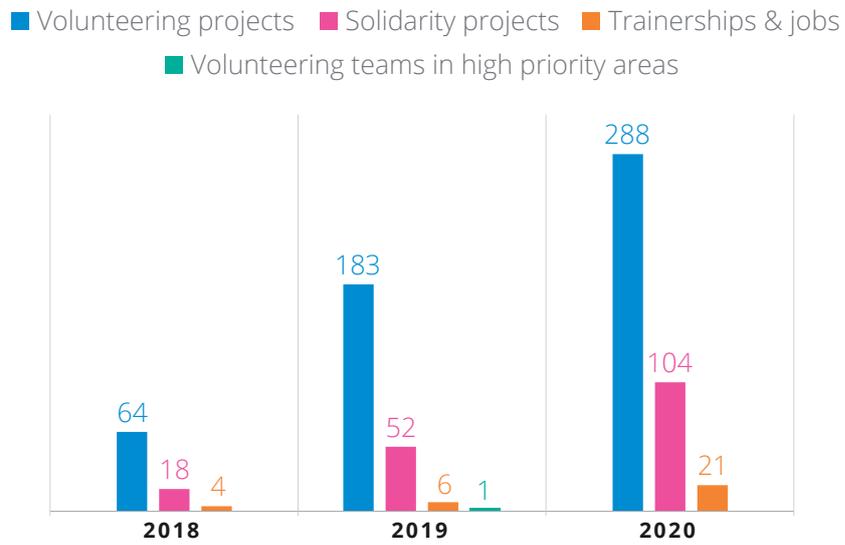


Fig. 3: The total number of non-formal European Solidarity Corps projects related to digital transformation

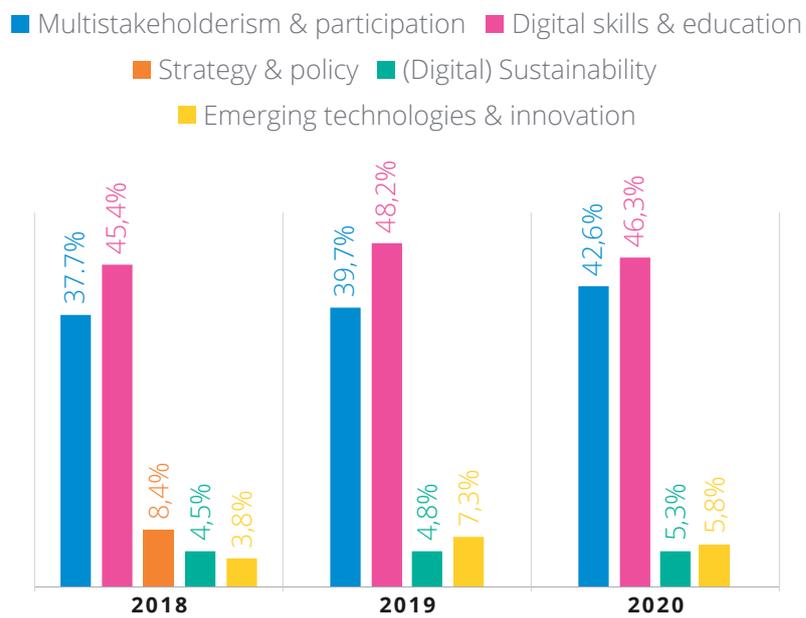


Fig. 4: The percentage of European Solidarity Corps projects related to digital transformation, by year and broken down by the aspect of digital transformation covered

## **DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION**

In ESC projects, digital technologies have been employed primarily as tools for communication and some aspects of project management. As things now stand, there is rather limited information available about what digital transformation is or even how to approach it, and this shortcoming could translate into lack of motivation to develop and deliver projects related to digital transformation. To address this problem, the European Solidarity Corps Programme Guide should present a well-clarified definition of digital transformation in the youth sector and the ESC Programme.

## **PROJECT PLANNING, DELIVERY, AND EVALUATION**

ESC projects' planning requires analysis of young people's (digital) needs and choosing the right approaches to address them. The Programme Guide should provide access to digital-transformation resources that address needs and risk analysis oriented toward informing understanding of which aspects of projects should be supported by digital technologies and which should stay non-digital. Better overall project management requires access to a standardised set of procedures (e.g., project-planning templates) and inclusive tools (e.g., apps that can be used and synchronised among separate ESC projects' participants).

## **APPLICATION CRITERIA**

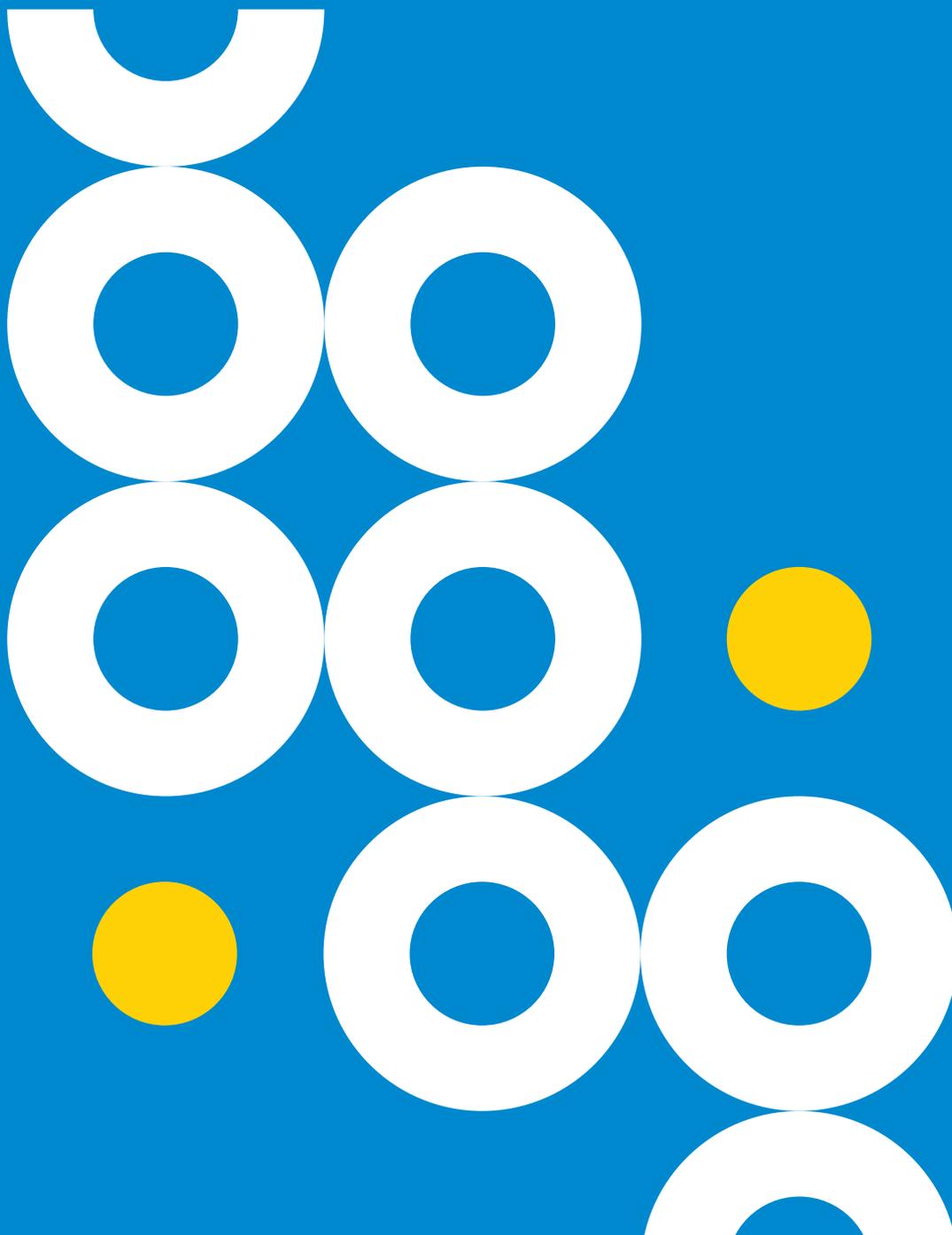
ESC officers require an ESC Programme Guide that contains more accessible information related to digital transformation (e.g., easy-to-understand text and format details). The current Programme Guide provides a brief overview outlining why digital transformation is important without clearly expressing what it is and how it can be described in an ESC project application. In light of this problem, some ESC Programme officers feel pressure to promote digital transformation without having any clear criteria to aid them in justifying its implementation. More information on digital-transformation-related quality criteria is essential for improving the application process.

## **FUNDING**

There seems to be a lack of funding dedicated to digital transformation in ESC projects. Some officers argued that no funding exists for virtual activities (e.g., online volunteering). Hence, applicants are not rewarded for the digitally transformative aspects of their projects. As one of the focus-group participants stated, 'there is no funding because there is no evidence of successful [digital transformation] projects. And there is no evidence because there is no funding'. The ESC Programme Guide should address these issues by specifying what types of funding are available and what kinds of outcome items are expected from the application.

## Examples of inspiring European Solidarity Corps projects related to digital transformation

Next section provides examples of inspiring projects that showcase digital transformation.



*Project title:*

## **Youth Digital Volunteer**

*Link for the project:*

[europa.eu/youth/solidarity/projects/details/2020-2-IT03-ESC11-019563](https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity/projects/details/2020-2-IT03-ESC11-019563)

### **The project is connected with the following aspects of the digital-transformation framework:**

- ▶ Multi-stakeholder emphasis and participation
- ▶ Digital skills and education
- ▶ Access and infrastructure
- ▶ Strategy
- ▶ Innovation
- ▶ Sustainability

### **Brief summary:**

Youth Digital Volunteer is a volunteerism-based project foreseeing the involvement of two European volunteers as ‘young digitizers’ in a vast project for intangible redevelopment of the peripheral neighbourhoods of a city with disadvantages related to dropping out of school, intolerance for institutions, a poor sense of civic belonging, and risk of social exclusion. The redevelopment project, called Social Art, includes initiatives aimed at promoting culture and reading, social and youth animation, and urban redevelopment. Young people participating in the project became ‘volunteers for digitization’ by spreading basic IT skills across the various strata of the population at risk of social exclusion.

### **Why the project is inspiring:**

The project offers an example of how arts, culture, and digital-skills training can be combined in a youthcentred volunteerism project. It represented an innovative peer-to-peer approach of ‘volunteering for digitalisation’. The project’s aim was to co-develop a sustainable innovation-rich space (called ‘Itinerant Creativity Laboratories’) for future work with young people that would combine outdoor and indoor activities (also tying in with topics related to digital skills). The project not only represents an opportunity for young people’s proactive participation in creation and delivery of digital skills in their communities but also aids in shaping a more strategically oriented vision of how matters related to digital transformation can be explored and addressed in a responsive, creative, and intergenerational manner.

*Project title:*

## **Acerra in E-motion**

*Link for the project:*

[europa.eu/youth/solidarity/projects/details/2019-3-IT03-ESC31-017354](https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity/projects/details/2019-3-IT03-ESC31-017354)

### **The project is connected with the following aspects of the digital-transformation framework:**

- ▶ Multi-stakeholder emphasis and participation
- ▶ Digital skills and education
- ▶ Access and infrastructure
- ▶ Strategy
- ▶ Innovation
- ▶ Sustainability

### **Brief summary:**

The aim of this project was to empower young citizens of Acerra, Italy, to examine their community from an emotional point of view, in aims of promoting a sense of belonging to the city but also a critical stance on its places. The project utilised digital technologies to create an emotional mapping path, based on participatory activities in the field. Project participants traced the relations between the citizens of Acerra and their territory, from the perspective of sensory-affective perception and local memory, in order to reconstruct the collective narratives and emotional experiences that support the notion of territory. The final result envisioned for the project was an emotional map of the city, in printed and digital form.

### **Why the project is inspiring:**

In this project, technologies were explored beyond their practical application and communication functions, extending to investigation of the emotional side of one's community and its history. The overall concept for the project offers a set of innovative and inspiring ideas related to how digital technologies can support mindful and sustainable co-creation of a sense of belonging, active citizenship, and intergenerational dialogue. Furthermore, the project illustrates how digital skills and literacy can be embedded in a creative community intervention geared toward producing a sustainable outcome (as with this project's emotional map of the city).

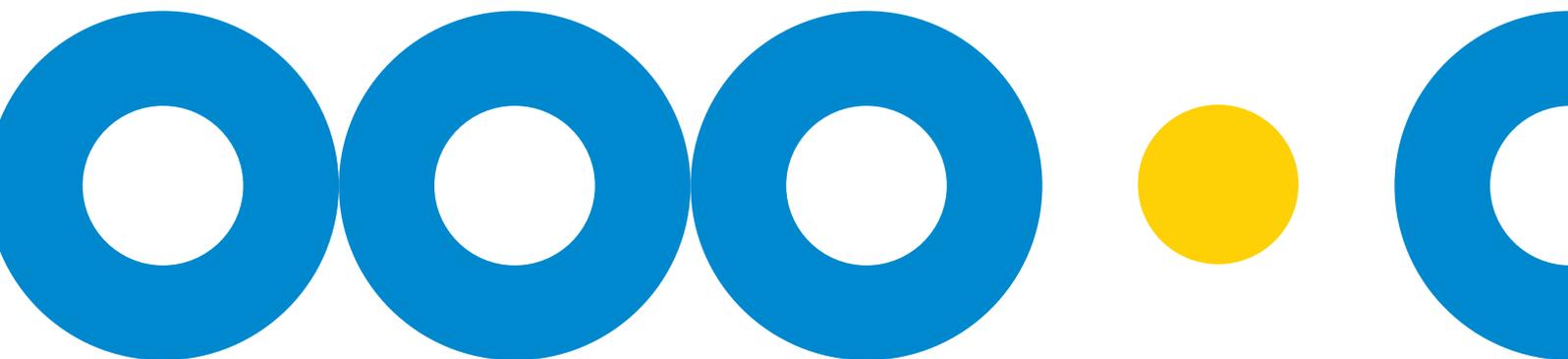
## 4.5. Conclusions and moving forward from here

The aim behind this report was to examine the matter of digital transformation within the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes. The objective was to gain new insights into what guidance and support are needed for promotion and implementation of digital transformation as a new horizontal priority in the EU youth sector. Again, the analysis presented here was obtained through

- ▶ Quantitative analysis of material from the [Erasmus+](#) and [European Solidarity Corps](#) databases;
- ▶ Qualitative analysis of the SALTO Inclusion and Diversity Resource Centre's recommendations on blended and online learning; and
- ▶ A qualitatively oriented analysis of four focus groups' discussion, involving Erasmus+ Key Action 1 and Key Action 2 officers, European Solidarity Corps officers, and the members of the SALTO Participation and Information Resource Centre's Digital Transformation Advisory Board.

The report presents new insights gained into the ways in which programme officers, beneficiaries, trainers, and youth workers experience and perceive digital transformation in the EU youth sector and into what support and guidance they need in this area. The description of findings here is meant to contribute to a better understanding of how best to strategically approach and implement digital transformation in the EU Youth Programmes. These findings might also offer insights for the European Commission for further development of the EU Youth Programme Guides with regard to the topic of digital transformation.

The following areas are proposed for consideration in the future development of the EU Youth Programme Guides, with specific regard to digital transformation:



## 1. Strategic understanding of digital transformation

There is need for a more comprehensive and accessible definition of digital transformation. Youth projects considering implementation of digital transformation should be provided with clearly defined and accessible information on what digital transformation is/entails and how it could be reflected in the various aspects of their [work](#). Likewise, it is necessary to clarify *why* digital transformation is important and *how* it can benefit the projects.

## 2. An evidence-based approach to digital transformation

Additional information and tools are necessary for revealing which needs related to digital transformation should be explored in the EU Youth Programmes. The National Agencies' programme officers should be provided with up-to-date information on trends and analysis of how digital transformation is affecting the youth sector and young people's lives, alongside how one may support and analyse young people's learning experiences. The improved EU Youth Programme Guides should not only emphasise the importance of digital transformation but encourage, motivate, and inspire its implementation in the European youth field. It is only through an evidence-based approach that potential project beneficiaries can create inclusive, meaningful, and sustainable projects.

## 3. Funding, impact, and quality criteria

There is limited understanding of the qualities and impact of a digitally transformative project.

A set of guidelines should be created to lay out the characteristics, elements, and types of digital transformation activities entailed by the project in question. The statement of quality criteria should serve principally to inform and support potential projects' design, rather than restrict it. Instead of using a check-box list, it might be beneficial to create a matrix of quality criteria that elucidates the [digital transformation framework](#) in place. In light of the complex and evolving nature of digital transformation, new approaches to the relevant quality criteria and impact measurement for the EU Youth Programmes should be considered. The approaches employed might, for example, take a youth-centred and participatory approach to developing and measuring projects' goals, outcomes, and impact (in addition to applying the existing impact criteria). More attention should be paid to the importance of a negative impact (e.g., failing to meet certain objectives) and what it says about the youth sector's responsiveness to the opportunities and challenges related to digital transformation in the EU setting. Finally, any funding system should be grounded also in evidencebased research, to clarify the types of costs involved in the projects in the domain of digital transformation. Current research in that area should also continue to inform and shape any future funding mechanisms and their rules.

#### **4. Provision of resources:**

##### **Tools, approaches, and examples of good practices**

Examples of good practices are a fundamental element for forming a solid understanding of what a digitally transformative project might look like. Resources describing how to strategically approach projects' planning (via risk assessment, evidence-informed needs analysis, etc.), design (e.g., via the use of participatory methods and co-design), implementation (e.g., with provision of accessible tools and platforms that can be used Europe-wide), and evaluation. There is also a need for effective ways of distributing these resources centrally. Examples might include European information hubs offering inspiring and informative examples of prior projects.

#### **5. Capacity-building and new forms of support**

##### **for the National Agencies' programme officers**

Practical steps should be taken to provide up-to-date, ongoing training for the NA programme officers with regard to the various distinct areas of digital transformation. Also, additional capacity-building is required for the community of practice and the diverse actors in the youth field (e.g., beneficiaries and accredited organisations). However, while training in digital competencies is essential, simultaneously there exists an urgent need to develop a more holistic, critically oriented understanding and an agile mindset that affords continuing to respond to digital transformation. To this end, it might be useful to consider new forms of support and training. One example might be the introduction of new multidisciplinary support teams of youth-oriented experts in digital transformation with an eye toward supporting project design and development. Experts covering such fields as online safety, human rights, digital well-being, and emerging technologies should be available to put the digital transformation described in the EU Youth Programme Guides into practice. Finally, continued analysis of E+ and ESC work on this matter is needed. This could entail, for instance, a follow-up to this report and/or quantitative analysis of the data from 2021.

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## 4.7. Appendices

### Appendix 1: Methodology for the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps databases' analysis

#### DATA COLLECTION

A broad-based desk review of research papers and publications related to digital transformation, coupled with the kick-off meeting with diverse stakeholders, served to define the foci and quality criteria for analysis of the projects considered within this mapping endeavour's scope. The process of selecting and analysing the projects for inclusion followed three steps:

#### **STEP 1: Searching the space and performing initial selection by programmes and actions**

The first step of the mapping was preliminary search and selection of all projects falling within the scope of the mapping endeavour.

#### **STEP 2: Clustering by area**

After identification of the projects connected with digital transformation, the selected projects were clustered on the basis of the seven facets to the digital-transformation framework<sup>[1]</sup>:

- ▶ A multi-stakeholder approach and participation
- ▶ Digital skills and education
- ▶ (Digital) sustainability
- ▶ Emerging technologies and innovation
- ▶ Strategy and policy
- ▶ Access and infrastructure
- ▶ Ethics and digital rights<sup>[2]</sup>

#### **STEP 3: Pinpointing good/inspiring projects**

After clustering of projects in accordance with the typology above, specific good or inspiring projects involving digital transformation were selected in consideration of the following quality criteria<sup>[3]</sup>:

- ▶ The project's alignment with the notion of digital transformation

- ▶ The project's consideration of various, intersecting aspects of digital transformation (the abovementioned multi-stakeholder orientation and participation, digital skills and education, access and infrastructure, strategy and policy, emerging technologies and innovation, (digital) sustainability, and ethics and digital rights)

The following aspects of the projects were considered, via additional selection criteria:

- ▶ Implementation being handled in a sustainable way
- ▶ The projects' consideration for ethical integration of digital technologies
- ▶ Inclusiveness (participatory nature, addressing of accessibility and disability issues, and accounting for diversity)
- ▶ Innovation (refer to the [DT framework's description of innovation](#))
- ▶ Focus on emerging technologies in the EU Youth Programmes (e.g., artificial intelligence, virtual reality, robotics, and the Internet of Things)

## **COLLECTION OF DATA: ERASMUS+**

All told, 16.964 Erasmus+ projects were considered for selection.

- ▶ 13,842 Key Action 1 (learning mobility of individuals) Erasmus+ projects were considered, subdivided into the following action types: KA105 (youth mobility and mobility of youth workers) and KA125 (volunteering projects), with the latter being for 2018 alone
- ▶ 2,108 Key Action 2 (co-operation for innovation and exchange of good practices) Erasmus+ projects were considered, falling under the following action types: KA205 (strategic partnerships in the youth field), KA213 (capacity-building for youth in ACE countries and in Latin America and Asia), and KA214 (capacity-building for youth in EU neighbourhood and enlargement countries)
- ▶ 1,014 Key Action 3 (support for policy reform) Erasmus+ projects were considered, with subdivision into the following action types: KA347 (youth dialogue), KA366 (social inclusion through education, training, and youth work), and KA369 ('European youth together')

The information available and, hence, the presentation of analysis and findings below, refers to 'digitally oriented' or 'digital-transformation-related' projects. Digital transformation is present in some elements and dimensions of these projects; for example, in some, digital transformation is linked to the objectives, in others to the educational activities, and in other cases to the deliverables or dissemination strategy.

### Scope of the mapping – number of projects, by year and action

	2018 Total	Related to digital transformation	2019 Total	Related to digital transformation	2020 Total	Related to digital transformation
<b>KA1</b> KA105: Youth mobility	3,692	446	4,179	799	4,313	1,033
KA125: Volunteering projects	1,658	138				
<b>KA2</b> KA205: Strategic partnerships in the youth field	351	113	899	130	455	178
KA213: Capacitybuilding for youth in the ACE countries, Latin America, and Asia	77	8	66	10	79	21
KA214: Capacitybuilding for youth in neighbourhood and enlargement countries	93	10	55	5	33	8
<b>KA3</b> KA347: Youth dialogue	269	34	273	23	316	36
KA366: Social inclusion through education, training, and youth activities	33	5	35	8	51	13
KA369: European youth together	14	1	11	2	12	4

One can characterise the evolution of the digital-transformation-related projects by year thus (there is no distinguishing between actions and action types here).

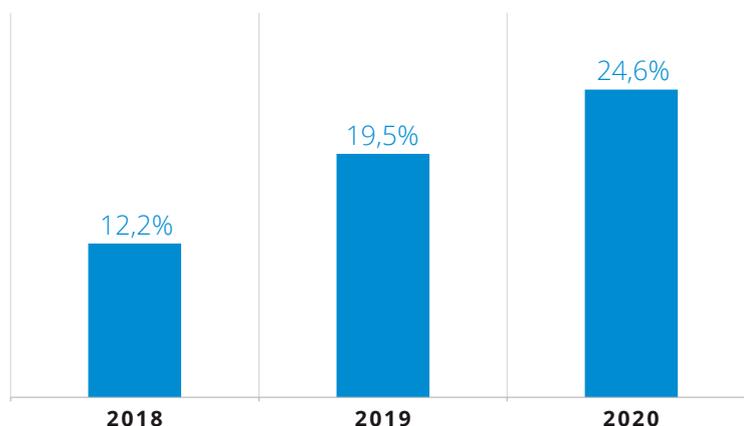


Fig. 1: *The percentage of non-formal Erasmus+ projects related to digital transformation*

As this diagram attests, the last three years witnessed constant growth of digital-transformation-related projects. Upon in-depth analysis of a representative sample of projects, it is reasonable to conclude that this growth is partly organic but also has been accelerated by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.

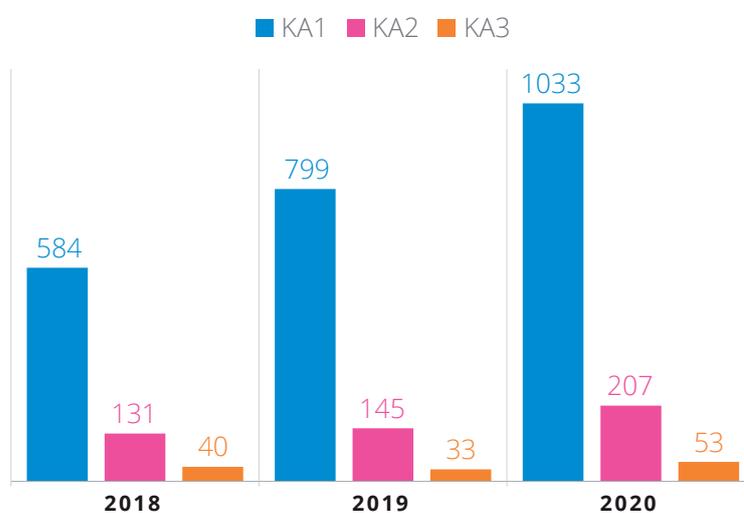


Fig. 2: *The total number of non-formal Erasmus+ projects related to digital transformation*

The development of the absolute number of projects related to digital transformation shows that braking for 2020 might have been provoked by the pandemic and in some cases by the end of the previous programme period. While this mapping is not intended to analyse how events related to COVID-19 have affected the implementation of projects, it is clear nonetheless that only a few projects were 'transferred' to a digital environment in 2020.

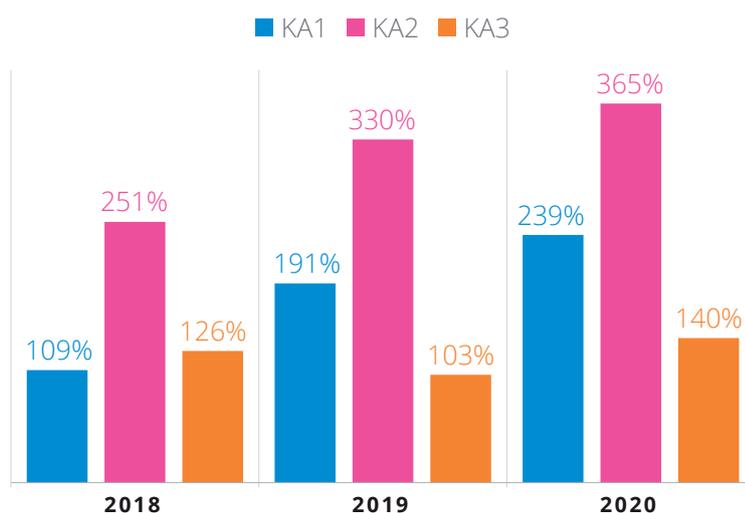


Fig. 3: Of all projects under each KA, the percentage related to digital transformation (by year and by action)

The evolution in the percentage of digital-transformation-related projects shows growth for the KA1 and KA2 projects and slightly more modest increase for KA3 ones.

In comparison with KA1 and KA3, the numbers for KA2 digital-transformation-related projects are considerably higher for all years examined. The qualitative analysis of a sample of these reveals that this is probably due to the long-term nature of strategic partnerships. The 'jump' in percentage for KA2 (between 2019 and 2020) is due not just to the overall growth tendency but also to the small number of strategic partnerships implemented in 2020 (the sample might not reflect great statistical significance).

### COLLECTION OF DATA: EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS

In total, 7,029 European Solidarity Corps projects were considered for selection:

- 4,558 volunteering-related projects
- 2,248 solidarity projects
- 191 'traineeships and jobs' projects
- 32 projects on volunteer teams in high-priority areas

Just as for the Erasmus+ projects, the description of results here refers to 'digitally oriented' or 'digitaltransformation-related' projects. In these projects, digital transformation is present in some elements and on certain dimensions. For example, digital transformation is linked to the objectives for some, to the educational activities for others, and in other cases to the deliverables or dissemination strategy.

### Scope of the mapping - number of projects, by year and action

	2018 Total	Related to digital transformation	2019 Total	Related to digital transformation	2020 Total	Related to digital transformation
Volunteering projects	663	64	1,894	183	2,001	228
Solidarity projects	189	18	780	52	1,279	144
'Traineeships and jobs' projects	25	4	53	6	113	21
Volunteer teams in high-priority areas	11	-	7	1	14	-

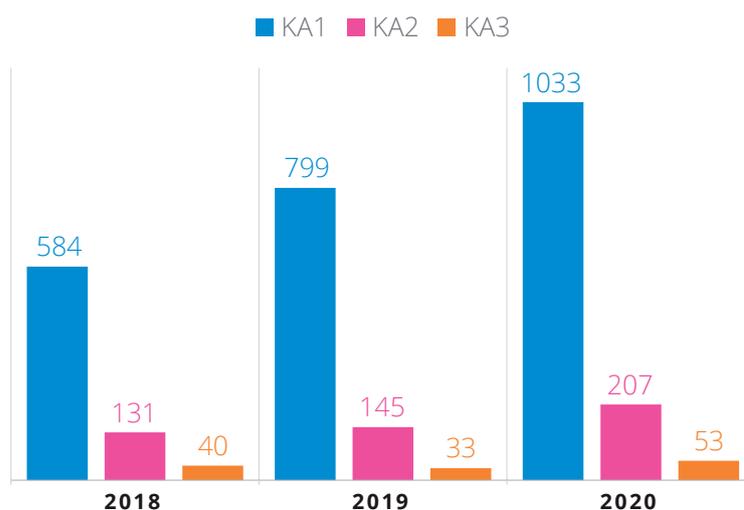


Fig. 4: The percentage of digital-transformation-related European Solidarity Corps projects

In the last three years, the proportion of digital-transformation-related European Solidarity Corps projects has remained rather constant, apart from some recent growth. Analysis of a representative sample of projects shows that this growth between 2019 and 2020 might have been caused by the pandemic.

Comparison between the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps Programme activities (see Figure 1 and Figure 4) shows that the percentages of projects linked to digital transformation is considerably higher for Erasmus+. The analysis of sample projects suggests that this is due to the Programmes' differing nature and the fact that a (collective) learning dimension is more prevalent in Erasmus+ projects and linked to the development of digital competencies and the use of digital tools.

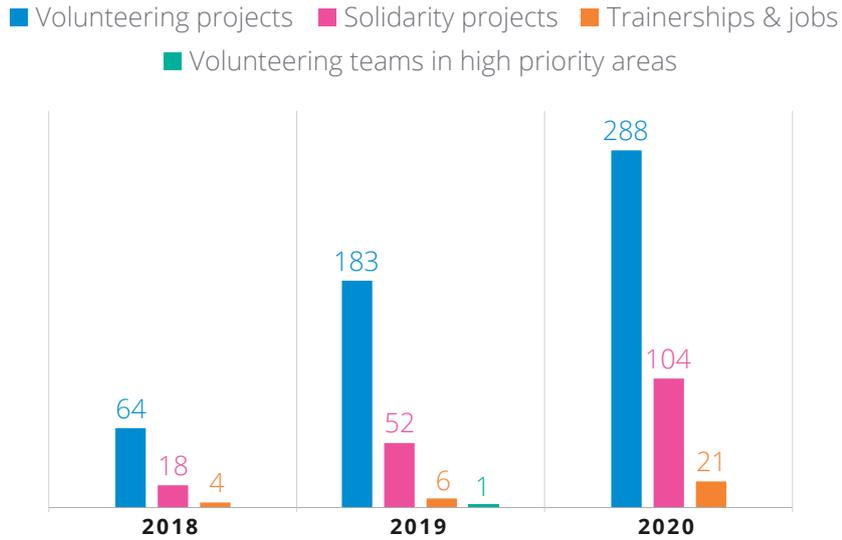


Fig. 5: The total number of digital-transformation-related European Solidarity Corps projects

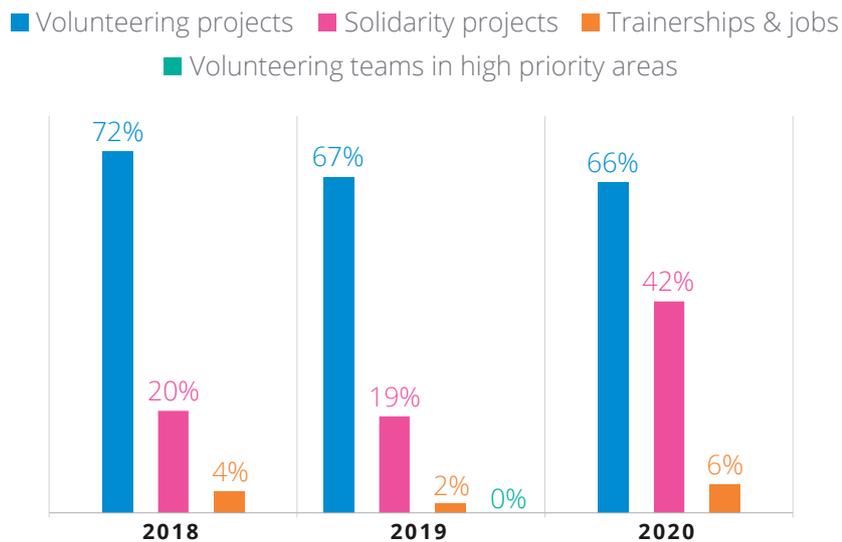


Fig. 6: The percentage of digital-transformation-related European Solidarity Corps projects

The total numbers of European Solidarity Corps projects for 2018, 2019 and 2020, at 889, 2,737, and 3,417, respectively, attest to rapid growth. The increase in the absolute number of digitaltransformationrelated projects (see Figure 5) tracks the growth in the total number of projects; therefore, in percentage terms, digital-transformation-related projects have remained rather constant (see Figure 4 and Figure 6). The growth in percentage between 2019 and 2020 is due to the rising number of digital-transformation-related solidarity projects and ‘traineeships and jobs’ actions (see Figure 6). Closer analysis of these projects shows that the ‘group dimension’ of these actions and the effects of the pandemic are behind the 2019–2020 growth.

## Clustering by area

After identifying and selecting those projects related to digital transformation (see the definition for 'digital transformation'<sup>[4]</sup>), the mapping proceeded to cluster them in accordance with the typology of areas identified in the definition of digital transformation:

- ▶ Multi-stakeholder orientation and participation
- ▶ Digital skills and education
- ▶ (Digital) sustainability
- ▶ Emerging technologies and innovation
- ▶ Strategy and policy
- ▶ Access and infrastructure
- ▶ Ethics and digital rights<sup>[5]</sup>

Firstly, certain limitations of this analysis have to be acknowledged. The analysis was challenging as not all areas of digital transformation are clearly defined yet, so considerable room remains for interpretation. The second difficulty lies in the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps projects being grouped in accordance with existing theme-linked areas, such as 'Youth Participation', 'EU Citizenship', and 'Migrants' Issues' but also to the education approaches and practices employed: 'open and distance learning', 'intercultural education', etc. Additionally, those areas differ between the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps projects. The third difficulty is that a project may be linked to more than one thematic area in the databases of the relevant Programme and to more than one category of digital transformation per the definition. Finally, the projects' descriptions often provide little information about the digital aspects of their activities or the impact of them. To address these issues, a combination of methods was applied for clustering the projects into the above-mentioned areas:

- ▶ Searching for keywords (e.g., 'robot' 'virtual reality' ... for the category related to emerging technologies and innovation and for 'robot' 'virtual reality' ..., 'digital competences' for the category covering digital skills and education)
- ▶ Checking for correlations between some pre-existing thematic clusters and the digital transformation areas – for example, it is reasonable to think that a project with a digital dimension associated with 'climate change' or 'energy and resources' might be related to digital sustainability
- ▶ Performing deep analysis of a representative sample of projects for purposes of correcting/adjusting the provisional results obtained through the keyword-based searches and from the correlation of thematic areas with categories of digital transformation

## Erasmus+ Programme projects

For the Erasmus+ projects related to digital transformation, the distribution by year and by area is characterised below.

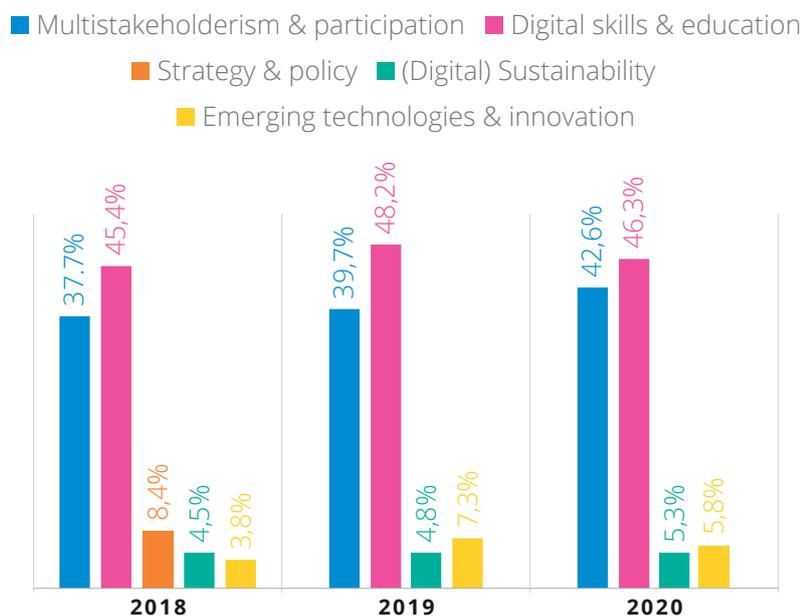


Fig. 7: The percentage of non-formal Erasmus+ projects related to digital transformation, by year and by area

The areas most prominently explored by these digital-transformation-related projects are the multistakeholder orientation and participation facet and the area of digital skills and education.

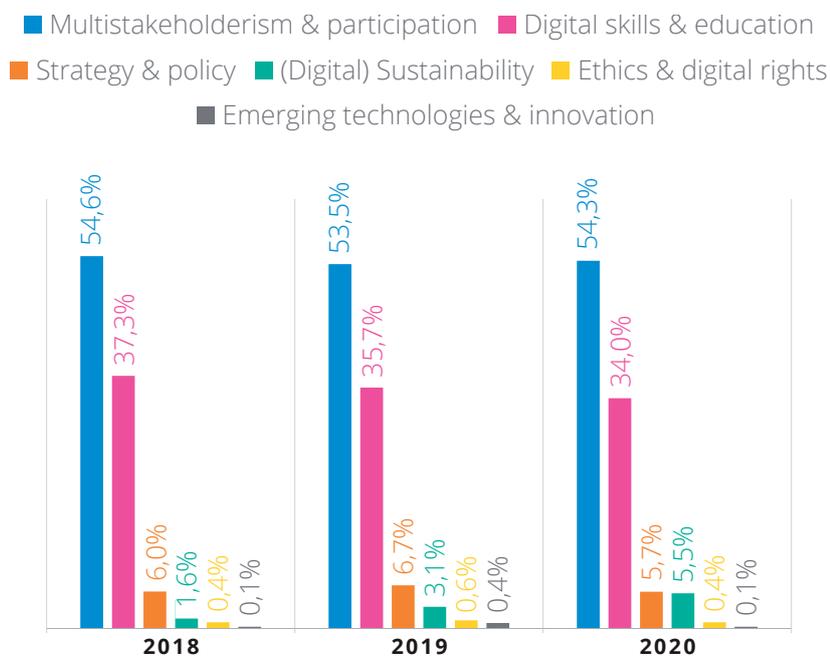


Fig. 8: The percentage of non-formal Erasmus+ projects in KA1 related to digital transformation – breakdown by year and area

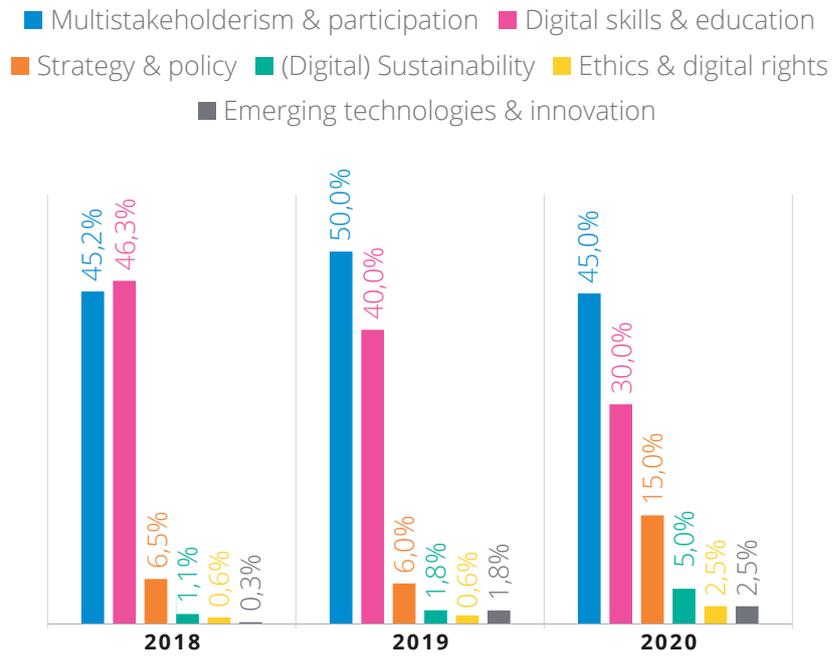


Fig. 9: For KA2, the percentage of non-formal Erasmus+ projects that were digital-transformation-related, by year and area

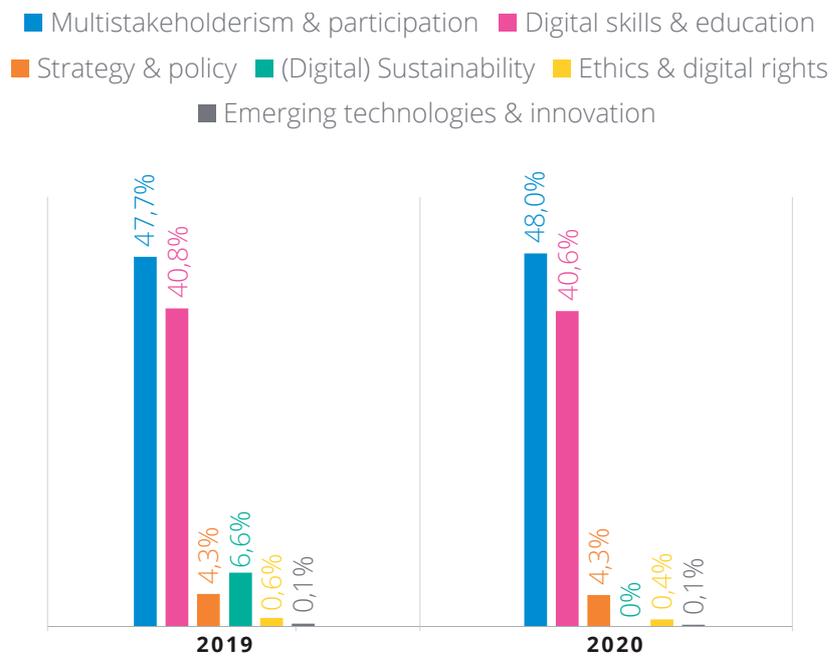


Fig. 10: The percentage of KA3's non-formal Erasmus+ projects related to digital transformation (distribution by year and area)

For each Key Action, the most prominent areas explored by the digital-transformation-related projects are those presented in the figures as ‘Multistakeholderism & participation’ and ‘Digital skills and education’. Our detailed analysis of a sample of projects shows that this area is in most cases not at the core of the projects but a consequence or follow-on from the projects or of a series of projects with a digital dimension. The significant growth of this area in KA2 (for strategic partnerships) between 2019 and 2020 might have to do with the COVID-19 situation and the need for planning long-term digital strategies.

### European Solidarity Corps projects

For the European Solidarity Corps projects related to digital transformation, the distribution by year and by area is presented below.

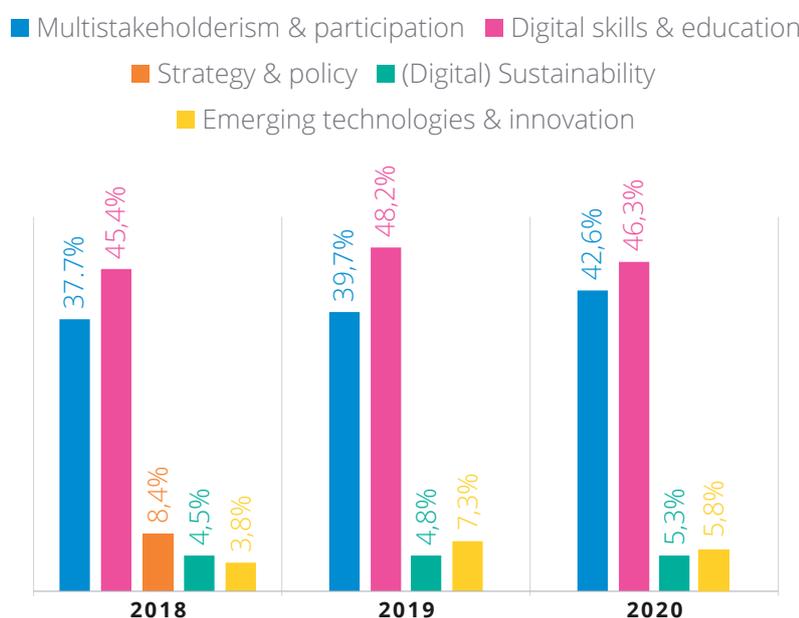


Fig. 11: The percentage of European Solidarity Corps projects related to digital transformation – breakdown by year and area

The reasons for the prevalence of the multi-stakeholder/participation element and the ‘digital skills and education’ one are the same as in the Erasmus+ projects: the importance of youth participation and the educational dimension of the Programme. However, a much higher number of European Solidarity Corps projects than Erasmus+ ones explored the latter area (see figures 7 and 11). The detailed analysis of a representative sample of projects indicates that this is due to the strong individual-level-learning dimension of the European Solidarity Corps projects and the corresponding link to development of digital skills.

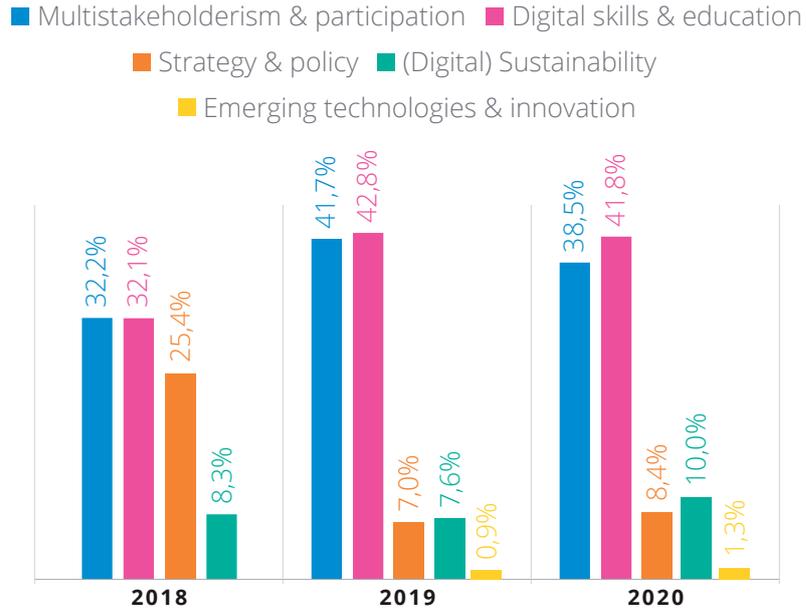


Fig. 12: The percentage of 'Volunteering' projects related to digital transformation – breakdown by year and area

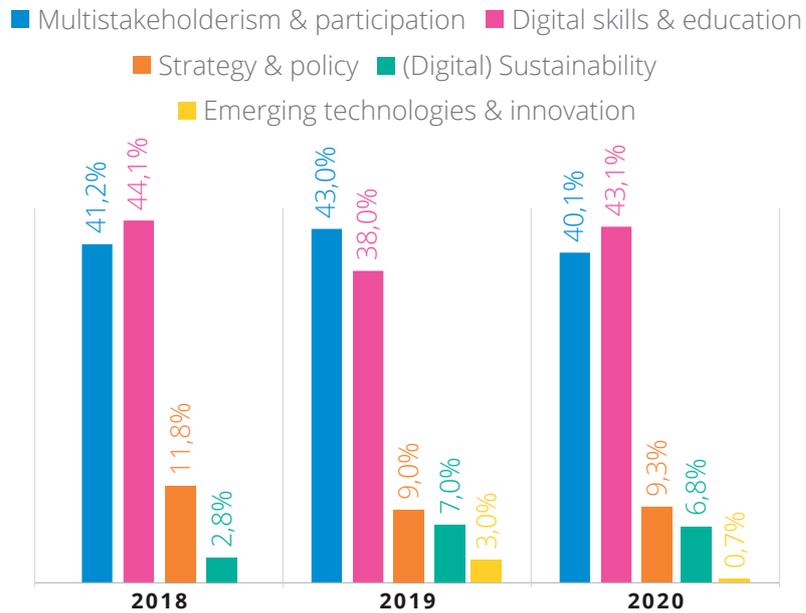


Fig. 13: The percentage of digital-transformation-related projects under 'Solidarity' – distribution by year and area

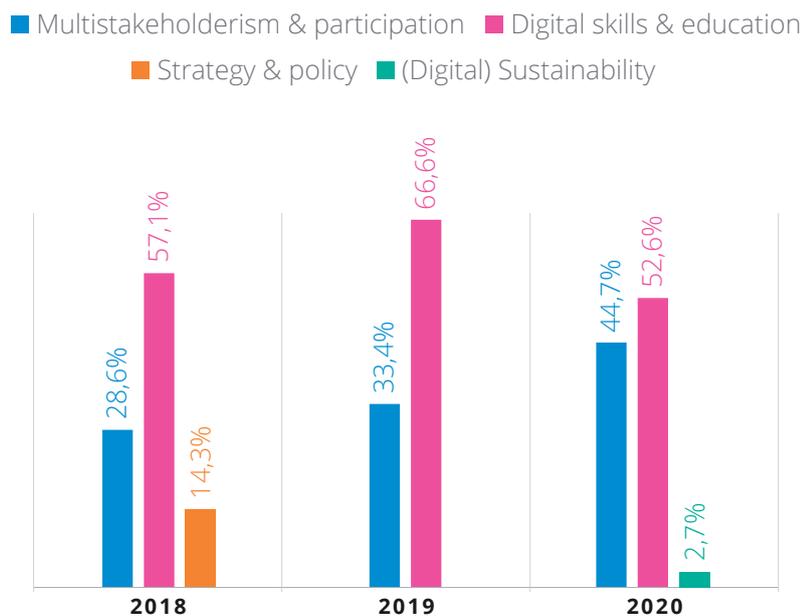


Fig. 14: *The percentage of 'traineeships and jobs' projects related to digital transformation, by year and area*

As for volunteerism work involving teams in high-priority areas, just one relevant project was implemented in 2019. Statistically, this is neither relevant nor representative.

- [1] Consult the SALTO Participation and Information Resource Centre's Web site on digital transformation: [participationpool.eu/resource-category/digital-transformation](https://participationpool.eu/resource-category/digital-transformation)
- [2] Several of these criteria are commensurate with those used for the SALTO Awards 2021 Criteria in Digital Transformation; see [saltoawards.eu](https://saltoawards.eu)
- [3] See [participationpool.eu/resource/digital-transformation-in-the-european-youth-field](https://participationpool.eu/resource/digital-transformation-in-the-european-youth-field)

## **Appendix 2:** Methodology for the SALTO Inclusion and Diversity Resource Centre's recommendations on blended and online learning

### **DATA COLLECTION**

Collection of data utilised a questionnaire circulated to the National Agencies to probe experiences from activities implemented in 2020 and 2021 by the beneficiaries or of activities organised by the NAs, Programme beneficiaries, or other stakeholders since the onset of the pandemic. To strengthen the process, SALTO I&D co-ordinated a group of 15 experts, representing multiple perspectives on digital youth work (practice, research, and policy), which produced a set of findings to support both the NAs and the beneficiaries in the running of higher-quality learning-mobility activities with a digital component.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

The subjects reviewed their direct experiences with the organisation of activities during the pandemic and identified digital activities that, in their opinion, both included methods/structures/tools that made a substantial difference and were innovative or required unexpected solutions. The insight reporting, which took into account the activity format (hybrid, blended, and online mobility), encompassed the following themes:

- ▶ Platforms and digital tools
- ▶ Recognition of international digital youth work
- ▶ Funding – criteria and flexibility
- ▶ Investment in capacity-building and learning processes connected with skills development
- ▶ Digital rights and online safety
- ▶ Inclusion measures
- ▶ Support for research into the impact of online activities / use of digital tools
- ▶ Creation of safe spaces
- ▶ The target group's involvement
- ▶ Tools, technology, and platforms
- ▶ Choosing the right format for reaching the project goals
- ▶ Development of competencies, learning, and exchange
- ▶ Addressing the full project cycle

## Appendix 3: Focus groups with the programme officers and the members of the SALTO PI Digital Transformation Advisory Board

### DATA COLLECTION

Focus groups comprising the Erasmus+ Key Action 1 and Key Action 2 officers, ESC officers, and all members of the [SALTO PI Digital Transformation Advisory Board](#) convened to coexplore *whether* and *how* digital transformation is contextualised and implemented across the EU Youth Programmes. The following questions guided the focus-group discussions:

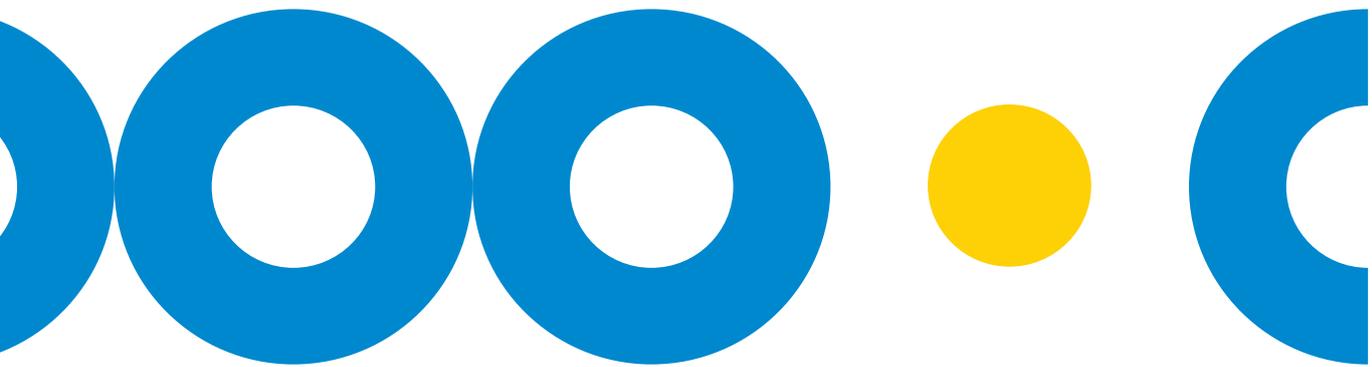
- ▶ What does digital transformation mean to you?
- ▶ What are some of the opportunities and challenges related to digital transformation in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps projects?
- ▶ What can be done to better support both digital transformation, as you understand it, and its implementation in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps projects?
- ▶ What type of support and guidance is needed to align digital transformation with each Key Action in the EU Youth Programmes?

Each focus-group session lasted one hour. Online focus groups' work was facilitated via videoconferencing software. The data generated by the focus groups were collected by means of an online tool for mind-mapping boards.

### DATA ANALYSIS

Focus groups' video recordings and mind-mapping boards were analysed by a researcher using a qualitative content-analysis approach.





You can find more digital transformation related resources in [participationpool.eu/resource](https://participationpool.eu/resource) with the filter Digital Transformation

