

---

## EU3D - BOOSTING DIGITAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCES OF THIRD SECTOR ORGANISATIONS AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

---

### Abstract

EU3Digital aims to gather and develop learning resources for Third Sector Organizations (TSO) and Social Enterprises (SE) to increase individuals' and organisations' digital competences. The EU3Digital outputs serve to support them in advancing their digital strategies, engaging with existing digital support and software, and building capacity. Digital development leverages many opportunities for TSOs and SEs, as they operate in ever-changing settings and their employees often find themselves wearing many 'hats' – digital technologies and skills offer increased efficiency, outreach and growth for social enterprises and are vital for their capacity to innovate. Summaries of Intellectual Outputs (IOs) IO1 and IO2 are presented and comments are made concerning the impact already made in the project goals. IO3 and IO4 are described and the plans to produce training and deliverables are discussed. The project outputs are Curricula and Training Materials and the Toolkit on Digital Skills. These intend to be practical materials that TSOs and SEs can use to improve their digitalisation activities. The Framework of Competences and the Policy Paper are theoretical outputs that contribute to the existing knowledge on this topic, aiming to support relevant stakeholders to be more aware of the digitalisation needs of TSOS and of SEs.

### Keywords:

Digital competences, Third Sector Organizations, Social Enterprises, Training, Digital Skills.

### The Project

Digital technologies are developing fast and offer tremendous opportunities to social enterprises across Europe. For this reason, EU3Digital will develop over the next years learning resources specific to the needs of European social enterprises to develop their digital competences, advance their digital strategies, help them to engage with existing digital support, and software, and thereby build capacity. Being a pilot project, EU3Digital will create a framework of competences for digital skills and provide an open-access knowledge center for current and future social enterprise professionals to navigate through e-learning materials and strategic tools to develop specific digital skills for a swift adaptation of digital technologies to ensure the success, impact, and sustainability of their organization (EUCLID Network).

The project EU3Digital (<https://eu3digital.com/>) is financed by the Erasmus+ program of the European Commission with reference 2020-1-PT01-KA204-078846. Consortium has five partners coordinated by Eslider (PT - <https://esliderportugal.pt/>) and with partners University of Porto (PT – [www.fe.up.pt](http://www.fe.up.pt)), Open University (UK - <https://www.open.ac.uk/>), DKolektiv (HR - <https://www.dkolektiv.hr/public/hr>), Euclid Network (NL - <https://euclidnetwork.eu/>) and ABD (ES - <https://abd.org/en/>). It is a two year financed project and it is expected to finish in mid 2022 (EU3Digital).

The first IO1 is a EU Framework of competences for digital skills. It intends to support citizens to become digitally competent. However, there is no equivalent framework that supports social enterprises during the transformation to improve the digital performance. The partner Open University, UK, is coordinating this package, published and made it available for download at project website a European Framework of Digital Competences for Social Enterprises. This articulates the first step in a long-term strategic view to develop digital skills and competences of social enterprises, to build a more modern, dynamic, committed and professional environment inside social enterprises, and to increase their capabilities to work at local and international level (EU3Digital).

The second IO is Curricula design and assessment of training. It is intended to articulate with IO1 and with DigComp 2.2 EU Framework of Competences for Digital Skills. It is coordinated by the partner University of Porto and it will

prepare curricula, innovative training materials and assessment specifically targeted to the digital skill-gaps and needs of social enterprises (EU3Digital).

IO3 will be a Policy Paper dealing with Digital Support for Social Impact: How digital competences can improve the action and impact of social enterprises? All above mentioned deliverables of EU3 Digital concur with in depth empirical and literature research built on academic and grey literature. These findings offer detailed insights into how digital competences can improve the action and impact of social enterprises. For this reason, Euclid Network will convert all those research findings into a policy advising paper aimed to inform the European Commission and other relevant stakeholders to inform further initiatives for developing digital skills and competences in Europe's social economy ecosystem (EU3Digital).

The IO4 is denominated Emergency Toolkit for Third Sector Social Organisations & Social Enterprises. It is published on the project website. It is intended to be a hands-on toolkit addressing the immediate needs of social enterprises, who are facing enormous challenges in the Covid-19 context, having to execute most of their operations remotely. Due to end of pandemic it became less an emergency toolkit and more about capitalising on digital gains, consolidating and moving on. In this Toolkit, the partners Euclid Network and Esliider, illustrated and provided guidelines through open access tools, resources and services, focusing on cybersecurity, project management to marketing and outreach, tailored to the context in which social enterprises operate (EU3Digital).

While the digital transformation is already many years underway and the EU increasingly prioritises digitalization, EU3Digital is arriving at the right moment, as digital skills became for the first time an absolute necessity amidst the Covid-19 pandemic accelerating the digital transformation by several years. This sudden acceleration illustrates the potential of digital technology in changing business as we know it, but at the same time it has also widened the gap between those who had the capacity to adapt fast and those who struggled to stay afloat during the pandemic or have limited resources.

Research of IO1 has shown that many organisations adopted digital in a pragmatic way during Covid19 era to address the immediate issue but have not had the time and space to think more strategically and review the digital resources needed. However, going digital leverages many opportunities for social enterprises, as they operate in agile settings and their employees often find themselves wearing many 'hats' within the organization – digital technologies and skills offer increased efficiency, outreach and growth for social enterprises and are vital for their innovation capacity (Euclid Network). Also according to IO1 research that a key point for SEs and TSOs is to adopt digital in a way that promotes their social mission or purpose.

## **Summary of IO1 - Framework of Digital Competences for Third Sector Organisations and Social Enterprises**

The goal of this work package was to develop a digital competence framework for the third sector and for the social enterprises. The work performed considered several subjects like aims and research questions, what is different about third sector organisations, social mission, voluntarism and stakeholders, networks, digital competence, digitalisation, inclusion, existing competence frameworks and DigComp 2.2. First, a review was done of academic and grey literature on digital competence. After that it was found that very little that addressed the specific context of the third sector.

An empirical research was conducted from existing practice and identification of digital competences for TSOs e SEs was carried out. Competences following the European Qualification Framework structure, were organized in knowledge, skills and attitudes. Taking into account the other IOs, example competences were rewritten to act as learning outcomes for the subsequent training (Van Laar).

The research that underpins this IO1 approach, and the development of the competence framework, has been undertaken by a team at the Open University's Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership (CVSL) in the UK, on behalf of the EU3Digital partnership, in four stages:

1. A review of the academic digital competence literature.

2. A broader review of literature and resources from different sources (including documents from policy-makers and practitioners) on developing digital competences, skills and practices – with a particular focus on digitalisation in organisations that are not-for-profit and focused on achieving social objectives.
3. A review of DigComp 2.2 and other existent competence frameworks in the light of the above literatures.
4. Empirical research consisting of 19 semi-structured interviews with experts from across Europe, as recommended by partners or suggested by the review in stage 2.

A glossary was created defining terms like digitalisation - the process through which organisations make use of digital technologies to support organisational functions and further organisational mission; digital culture - describes the relationship between humans and technology, informed by values and mission; a digital culture is developed and nurtured at individual, team, and system levels; leadership - denotes the visioning, strategizing, stakeholder engagement, and momentum needed to pursue digitalisation in the context of a TSO or SE.

The focus was to introduce a digital competence framework for TSOs that supplements DigComp 2.2 and other existing resources. The aim was to provide a framework that clearly adds to rather than replicates existing resources. Therefore, the EU3Digital competence framework can be used within third sector networks and as a basis for developing learning resources and opportunities. Research was done with a review of the academic digital competence literature, a broader review of literature and resources from different sources, a review of DigComp 2.2 and other extant competence frameworks in the light of the above literatures and empirical research consisting of several semi-structured interviews with experts from across Europe. Empirical research followed the review of the desk research.

Some key findings were that (EU3Digital):

- a) TSOs and SEs need both hard and soft digital skills. 'Hard' skills are technical, whereas 'soft' skills take familiar leadership and management competences (like managing change) and apply them in the digital domain.
- b) Maximising the potential of digital requires changes in both working practices and in attitudes and ways of thinking; that is to say the development of a digital culture.
- c) Involving all stakeholders in digitalisation informs effective decision-making and meets users' needs.
- d) Digitalisation may promote democracy and inclusion, but it can also exacerbate social divides.
- e) To promote effective digitalisation which avoids negative impacts, TSOs need to maintain the centrality of their social mission, whilst simultaneously adopting digital business practices that deliver efficiencies.
- f) Leadership that empowers, re-imagines, and develops shared vision has a central part to play in the process of digitalisation
- g) Digital competences distributed across an organisation, rather than concentrated in a single individual, support sustainable and effective digitalisation. This means it is not necessary for each individual in an organisation to develop the whole range of digital competences.
- h) Organisations which make effective use of their existing networks and create new connections fare better than those that digitalise in isolation.

Finally, the EU3Digital competence framework has five Dimensions and twenty-two competences. The five dimensions are Digital Tools, Operational Effectiveness, Organizational Culture and Leadership, Ethical Principles and Participation and Connection. These dimensions were subdivided into competences such as Gather, manage and analyse data to further social mission; Know when and how to outsource; Explore digital service delivery; Move forward on digital inclusion; Make use of existing networks to explore digital possibilities. This set of descriptors was used to develop IO2 looking at training of TSOs and SEs resources.

## **Summary of IO2 - Curricula and training materials**

This intellectual output was elaborated for designing, developing, and implementing the training curricula based on IO1. Document has three parts. Part A contains documents, articles or others in folders 1 to 5 available in a Google drive share mode. Each competence has one source that is related and provides support about meaning of competence, how it can be obtained, the possible usefulness and the description of indicators. Part A is useful for preparation of teaching by each trainer. Part B has training materials related with each of the five areas of competence. These training materials are from free online courses or from projects related with the areas of competence. Part C provides guidance on how to obtain proposals to assess the different types of competences with three suggestions for each of the competences. Parts A to C may be combined in different arrangements to obtain a strategy to provide teaching and training and to conduct proper assessment.

Part A has contents with related documents to provide for each of the twenty-two competences existing online materials that could be used to train elements of TSOs and of SEs. For instance, for the competence Identify digital needs and functions of the organization the document suggested was “Developing Organizational Approaches to Digital Capability” (JISC). It is a guide that aims at supporting organizations to develop their culture, infrastructure and practices to help grow organisational digital capability and enable individual digital capabilities to flourish.

In Part B other resources were listed like projects like DISK (Digital Immigrants Survival Kit - <https://www.disk-project.eu/web/>) and DSA (Digital Skills Accelerator - <https://www.digitalskillsaccelerator.eu/learning-portal/online-self-assessment-tool/>). Other digital resources were suggested like open online courses “Organisational Culture and Leadership” from Coursera - <https://www.coursera.org/specializations/organizational-leadership>.

Part C addressed the assessment of competences by learners in terms of evaluating the effectiveness of training. The proposed approach used the TALOE (Time to Assessment Learning Outcomes in E-learning) webtool to facilitate the choice of assessment methods according to the type of competences presented in IO1. Webtool is freely available at <https://taloe.up.pt>. Tutorials and examples are presented that may help any user.

An example of assessment is for example the competence “2.4. - Evaluate and monitor efficiency and sustainability of digital infrastructure”. Accessing the tool at <https://taloetool.up.pt/> and taking the text of the competence the verbs (from revised Bloom Taxonomy) that better suit are “Evaluate” (Checking) and “Analyse” (Organizing). Using the webtool the advice for this competence has three suggestions: 1. Practical work – structured enquiry, 2. Reflective practice – abstract conceptualization and 3. Essay – Problem. The trainer responsible for the assessment may choose one of the three according to own decision and to suitability in the process. This assessment procedure may be repeated for all competences and a group of three assessment techniques can be proposed for each competence (TALOE).

## **IO3, IO4 and future plans**

IO3 consists of Policy Paper addressing Digital Support for Social Impact and how digital competences can improve the action and impact of TSOs and SEs. The aforementioned deliverables of EU3 Digital concur with in-depth empirical and literature research conducted for the EU3 Digital project. Findings offer detailed insights into how digital competences can improve the action and impact of social enterprises. This policy deliverable converts the research findings into a policy advice paper aimed at informing the European Commission and other relevant stakeholders in their initiatives for developing digital skills and competences in Europe’s social economy ecosystem (EU3Digital).

The deliverable IO4 is a Toolkit on Digital Skills to support SEs and TSOs with going digital, this Toolkit provides users with a hands-on guide to open access tools, resources, and services that can enable them to adapt dynamically and swiftly to societal changes. Whether one wants to learn more about the processes one needs to have in place to meaningfully implement digital tools within the organisation, or if one would like to learn which free or low-cost tools can support in executing the organisation’s mission and activities, this toolkit intends to answer these requests. It addresses Data Collection, Cybersecurity, Teamwork, Finances, Design, Outreach, Community management, Conferences/events and Next Steps.

The other activities of the project are to test with 'fellows' – TSOs and SEs leaders and members from the project countries (UK, NL, Portugal, Spain, Croatia). The fellows are involved at key moments in the project to consult the project partners in the development of the IOs. The engagement of fellows guarantees that project outputs are relevant, adequate and responsive to the needs of TSOs and SEs in some European countries.

A session was held in June 2022 in Porto when a workshop was held for two days with stakeholders. These two days comprised training provided by the Croatian partner in coordination with the other members of the consortium. The goal was to train participants with two competences of the IO1 following guidance from IO2. The third day of the workshop was dedicated to the appreciation of the workshop outputs and producing recommendations for future training events. Next training session is planned for Barcelona, Spain in October of 2022.

## Acknowledgements

*The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.*



**Funded by  
the European Union**

## References

EU3Digital (2021). Retrieved from <https://eu3digital.com/>.

Euclid Network (2021). Retrieved from <https://euclidnetwork.eu/>.

JISC (2017). Retrieved from <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/developing-organisational-approaches-to-digital-capability>.

TALOE (2015). Time to Assess Learning Outcomes in Elearning. Retrieved from <https://taloe.up.pt>.

Van Laar, E. Van Deursen, A, Van Dijk, J and de Haan, J. (2020). Determinants of 21st-Century Skills and 21st-Century Digital Skills for Workers: A Systematic Literature Review. SAGE Open. Jan-March 2020, 1-14.