

## D.1.2.4 - Recommendations for Improvement of Regional Policy Frameworks

### GREECE - Based on the Regional State of the Art Report

#### Introduction

This document presents recommendations for improving the policy instrument(s) and the wider support framework for SME digitalisation in Greece, focusing on the Region of Western Greece and the persistent gap between the urban hub around Patras and more rural/semi-urban areas (notably parts of Aetolia-Acarnania and Ilia). The recommendations are based on the State of the Art Report content included in the CTI report template and supporting analysis, which describes the regional context, relevant policy instruments (ROP Western Greece 2021–2027, NSRF instruments, and Greece 2.0/RRF measures), and key implementation challenges.

Western Greece remains a less developed region (GDP per capita around 54% of EU average in 2021, PPS), with a traditional SME base and significant intra-regional disparities in skills, connectivity, and access to innovation ecosystems. Digital adoption is uneven: SMEs with higher capacity are clustered in Patras, while many micro and traditional-sector SMEs outside urban centres lag in readiness, awareness, and ability to navigate support schemes.

The recommendations outlined below aim to strengthen the coherence, inclusiveness, and effectiveness of the regional digitalisation support system. They shall be discussed and validated by the Regional Stakeholder Group for the Digitrans project in the western Greece region, which will assess their potential to be translated into concrete action plans and pilot activities to be tested within Working Package (WP) 2 of the project.



## Identified Gaps Between Urban and Rural Areas

The State of the Art analysis identifies several interrelated gaps:

- **Digital divide within the region:** Patras benefits from universities, ICT networks and intermediaries, while rural/peripheral areas face structural barriers to adoption.
- **Skills and talent gap:** Many SMEs lack digitally skilled staff; brain drain and low participation in lifelong learning reduce the available talent pool, especially outside urban centres.
- **Low awareness + weak advisory support:** No integrated regional dashboard for SME digital maturity or outcome-based impact tracking; limited sector/territory disaggregation.
- **Instrument accessibility gap:** Micro and family businesses struggle with complex applications, eligibility rules, and short timelines; programmes tend to attract already “ready” firms.
- **Fragmentation across levels and schemes:** Limited integration between regional, national, and EU initiatives reduces long-term impact and “end-to-end” SME journeys.
- **Data/monitoring gap:** No integrated regional dashboard for SME digital maturity or outcome-based impact tracking; limited sector/territory disaggregation.

## Recommendations for Improvement

### Recommendation 1: Establish a Unified Entry Point for SME Digitalisation Support

Create a unified regional entry point that guides SMEs through a coherent journey: basic diagnostic → advisory → skills → funding → implementation follow-up. This should map and connect the main pathways (ROP Western Greece actions under RSO1.2, NSRF programmes, Greece 2.0 vouchers/grants, and hubs).

Expected impact:

- Reduces confusion and increases uptake among micro/rural SMEs
- Improves targeting (right tool for right maturity level)
- Creates clearer “pipeline” from first adoption to advanced transformation

Relevance for WP2:

WP2 can pilot a regional digital concierge model, testing intake, triage, and referral mechanisms with SMEs outside Patras and validating a replicable “SME journey” framework.

### Recommendation 2: Expand Pre-Application Guidance and “Digital Readiness” Support

Introduce structured pre-application support for low-maturity SMEs: short readiness checks, solution selection guidance, cost estimation support, and simple templates—especially for SMEs with no prior experience in EU-funded schemes.

Expected impact:

- Increases participation of micro and first-time applicants
- Improves quality of funded projects (fewer misaligned tool purchases)
- Reduces administrative burden and drop-off rates

Relevance for WP2:

WP2 can pilot readiness checks and advisory light-packages as a prerequisite to funding or voucher schemes, generating evidence on how early guidance affects uptake and outcomes.

### **Recommendation 3: Decentralise Delivery Through Local “Digital Clinics”**

Scale decentralised delivery formats such as mobile digital clinics, rotating advisory days, and municipality- or chamber-based desks to reach SMEs outside Patras. Services should include diagnostics, roadmap development, and provider matching.

Expected impact:

- Improves territorial access to hands-on support
- Engages traditional sectors with strong rural presence
- Builds trust through local, face-to-face delivery

Relevance for WP2:

WP2 can pilot digital clinics in selected rural municipalities, testing decentralised delivery models and identifying optimal formats for outreach and follow-up.

### **Recommendation 4: Introduce a Micro-Enterprise Track (Simplified + Coached)**

Develop a dedicated micro-enterprise track combining simplified vouchers or micro-grants with coaching and light aftercare (setup, onboarding, basic cybersecurity). This addresses the structural exclusion of micro and family businesses.

Expected impact:

- Lowers entry barriers for micro and rural SMEs
- Improves effective implementation of digital tools
- Creates stepping-stones toward more advanced support

Relevance for WP2:

WP2 can pilot a voucher + coaching model for micro SMEs, generating practical lessons on simplification, coaching intensity, and sustainability of adoption.

### **Recommendation 5: Develop Sector-Specific Digitalisation Pathways**

Operationalise sector-specific pathways aligned with RIS3 priorities and employment-heavy sectors (e.g. agri-food, tourism, logistics, energy-related value chains). Each pathway should include concrete use cases, templates, and peer learning.

Expected impact:

- Makes digitalisation relevant to traditional sectors
- Accelerates adoption in rural economies
- Strengthens local value chains

Relevance for WP2:

WP2 can pilot sector-based cohorts (toolkits + mentoring) and test how sector framing improves engagement and implementation compared to generic schemes.

## **Recommendation 6: Strengthen Technology Diffusion via Regional Hubs and Intermediaries**

Better integrate regional intermediaries (science parks, incubators, chambers, EDIHs) into SME digitalisation pathways, ensuring they provide diagnostics, mentoring, and follow-up—not only access to funding. Examples include DigiWest and easyHPC.

Expected impact:

- Improves hands-on support capacity
- Enhances diffusion of advanced technologies
- Strengthens local innovation ecosystems

Relevance for WP2:

WP2 can test hub-led delivery models, clarifying roles between funding authorities and intermediaries and documenting effective diffusion practices.

## **Recommendation 7: Link Skills Development Directly to SME Implementation**

Shift from standalone training to “learn while implementing” formats: short, modular, work-based learning linked to real SME projects and delivered through blended (online + local) models.

Expected impact:

- Reduces tool abandonment
- Improves productivity outcomes
- Builds local absorptive capacity

Relevance for WP2:

WP2 can attach micro-learning and mentoring modules to each pilot cohort and assess their impact on adoption quality and sustainability.

## **Recommendation 8: Build a Regional Monitoring System and Digital Maturity Baseline**

Establish a regional SME digitalisation monitoring framework, including baseline digital maturity assessments, outcome KPIs, and follow-up tracking by sector and territory.

Expected impact:

- Enables evidence-based policy refinement
- Makes intra-regional gaps visible
- Supports scaling of effective interventions

Relevance for WP2:

WP2 can pilot before/after maturity assessments and follow-up surveys, creating a replicable monitoring template for regional digitalisation policies.

# Role of the Regional Stakeholder Group



The Regional Stakeholder Group (RSG) should validate, prioritise, and co-design these recommendations into WP2 pilots and future action plans, ensuring they effectively address territorial disparities within Western Greece.

The Regional Stakeholder Group will play a key role in:

- **Validating the relevance and feasibility of the proposed recommendations**

The RSG will be responsible for **validating and refining the proposed recommendations**, assessing their relevance in relation to existing regional strategies, policy instruments, and institutional capacities. Through its multi-actor composition—bringing together public authorities, SME representatives, business support organisations, innovation hubs, and other relevant stakeholders—the RSG will ensure that diverse territorial perspectives, including those of rural and peripheral areas, are adequately reflected.

- **Prioritising actions with the highest potential for pilot testing**

The RSG will contribute to the **prioritisation of recommendations** by identifying those with the highest added value, feasibility, and transferability. This prioritisation process will take into account regional development needs, existing gaps between urban and rural areas, and synergies with ongoing or planned initiatives, in order to avoid duplication and maximise impact.

- **Supporting the co-design of WP2 action plans adapted to regional and territorial needs**

A key function of the RSG will be to **support the co-design of action plans and pilot activities** to be implemented under WP2. This includes providing input on the scope, target groups, governance arrangements, and expected outcomes of the proposed pilots, as well as advising on suitable territorial testbeds (e.g. rural areas, specific sectors, or SME profiles). The RSG will also help identify potential risks and enabling factors for implementation.

Finally, the RSG will also contribute to **monitoring and learning**, by reviewing early results from pilot actions, providing feedback on implementation challenges, and supporting the identification of lessons learned. This involvement will help ensure that the pilot actions generate evidence that can inform future policy adjustments and support the scaling up of successful approaches beyond the project lifetime.