D.1.2.4 - Recommendations for Improvement of Regional Policy Frameworks

ITALY, Veneto Region - Based on the Regional State of the Art Report

Introduction

This document presents a set of recommendations for improving regional support systems for SME digitalisation in the Veneto Region, with a particular focus on identifying and addressing gaps between more developed urban areas and lagging rural and peripheral territories. The recommendations are derived from the findings of the Regional State of the Art Report, which analysed the existing policy framework, support instruments, stakeholder ecosystem, and digital maturity of SMEs across the region.

While Veneto benefits from a strong industrial base, advanced innovation hubs, and a wide range of digitalisation measures aligned with national and EU strategies, the analysis highlights persistent territorial and structural disparities. Urban and industrialised areas benefit from better access to digital infrastructure, innovation services, skills, and advisory support, whereas rural areas and micro-enterprises often face barriers related to accessibility, capacity, skills, and administrative complexity.

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 Veneto 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 regional State of the Art analysis points to several interrelated gaps:

- **Access gap:** Advanced digitalisation services (e.g. competence centres, testing facilities, specialised consultancy) are concentrated in urban hubs, making them less accessible to SMEs located in rural or peripheral areas.

- **Capacity gap:** Rural SMEs and micro-enterprises often lack internal resources, time, and skills to apply for and implement digitalisation measures.
- **Skills gap:** Lower levels of basic and advanced digital skills persist, particularly outside major industrial clusters.
- **Sectoral gap:** Certain sectors with strong rural presence—such as agri-food micro-producers, crafts, and construction—show slower digital adoption.
- **Implementation gap:** Digitalisation support often focuses on technology acquisition, with limited follow-up to ensure effective and lasting adoption.

Recommendations for Improvement

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

To reduce fragmentation and improve accessibility, a unified regional entry point ("no wrong door" approach) should be established. This could take the form of a central digital portal combined with a helpdesk function that guides SMEs towards the most appropriate instruments, such as vouchers, ERDF-funded schemes, national tax incentives, and services offered by EDIHs and DIHs.

Expected impact:

- Simplifies navigation of complex support ecosystems
- Particularly benefits rural SMEs with limited institutional knowledge
- Increases uptake of existing measures

Relevance for WP2:

This recommendation can be pilot tested through a digital concierge or advisory intake service targeting rural or peripheral areas.

Recommendation 2: Decentralise and Mobilise Digitalisation Support Services

To address territorial imbalances, regional digitalisation services should be delivered through mobile or decentralised formats. This includes extending the reach of existing innovation hubs via travelling advisory units, temporary local desks, or partnerships with chambers of commerce and municipalities.

Expected impact:

- Improves physical and practical access to expertise
- Strengthens local innovation ecosystems
- Encourages participation of SMEs outside urban centres

Relevance for WP2:

Pilot actions could include mobile "digital clinics" offering on-site digital maturity assessments and tailored roadmaps.

Recommendation 3: Introduce Tailored Support Packages for Micro-Enterprises

Micro-enterprises, which are prevalent in rural areas, require simplified and integrated support. Small-scale grants should be combined with mandatory coaching and implementation support to ensure effective use of digital tools.

Expected impact:

- Reduces risk of underutilised investments
- Addresses capacity and skills constraints
- Encourages first-step digital adoption

Relevance for WP2:

A bundled "micro-grant + coaching" pilot could be tested with selected rural micro-enterprises.

Recommendation 4: Develop Sector-Specific Digitalisation Pathways

The region should strengthen sector-focused approaches, especially for sectors lagging in digital adoption and with strong rural relevance (e.g. agri-food, construction, crafts). These pathways should include practical use cases, ready-to-use toolkits, and peer learning opportunities.

Expected impact:

- Increases relevance and applicability of digital solutions
- Builds trust through sector-specific examples
- Accelerates adoption in traditionally lagging sectors

Relevance for WP2:

Sector-based pilot actions could be implemented to test tailored digital solutions and learning formats.

Recommendation 5: Promote Advanced Digital Technologies Through Pilots

While basic digitalisation is progressing, the uptake of advanced technologies such as data analytics, AI, and IoT remains limited, especially outside urban hubs. Small-scale, low-risk pilot projects should be supported to demonstrate concrete benefits linked to SME needs.

Expected impact:

- Prevents widening technological gaps
- Encourages experimentation and learning
- Builds confidence in advanced solutions

Relevance for WP2:
Pilot actions could focus on applied use cases (e.g. predictive maintenance, quality control, energy management).

Recommendation 6: Strengthen Skills Development Linked to Implementation

Training initiatives should be closely linked to real business projects and delivered in flexible, time-efficient formats. Digital skills development should be integrated into funding schemes and supported by

local digital coaches or mentors.

Expected impact:

- Improves effective use of technologies
- Addresses skills shortages in rural areas
- Enhances sustainability of digital investments

Relevance for WP2:

Short modular training combined with mentoring could be tested alongside pilot investments.

Recommendation 7: Simplify Administrative Procedures and Provide Assisted Access

Administrative complexity remains a barrier, particularly for small and rural SMEs. Simplified application and reporting procedures, combined with assisted access support, should be expanded.

Expected impact:

- Increases participation of smaller firms
- Reduces administrative burden
- Improves inclusiveness of support schemes

Relevance for WP2:

A simplified application and reporting model could be piloted with selected beneficiaries.

Recommendation 8: Introduce Structured Follow-Up and Impact Monitoring

To ensure long-term impact, regional schemes should include light but structured follow-up after project completion. This would help identify implementation challenges, provide corrective support, and collect outcome data.

Expected impact:

- Improves sustainability of digitalisation efforts
- Generates evidence for policy refinement
- Supports continuous improvement of measures

Relevance for WP2:

Pilot actions could include post-implementation and comparative digital maturity assessments.

Role of the Regional Stakeholder Group

The Regional Stakeholder Group (RSG) plays a central role in ensuring that the recommendations identified through the Regional State of the Art analysis are grounded in regional realities and have a strong potential for effective implementation. Acting as a bridge between policy, practice, and project activities, the RSG will support the transition from analytical findings to concrete, pilotable actions.

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.

D.1.2.4 - Recommendations for Improvement of Regional Policy Frameworks, Italy, Veneto Region
FEBRUARY 2026

Interreg
IPA ADRION
Co-funded by
the European Union
DIGITRANS