



# A Digital Competence Framework for the Third Sector and Social Enterprises



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**EU3Digital**



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## Content

**Authors:** Carol Jacklin-Jarvis  
Tot Foster  
James Rees  
Kay Logan

**Design:** Ana Emília Martins

**Contributors:**

ESLIDER Portugal  
The Open University  
The Bienestar y Desarrollo Association  
The University of Porto  
Dkolektiv  
Euclid Network

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Ana Gonçalves Pereira,  
Cat Ainsworth,  
Diederick Van Der Wijk,  
Francesca Di Concetto,  
Marta Hauser,  
Miguel Neiva,  
Victor Capdevila,  
Wouter Tebbens

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## Glossary

**Competence:**

knowledge, skills, and attitudes practiced in the digital domain.

**DigComp:**

Digital Competence Framework for European Citizens.

**Digitalisation:**

the process through which organisations use digital technologies to support organisational functions and further organisational mission.

**Digital Culture:**

the relationship between humans and technology, informed by values and mission. A digital culture is developed and nurtured at individual, team, and system levels.

**Digital Maturity:**

the development of digital capacity and the adoption of tools and models so that an organisation is ready to respond to the continually evolving digital environment.

**Inclusion:**

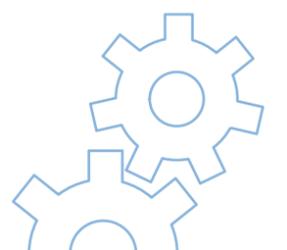
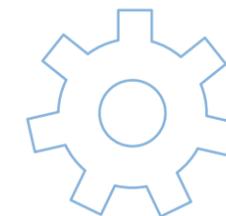
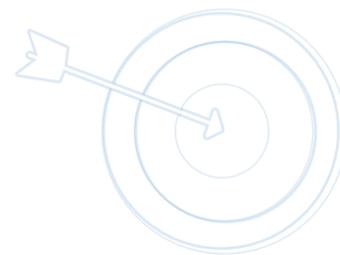
proactive engagement of stakeholders with different experiences, backgrounds and characteristics.

**Leadership:**

denotes the visioning, strategising, stakeholder engagement, and momentum needed to pursue digitalisation in the context of a TSO. Leadership is practiced by people with formal positions and by those who have no formal position (i.e. from the top down and bottom up). EU3 Digital builds on insights from the earlier project EU3Leader ([EU3Leader - Euclid Network](#))

**Stakeholders:**

any person or group of people involved in an organisation and with an interest in its success. Key stakeholders in a third sector organization include the organisation's users, employees, staff and board members.



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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Aims and Research Questions

This report is the product of an eighteen-month period of research to provide an intellectual basis for the work of EU3 Digital. It presents a digital competence framework that reflects the needs of the third sector as it faces a complex and turbulent environment. The report draws on reviews of academic, policy and practice literatures and on fieldwork undertaken by a team at the Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership at the UK's Open University to address the question:

**What digital competences are particularly important for Europe's third sector and social enterprise organisations?**

It also begins to address a second question to inform the learning resources to be developed in the further stages of EU3 Digital:

**How can these digital competences be nurtured and developed in Europe's third sector and social enterprise organisations?**

## 1.2. Report outline

**Section 1** provides a brief account of the research approach and methods, followed by a summary of key findings from the literature review and from empirical research.

**Section 2** examines the distinctive characteristics, needs, and context of third sector organisations (TSOs), in order to understand the digital challenges and opportunities that they face.

**Section 3** summarises the team's review of the literature to explore the idea of digital competence, and related ideas of digital culture and digital maturity, and their application in the third sector. This section highlights the importance of context and purpose, in the form of social mission, for understanding which competences are most important for TSOs. It also highlights the potential relationship between digitalisation, inclusion and democracy and the significance of this relationship for TSOs, given their focus on social mission. The section ends with a brief introduction to existing digital competence frameworks, including the DigComp<sup>1</sup> framework

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for citizens which has provided a base from which the EU3 Digital framework has been developed.

**Section 4** offers insights from a series of interviews with informants from across Europe. It identifies common themes across the interviews, highlighting challenges faced by TSOs seeking to develop digitally, whilst recognizing that there are commonalities but also differences across different contexts within Europe. The interviews complement and build on insights from the literature to illuminate the realities of digitalisation in TSOs.

**Section 5** returns to a focus on digital competences. It introduces a digital competence framework for TSOs that supplements DigComp and other existing resources, including ICT4NGO<sup>2</sup>. Our aim here is to provide a framework that clearly adds to rather than replicates existing resources.

**Section 6** concludes the report. It focuses on how the EU3D competence framework might be used within third sector and social enterprise networks and as a basis for developing learning resources and opportunities.

## 1.2. Research approach

The research that underpins this report, and the development of the competence framework, has been undertaken by a team at the Open University's Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership (CVSL)<sup>3</sup> in the UK, on behalf of the EU3 Digital 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 – with a particular focus on digitalisation in organisations that are not-for-profit and focused on achieving social objectives.
3. A review of DigComp and other extant 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.

We acknowledge that there are necessarily different perspectives offered in the research – for example those drawn from practice and academic

## 1.1. Introduction

literature; from different geographies, networks and organisational contexts; and between written reports and opinions expressed in interviews.

Furthermore, in a very diverse third sector, it is impossible to address the specific needs of each part of that sector. As academic partner, we have sifted and made sense of large volumes of information and data. However, in order to draw relevant and applicable conclusions, we acknowledge that we have made generalisations that sometimes do not reflect all perspectives represented in the research. Furthermore, the competence framework itself is a model that requires flexibility and adaptation to meet the needs of specific contexts.

### 1.2. Key findings

- In the post-COVID context there is a need to rationalise digital tools and practices adopted in crisis and to strategise for the longer-term;
- TSOs need both hard and soft digital skills. 'Hard' skills are technical, whereas 'soft' skills take familiar leadership and management competences (e.g. managing change) and apply them in the digital domain;
- 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;**

- **Involving all stakeholders in digitalisation informs effective decision-making and meets users' needs;**
- **Digitalisation may promote democracy and inclusion, but it can also exacerbate social divides;**
- **To avoid the potential negative impacts of digitalisation, third sector and social enterprise organisations need to maintain the centrality of their social mission, whilst simultaneously adopting digital business practices that deliver efficiencies;**
- **Leadership that empowers, re-imagines, and develops shared vision has a central part to play in the process of digitalisation;**
- **Digital competences that are 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;**
- **Organisations which make effective use of their existing networks and create new connections fare better than those that digitalise in isolation.**

Bearing in mind these findings, this report takes a holistic approach to the development of a competence framework; it considers soft and hard competences, and adopts an organisational level perspective (where competences are understood to be embodied within an organisation as a whole), rather than focusing on the competences of individuals.

## 2. What's different about third sector organisations?

### 2.1. Distinctiveness and variety

European TSOs are inherently diverse in terms of their organisational form, size and structure and the term 'third sector' operates as a strategic device, rather than a unifying definition (Alcock, 2010; see also Salamon and Sokolowski, 2018a). Furthermore, TSOs operate in local, national and international contexts with different legal frameworks, economies, cultures and histories. Following Salamon and Sokolowski (2018a; 2018b), we recognise that the term 'third sector organisation' (TSO) includes the following:

- i. Non-profit organisations**
- ii. Mutuels and cooperatives**
- iii Social enterprises**
- iv. Actions undertaken without pay, including volunteering and social movements.**

All of these represent 'organisational' activity, albeit with different levels and types of formal and informal structures and processes (see also Rochester, 2013). Digital activities within these organisations range from basic use of computing for administrative functions (see Charity Digital Skills Report<sup>4</sup>) to

participation in ground-breaking international programmes using digital advances such as machine learning and big data (Gagliardi *et al.*, 2020). Overall though, there is evidence that TSOs (used here as a shorthand for all of the above organisational forms) have difficulty keeping up with digital opportunities, and that small organisations are at a particular disadvantage (Dean 2020a; Saxton and Guo 2011; Walker *et al.*, 2020).

Although TSOs in different contexts encounter distinctive challenges, two broad trends stand out over the last two decades:

- i. Increasing professionalisation, adoption of business practices, and commercialisation that is in turn linked to funding practices in a context characterised by '...financial insecurity, increased competition and the necessity to develop and demonstrate increased efficiency.' (Simsa 2017 p13).
- ii. Changing social needs and growing inequalities, highlighted and exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Experiences born of the pandemic have reinforced the message that digital has the potential to break down barriers, extend reach and open-up service provision, but have also highlighted how dependency on digital tools can reinforce social inequalities without proactive attention to access issues (see for example, Dayson, 2021).

## 2. What's different about third sector organisations?

Arguably these two broad trends together capture the essence of third sector and social enterprise organisational life in recent decades – a continual balancing and movement between resourcing and ‘business’ challenges on the one hand and pressing social challenges on the other. The literature reviewed for this project suggests that digitalisation has potential to address these challenges by both increasing business efficiencies and changing lives through new mechanisms of user engagement<sup>5</sup>, but achieving this is by no means easy and requires complex skills and culture change.

### 2.2. Social mission

For the purposes of this study, we identify the key characteristic of TSOs as their social mission or public purpose, contained within a structure that limits profit distribution (Enjolras *et al.*, 2018). This is true for small community groups, large service providers, social enterprises and cooperatives. Closely related is the argument that TSOs are uniquely values-based. While this idea is open to contestation (see for example Dean, 2020b), it does imply a reasonable expectation that TSOs will approach their adoption of digital tools through their espoused values. Moreover, digitalisation should further social mission – either directly, or indirectly by creating or freeing resources that enable TSOs to serve their users<sup>6</sup> (individuals and communities).

### 2.3. Voluntarism and Stakeholders

Many TSOs involve and even depend on volunteers – for the purposes of service delivery and for their governance. Volunteering is a form of ‘serious leisure’ involving self-expression and sociability (Rochester, 2013 pp.156-158; Stebbins, 1996). Volunteer-involving TSOs face particular challenges in order to sustain the engagement of these key stakeholders, and this relates to digital, as much as to other elements of organisational life. The adoption of digital tools and practices must be carefully managed to ensure that they do not add complexity in ways that tip the balance unfavourably between volunteer costs and rewards. For example, Walker *et al.*'s (2020) community transport study highlights the importance of attending to volunteers' social needs for human interaction, even at the cost of foregoing efficiencies generated through digital tools.

More broadly, TSOs are characterised by particularly complex relationships with different stakeholders – not least because individuals may have multiple roles within a TSO (Billis and Glennerster, 1996). This has implications for engaging stakeholders in the processes of digitalisation. The stakeholder map in Figure 1 provides an example to illustrate this, but is further complicated in practice. For example, service users frequently act as

## 2. What's different about third sector organisations?

volunteers; employed staff are accountable to volunteer boards, who are in turn responsible for governance; and volunteers are frequently engaged in other social and community projects - all bringing complex motivations, accountabilities, and patterns of engagement.

Note that the diagram is an illustration of stakeholder engagement and the map will be different for each TSO. However, it illustrates how broad and complex stakeholder engagement can be and the importance of ensuring that there is some consistency across external and internal stakeholders when developing a digital strategy. For example, funders and commissioners can support and reinforce a digital strategy, or threaten that strategy through their willingness to resource digital tools and training.

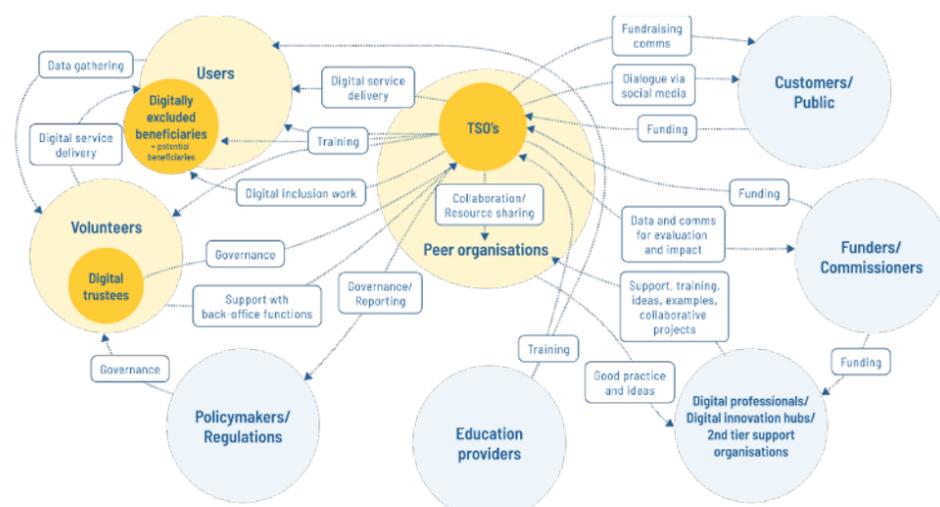


Figure 1: Stakeholder map of a digital ecosystem

Introducing new digital tools and practices is then an issue for stakeholders within and beyond the organisation, but also across the system and networks in which an organisation is embedded.

### 2.4. Sector support and networks

Supportive networks, external organisations, and peer support mechanisms often enhance the effective adoption of digital practices and skills development, and there are significant differences in the availability and capacity of networks or 'ecosystems' to support the work of TSOs in different parts of Europe. Although this research did not identify these differences in detail, it did identify an extensive list of free or low-cost learning and other resources available online in English<sup>7</sup>. In addition, Intellectual Output 4 will provide an extensive guide to current digital tools. We encourage existing third sector and social enterprise networks to facilitate access to such resources through signposting and outreach. This will add to the new training developed by the EU3 Digital partnership as Intellectual Output 2.

 See an enlarged "Stakeholder map of a digital ecosystem" on the next page

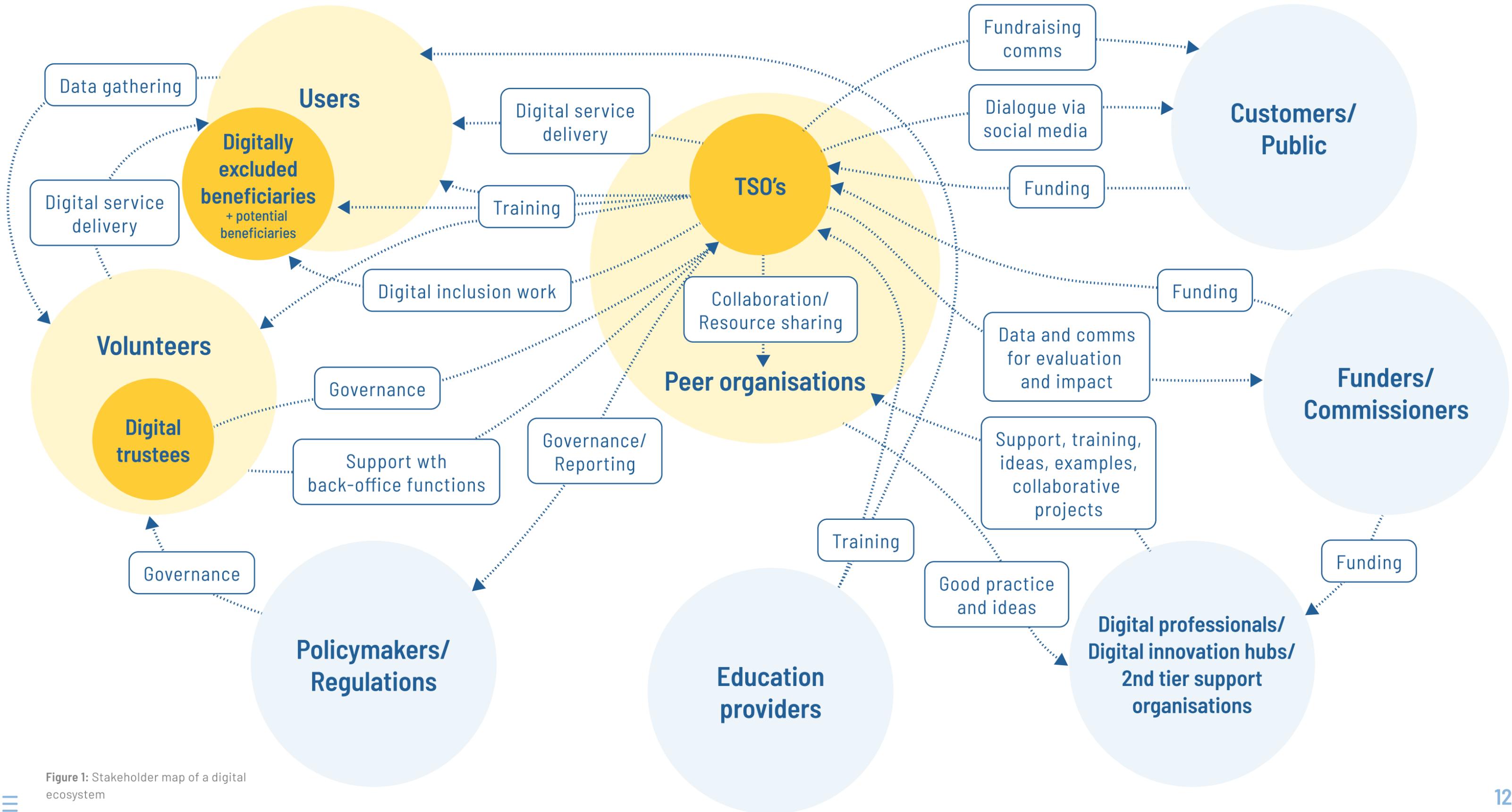


Figure 1: Stakeholder map of a digital ecosystem

# 3. Digital competence

## 3.1. Scoping the challenge

The literature argues that digital tools and practices have huge potential for TSOs, but also notes that this is difficult to achieve. Walker *et al.* (2020, p70) recognise the opportunities but also the challenges faced by small, local TSOs as they struggle to adapt ways of working to benefit from new technology, whilst taking their stakeholders with them:

**“How...can we think through the relationship between VCSOs (Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations) and digital differently, so that the benefits of adopting digital can be realised and the threats and uncertainties minimised?”**

For organisations that have already made digital advances, there are other challenges – including the challenge to take small innovations and scale-them up across the organisation and beyond. This is important on a wider scale, because scaling-up small innovations potentially can have a significant social impact:

**“The big challenges for the EU are how to make it easier for small-scale radical innovations involving digital technology to emerge and evolve, but perhaps more important how to create the conditions for the really powerful ones to get to scale. (Bria 2015, p6)”**

These concerns point to an underlying question that informs the narrative that follows – ‘what purpose(s) do digital competences serve in TSOs?’. For individual citizens, digital competences enable them to connect within a rapidly changing world, potentially increasing social and economic wellbeing and enabling participation in social structures and democratic process. For policy-makers and second tier organisations (ie. those providing services and support to other organisations), competence frameworks provide a scaffold for policy development. For organisations, digital competences, when combined effectively, increase capacity, effectiveness and efficiency to achieve organisational objectives. In this report, and the competence framework introduced in Section 5, we particularly address this organisational level. In broad terms, digitalisation and the use of digital competences should further the mission of a TSO – whether that mission is focused on a local community or interest group, a cooperative approach to a shared problem, or large-scale social change.

## 3. Digital competence

### 3.2. Competence, culture and maturity

This section of the report introduces key ideas about digitalisation identified in the literature that inform the development of the framework - notably digital competence, digital culture and digital maturity. Despite the prevalence of these terms in the literature, there is little consistency in their definition. However, we outline below how they are used in this report.

**‘Digital competence’** Competences include knowledge, skills and attitudes (Perez-Escoda, 2019) and are developed as an outcome of learning, training and practice (Ferreira *et al.*, 2015; Ilomaki *et al.*, 2014; Porat, Blau & Barak, 2018). Furthermore, competences include both ‘hard’ or technical knowledge and skills (e.g. to use social media applications) and softer knowledge, skills, and attitudes. For example Van Laar *et al.* (2020) identify the following:

- Information digital skills – searching, evaluating and organizing information in digital environments.
- Communication digital skills – sharing ideas, building relationships and interacting through digital tools.
- Collaboration digital skills – managing interdependencies to achieve a common goal supported by technology.

- Critical thinking digital skills – critically assessing, filtering, identifying bias and perspective
- Creative digital skills – producing and sharing content in new ways, including user-generated content
- Problem-solving digital skills – finding multiple solutions, solving unfamiliar problems, connecting information, and transferring knowledge to new situations and through new media.

The competences identified by Van Laar *et al.* refer to an individual’s knowledge, skills and attitudes – with the latter including confidence, creativity and a willingness to engage with new digital tools. However, in an organisational context, it is important to consider the practices of the organisation as a whole. This avoids over-dependency on a single competent individual and contributes to the development of a shared digital culture.

**‘Digital culture’** Culture is often defined simply as ‘the way we do things round here’. Hoe (2019) encapsulates the idea of digital culture in terms of Senge’s five disciplines of the Learning Organisation – personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning and systems thinking. So, a digital culture is developed and nurtured at individual, team and system levels. The ability ‘to develop a digital mindset as part of an organisation’s digital culture’ is critical if organisations are to ‘stay ahead’ (Hoe, 2019 p. 61). In other words, to remain sustainable in a competitive environment, it is important to re-

## 3. Digital competence

imagine what is possible through digitalisation. However, this potential is only fully achieved in an organisation when this re-imagining is shared, becoming embedded in organisational culture and everyday interactions – rather than the vision of a single individual.

**‘Digital maturity’** describes the ongoing development of digital capacity and the adoption of tools and models so that an organisation is ready to respond to the continually evolving digital environment. Beulen (2021; p. 70) characterises digitally mature organisations as living and breathing digital to such an extent that it becomes a part of their identity. Digital maturity is not then a fixed point but rather involves openness to continuous learning (Perez-Escoda 2019).

In summary, digital competences are both ‘hard’ (technical) and ‘soft’, the latter taking familiar leadership and management competences and applying them in the digital domain. Furthermore, in an organisational context, it is insufficient to focus on the digital competences of individuals, without also giving attention to the ideas of digital culture and digital maturity, which highlight the significance of shared ways of thinking and doing at the organisational level. This includes considering how individual competences contribute to the growth of shared vision, stakeholder engagement, and knowledge and skills development across the organisation to achieve its mission, but also attending to how competences are embodied and

distributed across an organization. In short, this approach enables an organization to re-think digital possibilities.

### 3.3. Digitalisation, inclusion and democracy

Digitalisation has the potential to shift unequal dynamics between professional and citizen and between unequally resourced collaborating partners. Over the longer-term, the adoption of digital tools can contribute to the creation of more inclusive and democratic patterns of engagement in organisations, communities and society. This potential is attractive to TSOs in so far as they pursue a social mission that includes commitment to participation, equality and inclusive values. Processes of digitalisation create multiple opportunities to re-think relationships with stakeholders by enabling more equal engagement with and between professionals, customers, service users, communities and citizens (Chiappero-Martinetti *et al.* 2017; Schreieck *et al.* 2017). Kaletka and Pelka (2015) offer evidence that social innovators can empower digitally excluded citizens by offering collaborative spaces and community-based intergenerational learning. Selander and Jarvenpaa (2016) examine collective action through social media. Prodanov (2018) states that digital social entrepreneurship can only be successful if links between suppliers and service users are strengthened and decentralised networks of

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knowledge developed. Online communications can strengthen relationships, mobilise supporters and encourage dialogue (eg Lucas, 2017), communicating ‘with’ rather than ‘to’ an audience (Olinski and Szamrowski, 2020). Social media provides new ways to engage stakeholders and offers new opportunities for advocacy and activism,

So, adopting digital tools effectively can extend reach, engage communities in new ways, and provide mechanisms for inclusion. However, the relationship between digital and inclusion is complex, and inequalities are not simply resolved through the provision of digital resources (Warschauer, 2004). Most obviously, staff must have the skills, commitment and confidence to engage in creative and meaningful ways with users and communities through digital tools<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, organisations need a mix of resources, human and digital, but also a strategy to effectively utilize this mix (Burt 2003). Without this mix, TSOs moving their processes and activities into the digital domain risk alienating volunteers and users and perpetuating social divides.

In short, a digital competence framework that addresses a context of social change and social justice will include competences that enable individuals and organisations to adopt tools, and develop practices and strategies that are inclusive, engage service users, and shift inequalities - rather than being drawn into perpetuating or adding to a growing digital divide.

### 3.4. Existing competence frameworks

There are many digital competence and maturity frameworks in existence – one review identified fifty with some relevance to the sector<sup>9</sup>. Frameworks typically focus on development – how to move forward – and practice – how to work smarter. Most consider competences of the individual but a few, such as DigCompOrg, relate to organisations. Most significant for this study are the DigComp and ICT4NGO digital competence frameworks. These key resources have elements of overlap with EU3D and so we have endeavoured to complement rather than duplicate this work, particularly through an emphasis on leadership and organisational digital culture which does not feature heavily in either of these frameworks. We encourage readers to refer to both DigComp and the ICT4NGO report alongside the EU3D digital framework.

### 3.4.1. DigComp

The European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp) is the European Union's framework for identifying and developing individual citizens' digital competences. The DigComp Framework enables citizens to assess and monitor digital skills, and enables policy-makers and educators to plan and develop curricula to develop those skills. In its most recent iteration, DigComp 2.1 (Carretero et al. 2017), includes five areas of competence, each with key descriptors (see Table 1):

| Competence area 1 | Information and data literacy  |
|-------------------|--|
| 1.1.              | Browsing, searching, filtering data, information and digital content |
| 1.2.              | Evaluating data, information and digital content                     |
| 1.3.              | Managing data, information and digital content                       |
| Competence area 2 | Communication and collaboration                                      |
| 2.1.              | Interacting through digital technologies                             |
| 2.2.              | Sharing through digital technologies                                 |
| 2.3.              | Engaging in citizenship through digital technologies                 |
| 2.4.              | Collaborating through digital technologies                           |
| 2.5.              | Netiquette   |
| 2.6.              | Managing digital identity  |

| Competence area 3 | Digital Content Creation                       |
|-------------------|--|
| 3.1.              | Developing digital content                     |
| 3.2.              | Integrating and re-elaborating digital content |
| 3.3.              | Copyright and licences                         |
| 3.4.              | Programming                                    |

| Competence area 4 | Safety                               |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 4.1.              | Protecting devices                   |
| 4.2.              | Protecting personal data and privacy |
| 4.3.              | Protecting health and well-being     |
| 4.4.              | Protecting the environment           |

| Competence area 5 | Problem Solving                               |
|-------------------|---|
| 5.1.              | Solving technical problems                    |
| 5.2.              | Identifying needs and technological responses |
| 5.3.              | Creatively using digital technologies         |
| 5.4.              | Identifying digital competence gaps           |

Table 1: DigComp2.1 Source: Carretero et al. (2017)

## 3. Digital competence

DigComp has provided the basis for the development of multiple competence frameworks tailored to a variety of specific contexts, including those that adapt the individual competences above to organisational contexts, such as DigCompOrg<sup>10</sup>. The EU3 Digital Competence Framework builds on DigComp to reflect the specific context and purpose of TSOs, whilst remaining sufficiently broad to be relevant across the diversity of those organisations.

### 3.4.2. ICT4NGO

A further framework that references DigComp is ICT4NGO, led by TechSoup. This 2016 framework comprises a Competency Assessment Standard for European NGOs and also includes a Guidebook for socially active individuals and trainers in this sphere<sup>11</sup>. ICT4NGO offers a structure through which to understand competences related primarily to working with digital tools in TSOs. The competences are grouped under five headings:

- Hardware, Infrastructure & Troubleshooting
- Processing Data & Information
- Management, Administration and Finances
- Communications, Marketing & PR
- IT Security & Safety

EU3D builds on ICT4NGO to include further softer competences suggested through the research, and to develop the notion of digital culture.

### 3.5. Constructing the EU3D Competence Framework

The extensive review<sup>12</sup> undertaken for this project reinforced the importance of reflecting the third sector's particular needs in frameworks and training to develop digital competence, culture, and maturity. This has highlighted key issues for consideration in a new digital competence framework for TSOs that complements, rather than replacing or duplicating existing frameworks, as summarised below:

1. The third sector context for developing and practicing competences is - primarily - an organisational one.
2. The purpose of competence development in the third sector and social enterprises is ultimately the achievement of social mission - via internal goals such as increasing efficiency, effectiveness and capacity, and developing and sustaining internal and external stakeholder relationships.
3. The potential of digital to engage citizens, service users and communities in new and more democratic ways aligns with third sector objectives and values of social justice and inclusion. However, there is also a challenge to ensure that the 'digital divide' is minimized and not extended.

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4. TSOs are governed and funded through structures and processes that differ from other organisational contexts, often including the involvement of volunteers. They have complex and ambiguous relationships with stakeholders. Leadership has an important part to play in bringing together the visioning, stakeholder engagement, and focus on values that enables digitalisation to further social mission.
5. TSOs take very different organisational forms – including informal community groups; cooperatives; large national and international corporate organisations and the small and medium sized organisations that make up much of the sector. The latter include charities and social enterprises. This report is particularly focused on the needs of medium and smaller sized organisations, recognizing the challenges they face in terms of limited resources and consequent limited access to training and professional development. Furthermore, our research indicates these are the organisations with the furthest distance to travel to achieve digital maturity and that this is where the potential lies for greatest gain. However, many of the findings will apply to other organisations where social mission is a central element of their identity.

In spite of these observations, the literature offers limited insight into how TSOs' social mission can be furthered through the development of digital competences. In the section below, we report findings from interviews with informants from across Europe who are experienced in supporting TSO digital development. These interviews illuminate insights from the literature and offer more detailed insights from everyday practice.

# 4. Interview findings: issues from practice

## 4.1. Overview

This section reports findings from interviews with experts identified by EU3D partners and through the authors' review of the field (see Appendix 1 for an anonymised list of interviewees). Findings from these interviews illuminate key findings from the literature review with evidence from informants with experience in supporting multiple TSOs from different contexts across Europe. In summary, interviewees affirmed that digitalisation serves a greater end – to extend reach and impact and make a difference in people's lives, but an intermediary goal is the wellbeing of the organisation itself. The nature of the challenge is illustrated by the two quotes below:

“...in order to survive, social economy organisations must go into digital transformation to gain efficiency, to stay on page, to reach more of the beneficiaries they address every day. (Interviewee 11)”

“...digital in itself, it's something which is something very barren...; it becomes important when we can see it in the context of what this can give to other people's lives, so it becomes something that is more human and also enjoyable. (Interviewee 12)”

Interviewees confirmed that many (particularly smaller) TSOs lag behind commercial organisations in their adoption of digital. Difficulties include getting resources in place; investment, hardware, software, support and human resources, but barriers can also be cultural; values, attitudes and habits. Informants noted the necessarily rapid adoption of digital tools during Covid lockdowns but reflected that this meant that TSOs had adopted tools as a response to circumstances, rather than as a result of a proactive strategic planning process. Furthermore, structures were not necessarily in place to enable organisations to reflect on and continue the learning and development from the Covid period.

## 4.2. Making it real

The themes from the interviews offered a more granular view of the challenges, potential, and ways of working that enable digitalisation in a TSO. Rather than focusing solely on individual technical competence, interviewees highlighted the importance of relationships and networks, and the distribution (often uneven) of competences in an organisation. They pointed to the importance of softer skills, including building confidence, developing a vision for what can be achieved through digitalisation, and bringing everyone on board.

## 4. Interview findings: issues from practice

Table 2 below provides a summary of themes related to digital competences.

### Themes from interview data:



- Rationalise and integrate existing tools
- Identify and procure tools appropriate to context
- Pursue organisational efficiency
- Analyse data effectively
- Catch up with safety and security
- Develop a long-term vision and strategy
- Manage continuous change
- Develop self-awareness of digital possibilities
- Develop a holistic 'mindset': digital as core work
- Engage, motivate and build confidence for stakeholders
- Empower bottom-up ideas and initiatives
- Empower a digital champion within the organisation
- Understand how to put training into action within the specific organisational context
- Know when and where to seek help or outsource
- Develop 'users' research skills
- Evaluate possibilities for digital service delivery
- Track and understand the impacts of decisions and investments
- Understand the limitations of digitalisation
- Understand the risks of digitalisation
- Pursue digital inclusion for staff, volunteers and beneficiaries
- Network with peers and tech organisations
- Build a knowledge community
- Understand trends and potentials of up-coming tech

Table 2: Themes identified from interview data

## 4. Interview findings: issues from practice

These themes have implications for thinking through which areas of digital competence are most important for TSOs and why. Further themes in the interview data relate to the importance of ‘nurturing’ change, developing a basic set of skills for everyone in an organisation, whilst distributing higher level skills and knowledge in an ongoing way, rather than as a single point of transformation. This builds on a distinction between basic digital knowledge and skills that represent the minimum for an organisation, and higher-level knowledge and skills. The former are needed by most people in an organisation if a digital system is to work, the latter are skills and knowledge that in large organisations will be the purview of digital specialists. However, the organisations supported and advised by our interviewees rarely had such specialists.

For many organisations, moving forward in the digitalisation process involves a cultural shift - visioning, understanding and re-imagining what is possible, as well as assessing and sifting the tools and resources available to select those that are right for the organisation, its context and mission. On the one hand, this cultural shift is enabled by the strategic work and enabling of positional leaders (managers, board members); on the other hand, the knowledge, creativity and confidence that contributes to cultural change can come from any part of the organisation. In other words, digital leadership may be top-down or bottom-up. Either way, successful digitalisation is a

process that works best when it involves all stakeholders, including service users and volunteers where relevant.

# 5. Digital competences for TSOs

## 5.1. A summary of the EU3 Digital Competence Framework

The EU3 Digital competence framework consists of five Areas of Competence and twenty-two Competences as summarised in Table 3 below.

| 1    | Digital tools   |
|------|---|
| 1.1. | Identify digital needs and functions of the organization                                  |
| 1.2. | Identify, assess, procure and maintain appropriate hardware and software                  |
| 1.3. | Gather, manage and analyse data to further social mission                                 |
| 1.4. | Track and act on the potential impacts of current and upcoming tools                      |
| 2    | Operational effectiveness   |
| 2.1. | Establish a coherent and efficient infrastructure through integration and rationalization |
| 2.2. | Know when and how to outsource  |
| 2.3. | Train stakeholders to enable digital infrastructure to function effectively               |
| 2.4. | Evaluate and monitor efficiency and sustainability of digital infrastructure              |
| 2.5. | Ensure the safety and security of infrastructure, data and stakeholders                   |

| 3    | Organisational culture and leadership  |
|------|--|
| 3.1. | Develop a long-term sustainable vision and strategy for digital                                      |
| 3.2. | Enable and empower bottom-up creativity and encourage innovation                                     |
| 3.3. | Distribute digital leadership across the organisation  |
| 3.4. | Explore digital service delivery   |
| 3.5. | Support digital confidence and continuous learning for all stakeholders                              |
| 3.6. | Establish principles and processes to manage continuous change                                       |
| 4    | Ethical practices  |
| 4.1. | Include all stakeholder groups within digital vision and strategy                                    |
| 4.2. | Understand and mitigate the negative consequences and risks of digitalisation                        |
| 4.3. | Move forward on digital inclusion  |
| 4.4. | Include social and environmental responsibility criteria when evaluating service providers and tools |
| 5    | Participation and connection   |
| 5.1. | Share knowledge and resources with peers   |
| 5.2. | Make use of existing networks to explore digital possibilities                                       |
| 5.3. | Discover the wider digital ecosystem and actively participate  |

Table 3: EU3 Digital Competence Framework summary

## 5. Digital competences for TSOs

To help understand what these competences look like in action, Appendix 2 provides links to examples of organisations whose practices embody particular competences to forward positive change, and to organisations that can provide further information on specific competences. (We will continue to work with EU3D partners to identify further examples.) In addition, Section 6 offers ideas for making use of the framework in everyday practice.

### 5.2. Drivers of the competence framework

The formulation of the competences reflects four key ideas from the research that act as drivers of the framework:

**Social Mission:** As highlighted in section 2, the uniqueness of TSOs in prioritising social mission over profit is fundamental to the formulation of this framework.

**Leadership:** Evidence from the literature and from interviews indicates the importance of supporting the development of leadership in the digital domain. As indicated in the glossary, for this report we use the term 'leadership' to denote the visioning, strategising, stakeholder engagement, and momentum needed to pursue digitalisation in the context of a TSO.

Leadership is practiced by people with formal positions (top-down) and by those who have no formal position (bottom-up).

**Distributed competences:** Within small and medium sized TSOs it is not possible for all stakeholders to be competent in every aspect of digital. The framework includes a set of competences that can be distributed across the organisation, with individuals developing different competences, depending on their role. Additionally, competences may be distributed across the wider ecosystem of which the organisation is a part. This ecosystem can provide skills and support for digital development which therefore do not need to be replicated within every organisation.

**Continuous learning:** The framework is intended to encourage continuous learning as a characteristic of digital maturity that enables an organisation to respond to rapidly developing circumstances, including the development of new technologies. Therefore, the framework itself does not name tools as these risk becoming out of date in the future. However, other EU3D outputs will list tools that are particularly useful at this time.

Additionally, the formulation of the framework is closely informed by evidence about the practices, barriers and enablers of digitalisation which emerged from the interview-based research.

To illustrate how these drivers come together in the formulation of the competences the following table offers a brief explanation for one competence in each area<sup>13</sup>.

|          |  |   |
|----------|--|---|
| <b>1</b> | <b>Digital tools</b>   |   |
| 1.1.     | <b>Identify digital needs and functions of the organization</b>                      | Tools are often selected because they are mainstream, already known, convenient or low cost. On occasion these are not necessarily the best criteria for tool selection; a systematized process for acquiring digital resources may lead to a better result. Third sector organisations are advised to invest in cloud-based tools.   |
| <b>2</b> | <b>Operational effectiveness</b>   |   |
| 2.5.     | <b>Ensure the safety and security of infrastructure, data and stakeholders</b>       | There are indications that many third sector organisations are not currently prioritizing security, yet any catastrophic breach could be financially ruinous, and reputationally disastrous. Third sector organisations working with vulnerable people have a particular responsibility to protect users.   |
| <b>3</b> | <b>Organisational culture and leadership</b>   |   |
| 3.2.     | <b>Enable and empower bottom-up creativity and encourage innovation</b>              | Those working face-to-face with beneficiaries, customers or clients have a keen understanding of where digital systems could positively impact social mission. Their experiences, understandings and ideas can add value to digital decision-making. Digital natives also have much to offer but younger people can be low down in the organisational hierarchy. Empowering these voices can introduce fresh digital ideas. |
| <b>4</b> | <b>Ethical practices</b>   |   |
| 4.2.     | <b>Understand and mitigate the negative consequences and risks of digitalisation</b> | Digitalisation may have negative as well as positive effects – perhaps fewer jobs, volunteers leaving, staff unable to continue working, exclusion of potential beneficiaries. Organisations should be aware and mitigate these negative impacts.   |
| <b>5</b> | <b>Participation and connection</b>  |   |
| 5.1.     | <b>Share knowledge and resources with peers</b>                                      | Small third sector organisations often do not have the capacity or funds to equip themselves with the digital knowledge and resources they need. At a basic level sharing information, knowledge and resources with peers is beneficial to all, but if organisations can form a mutually supportive digital community their power to act is also enhanced.  |

Table 4: Examples of the relationship between competences and drivers

### 5.3. Competences: knowledge, skills and attitudes

Section 3 of the report noted that competences include knowledge, skills and attitudes. In further expanding the framework we have broken down each

competence into requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes, as shown in Table 5 below. This comprises the full EU3D Competence Framework.

| 1 Digital tools |   |   |  |   |
|-----------------|---|---|--|---|
|                 | Competence  | Knowledge   | Skills   | Attitudes   |
| 1.1.            | <b>Identify digital needs and functions of the organisation</b>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Methods used to conduct research</li> <li>• Organisational structure, functions and internal workflows</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research</li> <li>• Draw together information from a variety of sources</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willingness to involve all stakeholders</li> </ul>   |
| 1.2.            | <b>Identify, assess, procure and maintain appropriate hardware and software</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Available tools</li> <li>• The application of digital tools to organisational needs and functions</li> <li>• Potential suppliers and partners</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess benefit versus cost (including hidden costs)</li> <li>• Project management</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Readiness to invest in digital</li> <li>• Forward-looking focus</li> <li>• Curiosity - to find out what is as yet unknown</li> <li>• Openness to new ways to source tools including those which are opensource, no-code, and free</li> </ul> |
| 1.3.            | <b>Gather, manage and analyse data to further social mission</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data protection laws</li> <li>• Assessment of data reliability</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practical data management (see ICT4NGO area 2)</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Readiness to engage in data-driven decision-making</li> </ul>  |
| 1.4.            | <b>Track and act on the potential impacts of current and upcoming tools</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Up to date with developments on the digital horizon - what is referred to by ICT4NGO as the next 'big thing'; currently AI, big data and blockchain</li> <li>• Potential benefits for organisation and its social mission</li> <li>• Potential for disruption</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research</li> <li>• Disseminate knowledge of future possibilities across the organisation to stimulate creative ideas</li> <li>• Timely action based on that knowledge</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resolution to be pro-active as well as reactive</li> <li>• Respect and empowerment of bottom-up knowledge</li> <li>• Prioritisation of long-term digital investment</li> </ul>   |

| 2 Operational effectiveness |  |   |  |  |
|-----------------------------|--|---|--|--|
|                             | Competence   | Knowledge   | Skills   | Attitudes  |
| 2.1.                        | <b>Establish a coherent and efficient infrastructure through integration and rationalisation</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current digital activities of the organisation and their limitations</li> <li>• Potential improvements in usability and efficiency</li> <li>• Risks involved in digital transformation</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital transformation</li> <li>• Procure help as needed</li> <li>• Communicate well with stakeholders</li> <li>• Inspire digital confidence across the organization</li> </ul>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Openness to change</li> <li>• Drive to involve all stakeholders</li> <li>• Sustained persistence</li> <li>• Willingness to delegate and to invest</li> </ul>      |
| 2.2.                        | <b>Know when and how to outsource</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current organisational capacity</li> <li>• Range of available options for outsourcing including private consultancy, second tier organisations, in-kind support from the private sector, competitions, datadives etc</li> <li>• Outsourcing processes</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research</li> <li>• Analyse cost benefit</li> <li>• Procure effectively to maximise impact and resources</li> <li>• Project manage</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Openness to new ways of working and collaborating</li> </ul>  |
| 2.3.                        | <b>Train stakeholders to enable digital infrastructure to function effectively</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training needs of different user groups</li> <li>• Accessibility issues</li> <li>• Training resources already available</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Train or outsource</li> <li>• Adopt learning styles appropriate to each user group</li> <li>• Evaluate and record training achievements</li> <li>• Develop an ongoing training programme</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willingness to invest in training</li> </ul>  |
| 2.4.                        | <b>Evaluate and monitor efficiency and sustainability of digital infrastructure</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Product lifecycles</li> <li>• Diverse approaches to assessing efficiency and sustainability</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect and evaluate systemic data</li> <li>• Include product lifecycle in decision-making</li> <li>• Review regularly</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commitment to solutions which perform best for the organisation and social mission rather than selecting those which are best known or most convenient</li> </ul> |
| 2.5.                        | <b>Ensure the safety and security of infrastructure, data and stakeholders</b>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Threats and potential solutions</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take action to maintain safety and security (see ICT4NGO area 5)</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritisation of safety</li> <li>• Protection of vulnerable users</li> </ul>   |

| 3 Organisational culture and leadership |   |   |  |  |
|---|---|---|--|--|
|   | Competence  | Knowledge   | Skills   | Attitudes  |
| 3.1.                                    | <b>Organisational culture and leadership</b>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different types of digital journey, for example rapid transformation or small iterative steps</li> <li>• Processes for strategising</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assimilate diverse sources of information</li> <li>• Plan and project manage</li> <li>• Effectively communicate the digital vision and strategy to all</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusion of digital within every strand of the organisation's work</li> <li>• Commitment to listening</li> </ul>   |
| 3.2.                                    | <b>Enable and empower bottom-up creativity and encourage innovation</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-depth understanding of the organisation's day-to-day work on the ground</li> <li>• Co-design and prototyping methods</li> </ul>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institute structures which support bottom-up idea generation and communication</li> <li>• Encourage co-design practices</li> <li>• Build digital confidence for diverse stakeholders</li> <li>• Evaluate to generate knowledge</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect for collaborative practices and ideas</li> <li>• Adaptability</li> </ul>  |
| 3.3.                                    | <b>Distribute digital leadership across the organisation</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management structures and relationships</li> <li>• Distributed forms of leadership</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empower others</li> <li>• Devolve digital responsibilities</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledgement that it is unlikely that one person can embody all the digital skills and knowledge required by the organisation</li> <li>• Willingness to establish flatter leadership structures</li> </ul> |
| 3.4.                                    | <b>Explore digital service delivery</b>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How the organisation's work could potentially embrace a digital inclusion agenda</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move towards digital inclusion for all stakeholders who are experiencing any form of digital exclusion</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commitment to digital inclusion</li> </ul>  |

| 3 Organisational culture and leadership |  |  |   |   |
|---|--|--|---|---|
|   | Competence   | Knowledge  | Skills  | Attitudes   |
| 3.5.                                    | <b>Support digital confidence and continuous learning for all stakeholders</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attitudinal and educational barriers to digital participation</li> </ul>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deliver inclusive learning packages which are evaluated and reviewed regularly</li> <li>Support stakeholders in self-education</li> <li>Provide face-to-face support where necessary</li> <li>Keep records and certify knowledge and skills</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acknowledgement that face-to-face support might be necessary</li> <li>Readiness to give time to learning and reflection</li> </ul>   |
| 3.6.                                    | <b>Establish principles and processes to manage continuous change</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ideas and programmes of organisational change e.g.theory of change</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Apply relevant change processes</li> <li>Involve and motivate stakeholders</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Willingness to embrace change and innovation</li> <li>Flexibility, agility, adaptability</li> <li>Willingness to enable and accept constructive criticism</li> <li>Openness to partnerships</li> </ul> |

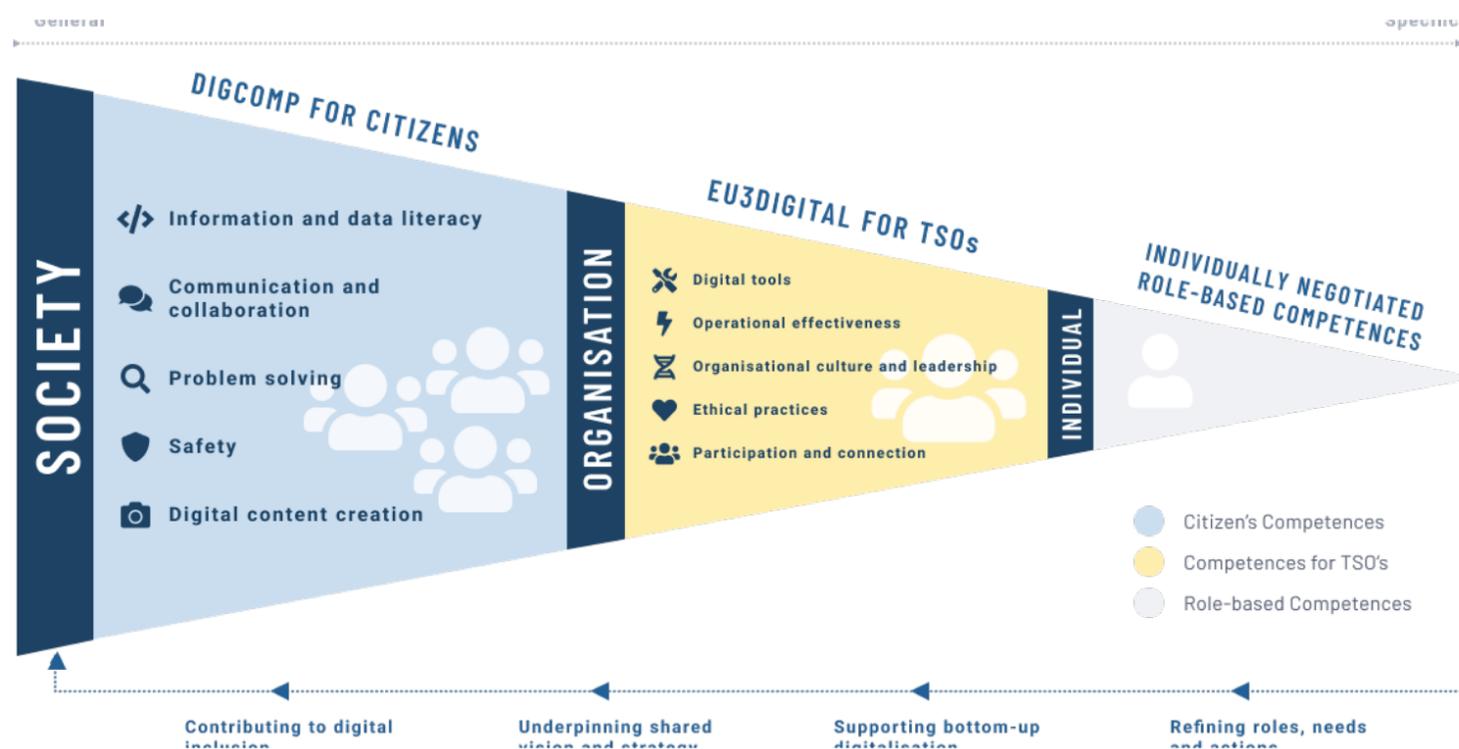
| 4 Ethical practices |   |   |  |  |
|---------------------|---|---|--|--|
|                     | Competence  | Knowledge   | Skills   | Attitudes  |
| 4.1.                | <b>Include all stakeholder groups within digital vision and strategy</b>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digital strengths and weaknesses of stakeholder groups</li> <li>The breadth and nature of the effects of digitalisation</li> </ul>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborate effectively</li> <li>Communicate effectively</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Willingness to devolve decision making</li> </ul>   |
| 4.2.                | <b>Understand and mitigate the negative consequences and risks of digitalisation</b>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consequences of digital change in the organisation for all stakeholder groups</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess potential harm</li> <li>Change direction or mitigate harm</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commitment to listen and consider all stakeholder positions</li> <li>Adoption of a 'do no harm' approach</li> </ul> |
| 4.3.                | <b>Move forward on digital inclusion</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digital literacy gaps</li> <li>Mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion</li> <li>Accessibility issues</li> </ul>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research</li> <li>Design and adopt user-focused digital products and interactions</li> <li>Provide suitable hardware, software and supported learning for those in danger of exclusion</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perseverance with digital inclusion</li> <li>Flexibility</li> </ul>   |
| 4.4.                | <b>Include social and environmental responsibility criteria when evaluating service providers and tools</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social evaluation techniques</li> <li>Social and environmental responsibility profile of digital tech companies (where available)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research</li> <li>Share knowledge with networks</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commitment to social and environmental responsibility in all areas of work</li> </ul>                               |

| 5 Participation and connection |   |  |   |  |
|--------------------------------|---|--|---|--|
|                                | Competence  | Knowledge  | Skills  | Attitudes  |
| 5.1.                           | <b>Share knowledge and resources with peers</b>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of what the organisation has to offer</li> <li>• Awareness of gaps in knowledge and resources</li> <li>• Communications for networking and knowledge sharing tools</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate effectively</li> <li>• Network widely and effectively</li> </ul>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willingness to share resources and knowledge</li> <li>• Respect for the principle of give and take</li> </ul> |
| 5.2.                           | <b>Make use of existing networks to explore digital possibilities</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Network relationships</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build connections, communication and interactions</li> <li>• Maintain diverse relationships</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community values</li> </ul>   |
| 5.3.                           | <b>Discover the wider digital ecosystem and actively participate</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overview of the interrelationships between players in the ecosystem</li> <li>• Value of the organisation's potential contribution to a third sector digital community</li> </ul>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiate new connections</li> <li>• Practice blue-sky thinking</li> </ul>                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willingness to invest in being part of a community</li> </ul>   |

## 5. Digital competences for TSOs

### 5.4. Positioning the EU3 Digital Competence Framework

Figure 2 below positions the EU3 Digital Framework in terms of a general approach to citizens' competences (DigComp) and a focus on the skills needed by individuals' for specific roles (addressed in part by ICT4NGO). This reasserts the role of the EU3 Digital Framework as providing a uniquely third sector organisational perspective.

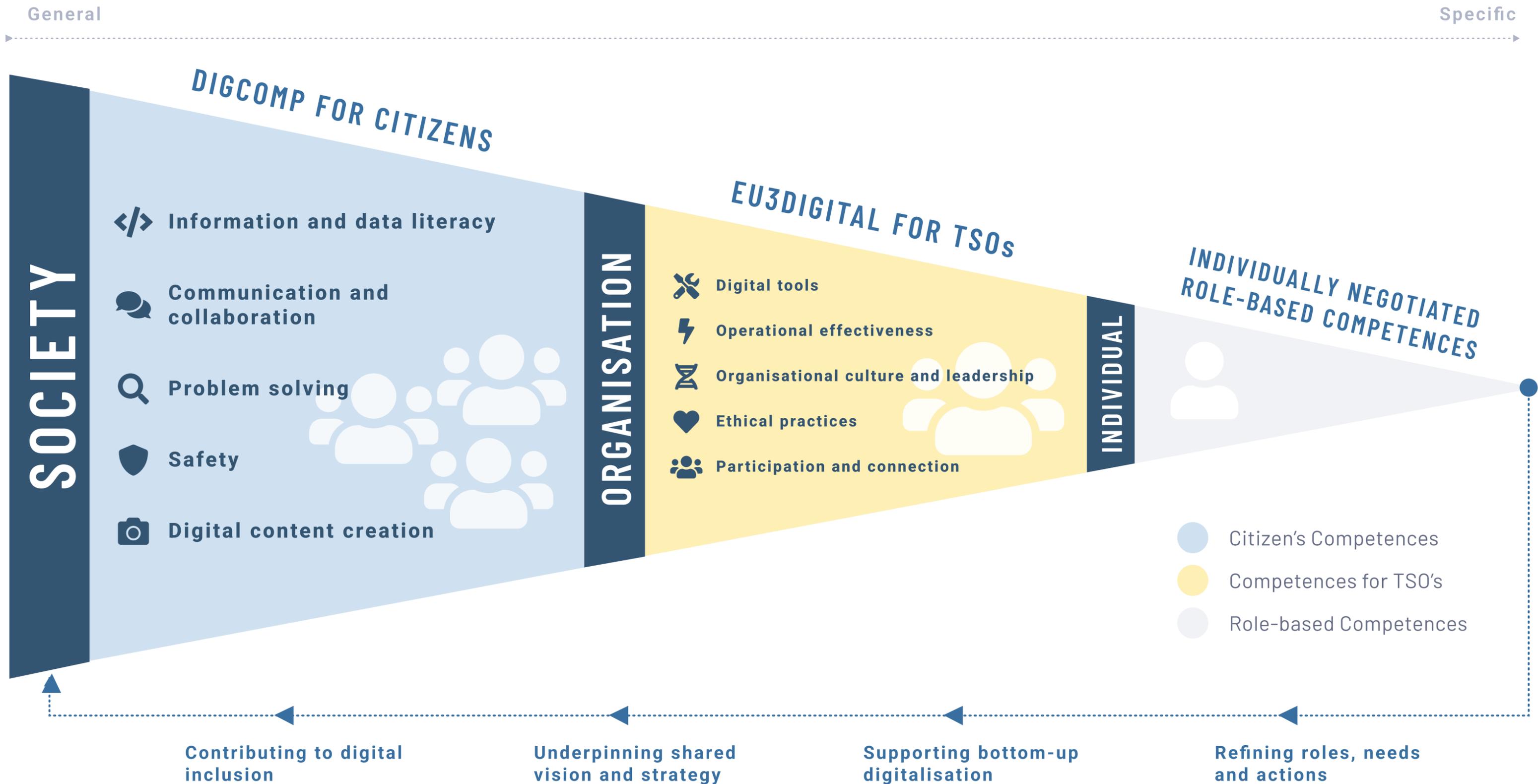


**Figure 2:** Visualisation of the EU3 Digital framework in relation to DigComp and the competences of an individual working in a TSO.

As previously stated, the EU3 Digital Competence Framework builds on DigComp which offers core competences for participation in society, and therefore a base level for everyone. The EU3 Digital Competence Framework identifies the skills, knowledge and attitudes that organisations need distributed amongst the stakeholders of a TSO – with their precise formulation across the five categories varying to reflect organisational circumstances. Individuals within specific roles will require a mix of competences in order to inhabit that role effectively and efficiently in relation to other roles within the organisation.



See an enlarged "Framework" diagram on the next page.



# 6. Next steps: The competence framework in practice

This final section of the report offers ideas for applying the framework to practice, and comments on the learning and training needs highlighted by the research that informs the framework. We offer five ideas that could be taken forward by partners, within or beyond the EU3 Digital project. These are by no means comprehensive, but rather illustrate potential uses of the competence framework, bringing the abstract ideas into concrete practice.

## 6.1. Training Development

The different elements of the EU3D competence framework provide a basis from which training resources can be developed by second tier organisations, third sector and social enterprise networks, and education and training providers – to support TSOs to develop digitally. Taken as a whole, the framework offers a starting point for a comprehensive and broad-ranging curriculum. Individually, and for a more focused approach, each competence descriptor can be re-framed as a learning outcome, and the training then constructed around the associated knowledge, skills and attitudes. For example, the descriptor, ‘Know when and how to outsource’ can be re-framed as shown in Box 1.

By the end of this training,  
you will know when and how to outsource:

- To achieve this outcome, you will learn about the range of options for outsourcing and consider how to apply this on the basis of your knowledge of your organisation’s current digital capacity.
- You will develop skills in research, cost benefit analysis, procurement and project management.
- To be successful in applying your learning, you will need to be open to new ways of working and willing to collaborate

Box 1: Re-framing a competence as a learning outcome

This competence could then be assessed (for example) through multiple choice questions on a case study that measure knowledge and skills.

However, whereas ‘hard’ competences like the one above are perhaps more straightforward to train on, and the knowledge and skills gained can be measured, the ‘soft’ competences in the framework will require more complex, reflective and developmental approaches to training and

## 6. Next steps: The competence framework in practice

assessment. For example, a reflective learning programme to develop digital leadership is a complex endeavour and assessing competence in visioning, strategy and culture change will require different tools from the assessment of competence in outsourcing or data protection (for example).

EU3 Digital will not have the resources to address the full spectrum of learning needs that arise from the framework, and will need to prioritise the development of achievable chunks of training and learning that address specific competences. However, over time a bank of learning resources could be developed by collating new training, signposting to existing training, and through the development of new learning resources within partner networks, as suggested elsewhere in this report.

### 6.2. Review and Reflection

Figure 2 shows how EU3 Digital is part of overlapping sets of competences which together hone down the competences needed for a TSO to be digitally effective. The EU3D competence framework provides a basis for an organisation to undertake a programme of structured collective reflection and review of digital processes and practice. In conjunction with the assessment of baseline digital competences provided by DigComp and the individual skills that are the focus of ICT4NGO, the EU3D framework can

be used by staff, managers and volunteers, working together to review the current and future role of digital in the organisation, to identify gaps and determine where to focus energies, training and resources.

Engaging key stakeholders in reflection, discussion and debate in a structured way, focusing on each area of competence in turn, will help an organisation to develop an understanding of its development towards digital maturity. This process of engagement and review can help stakeholders to determine together the next priorities for digitalisation – whether this be complex issues such as cultural change; or encouraging ‘bottom-up’ transformation; or specific training needs to fill gaps in knowledge and skills. The purpose of this review would be to bring all key stakeholders on board to understand where key competences lie within the organisation and to ensure that future digitalisation processes are inclusive.

For some organisations, engaging with the framework in this way will constitute a first step in the process of moving towards digital maturity.

This process of review and reflection based on the framework could also take place at a functional level. Box 2 illustrates this through a fictionalised example that shows a TSO following the framework to review their communications processes:

## 6. Next steps: The competence framework in practice

'Community Bank' is a small social enterprise that provides essential supplies - clothes, toiletries and so forth, to a growing number of homeless people in a small town. For the last ten years it has funded this work by selling books donated by the public through its small high street shop. A consultant has suggested that they begin to sell online and therefore widen potential buyers. The manager (and only employee) realises that to make this work 'Community Bank' needs to review their communications - to inform people about the change and to reach a new group of customers through online and social media channels.

The manager meets with three key volunteers to begin to consider what competences they will need to implement these changes. Following the outline of the EU3D framework, they begin by considering the digital tools they will need for future communications. They identify a lack of basic knowledge about communications tools (1.1) and an inability to undertake a cost benefit assessment (1.2), but they are able to find a short adult education course that increases their knowledge and skills. The course also covers data protection and gives them a brief insight into potential future communications tools (1.3, 1.4).

As a result of the course, and continuing to follow the framework, the manager realises the importance of integrating the different digital

communications tools (2.1). In spite of her own inexperience, she is determined to make this happen but realises she needs help so researches the potential to outsource the initial setting up and integration of social media channels (2.2). She identifies a low-cost non-profit consultant who will also train volunteers to maintain Community Bank's social media presence (2.3).

The manager is pleased that this work is progressing and agrees with her directors that the organisation should take small steps in this process, rather than seek rapid transformation (3.1). She joins a third sector network where she can continue to learn more from her peers, and where she is also happy to share her own learning (5.1, 5.2, 5.3). She encourages volunteers to feed back their experiences, so that together they can identify how to progress the change to digital communications that promote online sales (3.1, 3.2, 3.3). The volunteers survey other volunteers and customers to ensure that their views and experiences are recognised in this new strategy (4.1).

(Numbers in brackets refer to the numbering in the EU3D Competence Framework, Table 5.)

## 6. Next steps: The competence framework in practice

This brief example is necessarily simplified for this report but it shows how an organisation might take a key function or process and work its way through the competence framework to identify gaps and take action to fill those gaps.

### 6.3. Consolidation post-Covid

The research highlighted a specific learning and development need that relates to the post-pandemic context – to understand how to review, and rationalise digital tools and practices adopted as a response to immediate and urgent challenges in the environment; then to integrate this learning into practice with a focus on the longer-term. This relates to the competences in area 2 of the framework. There are already examples of nonprofit networks providing spaces in which TSOs can come together with digital experts with experience in the sector to begin to move from the reactive to more proactive digital development<sup>14</sup>. However, in the post-Covid context, there is some evidence that there is a particularly pressing need to build on the learning acquired as a rapid response to immediate need, and to support and empower TSOs to develop a more proactive, strategic and systemic approach to digitalisation.

The Emergency Toolkit (IO4) produced by the EU3 Digital Partnership provides important underlying knowledge about current digital tools (area 2 of the framework), but developing the competence to rationalise and integrate also requires skills in information gathering, assessment, analysis and application. The task of rationalising and integrating tools and practices to meet an organisation's needs is a complex one. One way of addressing this gap is to provide downloadable assessment templates and guidance to enable third sector and social enterprise organisations to at least begin the process of review and rationalisation. Individuals tackling this task will benefit from opportunities for peer support and we encourage third sector and social enterprise networks to offer opportunities for them to share experiences of rationalisation and integration. From this sharing, network facilitators could generate guidance based on experience, and including practice examples, that can be shared more widely. This iterative, practice-based approach will slowly build the resources available to practitioners and over time could be added to partners' websites, or the EU3D platform.

## 6. Next steps: The competence framework in practice

### 6.4. Digital leadership

A further need identified through the research is for TSOs to develop competence in 'digital leadership'. The group of competences headed 'organisational culture and leadership' identifies knowledge, skills and attitudes that constitute digital leadership, including complex 'soft' skills. To some extent, these can be developed in a general context (e.g. a course on managing change). However, generalist training is unlikely to address the particular combination of competences in this area of the framework. This points to a need for more targeted training to develop digital leadership in a third sector context. We recognise that this is a complex idea and that the 'soft' competences in this area of the framework are difficult to assess. We hope that this area of the framework will generate debate, within and beyond the EU3D partnership and associated networks, about what constitutes digital leadership in a TSO and how that leadership can be developed. Furthermore, we suggest that partners use this area of the framework and the associated research to advocate for the development of contextualised digital leadership learning that is open access or low cost.

As a point of comparison, business schools across Europe offer programmes in digital leadership<sup>15</sup>. However, few TSO leaders will have the resources to

access such opportunities, and they are unlikely to address the specifics of the third sector, particularly smaller TSOs. In this research, we have identified just one set of digital leadership resources aimed at small charities in the UK.<sup>16</sup>

### 6.5. Communities of Practice

The interviews undertaken for this research affirm that peer support and networks play a crucial part in increasing competence and confidence in the digital domain. We encourage EU3D partners and associated networks to consider how to facilitate spaces for sharing, discussion and debate of different areas of the competence framework, as an ongoing practice – for example offering a number of facilitated sessions for TSOs to meet regularly for such discussions. Over time, we hope to see multiple communities of practice emerge that are specific to different contexts (e.g. in different nations), but also interact with one another across different contexts (e.g. through European-wide networks), so that the overarching community of third sector digital practice grows in size and strength. Competence development will then become an increasingly shared concern and practice, rather than the concern of individuals or isolated organisations

# Conclusion

The period of the Covid-19 pandemic has seen rapid acceleration of the adoption of digital tools by third sector and social enterprise organisations. At the same time, it has accentuated the divide between those TSOs with capacity, capability and resources to move towards digital maturity that furthers social mission, and those that are struggling to apply digital tools even to basic tasks. Furthermore, the pandemic has highlighted a digital divide in organisations and in society. TSOs potentially have an important role to play in tackling the digital divide – particularly those smaller organisations (charities, social enterprises, community co-ops) working with communities of place and interest. However, these are the very organisations without the resources to employ digital specialists or to purchase costly resources. A digital competence framework for TSOs cannot in itself resolve this dilemma, but it can provide a starting place for organisations and networks to begin a journey towards digital maturity.



# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> DigComp | EU Science Hub [europa.eu](http://europa.eu)

<sup>2</sup> [www.ict4ngo.org](http://www.ict4ngo.org)

<sup>3</sup> Please contact the team at [oubs-cvsl@open.ac.uk](mailto:oubs-cvsl@open.ac.uk) for further details of the full literature review.

<sup>4</sup> <http://report.skillsplatform.org/charity-digital-report-2020/>

<sup>5</sup> Ashoka report in partnership with Intel : Social Entrepreneurs Changing Lives through ICT <https://www.changemakers.com/learning-lab/326888>

<sup>6</sup> In this paper, we use the term 'users' to denote individuals and communities who engage with and benefit from the activities of TSOs.

<sup>7</sup> Please contact the team at [oubs-cvsl@open.ac.uk](mailto:oubs-cvsl@open.ac.uk) for a list of these resources.

<sup>8</sup> see Charity Digital Skills report 2020 <http://report.skillsplatform.org/charity-digital-report-2020/>

<sup>9</sup> See the following, for example, for further insight <http://www.thinksocialtech.org/digitalmaturityresearch/poster> <https://medium.com/wethecatalysts/de-fragging-digital-maturity-f9e093554ca5>

<sup>10</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/digcomporg>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.techsoupeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/A-guidebook-for-socially-active-people-A-new-way-of-measuring-and-developing-of-your-ICT-competences-English.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Please contact [oubs-cvsl@open.ac.uk](mailto:oubs-cvsl@open.ac.uk) for further details of the full literature review.

<sup>13</sup> Please email [oubs-cvsl@open.ac.uk](mailto:oubs-cvsl@open.ac.uk) for the full table.

<sup>14</sup> see for example, <https://navca.org.uk/news-and-views/f/charities-invited-to-apply-to-%C2%A3495m-fund-to-improve-sector-digit>

<sup>15</sup> See for example Warwick Business School in the UK Why WBS | The Warwick Executive Diploma in Digital Leadership | Warwick Business School; INSEAD in France

<https://www.insead.edu/executive-education/digital-transformation-innovation/leading-digital-transformation-innovation-overview>; and Beeckestijn in the Netherlands <https://www.beeckestijn.org/en/courses/digital-marketing-strategy-leadership>

<sup>16</sup> <https://superhighways.org.uk/latest/digitalleadership101/>

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# Appendix 1: Interviewees

| Interviewee | Country/s of work/projects      | Type/s of organisation being discussed  | Digital specialist? |
|-------------|---------------------------------|---|---------------------|
| 1           | UK                              | Supporting grassroots charities to make the most of their data and digital tools  | yes                 |
| 2           | Croatia                         | Grant-making foundation that also runs their own projects   | no                  |
| 3           | Croatia                         | Pro-democracy watchdog NGO and 2 x smaller social enterprises   | no*                 |
| 4           | Croatia                         | Non-formal education provider to small organisations in the sector and a volunteer hub provider   | no                  |
| 5           | Germany, The Netherlands        | Social enterprise hub, social enterprise network  | yes                 |
| 6           | Portugal                        | Non-profit social innovation business school and social enterprise hub  | no                  |
| 7           | Portugal                        | Third sector leadership network and digital inclusion and innovation hub  | yes                 |
| 8           | Portugal                        | Large volunteer association   | no                  |
| 9           | Spain                           | European projects program of a large NGO  | no                  |
| 10          | UK                              | Network to support digital acceleration   | yes                 |
| 11          | Pan-European (Brussels), France | European think tank for digital acceleration in social economy, advisor in corporate philanthropy and social responsibility, European digital jobs platform. Knowledge of French third sector | yes                 |
| 12          | Pan-European (Italy)            | European project on digital inclusion directed at policymakers  | yes                 |
| 13          | UK                              | Freelance researcher in third sector digital skills   | yes                 |
| 14          | Pan-European (Brussels)         | Digital transition and the labour market project within a partnership network to further the social economy   | no*                 |

| Interviewee | Country/s of work/projects | Type/s of organisation being discussed  | Digital specialist? |
|-------------|----------------------------|---|---------------------|
| 15          | Denmark                    | Distribution of software and volunteer matching   | yes                 |
| 16          | Pan-European (UK), UK      | Independent researcher working on a variety of third sector projects in Europe and UK, including on digital inclusion | yes                 |
| 17          | UK,                        | Marketing resources and training for the third sector.  | no*                 |
| 18          | UK, Spain                  | Independent researcher and consultant on digitalisation in the third sector   | yes                 |
| 19          | Spain                      | Regional governmental organisation supporting social enterprises to expand into new markets                           | no                  |

## Appendix 2: Examples of Practices and Projects

|      | Competence  | Example   |
|------|---|---|
| 1.2. | <b>Identify, assess, procure and maintain appropriate hardware and software</b> | <p>Identify, assess, procure and maintain appropriate hardware and software</p> <p><a href="https://www.techsoupeurope.org/">https://www.techsoupeurope.org/</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.charitydigitalexchange.org/product_catalogue">https://www.charitydigitalexchange.org/product_catalogue</a></p> <p><a href="https://floss.colectic.coop/">https://floss.colectic.coop/</a></p> <p>An organization encouraging TSOs to use free and ethical software</p> |
| 1.3. | <b>Gather, manage and analyse data to further social mission</b>                | <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ULreEZ6iRvw&amp;list=PL2PcVRMiWoSNIIPhSicyEArCMHn8Yzbbpy&amp;index=4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ULreEZ6iRvw&amp;list=PL2PcVRMiWoSNIIPhSicyEArCMHn8Yzbbpy&amp;index=4</a></p> <p>Using pivot tables in Excel to learn more about services and adjust them accordingly</p>  |
| 1.4. | <b>Track and act on the potential impacts of current and upcoming tools</b>     | <p><a href="https://abd.org/ca/general-ca/momentum-analytics-i-abd-presenten-una-eina-predictiva-de-situacions-de-vulnerabilitat-als-barris-dels-municipis-de-catalunya/">https://abd.org/ca/general-ca/momentum-analytics-i-abd-presenten-una-eina-predictiva-de-situacions-de-vulnerabilitat-als-barris-dels-municipis-de-catalunya/</a></p> <p>Using big data to create predictive models on social risk and vulnerability</p>                                   |
| 3.1. | <b>Develop a long-term sustainable vision and strategy for digital</b>          | <p><a href="https://www.thecatalyst.org.uk/research/digital-journeys">https://www.thecatalyst.org.uk/research/digital-journeys</a></p>  |

# Appendix 2: Examples of Practices and Projects

|      | Competence  | Example  |
|------|---|--|
| 3.2. | Enable and empower bottom-up creativity and problem solving       | <a href="https://charitydigitalcode.org/the-code/culture/">https://charitydigitalcode.org/the-code/culture/</a>  |
| 3.3. | Distribute digital leadership across the organisation             | <a href="https://superhighways.org.uk/latest/digitalleadership101/">https://superhighways.org.uk/latest/digitalleadership101/</a>  |
| 3.5. | Support digital confidence and continuous learning for all        | <a href="https://bemore.digital/about-bemoredigital/">https://bemore.digital/about-bemoredigital/</a><br>Example of a new small-scale training supplier specific to the sector   |
| 4.1. | Include all stakeholder groups within digital vision and strategy | <a href="https://reachvolunteering.org.uk/blog/our-remote-volunteer-took-us-150">https://reachvolunteering.org.uk/blog/our-remote-volunteer-took-us-150</a>  |
| 3.5. | Support digital confidence and continuous learning for all        | <a href="https://bemore.digital/about-bemoredigital/">https://bemore.digital/about-bemoredigital/</a><br>Example of a new small-scale training supplier specific to the sector   |
| 4.4. | Include all stakeholder groups within digital vision and strategy | <a href="https://reachvolunteering.org.uk/blog/our-remote-volunteer-took-us-150">https://reachvolunteering.org.uk/blog/our-remote-volunteer-took-us-150</a>  |
| 5.2. | Make use of existing networks to explore digital possibilities    | <a href="https://netequality.org.uk/">https://netequality.org.uk/</a><br>A project to formalize existing networks and create a supportive community.   |
| 5.3. | Discover the wider digital ecosystem and actively participate     | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fqx_4PSPItg&amp;list=PL2PcVRMiWoSNIIPhSicyEArCMHn8Yzbpy&amp;index=3">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fqx_4PSPItg&amp;list=PL2PcVRMiWoSNIIPhSicyEArCMHn8Yzbpy&amp;index=3</a><br>Example of working with a second tier organization to do a DataDive in order to improve services.<br><a href="https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/collection/digital-response-covid-19/hackathons-and-events">https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/collection/digital-response-covid-19/hackathons-and-events</a> Example list of hackathons |

The above are examples rather than recommendations – please continue to do your own due diligence checks.