New paths for Twin Transition of Social Enterprises in Arts and Crafts sector

PROJECT REPORT

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DELIVERABLE TABLE

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Contributors:	ACT Center, All partners
Quality Check:	ARLAB, Asociation Loyola-Gymnasium, CDP Globus

TASK TABLE

WP2	Capacity Building for Twin Transition of Social Enterprises in Arts & Craft sector
WP Leader	Diesis Network (P4)
Task	T2.2 Survey to VET/C-VET organisations and representatives of social economy, their associations/stakeholders to identify new training paths for twin transition of social enterprises in arts & craft sector
Duration	M3-M7
Task Leader	Diesis Network (P4), Academy of Entrepreneurship (P5), All partners
Short description of the task	M3-M4 - Survey Protocol Preparation ● EU partners aiming at identifying best practices in twin transition of social enterprises in arts & craft sector ● WB partners aiming at identifying training needs (EQF5) M5-M7 - Stakeholders' Interviews for feedback & suggestions ● 6 representatives of VET/C-VET organisations ● 3 representatives of Social Economy (they can participate with more than 1 representative) M7 - Report AKEP with the assistance of ACT Center will collect data and results and create a report that will contain suggestions and feedback to better respond with training to twin transition of social enterprises in arts & craft sector.

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REVISION HISTORY

VERSION	DATE	DESCRIPTION
V1.0	25/07/2025	Draft version delivered to all PPs
V1.1	29/07/2025	Added graphs from the Survey Google Forms
V1.2	30/07/2025	Feedback form from ACT Center
V1.3	31/07/2025	Layout and formatting review
V1.4	01/08/2025	Final version and submission date

TtraSE Project Partners

P1   **MateraHub** - Consorzio MateraHub Industrie Culturali e Creative (Italy)

P2   **ARLAB** - Agenzia Regionale LAB - Lavoro e Apprendimento Basilicata (Italy)

P3   **CCIB** - Cámara de Comercio Italiana de Barcelona (Spain)

P4   **Diesis** Network (Belgium)

P5   **AKEP** - Academy of Entrepreneurship (Greece)

P6   **ACT Center** - Albanian Center for Education Care and Training (Albania)

P7   **Partners Albania** – Partners Albania for Change and Development (Albania)

P8   **ADP – Zid** - Association for Democratic Prosperity (Montenegro)

P9   **ALG** - Association "Loyola-Gymnasium" (Kosovo)

P10   **CDP Globus** - Center for the Development of Social Entrepreneurship (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

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Executive Summary

This report concludes Task 2.2 of the TtraSE project, which examined how VET/C-VET providers can better support social enterprises (SEs) in the arts and craft sector through training aligned with the **twin transition**—green and digital—and fast-changing labour market needs. Interviews were conducted with over 40 organisations from both EU and the Western Balkans (WB) countries, including SEs and training providers.

Social enterprises (SEs) show strong motivation to innovate and grow their social impact using digital tools and sustainable practices. However, most face challenges in accessing structured, sector-relevant training—especially in green skills, digital marketing, and sustainable production. Peer learning, in-person workshops, and micro-credentials were the most preferred formats.

VET/C-VET providers are beginning to adapt, offering practical, project-based learning and integrating sustainability themes. Still, common barriers include limited staff expertise, outdated curricula, and insufficient collaboration with labour market actors. The report highlights good practices from EU partners and identifies clear training gaps and institutional bottlenecks in the WB.

Policy recommendations call for greater autonomy for training centers, more inclusive training systems, stronger public–private collaboration, and flexible, modular learning models. These findings will directly inform the next project steps—**co-creation labs** and the development of **guidelines for twin transition training pathways** in arts & crafts.

Glossary

Best Practices	The term best practice is used as a recognition term for methodologies or procedures that are proven to be effective and optimal results. A best practice in twin transition can be considered as a set of processes that is widely accepted among different actors/stakeholders relevant to the field.
Blockchain Technology	A decentralized digital system for recording and verifying transactions across a network of computers. It stores data in linked blocks that are secure, transparent, and tamper-resistant, making it especially useful for applications requiring trust, such as cryptocurrencies, supply chain tracking, and digital contracts.
Digital Innovation	Digital innovation refers to the creation, enhancement, or transformation of products, services, processes, or business models through the use of digital technologies. This includes the application of tools such as artificial intelligence, big data, the Internet of Things (IoT), blockchain, and cloud computing to improve efficiency, competitiveness, and user experience.
Green Innovation	Green innovation refers to the development and implementation of new or significantly improved products, services, processes, or business models that reduce environmental impacts, promote sustainability, and support the transition to a low-carbon, resource-efficient economy.
Skill Gap	Skill gap is the mismatch of skills that an individual has and what is in reality required by ever-changing the labor market.
Small and Medium Enterprises	Commission Recommendation 2003/361 defines small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as companies whose staff numbers and economic weight fall below certain limits. ● A **medium-sized company** has up to 250 employees, a turnover of up to €50 million and a balance sheet total of up to €43 million; ● A **small company** has up to 50 employees and a turnover or balance sheet total of up to €10 million;

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	● A **micro-company** has up to 10 employees and a turnover or balance sheet total of up to €2 million.
STERN Pedagogical Methodology	An educational approach focused on fostering strong teacher-student relationships, emotional security, and individualized support. It emphasizes trust, respect, and social-emotional development to create a positive and inclusive learning environment, particularly in early childhood and primary education.
Social Enterprise	An undertaking, irrespective of its legal form, which is not listed on a regulated market within the meaning of Article 4(21) of Directive 2014/65/EU, and which:
	1) in accordance with its articles of association, statutes or any other statutory document establishing the business, has as its primary objective the achievement of measurable, positive social impacts rather than generating profit for its owners, members and stakeholders, where the undertaking:
	a) provides innovative services or goods which generate a social return and/or
	b) employs an innovative method of production of goods or services and that method of production embodies its social objective;
	2) reinvests its profits first and foremost to achieve its primary objective and has in place predefined procedures and rules for any circumstances in which profits are distributed to shareholders and owners, in order to ensure that any distribution of profits does not undermine the primary objective;
	3) is managed in an entrepreneurial, accountable and transparent way, in particular by involving workers, customers and/or stakeholders affected by its business activities.
	Social Enterprises operate by providing goods and services for the market in an entrepreneurial and often innovative fashion, having social and/or environmental objectives as the reason for their commercial activity. Profits are mainly reinvested with a view to achieving their societal objective. Their method of organisation and ownership also follow democratic or participatory principles or focus on social progress. Social enterprises adopt a variety of legal forms depending on the national context.
Training Needs	Training need is the identified gap in knowledge/skills/attitudes that are mandatory to perform a task effectively. The process of recognising the training needs is also connected with the vision and future plans of the organisation.

1.Introduction

1.1   The TtraSE Project

The "Twin Transition for Social Enterprises in Arts and Craft Sectors" project (TtraSE) is designed to robustly address the skills gap and foster sustainable socio-economic development in the arts and crafts sector within the Western Balkans, with a focus on Social Economy Enterprises (SEEs). TtraSE's multifaceted strategy not only addresses the skills development needs but also strengthens the strategic capacities of VET/C-VET providers, fostering a dynamic and collaborative ecosystem that directly contributes to the sustainable socio-economic development of the arts and crafts sector in the Western Balkans. The overarching goal is to empower institutions with the tools and capabilities required to actively contribute to economic growth, job creation, and social advancement in the Western Balkans.

The designated target groups for TtraSE encompass a broad spectrum within the arts and crafts sector recognizing the importance of collaboration between social entrepreneurship and educational entities, fostering an integrated strategy for sustainable socio-economic development within the targeted regions: Social Entrepreneurs in Arts & Craft, VET/C-VET Trainers, Professionals and staff of VET/C-VET providers, including directors, managers, technical staff, researchers, heads of units, and individuals guiding the formulation of training strategies.

The project is co-funded by the European Union, through the Erasmus + programme and will be implemented within a 3-year timeframe.

1.2   The Consortium

TtraSE's consortium consists of 10 partners in total, 5 from 4 EU countries: MateraHub - Consorzio MateraHub Industrie Culturali e Creative, ARLAB - Agenzia Regionale LAB - Lavoro e Apprendimento Basilicata (Italy), CCIB - Cámara de Comercio Italiana de Barcelona (Spain), Diesis Network (Belgium), and Academy of Entrepreneurship - AKEP (Greece), and 5 partners from 4 WB countries: ACT Center - Albanian Center for Education Care and Training (Albania), Partners Albania - Partners Albania for Change and Development (Albania), ADP-Zid - Association for Democratic Prosperity (Montenegro), ALG - Association "Loyola-Gymnasium" (Kosovo), and CDP Globus - Center for the Development of Social Entrepreneurship (Bosnia and Herzegovina).

1.3   The Report

The TtraSE project foresees the implementation of five work packages (WPs) in total during its duration, where under WP2: "Capacity Building for Twin transition of Social Enterprises in Arts & Craft Sector", several tasks are included, such as stakeholder engagement for the creation of a common database (T2.1), survey to VET/C-VET organisations and SEs to identify new training pathways (T2.2), capacity building co-creation lab (T2.3), and development of guidelines for the final capacity building of VET/C-VET organisations (T2.4).

The purpose of this report is to provide a contextual analysis of the survey results of T2.2 of all participating countries, and to highlight the suggestions and feedback given on the two major topics of the project:

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- How VET/C-VET organisations can better respond with training to the twin transition of the social enterprises in the arts and craft sectors.

- How VET/C-VET organisations and Social Enterprises can better respond to the challenges of adaptation to the constantly changing labour market requirements.

The report consists of six parts: Introduction, Methodology, Survey Results, Cross-country analysis & Thematic Conclusions, Policy Recommendations & Future Steps, Conclusion. The **Introduction** includes some general information about the project, and the purpose of this report. In **Chapter 2**, the one dedicated to the methodology, the survey protocols are analysed, and there is a first description of the data collected – both qualitative and quantitative, and a target group description. **Chapter 3** contains the surveys' data analysis organised regionally (EU & WB countries), and per target group category (SEs & VET/C-VET organisations) with a special attention given to the best practices given by the EU stakeholders, and the training needs deriving from the answers of the WB stakeholders. **Chapter 4** highlights the key conclusions of the previous analysis, organised in two sub-chapters, one for SEs and one for VET/C-VET organisations, while **Chapter 5** analyses the policy recommendation data to drive the change, and defines the future steps to be followed in and out of TtraSE. Finally, general conclusions are presented in **Chapter 6**, as a closure of the report.

The report was developed by the Academy of Entrepreneurship in collaboration with all partners, where suggestions and feedback on the training for achieving the twin transition for social enterprises are included as WP2/T2.2 final deliverable.

2.Methodology

2.1 Survey Protocols & Questionnaire Development

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the training needs and good practices related to the twin transition in the arts and craft sector, two survey protocols were developed as part of WP2/Task 2.2. These protocols were designed to be context-sensitive, responding to the differing levels of development, training infrastructure, and transition readiness between the EU and Western Balkan partner countries. The surveys targeted both key stakeholder groups: representatives of social enterprises (SEs) and representatives of Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Continuing VET (C-VET) providers. Together, these groups represent both the demand and supply sides of skills and training ecosystems for social enterprises operating in this sector.

The main objective of the surveys was to gather insights into **how social enterprises and training organisations are currently active — or can be supported to be active — in the green and digital transition**. This included identifying existing strategies and best practices, as well as uncovering training gaps, institutional needs, and barriers. Ultimately, the data collected would act as recommendations for designing new training paths or adapting already existing ones, to better equip social enterprises and VET institutions for the challenges and opportunities of the twin transition.

The structure of the research followed a dual-path approach to better facilitate the needs of the different target groups of the project. EU-based partners (Italy, Spain, and Greece) implemented a protocol focused on identifying and documenting good practices among social enterprises and training organisations that have already taken steps towards green and digital innovation, and are actively providing training to organisations/SEs to achieve their twin transition goals. These surveys aimed to showcase successful strategies, enabling mechanisms, and partnerships that have supported the twin transition in practice. Respondents were asked to reflect on enablers and barriers, and to share insights using a structured SWOT analysis, but also reflected on public and private collaborations, in addition to policy insights.

In contrast, the protocol applied in the project Western Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Montenegro) focused on mapping training needs and identifying skill gaps within both social enterprises and VET/C-VET providers. This version of the survey sought to explore the current state of training provision, understand the obstacles organisations face in initiating the transition process, and identify future-oriented skills and competencies needed to support twin transition pathways. The SWOT analysis was integrated also here, providing a structured means of evaluating transition readiness.

Each survey protocol contained two questionnaires: one addressed to social enterprise representatives and another directed to VET/C-VET organisations. The questionnaires for the EU countries were primarily qualitative, consisting of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed narrative responses and examples of best practices, and whether they can be transformed in different contexts. In the Western Balkan countries, the questionnaires followed a mixed-method approach, combining both closed and open-ended questions to facilitate both quantitative analysis and qualitative interpretation. In that way the partnership was able to understand clearer the training needs deriving from the local context.

To ensure relevance and accessibility, the questionnaires were first developed in English and then translated into the national languages of participating countries, if it was needed. Once completed, the responses were translated back into English and submitted in standardized formats for centralised analysis. The surveys could be completed either in written form via Google Forms or through online, face-to-face, or hybrid interviews. In all cases, appropriate GDPR-compliant consent procedures were followed (Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation).

In addition to the questions themselves, each questionnaire included brief explanatory notes and illustrative examples to help guide participants and clarify the intent behind each question. A glossary of core terms was also made available to ensure consistency of understanding across diverse contexts.

The thoughtful and targeted design of the two survey protocols allowed the project to capture both the current landscape and forward-looking training needs of social enterprises and VET/C-VET providers across two distinct regional realities, ensuring the findings could meaningfully inform the capacity-building activities that follow.

2.2   Target Group & Country sampling

As mentioned above, the two key target groups that were involved in the interviewing process were representatives of VET/C-VET institutions (public and private), and representatives of social enterprises in the arts and craft sector. That way the partnership managed to get insights on the training needs of the social enterprises for a successful twin transition, but simultaneously get advice from VET institutions on what is really needed to achieve it and to effectively adapt to the ever-changing labour market. It was cross-country research that enabled project partners to get in contact with the reality of TtraSE's stakeholders and their national context, and to later translate the results into a transnational capacity building pathway that will actively drive change.

In the interview phase, 7 out of 8 project partner countries participated, as Belgium is not actively recruiting stakeholders at this stage of the project. From the already involved stakeholders, partners were advised to choose the most suitable ones to reply to the questionnaires, keeping in mind the project's KPIs. Taking into account the Google Form replies from the whole partnership, the following data are available:

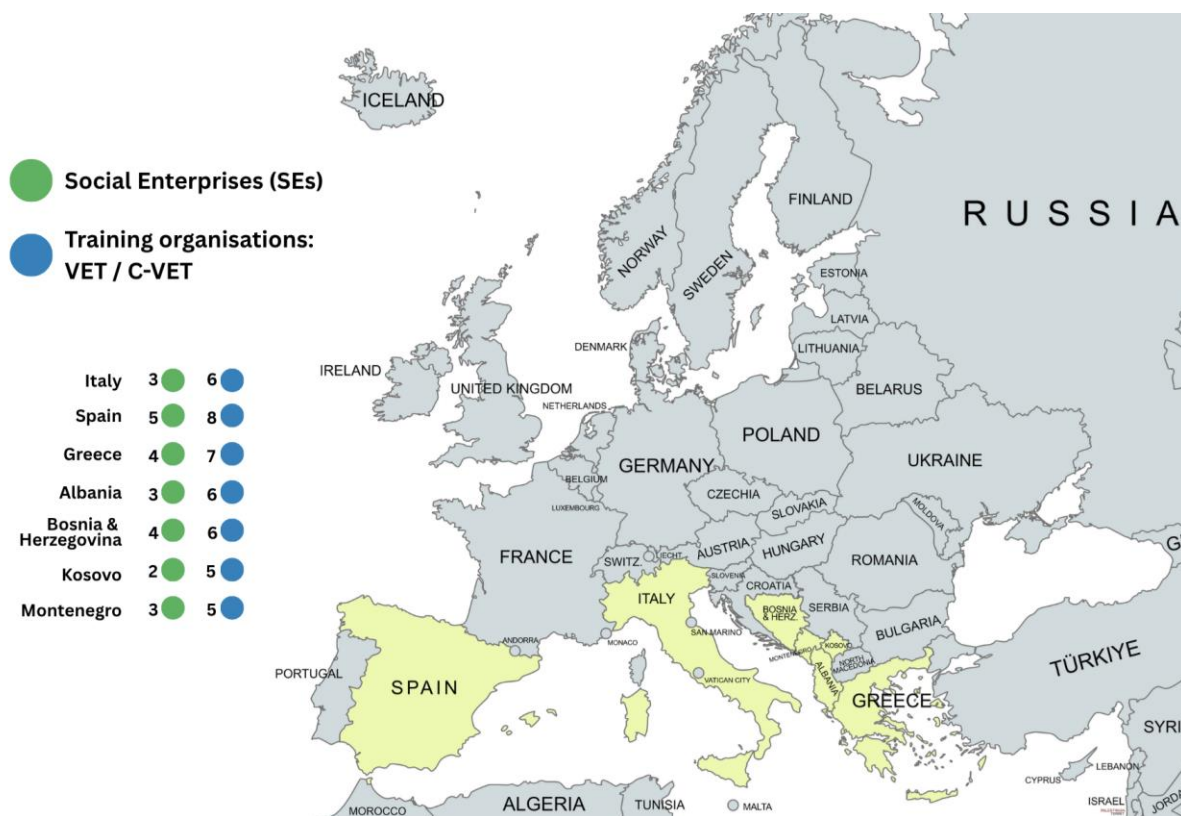| Country	Training organisations (VET/C-VET)	Social Enterprises (SE)
Italy	6 VET/C-VET	3 SEs
Spain	8 VET/C-VET	5 SEs
Greece	7 VET/C-VET	4 SEs
Albania	6 VET/C-VET	3 SEs
Bosnia and Herzegovina	6 VET/C-VET	4 SEs
Kosovo	5 VET/C-VET	2 SEs
Montenegro	5 VET/C-VET	3 SEs

Figure 1. Interviews from SEs and VET/C-VET from Selected Countries

The stakeholders were very eager to share their insights, although difficult to reach and engage in some specific country contexts, but overall, the results were sufficient to accumulate this report on the training needs of the social enterprises in EU and West Balkan countries.

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3. Survey Results

3.1 EU countries - Best Practices

3.1.1 - Social Enterprises

In the context of the project's effort to map best practices for the twin transition in the arts and craft sector, a total of twelve social enterprises from Greece, Italy, and Spain participated in the qualitative survey process. These organisations provided a diversified image of the sector—ranging from artisan workshops and educational spaces to cultural cooperatives and sustainability-focused initiatives. While their core missions differ, they all share a commitment for social impact, inclusive employment, and community-based innovation, making them highly relevant contributors to the goals of the twin transition.

From **Italy**, three social cooperatives participated. *Oltre l'Arte*, based in Matera, runs an artisanal workshop that blends heritage craft techniques with the empowerment of people in vulnerable situations, creating both cultural and economic value. *Con-Tatto*, is a social tailoring business with an emphasis on ecological sustainability.Their products are designed locally, and they make use of textile waste from a large furniture manufacturing company.

Noi Ortadini is a social promotion association working to regenerate a green space in Matera through sustainable urban horticulture practices and activities that involve citizens through bottom-up procedures.Their activities include urban regeneration,natural agriculture,outdoor environmental education and social inclusion workshops in collaboration with schools and ETS, youth exchanges (Erasmus+), training and entertainment (non-formal education) aim to stimulate active citizenship and promote a sustainable lifestyle.

From **Spain**, five organisations provided case studies of how digital and green innovation are merging with artistic practice. *La Jaira de Ana*, is a rural enterprise promoting environmental sustainability, traditional farming, and artistic events. *GLOBART* works at the intersection of community art and participatory education, fostering civic engagement through creative expression. *Fundación Mediterráneo* contributes through its cultural programming and educational workshops with an environmental and social lens. *BEE RURAL HUB* is a co-creation space in a rural setting, emphasizing agroecology, innovation, and social entrepreneurship, while *Objetos con Vidrio* explores circular production using recycled glass, offering a practical example of environmental sustainability within craft-based entrepreneurship.

From **Greece**, four enterprises offered valuable insights into how social innovation and circular economy principles are being integrated into creative industries. *Epanekkinisis* stands out for its work in the reuse and recycling of IT equipment, employing vulnerable groups in a circular repair model. *MESO* leverages cultural production and inclusive event planning to foster social cohesion and sustainability, while the *ANKAA Project* focuses on skills training and empowerment of refugees and migrants through craft and culinary arts. *Miazo*, a social enterprise based in Thessaloniki, bridges food, craft, and social awareness, creating spaces of expression and solidarity through artisanal and creative collaborations.

Together, these enterprises illustrate the diversity of approaches taken by social economy actors in the arts and craft sector in the European countries. Their experiences offer meaningful insights into how digital and green

transitions are already being explored and integrated—sometimes structurally, sometimes experimentally—within their daily operations, organisational strategies, and stakeholder collaborations.

Italian Social Cooperatives

Artisanal workshops empowering vulnerable groups and promoting sustainability.

Spanish Rural Enterprises

Rural enterprises merging digital innovation with artistic practice.

Greek Social Enterprises

Social enterprises integrating circular economy into creative industries.

Figure 2. Diverse Paths to Sustainability

SWOT ANALYSIS

The analysis of responses from EU social enterprises revealed a strong set of **internal strengths** that support their efforts in digital and green transformation. A qualified and motivated team, often driven by leadership with a clear vision, was commonly cited across countries as a fundamental asset. These enterprises benefit from agile decision-making structures and a notable readiness for change, reflecting a shared openness to innovation and experimentation. Many reported having deep technical knowledge, diversified experience, and a strong entrepreneurial spirit, which together enable them to adapt swiftly to new challenges that may occur. Of particular interest is their ability to bridge the artisan community with digital innovation, creating synergies between tradition and technology. Several organisations have also cultivated stable networks of collaborators and well-established communities or think tanks—described by one as a "fixers community"—that serve as support ecosystems for continuous learning and improvement.

However, despite these assets, social enterprises face considerable **internal limitations**, many of which are structural and widely shared. A limited budget, difficulty accessing funding, and staff shortages are typical constraints that prevent small SEs from scaling up or adopting advanced technologies. This was identified as a common barrier across all countries surveyed. Additionally, many reported the lack of infrastructure for conducting training or promoting their products, as well as the geographical dispersion of artisans and other key actors in the

sector. These gaps reduce visibility and make collaboration more complex. Another recurring issue is the resistance to change within certain communities or partner environments, highlighting the importance of addressing cultural and behavioural factors alongside technical ones.

Regarding **external opportunities**, responses were mixed. While some enterprises have successfully leveraged funding opportunities (EU and national) and engaged in public-private collaborations, others noted that no significant external support had been available—their progress was driven entirely by internal effort. Still, positive external drivers were reported, including private sector partnerships, donations, and even the relocation to more sustainable facilities, which enhanced operational alignment with twin transition goals. Interestingly, the financial crisis itself was seen as a trigger for strategic reflection and realignment, acting as a catalyst for innovation and value-driven restructuring.

Finally, several **barriers** emerged as consistent challenges across countries, but enterprises also shared strategies for overcoming them. Economic barriers were addressed through creative internal restructuring, securing contracts, and networking for new collaborations and funding—a pattern reported widely. The lack of knowledge and digital/green skills was mitigated through staff training and self-learning, often supported by informal but strong peer networks. Another recurring barrier was the mismatch between institutional expectations and the fragmented reality of the arts and crafts sector. Enterprises responded by building improved communication streams between public institutions and the private sector, aiming to shape more realistic and inclusive support frameworks for supporting the twin transition.

Overall, the insights from these organisations reveal that while EU-based social enterprises in the arts and crafts sector face substantial obstacles, their adaptability, strong values, and community-rooted approaches provide a solid foundation for advancing twin transition. Their experiences highlight not only the need for better-targeted external support, but also the transformative power of internal resilience and innovation.
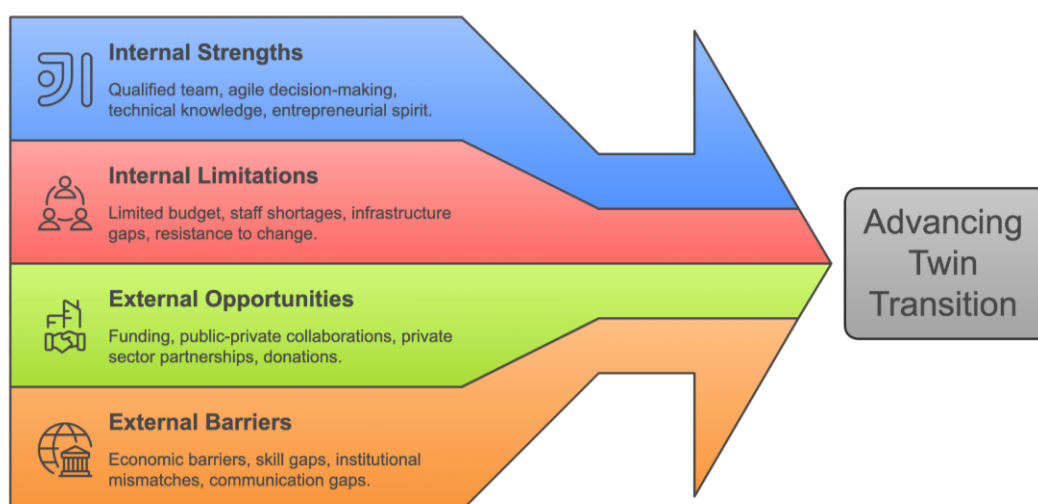

Figure 3. Navigating the Twin Transition

SUCCESS & STAKEHOLDERS

The experiences of social enterprises in the EU reveal a clear set of **success factors** that supported their efforts towards embracing green and digital transformation. A key element cited across all countries was **the importance of having a strong, high-quality product or idea** at the core of the business. This was consistently paired with professional support and continuous training, which allowed organisations to adapt, stay updated, and build internal capacity throughout their transition journey. Respondents highlighted that leadership/management with a clear and well-defined strategy, along with a solid, experienced team, were instrumental in maintaining direction and resilience during the transition process. Many also stressed the value of time—allowing for a gradual transition process rather than forcing change too quickly—which was identified as a shared condition for success. While not universally echoed, several enterprises pointed to their willingness to change and improve as a mindset that created space for innovation and adaptation.

Another major success factor, reported consistently across countries, was **the existence of collaboration networks, including volunteers,** which provided operational support, technical knowledge, and encouragement. In some cases, success was further facilitated by access to funding opportunities, though this was not uniformly available or leveraged. The enterprises that did benefit from financial support often connected it to their ability to scale up their efforts, invest in infrastructure, or pilot new tools for digital and green practices. Others, however, achieved success without substantial external funding, relying instead on community-driven approaches and internal organisational strengths.

When examining the **stakeholders and partners** involved in driving the twin transition, the responses pointed to a broad network of actors, and showed notable similarities in how this played out across different country contexts. Almost all enterprises identified private companies, public services, NGOs, universities, VET institutions, ministries, councils, chambers of commerce, schools, and accelerators as key players in their ecosystem. These collaborations provided knowledge, policy guidance, resources, and platforms for visibility and partnership. The involvement of educational institutions—particularly vocational providers—was noted as especially valuable for skills development, while private sector partners often brought in complementary expertise or market access. Ministries, chambers of commerce, and councils contributed more indirectly, creating enabling environments through policy or strategic initiatives.

The advice shared by the surveyed enterprises offers a **practical roadmap** for other social enterprises considering or beginning their own transition in the green and digital sector. Among the most widely agreed recommendations was **the importance of surrounding oneself with professionals and expertise**, and ensuring the organisation has the ability to resolve challenges efficiently. Equally important was **the need to define clear, measurable objectives**, grounded in research and aligned with the actual conditions of the sector—both of which were common suggestions across all countries. Enterprises advised others to involve a broad spectrum of stakeholders— including staff, volunteers, and beneficiaries—during the planning and implementation stages of transition. **Building collaborative networks with both public and private bodies** was viewed not just as supportive, but essential to resilience and innovation. There was also a strong emphasis on the value of continuous training in sustainability and digitalisation, recognizing that transition is an ongoing process that requires sustained learning and capacity building.

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While these shared insights dominate the landscape, some enterprises added further nuance. They advised newcomers to the transition process to start small, particularly when testing digital tools or green practices, and to have patience and persistence, as mindsets—especially within traditional communities—do not shift overnight. Others stressed the importance of marketing research, comparing different ideas, and critically filtering external information, particularly in an oversaturated digital landscape. These more individual reflections, though less commonly shared, offer depth and realism to the overall set of recommendations, reinforcing the idea that while a structured approach is necessary, adaptability and critical thinking remain key.

In summary, the insights from EU social enterprises underscore the critical interplay between internal capacity, stakeholder collaboration, and strategic adaptability in navigating the twin transition. Despite structural limitations, these organisations demonstrate that success is possible through clear leadership, quality-driven approaches, continuous training, and resilient networks. Their experiences highlight not only what is working, but also where support systems can be strengthened. As we now turn to the perspective of VET and C-VET providers, it becomes essential to examine how the training ecosystem aligns—or fails to align—with the evolving needs of social enterprises, and what capacities these educational actors require to better support a sustainable and digital future.

3.1.2 - VET/C-VET Organisations

A total of twenty-two VET and C-VET providers from Italy, Spain, and Greece participated in the survey, offering diverse perspectives on how vocational education institutions engage with, support, or adapt to the demands of the twin transition in the arts and craft sector. The organisations vary in size, structure, and approach—ranging from formal public training institutions and accredited private training providers to grassroots makerspaces, nonprofit initiatives, and national reference centers in specialised craft fields.

From **Italy**, participants included institutions with deep roots in artisanal training and applied technology. *Istituto Pavoniano Artigianelli per le Arti Grafiche* brings decades of experience in graphic arts education, while *BLUESEA Formazione* and *Scuola Centrale Formazione* operate at the intersection of vocational education and social inclusion. The *Fondazione ITS Green Energy Puglia*, meanwhile, represents a high-level technical institute committed to green transition, offering a cross-sectoral view of how sustainability is being embedded into vocational pathways. *Cometa Formazione*, the training arm of the Cometa social cooperative, combines vocational skills development with personal and social growth, particularly through hands-on learning in fields such as craftsmanship and tailoring. *Associazione Medeur-Mediterraneo Europa-Centro Studi* contributes a perspective rooted in European cooperation and policy engagement, with a focus on education, social innovation, and regional development. These institutions reflect a strong regional and national commitment to aligning training with both technological and environmental challenges.

In **Spain**, the responding organisations showcase a rich blend of traditional craft education and social innovation. Actors such as the *Centro de Referencia Nacional de Joyería y Orfebrería*, *Escuela de Arte 3*, and *IES Abastos* maintain strong links to the artistic heritage of their sectors, while organisations like *La Xixa Teatre*, *DomSpain*, and *Acción Laboral* bring a focus on social impact, equity, and community engagement. Notably, several Spanish providers also integrate artistic and performative approaches as tools for empowerment and training, particularly for disadvantaged groups.

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From **Greece**, a dynamic set of providers contributed to the study, combining formal education institutions (*SAEK Egaleo*, *Apopsi SA*, *Epimorfotiki Kilkis*) with innovative learning hubs such as *Athens Makerspace*, *coLab Makerspace*, and *European Progress*. These actors demonstrate a growing interest in connecting hands-on, experiential learning with green practices and digital fabrication. Additionally, social-purpose organisations like *Project Lighthouse NPO* introduce a human-centered, inclusive dimension to vocational learning, particularly targeting vulnerable groups and sustainability-driven entrepreneurship.

Together, these organisations reflect the multi-dimensional role of VET and C-VET providers in preparing learners—not just for employment—but for active participation in the digital and ecological transformation of their sectors. Their contributions offer crucial insight into the current training landscape and the institutional capacities needed to support the twin transition of social enterprises in the arts and craft sector.

Figure 4. Diverse Pathways to Vocational Education

The analysis of VET and C-VET providers in EU countries revealed a shared foundation of **internal strengths** that contribute to their effectiveness and resilience in responding to the twin transition. A significant common strength lies in their ability to personalise educational paths for mixed social and cultural groups, ensuring inclusion and accessibility—particularly relevant for the arts and craft sector, which often engages vulnerable or diverse learners. This adaptability is further reinforced by an ecosystemic approach that allows collaboration with universities, companies, and research centers, keeping training content in constant alignment with labour market demands. Another key shared asset is their commitment to using skills-based, active teaching methods, which move away from rigid, predefined curricula and instead respond dynamically to learners' evolving needs. Many institutions also emphasised the motivational value of the final, tangible product, a pedagogical tool that makes learning more engaging and experiential for students—particularly impactful in creative and craft-based learning contexts.

A strong, experienced and specialised teaching staff was also repeatedly mentioned as a vital resource, especially when supported with participatory methods, access to technology for inclusive teaching, and hands-on techniques like learning by doing in laboratories or workshops. These providers also value internationalisation, using EU collaborations to gain insight, build networks, and adopt modern pedagogical methodologies such as STERN.

While some providers highlighted additional specific assets—such as their diverse learner base, material know-how, or use of digital tools—what unites them is a shared culture of innovation, collaboration, and learner-centered design.

However, several **internal challenges** hinder the agility and broader impact of these institutions. One of the most widely reported difficulties is the need for highly skilled, adaptable trainers, with some organisations struggling with staff turnover and limited capacity to maintain multidisciplinary teams. The fast-changing demands of the labour market, often misaligned with student interests or institutional priorities, emerged as a cross-cutting concern. Moreover, many organisations acknowledged that while collaboration requests are frequent, they sometimes lack the resources to respond effectively, often due to staff shortages or financial constraints—a limitation echoed across all participating countries. Other common issues included resistance to technological change, bureaucratic hurdles, and the complexity of national legislation, which slows down decision-making and weakens cooperation between public and private stakeholders.

Beyond these shared limitations, some organisations also pointed to underdeveloped areas of non-formal education, particularly in spaces like maker labs or Do-It-Yourself (DIY) learning environments, which are vital in fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, but often lack systemic support. Additional **barriers** include student recruitment challenges, tight project deadlines, and EQF constraints, which limit flexibility and opportunities for wider collaboration. These internal constraints not only affect how these institutions operate, but also directly impact their ability to align effectively with labour market needs and twin transition priorities.

In terms of **external opportunities**, many VET and C-VET providers identified participation in EU-funded projects as a key enabler, helping them grow their networks, adopt new methodologies, and improve visibility. A widespread strength was their strong collaborative ties with public and private stakeholders—companies, schools, universities, and research institutions—which fostered agility and adaptability. Providers that excelled in stakeholder engagement benefited from greater recognition of the educational value of participatory art and the social relevance of their programs. Other commonly cited enablers included good local insight into student needs, exposure through events, and a unique educational offering that positioned them as distinctive actors in the training landscape. Less frequently mentioned, but still relevant, were benefits from adopting digital tools, effective internal management, and a growing tendency to treat business engagement as a standard operational method.

However, these opportunities were tempered by persistent **external risks** and systemic barriers. The accelerating pace of digital transformation, especially in sectors like graphic design, creates pressure for continuous adaptation, while some institutions struggle to integrate green transition themes into formal curricula. Many highlighted the lack of institutional recognition for artistic methodologies, leading to difficulties in validating and certifying their programs—this was a common challenge across countries. Others noted that the distance from decision-makers, the absence of incentives from the state, and weak marketing strategies further restrict their outreach and long-term strategic planning. Challenges such as fundraising complexity, unreliable collaborators, and limited private sector investment in education were also shared. Despite these barriers, most providers acknowledged that such challenges have also enhanced their organisational maturity, compelling them to adapt, innovate, and reflect critically on their mission and methods.
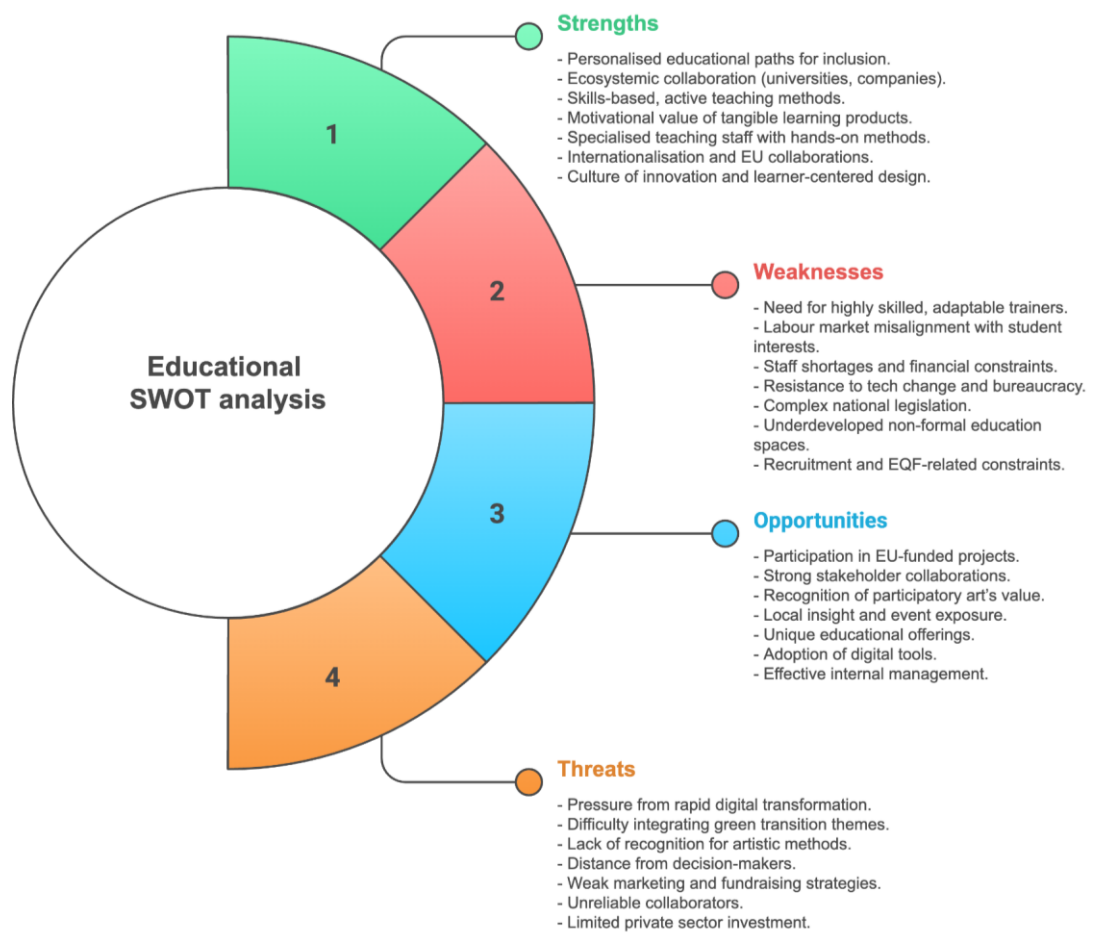
Strengths

- Personalised educational paths for inclusion.
- Ecosystemic collaboration (universities, companies).
- Skills-based, active teaching methods.
- Motivational value of tangible learning products.
- Specialised teaching staff with hands-on methods.
- Internationalisation and EU collaborations.
- Culture of innovation and learner-centered design.

Weaknesses

- Need for highly skilled, adaptable trainers.
- Labour market misalignment with student interests.
- Staff shortages and financial constraints.
- Resistance to tech change and bureaucracy.
- Complex national legislation.
- Underdeveloped non-formal education spaces.
- Recruitment and EQF-related constraints.

Opportunities

- Participation in EU-funded projects.
- Strong stakeholder collaborations.
- Recognition of participatory art's value.
- Local insight and event exposure.
- Unique educational offerings.
- Adoption of digital tools.
- Effective internal management.

Threats

- Pressure from rapid digital transformation.
- Difficulty integrating green transition themes.
- Lack of recognition for artistic methods.
- Distance from decision-makers.
- Weak marketing and fundraising strategies.
- Unreliable collaborators.
- Limited private sector investment.

Figure 5. SWOT analysis of VET/C-VET Organisations in EU selected countries

SKILLS VALIDATION & CERTIFICATION

Is your organisation familiar with the micro-credential system and its use?
22 responses

- Yes
- No
- Our organization is aware of the micro-credential system, although we do not currently use it formally. However, our self-funded programs align closely wit…
- No, microcredentials are not yet fully established—they are still in their early stages. However, we are among the first institutions actively engaging with this…
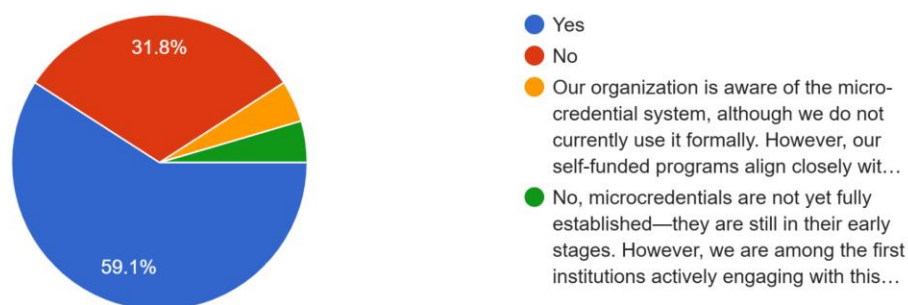
31.8%

59.1%

Figure 6. Familiarity with Micro-credential Systems

Among the twenty-two participating VET and C-VET organisations, thirteen reported **being familiar with the micro credentials system (13/22)**, while seven indicated **no prior knowledge or engagement with it (7/22)**. Even among those familiar, formal adoption remains limited. Some providers noted that although they do not yet officially issue micro credentials, their self-funded or modular training programs already reflect many of the same principles—short, focused, and responsive to specific learner and labour market needs. One organisation highlighted that this targeted approach has led to increased demand for such offerings, while another emphasised that micro credentials are still in an early development stage, though they are actively positioning themselves as early adopters. Overall, the feedback suggests a growing awareness and interest in micro credentials, with several institutions already aligning informally with the model, even in the absence of a formalised framework.

The majority of VET and C-VET providers across the EU countries indicated **familiarity with skills validation and certification systems**, though not all are currently implementing them. A key common practice is the provision of certificates of competence and qualification, often linked to formal or nationally recognised frameworks. Several organisations also reported the use of open badges, which offer a more flexible and digital approach to recognising skills—especially valuable in non-formal learning contexts. In addition, many institutions verify acquired skills through portfolio assessments or structured evaluations, with some already engaged in issuing micro credentials or participating in national programs such as *Acredita*.

Across countries, providers showcased a diverse and rich set of **certification offerings**, spanning both traditional vocational domains and more innovative or niche areas. Common examples include certifications in sustainable jewellery techniques, ethical design, innovation in materials, digital technology, as well as ACTA, UNICERT, and food safety certifications. In Greece, some providers noted their current ineligibility to certify skills due to regulatory limitations, such as not yet achieving recognition as a Lifelong Learning Center—though this was often tied to infrastructure or transitional phases. Importantly, there was a shared willingness among participants to further develop or adopt structured validation systems, reflecting a broader recognition of their importance in aligning with the twin transition and labour market demands.

SUCCESS FACTORS & PARTNERSHIP INSIGHTS

Most participating VET and C-VET organisations reported **well-established partnerships with both public and private entities at local, regional, national, and international levels**, a practice common across countries. These collaborations typically involve networks of schools, professional associations, companies, and economic actors, often facilitating internships, project development, and knowledge exchange. Many institutions also engage in international cooperation through Erasmus+, partnering with universities and training centers for educational initiatives. A notable number highlighted the importance of provincial or regional partnerships, particularly with companies and public institutions, which are instrumental for securing funding and aligning training with labour market needs. However, a few organisations indicated a more informal or limited engagement with public entities, focusing primarily on private-sector collaborations or event-based partnerships with NGOs and community actors. While the intensity and structure of partnerships vary, the majority of organisations demonstrate a broad and strategic approach to stakeholder collaboration, with a clear emphasis on sustaining multi-level networks that support both educational outcomes and institutional resilience.

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The most commonly identified **success factor** across countries was the **existence of shared values and objectives,** particularly around themes such as social justice, participation, and equity. This alignment not only provided a strong ethical foundation for cooperation, but also helped build shared working cultures and pedagogical philosophies. Many organisations highlighted the importance of mutual trust and horizontal, transparent communication, which was often maintained through regular contact, personal interaction, and clearly defined roles. These ongoing relationships created a sense of solidarity and reliability, reinforced by the fact that in several local contexts, the ecosystem includes few competitive organisations, enabling more collaborative and supportive partnerships. The presence of complementary skills and the clear identification of contact persons within partner organisations were also seen as practical enablers of smooth coordination and joint implementation.

Beyond values and communication, other **key enablers** included the credibility of proposals, the **ability to stay responsive** to the evolving needs of learners and technological developments, and the **availability of ongoing funding** to support sustained engagement. Many organisations also emphasized the value of regular and systemic scheduling, along with a shared willingness to learn and grow together. These elements not only ensured alignment, but also kept momentum and motivation high—particularly among teaching staff, who often feel more engaged when they see tangible results from collaborative work. Finally, attention to client satisfaction, active listening, and even the provision of additional services when needed helped deepen trust with external partners. In some cases, effective word-of-mouth and proactive risk management strategies were cited as factors that contributed to the long-term stability and success of partnerships, especially in more complex or multi-stakeholder environments.

Across the participating EU VET and C-VET organisations, **partnerships** have significantly influenced the development and adoption of new and more dynamic methods of training and collaboration. A widely reported outcome was the exchange of best practices, which served as a foundation for developing joint training programs, collaborative project work, and expanded networks—a process referred to by some as **"circle expansion."** Institutions described adopting community-based and participatory methods, such as creative facilitation tools, community labs, and participatory evaluation strategies, all contributing to more inclusive and learner-centered pedagogies. Another frequently cited development was the shift toward online and hybrid training models, including expert-led masterclasses, digital adaptation of practices like Forum Theatre, and monitoring tools for citizen science activities. These transformations were often inspired by partner exchanges and were oriented toward better inclusion, flexibility, and relevance to real-world settings. The adoption of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) was also mentioned as a structured response to increasing diversity and accessibility in training.

Beyond these common developments, several organisations described **innovative yet context-specific approaches**. One provider, for example, integrated *blockchain technology* into its training program through a flexible, project-based course module supported by a MOOC from the CHASE platform. This allowed students to go beyond the standard curriculum and earn additional certification. The same institution also piloted experimental specialties in open-source software and digital marketing, and proposed forward-looking roles such as 3D Printing Technician, even if not yet approved by the national educational authority. Another unique insight was the emphasis on spontaneous innovation, where new methodologies emerged organically through informal dialogue with adult education trainers, rather than formalised program redesign. Furthermore, partnerships enabled hands-on collaboration with craft-based enterprises, allowing learners to directly contribute to manual content production—

particularly valuable in the arts and crafts sector. Collectively, these examples highlight how partnerships not only shape new training content, but also **transform the methodology, mindset, and institutional culture** of VET providers, fostering agility, experimentation, and cross-sectoral learning.

Most participating VET and C-VET organisations adopt a multi-layered, stakeholder-driven approach to monitoring labour market needs, with ongoing collaboration with local and regional actors emerging as a key common practice. Institutions reported maintaining regular contact with companies, employment centers**,** NGOs**,** and other social and cultural actors, allowing them to gather qualitative feedback directly from communities and learners. Several organisations emphasized the importance of student internships and the feedback from tutors as an essential source of information on real-world labour market conditions. Beyond grassroots engagement, many also track broader trends through intersectoral working groups, labour agency reports, and recommendations from European education and culture bodies, which help them align their programs with emerging skills demands. Common priorities include the reinforcement of core transversal competences such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and emotional intelligence, which are increasingly valued across sectors.

Some organisations have gone further by institutionalising their **labour market responsiveness**. Notably, a few operate through dedicated curriculum committees or councils, such as the Coordinating Council for Linking Vocational Education with the Labor Market (SPAE) in Greece, which serves as a platform for local decision-making on training needs. Others reported using data from employability rates, course demand, and surveys distributed among stakeholders to assess and adapt their offerings. One insightful perspective highlighted that, while monitoring market demand is essential, it is not sufficient—training institutions should also play a proactive role in shaping labour market trends, a task that can only be achieved through collaborative innovation and shared foresight across networks. This view reflects a broader recognition among providers that vocational training must not only respond to change, but also help guide it.
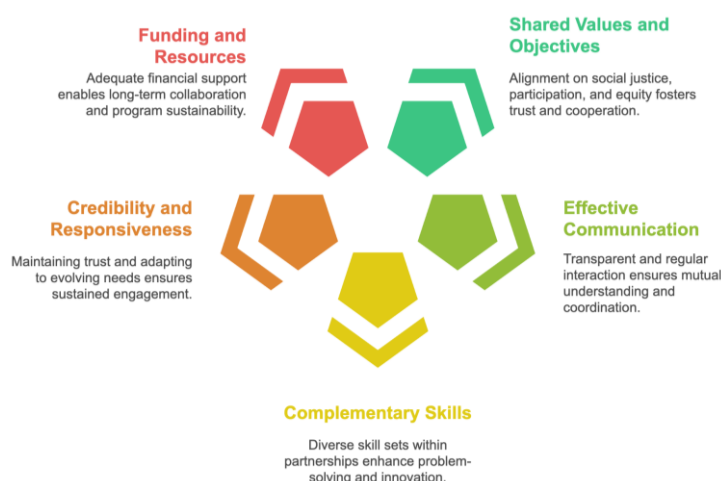

Funding and Resources
Adequate financial support enables long-term collaboration and program sustainability.

Shared Values and Objectives
Alignment on social justice, participation, and equity fosters trust and cooperation.

Credibility and Responsiveness
Maintaining trust and adapting to evolving needs ensures sustained engagement.

Effective Communication
Transparent and regular interaction ensures mutual understanding and coordination.

Complementary Skills
Diverse skill sets within partnerships enhance problem-solving and innovation.

Figure 7. Building Collaborative Educational Ecosystems

TRANSFERABILITY & POLICY RECOMMENDATION

A recurring theme across partner countries was the importance of cultivating a cohesive and motivated team that embraces not only an educational mission, but also a human-centered and entrepreneurial vision. This mindset

enhances adaptability and innovation. Furthermore, inter-institutional collaboration—particularly between educational providers, public institutions, and the private sector—was highlighted as a cornerstone for relevance and sustainability.

Several transferable practices were identified across countries:

- SCF's proactive digital transition stood out as a strong case, having anticipated the importance of technology in inclusive teaching. They coupled technology adoption with targeted trainer upskilling. While impactful, the model's reliance on guaranteed government funding limits direct replication.

- Noteworthy green initiatives included:

    o   Installation of green roofs for training environments

    o   Aquaponics courses tailored for trainers

    o   Masterclasses in sustainable fashion

    o   Involvement of trainers and students in citizen science projects

These actions are largely adaptable across contexts, depending on local needs and infrastructure.

A set of pedagogical strategies were also cited as promising and adaptable:

- Use of artistic and participatory methods (e.g., Theatre of the Oppressed)

- Pedagogical flexibility and localised content adaptation

- Intersectional, community-driven approaches that foster deep participant engagement

However, challenges to transferability were also acknowledged. These include the need for prior training of local teams, recognition of art as a valid educational tool, and community trust-building, which cannot be rushed or externally imposed. Moreover, hands-on, practice-based learning facilities were considered essential for effective training. Permanent installations for immediate skill application serve as a highly transferable model—provided there is alignment with local cultural and resource conditions.

Lastly, participation in Centers of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) was presented as a valuable mechanism. Through co-developing curricula and networks directly connected to industry, these institutions ensure that educational output remains labour market-relevant. The intention to share intellectual outputs with broader VET ecosystems further supports transferability and cross-border collaboration.

The feedback collected across partner countries highlights a strong consensus on the need to make vocational education and training systems more agile, inclusive, and better aligned with evolving labour market needs. A key priority identified is the **enhancement of collaboration between training providers and the labour market**.

Establishing stronger and more direct communication with businesses—particularly through regular meetings with local industry representatives—was seen as a vital step towards ensuring curricula reflect real-time skill demands. In addition, stakeholders suggested the creation of centralized databases (for example, in the jewellery sector) to

connect companies willing to collaborate with training institutions. These tools could be managed by business associations or chambers of commerce, enhancing coordination and partnerships.

Another recurring theme concerns the **need for a more flexible and responsive institutional framework**. Many providers expressed frustration at the slow pace of curriculum revisions by Ministries of Education. Faster responses and a greater degree of autonomy for vocational institutions were strongly advocated. Participants emphasized that educational institutions should not be entirely dependent on central authorities, especially given how rapidly science and technology are transforming the labour market. In this context, lifelong learning and the continuous updating of skills were identified as critical to staying relevant. There is no longer space, as one respondent put it, for someone to remain in the same profession indefinitely, relying solely on the knowledge they acquired before entering the field.

Innovation must also be understood in broader terms. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of integrating not only technology into training systems, but also investing in learning spaces tailored to young people's emerging needs, supporting continuous training for both educators and institutional leaders, and creating structured opportunities for youth voices to be heard. These innovations should be paired with stronger partnerships with companies and the third sector, ensuring a well-rounded, future-oriented learning environment.

Social inclusion was another key policy focus. The need to facilitate access to the labour market for people with disabilities was frequently noted, as was the importance of inclusive regulatory frameworks that empower social organisations to offer training adapted to their local contexts. In parallel, respondents advocated for the formal recognition of competencies acquired through non-formal or community-based learning, especially soft skills that are crucial, yet often undervalued in traditional qualifications.

Finally, recommendations emphasized **curricular enrichment** through the integration of artistic and participatory pedagogies, such as Theatre of the Oppressed, into formal continuous training. These methodologies were seen as effective tools for engaging learners and fostering critical, community-rooted competencies. Similarly, the formal recognition of innovative workshops—such as those in robotics—as legitimate educational programs would help align emerging fields with national qualification systems. Respondents also pointed to regulatory barriers at the EU level that hinder tool access for new enterprises, arguing that simplifying these processes would support entrepreneurship and innovation in smaller or newer social enterprises.
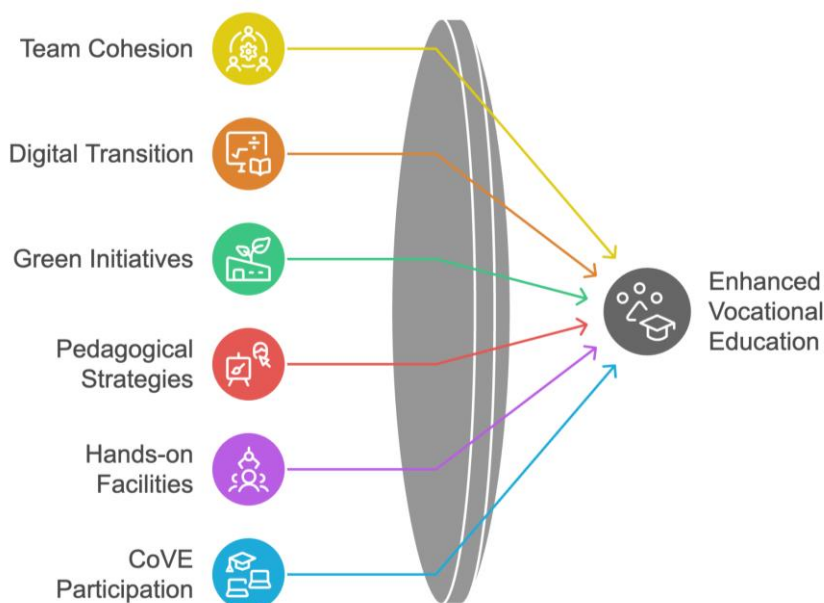
Figure 8. Pathways to Vocational Excellence

In summary, the policy directions suggested by stakeholders converge on the **need for a VET/C-VET system that is dynamic, inclusive, deeply embedded in its local economy and community, and capable of evolving in response to both technological change and human development needs.**

Improving the quality and impact of public–private partnerships was widely emphasized as a critical enabler of more responsive and inclusive vocational education systems. One of the main points raised by stakeholders is the need to move beyond formal or symbolic partnerships and invest in concrete, purpose-driven collaborations. Rather than relying solely on longstanding institutional ties, training providers and organisations are encouraged to actively seek out new partners, even those with whom they have no pre-existing contacts. Expanding the network is seen as a way to enrich perspectives and avoid stagnation within closed or repetitive collaboration cycles.

Establishing **more flexible structures** and reducing bureaucratic obstacles was also a recurrent concern. Stakeholders underlined the importance of granting greater autonomy to training centers, particularly in the design and implementation of partnership-based projects. Excessive oversight and rigid processes—especially from Ministries or public authorities—were described as key deterrents to innovation. In some cases, this rigidity has discouraged schools from participating in European projects altogether. Increased autonomy, on the other hand, would allow centers to manage administrative and financial aspects more effectively and implement policies tailored to their specific context.

Several respondents proposed **creating institutionalised spaces for dialogue**, such as biannual networking meetings, local committees, or round tables involving companies, public agencies, and vocational training centers. These platforms would help participants exchange needs, strategies, and opportunities for collaboration. Additionally, events co-organised with both public and private actors—such as study visits, awareness-raising missions abroad, or sessions with EU and regional stakeholders in Brussels—were viewed as strong tools to foster

mutual understanding and trust. Periodic working sessions with strategic objectives were also recommended to maintain momentum and focus in ongoing partnerships.

Stable and predictable funding streams are essential to support these partnerships, particularly those involving social and community-based organisations. These organisations were recognised as valid training providers, and also as key intermediaries capable of building bridges between the educational system and marginalized groups. In this context, it is also important to formally acknowledge the legitimacy of community-led and cultural entities as full partners in VET policy design and delivery.

Transfer of knowledge between local and international initiatives was repeatedly mentioned as a best practice, and respondents advocated for institutional mechanisms to support the exchange of methodologies. By promoting cross-country learning, local systems can enrich their approaches and scale up successful innovations. Collaboration with National Employment Services was also noted as a powerful lever, especially in designing customised learning paths for unemployed individuals, tailored to their profiles and labour market potential.

Finally, there was a **call for the public sector—especially Ministries and local governments—to demonstrate greater openness and willingness to collaborate**, by not only reducing red tape, but also recognising the value of bottom-up, participatory processes. Increased government support for networking efforts, including financial and logistical backing, was seen as essential to creating a vibrant, collaborative ecosystem where public and private stakeholders work together in service of a shared educational and economic vision.
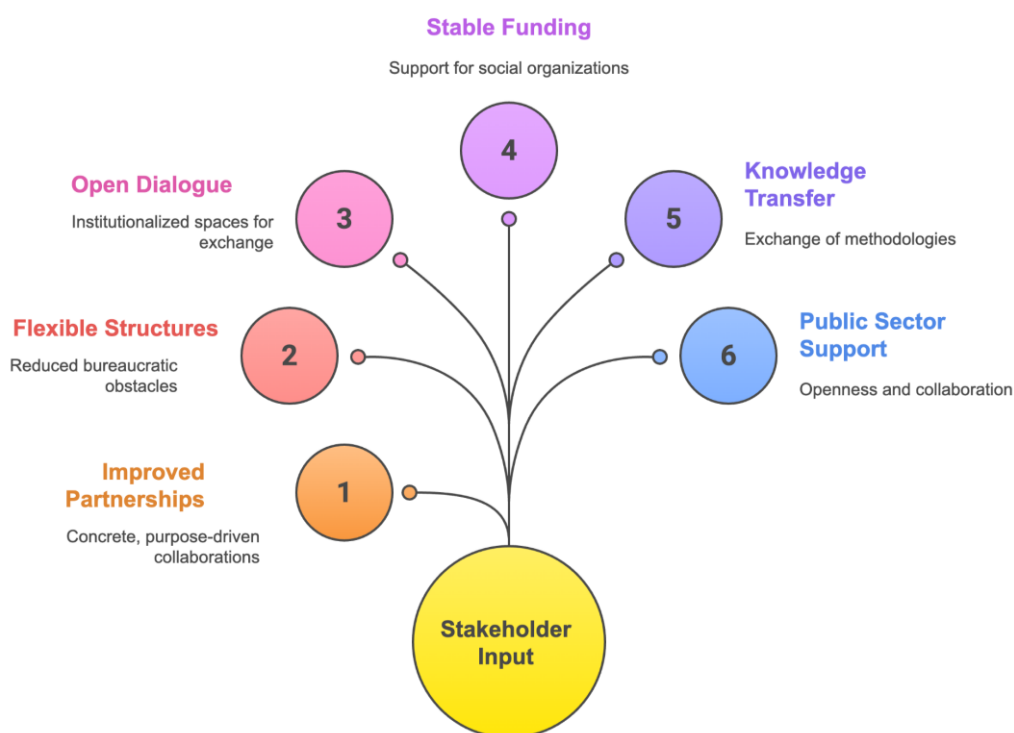

Figure 9. Stakeholder Input Shapes Dynamic VET System

3.2   WB Countries – Training Needs

3.2.1 Social Enterprises

As part of the TTraSE project's broader effort to map the realities, challenges, and good practices of social enterprises (SEs) in the arts and craft sector, a diverse sample of 12 organisations from the Western Balkans (WB) was interviewed. Representing **Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Montenegro**, these enterprises reflect a wide spectrum of activities, organisational structures, and degrees of maturity within the social economy. What unites them is their rootedness in local communities and their shared commitment to cultural heritage, social inclusion, and innovation.

The **Albanian** participants include *Tradita Ime Artizanale (My Craft Tradition)*, established by Joscelyn Foundation in 2021, which implements its activities in a confiscated asset by organized crime in the city of Elbasan, to support women in need through the provision of training and employment opportunities in the social enterprise. The SE works to preserve tradition and empower the community, especially focusing on women and children. *Qendra Art dhe Aktivizem* (Art and Activism Center) is a newly established SE located in a property confiscated from organized crime and corrupt high officials in Durrës, which empowers young artists to create positive change by leveraging the power of the arts and exploring creative ways to generate social and economic value. Finally, *Margjelo Filigran Albania*, is a SE specializing in handcrafted silver filigree, which vision is to refresh and preserve the ancient art of filigree, making sure that it continues to grow for future generations, by employing women artisans and artists (painters) that are engaged in the design processes, as well as Youth.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is represented by a mix of organisations including the *Youth Cultural Center "Lipe"*, *Printing Shop DMP* (a company dedicated to employing people with disabilities), and *RESET INŽINJERING DOO*, which brings a technological and sustainability-oriented dimension to the ecosystem.

Kosovo contributes with *Merita*, a locally engaged artisanal initiative, and *BONEVET*, a foundation known for combining creativity, innovation, and education with a community-driven approach.

Montenegro rounds out the group with *Kreativa Lab*, *Green Lining*—an initiative blending fashion with environmental awareness—and *Upbeat Hub*, which operates at the intersection of youth innovation, design, and sustainable entrepreneurship.

This cross-section of SEs from the WB region showcases the **rich interplay between cultural expression, social innovation, and enterprise**, and offers a valuable perspective on how social businesses are adapting to twin transitions: digital and green. Their responses to the interviews not only highlight specific operational and structural challenges they face, but also illuminate promising practices and strategies that may serve as a foundation for future training models and capacity-building across the region.

SWOT ANALYSIS

The social enterprises interviewed from the Western Balkans demonstrate a noteworthy degree of internal readiness for the green and digital twin transition. A **shared strength** among these organisations is the evident willingness of their teams to continuously learn, adapt, and adopt new skills. Many respondents described their staff as young, technically literate, and eager to integrate digital tools and environmentally responsible practices

into their daily work. These traits are further reinforced by practical commitments to sustainability, such as operating primarily through digital channels, avoiding waste, reducing printed materials, and minimising energy consumption through manual labour and shared travel arrangements. Several enterprises also reported integrating newer technologies and eco-friendly materials, reflecting an emerging culture of innovation and responsiveness to modern environmental and digital trends.

Yet despite this positive approach, significant **internal skill gaps** persist and inhibit deeper alignment with twin transition objectives. A major weakness commonly cited across the region is the lack of knowledge and practical capacity related to the circular economy. Many organisations admitted that they had not yet developed clear strategies or internal mechanisms to adopt circular models or track their environmental impact. There is also a pronounced shortage of traditional artisans, especially in heritage crafts like filigree, which presents a dual risk: loss of cultural value and limited ability to transfer skills. Strategic development also emerges as a challenge, with several enterprises lacking the expertise to position their brand effectively, develop promotional strategies, or understand economic drivers. Compounding these challenges are knowledge gaps regarding green standards, insufficient legal and regulatory clarity, and limited resources—both human and financial—that prevent organisations from institutionalising green or digital practices.

Encouragingly, many enterprises see **opportunities** in their external environment to address these deficits. A recurring theme is the value of partnerships—particularly with universities, professional institutions, and peer organisations involved in green innovation and sustainable development. SEs across countries pointed to the potential of joining transnational networks, participating in EU-funded capacity-building projects, and accessing free online training platforms as key enablers of upskilling. The availability of donor support and mentoring schemes was also seen as a vital support mechanism. In addition, initiatives such as networking events, business linkages with hospitality and retail sectors, and platforms for experience exchange were highlighted as important pathways for expanding reach and reinforcing collaborative ecosystems that support twin transition adaptation.

However, even with external opportunities in place, several **barriers hinder access to relevant training and support**. Chief among them is the lack of strategic direction and planning—a challenge amplified by limited internal staffing, time constraints, and underdeveloped connections to national education and employment systems. Many enterprises simply do not have the capacity to seek out and participate in training, particularly when operational demands are high and teams are small. The absence of clear, structured educational pathways, the high cost of specialised training abroad, and a general lack of accessible, context-relevant content present ongoing challenges. In some cases, external training options are perceived as disconnected from the concrete needs of social enterprises, limiting their practical application.

In conclusion, the social enterprises of the Western Balkans exhibit **strong intrinsic motivation and emerging operational capacities** for digital and green transition. Nonetheless, they face an uneven playing field when it comes to accessing structured support, building strategic capabilities, and embedding long-term sustainability practices. Addressing these gaps through targeted, inclusive, and regionally contextualised training—supported by stronger public-private and cross-sector partnerships—will be crucial to unlocking their full potential in the twin transition landscape.
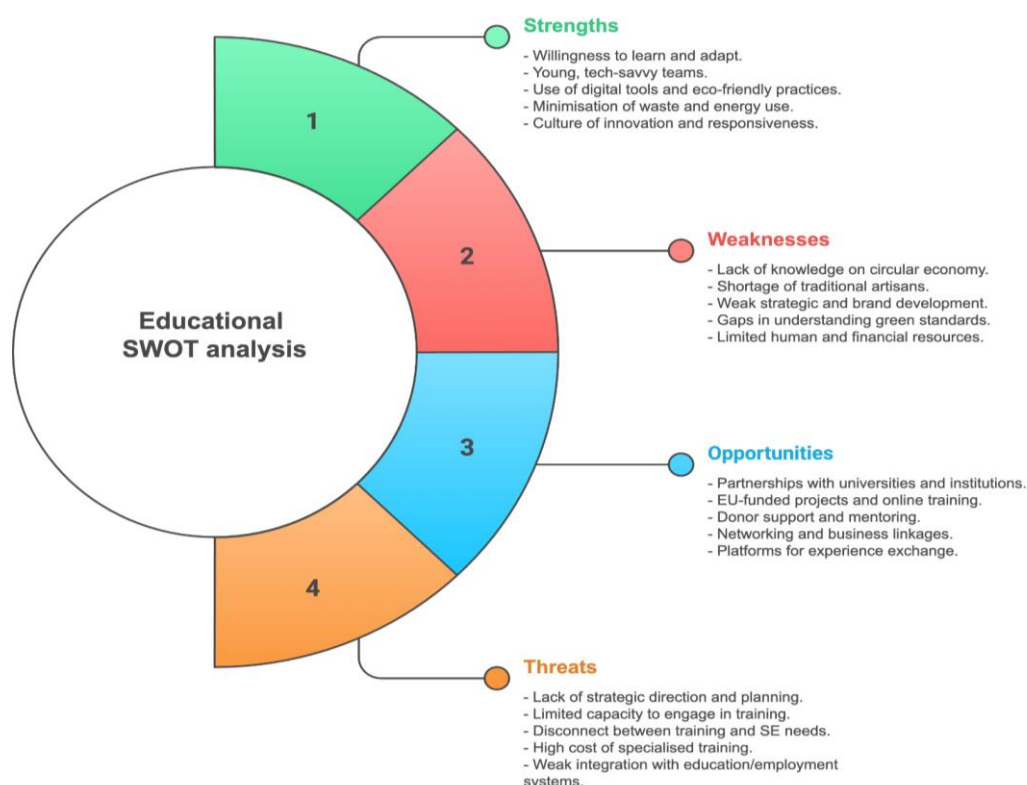
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Figure 10. SWOT Analysis of Social Economy Organisations in WB-Selected Countries

TRAINING NEEDS FOR SUCCESSFUL TWIN TRANSITION IN THE ARTS AND CRAFT SECTOR

The training needs expressed by social enterprises across the Western Balkans reflect a clear desire to build both digital and green skills in order to align more effectively with the demands of the twin transition.

Which of the following digital skills training topics are more relevant for your organisation?
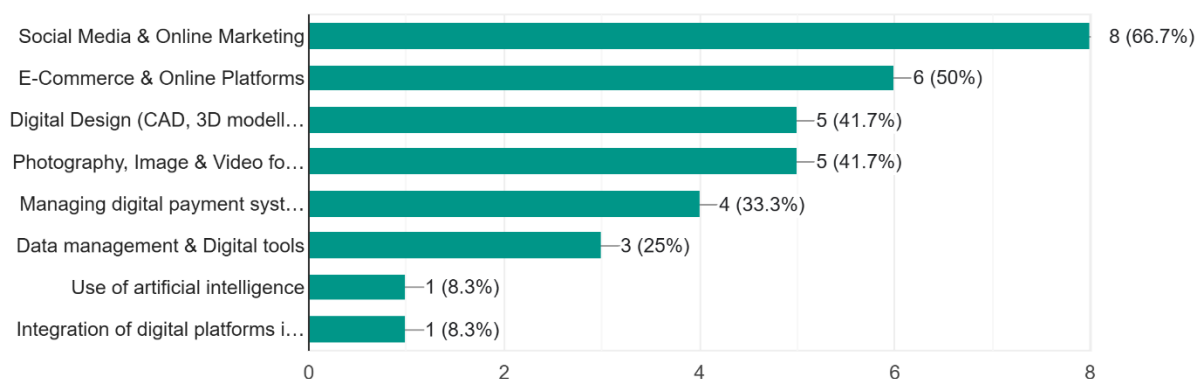12 responses

Figure 11. Relevance of Digital Skills Training Topics

On the **digital side**, the most commonly requested areas of training were social media and online marketing (9/12 SEs), followed by e-commerce and the use of online platforms (7/12 SEs). These priorities underscore the importance that SEs place on visibility, digital presence, and commercial sustainability in a competitive marketplace. Additionally, visual content production—including photography, image, and video editing for promotion—was identified by nearly half of the SEs, suggesting that storytelling and branding are increasingly viewed as vital components of market engagement.

Several SEs also expressed interest in more technical areas such as digital design tools, including CAD and 3D modelling (5/12 SEs), and a smaller number mentioned managing digital payment systems and logistics (4/12 SEs), data management, and the use of digital tools (3/12 SEs). Notably, only one enterprise mentioned artificial intelligence and interactive content creation, indicating that while some are beginning to think ahead, the majority are focused on more immediate, practical digital competencies. This reflects a digital maturity curve where **foundational skills are still being prioritized before more advanced or emerging technologies can be integrated**.

Which of the following green skills training topics are more suitable for your organisation?
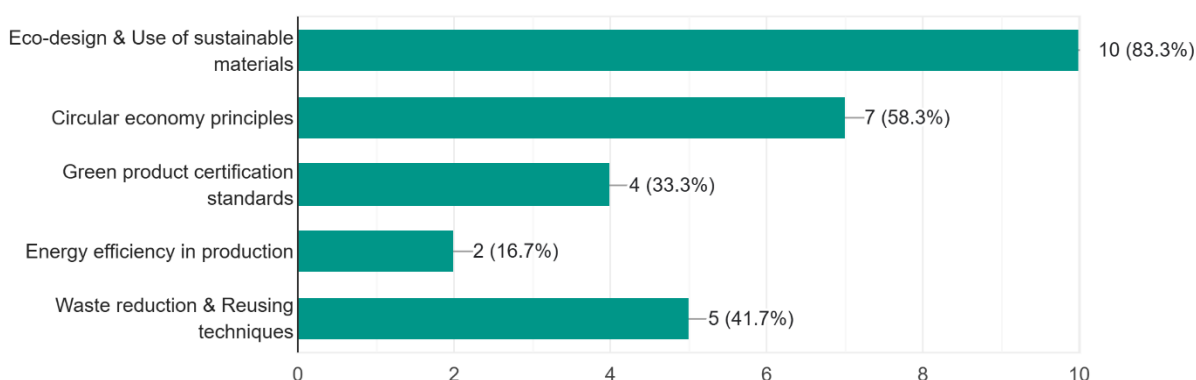12 responses

Figure 12. Suitability of Green Skills Training Topics

On the **green skills** side, eco-design and the use of sustainable materials emerged as the strongest area of interest (10/12 SEs), reflecting the core identity of many SEs working in the arts and craft sector, where materials and product ethics are central to value creation. The circular economy also ranked high (7/12 SEs), alongside training in waste reduction and reusing techniques (5/12 SEs). Meanwhile, green certification standards (4/12 SEs) and energy efficiency in production (2/12 SEs) were cited less frequently, which may indicate either a lack of awareness or practical constraints in applying such measures within the current resource or regulatory frameworks of the region. Nonetheless, the strong interest in sustainable materials and product innovation highlights the potential of SEs to become champions of environmentally responsible design when given access to the right knowledge and tools.
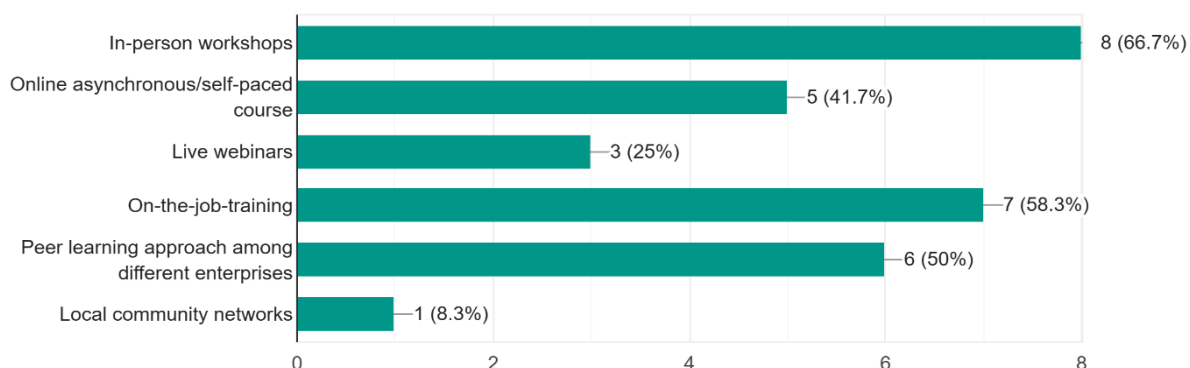
Preferred training format:

12 responses

Figure 13. Training Format Preference

When it comes to **preferred training formats**, the majority of social enterprises expressed a clear preference for in-person workshops (8/12 SEs) and on-the-job training (7/12 SEs), emphasizing a need for experiential, hands-on learning that is directly relevant to their work environment. This aligns with the practical nature of their activities and the craft-based orientation of many of the participating SEs. Peer learning models were also popular (6/12 SEs), indicating interest in knowledge-sharing between organisations facing similar challenges. Fewer SEs opted for online**,** self-paced training (5/12 SEs) or live webinars (3/12 SEs), and only one enterprise cited local community networks as a desirable training format. These preferences suggest that while digital training delivery can play a supportive role, relational, practice-based learning approaches remain central to how SEs in the WB region build capacity.

In summary, the training needs of WB social enterprises for the twin transition focus on **developing practical, market-facing digital skills** and **embedding sustainable, material-conscious practices**. The desire for in-person and hands-on training formats, coupled with a willingness to collaborate through peer learning, points to an engaged and motivated sector. However, tailored interventions—designed to bridge immediate operational gaps, while gradually introducing more advanced concepts—will be necessary to unlock the full potential of these enterprises in the digital and green economy.

The **motivations** driving social enterprises in the Western Balkans to pursue the twin transition are both strategic and mission-oriented. A majority of organisations identified increased social impact and expansion through digital channels as strong incentives, highlighting how technology can help them better serve their communities, while strengthening their economic resilience. Many also cited cost reduction and greater operational efficiency as central motivators—pointing to the role of digitalisation, not just in modernising their activities, but also in making them more sustainable and financially viable. Moreover, several enterprises expressed interest in exploring new technologies and partnerships, including the use of artificial intelligence, which, although still emerging, shows an aspirational readiness to innovate. Other drivers included the desire to contribute to environmental protection, enhance educational effectiveness, and ultimately build sustainable, future-ready business models.

However, it is observed that **past participation in related initiatives** has been limited. Out of the 12 social enterprises surveyed, seven reported no prior involvement in green or digital transition activities, while others described only partial engagement or isolated instances that did not lead to continued action. Among those with experience, the feedback was largely positive: they noted increased internal capacity, improvements in service delivery, and in some cases, the scaling of their business model as outcomes of participation in European or national projects. This mixed background suggests a sector with high motivation and potential, but low access and continuity in structured support programs, indicating a clear opportunity for better outreach, follow-up, and long-term engagement strategies.

The social enterprises operating in the Western Balkans region show **significant promise in aligning with the green and digital dimensions of the twin transition**, driven by a motivated, adaptable workforce, and a clear interest in innovation, sustainability, and impact expansion. Internally, their **strengths** lie in the willingness to learn, existing low-waste and digital-first practices, and a strong orientation toward social value creation. However, the lack of technical knowledge, particularly in circular economy, digital infrastructure, and green standards, along with limited financial and human resources, constrains their strategic transformation.

Training needs expressed by SEs are concrete and highly practical, with priorities centered on social media, e-commerce, digital design, and sustainable materials. Eco-design and circular economy topped the green agenda, while in-person, on-the-job, and peer-learning formats were preferred, reflecting a strong emphasis on experiential and collaborative learning. Motivations to embark on twin transition journeys are tied to efficiency, social and environmental responsibility, and innovation, but previous involvement in such initiatives remains limited, underlining the need for sustained access to tailored support mechanisms. Unlocking the full potential of SEs in the WB region will require targeted capacity building, context-sensitive training pathways, and robust partnerships that can bridge knowledge gaps and build resilient, scalable models for transition.

3.2.2 VET/C-VET Organisations

A successful transition to greener, more digitally enabled economies in the arts and crafts sector depends heavily on the capacity and responsiveness of vocational education and training (VET) and continuous vocational education and training (C-VET) providers. For the purposes of the project, interviews were conducted with **22 diverse institutions across Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Montenegro**. These organisations represent a broad cross-section of the training and skills development landscape in the Western Balkans—ranging from formal vocational schools and public training centers to civil society actors, private education companies, and business chambers involved in skills policy and labour market activation.

From **Albania**, responses were gathered from the *Tirana Chamber of Commerce and Industry*, the *Association of Professional Business and Craftswomen*, *Y-Peer Network Albania*, "*Antoni Athanas-Sarande" Vocational High School*, the *National Association for Integration and Development (SHKIZH)*, and *GIZ Albania*, reflecting a blend of institutional, community, and development perspectives.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, contributors included the *Center for Adult Education EDUKA BH Tešanj*, the *Center for Lifelong Learning*, the *Association for the Development of Competencies "S.K.I.L.L.S."*, *Kventum d.o.o. Business and Educational Center*, *PRONI Center for Youth Development*, and the *Center for the Promotion of Lifelong Learning Erazmo Tuzla*—each offering valuable insights from both urban and regional training settings.

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From **Kosovo**, the interviewees included *QK "11 Marsi" Prizren*, the *Prizren Chamber / Cultural Hub*, *ESNAF Handmade (Craft Incubator and Trainer)*, the *Vocational Training Center (VTC) Prizren*, and *Sh.p.k. "Filigran"*, all of which operate at the intersection of vocational education, cultural heritage, and entrepreneurship.

Finally, in **Montenegro**, respondents comprised a robust mix of public and private institutions: the *Secondary Vocational School Berane*, *Electrotechnical School Vaso Aligrudic*, the *Private Institution for Adult Education "Forum Youth and Non-Formal Education"*, *ZOPT LLC – Company for Employment, Adult Education, and Professional Rehabilitation*, and the *PI Center for Vocational Education*—each contributing perspectives from different levels of formal and lifelong learning.

Together, these organisations present a **comprehensive view of the VET and C-VET ecosystem in the Western Balkans**, illustrating the diversity of educational models and the varying degrees of readiness to support the twin transition in the arts and crafts sector. Their reflections provide critical insight into systemic strengths, skill development gaps, collaborative practices, and strategic opportunities for aligning vocational education with the evolving needs of socially-oriented enterprises and the broader green and digital economy.

MAPPING OF THE CURRENT SITUATION

Across the Western Balkans, VET and C-VET organisations are showing increased awareness of the opportunities and responsibilities posed by the twin transition —the combined shift toward digitalisation and sustainability. One of the **core strengths** consistently reported is the strong practical orientation of their training models. Institutions widely apply project-based learning, work-based learning (WBL), and dual education (DE) formats, ensuring that learners gain hands-on experience directly applicable to real market needs. This alignment is particularly impactful in the arts and craft sector, where experiential knowledge is essential. Also common is the integration of modular curricula, interactive teaching methods, and the use of digital support platforms, which enhance learner adaptability. Several organisations have made strides in integrating entrepreneurial thinking, soft skills, and leadership development into their programs—essential competencies for social enterprises. Many VET/C-VET centers maintain active links with local businesses, artisan groups, and craft chambers, using these relationships to co-design curricula, deliver internships, and better respond to evolving market conditions.

At the same time, providers are confronting **significant internal gaps** that hinder their ability to fully support the twin transition topics—particularly in the arts and craft context. The most commonly cited barrier is the lack of specialized staff with practical experience in traditional crafts, such as textiles, ceramics, woodworking, and filigree. While some organisations boast decades-long experience in artisanal work, the majority come from business, IT, or legal training backgrounds. As a result, they often lack the operational expertise to tailor content to the crafts sector without external partnerships. Additionally, the shortage of digital and green skills among educators was flagged as a limiting factor across the region, along with a lack of training modules that apply digital tools (e.g. 3D modelling, CAD, digital stencil-making) to craft production. Institutions also cited insufficient financial and technical resources to invest in modern tools, software, or teacher training. For many, this is compounded by bureaucratic dependence on education ministries, which slows curriculum revision and innovation. Internal green practices are still emerging, and while some institutions are starting to introduce sustainability concepts, few have systematically embedded these into their operations.

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To address these structural issues, VET/C-VET organisations across the WB region identified a number of **strategic priorities**. Chief among them is the development of new digital and green skills training modules, particularly ones that meet the needs of small producers and social enterprises. There is a strong push to enhance curriculum flexibility through short micro-courses, blended learning, and modular structures tailored to the realities of adult learners and micro-enterprises. Providers stressed the importance of deeper cooperation with businesses and professional associations—not only for curriculum design, but also for ensuring program sustainability and direct employability. Others emphasized the need for entrepreneurial skills training, digital marketing, and digital sales, to help small craftspeople and artists position their work in the modern economy. The desire to build partnerships across sectors—education, creative industries, SMEs, social enterprises—was widespread, alongside a shared commitment to map and anticipate local labour market needs (e.g., identifying "deficit crafts," assessing digital readiness among artisans). These efforts would be further supported by stronger tracking systems for post-training employment outcomes and clearer feedback loops with learners and employers.

When asked about **emerging markets and innovation trends**, VET providers across all WB countries demonstrated an increasingly sophisticated understanding of where the arts and craft sector is heading. A major opportunity lies in the regional and European markets for certified, locally produced, sustainable artisan goods. Many organisations emphasised the importance of training for eco-friendly materials, zero-waste design, and transparent supply chains that meet fair trade and sustainability standards. Others pointed to the growing importance of digital design tools, 3D printing, and rapid prototyping, which are reshaping how custom and small-batch products are developed. Particularly relevant is the need to prepare artisans to succeed in digital marketplaces, using platforms like Etsy, Shopify, or local e-commerce tools, and to support them in storytelling, SEO, content creation, and visual branding. This digital dimension is seen as key not just to revenue generation, but to globalising traditional crafts in a way that respects their authenticity while scaling their reach. A smaller number of providers mentioned tourism-related opportunities, such as souvenir production and cultural events, as well as niche areas like fashion upcycling, eco-packaging, and even green energy applications in artisanal workshops.

Despite the dynamism and creativity in these directions, stakeholders highlighted a number of **critical risks and challenges** in the institutional landscape that could undermine progress. Most notably, many expressed concerns about coordination and fragmentation: there is currently no unified twin transition strategy linking VET providers, public authorities, businesses, and social actors. This leads to duplication of efforts, lack of synergy, and confusion for learners and employers alike. A common challenge is the mismatch in operational timelines and priorities between ministries, schools, and businesses, which creates delays in curriculum reform and weakens partnerships. Some providers raised alarms about competition and rivalry among actors delivering similar training (including NGOs and private academies), often driven by project-based funding rather than systemic needs. There is also concern over financial instability: many programs are grant-dependent and thus unsustainable. Internal resistance to change—among teachers, public servants, and traditional SME actors—was also noted, particularly where twin transition efforts are perceived as too complex or resource-intensive. Finally, a lack of awareness, motivation, and structured policy support were repeatedly identified as barriers to broader uptake and innovation in the twin transition space.

On a more operational level, the way VET/C-VET organisations **gather and act upon feedback** is an area of relative strength, but also of potential growth. Most institutions use standard evaluation forms and online questionnaires, complemented by periodic focus groups with employers and follow-up surveys with graduates. Many providers described well-established systems for monitoring learner satisfaction, tracking employment outcomes, and gathering insights from teachers, partner organisations, and learners. Some reported using case studies, informal conversations, and performance monitoring after 3–6 months to gauge the long-term impact of training. However, a number of respondents also admitted that their data collection is not yet fully systematised. Structured, centralised systems for analysing and responding to feedback remain under development in several institutions, and a more robust feedback loop is needed to ensure that educational content remains up to date, demand-driven, and responsive to twin transition-related trends.

Taken together, the findings suggest that VET and C-VET institutions in the Western Balkans are **well-positioned to support the twin transition,** but require targeted investments, stronger cross-sectoral coordination, and enhanced internal capacities to move from fragmented initiatives to strategic, long-term transformation. Their awareness of emerging market needs, commitment to learner-centered education, and increasing attention to sustainability are all promising indicators of readiness—yet these must be matched by structural reforms, innovation incentives, and policy support to fully unlock their contribution to a greener and more inclusive future.
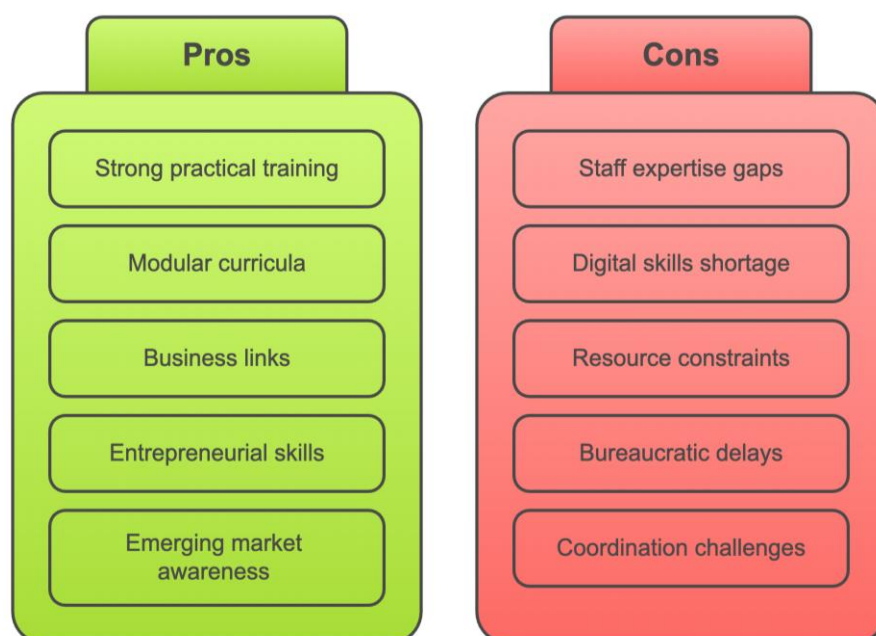

Figure 14. State-of-the-Art of WB VET and C-VET

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TRAINING NEEDS FOR THE TWIN TRANSITION IN THE ARTS & CRAFT SECTOR

Is your organisation familiar with the micro-credential system and its use?
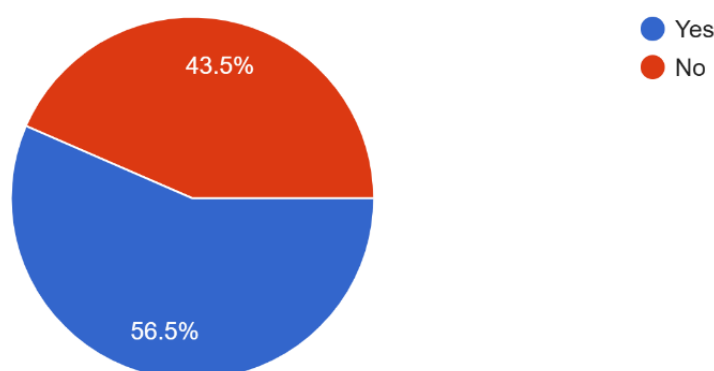23 responses

Figure 15. Familiarity with Micro-credential System in the Arts and Craft Sector

The training landscape among VET/C-VET organisations in the Western Balkans reveals an ecosystem in transformation—motivated, but still in need of significant capacity development to deliver on the promise of the twin transition. While **13 out of 22 institutions reported familiarity with micro-credentials**, the remaining 9 have yet to engage with these flexible tools, suggesting a need for broader awareness and adoption of such systems. Micro-credentials, digital badges, and modular certification models are becoming vital for offering stackable, on-demand skills—particularly important for artisans and social entrepreneurs who may not follow traditional academic paths.

In terms of **skills validation and certification**, a mixed picture emerges. Many organisations already have internal certification systems grounded in learning outcomes and practical evaluation. These include participation certificates, detailed competence summaries, and—where applicable—personal statements of applicability from learners themselves. Several organisations issue certificates aligned with national qualification frameworks, and a few collaborate with Ministries of Education to ensure formal recognition. Others plan to adopt external validation standards aligned with ESCO, ECVET, or other EU tools, particularly in the fields of business, sustainability, and digital skills. However, some institutions still report no existing certification system, or only very basic attendance-based formats, indicating a potential risk for training being perceived as informal or unstructured by employers and policy actors.

How well-equipped are your trainers and staff to deliver skills related to sustainability and digitalization?
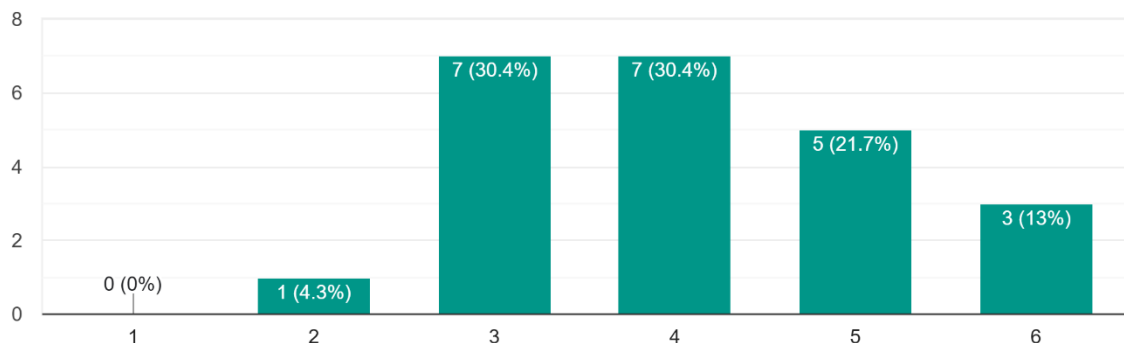
23 responses

Figure 16. Trainers and Staff Expertise to Deliver Twin Transition Skills

Self-assessment results on **institutional readiness to deliver sustainability and digitalisation-related training** reflect this transitional state. Only 3 providers rated themselves at the highest level of experience (6/6), while most responses clustered around levels 3 to 5, with 7 organisations scoring 3/6 and 6 scoring 4/6. This shows a moderate level of confidence, yet a clear recognition of the need for upskilling and investment.

Where do you see a lack of skills in your team regarding green and digital practices?

23 responses
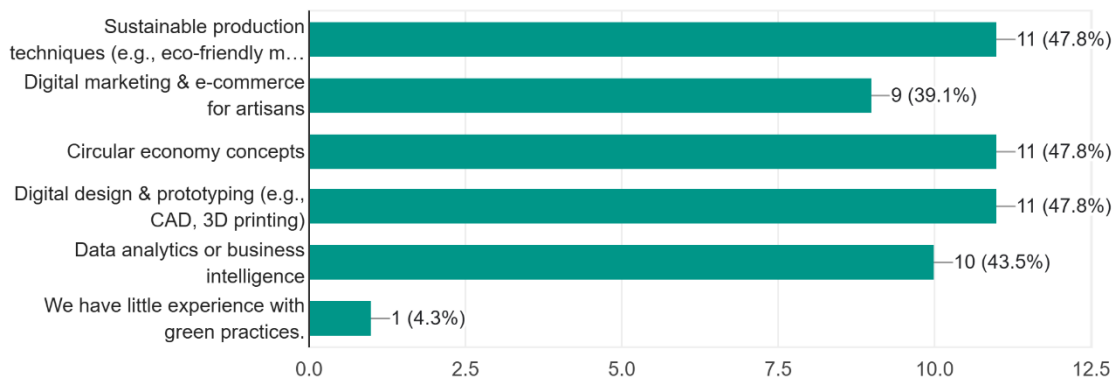
Figure 17. Twin Transition Skill Needs

Specifically, institutions reported notable **internal skills gaps** in digital design and prototyping (11/22), circular economy (10/22), sustainable production (10/22), data analytics (9/22), and digital marketing and e-commerce for artisans (9/22). These gaps are particularly significant given their direct relevance to emerging trends in the arts and craft sector and signal urgent priorities for staff development, curriculum enrichment, and partnerships with experts.

Which external trends or opportunities should we capitalize on to enhance your training offer?
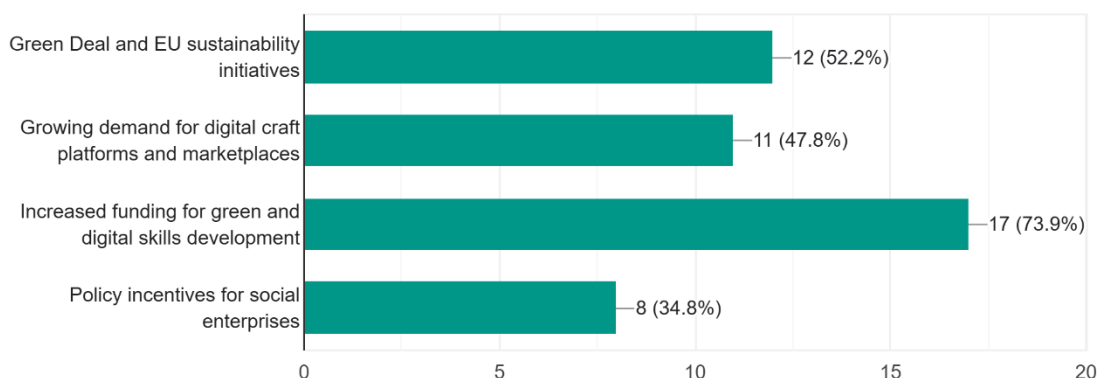
23 responses

Figure 18. Opportunities for Enhancement of Training Offer

From a strategic perspective, VET/C-VET providers are well aware of the **external trends shaping future training priorities**. The EU Green Deal, policy incentives for social enterprises, and the **r**ising popularity of digital craft marketplaces are recognised as strong opportunities. Notably, 15 out of 22 providers pointed to increased funding for green and digital skill development as a critical enabler. However, realising this potential depends on strengthening their ecosystems.

Which stakeholders should you strengthen partnerships with to support social enterprises in the twin transition?

23 responses

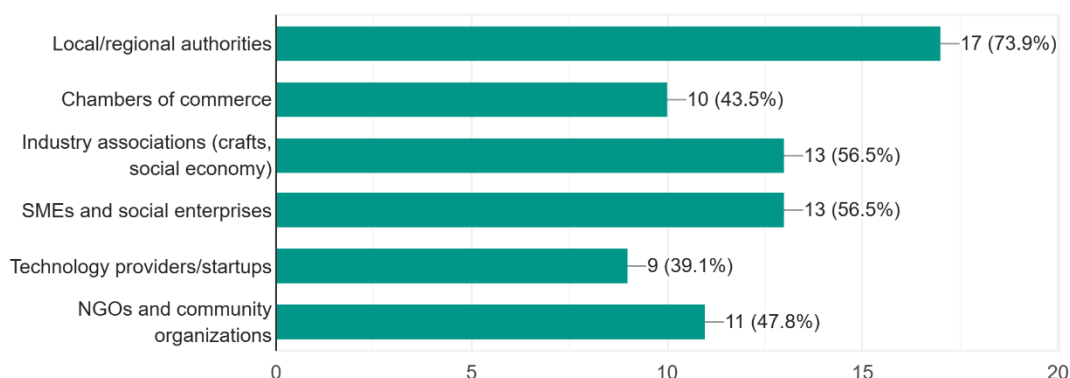Figure 19. Collaboration Needed to Support Social Enterprises in the Twin Transition

The majority of institutions expressed the need to build stronger partnerships with local and regional authorities (17/22), industry associations (12/22), and craft-focused SMEs and social enterprises (10/22). Chambers of commerce, NGOs, and tech startups were also noted as key future allies. These findings confirm the importance

of fostering cross-sectoral collaboration to both co-develop content and ensure that training outcomes are market-relevant and inclusive.

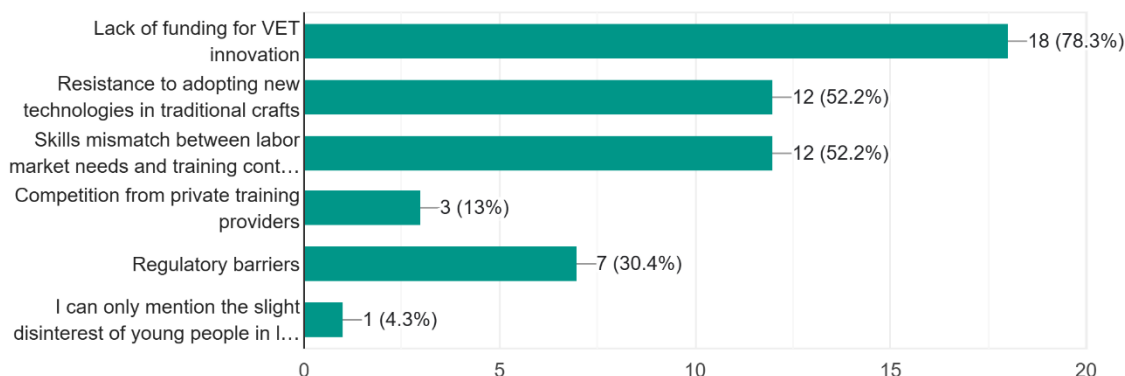What external factors could pose challenges to the success of your programs?
23 responses

Figure 20. External Challenges to the Success of Programs

Challenges to program success remain considerable. The most frequently reported external barrier was the lack of funding for VET innovation (17/22)—a constraint that limits infrastructure updates, staff upskilling, and curriculum modernization. Other significant risks include skills mismatches with labour market needs (11/22) and resistance to adopting new technologies in traditional crafts (11/22). Regulatory hurdles (7/22) and the absence of clear incentives or frameworks to support innovation compound these challenges. While competition from private providers was only marginally reported, some institutions raised concerns over youth disengagement—particularly where learners fail to connect traditional craft training with contemporary career prospects.

How significant is the risk of your programs becoming outdated due to rapid technological change?
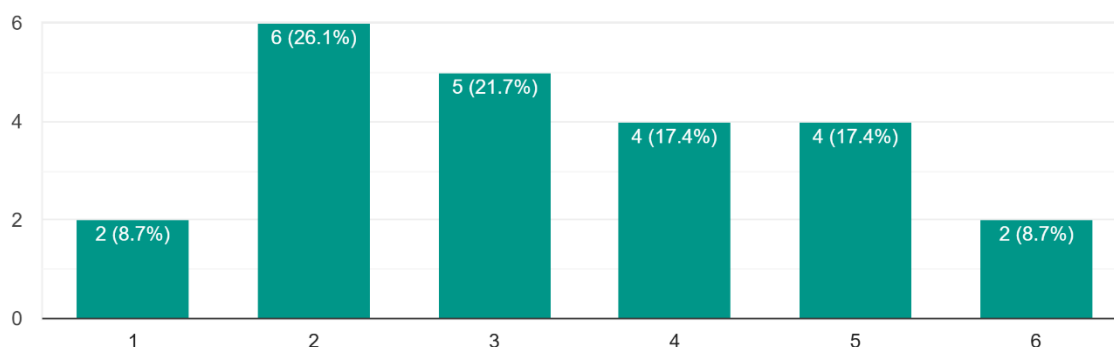23 responses

Figure 21. Programs' Risk Due to Technological Developments

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Finally, the question of whether **VET programs risk becoming outdated** due to rapid technological change yielded a bell-shaped curve of responses, with most institutions assessing the threat as moderate: 5 scored the risk at 3/6, another 5 at 2/6, and 4 each at levels 4 and 5. Only 2 institutions rated the risk as either extremely low or extremely high. This indicates a healthy level of awareness, yet also points to the need for more agile mechanisms—both in content and delivery—that allow VET/C-VET providers to regularly revise training offers in line with new technologies, sustainable production methods, and evolving market models. Without these mechanisms, even the most innovative programs risk stagnation in an accelerating digital and ecological landscape.

ADAPTING TO THE EMERGING GREEN & DIGITAL TRENDS IN THE FUTURE

Across the Western Balkans, VET and C-VET providers demonstrate an increasingly **strategic and committed approach to aligning their programs with the dual imperatives of sustainability and digital transformation**. Many institutions are actively working to update and modernize existing curricula, embedding components related to green skills (e.g., resource efficiency, waste management, circular economy) and digital tools (e.g., e-commerce platforms, automation, digital design) across educational profiles. Some providers are already developing sector-specific modules—particularly for the arts and craft sector—that combine ethical production practices with technological integration. These include courses on "Ethical and Digital Design in Crafts," focusing on sustainable materials, zero-waste techniques, and online sales through platforms like Etsy and Shopify.

A recurring strategy is the **introduction of new VET programs and professional profiles** that reflect the emergence of green and digital occupations—such as web developers, recycling specialists, and digital artisans. Institutions emphasize that these programs will be designed in line with national and EU quality standards, ensuring relevance and recognition. To increase accessibility, many are investing in flexible learning formats and micro-credentials—short, modular trainings that allow learners to build targeted skillsets quickly and independently. Several organisations plan to roll out hybrid and online training platforms, as well as virtual workshops, to simulate craft techniques or business processes. This shift toward personalised, on-demand learning reflects a deeper awareness of how education delivery must evolve to stay relevant.

Crucially, VET providers are also focusing on **internal capacity-building**, recognising that educators must lead by example in understanding and applying green and digital trends. Many institutions outlined plans for continuous professional development of trainers and staff, including seminars on green transition, digital pedagogy, and the use of technologies such as 3D printing, CAD software, digital archiving, and e-learning tools. Others are already implementing staff exchanges, study visits, and collaboration with advanced training centers, both regionally and internationally, to enhance pedagogical quality and future readiness. While some institutions are just beginning to define concrete steps, most show a strong commitment to building the expertise needed to deliver future-fit education.

Technological investment is another common pillar in their transition strategies. Several organisations are upgrading equipment in craft workshops to include eco-efficient tools, investing in e-learning platforms, and procuring digital solutions for skills validation—such as open badges and digital certificates. Notably, these efforts are not seen in isolation. Providers are actively seeking to expand strategic partnerships with universities, IT companies, startups, local governments, and innovation hubs. These collaborations are designed to support real-

world application through professional internships, joint project development, and shared infrastructure—ensuring learners are exposed to cutting-edge technologies and sustainable business practices in live environments.

Some institutions—particularly those with a strong community focus—are tailoring their transition by **building training initiatives** for youth, women, and artisans, promoting inclusive participation in green and digital economies. Plans include the creation of craft incubators, networking activities, and mobility projects with regional and EU partners. Others are launching pilot programs in smaller communities to test modular training formats combining craft skills with digital promotion and sustainable entrepreneurship. In more developed institutions, the twin transition is not a distant goal, but a cross-cutting principle already embedded in strategic planning, curriculum design, and stakeholder engagement.

Even among providers who are still at an early stage, there is a **strong belief that change is both necessary and inevitable**. Some are initiating market analyses and training needs assessments, while others are reviewing their legacy programs to identify entry points for sustainability and digitalisation. Importantly, all institutions—whether advanced or emerging in their transition journey—agree that education must remain dynamic, demand-driven, and socially impactful. They see their role not only as trainers of individuals, but as enablers of systemic transformation in the craft and social enterprise sectors.
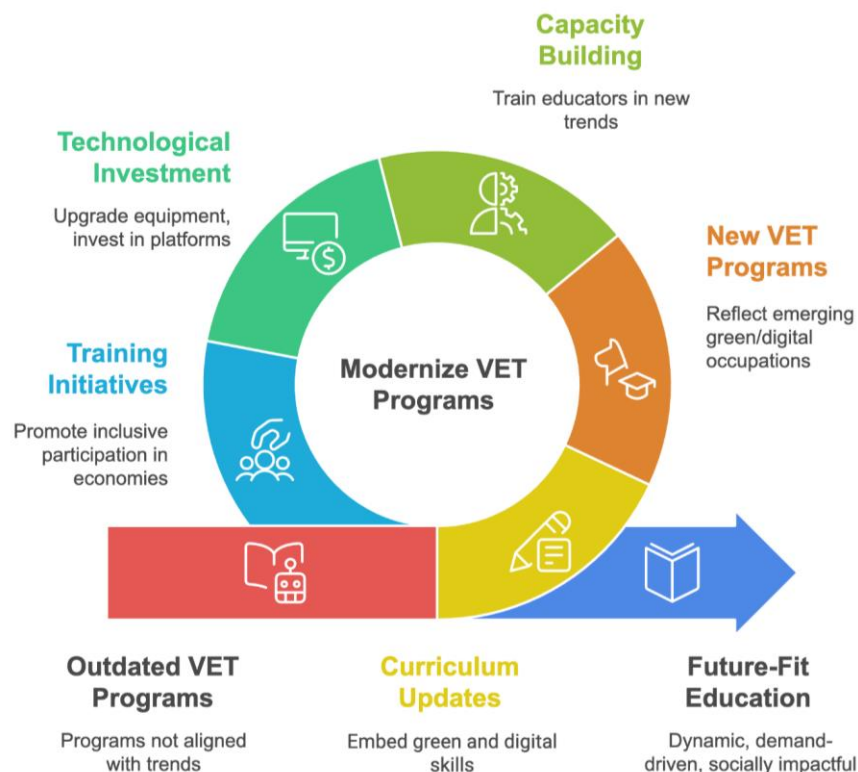

Figure 22. Adapting VET to Green & Digital Trends

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4. Cross-Country Analysis & Thematic Conclusions

This chapter consolidates and synthesizes the key insights emerging from the interview data gathered through Task 2.2. Its purpose is to highlight common trends, strengths, gaps, and needs that are evident across different Western Balkan (WB) and European Union (EU) countries, with a view to informing the capacity of VET/C-VET systems to:

1. **Support the green and digital (twin) transition (TT)** of social enterprises (SEs) in the arts and craft sector, and

2. **Adapt to the fast-changing labour market demands** affecting inclusive and future-ready skills development in Europe.

The findings are divided into two subsections — the first focuses on Social Enterprises, while the second draws conclusions from the input of VET/C-VET providers across the regions.

4.1   Summary of Findings – Social Enterprises

Across both Western Balkan and EU countries, social enterprises demonstrate an **increasingly strong commitment to sustainability and digitalization** — not only as market trends but as mission-aligned transformations. SEs often operate with **small but agile teams**, many of whom show **high motivation to continuously learn and adapt**.

This was especially consistent in **WB countries**, where the willingness to adopt digital tools, minimise waste, and experiment with environmentally responsible practices emerged as a common trait. In the **EU countries**, similar values were evident, but with **slightly more structured strategies**, often supported by national funding mechanisms or established partnerships with training providers.

Key internal strengths include:

- Staff adaptability.

- Use of digital platforms to reduce environmental impact.

- Need to better understand the circular economy principles, even if practical implementation remains partial.

Main barriers among all the participating countries include:

- Lack of deep expertise in applying green standards, performing environmental audits, or leveraging digitalization for strategic growth — especially when it comes to brand visibility, customer targeting, or entering new markets.

- Gaps in business management, Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) factors awareness, and the strategic use of digital design and data analytics were common across both regions.

Training needs align closely with the green and digital priorities of the twin transition. SEs from both WB and EU countries highlighted strong interest in:

- E-commerce,

- Digital marketing,

- Photography and video for promotion,

- CAD/3D modelling,

- Circular production principles.

Notably, **WB SEs were more likely to express training needs in eco-design and reuse techniques**, while **EU SEs showed stronger readiness for AI and data-driven tools**.

Across the board, **in-person workshops, on-the-job training, and peer learning models were favored formats** — underlining the importance of experiential, context-sensitive education.

Motivations for engaging in the twin transition **were broadly similar** across the regions: enhancing business efficiency, broadening social impact, reducing costs, and accessing new markets. However, many SEs — especially in WB — had not yet participated in previous twin transition-related initiatives, indicating both an outreach gap and an opportunity for targeted engagement. Both EU and WB SEs identified structural barriers, including lack of awareness of quality training, high costs, and disconnect between training content and practical needs.

In summary, while SEs across Europe share a common purpose of contributing to a fairer, greener economy, they still require tailored, practical, and accessible learning pathways to actualize that potential — particularly those in the WB region, which face more limited institutional support and fewer entry points into structured upskilling systems.

Key Internal Strengths

Staff are adaptable and flexible to change. Digital platforms help reduce environmental impact.

Motivations

Enhancing business efficiency and broadening social impact. Reducing costs and accessing new markets.

Main Barriers

Lack of expertise in green standards application. Gaps in business management and ESG awareness.

Favored Formats

In-person workshops, on-the-job training, peer learning. Experiential and context-sensitive education is important.

Training Needs

E-commerce, digital marketing, and promotional content. Circular production principles and design techniques.

Figure 23. Social Enterprises' Strengths and Needs

4.2   Summary of Findings – VET/C-VET Organisations

VET/C-VET providers across the participating EU and WB countries **demonstrate clear signs of progress** — but also share a number of systemic challenges — in aligning their training offer with the goals of the twin transition and the evolving needs of the labour market.

In both regions, institutions report **growing efforts to modernize curricula**, **increase modularity and interactivity**, and **embed twin transition-related content in training programs**. Providers commonly offer project-based learning, close cooperation with industry, and customizable training modules. Many WB institutions, similar to their EU counterparts, also emphasized **soft skills**, **entrepreneurial education**, and **social impact** in their curricula.

However, gaps in **staff expertise**, **financial resources**, and **specific technical know-how** — especially in areas like **digital design, green production, circular economy practices**, and **e-commerce for artisans** — persist widely.

A significant insight common to both EU and WB countries is the **lack of specialized trainers in green and digital arts & craft disciplines**, and the **difficulty of attracting experts from creative industries into VET**. Many WB institutions still operate without strong internal experience in crafts, culture, or eco-production methods, and rely heavily on external partnerships. In contrast, EU providers often have more structured feedback mechanisms and tools for skill validation (including digital badges and micro-credentials), though several WB providers are increasingly aligning with such systems.

In terms of adaptability to market needs, both regions are investing in **partnership development**, **curriculum co-design with enterprises**, and **new qualification pathways**. Across countries, providers see opportunities in **connecting with online sales platforms**, **promoting digital craft branding**, **upskilling youth**, and enhancing **sustainable production literacy**.

Yet, there is a shared recognition of **coordination risks**, especially where governance remains centralized, funding is unstable, or inter-stakeholder communication is limited. **Resistance to innovation** from more traditional actors, including within VET itself, is an issue on both sides of the EU-WB divide.

Interestingly, the self-assessed **readiness to deliver twin transition-related skills** tends to hover around moderate levels: **most providers rated themselves between 3 and 5 out of 6**, with only a few confident in their full capacity. **Partnerships with relevant stakeholders** - SMEs, municipalities, chambers of commerce, and NGOs - **are considered critical for future alignment** — especially in engaging social enterprises and artisanal networks. EU providers tend to have stronger public-private collaboration structures in place, while WB institutions still face limitations in outreach and institutional backing.

Commonly identified **future strategies** include:

- Curriculum modernization
- Teacher training

- Investment in green/digital tools

- Micro-credential development

- Hybrid training platforms

Importantly, many WB institutions have already begun this shift, guided by EU frameworks and funding, but they require sustained capacity-building support.

In conclusion, while the ambition to lead the twin transition is shared across the EU and WB regions, a **disparity in resources, institutional flexibility, and trainer expertise** remains a significant gap. Nonetheless**, the common ground is strong — and offers a promising foundation for transnational learning, peer support, and policy alignment within the TTraSE project and beyond.**

The cross-country analysis clearly demonstrates that the green and digital (twin) transition is no longer a distant ambition, but an emerging reality shaping the evolution of both social enterprises and the vocational education and training systems that support them. While differences between Western Balkan and EU countries persist — particularly in terms of structural support, institutional capacity, and market access — a shared momentum is unmistakable. **Both SEs and VET/C-VET providers are actively seeking to adapt, innovate, and better align with sustainability goals and digital transformation, especially within the arts and crafts sector.**

A key takeaway is the high degree of **readiness in spirit and intention**, but a **lag in institutional readiness**, especially in WB countries. Challenges such as funding shortages, lack of specialized trainers, weak intersectoral coordination, and regulatory rigidity often slow the pace of change. At the same time, the presence of motivated educators, forward-thinking entrepreneurs, and emerging best practices point to a real opportunity for system-wide innovation. VET/C-VET providers are already redesigning programs, forming partnerships, and investing in modern tools — but they need stronger policy support and sustainable pathways for implementation.

This shared journey requires an **ecosystem-wide approach**. The findings reveal the urgent need for **collaborative mechanisms**, **cross-border knowledge exchange**, and the **harmonization of skills validation systems** to create inclusive and future-proof training frameworks. Both SEs and VET/C-VET actors recognize that building green and digital capabilities is not simply a matter of adding new content — it demands **rethinking how education is delivered, who is included, and how rapidly evolving labor markets are monitored and addressed**.

As the TTraSE project moves into its next phase, these conclusions serve as a foundation for targeted policy recommendations and concrete future steps. The groundwork has been laid; what is now needed is the bold coordination of action — across education, enterprise, and public policy — to ensure that both social economy actors and vocational educators are empowered to co-lead Europe's sustainable and digital transition.

P

Coordination Risks

Governance and
communication limitations

E

Resource Disparity

Funding and market access

S

**Innovation
Resistance**

Traditional actors'
reluctance

T

Expertise Gaps

Digital skills and tools

E

Regulatory Rigidity

Slow pace of change

L

**Sustainable
Literacy**

Production knowledge
needed

Figure 24. PESTEL Analysis of VET/C-VET Organisations' Challenges

5. Policy Recommendations & Future Steps

5.1   Shaping a Resilient and Inclusive Ecosystem

The analysis across partner countries revealed a shared imperative to build more agile, inclusive, and future-oriented VET and C-VET systems that can meaningfully support social enterprises (SEs) in navigating the twin transition. While country contexts differ, several policy directions emerged consistently.

A first core recommendation is to **enhance inter-institutional collaboration**—not only between education providers and the private sector, but also with chambers of commerce, municipalities, civil society, and technology stakeholders. This multi-actor collaboration is essential for designing curricula and training models that respond to current and emerging labour market demands. It should be supported by **institutionalised dialogue mechanisms,** such as roundtables, regional working groups, and digital collaboration platforms.

Stakeholders also emphasized the **need for greater institutional flexibility**. Many VET/C-VET providers reported administrative constraints and slow curriculum revision processes driven by central authorities, which limit their responsiveness to technological and green innovations. Policy frameworks should promote **greater autonomy for training centers**—particularly in partnership projects, modular program design, and funding management—while maintaining coherence with national qualification standards.

Furthermore, **curricular innovation** is essential. Training content must integrate green and digital competencies across all levels and sectors, including micro-modules and experiential methodologies. Embedding concepts such as eco-design, sustainable materials, circular economy, and digital marketing into arts and craft training is key. Equally important is the recognition of non-formal, community-based learning and the inclusion of **participatory pedagogies** that foster social engagement and creativity.

The findings also call for **more inclusive education policy**. Supporting access to labour market for persons with disabilities, recognizing informal learning outcomes, and enabling grassroots cultural and social organizations to deliver certified training are all critical for equity. A more **human-centred and entrepreneurial vision of education**—as seen in some of the best practices—should be promoted at system level.

In line with this, **public–private partnerships** must move beyond symbolic affiliations. Training providers are encouraged to actively seek out **new and diverse partners**, including SMEs, social economy actors, and youth-led enterprises. At the same time, governments should invest in **stable and predictable funding mechanisms** that incentivize innovation and experimentation, particularly in underserved or rural areas.

Finally, fostering **cross-country knowledge transfer and European cooperation** is essential. The participation in CoVEs and structured exchange initiatives—such as Erasmus+, sector skills alliances, and micro-credential schemes—should be expanded, allowing local innovations to scale and adapt.

5.2   Future Steps for Work Package 2

The finalisation of this report marks a critical turning point in the project. The findings and recommendations will feed directly into the next phases of WP2, supporting the strategic development of capacity-building tools for VET/C-VET organisations across Europe and the Western Balkans.

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The next immediate step, Task 2.3, will be to organise a **Co-Creation Lab** at both EU and WB levels, applying a Design Thinking methodology. This Lab will bring together VET/C-VET representatives and SE actors to collaboratively interpret the findings of the report, add perspectives and expertise - and begin drafting the **Guidelines for Twin Transition in the Arts & Craft Sector**. The use of hybrid formats ensures broad inclusion and facilitates pan-European exchange.

Following this, Task 2.4 will pilot these draft guidelines via **national capacity-building seminars** in each WB country, enriched by contributions from EU experts. These events will involve VET/C-VET providers, SEs, and stakeholders - and will allow for real-world testing of the training approach and policy direction outlined in this report.

Throughout this process, feedback from participants and partners will be systematically collected and analysed. This input will integrate and inform the **final version of the Guidelines**, designed to support VET/C-VET providers in effectively guiding SEs toward a green and digital future while maintaining alignment with evolving labour market requirements.

Crucially, the Guidelines will embed **micro-credentials** as a tool to validate the knowledge, skills, and competences developed during the capacity-building process—helping to establish a more flexible, responsive, and learner-centered system across all participating countries.

6. Conclusions

The TtraSE Report has explored, through a dual lens, the present realities, challenges, and ambitions of both social enterprises and VET/C-VET organisations across the EU and Western Balkan countries in tackling the dual green and digital transition. As this phase of the project concludes, clear thematic patterns have emerged—offering both diagnostic clarity and direction for the project's next steps.

Firstly, it is evident that the twin transition—towards greener and more digital economies—is not only widely acknowledged among social enterprises in the arts and craft sector, but is increasingly seen as vital for their survival, growth, and impact. However, while motivation for embracing digital and ecological practices is high, significant internal barriers persist. These include lack of knowledge on circular economy principles, limited access to adequate funding, skill gaps in digital marketing and eco-design, and a shortage of training opportunities tailored to the sector's realities. Importantly, these challenges were consistently echoed across countries, highlighting their cross-border nature.

On the other side of the ecosystem, VET/C-VET providers are aware of their pivotal role in facilitating the twin transition, yet many face institutional, structural, and capacity-related barriers. Limited expertise in craft-specific sustainability practices, outdated curricula, insufficient staff training, and rigid public frameworks were reported widely, especially among Western Balkan countries. At the same time, strengths such as project-based learning, collaboration with enterprises, growing integration of sustainability themes, and interest in micro-credentials signal a readiness for transformation.

Both groups have clearly identified the need for stronger partnerships—not only between each other, but also with public authorities, industry stakeholders, and civil society. Feedback mechanisms, participatory curricula development, and cross-sectoral innovation have all been highlighted as central to building effective and responsive training systems.

Looking ahead, the insights of this report form a foundation for the forthcoming Co-Creation Labs and ultimately, the development of practical Guidelines for VET/C-VET capacity building. The challenges outlined here will directly inform policy recommendations, while the best practices identified—both from EU-based transferability cases and grassroots innovation in WB countries—will guide the co-creation of flexible, modular, and demand-driven training solutions.

Ultimately, TtraSE aims to move beyond documentation towards actionable change. This report confirms that both SEs and training providers are eager to adapt—but they need structured, supported pathways to do so. With the right policy framework, targeted capacity building, and inclusive collaboration, the VET/C-VET ecosystem can become a true enabler of green and digital transformation in the social economy of the arts and crafts sector.

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