DIGIT2ME PROJECT

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Building Inclusive, Resilient and Sustainable Youth Support Ecosystems in Europe



2026

Digital mentoring for young people with disabilities in rural areas: Improving skills for independent living

Co-funded by the European Union

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Executive Summary

For EU and National Decision-Makers

Why This Policy Is Needed

Across Europe, young people—particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those living in rural areas and those with disabilities—continue to face intersecting barriers in education, employment, digital access and psychosocial well-being. While numerous EU-funded projects have demonstrated effective solutions, their impact is often short-lived due to fragmented governance, project-based financing and weak integration into public policy systems. In 2025, one in nine young Europeans aged 15–29 (11.0%) was not in employment, education or training, and in 2024 the employment gap between persons with and without disabilities stood at 24.0 percentage points (Eurostat, 2025a, 2026a).

The DIGIT2ME Policy Framework responds directly to this challenge. It shifts the focus from isolated interventions to integrated, sustainable youth support ecosystems that combine mentoring, digital inclusion, employment pathways, psychosocial support and institutional sustainability.

This is not a proposal for new parallel structures. It is a strategy for embedding what already works into public systems, ensuring continuity, scalability and measurable impact.

What Makes This Policy Different

- From Projects to Systems

  DIGIT2ME transforms successful project practices into permanent policy instruments, reducing dependency on short-term funding cycles.
- From Fragmentation to Integration

  Education, employment, digitalisation, mental health and social inclusion are addressed as a single policy ecosystem rather than separate silos.

- From Intentions to Implementation

  Each policy area is operationalised through concrete implementation matrices defining actions, responsibilities, timelines, costs and indicators.

- From Cost to Investment

  The framework prioritises low-cost, high-impact instruments (mentoring, digital platforms, psychosocial support) before scaling more resource-intensive measures.

- From Evidence to Recommendation

  Each policy area draws on EU statistics, published research and the results of the Digit2Me pilots in partner countries, summarised in Section F.

Core Policy Pillars

- Structured Mentoring as a Public Policy Instrument

  Mentoring is institutionalised within youth, education and employment policies, supported by quality standards, trained mentors and outcome-based monitoring.

- Digital Access and Inclusion by Design

  MOOCs, accessible platforms and rural connectivity investments ensure that digitalisation reduces—rather than deepens—inequality.

- Inclusive Employment and Social Participation

  Independent living skills, employer incentives and community-based digital mentoring create realistic pathways into work and autonomy.

- Embedded Psychosocial Support

  Hybrid mentoring models integrate emotional well-being into education and employment pathways, strengthening resilience and retention.

- Sustainability Through Governance and Financing

  Cross-sector coordination, municipal capacity-building and diversified financing ensure long-term continuity beyond EU project cycles.

What Decision-Makers Are Asked to Do

At EU Level

- Recognise structured mentoring and integrated youth ecosystems as priority policy instruments.
- Support member states through ESF+, Erasmus+, IPA and recovery instruments.
- Promote accessibility-by-design and outcome-based monitoring as funding conditions.
- Include safeguarding and digital safety standards in all EU-funded mentoring programmes.

At National Level

- Embed DIGIT2ME pillars into youth, education, employment and social inclusion strategies.
- Appoint cross-sector coordinators to overcome ministerial silos.
- Allocate stable co-financing to scale proven models.
- Recognise the digital mentor as a professional role and adopt the Digit2Me curriculum in youth-worker training.

At Local Level

- Use municipalities and community centres as implementation hubs.
- Adapt the model to local labour markets and social needs.
- Engage young people as active partners, not passive beneficiaries.

Expected Strategic Impact

If implemented coherently, the DIGIT2ME framework is expected to:

- Increase youth participation in education and employment;
- Reduce long-term welfare dependency;
- Improve psychosocial well-being and social cohesion;

- Increase the return on public investment;
- Strengthen trust between young people and public institutions.

The Policy Message in One Sentence

Europe does not need more youth projects—it needs youth systems. DIGIT2ME provides a realistic, scalable and investment-oriented pathway to build them.

The following Implementation Matrix translates these priorities into a concise operational roadmap, outlining sequencing, responsibilities and timelines.

Simplified Master Implementation Matrix – High-Level Operational Roadmap

DIGIT2ME – Integrated Youth Support Ecosystems

Priority	Key Action	Lead Actor	Cost Level	Timeframe	Core KPI
HIGH	National mentoring framework	Ministry of Youth / Education	Low	0–12 m	Framework adopted
HIGH	Mentor training & certification	National Youth Agency	Medium	0–18 m	Certified mentors
HIGH	Hybrid mentoring (psychosocial)	Education & Health Ministries	Low	0–12 m	Well-being improved
HIGH	WCAG-compliant platforms	National Digital Authority	Low	0–12 m	Accessibility score
HIGH	Digit2Me curriculum adoption	Ministry of Youth / Education	Low	0–12 m	Curriculum in use
HIGH	Online safeguarding standards	National Youth Agency	Low	0–12 m	Standards adopted
MEDIUM	MOOC integration	Education / Digital Ministries	Medium	12–24 m	Active learners
MEDIUM	Wage subsidies (mentored youth)	Ministry of Labour	Medium	Ongoing	Employment rate
MEDIUM	Employer incentive conditionality	Public Employment Services	Low	Ongoing	12-month retention
MEDIUM	Independent living centres	Ministry of Social Affairs	Med–High	18–36 m	Autonomy outcomes
MEDIUM	Digital mentor occupational profile	Qualifications Authority	Low	12–24 m	Profile recognised
MEDIUM	Mentor supervision & networks	Youth Agency / Municipalities	Low–Med	12–24 m	Mentor retention
LOW	Rural connectivity & devices	Development Agencies	High	24–48 m	Coverage increases
LOW	Inter-ministerial coordination	Prime Ministry	Low–Med	0–12 m	Joint decisions
LOW	Blended finance models	Development Agencies	Medium	Ongoing	EU dependency reduced
LOW	Municipal capacity-building	Ministry of Interior	Medium	12–24 m	Scaled models

This matrix provides a prioritised overview and should be read in conjunction with the detailed policy sections below.

Introduction and Policy Rationale

Across Europe, young people—particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those living in rural areas and those with disabilities—continue to face structural barriers in education, employment, digital access and psychosocial well-being. EU statistics show the scale of the challenge: in 2025, 11.0% of young people aged 15–29 were not in employment, education or training (NEET), still above the EU 2030 target of 9% (Eurostat, 2026a); in 2024, the employment rate of persons with disabilities was 24.0 percentage points lower than that of persons without disabilities (Eurostat, 2025a); and in 2025, 40% of EU citizens still lacked basic digital skills, against the Digital Decade target of 80% with at least basic skills by 2030 (Eurostat, 2026b). Projects funded under Erasmus+, ESF+ and national programmes have produced valuable solutions, yet their long-term impact is often limited by fragmented governance, short-term funding cycles and weak policy integration—a gap also addressed by the OECD Recommendation on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People, which calls for integrated, whole-of-government youth policies (OECD, 2022).

This policy brief argues that youth support can no longer be addressed through isolated interventions. Instead, Europe requires integrated, cross-sector and sustainable policy ecosystems that combine mentoring, digital inclusion, employment support, psychosocial well-being and institutional sustainability.

The document synthesises evidence from education, social policy, labour markets and public administration to propose a coherent policy framework aligned with EU priorities on social inclusion, digital transformation and sustainable development.

About the Evidence in This Document

This brief combines three types of evidence, each cited in the text and listed in the References:

1. **EU statistics and policy frameworks** — Eurostat, European Commission and Council of the EU.
2. **Research and international guidance** — peer-reviewed studies and OECD, WHO and W3C standards on mentoring, accessibility, employment and governance.
3. **Digit2Me project evidence** — the transnational MOOC piloting report (Activity A.4.2), the transnational report on virtual seminars and face-to-face training (A.4.3) and the first mentoring session summary (A.4.4), all summarised in Section F.

*In each "What the Evidence Shows" subsection, points labelled **Digit2Me pilot** come from the project; all other points are referenced to external sources.*

Section A

Strengthening Structured Mentoring Systems

> KEY MESSAGE *Mentoring works when it is structured, delivered by trained mentors and funded as a public service—not as a project.*

Policy area Youth Policy – Social Inclusion – Education & Employment – Skills Development

Target audience EU and national policymakers; public authorities responsible for youth, education and employment; programme designers and funding bodies; civil society organisations and service providers.

Structured Mentoring Systems

Structured mentoring is an important mechanism for supporting young people's personal development, educational attainment and labour market integration. Evidence consistently shows that mentoring is most effective when it is intentional, quality-assured and embedded within broader support systems. In rural areas, where distances are long and specialised services scarce, a trained mentor is often the only continuous point of contact for a young person with a disability.

Unstructured or informal mentoring initiatives, while well-intentioned, often fail to produce sustained outcomes. In contrast, structured mentoring programmes—characterised by trained mentors, clear objectives and monitoring mechanisms—have been shown to reduce risk behaviours, improve psychosocial outcomes and strengthen transitions from education to employment.

At policy level, mentoring should therefore be recognised not as a voluntary add-on, but as a core public policy instrument. National youth strategies and education policies should formally integrate mentoring frameworks, supported by long-term funding rather than short-term project grants.

A critical determinant of success is mentor capacity. Effective mentors require competencies extending beyond career guidance, including empathy, communication skills and digital literacy. Without systematic training, mentoring risks becoming inconsistent and inequitable. Establishing national or EU-aligned mentor training standards is therefore essential.

Equally important is personalised mentor–mentee matching. Evidence shows that matching based on individual needs, goals and personal characteristics leads to higher trust,

engagement and long-term impact. Technology can support this process, but human judgement and continuous feedback remain indispensable.

The Policy Challenge

Despite increased investment in youth-related programmes, many initiatives fail to:

- respond to individual needs,
- ensure continuity and long-term impact,
- reduce inequalities affecting disadvantaged youth.

Unstructured or poorly designed mentoring initiatives often rely on voluntary goodwill rather than evidence-based standards, limiting their effectiveness and sustainability.

What the Evidence Shows

Evidence from international research on youth mentoring and from the Digit2Me pilots shows that:

- **Structured mentoring** improves psychosocial well-being, educational persistence and employability outcomes. (DuBois et al., 2011; Raposa et al., 2019)
- **Trained mentors** significantly enhance programme effectiveness compared with informal mentoring. (DuBois et al., 2002; MENTOR, 2015)
- **Personalised mentor–mentee matching** leads to higher satisfaction, trust and long-term engagement. (Rhodes, 2005; MENTOR, 2015)
- Mentoring is most effective when embedded within **broader social, educational and employment support systems**. (DuBois et al., 2011; Christensen et al., 2020)
- **Digit2Me pilot:** about two-thirds of registered MOOC participants completed the full training pathway, while others stopped at partial progress—mentor training needs active follow-up, not only enrolment (Section F).
- **Digit2Me pilot:** in the training pilots, mentors named learning to "support without substituting"—building trust without creating dependency—as a pivotal lesson, and the first mentoring sessions showed that young people with disabilities in rural areas need an exceptionally high level of mentor engagement (Section F).

These findings indicate that mentoring should be treated as a core policy instrument, not a peripheral activity.

Policy Objectives

The overarching goal is to establish mentoring as a systematic, inclusive and sustainable component of youth policy across the EU.

Specific objectives:

- Improve youth inclusion and life chances
- Reduce social and educational inequalities
- Support transitions from education to employment
- Strengthen social cohesion and resilience

Policy Recommendations

1. Institutionalise Mentoring within Youth Policies

- Recognise mentoring as a formal public policy tool.
- Integrate mentoring into national youth strategies, education and employment frameworks.
- Move from short-term projects to long-term, stable funding mechanisms.

2. Establish EU-Aligned Quality Standards for Mentoring

- Define minimum standards covering programme design, implementation and evaluation.
- Require structured mentoring frameworks rather than ad hoc arrangements.
- Promote evidence-based models validated by research and practice.

3. Professionalise Mentor Training

Mentor training programmes should systematically include:

- Empathy and emotional intelligence
- Active listening and communication skills
- Digital literacy and online mentoring competences

Mandatory training increases mentor effectiveness and safeguards mentee well-being.

4. Promote Personalised Mentor–Mentee Matching

- Replace one-size-fits-all approaches with needs-based matching systems.
- Combine data-driven tools with human judgement.
- Introduce continuous feedback loops to adjust matching over time.

5. Strengthen Monitoring and Impact Evaluation

- Shift focus from participation numbers to measurable long-term outcomes.
- Monitor indicators such as educational attainment, employability and psychosocial development.
- Use evaluation results to continuously improve programme quality.

6. Recognise the Digital Mentor as a Professional Role

- Define an occupational profile for digital mentors of vulnerable young people and young people with disabilities, and include it in national qualification frameworks and ESCO.
- Certify mentor training based on the Digit2Me curriculum through micro-credentials or recognised continuing education.
- Promote the digital mentor as a new source of skilled employment and a local development agent in rural areas.

Expected Impact

If implemented, these measures is expected to:

- Enhance youth participation in education and employment,
- Reduce vulnerability and social exclusion,
- Increase cost-effectiveness of public spending,
- Strengthen trust between young people and public institutions.

Structured mentoring represents a high-impact, low-cost investment with long-term social returns.

Section B

Enhancing Digital Access and Inclusion

> KEY MESSAGE *Digital inclusion is decided at the design stage: platforms are either accessible, safe and usable for everyone, or they exclude by default.*

Policy area Digital Education – Digital Inclusion – Accessibility – Lifelong Learning – Social Cohesion

Target audience EU and national digital policymakers; Ministries of Education and Digital Transformation; public e-learning platform administrators; higher education institutions and adult education providers.

Digital Access and Inclusion

Digital education and digital mentoring have become central to inclusive learning systems. However, digitalisation has also exposed and, in some cases, deepened existing inequalities. Unequal access to platforms, insufficient accessibility standards and infrastructure gaps—particularly in rural and underserved regions—limit the transformative potential of digital learning.

Integrating MOOCs and open digital resources into national e-learning platforms represents a powerful strategy to expand access, flexibility and lifelong learning opportunities. When aligned with national curricula and skills strategies, MOOCs can serve diverse learners, including adult learners, migrants and young people outside formal education pathways.

Accessibility remains a decisive issue. Without full compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), digital mentoring and learning tools systematically exclude persons with disabilities. Accessibility must therefore be embedded by design, not retrofitted after implementation. This requires not only technical compliance, but also training for educators, mentors and platform developers.

Digital inclusion also depends on infrastructure and device access. Evidence from rural and remote areas demonstrates strong links between broadband connectivity, educational participation and local economic development. Closing the digital divide is thus both an educational and an economic policy priority.

The Policy Challenge

Despite widespread digitalisation efforts:

- Access to high-quality digital learning remains uneven.
- Many national platforms lack accessibility-by-design principles.
- Rural and underserved communities face persistent connectivity and device shortages.

Without targeted policy action, digital education risks reinforcing existing inequalities rather than reducing them.

What the Evidence Shows

Evidence from EU statistics, accessibility standards, research and the Digit2Me pilots shows that:

- **MOOCs** (Massive Open Online Courses) widen access to learning, but completion stays low and benefits go mainly to already advantaged learners unless MOOCs are embedded in supported, blended pathways (Reich & Ruipérez-Valiente, 2019).
- Accessibility standards (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)) are critical for ensuring equal participation of persons with disabilities in digital mentoring and learning. (W3C, 2023; Directive (EU) 2016/2102; Directive (EU) 2019/882)
- Reliable internet infrastructure and device access are strongly linked to improved educational outcomes and local economic development in rural areas. In 2023, 77.6% of rural residents had at least basic information and data literacy skills, compared with 85.4% of city residents (Eurostat, 2025b).
- **Digit2Me pilot:** screen-reader users reported unlabelled elements and focus problems, partners working with people with intellectual disabilities asked for Easy-to-Read language and pictograms, and a notable share of mentors had not noticed the accessibility features at all (Section F).
- **Digit2Me pilot:** professionals rated digital safety content—online fraud, phishing, password hygiene and data protection—as immediately actionable for the vulnerable young people they support (Section F).

Digital inclusion is therefore both an educational priority and a socioeconomic investment.

Policy Objectives

This section aims to:

- Ensure equitable access to digital learning opportunities,
- Embed accessibility and inclusiveness into digital education systems,
- Support sustainable and resilient digital learning ecosystems across Europe.

Policy Recommendations

1. Integrate MOOCs into National E-Learning Platforms

- Systematically incorporate MOOCs and open digital resources into national platforms.
- Align MOOC content with national curricula, skills strategies and lifelong learning goals.
- Promote blended and flexible learning pathways combining online and face-to-face formats.

2. Ensure Accessibility by Design through WCAG Standards

- Mandate compliance with WCAG standards for all public digital learning and mentoring tools.
- Embed accessibility requirements at the design stage, not as retrofitted solutions.
- Provide structured training for educators, mentors and platform developers on accessible content creation.

3. Promote Inclusive Digital Mentoring for Persons with Disabilities

- Ensure that digital mentoring platforms are fully usable for learners with visual, auditory, cognitive and motor impairments.
- Combine assistive technologies with inclusive pedagogical practices.
- Monitor accessibility compliance through regular audits and user feedback mechanisms.

4. Close the Digital Infrastructure Gap in Rural and Underserved Areas

- Prioritise investment in broadband infrastructure in rural and remote regions.
- Support access to affordable digital devices for learners and educators.

- Encourage community-based and public–private partnership models to extend connectivity.

5. Strengthen Monitoring, Sustainability and Continuous Improvement

- Track not only access rates but also engagement, completion and learning outcomes.
- Use learner feedback to adapt digital content and platform design.
- Ensure long-term sustainability through coordinated governance and funding mechanisms.

6. Make Digital Safety and Safeguarding a Standard

- Include digital safety—online fraud, phishing, privacy and responsible communication—in every digital mentoring and MOOC programme.
- Adopt common safeguarding standards for online mentoring of vulnerable young people: informed consent, GDPR-compliant data handling and clear reporting procedures.
- Train mentors to protect young people online without restricting their digital autonomy.

Expected Impact

Effective implementation of these measures will:

- Reduce digital and educational inequalities,
- Increase participation in lifelong learning,
- Enhance employability and social inclusion,
- Support economic resilience in rural and disadvantaged regions.

Digital access and inclusion are foundational enablers of Europe's green, digital and social transitions.

Section C

Promoting Social Participation and Employment

> KEY MESSAGE *Jobs and autonomy follow when skills, employer incentives and community mentoring are aligned in the same place.*

Policy area Social Inclusion – Youth Employment – Disability Policy – Independent Living – Labour Market Integration

Target audience EU and national employment and social policymakers; Ministries of Labour, Social Affairs and Youth; local and regional authorities; employers' organisations and public employment services.

Social Participation and Employment

Employment remains a key driver of social inclusion, autonomy and well-being. Yet young people—especially those with disabilities—continue to face disproportionately high unemployment rates and delayed transitions to independent living.

One effective response is the establishment of independent living skills centres, which provide structured training in daily living, autonomy, social interaction and physical well-being. These centres have been shown to improve confidence, self-determination and quality of life, while also strengthening community integration.

On the labour market side, employer incentives such as tax reductions, wage subsidies and grants can significantly increase youth hiring—particularly when linked to mentoring and training schemes. However, financial incentives alone are insufficient. Their effectiveness depends on careful design, employer awareness and safeguards against misuse.

The strongest outcomes emerge when employment incentives, mentoring and skills development are aligned. Community-based digital mentoring, delivered through youth centres and local partnerships, plays a critical role in bridging skills gaps, strengthening social networks and supporting job readiness.

Local governance is central to this approach. Municipalities, NGOs, employers and public employment services must collaborate to create integrated ecosystems rather than fragmented programmes.

The Policy Challenge

Across Europe:

- Young people with disabilities experience lower employment rates and delayed transitions to independent living.
- Employers remain reluctant to hire young people with limited experience or additional support needs.
- Support systems are often fragmented between social services, employment policies and youth programmes.

Without coordinated policy intervention, these gaps perpetuate exclusion, dependency and long-term inequality.

What the Evidence Shows

Evidence from EU statistics, labour-market research and the Digit2Me pilots shows that:

- **EU statistics:** the employment gap between persons with and without disabilities was 24.0 percentage points in 2024—the largest of all labour-market gaps measured by Eurostat (Eurostat, 2025a).
- **Independent living skills** are among the evidence-based predictors of better adult outcomes for young people with disabilities; dedicated centres provide a structured setting to build them (Test et al., 2009).
- Employer incentives (tax reductions, wage subsidies and grants) raise youth hiring rates and improve workforce readiness. (Card, Kluve & Weber, 2018)
- Digital mentoring embedded in community centres strengthens digital skills, social networks and employment prospects. (Digit2Me pilot; see Section F)
- Integrated models outperform isolated interventions by addressing skills, motivation and opportunity simultaneously. (OECD, 2022)
- **Digit2Me pilot:** mentors rated the MOOC's relevance to their work at 4.5–4.9 out of 5 across countries, and mentees rated its contribution to independent-living skills at 4.4–5.0 (Section F).
- **Digit2Me pilot:** where training was linked to a real vocational course, young participants ranked job-readiness content—CVs, interview simulations and workplace etiquette—as the most important (Section F).

Social participation and employment outcomes improve most when skills development, incentives and mentoring are aligned.

Policy Objectives

This section aims to:

- Strengthen social participation and independent living for young people with disabilities,
- Improve youth employment outcomes through employer engagement,
- Promote inclusive, community-based support ecosystems.

Policy Recommendations

1. Establish Independent Living Skills Centres as Public Policy Instruments

- Support the creation of publicly funded centres focusing on daily living, autonomy and social skills.
- Prioritise transition-age youth, particularly persons with disabilities.
- Embed physical well-being, mobility and self-care training within these centres.

2. Introduce Targeted Employer Incentives for Youth Employment

- Implement tax reductions and wage subsidies for employers hiring mentored young people.
- Link financial incentives to participation in mentoring and skills development schemes.
- Encourage investment in training rather than short-term or symbolic hiring.

3. Align Employment Incentives with Skills and Mentoring Programmes

- Combine financial incentives with structured work-based learning and mentoring.
- Promote employer awareness of the long-term benefits of youth inclusion.
- Prevent misuse of incentives through monitoring and conditionality mechanisms.

4. Integrate Digital Mentoring and Independent Living Support in Community Centres

- Use youth and community centres as hubs for digital mentoring, life skills and employment guidance.

- Support programmes that build digital literacy, problem-solving and job-relevant skills.
- Encourage peer learning, social networks and participatory programme design.

5. Strengthen Local Governance and Cross-Sector Collaboration

- Foster partnerships between municipalities, employment services, NGOs and employers.
- Enable resource sharing and coordination across social, education and labour policies.
- Involve young people directly in programme design and evaluation.

6. Link Mentoring to Social Entrepreneurship and Active Citizenship

- Include social entrepreneurship, civic engagement and volunteering pathways in mentoring and independent living programmes.
- Connect mentored young people with local social enterprises, cooperatives and youth councils.
- Offer small seed grants or incubation support for youth-led social initiatives in rural areas.

Expected Impact

If implemented coherently, these measures is expected to:

- Increase employment rates among young people with disabilities,
- Reduce long-term dependency on social welfare systems,
- Strengthen local labour markets and social cohesion,
- Improve quality of life and independent living outcomes.

Social inclusion policies that connect skills, incentives and community support generate lasting economic and social returns.

Section D

Strengthening Psychosocial Support

> KEY MESSAGE *Young people learn and work better when someone is there for them—online where possible, in person where needed.*

Policy area Mental Health – Psychosocial Support – Youth Well-being – Education & Employment Support – Community Care

Target audience EU and national mental health and social policymakers; Ministries of Health, Education and Social Affairs; Local authorities and community service providers; Educational institutions and employers.

Psychosocial Support

Psychosocial well-being is a foundational condition for learning, employment and social participation. Yet it remains insufficiently integrated into education, mentoring and labour market policies. In rural areas, where psychological services are distant and waiting lists long, mentors are often the first to notice distress and the most accessible source of support.

Evidence strongly supports hybrid mentoring models that combine emotional support with practical guidance. Such models foster trust, resilience and sustained engagement, outperforming approaches focused solely on career outcomes.

Psychosocial support is most effective when it extends beyond the individual to include families and communities. Inclusive care planning, involving families, schools, community organisations and health services, improves continuity of support and mental health outcomes—particularly for vulnerable groups.

Policy frameworks should therefore treat psychosocial support not as a specialised service, but as a cross-cutting policy dimension embedded in youth, education and employment initiatives.

The Policy Challenge

Across Europe:

- Psychosocial support is often fragmented and reactive.
- Emotional well-being is insufficiently integrated into mentoring, education and employment programmes.

- Families and communities are underutilised as support resources.

As a result, many young people struggle with stress, disengagement and reduced capacity to benefit from skills and employment initiatives.

What the Evidence Shows

Evidence from mentoring and mental-health research and from the Digit2Me pilots shows that:

- Hybrid mentoring models that combine emotional and practical support outperform purely career-focused approaches. (DuBois et al., 2011; Christensen et al., 2020)
- Emotional safety and trust are key enablers of learning, professional growth and long-term engagement. (Rhodes, 2005)
- Family- and community-inclusive support plans improve continuity of care, mental health outcomes and social cohesion. (DuBois et al., 2002; WHO, 2022)
- Psychosocial support is most effective when embedded across education, employment and community services. (WHO, 2022)
- **Digit2Me pilot:** young participants asked for more personal guidance from a mentor, and the online forum stayed inactive without facilitation—digital content works best alongside a human relationship (Section F).
- **Digit2Me pilot:** interactivity reached 81.6% in online seminars but 95.8% once face-to-face sessions were included, and mentors found that in-person meetings motivated rural mentees far more than online work alone (Section F).

Well-being and performance are interdependent, not separate policy domains.

Policy Objectives

This section aims to:

- Strengthen psychosocial resilience among young people,
- Improve the effectiveness of mentoring and employment programmes,
- Promote inclusive, community-based support ecosystems.

Policy Recommendations

1. Mainstream Hybrid Mentoring Models

- Promote mentoring approaches that integrate emotional support with practical career guidance.
- Train mentors to address psychosocial needs alongside professional development.
- Encourage hybrid delivery models combining in-person and digital mentoring.

2. Embed Psychosocial Support into Education and Employment Policies

- Recognise emotional well-being as a prerequisite for skills development and employability.
- Integrate psychosocial support into youth employment, education and lifelong learning programmes.
- Ensure coordination between mental health services and labour market initiatives.

3. Involve Families and Communities in Support Planning

- Encourage structured involvement of families in care and support plans where appropriate.
- Strengthen partnerships between schools, community centres, health services and families.
- Promote community-based support networks to enhance continuity and trust.

4. Promote Inclusive and Participatory Care Models

- Ensure support plans reflect individual needs, preferences and lived experiences.
- Engage young people actively in decision-making processes affecting their well-being.
- Prioritise inclusivity for vulnerable and marginalised groups.

5. Strengthen Cross-Sector Coordination and Monitoring

- Improve coordination across health, education, employment and social services.
- Monitor psychosocial outcomes alongside educational and employment indicators.
- Use evidence and feedback to continuously adapt support models.

6. Care for the Carers: Support Mentors' Well-being

- Provide regular supervision and debriefing for mentors working with young people with complex needs.
- Establish regional networks of digital mentors for peer exchange, case discussion and burnout prevention.
- Include professional boundaries and self-care in all mentor training.

Expected Impact

If implemented, these measures is expected to:

- Improve mental well-being and emotional resilience,
- Increase engagement in education and employment programmes,
- Reduce dropout, burnout and long-term disengagement,
- Strengthen community cohesion and social trust.

Psychosocial support is a **strategic investment** in human capital and social sustainability.

Section E

Ensuring Sustainability and Policy Integration

> KEY MESSAGE *What the pilots built must outlive the project: embed it in ministries, municipalities and budgets.*

Policy area Governance – Policy Integration – Sustainable Development – Public Administration – Financing Mechanisms

Target audience EU and national policymakers; Ministries of Education, Social Affairs and Labour; National development agencies; Municipalities and regional authorities; public–private sector partners.

Sustainability and Policy Integration

The long-term value of youth-related initiatives depends on their ability to outlive individual projects. Across Europe, many successful interventions fail to scale due to weak institutionalisation and fragmented governance. For rural areas, sustainability also means keeping services within reach: without stable local funding, transport costs and staff turnover end mentoring as soon as the project does.

Sustainability requires systematic integration of project outcomes into ministerial strategies, particularly across education, social affairs and labour portfolios. Cross-sector governance mechanisms—such as inter-ministerial coordination units or policy brokers—are essential to overcome institutional silos.

Financing sustainability is equally critical. Reliance on EU project funding alone undermines continuity. National development agencies, municipalities and public–private partnerships (PPPs) offer important opportunities to diversify funding, provided that transparency, accountability and public value are safeguarded.

Local authorities play a pivotal role in adapting and scaling initiatives to local contexts. Strengthening municipal capacity and promoting inter-municipal cooperation are therefore key sustainability strategies.

Finally, aligning initiatives with EU priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) ensures coherence with broader policy agendas and enhances long-term legitimacy.

The Policy Challenge

Across Europe:

- Successful project outcomes are rarely mainstreamed into national policies.
- Ministries operate in silos, limiting policy coherence.
- Heavy reliance on EU programme funding undermines long-term sustainability.
- Municipalities and local actors lack stable financial instruments to scale impact.

Without structural integration and diversified funding, even effective initiatives risk discontinuation.

What the Evidence Shows

Evidence from OECD and EU governance guidance and from the Digit2Me pilots shows that:

- Cross-sector policy integration improves efficiency, coherence and long-term impact. (OECD, 2019)
- Strategic alignment between education, social affairs and labour policies is critical for youth and employment outcomes. (OECD, 2022; Council of the European Union, 2020)
- Public–private partnerships (PPPs) and national development agencies can enhance financial resilience when properly governed. (OECD, 2012)
- Sustainable projects rely on adaptive governance, data-driven decision-making and stakeholder engagement. (OECD, 2019)
- **Digit2Me pilot:** monitoring data differed across partners—gender was not always recorded and duplicate registrations occurred—showing why common monitoring standards must be agreed before scaling (Section F).
- **Digit2Me pilot:** 89% of training participants valued peer exchange with colleagues facing similar rural challenges, pointing to permanent regional mentor networks as a low-cost sustainability instrument (Section F).

Sustainability is a governance challenge, not merely a funding issue.

Policy Objectives

This section aims to:

- Ensure continuity and scalability of successful project outcomes,

- Strengthen inter-ministerial coordination and strategic governance,
- Promote diversified and resilient financing ecosystems.

Policy Recommendations

1. Integrate Project Results into Ministerial Strategies

- Systematically align project outcomes with national education, social and labour strategies.
- Establish formal mechanisms for transferring evidence and results to policy units.
- Use pilot projects as testing grounds for scalable public policy solutions.

2. Strengthen Cross-Sector Governance and Coordination

- Promote structured collaboration between ministries, agencies and municipalities.
- Appoint cross-sector coordinators or "policy brokers" to bridge institutional silos.
- Embed strategic management principles into public administration practices.

3. Diversify Sustainable Financing Mechanisms

- Complement EU funding with national development agency instruments.
- Encourage municipalities to leverage blended finance models.
- Promote public–private partnerships under transparent and accountable frameworks.

4. Support Municipal and Local-Level Capacity

- Enable municipalities to adapt and scale project models to local needs.
- Strengthen administrative and financial capacity at local level.
- Encourage inter-municipal cooperation and knowledge sharing.

5. Align Sustainability with EU and Global Frameworks

- Link project outcomes to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Ensure coherence with EU policy priorities on digital, green and social transitions.
- Use sustainability indicators to guide long-term policy planning.
- Encourage mentors to promote green practices in young people's daily lives, linking youth inclusion with the green transition.

6. Mainstream the Digit2Me Curriculum and Open Resources

- Integrate the Digit2Me curriculum into initial and continuing training for youth workers, social educators and teachers.
- Host the Digit2Me MOOC, the "Elixir of Independence" game and the planning tools (GROW, PATH, Empathy Mapping) on national platforms under open licences.
- Use the seven project language versions as a basis for adaptation in further countries and regions.

Expected Impact

If implemented, these measures is expected to:

- Increase policy coherence and institutional learning,
- Improve long-term return on public investment,
- Reduce dependency on short-term project funding,
- Enable scalable, resilient and transferable policy solutions.

Sustainability ensures that public value continues beyond project timelines.

Section F

Lessons from the Digit2Me Pilots

Common findings of seven partners in six countries (Activities A.4.2–A.4.4)

Why This Section Matters

The recommendations in Sections A–E were tested against the practical experience of the Digit2Me pilots, carried out in 2026 in Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Slovenia, Spain (including Catalonia) and Türkiye. The pilots ran in three steps—the Digit2Me MOOC (Activity A.4.2), virtual seminars and face-to-face training (A.4.3), and individual mentoring sessions with young people from rural areas (A.4.4)—and involved mentors (youth professionals, teachers, social workers and young mentors) and mentees, including young people with disabilities. Rather than reporting results country by country, this section draws out the lessons that recurred across the national pilots and links them to the recommendations of this brief.

6	161	66%	97%
countries, seven partners	MOOC participants	completed the MOOC pathway	found the training useful

Partnership-level results drawn from the transnational MOOC report (six countries) and the transnational training report (all seven partners).

Table F1. MOOC Piloting at a Glance (Activity A.4.2, six countries)

Country	Mentors registered / completed	Mentees registered / completed	Completion rate	Overall satisfaction, mentors / mentees (1–5)
Germany	1 / 0	–	– [3]	4.50 / –
Italy	17 / 8	6 / 5	56.5%	4.83 / 5.00 [2]
Lithuania	15 / 15	9 / 9	100%	4.70 / –
Slovenia	14 / 13	10 / 7	83.3%	4.73 / 4.57
Spain [1]	48 / 24	26 / 11	47.3%	4.53 / 4.89
Türkiye	13 / 10	7 / 7	85.0%	4.86 / 4.40
Total	**108 / 70**	**58 / 39**	**65.7%**	

[1] Includes Catalonia, which tested the Spanish-language course; the Catalan professionals' group assessment rated the MOOC 3 out of 5. [2] One respondent. [3] One participant; not comparable. Completion rate = mentors and mentees who completed the full pathway ÷ registered. 161 unique participants after duplicate registrations were removed. "–" = not reported. Source: Digit2Me transnational MOOC piloting report, 2026.

Table F2. Training Pilots at a Glance (Activity A.4.3, all seven partners)

Indicator	Target / quality threshold	Partnership result
Virtual seminars	21 sessions · 70 participants	**22 sessions · 130 participants**

Indicator	Target / quality threshold	Partnership result
Face-to-face courses	7 courses · 49 participants	**7 courses · 81 participants**
Content usefulness	≥ 90% positive	**97.3%**
Content clarity	≥ 85% positive	**95.5%**
Practical examples	≥ 80% positive	**91.1%**
Interactivity	> 80% very / moderately	**81.6% online · 95.8% blended**
Comfort participating and asking questions	> 85% "yes"	**94.0%**
Networking and peer exchange	> 80% "yes"	**89.0%**
Technical quality	> 90% good / excellent	**95.3%**
Technical difficulties reported	< 15%	**6.9%**
Would recommend to colleagues	> 85%	**90.5% (98.6% incl. "probably")**

Percentages are partnership averages of positive ratings in the evaluation questionnaires of all seven partners; participants are unique participants per activity. Source: Digit2Me transnational A.4.3 piloting report, 2026.

What worked	What needs to change
✓ A shared curriculum adapted into each national language ✓ Blended delivery: online for reach, face-to-face for practice ✓ Practical, game-based tools (GROW, PATH, "Elixir of Independence") ✓ A mentor–mentee model with dedicated learning pathways ✓ High relevance: satisfaction mostly 4.5–4.9 out of 5	→ Active follow-up to turn enrolment into completion → Cognitive accessibility: Easy-to-Read, pictograms, video → Fixes for screen readers and platform navigation → More time and more real-life practice → Common monitoring data across partners

Six Lessons from the Pilots

- **Blended beats online-only.** Online seminars and the MOOC worked well for reach and preparation, but practice, interaction and confidence grew in face-to-face sessions: rated interactivity rose from 82% in online seminars to 96% once face-to-face sessions were included, and the weakest online scores reached full marks in person.

> *"Perhaps at least one meeting in person."*
>
> — Mentor, MOOC evaluation

- **The human mentor is irreplaceable.** Young people repeatedly asked for personal guidance, online forums stayed inactive without moderation, and young people with disabilities in rural areas progressed only with close, patient mentor support—short steps, a calm pace and constant encouragement.

> *"I need more help; I need a mentor to guide me."*
>
> — Young participant, MOOC evaluation

- **Enrolment is not completion.** About two-thirds of MOOC registrations (109 of 166 mentors and mentees) reached full completion and 72% of all possible module certificates were obtained, but progress varied widely between groups. Non-completion rarely meant dissatisfaction: ratings stayed high where completion was lower, and participants who kept going scored 80–100% in assessments. Reminders, visible progress, facilitation and more time—the most common request across the national reports—make the difference.
- **Accessibility means usable for everyone.** Screen-reader barriers, requests for Easy-to-Read language, pictograms and video, low ratings for visual design among young users and unstable rural connectivity all show that accessibility is cognitive and practical as well as technical—and must be tested with users from the start.

> *"Shorter readings suited me better than longer ones; the game board took me a long time to finish."*
>
> — Young participant, MOOC evaluation

- **Practical, playful and safe content works.** Simulations, planning tools such as GROW and PATH and the "Elixir of Independence" game were valued most, while digital safety—fraud, phishing and data protection—was rated immediately useful for vulnerable young people.
- **Mentors and systems need support too.** Mentors stressed professional boundaries, burnout prevention and peer exchange, valued by 89% of training participants, while differing data practices across partners showed the need for common monitoring standards before scaling up.

Overall Conclusion

The pilots met or exceeded their participation targets in every partner country and brought 161 participants into the MOOC across six countries. Participants judged the Digit2Me content highly relevant: mentors' satisfaction and relevance ratings for the MOOC were predominantly between 4.5 and 4.9 out of 5, 97% of training participants found the content useful and nearly all would recommend it to colleagues. Their shared message confirms the core argument of this brief: digital tools widen reach, but results depend on trained and supported mentors working at the young person's pace, in blended formats, on accessible platforms and within public systems able to sustain them. Sections A–E translate these lessons into policy; Table F3 shows the link.

Table F3. From Pilot to Policy

Pilot finding	Policy response in this brief	Section
Many mentors stop at partial progress without follow-up	**Certified mentor training with progress monitoring and support**	A.3, A.5
Users ask for real cases, simulations and Easy-to-Read content	**Practice-based quality standards for mentoring and MOOC content**	A.2, B.1
Screen-reader barriers; accessibility features not visible	**WCAG by design, audits with assistive-technology users**	B.2, B.3
Rural users need low-bandwidth and mobile-friendly formats	**Rural connectivity, devices and lightweight content formats**	B.4
Content valued for career guidance and independent living	**Link digital mentoring to community centres and employment pathways**	C.3, C.4
Young people ask for a human mentor; in-person contact motivates more than online work; forum inactive without moderation	**Hybrid mentoring and facilitated peer communities**	D.1, D.3
Partner data are incomplete and not comparable	**Common outcome indicators and shared data standards**	A.5, B.5, E.1
Online seminars prepare; face-to-face practice lifts interactivity and confidence	**Hybrid mentoring with mandatory hands-on, in-person sessions**	B.1, D.1
Simulations, GROW/PATH planning and gamified tools valued most	**Practice-based standards and interactive mentoring tools**	A.2, C.4
Participants ask for more time; young mentees need a gradual pace	**Funding for longer in-person formats and realistic timelines**	A.1, E.3
Mentors aim to support without substituting; risk of burnout	**Supervision, boundaries training and regional mentor networks**	A.3, D.6
Digital safety rated immediately useful for vulnerable youth	**Digital safety and safeguarding standards**	B.6
Rural connectivity gaps and screen-reader friction in online sessions	**Connectivity checks, offline and printed materials, assistive-technology testing**	B.2, B.4
Project tools (curriculum, MOOC, game) proved transferable across seven countries	**Mainstream the Digit2Me curriculum; recognise the digital mentor role**	A.6, E.6

Data Note

Section F synthesises the Digit2Me transnational MOOC piloting report covering Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Slovenia, Spain (including Catalonia) and Türkiye (Activity A.4.2), the transnational report on virtual seminars and face-to-face training covering all seven partners (A.4.3) and the first mentoring session summary (A.4.4). MOOC participant numbers are unique participants after duplicate registrations were removed; Catalan participants used the Spanish-language course and are counted within Spain. Figures are partnership-level; samples are small and reflect participants' perceptions rather than measured learning outcomes. Mentoring findings will be updated as the remaining partners complete their sessions. Quotations come from participants' evaluation questionnaires; where needed they have been translated from the original language.

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