



EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



POLICY BRIEF

From Dialogue to Action: Strengthening EU–LAC Digital Cooperation through SPIDER

April 2026

SCENE SETTER: Bridging the gap between political ambition and operational delivery

Digital transformation is a shared strategic priority for the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean, playing a key role in advancing economic competitiveness, fostering social inclusion, and supporting sustainable development across both regions. In recent years, EU–LAC cooperation has intensified through a wide range of digital dialogues, agreements, and collaborative initiatives, reflecting a growing alignment around key technological domains such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, cybersecurity, and digital infrastructure.

However, despite this progress, a **structural gap persists between political commitments and their practical implementation**. Most cooperation frameworks remain high-level, lacking clear operational tools, defined responsibilities, funding mechanisms, and monitoring systems. This limits their ability to deliver measurable and scalable results. Both regions also face common challenges, including rapid technological change, unequal access to infrastructure and skills, fragmented governance, and increasing geopolitical pressure. These factors reinforce the **need to move beyond dialogue towards more structured, long-term, and impact-oriented cooperation**.

The SPIDER project addresses this gap by providing evidence-based analysis and tested mechanisms to strengthen implementation. Through mapping exercises, stakeholder engagement, and pilot actions, it identifies systemic barriers and proposes actionable solutions focused on governance, infrastructure activation, and multi-stakeholder collaboration. Building on these insights, SPIDER supports a shift

towards more coordinated and sustainable cooperation models, where policy frameworks are directly linked to implementation tools, infrastructure is actively used for concrete applications, and stakeholders across sectors are engaged in long-term partnerships. This approach aims to enhance the effectiveness, inclusiveness, and overall impact of EU–LAC digital cooperation.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS: Assessing the current state and challenges of cooperation

The findings of the SPIDER project are based on a comprehensive evidence base combining the mapping of more than 150 dialogues and agreements, survey data from over 350 stakeholders, inputs from multi-stakeholder working groups and the Digital Implementation Forum (DIF), as well as the practical experience from pilot initiatives such as the Twinning Programme.

Structural gap between policy commitments and implementation. The analysis highlights a high level of strategic convergence across EU–LAC cooperation frameworks. Shared priorities include the promotion of ethical and human-centred digital transformation, the development of secure and resilient digital infrastructures, and the strengthening of research and innovation ecosystems. However, this convergence is not matched by equivalent levels of operational maturity. Most cooperation instruments remain at a declarative level, lacking clearly defined implementation pathways, funding mechanisms, monitoring frameworks, and institutional responsibilities. This results in a **persistent gap between political ambition and practical delivery**, which has also been identified as a key systemic challenge in the SPIDER Roadmap.

Underutilisation of strategic digital infrastructure.

The analysis further shows that while the BELLA infrastructure provides a strong foundation for connectivity between Europe and LAC, its potential is not fully realised. The barriers to its effective use are primarily non-technical and relate to limited awareness, insufficient integration into national and institutional systems, lack of structured use cases, and misalignment between infrastructure provision and funding instruments.

Connectivity alone is not sufficient to enable cooperation. Targeted efforts are required to translate infrastructure into tangible applications and collaborative projects.

Fragmentation and asymmetries in the cooperation ecosystem.

Another key finding concerns the fragmented nature of the cooperation ecosystem. Significant differences exist in institutional capacity, research and innovation performance, and access to resources across countries and regions. These asymmetries limit participation, reduce the effectiveness of cooperation mechanisms, and hinder the scalability of successful initiatives. At the same time, the absence of structured coordination mechanisms further exacerbates fragmentation, preventing the alignment of actors, instruments, and policy priorities.

Limited integration of human-centred and inclusive approaches.

The project also identifies a gap between policy ambitions related to inclusion and their practical implementation. Although human-centred approaches, diversity, equity and inclusion are widely recognised as guiding principles, they are not systematically embedded in project design or implementation processes. This limits the societal relevance, long-term sustainability, and impact of digital transformation efforts.

Need for trust-based, long-term cooperation frameworks.

Finally, SPIDER findings underline the importance of trust, continuity, and institutional stability as critical enablers of effective cooperation. Evidence from stakeholder engagement through discussions held in the DIF and the SPIDER Final Conference shows that short-term project cycles and fragmented funding frameworks undermine the development of durable partnerships, while rapid technological change—particularly in artificial intelligence—places increasing pressure on skills systems and institutional readiness.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS: Identifying the shift towards implementation-oriented approaches

The evidence generated by SPIDER highlights the need for a fundamental shift in EU–LAC digital cooperation. Current models, often fragmented, short-term, and project-based, are not suited to address the scale and complexity of digital transformation. A more coordinated and implementation-oriented approach is required.

This involves **strengthening governance frameworks** to improve alignment between political dialogue and operational instruments, while ensuring coordination across actors, funding, and policy levels. It also requires moving beyond a focus on infrastructure deployment towards the activation of concrete use cases, enabling investments to generate tangible impact.

In parallel, **long-term cooperation models are essential to build trust, ensure continuity, and scale successful initiatives.** Broadening participation beyond top-down approaches is equally important, with stronger involvement of research institutions, startups, National Research and Education Networks, and civil society.

The transition towards long-term cooperation models is essential to build trust, ensure continuity, and support the scaling of successful initiatives.

Finally, **digital transformation must adopt a human-centred perspective**, integrating inclusion and equity as core elements of implementation. Addressing disparities in access, capacity, and participation is critical to ensure that cooperation delivers sustainable and socially relevant outcomes.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: Advancing concrete actions to strengthen EU–LAC digital cooperation

To address the identified challenges and support a more effective EU–LAC digital cooperation framework, SPIDER proposes a set of policy recommendations grounded in project evidence and validated through stakeholder engagement.

#R1 Establish operational governance frameworks for EU–LAC cooperation. There is a need for structured governance mechanisms that can support the implementation of digital dialogues commitments. This includes the institutionalisation of coordination platforms such as the DIF, which can

facilitate alignment between policy priorities and operational actions, ensure continuity across political cycles, and support multi-level governance.

#R2 Activate BELLA through concrete use cases and funding instruments. The strategic use of the BELLA infrastructure should be operationalised through targeted instruments. This requires the development of joint EU–LAC pilot projects, the creation of testbeds and experimentation environments, and the integration of infrastructure into national and regional research and innovation systems. Recognising BELLA as a strategic cooperation enabler, rather than a neutral backbone, is what gives these measures their long-term significance. Such measures would enable the transition from connectivity to collaboration and impact.

#R3 Develop joint funding schemes and matchmaking mechanisms. Dedicated funding mechanisms and matchmaking tools would facilitate cooperation. This includes the creation of joint calls, co-financing schemes, and platforms that support partner identification and project development. Reducing administrative and regulatory barriers will also be critical to enable broader participation, particularly from less represented actors.

#R4 Strengthen the role of NRENs as ecosystem orchestrators. The role of National Research and Education Networks should be strengthened as key enablers of cooperation. NRENs are well positioned to support cross-border collaboration, facilitate access to infrastructure, and connect research and innovation ecosystems across regions.

#R5 Systematically integrate human-centred and inclusive approaches. Embedding human-centred and inclusive approaches in all cooperation initiatives requires integrating diversity, equity and inclusion principles from the design phase, ensuring equitable participation across regions, and addressing socio-economic and cultural barriers.

#R6 Invest in skills and institutional capacity. This should be prioritised, including strengthening digital and artificial intelligence skills, enhancing institutional readiness, and supporting capacity building in less mature ecosystems to reduce asymmetries.

#R7 Implement monitoring systems to track real impact. Robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks should be implemented to assess progress and impact. These frameworks should include both qualitative and quantitative indicators, capturing not only outputs but also the quality of

collaboration, stakeholder engagement, and long-term policy outcomes.

SUSTAINABILITY AND LEGACY: Ensuring continuity, scalability, and long-term impact of SPIDER results

The SPIDER project has established a set of practical tools and cooperation mechanisms that provide a strong foundation for the long-term sustainability of EU–LAC digital cooperation. Rather than generating isolated project outputs, SPIDER has focused on creating mechanisms that can continue supporting policy dialogue, institutional coordination, and operational collaboration beyond the project's duration.

1. A central element of this legacy is the **Digital Dialogues Implementation Forum (DIF)**, conceived as a permanent multi-stakeholder coordination space to connect policy discussions with implementation processes. By bringing together policymakers, NRENs, research organisations, innovation actors, and private sector representatives, the DIF supports continuity across political cycles and helps transform high-level commitments into actionable cooperation pathways.
2. The **SPIDERHUB platform** further strengthens sustainability by providing a digital observatory for mapping, monitoring, and analysing EU–LAC digital dialogues and agreements. Its AI-supported structure improves institutional memory, reduces fragmentation of information, and offers policymakers and stakeholders a practical tool to identify synergies, monitor commitments, and support evidence-based decision-making over time.
3. The **Community of Practice (CoP)** complements these mechanisms by ensuring continuous stakeholder engagement and peer learning. It creates an informal but structured environment for knowledge exchange, capacity building, and the dissemination of good practices across both regions, helping to preserve trust and collaboration beyond formal project activities.
4. At the operational level, the **Twinning Programme** has demonstrated the value of direct institutional partnerships between EU and LAC innovation ecosystems. By facilitating cooperation between innovation hubs and supporting joint action plans, the programme provides a replicable model for long-term collaboration, particularly in areas linked to

digital innovation and the strategic use of BELLA infrastructure.

5. In parallel, the EU–LAC **Roadmap for Cooperation on Digital Transformation** offers strategic guidance for future action by translating project evidence and stakeholder input into concrete policy recommendations, priority areas, responsible actors, and implementation pathways. This roadmap provides continuity by ensuring that SPIDER’s vision is to identify actionable pathways that effectively serve the EU-CELAC priorities.

SPIDER tools provide a foundation for sustained cooperation. Their long-term impact depends on continued funding, institutional ownership, and integration into EU and LAC policy frameworks.

Together, these instruments form an integrated sustainability architecture that supports governance, knowledge sharing, and implementation. Their long-term impact, however, will depend on continued institutional ownership, sustained political commitment, and their integration into existing regional and national policy frameworks. Alignment with EU and LAC strategic agendas, as well as the mobilisation of future funding mechanisms, will be essential to preserve momentum and scale cooperation efforts.

Ultimately, SPIDER’s legacy lies not only in the recommendations it produces, but in the operational structures it leaves behind. Ensuring the continuity of these mechanisms will be critical to strengthening a more coordinated, inclusive, and durable EU–LAC digital partnership.

CONCLUSIONS: From strategic alignment to effective and sustainable implementation

EU–LAC digital cooperation is supported by strong political commitment, shared strategic priorities, and valuable assets such as the BELLA infrastructure, which provide a solid foundation for deeper collaboration between both regions. However, despite this favourable context, the impact of cooperation remains constrained by a persistent structural gap between high-level dialogue commitments and their operational implementation.

Evidence generated by the SPIDER project confirms that the main barriers are not technological, but institutional. Fragmented governance, weak coordination mechanisms, short-term project cycles,

and the limited integration of infrastructure into concrete use cases continue to reduce the effectiveness and scalability of cooperation efforts. As a result, many policy dialogue commitments remain declarative rather than transformative.

SPIDER demonstrates that strengthening EU–LAC digital cooperation requires a shift towards more structured, long-term, and implementation-oriented frameworks. **Effective cooperation depends on the combination of robust governance mechanisms, operational instruments that connect policy with practice, active use of strategic infrastructure, and sustained multi-stakeholder engagement** involving policymakers, research institutions, innovation actors, NRENS, and civil society.

The project also highlights that **trust, inclusiveness, and long-term investment in skills and institutional capacity are essential conditions for sustainable cooperation. Human-centred approaches must move from principle to practice**, ensuring that digital transformation responds to societal needs and supports equitable participation across both regions.

Looking ahead, the priority is not to define new strategic objectives, but to **operationalise existing commitments and ensure continuity beyond political and funding cycles**. Strengthening the link between dialogue and implementation will be essential to deliver measurable, scalable, and lasting impact.

In this context, SPIDER provides both the evidence and the practical tools to support this transition, contributing to a more coordinated, inclusive, and resilient EU–LAC digital partnership.

Dialogue creates commitment.

Structures create impact.

SPIDER provides the evidence and tools to move from one to the other.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	SPIDER - EU-LAC Strategic Partnership for the Implementation of Digital Dialogues in R&I Cooperation.
COORDINATOR	Yolanda Ursa, INMARK, Spain
CONSORTIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- CEDIA - Corporación Ecuatoriana para el Desarrollo de la Investigación y la Academia, Ecuador.- DLR - Deutsches Zentrum für Luft – und Raumfahrt ev, Germany.- 28Digital, Belgium.- EurA PT - 3ura Unipessoal Lda, Portugal.- INMARK - Grupo Empresarial Inmark, Spain.- RedCONARE - Fundación Centro de Alta Tecnología, Costa Rica.- REUNA - Corporación Red Universitaria Nacional, Chile.- RNP - Rede Nacional de Ensino e Pesquisa, Brazil.- UPM - Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Spain.
FUNDING SCHEME	HORIZON-CSA.
DURATION	November 2023 – April 2026 (30 months).
BUDGET	EU contribution: 1.996.450 €.
WEBSITE	https://spidernetwork.org/
FOR MORE INFORMATION	Contact: Eugenia Peñaloza, Communication Manager, info@spidernetwork.org
FURTHER READING	Public Deliverables at ZENODO SPIDER EULAC Digital Partnership . Other relevant publications and resources related to SPIDER can be downloaded from https://spidernetwork.org/resources/ .