SPIDER

EU-LAC Digital Partnership

# Roadmap for future EU-LAC Cooperation on Digital Transformation



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| BELLA | Building the Europe link to Latin America |
| CELAC | Community of Latin American and Caribbean States |
| CoC | Community of Practice |
| DEI | Diversity, Equality and Inclusion |
| DIF | EU-LAC Digital Dialogues Implementation Forum |
| EC | European Commission |
| EU | European Union |
| GEANT | pan-European research and education network. |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technologies |
| LAC | Latin America and Caribbean countries |
| NREN | National Research and Education Network |
| RedCLARA | South American research & education network |
| R&I | Research and Innovation |
| RFO | Research Funding Organisation |
| RPO | Research Performing Organisation |
| STI | Science, Technology and Innovation |
| ToR | Terms of Reference |
| WG | Working Group |

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This roadmap provides a structured framework to advance EU–LAC cooperation in Science, Technology and Innovation (STI), placing digital transformation at the centre as a key enabler of stronger and more effective cooperation between both regions.

It contributes to the EU–CELAC Strategic Roadmap and supports the implementation of the New Agenda for EU–CELAC Cooperation in Research and Innovation by providing a practical and implementation-oriented perspective.

The roadmap is grounded in broad evidence base generated throughout the SPIDER project, including mapping activities, surveys and focus groups, the Call for Ideas, thematic Working Groups discussions, and the insights from the Digital Dialogues Implementation Forum (DIF) events. These inputs were systematically analysed and translated into recommendations through a structured co-creation process involving the consortium partners and external experts.

Through this process, a set of 11 strategic recommendations was identified, prioritised, and organised into two thematic tracks:

- Digital infrastructure, cooperation ecosystems and bi-regional governance.
- Human-centric, inclusive and responsible digital transformation.

The relevance of this roadmap lies in the operationalisation of these recommendations. Each recommendation is supported by concrete implementation elements, including proposed actions, responsible actors, potential funding sources, timelines, indicators, and expected impacts, designed to move commitments from intention to practice.

The roadmap is grounded in shared bi-regional priorities: the development of secure and resilient digital infrastructures, the responsible and ethical use of artificial intelligence, and the promotion of inclusive and human-centred digital transformation. It also leverages existing initiatives and infrastructures, such as BELLA, to strengthen coordination and maximise the impact of collective efforts.

Ultimately, the roadmap serves as a practical tool to support policymakers, institutions, and stakeholders in moving from dialogue to implementation, enabling more coordinated, scalable, and impactful cooperation between the EU and LAC in digital transformation.

# 1. INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

This Roadmap for Future EU–LAC Cooperation on Digital Transformation, developed to support and advance the bi-regional dialogue between the European Union (EU) and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in the field of Science, Technology and Innovation (STI), places a specific focus on digital transformation as a key enabler of stronger, more connected, and more effective cooperation between both regions.

It contributes to the EU–CELAC Strategic Roadmap developed under the EU–CELAC Joint Initiative on Research and Innovation (JIRI), and supports the implementation of the New Agenda for EU–CELAC Cooperation in Research and Innovation by providing a practical and operational perspective on priority areas related to digital technologies and infrastructures.

The roadmap is also aligned with the broader political direction set by both the 2025 EU–CELAC Summit and the 2025 EU–CELAC Ministerial Declaration on Research and Innovation, which recognise research and innovation as a strategic pillar of the bi-regional partnership and highlight digital transformation—particularly the responsible and trustworthy use of artificial intelligence—as a key area for cooperation. These frameworks also stress the importance of strengthening infrastructures, promoting inclusive and human-centred approaches, and deepening long-term cooperation between both regions.

This roadmap approaches EU–LAC cooperation through the lens of digital transformation — understood not only as the deployment of technologies, but as a systemic process involving infrastructure, governance, skills, inclusion, and innovation ecosystems. Particular attention is given to areas where EU–LAC collaboration can be strengthened through the use and expansion of digital infrastructures such as BELLA, as well as through improved coordination between policy, research, and innovation actors.

The roadmap addresses key challenges identified in EU–LAC cooperation, including fragmentation of initiatives, uneven institutional capacities, and the gap between political commitments and operational implementation. In response, it provides a structured and implementation-oriented approach to support more effective, coordinated, and scalable collaboration between both regions.

In terms of scope, the roadmap focuses on:

- Identifying priority areas for EU–LAC cooperation on digital transformation
- Providing a set of strategic and operational recommendations
- Supporting the translation of dialogue outcomes into concrete actions
- Identifying relevant actors, funding sources, and implementation pathways

The roadmap is designed as a practical tool for policymakers, research organisations, digital infrastructure providers, innovation actors, and other stakeholders involved in EU–LAC cooperation. It aims to support decision-making, facilitate coordination across levels and sectors, and contribute to more effective implementation of bi-regional digital initiatives.

# 2. ROADMAP METHODOLOGY

The Roadmap for EU–LAC Cooperation on Digital Transformation was developed through a structured, participatory, and evidence-based process designed to translate the results of the SPIDER project into actionable and policy-relevant recommendations.

The methodology combines systematic analysis, co-creation, internal evaluation, and multi-stakeholder validation to ensure that the roadmap reflects shared priorities across the EU and LAC, while also being operational and aligned with real implementation conditions.

The process followed a clear logic chain, transforming participatory evidence into policy-relevant guidance. Inputs generated through SPIDER activities were translated into thematic and operational outputs, that later were consolidated, prioritised, and translated into implementation-oriented recommendations.

## *2.1 Evidence base and consolidation of inputs*

The evidence generated throughout the project was analysed and consolidated to provide a coherent and traceable foundation that supports the subsequent co-creation of recommendations.

The analysis focused on bringing together the main findings and inputs emerging from different SPIDER activities, identifying areas of convergence, recurring themes, and shared priorities across the EU–LAC digital cooperation landscape.

The evidence base includes:

- Findings from digital dialogues and bi-regional agreements mapping activities
- Results from the survey on the digital ecosystem interconnectivity in LAC and EU and the subsequent focus groups
- Inputs collected through a Call for Ideas on how to leverage BELLA to drive the digital transformation of both regions
- Contributions from the DIF thematic Working Groups
- Outcomes from DIF events

Each of these sources contributed a complementary perspective:

- **Digital dialogues and bi-regional agreements mapping activities** provided a systemic overview of the cooperation landscape, based on the analysis of more than 100 digital dialogues and over 60 bilateral and bi-regional agreements. This source made it possible to identify strong thematic convergence across EU–LAC cooperation (particularly in areas such as AI, cybersecurity and cloud), while also revealing fragmentation across initiatives and a limited level of coordination between actors. A key finding was the gap between political commitments and operational implementation, as many agreements lack concrete elements such as funding mechanisms, timelines, monitoring frameworks, or clearly assigned responsibilities. For the roadmap, this source was essential to position the recommendations within the existing cooperation architecture and to identify areas where stronger operational follow-up is needed.
- **The survey and focus groups** contributed a grounded, practice-oriented perspective based on stakeholder input. They captured how stakeholders perceive current cooperation conditions, especially in relation to digital infrastructure, institutional readiness, and access barriers. The survey gathered responses from 357 stakeholders across Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean, providing insights into the use and perception of BELLA infrastructure. The results highlighted both the recognised importance of connectivity and the persistence of barriers such

as limited awareness, funding constraints, and uneven institutional capacity. These inputs helped identify implementation challenges that are not visible in formal cooperation frameworks and ensured that the roadmap reflects real conditions affecting adoption and use.

- The **Call for Ideas,** launched to gather input on the use and exploitation of BELLA, introduced a bottom-up dimension to the evidence base, allowing stakeholders to contribute proposals and identify areas for action. This source captured forward-looking and solution-oriented inputs, complementing more formal sources and ensuring that emerging ideas and less institutionalised perspectives are reflected in the roadmap.
- **Digital Dialogues Implementation Forum (DIF) Working Groups** provided sustained expert input and thematic depth. Through structured and iterative discussions, they examined key dimensions of EU–LAC digital cooperation, including human-centric digital transformation, diversity, equity and inclusion, and enabling conditions for more balanced participation across regions. Their contribution helped refine the understanding of complex challenges and ensured that cross-cutting aspects—such as inclusion, ethics, and capacity building—are embedded in the roadmap.
- **DIF events** also added a policy validation layer to the evidence base. Organised in the context of major regional conferences, these events brought together not only experts, but also policymakers and institutional stakeholders to discuss and validate emerging findings. This helped ensure alignment with policy priorities and institutional realities, while also providing feedback on the feasibility and relevance of the issues identified through other sources.

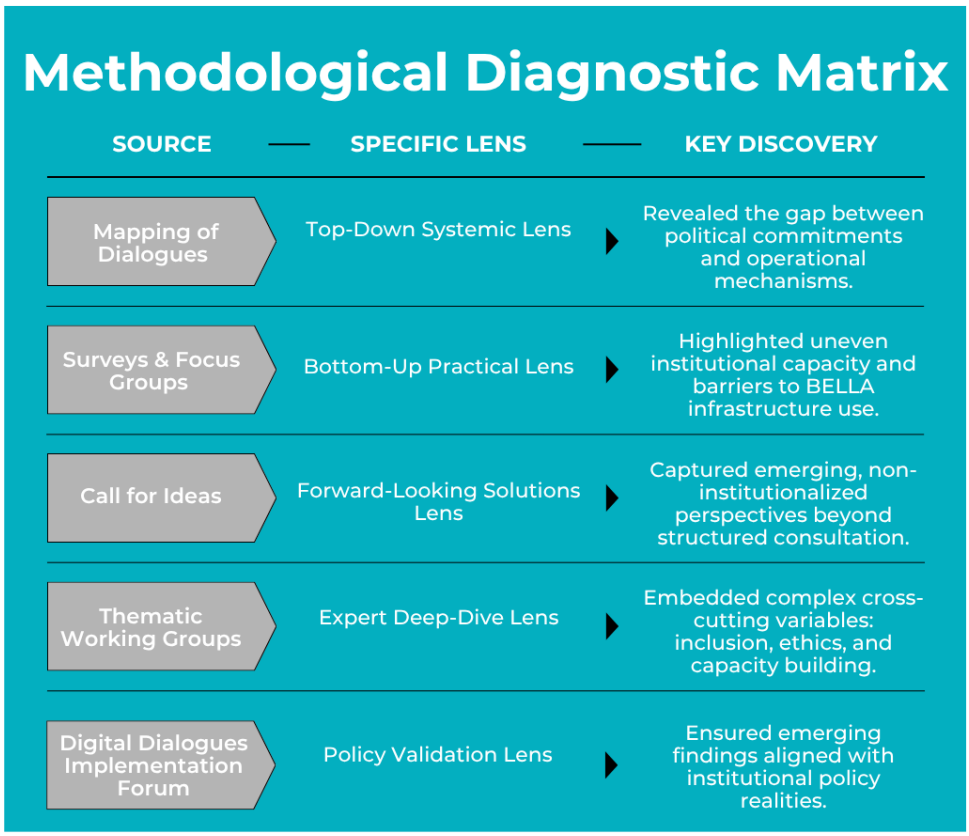


**Figure 1: Methodological Diagnostic Matrix**

All inputs were systematically analysed and integrated through a cross-analysis process, allowing the identification of common patterns, complementarities, and priority areas. This resulted in a consolidated evidence base that reflects both strategic orientations and practical insights from across the EU–LAC ecosystem.

This consolidated evidence base directly informed the co-creation process described in the following sections, ensuring that the recommendations are grounded in the results and stakeholder inputs generated throughout the SPIDER project.

## *2.2 Co-creation of recommendations*

A co-creation approach was applied to transform the results generated across SPIDER activities into a first set of structured recommendations.

This phase was based on a systematic review of all outputs produced within the project (described in section 2.1). Each partner contributed to the analysis of these results, identifying key messages, recurring challenges, and proposed solutions emerging from their respective activities.

Building on this, partners were invited to extract and formulate draft recommendations directly from the evidence generated. This process was carried out through coordinated internal exchanges, where contributions were compiled, compared, and discussed across the consortium.

The co-creation process involved:

- The identification of relevant findings and actionable insights from each activity
- The formulation of draft recommendations based on these findings
- The consolidation of overlapping or similar proposals into unified recommendations
- The clarification and alignment of wording, scope, and level of ambition across the full set

Through this iterative process, recommendations were progressively refined to ensure consistency and coherence. Particular attention was given to ensuring that each recommendation is clearly linked to evidence, reflects both EU and LAC perspectives, and addresses concrete needs identified during the project.

## *2.3 Identification and refinement of recommendations*

Following the co-creation phase, the draft recommendations gathered by consortium partners were brought together into a consolidated list.

This process yielded 41 recommendations, covering key areas for EU–LAC cooperation on digital transformation. They reflect the full range of inputs gathered throughout the project, spanning strategic orientations and operational measures alike.

Once compiled, the recommendations underwent a refinement process to ensure clarity, coherence, and usability. The refinement process addressed four dimensions:

- Reviewing the formulation of each recommendation to ensure consistency in structure and level of detail
- Merging overlapping or closely related recommendations
- Clarifying scope and avoiding duplication across thematic areas
- Ensuring alignment with the overall objectives of EU–LAC cooperation on digital transformation

The outcome is a structured and coherent set of recommendations that formed the basis for the subsequent evaluation and prioritisation process. (see Annex 1: 41 Recommendations).

## *2.4 Prioritisation process within the consortium*

Following the refinement phase, the recommendations were prioritised through a structured internal evaluation process within the consortium that was based on a dedicated assessment matrix including the full set of recommendations. Each recommendation was evaluated by consortium expert partners using a 1–5 Likert scale, assessing the extent to which it fulfilled a defined set of criteria (See Annex 2: Assessment Matrix Template):

- **Acceptability** – The extent to which the action is likely to gain political, institutional and stakeholder support, balancing effort and perceived benefits.
- **Accountability** – The action can be clearly assigned to specific institutions, organisations or stakeholders responsible for its implementation and monitoring.
- **Adaptability** – The action can be adjusted to different national legal frameworks, governance systems and cultural contexts without compromising its core objectives.
- **Cost/Benefit** – The expected benefits of the action are proportionate to the financial, administrative and political costs required for its implementation.
- **Phased feasibility** – The action can be realistically initiated and developed within short-, medium- or long-term timeframes, allowing for progressive and staged implementation.
- **Measurability** – The action can be monitored and evaluated through clearly defined qualitative and/or quantitative indicators.
- **Repeatability** – The action can be replicated, scaled up or adapted across different countries and stakeholder groups within the EU–LAC region.
- **Snowball effect** – The action has the potential to generate multiplier effects, influencing additional actors, sectors or policy domains beyond its immediate target group.
- **Social impact** – The action contributes positively to broader societal goals, such as inclusion, sustainability, digital rights, gender equality, economic development or technological sovereignty.
- **Sustainability** – The action and its impacts can be maintained beyond initial funding cycles or project timelines.
- **Tried & true** – The action has already been successfully implemented in one country or domain, or it is in line with existing policies.
- **Cultural specificity** – The action is particularly relevant for specific countries or contexts. Some recommendations may be impossible to implement or on the contrary are already existing. As long as a recommendation may improve the situation in some countries, especially if they are least advanced in terms of equality policies, they should be taken into consideration.
- **Strategic alignment** – The action is coherent with EU and LAC digital strategies, bi-regional cooperation frameworks and relevant international policy agendas.
- **Governance feasibility** – The action is compatible with multilevel governance structures and can be coordinated across diverse institutional and stakeholder landscapes.

The evaluation was carried out from the institutional and regional perspectives of consortium members, capturing institutional and regional differences between EU and LAC contexts as part of the analysis.

Based on this assessment, recommendations were comparatively analysed and ranked, with overlaps and redundancies identified and related recommendations merged.

Consortium partners also identified a subset of priority recommendations considered most relevant for inclusion in the roadmap.

The process yielded in a consolidated set of 11 strategic recommendations, organised into two thematic tracks (Track 1: Digital infrastructure, cooperation ecosystems and bi-regional governance, and Track 2: Human-centric, inclusive and responsible Digital Transformation) providing the structure for their further development and operationalisation".

## *2.5 Bi-regional validation and action plan development*

### *2.5.1 Identification and selection of external experts*

To complement the internal prioritisation process, a group of external experts from both regions was engaged to support the validation and further development of the strategic recommendations already defined.

Experts were selected based on their expertise and experience in areas relevant to EU–LAC digital cooperation, including policymaking, research and innovation, digital infrastructure, and inclusive digital transformation. The selection ensured diversity in terms of institutional background, sectoral expertise, and geographical representation, with balanced participation from both regions.

Their role was to provide independent, context-aware insights to validate the relevance of the prioritised recommendations and to contribute to their further development from an implementation perspective.

### *2.5.2 Bi-regional validation workshop and action plan development*

The final stage of the methodology focused on the validation of the 11 prioritised recommendations and their translation into concrete action plans through a bi-regional co-creation workshop. (Annex 3: Guidelines and Agenda)

The workshop, held online on 12 March 2026, brought together external experts, alongside SPIDER consortium members to enrich the roadmap with external input, and to define actionable elements to support the implementation of the recommendations. The session focused on moving from strategic recommendations to implementation-oriented guidance.

To support structured discussions, the 11 prioritised recommendations were organised based on the two thematic tracks (Track 1: Digital infrastructure, cooperation ecosystems and bi-regional governance; Track 2: Human-centred, inclusive and responsible digital transformation). Participants worked in small groups (breakout sessions), using a structured template (Miro board) to guide the discussion. For each recommendation, participants were invited to define key elements for implementation, including:

- Define realistic first steps to initiate implementation
- Identify responsible actors and leading institutions
- Map additional stakeholders to be involved
- Explore potential funding sources at national, regional, and international levels
- Define implementation timelines (short, medium, long term)
- Propose indicators and metrics for monitoring progress
- Reflect on expected impact on EU–LAC cooperation in research and innovation
- Identify potential risks and barriers, including institutional, political, technical, or financial challenges

The workshop methodology was inspired by structured facilitation approaches, including elements of SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results), encouraging constructive, forward-looking, and solution-oriented discussions.

The session combined focused group work with plenary exchanges, allowing participants to present, compare, and validate their contributions. In addition, further feedback was collected asynchronously from experts who were not able to attend the live session, ensuring inclusiveness and broader input into the process.

This co-creation phase enabled:

- Validation and refinement of the prioritised recommendations
- Enrichment through external and bi-regional perspectives
- Translation of strategic recommendations into more operational and actionable elements

As a result, the roadmap reflects not only consolidated evidence from project activities but also a consensus-oriented process that integrates both internal analysis and external expert input, strengthening its relevance and applicability for EU–LAC cooperation.

## *2.6 Roadmap validation through final conference and broader stakeholder engagement*

As a final step in the methodology, the roadmap was validated within the framework of the SPIDER Final Conference, held on 15 April 2025 in Bonn, Germany. This event provided a strategic space for dialogue and exchange among policymakers, institutional actors, research and education networks (NRENs), innovation stakeholders, and international partners from Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as from other global regions.

The validation of the roadmap was supported in particular by two panel discussions:

- A first panel focused on **EU–LAC digital transformation**, bringing together key actors such as RedCLARA, GÉANT, the EU–LAC Digital Accelerator, Enrich in LAC, EU–LAC ResINFRA, and the EU–LAC Interest Group. This discussion highlighted cooperation models, lessons learned, and priorities for strengthening the EU–LAC Digital Partnership and the role of infrastructures such as BELLA.
- A second panel focused on **global digital transformation and cooperation beyond regions**, which played a key role in extending the validation of the roadmap beyond the EU–LAC context. This session included representatives from major international initiatives such as INPACE (EU–Indo-Pacific), SEADE (EU–Africa), INSTAR (EU partnerships with global digital leaders), NGI Enrichers (EU–US–Canada), and other global cooperation platforms.

This second panel provided a comparative perspective on international digital partnerships, allowing SPIDER results and recommendations to be contrasted with experiences from other regions. It helped identify common challenges, success factors, and cooperation models applicable across different geopolitical contexts.

A dedicated presentation of the roadmap's methodology and scope was delivered, introducing the core of the work and providing participants with the necessary foundation to engage critically with its recommendations.

Through these discussions, the roadmap was not only validated in relation to EU–LAC priorities but also positioned within a wider global landscape of digital cooperation. Feedback collected during the conference contributed to refining the recommendations and ensuring their relevance, coherence, and added value in both bi-regional and international contexts.

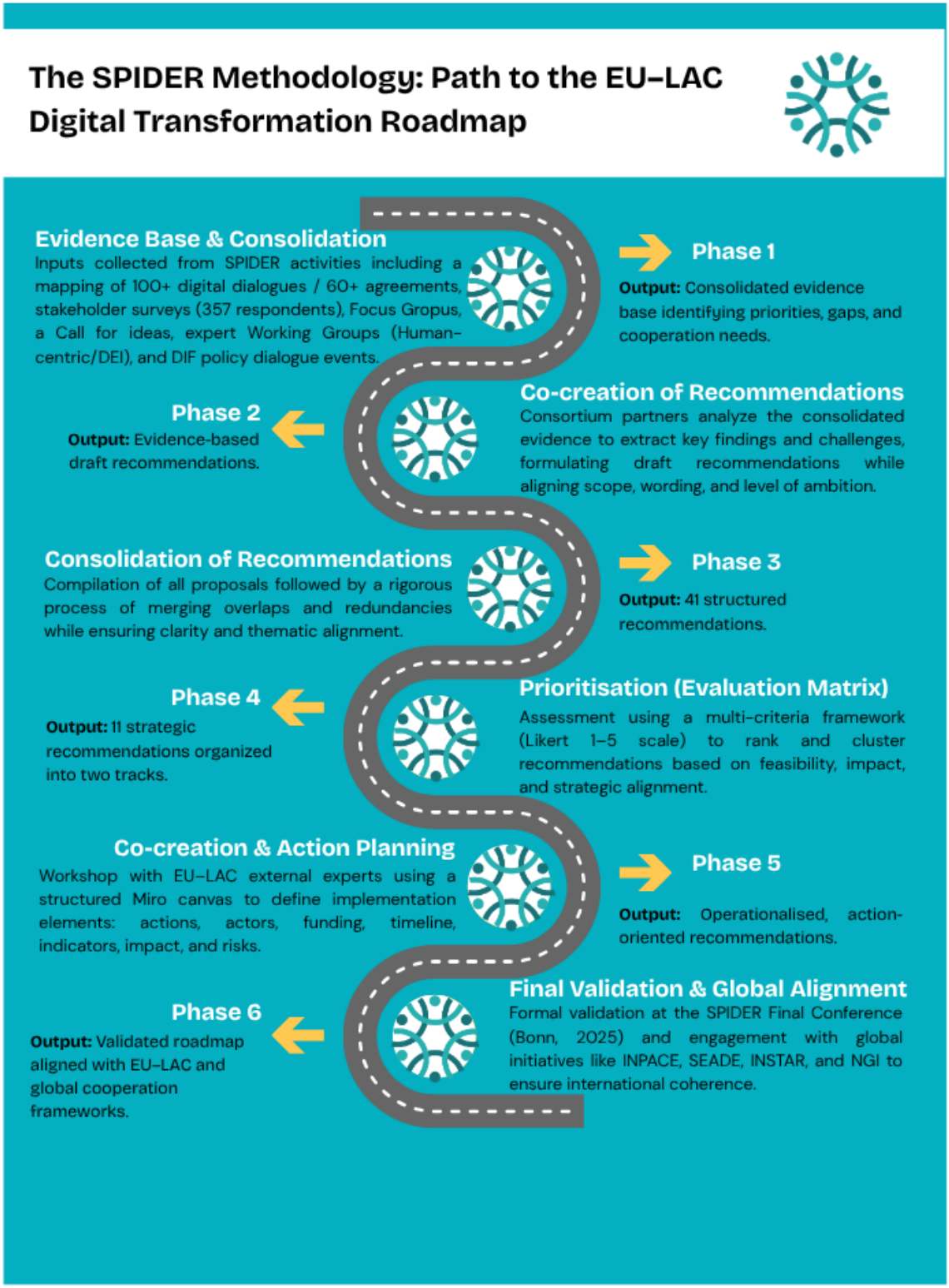


**Figure 2: Roadmap Methodology**

# 3. FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE COOPERATION

EU–LAC digital cooperation rests on a wide array of instruments, frameworks, and political commitments built over decades. Yet this expanding architecture has not translated uniformly into sustained cooperation outcomes. In practice, cooperation varies considerably across countries, institutions, and policy domains. Policy ambition and enabling assets are largely in place, but their interaction remains uneven — outcomes depend significantly on how these elements are combined, governed, and sustained in specific contexts.

Making sense of this landscape requires attention to the framework conditions that shape interaction between political ambition, operational tools, and institutional capacity. The analysis that follows does exactly that.

## *3.1 Policy and governance*

Policy and governance constitute the primary structuring layer of EU–LAC digital cooperation. Over recent years, digital transformation has moved firmly onto the bi-regional political agenda, reflected in the establishment of overarching frameworks such as the EU–LAC Digital Alliance and its integration within the EU–CELAC Strategic Roadmap on Science, Technology and Innovation. These developments have raised the political profile of digital cooperation and established a shared reference point for cooperation across a wide range of digital domains.

At the same time, the mapping of EU–LAC digital dialogues and agreements carried out within SPIDER shows that the governance landscape remains highly fragmented and multi-layered. Cooperation is organised through a dense ecosystem of political dialogues, thematic working groups, bilateral and regional initiatives, and sector-specific arrangements. While this diversity reflects the breadth of EU–LAC engagement, it also produces parallel governance tracks operating with different mandates, time horizons, and institutional anchors, with few mechanisms to align objectives or consolidate results across policy domains.

A recurring pattern is that governance mechanisms prioritise agenda-setting and the alignment of principles rather than coordinated implementation. Dialogues have been effective in fostering shared understanding around issues such as data governance, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and human-centred digital transformation. However, they are less consistently linked to implementation pathways, monitoring mechanisms, or accountability structures that could sustain cooperation beyond individual initiatives.

Regulatory heterogeneity and institutional asymmetries further shape the pace and depth of cooperation. Differences in regulatory maturity, institutional mandates, and administrative capacity across EU and LAC countries produce selective engagement in practice; cooperation concentrating in policy areas or among actors with higher institutional readiness, while others remain marginally involved. Governance frameworks create space for dialogue without fully resolving the challenge of aligning regulatory approaches or sustaining coordination across political and administrative cycles. Political commitments and joint declarations rarely specify indicators, timelines, or responsibilities, making cooperation outcomes difficult to track over time.

## 3.2 BELLA Infrastructure

The BELLA infractructure represents a key structural asset in this regard, establishing a dedicated intercontinental connectivity backbone that has substantially improved the technical conditions for bi-regional collaboration. Survey evidence from the SPIDER project shows that connectivity is widely recognised as foundational, with more than 85% of respondents identifying high-speed internet access as essential for their activities.

The survey also reveals, however, that BELLA is primarily understood as enabling collaboration in general terms rather than as a service-oriented asset embedded in institutional processes. Respondents most frequently associate BELLA with enhanced opportunities for collaboration, while fewer link it to access to specific digital services or sustained operational integration. More than half of respondents report limited familiarity with their local National Research and Education Network, and a significant share rarely or never use NREN-provided services. BELLA and NREN services are not yet systematically embedded in institutional strategies, accessed opportunistically through individual projects rather than through structured cooperation frameworks.

Insights from the DIF and its Working Groups further highlight that connectivity alone does not generate cooperation. BELLA's value becomes tangible when it is linked to concrete domains — such as artificial intelligence, data-intensive research, cybersecurity, or virtual research environments — and when its use is supported by governance arrangements, defined use cases, and aligned funding mechanisms. Without those linkages, BELLA risks functioning as a neutral technical backbone rather than a strategic enabler of sustained collaboration.

## 3.3 Funding mechanisms

Funding mechanisms shape EU–LAC digital cooperation not only by enabling activities but by structuring the form, duration, and depth of collaboration. The mapping of EU–LAC digital dialogues and agreements shows that the majority of cooperation is implemented through project-based instruments — particularly EU research and innovation programmes — complemented by regional and national schemes. These instruments have supported a wide range of activities and played an important role in initiating cooperation and enabling experimentation.

At the same time, the funding landscape is fragmented, with multiple instruments operating in parallel and with limited coordination across policy domains. Differences in objectives, eligibility criteria, timelines, and reporting requirements constrain strategic alignment and long-term planning. As a result, cooperation tends to organise itself around discrete funding opportunities rather than coherent, multi-year pathways capable of supporting cumulative learning and institutional consolidation. DIF discussions consistently highlighted that while project-based funding is effective in catalysing collaboration, it offers limited support for sustaining partnerships beyond individual cycles or embedding results in institutional and policy frameworks.

Two structural imbalances compound these limitations. Participation in EU-level programmes often requires substantial administrative capacity, co-funding ability, and familiarity with complex procedures — requirements that can represent a barrier for some Latin American and Caribbean institutions, contributing to uneven participation. At the same time, existing mechanisms favour technical and research-oriented activities while offering more limited support for governance experimentation, regulatory cooperation, skills development, and institutional capacity building — dimensions that are widely recognised as critical enablers of sustainable digital transformation yet remain less systematically funded.

## *3.4 Human and institutional capacity*

Human and institutional capacity cuts across all other framework conditions, shaping how governance frameworks, funding mechanisms, and digital infrastructure translate into effective cooperation. Differences in skills, organisational readiness, and institutional maturity strongly influence participation patterns and cooperation outcomes across the EU–LAC digital landscape. Organisations with stronger administrative structures, clearer strategic orientation, and dedicated digital expertise are consistently better positioned for sustained cooperation, while others engage more sporadically or remain confined to project-based involvement.

Insights from the DIF and its Working Groups highlight that capacity challenges extend well beyond technical skills. Participants repeatedly emphasised the importance of institutional capabilities related to data governance, regulatory literacy, ethical and human-centred digital transformation, and cross-border cooperation management; capacities that are unevenly distributed across countries and institutions, and that are critical for effective engagement in areas such as artificial intelligence, data sharing, and digital public services. A further recurrent theme was institutional continuity: staff turnover, project-based contracts, and limited incentives for sustained international engagement erode institutional memory, leaving cooperation dependent on individual champions rather than stable organisational strategies.

Taken together, these framework conditions define the enabling environment for EU–LAC digital cooperation. They are necessary conditions for cooperation, but their effectiveness depends on how they interact and reinforce one another in practice. Where these conditions are misaligned or unevenly developed, cooperation struggles to move beyond episodic engagement toward sustained, systemic collaboration. The structural challenges examined in the following section are a direct expression of these misalignments; and addressing them is precisely what the priorities and actions in this roadmap set out to do.

# 4. KEY CHALLENGES FOR EU–LAC COOPERATION

EU–LAC digital cooperation has grown significantly over recent years, driven by deepening political commitment, a multiplication of dedicated dialogue mechanisms, and the availability of shared digital infrastructure. Joint priorities have been articulated across a range of digital policy areas and enabling frameworks have been established to support bi-regional collaboration in research, innovation, and digital transformation.

At the same time, evidence gathered through the SPIDER project indicates that cooperation has not yet consolidated into a fully integrated and durable system. A set of structural challenges continues to shape its effectiveness, continuity, and long-term impact. Understanding them is a necessary step toward translating political commitment and available infrastructure into operational, sustained cooperation.

## *4.1 Fragmentation and weak systemic coordination*

EU–LAC digital cooperation involves a wide range of actors, formats, and governance levels, spanning political dialogues, thematic initiatives, bilateral arrangements, and sector-specific cooperation tracks at bi-regional, regional, and national levels. This diversity is a mark of sustained engagement across digital policy areas, including data governance, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, digital skills, and innovation ecosystems.

Yet the SPIDER mapping of more than 150 EU–LAC digital dialogues and agreements shows that this breadth has not produced a coherent coordination structure. Cooperation tracks addressing closely related priorities frequently evolve in parallel without alignment of objectives, timelines, or follow-up arrangements. Outputs generated within one initiative or dialogue are rarely connected to others, and few mechanisms exist to consolidate results or transfer lessons learned across policy domains or governance levels. As a result, cooperation struggles to build the cumulative momentum needed to move from episodic engagement to sustained, systemic collaboration.

## *4.2 Gap between political ambition and operational follow-through*

Political dialogue has been central to advancing EU–LAC digital cooperation, enabling shared priorities to be articulated and common reference frameworks to be established. Joint declarations, ministerial statements, and thematic dialogues have generated significant political momentum and helped consolidate a shared agenda for cooperation.

Yet DIF and Working Group discussions consistently point to a structural gap between the ambitions expressed through political dialogue and the operational structures needed to deliver on them. Dialogue processes frequently conclude without clearly defined implementation pathways, dedicated coordination mechanisms, or monitoring arrangements. Where follow-up does occur, it tends to rely on individual projects or particularly engaged institutions rather than on embedded processes capable of ensuring continuity across funding cycles. This is not primarily a question of political will — it is a question of design: cooperation frameworks have not systematically incorporated the operational structures needed to translate commitments into sustained, measurable outcomes.

## *4.3 Under-embedding of shared digital assets in cooperation models*

The BELLA Network is a flagship shared asset for EU–LAC digital cooperation, representing a significant public investment with clear potential to underpin sustained collaboration in research, data exchange, and digital innovation. Despite this, survey evidence and DIF discussions consistently indicate that BELLA is not yet systematically integrated into EU–LAC cooperation models, with its role more often framed as a general connectivity enabler

than as a strategic infrastructure anchoring specific cooperation frameworks or sectoral priorities.

The evidence points to a set of non-technical barriers as the primary explanation for this under-embedding: the absence of governance arrangements, defined use cases, and funding mechanisms that would enable BELLA's systematic use across research, innovation, and public policy domains. Without these enabling conditions, BELLA's contribution to cooperation remains episodic and project-driven.

## *4.4 Asymmetric access to resources, capacity, and participation*

Effective and sustained participation in EU–LAC digital cooperation requires organisational stability, adequate financial resources, and the administrative capacity to engage across multiple policy and funding cycles. Survey results and DIF discussions confirm that these conditions are unevenly distributed. Budgetary constraints are more prevalent among Latin American and Caribbean actors, while European stakeholders more frequently navigate complex administrative, compliance, and regulatory requirements. Sustained engagement also demands familiarity with international funding instruments and the capacity to manage long-term cooperative processes.

The structural consequence is a concentration of cooperation among a limited group of institutions with higher organisational readiness and prior international experience. This constrains the inclusiveness of participation and limits the diversity of perspectives informing cooperation agendas. These are structural conditions that cooperation design must actively address; through differentiated support, capacity-building provisions, and participation frameworks that account for uneven starting points across both regions.

## *4.5 Limited institutionalisation and continuity over time*

Much of EU–LAC digital cooperation is delivered through time-bound projects and collaboration formats; well-suited to initiating new partnerships and testing innovative approaches. This model, however, offers limited support for institutional continuity and long-term capacity development.

Staff turnover, project-based contracts, and insufficient incentives for sustained international engagement weaken institutional memory and reduce the ability to accumulate experience over successive cooperation cycles. When cooperation depends on individual roles or single-project structures, partnerships become vulnerable to disruption as projects end or personnel change. Without stronger institutional anchoring, cooperation cannot evolve incrementally or develop the strategic depth a durable bi-regional partnership requires.

## *4.6 Limited translation of technical cooperation into policy and societal impact*

EU–LAC digital cooperation has generated a substantial body of technical outputs, pilots, and collaborative initiatives across priority digital domains. These activities have advanced knowledge exchange, capacity development, and the strengthening of research and innovation communities across both regions. Yet survey evidence and DIF discussions consistently show that pathways connecting technical cooperation to policy implementation, regulatory processes, and broader societal outcomes remain underdeveloped. Technical results frequently remain within research or expert communities, with limited mechanisms to support their uptake by policymakers, public administrations, or other relevant actors.

This gap constrains the visibility, relevance, and long-term strategic value of EU–LAC digital cooperation beyond the technical domain, particularly in areas where public trust, inclusion, and accountability are central dimensions of digital transformation. Closing it requires the deliberate design of translation mechanisms — pathways for policy uptake, formats for knowledge transfer to non-specialist audiences, and structured engagement with public administrations and regulatory bodies.

# 5. ACTION PLAN FOR POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following action plan translates the priorities identified across EU–LAC digital cooperation into concrete implementation pathways. For each recommendation, the following dimensions are addressed: specific actions required to initiate implementation, institutions and organisations responsible for leading them, broader stakeholder base to be engaged, potential funding sources, a realistic time horizon, monitoring indicators and metrics to track progress, expected impact on bi-regional cooperation, and main risks and barriers to implementation.

**1. Position BELLA as a strategic enabler of EU-LAC cooperation, not only as connectivity infrastructure but as a foundation for shared technological sovereignty, research collaboration, and innovation ecosystems.**

The transformation of BELLA from a connectivity backbone into a strategic enabler of EU–LAC cooperation requires a fundamental shift in how its value is understood and operationalised. Connectivity alone does not generate collaboration. The current limitation of scientific traffic across the network reflects deeper structural constraints, including fragmented research ecosystems, uneven digital maturity, and limited adoption of advanced infrastructures.

Unlocking BELLA's full potential requires anchoring its role in the activation of scientific and technological ecosystems. This means embedding BELLA systematically into research and innovation projects that leverage advanced digital infrastructures such as high-performance computing, data platforms, and collaborative research environments. Without active use, the infrastructure risks remaining underutilised.

BELLA must be positioned within a broader framework integrating four key dimensions: advanced digital infrastructure, scientific and technological services, innovation ecosystems, and governance mechanisms. This integrated approach ensures that infrastructure is not treated in isolation but as part of a system that enables knowledge production, collaboration, and technological development.

Operational coordination between RedCLARA and GÉANT, alongside ministries and research institutions, is essential to translate this vision into practice. Funding should prioritise projects that actively use BELLA-enabled services, ensuring that investment leads to measurable outcomes.

The structural differences between regions — lower research intensity in parts of LAC and uneven adoption of digital infrastructures — remain the key challenge. Progress should therefore be measured not only in terms of connectivity but through indicators such as the volume of scientific traffic generated, the number of projects using advanced services, and the integration of BELLA into research workflows. The expected impact is the emergence of a more connected and functionally integrated EU–LAC research ecosystem, where infrastructure actively supports collaboration, innovation, and knowledge exchange.

**2. Strengthen the strategic role of NRENs as trusted intermediaries facilitating scalable, secure and sustainable cross-border collaboration, particularly in research and education.**

Strengthening the role of NRENs requires a shift from viewing them as connectivity providers to recognising them as critical digital infrastructures underpinning the scientific ecosystem. Their strategic value lies not only in enabling connectivity but in their capacity to bridge academia, governments, and the technology sector, positioning them as trusted intermediaries within a broader innovation system.

To fulfil this role, NRENs must evolve towards the provision of comprehensive and sustainable service portfolios. These should include high-performance computing, data management infrastructures, open science platforms, and services supporting innovation

and knowledge transfer. This transformation implies moving from infrastructure provision to platform-based service ecosystems.

Sustainability is a central challenge in this transition. NRENs need to adopt new service provision models based on consortial procurement, economies of scale, and hybrid funding approaches combining public investment with partnerships. These models can strengthen both financial viability and service scalability.

Beyond service provision, NRENs can play a more active role in mobilising funding and enabling project development, acting as connectors between research communities and funding opportunities. This positions them as key actors not only in infrastructure but also in ecosystem development.

Barriers remain significant, including uneven institutional maturity, limited resources, and regulatory fragmentation. Broader structural challenges — data governance concerns and technological sovereignty considerations — may also affect adoption. Progress should be measured through service uptake, number of advanced services deployed, and the volume of projects supported. The expected impact is a more robust, sustainable, and integrated digital research infrastructure across the EU–LAC ecosystem.

**3. Develop incentive schemes that encourage regular and strategic use of advanced NREN-provided connectivity and digital services to bridge uneven adoption patterns across institutions and regions.**

The uneven adoption of advanced NREN services across institutions and regions reflects not only differences in capacity, but also a lack of structured incentives to drive their use. Addressing this requires a shift from passive availability of services to actively incentivised engagement.

A central lever is embedding NREN usage within funding and evaluation mechanisms. By recognising the use of advanced connectivity and digital services as a positive criterion in research project evaluation, programmes such as Horizon Europe can drive behavioural change at scale. Targeted micro-project funding can complement this, providing low-barrier entry points for institutions to experiment with and adopt these services.

Equally important is understanding demand. Structured consultations with universities and research centres are necessary to align services with real needs, ensuring that incentives translate into meaningful adoption rather than superficial compliance.

Efforts must also address regional disparities by prioritising underrepresented institutions and fostering inclusive participation. Without deliberate attention to this, incentives risk reinforcing existing inequalities rather than reducing them.

Funding should draw on a mix of EU programmes, national funds, and international sources, with a focus on sustained engagement rather than isolated initiatives. Barriers include limited awareness, uneven institutional capacity, and the risk that services are primarily used within already established bi-regional collaborations.

Progress can be measured through service usage rates, number of projects leveraging NRENs, and participation of underrepresented groups. The expected impact is a more balanced and inclusive adoption of advanced digital services, contributing to reduced technological and social gaps across the EU–LAC ecosystem.

**4. Tailor BELLA exploitation and deployment strategies to sector-specific requirements and varying levels of regional digital maturity in order to strengthen resilience and maximise impact across diverse ecosystems.**

Maximising the impact of BELLA requires moving beyond uniform deployment models towards strategies that reflect the diversity of sectoral needs and regional digital maturity levels across the EU–LAC landscape. The heterogeneity of ecosystems means that a one-size-fits-all approach risks limiting both adoption and impact.

A key step is aligning BELLA deployment with specific sectoral priorities and local innovation ecosystems so that infrastructure responds to real demand. This includes identifying high-impact domains and tailoring strategies accordingly. In this context, advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence can act as enablers of technological leapfrogging, allowing regions with lower maturity levels to accelerate their development.

A dimension requiring stronger attention is the integration of regional technology providers. By integrating local industry capabilities into service provision, NRENs can expand their service portfolios, foster local ecosystems, and develop more sustainable economic models. This aligns with a triple-helix approach, connecting academia, public institutions, and industry in the co-creation of digital services.

Pilot-based approaches are essential to validate differentiated deployment strategies. These pilots should integrate infrastructure, services, and ecosystem actors, generating evidence for scalable models. Tools such as SPIDERHUB can support monitoring and coordination.

Barriers include political instability, uneven capabilities, and constraints related to infrastructure usage conditions. More structural challenges, such as differences in data governance models and technological sovereignty concerns, may also affect implementation. The expected impact is a more resilient, context-sensitive deployment of BELLA, capable of strengthening both scientific collaboration and regional innovation ecosystems.

**5. Encourage LAC actors to progress from participation to co-leadership roles in EU-LAC projects, strengthening ownership, sustainability, and strategic balance in bi-regional cooperation.**

Transitioning from participation to co-leadership in EU–LAC projects requires addressing structural asymmetries in capacity, experience, and access to funding. While LAC actors are increasingly present in collaborative projects, leadership roles remain concentrated, limiting ownership and long-term sustainability.

Capacity-building is a foundational step, training in proposal writing, project management, and coordination equips institutions with the skills to lead complex international projects. Capacity alone, however, is insufficient without structured opportunities to apply it

Active participation in bi-regional forums and academic summits plays a key role in positioning LAC actors within collaboration networks, enabling them to move from peripheral participation to agenda-setting roles. In parallel, strengthening bi-regional research networks provides the structural basis for joint project development.

Intra-LAC collaboration is equally important. By fostering regional integration and leveraging EU experiences, LAC actors can build stronger internal ecosystems that support external leadership roles. Knowledge transfer mechanisms are critical to ensure that expertise circulates effectively.

Funding remains a central challenge, particularly for countries classified as graduated, which face reduced access to international funds. Additional barriers include language constraints and structural inequalities within the research landscape.

Progress should be measured through the number of projects led by LAC institutions and their participation rates in EU-funded programmes. The expected impact is a more balanced and sustainable cooperation model, with increased ownership, diversified participation, and stronger alignment with regional priorities.

**6. Establish permanent interface mechanisms (including a dedicated multi-actor Task Force) to connect research outputs, practical implementation and policymaking, while creating structured policy feedback loops, iterative review mechanisms and key performance indicators (KPIs) to jointly evaluate dialogue**

**commitments and systematically track how dialogue findings are integrated into EU–LAC policy frameworks.**

Ensuring that dialogue outcomes translate into policy and practice requires moving beyond episodic exchanges towards permanent interface mechanisms that connect research, implementation, and policymaking. Without such structures, valuable insights risk remaining disconnected from decision-making processes.

A central component is establishing governance mechanisms to sustain initiatives such as SPIDERHUB as long-term platforms for coordination and knowledge exchange. Expanding the applicability of these tools across stakeholders is essential to maximise their value and ensure continuous engagement.

At the same time, mapping key actors and initiatives across the EU–LAC landscape provides the foundation for coordinated action, reducing fragmentation and enabling synergies. This mapping should inform both strategic alignment and operational collaboration.

Bridging research and policy requires systematic engagement with both bi-regional forums and multilateral spaces, including global governance arenas. Feeding project outcomes into these platforms allows the EU–LAC dialogue to influence broader policy agendas while reinforcing its own relevance.

Leadership should involve entities such as the EU-LAC Foundation, ministries, and regional bodies like CELAC, supported by organisations such as RedCLARA and GÉANT.

Barriers include the complexity of coordinating diverse actors and ensuring sustained engagement over time. Progress should be measured through the number of actors engaged, policy contributions generated, and the integration of dialogue outcomes into policy frameworks. The expected impact is the long-term sustainability of SPIDER results and a stronger alignment between research, policy, and implementation across the EU–LAC ecosystem.

**7. Align ethical AI principles across regions, including transparency, accountability, fairness, and human oversight, ensuring that emerging regulatory frameworks are translated into practice in a context-sensitive manner.**

The distance between the EU's advanced AI governance framework and the varied, fast-moving regulatory landscapes across LAC cannot be bridged through new dialogue forums alone. Before any coordination mechanism is designed, a systematic mapping of existing LAC legal and policy frameworks analogous to the EU AI Act is required, documenting per-country similarities, gaps, and context-specific constraints. The region already hosts multiple AI regulatory dialogue spaces, and new ones should only be created where confirmed gaps exist, such as AI governance in research and development contexts.

From that shared knowledge base, a bi-regional working group should be established to produce a ranked set of priority synergies and a first wave of joint activities to act on them. To keep both efforts alive between cycles, a community-of-practice hub platform should serve as the shared operational space, preserving institutional memory and sustaining dialogue. Alongside this, a network of AI ambassadors and science advisors from both regions should drive thematic agendas, mobilise co-financing groups, and facilitate peer-to-peer learning exchanges so that regulatory best practices circulate rather than remain confined within national boundaries.

Responsibility for leading this effort should rest with existing regional bodies, national ministries, secretariats and agencies, and EU Delegations in LAC, with collaboration between public institutions, universities, and the private sector treated as a foundational condition. Organisations such as ALETI's AI and PPP Commissions, academic councils, digital hubs, and OECD member countries within the region each bring distinct but complementary roles. The broader stakeholder base should be engaged systematically, with FIAAPP's precedent in digital governance support informing how EU engagement is structured across LAC.

Financing should draw on international cooperation as the primary source, complemented by national budgets, corporate funds, national development banks, innovation and development agencies, and foundations linked to technology companies. Governance and coordination structures can begin immediately, while framework alignment and first pilots are realistically targeted within 12 to 18 months.

A misalignment between the priorities of public institutions and those of technology providers can derail implementation even where political will exists. Frameworks risk being too generic to apply to real deployment domains, and the geopolitical reality that LAC countries navigating competing digital standards from the US, China, and Europe may find alignment with less regulated partners faster and easier than EU cooperation — making the concrete value proposition of ethical AI alignment something that must be demonstrated, not assumed.

Progress should be measured through the number of projects launched, institutions trained, norms and concrete plans adopted, pilots documented, guides and toolkits developed, and their usage rates, and evidence of framework adoption in research projects. The expected impact is less fragmentation between national AI regulatory approaches, reduced risks of bias, opacity, and irresponsible use, and a practical foundation for high-impact sectoral deployment in health and education.

**8. Embed DEI principles from the earliest stages of research, innovation, and digital policy design, rather than treating inclusion as a corrective measure.**

The structural shift this recommendation demands is moving diversity, equity, and inclusion from an afterthought to a design condition. Mapping existing DEI initiatives across EU-LAC digital research and innovation to identify where activity is genuinely absent, and launching pilot project calls to develop and test DEI methodologies and toolkits, guided by an interdisciplinary committee including humanities experts, are the immediate action points.

Operationally, incorporating equity and inclusion variables directly into data collection and analysis is equally critical. Designing pilots that test DEI integration in concrete sectors such as health and education moves this into implementation, and evaluating their results through structured assessment ensures that commitment does not remain at the level of intention.

Leadership should be shared between research centres and academia, EU-LAC ministerial networks and university networks, innovation ministries and secretariats, and local experts and communities. The broader stakeholder base includes: impact investors and entrepreneurs, human rights NGOs and collectives, incubator and accelerator networks, researchers, and citizen organisations operating under a quadruple helix approach.

Financing should draw on EU Global Gateway and D4DHub instruments, applied and social science research calls, BID, CAF and BICE, national development banks, national budgets, and international cooperation funds. Implementation is primarily short to medium term: guide elaboration and pilot integration can begin within 12 months, with indicator frameworks activated immediately so that measurement keeps pace with action.

Structural risks include a lack of resources, insufficient data to make inequalities visible, and uneven levels of technological development across LAC countries that prevent any single framework from applying uniformly. The most persistent risk, however, is treating DEI as a formal compliance requirement rather than a genuine design criterion, a dynamic that produces documentation without transformation.

Progress should be tracked through the number of DEI toolkits developed, pilots validated and transferred, structural changes made to policies or products based on feedback from excluded groups, and equity variables included in monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Qualitative metrics should complement quantitative indicators, using standardised tools such as GRI for cross-regional comparability. The expected impact is stronger EU-LAC

integration through shared commitments, transfer of best practices between regions, greater trust from diverse publics, better quality data and social diagnosis, and a positioning of both regions as preferred partners grounded in a demonstrated commitment to equitable digital development.

**9. Strengthen local capacity building, leadership development, and safe participation environments to empower women and underrepresented groups in digital sectors.**

AI-driven labour market disruption is accelerating faster than workforce adaptation, and LAC is among the regions where this gap is most measurable. Closing it requires structural intervention at multiple levels simultaneously. The immediate actions are capacity training for public and private organisations, the launch of capacity-building projects, the establishment of annual mentorship cycles linking women technology leaders with underrepresented groups and publicly recognising best practices. Publicly funded projects should include representation quotas for women and underrepresented groups.

At the operational level, mentorship and leadership programmes targeting women and underrepresented groups should run in parallel with inclusive tech entrepreneurship initiatives and co-creation sessions built from the local level upward. Promoting STEM technical training for women from school level addresses the pipeline problem at its root.

Leadership of this recommendation should be distributed across academic networks and research centres, incubator and accelerator networks, regional hubs, ministries and secretariats, institutes working for women's advancement, education ministries and schools, and commerce chambers and business associations. The broader stakeholder base includes funding agencies, private sector and professional associations, digital sector professional bodies, civil society, and small and large companies.

Financing should draw on R&D programmes, national research and innovation funds, multilateral organisations, NGOs, and international cooperation instruments, including GIZ, BID, and the World Bank. First actions should begin in the short term with annual mentorship cycles and pilot capacity programmes, while the cultural change required runs on a medium to long-term arc.

The most immediate operational risks are a lack of participation driven by economic gaps, resource constraints, and duplication of actions without coordination. Resistance to change, sustainability over time, and broad agendas that do not account for local realities are the cultural risks that require the most careful programme design.

Progress should be measured through the percentage of mentees achieving promotions or leadership roles, the number of projects and organisations led by women, annual tracking of concrete actions delivered, country and institution participation rates, and a targeted percentage increase in women in mid- and senior-level positions. The expected impact is a more inclusive and effective bi-regional cooperation ecosystem, with stronger networks, greater representativity across all groups, more diverse and resilient digital ecosystems, and expanded economic opportunities in digital sectors.

**10. Invest in continuous capacity building for public institutions and civil servants to enable human-centred digital transformation, equipping them with the digital, ethical, participatory and organisational skills needed to design, implement and govern digital policies and services that respond to citizens' needs and societal challenges.**

Digital transformation in the public sector stalls not from lack of technology but from lack of capacity to govern it. The immediate priority is designing a regional digital capacity development programme for civil servants that goes beyond technical training to include coaching, soft-skills, and participatory tools. Training must be delivered in dedicated time free from daily work pressures, and its outcomes measured by generating knowledge transfer groups and assessing what is actually retained, ensuring real institutional impact.

At the operational level, public innovation labs should be established where civil servants can experiment with human-centred digital solutions without standard procurement constraints. Incorporating user-centred design and citizen participation methodologies into service development, drawing on GovTech models and institutions like CorLab in Córdoba, Argentina, embeds participation as standard practice. Promoting more flexible regulatory frameworks - including public procurement of innovation and lighter bureaucratic processes is what makes the rest possible.

Local governments are the most accessible entry point and should lead implementation, supported by regional and central governments, government innovation agencies, regulatory bodies, civil service bodies, and public administration schools. The broader base includes citizen labs, data protection bodies, private sector companies, universities and research centres, business representatives, public sector professional associations, and incubator networks.

Financing should draw on national and private budgets, sectoral innovation funds, international technical cooperation, foundations, EU–LAC international cooperation, BID, CAF, and the World Bank, and local governments and innovation agencies. Implementation runs from short-term programme design and pilots through medium-term community of practice creation, to long-term consolidation of advanced digital competencies across public administration.

Rigid legal frameworks, inflexible civil service structures, and state budget limitations for continuous training are the most binding structural constraints. Resistance to change among civil servants, institutional inertia, union pressure to maintain the status quo, and lack of incentives to develop new competencies are the cultural barriers that no training programme alone can resolve. Political instability represents an additional structural risk specific to this recommendation: capacity embedded in government institutions is vulnerable to discontinuity when administrations change, making programme design that anchors competencies in civil service frameworks — rather than individual roles — essential.

Progress should be measured through the number of civil servants trained, policies adjusted during the sandbox phase, institutions implementing AI, participants in communities of practice, and new digital tools successfully adopted by public administrations. The expected impact is a public sector genuinely oriented to citizen needs: more robust and validated digital policies, greater efficiency and reduced corruption, higher citizen satisfaction, and digital public services that are more accessible, inclusive, and efficient.

**11. Institutionalise inclusive co-creation and structured multi-actor engagement mechanisms such as Living Labs, Communities of Practice and Innovation Forums to collaboratively design, implement and scale digital solutions while actively involving underrepresented stakeholders and low-connectivity regions.**

This recommendation calls for a shift from episodic collaboration to institutionalised engagement architecture — structured, sustained, and designed from the outset to include those most often left out. The immediate actions are building a digital platform for continuous multi-actor dialogue, launching co-creation activities with mandatory incorporation of underrepresented actors, and implementing open governance portals with voting, debate, and tracking tools that integrate mandatory participation quotas. Documenting and sharing learnings systematically enables replication across different national contexts.

Building that architecture requires a clear sequencing. In the short term, the priorities are piloting Living Labs, forming initial communities of practice, and identifying digital public goods - open software, standards, and interoperability frameworks - that can underpin shared infrastructure. Connections among associations, chambers of commerce, and non-profits should feed into an impact acceleration programme calibrated to different contexts

and connectivity levels. Medium-term consolidation should then focus on building stable networks of labs and communities that outlast individual funding cycles.

Regional and local governments, universities, incubators and accelerators, innovation agencies, and citizen participation ministries should lead implementation. The stakeholder base spans citizens, communities, NGOs, the private sector, non-profits including Enrich in LAC, multi-sectoral representatives, development banks, telecommunications companies, community organisations in low-connectivity regions, innovation hubs, and existing EU–LAC programmes.

Financing should draw on Open Government budgets, multilateral grants, national and local government budgets, development banks, EU–LAC international cooperation initiatives, and EU R&D programmes. First pilots and community formation should be completed within 12 to 18 months, with network consolidation in the medium term.

The defining risk is that the populations this recommendation seeks to include may be unable to access the very platforms built to serve them. Trust — which takes years to build and can be dismantled by a single short-term programme that ends abruptly — is the foundational risk. Skilled facilitation, symbolic participation without real influence, low capacity to maintain digital public goods, inter-institutional coordination failures, and connectivity gaps require explicit mitigation. Significant variation in ecosystem maturity across LAC also risks producing dependency rather than genuine co-creation if more advanced ecosystems are not paired with deliberate capacity-transfer mechanisms.

Progress should be measured through the percentage of citizen proposals converted into real service features, users, and satisfaction rates of developed solutions, partnership agreements signed, digital public goods generated and used, and the number of countries, active communities, and persons per community involved. The expected impact is public trust grounded in real citizen demand, more efficient policies, greater regional cooperation in technology development, broader access to digital infrastructures, and stronger open innovation ecosystems connecting the EU and LAC as partners in building digital solutions at scale.

## Recommendation Action Plan Summary

| Recomendation | Specific Actions | Responsible entity | Third parties involved | Timeframe | Metrics | Funding mechanisms |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| R1.1: Position BELLA as a strategic enabler of EU-LAC cooperation, not only as connectivity infrastructure but as a foundation for shared technological sovereignty, research collaboration, and innovation ecosystems | Participate in Horizon calls linked to BELLA-enabled cooperation | RedCLARA, GÉANT, NRENs, research institutions | Universities, research centres, ESFRI/ERICs, innovation agencies | Short to medium term | Number of proposals submitted; number of funded projects; number of EU-LAC partners involved | Horizon Europe; national R&I funds |
| | Develop a regional strategy to leverage BELLA for EU-LAC cooperation | RedCLARA, GÉANT, interministerial EU-LAC bodies | NRENs, ministries, universities, IFIs | Short term | Strategy adopted; number of institutions endorsing it; follow-up actions launched | Global Gateway; national public funding; IFI support |
| | Launch dedicated calls for proposals using BELLA as a cooperation catalyst | European Commission, DG INTPA, funding agencies, IFIs | RedCLARA, GÉANT, NRENs, universities, private sector partners | Medium term | Number of dedicated calls launched; number of projects funded; uptake of BELLA infrastructure | Horizon Europe; Global Gateway; BID/CAF/World Bank |
| | Establish EU-LAC committees to coordinate regulatory alignment | EU-LAC intergovernmental and policy coordination bodies | Ministries, regulators, legal experts, academic networks | Medium to long term | Number of coordination meetings; policy papers produced; regulatory areas aligned | Public institutional budgets; regional cooperation funds |
| | Participate in Erasmus+ and related academic mobility schemes | Universities, RedCLARA, GÉANT, academic networks | Students, researchers, ministries of education, NRENs | Short to medium term | Number of exchanges; joint programmes created; institutions participating | Erasmus+; national education funds |
| | Promote joint EU-LAC pilot projects to test what works and what fails | Universities, research centres, NRENs, RedCLARA | Innovation agencies, private sector, clusters, incubators | Short term | Number of pilots launched; number of pilots validated; number of pilots scaled or transferred | Horizon Europe; Global Gateway; national innovation funds; IFIs |
| R1.2: Strengthen the strategic role of NRENs as trusted intermediaries | Formalize NRENs as national strategic actors for research and education | National NRENs; Ministries | National governments; ONCYTs; Public universities | Short term (1–2 years) | Relevance of NREN at national level (% of institutions connected/engaged) | National research funds; public funding |

| Recomendation | Specific Actions | Responsible entity | Third parties involved | Timeframe | Metrics | Funding mechanisms |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| facilitating scalable, secure and sustainable cross-border collaboration, particularly in research and education | Establish a working group to strengthen cross-border NREN collaboration | RedCLARA; GÉANT; NRENs | Universities; ONCYTs; national governments | Medium term | Number of projects using NREN infrastructure | Mixed funding depending on initiatives |
| | Strengthen the positioning and value proposition of NRENs at national and regional level | NRENs; RedCLARA; GÉANT | Governments; universities; ONCYTs | Medium to long term | Number of projects using infrastructure; national relevance indicators | All available sources depending on context |
| | Increase adoption of NREN infrastructure in research and education projects | NRENs; Universities | Research groups; innovation agencies; ONCYTs | Short to medium term | Number of projects using NRENs; number of users; traffic/data usage | National R&I funding; project-based funding (e.g. Horizon Europe) |
| R1.3: Develop incentive schemes that encourage regular and strategic use of advanced NREN-provided connectivity and digital services to bridge uneven adoption patterns across institutions and regions | Consult universities and research centres on cross-border NREN services needs | Ministries; Universities; Research centres | NRENs | Short to medium term | Network and service usage | Horizon programmes; national and international funds (ONCYTs) |
| | Integrate NREN infrastructure usage as a positive criterion in research project evaluation | Ministries; funding agencies; research institutions | NRENs | Medium term | Network and service usage; % of participation of vulnerable groups | Horizon programmes; national R&I funding |
| | Fund micro-projects to promote the use of NREN services | Ministries; research centres; universities | NRENs | Short to medium term | Number of projects using infrastructure; service usage | National funds; Horizon programmes |
| | Develop co-investment schemes and a repository of use cases and best practices | Governments; research infrastructures; universities | NRENs | Medium term (3–5 years) | Number of use cases documented; service usage | Public funding; international programmes |
| R1.4: Tailor BELLA exploitation and deployment strategies to sector-specific requirements and varying levels of | Conduct needs assessments across universities and research centres to tailor BELLA deployment | RedCLARA; NRENs; Governments | Universities; research centres; academic and private tech sector | Short to medium term | Mapping of initiatives where BELLA can contribute | Public and private research funding |

| Recomendation | Specific Actions | Responsible entity | Third parties involved | Timeframe | Metrics | Funding mechanisms |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| regional digital maturity in order to strengthen resilience and maximise impact across diverse ecosystems | Identify regional priorities to guide sector-specific BELLA strategies (e.g. maritime ecosystems) | Governments; NRENs; RedCLARA | Universities; research centres; private sector | Short to medium term | Mapping of priority sectors and initiatives | Public and private research funding |
| | Promote the use of AI to leverage technological leapfrogging through BELLA | NRENs; Governments; multi-stakeholder governance bodies | Universities; research centres; private tech sector | Medium term | Number of initiatives using advanced technologies; BELLA-enabled projects | Public and private R&I funding |
| | Design and validate differentiated BELLA deployment strategies through pilot projects | RedCLARA; NRENs; Governments | Universities; research centres; private sector | Medium term | Use of monitoring tools (e.g. SPIDERHUB); number of pilots implemented | Public and private research funding |
| R1.5: Encourage LAC actors to progress from participation to co-leadership roles in EU-LAC projects, strengthening ownership, sustainability, and strategic balance in bi-regional cooperation | Provide training on proposal writing and project management for LAC actors | Ministries of Science, Education and Foreign Affairs | Research centres; universities; academic networks | Short to medium term | % participation of LAC institutions in EU-funded projects; increase in LAC-led projects | Horizon programmes; IFIs (e.g. BID, FMI) |
| | Promote active and strategic participation in EU–LAC academic forums and summits | Ministries; foreign affairs bodies | Universities; research centres; academic networks | Short term | Number of participations; leadership roles in events | Public funding; international programmes |
| | Increase experience of LAC actors in EU-funded project participation | Ministries; research institutions | Universities; research centres; academic networks | Medium term | Number of projects with LAC participation; progression to coordination roles | Horizon programmes; IFIs |
| | Support and strengthen bi-regional research networks as a basis for projects | Ministries; government bodies | Research centres; universities; academic networks | Medium term | Number of joint projects; number of active networks | Horizon programmes; IFIs (BID, FMI) |
| | Foster intra-LAC collaborative initiatives building on EU experiences | Ministries; government bodies | Research centres; universities | Medium term | Number of intra-LAC initiatives; participation rates | Public funding; international cooperation funds |

| Recomendation | Specific Actions | Responsible entity | Third parties involved | Timeframe | Metrics | Funding mechanisms |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Promote knowledge transfer between EU and LAC actors | Ministries; research institutions | Universities; research centres; academic networks | Medium term | Number of knowledge exchange activities; joint outputs | Horizon programmes; cooperation funds |
| R1.6: Establish permanent interface mechanisms (including a dedicated multi-actor Task Force) to connect research outputs, practical implementation and policymaking, while creating structured policy feedback loops, iterative review mechanisms and key performance indicators (KPIs) to jointly evaluate dialogue commitments and systematically track how dialogue findings are integrated into EU–LAC policy frameworks | Establish governance mechanisms to ensure long-term maintenance of initiatives (e.g. SPIDERHUB) | EU-LAC Foundation; Ministries; CELAC | RedCLARA; GÉANT | Medium to long term | Number of actors engaged; continuity of platform use | Funding focused on strengthening SPIDERHUB |
| | Assess and expand the applicability of SPIDERHUB across different stakeholders | EU-LAC Foundation; Ministries | RedCLARA; GÉANT | Medium term | Number of stakeholders using SPIDERHUB; number of use cases | SPIDERHUB-focused funding |
| | Identify key actors and initiatives contributing to EU–LAC cooperation strengthening | Ministries; CELAC; EU-LAC Foundation | Academic forums; research and policy actors | Medium term | Number of mapped initiatives; number of active collaborations | Public and cooperation funds |
| | Feed SPIDER results into multilateral policy spaces (e.g. UN, UNESCO, WSIS, IGF, ITU, CITEL) | Ministries; EU-LAC Foundation | Multilateral organisations; international forums | Medium to long term | Number of policy contributions; references to SPIDER outputs | Public funding; international cooperation funds |
| | Integrate SPIDER outcomes into EU–LAC bi-regional political and academic forums | CELAC; Ministries; academic forums and summits | Universities; research centres; policy actors | Short to medium term | Number of forums incorporating SPIDER results; follow-up actions | Public funding |
| R2.1 Align ethical AI principles across regions, including transparency, accountability, fairness, and human oversight, ensuring that emerging | Map existing LAC regulatory frameworks analogous to the EU AI Act | Existing regional bodies; national ministries | Academic councils; research centres | Short term | Mapping completed; number of frameworks documented; gaps identified per country | International cooperation funds; national budgets |
| | Establish a network of AI ambassadors and science advisors for strategic thematic agendas | Ministries; secretariats; agencies | Research networks; civil society | Short term | Network established; number of ambassadors active; thematic agendas launched | National budgets; international cooperation funds |

| Recomendation | Specific Actions | Responsible entity | Third parties involved | Timeframe | Metrics | Funding mechanisms |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| regulatory frameworks are translated into practice in a context-sensitive manner | Create thematic co-financing groups and peer-to-peer learning exchanges for best practices | Research centres and existing networks | Civil society; innovation agencies | Short to medium term | Number of co-financing groups active; number of peer exchanges held | International cooperation funds; corporate funds |
| | Build a community-of-practice hub platform as a shared operational space | Public institutions; universities; private sector | Regional clusters; NRENs | Short to medium term | Platform operational; number of active users; institutions engaged | National development banks; innovation agencies |
| | Generate a knowledge working group to identify synergies, rank priorities, and launch first concrete activities | Existing regional bodies; national ministries | Research centres; academic councils | Short term | Working group established; synergies identified; priority ranking produced | Innovation and development agencies; international cooperation funds |
| | Promote dissemination processes so each region understands the other's existing capabilities | EU Delegations; research centre networks | OECD member countries; digital hubs | Short term | Number of dissemination events; institutions and countries reached | International cooperation funds; national budgets |
| | Identify genuine regulatory gaps before creating new dialogue spaces | Industry chambers; ALETI; academic councils | Research centres; regulatory bodies | Short term | Number of gaps confirmed; domains where new spaces are justified | International cooperation funds; national budgets |
| R2.2 Embed DEI principles from the earliest stages of research, innovation, and digital policy design, rather than treating inclusion as a corrective measure | Create interdisciplinary committees including humanities experts | Research centres and academia | Humanities experts; civil society | Short term | Number of committees established; disciplines represented | Social science research calls; applied research funds |
| | Launch pilot project calls to design DEI methodologies or toolkits | EU–LAC ministerial networks; university networks | Impact entrepreneurs; research centres | Short term | Number of DEI toolkits and methodologies developed | EU Global Gateway; D4DHub; funding agencies |
| | Map existing DEI initiatives in digital research and innovation across EU and LAC to identify gaps and avoid | Policy experts from EU and LAC | Funding agencies; ministries; civil society | Short term | Number of initiatives mapped; gaps identified; duplication avoided | International cooperation funds; applied research calls |

| Recomendation | Specific Actions | Responsible entity | Third parties involved | Timeframe | Metrics | Funding mechanisms |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | duplication | | | | | |
| | Technical co-design roundtables with mandatory minority representation | Ministries and Secretariats of Innovation | Human rights NGOs; minority community representatives | Short to medium term | Number of structural changes to policy or product based on stakeholder feedback | Applied research calls; national budgets |
| | Incorporate equity and inclusion variables in data collection and analysis | Research centres; academic institutions | Incubator and accelerator networks | Short term | Number of equity variables included in M&E frameworks | EU Global Gateway, D4DHub |
| | Integrate DEI requirements into project calls — award higher scores to inclusive projects | Funding agencies; ministries | Researchers; civil society | Short term | Number of project evaluations incorporating DEI criteria | Applied research calls; national budgets |
| | Design pilots testing DEI integration in concrete sectors such as health and education | Research centres; health and education ministries | Civil society; health and education institutions | Short to medium term | Number of pilots designed and validated; sectors covered | BID, CAF, BICE; national development banks |
| | Treat DEI as a prerequisite for participation in collaboration projects | Funding agencies; EU–LAC programme bodies | Citizen organisations | Short term | Number of programmes with DEI as mandatory criterion; compliance rate | National budgets; international cooperation funds |
| R2.3 Strengthen local capacity building, leadership development, and safe participation environments to empower women and underrepresented groups in digital sectors | Capacity training for public and private organisations | Academic networks and research centres | Funding agencies; professional associations | Short term | Number of organisations trained; number of people trained | Chambers of commerce; government budgets |
| | Capacity-building projects | Incubator and accelerator networks | Companies; universities; NGOs | Short to medium term | Number of capacity-building projects launched; participants reached | R&D programmes |
| | Establish a bi-regional recognition programme to publicly award and disseminate best | Regional hubs; ministries; bi-regional bodies | Professional associations; civil society | Short to medium term | Number of best practices recognised; institutions replicating them | National research and innovation funds; international cooperation funds |

| Recomendation | Specific Actions | Responsible entity | Third parties involved | Timeframe | Metrics | Funding mechanisms |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | practices in digital inclusion, generating visibility and replication incentives across institutions and countries | | | | | |
| | Promote STEM technical training for women from the school level to close the digital gap | Ministries; institutes working for women | Tech companies; universities; NGOs | Medium to long term | Number of women enrolled in STEM programmes; countries and institutions participating | Multilateral organisations; national education budgets organisations |
| | Establish mentorship and leadership programmes for women and underrepresented groups | Ministries; academic networks; regional hubs | Civil society; professional associations | Short term | Number of women in leadership positions; mentees completing programmes | NGOs; international cooperation funds; R&D programmes |
| | Co-creation and ownership sessions built from the local level upward | Local organisations; community groups; regional hubs | Universities; civil society | Short to medium term | Number of co-creation sessions held; local actors engaged | International development banks; national budgets |
| | Ensure new publicly funded projects include mandatory representation quotas for women and underrepresented groups | Funding agencies; EU programme bodies; ministries | NGOs; civil society | Short term | % of funded projects meeting quota; verified representation per project | Ministries; international cooperation funds |
| | Create regional inclusive digital leadership networks connecting academia, companies, and the public sector | Ministries; academic networks; regional hubs | Companies; innovation agencies | Medium term | Number of networks established; institutions connected; countries covered | National budgets; international cooperation funds |
| | Mentorship programmes linking women tech leaders with underrepresented groups | Academic networks; incubators; tech companies | Professional associations; civil society | Short term | Number of mentoring pairs active; mentees progressing to leadership | NGOs; international cooperation; R&D programmes |

| Recomendation | Specific Actions | Responsible entity | Third parties involved | Timeframe | Metrics | Funding mechanisms |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Promote inclusive tech entrepreneurship programmes | Incubators; accelerators; innovation ministries | Private sector; investment funds | Medium term | Number of entrepreneurs supported; number accessing financing | Multilateral organisations; international development banks |
| | Use bi-regional spaces already created: CELAC–EU working groups | Ministries of foreign affairs; bi-regional bodies | Civil society; academic networks | Short term | Number of working group sessions; joint initiatives activated | Public institutional budgets; EU cooperation funds |
| R2.4 Invest in continuous capacity building for public institutions and civil servants to enable human-centred digital transformation, equipping them with the digital, ethical, participatory, and organisational skills needed to design, implement and govern digital policies and services that respond to citizens' needs and societal challenges | Generate knowledge transfer groups with built-in assessment | Local, regional, and central governments | Professional associations; universities | Short term | Number of civil servants trained; knowledge retention assessed | National budget; private budget |
| | Programmes not only of training and mentoring, but also personal coaching: soft-skills and life coaching | Public administration schools; training institutions | Coaching professionals; HR specialists | Short to medium term | Number of civil servants completing coaching; skills assessed | Sectoral innovation funds; international technical cooperation |
| | Promote flexible regulatory frameworks: public procurement of innovation and lighter bureaucracies | Central and local governments | Companies; regulatory bodies | Medium term | Number of regulatory reforms adopted; procurement innovation frameworks operational | National budgets; EU–LAC international cooperation |
| | Incorporate participatory tools, such as co-creation sessions between civil servants and citizens/users | Civil service bodies of each country | Universities; citizen associations; NGOs | Short to medium term | Number of co-creation sessions held; citizen satisfaction scores | National budgets; sectoral innovation funds |
| | Design a regional digital capacity development programme for public servants | Ministries; civil service bodies; academic networks | GovTech communities; innovation agencies | Short term | Programme designed and endorsed; number of institutions adopting it | EU–LAC international cooperation; BID, CAF, World Bank |
| | Establish public innovation labs to experiment with new human-centred digital solutions | Local governments; innovation agencies | Business representatives; citizen communities | Medium term | Number of labs established; solutions tested and scaled | National budgets; EU–LAC international cooperation |

| Recomendation | Specific Actions | Responsible entity | Third parties involved | Timeframe | Metrics | Funding mechanisms |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Incorporate user-centred design and citizen participation in digital services | GovTech institutions; public administration schools; ministries | Citizens and user communities; civil society | Short to medium term | Number of services redesigned; citizen satisfaction scores | National budgets; sectoral innovation funds |
| | Implement regulatory sandboxes where civil servants and technologists can test services | Regulatory bodies; government innovation agencies | Tech companies; startups; universities | Medium term | Number of sandboxes operational; services tested; policies adjusted | Public-private partnerships; national budgets |
| R2.5 Institutionalise inclusive co-creation and structured multi-actor engagement mechanisms such as Living Labs, Communities of Practice and Innovation Forums to collaboratively design, implement and scale digital solutions while actively involved underrepresented stakeholders and low-connectivity regions | Promote encounters among different ecosystem actors and build a digital platform for continuous dialogue | Regional and local governments | Multi-sectoral representatives; tech companies | Short term | Platform operational; number of active users; institutions engaged | Multilateral organisation grants; national budgets |
| | Co-creation activities and projects that require incorporating underrepresented actors | Universities; civil society; community organisations | Underrepresented community groups; NGOs | Short term | Number of co-creation activities; underrepresented actors involved | National and local government budgets; international cooperation funds |
| | Promote networking events to build inter-actor knowledge | Incubators and accelerators; innovation agencies | Companies; non-profits; innovation hubs | Short term | Number of events held; participants; new collaborations formed | Development financing organisations; national budgets |
| | Develop and promote digital public goods (open software, standards, interoperability frameworks, reusable platforms) | Universities and research centres; NRENs | Central government; open-source organisations | Short to medium term | Number of digital public goods developed; adoption rate; reuse across countries | EU–LAC international cooperation; EU R&D programmes |
| | Document and share learnings to facilitate replication and scaling of digital solutions across contexts | Innovation agencies; research centres | Community organisations in low-connectivity regions; NRENs | Short to medium term | Number of learnings documented; replications enabled; countries reached | EU R&D programmes; national budgets |
| | Exchange of good practices | Government secretariats; citizen participation ministries | Existing EU–LAC programmes; international | Short term | Number of good practices exchanged; institutions adopting transferred | EU–LAC international cooperation; national budgets |

| Recomendation | Specific Actions | Responsible entity | Third parties involved | Timeframe | Metrics | Funding mechanisms |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | organisations | | practices | |
| | Establish connections among associations, chambers of commerce, and non-profits; support the impact acceleration programme and differentiate actions | Innovation agencies; bi-regional bodies; ministries | Non-profits; chambers of commerce | Short to medium term | Number of alliances formed; actions differentiated by context; countries involved | Multilateral grants; EU–LAC international cooperation |

# 6. CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

EU–LAC cooperation on digital transformation has reached a point of clear political recognition, supported by a growing number of dialogue mechanisms, initiatives, and shared infrastructures. The analysis carried out through the SPIDER project confirms that the building blocks for effective cooperation are largely in place.

Yet the evidence also shows that these elements do not yet operate as a coherent system — cooperation remains fragmented, uneven across regions and institutions, and often limited in its ability to translate political ambition into sustained and measurable outcomes. The gap between dialogue and implementation, the underuse of shared infrastructures such as BELLA, and persistent asymmetries in capacity and access continue to constrain the overall impact of EU–LAC collaboration.

In this context, the roadmap does not propose new structures from scratch but focuses on strengthening the connections between existing elements — policy frameworks, infrastructures, funding mechanisms, and institutional capacities — so that they can function in a more coordinated and effective way.

The 11 recommendations presented in this roadmap respond directly to the structural challenges identified. They aim to:

- Reinforce the role of digital infrastructures as active enablers of cooperation
- Improve coordination across governance and funding mechanisms
- Reduce asymmetries in participation and capacity
- Strengthen the link between technical collaboration, policy processes, and societal impact
- Embed inclusion, ethics, and human-centred approaches across all cooperation activities

Each recommendation in this roadmap is supported by concrete implementation elements — actions, responsible actors, timelines, and indicators — shifting the focus from agenda-setting to execution. The SPIDER project has also demonstrated that structured, trust-based dialogue between EU and LAC actors produces better results than working in parallel. The Digital Dialogues Implementation Forum (DIF) and its thematic Working Groups have shown that when the right actors are brought together around concrete questions, convergence is possible. These mechanisms are a model for how sustained EU–LAC cooperation can be organised.

The priority is not to expand the number of initiatives but to improve their articulation and long-term sustainability, which requires:

- Stronger alignment between political dialogue and implementation mechanisms
- More coordinated use of funding instruments
- Systematic integration of infrastructures such as BELLA into cooperation models
- Sustained investment in institutional and human capacity
- Clearer pathways to translate technical results into policy and societal outcomes

EU–LAC digital cooperation has the potential to evolve into a strategic partnership built on shared infrastructure, aligned governance, and mutual commitment to inclusive and ethical digital transformation. What remains is a sustained commitment to treating this cooperation as a long-term investment rather than a series of isolated projects.

# ANNEX 1: 41 RECOMMENDATIONS

| # | STRATEGIC TOPIC | REFORMULATED RECOMMENDATIONS |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Governance & Regulatory Alignment | Develop shared yet flexible EU–LAC governance frameworks in data governance, AI and cloud computing that ensure regulatory alignment while preserving contextual adaptation to diverse legal and institutional realities |
| 2 | Governance & Regulatory Alignment | Complement high-level political dialogue with coordinated legislative, normative and operational instruments to reduce fragmentation and enable cross-border collaboration, building on concrete national experiences (e.g. Chile's data centre guidelines) |
| 3 | Monitoring & Institutionalisation | Establish structured monitoring and accountability mechanisms to track EU–LAC commitments over time, ensuring continuity beyond political cycles and project-based cooperation |
| 4 | Governance & Regulatory Alignment | Align ethical AI principles across regions, including transparency, accountability, fairness, and human oversight, ensuring that emerging regulatory frameworks (e.g. EU AI Act) are translated into practice in a context-sensitive manner |
| 5 | Monitoring & Institutionalisation | Move from mapping and visibility exercises towards impact-oriented cooperation, by complementing dialogue and ecosystem mapping with mechanisms to assess outcomes, societal value, and long-term effects |
| 6 | Governance & Regulatory Alignment | Identify and periodically review priority high-impact thematic domains to avoid dispersion and enhance strategic focus and measurability of EU–LAC cooperation |
| 7 | Ecosystems & Partnerships | Encourage LAC actors to progress from participation to co-leadership roles in EU-LAC projects, strengthening ownership, sustainability, and strategic balance in bi-regional cooperation |
| 8 | Infrastructure & Connectivity (BELLA, NRENs) | Recognise digital infrastructure as a necessary but insufficient condition for cooperation, requiring alignment with governance, policy frameworks, and capacity building to translate connectivity into tangible outcomes |
| 9 | Infrastructure & Connectivity (BELLA, NRENs) | Position BELLA as a strategic enabler of EU-LAC cooperation, not only as connectivity infrastructure but as a foundation for shared technological sovereignty, research collaboration, and innovation ecosystems |
| 10 | Infrastructure & Connectivity (BELLA, NRENs) | Increase visibility and awareness of BELLA, particularly among European stakeholders, to build a critical mass of users and cross-regional initiatives that actively leverage the infrastructure |
| 11 | Ecosystems & Partnerships | Consolidate multi-actor digital ecosystems integrating public authorities, academia, research organisations, private sector and civil society, fostering co-creation, trust and shared governance |
| 12 | Ecosystems & Partnerships | Promote innovation consortia, matchmaking mechanisms, and shared funding instruments as practical tools to connect infrastructure capabilities with concrete needs and use cases |
| 13 | Ecosystems & Partnerships | Promote structural and cultural incentives for sustained public–private and academic–private collaboration, enabling experimentation and open innovation models |

| # | STRATEGIC TOPIC | REFORMULATED RECOMMENDATIONS |
|---|---|---|
| 14 | Infrastructure & Connectivity (BELLA, NRENs) | Strengthen the strategic role of NRENs as trusted intermediaries facilitating scalable, secure and sustainable cross-border collaboration, particularly in research and education |
| 15 | Capacity Building & Skills | Invest in continuous capacity building for public institutions and civil servants, equipping them with digital, ethical, and organisational skills to enable citizen-centred digital transformation |
| 16 | DEI & Human-Centred Digitalisation | Ensure digital infrastructure and AI-enabled public services are designed through co-creation, transparency and accountability mechanisms that respond to societal needs |
| 17 | Capacity Building & Skills | Update educational and training models to integrate digital, cybersecurity, interdisciplinary, and soft skills, fostering long-term social sustainability beyond individual projects |
| 18 | DEI & Human-Centred Digitalisation | Embed DEI principles from the earliest stages of research, innovation, and digital policy design, rather than treating inclusion as a corrective measure |
| 19 | DEI & Human-Centred Digitalisation | Promote structural institutional change alongside targeted measures (e.g. quotas, Gender Equality Plans) to address persistent inequalities and accelerate progress |
| 20 | DEI & Human-Centred Digitalisation | Address bias in AI systems through inclusive design, diversified datasets, explainable AI, and strong human oversight, particularly in multilingual and multicultural EU-LAC contexts |
| 21 | DEI & Human-Centred Digitalisation | Strengthen local capacity building, leadership development, and safe participation environments to empower women and underrepresented groups in digital sectors |
| 22 | Monitoring & Institutionalisation | Adopt metrics and indicators to monitor DEI progress and impact, moving beyond policy adoption towards measurable and sustained change |
| 23 | Monitoring & Institutionalisation | Institutionalize the integration of SPIDER findings into formal EU–LAC Policy Dialogues and strategic cooperation frameworks |
| 24 | Monitoring & Institutionalisation | Establish structured policy feedback loops, iterative review mechanisms and key performance indicators (KPIs) to ensure adaptive governance and systematically track how dialogue findings are integrated into EU–LAC policy frameworks |
| 25 | Infrastructure & Connectivity (BELLA, NRENs) | Promote the full portfolio of BELLA advanced services and benefits beyond high-capacity interconnectivity through targeted dissemination campaigns and calls for dedicated scientific collaboration projects using the BELLA network |
| 26 | DEI & Human-Centred Digitalisation | Integrate Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and human-centred principles as core criteria across funding instruments, evaluation frameworks and cooperation agreements to advance inclusive digital transformation and address gaps in high-speed connectivity access and digital literacy across EU and LAC |

| # | STRATEGIC TOPIC | REFORMULATED RECOMMENDATIONS |
|---|---|---|
| 27 | Ecosystems & Partnerships | Establish permanent interface mechanisms, including a dedicated multi-actor Taskforce, to connect research outputs, practical implementation and policymaking while jointly evaluating dialogue commitments and co-developing actionable policy responses |
| 28 | Governance & Regulatory Alignment | Promote gradual regional convergence in digital transformation by aligning EU–LAC strategic priorities in emerging technologies such as HPC, Cloud Computing, VRE, AI ethics and Cybersecurity, through shared benchmarks, peer learning, coordinated research agendas and long-term collaboration frameworks embedded in regional innovation strategies |
| 29 | Infrastructure & Connectivity (BELLA, NRENs) | Expand and sustain high-capacity connectivity infrastructure to reduce regional digital disparities and enable equitable participation in research, innovation and digital transformation across both regions |
| 30 | Infrastructure & Connectivity (BELLA, NRENs) | Implement coordinated EU–LAC outreach strategies to increase awareness, understanding and uptake of NREN and BELLA services, addressing current visibility gaps that hinder their broader adoption |
| 31 | Infrastructure & Connectivity (BELLA, NRENs) | Develop incentive schemes that encourage regular and strategic use of advanced NREN-provided connectivity and digital services to bridge uneven adoption patterns across institutions and regions |
| 32 | Infrastructure & Connectivity (BELLA, NRENs) | Tailor BELLA exploitation and deployment strategies to sector-specific requirements and varying levels of regional digital maturity in order to strengthen resilience and maximise impact across diverse ecosystems |
| 33 | Infrastructure & Connectivity (BELLA, NRENs) | Address policy, governance and cybersecurity concerns through context-sensitive strategies that strengthen trust in BELLA-based connectivity and digital services and ensure their secure and transparent implementation |
| 34 | Governance & Regulatory Alignment | Align EU–LAC digital cooperation initiatives with shared strategic priorities, including Global Gateway, digital sovereignty and regional development agendas, by embedding agreed policy domains such as AI, Cybersecurity, Cloud Computing, Blockchain, 5G and VRE into funding programmes, bilateral frameworks and institutional strategies |
| 35 | DEI & Human-Centred Digitalisation | Institutionalise human-centred and ethical-by-design principles across digital governance and AI-enabled service development, prioritising equity, accessibility, transparency, privacy and user agency, with particular attention to gender, disability and geographical diversity |
| 36 | Infrastructure & Connectivity (BELLA, NRENs) | Consolidate a strategic roadmap that leverages BELLA as a multi-layer digital infrastructure by promoting federated access, shared governance models, national integration with NRENs and targeted awareness mechanisms to ensure sustainability and digital equity |
| 37 | Ecosystems & Partnerships | Develop operational pilot mechanisms such as cooperation matrices, roadmaps and compact agreements, that translate EU–LAC political commitments into implementable joint actions with clearly defined roles, responsibilities, timelines and performance indicators |

| # | STRATEGIC TOPIC | REFORMULATED RECOMMENDATIONS |
|---|---|---|
| 38 | Monitoring & Institutionalisation | Establish monitoring systems based on modular, qualitative indicators that can adapt to diverse institutional contexts, including regular review cycles to ensure that monitoring processes are participatory, transparent, and embedded in broader governance structures such as the DIF |
| 39 | Ecosystems & Partnerships | Institutionalise inclusive co-creation and structured multi-actor engagement mechanisms such as Living Labs, Communities of Practice and Innovation Forums to collaboratively design, implement and scale digital solutions while actively involving underrepresented stakeholders and low-connectivity regions |
| 40 | Capacity Building & Skills | Establish sustained cross-regional knowledge exchange and mutual learning platforms between EU and LAC actors that support capacity development through reciprocal practice-sharing, training programmes, mobility schemes and joint innovation calls |
| 41 | Monitoring & Institutionalisation | Embed roadmap guidelines into long-term inter-institutional agreements, cooperation frameworks and national digital agendas to ensure durability and alignment with the strategic objectives of the EU–LAC Digital Alliance |

# ANNEX 2: ASSESSMENT MATRIX TEMPLATE

| # | STRATEGIC TOPIC | RECOMMENDATION | Acceptability | Accountability | Adaptability | Cost/Benefit | Phased feasibility | Measurability | Repeatability | Snowball effect | Social impact | Sustainability | Tried & true | Cultural specificity | Strategic alignment | Governance feasibility |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| R1 | 1. Governance & Regulatory Alignment | Develop shared yet flexible EU–LAC governance frameworks in data governance, AI and cloud computing that ensure regulatory alignment while preserving contextual adaptation to diverse legal and institutional realities | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| R2 | 1. Governance & Regulatory Alignment | Complement high-level political dialogue with coordinated legislative, normative and operational instruments to reduce fragmentation and enable cross-border collaboration, building on concrete national experiences (e.g. Chile's data centre guidelines) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

# ANNEX 3: GUIDELINES AND AGENDA

## Operativización de las recomendaciones del Roadmap del proyecto SPIDER

*Moldeando el futuro de la cooperación y conectividad entre UE-ALC*

## Detalles del workshop

Fecha y hora: jueves 12 de marzo de 2026

Hora: 11:00–12:30 (Ecuador) / 17:00–18:30 (CET)

Formato: sesión online https://upm.zoom.us/j/89017777887

## Contexto

El proyecto SPIDER tiene como objetivo facilitar la implementación de los resultados de los Diálogos Digitales birregionales y apoyar el potencial de la infraestructura BELLA (Building the Europe Link to Latin America), con el fin de fortalecer la cooperación entre la Unión Europea y América Latina y el Caribe en investigación e innovación.

En este contexto, el proyecto SPIDER ha desarrollado un proceso de análisis y consulta para identificar recomendaciones orientadas a reforzar la cooperación UE–ALC en torno a la transformación digital y las infraestructuras necesarias, aprovechando el potencial de BELLA y del ecosistema digital birregional. Dichas recomendaciones han surgido de diferentes actividades realizadas a lo largo del proyecto, entre ellas:

- Mapeo de los compromisos y prioridades temáticas de más 96 diálogos digitales y 62 acuerdos bilaterales.
- Guía para una cooperación sostenible en transformación digital y centrada en el ser humano.
- Encuesta y Grupos Focales sobre el uso de la infraestructura BELLA por parte del ecosistema digital EU-LAC.
- Reuniones de los Grupos de Trabajo del Foro de Implementación de Diálogos Digitales (DIF), organizadas en cuatro sesiones en torno a dos grupos temáticos:
    - WG1: Transformación digital centrada en el ser humano.
    - WG2: Diversidad, igualdad e inclusión.
- Debates y aportaciones recogidas durante los eventos del DIF con actores de alto nivel, celebrados en el marco de las conferencias TICAL 2024 y TICAL 2025.

A partir de estos insumos, el proyecto está desarrollando un Roadmap estratégico, que consolidará un conjunto de recomendaciones y orientaciones para avanzar en la cooperación UE–ALC en investigación e innovación vinculada a la transformación digital.

## Objetivo del workshop

El objetivo de este workshop es recoger aportaciones de expertos de la región de América Latina y el Caribe para apoyar la operativización de las recomendaciones que formarán parte del SPIDER Roadmap.

Las recomendaciones identificadas en el proyecto pueden ser complejas y de carácter estratégico, por lo que será importante extraer acciones concretas y elementos operativos que permitan avanzar hacia su implementación.

En particular, la discusión buscará identificar:

- Primeros pasos concretos para iniciar su implementación
- Actores responsables de impulsar cada recomendación

- Otros actores o instituciones involucradas en su implementación
- Fuentes de financiación relevantes a nivel nacional, regional o internacional que podrían apoyar su desarrollo
- Horizonte temporal
- Indicadores y métricas que permitan monitorizar avances
- Impacto esperado de la acción
- Riesgos o barreras potenciales

Las contribuciones recogidas durante el workshop servirán para desarrollar la dimensión operativa del SPIDER Roadmap.

## Estructura de la sesión

El workshop tendrá una duración total de 90 minutos y estará organizado en tres partes principales:

| Tiempo | Bloque | Contenido |
|---|---|---|
| 15 min | Apertura | Breve introducción al proyecto SPIDER y al proceso de elaboración del Roadmap. Explicación de cómo se han generado y seleccionado las recomendaciones. Presentación de las recomendaciones que se trabajarán durante la sesión y explicación de la dinámica del workshop. |
| 60 min | Sesión de trabajo | Discusión estructurada orientada a traducir las recomendaciones en elementos concretos de implementación. Los participantes se dividirán en grupos pequeños (breakout rooms). La discusión estará guiada por una plantilla estructurada de trabajo en Miro. Acceso al tablero de Miro. |
| 15 min | Puesta en común y discusión final | Cada grupo compartirá brevemente sus conclusiones. La sesión finalizará con una reflexión estratégica sobre las condiciones necesarias para la implementación del Roadmap. |

## Criterios para la selección y priorización de recomendaciones

Como parte del proceso de elaboración del Roadmap, el consorcio del proyecto SPIDER ha llevado a cabo un ejercicio interno para evaluar y priorizar las recomendaciones identificadas a lo largo del proyecto. Para ello se ha utilizado una matriz de evaluación basada en una serie de criterios que permiten analizar diferentes dimensiones de viabilidad, impacto y alineamiento estratégico:

- ➔ *Acceptability*: Grado en que la acción podría obtener apoyo político, institucional y de los distintos actores implicados, equilibrando el esfuerzo requerido y los beneficios percibidos.
- ➔ *Accountability*: Capacidad de asignar claramente la acción a instituciones, organizaciones o actores responsables de su implementación y seguimiento.
- ➔ *Adaptability*: Posibilidad de adaptar la acción a diferentes marcos legales, sistemas de gobernanza y contextos culturales nacionales sin comprometer sus objetivos principales.
- ➔ *Cost / Benefit*: Relación entre los beneficios esperados de la acción y los costes financieros, administrativos y políticos necesarios para su implementación.
- ➔ *Phased feasibility*: Posibilidad de iniciar e implementar la acción de forma progresiva en horizontes de corto, medio o largo plazo.
- ➔ *Measurability*: Capacidad de monitorizar y evaluar la acción mediante indicadores cualitativos y/o cuantitativos claramente definidos.

- ➔ *Repeatability:* Posibilidad de replicar, escalar o adaptar la acción en diferentes países o contextos dentro de la región EU–LAC.
- ➔ *Snowball effect*: Potencial de la acción para generar efectos multiplicadores, influyendo en otros actores, sectores o ámbitos de política pública.
- ➔ *Social impact*: Contribución positiva de la acción a objetivos sociales más amplios, como la inclusión, la sostenibilidad, los derechos digitales, la igualdad de género, el desarrollo económico o la soberanía tecnológica.
- ➔ *Sustainability*: Capacidad de mantener la acción y sus impactos más allá de ciclos iniciales de financiación o del propio proyecto.
- ➔ *Tried & true*: Existencia de precedentes exitosos de implementación de la acción en algún país o ámbito, o alineación con políticas existentes.
- ➔ *Cultural specificity*: Relevancia particular de la acción para determinados países o contextos. Algunas recomendaciones pueden ser difíciles de implementar en ciertos contextos o ya estar parcialmente desarrolladas, mientras que en otros pueden aportar mejoras significativas.
- ➔ *Strategic alignment*: Coherencia de la acción con las estrategias digitales de la UE y LAC, los marcos de cooperación birregional y otras agendas políticas internacionales relevantes.
- ➔ *Governance feasibility*: Compatibilidad de la acción con estructuras de gobernanza multinivel y capacidad de coordinación entre diferentes instituciones y actores.

## Listado de recomendaciones

Durante el workshop se trabajará sobre un conjunto de recomendaciones seleccionadas a partir de los resultados de las actividades del proyecto y del proceso de evaluación interna descrito anteriormente.

Estas recomendaciones pueden tener un carácter estratégico y relativamente amplio, por lo que el objetivo de la sesión será identificar elementos concretos que permitan avanzar hacia su implementación práctica dentro del Roadmap.

Con el objetivo de facilitar una discusión más estructurada durante el workshop, las recomendaciones se han organizado en dos tracks temáticos.

Cada track agrupa recomendaciones que abordan dimensiones complementarias de la cooperación UE-ALC en investigación e innovación, permitiendo analizar tanto los aspectos estructurales (infraestructura, ecosistemas y gobernanza) como las dimensiones humanas, inclusivas y éticas de la transformación digital.

# Track 1: Infraestructura digital, ecosistemas de cooperación y gobernanza birregional

Este track aborda el papel estratégico de infraestructuras digitales como BELLA, las NRENs y los mecanismos de gobernanza birregional, así como los instrumentos necesarios para fortalecer la cooperación UE-ALC en investigación e innovación.

| Recomendación | Traducción al español |
|---|---|
| R1.1: Position BELLA as a strategic enabler of EU-LAC cooperation, not only as connectivity infrastructure but as a foundation for shared technological sovereignty, research collaboration, and innovation ecosystems | Posicionar BELLA como habilitador estratégico de la cooperación UE-ALC, no solo como infraestructura de conectividad, sino como base para la soberanía tecnológica compartida, la colaboración científica y los ecosistemas de innovación |
| R1.2: Strengthen the strategic role of NRENs as trusted intermediaries facilitating scalable, secure and sustainable cross-border collaboration, particularly in research and education | Fortalecer el papel estratégico de las NRENs como intermediarias de confianza que faciliten una colaboración transfronteriza escalable, segura y sostenible, especialmente en investigación y educación |
| R1.3: Develop incentive schemes that encourage regular and strategic use of advanced NREN-provided connectivity and digital services to bridge uneven adoption patterns across institutions and regions | Desarrollar esquemas de incentivos que fomenten el uso regular y estratégico de la conectividad avanzada y los servicios digitales proporcionados por las NRENs para reducir desigualdades en la adopción entre instituciones y regiones |
| R1.4: Tailor BELLA exploitation and deployment strategies to sector-specific requirements and varying levels of regional digital maturity in order to strengthen resilience and maximise impact across diverse ecosystems | Adaptar las estrategias de explotación e implementación de BELLA a las necesidades específicas de distintos sectores y a los diferentes niveles de madurez digital regional, con el fin de fortalecer la resiliencia y maximizar su impacto en diversos ecosistemas |
| R1.5: Encourage LAC actors to progress from participation to co-leadership roles in EU-LAC projects, strengthening ownership, sustainability, and strategic balance in bi-regional cooperation | Fomentar que los actores de ALC evolucionen desde roles de participación hacia roles de co-liderazgo en proyectos UE-ALC, fortaleciendo la apropiación, la sostenibilidad y el equilibrio estratégico en la cooperación birregional |
| R1.6: Establish permanent interface mechanisms (including a dedicated multi-actor Task Force) to connect research outputs, practical implementation and policymaking, while creating structured policy feedback loops, iterative review mechanisms and key performance indicators (KPIs) to jointly evaluate dialogue commitments and systematically track how dialogue findings are integrated into EU–LAC policy frameworks | Establecer mecanismos permanentes de interfaz (incluyendo una Task Force multi-actor) para conectar resultados de investigación, implementación práctica y formulación de políticas, creando además ciclos estructurados de retroalimentación política, mecanismos de revisión iterativa e indicadores clave (KPIs) para evaluar compromisos de los diálogos y monitorizar cómo sus resultados se integran en los marcos políticos UE-ALC |

# Track 2: Transformación digital centrada en las personas, inclusiva y responsable

Este track se centra en los principios, capacidades institucionales y mecanismos participativos necesarios para garantizar que la transformación digital EU–LAC sea ética, inclusiva y centrada en las personas.

| Recomendación | Traducción al español |
|---|---|
| R2.1: Align ethical AI principles across regions, including transparency, accountability, fairness, and human oversight, ensuring that emerging regulatory frameworks (e.g. EU AI Act) are translated into practice in a context-sensitive manner | Alinear principios éticos de inteligencia artificial entre regiones, incluyendo transparencia, rendición de cuentas, equidad y supervisión humana, garantizando que marcos regulatorios emergentes (como el EU AI Act) se traduzcan en prácticas adaptadas a cada contexto |
| R2.2: Embed DEI principles from the earliest stages of research, innovation, and digital policy design, rather than treating inclusion as a corrective measure | Integrar principios de diversidad, equidad e inclusión desde las primeras fases del diseño de políticas digitales, investigación e innovación, en lugar de tratarlos como medidas correctivas posteriores |
| R2.3: Strengthen local capacity building, leadership development, and safe participation environments to empower women and underrepresented groups in digital sectors | Fortalecer el desarrollo de capacidades locales, el liderazgo y los entornos de participación seguros para empoderar a mujeres y grupos infrarrepresentados en sectores digitales |
| R2.4: Invest in continuous capacity building for public institutions and civil servants to enable human-centred digital transformation, equipping them with the digital, ethical, participatory and organisational skills needed to design, implement and govern digital policies and services that respond to citizens' needs and societal challenges | Invertir en el desarrollo continuo de capacidades para las instituciones públicas y los funcionarios, con el fin de impulsar una transformación digital centrada en las personas, dotándolos de competencias digitales, éticas, participativas y organizativas necesarias para diseñar, implementar y gobernar políticas y servicios digitales que respondan a las necesidades de la ciudadanía y a los retos sociales |
| R2.5: Institutionalise inclusive co-creation and structured multi-actor engagement mechanisms such as Living Labs, Communities of Practice and Innovation Forums to collaboratively design, implement and scale digital solutions while actively involving underrepresented stakeholders and low-connectivity regions | Institucionalizar mecanismos inclusivos de co-creación y participación multi-actor, como Living Labs, Comunidades de Práctica o Foros de Innovación, para diseñar, implementar y escalar soluciones digitales involucrando activamente a actores infrarrepresentados y regiones con baja conectividad |

## Dimensiones de análisis durante la sesión de trabajo

Durante la sesión de trabajo, los participantes serán invitados a analizar cada recomendación desde una perspectiva operativa, con el objetivo de identificar elementos clave para su implementación.

La discusión estará guiada por una plantilla estructurada en Miro que abordará los siguientes aspectos:

1. Primer paso concreto
   Definir una acción inicial realista que permita poner en marcha la recomendación.
2. Actores responsables
   Identificar qué instituciones u organizaciones deberían liderar la implementación de la recomendación.
3. Otros actores involucrados
   Identificar otras instituciones, redes, organismos o actores que deberían participar o apoyar su implementación.
4. Fuentes de financiación potenciales
   Identificar posibles mecanismos de financiación relevantes a nivel nacional, regional o internacional que podrían apoyar la implementación de la acción.
5. Horizonte temporal
   Reflexionar sobre el plazo en el que la recomendación podría implementarse (corto, medio o largo plazo).
6. Indicadores y métricas de seguimiento
   Identificar indicadores que permitan monitorizar el progreso y evaluar resultados.
7. Impacto esperado
   Reflexionar sobre el impacto que podría generar la implementación de la acción en la cooperación EU–LAC en investigación e innovación.
8. Riesgos o barreras de implementación
   Identificar posibles obstáculos institucionales, políticos, técnicos o financieros.

# CITATION



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