

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-000937/26
to the Commission
Dimitris Tsiodras (PPE)
(6 March 2026)**

Subject: Strengthening digital transformation programmes and facilitating SMEs' access to them

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the Commission's assessment of the effectiveness of the Digital Europe Programme with regard to its successes and how to make it more effective.

In particular, while small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are a key target group of the programme's efforts, only 17% of funding is allocated to them. Indeed, the application process was considered challenging due to extensive administrative requirements, while many respondents pointed to issues such as obligatory double reporting to the European Commission and national authorities as well as co-financing requirements. These obstacles can have a significant impact on the programme's effectiveness and on the EU's ability to achieve its digital objectives.

In view of the multiannual financial framework 2028-2034, can the Commission say:

1. How does it intend to simplify the digital financing mechanisms and access thereto for SMEs, in order to boost their competitiveness and their ability to integrate into European value chains?
2. How will it help bridge the gap and accelerate the transition from research and innovation to the application of research results and their commercialisation?
3. How will it improve coordination with national funding programmes and national digital initiatives to ensure that activities at different levels support and reinforce each other?

Submitted: 6.3.2026

**Answer given by Executive Vice-President Virkkunen on behalf of the European Commission
(23 April 2026)**

Drawing on the learning from the programmes under the current Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the Commission's proposal for the next MFF ⁽¹⁾ foresees simpler and integrated support for stakeholders, including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

These include the use of a single work programme for the entire digital leadership window, a single rulebook, a common set of instruments, and a coherent approach to leveraging private investments through the European Innovation Council (EIC) and the European Competitiveness Fund ⁽²⁾ (ECF) InvestEU Instrument.

The proposal also foresees dedicated actions to increase SME participation, business support and the establishment of the 'EU for Business' Network.

The integrated approach between the ECF and the successor of Horizon Europe ⁽³⁾ will ensure a comprehensive support to the entire innovation journey from research to pilots, early industrialisation, manufacturing and deployment, with the EIC playing a key role. It aims to provide key infrastructure support.

The ECF will have dedicated support for scaling up, such as the scale up facility under the ECF InvestEU Instrument, and support for advanced skills development needed by SMEs to develop and deploy innovative solutions.

The Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030 ⁽⁴⁾ will be a policy framework for the ECF and National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs).

⁽¹⁾ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, 'A dynamic EU Budget for the priorities of the future — The Multiannual Financial Framework 2028-2034' (COM(2025) 570 final).

⁽²⁾ Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on establishing the European Competitiveness Fund ('ECF'), including the specific programme for defence research and innovation activities, repealing Regulations (EU) 2021/522, (EU) 2021/694, (EU) 2021/697, (EU) 2021/783, repealing provisions of Regulations (EU) 2021/696, (EU) 2023/588, and amending Regulation (EU) [EDIP] (COM/2025/555 final).

⁽³⁾ Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing Horizon Europe, the framework Programme for Research and Innovation, for the period 2028-2034 laying down its rules for participation and dissemination, and repealing Regulation (EU) 2021/695 (COM/2025/543 final).

⁽⁴⁾ Decision (EU) 2022/2481 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 establishing the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030 (OJ L 323, 19.12.2022, pp. 4-26, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec/2022/2481/oj>).

The State of the Digital Decade reports will ensure coordination and track progress towards the digital transformation, issuing semester-like recommendations on areas for reform and investment.
