



26th SEPTEMBER '23

# FINAL EVENT:

LESSONS LEARNT AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR  
POLICY MAKERS FROM THE COSME-FUNDED  
FLAGSHIP PROJECTS 'STARS' AND 'RESTARTSMEs'

*Lessons learned*

Natàlia Carmona (reStartSMEs)

Hosted by



European Committee  
of the Regions



The ReStartSMEs project was funded by the European Union's COSME Programme under grant agreement n° 101037910. The STARS project has received funding from the European Union's Competitiveness of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (COSME) programme under the Grant Agreement number: 101037897 — STARS — COS-STRAT-2020-3-05



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**reSTART**  
**SMEs**

## Lessons learned

deriving from all the **key activities planned in ReStartSMEs on how clusters and technology centers could**

**provide better technical assistance and business support**

to traditional SMEs in the manufacturing sector

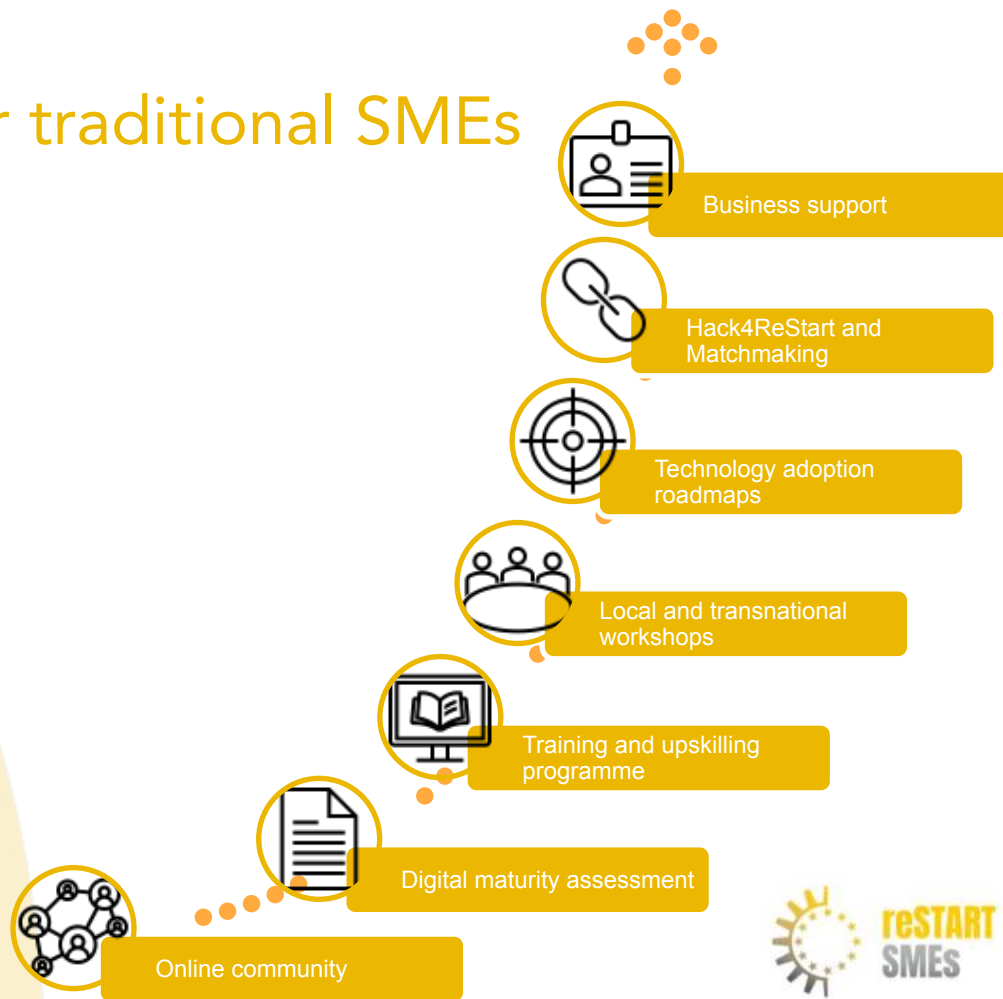
for the adoption of **Industry 5.0** concepts and **technologies**



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# ReStartSMEs journey for traditional SMEs



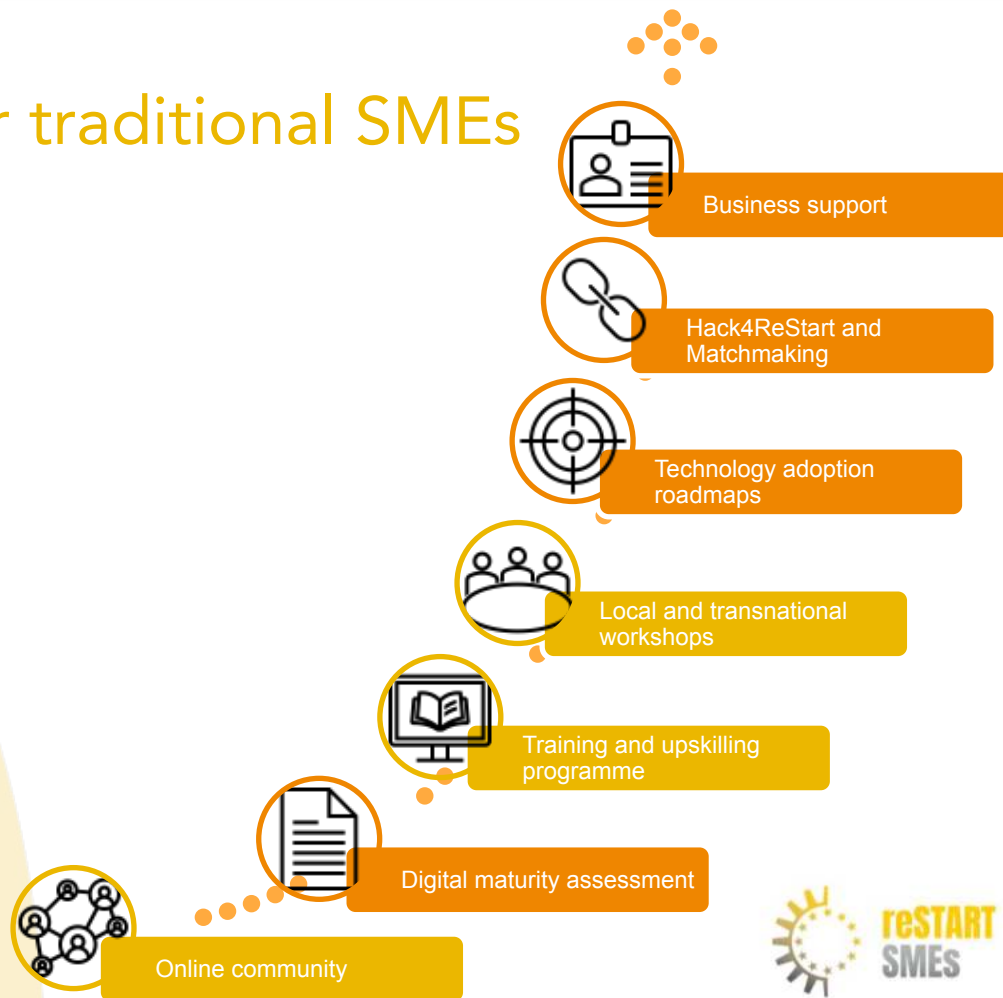
# ReStartSMEs journey for traditional SMEs

## SME testimonial

**DiCi S.r.l.s.**



- ReStart SMEs participant
- Located in Torino (Italy)
- Defined as idea makers
- 3D design and printing, prototyping
- Mass production
- Quality control



# Barriers to manufacturing SME engagement

1	Limited (financial) resources or technical expertise
2	Lack of awareness and understanding of benefits of advanced technologies
3	Perceived cost and complexity
4	Digital access and skills
5	Not having a dedicated person for digitalization / innovation
6	Great diversity of digitalization activities at local, regional and national level
7	Lack of industry success cases
8	Resistance to change and/or lack of trust
9	Data security and privacy concerns
10	Confluence of multiple crisis (war, inflation, energy prices, climate, supply chain disruption)



# Online community



## Activity

Platform to foster collaboration and knowledge sharing, as a centralized information point for onboarding of SMEs, Q&A, News & Events, Training, Networking activities, among others.



## Experience / Lessons learned

- Informative portal. Effectiveness as a single-entry point.
- Offer community engagement activities and guide new members.
- Traditional SMEs may be **hesitant** about using online formats actively.



## Recommendations

- ✓ **Low stakeholders' and manufacturing SMEs engagement** leads to the need for deeper stakeholder involvement and more targeted strategies.
- ✓ Offer offline meet-ups and industry specific seminars can bridge the digital gap.
- ✓ Tailored onboarding process: introduction, show benefits, data security measures.



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# Digital Maturity Assessment



## Activity

Improved tool to help SMEs to assess their digital maturity status; as an initial step on their technology adoption journey.



## Experience / Lessons learned

- Main **drivers**: offer the assessment on different **languages**, its user-friendly design, offering **range of answers** instead of specific data, and filling the assessment through **personal interviews**, obtaining a final **assessment report** to be analyzed.
- Main **barriers**: registration process, **number of questions** included that have made the filling process longer and more tedious to SMEs, the availability of **similar digital assessments** and **data privacy**.



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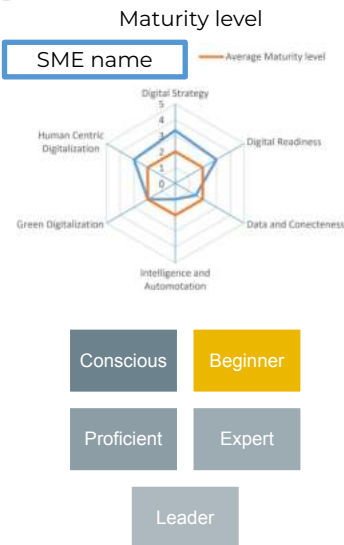




# Digital Maturity Assessment



## Recommendations



- ✓ **Address participation barriers** avoiding mandatory registration and explore ways to minimize barriers to entry.
- ✓ Continue **providing guidance and support**, possibly expanding direct interaction with SMEs to encourage completion.
- ✓ Experiment with different dissemination strategies and platforms, emphasizing those that have proven effective, like **direct calls and face-to-face interactions**.
- ✓ Differentiate the tool from similar assessments in the market and collaborate with stakeholders to avoid competition and ensure wider promotion.
- ✓ **Consider other formats and tools**, since participants offer resistance in filling questionnaires given several barriers mentioned.



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# Training and upskilling programme



## Activity

**Platform to provide a Digital Training Pathway** (by digital maturity level or sector-specific) **to raise awareness and knowledge on Industry 5.0** based on needs and challenges identified during the project (local, transnational, ad-hoc workshops and assessment).



## Experience / Lessons learned

- **Adequate process but needs to be individualized:** i) assessment to understand training needs, ii) Cluster's communication & support to identify challenges; iii) training offer based on SME needs identified
- Better engagement on **synchronous** and **on-site** activities
- Some barriers identified were that SMEs managers/workers may be **reluctant to change** – Seek in-depth knowledge of **business strategy**.
- **Language** and **culture** of the organizations can significantly impact participation.
- There might be a lack of direct **perceived tangible cost-benefit** for SMEs or lack of **resources** (time and personnel).



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# Training and upskilling programme



## Recommendations



- ✓ **Keep promoting and using** the training resources already created to maximize the efforts made (clusters) <https://mooc.restartsmes.eu/>
- ✓ **Long-term follow up** to know the implementation of the acquired knowledge
- ✓ Understand training needs **one-to-one interviews** is the most successful
- ✓ Offer personalized training – with fewer participants – can ensure **deeper long-term** tracking of training pathway and understanding individual SMEs efforts
- ✓ Synchronous **one-day activities** (workshops) promoted by clusters seem to be the most efficient and engaging format
- ✓ Establish **enough resources** and efforts to understand specific needs and adapted training offer to ensure engagement



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# Local and transnational workshops



## Activity

5 local workshops organized by 5 clusters, targeting manufacturing SMEs to **identify their common needs and challenges** in the uptake of advanced technologies.

Transnational workshops launched Strategic Alliances, contained specific topics identified during Local workshops and to raise awareness on I5.0.



## Experience / Lessons learned

- ✓ **Flexibility** of the workshop's methodologies and formats
- ✓ Online vs On-site
- ✓ Enabling the **transnational exchange and mutual learning** between traditional manufacturing SMEs – hard to exchange when previous understanding is needed.

	Recurrent Needs	Countries
Relevant to all	Digitalization Road Map and know-how	Germany
		Lithuania
		Italy
		Portugal
		Romania
Relevant	Upskilling and Reskilling of Employees	Germany
		Lithuania
		Italy
		Portugal
		Romania
Relevant	Synchronization of ERP Systems and Integration of Machines	Lithuania
		Portugal
		Italy
Relevant	Cybersecurity and data management	Lithuania
		Italy
		Lithuania
Relevant	Additional funding	Romania
		Portugal
		Portugal



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# Local and transnational workshops



## Recommendations

- ✓ Establish a **continuous dialogue or follow-up sessions** focused on skills and competencies, perhaps inviting experts or trainers in subsequent events.
- ✓ **Contrast initial topics & challenges** – ensure resilience by validating and prioritizing most relevant local need and challenges for each region
- ✓ **Adjust topics** based on **real-time insights and needs** – demonstrate the importance of resilience



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# Technology adoption roadmap



## Activity

A personalized strategic planning tool help match goals of the SME with specific technology solutions and matching with possible technology, promoting an Alliance between tech-savvy and manufacturing SMEs.



## Experience / Lessons learned

- **High-value tool** to identify synergies between manufacturing SMEs and technology providers
- **Adaptation** of the **technical assistance** has been key - a flexible and accessible tool – in terms of time, format and process – sustainability?
- Involvement of **staff** – no **responsible** for digitalization process, decision-making involvement and technical/operations and **lack of skilled staff**
- Addressing **local needs** – language, issues, culture – involvement of a tech expert and a cluster has been key



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# Technology adoption roadmap



## Recommendations

- ✓ Adaptation of the expert support, get SMEs on board and offer solutions and improvements to their challenges
- ✓ Avoid lack of interest, it's not a 'sales' product (e.g.. software sales that might not be adequate)
- ✓ Iterative development, providing a living document - can be regularly updated
- ✓ Approach diversity of profiles and roles – decision-makers, CEO, operators
- ✓ **Informal meetings** in an understanding approach – common ground, expertise
- ✓ Importance of the **ecosystem** (e.g, roles of clusters, other stakeholders, etc.)



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# Hack4ReStart SMEs and Matchmaking events



## Activity

Innovative event format thought to bring together traditional European manufacturing SMEs with technology providers that can offer them the right solutions for their digital transformation needs and for transitioning to Industry 5.0.

- Digitalization
- Robotics
- Systems' interoperability

Lithuania



- Artificial intelligence
- Blockchain

Germany



- Big Data
- Industrial IoT
- Cybersecurity

Italy



- Digitalization
- Green manufacturing

Romania



- Advanced manufacturing process
- Digital Twins
- Additive manufacturing

Portugal



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# Hack4ReStart SMEs and Matchmaking events



## Experience / Lessons learned

- A successful tool to promote **collaboration** allowing spaces for knowledge sharing and partnership opportunities for tech-savvy & manufacturing SMEs
- Enhance capacity to **tackle common challenges**
- Hybrid format: b2match & on-site activities – attached to a bigger event vs individual event
- Interactive sessions and workshops – activates **engagement**
- SMEs highly valued tech-savvy pitches and **success cases**
- 5 hackathons in different context allowed **feedback-driven improvement** which was very effective
- **Meticulous planning** and professional support plays a key role
- Informal activities enhance



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# Hack4ReStart SMEs and Matchmaking events



## Recommendations

- ✓ Prioritize **on-site** activities (networking and matchmaking) for SMEs in bigger events / hybrid formats to engage participants
- ✓ Provide keynote speakers – that can inspire innovation
- ✓ **Show success cases**
- ✓ Provide evidence of the added value and benefits tackling some SMEs challenges
- ✓ Diversity enriches knowledge exchange (e.g., viewpoints, experiences and expertise drive further exploration of challenges and potential solutions)
- ✓ Promote the holistic understanding of complex issues and resilience-driven solutions



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**How was your  
experience during  
*Hack4ReStart?***





# Business support



## Activity

- Prove **bottom-up driven services** from clusters: (i) access to public and private funding for the adoption of key technologies for Industry 5.0, (ii) provision of venture capital and investment-readiness support, (iii) definition of digital business models, (iv) comprehensive Technological assessment and IPR & licensing support and (v) development of new projects and pilot activities among the member of the SAs.



## Experience / Lessons learned

- **Direct and personal contact** is highly valued by SMEs to address their needs
- **Time-consumption** – understand project needs must involve business/technical dedicated to align them with funding opportunities
- Importance of planning and strategy
- Support priorities vary depending on region / type of cluster (funding opportunities, networking, alliances between companies, project proposals)





# Business support



## Recommendations

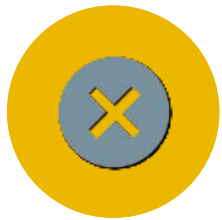
- ✓ Communication tools; portals and programmes accessible for ecosystems
- ✓ Provides high added value for SMEs, offering support on activities that require expertise, time and knowledge.
- ✓ Awareness of being part of an ecosystem, and not isolated from industry or resilient value chains
- ✓ Short-term vs Long-term planning – help companies to plan strategically based on funding and opportunities



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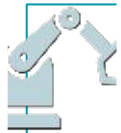


**Did you discover the  
*added-value* of advanced  
technology implementation  
within project?**



***What needs during your  
technology adoption process  
are not covered?***

# Overall learnings: some headlines



The sector addressed may be an obstacle to meet KPIs (traditional manufacturing)



Emphasize dissemination and continuous engagement & follow-up



Articulated networks do not guarantee success



Ensure engagement without overwhelming SMEs (e.g., **solution-driven** activities)



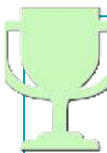
Limitation of time and deepness to provide technical assistance for manufacturing SMEs



2 years timeframe limits the results of longer-term engagement strategies



Regional considerations are crucial to explain some differences



Showcase **successful use cases**, not technologies itself



Help SMEs to plan for funding (e.g., timings, mechanisms, strategies, etc.)



Use different communication channels for SME outreach (e.g., phone, email, social media)



One-to-one interaction is key: acknowledge individual SME circumstances



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# Thank you!

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reSTART  
SMEs

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