FINE2WORK: Promoting financial, digital and entrepreneurial competences for vulnerable adults (women) with restricted access to the digitalised market (home based)

Intellectual Output 4: POLICY RECOMMENDATION STRATEGY

P4 – RCCI

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Project Information:

Project Acronym: FINE2WORK

Project Title: "PROMOTING FINANCIAL, DIGITAL AND ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPETENCES FOR VULNERABLE ADULTS (WOMEN) WITH RESTRICTED ACCESS TO THE DIGITALISED MARKET (HOME BASED)"

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Website: https://fine2work.eu/

E-learning platform: https://academy.fine2work.eu/

Consortium:

Policy Recommendations FINE2WORK

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1. Project NET (LV)
2. Descularte (PT)
3. Emphasys Centre (CY)
4. Ruse Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BG)

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Executive Summary

The FINE2WORK project is meant to provide adults with a three-stage upskilling pathway programme to acquire, develop, assess and validate a set of essential competences: financial, digital and entrepreneurial.

The project covers the initial introduction to the set of skills; however, it does not advise or provide guidance on how to use digital technologies. Instead, it allows participants to be equipped with the necessary knowledge to get started.

Based upon the experience gained, we developed four policy recommendations in the following categories:

- Training format for further training
- A multifunctional platform – offering overview of tools and technologies available for entrepreneurs
- Programmes supporting entrepreneurship and working from home
- Policy commitments

These policy recommendations are explained further in this document.

The challenges

Research (EUROSTAT 2017) has shown that there is a stable increasing of adults working from home. More specifically, the percentage of employed persons aged 15 to 64 in the EU who usually work from home stood at 5.0% in 2017. In the EU, more self-employed persons usually worked from home (18.1%) than employees (2.8%).

The frequency of working from home increases with age which indicates the necessity of adults and seniors to remain in the skill force. Only 1.6% of 15- 24-year-olds in the EU usually worked from home in 2017, rising to 4.7% of 25–49-year-olds and 6.4% of 50–64-year-olds. Further to the above, research has shown that a slightly higher proportion of women in the EU usually worked from home (5.3%) than men (4.7%).

Work is a determining factor of gender equality and women's economic independence, but also important for the entire economy. Women's employment patterns are tightly connected to motherhood. Similarly, another category of adults which favours working from home is the group of adults with disabilities. Over 15 % of employed people with disabilities worked from home in 2011, compared to 13 % of those with no disability irrespective of which of the two definitions of disability is used.

Facing the problems: approach and aims

The 2016 Council Resolution on A New Skills Agenda for an Inclusive and Competitive Europe reflects a common vision about the role of skills for jobs, growth and competitiveness. Skills are the key to social cohesion and can help to secure jobs and enable people to fulfil their potential. Adults need a broad set of skills to fulfil their potential both at work and in society which apart from the basic skills are more transversal skills such as digital, entrepreneurial and financial competences.

There is a growing awareness that entrepreneurial skills, knowledge and attitudes can be learned and in turn lead to the widespread development of entrepreneurial mind-sets and culture, which benefit individuals and society as a whole. The recent financial crisis has focused renewed attention on the importance of people being well informed about their financial options and

perspective. It revealed serious gaps in financial literacy in the EU as individuals execute poor financial management steps thus contributing to global economic instability.

The FINE2WORK project aims to tackle those exact challenges, and to offer a specific tools, training and mindset focus in order to provide high quality learning opportunities for adults so they can enhance their digital and financial competences while acquiring new key competences such as entrepreneurial skills in an attempt to safeguard social inclusion, access and participation in the labour market and society.

The E-Learning platform

Following initial research, partners developed the FINE2WORK learning platform (named FINE2WORK Academy, available here: https://academy.fine2work.eu/). The portal comprises of a set of e-learning modules, each exploring different aspects of the project's aims. Modules included teaching materials about entrepreneurship, digital and financial skills.

The e-learning platform also comes with a related workshop, where a coach guides the company representatives through the most important areas in relation to making a working strategy.

Partners developed the FINE2WORK learning portal with the learning modules available in English, Portuguese, Latvian, Bulgarian and Greek.
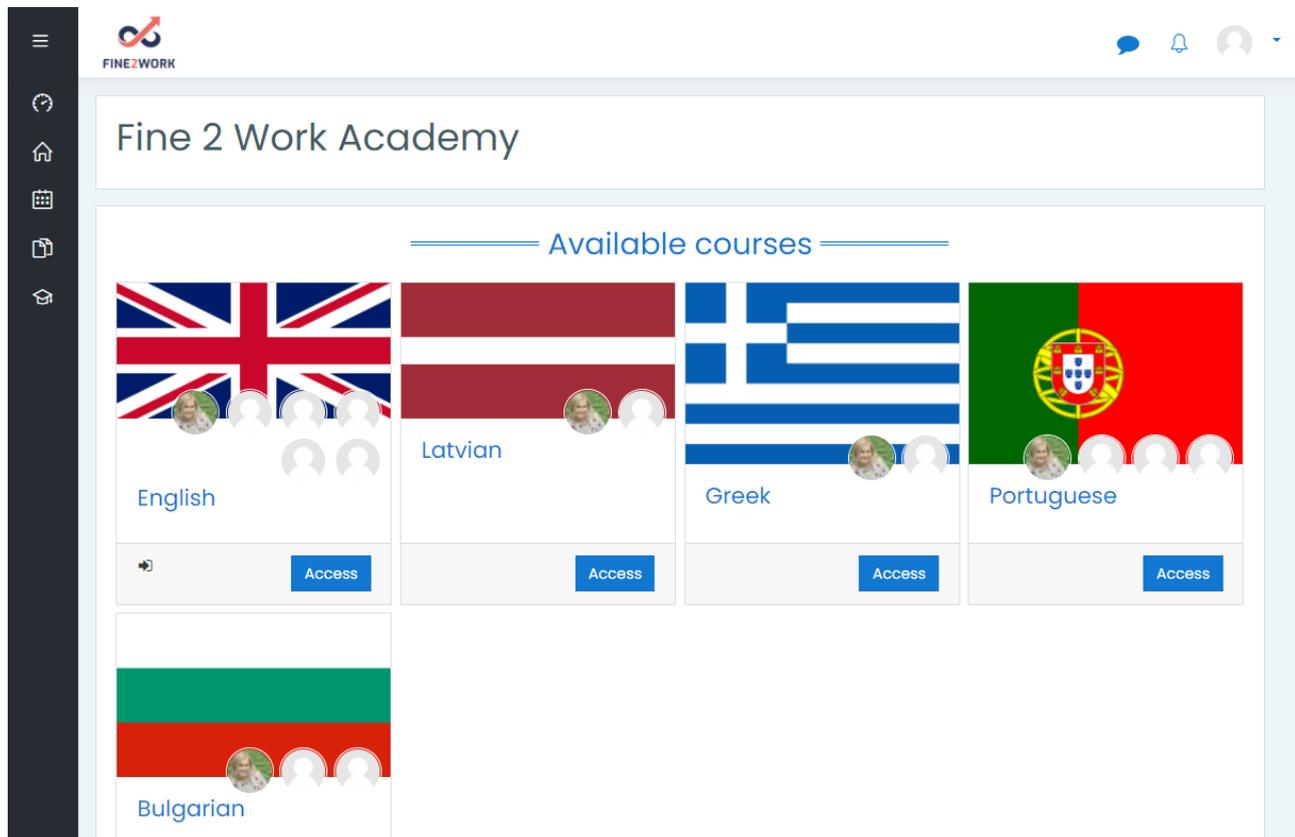
Figure 1: The Home page of the multi-lingual FINE2WORK Academy
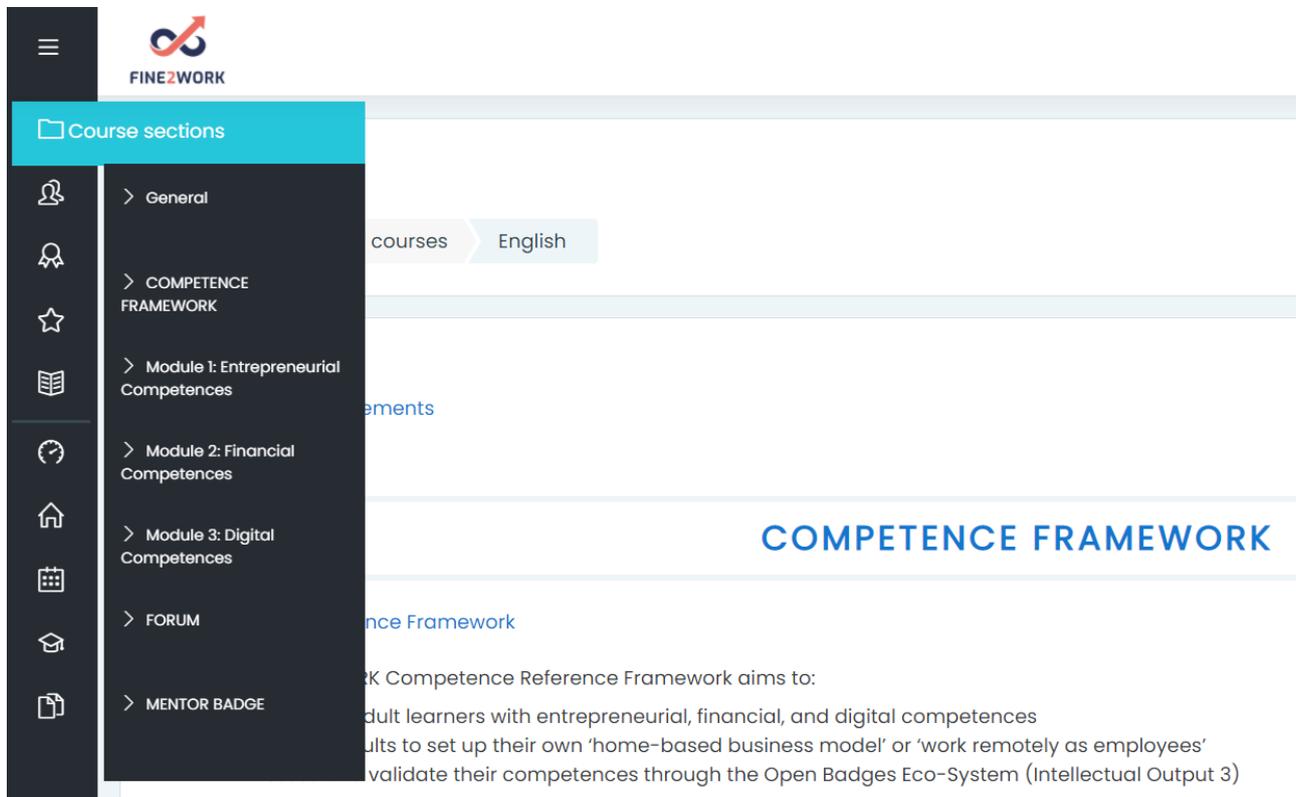
The FINE2WORK learning portal was populated with three e-learning modules, introducing participants to the FINE2WORK project and learning portal.

Figure 2: The three FINE2WORK learning modules

The project is by nature an introduction to the main areas of entrepreneurship, and therefore only gives an overall introduction to the topic and a simple toolbox to continue the work. In the future, if workshop and 1:1 coaching is envisioned, a more specific discussion is needed in relation to the individual's needs and opportunities.

A pilot training was undertaken in 4 European countries with a total of 50 attendees.

Following the workshop, participants were encouraged to continue their work and develop an entrepreneurship strategy for their own ideas or concepts. Not all partners have the means to provide follow-up advice, so there is a risk that good intentions are not followed by concrete actions.

Initial analysis

The project started with an initial survey analysis, to ascertain the need for specific knowledge and skills, to identify which parts of the trends were most relevant to participants.

The survey was completed by 70 participants from the target group, and it highlighted that a majority of them are willing to consider a career change. Following the survey, participants showed a **high interest for e-commerce topics**, i.e. new technologies helping to boost their activity. They were also interested in **broadening their knowledge of social media**, considering that the most used are those 'traditional', Facebook and Twitter. Finally, they were keen to learn about online solutions to improve their business in relation to file storage, collaborative and remote working among cloud tools.

Pilot training post-surveys

After the pilot training, surveys were undertaken with approximately 50 participants from the target groups, in order to assess the learning materials.

The results confirmed the initial project survey**,** showing appropriately chosen topics for the training materials, and high interest in the learning content.

Based upon the post survey undertaken, the following can be concluded:

- Knowledge about digital, entrepreneurial and financial opportunities was significantly strengthened;
- Participants appear to be more enthusiastic about developing a digital strategy and using digital tools in their endeavors
- Participants are still lacking practical knowledge regarding where and how to start implementing their business ideas.

Furthermore, the post-training surveys completed by participants in the pilot training and related workshop show, that a large number of participants have a need for follow-up and continued assistance post training. It was noted that most of the time such topics are not taught in schools, and would be very useful to expand on the idea.

Training format

A number of requirements regarding the format and operational details of training and education provision were evident from the qualitative research, namely the importance of self-learning, the day-to-day requirements at work allowing only short training sessions, or even one-to-one coaching. Consultancy projects are often used to transfer knowledge and gain skills.

Consequently, there is a preference for affordable and short training (a few days, with flexible hours), and more targeted towards current acute business issues.

General findings

The results highlight that many participants actually need **very strong, practical, hand-on skills** for the potential leadership and entrepreneurial education offers to be developed.

It is also very important to highlight that we have found significant differences in the need for training across the EU countries, e.g. participants in Portugal have other challenges than participants in Bulgaria. The reason can be the different level of digitalization and educational needs in the sector.

In terms of technical content most needed, **mobile apps and social media engagement** have been mentioned as technology trends that result in increased training and education needs for starting businesses.

Regarding other **entrepreneurial skills** required, answers from the participants were quite diverse and training could cover a full range of topics. **Communication skills** were mentioned, an **understanding of the customers and the market,** as well as **project management, business development and sales and marketing.**

Maintenance of the platform

Following the analysis, and considering e-learning trends that have become stronger in 2021, we examined the emerging needs which would need addressing to keep the platform up to date, develop it even further and increase its impact.

Content

In terms of content, emphasis should be given on the practice. An addition of practical segments for each module should provide the confidence and skills to take actions and transfer participants' theoretical knowledge into practice. In order to improve practical skills further, a final segment can be included, with scalable difficulty and case studies that will require the use of tools and the knowledge gained from the different modules. It is also worth mentioning that revisions of content on a regular basis could be considered, in order to include new trends or topics.

Community

A greater effort should be placed into building a strong FINE2WORK community. Evidence shows that education improves when knowledge is shared among peers. Forums, chat boxes, note sharing help people share ideas, encourage discussion and provide useful hints and contacts in a collaborative environment. It becomes easier for trainers to provide extra information for a module that needs more clarifications, answers for participants' questions and practical help by providing list of contacts. A stronger and more energetic community helps participants build their confidence in overcoming issues, as when they understand that the same issues were encountered by their peers. It also strengthens interpersonal relationships and builds better practical skills, as learners commonly share hints and solutions to difficult situations.

Personalisation

Instead of asking participants to rate their knowledge with a pre-training questionnaire to evaluate themselves, learners can be provided with a series of questions to test their expertise and skills in each module. Once learners choose their priorities from the modules available, areas where they have scored low can be addressed first. The best way to satisfy a variety of learning preferences is to design content that combines text, graphics, videos or other elements mentioned in micro-learning section.

Micro-learning

Micro-learning has already become a strong trend, as individuals' attention span is getting shorter. Specific benefits include quick deployment in their actual businesses, fast learning through regular 'refreshers', increased productivity and easy tracking. Since the structure of the course is already made of short modules, short revision videos can be made to summarise the information contained in each module. The learning experience can also be enhanced by adding gamification

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elements and quizzes, interactive infographics or even short videos to address specific questions that the participants might have difficulties to understand such various topics.

Interactivity

More time must be invested in interactivity. When learners are able to interact with their learning platform in more creative ways, they become more involved and more interested in logging in and pushing their learning forward. The graphical interface could be improved to it make easier to include some or all the propositions contained in the previous sections above. Another great way to improve interaction between the participants and the platform is to ask participants their initial motivation for signing up for the course. Once we know the reason, we can tailor the notifications according to the user to make it personal, thus increase engagement.

Conclusion

Content, Community, Personalisation, Micro-learning and Interactivity are the five basic categories that need to be further explored to enhance the FINE2WORK platform and increase its impact. All the categories can be implemented one by one and provide a better platform. However, for optimal results, it is recommended to consider implementing as many of these categories as possible. The ideas mentioned provide support to improve the FINE2WORK platform performance and should also include the start of a constant evaluating procedure to advance the platform for future use.

Promotional guidelines

General objectives

The main objectives of the informational and promotional activities ensuring project sustainability are as follows:

- to inform general public about the FINE2WORK project, its implementation and results,
- to promote the main objectives, as well as the benefits arising from their implementation.

Key messages

The key messages from FINE2WORK should take into account the main goals of the project, i.e. to facilitate access to upskilling pathways programme by designing a skills identification and screening tool, providing a learning programme adapted to the learning needs of the target group, and validating these skills acquired through non-formal learning.

The main objectives of the project can be elaborated on to ensure that the objectives of all focus areas convey the following messages:

- The importance of the ongoing adoption of digital tools in all sectors of social and economic life;
- The need for enhancing digital and financial competences while acquiring new key competences such as entrepreneurial skills in an attempt to safeguard social inclusion, access and participation in the labour market and society;
- The availability of the training platform - it is free, available in 5 languages, with accessible content, especially for beginners;
- Funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ programme, in line with the Commission's priorities, for further development of social inclusion;
- Long-term commitment of the project - the training platform is to be supported actively several years after completion of FINE2WORK project.

Target groups

Information and promotion activities on the FINE2WORK project shall be addressed to the following groups:

- Beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries
- Social partners, business environment, NGOs
- Media (e.g. press, TV, radio - local and countrywide, social media)
- General public

General public

The key messages aim to draw interest in the project and the training platform, and raise awareness about its objectives and benefits resulting from its implementation. Communication tools should use simple vocabulary and avoid abbreviations. After the project's end date, messages should focus on the usefulness of the training platform, instead of the project itself.

Media

Communication addressed to the media shall be simple and concise, avoiding technical vocabulary but yet include content-related comments if needed. Each partner can target not only local and regional, but national media as well - the delivery of the project is not location-bound and its outputs are widely available online.

Due to the nature of the information that the project aims to convey, online media and social media are the most suitable channels to be used.

Communication tools

Information and promotion activities can be conducted through:

- Opening/closing/information conferences, promotional events for general public (forums, fairs, open days)
- Contacts with the media: press conferences, briefings, interviews, press releases, e-newsletters, articles etc.
- Publications - electronic and paper (brochures, folders, leaflets etc.)
- Websites
- Workshops
- Other promotional materials

The above list presents standard, most commonly used tools and is not exhaustive. All partners may undertake additional activities if they effectively serve the purpose of informing about and promoting the FINE2WORK project without extra cost on their part.

Recommended activities

- **Website -** partners should include the information on the project on their website, along with the Erasmus+ logo and information on how the project was funded. The information of the project should include: scope and objectives of the project, start and end dates, benefits arising out of the project.
- **Social media publications -** simple 'reminders' that your organisation/institution is committed to the further development of a European digital market, small business initiatives and entrepreneurship. General information about the project and a link to the training platform should be included. Link to the project from individual partner websites would be optimal.
- **Press releases -** A minimum of one press release should be issued at the end of the project, outlining objectives and results. If a partner organisation/institution has regular communications with the media, short 'reminders' about the FINE2WORK project should be included in press releases, focused on project's results.
- **Seminars, presentations, workshops and similar live events -** to highlight good practice and reach a wider audience. Partners should make short presentations or basic outlines of the FINE2WORK project at live events

The consortium is encouraged to continue promotional activities beyond the completion of the project, in line with the Policy recommendations, where appropriate and where additional expenses are not incurred.

Partners would ideally publish at least 2 articles per year through their regular communication channels on digitalisation of European enterprises, and the benefits of using the FINE2WORK training platform as a basic learning tool for this purpose.

Additionally, handing out leaflets/brochures, and delivering live presentations at various events can be beneficial to sustain the legacy of the project.

Policy recommendations

Based upon the knowledge gained in the project, we will strongly recommend that the European Commission focuses on promoting basic entrepreneurial, financial and digital skills.

We have found that most participants and interested parties from the target groups are lacking the needed skills and knowledge to start their own business, and those who attempt to start on their own, usually adopt the "learning on the go". Many will not try to develop their idea because of the preconception "I'm not prepared for this".

We have determined four areas for policy recommendations:

- Recommendation 1: More training is needed
- Recommendation 2: Development of a European digital platform for entrepreneurial skills
- Recommendation 3: Programmes supporting young entrepreneurs
- Recommendation 4: Policy Commitment

More training is needed

We found that the need for training varies from country to country, therefore country specific training should be considered in future programmes.

It was observed that some MEs that did not complete the e-learning modules, which may be due the lack of interactivity within the platform, but can also mean that some of the learning content is either not of interested or the knowledge is already present.

It is important to remember that the lifespan of the e-learning content (especially for the Digital skills) is short due to the continuous development of new technologies.

We also found that more knowledge transfer is needed. In order to design training programmes, the following format requirements must be considered:

Format requirements of start-ups or "work from home" initiatives

- Importance of self-learning – develop some "start modules"

- Day to day requirement, short trainings, coaching, consultancy

- Few days, flexible hours - preferable 1-1 training!

- Targeted, „no nonsense" – and country specific training

- Affordable

- Other types of training and awareness should be considered

- Trainings must complement the practical approach

- Continuous improvement and maintenance of the FINE2WORK platform

- Continuous marketing and dissemination of the FINE2WORK project

- E-learning cannot stand-alone and the requirement for e-learning content is higher than onsite training

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Development of a European digital platform

- The need for support for start-ups and working from home is higher than ever – and it will continue to grow, considering the current Covid-19 situation
- At the same time, more and more technologies, methods and supporting tools are being developed.

The FINE2WORK project addresses a part of the need for learning, but the project found that learning only provides a foundation, when participants are asking for more. In particular, they need more detailed information and a map of the financial and entrepreneurial landscape.

Based upon input from participants, we are suggesting that the EU should host a European wide platform of resources for start-ups, young entrepreneurs, and working from home individuals – with the purpose of helping them in their business journey.

European learning platform

- E-learning content – to be continuously maintained and updated

- Quick overview over the new trends

- Case catalogue – for inspiration purposes – classified in markets

- Tools and consultancy catalog

- Country specific content

- Best practices – A method for starting the business journey

- Catalogue of national digitalization programs

- On-line Help Desk

Suggested new EU programmes

As mentioned previously, we found that a large number of participants do not have resources (financial and time) to start developing their business idea.

Our findings show that individuals are often overwhelmed by the huge amount of information about starting a business.

 Individuals need targeted advice, e.g.:

- What makes sense for me?
- Where to start?
- Who can help me?
- Which business processes can be optimized and digitalized?

Based upon the needs we will propose new EU programmes supporting starting businesses to be more digitalised and supported by financial literacy initiatives.

Programmes supporting digital transformation

Digital boost – Programme

Financial check

Entrepreneurial Mentor programmme

Policy Commitment

There is a broad agreement amongst European stakeholders and policy makers that digital leadership and entrepreneurship will be key policy topics in Europe over the coming years especially in the context of post-Covid recovery period.

Activities and initiatives are only slowly emerging at national level. First examples and best practice cases have been identified and are showcased on different European Commission web portals. National policy makers and stakeholders now need to become more active and show a strong commitment, implement necessary infrastructures and initiatives and operate these in each Member State so these topics can be anchored in national policies.

Policy commitment

- National policy makers and stakeholders to demonstrate commitment towards Digital transformation and digital entrepreneurship and scale up their efforts in a longer-term perspective

- National funds and programs to be specifically oriented towards promotion of financial and entrepreneurial skills required, including those for innovation leadership

- EU Member States to consider using European structural and investment funds, i.e. the European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund, to invest in training and lifelong learning projects helping individuals to make their first steps into economic life

- National governments and stakeholders to implement rapidly best practice experiences in making best use of such funds from highly successful projects

Catalogue of other sources of training

Online Resources

Open up Entrepreneurship (OpEN project)

https://www.openup-project.eu/index.php

Open up Entrepreneurship (OpEN) project fills the identified knowledge gap where existing and prospective entrepreneurs seek for business solutions into the digital technologies but lack the necessary skills and capabilities to exploit the vast potential of e-business models in the global market.

The main result & Intellectual Output of OpEn project is an open multilingual (English, Greek, Italian and Spanish) online course of 32 hours total duration, which is constructed from three Thematic Units as follows:

- o Business Development
- o Personal Development
- o Digital Development

This course is available via the special link of the e-learning platform: http://openup.upatras.gr/modules/auth/newuser.php

For the implementation of this main result, the production of two other previous Intellectual Outputs was required:

- o **Skill profile identification and Module Outline,** which includes the identification of the demanded digital & e-business skills for those who want to act within the digital economy and global market.
- o **E-module design and service set-up,** which includes at the beginning a review of state of the art of pedagogies and best practices for entrepreneurial online education. Then, based on this background, a design and implementation methodology of OpEn multilingual online course follows.

Framework for Innovation Competencies Development and Assessment (FINCODA)

http://www.fincoda.eu/

The **FINCODA** project was born out of the acknowledgment that **innovation** is vital to both the business and academic environments. It is a critical component for success in many modern-day organisations. A lack or absence of innovation could lead to a drought of creativity, an absence of new ideas, and a failure to see how 'good' can be turned into 'great'.

At the core of this project is the development of the FINCODA Innovation Barometer Assessment Tool. This is a psychometric tool that measures individuals' capacity for innovation.

It breaks innovation into 5 core areas and assesses the individual's capacity in each of these areas separately.

The research underpinning this tool has been conducted by the FINCODA partnership who brings together both the academic and industry innovation expertise from across Europe.

SME GAP (Growing Apprenticeship Partnerships for SMEs)
http://www.sme-gap.eu/are-you-ready

Over 2 years, partners in Manchester (UK), Vienna (Austria) and Cordoba (Spain) have been working together to better understand the needs of Small & Medium Sized Enterprises and holding events to encourage greater take up of apprenticeship provision.

Whilst apprenticeship systems vary to some extent across Europe, all businesses have the same needs and often face confusion about the national system. This is compounded by a lack of understanding of the benefits of hiring an apprentice, with many businesses often noticing only the 'cost'.

The website brings together a range of resources aimed at SMEs and also encourages Business Support Organisations (Intermediary Organisations) to provide consistent and clear messages to businesses.

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