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Project Findings

DECO - ENTER4FUTURE

**Developing need-based entrepreneurial competences and
showing opportunities in entrepreneurship**

**Activating potentials for sustainable economic
development in rural regions**

Project period: 01/10/2024 - 31/12/2025

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Explore how the project strengthened entrepreneurial skills among rural VET learners through practical training, supporting sustainable regional development.

Strengthening Rural Entrepreneurship through VET

The project was conceived as an initiative to strengthen the role of VET learners in shaping the future of rural entrepreneurship across Europe. In a context marked by demographic decline, skills shortages, and limited access to innovation ecosystems, rural regions require new, locally rooted approaches to economic development. Supporting VET learners in developing entrepreneurial competences is therefore essential for fostering long-term sustainability.

The project explored how VET learners, particularly those with fewer opportunities, can be empowered to recognise local potential and contribute to regional development.

A Collaborative European Approach

To achieve these aims, the project combined qualitative research, collaborative design processes, and hands-on training activities to develop a shared European approach to entrepreneurship education. Partner organisations from Germany, Lithuania, Italy, and Portugal jointly examined how entrepreneurship is perceived by VET learners, which barriers limit engagement, and which competences are needed to foster an entrepreneurial mindset. The project adopted a qualitative, learner-centred approach, with insights from interviews and exchanges directly shaping the development of practical and context-sensitive educational materials.

Focus on Inclusion and Gender Equality

The project promoted inclusion and gender equality through inclusive teaching approaches, the visibility of female role models, and targeted recommendations. Highlighting women entrepreneurs, particularly in male-dominated sectors, proved highly effective in challenging stereotypes and inspiring learners, especially young women, to consider entrepreneurial pathways.

Target Groups and Stakeholder Involvement

The primary target group consisted of VET learners, many of whom had limited prior exposure to entrepreneurship education, as well as learners with fewer opportunities due to social, economic, or geographical constraints. Beyond learners, the project actively engaged VET institutions, teachers, trainers, entrepreneurs, business professionals, and local stakeholders. This broad involvement ensured that the project outcomes were grounded in real educational and labour market contexts and contributed to strengthening learners' employability and entrepreneurial competences.

Key Findings and Lessons Learned

The central output of the collaboration between partners was the development of a Training Guide, which translated research findings into a practical and accessible educational tool. The guide was subsequently tested in real learning environments through workshops and networking events in all partner countries. These activities enabled learners to engage with entrepreneurship in a hands-on manner while establishing direct links between VET and local entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Project feedback highlighted the importance of adapting entrepreneurship education to learners at different stages of their educational journey. Participants in job-preparation courses benefited most from activities focused on basic entrepreneurial awareness, financial literacy and soft-skill development, while more advanced VET learners responded positively to modules on financial planning, sustainability-oriented business models, and practical business development. The evaluations also confirmed the strong impact of female role models on learners' perceptions of entrepreneurship. Seeing women succeed in entrepreneurial roles helped broaden learners' understanding of who can become an entrepreneur and supported more inclusive participation.

Strengthening Local Ecosystems through Collaboration

A central insight from the project is the importance of close cooperation between VET providers, local businesses, and community actors. Entrepreneurship education requires exposure to real challenges, hands-on problem-solving, and interaction with practitioners.

Workshops, business simulations, and networking sessions allowed learners to experience entrepreneurship as a practical process rather than a purely theoretical concept. By engaging directly with local entrepreneurs and understanding regional challenges and opportunities, learners were encouraged to explore sustainable development pathways within their own communities, thereby reinforcing both local economic resilience and individual motivation.

Visit <https://www.mmt-academics.de/ERASMUS-PROJEKTE/DECO/> for more on the DECO-ENTER4FUTURE project and to access its educational materials.

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