Erasmus+ ICT Literacy project description

The 2016 EU Council Resolution on A New Skills Agenda for an Inclusive and Competitive Europe reflects a common vision about the role of skills. Skills are a pathway to employability and prosperity. With the right skills, people are better equipped to find good-quality jobs and can fulfil their potential as confident, active citizens.

The development of key competences in a lifelong learning perspective becomes essential and support should be ensured at all levels of education, training and learning pathways including up-skilling pathways to those affected by unemployment and age. Thus digital competence as the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, is essential for people to fulfil their potential both at work and in society.

According to the New skills Agenda in 2014, 40% of the EU population had no or low digital skills sums up to 169 million Europeans between 16 and 74 years. This is indicative of a real potential digital divide if action is not taken swiftly. This group of "digitally excluded" persons is largely made up of people aged 45 to 74 years old, people on low incomes, the unemployed and the less educated. A significant part of this group resides in rural areas where digital technology infrastructure and access to it is restricted.

This situation is negatively affecting the economic prospects of rural areas as their businesses cannot compete in a highly competitive environment where digital accessibility is an essential element. People lacking digital competences are becoming less qualified and facing the danger to become unemployed with all the negative consequences to their personal and social life. Unemployment leads consequently to further enhancement of urbanization and to the deprivation of the respective communities. There are also significant negative effects concerning the social life as digital exclusion in conjunction with unemployment could lead to social exclusion, loneliness and increased risk for depression, especially for older people.

This project is directed towards tackling the digital literacy gap of the aforementioned group residing in rural areas in different parts of Europe in order to contribute to more digitally included communities with equal opportunities and access for every citizen.

The aims of the project are the following:

i. Developing the digital and media competences of the target group consisted of 200 low-skilled/low-qualified unemployed adults 40+ years of age and senior citizens residing in rural areas in Troodos mountainous area in Cyprus and …

ii. Enhancing the knowledge of 50 adult learning educators, VET providers, recruiters representing relevant authorities and organizations working with lower skilled/low-qualified unemployed and/or senior citizens and equipping them with a new approach & tools on ICT education.

iii. Developing sustainable digital tools and e-services for supporting ICT literacy in rural areas

iv. Drafting policy recommendations for regional and national authorities for better connected and digitally accessible rural communities.

The proposed objectives set to fulfill the above are:

a.   A needs assessment study to identify the needs of the communities in rural areas regarding ICT education and tailor the materials to the local context

b.   Development of an innovative training toolkit for educators designed to address the needs of the target group

c.   Trainings for educators in the respective partner areas for testing and assessing the draft toolkit (multiplier event)

d.   Organisation of a series of training courses on digital competences for target groups in the respective partner areas (Duration:100 hours)

e.   Establishment of innovative digital help centers (Helpline – ICT guidance) through an online platform specially designed according to the needs of the target group.

f.   Drafting of policy recommendations for enhancing digital accessibility in the respective rural areas through all day conferences in the respective areas which will gather together representatives of relevant stakeholders, local and regional authorities, public bodies, educational organizations and NGOs

The expected outputs of the project will be a needs assessment study based on the analysis of the responses collected by the people residing in rural areas and will be used as basis for the development of the training toolkit which will be the second output of the project. The toolkit will comprises a set of guidelines, innovative tools and activities that will help the educators to design and implement effective lesson plans and educational activities based on the needs of the target group. Another innovative output will be the development of an online platform that would serve as a digital helpline- guide on digital literacy where every citizen residing in rural areas and other citizens who need to attain basic digital skills and competences will have the opportunity to do it through an effective, easy and interactive way.

The expected outcomes consist of 3 trainings for educators in the respective rural areas where they will enhance their knowledge on the subject, explore innovative ways to work with the learners and will be given the opportunity to test and evaluate the tools and methods included in the educational toolkit. A great part of the project will be dedicated to a series of on the spot courses in the 3 respective areas of 100 hours which will be attended by 200 learners. Finally 3 conferences will be organised in the respective areas with the aim to disseminate the results of the project and in parallel to daft policy recommendations on how to safeguard a better connected and digitally accessible rural communities. Moreover it is expected to see an increased awareness within the local population of the respective areas of the need to adapt to a digitalized society and a positive shift towards digital competences within the local communities which will eventually lead to a narrowing of the existing gap. It is also foreseen to motivate local and regional authorities to work harder in order to eliminate all the obstacles towards an unrestricted accessibility to digital tools and services to people residing in rural areas.