

# RESTART: Resilience and Training for SMEs

## Mainstreaming Guidelines

### Findings from the trainings developed and conducted by the RESTART Project Partners

#### Introduction

This document, RESTART Mainstreaming Guidelines summarises the experiences, points out the commonalities and **provides mainstreaming guidelines** for future use of the RESTART training materials in order to ensure optimal and ongoing use of the knowledge created in the framework of the RESTART project and maximise its impact on European MSME development, in the partner countries and beyond.

The RESTART project aims to support MSME development by providing – after adequate background research and analysis – training materials available online in several different topics relevant in the post-COVID era, to be used not only by existing MSME leaders and staff but very importantly by the VET training system, preparing future MSME founders and employees understanding key phenomena and adapting to the constantly changing environment.

The key topics elaborated include innovation, servitization, localization, new business models for MSMEs, as well as digitalization, cybersecurity and sustainability trainings. Last but not least, a lesson on emotional intelligence is also provided in order to help MSMEs improve their internal HR structures, communication with staff and clientele and also support MSME leaders in fighting the challenges of not only the post-pandemic socio-economic environment but increase their capacity to cope.

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## List of Abbreviations

AI: Artificial Intelligence

COVID-19: the Coronavirus disease of 2019

COSME: Competitiveness of SMEs Programme

EEN: Enterprise Europe Network

EIC: European Innovation Council

ES: Spain

EU: European Union

EUR: Euro

EU27: The countries being members of the European Union since 2020 (post-Brexit)

FMUK: Faculty of Management at the Comenius University (Univerzita Komenskeho v Bratislave) (Slovak Partner)

GAP: Green Action Plan

GDP: Gross domestic product

GERD: Gross domestic expenditure on R&D

HETFA: Hétfa Kutatointezet Kft (Hétfa Research Institute) (Hungarian Partner)

HGC: High growth companies

HU: Hungary

IDP: IDP Sas di Giancarlo Costantino (Italian Development Partners) (Italian Partner)

IHF: Institut de Haute Formation aux Politiques Communautaires (Belgian Partner)

IT: Italy

IWS: Internet Web Solutions SL (Spanish Partner)

ML: Machine learning

MSME: Micro, Small and medium-sized enterprise(s)

NACE: Statistical classification of economic activities in the European Community used for identifying various industrial branches (among others)

OER: Open Educational Resources

R&D: Research and development

R&D&I: Research, development and innovation



RRF: Recovery and Resilience Facility for mitigation the impact of COVID-19

RRP: Recovery and Resilience Plan for mitigation the impact of COVID-19

SME: Small and medium-sized enterprise(s)

SBA: Slovak Business Agency (SK Project Coordinator)

SBA (policy context): Small Business Act (of the European Union)

STEP RI: STEP RI Science and technology park of the University of Rijeka (Croatian partner)

UCF: University of Customs and Finance, Ukraine

VET: Vocational Education & Training System

## 1. Key features of the RESTART training

This document provides guidelines regarding the usage and mainstreaming of:

- a.) the various training materials prepared in the framework of the RESTART project,
- b.) the online platform that caters the needs of online learners.

The guidelines gathered here support the wide variety of potentials of use and learning based on the RESTART materials and the maximalisation of impact generated for the MSMEs and the VET ecosystem not only in the countries represented within the project but also on the European level.

As described in the Introduction of this report, the main goal is to help MSMEs, entrepreneur-to-be-s and potential employees to better understand the challenges that characterize the 21<sup>st</sup> century, post-pandemic business environment with several challenges, potential shocks and permanent crises. In order to deliver available, easy-to-grasp yet relevant and up-to-date information and knowledge on their doorsteps, the RESTART project has developed several training modules and an online, user-friendly training platform <https://www.restartproject.eu/training.php>.

There were four main issues identified at the beginning of the project to cover and to explore:

- Innovation & Servitization
- Digital Transformation
- Localization
- Sustainability

These main issues were broken down into 7 themes and training topics:

- Module 1 - Digitalization & Online Learning
- Module 2 - Innovation and exploiting opportunities for MSMEs
- Module 3 – Cybersecurity in the (home) office
- Module 4 - Business model innovation, localization and resilience
- Module 5 - Sustainable, social, and green entrepreneurship
- Module 6 – Servitization – transforming products into services
- Module 7 - Emotional intelligence and well-being in the business context

These are presented on the online RESTART learning platform in English as well as in national languages of the partnership:

- Croatian
- Italian
- Hungarian
- Slovakian
- Spanish

## 2. The RESTART modules and the online platform

The online platform goes beyond the mere presentation of the training modules.

- It introduces the project itself, describing its main aims and the challenges that initiated the creation of the initiative in the first place.
- the partners, allowing the interested visitors to connect with the project partners who are all well-established experts and umbrella organizations in entrepreneurship education and VET ecosystems. This “one stop shop” can be a useful tool for MSMEs in these countries to get connected to other projects, initiatives and knowledge hubs.
- There is also a Community building opportunity offered by the website
- Furthermore, a Glossary and a Frequently Asked Questions menu is available as well
- The website also publishes all other project results and publications prepared
- The News segment allows for visitors to be up to date
- Finally, the training modules are available with all their annexes and details.

The content of the courses are, as described on the website:

### 2.1. Cybersecurity in the (home) office

Most European MSMEs see cybersecurity as a key business concern. However, in a post-pandemic context, not all companies have implemented new security measures to fight risks arising from remote working due to lack of awareness and lack of cybersecurity skills. This module will enable MSME staff and entrepreneurs to improve their cybersecurity skills and knowledge in order to increase their digital skills and cyber resilience.

### 2.2. Servitization – transforming products into services

Servitization is a business innovation process of transforming product-based business into a service-based one by developing a product-service system, allowing entrepreneurs to better adapt their solution to the needs of the customer and improve their business. In this module, you can learn how to improve business with implementing servitization. You will be introduced with the Things+ Service innovation Methodology, which is specifically tailored to help micro, small and medium product-based enterprises with designing and implementing innovative services.

### 2.3. Innovation and exploiting opportunities

This training program is divided into three units to help you understand the fundamentals of innovation, creativity and critical thinking, and how to apply these concepts in your business. In Unit 1, you will learn what innovation is and gain a deeper understanding of key concepts. Unit 2 will focus on the importance of creativity and critical thinking, including an overview of the concepts and practical ways to implement them in your organization. Finally, Unit 3 will provide recommendations on how to take

advantage of social and green innovation and how to gain benefits from creativity and critical thinking in your business.

#### 2.4. Emotional intelligence and well-being in the business context

This training module covers the concepts of emotional intelligence and well-being, exploring their definitions, key components and the relationship between them. Unit 2 focuses on developing emotional intelligence skills for entrepreneurs, while Unit 3 explores ways to enhance well-being in a business context and provides recommendations for entrepreneurs. The goal is to understand the importance of both emotional intelligence and well-being for personal and professional success.

#### 2.5. Sustainable, social and green entrepreneurship

Sustainability in business refers to doing business without negatively impacting the environment, community, or society thus reflecting the mutual effect of its three components (business, environment, and society). An example of the concept in terms of social sustainability is Social enterprises, which can operate in any field and generate profit as any other business. However, their profit is reinvested and fulfils a clear social mission that positively impacts a community. In the field of active environmental protection and minimization of negative impacts on nature, we are referring to Green entrepreneurship, which represents a huge business opportunity for the decarbonized world by 2050.

#### 2.6. Digitalization & Online Learning

In this module, you will learn what digitalization is, how it reshapes entrepreneurial opportunities, its drivers, benefits and operational implications for MSMEs. A separate section focuses on digital communication channels that can be implemented within internal and external communications. Collaboration, project management, document storage and sharing tools that are presented afterwards will undoubtedly help you increase work efficiency. The second unit focuses on online learning, where you will get to know the most widespread online learning platforms and get tips on specific training courses that are related to the RESTART curriculum.

#### 2.7. Business models for MSMEs in the post-COVID era

This training module describes what business model means, explains the nature of traditional and 21st century business models and provides tool for building your own business model.

#### 2.8. The elements and features of the trainings on the platform

The trainings are available for individual learning, and each module is self-explanatory, understandable without the support of the other modules (although there are interlinkages noted where appropriate). This helps the individual learners to design their own learning path, taken into account their own personal interests, carrier goals and levels of development. It is not compulsory to go through each module to take part in the training.

It is also possible, furthermore, strongly recommended, that the training materials are used in a more formal/organised training setting, with a trainer, mentor helping students to navigate and provide further

answers to questions. Nevertheless, the trainings included a self-check test for evaluation of lessons learnt and a Google-based feedback form for learners to be filled out.

The training materials are available in various formats:

- There is a teaser included, to provide a short overview of the content of the module. This is available in video format
- The training materials are available in ppt and doc format as well
- The self-check tests are included within the training materials themselves
- The feedback form is closely positioned, easy to fill out
- Each training module is accompanied by case studies and further explanatory materials to support the better understanding of the key messages and their application in everyday life.

### **3. Guidelines for RESTART trainings delivery – lessons learnt**

#### **3.1. Target group reach**

Target groups such as Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers, MSME policy practitioners, ecosystem actors, entrepreneurs, future entrepreneurs, potential employees, and especially inclusive of disadvantaged groups, play a critical role in MSME training initiatives.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers and MSME policy practitioners are crucial in shaping and delivering effective training programs. Their expertise and insight into industry trends, policy landscapes, and educational methodologies ensure the relevance and practicality of the training content. Incorporating their feedback and leveraging their experience enhances the quality of training programs, making them more attuned to the real-world needs and challenges of the MSME sector.

Entrepreneurs and various ecosystem actors, such as incubators and accelerators, bring invaluable practical knowledge and innovative perspectives to the table. Their involvement ensures that the training programs are grounded in entrepreneurial reality and are reflective of the dynamics and diversity inherent in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. For prospective and current entrepreneurs, access to tailored, relevant training resources is crucial. It empowers them with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the complex, ever-evolving business landscape, fostering innovation, resilience, and sustainable growth.

Prioritizing inclusivity of disadvantaged groups within MSME training is paramount. These include individuals who may be marginalized due to socio-economic, racial, gender-based, or other systemic barriers. Creating an inclusive learning environment and providing tailored support ensure equitable access to learning opportunities, enabling these individuals to overcome barriers and fully participate in entrepreneurial endeavors. Addressing the unique needs and challenges faced by disadvantaged groups not only fosters diversity and equality within the entrepreneurial ecosystem but also unlocks untapped potential, contributing to the overall development and resilience of the MSME sector.

Therefore, a multifaceted approach to MSME training that is inclusive of diverse target groups and considers the insights and needs of each, serves to enrich the learning environment, enhance the relevance and impact of the training programs, and foster a more inclusive, equitable, and dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem.

### 3.2. Training Modalities

When determining the most effective mode of training delivery—face-to-face, blended, or fully digital—several factors must be considered. The decision largely depends on the demographics of the participants, the resources available, and the content of the training. A blended approach, which combines face-to-face interaction with digital learning, appears to be a balanced solution, allowing for both personal interaction and flexibility in learning. However, fully digital platforms offer greater accessibility, especially in the current context of global pandemics and logistical restrictions. Further efforts to increase impact may include in further project collaboration mentoring mechanisms and more peer-to-peer learning.

### 3.3. Classroom Size

The size of the classroom plays a pivotal role in training delivery. Smaller groups facilitate more personalized interactions and tailored support, fostering a conducive learning environment. Larger groups, while economically efficient, may not allow for individualized attention and may inhibit participation from quieter attendees. A middle ground is optimal where group interactions and personalized learning can coexist.

### 3.4. Diversity & Inclusion

Diversity and inclusion are fundamental to create an enriching learning environment. Training programs must be designed with a universal approach, considering gender, age, migration background, occupational profiles, and other demographic factors. A heterogeneous group fosters a richer learning environment, enabling the exchange of varied perspectives and experiences. It is essential to ensure that the training is accessible and inclusive, catering to the diverse needs and preferences of the participants and eliminating any barriers to participation.

Important to note that the training has been tested on a very diverse set of participants, coming from metropolitan and international areas as well as from small, rural settlements, from all ages and different backgrounds. The training validation also included vulnerable groups such as a set of participants from Ukraine, with success, therefore trainers shall not hesitate to include more diverse communities into the trainings.

### 3.5. Environmental Consideration

Green delivery refers to the incorporation of environmentally friendly practices within the training delivery process. Digital and blended learning methods naturally align with this objective, reducing the need for physical resources and travel, thereby minimizing the carbon footprint. Additionally, incorporating sustainability principles within the curriculum reinforces the importance of ecological responsibility among participants.

### 3.6. Instructional Materials

The use of training handouts and teachers' notes is crucial for reinforcing learning outcomes. They serve as reference material for participants to revisit and consolidate their understanding post-session. However, the format of these materials must be user-friendly and engaging. Digital handouts are preferable, offering accessibility and convenience while aligning with environmental conservation efforts.

### 3.7. Validation of Learning Outcomes

Validation of learning outcomes is essential to ensure the effectiveness of the training program. Regular assessments, feedback loops, and evaluations should be incorporated to gauge participants' understanding and to refine the curriculum based on the evolving needs and preferences of the learners. Constructive feedback and reflective practices are instrumental in ensuring continuous improvement and relevance of the training materials.

### 3.8. Tailoring to Specific Needs

When applying these guidelines, it is crucial to tailor them to the specific circumstances and needs of the participants. The diversity in professional roles, sectors, seniority levels, and other demographic factors necessitates a flexible and adaptive approach to training delivery. For instance, managers might prefer strategic overviews and case studies, while administrative staff might benefit more from practical, hands-on exercises.

### 3.9. Conclusion

In essence, MSME training delivery requires a meticulous, adaptive, and inclusive approach. A blended training modality, mid-sized classrooms, diversity in participant demographics, ecologically responsible delivery, accessible instructional materials, and validated learning outcomes constitute the optimal environment for MSME training. However, the precise application of these guidelines must be nuanced, taking into account the unique context, needs, and preferences of the participants, ensuring that the training is not only informative and engaging but also inclusive, relevant, and impactful.