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IO2: Mobile and online interactive platform for building the digital competence of low-skilled/low-qualified unemployed persons

Task 2.2: Pilot implementation of digital skills building

COMMON PILOTING REPORT

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1. Introduction

This Common Piloting Report has been developed in the framework of the European project LINK-UPS: Social Media for Upskilling Unemployed and Low Skilled Adult Workers for Digital Society (2018-1-PT01-KA204-047429), co-funded by the Erasmus + Programme, KA2 – Strategic Partnerships for Adult Education.

The LINK-UPS project aims, on the one hand, at developing the digital and media skills of low-qualified/low-skilled unemployed people, mainly over 45, through innovative tools with the final purpose of motivating and preparing them to build a strong professional identity to reinforce their access to employment. On the other hand, it aims at increasing the knowledge of employment/career counsellors and other relevant professionals and organisations working with low-skilled/low-qualified adults and endowing them with a new approach/tools for supporting and interacting with middle-aged persons through social media. The first goal was supposed to be achieved through the use of the innovative tools produced. The second goal was supposed to be accomplished by means of disseminating and promoting the uptake of the approach and tools among the professionals.

Thus, after developing the digital skills-building framework, the learning outcomes, the training content, the interactive platform, the mobile app and the online self-assessment tool, the LINK-UPS partners have carried out the pilot implementation of digital skills building, one might as well say, the pilot testing of the interactive platform, its resources and tools, within the scope of O2 - Mobile and online interactive platform for building the digital competence of low-skilled/low-qualified unemployed persons.

This report summarizes the findings and results of the pilot implementation process undertaken in each partner country (Portugal, Bulgaria, Spain, Italy and Turkey) within task 2.2 - Pilot implementation of digital skills building of O2, whose purpose was to test and prove the viability and scalability of LINK-UPS interactive platform, its resources and tools while empowering low-skilled/low-qualified unemployed persons, in particular over 45, to build their digital competence in a way that it will promote their access to employment.

More in concrete, this report includes aggregate data acquired by the combination of the data collected from the National Reports delivered by each partner, enabling LINK-UPS consortium to validate the approach, identifying the strengths and weaknesses, managing the constraints and risks, and identifying the improvement opportunities.

Concerning its structure, in the first section, the report describes the context of the pilot implementation of digital skills building; in the second section, the report describes the group of participants; the third section presents the evolution of the level of digital skills and competence of the participants as registered by the assessment tool, as well as the



feedback from the facilitators/trainers at the end of the learning process; in the fourth section, the report presents the analysis of the participants' feedback regarding the e-learning platform, the modules, the e-learning experience, as well as their comments and suggestions for improvement; at last, the fifth section presents the summary of the main conclusions drawn up from the overall analysis of the pilot implementation process.

2. Pilot Implementation Context

According to the initial Gantt chart and action plan of the LINK-UPS project, the pilot implementation of digital skills building was supposed to be held between October 2019 and August 2020. In fact, it has started in October 2019 in controlled trial mode to fine-tune the platform and its functionalities, i.e., to make small necessary modifications and improvements before piloting with participants. In February 2020, after this internal trial phase, the LINK-UPS consortium decided to start the pilot implementation with the adult participants. Ege University, from Turkey, was the partner to take the first step in initiating the piloting.

The first clusters of COVID-19 cases were reported in the partner countries between the end of February/beginning of March 2020. Since then, partner countries have experienced a pandemic of COVID-19. Therefore, at the different national levels, the pilot implementation of digital skills building was a multi-stage flexible process that faced the various challenges of the pandemic. In fact, due to the public health measures taken by the national authorities based on the continuous assessment of COVID-19 risks, all the partners had to permanently adapt the pilot plan, adopting different approaches and procedures, which have enriched the overall experience.

Advised time management conducted to extend project pilot activities – and therefore the project lifetime in 4 months - in order to duly complete pilot implementation, efficiently gather all the national feedback on the platform, its resources and tools, and proceed with their revision and adaptation, if necessary, and finally proceed with its effective dissemination.

Therefore, the pilot implementation with the participants took place between February and December 2020 in the five partner countries, although at different speeds, with different durations, and organised in different ways. But always with the same purpose: to test (and validate) the approach, interactive platform, resources and tools in the best way possible, given the different national contexts, considering that the pilot implementation would be a potentially valuable insight to improve the chances of future uptake by relevant stakeholders.

In general, the pilot implementation involved an initial workshop to introduce the participants to the platform and its basic functionalities, online training in self-guided



learning mode oriented by trainers/facilitators, and a post-training workshop after having completed the pilot online training to assess the outcomes, provide participants with feedback, and also assess their readiness to implement the topics of training, as well as their views and level of satisfaction towards the platform and experience.

These workshops and online training with the support of the facilitators/trainers adopted the mode and took the time required and deemed necessary by each partner, according to the concrete pandemic reality and the level of difficulties of the participants, which were naturally the major obstacle to overtake in the online environment. This was a joint decision of LINK-UPS partners, which understood that just by strengthening the support availability was possible to successfully complete the pilot implementation of the digital skills building.

Therefore, the online training in self-guided learning mode oriented by trainers/facilitators between workshops was greatly reinforced due to the pandemic and the imperative need for online activities for a long period. Assistance for the explanation of doubts and exercise solving, supporting information and delivery of complementary learning materials were the type of support given by the facilitators/trainers. Project partners used individual and group support approaches and different types of instructional methods depending on the concrete circumstances: face-to-face learning, online learning and blended learning.

Participants have carried out pre-assessment to measure the level of digital proficiency at the initial stage of the piloting, and post-assessment to measure the level of digital proficiency that has been obtained.

3. Participants

The LINK-UPS project foresaw that each partner would select at least 25 low-skilled/low-qualified unemployed persons, mainly over 45, 150 participants in total. This meant the following geographical distribution among the project consortium: 25 participants from Bulgaria, 25 participants from Italy, 25 participants from Spain, 25 participants from Turkey and 50 participants from Portugal.

In order to recruit adult participants for the pilot implementation of digital skills building, each partner launched a call for eligible participants through different channels: internal and external communication, local networks, associated partners and institutions (which included public employment services), and local and social media.

The selection of the eligible candidates that took part in the pilot was based on a set of selection criteria determined during the project preparatory phase – namely motivation and commitment -, as well as on structured interviews with candidates, seeking to avoid unhelpful participants and timewasters. Some demographic eligibility criteria were set,



namely regarding age, gender and educational level: LINK-UPS partners have decided that at least half of the participants should have over 45, that most of them should be women, and that EQF level 3 should be the maximum qualification level acceptable within the candidates. Thus, the level range would include all possible compulsory educations within the LINK-UPS consortium considering the age ranges of the candidates and their school time. The status of unemployed was a pre-condition as well. No digital skills were required.

Despite the pandemic situation that affected the entire period of the pilot implementation, the LINK-UPS consortium managed to carry out the experimentation with 190 participants, from which 38% were men and 68% were women, as shown in chart 1.

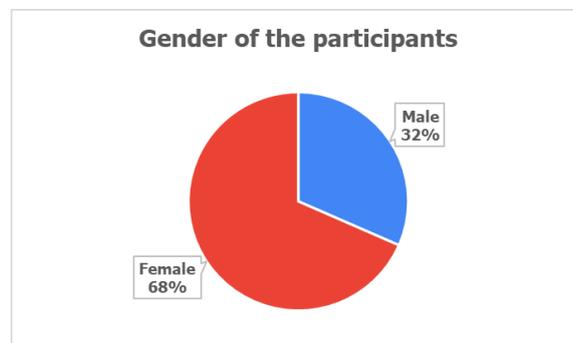


Chart 1

In fact, during the desk research carried out by the partnership during IO1-Methodological framework for the building of digital skills through social media for low-skilled/low-qualified unemployed persons, one of the findings concerning the level of digital skills was that women are the ones who present the lowest rates of basic digital skills in all project countries. This was the reason for the gender criterion, i.e., that most of the participants should be women. In concrete, there was a strong predominance of female participants in Bulgaria, Spain and Turkey.

Concerning the age criterion, 85% of the participants were over 45 years old, exceeding what was expected (see chart 2). This was a great opportunity to support those adults who have fewer digital skills, as the level of e-skills is generally inversely proportional to age: it decreases when age increases. This was one of the findings of desk research carried out by the partnership during IO1.

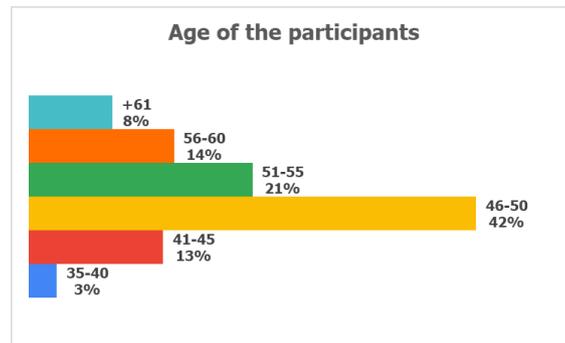


Chart 2

The education level criterion was duly fulfilled as well. This was important as education level also is a key factor for the acquisition of digital skills, according to the findings of the desk research carried out during IO1: the level of e-skills generally increases, so does the formal education level among individuals. Most participants just have completed compulsory education at their school time (chart 3), so they were low-qualified. The others are even less qualified.

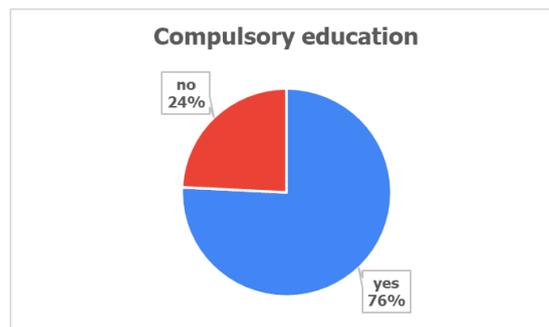


Chart 3

In particular, one must refer that all the participants from Bulgaria, Italy and Turkey had completed compulsory education, while participants from Spain and Portugal were distributed within those having completed compulsory education at their school time and those who did not.

4. Assessment Results and Facilitators' Feedback

Within the LINK-UPS consortium, about 20 facilitators/trainers, i.e., professionals working with low-skilled/low-qualified adults, have participated in the pilot implementation of digital skills building, supporting and enhancing the learning process.

As mentioned before, the pilot implementation involved an initial workshop to introduce the participants to the platform and its basic functionalities, online training in self-guided learning mode oriented by trainers/facilitators, and a post-training workshop after having completed the pilot online training to assess the outcomes, provide them with feedback,



and also assess the participants' readiness to implement the topics of training, as well as their views and level of satisfaction towards the platform and experience.

In concrete, the role of these facilitators/trainers was to deliver the initial and post-training workshops, as well as to orientate the adult learners by giving guidelines, feedback and advice throughout the learning process, in addition to assisting the development of knowledge and competences. The support intervention of the facilitators/trainers was greatly reinforced due to the pandemic and subsequent need for individual support activities without physical presence.

Duly oriented by the facilitators/trainers, the participants have carried out pre-assessment to measure the level of digital proficiency at the initial stage of the piloting, and post-assessment to measure the level of digital proficiency that has been obtained. The pre-assessment questionnaire was composed of 25 questions. The post-assessment questionnaire was composed of 20 questions. A good level of digital literacy would be reached by each participant after 15 correct answers. The assessment could be repeated according to the participants' willingness and progress.

The overall results have shown a positive evolution in the level of digital proficiency of the adult participants (charts 4 and 5). In concrete, the participants have started with few digital skills and, although having progressed at a different pace, all of them have attained a good level of digital proficiency.

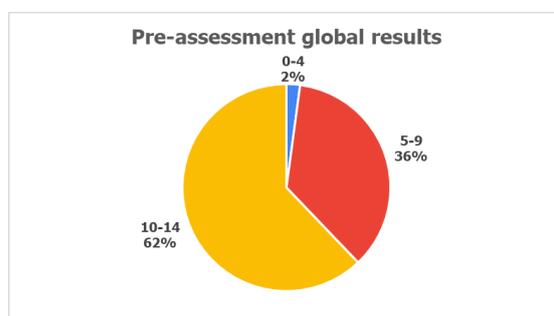


Chart 4

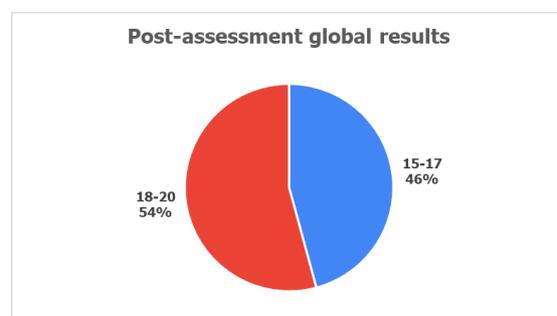


Chart 5

These assessment results were validated into substance by the facilitators/trainers, which reported that the participants acquired a great deal of knowledge and developed new competences throughout the learning process that will be important for their employability and participation in society. According to the information gathered from these professionals, these are the main learning outcomes achieved by the participants at the end of the learning process:

- Understand and adapt themselves to changing online career contexts and learn how to use new social media technologies for career development.
- Source, manage and retrieve career information and resources via social media.



- Understand the nature of social media career information and resources, and consider its usefulness for a career.
- Build relationships and networks (be linked) through social media which can support career development.
- Interact effectively over different platforms/media, understand the genre and netiquette of different interactions, and use them for career development.
- Create online content that successfully represents the individual, their interests and their career history.
- Reflect on and develop their digital footprint and online networks as part of their career building.

5. Participants' Feedback

After the total completion of the experimentation, the participants answered an evaluation form/follow-up survey about the LINK-UPS e-learning platform, which overall results are presented below.

5.1 E-learning Platform

The participants in the pilot implementation had the chance to evaluate the interactive platform for building digital competences. As planned, the platform included online training courses, guidelines and learning resources materials. Overall, 11 features regarding the e-learning platform were assessed.

As it can be observed in charts 6, 7 and 8, the participants considered overwhelmingly the platform as **accessible for all, easy to access and register in**. The average results of the 3 charts show that 54% of the participants considered it very good, 29% considered it good and 14% satisfactory.

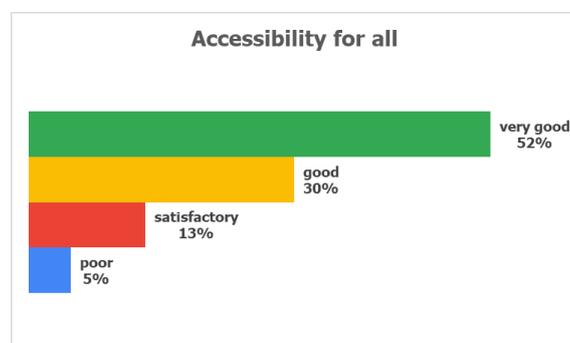


Chart 6

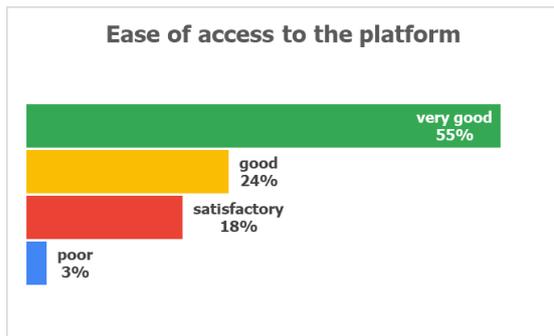


Chart 7

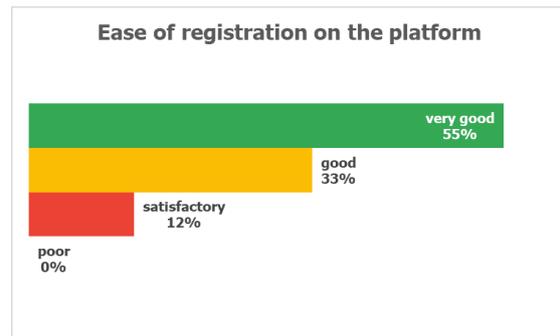


Chart 8

Regarding the **visual design** (chart 9), participants considered it as globally good, with 51% considering it very good.

The same occurred concerning the **simplicity and clarity of the course structure** (chart 10), in which 52% of the participants considered it very good, 32% considered it good and 14% satisfactory.

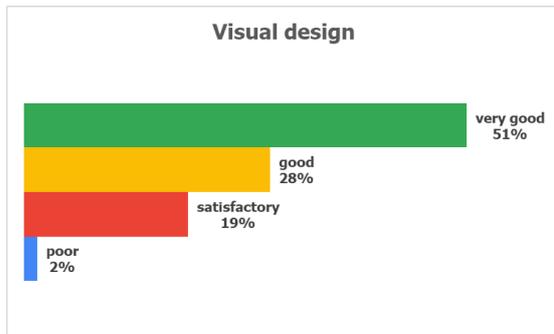


Chart 9

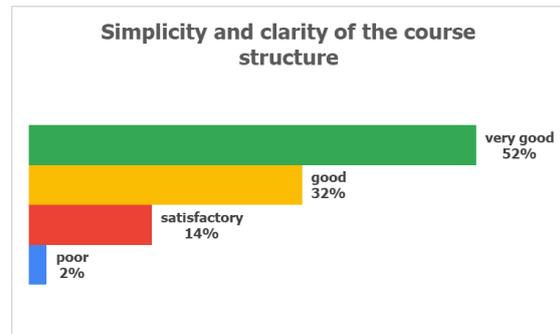


Chart 10

The participants found, in general, the **clarity of course objectives** (chart 11) very good (54%), 30% found it good and 14% satisfactory.

The same occurred with the **adequacy of activities and resources for self-learning** (chart 12) with the majority of the participants (52%) considering it very good, 27% good and 20% satisfactory.

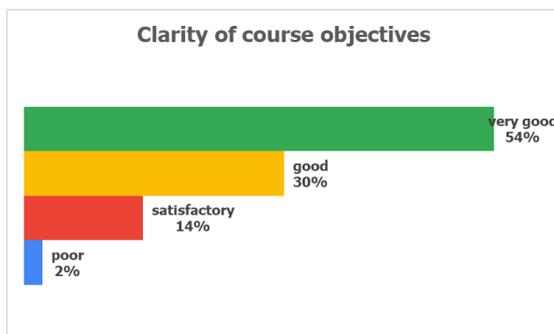


Chart 11

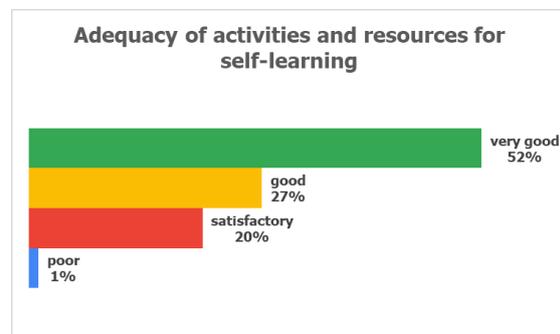


Chart 12



The **functionality of the communication/chatbox** (chart 13) was considered globally positive with 48% of participants considering it very good, 37% good and 13% satisfactory.

Concerning the **feedback/assessment provision** (chart 14) once again most of the participants considered it very good (52%), 36% considered it good and 10% satisfactory.

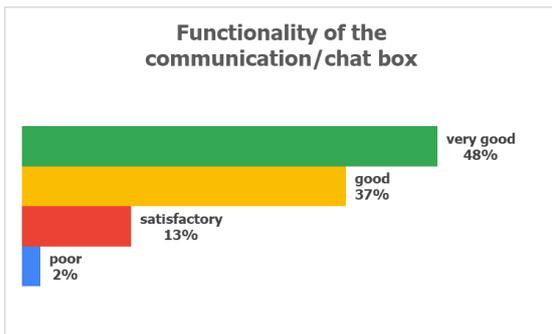


Chart 13

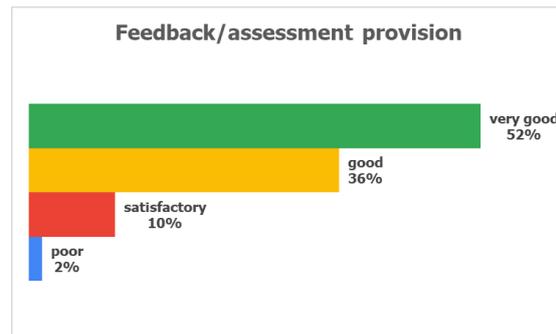


Chart 14

The **pre and post-assessment questionnaires** are very important to the platform users because they enable them to assess their digital skills before and after the completion of the e-learning course. In fact, the pre-assessment questionnaire enables the users to know which areas of digital competences they must orient their study, which modules or part of the modules they should focus on. The post-assessment allows the users to assess the new competences and the evolution made. Regarding this matter, the participants found the pre and post-assessment questionnaires (charts 15 and 16) very good (51% and 53%, respectively), 34% and 28% found them good and 13% and 17% found them satisfactory. Although globally the assessments were considered very good, a few participants found some of the questions not very clear, a view that was taken into account.

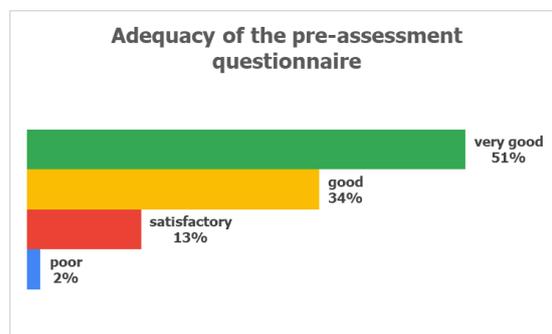


Chart 15

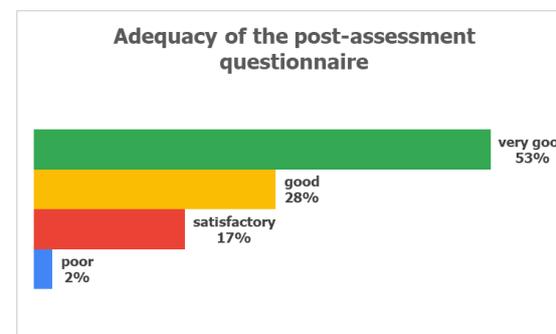


Chart 16

The interactive platform is accessible directly from the homepage of the LINK-UPS website (<https://www.linkups.eu/>). And it is a multi-device accessible platform, as users



can access it from various devices, such as computers, tablets and smartphones. For better integration it was created a mobile app downloadable from Google Play.

Thus, regarding the **equipment/devices used by the participants** to access the platform and follow the course (chart 17) 90% of the participants used a computer, 57% used a smartphone, and 22% used a tablet.

However, it is important to point out that most of the participants used a combination of devices, i.e. they used computer and smartphone, or computer and tablet or even, in some few cases, the 3 devices.

The computer was the preferred device in all countries. The Italian partner reported that there was a reason for this choice: the older participants read better on a computer screen due to its size, and it is easier for them to surf between the modules and the slides using this equipment.

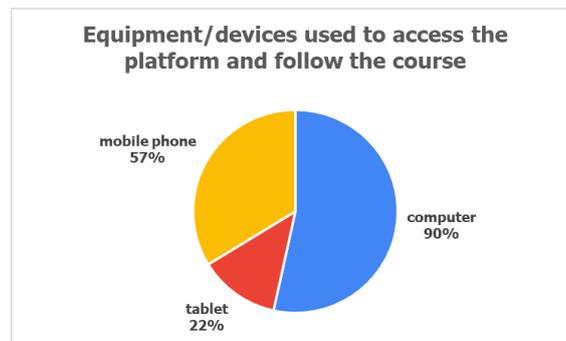


Chart 17

5.2 Modules

The learning materials, i.e., the modules for the building of the media and digital literacy skills, were developed by LINK-UPS partners considering the training needs of the target group, based on the Human Resources professionals' opinions gathered within the activities developed in IO1.

Five modules have been created, corresponding to the five competences areas related to the Digital Competence Framework 2.1: Information Processing, Communication, Content Creation, Problem Solving and Safety. The total workload of the five modules was estimated to be 38 hours.

The modules were also assessed by the participants, who evaluated them according to 10 indicators as follows:

The **clarity of learning objectives of the modules** (chart 18) was considered very good by 55% of the participants, good by 36% and satisfactory by 8%.

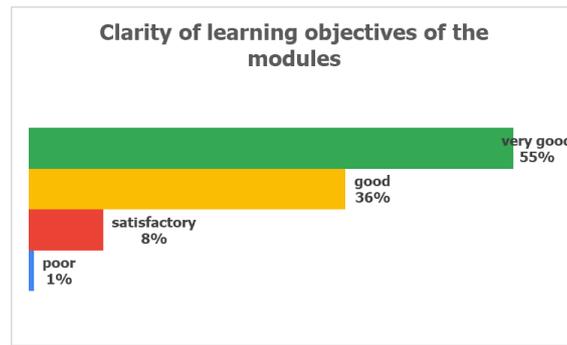


Chart 18

Regarding the **adequacy of the training contents to the objectives** (chart 19) and the **adequacy of the content structure** (chart 20), most of the participants in the piloting experimentation considered them very good (58% and 52%, respectively), about 30% considered them good, and about 15% considered them satisfactory.

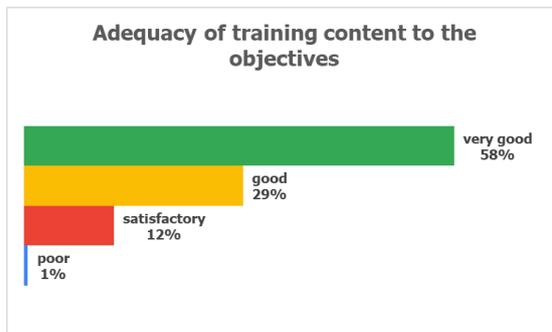


Chart 19

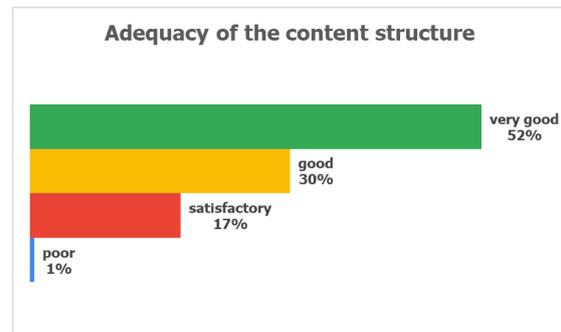


Chart 20

Concerning the **interest and usefulness of contents** (chart 21) the participants considered it very good (59%), 31% considered it good and 10% satisfactory.

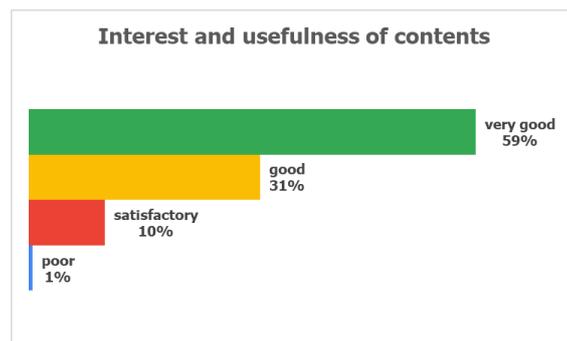


Chart 21

The **adequacy of the instructional method** (chart 22) was evaluated as very good by 55% of the participants, 33% evaluated it as good and 11% as satisfactory.

Concerning the **balance between theoretical and practical contents** (chart 23), it was considered very good by 49% of the participants, 40% considered it good and 10% satisfactory.

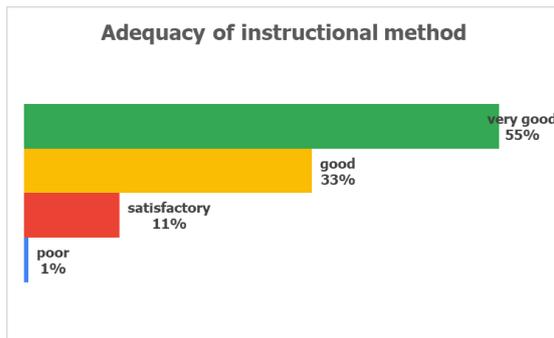


Chart 22

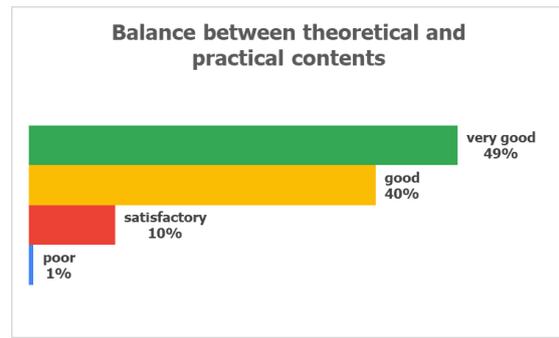


Chart 23

Concerning the **adequacy of theoretical and practical contents to the topics** (charts 24 and 25), on average 47% of the participants considered it very good, 44% considered it good and 9% considered it satisfactory.

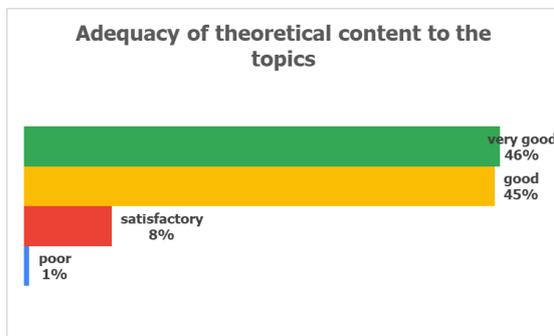


Chart 24

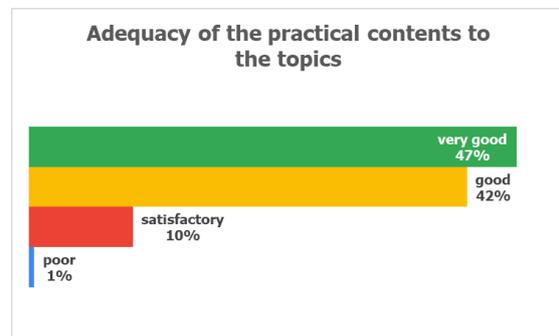


Chart 25

Following the other evaluations made by the pilot participants regarding the training modules, the **adequacy and sufficiency of the resources** (chart 26) were considered very good by 48% of the participants, good by 35% of the participants, and satisfactory by 16%.

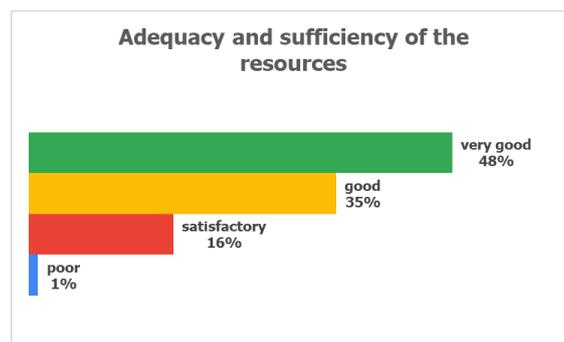


Chart 26

It was also asked the participants if they consider that **there were modules that require further development**, and as it can be observed in chart 27, 82% considered that the modules do not need further development.

However, 18% of the participants considered that some modules (they do not indicate which ones) could be improved, namely in what regards to the clarity of the vocabulary



and internal dynamics and that they should include more information. These views were taken into consideration as far as possible.

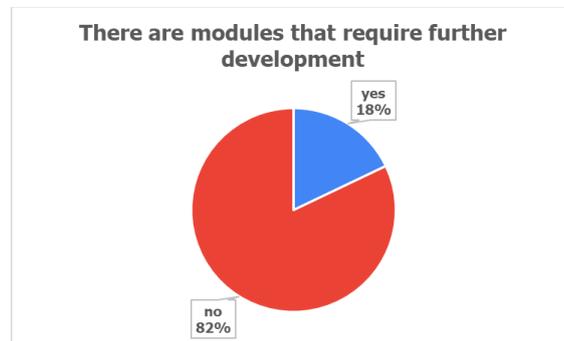


Chart 27

The **overall quality of the modules** (chart 28) was considered very good by 52%, good by 43%, and satisfactory by 4% of the participants in the piloting. This was an important insight for the LINK-UPS consortium.



Chart 28

5.3 E-learning Experience

Besides assessing the interactive platform and the learning material, the follow-up survey also intended to evaluate the e-learning experience of the participants. It should be noted that the pilot implementation of the platform was the first e-learning experience of the participants.

So, in what concerns the participants' **fulfillment of personal expectations** (chart 29) and the **satisfaction of their personal needs** (chart 30) the majority considered them very good (56%), on average 33% considered them good, and on average 11% considered them satisfactory.

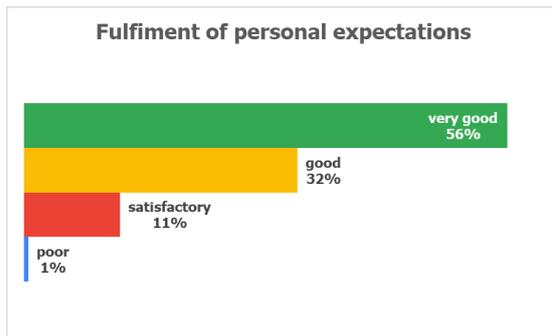


Chart 29

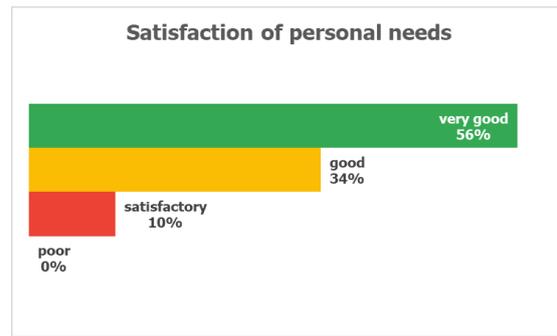


Chart 30

Regarding the **acquisition of new knowledge** (chart 31), once again most of the participants (54%) found the experience very good, 29% found it good, and 16% of them considered it satisfactory.

In what concerns the **development of new competences** (chart 32), again the participants in the piloting considered the experience very good (61%), 29% considered it good and 10% satisfactory.

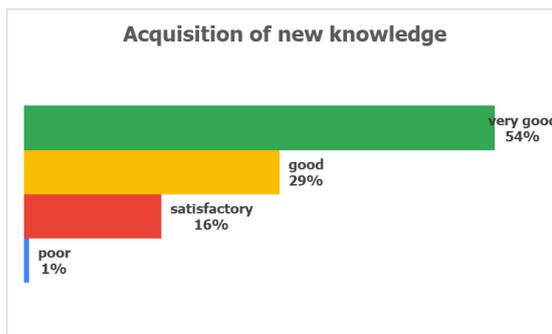


Chart 31

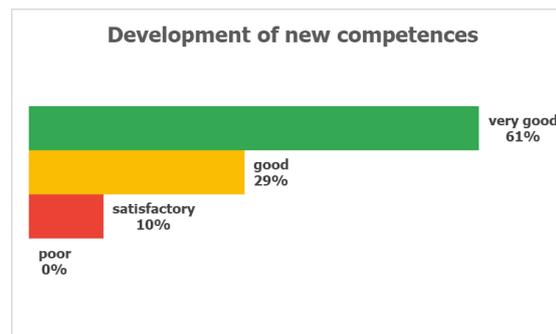


Chart 32

One of the major objectives of the LINK-UPS project is to increase the employability of low-skilled/low qualified people over 45, so it was important to assess the target group's view about the usefulness of the e-learning platform to their professional life.

Thus, regarding the **applicability to professional context** (chart 33) and the **improvement of employability** (chart 34), the answers were basically identical, i.e., on average 53% of the participants considered them very good, 32% considered them good and 14% considered them satisfactory.

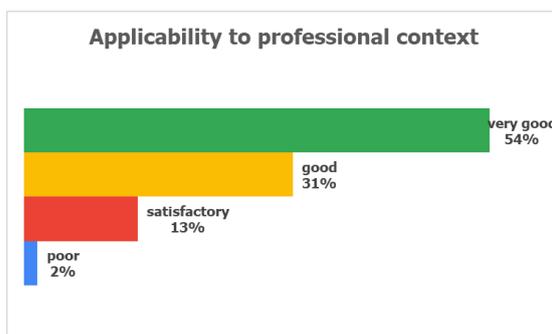


Chart 33

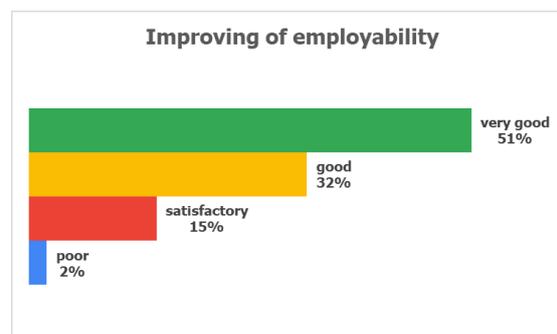


Chart 34



Concerning the **e-learning experience overall satisfaction** (chart 35) the participants considered it globally very satisfactory (65%), 28% considered it good and 7% satisfactory.



Chart 35

It was also asked the participants in the pilot implementation if **they recommend the use of the e-learning platform to friends/colleagues** and 99% of them said yes, as shown in chart 36.

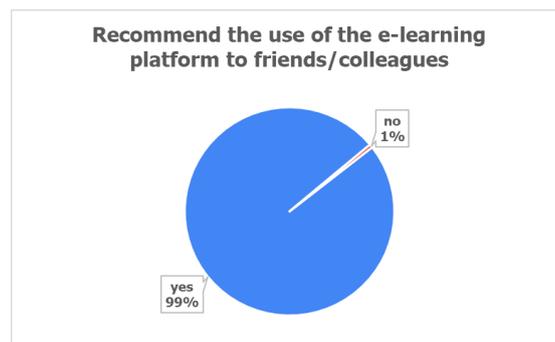


Chart 36

The participants also expressed the reasons why they recommend the use of the platform. The most common answers of the participants are highlighted below:

- Easy to use.
- Useful and accessible.
- A new and/or different way to learn.
- Enjoyable experience.
- A new way of learning adapted to pandemic times.
- Innovative platform with individualized support.
- A perfect tool to learn with.
- A very rewarding experience.



- It helped me to learn some useful things as nowadays everything is done on the computer.
- Because now if you don't know how to use a computer you can't do anything and this free course helps those who are not very good.
- Because some of the modules contain clear and useful information on how to access many sites and services that I had difficulties with before.
- There is useful information also for those who already know a little bit about computers.
- Interesting and free content.
- I was able to learn new things and meet nice people.
- I'm happy I did the course because I improved some knowledge.
- Useful for other people.
- Good to get more confident with ICT.
- I am more capable to use social media now.
- Very useful for additional adult training.

5.4 Comments/Suggestions for Improvement

The last request to the participants in the pilot implementation was if they would have further comments/suggestions for improvement of the e-learning platform and learning materials. Thus, some of the participants made some suggestions and remarks:

- Develop even more practical content.
- Develop more advanced content.
- Make some assessment questions more accurate.
- Further courses can be useful.
- Online support of the trainers appreciated.
- More intuitive navigation.
- Do more free courses.
- Better information on duration of modules.
- Difficulty of the final assessment questionnaire.



6. Conclusions

The pilot implementation of the interactive platform was successfully carried out with 190 low-skilled/low-qualified unemployed persons, mainly over 45, in Bulgaria, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and Turkey. In concrete, 40 persons more than originally targeted (150) have participated in the pilot implementation, which represents an increase of 27% and added value to the testing. It was a hard task given the pandemic of COVID-19, but at the same time it was an enriching experience for the LINK-UPS consortium.

The main findings derived from the overall analysis of the learning process and its results are the following:

- The platform is easy to access and register in.
- The visual design of the platform is appealing.
- The course structure is simple and clear.
- The course objectives are clear.
- The proposed activities and resources are adequate for self-learning and blended-learning.
- The communication/chatbox is functional.
- The feedback/assessment provision is good.
- The pre-assessment questionnaire and post-assessment questionnaire are adequate, although they could still be improved.
- The learning objectives of the modules are clear.
- The learning contents are adequate to the objectives.
- The content structure is adequate.
- The learning contents are interesting and useful.
- The instructional methods were adequate.
- The balance between theoretical and practical contents is positive, although more practical content would be welcome.
- The resources delivered were adequate and sufficient.
- The theoretical contents are adequate to the topics.
- The practical contents are adequate to the topics.
- The modules are high-quality.



- The experience fulfilled the personal expectations of the participants.
- The experience satisfied the personal needs of the participants.
- The experience enabled the acquisition of new knowledge by the participants.
- The experience enabled the development of new competences by the participants.
- The skills and competences developed apply to the personal context.
- The skills and competences developed apply to the professional context.
- The experience increased the employability of the participants.
- The learning outcomes previously set were achieved by the participants.
- The overall satisfaction of the participants was very high.
- The participants would recommend the use of the e-learning platform to friends and colleagues.
- The platform can be used and the experience replicated with other target groups.

The pilot implementation findings lead the LINK-UPS consortium to the overall conclusion that a high-quality platform was prepared, that its learning contents are relevant within the personal and professional contexts, and that the e-learning experience will enable a more active economic and civic participation of low-skilled/low-qualified adult persons in society, providing them better possibilities to find employment.

Therefore, the pilot implementation carried out has proven the viability and scalability of the LINK-UPS approach and interactive platform as an innovative tool for successfully building the social media competence and digital skills of low-skilled and low-qualified adult persons, in particular over 45, in a way that it will promote their access to employment.

7. Annexes

- 1) National Piloting Reports
- 2) E-Learning Platform Evaluation Form (template)
- 3) Certificate of Participation (template)