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SWIFT SME IO4: SMART WORK FOR SMEs MANIFESTO

TO PROVIDE PRECIOUS INPUT TO THE ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM IN THE
SPECIFIC DOMAIN INTERSECTED BETWEEN DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT AND
BUSINESS/PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

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THE NEED FOR THIS MANIFESTO

We all know that the COVID-19 Pandemic has changed the world we have known so far. Based on the qualitative and quantitative data analysed on the digital resilience of the SME ecosystem in Europe, we can see how, as a result of the pandemic suffered in the last year, the digitalisation process that was gradually beginning to take hold has been completely accelerated due to the health crisis, and the restrictions and changes that this has entailed, among many things in the field of work and work methodologies.

Digitization is permeating the world of work and changing it. It is significantly more difficult for SMEs than for large companies to approach the topic of Smart Work and Economy 4.0 in general. Current studies show that these companies are less digitized than large companies are and thus have a greater need to catch up when it comes to implementing Economy 4.0 activities. Digitization is also changing the content and processes of training. As mentioned above digital skills are becoming increasingly important.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE NEW NORMAL & ADAPTING ACCORDINGLY TO IT

The backbone of Europe's success is the SMEs: they make up 99% of all businesses in the EU. From 2013 until today, SMEs provided approximately 85% of new jobs and accounted for over two thirds of the total employment on the continent. SMEs are integrated in local communities and active on global markets at the same time.

For the current challenge, and the future challenges that may lie ahead, SMEs more than any other type of enterprise, need to be equipped with tools, skills and free, structured and joint digital training, so that SMEs can cope with current and future changes in working methodology, and jump on the Smart working methodology bandwagon, in order to stay flexible, adapt and move forward in a digital world, in a constantly changing and evolving society.

In this way, SMEs will be able to experience the benefits of a new way of working, feeling competent in the face of this challenge, and the rest of the challenges to come.



ACHIEVING THE MAIN GOAL

One specific evaluation profile of Erasmus+ projects is concerning the sustainability of the given initiative – and related resources – in the long run. By Sustainability, we refer to the capacity of the project and its deliverables to keep on generating positive benefits for targets and other organizations involved independently from the organisation that participated to its development, and their current engagement in the project.

A project is sustainable when it manages to trigger positive and beneficial outcomes despite being formally closed/ended.

The sustainability of a project highly depends on the ease of these three factors: transferability, replicability and portability.

In simpler terms, a project is sustainable when the results and resources that it produces can be easily adopted by other groups of interest, can benefit multiple cohorts of targets, can find application regardless geographical context and, more in general, gather interest among stakeholders of influence.

Sustainability can be intended from different angles than results: in this sense we refer to the sustainability of methods, approaches and practices – independently from the underlying content, nature and scale of the project.

THEREFORE...

Avery important fact is to have a picture of the situation of small and middle-sized companies. The difference between those companies and big companies is the networking with politicians, which results in a lack of the communications of needs. The SWIFT project addressed especially those companies providing them with useful information concerning digitalization. As such, it is important to keep and improve the communication to small and middle-sized companies in order to avoid gaps as they were found in digitalization prior to the SWIFT project.



TIME TO ACT!

Following the results and the potential achieved during the project implementation in terms of identifying relevant intervention areas and developing training in the field of Smart Working for SMEs through collaboration between educational providers, the VET and Business sectors, SMEs and NGOs:

- Aware of the fact that it is significantly more difficult for SMEs than for large companies to approach the topic of Smart Work and Economy 4.0
- Based on studies that show SMEs are less digitized than large companies
- Based on the qualitative and quantitative data analysed on the digital resilience of the SME ecosystem in the European Union
- Based on the changes in the teleworking data caused by the Pandemic of COVID-19
- Based on the lack of regulation, investment in computer and technological equipment, computer training for workers, and lack of flexible working hours
- Based on research carried out through this project, and on the detection of identified needs and challenges for SMEs
- Aware of Smart working requires a series of skills from the point of view of technological security
- Having identified the EU opportunities to support education and training
- Aware of data provided by DESI and EIDES that confirms there is still a historic trend of digital gap in Europe
- Aware of the official EU framework for education and training on digital competences through DigiComp
- Aware of the lack of the communications of SMEs needs caused by the politicians' interest shown solely in big companies
- Having identified an insufficient broadband capacity in rural areas of European Union



WE CALL FOR AN ALLIANCE...

Among all relevant stakeholders including **policy makers and providers** in areas of Business, SMEs and primary, secondary, VET and higher education and lifelong learning; **business associations and entities; NGOs and all other interested individuals**

Through a collaboration that will lead to:

- Providing SMEs with useful information concerning digitalization
- Calibration of European and national initiatives in area of SMEs support
- SMEs equipped with tools, skills and free, structured and joint digital training
- Acknowledgment of need for rapid intervention on improvement of the broadband internet connections in the rural areas
- Investments in improving the overall digital infrastructure and cyber security
- Tackling the skill gap and build up digital knowhow through urgent training of the SMEs employees
- Strengthening the impact of digital education that should always be brought in public debate
- An effective concept of transferability: the materials can be introduced in courses in higher education and other educational activities
- Identifying the most effective solutions for housing the employees who are telecommuting
- Develop new, flexible pricing models for public transport solutions
- Raising awareness that digitalization is a good chance for a change in mobility
- A fair pricing model of IT software and hardware for SMEs
- Incentives from policy makers at grass-root level training and the capacity of building highly flexible, modular educational programmes for digital and soft skills
- A more micro-credential-oriented, innovative, transferable, trans-national approach in trainings
- Policy makers looking into the resources made available at EU level to better orientate their focus and perspective
- A better grasp of the accelerated changes due to the COVID-19 Pandemic
- More benefits for employees after a clear set of regulations for overtime, working hours, provision of IT equipment, payment of electricity and internet used during teleworking
- Alignment of European initiatives for hybrid working - special emphasis on the creation of public policies that regulate and support specifically the smart working modality



Anyone is welcome to join this Manifesto and to contribute to the development of a shared agenda capable of aligning objectives and strategies to calibrate on the smart work policies and to develop the digital and soft skills of employees in SMEs.

UNDERSIGNED

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