YouLead

The YouLead Compass

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Purpose of the YouLead Compass

Context: Erasmus+ YouLead Project

How this Document was Developed

Alignment with EU Priorities

Education Action Plan

Purpose of the YouLead Compass

The **YouLead Compass** is designed as the central guiding framework of the YouLead project. Its purpose is to provide **a strategic and methodological foundation** that ensures all project activities remain coherent, evidence-based, and responsive to the specific realities of youth entrepreneurship. Acting as a navigation tool, the Compass aligns goals, activities, and outcomes with the aspirations of young people, particularly those with fewer opportunities, while also creating space for innovation in entrepreneurial learning.

Beyond offering orientation, the YouLead Compass establishes **a common language and shared direction** among project partners, stakeholders, and youth participants. It transforms data, insights, and best practices into a structured methodology that drives the development of the digital serious game and related learning activities. In doing so, it guarantees that the project's outputs are relevant, inclusive, and impactful across diverse European contexts.

Context

Youth in Europe face a complex landscape of opportunities and challenges. While entrepreneurship is increasingly seen as a pathway to employability, empowerment, and innovation, many young people—especially those with fewer opportunities—struggle with limited access to resources, networks, and tailored training.

The YouLead Compass emerges as a response to these challenges. It is grounded in **extensive needs analysis** and enriched through **YouLead Breakfast Sessions,** where youth, stakeholders, and experts collectively identify barriers, enablers, and aspirations linked to entrepreneurship. By situating the project within the broader realities of the digital age and shifting labour markets, the Compass ensures that the project does not adopt a one-size-fits-all approach but rather responds to specific national and local contexts.

Development Approach

The YouLead Compass is not a static framework but a participatory and evolving tool. Its development combines:

- **Data collection and consultation** – insights gathered directly from young people, stakeholders, and experts through interactive sessions.
- **Review of best practices** – analysis of innovative and adaptable approaches in entrepreneurial education and youth engagement.
- **Collaborative synthesis** – project partners jointly shaping the Compass to reflect diverse realities across participating countries.

This **co-creation process** ensures ownership by all partners and stakeholders, strengthens the project's legitimacy, and makes the Compass a framework rooted in both research and lived experience.

Alignment with EU priorities

The YouLead Compass is fully aligned with the **EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027**, which emphasizes fostering youth participation, inclusion, and empowerment. By promoting entrepreneurship education through innovative digital methods, it directly contributes to the EU's goals of providing **fairer opportunities** in education and the **labour market**.

It also resonates with the **European Pillar of Social Rights,** supporting equal opportunities, lifelong learning, and inclusion, while fostering youth resilience in the face of rapid social and economic changes. By tailoring approaches to national contexts, the Compass strengthens the project's contribution to EU cooperation in youth policy and reinforces European solidarity through shared innovation.

Education Action Plan

The YouLead Compass places education at the core of its mission, in line with the **European Education Area** and **the Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027)**. It emphasizes the development of digital skills, entrepreneurial competences, and innovative learning pathways that combine technology with creativity.

By embedding serious digital play into entrepreneurial education, the Compass advances the EU's vision of **high-quality, inclusive, and accessible education.** It not only equips young people with practical

entrepreneurial knowledge but also fosters transversal skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and adaptability. In this way, the Compass ensures that the project contributes directly to the EU's wider ambition of preparing young Europeans for the opportunities and challenges of the digital and green transitions.
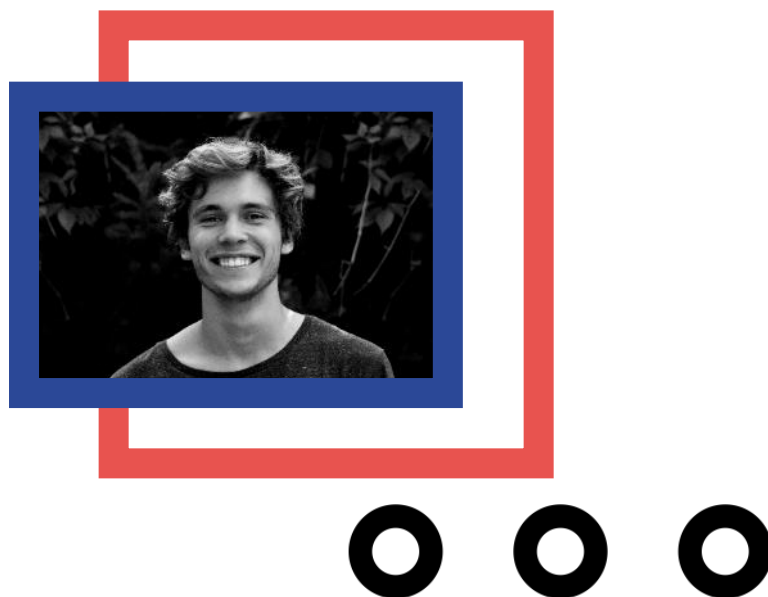
Intended Audience

Primary Target Groups

Secondary Audiences

Policy & Support level

Wider Audience

Primary Target Groups

The primary target groups of the YouLead Compass are:

- **Youth workers and educators** who provide non-formal education and digital learning opportunities, equipping them with innovative tools and methods to support entrepreneurial training.
- **Young people**, particularly those with fewer opportunities, who aspire to engage in entrepreneurship but face barriers such as limited skills, resources, or access to training.

The Compass addresses their needs by embedding **game-based learning approaches**—centered on the YouLead Serious Game, Audiobook, and Animation Palette—that make entrepreneurial education more engaging, accessible, and practical. It equips youth workers with structured resources to integrate into their programs and empowers young people to develop initiative, creativity, innovation, and risk-taking skills in line with the EntreComp framework.
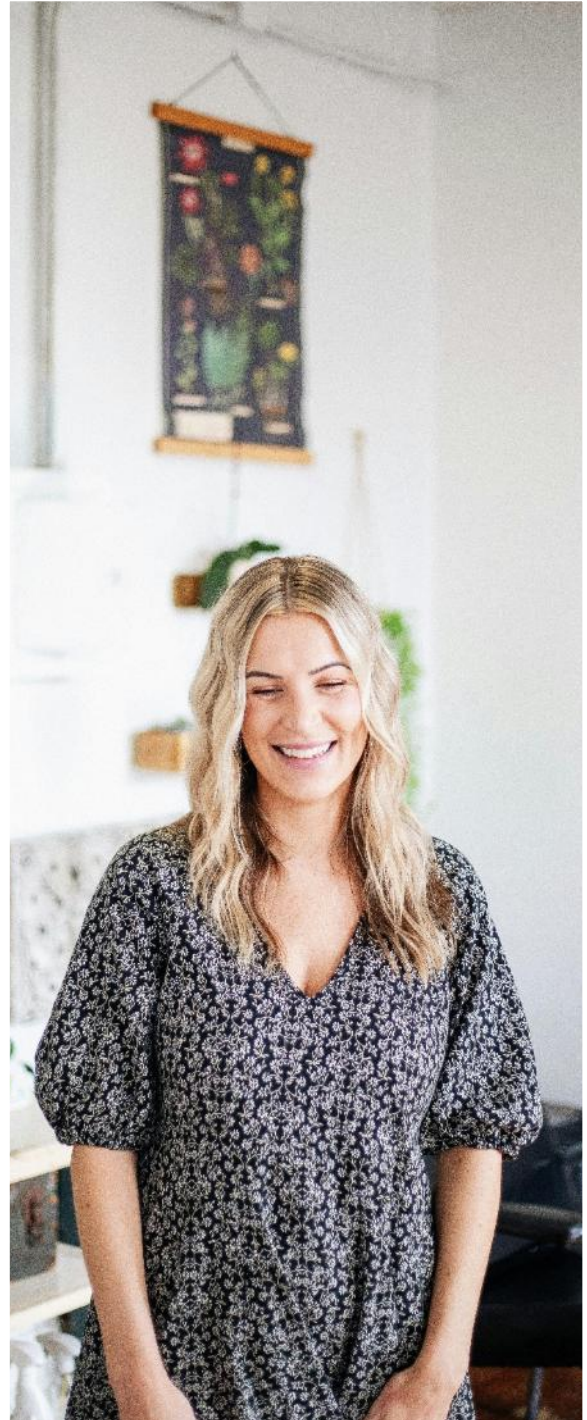
Secondary Audiences

Secondary audiences include actors and institutions who may not be directly involved in the delivery of activities but can **adopt, adapt, or support** YouLead outputs:

- **Higher education institutions** and vocational training providers, who can integrate Compass insights into their curricula.
- **Entrepreneurial development experts and trainers** who can use the framework to refine their approaches.
- **Employers, business organizations, and professional associations** interested in fostering entrepreneurial skills among youth.

For these groups, the YouLead Compass offers a knowledge base of best practices and a tested methodology for engaging youth through digital serious play and innovative educational strategies.

Policy & Support Level

At the policy and institutional level, the Compass is intended for:

- **Regional, national, and EU-level authorities** involved in youth, education, and labor market policy.
- **Government agencies**, **policymakers**, and **public institutions** tasked with implementing strategies for youth inclusion and employability.

The YouLead Compass aligns with **the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027, the European Pillar of Social Rights**, and the **Digital Education Action Plan**, making it a policy-relevant tool that supports systemic improvements in entrepreneurial education. By providing evidence-based insights and practical recommendations, it strengthens policymaking and fosters closer connections between youth needs and institutional responses.

Wider Audience

The wider audience consists of stakeholders who, while not directly targeted, may benefit from exposure to the project results, including:

- Civil society organizations and NGOs working in youth development and social inclusion.
- Networks and platforms supporting innovation, digital learning, and entrepreneurship across Europe.
- The general public, who will gain from increased awareness of the importance of entrepreneurship as a driver of social and economic development.

Through dissemination efforts at the **local, regional, national, and EU levels**, the Compass aims to reach these wider groups, contributing to a cultural shift that values youth initiative, creativity, and entrepreneurship as essential competences for Europe's future.
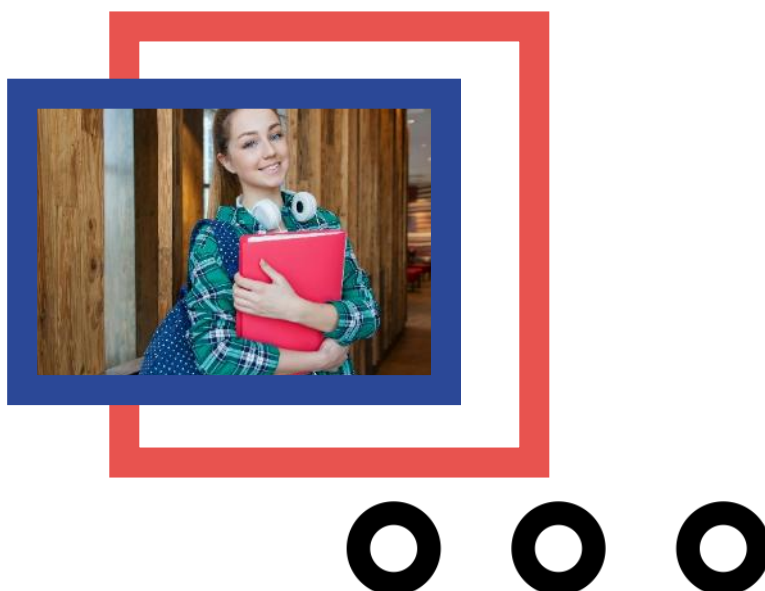
The Landscape of Youth Entrepreneurship

Challenges faced by Youth in Entrepreneurship

The Reality of Youth Entrepreneurial Journeys

Special attention to underrepresented groups

The landscape of youth entrepreneurship is shaped by both opportunities and obstacles. While many young people aspire to create and grow their own businesses, they often face a variety of challenges that hinder their progress. From limited knowledge and resources to financial, regulatory, and psychological barriers, these obstacles define the reality of youth entrepreneurial journeys. Special attention is needed to understand how these challenges affect underrepresented groups, who may encounter additional barriers in accessing opportunities and support.

Challenges faced by Youth in Entrepreneurship

During a series of Breakfast Sessions held across five partner locations—Austria, France (Toulon and Corsica), Greece, and Ireland—in collaboration with local stakeholders, young entrepreneurs, youth workers, subject-matter experts, and key ecosystem actors were engaged in structured discussions. These exchanges highlighted several recurring obstacles faced by young people in the field of entrepreneurship. From these deliberations, six principal domains of challenge were identified:

1. **Lack of Entrepreneurial Knowledge and Practical Skills**

Many young entrepreneurs struggle because their educational background does not fully equip them with the skills required for starting and sustaining a business. While formal education often provides theoretical knowledge, it rarely emphasizes practical aspects such as financial management, marketing strategies, or business planning. Knowledge gaps around entrepreneurship create uncertainty when facing real-world challenges. In addition, resilience, adaptability, and the ability to navigate setbacks are

rarely taught, leaving youth underprepared for the realities of entrepreneurial life.

2. Limited Access to Mentorship, Coaching, and Support Systems

A key factor in successful entrepreneurship is access to experienced mentors and networks. Young entrepreneurs often lack structured mentorship opportunities that can guide them through professional responsibilities, problem-solving, and long-term business growth. In many cases, follow-up and ongoing support systems are absent, leading to feelings of isolation. Limited awareness of existing support structures, business incubators, and professional networks prevents youth from leveraging resources that could help them scale their ideas into sustainable ventures.

3. Financial and Funding Barriers

Access to finance remains one of the most significant barriers for young entrepreneurs. Many struggle to secure financial support from banks, investors, or government initiatives due to strict requirements or insufficient information about available funding schemes. Bureaucratic obstacles, limited transparency in financing options, and overall legal and financial uncertainty add to the challenge. Without adequate funding, young entrepreneurs face difficulties in covering start-up costs, scaling operations, or investing in innovation.

4. Administrative and Regulatory Complexity

Young entrepreneurs often face overwhelming administrative burdens when starting a business. Legal registration, tax compliance, and navigating judicial processes can be complex and intimidating. Regulatory barriers—such as strict licensing requirements or unclear legal frameworks—further discourage youth from pursuing entrepreneurship. This complexity not only delays business establishment but also increases the risk of errors, penalties, and discouragement.

5. Market Access and Business Development Challenges

Securing a customer base is essential for the survival of any business, yet young entrepreneurs frequently face difficulties in reaching markets. Many lack affordable tools for conducting proper market research, making it hard to identify consumer needs and trends. Barriers to collaboration and limited access to distribution channels also hinder growth opportunities. Without strong networks and partnerships, it is harder for youth-led businesses to scale and compete effectively in broader markets.

6. Psychological and Environmental Barriers

Beyond structural and financial obstacles, psychological challenges also play a critical role. Fear of failure often prevents young entrepreneurs from taking risks or persevering after setbacks. Many lack prior experience, resilience, and the "growth-through-action" mindset necessary to adapt and learn through practice. Environmental factors, such as geographical isolation or limited access to resources, further constrain entrepreneurial activity. These barriers create additional stress, reducing motivation and limiting the long-term sustainability of youth-led businesses.

The Reality of Youth Entrepreneurial Journeys

The journey of youth entrepreneurship is defined by both significant obstacles and transformative opportunities. Aspiring entrepreneurs often begin with enthusiasm and ambition but face deep-seated fears, including fear of failure, financial insecurity, and legal uncertainty. These emotional and psychological challenges are compounded by practical gaps: many young people lack entrepreneurial knowledge, hands-on business skills, and awareness of available support systems. Formal education frequently emphasizes theory over practice, leaving youth underprepared to navigate the realities of running a business. Regulatory and administrative complexities, limited access to funding, and difficulties in reaching markets further hinder entrepreneurial initiatives.

Despite these barriers, young entrepreneurs demonstrate remarkable resilience and adaptability. Participants consistently emphasized that learning through experience is central to success, often expressing that "you grow with your company." Soft skills such as communication, negotiation, self-awareness, and conflict management were highlighted as crucial, alongside practical know-how in financial management, legal literacy, and client relations. Mentorship and networking emerged as powerful enablers, transforming isolation into collaboration and enabling access to guidance, resources, and opportunities. Participants underscored the importance of proactive engagement: attending events, seeking mentors, and cultivating partnerships both within and outside the business can significantly enhance sustainability and growth.

New opportunities are reshaping the landscape of youth entrepreneurship. Digital tools, online platforms, and e-commerce make starting a business increasingly accessible, lowering entry costs and enabling access to

broader markets. Local incubators, accelerators, and professional networks offer training, mentoring, and collaborative spaces, while targeted initiatives for young people from priority neighbourhoods help reduce inequalities and increase participation. Additionally, there is a growing interest in sustainable and socially responsible entrepreneurship, reflecting a desire among youth to build ventures that create positive societal impact.

Sustaining entrepreneurial efforts, however, requires more than initial support. Long-term guidance, structured follow-up systems, and clarity around funding and legal frameworks are essential to prevent dropouts and encourage perseverance. Collaboration—both with mentors and peers—fosters resilience and helps young entrepreneurs navigate challenges more effectively. The journey is therefore not just about launching a business, but about personal growth, learning by doing, and building networks that enable sustained success.
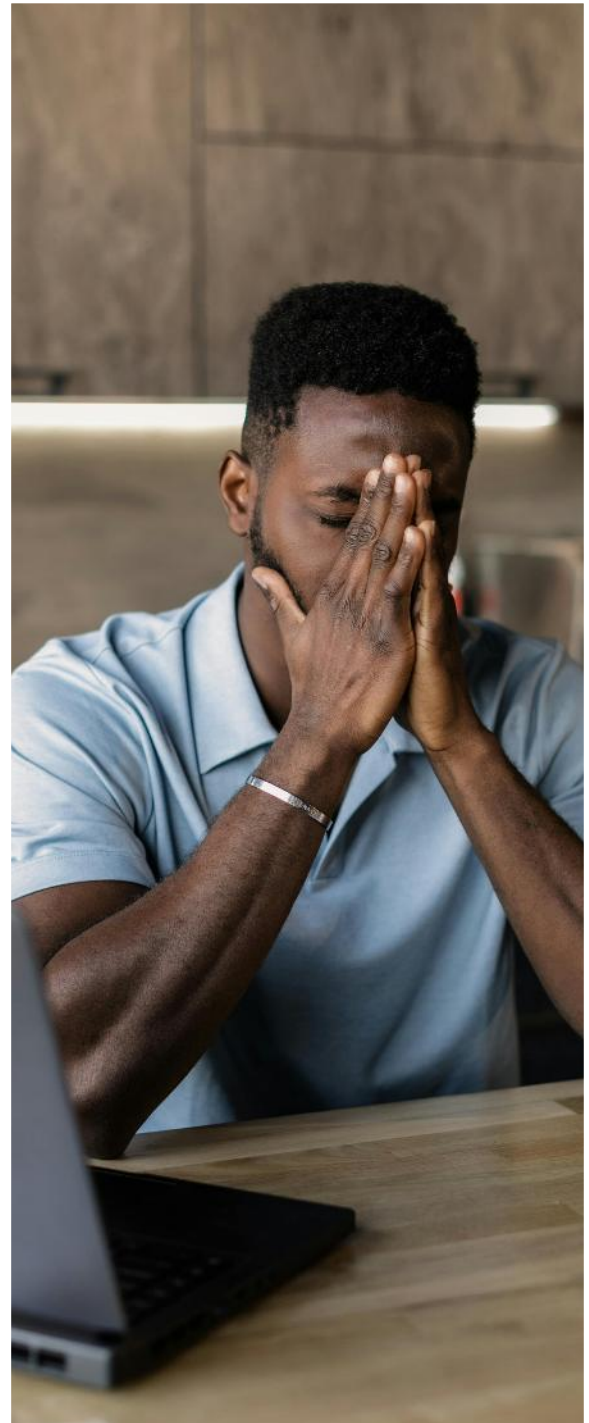
Special attention to underrepresented groups

The YouLead Compass emphasizes inclusion and equity in youth entrepreneurship education by paying particular attention to underrepresented groups. These groups often face structural, social, economic, or cultural barriers that limit their access to entrepreneurial opportunities. Tailored approaches are necessary to ensure that digital and experiential tools are relevant, accessible, and effective for all participants.

NEETs

Challenges: Lack of engagement with formal education or training, limited professional networks, low self-confidence.

Educational Response:

➔ Use experiential learning and gamified tools to increase motivation and engagement.
➔ Include mentorship opportunities to provide guidance and confidence-building.
➔ Provide clear, step-by-step guidance in digital modules to bridge knowledge gaps.

Rural Youth

Challenges: Geographical isolation, limited access to business resources and mentorship, fewer networking opportunities.

Educational Response:

➔ Leverage online tools and mobile-accessible content to overcome physical distance.
➔ Organize virtual peer-learning communities to foster collaboration.

➔ Incorporate local context in learning modules to make entrepreneurship relevant to rural realities.

Migrants

Challenges: Language barriers, unfamiliarity with local business regulations, limited social and professional networks.

Educational Response:

➔ Provide multilingual resources and accessible learning materials.
➔ Offer targeted guidance on legal, financial, and administrative requirements.
➔ Encourage peer mentoring to integrate cultural perspectives and enhance social inclusion.

Irish Travellers

Challenges: Historical social marginalization, limited educational attainment, distrust of formal institutions.

Educational Response:

➔ Design culturally sensitive and inclusive content.
➔ Use community-based mentorship and support networks.
➔ Focus on practical, hands-on learning experiences to build confidence and entrepreneurial competence.

Methodological Principles of YouLead

Human-centred Design

Learning by doing

Serious Gaming & Gamification

Digital Inclusion & Accessibility

Co-creation & Peer Learning

Mentorship and Community Building

Emotional Safety & Resilience-Building

Human-centred Design

Definition

The YouLead Project embraces the methodological principle of human-centred design[1] (HCD) to place young people at the core of every stage of the YouLead process. This approach ensures that tools, training materials, and learning experiences are shaped by the real needs, motivations, challenges, and contexts of youth—rather than by assumptions or top-down prescriptions. In practice, HCD means **designing with youth, not just for youth**.

Human-centred design is an **iterative approach** that engages end-users in problem-identification, ideation, prototyping, testing, and refinement. It focuses on empathy, usability, accessibility, and contextual relevance. Within youth entrepreneurship education, HCD helps ensure that learning tools resonate with diverse profiles of young people, including those who face structural barriers such as limited digital access, low confidence, literacy difficulties, or exclusion from traditional entrepreneurship networks.

The phases of human-centred design

The HCD methodology is broken down into four phases:

1. **Clarify:** The first phase focuses on understanding your target audience through observation and research rather than relying on assumptions. The goal is to clarify the problem by identifying what users truly need and want. In this step, collecting data and observing your target group is crucial, as it allows you to uncover pain points—both explicit and latent.

2. **Ideate:** The insights gathered during the first phase naturally lead to the second phase: ideation. In this stage, various design thinking tools—such as brainstorming or systematic inventive thinking (SIT)—

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[1] Landry, L. (2020, December 15). What is human-centered design? HBS Online Business Insights. Harvard Business School. https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/what-is-human-centered-design

can be used to overcome cognitive fixedness, a mindset that limits thinking by assuming there is only one way to approach a problem. Once cognitive fixedness is addressed, the focus shifts to generating a wide range of ideas. This encourages creativity and ensures that no single solution becomes prematurely fixed before being tested.

3. **Develop**: The develop phase involves reviewing, combining, and evaluating the ideas generated during ideation to produce a set of potential solutions. Through critical assessment and refinement, this phase enables the identification of concepts most suitable for prototyping, enhancing alignment with user needs while optimizing resource efficiency, reducing costs, and improving the quality of the resulting solution.

   When evaluating ideas, three key characteristics of human-centred design should be considered: desirability, feasibility, and viability:

   - Desirability: Does the innovation meet user needs, and is there demand for it?
   - Feasibility: Can it be implemented? Does the organization have the resources, and are there any legal, economic, or technological constraints?
   - Viability: Is the solution sustainable? Can it be delivered or maintained profitably over time?

4. **Implement:** The implementation phase represents the final stage of the process, focusing on applying the developed solutions in practice and demonstrating their value to both participants and stakeholders. This stage facilitates the practical testing of ideas and supports the continuous improvement of tools and activities. It also involves reflection on organizational culture and group dynamics, as a supportive environment is critical for the ongoing development and iteration of user-centred solutions. Innovation remains an ongoing process, as learners' needs and contexts evolve over time. Maintaining a human-centred focus throughout ensures that solutions remain relevant, effective, and responsive to the evolving requirements of

participants. Solutions provided should be tested with participants to gather feedback and improve usability and relevance.

Application in Youlead

YouLead integrates HCD throughout the entire development cycle:

- **Youth-driven needs assessment:**

Early consultations, focus groups, and partner workshops captured the lived realities of NEETs, rural youth, migrants, and other underrepresented groups. Their experiences directly informed the challenge mapping and the structure of the Compass.

- **Co-created prototypes:**

Elements of the Serious Game, Workbook, mentoring resources, and Audiobook were prototyped and validated with youth. Their feedback influenced difficulty levels, storytelling tone, visual design, and digital accessibility requirements.

- **Iterative testing:**

Youth participants tested early versions of the Serious Game, provided insights on the clarity of scenarios, and helped identify motivational triggers (e.g., reward systems, narrative pacing). Their contributions shaped improvements before final development in WP3.

- **Design for real-life constraints:**

Through HCD workshops, young people highlighted barriers such as low connectivity, limited devices, and preference for audio or visual formats over extended text. This directly informed decisions such as:

- offering offline-first modules,
- integrating bite-sized content,
- providing an Audiobook version,
- using simple, direct language,
- avoiding complex registration systems

Learning by doing

Definition

Learning by Doing[2] is a **pedagogical approach** in which learners acquire knowledge, skills, and competencies through **active participation** and **practical experience** rather than passive instruction. It emphasizes hands-on engagement, experimentation, and reflection, allowing participants to apply concepts in **real-world** or **simulated contexts**. This approach enhances understanding, fosters problem-solving abilities, and supports the development of both technical and transferable skills.

This approach aligns with **Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory**, which conceptualizes learning as a four-stage cycle: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. By moving through these stages, learners transform experience into knowledge and are better equipped to apply insights to new challenges.

In the context of youth entrepreneurship, learning by doing supports skill development, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities, fostering confidence and self-efficacy.

Key Principles and components

Experiential learning goes beyond "doing things"; it is a structured approach guided by several core principles:

- **Active Participation:** Learners move from passive recipients to active agents, taking roles as researchers, problem-solvers, and creators. Engaging both cognitively and physically strengthens understanding and retention compared with passive learning.

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[2] Vea, A. (2025, October 29). Learning by doing: what is it and what is its methodology? SMOWL. https://smowl.net/en/blog/learning-by-doing-definition-methodology/

- **Real-World Relevance:** Activities are designed to simulate or engage with authentic scenarios, connecting theory to practice. This enhances the meaningfulness of learning and helps bridge academic knowledge with practical competence.
- **Reflection:** Critical reflection transforms experience into learning. Learners analyse outcomes, assess strategies, extract lessons, and consider how to apply knowledge in new contexts. Reflection is central to turning doing into understanding.
- **Emphasis on Mistakes:** Errors are reframed as valuable learning opportunities rather than failures. Analysing mistakes fosters problem-solving, iterative improvement, and a growth mindset in a safe, low-risk environment.
- **Tailored Support:** Educators shift from "sage on the stage" to "guide on the side," facilitating learning, prompting reflection, helping navigate challenges, and providing constructive feedback while supporting learner autonomy.

Application in YouLead

Within the YouLead project, learning by doing is implemented across workshops, training labs, and mentoring sessions:

- **Serious Games:** Interactive game scenarios simulate entrepreneurial challenges, allowing youth to practice decision-making, resource allocation, and problem-solving in a risk-free environment.
- **Hands-on Activities:** Participants engage in project-based exercises, such as creating mock business plans, designing product prototypes, or developing social enterprise ideas, applying concepts introduced during training.
- **Reflection Exercises:** Workbooks, group discussions, and facilitated debriefing sessions enable learners to analyse outcomes, identify lessons learned, and link practical experience to broader entrepreneurial principles.

Serious Gaming & Gamification

Definition

Serious gaming[3] and gamification[4] are methodologies that **incorporate game principles** and **mechanics into learning experiences** to enhance engagement, motivation, and knowledge retention. While serious games are full simulations designed for learning or problem-solving, gamification involves applying game elements—such as points, badges, levels, or challenges—to non-game activities. Both approaches leverage interactive, participatory, and experiential learning to support skill acquisition and decision-making.

Application in YouLead

Within the YouLead project, serious gaming and gamification are employed to simulate entrepreneurial scenarios and foster active learning among youth participants:

- **Serious Game Scenarios:** Youth engage in realistic simulations of entrepreneurial challenges, such as budgeting, marketing, customer management, or ethical decision-making. These controlled, interactive environments allow learners to experiment, make decisions, and experience consequences in a risk-free setting.

- **Gamified Learning Modules:** Elements such as points, progress tracking, badges, and challenges are integrated into workshops and digital tools to encourage sustained participation, goal-oriented learning, and friendly competition.

- **Reflection and Debriefing:** After gameplay or gamified activities, facilitated discussions and workbook exercises help participants

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[3] Dyshkant, A. (n.d.). What are Serious Games: Ultimate guide. Piogroup. Retrieved from https://piogroup.net/blog/what-are-serious-games-ultimate-guide

[4] Gamify. (n.d.). What is gamification? Gamify. Retrieved from https://www.gamify.com/what-is-gamification

analyse decisions, outcomes, and strategies, ensuring experiential insights are converted into practical learning.

Digital Inclusion & Accessibility

Definition

Digital inclusion[5] and accessibility[6] ensure that all participants can access, engage with, and benefit from learning resources, regardless of technical infrastructure, digital literacy, or individual abilities. Digital inclusion addresses barriers such as low connectivity, limited devices, or unfamiliarity with technology, while accessibility focuses on designing materials that accommodate diverse needs, including cognitive, visual, auditory, or motor impairments. Together, these principles promote equity and participation in digital learning environments.

Application in YouLead

The YouLead project applies digital inclusion and accessibility across its tools and activities to ensure all youth can participate meaningfully:

- **Accessible Learning Materials:** All digital modules, workbooks, and audio-visual resources are designed using clear language, simple navigation, and multiple formats (text, audio, visual).
- **Offline and Low-Bandwidth Solutions:** Digital tools are optimized for use in low-connectivity environments, ensuring that rural or resource-limited participants can fully engage.
- **Inclusive Design Practices:** Materials are developed in accordance with accessibility guidelines (e.g., WCAG principles), considering readability, color contrast, and alternative formats.

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[5] Digital inclusion. (n.d.). *In Wikipedia.* Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_inclusion
[6] Halpin, M. (n.d.). *The importance of accessibility in education.* Recite Me. Retrieved from https://reciteme.com/us/news/accessibility-in-education/

- **Supportive Facilitation:** Facilitators provide guidance and technical support to participants, helping them navigate tools, troubleshoot challenges, and engage confidently.

Co-creation & Peer Learning

Definition

Co-creation[7] and peer learning[8] are participatory approaches in which learners actively contribute to the design, development, and implementation of learning activities while learning from one another. Co-creation emphasizes collaborative problem-solving and shared decision-making, giving participants a voice in shaping content and solutions. Peer learning fosters mutual support, knowledge exchange, and the development of social and professional skills through interaction among learners.

Application in YouLead

Within the YouLead project, co-creation and peer learning are integrated across workshops, mentoring programs, and digital tools to promote active engagement and collaborative learning:

- **Co-Creation of Solutions:** Participants are involved in designing exercises, business ideas, or solutions within Serious Games and workshops, ensuring that activities reflect their perspectives and needs.

[7] Queen Mary Academy. (n.d.). *What is co-creation?* Queen Mary University of London. Retrieved from https://www.qmul.ac.uk/queenmaryacademy/students/co-creation/what-is-co-creation-/

[8] Themeli, C. (2023). *Peer learning pros, cons, and contextual factors in higher education* (Chapter 2). In *Inclusive Peer Learning & Augmented Reality in Higher Education: A Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) Perspective*. Pressbooks. Retrieved from https://pressbooks.pub/ipear/chapter/chapter-2-peer-learning-pros-cons-and-contextual-factors-in-higher-education/

- **Structured Peer Learning:** Small-group activities, peer mentoring, and collaborative problem-solving sessions allow participants to share experiences, provide feedback, and learn from diverse approaches.
- **Collective Reflection:** Group discussions and collaborative debriefing encourage participants to analyse outcomes together, enhancing understanding and reinforcing learning through social interaction

Co-creation and peer learning contribute to:

- Empowerment of learners, as they actively shape their learning experiences.
- Enhanced collaboration, communication, and teamwork skills.
- Increased motivation and engagement through shared ownership of learning processes.
- Development of social networks that can support ongoing learning and entrepreneurial activity.

Mentorship and Community Building

Definition

Mentorship[9] and community building[10] are complementary approaches that support learning, personal growth, and professional development by fostering guidance, collaboration, and social networks. Mentorship involves structured relationships in which experienced individuals provide advice, knowledge, and feedback to less experienced learners. Community building focuses on creating inclusive environments where participants can share experiences, collaborate, and establish supportive networks.

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[9] Bowman, M. (2014). *Teacher mentoring as a means to improve schools*. BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education, 6(1), 47-51. Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1230726.pdf
[10] Columbia Center for Teaching and Learning. (2021). *Community building in the classroom*. Columbia University. Retrieved from https://ctl.columbia.edu/resources-and-technology/teaching-with-technology/teaching-online/community-building/

Application in YouLead

In the YouLead project, mentorship and community-building strategies are integrated to enhance engagement, support learning, and develop entrepreneurial skills:

- **Structured Mentoring Programs:** Participants engage in peer-to-peer and expert mentoring sessions, where mentors provide guidance on entrepreneurial challenges, share experiences, and facilitate skill development.

- **Community Events and Networks:** Workshops, collaborative projects, and digital platforms foster a sense of belonging, enabling youth to exchange ideas, access resources, and expand their professional and social networks.

- **Integration with Learning Tools:** Mentoring and community-building activities are connected to other YouLead tools, such as Serious Games, workbooks, and digital modules, to provide guidance during experiential learning and reflection phases

Emotional Safety & Resilience-Building

Definition

Emotional safety[11] and resilience-building[12] are core principles that ensure participants can engage fully in learning experiences without fear of judgment, discrimination, or psychological harm. Emotional safety refers to creating environments in which learners feel respected, supported, and confident to express ideas or take risks. Resilience-building involves fostering the ability to cope with challenges, recover from setbacks, and adapt to

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[11] Emotional safety. (n.d.). *Wikipedia.* Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emotional_safety
[12] American Psychological Association. (2020, April 1). *Building your resilience.* https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience/building-your-resilience

changing circumstances, enabling participants to persist in learning and entrepreneurial endeavours.

Application in YouLead

Within the YouLead project, emotional safety and resilience are embedded in workshops, mentoring programs, and digital tools:

- **Safe and Inclusive Spaces:** Facilitators establish clear ground rules, encourage respectful communication, and actively monitor group dynamics to ensure participants feel secure in expressing themselves.
- **Reflection and Debriefing:** Structured reflection exercises in workbooks, group discussions, and mentoring sessions provide opportunities to process experiences, analyze mistakes, and derive learning points.
- **Resilience-Focused Activities:** Simulations, Serious Games, and project-based tasks expose participants to controlled challenges, enabling them to develop problem-solving skills, perseverance, and adaptive strategies.
- **Supportive Facilitation:** Facilitators provide guidance, constructive feedback, and encouragement, helping participants navigate setbacks and reinforcing a positive, growth-oriented mindset.

Mapping Youth Needs to Educational Responses

Methodological approach

Mapping table of Youth Challenges, Responses and Tools

Methodological Approach

The mapping of youth challenges to targeted educational responses within the YouLead Compass was conducted through a **structured, multi-stage methodological process** designed to ensure both rigor and practical relevance. The approach draws on principles of human-centred design, participatory research, and experiential learning, ensuring that interventions are firmly grounded in the realities of young entrepreneurs across partner countries.

1. Stakeholder Engagement and Data Collection

A series of **Breakfast Sessions** was conducted across five partner locations (Austria, France – Toulon and Corsica, Greece, and Ireland) in collaboration with local stakeholders. Participants included young entrepreneurs, youth workers, subject-matter experts, and key ecosystem actors. Structured discussions, semi-structured interviews, and observational data were used to capture the full spectrum of youth experiences and challenges. This approach ensured that the data reflected both the diversity of local contexts and the lived experiences of the target population.

2. Identification of Principal Challenges

Data from the stakeholder consultations were systematically analyzed to identify **recurring obstacles** faced by young entrepreneurs. Using thematic analysis, six primary domains of challenge were delineated: (1) lack of entrepreneurial knowledge and practical skills; (2) limited access to mentorship, coaching, and support systems; (3) financial and funding barriers; (4) administrative and regulatory complexity; (5) market access and business development challenges; and (6) psychological and environmental barriers. These domains provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted barriers to youth entrepreneurship.

3. Mapping Challenges to Educational Responses

Each identified challenge was then mapped to **targeted educational responses**. These responses were informed by the methodological principles of the YouLead project, including learning by doing, gamification, mentorship, co-creation, and digital inclusion. The mapping process considered the relevance, feasibility, and accessibility of interventions to ensure that proposed responses could effectively address the specific needs and contexts of youth participants.

4. Alignment with YouLead Tools

For each educational response, specific **YouLead tools** were identified to operationalize interventions. Tools included Serious Games, workbooks, digital modules, facilitator kits, and structured mentoring programs. Selection criteria emphasized usability across different literacy levels, adaptability to varying connectivity environments, and suitability for diverse learning contexts, ensuring inclusive and equitable access.

5. Validation and Iterative Refinement

The resulting mapping was reviewed with project partners and stakeholders to validate alignment with local realities and practical applicability. Feedback from these consultations informed iterative refinements, enhancing clarity, relevance, and usability. This iterative process ensured that the Compass provides a robust, evidence-informed framework linking youth challenges to practical educational responses and resources.

Mapping table of Youth Challenges, Responses and Tools

This mapping links the main challenges identified through partner consultations across Austria, France, Greece, and Ireland to targeted educational responses and practical tools offered by the YouLead Compass. The framework ensures that youth learning activities are responsive, practical, and tailored to real-world needs, fostering skill development, confidence, and entrepreneurial capacity.

Youth Challenge	Compass Response	YouLead Tool
Lack of Entrepreneurial Knowledge and Practical Skills	Hands-on learning to develop practical skills, resilience, adaptability, and problem-solving	Serious Game + Workbook; Digital learning modules; Reflection exercises
Limited Access to Mentorship, Coaching, and Support Systems	Structured peer and expert mentoring; networking and ongoing support	Audiobook + community events
Financial and Funding Barriers	Simplify funding processes; provide guidance on financial planning and resource allocation	Serious game scenarios Facilitators kits
Administrative and Regulatory Complexity	Clarify legal, tax, and regulatory requirements in accessible formats; practical walkthroughs	Serious game scenarios
Market Access and Business Development Challenges	Support market research, business planning, and networking; simulate business development activities	Serious game scenarios

Psychological and Environmental Barriers	Build resilience, confidence, and growth mindset; address geographical/resource limitations through resilience & reflection exercises	**Serious Game + Workbook**

Selecting the proper tools

How to integrate the tools into workshops and mentoring

Sample Session Plan: Enhancing Motivation and Entrepreneurial Awareness

How to integrate the tools into workshops and mentoring

Purpose of the Tool-selection framework

The tool-selection framework serves as a central, operational element of the YouLead Compass. Its primary purpose is to ensure that choices about which pedagogical and digital instruments to deploy are systematic, transparent, evidence-based and tailored to the needs of youth with fewer opportunities. Rather than leaving tool choice to ad-hoc judgement, the framework provides partners, youth workers and trainers with a consistent decision-making architecture that aligns: (a) the needs analysis carried out in WP2; (b) the digital resources developed in WP3; (c) the training and piloting activities in WP4; and (d) the uptake, dissemination and sustainability goals of WP5.

The tool-selection framework has the following operational objectives:

- **Match tools to needs:** Provide clear guidance to match identified youth challenges (e.g., low literacy, limited mentorship, financial barriers) to pedagogical responses and concrete YouLead tools (Serious Game, Audiobook, Animation Palette, Workbooks, Facilitator Kits).

- **Ensure pedagogical coherence:** Guarantee that selected tools activate the project's methodological principles (human-centred design; learning by doing; gamification; digital inclusion; co-creation; mentorship; emotional safety).

- **Maximise inclusivity and accessibility:** Prioritise tools and delivery modes that are accessible across literacy levels, connectivity constraints, language differences and disability requirements.

- **Promote feasibility and sustainability:** Steer choices towards tools that are feasible within partners' resources and that can be sustained, adapted or scaled after project completion.
- **Facilitate harmonised implementation:** Provide a shared, replicable process that WP4 training labs and WP5 dissemination can reference, ensuring cross-partner comparability and quality assurance.
- **Support iterative evaluation and refinement:** Embed monitoring and feedback loops so that tool choices can be validated and refined through pilots and training feedback.

Tool-selection criteria

The selection of appropriate digital and pedagogical tools is a critical step in ensuring the quality, inclusiveness, and effectiveness of YouLead interventions. Because young people with fewer opportunities face highly diverse challenges—ranging from low literacy, limited access to technology, low confidence, or fragmented entrepreneurial knowledge—the process of selecting tools cannot rely on intuition alone. Instead, it requires a structured and transparent set of criteria that ensures that each tool deployed in the learning journey is both fit-for-purpose and fit-for-context.

Pedagogical fit

Pedagogical fit refers to the **degree to which a tool supports the intended learning outcomes, learning approach**, and **didactic principles** established in WP2.

A tool is considered pedagogically appropriate when it:

1. Directly supports the intended learning objective (knowledge acquisition, skill development, attitude change, behavioural activation).

2. Activates the core YouLead methodological principles, such as experiential learning, gamification, human-centred design, storytelling, co-creation, or mentorship.

3. Matches the cognitive and developmental level of the learners, avoiding unnecessary complexity while still stimulating critical thinking and creativity.

4. Facilitates active engagement, enabling learners to practice, experiment, reflect, or make decisions within the learning experience.

Examples:

- The **Serious Game** aligns well with learning objectives focused on problem-solving, entrepreneurial reasoning, and experiential practice.
- The **Audiobook/Podcast** is pedagogically fitting when the objective is to convey knowledge, role models, or motivational narratives.
- The **Animation Palette** supports conceptual explanations, awareness-raising, and simplified introduction of complex topics (e.g., value proposition, cash-flow basics).

Context relevance and contextualisation

Tools must be **relevant to the learners' socio-economic realities**, **entrepreneurial aspirations**, and **cultural or linguistic context**.

This criterion assesses:

1. Relevance of thematic content to real-life entrepreneurial pathways accessible to disadvantaged youth.
2. Alignment between tool narrative/visuals and the learners' lived experiences, avoiding abstract or culturally distant examples.
3. Adaptability of content to local examples, local languages, or contextual constraints identified in WP2 national mappings.

Accessibility and inclusion

Accessibility is central to the YouLead mission. A selected tool is appropriate only if it can be **used effectively** by youth with fewer opportunities, regardless of literacy, socio-economic constraints, or disabilities.

Criteria include:

1. Low literacy compatibility (audio formats, simplified language, visual storytelling).
2. Digital accessibility:
    a. low bandwidth requirements,
    b. offline functionality,
    c. mobile-first design.
3. Disability-inclusive features, such as subtitles, contrast clarity, audio narration, or text-to-speech compatibility.
4. Ease of navigation for users unfamiliar with digital interfaces.
5. Language accessibility (simple vocabulary, translatability, multilingual versions as needed).

Technical feasibility

This criterion helps ensure that selected tools can **realistically be implemented given available infrastructures**, **staff competencies**, and **time constraints**.

Technical feasibility includes:

1. Device compatibility (smartphone, tablet, PC).
2. Connectivity requirements relative to local bandwidth availability.
3. User-friendliness (onboarding time, minimal technical support needed).
4. Resilience to unstable connections or older devices.
5. Training needs for youth workers and facilitators who will deploy the tool.

Engagement and motivation

Tools must be capable of **capturing** and **sustaining attention**, particularly among youth with low self-confidence, low patience for abstract theory, or previous negative learning experiences.

This criterion evaluates:

1. Gamification features (points, missions, storytelling).
2. Narrative appeal (relatable characters, real-world scenarios).
3. Interactivity level (choices, branching paths, feedback loops).
4. Emotional resonance (moment of success, inclusion, empowerment).
5. Capacity to promote ownership of the learning journey.

Complementary with other tools

No single tool should operate in isolation. This criterion ensures that the selected tool **fits coherently within a blended learning sequence** or **session plan**.

Complementarity includes:

1. Alignment with preceding and following steps in the session/module.
2. Ability to reinforce or extend learning introduced by another tool.
3. Cross-format reinforcement (e.g., a podcast introduces a concept; the animation explains it visually; the game lets the learner practice it).
4. Balance between digital and human interaction (tools should not replace mentorship but strengthen it).

Sustainability and reusability

To ensure long-term impact beyond the project lifespan, tools must be selected with **sustainability** in mind.

This criterion assesses:

1. Durability of the resource (updated or obsolete in 2–3 years?).
2. Ease of reuse by youth workers after the project ends.
3. Need for recurrent costs or subscriptions (should be avoided).
4. Compatibility with open-source or freely available distribution models.
5. Ease of integrating into existing youth work ecosystems.

Monitoring and Evaluation Alignment

Selected tools must generate observable learning outputs and measurable feedback that feed **WP4 evaluation frameworks**.

A tool is appropriate if it enables:

1. Clear learning indicators (completion, choices, reflections).
2. Opportunities for facilitators to capture qualitative feedback.
3. Pre/post assessment options (immediate or delayed).
4. User analytics (where applicable and GDPR-safe).
5. Observable behavioural outcomes during facilitation activities.

Tool-Selection Process / Methodology

The methodology described below provides a step-by-step process that youth workers, educators, and project partners can use to identify, match, and operationalise tools from the Digital Quiver within any learning activity, training session, or module.

Overview of the methodological logic

The process follows a needs-driven → objective-aligned → criteria-based → context-validated logic:

1. **Start from the needs** of the learners identified through WP2 (motivational, socio-emotional, cognitive, entrepreneurial, and inclusion needs).

2. **Translate those needs into clear learning objectives** for the specific session or module.
3. **Select tools** using a **structured criteria grid**.
4. **Validate the selection** against the local context and constraints (technology, time, group size, competencies of facilitators).
5. **Integrate the chosen tool** into a coherent learning sequence.
6. **Pilot, observe, adjust**, and only then formalise.

Step-by-step tool selection process

Step 1 – Define the Target Group and Its Needs

Before selecting any tool, practitioners must identify:

- Who the learners are (age range, background, barriers, motivations).
- What specific needs they exhibit (e.g., low literacy, low confidence, lack of entrepreneurial exposure, limited attention span, need for visual support).
- What stage of their entrepreneurial journey they are in (awareness, exploration, idea generation, early activation).

Step 2 – Identify the Learning Objectives

Each session or activity must specify what participants should:

- Know (conceptual knowledge)
- Understand (contextualised meaning)
- Be able to do (skills, behaviours, problem-solving)
- Feel or believe (motivation, confidence, self-efficacy)

Step 3 – Consider the Desired Learning Experience

The YouLead methodology is grounded in experiential, engaging, and human-centred approaches.

Facilitators should identify what type of learning experience they want to create:

- Exploratory (discovering, observing, being inspired)
- Reflective (thinking, discussing, personalising)
- Applied (practising, testing decisions, confronting scenarios)
- Interactive and playful (games, challenges, narrative journeys)
- Collaborative (group tasks, peer exchange, co-creation)

Step 4 – Apply the Tool-Selection Criteria

Using the criteria outlined before (pedagogical fit, accessibility, engagement potential, technical feasibility, etc.), facilitators systematically assess the relevance of each candidate tool. This enables transparency and replicability.

The assessment may include:

- A scoring rubric
- A short justification statement
- A visual decision matrix
- A "traffic-light" classification (green = strong fit; yellow = usable with adaptations; red = not suitable)

Step 5 – Validate Against Contextual Constraints

Even a pedagogically perfect tool may be unusable in a given context.

Validation includes:

- Technical feasibility (internet connection, device availability)
- Space and time constraints
- Facilitator readiness
- Group dynamics (size, diversity, behavioural risks)
- Cultural and linguistic relevance

If a tool fails context validation, an alternative must be selected.

Step 6 – Integrate the Tool into a Blended Learning Sequence

Tools must be integrated into a coherent learning sequence rather than used in isolation.

This step involves:

1. Determining the tool's placement (warm-up, core activity, reflection, closure).
2. Ensuring smooth transitions before and after the tool.
3. Aligning complementary tools (e.g., animation → discussion → game → reflection).
4. Preparing guiding questions, reflection prompts, or debrief notes.

Step 7 – Pilot and Adapt

Facilitators should test the tool with a small group or in a short version of the activity.

The piloting phase checks:

- Comprehension
- Engagement level
- Technical stability
- Emotional response
- Inclusiveness
- Relevance to objectives

Based on pilot feedback, adaptations are made before implementation with the full group.

Step 8 – Implement, Observe, Reflect

During real implementation:

- Facilitators track engagement, reactions, and difficulties.
- Learners' feedback is collected informally or through quick evaluation sheets.
- Observations are documented for future refinement and for feeding WP4 evaluation processes.

This step ensures continuous improvement and alignment with youth needs over time.

Tool-objective Mapping Table

Learning Objective Category	Specific Objective	Recommended Tool(s)	Why use it/them?
Motivation & Engagement	**Increase initial motivation for entrepreneurship**	YouLead Animation Palette	Short, colourful animations capture attention, simplify complex ideas, and create emotional engagement—ideal for low-confidence learners.
	Reduce anxiety and increase openness to learning	YouLead Audiobook/Podcast	The narrative style feels friendly and non-threatening; audio format reduces pressure for learners with low literacy.
	Strengthen curiosity and "entrepreneurial spark"	Digital Serious Game	Game-based learning creates positive emotional impact, supports exploration, and introduces entrepreneurship through play.
Entrepreneurial Awareness	**Understand what entrepreneurship is**	Animation Palette, Audiobook/Podcast	Animations explain core concepts visually; audio stories demonstrate real-life examples in an accessible way.
	Recognise different types of entrepreneurship	Digital Serious Game	Scenarios allow learners to explore multiple paths (social business, creative industries, services, etc.).
Skill Development (Soft Skills)	**Build confidence and self-efficacy**	Audiobook/Podcast Digital Serious game	Hearing relatable stories boosts self-belief; gameplay allows safe trial-and-error.
	Improve communication skills	Animation Palette	Learners create simple storyboards or respond to animation prompts.
	Strengthen teamwork and cooperation	Digital Serious Game	Joint decision-making fosters collaboration.

Category	Skill	Tool	Description
Entrepreneurial Competences (Harder Skills)	**Basic idea development**	Digital Serious Game	The game guides players through idea creation, choices, and consequences.
	Understanding market needs & customers	Animation Palette, Digital Serious Game	Short scenarios + interactive exploration of customer profiles.
	Introductory financial literacy	Digital Serious Game	Simulated financial decisions lower fear and build intuitive understanding.
Digital Skills & Digital Confidence	**Become comfortable using digital tools**	Animation Palette Digital Serous Game	Both tools create a fun, low-pressure digital experience.
	Navigate multimedia educational content	Audiobook/Podcast Animation Palette	Builds capacity to consume and switch between digital formats.
Reflection & Personal Growth	**Reflect on personal strengths and weaknesses**	Audiobook/Podcast	Audio stories stimulate introspection and emotional connection.
	Learn from mistakes and analyse outcomes	Digital Serious Game	The game provides immediate feedback and safe failure scenarios.
Inclusion & Accessibility	**Bridge literacy gaps**	Audiobook/Podcast Animation Palette	Text-lite and visually/audibly accessible formats help reduce barriers.
	Adapt learning to mixed-ability groups	Audiobook/Podcast Animation Palette Digital Serious Game	Each tool offers an alternative learning modality.

Sample Session Plan: Enhancing Motivation and Entrepreneurial Awareness

Exploring Entrepreneurship Through the YouLead Digital Serious Game

Duration: approx. 90–120

Context and Target Group: Youth with fewer opportunities, aged 16–25.

Learning Objective(s)

➔ Understand key entrepreneurial concepts such as business planning, market research, risk assessment, and financial basics.

➔ Develop problem-solving, creativity, and decision-making skills in entrepreneurial contexts.

➔ Gain experience in applying entrepreneurial thinking through digital simulations and gamified learning.

➔ Build resilience and reflective skills to analyze and learn from successes and failures.

➔ Encourage collaboration and peer learning while exploring entrepreneurial challenges.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of the activity, participants will be able to:

- Identify and analyze common challenges faced by young entrepreneurs.
- Demonstrate the ability to make informed decisions in simulated business scenarios.
- Apply entrepreneurial concepts within the Digital Serious Game environment.

- Reflect critically on their choices and outcomes, identifying lessons for real-world application.
- Show improved engagement, confidence, and motivation to explore entrepreneurship further.
- Articulate at least one actionable idea or project they could pursue in real life.

Structure of the session

Step 1 – Welcome and Introduction (10 minutes)

1. Facilitator welcomes participants and introduces themselves.
2. Facilitator presents session objectives and agenda.
3. Participants briefly introduce themselves and share background.
4. Icebreaker activity to encourage interaction.
5. Facilitator models respectful communication and ensures inclusivity.

Step 2 – Identifying Entrepreneurial Challenges (20 minutes)

1. Facilitator explains the purpose: explore real-life challenges in starting or running a business.
2. Participants form small groups and discuss personal experiences or perceived barriers in entrepreneurship.
3. Groups list challenges (financial, market access, skills gaps, fear of failure) on sticky notes or worksheets.
4. Facilitator circulates, prompts reflection: "Which challenges do you face most frequently? How do they affect your entrepreneurial ambitions?"
5. Groups share top challenges with the larger group; facilitator notes common patterns.

Step 3 – Introduction to the YouLead Digital Serious Game(20 minutes)

1. Facilitator presents the Digital Serious Game, explaining its role in simulating entrepreneurial decision-making.
2. Facilitator demonstrates key game mechanics, showing how challenges from Step 2 are reflected in game scenarios.

3. Participants observe and ask questions about game dynamics, decision points, and potential learning outcomes.
4. Facilitator highlights how the game links entrepreneurial concepts (market research, finance, resilience) with hands-on activities.

Step 4 – Hands-On Tool Practice (40 minutes)

1. Participants play the game individually or in small groups, making business decisions and solving entrepreneurial problems in simulated scenarios.
2. Facilitator provides guidance, encourages experimentation, and prompts reflection on choices.
3. Participants discuss strategies, outcomes, and lessons learned within their groups.
4. Emphasis on connecting game experiences to real entrepreneurial skills: problem-solving, teamwork, risk assessment, and resilience.

Step 5 – Reflection & Debrief (20 minutes)

1. Facilitator leads discussion on insights gained from the game: "Which strategies worked? What were the consequences of different decisions?"
2. Participants relate game experiences to personal entrepreneurial goals or potential ventures.
3. Facilitator emphasizes transferable skills and encourages identifying next steps.

Step 6 – Optional Introduction to the Digital Serious Game (10–20 minutes)

1. Facilitator summarizes key entrepreneurial lessons from the workshop.
2. Participants are encouraged to apply insights to their own ideas/projects.
3. Facilitator shares resources for further exploration (Digital Game, YouLead Audio Book, Animation Palette).
4. Participants provide feedback and leave with clear understanding of how to continue developing entrepreneurial skills.

Country Snapshots: Youth Ecosystems

Austria

France

Greece

Ireland

Austria

Overview of Youth Entrepreneurship

Youth entrepreneurship is gaining increasing relevance in Austria, as self-employment and innovative thinking are becoming accessible at all ages. Young entrepreneurs play a critical role in driving innovation, economic growth, and job creation. While Austria actively supports entrepreneurial ideas across generations, many young people still face significant barriers—particularly in the early stages—such as fear of failure and lack of experience.

Austria's legal framework provides a relatively easy entry into entrepreneurship through the "freies Gewerbe" system, which allows individuals to start a business without needing specific qualifications or background. However, this low-barrier entry often leads to challenges later on, especially when navigating the country's complex legal and financial landscape. Risk tolerance—especially regarding financial and legal responsibilities—is essential due to Austria's highly regulated environment.

Recent studies shed light on the mindset and intentions of young people toward entrepreneurship in Austria. According to a 2019 study by FH Joanneum and BM (Bundesministerium Austria), around 40% of individuals between the ages of 18 and 34 were entrepreneurially active. The study emphasized that motivations are more often based on opportunity rather than necessity—a positive sign for long-term impact and sustainability.

Furthermore, both the 2019 and 2025 research consistently highlight a strong correlation between personal interests—especially in entrepreneurial, practical-technical, and social domains—and the intention to start a business.

Gender disparities persist. A 2025 study conducted by Talentcenter and the University of Graz found that while 30% of young people could imagine starting a business, only 7% had taken concrete steps, with young men significantly more likely to start than women.

These insights underline the need to support youth not only through legal and financial measures, but also by addressing their diverse interests, motivations, and the psychological barriers they face in taking the first step into entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurial intentions among Austrian youth remain high (30–40%), but actual business creation is low (≈7%). This intention–action gap has been documented by both Friedl et al. (2019) and WPZ Research & AIT (2024). This confirms the findings of Friedl et al. (2019) and underlines the persistent intention–action gap. Both studies also noted that entrepreneurship is primarily opportunity-driven and that the gender gap remains significant.

Cultural and Socio-Economic Factors

Austria is characterised by risk aversion and a stigma surrounding failure, which dampen entrepreneurial engagement (Friedl et al., 2019). Stakeholders in Graz underlined regional disparities: Vienna and Graz offer dense networks and incubators, while rural youth face isolation and fewer mentors.

Education and Training Systems

Entrepreneurship education is fragmented. While innovative initiatives exist, they are not systemically embedded (WPZ Research & AIT, 2024). Skill gaps remain in financial/legal literacy—taxation, accounting, contract law, social security—and in soft skills such as negotiation, pitching, and conflict resolution (Friedl et al., 2019). Participants in the **YouLead Breakfast Session (2025)** stressed that informal peer-learning formats are often more engaging than formal training.

Barriers and Challenges

Despite Austria's supportive entry frameworks, young entrepreneurs continue to face several persistent challenges that hinder long-term success. These can be grouped into three key areas:

Knowledge Gaps:
Many young founders in Austria lack essential financial and legal literacy, which is rarely covered in depth in the school system. Practical skills such as tax planning, business registration, or contract management are often acquired too late—leading to costly mistakes in the early stages of a venture.

Soft Skills Needs:
Youth entrepreneurs frequently report difficulties in areas like negotiation, self-presentation, and conflict resolution—skills that are crucial for navigating partnerships, clients, and team dynamics. These are not systematically developed in formal education or early career environments.

Emotional Barriers:
Fear of failure, self-doubt, and a lack of relatable role models often prevent young Austrians from taking the first entrepreneurial step. Isolation—especially outside major cities—is another common theme.

Innovation and Trends in Youth Entrepreneurship

The introduction of the **FlexKapG** in 2023, documented by the **WKO (2023b)**, lowered entry barriers for scalable startups. Peer-led spaces such as coworking and incubators are expanding (WPZ Research & AIT,

	2024). Schools and universities increasingly integrate project-based entrepreneurial learning
Digital and Technological Trends	Digitalisation drives many youth businesses, especially in e-commerce and platforms (WPZ Research & AIT, 2024). However, the digital divide between urban and rural regions persists, limiting equal access to opportunities (YouLead Breakfast Session, 2025)

Takeaway

- **High entrepreneurial interest but low execution since 30–40% of Austrian youth express interest in entrepreneurship, only about 7% take concrete steps—indicating a strong and persistent intention-action gap**
- **Austria's easy business entry contrasts with a complex operational environment that overwhelms young founders.**
- **Entrepreneurial education is fragmented and fails to prepare youth for real-world challenges.**
- **Social and cultural conditions shape unequal access to entrepreneurship since gender and regional disparities remain strong**
- **Evolving innovation trends create opportunities, but uneven digital access limits participation**

France

Overview of Youth Entrepreneurship	• Current picture: France's entrepreneurship dynamism is strong — over 1 million new businesses registered in 2023 (nationally), with youth entrepreneurship highlighted as a priority area in recent ecosystem reports • Youth focus: national and international reviews (OECD, GEM) single out youth as a target for inclusive entrepreneurship policies and note specific programmes and diagnostics aimed at 18–34-year-olds.
Cultural and Socio-Economic Factors	• Attitudes: France shows growing cultural acceptance of entrepreneurship, but caution and preference for stable employment remain stronger than in higher-risk startup cultures. • Inequalities: regional disparities (Paris vs. regions), and socio-economic divides (under-served suburbs/rural areas) limit access to networks and capital for many young people. • Social safety net: France's generous social protections reduce downside risk for entrepreneurs but can also create bureaucratic complexity for small startups. OECD
Education and Training Systems	• School & university initiatives: Entrepreneurship is increasingly embedded in curricula and extra-curricular offers (secondary school entrepreneurial spirit programmes; numerous entrepreneurship degrees and university accelerators). • Practical supports: A dense network of incubators, accelerators and university spin-off support helps students and grads, especially in major cities (Paris, Lyon, Grenoble). • Skills gap: Reports note the need for stronger practical training in business development, fundraising, and digital/AI skills for young founders.
Barriers and Challenges	• Access to finance: Early-stage funding for youth-led ventures remains constrained compared with U.S. benchmarks; seed and growth capital often concentrates in Paris.

	• Administrative burden & regulation: Business creation is easier than before, but taxation, labour rules and bureaucratic complexity still deter some young founders from scaling. • Inequality of opportunity: Network effects, regional gaps, and limited mentorship for under-represented groups (youth from disadvantaged areas, migrants) persist. OECD recommends targeted inclusive policies. • Talent & hiring: Competition for developers and AI specialists is intense; younger firms often lose talent to larger tech players or established firms.
Innovation and Trends in Youth Entrepreneurship	• Tech & deep tech boom: Paris and some regional hubs are producing high-growth startups (AI, biotech, cleantech); government initiatives (e.g., France 2030) push strategic sectors. • Startup ecosystem maturation: More accelerators, POC programmes, and French Tech initiatives (Next40/120) provide scale pathways—these benefits ambitious young founders with scalable ideas. • Social entrepreneurship: Rising interest in green/social ventures among youth, aligned with EU and national sustainability funding windows.
Digital and Technological Trends	• AI & data: Paris is positioning as a European AI hub; many youth founders enter AI-enabled product spaces but face capital and talent constraints. • Digital infrastructure & SME digitisation: France has strong fibre rollout progress but SMEs (and many youth ventures) still need help adopting advanced cloud/AI tools—national digital strategies highlight this gap. • Funding & policy supports: Large public programmes (France 2030 and related investment schemes) prioritise digital, green tech and advanced manufacturing — opportunities for youth founders with aligned projects.

Takeaway
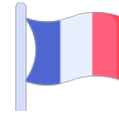
- **Momentum is high and institutions are paying attention, but policy and support still need tailoring so young founders can scale rather than just create micro-businesses**
- **Cultural respect for entrepreneurship is growing, yet socio-economic and geographic inequalities remain the main non-technical constraints for youth entrants.**
- **Education infrastructure is improving and offers many entry points, but scaling skills (finance, commercialization, tech) needs reinforcement.**
- **The main constraints are systemic (finance, regulation, networks). Targeted policy and regional capital can reduce these barriers for youth.**
- **Young entrepreneurs are increasingly oriented toward tech and impact; the ecosystem offers more ladders to scale than a few years ago**
- **Digital opportunities (AI, cloud, platform models) are abundant; success depends on talent access, funding and commercialization support.**

Greece

| Overview of Youth Entrepreneurship | Over the past decade, Greece has undergone a significant transformation in its youth entrepreneurship landscape, shaped by both economic necessity and policy innovation. Following the financial crisis of the 2010s, youth unemployment rates reached some of the highest levels in Europe—often exceeding 35–40%. This challenge prompted national and EU-supported initiatives to promote entrepreneurship as a means of employability, resilience, and economic diversification. Today, youth entrepreneurship is recognized as a strategic pillar of Greece's economic recovery and digital transition.

Government policies such as the National Strategy for Youth Entrepreneurship (2020–2027) and initiatives supported by the Operational Programme "Human Resources Development, Education and Lifelong Learning" (ESPA) have been instrumental in fostering entrepreneurship education, start-up incubation, and access to finance. Greece's participation in EU programs such as Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs, EIT Digital, and Horizon Europe has further strengthened opportunities for young innovators. Additionally, the Hellenic Development Bank (HDB) and national incubator networks have expanded access to start-up financing, helping young entrepreneurs bridge the gap between idea development and business sustainability.

While unemployment among youth remains a concern, recent years have shown a gradual improvement, with entrepreneurship emerging as both a job creation mechanism and a driver of social change. The rise of start-ups in technology, green innovation, and creative industries illustrates a growing appetite for innovation-led ventures among young Greeks. |
| --- | --- |
| Cultural and Socio-Economic Factors | Cultural attitudes toward entrepreneurship in Greece have evolved considerably. Traditionally, Greek society placed a higher value on stable employment in the public or corporate sectors; however, prolonged economic instability has shifted perceptions, with self-employment and entrepreneurship increasingly viewed as viable and even aspirational paths. Younger generations, in particular, show greater openness to innovation, risk-taking, and collaboration, |

supported by an expanding network of incubators, accelerators, and entrepreneurial communities.

Regional and gender disparities, however, remain significant. Urban centers such as Athens and Thessaloniki host most entrepreneurial activity, while rural and island regions continue to face limited access to training, funding, and digital infrastructure. Women entrepreneurs, despite growing representation, still encounter barriers related to funding and mentorship opportunities. Programs such as the GreenHouse Accelerator and the Women Do Business Initiative have sought to address these inequalities by promoting inclusivity and equal access to entrepreneurial resources.

Education and Training Systems

Entrepreneurship education in Greece has become increasingly integrated into both formal and non-formal education frameworks. Universities such as the Athens University of Economics and Business, University of Macedonia, and University of Crete have established entrepreneurship centers, incubators, and innovation hubs that offer specialized courses, summer schools, and mentoring programs. Initiatives like the YES Summer School provide early exposure to entrepreneurial learning at the secondary education level, promoting creativity, teamwork, and problem-solving.

At the tertiary level, entrepreneurship is embedded in curricula through project-based learning, business competitions, and cross-disciplinary collaborations. The Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, in cooperation with the General Secretariat for Vocational Education, Training, and Lifelong Learning, has encouraged the inclusion of entrepreneurship-related modules in vocational programs and youth work. Non-formal education actors such as the Youth Entrepreneurship Club (YEC) complement formal education by offering accessible learning opportunities that focus on empowerment and experiential engagement, especially for disadvantaged youth.

Barriers and Challenges

Despite progress, several challenges persist within the Greek youth entrepreneurship ecosystem. Access to finance remains a primary barrier, particularly for early-stage entrepreneurs and those from marginalized backgrounds. While public and EU-funded programs have expanded, bureaucratic complexity and limited venture capital availability can hinder growth. Mentorship and guidance are often concentrated in major cities, leaving regional youth with fewer opportunities for professional support.

Moreover, digital readiness and technological literacy remain uneven across regions and demographics. Many young people lack the necessary digital tools or training to fully leverage online platforms for business development. Additionally, risk aversion and limited entrepreneurial experience among educators can restrict the effective delivery of entrepreneurship education. Addressing these challenges

	requires a coordinated approach involving education, finance, and policy reform, alongside continuous support for networking and community-building initiatives.
Innovation and Trends in Youth Entrepreneurship	Innovation and sustainability are increasingly central to youth entrepreneurship in Greece. Emerging start-ups are focusing on digital transformation, circular economy practices, and green technologies, reflecting alignment with EU Green Deal priorities. The promotion of social entrepreneurship has also gained traction, with youth-led ventures addressing issues such as environmental protection, cultural heritage preservation, and social inclusion. Collaborations between public institutions, private sector actors, and universities are producing a new generation of innovation-oriented programs. Examples include Egg – enter•grow•go, which provides incubation and mentoring to technology-based start-ups, and the GreenHouse Accelerator, which integrates sustainability and community outreach. These initiatives demonstrate how entrepreneurship education can be leveraged to drive social impact and regional development.
Digital and Technological Trends	The digitalization of entrepreneurship education has accelerated rapidly in recent years. Greek youth increasingly rely on digital tools, online learning platforms, and virtual mentoring environments to acquire entrepreneurial skills. Programs have begun integrating serious games, simulation-based learning, and digital collaboration tools to enhance engagement and experiential learning. Incubators and accelerators such as Egg and ACEin have adopted hybrid and remote training models, allowing broader participation and flexibility. Digital ecosystems now facilitate networking between start-ups, investors, and educators, helping to overcome geographic barriers. Furthermore, initiatives promoting digital upskilling—supported by EU programs like Digital Europe and EIT Digital—are equipping young entrepreneurs with competencies in coding, digital marketing, and data management. These trends collectively signal a shift toward a more connected, adaptive, and technology-driven entrepreneurial culture in Greece.

Takeaway

- **Youth entrepreneurship has become a core pillar of Greece's economic recovery, shifting from crisis-driven necessity to an increasingly innovation-driven opportunity.**

- **Cultural attitudes toward entrepreneurship are improving, but strong regional and gender inequalities continue to limit who benefits from the ecosystem.**

- **Education and training systems now offer many pathways into entrepreneurship, yet scaling requires stronger digital readiness, deeper mentoring, and more practical experience among educators.**

- **Systemic barriers—bureaucracy, weak access to finance, limited venture capital, and uneven support outside major cities—remain the main obstacles preventing youth from moving beyond early stages.**

- **Young Greek entrepreneurs are increasingly oriented toward technology, sustainability, and social impact, supported by collaborative public–private innovation programs and rapid digitalization.**

Ireland

Overview of Youth Entrepreneurship	**High early-stage entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) :** Ireland shows stronger TEA rate, stating 12.5% face to EU average of 8.4% (Oireachtas,2024) According to the OECD, in terms of inclusive entrepreneurship, Ireland displayed a **high youth entrepreneurship rate, counted on 17%** between 2019 and 2023, against 9% of EU average. **Youth entrepreneurship is explicitly embedded in Ireland's enterprise strategy and action plans**, including the White Paper on Enterprise 2022–2030 and the SME & Entrepreneurship Growth Plan, which stress digitalisation, green transition and regional balance as priorities for enterprise growth. **Pipeline of supports from school to HPSU**: Ireland operates a visible pipeline, in school-level enterprise programmes, Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) for micro firms, and Enterprise Ireland's High Potential Start-Up (HPSU) and pre-seed pathways, providing staged supports for founders aiming to scale.
Cultural and Socio-Economic Factors	**Ireland as strong innovator:** European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS) 2025 classifies Ireland as a "Strong Innovator" with 123.1 scored performance relative to EU. **Positive attitude towards entrepreneurship:** Irish culture continues to be supportive of entrepreneurial activity as over 80% of adults hold successful entrepreneurs in high regard**.** This relates to mediatic presence of successful stories. It translates, nevertheless to only 67% of adults believing entrepreneurship is a good career choice. Positive perception in entrepreneurship opportunities: Nearly 60% of adults in Ireland perceive business opportunities in their local area, suggesting entrepreneurial mindset. **Increase in youth entrepreneurship in the 18-24 y.o groups:** many early-stage entrepreneurs come from the age 18-24, representing 18% back in 2021. Early-stage entrepreneurs tend to have over secondary education: 74% have post-secondary education.

	Gender gap is to be considered: Male entrepreneurs represent the most nascent entrepreneurs and new business owners; they are also the group that demonstrates more interest in starting a business; conversely, females are outruns in terms of educational level.
Education and Training Systems	Ireland employs a structured, multi-level system designed to cultivate entrepreneurial skills: Primary and Secondary Education: **Junior Entrepreneur Programme (JEP)** and **Student Enterprise Programme** (SEP): These national programmes embed "learning by doing" into the school system. They teach essential soft skills—creativity, risk-taking, project management, and basic financial literacy—through the creation and operation of mini-companies (JEP and SEP official websites). **Curriculum Integration**: The revised Framework for Junior Cycle explicitly integrates "Takes initiative, is innovative and develops entrepreneurial skills" as part of the programme; Third-Level and Lifelong Learning: At the Cork Institute of technology, for example, the goal is to develop an "**Entrepreneurial Graduate**" across all disciplines. HEIs offer cross-faculty entrepreneurship modules and accelerator supports. Also, Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) serve as the critical delivery channel for post-education support, providing comprehensive training, one-to-one mentoring, and financial grants to first-time entrepreneurs.
Barriers and Challenges	A significant issue is the "funding gap" for companies attempting to raise larger, later-stage rounds (Series A and above). Reports from the technology sector indicate a worrying trend of declining deal numbers in the mid-range funding brackets (€3–10 million), which can stifle the growth of young, scalable businesses. There is a clear gender gap: women were nearly 20% less likely to report having entrepreneurship skills than men. Similarly, youth (ages 18-30) were nearly 15% less likely than the overall adult population to report these skills. These measured skills gaps are a key factor driving the differing entrepreneurship rates across population groups. Entrepreneurship policy and support generally lack a tailored approach for promoting inclusive entrepreneurship among target population groups at both the national and local levels. Consequently, few government-led programs are specifically designed for underrepresented entrepreneurs, with policies primarily making exceptions only for women. In disadvantaged communities, the welfare benefit trap is a major problem: the potential loss of income from social security or supplemental disability programs often becomes a significant barrier to self-employment.

Innovation and Trends in Youth Entrepreneurship	Deep Tech and Export Focus: Government investment, particularly through Enterprise Ireland's High Potential Start-Up (HPSU) programme, encourages young founders to focus on deep technology. Key sectors for new ventures include Cybersecurity, Digital Health, Fintech, and Smart Cities, supporting the national goal of growing indigenous companies with significant export potential. Sustainability and Green Economy: The youth demographic is a major driver of the 'Green' or Sustainable Entrepreneurship trend, prioritising environmental impact and resource efficiency. Policy is actively supporting this via initiatives like the Green for Micro programme, which provides funding for sustainability strategies through the LEO network.
Digital and Technological Trends	High Digital Skills Base: Young Irish founders benefit from a high base of digital literacy. Ireland ranks well for individuals with above basic overall digital skills AI and Disruptive Technology Adoption: New Irish companies are quickly integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other disruptive technologies. The Ireland's Innovation Index 2024 found that a high percentage of Irish companies engaged in Research, Development, and Innovation (RDI), where many young firms operate, are actively prioritising the leveraging of AI for both product development and internal business processes. E-Commerce and Globalisation: Digital skills allow young-led start-ups to be "born global." The government supports this through digital transformation initiatives (e.g., the Grow Digital Portal and vouchers from the LEOs) designed to ensure that even micro-enterprises can leverage e-commerce and digital marketing to compete internationally from the very beginning.

Takeaway 🇮🇪

- **Ireland has a strong and growing entrepreneurial ecosystem, especially among youth.**
- **A structured, end-to-end support pipeline strengthens entrepreneurial talent development.**
- **Innovation capability and digital readiness are major competitive advantages.**
- **Significant structural gaps persist: gender, youth skills, disadvantaged groups, and funding.**
- **Policy prioritises high-growth, export-oriented and sustainable entrepreneurship.**

Best Practices Compilation

Best practices identified in Austria

Best practices identified in France

Best practices identified in Greece

Best practices identified in Ireland

Best practices identified in Austria

Best Practice 1 – Teach for Austria: Entrepreneurship Lab

Brief Description

Teach for Austria runs the *Entrepreneurship Lab* as part of its broader mission to promote equal educational opportunities in Austria. The programme integrates entrepreneurship education into regular classroom learning, particularly in schools located in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. Through project-based work, students design small entrepreneurial initiatives supported by mentors from the business, start-up, and innovation communities. The focus lies on helping students recognise their own potential, think creatively, and develop problem-solving skills through real-life projects. The approach connects education with practice and encourages young people to see entrepreneurship as a mindset, not just a career path.

Teach For Austria
Organisation und Netzwerk für Bildungsfairness

TFA

Werde TFA Fellow

Plan Ahead Bewerbungsfrist am 14. Dezember

Objective(s)

➔ **To empower students regardless of their background, foster creativity, teamwork, and critical thinking, and connect schools with real-world networks of entrepreneurs and professionals.**

Target Audience

- Secondary and VET students, especially from diverse or underserved school environment

URL

https://www.teachforaustria.at/
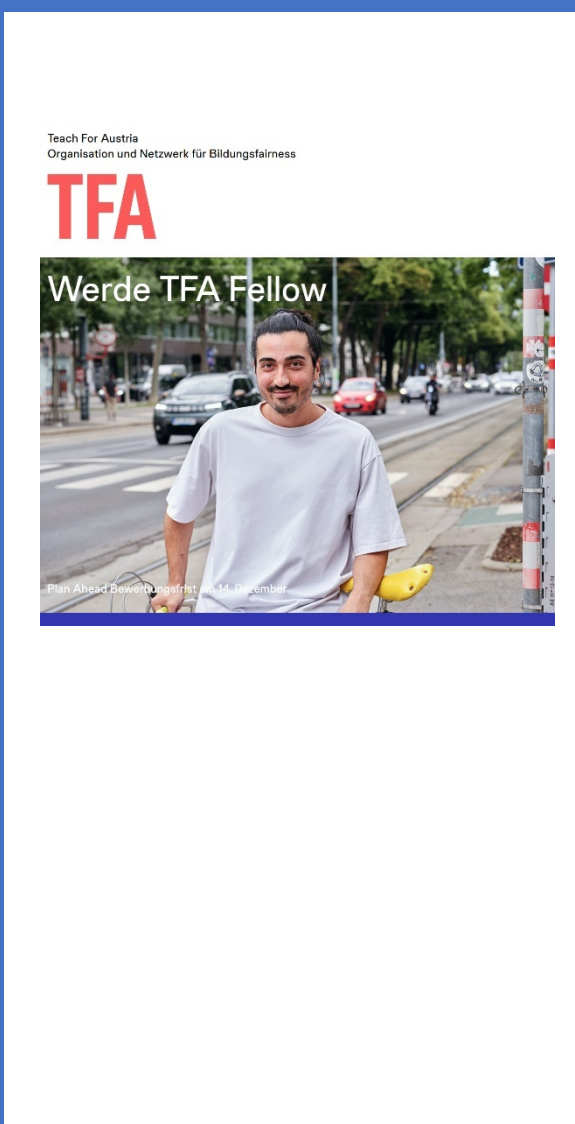
Impact and Results

Key Outcomes	The Entrepreneurship Lab has provided many students with their first direct contact with entrepreneurship. Learners report improved self-confidence, stronger teamwork, and a greater sense of agency in shaping their ideas. Teachers notice higher motivation and engagement when classes include hands-on projects. The approach also helps build lasting links between schools and the business community, supporting inclusion through practical exposure and dialogue.
Success Factors	The initiative's success is rooted in its integration into existing school structures and its close cooperation with external mentors who bring real cases and authentic business experience. Its project-based learning method supports active participation, while the emphasis on social inclusion ensures that all students, regardless of their background, can contribute. The flexibility of the concept allows it to be adapted to different school types and subject areas.
Lesson learned	Continuity of mentoring is essential for achieving lasting outcomes. Experience has shown that the most sustainable results occur when teachers and mentors collaborate over several school terms. For broader implementation, clear teacher toolkits, training formats, and strong local partnerships are required to ensure scalability. Building a community of educators and mentors around the Lab supports long-term impact and knowledge sharing.

Additional Information

Supporting Materials	**Teach For Austria verändert Bildungswege | Teach For Austria**

Jugend Innovativ: National Innovation Competition

Brief Description

Jugend Innovativ is Austria's leading national competition for innovation and entrepreneurship in education. Established in 1987, it motivates students to transform creative ideas into practical solutions in fields such as business, sustainability, science, and technology. The initiative is implemented by Austria Wirtschaftsservice GmbH (AWS) on behalf of three federal ministries and serves as a central platform for developing entrepreneurial and innovative mindsets among young people. In addition to the competition, Jugend Innovativ provides workshops and qualification programmes for students and teachers, offering guidance on creativity, innovation management, and intellectual property protection. The programme combines competition, mentoring, and visibility, helping young people gain confidence, teamwork experience, and presentation skills. Since its launch, more than 11,900 project teams have participated, reflecting its long-term national relevance and its contribution to strengthening Austria's innovation culture at the school level.

Objective(s)

➔ **To promote creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship among young people.**

➔ **To strengthen practical problem-solving and teamwork skills.**

➔ **To bridge education and business through mentoring, networking, and visibility for youth-led projects.**

Target Audience

- Students and teachers from secondary schools, higher technical colleges, and

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https://www.jugendinnovativ.at/
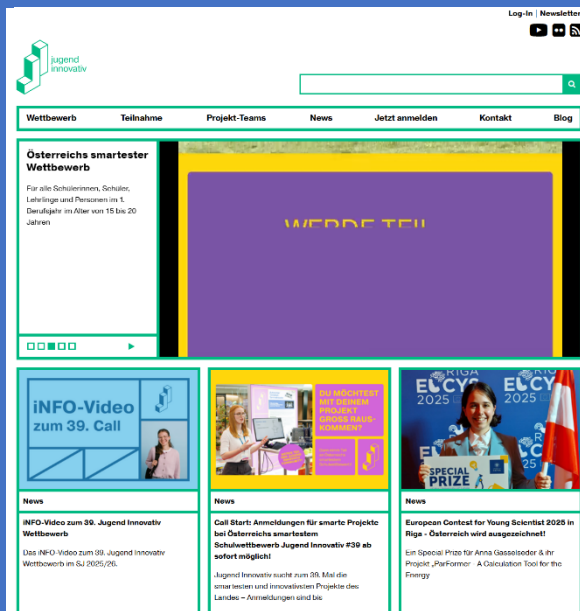
	universities of applied sciences, typically aged 15–20.	

Impact and Results

Key Outcomes	Jugend Innovativ is Austria's national innovation and entrepreneurship competition for young people aged 15–20, organised by Austria Wirtschaftsservice (AWS) and the Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy. Each year, hundreds of projects are submitted across fields such as business, sustainability, and digitalisation. The competition helps young people build entrepreneurial and creative skills, receive expert feedback, and gain national visibility for their ideas. Several winning teams have continued developing their concepts through regional incubators or study projects.
Success Factors	The programme's success is rooted in its clear structure, long-standing government support, and mentoring approach, which connects students with experts from education and business. Its open thematic focus encourages interdisciplinary teamwork and attracts participants from both technical and social backgrounds. The competition's public recognition also motivates teachers and schools to integrate innovation and entrepreneurship topics into their curricula.
Lesson learned	One recurring challenge is keeping participants engaged beyond the competition itself. To address this, organisers have established follow-up formats such as mentoring sessions, alumni networking, and support for connecting with regional innovation hubs. Another lesson has been the importance of gender-sensitive communication and role models to ensure that both male and female students see entrepreneurship as equally accessible.

Additional Information

Supporting Materials	**Jugend Innovativ - Austria Wirtschaftsservice** **Wettbewerb 2025/26- Jugend Innovativ**

Best practices identified in France

Pépite France

Brief Description

Launched in 2014 by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research, Pépite France brings together a national network of student hubs for innovation, transfer, and entrepreneurship spread across the country.

These hubs aim to strengthen entrepreneurial culture within higher education by offering awareness initiatives, training opportunities, and tailored support for young project leaders. Through Pépite France, students and recent graduates with business creation projects are connected to companies, incubators, and funding organizations, helping them move from idea to implementation.

Objective(s)

➔ **Cultivate Entrepreneurial Culture among Students & Graduates**
➔ **Support Project Development & Training**
➔ **Facilitate Resources & Ecosystem Connections**
➔ **Enable Entrepreneurship While Continuing Studies (SNEE)**
➔ **Provide an Online Platform and Community**

Target Audience

- Students in Higher Education
- Recent Graduates
- Early-stage Young Entrepreneurs
- Academic & Business Partners

URL

https://www.pepite-france.fr/
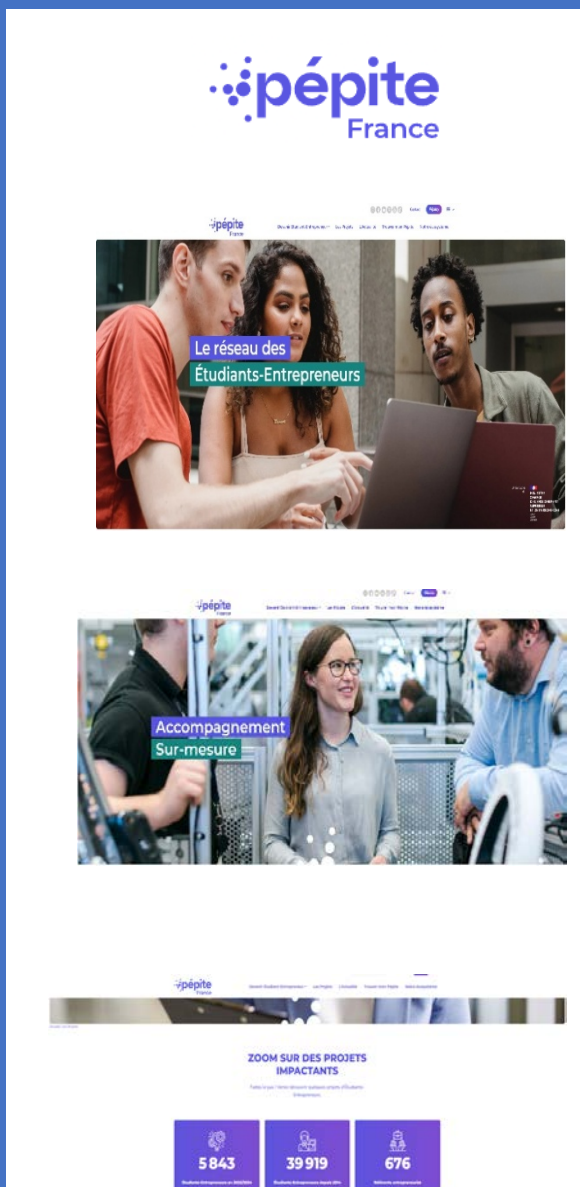
Impact and Results

Key Outcomes	- Since 2014-2015, over 40,000 students and young graduates have been accompanied with entrepreneurial projects through the Pépite network. - In 2023-2024, 5,861 students held SNEE; 1,546 of them were young graduates - In 2023-2024, about 36% of project leaders under Pépite were women - A survey of over 5,800 students showed that many are highly satisfied with Pépite, citing project construction, skills building, credibility of their projects. Approximately 30% of respondents had already created active companies at time of survey, with an average of 2.4 jobs per such company - Pépite was chosen to represent France in the 2024 European Awards for Promoting Entrepreneurship (EEPA) in the category "Promouvoir l'esprit d'entreprendre."
Success Factors	Pépite France has become a key driver of youth entrepreneurship by embedding itself within higher education, ensuring nationwide coverage, and offering comprehensive, hands-on support. Its strength lies in combining legitimacy, territorial reach, skill development, and a focus on impactful innovation.
Lesson learned	➕ **Balancing utility and existential dimensions of legitimacy** Students-entrepreneurs appreciate the social legitimacy and regional anchoring of Pépite more strongly than sometimes the utility dimension (i.e. access to funding, investor networks) and existential dimension (ability to take risk). There is demand for Pépite to boost its offerings in those weaker dimensions. ➖ **Gender gap still exists** While increasing, female students are under-represented among project leaders (≈36% in the latest measured period), showing room for improvement in diversity. ➕ **Sustainability beyond program period** Some enterprises take time to become active and create employment; follow-ups and longitudinal tracking are important. The study of +5,800 students provides that, but more data is helpful. ➖ **Need for stronger financial / investor bridging** Students report that while support is strong for project conception, development, and validation, access to finance (seed, early-stage investors) and investor networks remains an area for improvement

Additional Information

Supporting Materials	- Pépite France **study**: *Effets du dispositif d'accompagnement du réseau Pépite France sur les Étudiants-Entrepreneurs* (2023 survey of

~5,800 students) – gives insight on outcomes, satisfaction etc. [Pepite France](#)

- **Rapport d'activité 2024** – annual report with key metrics. [Pepite France](#)
- **Prix Pépite / Pépites des Pépites** announcements – examples of specific project successes, visibility. [Pepite France](#)
- **The Conversation article** on legitimacy of Pépite from students' perspective. [The Conversation](#)

French Tech 2030

Brief Description

French Tech 2030 is a support programme launched in 2023 by the French government (Mission French Tech, Bpifrance, and the General Secretariat for Investment), under the larger France 2030 investment plan.

It selects a cohort of ~125 emerging innovative companies ("laureates") that work on technologies and sectors aligned with France's strategic priorities (industrial/technological sovereignty, ecological transition, digital, health, agriculture etc.).

The support provided is both financial and non-financial (regulatory help, administrative support, visibility, market / commercial development, public & private procurement, internationalization etc.

Objective(s)

➔ **Support emerging players whose innovations address major societal challenges, including ecological transition, health, digital sovereignty, etc.**

➔ **Help companies scale up in strategic sectors (deep tech, industry, etc.) toward both national and international competitiveness.**

➔ **Reduce barriers related to regulation, financing, norms and administrative oversight.**

➔ **Increase visibility of innovative French companies, globally and in France, helping them attract talent, investment, partnerships**

➔ **Encourage peer-learning and expertise sharing among laureates and with the wider ecosystem.**

French Tech 2030

Winner Selection Criteria

The innovative companies selected had to meet territorial, economic and strategic criteria, defined with all the stakeholders in the support program. The selection criteria were :

☑ Be headquartered in France

☑ Meet at least one of France 2030's objectives

☑ Be an independent company: no takeovers (not controlled directly or indirectly by another company or other entities, with a maximum holding by another company of 39.9%), nor IPOs in excess of 150 million euros.

☑ Have secured financing of at least 5 million euros over the past 3 years (private-sector fundraising/debt and sales combined).

2023 Laureates

The 125 Laureates

The winners of this first promotion are working on issues targeted by the 10 objectives and 6 levers of France 2030, with a particular focus on solutions that strengthen our industrial and technological sovereignty.

Their solutions address major industrial and technological challenges:

☑ Moving towards new marine, space and quantum frontiers

☑ Better production while decarbonizing our society

☑ Ensuring our digital sovereignty

☑ Strengthening our food sovereignty

☑ Making France a sovereign European leader in healthcare innovation

☑ Make France a leader in the production of cultural and creative content and immersive technologies

AgriTech / FoodTech

Agriodor   Algama   Calyxia

Elicit Plant   Faircraft   Gaiago

Green Impulse   Green Spot Technologies   Innovafeed

See all laureates ∨

Education

Lynx   My Job Glasses   Nomad Education

Target Audience	URL
• Innovative startups and emerging companies headquartered in France that are mature enough to scale • Companies addressing priority sectors of *France 2030* • CEOs / co-founders / leadership teams • Firms that are looking for both financial and regulatory / administrative / market access support	**https://lafrenchtech.gouv.fr/en/programme/french-tech-2030**

Impact and Results

Key Outcomes	• First cohort: 125 laureate companies selected in 2023 from 844 applications. • Over 50% of the selected companies are committed to ecological transition. • Approximately 30% of laureates have a female CEO or co-founder. • Many laureates have industrial projects (factories/plants) or plan to establish industrial capacity. Roughly 69% have or plan a plant project.
Success Factors	• Clear alignment with national strategic priorities under France 2030, which gives coherence and political will + substantial resource backing. • Comprehensive support package: not just funding but regulatory, administrative, industrial, internationalisation, visibility etc. Helps remove multiple types of barriers. • Strong selection criteria (technological/economic maturity, growth potential, strategic relevance) that ensure winners are able to leverage support. • Partnerships across public bodies (ministries, regulatory agencies, innovation agencies) and private players (Bpifrance etc.) which provide the ecosystem to act
Lesson learned	➕ Having a high number of applications (844) shows strong demand, but also means selection is highly competitive. Prioritization and transparency matter to build trust. ➖ Although many selected projects are well aligned with ecological transition or industrial goals, ensuring that companies can fully scale (industrialization, staffing, regulatory compliance) remains a challenge. Support beyond first year is critical. ➖ Gender parity goals can be met or exceeded (30% female leadership in cohort), but sustaining diversity across other axes (region, socio-economic background) is still ongoing. ➖ Visibility and regulatory assistance are as important as financial help for many startups; programmes that neglect non-financial barriers risk under-utilizing their impact

Additional Information	
Supporting Materials	• Official programme page: *French Tech 2030* (Mission French Tech) [La mission French Tech](#) • Press release "French Tech 2030 Program" June 2023 (launch, laureates etc.) [La mission French Tech](#) • Data on selection: number of applications, percentages for sectors, female leadership etc. [La mission French](#)

Télémaque – Mentoring Programme for Youth from Disadvantaged Backgrounds

Brief Description

Télémaque is a French non-profit association founded in 2005 that promotes equal opportunity, empowerment, and social mobility among young people from disadvantaged territories. It provides a "double mentoring" system: each young participant (secondary school, vocational, or higher education student) is mentored by both a teacher (academic guidance) and a company professional (career and personal development). This long-term relationship lasting on average 6 years helps youth build self-confidence, cultural capital, networks, and professional aspirations.

Télémaque operates nationwide through partnerships with over 100 companies, universities, and public institutions, focusing on inclusive education, employability, and access to entrepreneurship or leadership roles. Its model has inspired replication abroad and has been recognised by the French government as a high-impact initiative for equal opportunity and youth inclusion.

Objective(s)

➔ **Empower young people from disadvantaged or underprivileged backgrounds.**
➔ **Strengthen self-esteem, autonomy, and long-term employability**
➔ **Bridge the gap between education and professional life through mentoring.**
➔ **Foster social mobility and diversity in higher education and business leadership.**

Target Audience

• Young people aged 12-25, primarily from low-income families, priority

URL

https://www.telemaque.org/

education areas (*Zones d'Éducation Prioritaire*), or remote territories. Participants are identified in partnership with schools and local authorities.	

Impact and Results

Key Outcomes	• As of 2024, Télémaque has supported over 2,000 young people nationwide through its double mentoring approach. • 91% of Télémaque alumni successfully pursue higher education or qualified employment after completion. • Over 500 active mentors from 100+ partner companies (e.g., BNP Paribas, EDF, Orange, Engie, SNCF, Capgemini). • Studies show a 20-30% increase in self-confidence and school performance compared to non-mentored peers. • Télémaque's alumni network is growing into a self-sustaining community, promoting peer mentoring and leadership.
Success Factors	• Double mentoring model combining academic and professional guidance, unique in France. • Long-term engagement (4-6 years) ensures continuity and trust-based relationships. • Strong corporate partnerships providing exposure, internships, and role models. • Integration of cultural and civic experiences (museum visits, volunteering, study trips) to expand horizons. • Continuous monitoring and evaluation using social impact metrics (confidence, school success, employment rates).
Lesson learned	• Recruiting and training high-quality mentors is resource-intensive but essential for impact. • Maintaining mentor-mentee engagement over several years requires structured coordination. • Geographic expansion (beyond major cities) challenges consistency of resources and partnerships. • Measuring long-term outcomes (professional trajectories 5–10 years later) demands ongoing data collection. • Linking mentoring to entrepreneurship or innovation pathways can further enhance employability impact

Additional Information

Supporting Materials	• Télémaque Annual Report 2024: https://www.telemaque.org/outils/rapports-annuels/

	• Donnez toutes les chances de réussite aux collégiens et lycéens avec le double mentorat: https://www.montpellierimpact.fr/action-donnez-toutes-les-chances-de-reussite-aux-collegiens-et-lyceens-avec-le-double-mentorat Impact studies: https://www.telemaque.org/impact/#etudes-impact

Groupements de Créateurs

Brief Description

This is a non-directive, self-guided support program (lasting up to two years) aimed at unemployed youth interested in creating a project (business, event, social initiative) or becoming more autonomous in their professional path. Rather than prescribing a standard roadmap, it focuses on developing participants' decision-making, self-awareness, motivation, and capability to set and pursue their own goals. The program includes group workshops, individual coaching, peer learning, and support to refine ideas, assess motivations, and "emergence" of a feasible project.

Objective(s)

➔ **Encourage youth entrepreneurship or self-employment**
➔ **Support professional insertion / autonomy among young unemployed people**
➔ **Build soft skills and project development capabilities.**

Target Audience

- Young unemployed people (age roughly 16-25) who are motivated to start something but may lack direction, confidence, or support.

URL

https://lafrenchtech.gouv.fr/en/programme/french-tech-2030
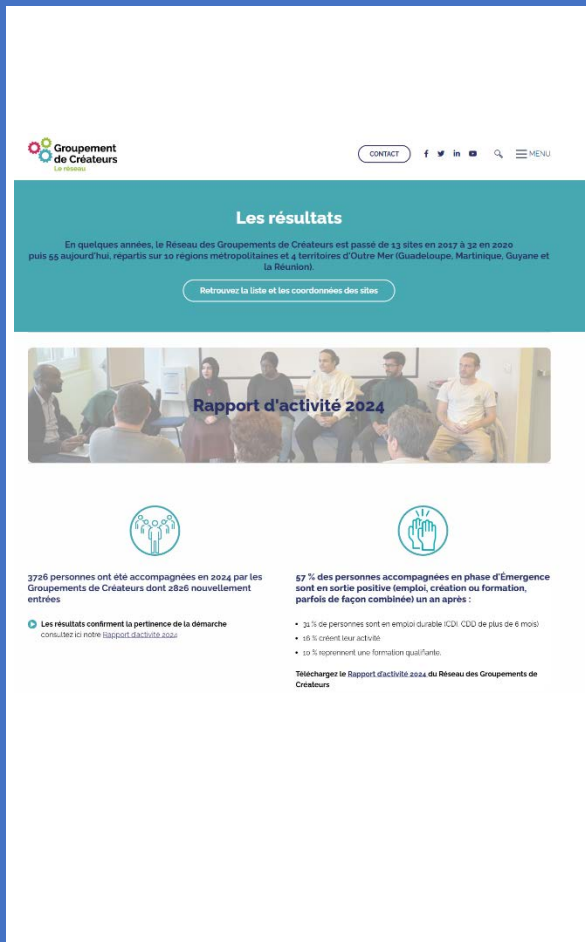
Impact and Results

Key Outcomes	
	• In 2024, 3,726 persons were accompanied, of which 2,826 were new entrants.
	• About 57 % of participants in the "emergence" phase achieve a "positive exit" one year later (e.g. employment, starting a business, or entering training). Specifically: 31 % secure durable employment (CDI or CDD > 6 months), 16 % launch their activity, 10 % go into qualifying training.

	• The program was subjected to a randomized controlled evaluation (902 youth across 16 sites). The evaluation found that participants improved their rates of insertion and autonomy compared to non-participants
Success Factors	• Pedagogical approach emphasizing autonomy and participant agency. • Combination of group workshops + individual coaching + peer exchange. • Embedded in local "missions locales" (local employment / support networks). • Strong partnership with research institutions to evaluate and adjust the model.
Lesson learned	• One challenge is balancing freedom/autonomy and the need for structure; some participants require more guidance. • Not all participants moved directly to entrepreneurship; some initially opt for training or employment first, which is acceptable if viewed as a stepping stone. • Maintaining fidelity of the model across multiple sites is a challenge; ongoing training of coaches and quality control is important. • The collaboration between practitioners and evaluators was essential to maintain both practical viability and rigorous accountability
Additional Information	
Supporting Materials	• Annual activity reports (e.g. 2024 results) available on the Groupements de Créateurs site Groupements de Créateurs • Evaluation papers (J-PAL / CREST) on the RCT design and outcomes J-PAL+2OpenEdition Journals+2

Best practices identified in Greece

Greenhouse - Youth Entrepreneurship Accelerator in Greece

Brief Description

The GreenHouse Youth Entrepreneurship Accelerator is a nationwide mobile incubator in Greece that equips young people with the skills, resources, and networks to create sustainable and innovative businesses. Supported by The Hellenic Initiative and local partners, it brings entrepreneurship education directly to cities across the country to ensure inclusive participation.

Targeting youth aged 18–30—especially NEETs, women, and those in rural or disadvantaged areas—GreenHouse offers intensive workshops, expert mentoring, and structured support for business plan development focused on sustainability and digital innovation. It has supported hundreds of aspiring entrepreneurs by providing practical training, coaching, and networking opportunities, fostering employability and promoting socially and environmentally responsible entrepreneurship.

Objective(s)

➔ **Build entrepreneurial mindsets and skills in youth aged 18–30.**
➔ **Create pathways to self-employment and innovation careers.**
➔ **Provide equal access for NEETs, women, and marginalized youth.**
➔ **Deliver high-quality training focused on sustainability and digital innovation.**
➔ **Strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem through local and institutional collaboration.**

Target Audience	URL
• Young Entrepreneurs • Disadvantaged Youth • Youth Workers and Educators • Local Communities and Stakeholders	

Impact and Results

Key Outcomes	• Over 1,200 young people across multiple Greek cities have participated in GreenHouse entrepreneurship workshops, gaining practical skills in business planning, digital innovation, and sustainability-oriented entrepreneurship. • More than 150 start-up ideas have been developed within the program, with a significant number advancing to incubation or early-stage implementation. • A network of experienced mentors and business experts has been established, providing tailored guidance to participants and strengthening the link between youth and the national entrepreneurial ecosystem. • Increased inclusion of disadvantaged groups, with a notable percentage of participants representing NEETs, women, and youth from rural or economically disadvantaged regions. • Strengthened employability and entrepreneurial resilience, as evidenced by positive feedback from participants and the creation of new employment opportunities through youth-led ventures. • Enhanced regional outreach and community impact, with GreenHouse activities implemented in diverse locations beyond major urban centers, ensuring broader accessibility.
Success Factors	The success of the GreenHouse Youth Entrepreneurship Accelerator stems from its experiential learning, strategic multi-stakeholder partnerships, and strong commitment to inclusivity. Interactive workshops, business simulations, and mentoring help participants build practical skills and confidence. Its mobile format reaches rural and semi-urban areas, while tailored support for NEETs, women, and disadvantaged youth addresses systemic barriers. Focus on sustainability and digital innovation equips young entrepreneurs to create socially responsible, future-oriented ventures.
Lesson learned	The GreenHouse Youth Entrepreneurship Accelerator highlighted key lessons for future practice. Ensuring participation of disadvantaged youth, especially NEETs and rural youth, required targeted outreach and a mobile incubator model. Sustaining engagement post-training was addressed through enhanced mentorship and network connections. Balancing theory with hands-on, experiential learning proved essential, as participants responded best to practical activities and peer exchange. Overall, inclusivity, ongoing support, and experiential engagement emerged as crucial for lasting impact

Additional Information

Supporting Materials

The GreenHouse Youth Entrepreneurship Accelerator is supported by a range of materials designed to extend its impact and facilitate knowledge transfer. These resources include:

Training Manuals and Toolkits: Comprehensive guides that outline entrepreneurship methodologies, business planning processes, and sustainability-oriented strategies used during the workshops.

Case Studies: Detailed examples of successful youth-led business initiatives developed through the program, illustrating best practices, challenges, and lessons learned.

Multimedia Content: Video recordings of workshops, interviews with mentors and participants, and digital presentations that showcase the program's activities and outcomes.

Evaluation Reports: Documents summarizing participant feedback, program performance, and recommendations for future cycles, ensuring transparency and continuous improvement.

Promotional and Outreach Materials: Brochures, posters, and digital flyers that supported awareness-raising and encouraged the participation of disadvantaged youth.

Together, these materials provide a structured framework for replication and transferability. They ensure that the knowledge, methodologies, and insights developed in Greece can be effectively disseminated to other regions and adapted to different contexts.

Egg – enter•grow•go Incubator

Brief Description

Egg – enter•grow•go, founded in 2013 by Eurobank and Corallia, is a leading Greek incubator that helps young entrepreneurs turn innovative ideas into successful businesses. It offers incubation, mentoring, financing, training, and networking, targeting sectors like technology, green economy, and creative industries. Over the past decade, Egg has supported 350+ start-ups and become a benchmark for entrepreneurship in Greece.

Objective(s)

- Support the creation and growth of innovative start-ups driven by young entrepreneurs.
- Provide structured incubation services that enhance business viability and competitiveness.
- Strengthen access to finance and investment opportunities for early-stage ventures.
- Promote sustainable and digital entrepreneurship models aligned with current market needs.
- Contribute to the development of Greece's entrepreneurial ecosystem and international visibility.

Target Audience

- Young Entrepreneurs
- Disadvantaged Youth
- Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Stakeholders

URL

EGG Enter.Grow.Go

Impact and Results

Key Outcomes	Since 2013, Egg – enter•grow•go has become one of Greece's most impactful incubators, supporting 350+ start-ups, many expanding nationally and internationally. It has trained thousands of young entrepreneurs in business planning, digital innovation, and sustainable development, attracted millions in investment, and increased the international visibility of Greek ventures. Most importantly, Egg has enhanced employability and self-employment, fostering a resilient, future-oriented generation of entrepreneurs.
Success Factors	The enduring success of the Egg – enter•grow•go Incubator is closely linked to the strength and comprehensiveness of its incubation model. By uniting professional mentoring, financial advisory services, and co-working facilities within a single structured framework, the initiative created an enabling environment where young entrepreneurs could progress from concept development to market entry with confidence and guidance. Equally significant has been the establishment of strategic partnerships with Eurobank and Corallia, which ensured financial stability, access to expertise, and institutional credibility. These partnerships also facilitated the creation of robust connections with investors, thereby expanding opportunities for early-stage ventures to secure funding and scale their operations. Another defining factor has been the program's capacity to remain adaptive and forward-looking. Through the integration of elements of sustainability, digital innovation, and emerging market trends into its training and mentoring components, Egg has maintained a high level of relevance for participants and stakeholders alike. This adaptability has not only strengthened the impact of the initiative but also positioned it as a benchmark within the Greek entrepreneurial ecosystem.
Lesson learned	The implementation of the Egg – enter•grow•go Incubator highlighted several important lessons for the design and delivery of effective entrepreneurship support. One of the primary challenges was ensuring that participants successfully progressed from the stage of idea generation to the practical implementation of their business concepts within a highly competitive environment. This difficulty was addressed through the introduction of structured milestones and progress evaluations, which provided a clear framework for accountability and guided each team toward achieving market readiness. Another challenge concerned limited access to financing, a barrier that often restricts the growth of early-stage ventures. To overcome this, the program expanded and strengthened its investor networks, while simultaneously creating new pathways to venture capital and alternative sources of funding. These measures not only increased the likelihood of financial support for participants but also fostered stronger connections between start-ups and the wider entrepreneurial ecosystem. A key lesson emerging from these experiences is the importance of integrating incubation services with long-term mentorship and financial support. The sustainability of youth-led start-ups depends not solely on initial training but
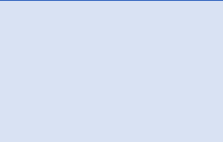
	on continued access to expertise, resources, and investment opportunities. This insight has shaped the program's evolution and reinforced its role as a catalyst for lasting entrepreneurial success.
Additional Information	
Supporting Materials	Egg – enter•grow•go is supported by comprehensive materials that extend its impact beyond the program. Training curricula, toolkits, and case studies provide practical guidance on business planning, finance, and digital innovation. Annual reports track outcomes and inform improvements, while multimedia resources share entrepreneurial stories and best practices, enhancing the program's visibility, accessibility, and transferability.
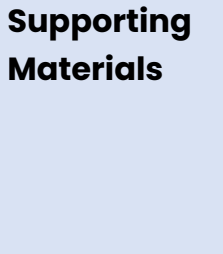
Best practices identified in Ireland

Title of the Best Practice/Approach

Brief Description

The Junior Entrepreneur Programme (JEP) is a 12- to 16-week entrepreneurial education programme developed specifically for primary school children on the island of Ireland. The programme's core philosophy is "learning by doing," providing pupils with a practical, real-life business experience integrated seamlessly into the existing school curriculum, particularly focusing on literacy, numeracy, and social education.

Under the guidance of their teachers, the entire class collaborates to move a single business idea from concept to reality. This process involves welcoming a local entrepreneur into the classroom to inspire the children, followed by idea brainstorming, market research, team formation (e.g., Finance, Marketing, Design teams), and production. The programme is designed to cultivate skills during the crucial primary-level years, before the competitive pressures of second-level education begin to affect student confidence.

The journey culminates in a JEP Showcase Day, where the pupils launch, market, and sell their product or service to the wider school and community. The class invests a token amount of money into the venture, makes real sales, manages its costs, and ultimately enjoys the profits (often choosing to donate a portion to charity), providing a tangible lesson in risk, reward, and financial management.

Objective(s)

➔ **Foster Entrepreneurial Mindset:** introduce pupils to entrepreneurship and promote self-employment as a viable option.
➔ **Integrate Core Skills:** integrate key skills into the curricula for real life applications
➔ **Develop personal qualities:** build confidence, self-esteem, self-awareness and individual and collaborative skills.
➔ **Connect School and Community:** work closely with local community by involving local entrepreneurs as role models

Target Audience

- Primary School Children (ages 10-12)
- Teacher and schools: integration free of charge of enterprise activities

URL

https://www.juniorentrepreneur.ie/

Impact and Results

Key Outcomes	• High participation rate: over 120,000 primary school pupils have participated in the programme since 2010: • Commercial success: Business created by participating pupils have achieved and aggregate sales of nearly 3 million euros; much of the proportion has been donated to local charities. • Career aspirations and gender balance: in JEP survey, 60% of girls want to become an entrepreneur against 53% of boys, differing from adults' rates. • Teachers have reported that the programme enhanced mathematics learnings
Success Factors	• Academic Approval: The programme has been academically approved and developed in collaboration with Mary Immaculate College and endorsed by Ireland's Department of Education; • Local Role Models: The structured involvement of local entrepreneurs provides real-world context and inspiration, demonstrating that business success is achievable within their own community. • Government/Agency Support: The programme is delivered in partnership with Enterprise Ireland under its Primary Schools Entrepreneurship Initiative, underpinning its long-term stability and national recognition

Lesson learned	• Difficulty of Execution: Pupils frequently cite the biggest challenges as learning to compromise, listening to everyone's ideas, and working as a team, indicating the programme effectively exposes them to the real complexities of collaboration and business management.
	• Pride and Achievement: The biggest takeaway for children is the profound sense of pride and achievement derived from successfully creating a business from scratch and seeing their hard work pay off.
	• Success stories:
	    ○ Knocknagoshel National School (2025): Students launched "The Mall Market," a grocery subscription service using local produce, which turned a profit of €1,000 in eight weeks.
	    ○ Cromane National School (2025): Students created a 100-page local history book, "Cromane – A Place We Call Home," which sold out its first print run and was added to the local library service.

Additional Information

Supporting Materials	

Student Entrepreneur Awards Ireland

Brief Description

The Student Entrepreneur Awards (SEA) is a prestigious, long-running competition led by Enterprise Ireland (EI), the government agency responsible for scaling Irish businesses globally. Operating for over 40 years, the SEA serves as a critical third-level pathway in the national entrepreneurship pipeline, helping ambitious students move their innovative ideas from academia into commercial reality.

The competition spans a staged, rigorous process designed to mimic real-world business development. Students initially submit a two-minute video showcasing their idea's commercial and export potential. If shortlisted (Top 50), they must then develop a comprehensive business plan, and finally, the Top 10 finalists present their ideas to a panel of expert judges from Enterprise Ireland and its co-sponsors.

The SEA is more than a prize ceremony; it functions as a comprehensive development platform. Winners receive significant cash prizes and tailored, high-value mentoring and consultancy from leading professional services firms and state agencies, providing the necessary guidance and funding to transition immediately to a full-time, scalable start-up with global ambitions.

Objective(s)

- **Stimulate Entrepreneurship**: To encourage and stimulate entrepreneurship among the third-level student population as a viable career path
- **Identify and Nurture High Potential**: To identify and fast-track innovative ideas that possess genuine commercial viability and export potential into formal business ventures
- → **Provide Core Business Support**: To equip students with practical business skills and professional guidance in key

areas such as intellectual property (IP), financial planning, and market validation

➔ **Strengthen the Pipeline:** To accelerate the flow of innovative, graduate-level companies into the national enterprise ecosystem, preparing them for future state support programmes like EI's High Potential Start-Up (HPSU) scheme

Target Audience

- **Full-Time Students:** All full-time registered third-level undergraduate and postgraduate students across the island of Ireland
- **All Academic Disciplines**: Students from any academic discipline or course of study are eligible, reflecting the focus on developing an entrepreneurial mindset regardless of subject area
- **Ambitious Teams/Individuals**: Individuals or teams (maximum five students) who possess an innovative idea, own their business Intellectual Property, and demonstrate an ambition to start their company in Ireland

URL

https://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/student-entrepreneur-awards

Impact and Results

Key Outcomes	o **Financial and Consultancy Support:** The overall winner receives a €10,000 cash prize and access to a fund of mentoring and consultancy services provided by Enterprise Ireland, Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs), Cruickshank (IP), and Grant Thornton (Business Plan development).
	o **Launchpad for HPSUs**: The Awards act as a crucial "springboard"; many finalists and winners transition directly into the formal state support ecosystem, with some eventually becoming High Potential Start-Ups (HPSUs). Previous winners have gone on to achieve major national and international success.

	o **Focus on Innovation**: The competition consistently attracts solutions addressing global challenges in high-growth areas, such as sustainable alternatives to plastic (Saor Water, 2025 winner), FinTech (JustTip, 2024 winner), and MedTech devices.
Success Factors	o **Co-Sponsor Expertise**: The competition's strength lies in the synergy between state agencies and private industry, ensuring students receive credible, high-quality advice that de-risks their venture's earliest stages. o **Focus on Export Potential:** By demanding ideas demonstrate commercial viability and export potential from Stage 1 (the video pitch), the awards align student ambition with Enterprise Ireland's mandate for supporting internationally traded services. o **Academic Support**: The inclusion of the Enterprise Ireland Academic Award recognises the vital role of third-level academic supervisors in nurturing the initial idea, embedding the entrepreneurial spirit within the academic institutions themselves.
Lesson learned	o **Longevity and Prestige**: The competition has been running for over 40 years, giving it significant prestige and visibility within the Irish third-level sector and the wider business community. o **Skill Transfer**: Participation, even without winning, provides students with invaluable experience in pitching, financial projection, and market testing, which enhances their employability even if they choose not to pursue their start-up immediately. o **Social and Sustainable Innovation**: The judging criteria are inclusive, explicitly welcoming not-for-profit and social entrepreneurship applications, provided they operate in a commercial domain. This reflects the growing student interest in purpose-driven business.
Additional Information	
Supporting Materials	

Recommendations for Youth Facilitators

Tips for creating safe, inclusive spaces

How to adapt content to literacy and cultural needs

How to start mentoring programs with limited resources

How to use digital tools in low-connectivity environments

The landscape of education has evolved significantly, requiring teachers to develop new competencies and attitudes to respond to emerging challenges. This shift, which began in the EU in the early 2000s, was further accelerated by the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic across all aspects of life, including education.

Tips for creating safe and inclusive spaces

The need for safe and inclusive spaces is crucial in educational settings, as they foster social cohesion and help remove barriers in an increasingly divided and dissonant world.

Inclusion is defined by UNESCO as "a commitment that each child – regardless of his or her background or ability – has the right to receive a good quality education"[13]. The idea behind inclusive education promotes building a school system that adapts to the needs of every child within a shared learning space. To fully grasp what inclusion means, it can be useful to contrast it with related approaches like exclusion, segregation, and integration. Exclusion happens when children are refused access to education, such as in the case of learners with disabilities or those from marginalized social groups. Segregation refers to situations where separate educational settings are established for different groups of students — for instance, when children with disabilities are placed in special schools outside the general learning environment. Integration, on the other hand, means placing all children in the same educational space, usually in

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[13] UNESCO Office Bangkok and Regional Bureau for Education in Asia and the Pacific, Kaplan, I., & Bista, M. B. (2022). [Title of the book/report]. UNESCO. https://doi.org/10.54675/UHWS5380

mainstream schools, but without adapting teaching methods or school conditions to meet varied learning needs. By contrast, an inclusive system recognizes and appreciates diversity, making adjustments to teaching and learning so that students' physical, intellectual, or developmental needs are addressed.

Inclusive Education as a teacher/trainer

Inclusive education as a teacher or trainer means creating a learning environment where every student feels welcomed, respected, and supported. Teachers do not need to be specialists in disability, language, or equality issues; rather, they need to embrace diversity, show empathy, and take time to understand their students as individuals.

Tips for Promoting Inclusive Education as a Teacher/Trainer

- **Welcome and value diversity**: go beyond tolerance by showing genuine appreciation for differences in ability, background, and experience.

- **Know your students**: invest time in understanding learners as individuals, not just names or grades.

- **Show empathy**: try to see situations from the perspective of learners and their families.

- **Be observant**: pay attention not only to students' academic performance but also to their behaviours, moods, and interactions.

- **Stay flexible**: adapt your teaching methods, classroom environment, and assessments to suit different learning needs.

- **Collaborate and share**: work with colleagues, parents, and professional networks to exchange ideas and strategies.

- **Seek support when needed**: know that you cannot solve every challenge alone and reach out to specialists or community resources.

- **Continue learning**: remain open to new teaching methods, tools, and practices to improve inclusion.

- **Balance individual and system needs**: support learners directly while also addressing broader issues (e.g., accessibility, school policies).

The twin-track approach to inclusive education

Achieving genuine inclusion requires the use of two complementary approaches that pursue the same objectives:

- **System-level approach:** This entails identifying barriers within the educational system, community, and culture that prevent participation, and working to remove them. It also means embedding disability-sensitive practices into all aspects of the education system so that learners with disabilities are able to access, participate in, and benefit fully from schooling.

- **Learner-focused approach:** This emphasizes addressing the specific needs of students who are at risk of exclusion. It involves ensuring their rights are respected and that they receive appropriate support, resources, and interventions within their families, communities, and learning environments.

The two elements of the twin-track approach to inclusive education should not be seen as completely separate. If treated in isolation, teachers might feel burdened by the idea of addressing the needs of the majority while also managing additional, individualized support. Instead, the twin-track model emphasizes that both tracks are interconnected and work toward the same purpose. In practice, the system-level track creates an environment that supports all learners, while the individual-level track ensures that those requiring extra assistance receive it. Importantly, focusing on individual needs does not imply teaching each student separately; many needs are shared among learners, and inclusive teaching allows everyone to benefit from learning together.

How the dual approach fosters inclusive and safe learning environments

- **Flexibility**

  - <u>System level:</u> adaptable curricula, flexible timetables, and responsive policies.

  - <u>Individual level:</u> personalized adjustments such as extra learning time or language support.

- **Inclusive teaching practices**

  - <u>System level:</u> school-wide promotion of differentiated and collaborative methods.

  - <u>Individual level:</u> classroom application through tailored instruction for specific needs.

- **Resources**

  - <u>System level:</u> provision of locally relevant, culturally sensitive learning materials.

  - <u>Individual level:</u> specialized resources like Braille, large print, or assistive technologies.

- **Learning environment**

  - <u>System level:</u> universal design principles to ensure safe, accessible, and welcoming spaces.

  - <u>Individual level:</u> targeted spaces or support (e.g., resource rooms, calm areas) for learners with particular needs

Best Practices for safe and inclusive learning spaces

1. **Adopt Universal Design for Learning (UDL)**[14]

   o Design learning environments and materials so all learners can access and engage without barriers.

Suggested Methodology:

i. Set clear and flexible goals but allow learners multiple pathways to success. You can use SMART goals[15] approach to define what learners should achieve. Optimize choice and autonomy.

ii. Provide multiple means of engagement by offering choices to spark interest (topics, formats, pace) and using collaborative, independent and real-world tasks.

iii. Foster collaboration, interdependence and collective learning. Cultivate empathy and restorative practices. Offer action-oriented feedback

iv. Provide multiple means of representation. Present information in different ways: text, visuals, audio, hands-on models. Support language, symbols, and background knowledge. Use multiple media for communication.

v. Provide Multiple Means of Action & Expression. Allow students to show learning through writing, speaking, creating, or digital tools. Provide assistive technologies and varied assessment formats. Adress biases related to modes of expression and communication.

vi. Build in flexibility & accessibility from the start. Use inclusive materials, captions, readable fonts, and accessible digital platforms.

vii. Reflect & adjust. Gather feedback from learners. Revise strategies to reduce barriers and improve inclusivity.

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[14] CAST. (2024). *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 3.0*. CAST. https://udlguidelines.cast.org/

[15] University of California Office of the President, Local Human Resources. (n.d.). How to write SMART goals [PDF]. https://www.ucop.edu/local-human-resources/_files/performance-appraisal/How+to+write+SMART+Goals+v2.pdf

CAST Universal Design for Learning Guidelines

The goal of UDL is **learner agency** that is purposeful & reflective, resourceful & authentic, strategic & action-oriented.

Design Multiple Means of **Engagement**	Design Multiple Means of **Representation**	Design Multiple Means of **Action & Expression**
Access		
Design Options for **Welcoming Interests & Identities** • Optimize choice and autonomy • Optimize relevance, value, and authenticity • Nurture joy and play • Address biases, threats, and distractions	Design Options for **Perception** • Support opportunities to customize the display of information • Support multiple ways to perceive information • Represent a diversity of perspectives and identities in authentic ways	Design Options for **Interaction** • Vary and honor the methods for response, navigation, and movement • Optimize access to accessible materials and assistive and accessible technologies and tools
Support		
Design Options for **Sustaining Effort & Persistence** • Clarify the meaning and purpose of goals • Optimize challenge and support • Foster collaboration, interdependence, and collective learning • Foster belonging and community • Offer action-oriented feedback	Design Options for **Language & Symbols** • Clarify vocabulary, symbols, and language structures • Support decoding of text, mathematical notation, and symbols • Cultivate understanding and respect across languages and dialects • Address biases in the use of language and symbols • Illustrate through multiple media	Design Options for **Expression & Communication** • Use multiple media for communication • Use multiple tools for construction, composition, and creativity • Build fluencies with graduated support for practice and performance • Address biases related to modes of expression and communication
Executive Function		
Design Options for **Emotional Capacity** • Recognize expectations, beliefs, and motivations • Develop awareness of self and others • Promote individual and collective reflection • Cultivate empathy and restorative practices	Design Options for **Building Knowledge** • Connect prior knowledge to new learning • Highlight and explore patterns, critical features, big ideas, and relationships • Cultivate multiple ways of knowing and making meaning • Maximize transfer and generalization	Design Options for **Strategy Development** • Set meaningful goals • Anticipate and plan for challenges • Organize information and resources • Enhance capacity for monitoring progress • Challenge exclusionary practices

CAST Until learning has no limits®

Source: *CAST (2024). Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 3.0 [graphic organizer]. Lynnfield, MA: Author.*

(Translations available in multiple languages here)

2. **Ensure Physical and Emotional Safety**

Phase	Key Activities	Who's Involved	Purpose/Expected Outcome
1. Assessment & Risk Analysis	• Survey learners/staff for what they feel unsafe about (both physically and emotionally). • Audit the physical space for hazards (lighting, furniture, exits, ventilation). • Review policies/procedures: what is in place for bullying, harassment, emergencies. • Map emotional risk points (e.g., areas of conflict, sensitive topics in curriculum).	School leadership, teachers, support staff, students (via anonymous feedback), possibly health & safety officer.	Identify actual and perceived risks. Gather baseline data to guide interventions.
2. Policy & Culture Development	• Develop or review policies that explicitly protect learners from physical harm, bullying, harassment, discrimination, emotional harm. • Create codes of conduct / classroom norms collaboratively with students. • Build a culture of respect, inclusion, empathy. • Include trauma-informed or resilience-building practices.	Leadership, teachers, school counsellors, students, external experts if needed (psychologists, legal advisors).	A shared framework that sets expectations of behaviour, response, accountability. Culture shifts so safety is valued and embedded.
3. Environment & Infrastructure Design	• Ensure physical spaces are safe: adequate lighting, clear exits, non-hazardous materials, visibility / supervision. • Arrange furniture to support supervision, movement, accessibility. • Provide private/semi-private spaces for counseling, for students to retreat if overwhelmed. • Emergency preparedness (fire drills, lockdown, medical first aid).	Facility managers, safety officers, teachers, local authorities.	Minimize physical risks. Ensure readiness and psychological reassurance that emergencies are handled.
4. Emotional Safety Practices	• Social-emotional learning (SEL): teaching empathy, self-regulation, conflict resolution.	Teachers, counsellors, possibly external experts, all staff interacting with students.	Students feel supported, seen; emotional harms are prevented or addressed early; trust builds.

	• Regular check-ins: how students are feeling; safe spaces for sharing. • Training staff to recognize signs of trauma, intervene sensitively. • Encouragement of growth mindset; mistakes viewed as learning. • Confidential reporting channels for harassment or emotional harm		
5. Monitoring, Feedback, Continuous Improvement	• Collect feedback from students and staff (surveys, focus groups) regarding safety. • Monitor incidents of physical harm, bullying, harassment; examine root causes. • Evaluate whether interventions are working; adapt as necessary. • Provide ongoing professional development to adapt to changing needs.	Leadership, teachers, counsellors, possibly external evaluators.	Safety practices become dynamic, responsive; gaps are closed; trust is sustained.
6. External Partnerships & Community Engagement	• Engage parents/guardians: communication about policies, encouraging support at home. • Partner with mental health services, social workers, local agencies. • Law enforcement or safety authorities for emergency planning. • Student participation / leadership in safety awareness and peer support.	Leadership, community partners, parents, students.	Safety is reinforced beyond school; broader community norms aligned; more resources/referral pathways.

3. **Promote Positive Discipline and Respectful Relationships**

Aim: Replace punitive discipline with restorative, supportive practices that build trust and responsibility.

What are restorative practices?[16]

Restorative practices are relationship-centred approaches in education that aim to build community, strengthen communication, and address conflicts by repairing harm rather than imposing punishment. They emphasize proactive support for students' social, emotional, and behavioural needs—including those shaped by trauma—so that misbehaviour is reduced. Through strategies such as classroom meetings, community circles, mediation, and conflict resolution, restorative practices foster accountability, empathy, and positive reintegration into the school community.

Impact of restorative practices

Restorative practices positively influence both student behaviour and the overall school environment. They help reduce conflicts, bullying, and classroom disruptions while lowering reliance on punitive measures such as suspensions or expulsions. By encouraging dialogue, empathy, and personal accountability, restorative approaches strengthen relationships between students and teachers and foster a sense of belonging within the school community. Overall, these practices contribute to creating safer, more inclusive, and supportive learning environments where all students can thrive.

Implementing Restorative Approaches

Successfully integrating restorative approaches in schools requires both structural and practical support. It involves moving away from punitive or zero-tolerance disciplinary models toward practices that prioritize

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[16] Learning Policy Institute. (2023, October 18). Improving student outcomes through restorative practices [Fact sheet]. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/restorative-practices-factsheet

relationship-building and student well-being. Effective implementation draws on a whole-school approach, incorporating community-building activities, interpersonal skill development, and restorative responses to conflicts or misbehaviour. Sustained investment in staff training and professional development is essential to build confidence, expertise, and commitment to these practices. Additionally, centering the voices of students and the wider school community ensures that restorative approaches are meaningful, inclusive, and strengthen connections across the learning environment.

4. Learner Engagement and Voice[17]

Suggested Methodology:

i. Co-Design learning experiences. Involve students in planning lessons, projects, and classroom activities. Encourage input on topics, materials, and learning formats to ensure relevance and motivation.

ii. Encourage collaborative learning. Use group work, peer mentoring, and cooperative projects to promote interaction and mutual support. Create structured opportunities for students to share ideas and solve problems together.

iii. Provide multiple channels for expression. Allow students to demonstrate understanding in varied ways: oral presentations, digital media, artwork, or written assignments. Incorporate reflective practices, such as journals or discussion forums, to capture student perspectives.

iv. Build a Safe and Inclusive environment. Establish classroom norms that value respect, active listening, and constructive feedback. Ensure that quieter or marginalized voices are intentionally included and supported.

v. Incorporate feedback loops. Regularly gather student feedback on teaching methods, materials, and classroom climate. Use this feedback to adapt instruction, ensuring responsiveness to learner needs and interests.

vi. Empower Decision-Making Involve students in rule-setting, classroom management decisions, and school-wide initiatives. Promote leadership roles, student councils, or committees to deepen engagement and ownership.

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[17] Stanford University. (n.d.). Increasing student engagement. Stanford Teaching Commons. Retrieved from https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/teaching-guides/foundations-course-design/learning-activities/increasing-student-engagement

How to adapt content to literacy and cultural needs

Ensuring that educational materials are accessible to learners with diverse literacy levels and cultural backgrounds is fundamental to the inclusive principles of the YouLead approach. Effective adaptation enhances comprehension, fosters equitable participation, and supports meaningful engagement in entrepreneurial learning. This section outlines key considerations and strategies for facilitators when developing or delivering content in youth entrepreneurship settings.

1. Literacy-Responsive Adaptation

Use of Clear and Accessible Language[18]

Facilitators should employ concise, direct language and prioritise clarity over technical terminology. Where specialised terms are unavoidable, they should be defined using relatable examples. Abstract concepts should be grounded in concrete, practical illustrations to improve comprehension.

Structured and Reader-Friendly Materials

Documents and presentations should follow a logical and transparent structure. The use of headings, bullet points, and short paragraphs assists learners in navigating the material. Essential information should be presented first, with supplementary or optional content positioned later.

Use of Visual and Multimodal Supports

Visual aids—including diagrams, icons, process maps, and practical demonstrations—play a significant role in supporting learners with limited literacy skills. Images must be directly relevant to the topic, culturally

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[18] Centre for Excellence in Universal Design. (n.d.). Use clear and simple language. Universal Design. Retrieved from https://universaldesign.ie/communications-digital/web-and-mobile-accessibility/web-accessibility-techniques/content-providers-introduction-and-index/writing-accessible-text/use-clear-and-simple-language

appropriate, and free from unnecessary complexity. Whenever possible, key messages should be reinforced across multiple formats (text, visuals, audio, or demonstration).

2. Culturally Responsive Adaptation

Selection of Culturally Relevant Examples

Examples, scenarios, and case studies should reflect the cultural, social, and economic realities of the learner groups. Incorporating locally relevant entrepreneurial activities and common community experiences increases engagement and improves the applicability of the learning content. Mixed groups benefit from a diverse array of examples representing different cultural contexts.

Ensuring Inclusive and Respectful Representation

Text and imagery should avoid stereotypes and should reflect diversity in gender, ethnicity, ability, age, and background. Neutral, respectful language should be used consistently, particularly when referencing vulnerable or underrepresented groups.

Avoidance of Culturally Specific Expressions

Idiomatic language, humour, and metaphors may not translate across cultures and should therefore be used with caution. When such expressions are necessary, facilitators should provide clear explanations to avoid misinterpretation.

Sensitivity to Communication Norms

Facilitators should be aware of cultural differences in communication styles, such as preferences for indirect or formal language, collective decision-making processes, or varying expectations regarding facilitator authority. Instruction and facilitation methods should be adapted to align with these preferences wherever feasible.

3. Co-creation with Learners

Consistent with the YouLead human-centred design ethos, content adaptation should include the active involvement of learners. Facilitators are encouraged to gather feedback on clarity, cultural relevance, and accessibility, and to integrate learner contributions into examples, visuals, and practical tools. Pilot testing materials with small groups is recommended to ensure appropriateness and effectiveness.

4. Practical Strategies for Facilitators

Use of "Teach-Back" Techniques

Learners may be asked to restate key concepts in their own words. This method allows facilitators to gauge comprehension while fostering learner confidence.

Breaking Down Complex Skills

Tasks such as budgeting, ideation, or market analysis should be introduced through incremental steps and supported with templates or guided examples.

Peer and Group Learning

Peer learning can support both literacy and cultural inclusion. Depending on group composition, facilitators may pair learners with similar needs for comfort or with diverse backgrounds to encourage mutual support and cultural exchange.

Strength-Based Framing

Content should highlight learners' existing skills—such as creativity, resilience, digital familiarity, or community knowledge—thereby promoting empowerment rather than deficit framing.

5. Multilingual Considerations

Translations should prioritise conceptual accuracy over literal correspondence. Bilingual glossaries for key terminology and the use of supportive visuals can facilitate comprehension across language backgrounds. Learners should be encouraged to process information initially in their preferred language before presenting key points in the group setting.

6. Digital Inclusion for Low-Connectivity or Low-Literacy Environments

Facilitators should provide lightweight, mobile-friendly materials where possible, and ensure that documents are easy to navigate. Audio or video explanations can assist learners with literacy challenges, while downloadable resources support those with intermittent connectivity.

Facilitator Checklist: Adapting Content to literacy and cultural needs

Language & Clarity	☐ Have I used clear, plain, and direct language throughout? ☐ Are technical terms defined with simple examples? ☐ Are key messages placed at the beginning of sections?
Structure & Navigation	☐ Is the content organised with clear headings and short paragraphs? ☐ Have I used bullet points or numbered steps where appropriate? ☐ Is the document easy to skim and understand at a glance?
Visual and Multimodal Support	☐ Do visuals directly reinforce the learning objectives? ☐ Are graphics simple, relevant, and culturally appropriate? ☐ Have I included multiple formats (text, visuals, audio, hands-on activities)?
Cultural Responsiveness	☐ Are examples relatable to the learners' cultural and local context? ☐ Does the content avoid cultural stereotypes and assumptions? ☐ Are communication norms and preferences taken into account?

Inclusive Representation	☐ Do images and case studies reflect diverse genders, ethnicities, bodies, and abilities? ☐ Is the language neutral, respectful, and inclusive?
Multilingual Accessibility	☐ Is translation focused on meaning rather than literal wording? ☐ Are key terms supported with glossaries or visuals? ☐ Have I encouraged learners to use their preferred language during group work?
Pedagogical Approach	☐ Have I planned for teach-back or comprehension checks? ☐ Are complex tasks broken down into manageable steps? ☐ Have I incorporated peer-learning opportunities?
Digital Inclusion	☐ Are materials accessible offline or in low-connectivity environments? ☐ Are PDFs lightweight and mobile-friendly? ☐ Are audio or video supports available when needed?

How to start mentoring programs with limited resources

Mentoring is a central component of youth entrepreneurial support and can be successfully implemented even in contexts with limited financial or organisational resources. **Effective mentoring** relies less on extensive infrastructure and more on **clear design**, **community engagement**, and **structured facilitation**. This section provides practical guidance for establishing mentoring initiatives aligned with the inclusive and learner-centred principles of YouLead.

1. Defining the Purpose and Scope of the Programme

A clear framework is essential for ensuring that mentors and mentees share common expectations. Before implementation, facilitators should define:

- **Programme objectives** (e.g., skill development, confidence-building, exposure to entrepreneurship).

- **Target groups** and their specific needs, including NEETs, rural youth, migrants, and other underrepresented groups.
- **Format and duration**, such as one-to-one, group mentoring, peer mentoring, or micro-mentoring sessions.
- **Expected outcomes**, using simple indicators that can be monitored with limited administrative burden

A well-articulated scope ensures efficient use of available resources and enhances programme coherence.

2. Community-Based Recruitment Strategies

In low-resource contexts, **community actors** can serve as highly effective mentors. Potential mentors may include:

- Local entrepreneurs and small business owners.
- Youth programme alumni or former participants.
- Teachers, NGO staff, and community leaders.
- Retired professionals or vocational experts.
- Members of local chambers of commerce, cooperatives, or social enterprises.

These individuals often bring experience that is practical, context-sensitive, and relatable to youth. Recruiting mentors from the local environment increases accessibility and strengthens community ownership of the programme.

3. Low-Resource Mentoring Models

Group Mentoring

A single mentor supports several participants simultaneously.

Advantages: efficient use of human resources, fosters peer learning, and enables diverse perspectives.

Peer Mentoring

Youth with slightly more experience support their peers.

Advantages: low cost, empowers young people, and strengthens community cohesion.

Micro-Mentoring

Short, topic-specific mentoring sessions (20–40 minutes) delivered intermittently.

Advantages: reduces time burden on mentors, ideal for volunteers with limited availability.

Remote and Hybrid Mentoring

Use low-data communication channels such as SMS, phone calls, WhatsApp voice notes, or lightweight video calls.

Advantages: suitable for rural or low-connectivity environments and reduces travel costs.

4.Leveraging Partnerships and Local Assets

Many mentoring programmes can be enhanced through collaboration with **local actors**, even in the absence of direct funding. Facilitators may seek support from:

- **Co-working spaces** offering free meeting rooms.
- **Local businesses** sponsoring refreshments or materials.
- Universities providing **student mentors** or **research support**.
- **NGOs** lending training materials or facilitators.
- **Municipal services** promoting the programme through local channels.

Partnerships enhance sustainability and broaden the impact of youth empowerment initiatives.

5.Creating a Safe and Supportive Mentoring Environment

YouLead emphasises emotional safety, inclusion, and respect as foundational elements. Facilitators should ensure:

- **Clear communication** on confidentiality and boundaries.

- A focus on **strengths-based feedback** and **positive reinforcement**.
- **Trauma-informed** and **culturally sensitive practices**.
- **Flexibility** to accommodate the needs of underrepresented youth groups.

A safe environment fosters trust, motivation, and long-term engagement.

6.Light-Touch Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring progress does not require complex systems. Low-resource evaluation options include:

- **Short feedback forms** at mid-point and conclusion.
- **Quick check-ins** with mentors or mentees (verbal or written).
- **Simple goal review sheets** completed jointly by mentor and mentee.
- **End-of-cycle reflection prompts** for participants.

The aim is to ensure quality, adapt to emerging needs, and maintain accountability without administrative burden.

How to use digital tools in low-connectivity environments

Using digital tools in low-connectivity or intermittent-connectivity environments requires choosing **the right technologies** and **designing workflows** that don't rely on constant internet access. Digital tools offer significant potential to enhance youth entrepreneurship learning, enabling interactive, flexible, and scalable approaches. However, many learners, particularly those in rural areas, under-resourced communities, or low-income households, face limited internet access or unstable connectivity. Facilitators can overcome these challenges through thoughtful planning, tool selection, and adaptive delivery.

1. Prioritise Low-Bandwidth Solutions

- **Lightweight platforms:** Use applications that require minimal data, such as simple learning management systems (Moodle Lite), text-based chat apps (WhatsApp, Telegram), or SMS-based learning.

- **Offline functionality:** Select tools that allow downloading content for offline use, such as PDFs, videos, or interactive worksheets.

- **Compressed media**: Reduce file sizes for images, audio, and video to minimise data consumption.

2. Leverage Asynchronous Learning

- **Pre-recorded lessons**: Provide audio or video recordings that learners can access at their convenience.

- **Self-paced modules**: Offer exercises, quizzes, and tasks that do not require real-time connection.

- **Document sharing**: Use PDFs or slide decks that learners can download and annotate offline.

This approach ensures learners remain engaged even with irregular internet access.

3. Use Hybrid and Blended Approaches

- **Periodic in-person sessions**: Combine online tools with face-to-face meetings when possible to build relationships and provide guided instruction.

- **Local learning hubs**: Coordinate access to community spaces with stable internet (libraries, schools, or community centres).

- **Peer-support structures**: Encourage learners to collaborate offline and share progress during group sessions.

Hybrid methods maximise learning while reducing reliance on continuous connectivity.

4. Select Accessible and Inclusive Tools

- Ensure interfaces are **intuitive** and **do not require advanced digital literacy**.

- Use **multiple modes of content presentation**: text, visuals, audio, or simple interactive elements.

- Consider tools that support **multiple languages** or allow translation of key content.

- Verify **accessibility compliance** (e.g., screen reader compatibility, contrast, font size).

Accessible tools reduce barriers for learners with disabilities, low literacy, or limited prior experience with digital devices.

5. Provide Clear Guidance and Support

- **Step-by-step instructions**: Prepare simple manuals or guides for accessing and using digital tools offline.

- **Tech support channels**: Use phone, SMS, or low-data messaging for troubleshooting.

- **Practice sessions**: Offer initial training to ensure learners feel confident with the tools.

- **Feedback loops**: Encourage learners to report issues or suggest improvements to adapt resources as needed.

6. Integrate with Learning Objectives

- Align digital tools with **practical exercises** and **skill development**.

- Use digital tools to **complement hands-on** or **experiential learning** ("learning by doing"), **gamified activities**, and **mentorship interactions**.

- Encourage learners to **document their progress** digitally, even in **offline formats**, for later review or sharing.

7. Key Considerations for Facilitators

- **Assess connectivit**y and **device availability** before selecting digital tools.

- Prioritise tools that are **adaptable** across **low-resource contexts**.

- Promote **collaboration** and **peer learning offline** when connectivity is limited.

- Maintain inclusivity by offering **alternative access paths** (printed materials, local storage of digital content, community support).

Conclusions

Contribution to WP3: Tool development

Contribution to WP4: Training Labs

Contribution to WP5: Sustainability and Long-term impact

Contribution to WP3: Tool development

The YouLead Compass serves as a critical reference for WP3 by providing a methodologically grounded framework for the design and development of digital tools. It translates the insights gained from youth needs mapping and stakeholder consultations into actionable guidance for tool creation. Specifically:

➔ It ensures that the Digital Serious Game, YouLead Audio Book/Podcast, and Animation Palette are aligned with the real challenges and aspirations of young people with fewer opportunities.

➔ It embeds human-centred and experiential learning principles in each tool, ensuring that learners are actively engaged, reflect on their experiences, and can transfer acquired knowledge to real-world entrepreneurial situations.

➔ It establishes clear learning objectives and outcomes for each digital tool, providing a structured pathway for skill development, creativity, and confidence-building.

➔ By connecting tools to specific youth challenges, such as lack of entrepreneurial knowledge, limited mentorship access, or fear of failure, the Compass ensures that the resources are not only engaging but also impactful and targeted

Contribution to WP4: Training Labs

In WP4, the Compass functions as a pedagogical blueprint that guides the planning, delivery, and evaluation of training labs for both youth workers and young aspiring entrepreneurs. Its contributions include:

➔ Offering detailed guidance for integrating digital tools into interactive workshops, ensuring that learning activities are meaningful, structured, and directly linked to real-life entrepreneurial tasks.

➔ Supporting youth workers in the adoption of inclusive and participatory teaching methods, such as co-creation, mentorship, and peer learning, which enhance engagement and support underrepresented groups.

➔ Providing a step-by-step framework for designing session plans, exercises, and role-playing activities, ensuring that each training lab builds competencies progressively and aligns with the intended learning outcomes.

➔ Establishing mechanisms to assess participants' learning and engagement, enabling facilitators to adapt the workshops in real-time and ensure that both youth workers and young entrepreneurs acquire the targeted skills and knowledge.

➔ Reinforcing the development of a mentoring and support culture, so that youth workers are not only trainers but also mentors who can continue guiding participants beyond the workshops.

Contribution to WP5: Sustainability and Long-term impact

For WP5, the Compass provides a strategic framework for ensuring the sustainability and wider impact of the YouLead project. Its contributions include:

➔ Guiding the design of dissemination and communication strategies, including social media campaigns, project websites, newsletters, and multiplier events, to ensure that project outputs reach a broad audience.

➔ Supporting the creation of a knowledge-sharing ecosystem where lessons learned, best practices, and digital resources can be accessed, adapted, and reused by youth workers, educators, and other stakeholders across Europe.

➜ Establishing clear impact indicators for monitoring the effectiveness of the project, including engagement levels, learning outcomes, skill development, and employability improvements among underrepresented youth.

➜ Promoting equitable access to entrepreneurial education, ensuring that tools and resources are inclusive, culturally sensitive, and adaptable to diverse contexts and learning needs.

➜ Providing a framework for long-term project sustainability, including strategies for ongoing mentorship, community building, and the maintenance and expansion of digital resources beyond the project's lifetime.

Annexes

Glossary of terms

Bibliography

Resources

Glossary of Terms

NEET	NEET stands for "Not in Education, Employment or Training." It refers to young people (typically aged 15–29 in OECD/Eurostat statistics, though sometimes 15–24 is used) who are not engaged in formal education, not employed (either full-time or part-time), and not participating in any form of vocational or skills training.
EntreComp Framework	The Entrepreneurship Competence Framework (EntreComp), developed by the European Commission (Joint Research Centre, 2016), is a reference framework that defines entrepreneurship as a key competence for lifelong learning. EntreComp is a comprehensive, flexible framework that describes entrepreneurship as the ability to act upon opportunities and ideas, and to transform them into value for others. The value created can be social, cultural, or financial. The framework identifies three interconnected competence areas: • Ideas and Opportunities – spotting opportunities, creativity, vision, valuing ideas, ethical and sustainable thinking. • Resources – self-awareness, motivation, mobilizing resources, financial and digital literacy, mobilizing others. • Into Action – taking initiative, planning, working with others, coping with uncertainty, learning through experience. In total, EntreComp maps 15 competences across 8 progression levels, providing a shared reference for policymakers, educators, employers, and learners to foster entrepreneurial learning in both formal and non-formal contexts.
Gamification	Gamification is the use of game design elements and principles in non-game contexts to engage, motivate, and influence behaviour or learning. In education and training, gamification leverages features such as

	points, levels, challenges, feedback, leaderboards, storytelling, and rewards to make learning experiences more engaging, interactive, and motivating. Unlike digital games themselves, gamification does not necessarily involve full gameplay, but rather selective integration of game mechanics to achieve specific learning or behavioural outcomes.
Inclusion	"Inclusion is basically ensuring that every child, adolescent and youth is taken into consideration equally by the education system. It is about guaranteeing fair and quality learning conditions, processes, and outcomes for all." **UNESCO IIEP Glossary**
Universal Design for Learning (UDL)	An educational framework that aims to optimize teaching and learning for all students by providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression. UDL emphasizes flexibility in how content is presented, how learners can demonstrate understanding, and how they are motivated to participate. The goal is to reduce barriers to learning, accommodate learner variability, and ensure equitable access to education for students of all abilities, backgrounds, and learning styles.
Restorative Approaches	Restorative practices in schools focus on repairing harm and rebuilding relationships through structured dialogues, such as restorative circles. These approaches involve all affected parties—the person harmed, the person who caused harm, and others—to discuss their feelings and perspectives and collaboratively find solutions. The aim is to heal relationships rather than punish individuals.[19]
Peer Mentoring	Peer mentoring refers to a planned process in which young people support other young people by sharing skills, experiences, and practical guidance to enhance learning, wellbeing, or participation. It is based on mutual respect, collaboration, and shared lived experiences, and aims to strengthen confidence, motivation, and a sense of belonging among participants.
Teach-back techniques	Teach-back is an instructional and communication method in which learners are asked to explain back, in

[19] Johanson, A. (2024, December 3). Restorative practice in schools: Time for a new approach? European School Education Platform. https://school-education.ec.europa.eu/en/discover/expert-views/restorative-practice-schools-time-new-approach

	their own words, the information, skills, or concepts that have just been taught. Its purpose is to confirm understanding, reinforce learning, and allow facilitators to identify misunderstandings or gaps in knowledge so they can clarify or adapt the instruction accordingly
Group Mentoring	Group mentoring refers to an intentional and facilitated process where a mentor (or a small team of mentors) meets regularly with a defined group of mentees to support their personal, academic, or professional development. This approach fosters a sense of community and empowerment, as mentees benefit not only from mentor guidance but also from peer learning, diverse perspectives, and collective dialogue. Group mentoring is particularly useful in resource-limited settings, inclusive learning environments, and youth projects that prioritise teamwork, social cohesion, and shared agency.
Micro-mentoring	Micro-mentoring refers to a flexible and accessible mentoring format that delivers just-in-time, need-based support. It is typically structured around a clearly defined goal—such as solving a problem, refining an idea, completing a task, or acquiring a specific skill. Sessions are usually brief (often 10–30 minutes), highly practical, and action-oriented. Micro-mentoring is particularly valuable in environments with limited resources, where continuous long-term mentoring is not feasible, and where learners benefit from rapid, situational input from experienced peers or professionals.
Accessible education	Accessible education encompasses the intentional creation of learning experiences that comply with principles of equity, universal design, and inclusion. This includes: • ensuring physical, digital, linguistic, cultural, and cognitive accessibility; • providing flexible formats and multiple means of expression and engagement; • integrating assistive technologies and accessible digital design; • promoting inclusive educator practices that support learners with disabilities, learners with low literacy, culturally diverse groups, and those facing structural barriers.

	Accessible education aligns with EU commitments to inclusive lifelong learning, digital accessibility, and the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework.
Human-centred design	"Human-centered design is a problem-solving technique that puts real people at the center of the development process, enabling you to create products and services that resonate and are tailored to your audience's needs. The goal is to keep users' wants, pain points, and preferences front of mind during every phase of the process. In turn, you'll build more intuitive, accessible products that are likely to turn a higher profit because your customers have already vetted the solution and feel more invested in using it" Source: Harvard Business School Online.
Learning by Doing	Learning by Doing is a pedagogical approach in which learners acquire knowledge, skills, and competencies through active participation and practical experience rather than passive instruction. It emphasizes hands-on engagement, experimentation, and reflection, allowing participants to apply concepts in real-world or simulated contexts. This approach enhances understanding, fosters problem-solving abilities, and supports the development of both technical and transferable skills.

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