AI-Powered eToolkit & Digital Learning Platform

Co-funded by the European Union

S.M.A.R.T. AI & Digital Power

S.M.A.R.T. - AI & Digital Power for Rural Entrepreneurs

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1. About the SMART Project

The *SMART – AI & Digital Power for Rural Entrepreneurs* project has been developed to bridge the persistent digital divide and stimulate sustainable growth in rural economies across Bulgaria and North Macedonia. The project aims to empower local entrepreneurs and adult learners through Artificial Intelligence (AI)–based digital marketing tools, mentorship, and certified training programmes.

Its objectives are threefold:

- Empowerment – to train and mentor rural entrepreneurs in using AI-driven marketing and data tools to improve visibility, competitiveness, and resilience.
- Capacity Building – to certify local trainers through *Training of Trainers (ToT)* programmes aligned with the *European Qualifications Framework (EQF)* and equipped with micro-credentials for long-term knowledge transfer.
- Sustainability – to establish a *Digital Business Support Network (DBSN)* that connects rural entrepreneurs, mentors, and trainers for continued peer learning and collaboration.

The project directly supports Erasmus+ priorities by promoting digital transformation, social inclusion, and green sustainability in adult education. It aligns with the *Digital Education Action Plan 2021–2027* and the *SME Strategy for a Sustainable and Digital Europe*, both of which emphasise AI literacy, resilience, and upskilling of adults in underserved areas.

Table 1 Partner Overview

Partner	**Country**	**Core Expertise**	**Key Role in SMART**
Global Edu Hub	Bulgaria	Adult education, entrepreneurship, and teacher training	Project coordination and national implementation
InnovEdu Nexus Institut e.V.	Germany	AI-driven education and digital innovation	Lead expert for mentorship, quality assurance, and ToT certification
Marketing Gate	North Macedonia	Digital entrepreneurship and rural innovation	Dissemination, local training delivery, and business support

Together, the consortium represents a balanced partnership between innovation, education, and local economic empowerment — ensuring that European expertise is effectively adapted to regional needs.

1.1. Why this Toolkit?

Rural entrepreneurship in South-Eastern Europe faces structural challenges: weak access to digital infrastructure, limited AI literacy, and low online visibility. According to the *Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI 2023)*, fewer than half of rural businesses in Bulgaria and North Macedonia use basic digital tools, and only 30% employ digital marketing strategies.

These gaps restrict innovation, hinder competitiveness, and intensify migration trends among working-age adults.

This *SMART eToolkit* has therefore been designed as a practical and inclusive response. It translates complex concepts of AI and digital transformation into accessible, step-by-step learning modules. Each component combines theory, examples, and ready-to-use resources to help entrepreneurs and trainers integrate AI into their daily work.

Specifically, the Toolkit aims to:

- provide rural entrepreneurs with hands-on AI tools for marketing automation, customer engagement, and analytics;
- support trainers with ready-made ToT materials, aligned with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF);
- offer policymakers and NGOs a scalable model for digital and green transition in adult education.

By focusing on accessibility, usability, and sustainability, the eToolkit becomes both a training manual and a long-term capacity-building resource for local communities.

1.2. How to Use This Toolkit

The *SMART eToolkit* is structured as an open and modular resource intended for flexible use by trainers, entrepreneurs, and adult educators.
Each section can be used independently or as part of a complete training course.

Table 2 Structure Overview

Section	Title	Purpose
1	Introduction & Context	Presents background, aims, and usage guidance
2	Foundations of Digital & AI Marketing	Introduces basic digital concepts and AI relevance
3	The SMART AI eToolkit	Provides detailed tutorials and templates
4	Sustainable & Green Business Practices	Integrates eco-friendly principles in digital work
5	Training of Trainers (ToT) Integration	Guides certified trainers and ToT sessions
6	Mentorship & Community Network	Describes the DBSN and peer learning system
7	Impact, Monitoring & Sustainability	Offers self-evaluation tools and KPIs

Users can navigate through each part sequentially or access the modules most relevant to their needs. Trainers may integrate the material into workshops, while entrepreneurs can use it for self-learning.
To ensure clarity and consistency, simple symbols are used throughout the document:

Table 3 Meaning of Symbols

Symbol	Meaning	Example
🛠	Practical tip	How to apply AI tool in your business
💡	Key insight	Lesson summary or success factor
🔗	Resource link	Downloadable template or website

This structure reflects the Erasmus+ principles of inclusiveness, accessibility, and lifelong learning, enabling users to gain concrete skills and measurable outcomes.

2. Foundations of Digital & AI Marketing

Digitalisation has transformed the way businesses operate, learn, and connect. For rural entrepreneurs, mastering the basics of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital marketing is not a luxury — it is a necessity for survival and growth. This section introduces the fundamental concepts and tools that underpin the SMART approach, helping learners understand how AI can simplify everyday business tasks, open new markets, and foster sustainable development.

2.1. What is AI and Why It Matters for Small Businesses

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to computer systems designed to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as learning, reasoning, and problem-solving. In the context of small and rural businesses, AI simplifies complex processes, automates repetitive tasks, and enhances decision-making. For entrepreneurs with limited staff and resources, these technologies can significantly increase efficiency and market competitiveness.
AI can generate marketing content, analyse customer behaviour, and predict sales trends with remarkable accuracy. Tools such as ChatGPT or Google Analytics can help rural entrepreneurs develop professional campaigns without needing large budgets or advanced technical skills.

Table 4 Application areas of Artificial Intelligence tools for small businesses

Application Area	**Example AI Tool**	**Business Benefit**
Content creation	ChatGPT	Generates texts for websites, ads, and emails
Design & branding	Canva / Midjourney	Creates visuals and logos quickly
Social media management	Meta Business Suite	Schedules posts and tracks engagement
Data insights	Google Trends / Analytics	Identifies market opportunities and customer preferences

Integrating AI into small business operations also supports sustainability: it reduces resource waste, limits travel costs, and encourages smarter energy use through digital workflows. For rural entrepreneurs, AI represents both an opportunity for growth and a practical path to digital inclusion.

2.2. The Digital Transformation of Rural Economies

Digital transformation refers to the adoption of new technologies that improve how organisations operate and deliver value. In rural contexts, this transformation is essential for overcoming geographic isolation, limited access to markets, and economic stagnation.

According to the *Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI, 2023)*, only around 47% of rural enterprises in Bulgaria and North Macedonia actively use online tools, compared to over 75% in urban areas. This digital gap directly affects employment, competitiveness, and innovation capacity.

The *SMART project* addresses these gaps by combining AI-based learning with practical applications that enable businesses to move online, develop digital marketing strategies, and reach new customers beyond local markets.

Table 5 Key challenges in rural entrepreneurship and the SMART project's responses

Challenge	**Typical Situation in Rural Areas**	**SMART Response**
Low digital literacy	Limited knowledge of AI and marketing tools	Training sessions and eToolkit tutorials
Limited market access	Dependence on local sales	Online campaigns and e-commerce guidance
High migration	Young people leaving for cities	Creating local jobs through digital entrepreneurship
Lack of support	Few mentors or peer networks	Digital Business Support Network (DBSN)

The European Union recognises digitalisation as a key driver for territorial cohesion. By equipping rural entrepreneurs with AI and digital marketing skills, projects like SMART contribute to the goals of the *EU Digital Decade 2030* — ensuring that at least 80% of adults possess basic digital skills and that small businesses adopt advanced technologies to remain competitive.

2.3. Building Your Online Presence

A strong online presence is essential for visibility and trust. For small enterprises, especially in rural communities, the internet provides access to wider markets without the costs of physical expansion. Building this presence involves three interconnected steps: branding, communication, and optimisation.

1. Branding and Identity
- Define a clear brand message and visual style (logo, colours, tone of voice).
- Use AI tools such as Midjourney or Canva to design promotional materials.
- Maintain consistent messaging across all online platforms.

2. Communication and Engagement

- Use Meta Business Suite or other social media management tools to schedule posts and monitor audience reactions.
- Respond promptly to customer messages to build trust and loyalty.
- Encourage user-generated content, testimonials, and local storytelling.

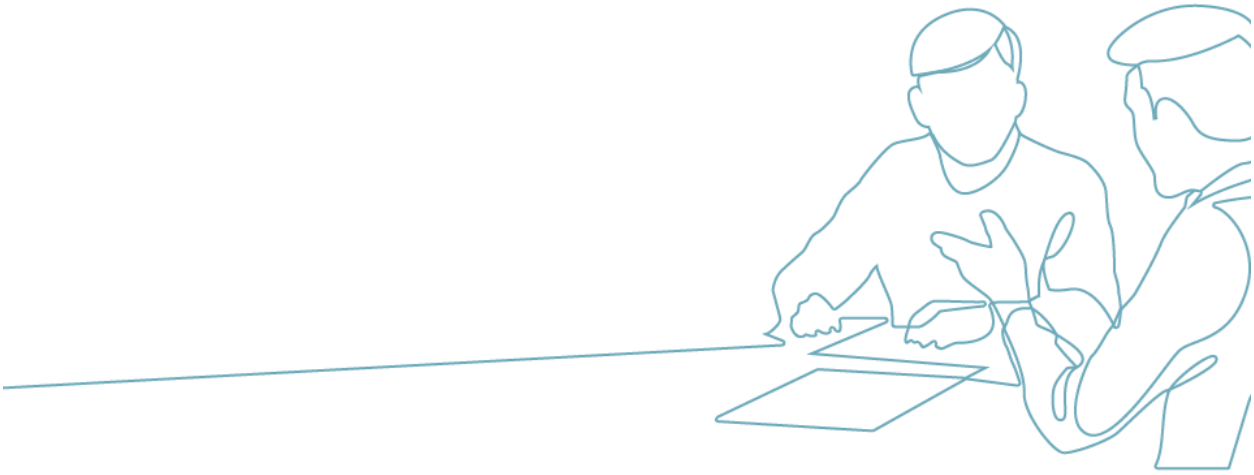
3. Optimisation and Growth

- Ensure that websites are mobile-friendly and optimised for search engines (SEO).
- Use Google Analytics to track visitor behaviour and adjust marketing strategies.
- Explore AI chatbots for basic customer support to increase efficiency.

Table 6 Practical steps and digital tools for building an online presence

Step	Tool or Method	Expected Outcome
Branding	Canva / Midjourney	Professional identity and visual consistency
Communication	Meta Business Suite	Improved audience reach and engagement
Optimisation	Google Analytics	Data-driven marketing and better sales conversion

In the SMART framework, online presence is not just a marketing task but part of a larger digital transformation process that enhances sustainability, economic independence, and regional visibility.



3. The SMART AI eToolkit

Digitalisation is no longer an abstract concept; it is a tool for inclusion, growth, and sustainability. The SMART eToolkit brings Artificial Intelligence (AI) closer to rural entrepreneurs by transforming complex technologies into simple, hands-on actions. Designed for real people — trainers, small business owners, and community innovators — it turns digital potential into measurable progress. Every module is built for immediate impact: to save time, reduce costs, and create new learning and business opportunities.

3.1. Overview of AI Tools Included

The SMART eToolkit presents a curated collection of accessible, affordable, and sustainable AI tools, tailored to small businesses in rural regions. Tools were selected according to their usability, low environmental footprint, and proven relevance to digital marketing and communication.

Table 7 Overview of selected AI tools and their applications

Tool	Main Purpose	Practical Use	Access Type	Difficulty Level	Sustainability Note
ChatGPT	Content generation	Writing posts, ads, and customer messages	Free / Pro	Low	Cloud-based, low hardware use
Midjourney	Visual design and branding	Creating logos and visuals for campaigns	Subscription	Medium	Paper-free branding resource
Canva	Design templates	Producing graphics and flyers	Free	Low	Reduces printing costs and waste
Meta Business Suite	Social media management	Scheduling and analytics	Free	Low	Supports local online visibility
Google Trends / Analytics	Market insights	Analysing audience behaviour	Free	Low	Promotes data-driven efficiency

Source: Authors, based on SMART Project WP2 and DESI 2023 data.

All recommended tools prioritise low-energy, cloud-based operations that minimise resource use and carbon footprint, in line with the *EU Green Deal* and the *Digital Strategy for a Sustainable Europe* (European Commission, 2023).

3.2. Step-by-Step Guides (Modules 1–4)

The SMART eToolkit is built around four applied modules. Each combines explanation, exercises, and templates to ensure measurable learning outcomes. Trainers can deliver them in workshops or participants can use them for self-learning.

Module 1: Creating AI-Driven Social Media Campaigns

- **Objective:** Enable participants to create and manage online campaigns using AI tools.
- **Tools:** ChatGPT, Canva, Meta Business Suite.
- **Steps:**
  - Identify audience and marketing goal.
  - Generate campaign texts using ChatGPT.
  - Design visuals in Canva.
  - Schedule and monitor posts via Meta Business Suite.
- **Estimated Duration:** 3 hours (trainer-led).
- **Expected Competence:** Participants can design, publish, and monitor an AI-assisted campaign.

Module 2: Automating Customer Interaction

- Objective: Reduce repetitive communication through automation.
- Tools: ChatGPT, WhatsApp Business, Mailchimp.
- Example: Auto-reply messages or post-purchase follow-ups.
- Estimated Duration: 2 hours (self-paced or trainer-assisted).
- Expected Competence: Participants can create automated customer interactions using accessible tools.

Module 3: Market Analysis and Segmentation Using AI

- **Objective:** Understand customers and plan targeted marketing.
- **Tools:** Google Trends, ChatGPT, spreadsheets.
- **Method:** Identify relevant keywords, measure online interest, and create basic reports.
- **Estimated Duration:** 2.5 hours (trainer-led).
- **Expected Competence:** Participants can produce a simple market insight summary using data-based reasoning.

Module 4: Measuring Performance with Digital Analytics

- **Objective:** Evaluate results using key performance indicators (KPIs).
- **Tools:** Google Analytics, Meta Insights Dashboard.
- **Key Metrics:** Reach, engagement, conversion, cost per lead.

- **Estimated Duration:** 2 hours (trainer-led).
- **Expected Competence:** Participants can interpret basic analytics to improve future campaigns.

The combination of these four modules ensures that each learner moves from awareness to mastery — from understanding AI to using it confidently

Table 8 Summary of SMART eToolkit modules and expected outcomes

Module	Core Focus	Main Tools	Learning Time	Expected Learning Outcome
1	AI-based content creation	ChatGPT, Canva	3h	Learners create one complete AI-powered campaign
2	Customer automation	ChatGPT, Mailchimp	2h	Learners automate one client interaction process
3	Market segmentation	Google Trends	2.5h	Learners generate one market analysis report
4	Digital analytics	Google Analytics	2h	Learners interpret campaign data using KPIs

Source: Authors, based on SMART Project WP2 and Erasmus+ OER Framework.

These learning outcomes are measurable, realistic, and directly contribute to the participants' employability and entrepreneurial capacity.

To ensure continuous improvement and transparency, the SMART project integrates specific performance indicators.

Table 9 SMART indicators for module implementation

Indicator	**Description**	**Target**	**Measurement Method**
Training completion rate	Share of participants finishing all 4 modules	≥ 80%	Attendance sheets / eLogs
AI adoption rate	% of learners applying AI tools post-training	≥ 70%	Follow-up survey (M+6)
Created digital campaigns	Number of campaigns implemented	≥ 50	Portfolio review
Certified ToT trainers using Toolkit	No. of trainers integrating toolkit in their courses	≥ 20	Partner reports
User satisfaction	Average score from evaluation form (1–5 scale)	≥ 4.5	Online feedback survey

Source: Authors, based on SMART Monitoring Framework.

Each KPI is linked to the project's *Quality Assurance Plan* and contributes to the overall monitoring and evaluation strategy (Work Package 5).

3.3. Templates and Resources

The SMART eToolkit provides practical templates that can be customised for any local business or training setting. These resources are designed for low-barrier access, ensuring usability in both online and offline environments.

Table 10 Toolkit templates and their functions

Template	Purpose	How to Use	Format
Business Plan Template	Structure core business ideas	Follow guided questions to define goals, strategy, and sustainability	Word / PDF
AI Prompt Library	Assist creative content generation	Use predefined prompts for posts, ads, or messages	Word / Web
KPI Tracking Sheet	Monitor marketing performance	Input monthly data to visualise growth	Excel / Google Sheet
Customer Persona Worksheet	Define target audience	Describe customer profile, needs, and challenges	PDF
Campaign Calendar	Plan social media content	Schedule topics, platforms, and deadlines	Google Sheet

Source: Authors, based on SMART Project WP2 Resource Library.

All resources are open-access and freely reusable under the *Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0)* licence.

3.4. Accessibility, Inclusion and Sustainability Features

Accessibility is a cornerstone of the SMART approach. The eToolkit and all resources are designed to function effectively even in low-connectivity or multilingual contexts.

Accessibility features include:

- Availability in English, Bulgarian, and Macedonian.
- Offline PDF and print-ready versions for rural trainers.
- Simple, high-contrast layout for readability and visual comfort.
- Plain-language explanations for learners with limited digital background.

Beyond accessibility, the eToolkit supports **inclusion and sustainability** by integrating digital and green transitions.

All activities promote low-carbon digital practices, cloud-based collaboration, and paperless learning. This ensures that environmental responsibility becomes an integral part of digital transformation — fully aligned with the *EU Green Deal* and the *European Skills Agenda (2025)*.

Sustainability statement:

The SMART eToolkit will remain available online for a minimum of three years after project completion. Partners commit to updating the materials annually, adding new AI tools, and incorporating user feedback. This approach guarantees long-term usability, replicability, and European added value.

4. Sustainable & Green Business Practices

Sustainability is no longer an optional value — it is a condition for competitiveness, innovation, and social responsibility. The SMART eToolkit promotes green entrepreneurship as a natural extension of digital transformation, ensuring that progress in technology goes hand in hand with care for the planet.
This chapter introduces practical ways to make digital marketing more sustainable, provides low-cost actions for small enterprises, and helps entrepreneurs evaluate their environmental performance through a simple self-assessment checklist.

4.1. Green Digital Marketing

Digital marketing can have a surprisingly large environmental impact, from data storage and online advertising to energy-intensive servers. However, with mindful strategies, even microbusinesses can dramatically reduce their carbon footprint while maintaining visibility and efficiency.
Green digital marketing means designing campaigns and operations that consume fewer resources, rely on renewable energy, and promote environmentally responsible messages.

Key Principles of Green Digital Marketing:

1. **Optimise digital content:** Reduce unnecessary emails, attachments, and oversized images.
2. **Use renewable-energy hosting:** Choose web providers powered by wind or solar energy.
3. **Encourage conscious consumption:** Promote repair, reuse, and responsible production.
4. **Reduce travel and printing:** Replace physical materials with digital tools.
5. **Collaborate with green partners:** Work with suppliers committed to sustainability.

Table 11 Examples of eco-conscious digital marketing practices

Practice	Description	Environmental Benefit	Example
Eco-friendly web design	Lightweight websites with optimised images	Less energy use during page loading	Sustainable tourism blog in Bulgaria
Green content marketing	Campaigns promoting local or recycled products	Supports sustainable consumption	"Buy Local, Think Global" – MK campaign
Paperless advertising	Full shift to online brochures and e-catalogues	Reduces paper waste and logistics	Digital farm product catalogue
Cloud collaboration tools	Shared documents instead of printed materials	Minimises resource duplication	Google Workspace shared planning
Carbon offset partnerships	Cooperation with reforestation projects	Neutralises emissions from digital ads	GreenTree Digital – North Macedonia

Source: Authors, based on European Commission (2023) and OECD (2024).

These examples demonstrate that sustainability can coexist with profitability. Every environmentally conscious campaign strengthens brand reputation, appeals to modern consumers, and aligns the business with the *EU Green Deal* and *UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*.

4.2. Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency

A circular economy aims to keep materials, energy, and products in use for as long as possible. For rural small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), this approach is not just ecological — it is economically smart. By reusing, repairing, and recycling resources, entrepreneurs can save costs, reduce waste, and open new market opportunities.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) can make these processes simpler and more efficient. AI-based analytics help businesses identify resource waste, optimise logistics, and forecast energy use.

Before exploring practical measures, it is important to remember that **sustainability starts with awareness**. Small changes — such as switching to digital invoices or sharing delivery routes — can collectively make a large impact.

Table 12 ***Low-cost actions for resource efficiency in rural SMEs***

Action	Description	Type of Benefit	Required Tools
Switch to LED and smart lighting	Reduces electricity costs and energy waste	Environmental & financial	Smart sensors, timers
Digital invoices and e-signatures	Paperless financial transactions	Administrative efficiency	Free online invoice tools
Optimised logistics planning	AI-based route planning to reduce fuel use	Cost and emission reduction	Google Maps / Route4Me
Reuse of packaging materials	Collect and repurpose boxes or bottles	Lower waste output	Local return systems
Product life-cycle tracking	Use AI to predict product maintenance	Circular business planning	CRM software, ChatGPT analytics

Source: Authors, based on Circular Economy Action Plan (European Commission, 2020).

Each small action, when consistently applied, builds a foundation for long-term resilience. Entrepreneurs who embed circular principles into their strategy also strengthen trust among consumers and partners, as environmental responsibility becomes a core part of brand identity.

4.3. Sustainability Checklist

Becoming sustainable is an ongoing process, not a one-time decision. This self-assessment checklist allows entrepreneurs and trainers to evaluate their environmental performance and identify realistic improvement areas.
It covers energy use, materials, communication, and long-term planning — all tailored for small businesses in rural settings.

Table 13 Ten step sustainability self-assessment checklist for entrepreneurs

Step	Question	Possible Action
1	Do you use renewable energy for your business or hosting?	Switch to a green energy supplier or hosting provider.
2	Are all your marketing materials digital and paper-free?	Convert brochures to PDF or interactive web versions.
3	Do you measure your energy and resource use monthly?	Track usage through free monitoring apps.
4	Are you collaborating with local suppliers to shorten logistics?	Establish local partnerships and shared transport routes.
5	Have you implemented recycling practices at your workplace?	Introduce waste separation bins and local recycling stations.
6	Do you use eco-efficient AI tools for business planning?	Integrate ChatGPT or analytics to forecast resource needs.
7	Are your employees trained in sustainability and digital tools?	Organise short training sessions or join Erasmus+ workshops.
8	Do you communicate your sustainability efforts publicly?	Share stories via your website and social media.
9	Have you set yearly sustainability goals with measurable outcomes?	Use SMART indicators to track progress.
10	Is sustainability part of your customer value proposition?	Include environmental benefits in your branding and messages.

Source: Authors, adapted from SMART Project Sustainability Framework (2025).

Entrepreneurs who score positively on 7 or more steps can be considered "green-ready," meaning they actively integrate sustainability into their operations. For those with lower scores, the SMART eToolkit provides guidance on where to start and how to improve over time.
At the community level, using such checklists also fosters peer accountability — enabling local business networks to share best practices and mentor one another toward greener transformation.

Closing Reflection

Sustainability is not about perfection; it is about progress. By applying the principles and actions outlined in this chapter, rural entrepreneurs can transform their digital presence into a positive environmental force.

Each AI-driven campaign that saves paper, each collaborative delivery route that reduces emissions, and each small step toward efficiency contributes to a collective European goal: a green, inclusive, and resilient economy.

“Going green is not a cost — it is an investment in the future.”

5. Training of Trainers (ToT) Integration

The transition from digital knowledge to sustainable action depends on the capacity of trainers to transfer what they learn to others. The *SMART Training of Trainers (ToT)* programme was created to ensure that knowledge from this eToolkit reaches communities effectively and continues to grow beyond the project's lifetime.
It transforms adult educators, mentors, and local facilitators into catalysts of digital and green entrepreneurship.

5.1. How Trainers Can Use the Toolkit

The Toolkit is not only a learning resource but also a ready-made training package. Trainers can use it as a modular guide, combining theoretical sessions with hands-on exercises. Each module corresponds to a specific learning unit, complete with objectives, materials, and evaluation criteria.

Table 14 Example structure for a 5-session ToT course using the SMART eToolkit

Session	Focus Area	Duration	Main Activities	Learning Output
1	Introduction to AI and Green Entrepreneurship	3 h	Ice-breakers, expectations, overview of Toolkit	Trainers understand project goals and tools
2	Practical use of AI tools	4 h	Demonstrations, exercises with ChatGPT and Canva	Trainers create sample digital materials
3	Sustainable digital marketing	3 h	Group work on green campaign planning	Draft eco-marketing project
4	Mentoring and peer learning methods	3 h	Role-plays, feedback rounds	Trainers design mentoring scenarios
5	Assessment and certification	2 h	Reflection, self-evaluation, micro-credential exam	Participants obtain EQF-aligned certificate

Source: Authors, based on SMART Project WP3 Training Plan (2025).

Before training delivery, trainers are encouraged to:

1. **Adapt** materials to local language and cultural context.
2. **Combine** digital learning with experiential exercises.

3. **Encourage** peer learning and reflection sessions.
4. **Evaluate** progress using SMART indicators from Chapter 3.
5. **Integrate** sustainability messages in all examples and discussions.

This flexible framework can be replicated in any adult education centre. Trainers may adjust timing, case studies, or language according to the participants' backgrounds and learning needs.

5.2. Assessment and Certification

To guarantee recognition and quality, the SMART ToT programme is aligned with the *European Qualifications Framework (EQF)* and the *Council Recommendation on Micro-Credentials (2022)*. Each trainer who completes the course receives a digital micro-credential describing the achieved competences, learning hours, and assessment results.

Assessment Components:

1. **Knowledge Test** – short quiz covering AI, digital marketing, and sustainability basics.
2. **Practical Task** – creation of one complete AI-based campaign.
3. **Peer Review** – feedback exchange among trainers.
4. **Reflection Report** – summary of personal learning outcomes.

Table 15 Competence mapping of SMART ToT programme to EQF levels

Competence Area	Description	EQF Level	Evidence of Achievement
Digital literacy and AI use	Ability to apply AI tools for content creation and analysis	Level 5	Completed module tasks
Sustainability awareness	Integration of eco-responsible approaches in teaching	Level 5	Green campaign project
Training design and facilitation	Capacity to deliver blended learning using eToolkit	Level 6	Session plan and reflection
Evaluation and mentoring	Use of feedback and self-assessment for improvement	Level 6	Peer review results

Source: Authors, based on European Qualifications Framework (EQF, 2023).

Certification is issued jointly by project partners and validated under open micro-credential standards. The digital badge includes metadata describing learning hours, competences, EQF level, and issuing institution.

5.3. Practical Exercises and Peer-Learning Activities

Experiential learning strengthens both competence and confidence. The SMART ToT course integrates collaborative and reflective exercises designed to connect trainers across countries and disciplines.

Example Activities:

- **Exercise 1 – AI Campaign Challenge:** Participants design a digital campaign using ChatGPT and Canva within 60 minutes.
- **Exercise 2 – Sustainability Pitch Simulation:** Trainers present a short "green business pitch" applying principles from Chapter 4.
- **Exercise 3 – Peer Reflection Round:** Participants provide constructive feedback using the SMART feedback form.

These exercises support creativity, teamwork, and self-assessment — core elements of adult learning. Trainers are encouraged to document outcomes, photos, and reflections to enrich the shared *Digital Business Support Network (DBSN)* repository.

Table 16 Overview of practical ToT exercises and their learning outcomes

Exercise	Method	Duration	Expected Outcome
1. AI Campaign Challenge	Group work, tool-based creation	1 h	One complete AI-based campaign
2. Sustainability Pitch	Role-play, peer feedback	45 min	Improved presentation and persuasion skills
3. Reflection Round	Guided discussion	30 min	Consolidated learning and future action plan

Source: Authors, based on SMART Project WP3 Implementation Guidelines.

These collaborative activities encourage trainers not only to teach but to embody the SMART values — openness, digital confidence, and environmental responsibility.

Closing Reflection

Training others is the most effective way to learn. The SMART ToT programme ensures that every trainer becomes a multiplier of knowledge — capable of combining AI, sustainability, and adult education principles in real practice.

By empowering trainers, SMART creates a ripple effect: hundreds of adult learners will gain new digital and green skills, strengthen rural economies and promoting the European vision of a smart, inclusive, and sustainable future.

"A great trainer does not transfer knowledge; they inspire transformation."

6. Mentorship & Community Network

Innovation thrives when knowledge is shared. The SMART project transforms individual learning into collective empowerment through the *Digital Business Support Network (DBSN)* — an open European community where rural entrepreneurs, trainers, and mentors collaborate, exchange ideas, and co-create sustainable digital solutions.
The DBSN extends the life of the SMART eToolkit beyond the project's timeframe, ensuring that mentorship, peer learning, and collaboration continue to grow organically. It embodies the Erasmus+ vision of inclusion, connectivity, and lifelong learning.

6.1. Structure and Benefits of the DBSN

The DBSN is designed as a hybrid network combining an online platform and local hubs managed by partner organisations. Each hub serves as a meeting point for adult learners, trainers, and business mentors to share expertise, success stories, and new tools.
Participation is open and voluntary, ensuring accessibility for everyone interested in digital transformation and sustainable entrepreneurship.

Table 17 Structure of the Digital Business Support Network (DBSN)

Level	Description	Coordinating Partner	Activities
European	Online platform connecting all partners	InnovEdu Nexus Institut (DE)	Platform maintenance, webinars, EU networking
National	Local clusters in BG and MK	Global Edu Hub (BG), Marketing Gate (MK)	Local mentoring sessions, translation of resources
Thematic	Specialised expert groups (AI tools, sustainability, marketing)	Shared among partners	Joint workshops and research briefs
Individual	Members (entrepreneurs, trainers, mentors)	Open membership	Participation in forums and peer learning

Source: Authors, based on SMART Project WP4 design framework.

Key functions of the DBSN:

- Peer Mentoring: Connecting experienced trainers and entrepreneurs with beginners.
- Knowledge Exchange: Sharing good practices, case studies, and templates.

- Digital Support: Offering guidance on AI and green tools from the Toolkit.
- Community Building: Encouraging cooperation across borders and sectors.
- Policy Feedback: Providing grassroots input for future Erasmus+ initiatives.

This multi-level structure allows knowledge to circulate effectively between European and local levels. Every participant, regardless of background, can contribute, learn, and connect — creating a sustainable ecosystem for digital growth and innovation.

6.2. How to Join and Contribute

The DBSN operates on the principle that learning is most effective when it is social. Participation is open to all adult educators, entrepreneurs, and local actors interested in green and digital skills. Joining is simple: participants register online through the SMART platform or during local events organised by project partners. After joining, members gain access to the full eToolkit, resource library, and mentorship network.
Opportunities for members:

- Attend free online mentoring sessions and webinars.
- Access a resource repository with templates and case studies.
- Collaborate on joint initiatives and Erasmus+ proposals.
- Showcase success stories in the DBSN newsletter.
- Participate in annual SMART Community Days to network and exchange ideas.

Table 18 Roles and contributions of DBSN members

Member Type	Main Role	Possible Contributions	Benefits
Trainer / ToT graduate	Share expertise and mentor others	Provide webinars, review materials	Visibility and professional recognition
Entrepreneur	Apply Toolkit and report outcomes	Share testimonials and local examples	Access to mentoring and new markets
Mentor / Expert	Guide new members and review cases	Provide advice and peer support	Strengthen European reputation
Partner Organisation	Manage national coordination	Host events, collect data	Sustained project visibility

Source: Authors, based on SMART Project Community Framework.

The collaborative character of the DBSN ensures that participants are not passive recipients of information, but active contributors to an evolving European learning community.

6.3. Examples of Successful Mentorship

The DBSN model has already produced inspiring results. Through pilot mentorships conducted during the project, trainers and entrepreneurs collaborated to develop sustainable business strategies and apply AI tools in real contexts.

Case Example 1 – Digital Tourism Start-up (Bulgaria):
A local entrepreneur used ChatGPT and Canva to design marketing campaigns for eco-tourism. With mentor guidance, the company improved its online visibility by 60% within three months.

Case Example 2 – Green Agro-Food Initiative (North Macedonia):

A small producer introduced automated order management and eco-packaging after attending SMART mentorship sessions. The business cut paper use by 80% and reduced logistics costs by 25%.

Table 19 Summary of mentorship outcomes under the SMART DBSN pilot phase

Country	No. of Mentorship Pairs	Main Focus Area	Key Result
Bulgaria	10	AI-driven marketing for rural SMEs	60% growth in social media engagement
North Macedonia	8	Green packaging and logistics optimisation	25% reduction in operating costs
Germany	5	Digital training and ToT evaluation	Integration of Toolkit in 2 adult centres

Source: Authors, based on partner progress reports (2025).

These case studies highlight how mentorship accelerates learning and innovation. Each success story adds value to the community by inspiring others to act and replicate effective models.

6.4. Monitoring and Long-Term Impact

The DBSN is not a one-time activity but a living system that will continue to evolve after the project's completion. To measure its effectiveness, clear performance indicators are defined.

Table 20 SMART indicators for monitoring the DBSN

Indicator	**Description**	**Target (M+24)**	**Data Source**
Active DBSN members	Registered individuals in the online platform	≥ 100	Platform analytics
Mentorship sessions conducted	One-to-one or group mentoring activities	≥ 25	Partner reports
Shared resources uploaded	Templates, cases, or tutorials contributed	≥ 60	DBSN repository
Cross-country collaborations	Joint webinars or exchanges among partners	≥ 10	Meeting reports
Policy feedback submissions	Inputs provided to Erasmus+ or national agencies	≥ 5	Policy roundtable notes

Source: Authors, based on SMART Project Impact Framework.

Monitoring will be coordinated by InnovEdu Nexus Institut, while partners will provide quarterly updates. This ensures transparency, accountability, and long-term relevance.

The DBSN will remain active for at least three years beyond the project, supported by volunteers, trainers, and partner organisations. It will also be integrated into future Erasmus+ applications to sustain growth and collaboration.

Closing Reflection

Mentorship turns knowledge into action. By creating a living network that connects people, skills, and values, SMART ensures that learning continues long after formal training ends. The Digital Business Support Network (DBSN) represents more than a platform — it is a growing community where digital innovation meets human connection.

"When one entrepreneur learns, a business grows. When a community learns together, a future is built."

7. Impact, Monitoring & Sustainability

Impact is the ultimate measure of success. The SMART project ensures that every training activity, mentorship, and resource creates tangible improvements in digital literacy, sustainability awareness, and entrepreneurial confidence.
This chapter outlines how impact is measured, how progress is monitored, and how long-term sustainability will be achieved at institutional, community, and European levels.

7.1. SMART Indicators and Key Performance Metrics

To ensure accountability and transparency, the project applies a clear monitoring framework. All results are measured through quantitative and qualitative indicators aligned with Erasmus+ and OECD standards for adult learning evaluation.

Table 21 SMART indicators for the overall project impact

Area of Impact	Indicator	Target Value	Measurement Method	Responsible Partner
Digital Skills Development	No. of adult learners trained	≥ 120 participants	Attendance sheets, training reports	Global Edu Hub
AI Adoption	% of participants using AI tools six months post-training	≥ 70 %	Online follow-up survey	Marketing Gate
Green Transition	No. of businesses applying eco-friendly practices	≥ 40 SMEs	Self-assessment checklist	Marketing Gate
Networking	No. of active DBSN members	≥ 100	Platform analytics	InnovEdu Nexus Institut
Visibility	Social media reach and event participants	≥ 1 000 stakeholders	Communication dashboard	All partners
Policy Uptake	Recommendations shared with policy bodies	≥ 5	Policy roundtable minutes	InnovEdu Nexus Institut

Source: Authors, based on SMART Project Monitoring Framework (2025).

These indicators allow the consortium to track not only what was achieved but also what has changed. The results feed into a continuous improvement cycle, where data informs future activities and updates of the eToolkit.

Between quantitative evidence and qualitative reflection, SMART demonstrates a holistic approach — numbers measure reach, while stories capture transformation.

7.2. Monitoring and Feedback Tools

Monitoring in SMART is not limited to reporting; it is part of learning. Each activity includes feedback loops that enable trainers, participants, and partners to reflect, evaluate, and adapt in real time.
This ensures responsiveness, inclusivity, and evidence-based improvement.

Main monitoring tools include:

- Participant feedback forms after every session.
- Trainer reflection sheets documenting learning outcomes.
- Online satisfaction surveys through the DBSN platform.
- Monthly coordination meetings among partners for data review.
- Annual evaluation reports summarising progress and lessons learned.

Table 22 Monitoring instruments and frequency

Instrument	Type	Frequency	Responsible Partner	Output
Training feedback form	Quantitative & qualitative	After each session	Local trainers	Improvement log
ToT reflection sheet	Qualitative	After ToT course	InnovEdu Nexus Institut	Lesson learned report
Online participant survey	Quantitative	6 months after training	Marketing Gate	Adoption analysis
Partner coordination meeting	Mixed	Monthly	All partners	Joint action notes
Final evaluation report	Comprehensive	End of project	InnovEdu Nexus Institut	Impact summary

Source: Authors, based on SMART WP5 Evaluation Plan.

Monitoring data will be centralised through the DBSN online repository, allowing partners to visualise trends and exchange insights. This transparency helps maintain a culture of trust and shared responsibility.

7.3. Sustainability and Future Use

Sustainability is both an outcome and a guiding principle. The SMART consortium has developed a realistic plan to ensure that project results remain accessible and beneficial long after funding ends.

The approach focuses on three levels: institutional, community, and European.

1. **Institutional Level:**

Each partner will integrate the eToolkit and ToT curriculum into its regular adult education programmes. This ensures continuity through formal training offers, national EPALE platforms, and local learning centres.

Table 23 Long-term sustainability measures and responsibilities

Sustainability Measure	Description	Responsible Partner	Timeframe
Integration into regular curricula	Use of Toolkit in annual adult education courses	Global Edu Hub, Marketing Gate	Post-project Year 1
Maintenance of DBSN	Platform hosting and community coordination	InnovEdu Nexus Institut	3 years post-project
Update of eToolkit	Annual review and addition of new AI tools	Consortium	Continuous
Policy dissemination	Submission of policy briefs and participation in events	All partners	Year 1–3
Replication through new Erasmus+ projects	Inclusion of SMART results in new applications	Consortium	Year 2–5

Source: Authors, based on SMART Sustainability Plan (2025).

2 **Community Level:**

The *Digital Business Support Network (DBSN)* will continue to function as an open learning space, supported by volunteers, trainers, and new project collaborations. Regular "SMART Community Days" will maintain engagement and visibility.

3 **European Level:**

Project outcomes will be shared through the *Erasmus+ Results Platform*, the *EPALE Adult Learning Community*, and upcoming KA220 partnerships, promoting replication across Europe.

These measures turn short-term achievements into a sustainable European model for digital and green entrepreneurship education.

7.4. Legacy and European Added Value

The true legacy of SMART lies not only in the materials produced but in the mindsets changed. By merging AI literacy with sustainability values, the project demonstrates how technology can serve humanity and the planet sim**ultaneously.**

European Added Value includes:

- Contribution to *Digital Education Action Plan 2021–2027* through scalable AI-based learning.
- Alignment with the *Green Deal* and *European Skills Agenda* by promoting sustainable digital entrepreneurship.
- Strengthening cross-border collaboration through the DBSN and shared OERs.
- Empowering adults with fewer opportunities to participate actively in the digital economy.

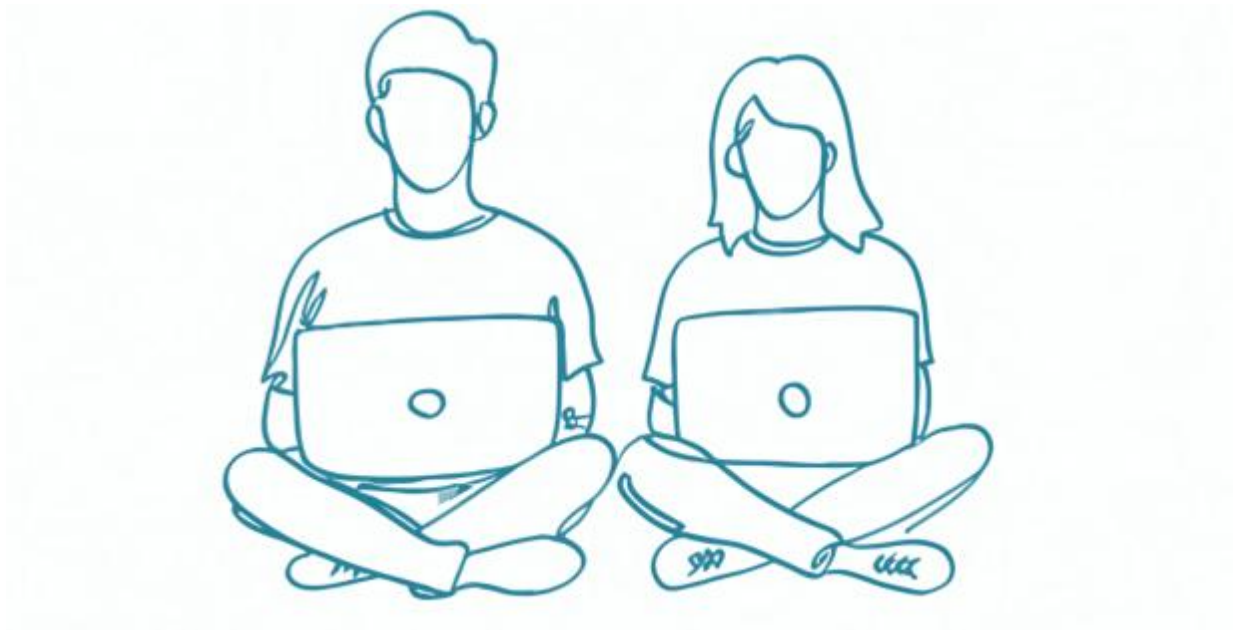
"When knowledge becomes accessible and sustainable, Europe becomes stronger."

The SMART consortium will continue to act as a regional multiplier, spreading this model through future Erasmus+, Horizon, and Creative Europe collaborations.

Closing Reflection

Impact is not measured only by numbers but by transformation.
The SMART project proves that when adult learning combines digital tools, mentorship, and sustainability, it creates lasting change — empowering individuals, strengthening communities, and contributing to a greener and more resilient Europe.

"The most powerful outcomes are the ones that keep growing after the project ends."



8. Annexes

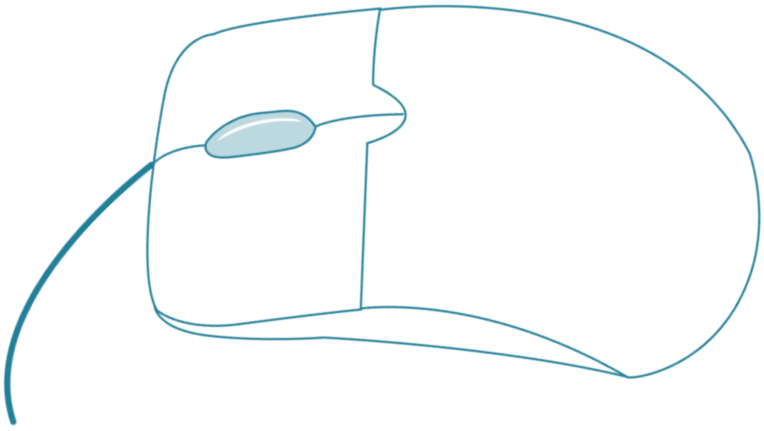
This section provides a comprehensive overview of all bibliographic references, practical resources, and contributors involved in the development of the *SMART – AI & Digital Power for Rural Entrepreneurs* eToolkit.
All entries follow Harvard style referencing, ensuring academic integrity and transparency.

8.1. Consolidated Reference Table

No.	Reference (Harvard style)	Chapter(s)
1	Council of the European Union (2022) *Council Recommendation on Micro-Credentials for Lifelong Learning and Employability.* Brussels: Official Journal of the EU.	1, 5
2	Council of the European Union (2022) *Council Recommendation on Access to Lifelong Learning.* Brussels: Official Journal of the EU.	3, 4
3	European Commission (2020) *Circular Economy Action Plan – For a Cleaner and More Competitive Europe.* Brussels: Publications Office of the EU.	4
4	European Commission (2021) *The Digital Decade 2030: Policy Programme.* Brussels: Publications Office of the EU.	2
5	European Commission (2022) *Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp 2.2).* Brussels: Publications Office of the EU.	3
6	European Commission (2022) *SME Strategy for a Sustainable and Digital Europe.* Brussels: Publications Office of the EU.	1, 2
7	European Commission (2022) *Digital Education Action Plan 2021–2027.* Brussels: European Commission.	1
8	European Commission (2023) *Artificial Intelligence for Sustainable Digitalisation.* Brussels: Publications Office of the EU.	3

9	European Commission (2023) *Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2023 – Country Report: Bulgaria and North Macedonia.* Brussels: European Commission.	1, 2
10	European Commission (2023) *Inclusion and Diversity Strategy in Erasmus+.* Brussels: Publications Office of the EU.	3
11	European Commission (2023) *EU Green Deal: Sustainable Digitalisation Pathways.* Brussels: Publications Office of the EU.	4
12	European Commission (2023) *European Skills Agenda – Lifelong Learning for the Green and Digital Transition.* Brussels: Publications Office of the EU.	3, 4
13	European Commission (2023) *Artificial Intelligence in Europe: Opportunities for SMEs.* Brussels: Publications Office of the EU.	2
14	European Commission (2023) *Digital Education Action Plan 2021–2027: Progress Report.* Brussels: Publications Office of the EU.	7
15	European Commission (2023) *Sustainability and Dissemination of Erasmus+ Project Results.* Brussels: Publications Office of the EU.	7
16	European Commission (2024) *Guidelines for Open Educational Resources (OER) in Erasmus+ Projects.* Brussels: EACEA.	3
17	European Commission (2024) *Open Educational Resources for Adult Education – Implementation Guidelines.* Brussels: EACEA.	1
18	European Commission (2024) *Green Deal and Digital Transition Synergies.* Brussels: Publications Office of the EU.	7
19	European Parliament (2022) *Resolution on Corporate Sustainability and Digital Responsibility.* Strasbourg: European Parliament.	4
20	OECD (2022) *Bridging the Digital Divide in Rural Regions.* Paris: OECD.	2
21	OECD (2023) *AI and the Future of Small Business Productivity.* Paris: OECD Publishing.	2, 3
22	OECD (2023) *Empowering SMEs for Digital Transformation.* Paris: OECD Publishing.	1
23	OECD (2023) *Resource Efficiency and Green Innovation in SMEs.* Paris: OECD Publishing.	4

24	OECD (2023) *Pedagogical Innovation in Lifelong Learning.* Paris: OECD Publishing.	5
25	OECD (2024) *Entrepreneurship and Digital Skills Development in SMEs.* Paris: OECD.	3
26	OECD (2024) *Greening the Digital Economy: Policy Toolkit for SMEs.* Paris: OECD Publishing.	4
27	OECD (2024) *Innovation, Skills and Sustainability – Policy Insights for Europe.* Paris: OECD Publishing.	7
28	UNESCO (2023) *AI Competency Standards for Adult Education Trainers.* Paris: UNESCO.	3
29	UNESCO (2022) *Competence Framework for Digital Educators.* Paris: UNESCO.	5
30	World Economic Forum (2024) *Global Future Council on AI for Business Transformation.* Geneva: WEF.	2
31	Erasmus+ Programme Guide (2025) *Key Action 2 – Adult Education: Small-Scale Partnerships (KA210-ADU).* Brussels: European Commission.	1



8.2. AI Tools and Templates Overview

Overview of digital tools and open resources integrated in the SMART eToolkit

Tool / Template	Main Function	Format	Accessibility	Sustainability Note
ChatGPT	Content creation and customer support automation	Web / App	Free / Pro	Cloud-based, low-energy
Canva	Visual design and brand identity	Web	Free	Paperless creativity
Midjourney	AI-driven graphic generation	Web	Subscription	Digital-first, no printing
Meta Business Suite	Social media scheduling and analytics	Web / Mobile	Free	Encourages efficient communication
Google Trends / Analytics	Data insight and performance analysis	Web	Free	Promotes data-driven decision-making
Mailchimp	Customer email automation	Web	Free	Reduces manual repetition
Route4Me	AI route optimisation for SMEs	Web / Mobile	Subscription	Reduces fuel use and CO_2 emissions
SMART Business Plan Template	Guided business model design	Word / PDF	Open-access	Reduces consultancy costs
AI Prompt Library	Content generation support	Word / Web	Open-access	Enhances creativity, no materials waste
KPI Tracking Sheet	Performance monitoring	Excel / Google Sheet	Open-access	Transparent impact tracking
Customer Persona Worksheet	Audience profiling	PDF	Open-access	Reusable training material
Campaign Calendar	Planning and scheduling tool	Google Sheet	Open-access	Paperless planning

Source: Authors, based on SMART Project WP2 Resource Library (2025).

8.3. Acknowledgements

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Consortium Partners:

1. Global Edu Hub (Bulgaria) – Coordinator, adult education and entrepreneurship.
2. InnovEdu Nexus Institut e.V. (Germany) – Digital innovation, mentorship, quality assurance.
3. Marketing Gate (North Macedonia) – Dissemination, localisation, and business support.

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