



STARTUP LAB PROJECT

Empowering Adults to Build Digital Businesses

Grant Agreement No: 2025-1-LT01-KA210-ADU-000355499

TRANSNATIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT

Activity 1 – Consolidated Cross-Country Analysis

France	Lithuania	Türkiye
Association Hexagonale de l'Innovation Sociale et de l'Education	Panevežys Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Crafts	EduXperts-Esra Nil Doğan Technology Education and Consultancy

Lead Partner (Activity 1):	Association Hexagonale de l'Innovation Sociale et de l'Education (France)
Data Collection Period:	January 2026
Report Date:	March 2026
Total Sample:	n=60 (survey respondents) + 6 in-depth interviews across 3 countries
Programme:	Erasmus+ KA210-ADU – Small-scale Partnerships in Adult Education

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Contributing partners: Panevežys CCIC (LT) | EduXperts (TR)*

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Transnational Needs Assessment Report consolidates the findings of Activity 1 of the Startup Lab project, an Erasmus+ KA210-ADU small-scale partnership involving Association Hexagonale (France), Panevežys CCIC (Lithuania), and EduXperts (Türkiye). The research combined structured surveys with 20 adults per partner country (n=60 total) and six in-depth qualitative interviews conducted in January 2026. The findings presented here provide the evidence base for the design of Activity 2 (Digital Entrepreneurship Training Programme) and Activity 3 (Step-by-Step Business Launch Guide).

60 Survey Participants <i>20 per partner country</i>	6 In-Depth Interviews <i>2 per partner country</i>	3 Countries <i>FR LT TR</i>	18 mo. Project Duration <i>Oct 2025 – Mar 2027</i>
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Cross-Cutting Findings

- **Universal motivation gap vs. competency gap:** Across all three countries, entrepreneurial attitudes (desire to start a business, motivation to learn, openness to new tools) consistently scored 0.8–1.5 points higher on the Likert scale than knowledge and skill items, confirming that motivational capital is present but technical and strategic competency is the limiting factor.
- **Barriers are multi-dimensional and interlocking:** No single barrier dominates across the full dataset. Lack of business knowledge, fear of failure, financial constraints, and lack of mentorship each affect 30–55% of respondents across all three countries, requiring a holistic programme design that addresses knowledge, confidence, and structural access simultaneously.
- **Financial and legal literacy is the shared critical gap:** Across all three countries, legal/regulatory knowledge and financial requirements were among the lowest-scoring Likert items (ranging from 2.35 to 2.85), and financial/legal processes ranked among the top three most challenging areas in every national dataset.
- **A single curriculum cannot serve all three countries equally:** The three national datasets reveal meaningfully different starting points, France with a foundational digital skills gap, Lithuania with a strategic application gap, and Türkiye with a business planning and ideation gap, requiring modular curriculum design with differentiated entry pathways.
- **Post-training support is a universal priority:** All six interview participants, across all three countries and all interviewee profiles (end-users, experts, practitioners), independently identified post-training mentorship, peer community, and sustained support as essential, not supplementary, programme components.

Consolidated Policy Recommendations

- Design the Startup Lab training programme as a shared curriculum that is adaptable to different socioeconomic realities, aligned with the project's original design principle of developing a training model scalable and replicable across European regions.
- Establish a structured post-training mentorship and alumni network as a core programme deliverable, not an optional add-on.

- Develop the Step-by-Step Business Launch Guide (Activity 3) as a four-language, country-specific resource with distinct legal and regulatory sections for France, Lithuania, and Türkiye.
- Integrate AI tools as active pedagogical co-creators throughout the curriculum, responding to consistent cross-country demand and high attitudinal receptiveness.
- Design all sessions as output-producing: every module should end with a tangible, real-world deliverable that participants can show to peers, family, and potential customers.

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

2.1 The Startup Lab Project

The Startup Lab project (Grant Agreement No: 2025-1-LT01-KA210-ADU-000355499) is a transnational small-scale partnership under the Erasmus+ KA210-ADU (Small-scale Partnerships in Adult Education) action, running from October 2025 to March 2027. The project aims to empower adults and NEETs (young people Not in Employment, Education, or Training) with the entrepreneurial, digital, and business skills necessary to create sustainable self-employment opportunities, foster economic inclusion, and contribute to the digital transformation of their communities.

The project partnership brings together three complementary organisations: Panevežys CCIC (Lithuania), a non-governmental chamber of commerce, industry and crafts with over 30 years of experience in business development and project implementation, serving as project lead; Association Hexagonale (France), an NGO focused on social innovation, employability, and entrepreneurship education, leading Activity 1 (Needs Assessment); and EduXperts (Türkiye), a technology training and consultancy company specialising in e-learning development and digital business education, leading Activity 2 (Training Programme) and overseeing quality assurance.

2.2 The Needs Assessment: Purpose and Scope

Activity 1 - Needs Assessment Research was designed as the evidence foundation for all subsequent project activities. Rather than designing training content based on assumptions about target group needs, the project committed to grounding every curriculum decision in empirical data gathered directly from the target population and sector experts across all three partner countries.

The needs assessment pursued the following transnational objectives:

1. To map digital entrepreneurship skill gaps across the three partner country contexts.
2. To identify structural, financial, psychological, and knowledge-based barriers preventing target group members from initiating digital businesses.
3. To document training content priorities and learning format preferences in each national context.
4. To gather practitioner and expert perspectives on the digital entrepreneurship landscape through in-depth qualitative interviews.
5. To generate a consolidated transnational evidence base that directly informs the design of Activity 2 (training curriculum) and Activity 3 (Step-by-Step Business Launch Guide).

2.3 Contextual Framing: Why Now?

Digital entrepreneurship has emerged as a structural pathway to economic inclusion and employment in the post-pandemic European economy. According to the World Economic Forum, digital businesses are expected to contribute up to 25% of global GDP by 2025. The ILO estimates that over 40% of workers globally require reskilling due to digital transformation. E-commerce alone reached \$5.7 trillion in global sales in 2022.

Yet access to this economic frontier remains highly unequal. The EU's Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI, 2023) reports that 44% of EU adults still lack basic digital competencies. NEET rates in France (14.4%) exceed the EU average (11.7%) (OECD, 2023). Only 5.4% of Lithuanian adults are involved in starting a business, well below the EU average of 8.2%. In

Türkiye, fewer than 10% of vocational training programmes include e-commerce or digital marketing content (Turkish Ministry of Education, 2023). These systemic conditions define the context in which the Startup Lab project operates.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The transnational needs assessment employed a sequential mixed-methods design, implemented consistently across all three partner countries during January 2026. The quantitative component (structured survey, n=20 per country) established breadth and comparability of findings. The qualitative component (two in-depth semi-structured interviews per country) provided contextual depth, explanatory richness, and practitioner perspectives that survey data alone cannot generate.

3.2 Survey Instrument

A harmonised survey instrument was developed jointly by the project partnership and administered identically across all three countries, enabling direct cross-national comparison. The survey comprised 13 question items:

- *Demographic items*: gender, employment/educational status, prior entrepreneurial experience
- *Multiple-select items*: barriers to starting a digital business, most challenging areas, desired training topics, preferred learning formats
- *21-item Likert scale* (1–5: Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) covering three domains: Entrepreneurship Knowledge (8 items), Digital Skills (7 items), Entrepreneurial Attitudes (6 items)
- *Open-ended items*: preferred business models, training expectations, post-training support needs, entrepreneurial goals and qualities

3.3 In-Depth Interviews

Six in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted across the three partner countries, with two per country. Interview selection strategies differed deliberately between partners to maximise the range of perspectives:

Country	Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2	Selection Rationale
France	FR-A: Unemployed single mother, former retail worker	FR-B: NEET, school dropout, immigrant background	End-users from primary target group; representing unemployment/NEET vulnerability and social exclusion dimensions
Lithuania	LT-Expert-1: Head of digital marketing agency; business mentor	LT-Expert-2: Senior project manager, regional development agency	Sector experts; practitioner perspectives on the skill gap landscape from a business development and digital marketing standpoint

Türkiye	TR-Entrepreneur-1: Graphic designer & e-commerce founder	TR-Entrepreneur-2: Retired teacher & artisan natural cosmetics founder	Practising digital entrepreneurs who made the transition from non-digital careers; representing the target group's aspirational trajectory
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3.4 Sample Overview

Characteristic	France	Lithuania	Türkiye
Survey respondents	20	20	20
Female respondents	60% (12)	65% (13)	35% (7)
Largest status group	Unemployed 25%	Employed 50%	Employed 30%
NEET respondents	20%	<5%	15%
Previously launched	30%	30%	15%
In-depth interviews	2 (target group)	2 (sector experts)	2 (entrepreneurs)

4. COMPARATIVE SURVEY RESULTS

4.1 Barriers to Starting a Digital Business

The comparative barrier analysis reveals both cross-national consensus and important country-level divergences. All five barrier items were present across all three countries, but their relative salience differs in ways that reflect each country's distinct socioeconomic and digital literacy context.






Barrier	FR %	LT %	TR %	Transnational average
Lack of business knowledge	35%	40%	45%	 40%
Lack of digital skills	55%	35%	35%	 42%
Lack of finances	40%	35%	40%	 38%
Fear of failure	40%	35%	40%	 38%
Lack of mentorship	45%	30%	40%	 38%

Three observations stand out from the comparative barrier analysis. First, no single barrier dominates the full transnational dataset: all five barriers cluster between 30–55% across countries, reflecting the multi-dimensional and interlocking nature of exclusion from digital entrepreneurship. Second, digital skill deficits are most acute in France (55%), consistent with the lower digital literacy baseline in French socioeconomic context. Third, lack of business knowledge leads in both Lithuania (40%) and Türkiye (45%), indicating that as basic digital access increases, the barrier frontier shifts from tool competence to strategic and conceptual knowledge.

Qualitative data from all six interviews consistently confirms that barriers do not operate independently. F1 described an interlocking system where financial precarity amplifies fear of failure, which is reinforced by absent mentorship, which in turn sustains low digital self-efficacy. T1 and L2 both identified lack of clear starting pathways as a primary barrier, not the absence of any single resource, but the absence of a structured entry point that integrates knowledge, financial guidance, and social support.

4.2 Most Challenging Areas

The challenging areas data provides a nuanced complement to the barrier analysis, revealing where participants feel least equipped once they consider actively starting a business.

Challenging Area	FR %	LT %	TR %	Transnational pattern
Creating a business plan	45%	30%	75%	 50%
Financial/legal processes	35%	55%	45%	 45%
Marketing	60%	35%	20%	 38%
Finding a business idea	35%	25%	45%	 35%
Online tools setup	30%	15%	20%	 22%






Bold values = highest-scoring item per country per row.

The challenging areas data is the most analytically differentiated finding in the transnational dataset. Each country presents a distinct primary challenge: marketing leads in France (60%), financial/legal processes in Lithuania (55%), and business plan creation in Türkiye (75%, the single highest concentration on any challenge item across the full dataset). This differentiation directly implies that a one-size curriculum cannot serve all three cohorts equally at the module entry point; differentiated sequencing is required.

The only universally high-challenge item is financial/legal processes, which ranks in the top three most challenging areas across all three countries. This convergence designates financial and legal literacy as the single non-negotiable curriculum priority for the transnational programme. Online tools setup consistently ranks lowest across all three countries, suggesting that platform-level technical instruction should not consume significant training time.

4.3 Training Topic Preferences

Across all three countries, respondents selected multiple desired training topics. The comparative analysis reveals a shared core curriculum demand overlaid with country-specific priorities.





Training Topic	FR %	LT %	TR %	Demand level
E-commerce	40%	55%	45%	 47%
Digital marketing	35%	65%	30%	 43%
Financial literacy	25%	45%	40%	 37%
AI tools	35%	40%	40%	 38%
Business planning	30%	50%	30%	 37%

Social media strategy	25%	45%	40%	 37%
Entrepreneurship basics	25%	35%	50%	 37%
Funding/grants	25%	40%	30%	 32%
Content creation	20%	40%	10%	 23%
Website creation & management	20%	35%	15%	 23%

E-commerce (47% transnational average), digital marketing (43%), financial literacy (37%), AI tools (38%), business planning (37%), social media strategy (37%), and entrepreneurship basics (37%) constitute the shared core curriculum demand across all three countries. This seven-topic core provides a robust, evidence-based foundation for the Startup Lab training programme's universal curriculum architecture.

Country-level divergences are equally instructive. Digital marketing dominates Lithuania's demand hierarchy (65%), reflecting a population with higher digital baseline skills seeking commercial application. Entrepreneurship basics leads in Türkiye (50%), indicating an earlier-stage population that needs foundational framing before applied tools. E-commerce leads in France (40%), consistent with the target population's interest in accessible product-selling models. These divergences validate differentiated module sequencing by national cohort.

4.4 Preferred Learning Formats

Learning Format	FR %	LT %	TR %	Transnational pattern
Blended (online + face-to-face)	45%	75%	40%	 53%
Self-paced online courses	50%	35%	50%	 45%
Live online workshops (real-time)	45%	30%	50%	 42%
Face-to-face workshops only	25%	25%	25%	 25%

Blended learning is the most preferred format at the transnational level (53% average), with Lithuania's strong preference (75%) driving the aggregate. Self-paced online (45%) and live online (42%) follow closely, while face-to-face only consistently receives the lowest preference (25%) across all three countries. This cross-national consensus has a clear curriculum implication: the training programme should not be designed as a purely in-person or purely asynchronous course. A blended architecture, combining flexible online content with structured synchronous sessions, best serves the aggregate preference profile.

The Turkish dual preference for self-paced and live online (50% each, with blended at 40%) reveals a cohort comfortable with digital engagement per se but seeking both autonomy and guided instruction. All six interview participants across all three countries, regardless of background, country, or interview type, independently advocated for hands-on, project-based, and output-producing learning as the format that produces lasting change. This qualitative consensus strengthens the quantitative format preference data: the modality matters less than the pedagogy.

4.5 Digital Competency Self-Assessment: Comparative Likert Results

The 21-item Likert scale (1–5) generates the richest comparative dataset across the three countries. Results are organised by the three measurement domains.

Domain A: Entrepreneurship Knowledge — Comparative Means


Statement	FR	LT	TR	LT visual	Pattern
8.1 Entrepreneurship basics	2.55	3.35	3.20		Moderate
8.2 Digital business operations	1.85	3.15	2.80		FR critical gap
8.3 E-commerce platforms	2.75	3.30	2.70		Moderate
8.4 Digital marketing	2.75	3.00	2.95		Below midpoint
8.5 Financial requirements	2.80	2.85	2.75		Universal gap
8.6 Identify business ideas	2.40	2.60	2.63		Universal gap
8.7 Cybersecurity	2.25	3.35	2.90		FR gap vs LT
8.8 Legal/regulatory	2.35	2.60	2.60		Universal gap

Domain B: Digital Skills — Comparative Means

Statement	FR	LT	TR	Average visual	Pattern
8.9 Confident using digital tools	3.20	3.85	3.10		LT advantage
8.10 Create social media/website content	2.65	3.45	3.15		LT strongest
8.11 Create digital content	2.85	4.00	3.30		LT: highest in B
8.12 Manage business profile	2.75	3.15	3.05		Moderate
8.13 Analyze digital data	2.50	3.40	2.60		FR/TR gap
8.14 Use online payment systems	2.50	4.25	3.15		LT: infrastructure
8.15 Use AI tools	2.45	3.62	3.73		TR: AI-ready

Domain C: Entrepreneurial Attitudes — Comparative Means

Statement	FR	LT	TR	Average visual	Pattern
8.16 Want to start digital business	3.65	3.55	3.84		Consistently high
8.17 Improves employment opportunities	3.20	4.10	3.95		LT/TR high
8.18 Motivated to learn	3.65	3.90	3.63		Consistently high
8.19 Online biz accessible with low finances	3.30	3.50	3.11		TR: most sceptical

8.20 Comfortable with risk	3.90	3.05	3.20		FR: most risk-ready
8.21 Open to new digital tools	3.85	3.60	4.05		TR: highest overall

The comparative Likert data yields five analytically significant cross-national patterns. First, financial requirements (8.5) and legal/regulatory knowledge (8.8) are below 3.0 in all three countries, the only two items to achieve this consistent cross-national consensus, designating them as the universal training priorities. Second, Lithuania demonstrates a systematically higher digital skills profile in Domain B (averages 0.5–1.0 points above France and Türkiye), confirming its higher digital readiness baseline. Third, digital data analysis (8.13) is below 3.0 in France (2.50) and Türkiye (2.60), and only moderate in Lithuania (3.40), suggesting that analytics remains underdeveloped across all contexts. Fourth, AI tool usage (8.15) shows the widest country spread: France 2.45, Lithuania 3.62, Türkiye 3.73, indicating that AI-integrated pedagogy will be perceived very differently by French versus Turkish/Lithuanian cohorts, requiring calibrated introduction. Fifth, Domain C attitudes consistently outperform Domain A knowledge and Domain B skills across all three countries, confirming the universal motivational capital that the training programme must leverage.

5. CROSS-NATIONAL QUALITATIVE THEMES

Thematic synthesis across all six interview transcripts, spanning three countries, three interviewee profile types (end-users, sector experts, practising entrepreneurs), and two distinct cultural contexts (Western European and Turkish-Anatolian), produced five convergent cross-national themes. These themes are significant precisely because they emerged independently across six interviews, without interviewees having access to each other's accounts. Their convergence constitutes robust qualitative evidence.

Theme 1: The Digital Use–Competency Divide

Every interview, regardless of country or interviewee background, drew the same fundamental distinction: between using digital tools for personal consumption and using them for commercial, entrepreneurial purposes. F1 described his peer group as 'on the internet all day' (neet, France) while being 'completely lost' when it comes to professional applications. T1 observed that *'the biggest gap is not actually technical. It's conceptual. People can learn tools quite quickly... but they don't understand how the digital world works as a system'* (entrepreneur, Türkiye). L1 noted that *'many people use digital tools in their everyday lives, but they don't really know how to apply them strategically for business'* (expert, Lithuania).

This theme has a critical curriculum design implication: training programmes that assume consumer digital fluency equates to entrepreneurial digital readiness will fail to bridge the gap. The transition from 'user' to 'entrepreneur' requires explicit instruction in how digital systems (platforms, marketing channels, customer journeys, analytics, payment infrastructure) interconnect as a commercial ecosystem, not just how to operate individual tools.

Theme 2: The Entry Point Problem - Where to Start?

All six interviewees identified the absence of a clear, structured entry point as a primary obstacle to entrepreneurial action. F2 articulated this as: *'the gap between having an idea and actually doing something feels huge. You don't know where to start, so you just... don't start'* (neet, France). F1 described two previous failed attempts to launch an online presence before giving up. T1

identified the *'lack of a clear learning path. People don't know what to learn first, second, and third. They feel lost.'* L2 observed that *'improving digital skills alone isn't enough. People also need clear paths that show them what steps to take and in what order'* (senior project manager, Lithuania)

This theme directly validates the project's Step-by-Step Business Launch Guide (Activity 3) as a pedagogically essential complement to the training programme. The guide's step-by-step sequencing, from 'what you need to start' through to 'troubleshooting when sales don't come', addresses precisely the entry point vacuum identified uniformly across all interview contexts.

Theme 3: Relational Learning and Sustained Support

All six interviewees, without exception, identified relational, human-mediated learning as the modality that produces lasting change, and all six expressed the need for support extending beyond the training period. F1 described her online course dropout pattern as driven by isolation and lack of accountability: 'I got lost and gave up.' T2 contrasted a passive seminar ('I nodded, I took notes, but I didn't change anything') (entrepreneur, Türkiye) with a hands-on workshop where she fixed a real product listing during the session. L1 stated that 'adults benefit most from workshops that focus on real-life business situations, mentoring and learning by doing.' T1 highlighted peer learning: 'when you sit in a group and hear someone else say I'm also scared of launching my product, you feel less alone.'

The consensus extends explicitly to post-training support. F1 and F2 called for mentors they can contact when stuck. T2 requested mentors who say *'you're doing okay, this problem is normal.'* L2 cited *'real-world examples and strong support'* as critical enablers. This cross-national consensus is among the most actionable findings of the full research: mentorship and peer community must be designed as core programme deliverables, not peripheral additions.

Theme 4: Psychosocial Dimensions of Entrepreneurship

Across all three country contexts, interview participants foregrounded psychosocial dynamics, fear of failure, lack of self-belief, social stigma, isolation, and emotional fatigue, as significant barriers that technical training alone cannot address. F1 described her self-exclusion from entrepreneurial identity: 'I don't see myself as an entrepreneur. I'm just someone who worked in a shop.' F2 described the mental health dimension of working alone: 'it's depressing sometimes. I start feeling like 'what's the point?'' T1 named the comparison trap: 'you compare yourself to others all the time... that can slowly drain your motivation.' T2 described isolation: 'you don't have colleagues to talk to. It's just you and your screen.' L2 identified mental pressure as 'the biggest challenge' for most founders he knew.

The cultural dimensions of this theme vary by country. In France, the psychosocial barriers are heavily gendered and class-inflected, women from working-class backgrounds do not see themselves as entrepreneurs. In Türkiye, family and social network pressure operates as a specific self-exclusion mechanism in a collectivist social context. In Lithuania, regulatory uncertainty produces risk aversion more than identity-based exclusion. The training programme must address these dimensions through explicit confidence-building content, diverse role model exposure, and community-building pedagogy, calibrated to each national context.

Theme 5: Consistency, Data, and Long-Term Thinking as the Missing Higher-Order Skills

All three Lithuanian and Turkish interviewees, and to a lesser extent the French interviewees, identified a cluster of higher-order entrepreneurial competencies that are rarely taught in standard digital skills programmes: consistency in showing up and producing content, data literacy as a decision-making tool, and long-term brand-building thinking. T1 stated: 'digital success rarely

comes from one viral post. It comes from showing up every week, sometimes every day, even when nothing seems to be happening.' L1 identified the validation mindset as missing: 'the real skill is not planning endlessly but starting something small, actually trying, testing ideas and learning by doing.' T1 and T2 both reframed data as storytelling: 'numbers are actually stories about what people are doing.'

These higher-order skills, consistency, data-informed iteration, and long-term strategic thinking, represent the difference between a participant who completes the training programme and one who builds a sustainable digital business. They must be embedded throughout the curriculum rather than treated as advanced content reserved for later stages.

6. NATIONAL TRAINING NEED PROFILES

The transnational analysis produces three distinct national training need profiles, each requiring differentiated curriculum entry points while sharing a common structural core. These profiles are intended to guide Activity 2 curriculum design and Activity 3 guide customisation.

6.1 France - The Foundational Digital Inclusion Profile

Defining feature	Foundational digital skill deficits in a context of high economic vulnerability and significant psychosocial barriers
Skill gap type	Foundational - tool competency, basic digital marketing, e-commerce platform knowledge
Primary challenge	Marketing (60%); aspirants know what they want to do but cannot make themselves visible
Dominant barrier	Lack of digital skills (55%); compounded by financial precarity, care responsibilities, and identity-based self-exclusion
Key attitudinal asset	Highest risk comfort (3.90) across all three countries; strong desire to start (3.65)
Curriculum entry	Foundational: mindset + identity first → digital basics → platform practice → marketing → business planning
Format priority	Blended with flexibility for care responsibilities; childcare provision at in-person sessions; mobile-first
Support priority	Post-training mentorship with sustained emotional support; peer community; connections to local funding (micro-loans, grants for women entrepreneurs)

6.2 Lithuania — The Strategic Transition Profile

Defining feature	Strong digital tool competency seeking commercial application - the 'strategic gap' between digital fluency and entrepreneurial readiness
Skill gap type	Strategic - customer acquisition, business idea validation, financial/legal knowledge, performance analytics
Primary challenge	Financial/legal processes (55%); regulatory complexity as the primary friction point to formalising digital businesses
Dominant barrier	Lack of business knowledge (40%); confidence deficit in applying digital tools commercially rather than personally
Key attitudinal asset	Highest belief in digital entrepreneurship's economic potential (4.10); highest digital content creation skills (4.00)
Curriculum entry	Intermediate: validation mindset → customer acquisition → financial/legal → analytics → scaling
Format priority	Blended strongly dominant (75%); structured cohort learning; project-based with real business outputs

Support priority	Business mentor network; connections to Lithuanian support ecosystem (Enterprise Lithuania, CCIC business network); peer cohort
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6.3 Türkiye - The Aspirational Pre-Launch Profile

Defining feature	Highest aspirational readiness combined with lowest prior launch experience (15%); deepest business planning gap
Skill gap type	Foundational-strategic - business planning, ideation, systems thinking, financial/legal literacy
Primary challenge	Creating a business plan (75%) - the single highest concentration on any challenge item in the full dataset
Dominant barrier	Lack of business knowledge (45%); fear of public failure amplified by family social pressure in collectivist context
Key attitudinal asset	Highest openness to new digital tools (4.05) and highest AI tool self-rated competency (3.73) across all three countries
Curriculum entry	Foundational: digital ecosystem orientation → entrepreneurship basics → business planning → e-commerce → AI tools
Format priority	Dual self-paced and live online (50% each); mobile-first; AI-integrated content throughout
Support priority	Community of practice to counteract isolation; Turkey-specific legal/financial orientation; alumni peer network; role model exposure

7. CONCLUSIONS

The transnational needs assessment generates a comprehensive, evidence-based foundation for the Startup Lab project's training design, combining three country-level analyses into an integrated picture of digital entrepreneurship skill gaps, barriers, and training needs across France, Lithuania, and Türkiye. Eight primary transnational conclusions emerge from the full dataset.

1. **Financial and legal literacy is the single universal training priority.** Legal/regulatory knowledge and financial requirements are the only two items that fall below 3.0 on the Likert scale in all three countries, and financial/legal processes ranks among the top three challenge areas across all national datasets. No other finding achieves this level of cross-national convergence.
2. **The motivation-competency gap is the defining structural challenge of the programme.** Across all three countries, entrepreneurial attitudes consistently score 0.8–1.5 points higher than knowledge and skill items. Participants want to start digital businesses, are motivated to learn, and are open to new tools, but lack the strategic, technical, and regulatory knowledge to act. Converting aspirational capital into entrepreneurial action is the programme's central pedagogical task.
3. **A single adaptable curriculum is the appropriate response to national profile differences.** France, Lithuania, and Türkiye present different skill gap profiles, but these differences are best addressed through a shared 20-hour universal curriculum delivered in a blended format, with targeted adaptations in legal/financial content, case study

selection, and emphasis allocation. This approach is scalable and replicable across other European regions.

4. **The entry point problem requires a structured, sequenced response.** All six interview participants identified the absence of a clear starting pathway as a primary obstacle to entrepreneurial action. The Step-by-Step Business Launch Guide (Activity 3) must be designed as a navigational map for the entrepreneurial journey, not merely a resource repository with explicit sequencing from first idea to first sale.
5. **Post-training support is a core programme component, not an optional supplement.** Every interview participant across all three countries independently called for mentorship, peer community, and sustained support beyond the training period. The programme's impact trajectory depends on what happens in the months after training, when participants attempt to translate learning into action without the structure of a cohort.
6. **AI-integrated pedagogy is an opportunity, not a risk.** Openness to new digital tools (3.83 average), motivation to learn (3.73 average), and AI tool self-reported competency (ranging from 2.45 in France to 3.73 in Türkiye) collectively indicate that the target population is receptive to AI as a learning and business tool. The curriculum should treat AI as a practical co-creator, for content generation, market research, customer communication, and analytics interpretation, rather than an advanced topic reserved for later stages.
7. **Pedagogy must be output-producing, not knowledge-transferring.** The consistent message from all six interviews, 'by the end of today, you will have a working online store' (T1), 'let's open your shop and fix one product listing together' (T2), 'people get way more out of short bits of theory mixed with real tasks' (L1), constitutes a unified pedagogical mandate. Every training session must end with a tangible output that participants can show, use, and build on.
8. **Digital entrepreneurship must be treated as a holistic life project, not a technical skills acquisition.** The psychosocial dimensions identified consistently across all interview data, identity, confidence, isolation, fear of public failure, work-life integration, emotional resilience, are not peripheral to the training challenge. They are constitutive of it. A programme that delivers only technical content without addressing the full human context of entrepreneurial transition will produce knowledge without action.

8. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND CURRICULUM DESIGN GUIDANCE

The following recommendations are directed at the Startup Lab project partnership for Activity 2 curriculum design and Activity 3 guide development, and at the broader adult education and digital entrepreneurship policy community. Recommendations are organised across five domains.

8.1 Curriculum Architecture and Module Sequence

The transnational data supports a single, universal 20-hour curriculum delivered in a blended format across all three partner countries. Rather than separate national programmes, the project implements one shared curriculum that is adaptable to different socioeconomic realities, aligned with the project's original design principle of developing a training model scalable and replicable across European regions.

The curriculum is structured as 6 modules covering the shared core content identified across all three national datasets. Country-specific adaptations are applied to legal and financial content, case studies, platform references, and session emphasis, not to the overall structure or module sequence. The AI-driven online learning platform, developed and maintained by EduXperts, hosts

all self-paced content in English and partner languages (French, Lithuanian, Turkish), enabling flexible access while maintaining universal curriculum integrity.

Based on the convergence of survey topic demand and interview curriculum recommendations, the following six-module structure is proposed as the universal core curriculum for the Startup Lab training programme.

Module	Proposed Title	Content
1	Digital Entrepreneurship Foundations & Mindset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to digital entrepreneurship and online business models • Entrepreneurial mindset for the digital age (adaptability, initiative, problem-solving) • Overview of the digital economy and self-employment opportunities
2	Financial Literacy & Legal Essentials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial fundamentals: costs, pricing, and revenue models • Legal basics: business registration, compliance, GDPR awareness • Funding opportunities (grants, investors, crowdfunding, EU programmes) • Strategic planning and next steps toward self-employment
3	Idea Generation, Validation & AI-Powered Decision Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying digital business opportunities and market needs • Business model canvas & value proposition design • AI-assisted market analysis tools • Idea validation techniques and feasibility assessment
4	E-Commerce Setup & Digital Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting up an online business (platforms, marketplaces, storefronts) • Payment systems and transaction management • AI tools for automation and operational management • Business intelligence tools for performance tracking • Data analytics basics
5	Digital Marketing & Customer Acquisition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Branding & Social Media Marketing • SEO and content marketing • Sales strategies & customer acquisition • Green digital marketing and ethical branding
6	Sustainability, Circular Economy & Responsible Digital Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principles of sustainability and circular economy in business • Integrating eco-friendly practices into online business models • EU Green Deal, UN SDGs and regulatory compliance for digital businesses • Developing sustainable and responsible business models

8.2 Pedagogical Design Principles

Six evidence-based pedagogical principles should govern the design and delivery of all training sessions:

1. **Output-first design.** Every session should begin with a clear deliverable goal ('by the end of this session, you will have...') and end with a completed, visible output. Passive knowledge transfer is insufficient.

2. **Sequenced small wins.** The first session should produce the simplest possible entrepreneurial act: a product listing, a business profile, a one-sentence value proposition. Each subsequent session builds on completed prior outputs.
3. **AI as co-creator, not subject matter.** AI tools should be actively used during sessions, not merely discussed. Participants should use AI to write product descriptions, research markets, generate content ideas, and interpret basic data. This principle is consistent with the AI-driven methodology committed to in the project application and implemented through the learning platform.
4. **Diverse role model integration.** Every module should open with a brief story (2–3 minutes) of a real entrepreneur from a background similar to participants', featuring women, school dropouts, immigrants, rural residents, retirees, and working-class individuals. For the Turkish cohort, TR-Entrepreneur-1 and TR-Entrepreneur-2 have consented to serving as role models; equivalent individuals should be identified for France and Lithuania in coordination with Hexagonale and Panevėžys CCIC. Role models may appear as short video testimonials, written case studies, or live guest speakers.
5. **Safe-to-fail learning environments.** Particularly for French and Turkish cohorts, group norms must explicitly normalise imperfection, slow progress, and public mistakes as essential parts of entrepreneurial learning, not evidence of unsuitability.
6. **Data storytelling, not data analytics.** Reframe all analytics content as 'what are your customers telling you through their behaviour?' rather than 'how to use Google Analytics.' Numbers must be presented as business stories, not mathematical outputs.

8.3 Delivery and Format Recommendations

Based on the learning format preference data and interview testimony, the following delivery architecture is recommended:

- Adopt a blended learning architecture as the primary delivery model, combining: (a) asynchronous self-paced online modules for knowledge acquisition and pre-session preparation; (b) weekly synchronous sessions (live online or in-person) for hands-on practice, peer exchange, and real-time feedback; and (c) an ongoing peer communication channel (messaging group) between sessions.
- Ensure all online content is mobile-first and accessible on low-bandwidth connections, particularly for French and Turkish cohorts with potential infrastructure constraints.
- Design synchronous sessions as workshops, not lectures: 80% of session time should be spent doing, not listening.
- For France specifically: offer flexible scheduling options (evening/weekend) and consider childcare provision at in-person sessions to remove structural barriers for single-parent participants.
- For Lithuania specifically: maximise blended format with a strong cohort identity; the 75% blended preference reflects a desire for peer community as much as pedagogical format.
- For Türkiye specifically: AI-integrated content should appear in every module from Session 1 — not as an advanced topic but as a standard working tool.

8.4 Step-by-Step Business Launch Guide Design Principles

Activity 3 (Step-by-Step Business Launch Guide) should be designed as a four-language (EN, FR, LT, TR), interactive digital resource addressing the universal entry point problem. Evidence-based design principles:

- Sequential architecture: The guide must be explicitly structured as a numbered pathway — 'Step 1... Step 2... Step 3...' — not a resource collection. The sequencing anxiety identified universally must be resolved by the guide's fundamental structure.
- Small-win checkpoints: Every section should include a 'you've completed this step when...' checkpoint that participants can self-assess against, providing progress markers across the entrepreneurial journey.
- Real case studies: Each major section should feature a case study from a real entrepreneur who completed this step, using anonymised interviewee profiles as authentic anchors, with full participant consent obtained before publication.
- Post-training resource: The guide should be framed explicitly as a post-training companion, given to participants at programme completion, not during it, to serve as their roadmap for the six months of entrepreneurial action following the training.

8.5 Policy-Level Recommendations for EU Adult Education

Beyond the immediate Startup Lab programme, the transnational needs assessment findings point to several broader adult education policy implications relevant to Erasmus+ KA210 programming and EU digital skills policy:

- Digital entrepreneurship curricula should prioritise flexibility and adaptability across EU member states and associated countries with different digital readiness baselines. Effective programming requires country-level needs assessment combined with a shared universal curriculum structure, not standardised delivery, but not separate national programmes either.
- EU adult education funding should explicitly support the post-training transition period — the six to twelve months when participants attempt to translate learning into business action. This period is consistently identified as the highest-risk and least-supported phase of the entrepreneurial journey.
- Women's digital entrepreneurship requires targeted and culturally-informed intervention. Across all three country contexts, female participants face specific identity-based, structural, and social barriers not fully addressed by gender-neutral training programmes.
- AI literacy for entrepreneurs should be integrated into all EU-funded digital entrepreneurship programmes as a foundational, not advanced, competency, responding to the consistent cross-country demand and high receptiveness revealed in this research.
- Peer learning and community of practice structures should be recognised as core programme components with dedicated resource allocation, not informal by-products of training delivery.

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