

DIGITAL COMPETENCES FOR WOMEN IN RURAL
AREAS TO INCREASE THEIR ENTREPRENEURIAL
OPPORTUNITIES AND EMPLOYABILITY. TOWARDS
INCLUSION THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP
BRIDGING THE GAP

IO1. BRIDGING THE GAP PLATFORM

National Report
Romania



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Introduction

The present report was elaborated by INCSMPS in the framework of the *Bridging the gap* project: *DIGITAL COMPETENCES FOR WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS TO INCREASE THEIR ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITIES AND EMPLOYABILITY. TOWARDS INCLUSION THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP BRIDGING THE GAP*. It gathers the conclusions of data collection and analysis regarding digital skills and entrepreneurial opportunities for rural women in Romania.

The aim of the report is to detect the existing training needs and gaps of rural females on digital skills and competences. In this sense, the report aims to:

- I. Provide a picture about the current context of rural environments;
- II. Assess the support available to the development of entrepreneurial competences, with special regards to the rural women;
- III. Identify the gaps and needs of the rural females regarding entrepreneurship and digital competences.

Thus, the report analyses the following topics:

- The existing situation in Romanian rural areas;
- The existing policies to support entrepreneurship in rural areas;
- The current level of digital skills, especially among rural and female population in Romania;
- The access and barriers of rural women to training, with focus on digital skills;
- The digital skills and competencies to support the entrepreneurial activity of the rural females.

The report is based on data collected through desk research (reports and web resources regarding policies and programs supporting entrepreneurship), statistical data analysis (sources: Romanian National Institute for Statistics and Eurostat) and 6 interviews with rural female entrepreneurs (4) and trainers (2) in the field of entrepreneurship. Also, qualitative information collected in a focus group carried out in November 2020 with stakeholders in the field of entrepreneurship have been used as input.

General description of rural women

Brief introduction to Romanian rural areas (population, employment and unemployment, sector activities and programmes to support the rural development)

The rural population of Romania is 8.872.342 from a total of 19.328.838 inhabitants, meaning 45.90% from the total population of Romania.

The population employed in the rural area is about 3.848.126 people from a total of 8.555.369 in the third semester of 2020. Also, the unemployed population is 4.799.216 from a total of 10.252.316 in Romania in the third semester of 2020. By professional status, the people in rural area are employees (2.128.109), business owners (34.792), self-employed (1.080.804) and unpaid family worker (604.290)¹.

The main economic activities in Romanian rural areas include the agricultural sector, forestry, fisheries and constructions followed by other non-agricultural activities like industry, services and rural tourism.

In the present, there is a program that pursues the rural development called Programul Național de Dezvoltare Rurală 2014-2020 (PNDR) (en. National Program of Rural Development) a program through which non - reimbursable funds are granted from the European Union and the Government of Romania for the economic - social development of the rural space in Romania.

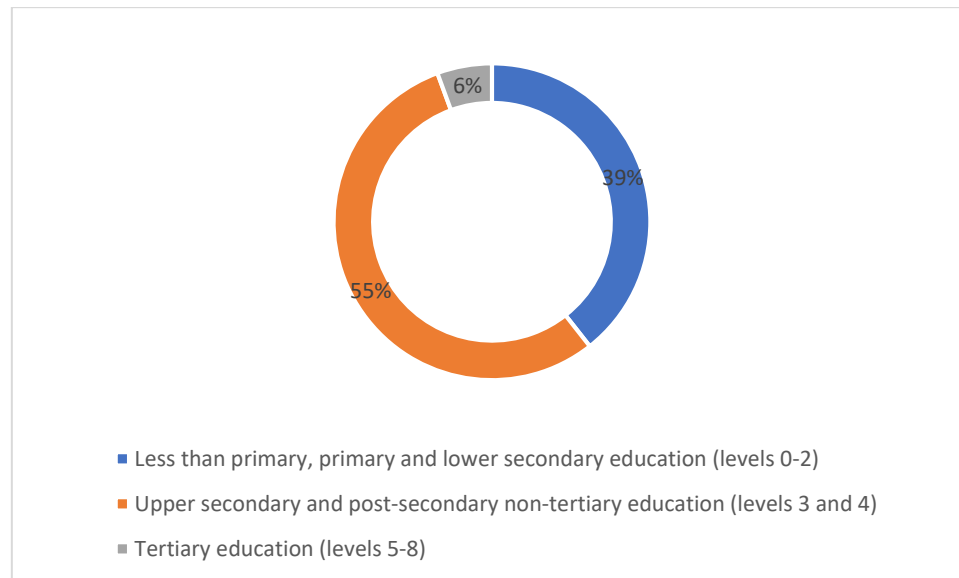
Draft profile of the rural females in Romania (age average, level of studies, economic activity, etc.)

According to National Institute of Statistics, Romanian female population was of 11.305 million persons in January 1st 2021. Around 20% of female population ages 65 years and over. In 2020, 4.796 million women were established in rural areas. The female population in rural areas is older than in urban ones.

¹ National Institute of Statistics

More than half of rural female population reached upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education and only 6% graduated higher education. Low level of education is registered by almost 40% of women living in rural areas.

Figure 1. Female population (from 15 to 64 years) in rural areas by educational attainment level in 2020 (%)



Source: Eurostat [edat_lfs_9913]

For women in rural areas, the access to medical care remains limited as medical services are usually located in urbanized areas and due to the fact that many rural females are not employed and have no access to medical insurances.

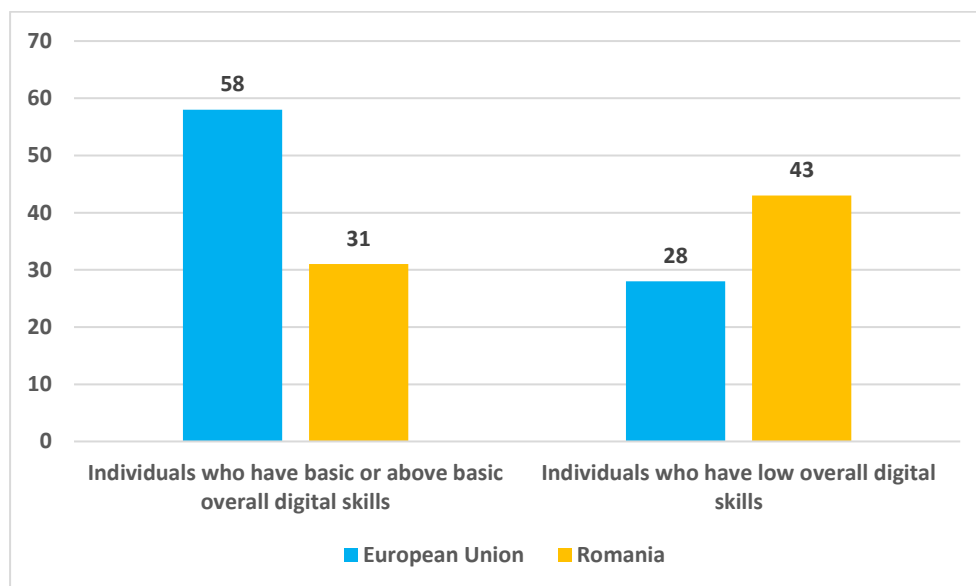
Also, the main activity of rural females is agricultural activities, followed by rural females who work in public administration, health care and education sectors. Generally, the rural females are the ones that take care of the household, performing domestic labour and taking care of dependent persons such as children or old people.

Situation of digital, urban/rural and gender gaps

Digital skills become increasingly important in the last few years, now being demanded more and more and at an increasingly higher level both on the labor market and in the society in general. That is why it is very important to know which is the level of this type of skills among individuals and whether there are significant differences between males and females, between different age groups, different education level of individuals and the place of living.

Also, it is important to see which are the differences between Romania and the European Union average to have a proper image on the level of digital skills among Romanian individuals. Although digital skills become extremely important in the last few years, only 58% of people from EU28 and 31% of people from Romania have had basic or above basic overall digital skills in 2019. Thus, the level of digital skills in Romania is significantly lower than the EU28 average, given that a significantly higher percentage of individuals have had low digital skills (43%) compared to a much smaller percentage that have had basic or above basic digital skills (31%) in 2019.

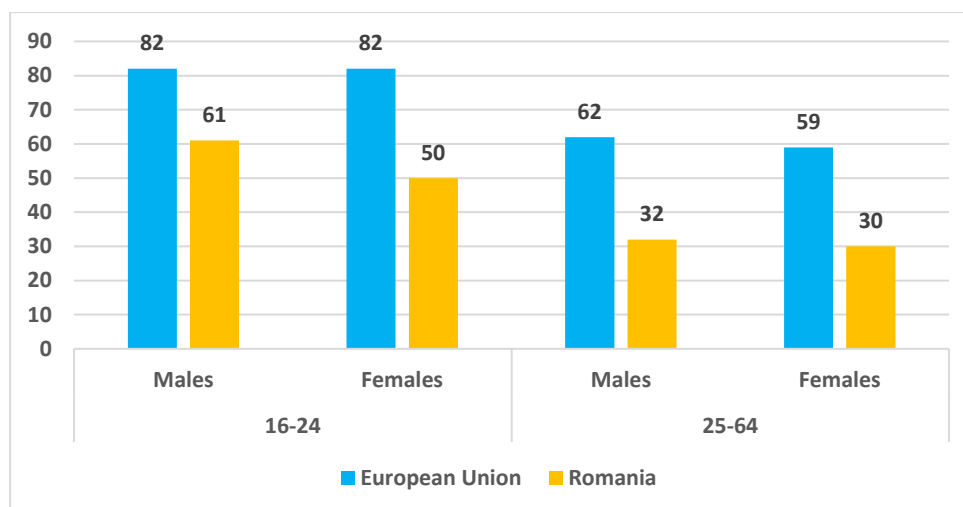
Figure 2. The level of digital skills of individuals in Romania vs. European Union in 2019 (%)



Source: Eurostat, [isoc_sk_dskl_i]

Taking into account both the age and gender, statistical data show that the level of digital skills is significantly higher among the young people aged 16 to 24 both in the EU28 and in Romania, compared to individuals aged 25 to 64. At EU28 level, there are no significant differences between males and females regarding the level of digital skills among individuals, while in Romania there is a significant difference between males and females aged 16 to 24, given that only a half of females aged 16 to 24 have had basic or above basic digital skills in 2019 compared to 61% of males aged 16 to 24. On the other hand, only 30% of females and 32% of males aged 25 to 64 have had basic or above basic digital skills in 2019 in Romania.

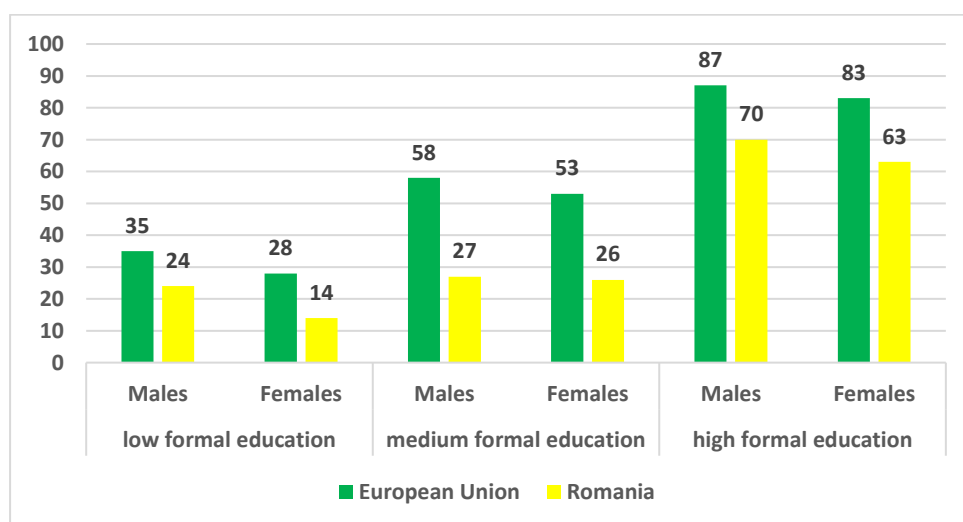
Figure 3. The share of individuals who have basic or above basic overall digital skills in Romania vs European Union, by age and sex, in 2019 (%)



Source: Eurostat, [isoc_sk_dskl_i]

As expected, level of digital skills is influenced by the education of individuals. There are significant differences between the individuals with low, medium or high formal education, both in Romania and at EU28 level. But, there are also differences between males and females with the same education level, especially at low and high formal education levels. Only 14% of low educated females and 24% of low educated males have had basic or above basic digital skills while almost two thirds of highly educated females and 70% of highly educated males have had this type of skills in 2019 in Romania.

Figure 4. The share of individuals who have basic or above basic overall digital skills in Romania vs European Union, by education level and sex, in 2019 (%)



Source: Eurostat, [isoc_sk_dskl_i]

Entrepreneurship ecosystem in the rural areas

The Romanian strategic framework is harmonized with the European one. The government strategy for the development of the SME sector - Horizon 2020 is anchored in European trends and includes in its directions of action all areas of development that are considered at European level. The development of the SME sector is also found among the objectives of Romanian National Strategy for Sustainable Development. However, Romania lacks a strategy for developing the entrepreneurial culture. In the recent years, entrepreneurial education has been included in the formal education at upper secondary and higher education levels.

The institutional framework has been affected by multiple changes in the last seven years, hindering the implementation of national policies and programs, as well as funding the entrepreneurial environment.

Various national programs grant funds and other support measures for entrepreneurs and start-ups. For example, Operational Program for Human Capital (ESF) provides support for inactive or unemployed persons to start businesses or for newly established small enterprises to consolidate and develop their business. Specific measures have been focused on supporting entrepreneurship among returning migrants (diaspora start-up). The support measures include training on entrepreneurship. One impact assessment study carried out in 2020 showed that 95% of participants have considered skills development programs as being useful and very useful (QUERES, INCSMPS and E&Y, 2020).

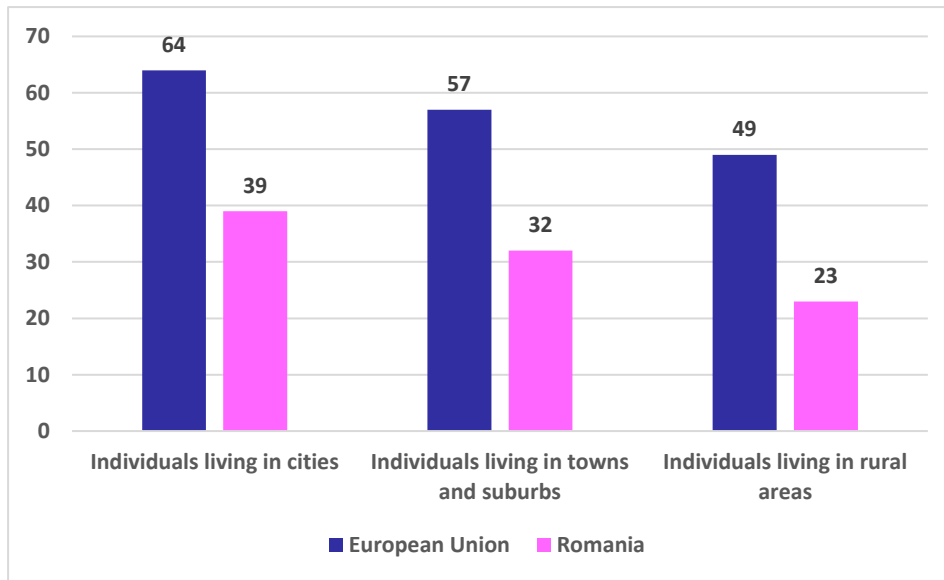
According to statistical data, the structure of entrepreneurs indicates that most family enterprises activate in *commerce*, while most self-employed are active in *other activities* sector (National Institute for Statistics).

Rural female entrepreneurs. Digital competences to support entrepreneurship

Both in Romania and at EU28 level, there are significant differences between cities, towns and suburbs and rural areas regarding the share of individuals who have basic or above basic overall digital skills. In Romania, only 23% of individuals living in rural areas, 32% from

towns and suburbs and 39% from cities have had basic or above basic overall digital skills in 2019. Statistical data indicate important disparities between the share of individuals living in cities and those living in rural areas who have basic or above basic overall digital skills.

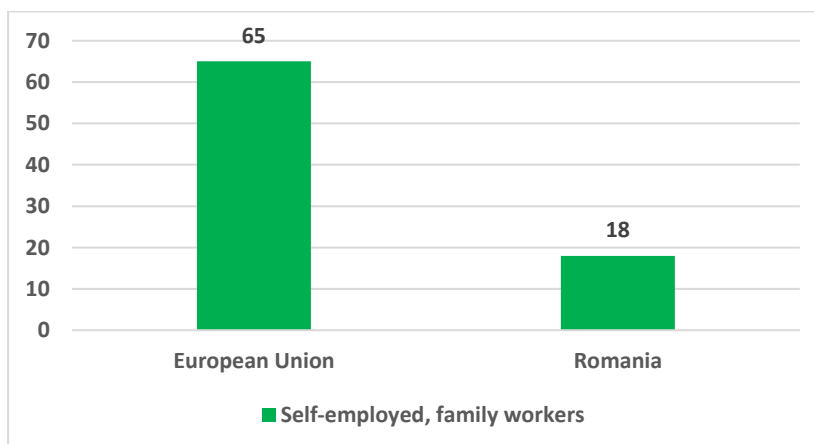
Figure 5. The share of individuals who have basic or above basic overall digital skills in Romania vs European Union, by place of living, in 2019 (%)



Source: Eurostat, [isoc_sk_dskl_i]

The share of self-employed and family workers who have had basic or above basic overall digital skills in 2019 was extremely lower in Romania than the EU28 average. Thus, in our country only 18% of all self-employed and family workers have had this type of skills in 2019 compared to almost two thirds in EU28.

Figure 6. The share of individuals (self-employed, family workers) who have basic or above basic overall digital skills in Romania vs European Union, in 2019 (%)



Source: Eurostat, [isoc_sk_dskl_i]

According to rural female entrepreneurs and trainers, most important digital skills supporting their business are as follows: business data analysis, accounting, market analysis (online search for information regarding the market dynamics, new trends and evolution of the demand, new technologies and methods, services, products, materials, suppliers), email and WhatsApp communication, online management of orders, telework, online banking, online promotion of services.

"Digital skills are very important. We registered an improved performance since the business is more digitalised" (Female entrepreneur)

Training and learning on entrepreneurship in rural areas

The rate of participation to training and learning on entrepreneurship is not very high in rural areas. Most entrepreneurs rely on their experience and abilities to manage risks and adverse situations.

"Yes, I went through many difficulties with the business. But we took it from the beginning and got over the problems by being persistent and trying to correct our mistakes. Practically, our lack of knowledge did not lead to big problems, but the very fluctuating economic conditions made the first steps very difficult. We learned from our mistakes and were alert to future obstacles." (Female entrepreneur)

Most of the participants to training courses on entrepreneurship benefit for improved self-confidence, increasing knowledge on market analysis, risk management skills, higher motivation and improved knowledge on the regional business environment.

Training and learning on entrepreneurship in rural areas - specific for women

In most cases, female entrepreneurs from rural areas didn't participate to formal training programs on entrepreneurship. Lack of such learning opportunities in the past years and a general low participation to formal lifelong learning in Romania have affected also the participation of rural women to training on entrepreneurship.

Rural female entrepreneurs have relied extensively on self-learning via internet or other available resources on entrepreneurship.

"I did not consider it necessary to participate in training programs. I learned on my own, from books, on the internet once it appeared and I was able to access it."
(Female entrepreneur)

"I did not do training in entrepreneurship because I had not heard of courses that offer this type of training in my area of residence." (Female entrepreneur)

Rural female entrepreneurs are more open to participate to flexible ways of learning, based on self-learning or guided learning that are more appropriate and effective in the case of adult learning.

"I am open to learning and developing my competences, but I wouldn't participate in courses under anyone's guidance. I prefer learning independently. I do not consider that the entrepreneurial spirit is learned from books or courses, but you have to have it to a certain extent. And at this age I would not have the patience to learn in a formal way, taught by someone". (Female entrepreneur)

Main barriers hindering training and learning on entrepreneurship among rural women include: the distance from home to where the course/s takes place, the lack of free time, and lack of financial resources. Many women do not participate in courses because of the lack of self-confidence, lack of financial resources, and lack of access to quality training programs at the local level.

Training and learning to develop digital competences and skills in rural areas

Most rural entrepreneurs rely on digital skills acquired during formal education and on skills acquired through informal learning. However, they consider that such training programs are very beneficial if they are of quality, especially as the business grow.

Female entrepreneurs would be interested in participating in trainings focused on practical learning. In their opinion, the training should be organized in a face-to-face manner especially for beginners and online for women who do not have time to participate. The

duration of the course should be about 2-3 hours a day. The training programs should have a mixed approach combining theoretical knowledge with many practical exercises. The training programs should be available and accessible for everyone.

They also emphasize the need for some training program fairs or information campaigns where people can find out about available training opportunities.

Conclusions

Romania faces an acute lack of digital skills, especially among low educated individuals and those living in rural areas. This situation also affects the chances of women belonging to these groups to develop successful entrepreneurial activities.

Most rural female entrepreneurs rely on digital skills that they have developed during formal initial education and on self-learning. Main barriers affecting their participation to training and learning are lack of courses provision in the proximity of their area of residence and lack of available time. In this context, rural female entrepreneurs would prefer flexible and accessible training, focused on practical learning, in which they would feel empowered to develop useful skills for their business.

Top digital skills for rural female entrepreneurs include:

1. Computer use skills
2. Online searching of market information
3. Virtual communication
4. Content creation skills (for social media, advertising, etc.)
5. Excel skills and accounting programs and applications
6. Digital safety skills

Case of study

Case of study I

Identification of the initiative/ programme	Antreprenoriat pentru o viață activă (En. Entrepreneurship for an active life)
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	Project funded under "România Start-Up Plus" initiative
Promoter(s):	University of Craiova
Website:	http://ava.incesa.ro/
Country:	Romania
Active:	No 05.01.2018 - 30.06.2020
Language (s):	Romanian
Type of training:	Face-to-face course
Is it the initiative addressed to rural female (exclusively)?	No Half of the target was represented by women
If no, please indicate other groups addressed.	Inactive or unemployed persons from South-West region
Starting point:	High poverty and unemployment rates in the region The need to support local entrepreneurship and micro-enterprises
Objectives	Increasing employment and economic development in South-West region through establishing and supporting micro-enterprises in non-agricultural sectors
Description	-Training program on entrepreneurship -Implementing business plans: mentoring and counselling services, subsidies granting, advertising and visibility -Monitoring and support services for start-ups established with the support of the project
Training/learning methodology applied	Face-to-face learning and practical sessions
Competences developed:	Responsibility, good observation and analysis capacity, perseverance, creativity, high motivation, self-confidence, attitudes oriented towards efficiency and quality, digital skills, persuasion and communication skills, planning and monitoring skills.

Structured - learning/training topics covered:	Market analysis Business plan development Business plan implementation and monitoring
Results:	300 persons trained and certified in entrepreneurial skills 300 business plans developed 36 enterprises established 36 business plans subsidized
Challenges:	COVID 19 pandemic Bureaucracy The time framework of the project
Potential for Bridging the gap:	Topics to be included in the training programs Skills to be developed: market analysis, business plan development, monitoring skills, communication and visibility skills

Case of study II

Identification of the initiative/ programme	UNI HUB Societatea antreprenoriala studenteasca din Universitatea Bucuresti (En. Entrepreneurial Society of Students)
Promoter(s):	University of Bucharest
Website:	https://hub.unibuc.ro/home/
Country:	Romania
Active:	Yes
Language (s):	Romanian
Type of training:	Face-to-face and blended learning Interactive and practical learning through micro-production workshops
Is it the initiative addressed to rural female (exclusively)?	No Part of beneficiaries are female students and graduates from rural areas
If no, please indicate other groups addressed.	Students and graduates

Starting point:	The need to support youth entrepreneurship
Objectives	Developing entrepreneurial skills and encouraging entrepreneurial initiatives among students and graduates
Description	-Training program on entrepreneurship -Experience exchange activities and events in the field of entrepreneurship -Thematic camp on entrepreneurship -Mentoring and counselling services
Training/learning methodology applied	Course including theoretical and practical learning (32 hours) Workshops Interactive events with successful entrepreneurs
Competences developed:	Management and marketing skills, costs calculation, price strategy, stocks and sales planning, online advertising
Structured - learning/training topics covered:	Management Marketing Financial management and accountancy Business development Methods and instruments of the concept of Lean Startup
Results:	Trained students in the field of entrepreneurship Contest of business ideas
Challenges:	COVID 19 pandemic
Potential for Bridging the gap:	Topics to be included in the training programs Skills to be developed: specific management and marketing skills The concepts and instruments of Lean Startup

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