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Transnational Report │ Output 1, Task 1.2

O1: Development of capacity building methodology for educators of alternative education institutions for adults

Task 1.2: Study of the existing level of digital skills & competences of adults attending alternative educational institutions

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Executive Summary

The **ALTER project's Transnational Report** (Output 1, Task 1.2) aims to consolidate the results from the primary and secondary research carried out in five partner countries **(Turkey, Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Spain)** about the existing web-based professional profiling methodologies & practices, as well as the existing level of digital skills & competences of adults attending alternative educational institutions. More specifically, It summarizes the **desk research** and **stakeholder's interviews (50 in total)** on how digital and social media are used for job search at transnational level and, in addition, discusses the key findings reached through organized focus groups and online surveys with a) **educators of adults (58 in total)**, expressing opinions about their level of digital skills and b) **adults having dropped out of school** and attending alternative educational institutions **(96 in total)**. The final chapter includes conclusions and recommendations at EU level, to be linked with the capacity building methodology for the educators of alternative education institutions for adults (O1).

As the results reveal, in all participating countries, as it happens worldwide, the internet and mobile Internet usage is **increasing rapidly**, also affecting the job research and recruiting processes. The most important **channels for job seekers** are **job websites/career portals**, followed by web search (e.g. via Google). However personal contacts/recommendations remain the first option to search for a job, especially among low-qualified people.

Social media are becoming increasingly important but their full potential still remains to be discovered. All interviewees attending alternative educational institutions acknowledged the key role that social networks can play in the search for a job, and on average, a percentage of **45%-60%** stated to have used them for such a reason.

The vast majority of available job vacancies in all project's countries, is published on companies' websites and/or on online career portals, as well as on the employer's/company's social media or even, sometimes, on relevant online groups. Most companies, especially the large ones, seem to receive applications via **e-mail** and/or **online forms**, while the age group **18-44** is most active in applying for a job online.

Recruiting via social media – **"social recruiting"**, **"social media recruiting"** or **"social hiring"** – is becoming increasingly important, growing engagement and making both applicants and employers more "transparent". The most popular social networks used for posting job ads and job search are **LinkedIn** and **Facebook**, followed by **Twitter** and also **XING** (in Austria and Bulgaria).

The trainers interviewed in all participating countries were fond of the idea of the ALTER project, acknowledging the fact that there is a great need among the **final target group (low-qualified adults in search of a job)** as well as the **trainers** themselves, regarding further education on Information and communication technologies and how social media can facilitate access to the labour market.

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As the research has shown, in all participating countries, most of the adults who have dropped out of school early and now try to improve their digital skills in order to search for a job, have a very **low level of digital knowledge (or even a total lack)**, especially if they are aged 45 and over.

For a beginning, it is of crucial importance for adults in search of a job to become **motivated** to start searching online, as well, taking advantage of the social media for professional reasons. The training courses that will be provided in the context of ALTER should not only focus on purely technical skills, but should also provide **empathy and understanding** on the part of the trainers for their course participants, as they are often discouraged by long-term unemployment and have a lack of self-confidence and self-esteem, which must first be rebuilt.

What has become evident through the primary research, is that there is a **great diversity** among final beneficiaries, making it difficult to develop customized trainings that will meet all requirements. The capacity building methodology should therefore be **flexible** enough to be adaptable to **at least two digital-skills levels** (limited/basic and medium/advanced).

Taking into consideration all the relevant answers given by stakeholders, trainers and the adults in search for a job, it is proposed that specific skills, such as the following, could be taught in both levels: Critical thinking & decision making, browsing, searching & filtering data and information, using of Office tools (word processing, spreadsheets, databases and presentations) and how to be aware of the copyright (music, film, pictures, texts, software) & the right to the protection of personal data.

On the other hand, skills such as: interacting through digital technologies, using a wide range of communication tools (e-mail, chat, SMS, instant messaging, blogs, micro-blogs, social networks), creating & managing content with collaboration tools (e.g. electronic calendars, project management systems, online proofing, online spreadsheets) and producing complex digital content in different formats (e.g. text, tables, images, video), could be only for the more "advanced" ones.

An additional **training in CV writing, online interviews** and **time management** would be very useful. People searching for a job should become familiar with the advantages and disadvantages of creating and managing an account/profile in social media (especially **LinkedIn** and **Facebook** or **XING** in countries that is popular). The function of **specific groups** that offer newsfeeds on job ads would be of great importance as well. In addition, they should be prepared for the fact that all their "social profiles" could be checked at any time during their recruitment process and therefore keep their accounts up-to-date and pay high attention to the photos, information and posts they upload and reveal in public.

A proposed **capacity building methodology**, should take into consideration the following: how it will enable **active participation** of both trainers and final beneficiaries, how it will encourage **critical thinking** through interesting relevant material, how it will meet the various needs of different students, offering **rounded explanations** of the subject's content, enabling **constructive feedback** and creating **mentoring skills** for the trainers, aiming to facilitate adults, especially those in alternative education, to make the optimal use of social media, getting into the labour market.

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1   Introduction

1.1   ALTER Project's Summary

Early school leaving, often linked to low-skilled employment or unemployment and social exclusion, is a critical issue both for individuals and societies. Despite the fact that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and social media are also utilized by low-skilled and low-qualified adults searching for a job, it seems that they do not fully acknowledge the broader implications that their online activity has on their professional life. In addition, vocational training programmes for unemployed adults, usually focus on developing certain "basic" ICT skills, e.g. the use of a PC and the most commonly used software packages, without giving emphasis on more "advanced" skills, like the use of social media.

Empowering low skilled unemployed adults by means of upskilling their digital/social media competences through innovative training methodologies and tools, can motivate and enable them to create a strong online professional identity that will facilitate their access to employment and therefore their socioeconomic inclusion. In this regard, the **overall objective of the ALTER project (Alternative Safety Nets)** is to *maximise the impact and contribution of alternative education or other equivalent institutions for adult education both in terms of increasing the quality of courses provided and also in facilitating the access of their attendants to the labour market through developing social media literacy competences and digital skills for job search purposes.*

Specific project **objectives** include:

▶ To enhance social media literacy competences and digital skills of adults having dropped out of school early and attending alternative education through innovative learning tools;
▶ To encourage educators in alternative education or other equivalent institutions to extend their media literacy and digital skills by understanding their significance and contribution to the advancement of the learners, both from an educational and a professional scope of view;
▶ To attract adults having dropped out of school to complete their secondary education by attending alternative educational institutions for adults through effective outreach strategy.

The main **target group** of the project is **educators** in alternative educational institutions for adults who haven't completed secondary education. **Adults with low typical skills** who haven't completed the secondary education will be the final project beneficiaries and will be actively involved in the main project activities. The project will also target **institutions and stakeholders** active in adult education (e.g. employment agencies, VET providers, recruiters, employers' associations).

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The main **activities** of the project include: a) the development of a capacity building methodology for educators of alternative education institutions for adults based on the existing web-based professional profiling methodologies & practices, as well as on the special needs of low-skilled middle-aged adults who haven't completed the secondary education; b) the development and pilot testing of an online capacity building platform; and c) the promotion of this methodology and tool together with a comprehensive manual and accompanied by proposals for updating the existing curricula for adult education.

1.2   Project Partners

The transnational character of ALTER project adds significant value, since it focuses on developing a common solution for a complicated problem, affecting all countries represented in the consortium.

Applicant Organisation:
▶ BEŞIKTAŞ DISTRICT DIRECTORATE OF NATIONAL EDUCATION (**Turkey**)

Partner Organisations:

▶ SYMPLEXIS **(Greece)**
▶ DIE BERATER UNTERNEHMENSBERATUNGS GMBH (**Austria**)
▶ "KNOW AND CAN ASSOCIATION" (**Bulgaria**)
▶ MAGENTA CONSULTORIA PROJECTS SL (**Spain**)
▶ EU ACTIVITIES CENTRE (EUAC) (**Turkey**)

Therefore, the developed methodology would be tailor-made, but also highly customizable, in order to be applicable in each one of these countries, but also at EU level, contributing to tackling a very crucial problem.

1.3   Report's Scope

The present **Transnational Report** concerns the implementation of the **Task 1.2** of the ALTER's **first Output (O1)**: "Development of capacity building methodology for educators of alternative education institutions for adults".

The content of **O1** is to develop the most effective capacity building methodology for the educators of adults in alternative institutions, combining on the one hand the prerequisites in terms of skills and competences driven by how web-based job search is met now (mainly through social media) and on the other hand the existing level of digital skills & competences of adults attending alternative

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education. This capacity building methodology for educators of adults will follow a set of horizontal guidelines, to be applied in all countries, allowing at the same time the flexibility for some fine-tuning, based on the particularities of national contexts. It will be also the base for the resource platform of O2, since it will define the content of the training material to be developed.

O1 is implemented through the following **tasks**:
▶ Task 1.1 Study of the existing web-based professional profiling methodologies & practices
▶ Task 1.2: Study of the existing level of digital skills & competences of adults attending alternative educational institutions
▶ Task 1.3: Development of the capacity building methodology for the educators.

The **Task 1.1**, has been implemented by the partners, combining desk research and primary information (10 interviews with various stakeholders of the labour market, like HR managers, owners, executives in chambers, head hunters etc.) and has involved the identification and study of the main methodologies, practices and tools applied by employers through the use of social and digital media for attracting, recruiting, screening and selecting personnel.

Having in mind the implications about the most appropriate digital literacy competences that should be developed by adults who have dropped out of school and are actively engaged in job search, the project partners tried to assess where these adults stand right now. For doing so, they were engaged by organizing **2 focus groups** in each one of the participating countries or by conducting relevant **electronic surveys/interviews** (through online questionnaires with open-ended questions) due to the **COVID-19 restrictions**. The first focus group involved **(at least 15) adults** having dropped out of school and attending alternative educational institutions, while the second one involved **(at least 10) educators** of adults, who expressed their opinion about their level of digital skills.

Each country produced its own **brief report** presenting the main findings and conclusions in terms of the existing level of skills and competences. The comprehensive transnational report in hand, produced by **Symplexis**, aims to **consolidate the findings of all five national reports**, following the **structure** below:

▶ Brief summary of the desk research on how social and digital media are used for job search at transnational level.
▶ Brief summary of the key findings reached through the organized focus groups with educators of adults, who can objectively express an opinion about their level of digital skills transnationally.
▶ Brief summary of the key findings reached through the organized focus groups with adults having dropped out of school and attending alternative educational institutions transnationally.
▶ EU level conclusions and recommendations that should be linked with the capacity building methodology for the educators.

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2 National Reports' Key-Findings

Digital technologies are key drivers of innovation, growth and job creation. The use of social media (such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.) in searching for a job has become a very common mean and to a great extent has replaced traditional forms of creating and maintaining contacts, identifying employment opportunities and searching for a company's profile. By creating and maintaining **attractive professional profiles**, job-seekers can connect with potential employers and highlight their skills and experiences, **facilitating their entrance in the labour market**. At the same time, more and more recruiters use social media profiles as a source of reference when recruiting new employees, either for high, medium or low skill jobs. Therefore, it is of paramount importance for unemployed adults attending an alternative education institution to develop the necessary skills for being able to follow these changes and new trends.

2.1 Brief summary of the desk research and online questionnaires on how social and digital media are used for job search

All partners conducted a **desk research** in each participating country about how social and digital media are used for job search, capitalizing on information existing on web, and also data provided by employers' stakeholders from various fields and sectors (e.g. corporate annual reports, researches and press releases by Chambers and other employers' associations, articles, announcements etc.).

In addition, **online interviews** were conducted with relevant stakeholders. The respondents in all participating countries were **owners, directors** or **held positions in management and human resources**, while their (small-medium-large) businesses/companies were involved in **various industries and sectors** such as: administration and finance, recruitment and consultancy services, telecommunications, tourism, shipping, real estate, press and publications, social responsibility projects, agriculture and animal husbandry, healthcare and fitness, IT, education, insurances and manufacturing.

2.1.1 General info & statistical data

In all participating countries, as it happens worldwide, the internet and mobile Internet usage is **increasing rapidly**, also affecting the job research and recruiting processes. Some indicative data are provided below:

- ✓ In **Turkey**, 64% of the country's population uses social media, while Internet usage was 75.3% in individuals aged between 16-74 (2019);
- ✓ In **Bulgaria**, 72.1 % of households have access to the Internet and almost 64% of the population between 16 - 74 years use the Internet every other day or at least once a week;

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- ✓ In **Spain**, the degree of digitalization of the selection process in companies reaches 53% on average;
- ✓ In **Austria**, some years ago, more than 80% of all job applications reached the top-500 Austrian companies online, while more than 80% of the Austrians use a smartphone or tablet to look for job opportunities;
- ✓ In **Greece**, 8 out of 10 households have internet access from their home (78.5%) and job search or sending job applications corresponds to 17.0% of the reasons for using the internet (2019).

2.1.2   The use of Social Media by employees/candidates

The most important **channels for job seekers** are **job websites/career portals**, followed by web search (e.g. via Google) and of course, usually as a first option, personal contacts/recommendations. Social media are becoming increasingly important; however, their full potential still remains to be discovered. The age group **18-44** is most active in applying for a job online.

LinkedIn, while not at the forefront of users' preference, is nevertheless one of the largest social networks in which people interact with businesses and unlike other social networks, is used to create a professional profile of a person or a business/company. LinkedIn is in fact the world's largest professional network with nearly 690+ million users in more than 200 countries and territories worldwide.

XING, as the "German equivalent to Linkedin", reported 16 million members (April 2019). It is popular among the German-speaking countries, such as Austria, especially among employees aged 35+, while XING is also used in Bulgaria.

Facebook with over 2.6 billion monthly active users as of the first quarter of 2020, is the biggest social network worldwide and of course the most widely used social media network in all project's participating countries. Users seem to prefer it mostly for bonding with friends, entertainment and generally for private use/personal purposes. However, Facebook has a considerable untapped potential for "social media recruiting", plus considering the existence of plenty of Facebook groups for job ads, and job search even for home-based/freelance work (such groups can be found by using the FB search function). It is also worth mention, that in many countries, plenty of "Jobs Postings on Facebook" (namely the relevant Facebook page containing jobs ads, through filtering by region) require medium-low skills/qualifications.

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2.1.3   Career portals & online applications

All participating countries present **a great variety of specialized job websites** that deal specifically with employment or careers (career portals, employment or recruitment platforms etc.). Sometimes there are also **app versions** of the websites suitable for smartphones and tablets. It should be also mentioned that all countries have **National/Public Employment Services/Organisations**, offering job opening positions on their websites/social media.

These job portals publish **thousands of open positions** (by location, by field/sector, by company etc.) and attract **millions of unique internet users** (numbers per month).

The majority of these portals allow **employers/companies** to post job openings for a position to be filled, while the prospective employees can locate the job notices/ads and fill out a job application or submit resumes online. In order to apply for a job, an **applicant** might need to create an **account** (usually free of charge), and upload a CV or fill in a specific form with his/her experience, skills etc.

Most employment sites offer personalized newsletters (with relevant jobs the applicant is searching for), companies' presentations and employer reviews, career and job-search advice, CV or interview tips, training opportunities etc. Some of these portals can also play the role of the recruitment agency, however the majority of the small-medium job portals doesn't participate in the recruitment process, nor in the communication between the employers and the candidates.

2.1.4   Social media use by businesses/recruiters in the selection process

Despite the fact that personal contacts seem to remain the first option for employers in search for new staff, companies also use digital tools such as job web portals, social networks, corporative web and also via Public Employment Services. The vast majority of available job vacancies in all project's countries, is published on companies' websites and/or on online career portals, as well as on the employer's/company's social media or even, sometimes, on relevant online groups. Most companies, especially the large ones, seem to receive applications via **e-mail** and/or **online forms**.

When the selection departments use social networks in search of candidates, they do so mainly to fill positions in the category of employees (high/middle/low skilled), technicians and middle managers. For management positions, HR professionals do not usually use social networks.

Recruiting via social media – **"social recruiting", "social media recruiting"** or **"social hiring"** – is becoming increasingly important, growing engagement and making both applicants and employers more "transparent". The most popular social networks used for posting job ads and job search are LinkedIn and Facebook, followed by Twitter and also XING (in Austria and Bulgaria).

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The **benefits** of businesses choosing "social recruiting" in order to select the suitable candidates, are related to costs (free posting), access to qualified candidates who do not search necessarily / actively for a new job, greater reach in a larger and diverse internet users base or even more targeted (e.g. via specific online groups), candidates' response time etc. There is also evidence that this process can attract better and more productive employees than companies using traditional ways of recruitment. At the same time, companies can also leverage social media platforms to "sort out" candidates. In addition, recruiters can explore the applicant's digital profile to ensure that the person who will be chosen fits also with the company's culture.

However, there are also **disadvantages** for the recruitment agencies and HR professionals, such as the fact that shared information is out of control after posting and they cannot filter the audience that will see it. In addition, sometimes the job ad reaches too many people who do not meet the requirements, but decide to apply, so it is very time-consuming for the specialists to handle all of them. There are also cases when candidates are contacting the company regarding a position no longer available (published several months ago).

According to future trends, "traditional" applications via email are expected to decrease in favor of recruiting **automation**: the candidates will be able to make **one-click applications** over their PC or mobile devices, and their profiles will be reviewed by specialised software.

The use of the so-called **Applicant Tracking Systems** (ATS), managing the entire talent acquisition process, is expected to increase. These ATS include questionnaire of aptitudes and competences in digital formal, video interviews, mobile recruiting/selection app, work simulations in digital environment, gamification/ludification, HR analytics, crowdsourcing, virtual reality, artificial intelligence and machine learning, chatbot, hackathon, PA (Robotic Process Automation).

However, this systems and processes are expected to play a more critical role in planning for tomorrow's workforce mainly in large and/or multi-ethnic companies seeking for high-qualified personnel, but may also affect in some way small-medium businesses looking for low-skilled, low qualified personnel.

2.1.5 Stakeholders' Interviews - Online questionnaires

▶ *Use of social media in the recruitment process:* LinkedIn (in all countries) and XING (in Austria and Bulgaria) are dominant in the recruitment process, although companies may also use various tools and platforms, depending on the country and the industry/ sector involved. Facebook, Twitter and Google+ also rank relatively high.

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▶ *Reasons for using social media:* The ease of access, the ability to reach candidates directly and often informally, and the ability to find the right match for a position appear to be the main key-reasons for people who play an active role in the recruitment processes of a business, so as to make use of social media.

▶ *What employers are looking for in social media:* There appears to be one dominant focus of attention for companies in their search for candidates, even on social media: the presence of specific skills, as well as education and experience required for a position.

▶ *Use of social media in recruiting:* The majority of recruiters/employers use social media at the application stage, while they also check the applicant's social media accounts (especially LinkedIn and then Facebook) before conducting face-to-face interviews, namely during the interview and reference check phases. However, offers are most of the times extended through traditional channels.

▶ **Difficulties and/or problems related to the use of social media for recruitment, usually include:** Potential discrimination (not treating all candidates equally, or having access to private information about candidates), the risks of targeting a certain pool of candidates only, as well as the fact that some positions and/or target groups can only be reached through traditional channels.

▶ *Reasons to exclude a candidate from an interview after checking his/her social media:* There is no consensus among the answers, but all the following reasons can lead to the exclusion of a candidate, according to employers: inappropriate images, poor communication skills, discriminatory comments, negative information, comments about previous employers, as well as inconsistencies between the information presented in the CV or comments made in the interview and the information found on social networks.

▶ **Required skills for a good candidate:** In line with the answers given, it seems that the skills the employers seek in the recruitment processes differ, obviously depending on the industry/sector. However, most employers in all countries see all discussed digital competences as, on average, **important**. Only in very few cases, some of the employers listed one/some competence(s) as non-important. Those rated among the **highest** include the *use of Office Tools* (word processing, spreadsheets, databases and presentations) and *browsing, searching & filtering data and information,* along with *critical thinking and decision making*. In many cases, *interacting through digital technologies*, the *use of a wide range of communication tools* and *copyright awareness* are considered as **valuable/important** as well. At the same time, the *ability to produce complex digital content in different formats* (e.g. text, tables, images, video) and the *ability to create and manage content with collaboration tools* (e.g. electronic calendars, project management systems, online proofing, online spreadsheets) are seen as somehow **less important, but still valuable**.

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2.2 Brief summary of the key findings reached through the organized focus groups with educators of adults, who can express an opinion about their level of digital skills transnationally

2.2.1 Introduction: services offered by the interviewees' institutions & target groups/ beneficiaries

The **58 educators interviewed**, in total, in all participating countries have been mainly working in the field of adult education. In more details:

▶ In **Turkey**, they have been offering courses in alternative educational institutions and providing training to adults in skill-building courses such as crafts and folk dances, education support courses such as English and mathematics, and vocational courses such as cooking and real estate.

▶ In **Greece**, they were offering courses in "Second Chance Schools" (free innovative public adult education schools with total study duration of approximately 2 years), NGO's, higher education, VET Institutions, private colleges, as well as corporate trainings.

▶ In **Austria**, there were trainers with areas of expertise ranging from foreign languages (English) to mathematics and IT skills, while almost all of them offered job application training, as well.

▶ In **Bulgaria**, they were trainers in formal courses with a full education program for the respective class, and also trainers in non-formal courses for various topics.

▶ In **Spain**, the trainers/educators were teaching in the fields of digital skills, job search through the internet, vocational training (both, face-to-face and online), different skill workshops and English lessons.

The majority of the **beneficiaries/main target-groups** were adults, both young and older ones, mostly unemployed, looking to widen their knowledge and digital skills in order to facilitate their entrance in the labour market. Most of the beneficiaries have been also people who had dropped out of school early and decided to attend again at an older age (e.g. alternative courses, second chance schools etc.). In addition, there were trainers working with migrants, Roma youth and adults in risk of exclusion. The vast majority of the beneficiaries had basic or even not at all knowledge of digital and social media skills, while in the cases of migrants and refuges courses were given in English or even in the students' native language.

2.2.2 Experiences and challenges faced while teaching/working with adults who want to improve their digital skills for job search

In all countries, according to the majority of the interviewees, most of the adults who have dropped out of school early and now try to improve their digital skills in order to search for a job, have a very **low level of digital knowledge (or even a total lack)**, especially if they are aged 45 and over.

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All participants agree that digital illiteracy is a big barrier in the active job search and most of them have underlined the **need for training on the use of search engines and social media**, as well as the use of Microsoft office tools, so as the students to be able to prepare a good CV and sent it via e-mail or online application forms.

As for the main **difficulties and challenges** that usually come up, the answers vary but are similar in the majority of the participating countries: some trainers mention as a major problem the limited time (short training periods), that is not sufficient for them to cover many subjects to people who have limited knowledge and sometimes limited interest or no motivation; others mention problems related to language (e.g. when teaching migrants), while others mention lack of equipment. In addition, it has been mentioned the absence of a training curriculum customized to the needs and available time of this specific target group.

Especially regarding courses on (online) application processes, it has been mentioned that **online applications** are considered by the students as time consuming, and especially when certificates and diplomas are required, migrants and people who have dropped out of school, rarely can apply.

Speaking about social media however, there are cases where the trainers mention that adult students make use of them for social interacting, but are **weak when it comes to job search processes**, or that they are not using social networks at all for professional reasons. Especially when people are living in small cities, they prefer to search for a job through their acquaintances than search through the web. It one case, trainers from Turkey have mentioned that adult students **don't "trust"** the digital media and the online job advertisements.

Despite the fact that older people tend to think that "technology is for the younger generations", an interesting comment was made in Spain, when one trainer highlighted the fact that, although the level of digital knowledge is very low, adult learners are more aware of the importance of acquiring such skills in order to access the labour market.

2.2.3 Qualifications of adult education providers, main challenges and future perspectives

Answers on whether the **staff of their organisation/institution is qualified** and properly trained in providing training to adults, vary per country:

▶ In **Spain**, all participants stated that the personnel of their organisations are qualified to provide adults with different kinds of training.
▶ In **Greece**, the vast majority of the interviewees answered that the staff of their organisation/ institution is qualified, properly trained and experienced in providing training to adults. In the cases of NGO's and volunteer trainers it has been mentioned that they usually come from different educational backgrounds and their training isn't sufficient. In a few cases however, it has been

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mentioned that additional training on digital skills/IT technologies etc. would be useful, in order to teach adults (especially older ones) social media/digital literacy.

▶ In **Turkey**, all participants mentioned that had passed certain trainings but also underlined that all of them wanted to increase their capacity to provide education and training to adults and they were open to different types of alternative education.

▶ In **Austria**, the trainers interviewed indicated that there was no specific training for the staff working with adults in their institutions. Their knowledge, e.g. about didactics and methods of how best to convey the contents, was gained through their own experience, while many of them studied at the university and then continued their education independently. The interviewees were of the opinion that further training in this area is a must.

▶ In **Bulgaria**, trainers in the formal education are qualified and trained, while trainers in the informal education rarely have pedagogical background, which in some cases is considered as a problem. Describing the main challenges faced by the staff of their organisation while providing education to adults in need for a job, the majority mentioned the difficulties to adapt the courses to the need of various target groups, with low digital skills background. Difficulties related to the language and the lack of time, motivation and engagement were also mentioned.

When asked if the staff of their organisation would be interested in **further building its capacities on providing training and education to adults**, the vast majority of the interviewees in all participating countries answered positively, while some mentioned that it might also depend on the time period.

In addition, the vast majority of all interviewees expressed their interest in an additional training on how to teach their colleagues in providing courses for adults who want to improve their social and digital skills. Particular interest has been expressed on the field of **methodologies and approaches** being used, as well as in customized seminars where trainers learns how to work explicitly with the target group and exchange ideas with other trainers, for example about how learning could be more interesting and "fun".

When participants were asked about the **scope of the project**, there has been a consensus on the importance of digital skills for adults, especially vulnerable groups, in search for a job. In addition, some commented on the importance of improving educators' skills and providing more tools to educators, so as to help people develop more efficiently their digital skills and find a job; others mentioned the importance of providing adult learners with training in order to make learning a lifelong process that will enrich the individual's life.

2.2.4 Interviewees' opinion about the importance of specific social/digital skills

In the last part of the survey, the trainers were asked to assess the **importance** of some specific social and digital skills for people in search of a job. On average, all of them are considered as **important and very important**. In more detail:

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The most crucial skill seems to be *critical thinking and decision making* followed by *browsing, searching & filtering data and information.* Very important is considered the *use of Office tools (word processing, spreadsheets, databases and presentations), as well as the knowledge of the copyright* (music, film, pictures, texts, software) and the right to the protection of personal data, especially the right to my own picture. Then comes the skill to *use a wide range of communication tools* (e-mail, chat, SMS, instant messaging, blogs, micro-blogs, social networks) and *interacting through digital technologies. Creating and managing content with collaboration tools* (e.g. electronic calendars, project management systems, online proofing, online spreadsheets) and *Producing complex digital content in different formats (e.g. text, tables, images, video)* seem to be, in comparison to the others, the "least" important- but still valuable (namely important/somewhat important). Very few participants mentioned that one/some of these skills are not important at all.

2.3 Brief summary of the key findings reached through the organized focus groups with adults having dropped out of school and attending alternative educational institutions transnationally

2.3.1 Introduction: interviewees' educational level and employment status

Some interesting details, regarding the **96 adults interviewed**, in total, in all participating countries are presented below:

▶ In **Austria**, the educational levels of the interviewees ranged from university graduates (migrants who had graduated in their country of origin and whose diplomas were not recognized in Austria) over adults who had completed compulsory school to people without any school leaving certificates or diplomas. All of them were attending alternative educational courses financed by the AMS (Public Employment Service Austria) in the fields of foreign languages (English), mathematics and IT skills. In addition, almost all of them were actually unemployed and/or job seeking, a few were marginally employed and all of them had participated/were participating in job application trainings.

▶ In **Turkey**, there were adults who had left school at an early age, having completed the compulsory education at a primary level. A percentage of ~19% had completed primary school and the remaining ~81% had received later secondary education (high school), while some of them had completed or tried to complete distance secondary education. The majority were working/had worked as cleaning staff, while there were also other professions (workman, security guard, janitor).

▶ In **Bulgaria**, there were early school leavers, having either a primary or lower education and among them were seasonal or temporary economic, low skilled migrants. The survey also showed that 51% of the group were of Turkish and Roma origin and 46% were Bulgarian. The majority lived in a village or a small town.

▶ In **Spain**, most of the adults interviewed had completed EGB (Basic General Education), and only 8% hadn't. A percentage of 16% started secondary education, but did not finish it, while 16% was

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engaged in vocational training and did not finish it, either. A 66% of the participants declared to be unemployed, 25% were employed in the catering sector, while 8% were working as clerks.

▶ In **Greece**, the majority of the participants had attended or were still attending "Second Chance Schools" and "Evening High Schools" (offering evening/late classes for adults who usually work in the mornings). There were also people who had attended only compulsory education/lower secondary education school, as well as people who had attended vocational training. Only three participants were unemployed, while the majority of the rest held various low-medium or even higher-qualified positions (e.g. salesman, courier, waiters, craftsman, store assistants and store managers).

2.3.2   Social media sites/networks used by the interviewees

Regarding the use of social media, the answers **vary** according to the country, and the age of the participants, however **Facebook** seems to be the most popular social network among the interviewees, transnationally. The percentage of adults not using social media accounts for job search or not using them at all, should not be of course ignored. In more details:

▶ In **Austria**, almost all the interviewees had social media profiles and those mentioned were Instagram, Snapchat, Tik-Tok, YouTube, LinkedIn, XING or even personal websites and blogs. Regarding their use for professional purposes, the interviewees older than 30 years were increasingly using LinkedIn and XING.

▶ In **Turkey**, only 3 adults among the 16 participants did not use social media, while the rest had a Facebook account. Instagram, Twitter and TikTok were also widely used, while only one of the participants was using LinkedIn.

▶ In **Bulgaria**, the lack of adequate equipment in the group (47%) for using the Internet and its opportunities for finding a job, had been mentioned as obstacle.

▶ In **Spain**, 83% of the interviewees used social media; 50% of participants had only Facebook, while 33% had Instagram as well. The remaining 17% stated not to have any social network profile.

▶ In **Greece**, all of the participants had a Facebook account, while more than half of them used Instagram, as well. Some also mentioned that they used Skype (telecommunications application) and Viber (social chatting app).

All interviewees acknowledged the key role that social networks can play in the search for a job, and on average, a percentage of **45%-60%** stated to have used them when looking for a job. In general, most of the interviewees in all five countries used mainly job websites & career portals to search for job ads and not social media networks that much, while most of them mentioned that they were also taking advantage of the services offered by their National/Public Employment Services/Organizations. The majority of the participants, especially **over the age of 30**, seemed to rely more on their personal

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acquaintances in order to find a job. In some cases, it was emphasized that job postings are being shared on Facebook and WhatsApp groups and by that way the participants can receive useful newsfeeds.

The majority agreed that when they look up **the profile of a company** in professional social networks, it is with the aim of obtaining information about the company and the profile of people working there (especially when an interview is about to follow), to check for additional job postings, to look for any complaints posted and also to see if there is someone they already know, who also works there.

2.3.3   Main challenges faced by adults having dropped out of school in search for a job

When asked about the main **difficulties and challenges** that adults having dropped out of school are facing while searching for a job, the interviewees in all participating countries mentioned the lack of certificates and diplomas, as well as the lack of qualifications/knowledge/skills needed for many jobs. In some cases, they mentioned age barriers (for applicants above 35-40), while it has been underlined that even though an applicant might have many years of experience, the employers (private business or public authorities) usually seek for at least a secondary school certificate.

Other **obstacles** and challenges mentioned include: lack of information about the job market, lack of motivation and self-confidence (especially for the long-term unemployed), language barriers (especially for migrants and refugees), economic and geographical disadvantage factors, as well as high competition.

2.3.4   Interviewees' interest in receiving training for developing social and digital skills and competences

In **Austria**, almost all of the participants had already participated in trainings on media literacy and digital skills (for periods from 2 to 6 weeks). In **Turkey**, it turned out that none of the participants had attended such a training, since there was no relevant course available in the region. In the rest of the countries (**Greece, Bulgaria, Spain**) the answers among the participants varied, since some of the participants stated to have received some training related to digital skills and digital literacy (a few hours or month courses).

In all countries, the vast majority of the interviewees **(~80% on average)** was interested in attending additional trainings, acknowledging how important it is for them to improve their social and digital skills in order to increase their chances of getting a job.

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2.3.5   Participants' opinion about the importance of specific skills

In the last part of the survey, the participants were asked to assess the **importance of some specific social and digital skills** for people in search of a job. On average, all of them are considered as important and very important. In more detail:

The most crucial skills for the applicants seem to be *the awareness of copyright (music, film, pictures, texts, software) and the right to the protection of personal data, especially the right to my own picture,* along with the *critical thinking* and the *use of office tools.* Many participants also thinks that *using a wide range of communication tools* is valuable, along with the skill of *browsing, searching and filtering data and information*. Skills that are found on average "less" important in comparison with the aforementioned (meaning "somewhat important") are *interacting through digital technologies*, *creating and managing content with collaboration tools* and *producing complex digital content in different formats*. Asked for the reasons, the interviewees usually think that these competences characterize more "specialised"/qualified personnel.

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3 EU level conclusions and recommendations that should be linked with the capacity building methodology for the educators

Nowadays, the use of digital and social media is a widespread practice of modern businesses in the so-called **"social recruiting"**, i.e. posting announcements/ads on social networks to attract candidates and select staff. People involved in the recruitment processes are always in search of "good practices" so as to deliver good results and save valuable time and efforts. Of course, one should always keep in mind that what works for one company, doesn't always work for another and that the social media and social recruiting strategy of a business should always match its vision. Companies believe that by employing **recruitment software**, they will be able to recruit candidates who match better to their open positions. Therefore, a crucial point is the prerequisite that candidates will be able to present in the best way possible all their **skills** and **experience**, so that the software will be able to **analyze them and find a suitable match**.

People who left school early, but returned and graduated at an older age, can work in **many different industries/sectors** as **low-middle qualified personnel**, while people without school diplomas can search for **various non-qualified positions**. In any case, according to recruiters, it seems that candidates who are **active** in social networks have more job opportunities than the inactive ones. Obviously, there is no universal recruiting social media platform to meet all the needs. Thus, it seems that as recruitment processes are increasing in various social media, the **applicants that own accounts/profiles in more than one network** and build a **strong online identity**, will have more possibilities to find a suitable job.

The trainers interviewed in all participating countries were fond of the idea of the ALTER project, acknowledging the fact that there is a great need among the **final target group (low-qualified adults in search of a job)** as well as the **trainers** themselves, regarding further education on Information and communication technologies and how social media can facilitate access to the labour market. The ALTER project could function as a **bridge** for adults, especially in alternative educational institutions, closing the gap between the application process for a position and actually finding a job.

For a beginning, it is of crucial importance for adults in search of a job to become **motivated** to start searching online, as well, taking advantage of the social media for professional reasons. The training courses that will be provided in the context of ALTER should not only focus on purely technical skills, but should also provide **empathy and understanding** on the part of the trainers for their course participants, as they are often discouraged by long-term unemployment and have a lack of self-confidence and self-esteem, which must first be rebuilt.

What became evident through the interviews, is that there is a **great diversity** among final beneficiaries, making it difficult to develop customized trainings that will meet all requirements. The capacity building methodology should therefore be **flexible** enough to be adaptable to **at least two digital-skills levels** (limited/basic and medium/advanced). In the case of Bulgaria, it was proposed the training programme to have a combined character of basic and digital skills.

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Taking into consideration all the relevant answers given by stakeholders, trainers and the adults in search for a job, it is proposed that specific skills, such as the following, could be taught in both levels: Critical thinking & decision making, browsing, searching & filtering data and information, using of Office tools (word processing, spreadsheets, databases and presentations) and how to be aware of the copyright (music, film, pictures, texts, software) & the right to the protection of personal data.

On the other hand, skills such as: interacting through digital technologies, using a wide range of communication tools (e-mail, chat, SMS, instant messaging, blogs, micro-blogs, social networks), creating & managing content with collaboration tools (e.g. electronic calendars, project management systems, online proofing, online spreadsheets) and producing complex digital content in different formats (e.g. text, tables, images, video), could be only for the more "advanced" ones.

Regarding **migrants and refugees**, there is an additional challenge: the **language** barriers. The question is whether it makes more sense to offer training in their native language, English or the host country's language, keeping always in mind that the "computer language" can be considered as a "universal one".

Considering the number and variety of **career portals** in all participating countries, it would be useful for the final participants to become familiar with the **most popular ones** in each country, learning also how to create an account and save their CV online for future use. It seems that many applicants who try to create and send their CV via e-mail or special applying forms, give up in the beginning, when they are confronted with "mountains" of fields that need to be filled in. Therefore, an additional **training in relevant computer skills, CV writing, online interviews** and **time management** could be considered as useful. While upgrading the candidates' digital skills, priority should be given on **how to bring their professional experience, education and skills to the fore** in social and digital media.

People searching for a job should become familiar with the advantages and disadvantages of creating and managing an account/profile in social media (especially **LinkedIn** and **Facebook** or **XING** in countries that is popular). The function of **specific groups** that offer newsfeeds on job ads would be of great importance as well. In addition, they should be prepared for the fact that all their "social profiles" (e.g. Twitter, Instagram etc.), could be checked at any time during their recruitment process and therefore keep their accounts up-to-date and pay high attention to the photos, information and posts they upload and reveal in public.

"Good" and "Bad" Practices, **"Do's and Don'ts"** with relevant, interesting of even funny examples are of great importance for the students, so as to know what they should do and what to avoid. Some of the reasons leading to the exclusion of an applicant, after the recruiter has checked on his/her social profiles are **general**, not specific to social media, like frequent job changes or poor communication skills. Others are related to the **lack of sufficient information** in order to take an informed decision. Still others are **value**-related: the presence of discriminatory commers or a contradiction to corporate culture.

The area of social media recruiting is dynamic, constantly changing and requires continuous learning and updating. In addition, there is a need for raising awareness among the people involved in the recruitment processes, so as to be better acknowledge, consider and estimate the benefits and risks,

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as well as the ethics of using social and digital media in recruitment. Applicants themselves should od course learn how to behave **ethically** when examining another personal/business profile in social media.

The ALTER project seeks to upskill educators and enable degrees of interaction that would otherwise not be possible because of time, geographical and economical restraints, aiming to facilitate adults, especially those in alternative education, to make the optimal use of social media, getting into the labour market.

A proposed **capacity building methodology**, should take into consideration the following: how it will enable **active participation** of both trainers and final beneficiaries, how it will encourage **critical thinking** through examples, meaningful exercises and interesting relevant material, how it will meet the various needs of different students, offering **rounded explanations** of the subject's content, enabling **constructive feedback** and creating **mentoring skills** for the trainers, so as to facilitate extended practicum period for the students.

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