

**Interreg
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SEE

Sustainable Entrepreneurship Education (SEE)

**“DEVELOPING 21ST CENTURY SKILLS
(SOFT SKILLS)”**

3rd collaborative document April - September 2025



SMART

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1. Introduction

As global economies face technological disruption, climate challenges, demographic shifts, and geopolitical uncertainty, the need to rethink entrepreneurship education has never been more urgent. There is a growing demand for a new generation of entrepreneurs equipped not only with technical expertise but also with a robust set of 21st century soft skills, which are increasingly viewed as critical enablers of success in dynamic and uncertain environments.

The Future of Jobs Report 2025 by the World Economic Forum reveals that nearly 40% of existing skill sets are expected to become outdated by 2030, underscoring the urgency for education systems, particularly those focused on entrepreneurship, to emphasise lifelong learning and human-centered competencies. Skills such as adaptability, emotional intelligence, and effective communication are essential in fostering innovation, managing risk, and leading diverse teams through transformation. Furthermore, as automation and artificial intelligence reshape industries, soft skills represent a comparative advantage that machines cannot replicate, empowering entrepreneurs to navigate ambiguity and drive value through human ingenuity.

2. Cross-Regional Insights: Common Challenges and Opportunities Across SEE Partner Regions

As part of the Interreg Europe project SEE – Sustainable Entrepreneurship Education, seven partner regions have engaged in a joint reflection on how to effectively develop 21st century soft skills through entrepreneurship education. This analytical document brings together shared insights and practices gathered from each regional context, highlighting both the diverse local approaches and the strikingly common challenges faced across Europe.

A key strength observed among all partners is the existence of a vibrant and increasingly supportive environment for soft skills development in entrepreneurial education. Regional actors, including schools, NGOs, private enterprises, local authorities, and EU-funded initiatives, play an active role in introducing experiential learning formats, mentoring, and collaborative projects. Moreover, in all partner regions, there is a noticeable and growing interest among young people in entrepreneurial careers, which strengthens the relevance of embedding transversal skills such as problem-solving, communication, collaboration, and adaptability into formal education.



Nevertheless, the partnership has also revealed a set of common internal weaknesses that limit the effectiveness and scalability of these efforts. One recurring issue is the fragmentation of initiatives. Despite the presence of many promising programmes, most are isolated, small in scale, or heavily reliant on individual educators' motivation, leading to a lack of continuity and coherence. Teacher training remains a critical area of concern: in many regions, educators lack both the pedagogical tools and institutional support to systematically foster and assess soft skills in the classroom. Additionally, rigid curricular structures, exam-oriented systems, and overloaded timetables continue to limit opportunities for cross-disciplinary, student-centered learning approaches. In rural or under-resourced areas, these challenges are often compounded by unequal access to infrastructure, digital tools, and external partnerships.

Across all seven regions, promising external opportunities have also been identified. Ongoing or planned national curriculum reforms in several partner countries, create a timely window for embedding transversal competencies into learning outcomes.

At the same time, the increasing use of digital tools and technology-enhanced learning methods in education, along with the growing ecosystem of entrepreneurship-related programmes -

such as Junior Achievement and regional startup incubators - provide useful platforms for skill-building, mentorship, and real-world application.

Crucially, employers and policymakers increasingly acknowledge that soft skills are vital for workforce readiness and sustainable economic development, reinforcing the value of a shift toward more competence-based education models. Interregional collaboration, as fostered by the SEE project itself, offers a powerful mechanism for mutual learning, transfer of good practices, and co-development of scalable strategies.

However, the ambition to advance soft skills development still faces notable obstacles at both institutional and policy levels. In many partner regions, resistance to educational innovation - whether cultural, bureaucratic, or institutional - continues to slow down change. Schools and teachers are often expected to take on new educational priorities without the necessary resources, time, or structural support. The absence of standardised assessment frameworks for soft skills further complicates efforts to monitor progress or demonstrate impact, which in turn weakens the case for systemic investment.

Additionally, demographic pressures such as youth migration and shrinking rural school populations threaten the long-term viability of some regional initiatives, particularly those that rely on local networks or short-term funding.



3. 3rd Interregional Policy Learning Event in Harghita County, Romania

Tackling the shared challenges related to soft skills development in entrepreneurship education across the SEE partner regions, Harghita County Council hosted the third interregional learning event in Miercurea Ciuc, Romania, on 17-18 June 2025. The event created a dynamic space for exploring these issues in practice, with a focus on experiential, learner-centered approaches to building 21st century competencies.

Through a mix of good practice presentations, collaborative dialogue and workshop activities, participants engaged in discussions on embedding skills development into varied educational settings, while also showcasing promising local solutions.

The event concluded with a study visit to the Harghita Business Center in Odorheiu Secuiesc, a regional startup incubator that runs a wide range of programmes supporting entrepreneurial learning among young people.



4. Good Practices Shared

The meeting featured good practice presentations from several partner regions, each demonstrating a different method of supporting soft skill development.

Riga Local Government, Latvia - "The Emotional Bank"

Implemented at Riga Jugla Secondary School, as part of the programme "Leader in me", this activity fosters emotional intelligence and empathy by encouraging positive communication and class cohesion. Students create personal "emotional banks" (jars or envelopes) into which classmates anonymously drop kind notes. The flexible format nurtures a culture of recognition, reflection, and emotional well-being. Although not quantitatively measured, it significantly improves classroom climate and supports key soft skills such as collaboration, self-esteem, and motivation.

BGE Hauts-de-France and Hauts-de-France Region, France - "Open Badges" and "The Most Competent Entrepreneur"

In Hauts-de-France, two complementary initiatives promote the recognition of interpersonal skills and experiential learning. The "Open Badges" programme, developed by Hauts-de-France Region, as part of the Maison des Entrepreneurs, certifies expertise and key skills, such as leadership or civic engagement, through digital micro-certificates.



Thanks to a validation system, the badges are recognised and promoted by a wide range of well-established organisations to recruiters, universities, and young people, thereby increasing both the visibility and the value of the skills acquired.

Complementing this, “The Most Competent Entrepreneur” is an interactive online escape game developed by BGE Hauts-de-France. Players take on entrepreneurial challenges while earning soft skill badges. A facilitation guide is also provided to help teachers integrate the game into classroom activities and lead follow-up discussions aimed at deepening students’ understanding of soft skills and raising awareness of their importance in the professional world.

Westpomeranian Region, Poland - “Youth on the Wave”

Organised by the West Pomeranian Youth Office, this regional youth gathering event blends EU citizenship education with soft skill development through workshops, panel discussions, and civic games. Participants practice teamwork, debate, creativity, and leadership in a peer-driven, inclusive setting. It strengthens initiative, civic engagement, and project-based thinking - traits that support entrepreneurial pathways. The format is replicable in other contexts with minimal resources.

Economic Council of East Flanders, Belgium - “PLANKGAS” by UNIZO and “Europe 101” by d-teach

A year-long entrepreneurship programme for secondary students, “PLANKGAS” guides learners through business ideation, planning, and real-world application via a pop-up experience. The programme integrates coaching, teamwork, and practical tasks to build resilience, initiative and problem-solving abilities. Its strong connection to real-life business practice enhances students’ confidence and entrepreneurial spirit, making it easily transferable to schools in other countries with similar education levels.

“Europe 101” is a free, four-week online leadership programme for young people aged 16-30 across Europe. Its main goal is to connect and empower the next generation of leaders by equipping them with the skills, knowledge, and networks necessary to become changemakers. Through the programme, participants explore the “liquid leadership” model, a contemporary framework focused on adaptability and collaboration. By exploring the key concepts and reflecting on their own experiences, strengths, challenges and contexts, students develop their own leadership potential.

District of Rottal-Inn, Germany - “Fit for StartUp”

Combining founder talks, mentoring, and a pitch competition, this one-day entrepreneurship workshop for secondary school students in Bavaria offers hands-on business simulation experience.



Students work in teams to develop and pitch business ideas to a jury of real entrepreneurs and mentors, reinforcing creativity, collaboration, and initiative. The programme not only strengthens 21st century skills, but also acts as an entry point into entrepreneurial practice, helping to build early connections between schools and the regional startup ecosystem.

Lazio Region, Italy - "Che impresa, ragazzi!"

An extensive 37-hour programme by FEduF and Fondazione Buon Lavoro, this educational initiative aims to stimulate entrepreneurial thinking and develop transversal skills among secondary school students. The programme offers a structured learning path that combines digital tools with direct mentorship and teamwork. Students engage in video lessons and knowledge checks, complete five interactive e-learning modules with associated tests, participate in two mentoring sessions with experienced tutors, and collaboratively design a business project simulating a "mini enterprise," which they present through a final pitch to a jury. At the end of the programme, the transversal and entrepreneurial competences acquired are assessed, providing valuable feedback and supporting further development.

Harghita County Council, Romania - "Future Makers" by Harghita Business Center and "Launch Your Career Today!"

Addressing the generally low entrepreneurial self-confidence among youth in Harghita County, the "Future Makers" entrepreneurship programme aims to strengthen secondary school students' soft skills such as creativity, initiative and collaboration. It combines self-awareness training with entrepreneurial learning in a two-phase structure. The first phase focuses on personal development and career orientation, encouraging students to explore their strengths, values, and goals. In the second phase, students engage in interactive tasks and simulations that foster entrepreneurial thinking. They team up to develop and pitch their own business ideas, resulting in a tangible project by the end of the programme. Led by a psychologist and a business consultant, the training is highly participatory and experience-based.

The "Launch Your Career Today!" programme, implemented by Harghita County Development Agency, is a rotating county-wide initiative, connecting vocational school students with local entrepreneurs during homeroom hours. It addresses skills mismatch, migration, and career disorientation. Students gain realistic insight into local businesses, success stories, and skill demands. Based on low-cost, high-impact school-business partnerships, the programme strengthens place attachment, encourages informed career planning, and is easily transferable where strong community ties exist.



5. Thematic Workshop

Building on the inspiration and learning generated by the exchange of good practices, the event transitioned into an interactive workshop, designed to deepen the collective reflection around the theme "Bridging the gap: Aligning 21st century skills with vocational education – What’s needed vs. what we teach".



This practice-oriented workshop aimed to explore how 21st century soft skills can be more effectively embedded in vocational education. Participants collaborated through interactive activities to reflect on the evolving demands of the entrepreneurial landscape and the educational challenges of skills development.

To guide the workshop discussions, and select the key top skills to be discussed, the workshop facilitators referred to the Future of Jobs Report 2025, published by the World Economic Forum, that brings together the perspective of over 1000 leading global employers across 22 industry clusters and 55 economies from around the world, to examine how macro-trends impact jobs and skills.

The Future of Jobs Report lists and analyses the most in-demand skills for each year. It is remarkable that most of the “top skills” are soft skills.

During the workshop 8 soft skills were discussed from the 15 top skills listed in the 2025 Report: 1) Empathy and active listening; 2) Leadership and social influence; 3) Motivation and self-awareness; 4) Resilience, flexibility and agility; 5) Analytical thinking; 6) Systems thinking; 7) Curiosity and lifelong learning and 8) AI and big data.

Future of Jobs Report 2025

Core skills in 2025



1. Analytical thinking
 2. Resilience, flexibility and agility
 3. Leadership and social influence
 4. Creative thinking
 5. Motivation and self-awareness
 6. Technological literacy
 7. Empathy and active listening
 8. Curiosity and lifelong learning
 9. Talent management
 10. Service orientation and customer service
- Legend: Cognitive skills (green), Self-efficacy (blue), Working with others (red), Management skills (purple), Technology skills (orange), Engagement skills (yellow)

Note: The skills selected by surveyed organizations to be of greatest importance to workers at the time of the survey. Source: World Economic Forum. (2025). *Future of Jobs Report 2025*.



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The programme consisted of three main activities:

1. Introduction and Self-reflection

In the introductory section of the workshop, the goal was to help participants become more aware of their own skills and development needs.



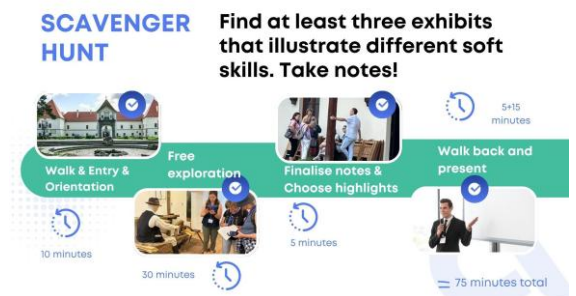
To achieve this, the workshop began with an introductory activity, where participants reflected on their soft skills and negotiated roles within their teams.

Each team was required to assign at least one "Skills Scout," one "Evidence Snapper," one "Presenter," and one "Leader & Timekeeper". This activity not only encouraged self-reflection but also fostered collaboration and active engagement.



2. Museum Scavenger Hunt

The teams then explored historical exhibits to identify skills applied in the past and discussed their relevance and reinterpretation in today's context.



During the Museum Treasure Hunt, participants were tasked with identifying at least three exhibits that illustrate different soft skills. For each of the three skills, they had to take note of the exhibit title/object (brief description), the historical context, the soft skills on display, and why they mattered in that specific context.

They also had to find a contemporary parallel, reflecting upon how the same skill benefits today's people. They were required also to take photos or sketches of those objects.



Following the hunt, participants discussed and reflected on the following: Have you identified any exhibits that show a lack of a soft skill? If so, what were the historical consequences? Which soft skill appears to have declined in importance over time? Which soft skill has become more important as history has progressed? Which soft skills proved most vital during periods of adversity (e.g., war, dictatorship)?

3. Speed Ideation Workshop

The workshop culminated in a structured, dynamic group discussion that helped participants identify current challenges and opportunities and develop practical recommendations for integrating skills into education.

The facilitators suggested a set of discussion prompts regarding both Needs & Challenges and Opportunities & Good Practices. The participants shared their experience on developing the selected 8 key soft skills, following these discussion prompts:

- (1) Spotting the struggle (Where do your learners stumble most with this skill? Can you share a recent classroom or workplace moment that illustrates the challenge?)
- (2) Resource needs (What tools, activities, or partnerships would help you build this skill more effectively?)
- (3) Teaching hurdles (What makes cultivating this skill tricky for you as a teacher/trainer? - Is it time, assessment, learner motivation, or something else?)

(4) Self-check (How confident do you feel modeling this skill yourself, and what support would help you strengthen it?)

(5) Recalling bright-spot stories (Describe a recent lesson, project, or workplace task where learners excelled at this skill! What made that success possible?)

(6) Thinking about possible partnerships (What collaborations - colleagues, employers, community groups, have you used (or could you use) to strengthen this skills development?)

(7) Identifying emerging openings (Which current trends, tools, or industry changes give us new ways to nurture these skills?)



6. Key Themes and Takeaways

The workshop highlighted several key themes in developing 21st century soft skills, emphasizing that these competencies are best cultivated through practical, human-centered experiences.



Empathy and active listening emerged as fundamental abilities, particularly in today's increasingly diverse and emotionally complex environments. Participants agreed that these skills should be nurtured from an early age through experiential methods such as role-play, team-building activities, and meaningful face-to-face conversations in both formal and informal settings. Exercises that encourage learners to "walk in someone else's shoes" were seen as especially impactful in fostering understanding and connection.



EMPATHY & ACTIVE LISTENING

Reading others' perspectives and responding thoughtfully is a human-centric skill employers say will grow with ageing and more diverse workforces.

In the area of **leadership and social influence**, the group underscored the role of self-awareness and experience. Good leadership, they noted, requires confidence, attentive listening, and the ability to recognise and support the strengths of others. Importantly, young people should be given safe opportunities to step into leadership roles and develop these capacities gradually over time.

Motivation and self-awareness were seen as deeply connected to a sense of belonging. Participants recommended fostering inclusive environments through regular check-ins, team rituals, and community-building activities.

Psychological safety and peer support were identified as key drivers for intrinsic motivation and personal growth, both in schools and workplaces.



RESILIENCE, FLEXIBILITY & AGILITY

The capacity to adapt quickly and bounce back from shocks differentiates workers in both growing and declining roles. (WEF)

To build **resilience, flexibility and agility**, the group recommended practices that normalise failure as part of the learning process. Design thinking and creative workshops were cited as effective spaces for problem-solving, while peer networks and mentoring for young entrepreneurs were seen as essential in reducing fear of failure and encouraging risk-taking.



ANALYTICAL THINKING

Breaking complex problems into evidence-based insights remains the #1 capability employers need now and in the years ahead. (WEF)

Analytical thinking was linked to structure and strategic clarity. Clear role definitions and strong leadership were seen as prerequisites for effective collaboration, with good leaders described as those who can bring order to chaos and help teams maintain momentum.





SYSTEMS THINKING

Seeing how parts connect inside larger economic, ecological or technical systems enables smarter, long-range decisions. (WEF)

Systems thinking, though complex, was recognised as indispensable in understanding the interconnected realities of today's world, whether economic, ecological, or technological. Participants emphasised the importance of continuous training, perspective-sharing, and equitable access to tools that support this way of thinking, especially for learners who may struggle with abstract or big-picture concepts.



CURIOSITY & LIFELONG LEARNING

Continually seeking new knowledge keeps skills current in a labour market where 39 % of core capabilities will shift by 2030. (WEF)

Curiosity and lifelong learning were seen as essential traits across generations. Participants, especially trainers and educators were encouraged to model these behaviors themselves, so that students learn not only through instruction but also by example.

Finally, **artificial intelligence and data literacy** were discussed not as technical skills in themselves, but as a complex skill set with multiple soft skill implications, such as responsibility and critical thinking. Since many learners already use AI tools daily, it is crucial that teachers understand how to guide these uses meaningfully and model responsible engagement with artificial intelligence. Participants emphasised that education systems should help students develop skills to work with AI consciously - such as writing effective prompts, evaluating sources, and adapting to the rapidly evolving nature of AI technologies.



AI & BIG DATA

Knowing how to harness machine-learning tools and large datasets is the fastest-growing competence and will keep accelerating toward 2030. (WEF)

During the museum scavenger hunt, participants reflected on the enduring relevance of soft skills throughout history. Professions of the past illustrated that **persistence, patience, and creativity** have always been essential to personal and professional success. At the same time, participants observed that **emotional intelligence and multitasking** have gained even more significance in today's rapidly changing world.



Some traditional values, such as **pride in craftsmanship** and **meticulous attention to detail**, seem to have faded and, according to many, deserve to be rediscovered and rebalanced in modern education and work.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

The third interregional learning event confirmed that developing 21st century soft skills is not merely an educational priority, it is a regional development imperative. Project partners and their accompanying stakeholders agreed that future entrepreneurs will require not only technical knowledge but also strong human competencies. Without empathy, collaboration, resilience, leadership, critical thinking and creativity, young people will be unprepared to navigate the challenges of a rapidly evolving economy and society.

Based on the insights gained during the partner meeting, including the exchange of good practices, collaborative discussions, and thematic workshop, the following conclusions and recommendations have been formulated to support more effective integration of soft skills into entrepreneurship education across partner regions.

1. Renewing vocational and general education with a soft skills focus: Systemic support for skill-building pedagogies (e.g. project-based learning, role-play, design thinking); Ongoing teacher training in methods for developing 21st century skills; Integrating curiosity-driven learning and ethical AI use into curricula;

2. Encouraging inter-institutional and cross-sector partnerships: Collaborations with businesses, NGOs, and cultural institutions to offer real-world skill application; Establishing local mentoring programmes, startup incubators, and internship opportunities;

3. Strengthening youth belonging and self-awareness: Supporting school and regional programmes that build community; Promoting self-reflection and peer-to-peer learning formats;

4. Promoting digital and systems thinking for future citizens: Prioritising the understanding of complex systems (ecosystems, economies, digital networks); Developing critical thinking and digital literacy related to AI.

8. Summary

Developing soft skills is not optional, it is a social and economic necessity. These competencies form the foundation of flexibility, adaptability, and innovation, all of which are essential for entrepreneurial success and strong communities. The long-term competitiveness and social cohesion of the region will depend on how effectively we empower young people to shape their future through skills that matter.

