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DEPARTMENT OF FOOD
SCIENCE, AU FOOD HOST
MEETING IN BRUSSELS

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According to the European Commission, the definition of micro-credentials has been designed in a way that allows Member States to adapt it according to the needs and objectives of their national qualification systems: find out more!

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OPEN DAYS ALL
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Check out the three most mentioned skills needs in all focus groups in all countries, by area of expertise, along with some concerns and statements expressed by focus group participants.

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From the 5th to the 7th of February, Brussels welcomed a partners meeting, where valuable ideas and insights were shared in order to advance with project's curricula development and micro-credentials.

I-RESTART COURSES
WILL LEAD TO
MICRO-CREDENTIALS

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From Spain to Italy and even Greece, the I-RESTART project has been the topic of conversation at several assemblies, committees and conferences.

SKILLS NEEDS IN
THE FOOD
INDUSTRY



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I-RESTART PROJECT PARTNERS MEET IN BRUSSELS FOR PROJECT'S CURRICULA DESIGN FROM THE 5TH TO THE 7TH OF FEBRUARY 2024

by Konstantina Ntrallou
AARHUS UNIVERSITET

The I-RESTART project advanced to its next phase with a Brussels meeting from the 5th until the 7th of February 2024, exclusively in person. The meeting was hosted by the EIT House and organized by the Department of Food Science, AU FOOD.

Partners shared their valuable insights and actively contributed to the project's curricula design. Based on the qualitative data of the "Skills needs identification" activities, they started developing Lines of Competencies for the Animal Production, Food Industry and Veterinary Sectors, for the skills categories of Digitalization, Sustainability, Entrepreneurship and Soft Skills, One-Health, and Sector Specific emerging trends.

A Line of Competencies was defined as a set of knowledge/skills necessary to acquire specific competencies. The developed Lines of Competencies will fulfil the urgent needs to upskilling and reskilling the workforce in the Agri-food and Veterinary sectors. Partners have regular scheduled meetings for the completion of this task and more information will be shared in the next project's newsletter.



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I-RESTART COURSES WILL LEAD TO MICRO-CREDENTIALS

by Konstantina Ntrallou
AARHUS UNIVERSITET

As I-RESTART will follow the DG EAC initiative on micro-credentials, partners discussed the European Union (EU) Council's Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability, that seeks to support the development, implementation and recognition of micro-credentials across institutions, businesses and borders. The Recommendation provides building blocks including a definition, standard elements for describing micro-credentials, and principles for designing and issuing micro-credentials. Micro-credentials certify the learning outcomes of short-term learning experiences, for example a short course or training. They offer flexible, targeted way to help people develop the knowledge, skills, and competences they need for their personal and professional development. According to the European Commission, the definition of micro-credentials has been designed in a way that allows Member States to adapt it according to the needs and objectives of their national qualification systems, whether in formal, non-formal or informal settings or at different education levels. As highlighted by the Council Recommendation, micro-credentials do not seek to replace traditional qualifications, but rather complement existing ones by providing added value to end users, to the labour market and to society in general. The Recommendation also touches on the fact that micro-credentials may be designed and issued by a variety of providers in different learning settings, including formal, non-formal and informal.



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THE AGRIFOOD INDUSTRY (AFI) OPEN DAYS ALL OVER EUROPE

The activities planned in WP2 - Fast Track to curricula and training program have been concluded in this last March. After finalizing the Report on urgent skills needs - in which, through a Quick Study (taking into consideration the results already available from studies at the European level and from previous projects developed by the partnership, in particular FIELDS) the Skills&knowledge that are most in need of updating were selected to ensure the competitiveness of the operators in the sector - a Pilot Training Program has been defined!

In order to implement and discuss these results, the AgriFood Industry (AFI) Open Days were organized by Agrifood and Food Industry Federations during their daily own main events - either internal such as Assemblies and Committees or external such as Conferences, Innovation Awards/Prizes, International Fairs with the aim to present their best practices but also to host the pilots/workshops with the help of the trainers and the experiences of the agrifood chain operators/companies.

The result has been an interesting track record of events all over Europe starting in November 2023, going through major trade fairs such as Alimentaria in Barcelona, Ecomondo - The Green Technology Expo in Rimini Italy, the FOOD EXPO GREECE 2024. A great opportunity to talk and discuss topics related to reskilling and upskilling in agrifood and veterinary sector!



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SKILLS NEEDS IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY - OUTCOMES OF THE I-RESTART PROJECT FOCUS GROUPS WITH EXPERTS

by Ana Ramalho & Luiz Mayor
ISEKI-Food Association Project Managers

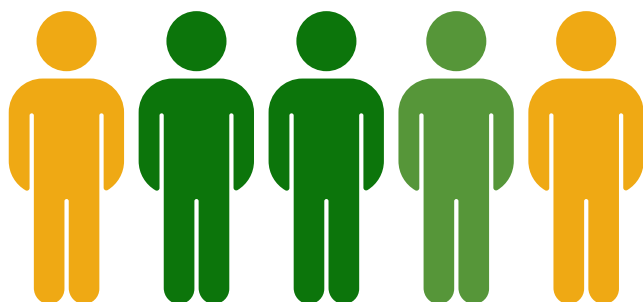
Our project aims to reskilling and upskilling the workforce in the agri-food and veterinary sectors to improve their digital skills and facilitate the transition to the Green Deal initiative.

The starting point of the project was to map the skills needs in the different sectors, taking into consideration the work developed to identify the skills gaps under the [FIELDS project](#), in a complementary way. To carry out this task, several activities were undertaken, namely focus groups with experts, a European survey and the analysis of future scenarios on skill needs.

Diving into the results of the focus groups for the Food Industry sector, several outcomes can be highlighted. These focus groups were organised in the project partner countries Austria, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain, between March and May 2023, most were online, and two were in a face-to-face format.

In total, 76 participants from different stakeholders of the food industry, such as managers and directors, as well as advisors and education providers, get together to debate the main current and future skills needs, according to their experience, in each topic presented. The groups also discussed the best methods for delivering training, but also the main challenges they found in training their staff.

Here we highlight the three skills needs most mentioned in all the focus groups across countries by area of knowledge, alongside some concerns and statements expressed by the focus group participants.



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In **DIGITALIZATION**, data management (collection, handling, analysis); basic IT skills; and sector specific digitalization skills (software, equipment, robots, machinery) were seen as the most needed out of 15 identified skills.

Some of the arguments given were: “In the food industry, many tasks have been replaced by robotization; this was previously mostly unskilled labour. The use of technology is not just about replacing existing human tasks with computers or robots. Work is now all high-tech business, with new work and processes and questions arising (FG The Netherlands”. Also, big differences in terms of IT skills are observed: “some do nothing else the whole day long than using a computer, and others only knows how to switch it on (FG Austria)”.



In the field of **SUSTAINABILITY**, Sustainable use of resources (energy, water, raw materials...); Environmental impact of food industry activities and its measurement; and Awareness of the circular and sustainable food production concepts, were the top three skills mentioned, among 13 identified skill needs. As some focus group participants said: “Being able to label a product’s environmental footprint is a new trend that should and will be a common practice for all food products in the coming years (FG Denmark)”, and “The ability to evaluate the and tackle and issue in a sustainable way - e.g. process water vs. food safety, because from a food safety point of view, process water should be changed quite often, but from a circular economy point of view, it’s the opposite. It is very difficult for the responsible person because it wasn’t an issue 20 years ago (FG Austria)”.



In **BUSINESS and SOFT-SKILLS**, Teamwork, negotiation and conflict management; Leadership; and Innovation management were the three most requested skills out of the 21 identified. The experts strongly emphasised soft skills as a real need for food workers in the food industry arena: “The ability to work in a team is the only way a production system, like the food one, can exploit its potential. Whether we are considering food companies or restaurants, effective teams can improve the food experience. In addition, it makes day-to-day activities run more smoothly: operators work more efficiently, and they also tend to innovate faster as they genuinely collaborate (FG Italy)”, and “Positive leadership could be a key element not only to successfully lead a company, making higher profits but also to build strong loyalty with customers. Food companies led by effective leaders have more chances to be successful at the local or even global level. Leadership helps to be more proactive and reactive to new trends consumers show and innovation to be implemented (FG Italy)”.

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In the emerging **ONE HEALTH** domain, Basic knowledge on food, nutrition, and health (including nutraceuticals and gut microbiome); Food safety awareness and emerging food safety topics related to new consumer trends; and Food and feed security topped the list of 15 skills. Some of the comments behind this selection were: “Information about the products is a matter of public health. Myth-based food fads are completely legitimate on an individual basis but should not be disseminated as truth (FG Portugal)”, and “Food safety significance among the workforce of a food industry differs. Continuous and tailored-made trainings based on the initial knowledge on the theme should take place (FG Greece).



In **SECTOR-SPECIFIC TRENDS** | New ingredients, novel foods and nutraceuticals; Smart Packaging and food contact materials; and Efficient management of the supply chain (resources and logistics) scored highest out of 15 skills. Some experts opinion on these needs were as follows: “Food industry workers and operators should be updated on novel foods and other new terms coming from innovation in the sector (FG Italy)”; “Active packaging provides superior protection against moisture, oxygen, odour, and other volatiles which helps packaged foods last longer and has a direct effect on food sustainability (FG Greece)” and “Knowledge in logistics is highly distinctive for today’s food industry: from raw material sourcing to final product distribution, a harmonised system is necessary to avoid serious critical issues and shortages (FG Italy)”.

Another central question was to understand the difficulties related to training and how to overcome them. Among the 15 difficulties mentioned, the experts identified a lack of precise, target-oriented training; a lack of (qualified/motivated) trainers and a lack of practical relevant training. With regard to training methods, the three most requested by participants in the focus group were in line with the difficulties described, which suggests the importance of addressing these issues: Relevant practical training; Online learning and Specific training (expert or tailor-made).

The I-RESTART project will continue its efforts to tackle the needs observed and help the food industry workers to improve their skills and competences. According to these skill needs, training materials will be developed by the consortium and will later be made available on the website. In addition, face-to-face training sessions will also be carried out in the partners countries, focusing on the most important skills needs found in each country.



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