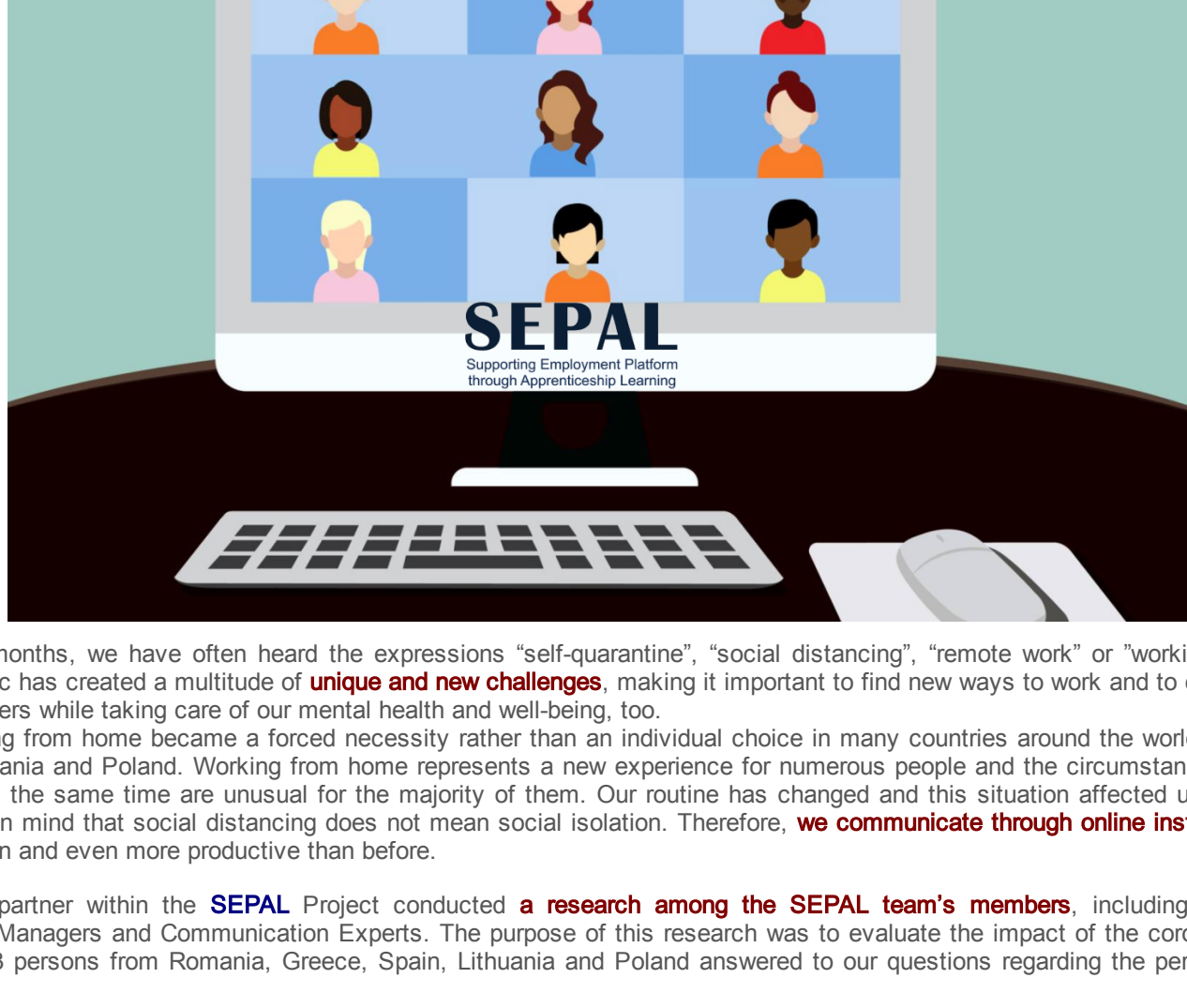


SEPAL Newsletter—Issue no. 7

July 2020

Challenges during the coronavirus pandemic

A study regarding the impact on the SEPAL Project's team



Over the past two months, we have often heard the expressions "self-quarantine", "social distancing", "remote work" or "working from home". The coronavirus pandemic has created a multitude of **unique and new challenges**, making it important to find new ways to work and to communicate with our colleagues and partners while taking care of our mental health and well-being, too.

Unfortunately, working from home became a forced necessity rather than an individual choice in many countries around the world, including Romania, Greece, Spain, Lithuania and Poland. Working from home represents a new experience for numerous people and the circumstances in which they are working and living at the same time are unusual for the majority of them. Our routine has changed and this situation affected us, causing anxiety or stress, but we kept in mind that social distancing does not mean social isolation. Therefore, **we communicate through online instruments**, trying to be as efficient as we can and even more productive than before.

Bucovina Institute, partner within the **SEPAL** Project conducted a **research among the SEPAL team's members**, including WISE experts, ICT Specialists, Project Managers and Communication Experts. The purpose of this research was to evaluate the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the SEPAL team. 13 persons from Romania, Greece, Spain, Lithuania and Poland answered to our questions regarding the personal impact and the professional one.

As we have mentioned above, this challenging period has changed our lifestyle, preponderantly regarding our work and our relationships and it will possibly change our values and our habits, too. Therefore, concerning the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the SEPAL Project's team members' personal life, six of the respondents declared that are somewhat worried (46.2%) and three of them very worried (23.1%), meaning that only four of the respondents manifest little (23.1%) or no concern at all (7.7%) regarding the influence of the coronavirus personally.

Needless to say, our work within the **SEPAL** Project it is affected, too. Given the fact that our work largely involves face-to-face meetings with the NEETs, the employers, the LSCs and also with the local partners or the project partners, we had to adapt to the circumstances, adopting different ways of working. This means that we have been communicating and working online using different tools available for free on the internet. Asking the SEPAL Project's members about the **impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our team's work** within the SEPAL project, we observed that they are all worried about their work on the project, some to a small extent, others to a large extent.

The **SEPAL** team strives to be as efficient as before during this time of crisis, working online with the young people registered in the project. However, most of them encountered difficulties. Fortunately, our team has a sense of confidence when it comes to supporting NEETs during this period. Self-confidence is vital in almost **every aspect** of our lives, yet many people struggle to find it. It is important for us, as WISE experts who interact directly with the NEETs to convey confidence around us. NEETs need encouragement because most of them have problems with self-esteem and this is why we must emanate confidence when we speak to them.

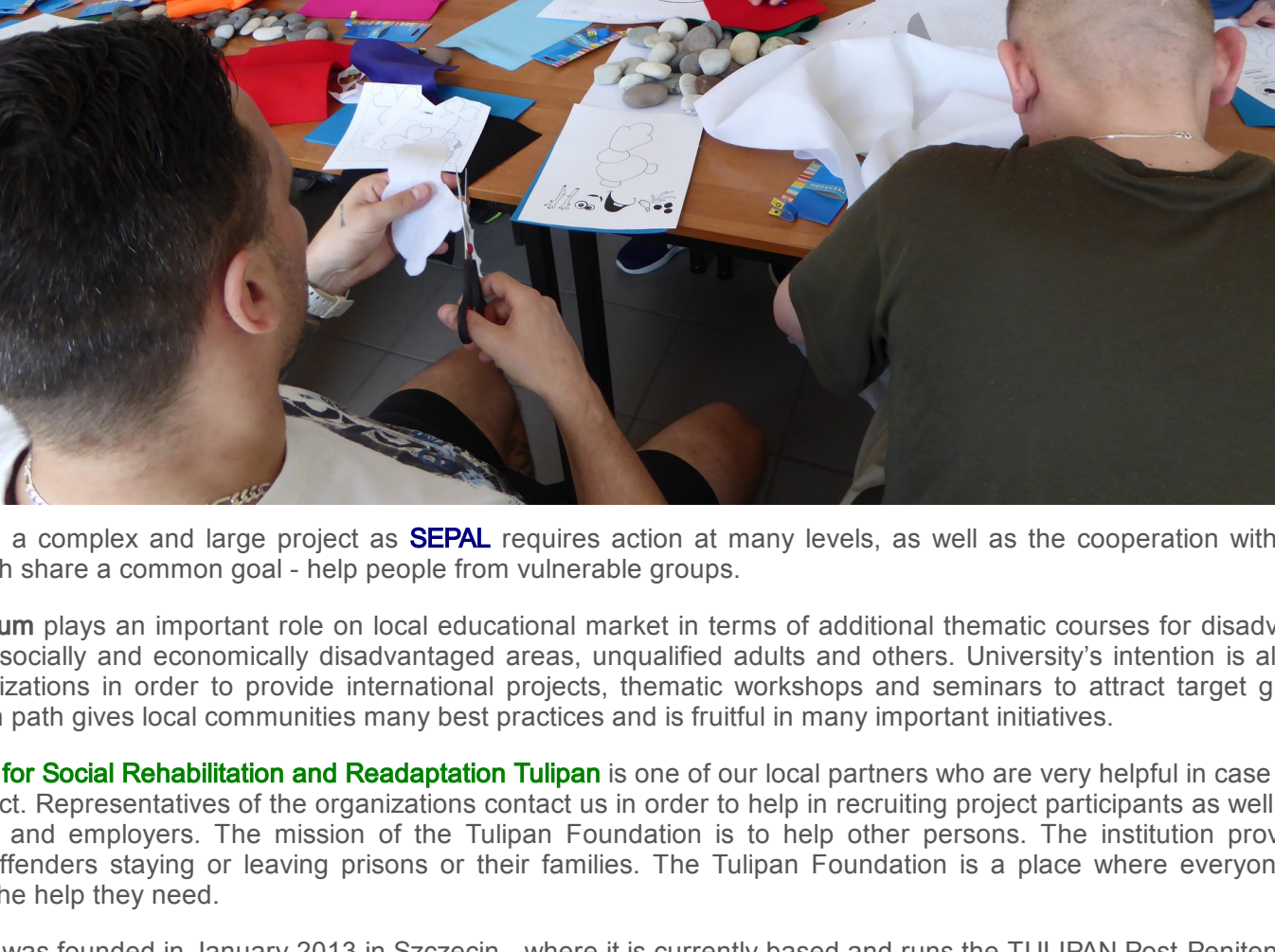
After asking the SEPAL Project team to name three **challenges that they are currently facing while working remotely**, we managed to make a top five regarding the biggest challenges:

- #1 GENERAL ANXIETY ABOUT THE IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS**
- #2 SOCIAL ISOLATION**
- #3 PHYSICAL WORKSPACE**
- #4 COMMUNICATION WITH COWORKERS**
- #5 INTERNET CONNECTIVITY**

In the end we collected some best practices from our colleagues from Romania, Greece, Spain Lithuania and Poland. We concluded that we have to take each day as an opportunity, to learn something new and to evaluate our work, developing action plans. More than this, where work can be done online, we should use the available tools for communicating with our colleagues, partners, stakeholders and NEETs, to establish and respect a work schedule. To keep in touch with the NEETs and to offer them the necessary support and motivation is also important during this period.

The final message is: KEEP CALM! DO NOT PANIC! DO NOT STRESS!

Cooperation on the road to freedom – Tulipan Foundation Poland



Working in such a complex and large project as **SEPAL** requires action at many levels, as well as the cooperation with local and state institutions, which share a common goal - help people from vulnerable groups.

Collegium Balticum plays an important role on local educational market in terms of additional thematic courses for disadvantaged groups i.e people from socially and economically disadvantaged areas, unqualified adults and others. University's intention is also to cooperate with local organizations in order to provide international projects, thematic workshops and seminars to attract target groups. This non formal education path gives local communities many best practices and is fruitful in many important initiatives.

The **Foundation for Social Rehabilitation and Readaptation Tulipan** is one of our local partners who are very helpful in case of implementing the SEPAL project. Representatives of the organizations contact us in order to help in recruiting project participants as well as in contacting local institutions and employers. The mission of the Tulipan Foundation is to help other persons. The institution provides support to prisoners and offenders staying or leaving prisons or their families. The Tulipan Foundation is a place where everyone who wants to change will get the help they need.

The Foundation was founded in January 2013 in Szczecin - where it is currently based and runs the TULIPAN Post-Penitentiary Aid Center. There are **support groups** operating in the foundation, and a number of initiatives are carried out to support their activities. The Foundation carries out its activities in the form of freedom and penitentiary (in the area of detention centers and prisons). Tulipan Foundation provides the correspondence assistance as the only institution in Poland (by letters), for convicts in prison all over Poland. In the Tulipan Foundation work specialists (experts) - people with a big heart, very educated, huge professional experience and knowledge. Tulipan Foundation's activity is supported by state institutions with which it cooperates on a daily basis, as well as private persons (former convicts, journalists, artists, publicists).

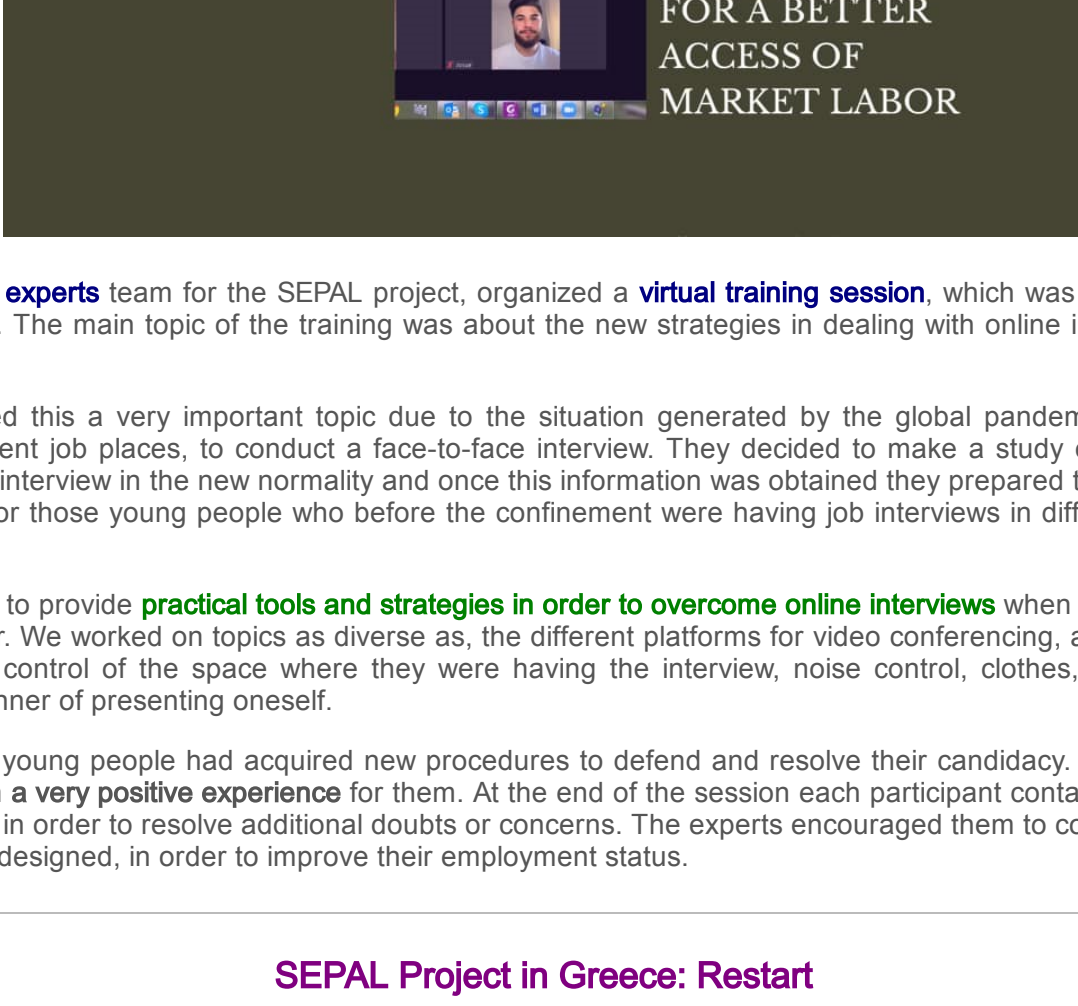
Former prisoners receive: support and motivation, information, penitentiary and post-penitentiary, legal, **vocational training**, psychological, therapeutic and social assistance. The Tulpan Foundation has already implemented more than 50 original programs and published many publications on penitentiary and post-penitentiary assistance, professional, preventive and motivational. It has created many spots and films promoting help for convicts - touching on many social problems. The Foundation has received many significant awards, among others for "Special and innovative achievements in social assistance and integration".

Our cooperation within the SEPAL project wouldn't be effective without the support of our local partners (LSC). So, in the end, we present a spot of the **Fundacja Tulipan**, which actually supports the SEPAL project and is one of the few organizations in Poland that provides comprehensive support for former convicts.

More information about **Foundation Tulipan** you can also find here: www.fundacja.tulipan.pl

Online Group Session training:

Improving the soft skills and how to have a successful Job Interview



In May, the **Spanish WISE experts** team for the SEPAL project, organized a **virtual training session**, which was held to train young people participating in the project. The main topic of the training was about the new strategies in dealing with online interviews, which they have called interviews 2.0.

Pere Ciosa has considered this a very important topic due to the situation generated by the global pandemic and the impossibility of physically moving to different job places, to conduct a face-to-face interview. They decided to make a study of what would be the most effective way to face a job interview in the new normality and once this information was obtained they prepared the theoretical and practical training. It was designed for those young people who before the confinement were having job interviews in different productive sectors of the city.

The training was designed to provide **practical tools and strategies in order to overcome online interviews** when you cannot interact directly with the potential employer. We worked on topics as diverse as, the different platforms for video conferencing, analyzing the strengths and weaknesses, through the control of the space where they were having the interview, noise control, clothes, or profile on the different platforms, but also the manner of presenting oneself.

At the end of the day, the young people had acquired new procedures to defend and resolve their candidacy. The general opinion of the group was that it had been a **very positive experience** for them. At the end of the session each participant contacted with the WISE experts through different channels in order to resolve additional doubts or concerns. The experts encouraged them to continue performing dynamic activities, such as the one designed, in order to improve their employment status.

SEPAL Project in Greece: Restart

In the last few months **PEPSAEE (Panhellenic Association for Psychosocial Rehabilitation & Work Integration)** has been delighted to cooperate with **KoISPE "Diadromes"** and to participate as a Local Stakeholder (LSC) in **SEPAL project**. Part of this partnership is the **apprenticeship** of Mr. E.K. at the Specialized Day Centre - "PEPSAEE Social Dialogue Centre".

Mr. E.K. was introduced to the organisation four months ago, when he visited the premises along with the WISE expert Evie Georgakopoulou in order to gain a direct, first-hand experience of the context and the people of PEPSAEE and similarly for our associates in PEPSAEE to meet the participant. In this first meeting E.K. was quiet but showed his sincere intent to conduct his apprenticeship at the centre as he really liked the space.

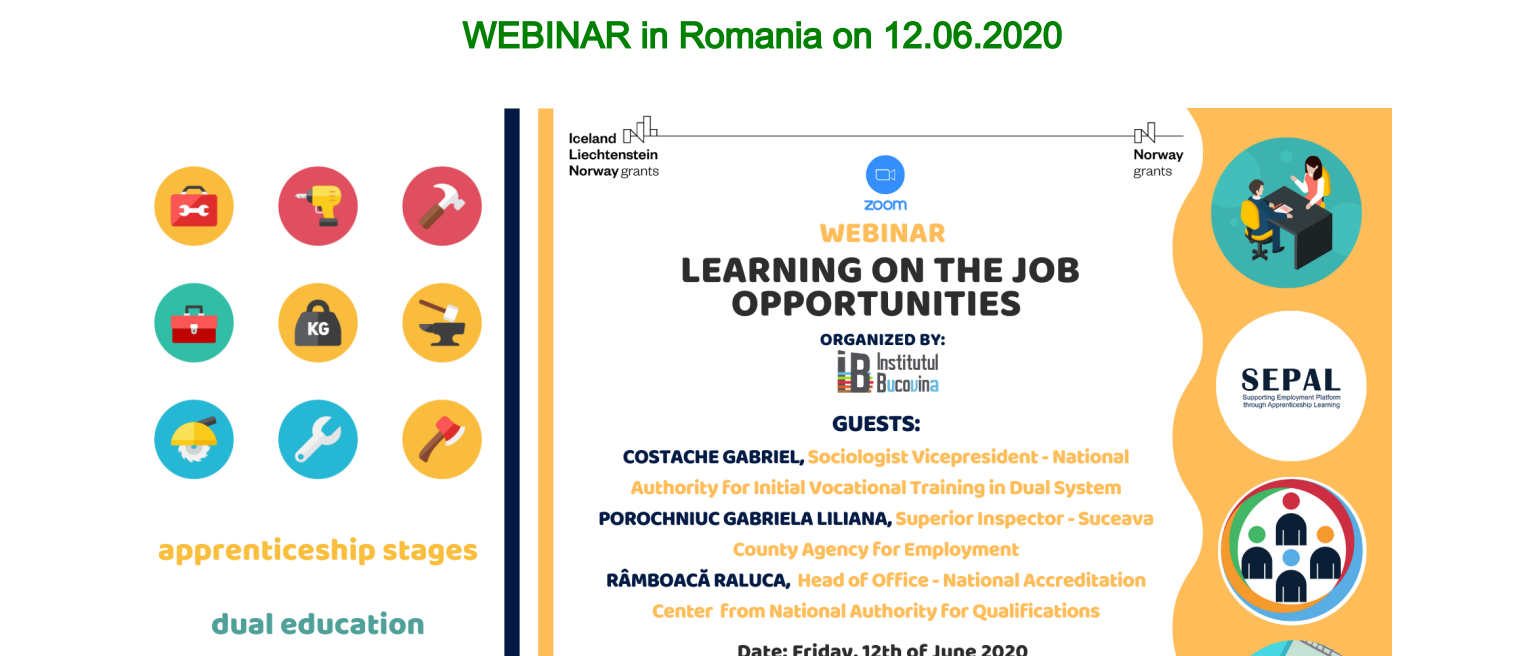
In the meetings that followed, he gradually familiarized himself with the site and the employees and from the very first day of his apprenticeship he took up certain duties. Specifically, he has undertaken the preparation of the room where the IT training groups are carried out – that is the 2 out of the 41 workshops that are being held this year at the Centre for Social Dialogue. Mr. E.K. obviously feels more comfortable in the centre while also developing dialogue with other employees. However, the consistency shown by his impeccable commitment to his duties must not be overlooked.

During the COVID-19 outbreak and the subsequent lock down, E.K. ceased his apprenticeship until further notice. His frustration was evident as well as his impatience to reconnect and complete his participation. During the quarantine period, **he had constant and regular contact with the WISE expert** Evie, who supported him and helped him to increase his tolerance for waiting, to verbalize the feelings and dissatisfaction he experienced, in a quarantine with no visible horizon. Furthermore, the WISE's role was to fill the gap created by the quarantine and to ensure the "continuity" of the project (and of the services provided) within this unpredictable condition.

When the government introduced the easing of lock-down restrictions, E.K. was thrilled to receive the news of his resuming the apprenticeship in PEPSAEE. In the meantime, many things had been modified in the operation and services provided by PEPSAEE, such as the cancellation of some of the workshops, in which E.K. had the task of preparing the room.

A new meeting was carried out, that was attended by the WISE expert, the LSC's representative Ioanna Tsamblati (Psychologist MSc, Head of the Office of Supported Employment) and the participant, during which the duties of the E.K. were redefined. Specifically, and given that E.K. had a long experience in gardening, he was assigned the corresponding tasks in the garden of PEPSAEE. Mrs. E. Prokopiou, who has the overall responsibility of the garden also attended the meeting and was appointed as the **participant's mentor** for the specific tasks.

The cooperation of KoISPE "Diadromes" with PEPSAEE dates far back and is remarkably close. The **SEPAL project** offered the opportunity to systematize the exchange of experiences, expertise, and good practice, as well as activities which may lead to long-lasting quality projects, partnerships and networks.



WEBINAR in Romania on 12.06.2020



On the 12th of June at **Bucovina Institute**, we had the pleasure to organize an **online event** within the **project SEPAL**, an webinar which took place online on the Zoom Platform and which was entitled: **"Learning on the Job Opportunities"**. The participants who attended the webinar were specialists in the fields of dual education, apprenticeship, certification and employment from different institutions at County and National level.

Within the SEPAL Webinar, several specialists in the fields of dual education, apprenticeship, certification and employment from different institutions at County and National level had an intervention regarding the Perspectives on dual education in Romania, the Law of Apprenticeship, Assessment of skills acquired in a non-formal and/or informal way. We had guests from County Agency for Employment, National Authority for Initial Vocational Training in Dual System and National Authority for Qualifications.

In addition, one **NEET registered in the SEPAL Project, Arina Melniculuc** employed at Suceava County Hospital as a medical assistant, shared her thoughts about her learning on the job experience, mentioning the support she got during her apprenticeship stage and the qualities that a NEET who wants to learn for a job in the field mentioned above should have. She was and still is a very motivated and positive person, eager to learn and to continuously develop her knowledge and abilities. You can watch **Arina's testimonial** [HERE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnTgYUybY8&t=4s).

More than this, we had four **mentors who manifested the need of having apprentices at their workplace**, being eager to train young people to earn the necessary skills through practice and experiential learning and with whom we established a relationship of collaboration.

In conclusion, the Webinar "Learning on the Job Opportunities" turned out to be a real success, having 224 individuals registered on Zoom and 176 of them participated directly within the webinar. More than this, we managed to gather specialists at the national level (National Authority for Initial Vocational Training in Dual Training and National Authority for Qualifications) and we had the support of our Local Stakeholders from the County Employment Agency (AJOFM, Suceava). What is important to mention is that we collaborated with a few mentors from Suceava that are willing and prepared to guide and hire NEETs motivated to learn and to get employed.

The **full video of the Webinar "Learning on the Job Opportunities"** can be found on our YouTube Account and you can access it by clicking the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnTgYUybY8&t=4s>



It's time for apprenticeship

SomEsquex is one of the local stakeholder that **Pere Ciosa** Spain started working with in the very beginning of the project and that participated at the stakeholder's meeting in Greece. It is a non-profit association in the Baix Llobregat/**Barcelona** that recovers abandoned farms to promote social agriculture under ecological criteria, responsible consumption and the training and employment of people at risk of social exclusion. They believe that the best way to reclaim land is to use it socially and responsibly. *"We grow under ecological criteria to preserve the environment and minimize the ecological footprint."*

They are **social and inclusive** because they promote the social and solidarity economy, are part of the social fabric of the region and share the values of cooperation, responsibility and care of people. They work for people to be a center of new opportunities rooted in the earth. The mission of their association is to create a **work and training space that respects diversity**, the principles of social justice and equal opportunities for all workers.

Related to this mission, **Fundacion Privada Pere Ciosa** and **SomEsquex** start with a very good approach of apprenticeship. The project idea consists in theoretical and practical training course in agriculture ecological development and the acquisition of transversal skills to improve the employment of people and accompany them in the job placement process. The project is designed to serve a small group of 5-10 people. The origin of the participants will be through a referral process from the Pere Ciosa Foundation.

The recipients of the training will be in the age group of 20-30 years. This group has specific needs that are taken into account for determining the individualized work plan. Talking about specific needs, is related to the social and legal situation of our NEETs as part of this **apprenticeship initiative**. They are youngsters, migrants, and with a very considerable level of poverty. Thanks to this apprenticeship program they can gain practical experience on how to work in horticulture field and can be employed in different farms. Regarding to the recent Spanish state decrees the people who work at least 2 years in farms they can normalize they legal residence in Spain.



What's for dinner today?

Eligija Baliene (27 years old) is a **SEPAL project** participant from Šiauliai/Lithuania. She brings joy to her workplace clients with some delicious dishes. Read her story and you'll understand that the best chefs are the ones who don't give up.



"I've been interested in working in the kitchen since I was a child. I've been cooking with my mom since I was 12, so I already knew I wanted to be a chef. The more time passed, the more I admired it. It was hard to get started, I wanted to throw everything away because it wasn't as easy as it might seem from the outside. There were both tears and frustration, but the desire to prove I could continue going forward was stronger. That's why I was promoted fast - from an assistant kitchen worker, I became the one of the chefs in charge of the whole kitchen in less than a month. I prepare the banquets, what is more, I am responsible for the final quality of the dish before serving it to the customer. I learned a lot from more experienced chefs in this kitchen. And what fascinates me most about my work is that new challenges are waiting for me every day. Although sometimes they seem very heavy, cheering words as 'well done' and 'Thanks for the delicious food' make up for it all. That's why I love my job so much. ❤️" – says Eligija.

She is an inspiration for following your dream despite all the struggles and challenges. **Dare to follow Your dream, too – join SEPAL project!**

The SEPAL project is financed by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Youth Employment.

