



**WINNOVATORS**  
Boosting entrepreneurial and  
STEAM capacity

# Deliverable 4.2

## Policy Guidelines for HEI Educators and Communities: WINnovators Project

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**WINNOVATORS**

“Boosting young women entrepreneurial spirit and skills to become the Women INNOVATORS of the future”



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## PROJECT PARTNERS



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## 1. Executive Summary

The **WINnovators project** emerged with a bold vision: to uplift marginalized young women, particularly in rural areas, by equipping them with STEM/STEAM and entrepreneurial skills. In doing so, it seeks not only to address gaps in digital and business skills but also to foster a sense of agency and opportunity among these women.

This policy paper, designed as a guide for HEI educators, community leaders, and policymakers, brings together the critical insights and recommendations derived from the WINnovators initiative. It is intended to facilitate the broader adoption and integration of WINnovators' innovative educational practices into formal curricula and community programs. By offering targeted recommendations at the EU, national, and local levels, this paper envisions a framework that ensures the sustainability, inclusivity, and impact of educational interventions focused on marginalized women across Europe.

## 2. Introduction to WINnovators and Policy Context

The **WINnovators Project** is a cross-border initiative that has sought to empower young women who are often excluded from the mainstream pathways to digital and entrepreneurial skill development. By integrating higher education institutions (HEIs), local community resources, and a tailored eTraining platform, the project provides an innovative and inclusive model that goes beyond traditional education.

With its primary focus on marginalized women, WINnovators is structured to overcome barriers faced by these women in accessing education and career opportunities in fields such as technology and entrepreneurship. The project brings together academic institutions, business incubators, NGOs, and policymakers to create a nurturing environment that fosters personal and professional growth. This policy paper builds on the project's success, identifying how HEIs and communities can create more inclusive spaces for marginalized groups, particularly young women in rural areas.

### 3. Key Challenges and Opportunities

In implementing the WINnovators model, the project partners identified significant challenges that influence policy recommendations. These barriers underscore the need for a multifaceted approach to create supportive ecosystems within HEIs and local communities.

- 1. Digital Access and Infrastructure:** For many young women in rural areas, the lack of digital infrastructure is a barrier to participating in online education. Limited internet access, insufficient digital tools, and a lack of technological literacy hinder the reach and effectiveness of eTraining. Overcoming this digital divide requires infrastructure improvements, but also creative solutions such as partnerships with local government and businesses to establish accessible technology hubs.
- 2. Cultural and Social Barriers:** In many communities, gender stereotypes and traditional expectations limit women's engagement in fields such as STEM/STEAM and entrepreneurship. These cultural barriers can dampen confidence, restrict educational aspirations, and reduce participation in skill-building programs. The WINnovators approach, therefore, emphasizes community involvement, mentorship, and local role models to challenge and shift these perceptions, encouraging young women to envision themselves as entrepreneurs and leaders.
- 3. Curricular Integration in HEIs:** Higher education institutions often have limited flexibility in integrating interdisciplinary programs, especially those that merge STEM and entrepreneurial training. These institutions need policy support to introduce flexible curricula that allow for hands-on, problem-based learning models like WINnovators. Supportive policies can enable HEIs to prioritize such training, including grants and incentives to foster a more interdisciplinary, inclusive curriculum.
- 4. Sustainability of Training Models:** A significant challenge lies in ensuring the continuity of programs like WINnovators beyond their initial funding period. While the project demonstrates immediate benefits, sustaining its impact requires ongoing investment, strong local partnerships, and mechanisms to maintain alumni engagement and resource availability. Creating networks of support and community-based partnerships can ensure that the project's benefits continue to thrive.

## 4. Policy Recommendations

These policy recommendations are designed to address the challenges highlighted above, providing pathways for various stakeholders to support WINnovators' vision across different governance levels.

### At the EU Level:

- **Funding and Visibility:** The European Union can play a pivotal role by amplifying the success stories of WINnovators through platforms like the European School Education Platform, inspiring similar initiatives across member states. Additionally, EU funding mechanisms such as Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe should prioritize projects that foster gender equity and inclusivity in STEM/STEAM fields, ensuring that more HEIs and local communities can adopt and scale similar models.
- **Gender-Inclusive Policies:** EU policy should advocate for gender sensitivity across all educational and vocational training programs. By setting guidelines for gender equity and actively supporting initiatives that challenge stereotypes, the EU can help bridge the gender gap in STEM/STEAM and entrepreneurship.

### At the National Level:

- **HEI Integration:** National governments can support HEIs by incentivizing the integration of programs like WINnovators. Offering accreditation for programs that incorporate entrepreneurship, STEM/STEAM, and gender-sensitive training can encourage more institutions to adopt this model.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** National campaigns can reshape perceptions of women in technology and entrepreneurship, challenging stereotypes and promoting positive role models. Such campaigns could highlight success stories from WINnovators, showing the real-world impact of supporting women in these fields.
- **Mentorship and Networking:** Mentorship is a critical component of WINnovators. National policies can create frameworks to establish mentorship networks, connecting young women with professionals and role models in their field. This support network is invaluable in overcoming barriers, building confidence, and fostering resilience among participants.

### At the Local Level:

- **Community Technology Hubs:** Local governments can partner with businesses and NGOs to create accessible community technology hubs that provide internet access, computers, and

other resources. These hubs support marginalized young women, helping them access WINnovators training and other online learning opportunities.

- **Business Incubation and Support:** To nurture an entrepreneurial culture, local governments and business associations can provide mentorship, networking opportunities, and funding options for women-led startups, especially in rural areas. By connecting WINnovators graduates with incubators and business mentors, communities can create pathways for sustainable local businesses.

## 5. Role of HEIs and Educators in Policy Implementation

HEIs are central to implementing WINnovators' policy recommendations. Their leadership and willingness to innovate within educational frameworks are essential to creating an inclusive environment that fosters learning and entrepreneurship.

- **Guidelines for HEIs:** HEIs should commit to supporting initiatives like WINnovators by allocating resources, developing local training teams, and formalizing their support through official documentation. Policy incentives that encourage such initiatives within HEIs will enable more institutions to adopt similar programs.
- **Guidelines for Educators:** Educators play a crucial role in delivering training and providing mentorship. Professional development in digital entrepreneurship and gender-sensitive teaching methodologies is essential. Educators must also be equipped to support marginalized women, guiding them through a process that builds both technical skills and confidence.

## 6. Specific Policy Guidelines for Program Design and Delivery

To ensure effective implementation, specific policies are recommended for various aspects of program delivery:

1. **Educational Settings:** Courses should blend online and in-person modes to accommodate different learning environments, especially for rural participants. Materials must be accessible and adaptable, ensuring that all participants, regardless of digital access, can fully engage with the content.



2. **Course Structure and Assessment:** Each course should have clear learning objectives, targeted audiences, and assessment methods. Gamification techniques like digital badges and leaderboards are effective in maintaining engagement and should be part of course design.
3. **Material and Resource Policies:** Open-source materials and Creative Commons licenses can reduce barriers to access, allowing broader use and adaptation of educational resources. Collaboration among project partners enables a unified and accessible framework.
4. **Certification Policies:** Certifications should be meaningful and recognized, encouraging participants to share their achievements on social media to build credibility and encourage broader engagement.

## 7. Implementation Strategies

- **HEI Partnerships:** Building partnerships among HEIs, local businesses, and NGOs can create a foundation for sustained engagement, fostering a community that supports and amplifies the impact of WINnovators beyond the program duration.
- **Capacity Building Events:** Regular events such as alumni meetups and multiplier events provide ongoing professional development, networking, and mentorship opportunities for WINnovators graduates. These events encourage continued engagement and offer a platform for feedback and program refinement.
- **Monitoring and Feedback Mechanisms:** Continuous feedback from participants and stakeholders helps ensure that the program evolves to meet the needs of the target group. Establishing clear channels for feedback will support ongoing improvement of the WINnovators program.

## 8. Conclusion

The WINnovators project highlights the transformative power of targeted educational initiatives in addressing gender disparities and building capacity among marginalized groups. Through sustained efforts at the EU, national, and local levels, HEIs and community stakeholders can play a pivotal role in ensuring that young women in rural areas have the skills, confidence, and opportunities to contribute meaningfully to the economy and society.