



Co-funded by
the European Union



DEW

Digital Entrepreneurship for Women

2021-1-IE01-KA220-VET-000033081

PR1 – Gender Effect Assessment

- *Country Snapshot – Composite*
- *Survey results*

Prepared by: All DEW project partners



The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



Co-funded by
the European Union

The DEW Project: A Summary

The lack of female participation in the EU labour market continues to represent a significant source of untapped potential for EU economies. As outlined by the EU Commission Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, gender stereotypes and male-dominated models and networks continue to prevail to the detriment of women. Covid-19 has undoubtedly exacerbated the challenges of female entrepreneurship promotion as well as the social challenges of violence against women and discrimination. However, the post-pandemic landscape provides for new opportunities for female entrepreneurship, therefore, DEW - Digital Entrepreneurship for Women - is ideally placed to respond to the need for gender-specific training around digital enterprise as well as to the under-representation of women in the entrepreneurial space.

Within this context, DEW delivers the following innovative solutions:

- Developing innovative, gender-specific training on female entrepreneurship with specific focuses on key areas where women entrepreneurs experience the most challenges (i.e., access to finance, digitalisation and accessing networks)
- Establishing an Open Educational Resource Platform which enables access to free resources in 4 languages
- Contributing to policy development on the topic of women entrepreneurs and digital enterprises, by specifically applying a gender lens to the ENTRECOMP Framework

DEW harnesses the expertise of seven partners from five countries who represent the various dimensions and aspects of female entrepreneurship with a specific emphasis on digital empowerment. Within the partnership are public and private sector organisations as well as academic, NGO and ICT partners. All of this expertise will combine to successfully deliver on this innovative project.



OBJECTIVES

DEW is an operational solution to the challenges faced by existing and potential female entrepreneurs in a post-pandemic world. DEW aligns itself with the key Erasmus+ priorities:

- Inclusion and diversity in education and training
- Digital transformation
- Adapting VET to labour market needs
- Increase flexibility of opportunities in VET

DEW addresses the issue of social and economic exclusion of women, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds who do not have the opportunity to access supports to acquire or enhance digital enterprise skills. The DEW OER will enhance opportunities for new and existing female entrepreneurs as well as the suite of supports available to the project partners and external VET providers. DEW will contribute to policy as part of the Gender Effect Assessment, applying a gender lens to the ENTRECOMP framework, and it will create a European-wide Community of Practice on the issue combining the learning and results into a format that can enhance and strengthen new policy.

ACTIVITIES

1. Map the ecosystem of female entrepreneurship to extrapolate gender-specific needs and competencies on to the existing ENTRECOMP framework, through primary and secondary research
2. Develop and maintain the DEW OER Platform to provide visibility to project activities and promote the adoption and use of the DEW tools and resources in their multilingual versions
3. Develop and deliver innovative training specifically tailored and targeted to existing or prospective women entrepreneurs



4. Validate in real operational environments the DEW tools and training involving at least 100 target groups
5. Promote the adoption and replication of DEW by mainstreaming its use across EU

This document presents an overview snapshot of EU-wide digital skills. Its purpose is to:

- 1) Present an overview of digital entrepreneurial needs for female entrepreneurs in Europe
- 2) Provide a foundation for proposed digital entrepreneurship training content for female entrepreneurs and for identifying modules to be developed in PR3 of the DEW Project.
- 3) To populate the Project OER for the purpose of open source free digital entrepreneurship training for women.
- 4) Provide country level data for the Project Result (PR1) Gender Effect Assessment as required in the project contract.
- 5) Present the result of the transnational cross-sectoral survey conducted by all partners in Q2 2022.



Report Contents

The DEW Project: A Summary.....	2
1. Female Digital Entrepreneurship	5
2. EU Profile of Female Entrepreneurship	7
3. Transnational survey results	11
4. Recommendations for DEW PR3 Training	16

This DEW Composite report, completed as part of the PR1 activities, was completed following the preparation of a country snapshot by each partner in the DEW Project; France, Ireland, Italy and Spain. The remaining project partner prepared an EU level report in relation to digital skills for female entrepreneurs. The outcomes of each of these snapshots, which can be located on the DEW project website, were amalgamated to produce this composite report. All partners conducted desk research on the trends, challenges and opportunities in relation to digital entrepreneurship for women in business.

The purpose of this report is to provide foundation and direction for digital entrepreneurial content that will be hosted on the DEW Project Open Educational Resource (OER) and will be an integral element of the contribution to knowledge that is established by DEW.

1. Female Digital Entrepreneurship

Female entrepreneurs and business leads are an integral part of the EU economy. However across the EU, the percentage of women in entrepreneurship is still low. Gender-based discrimination still impacts on the decision of women to start a business, while the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted and increased gender gaps, having had a disproportionate impact on female participation to the labour market. In the entrepreneurial sector, female entrepreneurs were affected more than male entrepreneurs for several reasons. Firstly, the majority of female-led businesses are SME’s and smaller businesses had less resources and capacity to respond to the global crisis of the pandemic.

Many of them expended their savings simply trying to survive, (Eurochambers 2022). In addition to this, women remain responsible for most of the unpaid care work (Hillard, 2019, IBEC, 2021). This negatively impacted female entrepreneurs' work/life balance and contributed to an already existing gender-pay gap.

Since 2010, the EU Directive 2010/41 bound EU Member States to promote entrepreneurship initiatives for women, introducing the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in self-employment. More than ten years later, the European Parliament recognises that at EU level investors still tend to favour male entrepreneurs, while women have limited access to business networks or informal learning and they acquire fewer business-related competences (European Parliament, 2021).

From 2016 to 2020, WEbarometer (2020) reported that nearly four out of ten women in the EU (38%) stated that they had the skills and knowledge to start a business, relative to 50% of men. In addition, the Gender Equality Index 2020 (European Institute for Gender Equality) identified a need for digital entrepreneurship competences, especially for women experiencing social disadvantages. Indeed, according to the European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2021-2025, digital technologies and solutions can accelerate progress on gender equality and women's empowerment in the field of entrepreneurship.

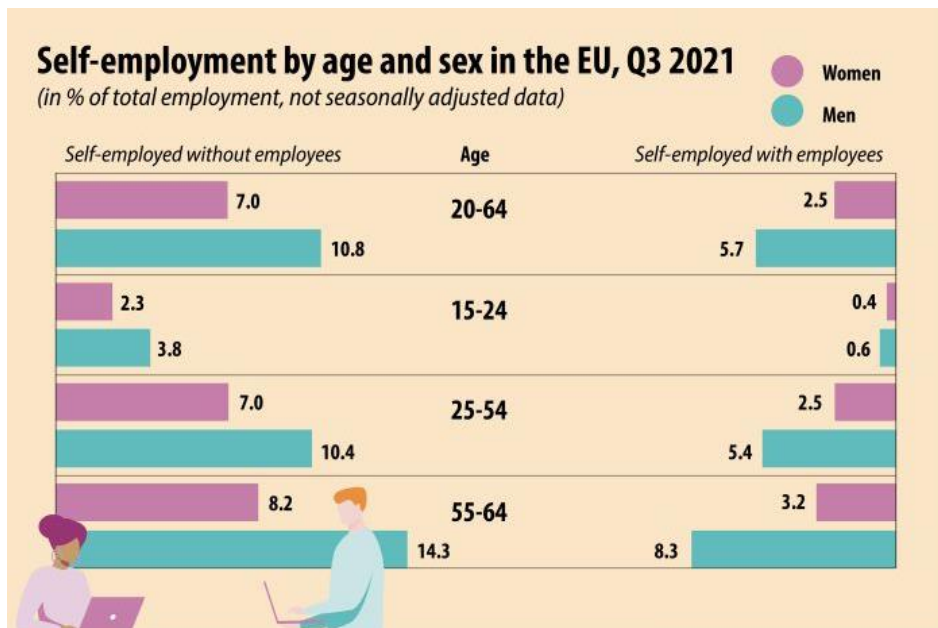
The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) defines entrepreneurship as any one of the following; (i) starting a business in the next two years, (ii) actively involved in planning a venture and organising a start-up team, (iii) wholly or partly owning and/or managing a business, or (iv) having already set up a business and continuing to own and/or manage it. Considering this, the DEW Consortium defines female entrepreneurship as any attempt at new business or venture creation, such as self-employment, a new business organisation, or the expansion of business, by any woman, or team of women, or an established female-led business. In relation to digital entrepreneurship, policy frameworks are regularly based on the definition set out by the European Commission and the OECD (2021), as any entrepreneur who creates a digital business or adopts digital technologies for an existing business.

As outlined above and also by the EU Commission Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, gender stereotypes and male-dominated models and networks continue to prevail to the detriment of women. Women make up 52% of the total EU population, yet only 34% are self-employed and just 30% of start-up entrepreneurs are female (WEgate, European Commission, 2020). Covid-19 has undoubtedly exacerbated the challenges of female entrepreneurship promotion yet at the same time, the post-pandemic landscape provides for new opportunities for female entrepreneurship, specifically the unexploited potential of digital entrepreneurship.

2. EU Profile of Female Entrepreneurship

Analysing the most recent statistics from Eurostat, it is evident that men continue to be more likely to be self-employed. (Eurostat, 2021). Figure 1 presents a comparison of self-employment by both age and sex.

Figure 1:



(Source: Eurostat, 2021)



Further research from Eurostat affirms this, with men outnumbering women both as entrepreneurs with and without employees (see Figures 2 & 3).

Figure 2: Entrepreneurs with employees

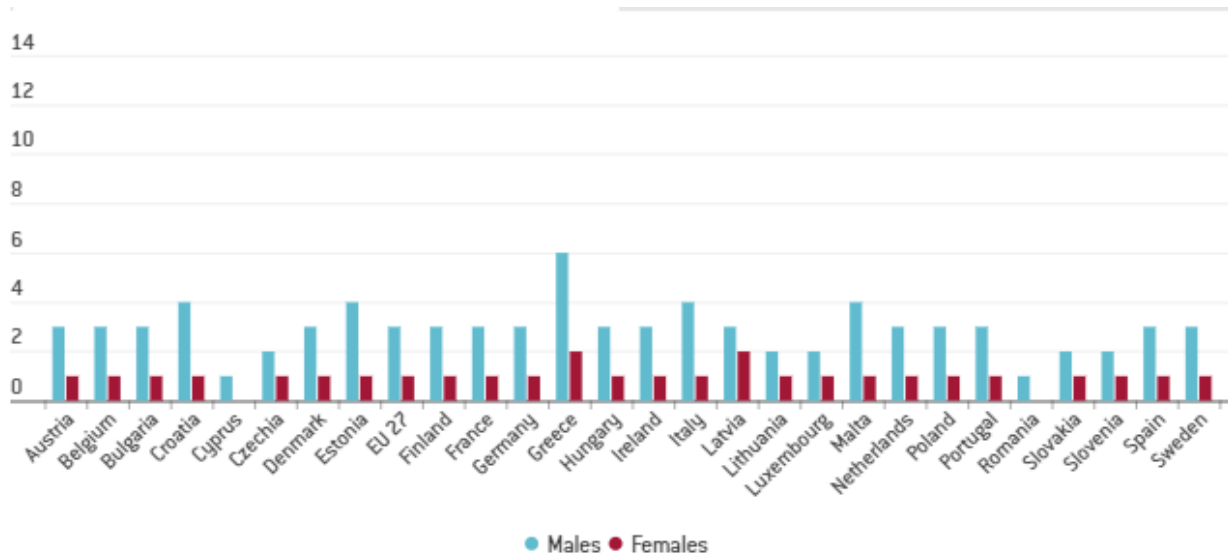
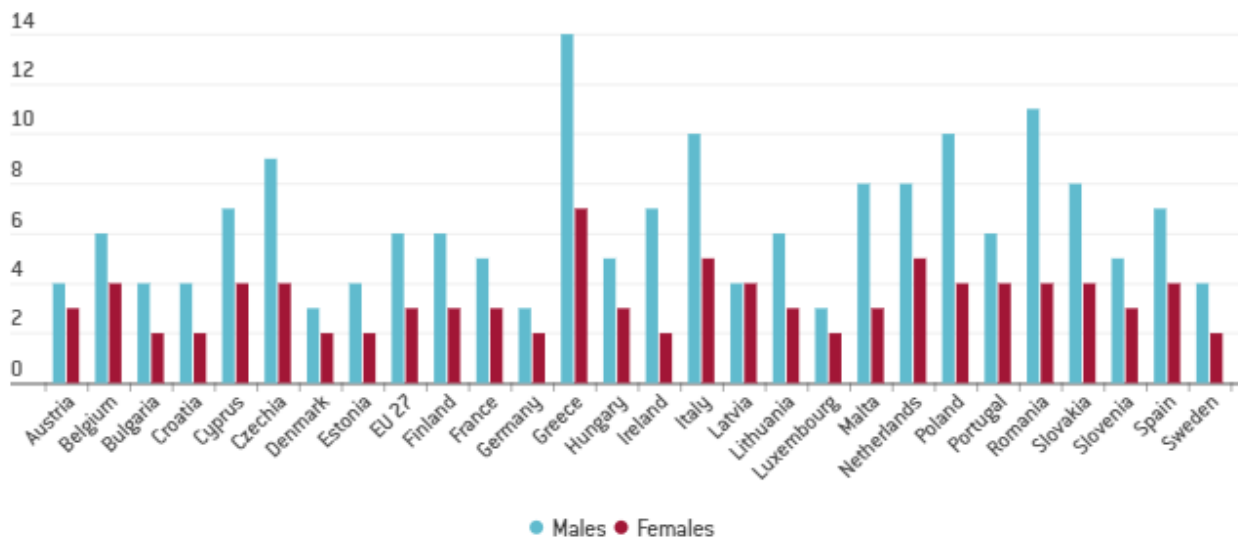


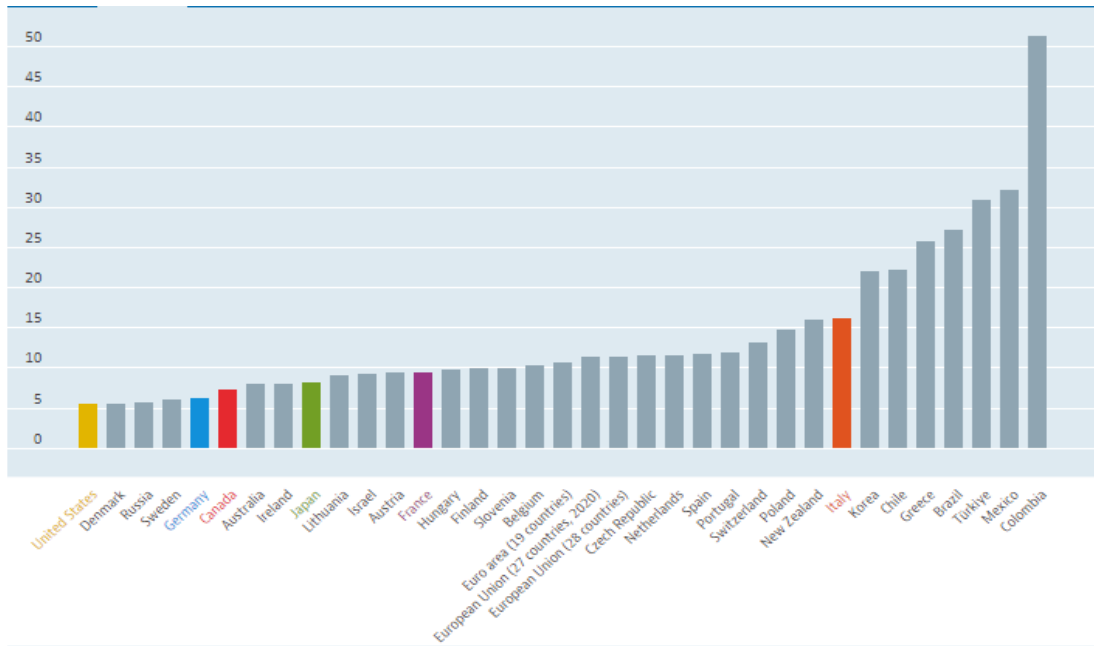
Figure 3: Entrepreneurs without employees



(Source: Eurostat 2020)

Finally, the OECD data presented in Figure 4, shows the self-employment rate across the OECD but with DEW partner countries included. Figure 4 presents the percentage rate of female entrepreneurs with the DEW partner and EU rates presented in Table 1.

Figure 4: % of female entrepreneurs (OECD and EU)



(Source: OECD, 2021)

France	9.5%
Ireland	8.1%
Italy	16.2%
Spain	11.8%
EU	11.4%



Key themes emerging from the DEW partner country reports included:

- **Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic**
- **Access to financial supports for female digital entrepreneurs**
- **Digital upskilling**
- **Adoption of digital technologies**

The specific focus of the DEW partner country reports was the identification of skills needs for female digital entrepreneurs within each country. Table 2 presents the identified skills across all DEW partner countries.

Table 2: Skills needs identified in DEW partner country reports

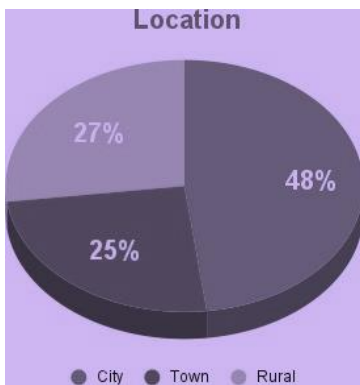
Access to Finance	Marketing	Digital Skills
Pricing	Leadership	Communications
Networking	Work/Life Balance/ Wellbeing	Business Planning
Confidence/ Motivation	Coping with Risk	Self-awareness

3. Transnational survey results

As part of the activity under DEW PR1, a survey was conducted within all partner countries. The objective of the survey was to hear from primary sources of current entrepreneurial challenges in post-COVID markets as perceived by professionals and stakeholders (for our proposal). The survey questions were developed by all partners based on the EntreComp Framework and experience within the sector.

The survey was distributed via Google drive and it was shared online using a variety of methods such as partner’s own mailing lists, social media etc. All responses were collected in this way with the survey available in Italian, French and Spanish as well as English. Relevant partners translated the surveys into English and returned them in spreadsheets for compilation. As part of the DEW application process, the survey had a target of 200 and the final number of respondents was 206.

Key survey demographics



Location

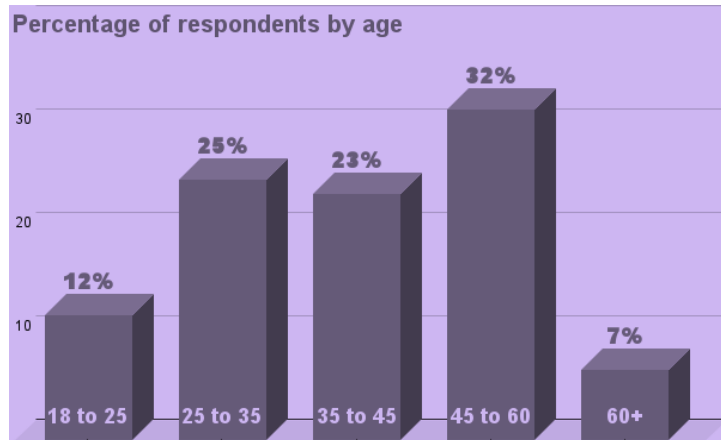
206 respondents completed the survey. Almost half (48%) live within a city containing a population greater than 50,000 people.

Nearly thirty percent reside in a rural area. The remaining twenty five percent live in a town containing less than 50,000.

Age

Age groups were divided into five categories. 66 respondents (32%) fall within the 45-60 age group.

The 25-35 and 35-45 categories are almost equal at 25% and 24% respectively. 18-25 account for 12% while the 60+ group is the smallest, containing 7%.

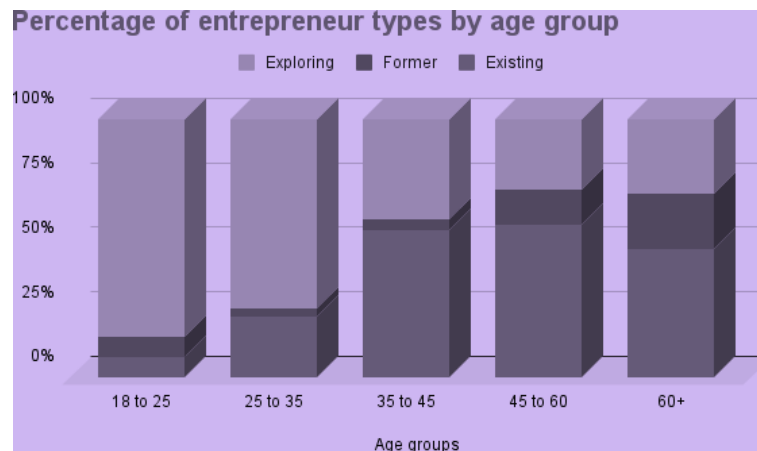


Education level & entrepreneur type

Over 80% went to third level education. The majority of which (50%) obtained a Masters level qualification. 12% went to technical college while the remaining 7% (14 people) went from secondary school to the workplace.

The majority of participants were either existing entrepreneurs (44%) or exploring the possibility of becoming one (48%).

While many over 35 year olds are exploring entrepreneurship, significantly more younger respondents are doing so. The reverse pattern occurs with a greater number of existing entrepreneurs over 35. While greatest among those over 45, former entrepreneurs exist across all age categories with more in the 18-25 than both the 25-35 and 35-45 groups.



Experience of the Covid-19 pandemic

A range of questions teased out various entrepreneur experiences relating to the COVID 19 pandemic and its effect on their business.

When asked about the possible new opportunities provided by the pandemic, 54% of respondents reported no new opportunities, however the remainder (46%) outlined:

- Shifting markets
- Application of Technology
- Business function
- Output altered
- Skills

The establishment of particular collaborations unique to the pandemic business environment e.g. networking via local Covid-19 response forums was also highlighted.



Skills needs

Respondents were asked to rank skills needs, in particular the four most important skills required by female entrepreneurs. Skills were selected from the EntreComp framework and were ranked by respondents as presented in Table 3:

Table 3 – Respondent-ranked skills for female digital entrepreneurs

1	Self-awareness	2	Motivation	3	Planning & management	4	Financial Literacy
5	Initiative	6	Digital skills	7	Managing risk	8	Sustainable thinking
9	Spotting opportunities	10	Leadership & communications	11	Managing work-life balance	12	Working with others
13	Creativity	14	Mobilising resources	15	Learning through experience	16	Vision
17	Mobilising Others	18	Valuing ideas	19	Pricing & marketing	20	Pitching to investors

When asked to elaborate on specific skills and qualities, four categories of skills were identified presented in Table 4.



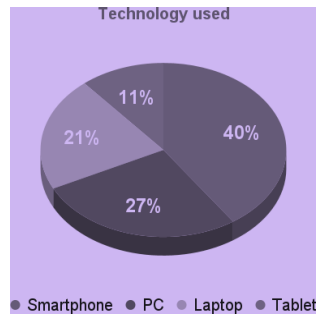
Table 4: Skills and qualities identified by respondents

PERSONAL SKILLS	BUSINESS ACTIVITY
<i>“Technology can be cold and lifeless. Women can ensure that the personal touch is present and accounted for. I believe that in this changing world our personal skills will be an advantage”.</i>	<i>“The ability to set up a network to mobilise the right contacts”</i>
Self-confidence / Passion	Delegation / Prioritisation / Time Management
Insight / Ability to find own way	Good staff support & appreciation of quality staff
Understanding community needs	Reinventing business digitally / Knowledge of sector
Digital skills	Marketing & Market research
Empathy	Flexibility in working hours & tasks
INTERACTION & COMMUNICATION	OBSTACLES & PLANNING
<i>“Above all, emotional intelligence ... working with others... and it amazes me that it is not mentioned”.</i>	<i>“Resilience- a lot of people almost laugh at you when you say you want to start a business. Believe in yourself and your abilities”</i>
Facilitate meetings online	Perseverance / Grit
Social network management & communication	Work life balance / Multitasking (more appreciation)
Social media promo skills	Not giving up in the face of adversity
Good communication / listening	Learn every day
Being unique / Relationship building	Strategic vision

Digital Skills

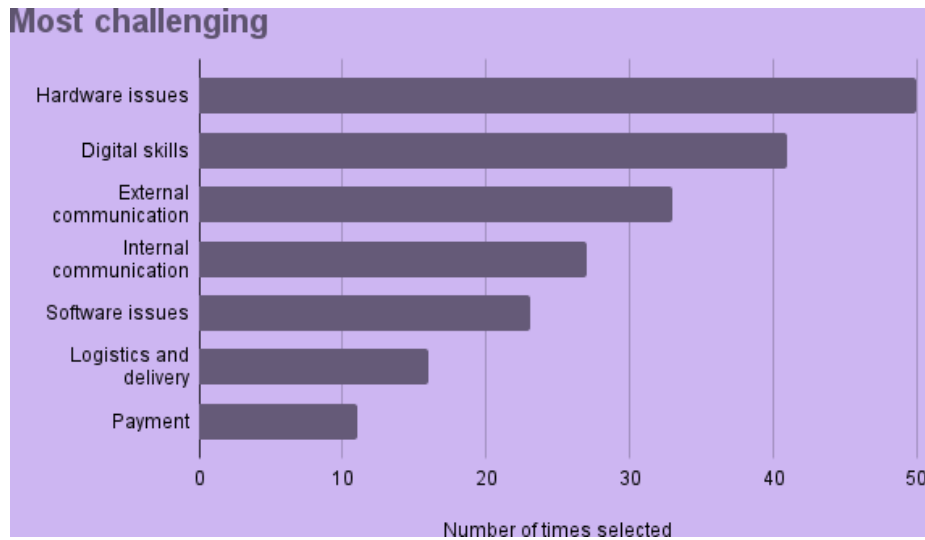
Respondents were asked a series of questions in relation to their digital skills and perceived needs. Almost two-thirds (62%) felt that technology had always been essential to their business with 14% believing it essential since the pandemic. Smartphones are the dominant technology (as presented in Figure 5) and the importance of high quality broadband was also highlighted. The time and ability required to adopt new digital technologies was also a factor.

Figure 5: Technology used by female digital entrepreneurs



Finally, one fifth of respondents reported digital skills as being amongst the most challenging obstacle to digital transformation. These responses are presented in Figure 6:

Figure 5: Most challenging obstacles to digital transformation





Unique attributes of Female Entrepreneurs

Respondents were asked to comment on the unique attributes and skills of digital female entrepreneurs. The responses reflected the impact of the pandemic but also provided insights into the mind-set of this cohort of entrepreneurs and informed the development of the training material. Responses included:

- Innovative, Pragmatic, Adaptable, Empathetic
- Listening in a time of crisis
- Understanding customers
- Ability to create communities and networks
- Attentive to sustainability
- Offer different visions for equal business models - application of technology has the potential to overcome inequalities within and external to the enterprise.

4. Recommendations for DEW PR3 Training

Based on the evidence from the DEW partner country reports, along with the survey results, a number of areas of learning have been identified which also align with the DEW application.

It is clear that the pandemic has had significant impact on female-led enterprises; however it has also provided certain opportunities as well as impetus to further develop digital entrepreneurial skills.

The country snapshots prepared by all DEW partners indicate that there is a need to support the enhancement of digital skills for female entrepreneurs, taking into account the additional barriers of geography and access to learning. The DEW project is also cognisant of the different needs of adult learners as well as the competing demands on the lives of female entrepreneurs and the training materials are being designed with this in mind. Key elements of the survey results include the need to be mindful of the time required to engage with new technology and therefore learning materials must be efficient and adaptable. There are also specific needs identified by rural entrepreneurs in relation to connectivity and development of online networks.

Therefore, the DEW training materials will offer appropriate learning content that:

- Responds to the identified needs of female entrepreneurs (potential or existing).
- Enhances current skills levels
- Presents ‘bitesize’ learning materials so that they are available in brief modules and units which can be completed on a standalone basis according to the specific requirements of both the entrepreneur and the enterprise. This will also include specific revision materials to allow learners to summarise key steps.
- Utilises a wide range of media and learning technologies
- Incorporates peer learning, case studies and the voice of the female entrepreneur

The DEW training materials will be presented in relatable modules subdivided into learning units. Units will be no more than an hour in duration and will be as interactive as possible, interspersed with reminders, revisions, short ‘how to’ exercises and encouragement to apply the learning. Training materials will be accessible on all forms of technology e.g. desktop computer/laptop, mobile and tablet fixed and mobile devices. DEW project partners propose the following content for free open source digital skill learning:

Module Title	Units
Digital Skills	Web Site development/ICT Social Media Cyber Security
Managing Digital Teams	Smart Working Team Management Leadership
Entrepreneurship	Motivation Creativity Self Confidence
Communications Change Management	Relationship building Communicating online
Financial Literacy	Profitability Interest Rates, Cash Flow, Inflation Costs Pricing
Teacher Guidance and Adult Learner Review underpinning all modules	

There are other areas and considerations which will inform the development of the training materials throughout the period of PR3, namely:

- Consideration of younger entrepreneurs, especially in the digital context. DEW partner experience indicates that although younger entrepreneurs are often highly skilled in the area of social media, they may not have had the opportunity to develop other digital skills.
- The EntreComp Education Framework – DEW partner Maynooth University will be examining the pedagogy principles.
- Development of specific guides for teaching and facilitation
- Highlighting country-specific supports e.g. the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) in Ireland.

END OF DEW Composite Report