

Breaking Barriers: Upskilling SNLs for Success in the Hospitality Industry via Micro-Credentials



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The Project


The right to work and employment is a fundamental right enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (including people with mental challenges), while the EU Pillar of Social Rights recognizes the right of people with disabilities to inclusion including education and training and access to lifelong learning opportunities. The EC's communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 works to develop a European approach to micro-credentials to help widen learning opportunities and strengthen the role played in lifelong learning by higher education institutions and VET institutions, and recommends member states to adapt the Micro-Credentials to strengthen both the formal and non-formal education and training, supporting lifelong learning of Europeans.

The UPWORK project aims to provide vulnerable groups, i.e., people with mental challenges, those suffering from depression, and long-term unemployed with innovative and alternative methods to training and reskilling so they can have a meaningful life. It is using micro-credentials to support these vulnerable learners.



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The project will develop a flexible curriculum for VET teachers to teach vulnerable groups in the events management and hospitality sectors, combining classroom and digital learning, job shadowing, and on-the-job training for vulnerable groups. This curriculum contains the soft skills needed to teach the target groups effectively, as well as the hard skills that the target groups would need to acquire to get a job in the labor market. Moreover, a clear and compelling training scheme (such as on-the-job training/job shadowing) will be developed for the target group, working closely with potential employers. Lastly, the project will develop a European micro-credential system based on Open Badges for recognizing skills and competencies for vulnerable groups in events management and the hotel and restaurant sector. The VET teachers will be trained in how to train their learners, and what skills to focus on so that their students will acquire the micro-credentials.

UPWORK is an Erasmus+ project with a consortium of 6 VET organizations and NGOs from Denmark, Greece, Italy, Poland and Spain.



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Partners



- **FO-Aarhus** (Association for Adult Education) is a non-government, non-profit organization established in 1973 to provide non-formal adult learning courses to the citizens of Aarhus. Its Board of Directors comprises representatives from the private sector, public administration, and the formal and vocational education sectors. FO-Aarhus' expertise is in non-formal education for adults and young people, for the general public, and specialization in programs that help disadvantaged groups – e.g. immigrants, the unemployed, people with learning disabilities, dyslectics, people with mental issues – to enhance their quality of life and to integrate (or re-integrate) into society and the workforce. The aim is to strengthen the participants' personal, social, and vocational competencies as a stepping-stone to re-education, re-inclusion into the job market, or further education.



- The **School, Community, and Company Consortium** (CSCI) is a Vocational Training Agency certified under UNI EN ISO 9001:2015 and authorized by the Piedmont Regional Government. It was established as a collaboration between private companies, schools, universities, and civil service organizations across Italy, Hungary, Romania, and Spain to develop human and professional resources. CSCI provides training and refresher programs for workers and job seekers, emphasizing social inclusion, multicultural dialogue, and workforce development. Its activities include soft skills training, technical courses, research on new technologies in education, mobility actions, and teacher training. Operating in Northern Italy, particularly in Novara and Milan, the consortium has played a key role in addressing challenges such as unemployment, migration, and the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. CSCI also focuses on adult education and internationalization, leveraging creativity and the arts to support disadvantaged groups, with a staff of 14 professionals and a network of schools and universities



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Partners



- **Oloklirosi** is a certified Lifelong Learning Centre in Greece, accredited by EOPPEP and the Ministry of Education. It provides vocational training, counseling, and entrepreneurial services to unemployed individuals, vulnerable groups, and employees to enhance their skills and job prospects. In 2018, it established the Erasmuslearn educational center, specializing in training educators and participating in Erasmus+ projects. Over five years, it has trained 800+ educators across Europe through its mobility programs. Oloklirosi collaborates with schools, VET centers, and businesses in Greece and Europe, offering training and job placements in diverse fields such as IT, business, hospitality, and gastronomy.



- **STELLA VIRIUM Qualifications Development Foundation** (*Opportunities Star*) was established in 2013 in Krakow, Poland to support and promote human beings' continuous development. The foundation focuses on Life-Long Learning projects - upskilling, re-skilling, supporting the adaptation of people at risk of social and employability exclusion due to diversity characteristics while responding to the current requirements of the changing labor markets, embracing diversity through social and workplace inclusion, offering adaptive and assistive solutions, often based on volunteering of employees, and promoting DE&I within organizations.



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Partners



- The **Soro Tori ETS Association**, founded in 2006 in Villa San Sebastiano Nuova (Tagliacozzo, Italy), operates in a rural and disadvantaged area. It runs EU-funded projects like Erasmus+ and collaborates with European partners on youth and adult programs. In 2012, it contributed to an award-winning project with Croatia and Hungary. The association also promotes community opportunities, hosting international conferences and advocating for integration, social inclusion, cultural promotion, and family support, as outlined in its mission.



- **Gureak** has been integrating people with disabilities into the workforce since 1975, employing nearly 6,000 workers. As a not-for-profit unique employment center, it creates sustainable job opportunities by diversifying into industrial and service sectors, including automotive, electronics, marketing, cleaning, catering, and more. Its Gureak Itinerary division designs employment pathways through counseling and training, while the Training and Development Centre provides specialized training for disabled individuals and companies hiring them. Gureak offers flexible vocational training in areas such as gardening, office work, and catering, emphasizing learning by doing with simulated environments. It also develops innovative training methods using digital tools to enhance effectiveness.



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Introduction to the Methodology

As part of UPWORK project activities, **2 focus groups** per country were organized to develop effective methodology for teaching special needs learners in the hospitality and event management sectors.

These discussions aimed to highlight **best practices, challenges, and improvements** needed in special education and employment training.

Two primary groups contributed valuable perspectives: **teachers and educational operators** – professionals with experience in special needs education shared their methodologies, challenges, and recommendations for better engagement.

Special needs learners – learners provided firsthand insights into their learning experiences, preferred teaching methods, and obstacles in education and vocational training.

Structure:

1. Social knowledge and competences for educators dealing with special needs learners.

2. SNLs necessary social and professional skills.

3. Open Badges and Microcredentials.



Danish SNLs focus group



Danish operators dealing with SNLs focus group.



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Social knowledge and competences for educators



Regarding **social knowledge, competences**, and **teaching strategies** that facilitate the engagement and training of special needs learners for successful job placements, teachers and operators dealing with special needs students should focus on:

- Development of essential social skills and competences: it is important for educators to develop essential social skills like effective communication, teamwork, and customer service.
- Practical experiences: educational strategies prioritize hands-on experiences that build relational and socialization skills through real-world interactions, helping SNLs understand and interpret workplace needs.
- Tailored training approaches: recognizing the diversity among special needs learners, training is customized to accommodate different levels of independence, intellectual functioning, and communication abilities.
- Use of individualized education plans (IEPs): IEPs, including internships and apprenticeships, are utilized to provide specific and relevant real-world experience, enhancing both skill development and confidence of SNLs.



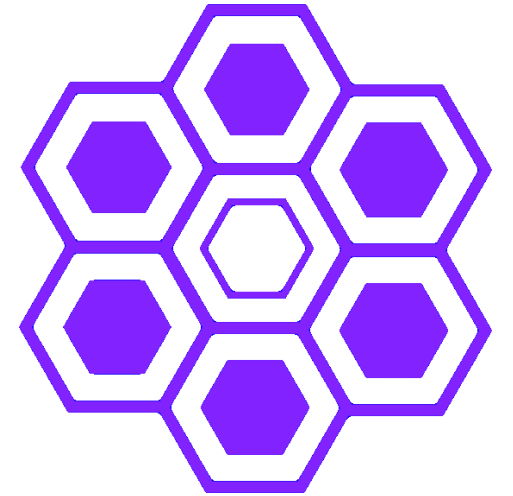
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Social knowledge and competences for educators



- Integration of technology: technological tools are employed to foster independence and provide step-by-step task management, enhancing practical skills and supporting autonomous task performance.
- Interactive and dynamic teaching methods: these methods include peer-to-peer learning and role-playing, which are essential for engaging SNLs, boosting self-esteem, and practicing real-world tasks in a supportive environment.
- Multisensory approaches: in order to make learning accessible and engaging, multisensory strategies involving visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements should be utilized with SNLs, which help in processing information through multiple senses.



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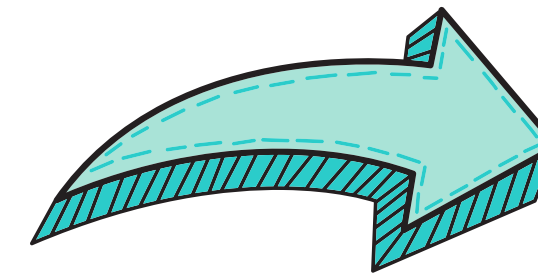
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Social knowledge and competences for educators



- Real-world practice and simulated environments: SNLs can be placed in controlled environments that simulate real-life scenarios, facilitating the development of both technical skills and social interactions essential for workplace readiness.
- Assessment and continuous feedback: regular monitoring of progress with clear, attainable goals is key, along with feedback from specialists to tailor educational strategies that support social and emotional development.
- Mentorship and peer support: such elements are integral in providing personalized guidance, emotional support, and practical advice, helping SNLs navigate the complexities of both educational and professional environments, and fostering a sense of community and belonging.



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SNLs social and professional skills to transition into employment



The relevant professional skills that special needs learners should prioritize for a successful transition to employment include:

- Effective communication: being able to communicate clearly, accurately, and understandably is essential for effective information exchange in the workplace.
- Teamwork and collaboration: skills in working within a team, contributing ideas, compromising, and resolving conflicts are essential for SNLs in order to successfully collaborate in any professional setting.
- Critical thinking and creativity: these skills enable SNLs to solve problems and adapt to workplace challenges, fostering innovative thinking and solutions.



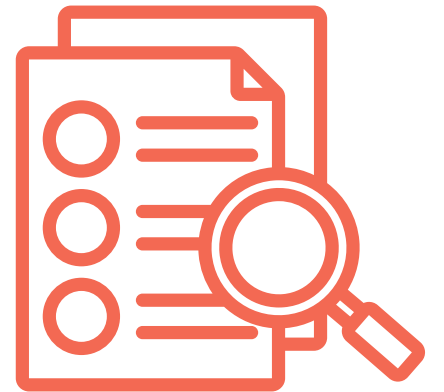
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SNLs social and professional skills to transition into employment



- Time management and organizational skills: SNLs should focus on efficient management of workload and maintaining productivity to meet professional demands.
- Customer service skills: empathy, patience, and professionalism are vital for managing interactions and ensuring customer satisfaction in service-oriented sectors, such as hospitality, restaurant, and events management sectors.
- Attention to detail: maintaining high standards of quality is important in ensuring that tasks are completed accurately and to a high standard.
- Technology proficiency: SNLs should have basic computer skills and the ability to adapt to new technologies that are essential for workplace competence.



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SNLs social and professional skills to transition into employment

- Professionalism and work ethic: attributes like punctuality, integrity, and a positive work attitude are fundamental for creating a respectful and effective work environment.
- Adaptability and flexibility: these skills help SNLs to integrate into various workplace cultures, responding effectively to changing job demands and challenges.
- Resilience: it is crucial for helping SNLs manage and recover from setbacks, contributing to their long-term success and stability in their careers.

BE
RESILIENT!



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Microcredentials and Open Badges



What are Microcredentials?

Microcredentials seen as “record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning”.

They are **short, targeted learning achievements** that validate specific skills, knowledge, or competences.

They are designed to **complement traditional qualifications**, offering a flexible and personalized learning experience.

Key features:

- Microcredentials are focused on **specific competences** rather than broad academic subjects.
- Microcredentials are designed to be **modular, stackable, and adaptable** to *different learning pathways*.
- Microcredentials can be **recognized** by institutions and employers for their relevance to industry needs.
- Microcredentials can be **obtained** through online platforms, universities, and professional training organizations.

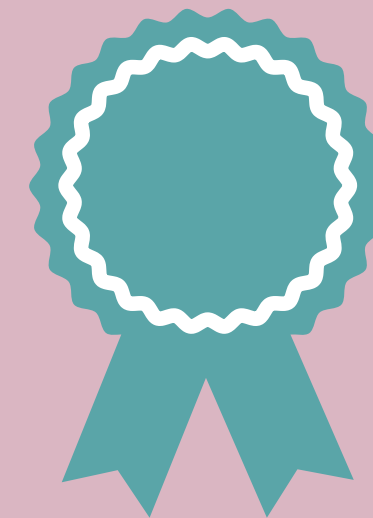


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Microcredentials and Open Badges



Benefits of Microcredentials

Micro-credentials provide a modern approach to education, offering learners greater **flexibility, lower costs, and up-to-date content tailored to industry needs.**

- **Reskilling and upskilling:** they allow learners to update or acquire new skills, staying competitive in evolving industries.
- **Lower costs and flexibility:** more affordable than traditional degrees, they enable self-paced learning, ideal for working professionals.
- **Personalization and industry relevance:** learners choose courses aligned with career goals, ensuring immediate applicability in the job market.



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Microcredentials and Open Badges

Introduction to Open badges

Key features:

Open Badges are **digital credentials** that certify **skills** and **achievements**.

Unlike traditional certificates, they contain embedded **metadata**, making them verifiable and interactive.

They help special needs learners showcase their competences in professional fields.

- **Detailed metadata:** each badge includes essential information such as the issuing organization, description of the achievement, and the criteria met to earn it.
- **Verification:** Open Badges serve as authentic, verifiable records of skills and accomplishments, enhancing credibility in academic and professional settings.
- **Bridging formal and informal learning:** unlike traditional diplomas, Open Badges acknowledge a broader range of learning experiences, validating skills gained both inside and outside formal education.



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Microcredentials and Open Badges

Use of Open Badges

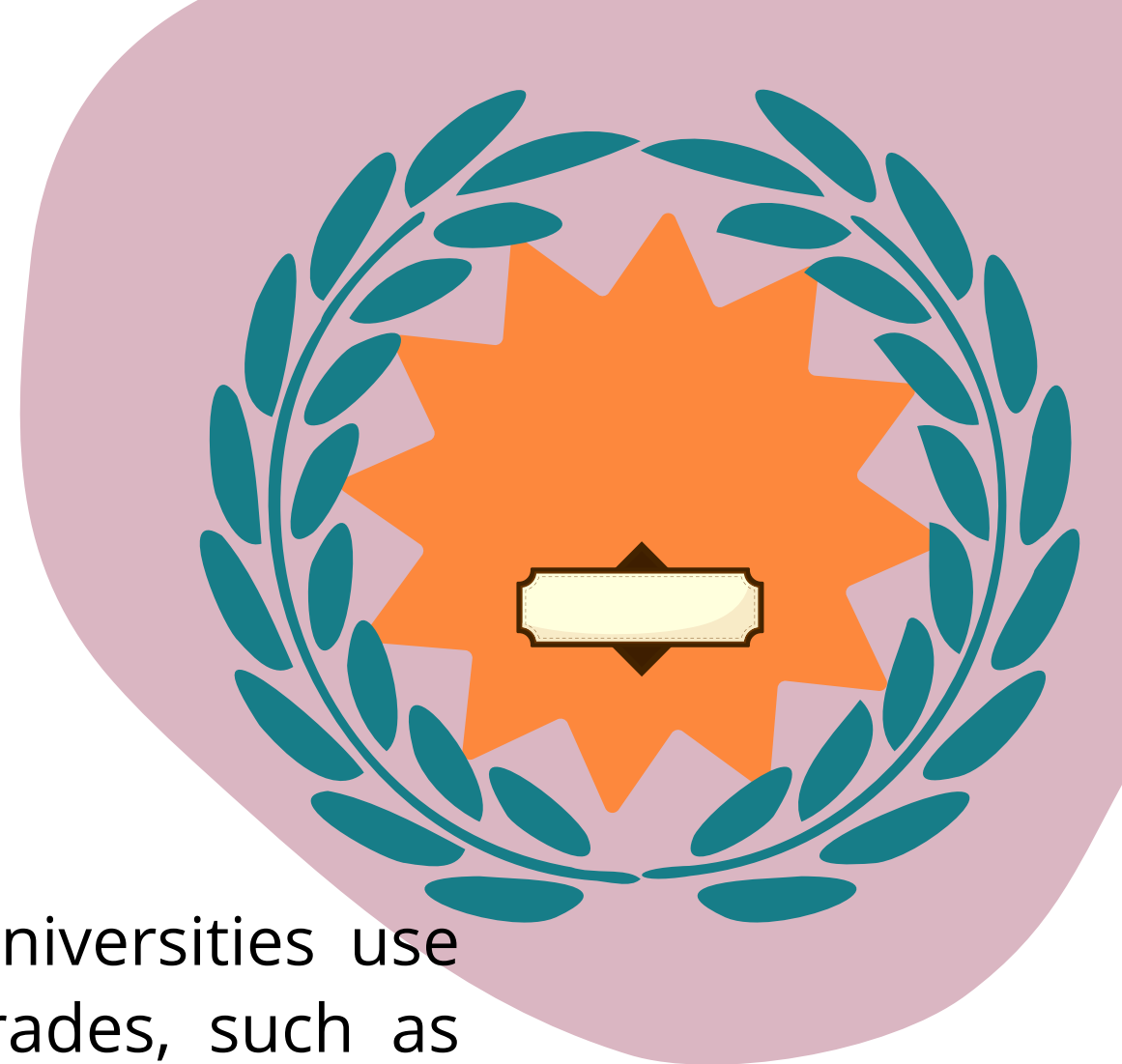
Open Badges are widely used in **education** and the **workplace** to recognize skills and achievements beyond traditional assessments. They provide a **digital, verifiable record of competences**, enhancing employability and lifelong learning.

Key applications:

- **Education and learning:** schools and universities use Open Badges to certify skills beyond grades, such as teamwork, leadership, and extracurricular achievements.
- **Workplace recognition:** employers issue badges to validate employees' technical skills, training completion, and soft skills, improving professional mobility.
- **Digital portfolio and visibility:** earners can showcase badges on LinkedIn, professional websites, or digital CVs, increasing their credibility with employers and institutions.



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Microcredentials and Open Badges



Open Badges as an example of Microcredentials

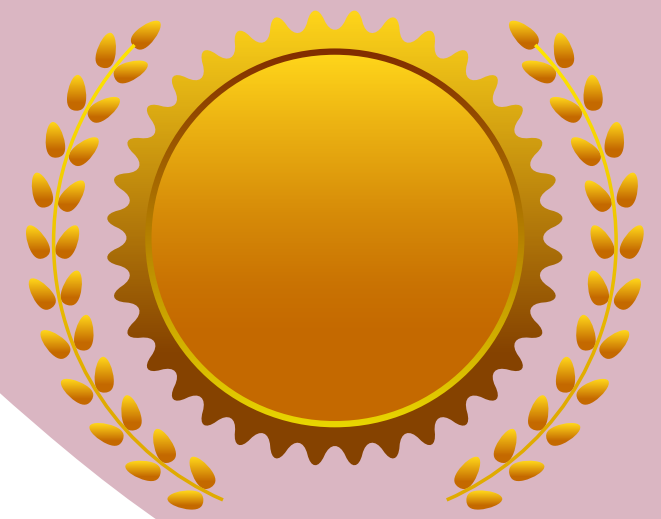
Open Badges and **micro-credentials** represent a modern approach to recognizing skills and learning achievements. They provide **flexible validation for competences** gained through formal, non-formal, and informal education, offering greater accessibility and **lifelong learning opportunities**.



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Microcredentials and Open Badges



Key characteristics of Open Badges as Microcredentials

- **Validation of skills & achievements:** Open Badges certify specific competences, providing digital proof of knowledge acquired in different learning contexts.
- **Portability:** a key advantage of Open Badges as micro-credentials is their ability to be easily shared and verified across different digital platforms.
- **Stackability for lifelong learning:** individuals can accumulate multiple badges, progressively building a comprehensive skill set, similar to micro-credentials that contribute to larger qualifications.
- **Career and academic value:** the ability to combine smaller credentials enables learners to document professional development, making their achievements more structured and widely recognized.
- **Adaptability in learning:** open badges support non-traditional learning, recognizing skills gained through workshops, online courses, and professional development activities.
- **Bridging education and employment:** they provide job-relevant credentials, helping candidates showcase specific skills and offering greater transparency to employers.
- **Career advancement tool:** by earning and displaying badges, individuals can prove their competencies, increasing their chances of professional growth and job placement.



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Microcredentials and Open Badges

Open Badges for SNLs

For teachers and professionals working with special needs students, Open Badges provide a **flexible** and **inclusive** way to recognize achievements, promote engagement, and document skill development for future educational and career opportunities.

Key benefits for SNL:

- **Personalized learning and recognition:** Open Badges allow **customized learning paths**, accommodating different abilities and strengths while promoting inclusivity.
- **Industry and career readiness:** by aligning with employer needs, these badges help students showcase skills, **increasing job opportunities** and workplace inclusion.
- **Community and continuous improvement:** collaborations with industry partners ensure **real-world relevance**, enhancing acceptance and value for both students and employers.



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UPWORK Open Badges

The UPWORK partnership has established an open badge system integrated with the Moodle platform (<https://upwork.csciformazione.eu/>).

This platform is designed to support trainers and learners with special needs who aim to enhance their skills in the hospitality and event management sectors.

The program offers two courses:

1. **Learners' Course:** it is divided into two sections.

The first section includes five presentations focusing on universal skills:

1. Introduction to the Hospitality and Services Industries
2. Workplace Competences
3. Communication
4. Personal Development and Competence Building
5. Job Search and Employment Preparation

The second section features four job-specific skills presentations tailored to the UPWORK project, covering roles such as kitchen staff, waiter/waitress, receptionist, and housekeeping personnel.

2. **Trainers' Course:** it consists of five learning units designed for trainers:

1. Understanding Special Needs Learners and the Hospitality Industry
2. Effective Communication and Interaction
3. Pedagogical Approaches and Methods
4. Micro-Credentials and Open Badges
5. Professional Development and Continuous Improvement



TRAINER



LEARNER



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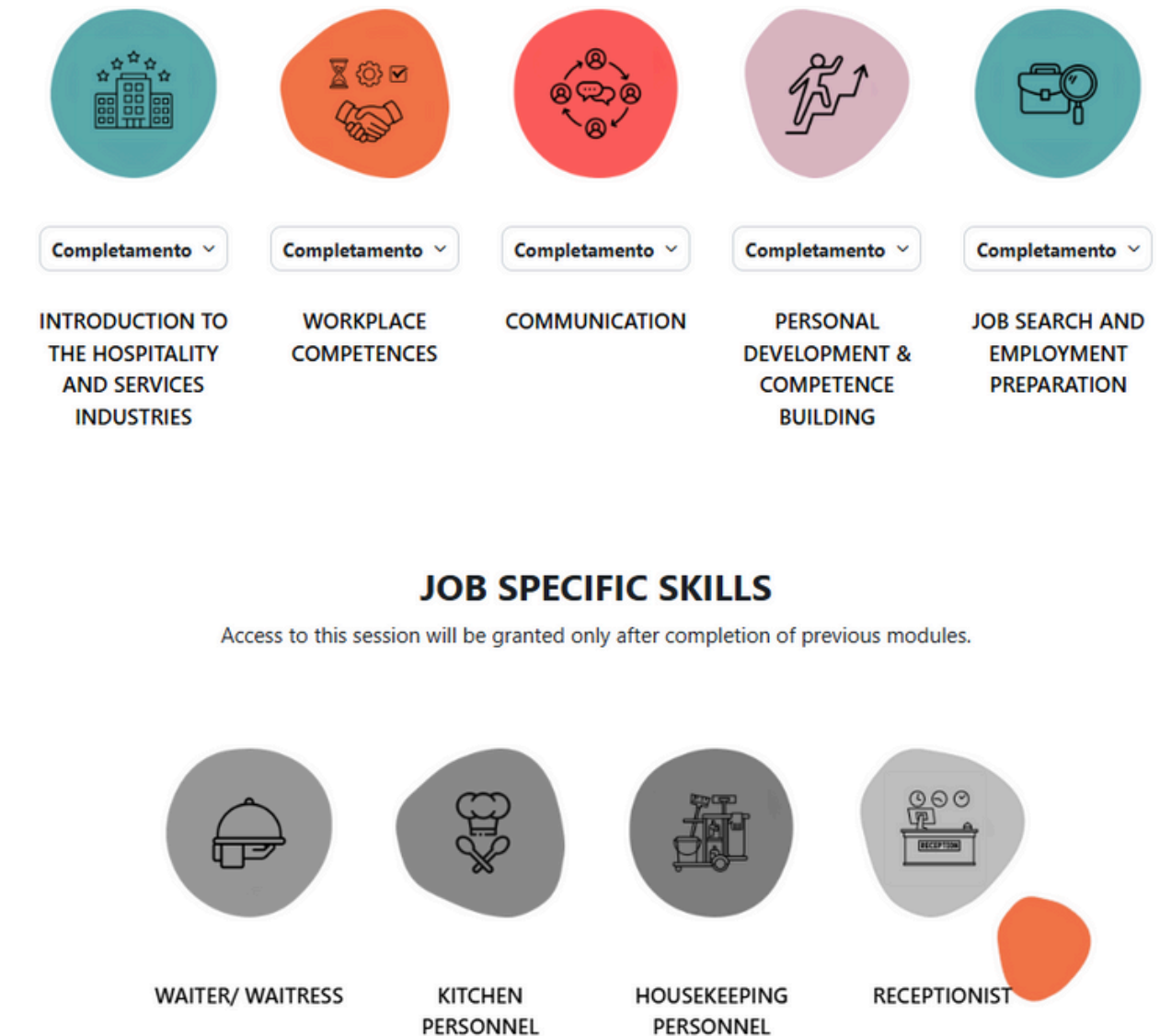
UPWORK Open Badges

Welcome to the trainer's course!



UPWORK Moodle platform: Trainer's course

Welcome to the learner's course!



UPWORK Moodle platform: Trainer's course



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UPWORK Open Badges

The UPWORK partnership has designed and created 10 Open Badges:

- 9 Open Badges for special needs learners.
- 1 Open Badge for trainers and operators dealing with special needs learners.

Users may receive an Open Badge upon successfully passing the quiz.

This earned Open Badge can be showcased on their CVs and social media profiles, effectively highlighting the competencies they have acquired. By doing so, they enhance their employability prospects and opportunities.



STUDY MATERIAL

There are multiple slides. Use the arrows at the bottom of each slide to proceed!
You can pause the lesson slides at any time and restart from the beginning whenever you need a break or choose to come back later.
Similarly, you have the option to pause the quiz and resume it at your convenience.
WHEN YOU ARE READY TAKE THE TEST AT THE BOTTOM!



UPWORK Moodle platform: Communication module

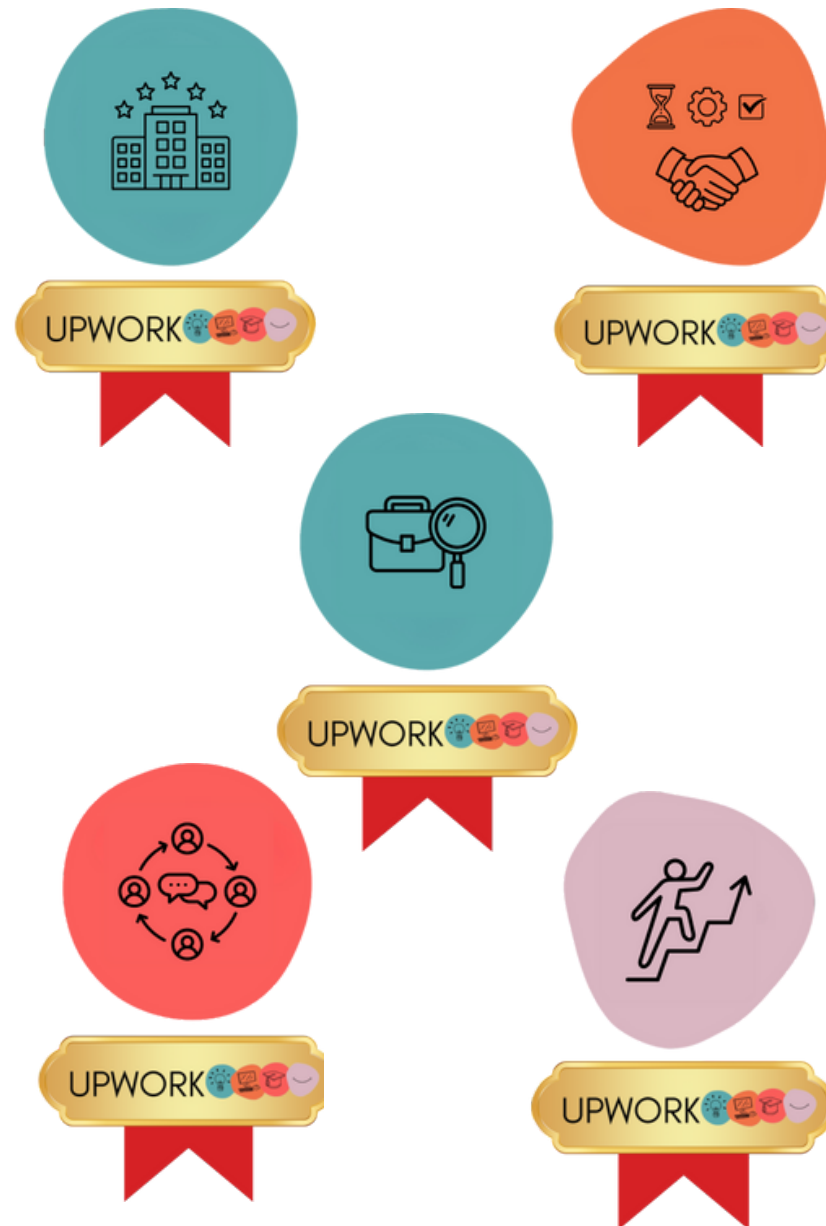


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UPWORK Open Badges

An overview of UPWORK Open Badges.

Learners' UPWORK Open Badges: universal skills



Learners' UPWORK Open Badges: Job specific skills



Trainer's UPWORK Open Badge



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The value of the Curriculum

The curriculum equips teachers and operators with the necessary social knowledge, competences, and pedagogical strategies to effectively train and support SNLs for employment in the hospitality and services industries.

Reflective Teaching



Self Reflection



Action research



Professional Growth



Student Centered Approach



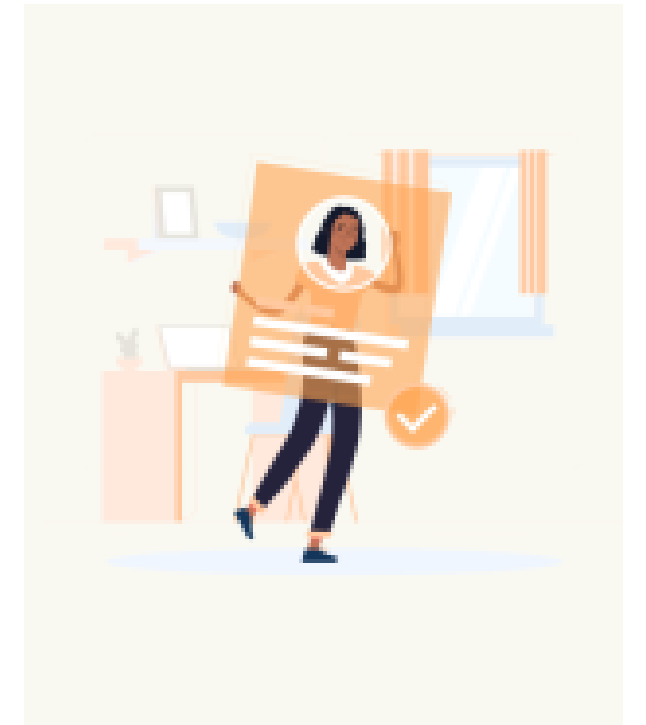
Enhanced Classroom management



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Curriculum for VET Trainers

- UPWORK project offers a specialized content designed for VET teachers and operators working with Special Needs Learners (SNLs) — including those with mental health challenges, neurodivergence, and experiencing long-term unemployment — specifically in hospitality, catering, and events sectors.
- The Curriculum offers a practical & inclusive training framework: Combines theoretical knowledge with hands-on strategies to enhance educators' ability to support SNLs, focusing on professional skills, social competences, and employability through modern tools like micro-credentials.
- All content is Accessible and Multilingual ensuring usability across diverse educational contexts.



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Curriculum for Trainers

By adopting a five-unit structure, the curriculum offers a comprehensive, cohesive and practical educational experience, equipping teachers and operators with the knowledge and skills necessary to support special needs students effectively.

The professionals will be better equipped with the social knowledge and competences that are required when working with SNLs - the VET teachers will gain greater insight into learning styles, methodology and pedagogy for SNLs.

Unit 1: Understanding Special Needs Students and the Hospitality Industry

Lesson 1.1: Introduction to Special Needs - characteristics and types

Lesson 1.2: Identifying Diverse Needs - Employment opportunities in the hospitality and services industries for SNL

Lesson 1.3: Engaging Special Needs Students - Implementation of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).

Unit 2: Effective Communication and Interaction

Lesson 2.1: Communication Techniques - Building rapport with special needs learners

Lesson 2.2: Building Trust and Relationships - fostering motivation

Lesson 2.3: Collaborative Strategies - promoting social interaction and communication; Understanding and addressing behavioral issues



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Curriculum for Trainers

Unit 3: Pedagogical Approaches and Methods

Lesson 3.1: Inclusive Teaching Methods - Applying differentiated instruction and adaptive learning techniques.

Lesson 3.2: Adapting Curriculum for Special Needs - Integrate Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles - Use of visual aids, hands-on activities, and technology in teaching.

Lesson 3.3: Utilizing Technology in Education - Creating an engaging and supportive learning environment.

Unit 4: Open Badges & Micro-Credentials

Lesson 4.1: Understanding Micro-Credentials - Definition, principles, and features of micro-credentials.

Lesson 4.2: Open Badges and Moodle platform.

Lesson 4.3: Micro-Credentials and Open Badges for Special Needs Learners.

Unit 5: Professional Development and Continuous Improvement

Lesson 5.1: Identification of Skills - Teaching essential job skills (e.g., food and beverage service, housekeeping, customer service);

Lesson 5.2: Ongoing Training and Workshops - Enhancing communication skills (verbal, non-verbal, active listening); Building teamwork and collaboration skills;

Lesson 5.3: Reflective Practices:

- Preparing learners for job interviews and workplace integration; Developing soft skills (e.g., time management, problem-solving, adaptability)
- Providing on-the-job support and mentorship;
- Strategies for helping learners maintain employment and advance in their careers.



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Learning Paths for Learners

Creating a Learning Path for special needs learners (SNL) tailored to prepare them for the hospitality and services industries involves a structured approach that addresses specific competences, professional skills, and social skills, and it should take its starting point in the tailored methodologies of the UPWORK project. The chapters of the Learning Path are to cover a range of topics designed to enhance SNLs' employability, adaptability, and confidence in the workplace careers.

For the purpose of UPWORK Project the following 4 main job roles were selected and targeted:

- kitchen personnel
- waiter
- receptionist
- housekeeper



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Learning Paths - Universal Skills

Our Universal Skills module equips participants with essential, transferable abilities that form the foundation for success in any hospitality role. These skills build confidence, professionalism, and readiness for the workplace. The module includes:

Introduction to the Hospitality and Services Industries

- A beginner-friendly overview of how the hospitality sector works, the types of jobs available, and the values that guide service-oriented environments.

Workplace Competences

- Core skills for thriving in a team, following routines, managing time, and maintaining professional behavior in real-life work settings.

Communication

- Practical training in both verbal and non-verbal communication, including listening skills, polite interaction with guests, and effective teamwork.



INTRODUCTION TO
THE HOSPITALITY
AND SERVICES
INDUSTRIES



PERSONAL
DEVELOPMENT &
COMPETENCE
BUILDING



JOB SEARCH AND
EMPLOYMENT
PREPARATION

Personal Development and Competence Building

- Activities focused on self-awareness, emotional resilience, motivation, and setting personal growth goals tailored to each participant's journey.

Job Search and Employment Preparation

- Support with creating CVs, preparing for interviews, understanding job ads, and developing the confidence to enter or re-enter the workforce.



WORKPLACE
COMPETENCES



COMMUNICATION

Together, these areas prepare individuals not only to access employment but also to grow within it — with dignity, confidence, and clarity.



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Learning Paths - Job Specific Skills

After building a strong foundation with Universal Skills, participants continue their journey by focusing on practical, hands-on training tailored to key roles in the hospitality sector. **The Job-Specific Skills** modules prepare learners for real-world tasks, routines, and responsibilities in four high-demand areas of hotel and restaurant work.

Each module is carefully designed to match the needs of both trainees and employers, combining technical know-how with interpersonal skills that matter just as much. The focus is on building competence, confidence, and independence at work.

Participants can choose one or more of the following job tracks:



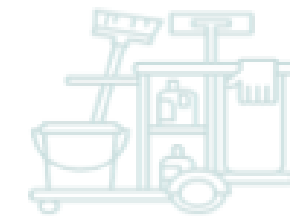
Kitchen Personnel

Training in food preparation, hygiene and safety standards, teamwork in the kitchen, and following instructions in fast-paced environments.



Waiter/ Waitress

Skills for guest service, table setting, taking orders, serving food and beverages, and handling customer interactions with professionalism and care.



Housekeeper

Competencies for room cleaning, laundry service, time-efficient routines, attention to detail, and respect for guests' privacy and comfort.



Receptionist

Communication and organizational skills for front desk tasks, guest check-in/check-out procedures, handling inquiries, and managing bookings with a welcoming attitude.

Each path includes simulated tasks, real-world scenarios, and clear assessment criteria. Upon successful completion, participants earn microcredentials as proof of their readiness to join the workforce in their chosen role.



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SWOT analysis:

Dropout Phenomenon Among Adult Learners with Special Needs

Key Contributing Factors:

Personal & Psychological Factors

- Low self-esteem due to past academic struggles (Brown & Watson, 2017)
- Mental health issues (e.g., anxiety, depression, ADHD) affecting engagement
- Lack of self-advocacy skills to request necessary accommodations

Socioeconomic Barriers

- Financial constraints (tuition, transportation, assistive technology costs)
- Balancing work, caregiving, and education responsibilities (Dunn & Andrews, 2020)
- Limited access to disability support services in low-income areas



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Institutional & Structural Challenges

- Inaccessible learning materials or teaching methods (e.g., no braille, captions, or ASL interpreters)
- Inflexible policies on attendance and assessment accommodations
- Insufficient faculty training in special education needs

Social & Environmental Influences

- Lack of peer support or inclusion in mainstream classroom settings
- Negative stigma around disabilities leading to isolation (Jones & Cooper, 2019)
- Limited role models with disabilities succeeding in academia or careers



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Interactive links

Through interactive links, you'll be able to navigate seamlessly through the content, access additional resources, view presentations, watch explainer videos, read technical documents, and much more.



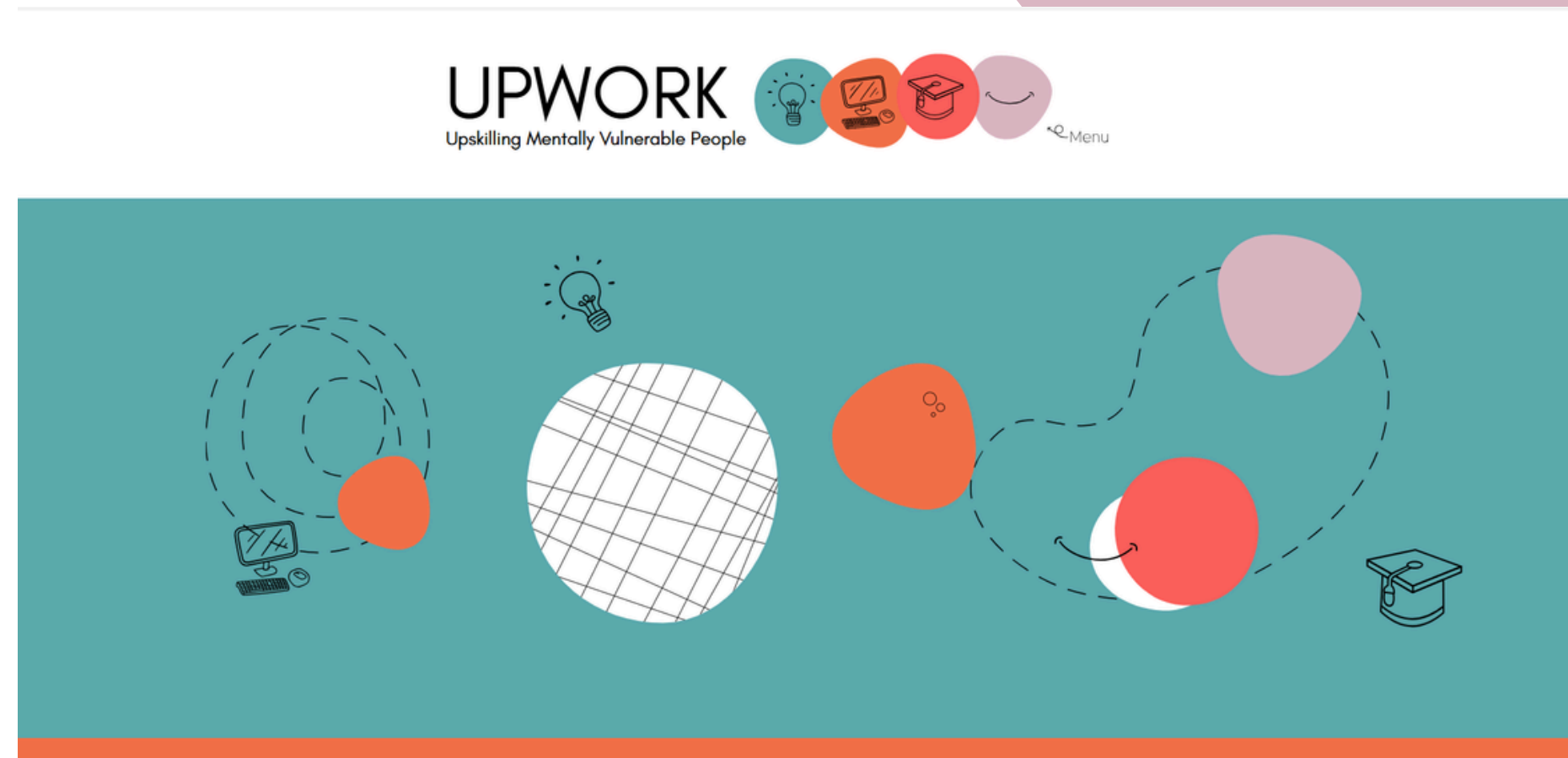
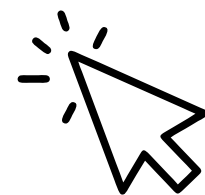
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UPWORK A series of four small, colorful circular icons: a lightbulb (blue), a computer monitor (orange), a graduation cap (red), and a smiley face (purple).

WELCOME TO UPWORK WEBSITE

This is the online home of Upwork project. The website is designed to provide readers with the tools, resources, and knowledge needed to know more about the project.

www.upworkproject.eu

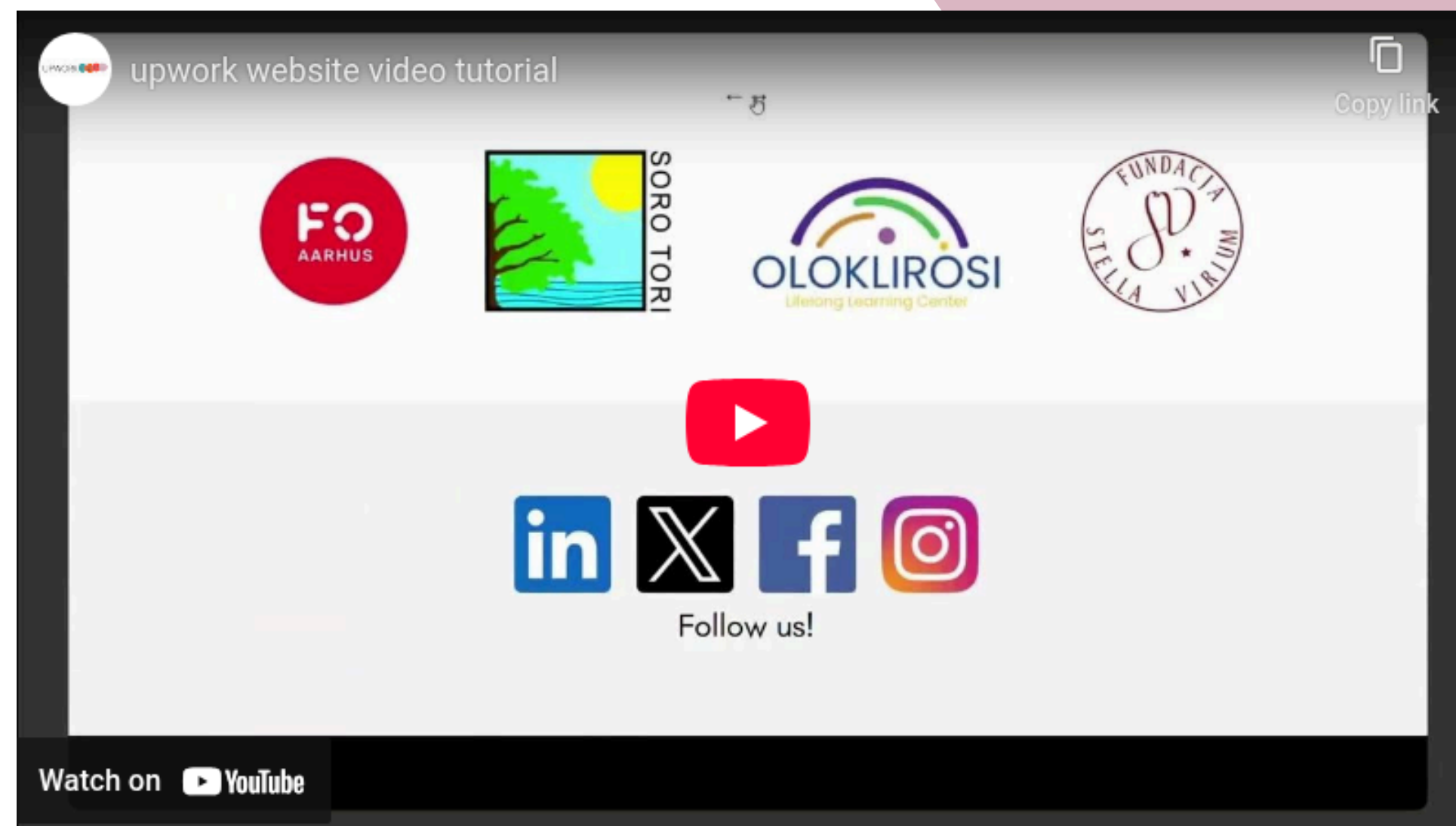


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Take a Look at the Website Video Tutorial!

Explore our step-by-step video tutorial designed to guide you through the key features and functionalities of the website.



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OUR YOUTUBE CHANNEL

Explore a collection of videos designed to inspire.



Buscar

Upworkproject

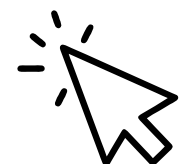
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Vídeos

Publicaciones



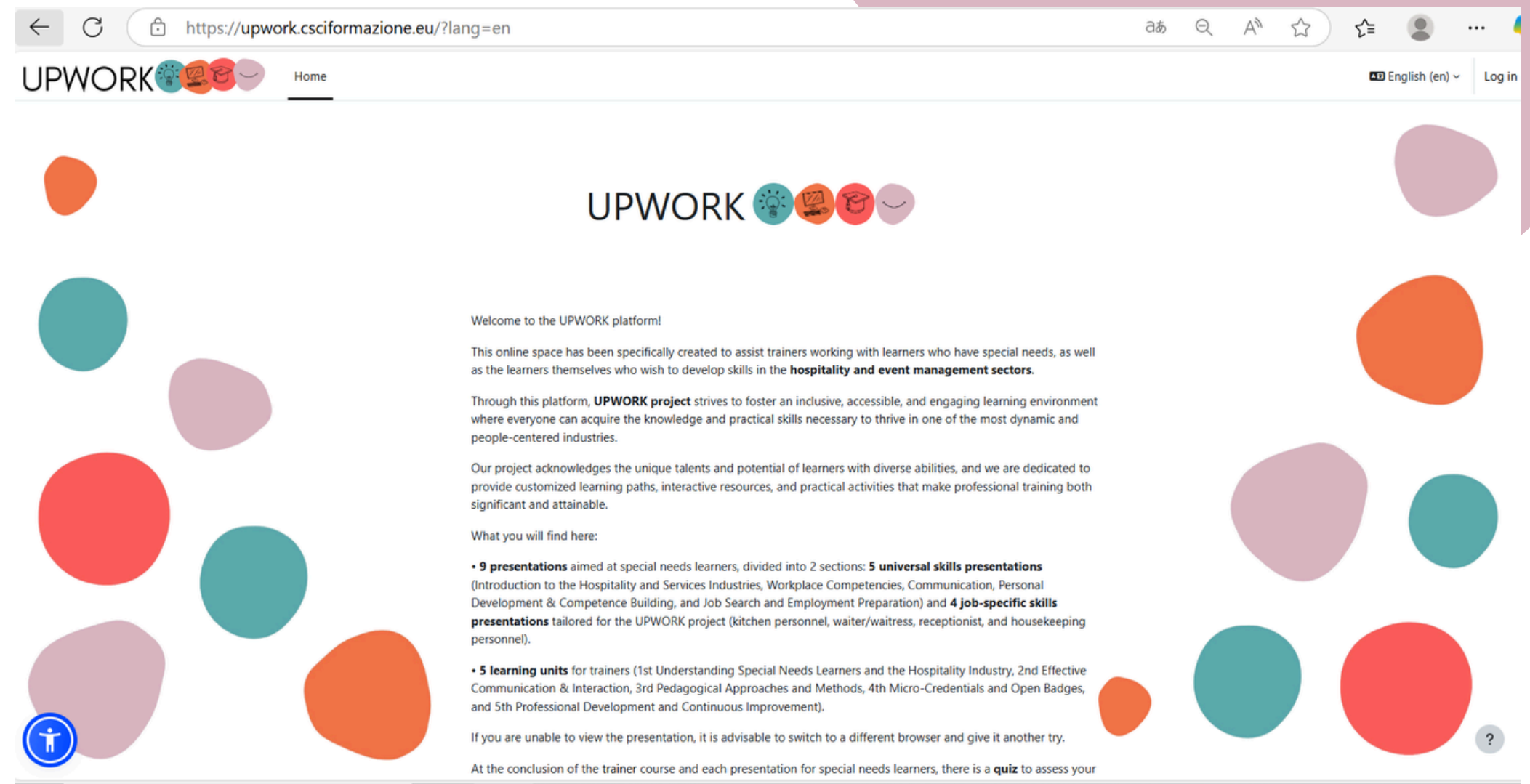
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The learning platform is designed to provide a comprehensive and engaging experience for learners at all levels.

Upwork Project Learning Platform



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