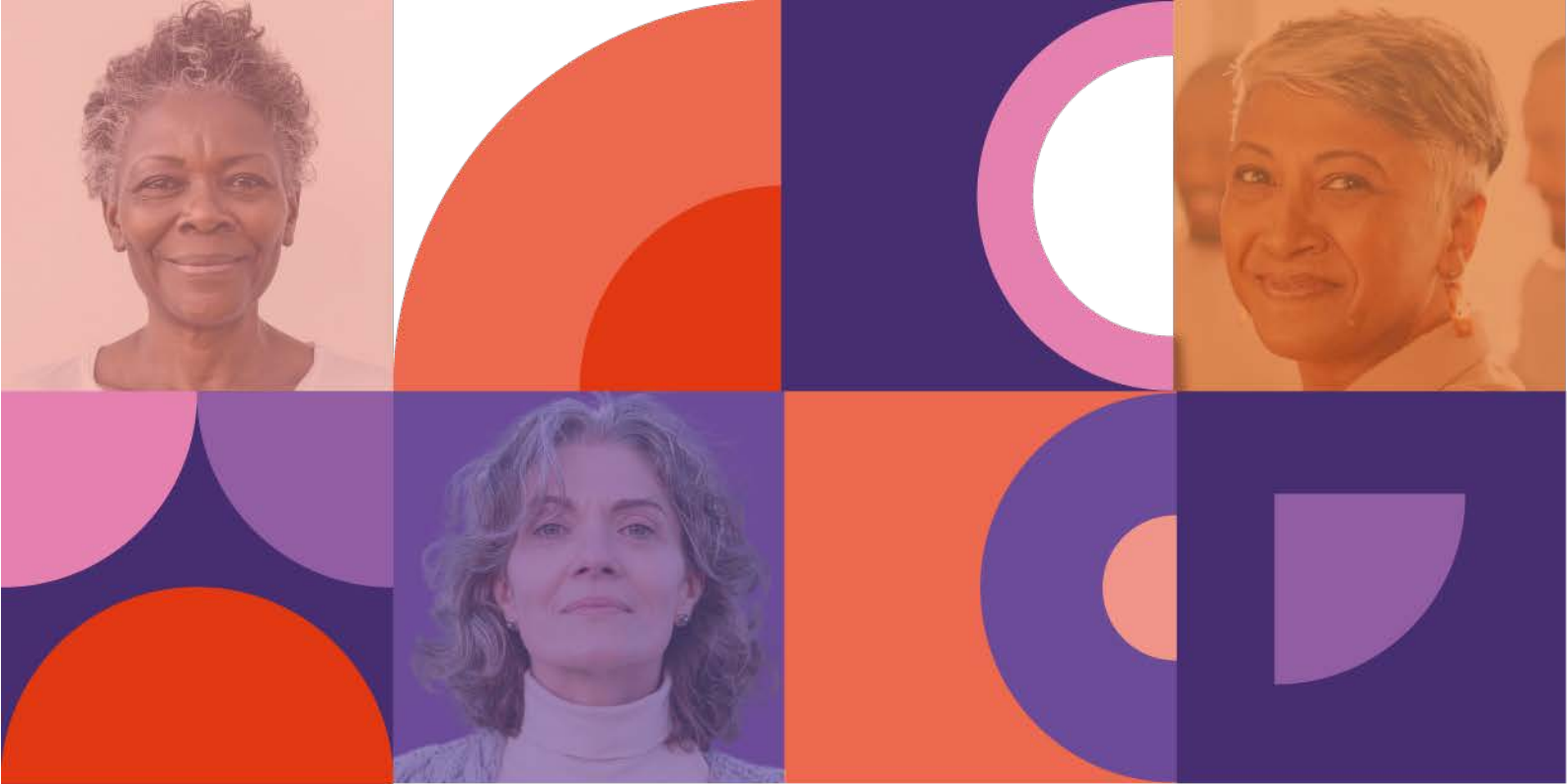




Hera

Helping Empower Women
through Reskilling and
Advancement

HERA METHODOLOGY D3.1



Co-funded by
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

DOCUMENT INFORMATION

Deliverable number:	D3.1
Deliverable title:	HERA METHODOLOGY
Deliverable version:	V1
Deliverable Security Class:	
Editor(s):	Zervou Nikolina
Contributor(s):	
Reviewer(s):	
Due Date:	
Delivery date:	
Project name:	HERA: Helping Empower Women through Reskilling and Advancement

DOCUMENT HISTORY

Version	Date	Author(s)/Partner	Main changes
V1		Zervou Nikolina, IED	First Draft

Disclaimer

This deliverable is subject to final acceptance by the European Commission. The content and results of the publication herein are the sole responsibility of the publishers, it reflects only the contributors' view and it does not necessarily represent the views expressed by the European Commission or its services, neither the European Commission is responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

While the information contained in the documents is believed to be accurate, the contributor(s) or any other participant in the Hera consortium make no warranty of any kind regarding this material including, but not limited to, the implied warranties of merchantability and fitness for a particular purpose.

Neither the Hera Consortium nor any of its members, their officers, employees, or agents shall be responsible or liable in negligence or otherwise howsoever in respect of any inaccuracy or omission herein.

Without derogating from the generality of the foregoing, neither the Hera Consortium nor any of its members, their officers, employees, or agents shall be liable for any direct or indirect or consequential loss or damage caused by or arising from any information advice or inaccuracy or omission herein.

Copyright message

© Hera Consortium, 2025-20xx. This deliverable and its content are the property of the Hera Consortium. This deliverable contains original unpublished work except where clearly indicated otherwise. Acknowledgement of previously published material and of the work of others has been made through appropriate citation, quotation, or both. Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged. The content of all or parts of these documents can be used and distributed provided that the SIRENE project and the document are properly referenced.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The HERA Methodology presents a structured and

The HERA Methodology presents a structured and evidence-informed approach to empowering women aged 45 and over through lifelong learning, community participation, and personalised reskilling pathways. Developed within the framework of the HERA (Helping Empower Women through Reskilling and Advancement) project, funded under the Erasmus+ European Policy Experimentation programme, the methodology responds to the persistent barriers that many women in midlife face in accessing education, employment, and opportunities for personal development. It contributes to the objectives of the European Skills Agenda, the European Pillar of Social Rights, and the European Education Area 2030 by promoting inclusive, learner-centred, and community-based approaches to adult learning.

Rather than proposing a traditional training programme, HERA introduces an integrated methodological framework that combines three complementary educational and community-based approaches: **Mutual Aid Groups, Living Labs, and Innovation Hubs**. These approaches are not implemented independently; instead, they are combined into a coherent learning journey that progressively supports participants in strengthening their confidence, recognising their existing knowledge and capabilities, connecting with local learning and employment ecosystems, and designing realistic pathways towards education, employment, entrepreneurship, or active citizenship.

The methodology is grounded in the principles of adult learning, community development, community psychology, experiential learning, and participatory education. It places particular emphasis on self-help, mutual aid, solidarity, self-organisation, democratic participation, and the recognition of experiential knowledge as essential components of meaningful learning and empowerment. Within HERA, learning is understood not only as the acquisition of new skills but also as a process through which women strengthen their agency, rebuild confidence, and actively shape their own futures.

The implementation model follows four interconnected phases: **Team Building and Mutual Aid, Learning to Learn, Engagement with External Stakeholders, and Personal Action Planning**. Together, these phases create a progressive pathway that begins with psychological safety and peer support, continues with the development of learning confidence and self-awareness, expands through collaboration with local stakeholders, and concludes with the co-design of individual action plans tailored to each participant's aspirations and circumstances. The methodology is intentionally flexible, allowing adaptation to different national, regional, and local contexts while maintaining a common pedagogical framework across all participating countries.

This document represents the **first version of the HERA Methodology**. As the HERA Labs are currently being implemented across seven European countries, the methodology should be understood as a living framework that will continue to evolve throughout the policy experimentation process. Evidence gathered through pilot implementation, participant feedback, facilitator reflections, stakeholder engagement, and impact assessment activities will be used to validate, refine, and strengthen the methodological approach. The final version will therefore combine its theoretical foundations with practical evidence generated through

implementation, contributing to the development of transferable policy recommendations and more inclusive lifelong learning systems across Europe.

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
THE HERA METHODOLOGY PRESENTS A STRUCTURED AND	4
1. INTRODUCTION.....	8
1.1BACKGROUND AND AIM.....	8
1.2STRUCTURE OF THE DELIVERABLE.....	9
1.3METHODS	10
1.4SYNERGIES WITH OTHER TASKS AND DELIVERABLES.....	10
2. CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK	11
2.1THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS.....	11
2.2MUTUAL AID AS THE FOUNDATION.....	12
2.2.1 PRINCIPLES OF MUTUAL AID.....	13
2.3 LIVING LABS	14
2.4INNOVATION HUBS.....	16
2.5INTEGRATING THE THREE APPROACHES: THE HERA METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK	17
3.HERA LABS IMPLEMENTATION MODEL	18
3.1 OPERATIONALISING THE HERA METHODOLOGY.....	18
3.2 OVERALL STRUCTURE OF THE HERA LABS	18
3.3 THE FOUR LEARNING PHASES	19
3.4 CROSS-CUTTING PRINCIPLES FOR IMPLEMENTATION	20
3.5 FLEXIBILITY AND CONTEXTUAL ADAPTATION	20
3.6 PILOT IMPLEMENTATION AND FUTURE REFINEMENT.....	20
4. GUIDELINES FOR FACILITATORS	21
4.1 ROLE AND ETHOS OF THE FACILITATOR	21
4.2 KEY FACILITATION CONSIDERATIONS	22
4.3 COMMON FACILITATION CHALLENGES	23
CONCLUSIONS.....	24
REFERENCES.....	25
ANNEX I: SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL TEMPLATE.....	27
ANNEX II STAKEHOLDER SESSION SUMMARY FORM	28
ANNEX III: PERSONAL ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE	29
ANNEX IV :FACILITATOR SESSION REPORT TEMPLATE	30

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and aim

Across the European Union, the participation of adults in lifelong learning remains significantly below the 60% target set for 2030 (European Commission, 2023). Despite ongoing efforts at EU and national levels, women aged 45 and over continue to face multiple and intersecting barriers to accessing learning and reskilling opportunities, particularly those with low or outdated qualifications, limited digital access, care responsibilities, or fragmented employment histories. Participation rates are especially low among women with fewer qualifications, migrant backgrounds, or those living in rural areas (Cedefop, 2022).

These disparities are not only a matter of social fairness, but also a structural limitation in Europe's pursuit of inclusive growth, gender equality, and the green and digital transitions. As highlighted in the European Skills Agenda, modern labour markets demand continuous skills development and adaptable learning systems capable of engaging all adults, regardless of age, background, or life course (European Commission, 2020). Yet, most adult education models remain misaligned with the lived realities of women aged 45+, particularly those who have experienced exclusion from formal learning or long-term disconnection from the workforce.

For many women in this age group, the prospect of returning to learning can awaken feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, or irrelevance. Years spent in unpaid care work, informal employment, or transnational migration often erode self-confidence, while traditional training environments may feel intimidating or disconnected from personal aspirations. The HERA project recognises these experiences not as deficits, but as reservoirs of knowledge, resilience, and value. By creating inclusive, trust-based, and participatory learning environments, the initiative seeks to support women in reconnecting with their strengths, expressing their goals, and rebuilding a sense of possibility.

The HERA project, funded under the Erasmus+ European Policy Experimentation programme, was launched to address these gaps through the design, piloting, and evaluation of a new methodological model. At the heart of the initiative are the HERA Labs, community-based learning spaces that integrate three participatory approaches: Mutual Aid Groups, Living Labs, and Innovation Hubs.

This methodology responds to the strategic and practical need for a coherent, adaptable, and evidence-informed framework to support the implementation of HERA Labs across Europe. Rather than presenting a fixed educational programme, it introduces a methodological framework that combines theoretical foundations with practical implementation guidelines to support the empowerment of women aged 45 and over through lifelong learning, community participation, and personalised reskilling pathways. The methodology provides the pedagogical rationale, implementation model, facilitation guidelines, and practical tools required for the delivery of HERA Labs, while establishing a common framework that can be adapted to different national and local contexts.

Intended for facilitators, adult educators, community organisations, and public authorities, the HERA Methodology supports the development of inclusive, learner-centred ecosystems in which women aged 45 and over can rebuild confidence, strengthen their agency, and shape meaningful pathways towards learning, employment, entrepreneurship, or active participation

in their communities. In doing so, it contributes to the broader European objectives of inclusive lifelong learning, social innovation, gender equality, and resilient adult education systems.

1.2 Structure of the deliverable

This methodology is structured to support the design, implementation, and continuous refinement of the HERA Labs across diverse national and local contexts. It combines theoretical foundations, methodological guidance, implementation procedures, and practical tools into a coherent framework that can be adapted to different learning environments while maintaining a common educational philosophy across all participating countries.

The document is organised into the following sections:

Section 1: Introduction

Presents the policy context, rationale, objectives, scope, and methodological approach of the HERA Methodology. It also explains the relationship between this deliverable and the broader HERA project.

Section 2: Theoretical and Methodological Framework

Introduces the theoretical foundations underpinning the HERA Methodology. Drawing on adult learning, community development, community psychology, participatory education, and career development theories, this section explains the educational principles that inform the methodology. It also presents the three complementary approaches—Mutual Aid Groups, Living Labs, and Innovation Hubs—and explains why their integration constitutes the core innovation of the HERA approach.

Section 3: The HERA Implementation Model

Describes the methodological structure of the HERA Labs and presents the four interconnected implementation phases: Team Building & Mutual Aid, Learning to Learn, Engagement with External Stakeholders, and Personal Action Planning. For each phase, the document explains its educational purpose, expected outcomes, implementation process, and supporting tools.

Section 4: Guidelines for Facilitators

Provides practical guidance for facilitators regarding inclusive facilitation, group dynamics, ethical considerations, adaptive learning environments, and participant engagement throughout the HERA Labs.

Section 5: Conclusions

Annexes

Include all practical tools supporting the implementation of the methodology, including self-assessment instruments, worksheets, stakeholder documentation templates, and the Personal Action Plan.

As this document represents the first version of the HERA Methodology, it should be regarded as a living methodological framework. The methodology will be continuously refined through the implementation of the HERA Labs, incorporating evidence generated through pilot activities, facilitator reflections, participant feedback, stakeholder engagement, and the impact

assessment process. The final version will therefore combine its theoretical foundations with implementation evidence, ensuring both academic robustness and practical applicability..

1.3 Methods

This methodology guide was developed as a dynamic, project-specific tool designed to support the design and implementation of HERA Labs. While it is informed by existing educational theories and policy frameworks, the methodology was not derived from a single model. Instead, it was constructed through a practice-oriented design process tailored to the aims of the HERA project and the specific needs of its target group.

The development of the guide drew upon principles from adult learning theory, particularly those that emphasise autonomy, self-directed learning, and experiential engagement (Knowles, 1984; Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 2000). These theories support the idea that adult learners bring valuable lived experience into the learning environment and benefit from participatory, flexible approaches that respect their individual goals and rhythms.

The content and structure of the methodology were also shaped by the practical design of the HERA Labs. The four-phase model, Team Building & Mutual Aid, Learning to Learn, Stakeholder Engagement, and Personal Action Planning, guided the development of tools and guidance materials included in this document. Specific instruments drawn from the field of career counselling were integrated into the later stages of the Labs to support participants in identifying their strengths, assessing their skills, and designing personalised reskilling or upskilling pathways (Sultana, 2012).

As this document represents the first version of the HERA Methodology, it should be regarded as a living methodological framework. The ongoing pilot implementation across the participating countries will generate additional evidence through facilitator reflections, participant feedback, stakeholder engagement, and impact assessment activities. These findings will inform the continuous refinement and validation of the methodology, leading to its final version at the end of the policy experimentation process.

1.4 Synergies with other tasks and deliverables

The development of the HERA Labs Methodology is closely linked to other work packages (WP) in the HERA project, helping to ensure consistency between design, implementation, and evaluation activities.

The methodology builds on the groundwork laid by WP2 (Stakeholder Engagement, Outreach and Sustainability). WP2 helped identify local organisations and community actors who will take part in the Labs, especially during the Innovation Hub phase, where the involvement of external stakeholders is a key element. WP2 also supported the outreach process for recruiting women aged 45+, guiding the creation of inclusive and locally adapted engagement strategies.

In addition, the work carried out in WP3 feeds directly into the digital version of the Labs being developed in WP4 (HERA Community Portal). The tools, activities, and structure outlined in this guide form the basis for designing the online platform, making it possible to mirror the in-person Lab experience in a digital setting.

Finally, this deliverable contributes to the data needed for the evaluation process led by WP5 (Policy Experimentation and Impact Measurement). Although WP5 is responsible for the overall evaluation design, the Labs described here will provide real-world spaces where data can be collected to understand how the approach works and what impact it has. Additionally, tools presented here are self-assessment tools, developed as guiding references for participants, whereas the WP5's Policy Experimentation and Impact Measurement access the impact of the overall activities.

In this way, the HERA Labs Methodology plays a central role in connecting different parts of the project and ensuring that learning, stakeholder involvement, digital access, and evaluation all work together.

2. Conceptual and Methodological Framework

2.1 Theoretical Foundations

The HERA Methodology is grounded in a multidisciplinary theoretical framework that combines principles from adult learning, community development, community psychology, participatory education, and career development. Rather than relying on a single pedagogical model, the methodology integrates complementary educational and community-based perspectives to respond to the complex realities faced by women aged 45 and over.

This integrated approach reflects the understanding that reskilling is not solely a process of acquiring new competences. For many adult women, particularly those who have experienced prolonged periods outside formal education or employment, successful participation in lifelong learning also requires rebuilding confidence, strengthening social connections, increasing learning motivation, and recognising existing knowledge and life experience as valuable learning resources. Consequently, the HERA Methodology combines cognitive, social, and community dimensions of learning into a single methodological framework.

A central influence on the methodology is **Adult Learning Theory (Andragogy)**, developed by Knowles (1984), which argues that adults learn most effectively when learning is relevant to their personal experiences, immediately applicable to their lives, and when they actively participate in shaping their own learning process. Within HERA, participants are recognised as experienced learners whose knowledge, competences, and lived experiences constitute valuable educational resources rather than deficits to be addressed.

The methodology also draws upon **Experiential Learning Theory** (Kolb, 1984), which views learning as a continuous process of experiencing, reflecting, conceptualising, and applying new knowledge. Throughout the HERA Labs, participants are encouraged to reflect on previous life experiences, identify transferable skills developed through work, family responsibilities, volunteering, or community engagement, and transform these experiences into new learning opportunities and future aspirations.

Similarly, **Transformative Learning Theory** (Mezirow, 2000) informs the reflective dimension of the methodology. Returning to education after long periods of exclusion often requires individuals to reconsider assumptions about themselves, their abilities, and their future possibilities. Through dialogue, reflection, and peer interaction, the HERA Labs create

opportunities for participants to challenge limiting beliefs, strengthen self-confidence, and develop new perspectives on lifelong learning and personal development.

Beyond educational theories, the methodology is strongly influenced by **Community Development** and **Community Psychology**, both of which recognise that empowerment emerges through collective participation, shared responsibility, and active engagement within communities rather than through individual interventions alone. These perspectives shift the focus from supporting individuals in isolation towards strengthening local networks, encouraging collaboration, and fostering active citizenship. Within HERA, learning is therefore understood as both an individual and a collective process, where relationships, participation, and community engagement become integral components of personal development.

Finally, the methodology incorporates principles from **Career Development** and **Career Management Skills**, recognising that contemporary careers are increasingly non-linear and require continuous learning, adaptability, and informed decision-making (Sultana, 2012). Rather than preparing participants for a single occupational outcome, HERA supports women in identifying their strengths, exploring learning opportunities, engaging with local ecosystems, and designing personalised pathways that may lead to further education, employment, entrepreneurship, or community participation.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives provide the educational foundation upon which the HERA Methodology has been developed. They explain not only how adults learn, but also why empowerment, mutual support, community participation, and experiential knowledge constitute essential elements of an effective lifelong learning methodology for women aged 45 and over.

2.2 Mutual Aid as the Foundation

Mutual Aid constitutes the starting point and one of the three core methodological pillars of the HERA Methodology. Its inclusion is based on the understanding that effective lifelong learning, particularly for adults who have experienced periods of educational, social, or labour market exclusion, begins with the development of trust, belonging, and meaningful social relationships rather than with the immediate acquisition of technical skills.

The concept of mutual aid originates from the fields of community development, community psychology, and self-help movements, where individuals facing common challenges come together to exchange experiences, provide reciprocal support, and collectively identify solutions to shared concerns (Katz & Bender, 1976; Ife, 2016; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Unlike traditional support models that position individuals as passive recipients of professional expertise, mutual aid is based on reciprocity, recognising that every participant has valuable knowledge, experiences, and capacities that can contribute to the learning and development of others (Riessman, 1965).

Within community development, mutual aid is understood as a participatory process that strengthens both individual empowerment and collective capacity. Rather than focusing exclusively on individual needs, it encourages people to identify common challenges, build supportive relationships, and actively participate in improving their own lives and the communities to which they belong (Ledwith, 2020; Ife, 2016). Similarly, community psychology emphasises that wellbeing and empowerment are achieved not only through individual change

but also through participation, collaboration, and access to supportive social networks (Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, 2000).

These principles are particularly relevant to the HERA target group. Many women aged 45 and over have experienced interrupted career pathways, extended caregiving responsibilities, limited participation in lifelong learning, or prolonged absence from the labour market. As a result, barriers to participation often extend beyond skills gaps and include reduced confidence, social isolation, uncertainty about future opportunities, and limited awareness of available support mechanisms. Addressing these barriers requires learning environments in which participants feel respected, listened to, and supported before they are expected to engage in reskilling or career planning activities.

For this reason, the HERA Methodology positions Mutual Aid as the foundation upon which all subsequent learning activities are built. Through structured group interaction, collaborative reflection, and reciprocal support, participants gradually develop trust, strengthen their sense of belonging, recognise the value of their own experiences, and build the confidence required to engage actively in lifelong learning. In this sense, Mutual Aid is not treated as a standalone educational activity but as the pedagogical foundation that enables the successful implementation of the Living Lab and Innovation Hub approaches introduced in the following stages of the methodology.

The Mutual Aid approach is operationalised through a number of interconnected principles that guide both the organisation of the groups and the facilitation process. These principles are not implemented independently; rather, they reinforce one another and collectively create the collaborative learning environment upon which the HERA Labs are built.

2.2.1 Principles of Mutual Aid

Self-help

The concept of **self-help** within the HERA Methodology refers to the active engagement of individuals in addressing shared challenges through collective learning and cooperation rather than passive reliance on external support (Ife, 2016). Closely linked to this concept is **mutual aid**, understood as the reciprocal exchange of knowledge, experience, emotional support, and practical assistance among participants who recognise common needs and shared aspirations (Katz & Bender, 1976).

Mutual aid differs from traditional educational approaches in which knowledge is transmitted primarily by experts. Instead, it acknowledges that every participant brings valuable experiential knowledge that contributes to the collective learning process (Riessman, 1965). Women participating in the HERA Labs are therefore recognised not only as learners but also as contributors who support one another through dialogue, reflection, and the exchange of lived experiences.

This principle aligns closely with adult learning theory, which recognises that adults learn most effectively when they actively participate in constructing knowledge and when learning is directly connected to their own experiences (Knowles, 1984; Kolb, 1984).

Solidarity

Solidarity constitutes one of the central values underpinning the HERA Methodology. Unlike charitable approaches based primarily on providing assistance, solidarity is based on reciprocity,

equality, and the recognition of shared humanity despite differences in personal backgrounds or life experiences (Freire, 1970; Ledwith, 2020).

Within the HERA Labs, solidarity is fostered by creating environments in which participants listen to one another, exchange experiences, recognise common challenges, and jointly explore possible solutions. This process contributes to the development of trust, belonging, and psychological safety, which are widely recognised as essential conditions for meaningful adult learning and participation (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010).

Self-organisation and Self-management

Another defining principle of the HERA Methodology is the promotion of **self-organisation** and **self-management**. Community development literature emphasises that sustainable empowerment occurs when individuals gradually assume responsibility for organising activities, making decisions, and managing collective processes rather than depending exclusively on external leadership (Ife, 2016; Ledwith, 2020).

Within the HERA Labs, facilitators therefore act primarily as enablers rather than instructors. Participants are encouraged to contribute to discussions, co-design activities, share responsibilities, and gradually become active members of their learning community. This shift from facilitator-centred to participant-centred learning reflects the participatory philosophy that underpins the entire methodology.

Democratic Participation and Experiential Knowledge

The HERA Methodology recognises that learning environments become more meaningful when participants actively influence the learning process itself. Democratic participation therefore represents a fundamental principle throughout the implementation of the HERA Labs. Participants are encouraged to express opinions, contribute ideas, participate in decision-making, and collaboratively shape both group activities and individual learning pathways (Freire, 1970; Brookfield, 2013).

Equally important is the recognition of **experiential knowledge**. Women aged 45 and over possess extensive knowledge acquired through employment, family responsibilities, volunteering, migration, caregiving, and community participation. Although these experiences are often overlooked within formal education systems, adult learning research consistently demonstrates that prior experience constitutes one of the most valuable resources for learning (Knowles, 1984; Kolb, 1984).

By recognising participants as knowledgeable individuals rather than passive recipients of education, the HERA Methodology creates learning environments that promote confidence, participation, collaboration, and agency. Together, these principles provide the foundation upon which the subsequent methodological approaches—Mutual Aid Groups, Living Labs, and Innovation Hubs—are integrated into a coherent learning journey.

2.3 Living Labs

Living Labs constitute the second methodological pillar of the HERA Methodology, building upon the trust, reciprocity, and collaborative relationships established through the Mutual Aid approach. While Mutual Aid focuses on strengthening participants' confidence and creating psychologically safe learning environments, Living Labs expand the learning process beyond the

group by connecting participants with their local ecosystems and enabling them to engage with real-life challenges and opportunities.

The Living Lab concept emerged within the field of open innovation and is defined as a user-centred, open innovation ecosystem where multiple stakeholders, including citizens, businesses, public authorities, researchers, and civil society organisations, collaborate to co-create, test, and evaluate solutions in real-life environments (European Network of Living Labs [ENoLL], 2019; Leminen, Westerlund, & Nyström, 2012). Unlike traditional innovation models, Living Labs recognise end-users as active partners throughout the innovation process rather than passive recipients of products or services (Schuurman et al., 2016).

The educational value of Living Labs lies in their emphasis on **co-creation**, **experiential learning**, and **participatory problem-solving**. Learning takes place through active engagement with authentic contexts, allowing participants to apply their knowledge, reflect on real experiences, and collaborate with others to address community needs (Kolb, 1984). This approach aligns closely with adult learning principles, recognising that adults learn most effectively when educational experiences are relevant, participatory, and directly connected to their personal and professional lives (Knowles, 1984).

Living Labs also reflect the principles of community development by strengthening relationships between individuals and local stakeholders. Through collaboration, dialogue, and joint exploration of opportunities, participants become active contributors to their communities while simultaneously expanding their own social capital and access to learning, employment, and support networks (Ife, 2016; Ledwith, 2020).

Within the HERA Methodology, the Living Lab approach represents the transition from peer learning to community engagement. After participants have developed trust, confidence, and mutual support through the Mutual Aid phase, they are encouraged to engage with the wider ecosystem surrounding them. This includes local authorities, employers, vocational education and training providers, universities, social enterprises, civil society organisations, career guidance services, and other stakeholders that can support women's lifelong learning and labour market participation.

Rather than positioning stakeholders as external experts who simply provide information, the HERA Living Labs encourage dialogue and collaboration between participants and local actors. Women are invited to share their experiences, identify challenges within their communities, explore available opportunities, and co-design potential solutions together with relevant stakeholders. This collaborative process enables participants to gain a deeper understanding of local resources while simultaneously strengthening the responsiveness of local ecosystems to the needs of women aged 45 and over.

The Living Lab approach also contributes to the development of career management skills by exposing participants to authentic learning environments where they can explore educational opportunities, employment pathways, entrepreneurship support services, and community initiatives. Through these interactions, participants broaden their networks, increase their awareness of available resources, and strengthen their ability to make informed decisions regarding their future learning and professional development (Sultana, 2012).

Within the HERA Methodology, Living Labs therefore function as a bridge between individual empowerment and active community participation. They transform learning from an internal group process into a collaborative experience rooted in local realities, ensuring that participants

not only develop new knowledge and confidence but also establish meaningful connections with the ecosystems that can support their future development. In this way, Living Labs prepare participants for the final methodological pillar of HERA, the Innovation Hubs, where ideas, networks, and learning are translated into concrete actions and personalised development pathways.

2.4 Innovation Hubs

Innovation Hubs constitute the third methodological pillar of the HERA Methodology and provide the environment in which participants can transform ideas into concrete initiatives. While Mutual Aid Groups strengthen peer support and Living Labs facilitate collaboration with local ecosystems, Innovation Hubs focus on experimentation, creativity, and the practical development of solutions that respond to individual aspirations and community needs.

The concept of Innovation Hubs has evolved from innovation ecosystem theory, which emphasises collaboration, knowledge exchange, and multidisciplinary cooperation as drivers of innovation (European Commission, 2021; OECD, 2021). Increasingly, Innovation Hubs are recognised not only as spaces for technological or business innovation but also as environments that foster **social innovation**, enabling individuals and communities to develop new responses to social, educational, and labour market challenges (Bason, 2010).

Within the HERA Methodology, innovation is understood in a broad and inclusive sense. It may involve designing a community initiative, developing a learning activity, exploring self-employment opportunities, creating a support service, or identifying new ways of applying existing knowledge and competences. The emphasis is placed on generating value for participants and their communities rather than on commercial outcomes alone.

The Innovation Hub approach promotes creative thinking, problem-solving, experimentation, and iterative learning. Participants are encouraged to explore opportunities, refine ideas through feedback, assess their feasibility, and gradually translate them into realistic actions. In doing so, they strengthen competences such as initiative, adaptability, collaboration, and decision-making, all of which are increasingly recognised as essential for lifelong learning and employability (European Commission, 2020).

Within HERA, Innovation Hubs represent the stage where reflection and collaboration are translated into purposeful action. Drawing on the knowledge gained through the previous phases, participants work individually and collectively to identify opportunities that are meaningful within their local contexts and aligned with their personal goals.

Innovation Hub activities are designed to support participants in exploring different future pathways, testing ideas, and connecting available resources with realistic next steps. Depending on participants' interests and aspirations, these pathways may include further learning, employment, entrepreneurship, volunteering, or community-based initiatives. Facilitators and external stakeholders provide guidance and constructive feedback, helping participants evaluate different options while maintaining ownership of their decisions.

Rather than promoting a single model of success, the Innovation Hub recognises that meaningful innovation can take different forms. For some women, innovation may involve launching a small business or developing a professional project; for others, it may consist of initiating a community activity, participating in local networks, or applying newly acquired competences in their everyday lives. By acknowledging these diverse trajectories, the HERA Methodology adopts a

person-centred understanding of innovation that reflects the realities, motivations, and ambitions of women aged 45 and over.

As the final methodological pillar of the HERA Labs, Innovation Hubs create the conditions for participants to move from exploration to implementation.

2.5 Integrating the Three Approaches: The HERA Methodological Framework

The HERA Methodology does not treat Mutual Aid, Living Labs, and Innovation Hubs as independent educational approaches implemented in parallel. Instead, it integrates them into a coherent methodological framework in which each approach fulfils a distinct function within participants' learning journey. The added value of the methodology lies not in the individual approaches themselves, all of which are well established within the literature, but in their intentional combination into a structured process that reflects the realities, aspirations, and learning needs of women aged 45 and over.

The design of the methodology is based on the assumption that meaningful reskilling extends beyond the acquisition of technical competences. Research in adult education consistently demonstrates that successful participation in lifelong learning is influenced by a combination of personal, social, and environmental factors, including self-efficacy, motivation, supportive relationships, access to opportunities, and the ability to apply learning in authentic contexts (Knowles, 1984; Mezirow, 2000; Sultana, 2012). Consequently, the HERA Methodology adopts a holistic perspective in which personal development, community engagement, and action-oriented learning are viewed as complementary dimensions of the same educational process.

For this reason, the methodology follows a progressive sequence. The first stage focuses on establishing trust, psychological safety, and peer support through the Mutual Aid approach. Rather than introducing participants immediately to reskilling opportunities, the methodology prioritises the creation of collaborative learning environments in which women can share experiences, recognise existing strengths, and gradually rebuild confidence. This initial phase provides the social foundation upon which subsequent learning activities can develop.

Once these foundations have been established, the methodology extends learning beyond the group through the Living Lab approach. At this stage, participants begin to engage with their local ecosystems, interact with relevant stakeholders, and explore opportunities within their communities. Learning becomes increasingly contextual, allowing participants to connect their personal aspirations with existing educational, employment, entrepreneurial, and community resources. The emphasis shifts from internal reflection to external engagement, encouraging participants to understand themselves as active members of wider social and economic networks.

The final methodological component is implemented through the Innovation Hub approach, where ideas generated throughout the previous phases are translated into practical initiatives and future-oriented plans. Innovation is understood broadly, encompassing personal, social, educational, and professional development rather than exclusively business creation. Participants are encouraged to identify realistic opportunities, explore different pathways, test ideas, and define meaningful next steps that correspond to their individual circumstances and ambitions. In this way, innovation becomes a vehicle for agency, initiative, and sustainable participation rather than an end in itself.

Together, these three approaches establish a continuous learning pathway that moves from reflection, to connection, and finally to action. This progression reflects the educational philosophy underpinning the HERA Methodology: women first strengthen their confidence and sense of belonging, then expand their engagement with the surrounding ecosystem, and finally translate learning into concrete personal and professional opportunities. Rather than viewing empowerment as a single outcome, the methodology conceptualises it as a gradual process that develops through participation, collaboration, and purposeful action.

The conceptual framework is operationalised through the implementation model of the HERA Labs, presented in the following chapter. The four implementation phases,

Team Building and Mutual Aid → Learning to Learn → Stakeholder Engagement → and Personal Action Planning,

translate these methodological principles into a structured sequence of activities that can be adapted to different national contexts while maintaining a common pedagogical philosophy across all participating countries.

3. HERA Labs Implementation Model

3.1 Operationalising the HERA Methodology

The HERA Methodology is implemented through the **HERA Labs**, community-based learning environments designed to translate the conceptual framework presented in the previous chapter into a structured educational experience. The implementation model follows a progressive learning pathway that combines personal reflection, peer learning, stakeholder engagement, and action planning. Rather than delivering isolated training sessions, the HERA Labs are organised as an interconnected process in which each phase prepares participants for the next stage of their development.

The implementation model has been designed to remain sufficiently structured to ensure consistency across participating countries while allowing flexibility for adaptation to different local contexts, participant profiles, and stakeholder ecosystems. Although all partners follow the same methodological principles and learning sequence, facilitators are encouraged to adjust the pace, examples, and supporting activities according to the needs and characteristics of each group.

The HERA Labs target women aged 45 and over who may be seeking opportunities for personal development, lifelong learning, reskilling, employment, entrepreneurship, or greater participation in community life. Throughout the implementation process, learning is facilitated through collaborative, experiential, and reflective methods that recognise participants' existing knowledge and life experiences as valuable learning resources.

The implementation model is organised into four interconnected phases that collectively support participants in moving from self-awareness to action. These phases do not function as isolated modules but as complementary stages of a continuous learning journey that reflects the pedagogical philosophy of the HERA Methodology.

3.2 Overall Structure of the HERA Labs

The HERA Labs are organised into four sequential phases, each addressing a different dimension of participants' learning and empowerment process. Together, these phases create a coherent pathway that combines personal development, collaborative learning, stakeholder engagement, and future planning.

Rather than prescribing a rigid curriculum, the methodology provides a common implementation framework that can be adapted to different national contexts while maintaining the same educational objectives and methodological principles. The duration of each phase may vary slightly depending on local circumstances, participant needs, and organisational arrangements; however, the overall sequence remains consistent across all partner countries.

Phase	Main Focus	Indicative Purpose	Key Supporting Tools
Phase 1	Team Building & Mutual Aid	Establish trust, group cohesion and psychological safety	Group Agreement, Self-Assessment
Phase 2	Learning to Learn	Strengthen learning confidence and career management skills	Learning to Learn Modules, Reflection Exercises
Phase 3	Stakeholder Engagement	Connect participants with local ecosystems and opportunities	Stakeholder Meetings, Ecosystem Mapping
Phase 4	Personal Action Planning	Translate learning into realistic future pathways	Personal Action Plan, Final Reflection

Each phase contributes to different learning outcomes while reinforcing those achieved during previous stages. Consequently, participants gradually move from self-awareness and peer support towards external engagement and the development of realistic plans for lifelong learning, employment, entrepreneurship, or community participation.

3.3 The Four Learning Phases

The implementation model follows a progressive educational sequence in which each phase responds to a specific learning purpose while contributing to the overall objectives of the HERA Methodology.

Phase 1 – Team Building and Mutual Aid

The first phase establishes the social foundations of the HERA Labs by creating a safe, inclusive, and collaborative learning environment. Activities focus on building trust, encouraging participation, and developing supportive peer relationships that enable participants to engage confidently in subsequent learning activities.

Phase 2 – Learning to Learn

The second phase strengthens participants' capacity to manage their own learning. Through structured reflection and Learning to Learn activities, participants identify existing competences, recognise learning needs, and increase their confidence in engaging with future education and training opportunities.

Phase 3 – Stakeholder Engagement

The third phase extends learning beyond the group by connecting participants with relevant actors from the local ecosystem. Through dialogue with employers, training providers, public authorities, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders, participants gain a broader understanding of available opportunities while strengthening their networks and community participation.

Phase 4 – Personal Action Planning

The final phase supports participants in translating their learning experiences into realistic and personalised future pathways. Drawing upon the knowledge, confidence, and connections developed throughout the HERA Labs, participants develop individual Action Plans that identify concrete next steps aligned with their personal aspirations and local opportunities.

Detailed guidance regarding the implementation of each phase, including indicative session structures, facilitation techniques, recommended activities, and supporting materials, is provided in the accompanying **HERA Labs Implementation Guidelines**.

3.4 Cross-cutting Principles for Implementation

Regardless of the implementation phase, all HERA Labs are guided by a common set of pedagogical principles that ensure consistency across different contexts. These include active participation, experiential learning, mutual respect, inclusion, flexibility, learner autonomy, and collaborative knowledge construction. Facilitators are encouraged to create environments where participants actively contribute to the learning process, reflect on their experiences, and support one another throughout their individual and collective learning journeys.

The methodology also emphasises continuous reflection and adaptation. Facilitators are expected to monitor group dynamics, respond to emerging needs, and adjust learning activities where appropriate while maintaining the overall objectives and sequence of the HERA Methodology.

3.5 Flexibility and Contextual Adaptation

One of the defining characteristics of the HERA Methodology is its adaptability. While the overall implementation framework remains common across all participating countries, the methodology recognises that local labour markets, stakeholder ecosystems, participant profiles, and available resources differ considerably between contexts.

For this reason, facilitators may adapt examples, stakeholder involvement, learning activities, and implementation pace without altering the core methodological principles or educational objectives. This flexibility allows the HERA Labs to remain relevant, responsive, and meaningful for diverse groups of women while ensuring comparability across the policy experimentation process.

3.6 Pilot Implementation and Future Refinement

The present document represents the initial version of the HERA Methodology and has been developed prior to the completion of the pilot implementation in the participating countries. As such, the implementation model presented in this chapter should be considered a methodological framework that guides the delivery of the HERA Labs rather than a definitive implementation protocol.

Evidence collected during the pilot phase—including participant feedback, facilitator reflections, stakeholder contributions, and findings from the policy experimentation and evaluation activities—will inform the refinement of the methodology. The final version of the guide will incorporate lessons learned, examples of good practice, and recommendations arising from the implementation process, further strengthening the applicability and transferability of the HERA Methodology across different educational and community contexts.

4. Guidelines for Facilitators

4.1 Role and Ethos of the Facilitator

The effectiveness of each HERA Lab depends not only on its structure and content, but also—critically—on the quality of its facilitators. Facilitators are not traditional instructors who stand at the front of the room and deliver knowledge. Rather, they create conditions that foster collaborative learning, support personal growth, and encourage group unity through empathy, presence, and intentional design.

HERA Lab facilitators are responsible for maintaining a safe, inclusive, and emotionally responsive space. They recognize that many participants may have complex life histories, including disconnection from formal education, prolonged care responsibilities or limited access to paid work. Thus, facilitators act as bridges between each woman's untapped potential and the wider world of learning, participation, and opportunity (Rochim, Ediatna, & Satori, 2023).

A core principle of facilitation in HERA is non-hierarchical leadership. Facilitators guide without directing, invite without pressuring, and support without evaluating. This approach aligns with participatory pedagogical theories that view education as a shared process rooted in dialogue and mutual respect (Freire, 1970).

From the first sessions on, facilitators co-create group agreements with participants. These agreements uphold essential values such as confidentiality, mutual respect, active listening, and emotional safety, while reinforcing the idea that every woman is a co-owner of the space. This participatory approach promotes collective responsibility and autonomy, two pillars of adult empowerment.

Facilitators also play a vital role in modelling empowerment. In the context of HERA, this means recognizing subtle signs of progress, such as a woman speaking up for the first time, expressing a learning goal, or supporting a peer. Though small, these moments are critical milestones in the reskilling journey.

In addition to emotional intelligence, facilitators must have practical group management skills. They are responsible for pacing the session, navigating power dynamics, handling conflicts sensitively, and ensuring that all voices are heard, including the quieter ones (Voltage Control, 2021). Facilitators adapt fluidly to the energy and needs of the group, balancing flexibility with a light structure.

Ultimately, the facilitator's role is not to solve problems on behalf of participants or to prescribe solutions. Instead, facilitators create the conditions that enable women to identify their own strengths, make informed decisions, and gradually take ownership of their personal learning and development pathways. This learner-centred approach reflects the broader philosophy of the

HERA Methodology, where empowerment is understood as a process of increasing agency rather than dependence.

4.2 Key Facilitation Considerations

4.2.1 Creating a Safe and Inclusive Learning Environment

The establishment of a safe and inclusive learning environment represents one of the facilitator's primary responsibilities throughout the HERA Labs. Participants should feel able to express opinions, share experiences, ask questions, and participate in discussions without fear of judgement or criticism. Psychological safety encourages openness, strengthens trust among participants, and creates the conditions necessary for collaborative learning.

At the beginning of the HERA Labs, facilitators are encouraged to establish group norms collaboratively with participants. These shared principles may include confidentiality, mutual respect, active listening, equal participation, and respect for different opinions and experiences. Revisiting these principles throughout the programme reinforces collective responsibility and contributes to maintaining a supportive learning environment.

Inclusive facilitation also requires sensitivity towards the diversity of participants' backgrounds, experiences, educational levels, and communication preferences. Facilitators should use inclusive language, encourage respectful interaction, and ensure that learning activities remain accessible and meaningful for all participants.

4.2.2 Encouraging Meaningful Participation

Participation within the HERA Labs should remain active, voluntary, and meaningful. Facilitators are encouraged to create multiple opportunities for engagement while recognising that participants may express themselves in different ways. Some women may contribute confidently during group discussions, whereas others may feel more comfortable participating through pair work, reflective writing, practical activities, or small-group conversations.

The facilitator's responsibility is not to ensure that everyone contributes equally, but rather that every participant feels equally welcome and valued. Particular attention should be given to encouraging quieter participants without placing them under pressure, while also ensuring that more confident participants do not unintentionally dominate discussions.

Meaningful participation is strengthened when facilitators acknowledge participants' experiences, encourage peer learning, and create opportunities for collaborative reflection. This reinforces the principles of Mutual Aid that underpin the HERA Methodology and supports the development of confidence, autonomy, and collective learning.

4.2.3 Managing Group Dynamics

The diversity of experiences represented within each HERA Lab is one of the programme's greatest strengths. At the same time, differences in educational background, communication styles, confidence, or expectations may influence group dynamics throughout the implementation process.

Facilitators should continuously observe interactions within the group, ensuring that discussions remain respectful, balanced, and constructive. Differences of opinion should be recognised as

valuable learning opportunities, provided that dialogue remains respectful and aligned with the group's shared principles.

Where conflicts or misunderstandings arise, facilitators are encouraged to respond calmly and objectively, promoting dialogue rather than confrontation. Similarly, any discriminatory, exclusionary, or disrespectful behaviour should be addressed promptly in order to preserve the inclusive character of the HERA Labs.

4.2.4 Maintaining a Learning Focus

Although personal experiences and emotional expression form an important part of the HERA learning process, the primary purpose of the HERA Labs remains lifelong learning, reskilling, personal development, and future planning. Facilitators therefore balance opportunities for personal reflection with activities that support learning objectives and encourage participants to translate reflection into action.

Throughout the programme, facilitators help participants connect their experiences with future possibilities, encouraging them to identify learning goals, recognise transferable competences, explore available opportunities, and gradually develop realistic pathways towards education, employment, entrepreneurship, or community participation.

4.2.5 Reflective Facilitation

Facilitation within HERA is understood as an ongoing reflective practice. Facilitators are encouraged to observe participants' engagement, reflect on the effectiveness of learning activities, and adapt their facilitation approaches where appropriate while maintaining the core principles of the methodology.

Documenting observations, monitoring group progress, and reflecting on participants' evolving needs contribute not only to improving individual learning experiences but also to the continuous refinement of the HERA Methodology throughout the pilot implementation. Reflective facilitation therefore supports both participant development and the broader policy experimentation objectives of the HERA project.

4.3 Common Facilitation Challenges

Facilitating participatory learning environments inevitably involves responding to diverse group dynamics and unexpected situations. While each HERA Lab will develop differently according to its participants and local context, several common challenges may arise during implementation.

One common challenge concerns balancing emotional support with the educational objectives of the programme. Participants may wish to discuss personal experiences that extend beyond the scope of the planned activities. Facilitators should acknowledge these experiences respectfully while gently guiding discussions back towards the learning objectives and intended outcomes of the session.

Another challenge relates to encouraging equitable participation. Some participants may naturally contribute more frequently, while others may prefer to observe before engaging. Facilitators should employ a variety of participatory methods that enable different forms of contribution and ensure that all participants have opportunities to engage according to their own preferences and confidence levels.

Managing diversity within the group also requires continuous attention. Participants may differ considerably in educational background, employment history, digital competences, learning confidence, or personal aspirations. Facilitators should recognise this diversity as a valuable learning resource while avoiding unnecessary comparisons between participants or assumptions regarding their abilities.

Finally, facilitators should remain responsive to the evolving needs of the group. Flexibility is a defining characteristic of the HERA Methodology, allowing facilitators to adjust the pace of activities, provide additional opportunities for reflection, or adapt examples to local contexts while preserving the overall educational objectives and methodological sequence of the HERA Labs.

Further practical guidance regarding session planning, activity implementation, group management techniques, and documentation procedures is provided in the accompanying **HERA Labs Implementation Guidelines**, which complement the present methodology by supporting its practical application across different national contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

The HERA Methodology has been developed as a practical framework to support the design and implementation of inclusive learning environments for women aged 45 and over. Rather than proposing a one-size-fits-all educational model, it provides a flexible approach that can be adapted to different national, regional, and local contexts while maintaining a common pedagogical philosophy.

The methodology should be understood as the starting point of an ongoing learning and development process rather than as a finalised product. As the HERA Labs continue to be implemented across the participating countries, the methodology itself will evolve through continuous reflection, observation, and evidence generated during the policy experimentation process. This iterative approach reflects the project's commitment to designing solutions that are informed not only by educational theory but also by real-world implementation.

Particular attention will be given to the experiences of participants, facilitators, and stakeholders, whose feedback will contribute to validating the proposed implementation model and identifying areas requiring further adaptation. In parallel, findings from the evaluation activities will provide evidence regarding the methodology's relevance, usability, and potential for transferability to other contexts and target groups.

The final version of the HERA Methodology will incorporate the lessons learned throughout the pilot implementation, strengthening both its practical applicability and its contribution to evidence-informed adult education. It is anticipated that this continuous refinement process will support the wider adoption of participatory, community-based approaches to lifelong learning and contribute to future discussions on inclusive reskilling policies for adult learners across Europe.

REFERENCES

- Bason, C. (2010). *Leading public sector innovation: Co-creating for a better society*. Policy Press.
- Bergvall-Kåreborn, B., & Ståhlbröst, A. (2009). Living Lab: An open and citizen-centric approach for innovation. *International Journal of Innovation and Regional Development*, 1(4), 356–370. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJIRD.2009.022727>
- Brookfield, S. D. (2013). *Powerful techniques for teaching adults*. Jossey-Bass.
- Cedefop. (2022). *Empowering adults through upskilling pathways: Key lessons from implementation*. Publications Office of the European Union.
- European Commission. (2020). *European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience*. Publications Office of the European Union.
- European Commission. (2021). *European Innovation Ecosystems*. Publications Office of the European Union.
- European Commission. (2023). *Education and Training Monitor 2023*. Publications Office of the European Union.
- European Network of Living Labs (ENoLL). (2019). *What are Living Labs?* <https://enoll.org>
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.
- Ife, J. (2016). *Community development in an uncertain world: Vision, analysis and practice* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Katz, A. H., & Bender, E. I. (1976). *The strength in us: Self-help groups in the modern world*. New Viewpoints.
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice Hall.
- Knowles, M. S. (1984). *The adult learner: A neglected species* (3rd ed.). Gulf Publishing.
- Ledwith, M. (2020). *Community development: A critical approach* (3rd ed.). Policy Press.
- Leminen, S., Westerlund, M., & Nyström, A.-G. (2012). Living Labs as open-innovation networks. *Technology Innovation Management Review*, 2(9), 6–11.
- Mezirow, J. (2000). *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. Jossey-Bass.
- Nelson, G., & Prilleltensky, I. (2010). *Community psychology: In pursuit of liberation and well-being* (2nd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- OECD. (2004). *Career guidance and public policy: Bridging the gap*. OECD Publishing.
- OECD. (2021). *The OECD Digital Innovation Policy Framework: Building innovation ecosystems for the future*. OECD Publishing.
- Rappaport, J. (1987). Terms of empowerment/exemplars of prevention: Toward a theory for community psychology. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 15(2), 121–148.
- Riessman, F. (1965). The "helper" therapy principle. *Social Work*, 10(2), 27–32.

Rochim, A., Ediatna, A., & Satori, D. (2023). The role of facilitators in community empowerment based on learning community to improve vocational skills. *Journal of Nonformal Education*, 9(1), 47–57.

Schuurman, D., De Marez, L., & Ballon, P. (2016). The impact of Living Lab methodology on open innovation contributions and outcomes. *Technology Innovation Management Review*, 6(1), 7–16.

Steinberg, D. M. (2004). *The mutual aid approach to working with groups: Helping people help one another* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Sultana, R. G. (2012). Learning career management skills in Europe: A critical review. *Journal of Education and Work*, 25(2), 225–248.

Zimmerman, M. A. (2000). Empowerment theory. In J. Rappaport & E. Seidman (Eds.), *Handbook of community psychology* (pp. 43–63). Springer.

ANNEX I: Self-Assessment Tool Template

This self-assessment tool is designed to support women participating in the HERA Labs to reflect on their skills, strengths, needs and learning goals. It combines elements from the COMPASS career counselling model and the LifeComp framework for personal, social and learning-to-learn competences. Participants are invited to complete this at the beginning of the Labs and revisit it at the end to reflect on their growth and progress.

Section 1: Self-Perception and Confidence

Please indicate how confident you feel about the following statements, using a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Very confident):

1. I can express my opinions clearly in a group.
2. I feel confident using digital devices like smartphones or computers.
3. I can manage my time and responsibilities effectively.
4. I am able to make decisions and solve problems.
5. I feel comfortable asking for help or support when I need it.
6. I believe I can learn new things, even at this stage of life.
7. I can adapt to new situations or changes in my environment.
8. I have a good understanding of my own strengths and limitations.
9. I can stay motivated when learning something new.
10. I feel in control of planning my personal or professional future.

Section 2: Interests and Learning Motivation

Which of the following areas are you most interested in exploring? (You may tick more than one):

- ☐ Improving my digital skills
- ☐ Learning about green practices or sustainability
- ☐ Starting a business or social initiative
- ☐ Finding a job or changing career
- ☐ Volunteering or supporting my community
- ☐ Returning to education or formal training
- ☐ Strengthening my confidence and communication
- ☐ Other:

Section 3: Barriers and Challenges

What are the main challenges or barriers you face at this time? (Tick all that apply):

- ☐ Low confidence or self-esteem
- ☐ Limited access to digital tools or internet
- ☐ Care responsibilities (children, family, etc.)
- ☐ Lack of recent work experience or qualifications
- ☐ Language or communication difficulties

- ☐ Feeling isolated or socially disconnected
- ☐ Financial difficulties
- ☐ Health issues (physical or mental)
- ☐ Other:

Section 4: Personal Goals and Strengths

Please answer the following short questions:

1. One thing I hope to achieve through this Lab:
2. One strength or quality I bring to this group:
3. One area where I would like to grow or improve:
4. One type of support I think I will need:

ANNEX II Stakeholder Session Summary Form

In Phase 3 of the HERA Labs (Engagement with Stakeholders), facilitators are encouraged to complete a short reporting form after each session. This helps to document the interaction with external guests, reflect on the outcomes, and capture early indications of participants' interest in specific sectors or training opportunities. The information collected will support the refinement of Personal Action Plans and the overall evaluation of the methodology.

• Session Information

Date of session:

Facilitator name:

Stakeholder/Organisation name:

Topic/Theme discussed:

• Key Observations (tick all that apply)

- ☐ The topic matched participants' interests
- ☐ Participants asked questions and showed curiosity
- ☐ The stakeholder was open and interactive
- ☐ The session helped clarify possible training or employment options
- ☐ Women connected their own experiences to the topic discussed
- ☐ Some participants expressed interest in follow-up opportunities
- ☐ The session inspired new ideas or motivation

• Facilitator Notes (short reflections)

1. What stood out during the session? (e.g. themes, reactions, surprises)
2. Did any participants express a desire to pursue training or a specific path?
3. Any challenges or improvements for future sessions?

ANNEX III: Personal Action Plan Template

To be completed by each participant individually.

1. Personal Profile

Name:

Date:

2. My Current Situation

What is my current employment or learning status?

3. My Strengths and Interests

What skills, experiences, or interests do I want to build on?

4. My Goals

What do I want to do next? (Choose one or more)

- ☐ Start a training course
- ☐ Find a job
- ☐ Career Transition
- ☐ Start my own project
- ☐ Other:
- ☐

5. Steps I Will Take

List 2–3 concrete actions you will take in the next 3 months

1.

2.

3.

6. Support and Resources

6.1 Who or what can support me?

- ☐ Training centre
- ☐ Mentor
- ☐ Friend/family
- ☐ Local NGO/service
- ☐ Other:

6.2 What challenges might I face, and how will I address them?

7. Timeline and Checkpoints

7.1 My goal(s):

7.2 When will I complete the steps above? (Rough dates)

8. The Role of the Group

8.1 Has the group helped me discover something about myself or my future?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I'm not sure yet

If yes, what did I discover?

ANNEX IV :Facilitator Session Report Template

This template must be completed after each Lab session. It serves both WP3 (implementation documentation) and WP5 (impact measurement) purposes. To ensure accuracy, facilitators are encouraged to complete the report immediately after the session, while the activities and group dynamics are still fresh. Please save all reports in your national Lab folder.

Partner:

Facilitator:

Country:

Date of session:

Session number: / 18

Duration: (e.g. 1h 30min)

Phase: ☐ Team Building & Mutual Aid ☐ Learning to Learn ☐ Stakeholder Engagement ☐ Personal Action Plans

1. Session Focus and Activities

1. Briefly describe the main objectives and activities of today's session.

(e.g. trust-building exercise, reflection on learning styles, meeting with local stakeholders, personal action plan drafting)

Summary (max. 5 lines):

2. Group Dynamics and Participation

2.1 How would you describe the atmosphere and engagement of participants during this session?

(tick the option that best fits and add comments)

☐ Very engaged ☐ Moderately engaged ☐ Passive / low energy

☐ Stable group attendance ☐ Noticeable absences ☐ New participants joined

Facilitator's observations:

3. Key Insights and Learning Outcomes

3.1 What new ideas, reflections, or breakthroughs emerged?

3.2 Were there any noticeable changes in attitudes, confidence, or learning behaviour?

Notes:

4. Challenges or Needs Identified

List any difficulties, barriers, or support needs that emerged (e.g. logistical, emotional, technical).

Comments:

5. Additional Notes / Follow-up Actions

6. Attachments (if available):

☐ Attendance list ☐ Photos ☐ Participant feedback mini-form (optional)

