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**European Commission
Directorate Enterprise and Industry
Unit Innovation and Advanced Manufacturing,
Clusters, Social Economy and Entrepreneurship, F.2**

**CASE STUDY
Ruta CECE
Spain**

June 2016

Name of initiative:	Ruta CECE - Ruta Hacia la Cooperación Empresarial y Comercio Electrónico (Route towards business cooperation and e-commerce)
Name of implementing organisation:	City council of La Palma del Condado (Organiser), city council of Palos de la Frontera, city council of Lepe, city council of Faro, Mita ONG, Unión de Asociaciones de Trabajadores Autónomos y Emprendedores (UATAE) and Confederação dos Empresários do Algarve (CEAL)
Country (region/municipality):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In Spain: Huelva province, Andalucía Region, Municipalities of La Palma del Condado, Palos de la Frontera, Lepe and organisations located in Barcelona and Madrid. In Portugal: Algarve region, Faro Municipality.
Type of implementing organisation:	Public body and NGOs
Implementation period:	2013-2015 Ruta CECE is still ongoing supported by the city partners and NGOs (MITA).
Main activity/dimension:	Business training and individual business support.
Funding:	<p>Total funding: 912,243.32€</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), through the Program Cross-border Cooperation Spain-Portugal 2007-2013: 684,182.49€ (75%) Other local, regional and national funds from Spain and Portugal: 228,060.83€ (25%)
Success factors:	<p>The development of two online platforms (e-commerce and e-learning, including assistance for businesses):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The entrepreneurs could receive all necessary training online (on business management, languages, culture, etc.) The users could create an e-commerce business without spending a large amount of money. The online platform provided the minimum to check the viability of the business idea. The online platform encouraged the users and service providers to interact and create useful discussions and training material. <p>The reduction of all these barriers and the collaboration with different stakeholders created the proper environment of entrepreneurship for the promising projects.</p>

Overview

National context

Since the nineties Spain has been a destination country for migrants coming mostly from Latin American (no or low language barriers) and African (proximity) countries¹. The government is aware of the issues that migrant face to integrate in the host community and

¹ INE (National Institute of Statistics) data 1st of July 2015: Total population 46,423,064; Spanish 40,521,981; EU 1,976,137; South America 1,797,822; Africa 970,603; Central America 386,372; Asia 359,729; Other EU 303,2014; North America 99,204; Oceania 8,011.

has been promoting initiatives in order to support them as much as possible². The practices promoting migrant entrepreneurship are normally carried out by local organisations, with state and/or European funding.

In 2013, Spain approved a specific migration scheme for migrant entrepreneurs. The main objective of this scheme is to attract and retain migrant entrepreneurs by removing administrative burdens. The key elements of this scheme are: flexibility, involvement of business experts in the decision process over business ideas, short processing times, improving changes of status and equal treatment.³

In addition, Spain has been carrying out proactive migration policies for years, thus the local and regional governments have also developed strategies towards integration. The government has created different funding lines⁴ (ENISA⁵, ICO⁶, ICEX⁷, AEESD⁸, etc.) in order to support the programmes and organisations working for integration and entrepreneurship.

Objectives

The practice was created with the aim of promoting cross-border entrepreneurship and collaboration between Spain and Portugal, creating networks, sharing knowledge and promoting the economies of the regions involved. The partner cities collaborate for the support of e-commerce entrepreneurs, providing also special assistance for immigrants.

Ruta CECE consists of a web platform with three main sections:

1. E-learning platform: The website offers more than 60 online courses. The courses cover a wide variety of topics (tourism, caring assistance, environment, financing, informatics, management, marketing, negotiations, human resources, language training courses in Spanish, Portuguese and English).
2. E-commerce platform: The website provides a market place where entrepreneurs can offer their products and services where anyone can buy them.
3. Platform of services assistance to businesses: The website provides a place where entrepreneurs, recently created businesses, mentors and experts help each other in the process of setting up and establishing a company. In the platform the participants can share their ideas and receive feedback as well as create a useful network for their businesses.

Additionally, there is a part where the entrepreneurs are assisted by the service providers to get crowdfunding for their projects.

Strengths

² Mipex, 2015.

³ Information provided by Sara Corres, Ministry of Employment and Social Security.

⁴ Information provided by Sara Corres, Ministry of Employment and Social Security.

⁵ ENISA - Creation entrepreneurs and young entrepreneurs line

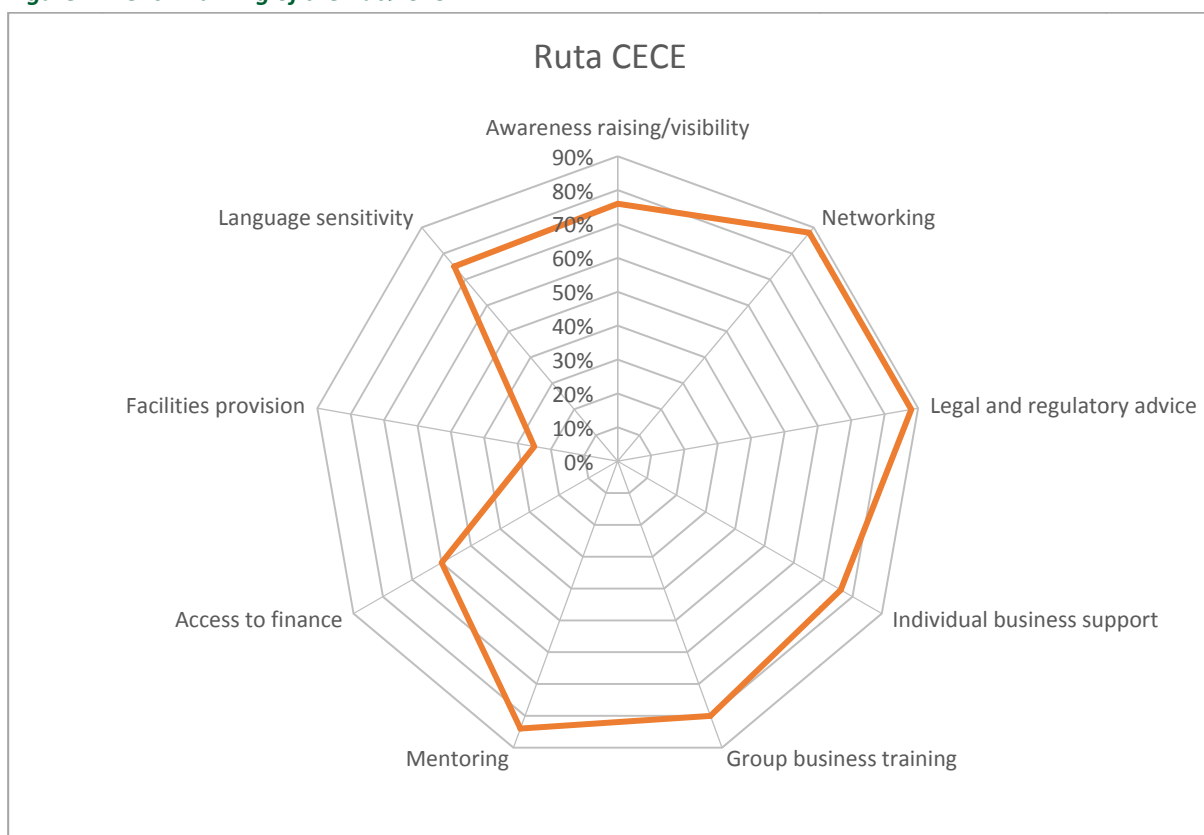
⁶ ICO - Instituto de Crédito Oficial (Official Credit Institute, State Finance Agency)

⁷ ICEX España Exportación e Inversiones (Spain Exports and Investment)

⁸ AEESD - Acción Estratégica Economía y Sociedad Digital (Digital Economy And Society Strategic Action)

The catalogue of offered services by Ruta CECE is certainly complete, even though it is important to note that most of them were provided only through the internet platforms. The legal and regulatory advice provided by the experts stands out over all the indicators analysed. The experience of the services providers, the multiple information available for the users and the strong coordination between public and private organisations were critical for the success. In addition, the networks created among the organisers, as well as the entrepreneurs, scored notably high, while the individual business support and mentoring scored similarly high due to the expertise of the service providers and the material created for the practice.

Figure 1: Benchmarking of the Ruta CECE



Implementation

Activities

The project consists of an online platform in which all the services are provided. For that reason, the **awareness and visibility** of the website had a heavy weight on the success of the practice. The communication campaigns involved the use of multiple platforms. There were events, posters, use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube), newsletters, TV, radio and other platforms depending on the type of event or course that was being promoted. The city councils of the involved cities shared and created events via this platform, making them accessible for all the participants and people of the network, as well as to other people invited. A total of 14.536 people received information from the activities

and promotion events⁹. In total, RUTA CECE developed during 2015 a total of 48 events with more than 600 participants and with a total participation of more than 100 immigrants attending the meetings (75 % of them from Latin America and the rest from east European countries, Morocco and sub-Saharan countries). Moreover, success stories have been used in order to encourage entrepreneurs in their path to set up a company. In these networking events, successful immigrants and other entrepreneurs pronounced speeches about their experiences, inviting more migrants to assist and take part of the activities.

One of the most important campaigns to reach the migrant communities was made through the Internet Access Points (normally provided by the city councils or employment agencies), which acted like a grass root system. The Internet Access Points are places supplied with computers where the people can access to internet for free. These points may also have assistants from the local authorities to support the search of employment or help with some administrative issues. The organisers of Ruta CECE realised that many migrants used these places and were interested in the project. Thus, the use of these places achieved a great success reaching migrant communities.

The **website** has been promoted in the websites of all the partners. In order to gain more visitors, it was created in a user friendly way and with proper and relevant information. In addition, new events, activities, and evolution of the participants are posted in a wall of news like in the social networks, which creates updated content and leads to users visiting the website more often. The platform is also available for smartphones, there are two apps available in the Google Play (Android) and in the App Store (iOS). The first app contains the services provided over the main web platform (mentoring, e-learning courses, etc.). The second app is an e-commerce platform, where the people can offer/buy products and services of the participants.

The **networking** for the participants was a relevant part of the practice, for both entrepreneurs and collaborating cities. Thanks to the programme, 30 new networks of cooperation (between Spain and Portugal mainly) have been created. In addition, more than 15 networking events were organised in the participant cities, as well as 30 informative events, 30 experts' forums and 40 discussion groups of entrepreneurs.¹⁰ The mentors and other entrepreneurs network have created great opportunities and an environment of networking for the new participants. The e-learning platform is also a place where the entrepreneurs can share their problems creating their businesses, their needs and the opportunities found for other entrepreneurs. Additionally, there is a section where there are posted job applications for entrepreneurs to join the recently created companies, or those that are in progress. Besides, Chambers of Commerce and business associations are in the network and create events where the organisation and city councils are involved. Moreover, there are many businesses participating in the programme and the platform promotes networking among them and with other entrepreneurs.

⁹ Informe Final, Evaluación Ruta CECE (Final Report, Evaluation of Ruta CECE), 2015.

¹⁰ Informe Final, Evaluación Ruta CECE (Final Report, Evaluation of Ruta CECE), 2015.

One of the strengths of the practice is the **legal and regulatory advice** provided. More than 80 B2B groups have been created in the platform, where the 40 expert service providers through the intranet have given legal advice individually or in group. Since the information is not deleted from the online platform, more users may benefit from it. Besides, more than 40 newsletters to registered users (1,200 users) have been delivered with useful information.

The platform also offers **individual business support** for the users. The variety of areas of advice is based on the required individual information in tax, legal, marketing, internet, web 2.0, social networking and cross border issues in all these topics. Due to the great variety of areas of assistance, and the feasibility assessment of the ideas in relation with the Spanish-Portuguese-International markets, numerous projects have been developed. Besides, there was an extensive amount and quality of public workforce involved in supply services to RUTA CECE users (from mediators to social mediators and experts in local development and administrative issues), which allowed a better support and knowledge of administrative procedures.

The practice is mainly based on the e-learning platform, offering all the **business training** needed to set up an e-commerce. All the materials (usually training videos where the topic is explained) were posted and available for free to all the participants. There are also documents and presentations of the trainings. These trainings normally imply 20 hours of working for the participants, and once the training is completed there is an exam. If the exam is passed, the participants get a certificate. There are no specific timetables for the courses, the users may start the courses at they will.

The variety of topics covered by the trainings is huge, as there are more than 60 different training courses: tourism, caring assistance, environment, financing, informatics, management, marketing, negotiations, human resources, etc. The materials have been created by experts, considering the necessities of the entrepreneurs and making them clear and understandable by all. Additionally, business plan models have been created for different sectors to help the entrepreneurs creating their business plans adapted to the specific questions required in each sector. The trainees are encouraged to participate and make suggestions as well as questions on the platform. In this way, the experts and other users may answer and therefore, develop more useful training material onsite. Besides, the web platform provides a news section where other business trainings provided by any organisation in the cities involved are posted. The objective of posting these business trainings on the platform is to encourage the entrepreneurs to attend, even if the organisation is not providing them.

Any user of Ruta CECE may receive **mentoring** from the experts. There are more than 30 mentors available with different backgrounds and accessible by all users. The mentoring is mainly done through the online platform, where mentors and participants are summoned to share their experiences and needs. In addition, the mentors have a profile where they share their background and areas of knowledge on the platform, thus mentees select their mentors

according to their necessities. Besides, there are mentoring objectives to see the success of the relationship, but the indicators are for internal use¹¹.

The web platform provides a section where the participants are assisted to receive **financing** through the best crowdfunding platform according to their projects, even if the organisation itself does not provide it. However, the partner organisations Mita and UATAE help them personally on getting finance, dealing with the banks and speeding the procedures. These organisations support the entrepreneurs throughout all the steps of getting finance and follow them up they receive it¹².

Additionally, the events and training help the entrepreneurs and show them the possibilities to get financing at local level. The network and mentors may help each project with their requirements of financing by redirecting them to places where it could be easier to obtain funding. The projects may be certified to receive the financing easily by Mita and UATAE, which also have agreements with banks.

The involved organisations of the network may provide **free or discounted facilities** or they may redirect the users to places where they can rent facilities as well as help finding a workplace. Besides, Ruta CECE offers a free online e-commerce platform where the entrepreneurs sell their products and services, which may be considered an online facility.

Language and cultural sensitivity

The language and cultural sensitivity has been present since the creation of the practice. As the project aims at interaction between the countries, almost all the services, as well as the oral and written information are provided in Spanish and Portuguese, although there are some few services provided in only one of these two languages. In addition, the platform provides general and business language courses in Spanish, Portuguese and English. Therefore, all the users may be trained in the three languages with its beneficial consequences for interactions and cooperation on businesses. For the immigrants in need of further assistance with language translations, there is an additional local resource. These service providers are able to solve the possible translation needs for certain groups (Arabic, Romanian and Roma). Since the programme is carried out by the public administration, there is a strong relation with the social services, which take part directly and are engaged with the project staff. The social services act as mediators for migrant communities in intercultural understanding in different ways (e.g. help with the language, cultural aspects). However, note that the cultural mediators are not part of the programme.

Outcomes and results

Impact

The value added of the initiative has been relevant for the regions involved. Since the creation of the programme, a total number of 69 SMEs have been created. These SMEs have been engaged in new 96 B2B (Business-to-Business) relationships.

¹¹ Interview with Andrés Dochao, carried out on 25 May 2016.

¹² Interview with Cecilia Fernández, carried out on 16 June 2016.

So far, the SMEs have created a total of 300 direct and indirect jobs and all of them are still ongoing, either as a new version of the previous company or as a consolidated business idea after the programme¹³.

Moreover, 300 out of 1,200 participants of the training courses have got a certificate after the successful conclusion of it, while 20 participants¹⁴ were self-employed after the conclusion of the training courses

The practice was monitored from beginning to end, and a final report¹⁵ was created based on the analysis. Consequently, there is clear document which shows the objectives pursued and the final results. The results indicate the overall effectiveness of the Ruta CECE, which have accomplished almost all the objectives, while in most of them the practice has been more effective than expected.

All the communication campaign objectives were achieved effectively, and even more promotion events, activities, publications, use of social media, etc. were carried out. The reason for the increase of the communication campaign was to reach a larger audience and create more businesses, since the platform capacity was higher than the actual number of users.

Finally, the number of indirect employments created was considerably higher, whereas the number of direct employments has been a little lower than expected. In consequence, the global effectiveness of the practice may be considered favourable for the economy of the regions, and still more for the participants' cities involved and entrepreneurs.

Challenges

The main challenge of the practice was to engage possible entrepreneurs for the creation of the e-commerce. Since the platform is online, the rate of users who leave the practice without starting their company or passing the trainings is larger than the face-to-face practices. For that reason, in order to overcome the challenge, the creation of quality material and updated information was completely required since the beginning. Besides, the integration of the two languages was an adversity to overcome. The partners were aware of the challenge, but also of the possible positive impact. Once they managed to create the material in both languages, the numerous interactions between participants from both countries exceeded the expectations.

Conclusions and for further development

Key success factors

There are three main key success factors of Ruta CECE. Firstly, the network of cities and associations. It was created with a clear objective and all the partners have worked in the same direction. Secondly, the creation of the e-platforms, the development of the wide variety of training materials and the selection of the service providers. The creation of quality training materials and services were completely required for the success the entrepreneurs.

¹³ Interview with Andrés Dochao, carried out on 25 May 2016.

¹⁴ Estimations of Andrés Dochao, city council of La Palma del Condado.

¹⁵ Informe Final, Evaluación Ruta CECE (Final Report, Evaluation of Ruta CECE), 2015.

Thirdly, the thorough communication campaign. The use of different platforms allowed a great number of people get to know about the practice.

Besides, the provision of the two online platforms (e-learning and e-commerce) offered the entrepreneurs the possibility of taking a lower risk to set up their ideas. Thus, it allowed a large amount of entrepreneurs to start their businesses without the necessity of a big investment on the web platform.

The foremost innovative part of Ruta CECE is the integration of all the required support services in an online platform. Due to the use of the platforms by all the agents (service providers, entrepreneurs and partners of the network), a richer content has been developed. The promotion campaign of the practice had a big success in both native and migrant communities. The use of a multiple approach for the different targets, as well as a wide variety of communication platforms, engaged a varied community of users. In this case, the use of the Internet Access Points was vital for reaching more migrant communities¹⁶.

Replicability

The practice success is based on the coordination of the different agents of each country. In this case, the coordination of the cities involved promoted the interaction of several agents and attracted participants from both regions, as well as many migrants looking for a great opportunity to start an e-commerce shop with lower risk. The success of the online platform required an important investment in the communication campaign. The investment may be reduced if each organisation involved and a wide network contribute for the campaign in the best way possible. Therefore, a large network and close collaboration is needed for the success of the promotion campaign. The interaction between all the actors of the platform must be enhanced in many ways. The mentors should create debates where people participate, whereas at the same time they resolve doubts and provide information. An online platform without activity or updated information will not succeed, therefore it is important to have people contributing constantly to the web.

Besides, there are new communities in both territories interested to implement RUTA CECE. In consequence, there will start an approach to particular municipalities in the Spain-Portugal border (Ayamonte, Castromarin, Vilareal).

On the other hand, there are some points that could be improved for the future development of the practice:

- The project leaders are considering adding more languages to the web platform. Since the platform is already ongoing, the addition of more languages should be easier and may engage people from other countries. The provision of training on more languages could be a good idea to engage entrepreneurs with the idea of selling internationally¹⁷.
- The practice finished in 2015, but the online platform where all the services are provided is still ongoing. The cities involved will continue supporting the platform and creating events or activities in collaboration. Moreover, the current required expenditure to maintain the network and platform is assumed by municipalities with

¹⁶ Interview with Andrés Dochao, carried out on 25 May 2016.

¹⁷ Interview with Cecilia Fernández, carried out on 16 June 2016.

involvement of technicians. It is expected an amount below 300 € to 600 € per month by each local public partner¹⁸.

Testimonial – Cecilia Fernández 2015:

“I have finally fulfilled my business dream. Now I have the stability I needed for the success of my business.”

A Peru native living in Spain for more than 27 years. She started the programme in 2015 for 8 months. She used the e-learning platform of Ruta CECE for learning English and e-commerce. In addition, she received assistance getting the completely necessary finance for her workplace. She has been working on mending all her life and wanted stability for her business. She now is thinking about growing, but the requirements of her traditional artisanal job are so high. For that reason, she is plans to train not only her new employee but to create workshop for more people. She is one of the last artisanal menders and she wants her job pass to the next generations.

¹⁸ Interview with Andrés Dochao, carried out on 25 May 2016.

Sources

Literature list

- Informe Final, Evaluación Ruta CECE (Final Report, Evaluation of Ruta CECE), 2015.
- INE (National Institute of Statistics)
- MIPEX Integration Policy Index, <http://www.mipex.eu/spain> [Accessed 26.05.2016]

List of interviews

- Andrés Dochao – City council of La Palma del Condado
- Sara Corres – Assistant deputy director, Legal service unit, General secretariat for immigration and emigration, Ministry of Employment and Social
- Cecilia Fernández – Beneficiary
- Final beneficiary II

Contact details and website for the initiative

Website of the E-learning platform: www.rutacece.com

Website of the E-commerce platform: www.ceceshop.eu

Email: info@rutacece.com

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