Project Result 4
PILOTING OF THE NEW TRAINING PROGRAM AND SWOT ANALYSIS POST-NATURAL DISASTERS

Synthesis report

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RETOURN - Pilot training program: An evaluation

The RETOURN project, dedicated to improving post-natural disaster responses through comprehensive training, entered a crucial phase with the piloting of its newly developed training materials. This phase aimed to test and validate the project's outputs, ensuring they met the needs of diverse learners across multiple countries. Conducted in Italy, Hungary, Greece, and Slovenia, the pilot phase included both traditional and innovative learning methods, providing a thorough assessment of the program's effectiveness.

Structure and implementation of the pilot phase

The pilot phase was divided into two main components: "Learning by Thinking" and "Learning by Doing." The first component involved traditional face-to-face teaching sessions and the use of Open Educational Resources (OERs) for self-study and reference. This approach allowed participants to engage with the material in a structured classroom environment while also providing the flexibility to study independently at their own pace.

The second component, "Learning by Doing," involved laboratory activities and the application of SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis to local territories. This hands-on approach aimed to solidify participants' understanding through practical application, ensuring that theoretical knowledge was effectively translated into real-world skills.

Participation and engagement

The intensive dissemination efforts by all project partners led to the successful engagement of 146 participants, significantly exceeding the initial target of 65. This impressive turnout, a 45% increase, underscores the broad interest and perceived value of the RETOURN platform. Additionally, 30 learners participated in laboratory activities and produced SWOT analyses, further demonstrating the practical impact of the training.

Survey analysis and insights

A comprehensive survey was conducted to gather feedback from participants, with a total of 53 responses received. The respondents came from various professional backgrounds, including company leaders, tour guides, students, and unemployed individuals with a background in tourism. This diverse sample provided a well-rounded perspective on the program's effectiveness.

Expectations and satisfaction

The survey revealed that the training program largely met participants' expectations. A significant majority rated the program highly, with 27 respondents indicating that it fairly met their expectations and 9 stating it fully met them. Only a small minority found the program to be slightly below their expectations. This positive feedback reflects the program's alignment with participant needs and its ability to deliver on its promises.

Appropriateness and interest

Participants also found the level of difficulty to be appropriate, with the majority rating it as fairly or fully suitable. This balance suggests that the program was neither too challenging nor too simplistic, striking the

right chord for effective learning. Moreover, the content was widely regarded as interesting, with 28 participants rating it as fully interesting and 19 as fairly interesting.

Usefulness and relevance

The practical applicability of the training was another highlight, with many respondents acknowledging its usefulness for their work or study. While a few found the content interesting but not directly useful, the overall sentiment leaned heavily towards the program being beneficial. Participants appreciated the relevance of the training to their professional needs, indicating that the material was both timely and pertinent.

Impact on future activities

The program's influence on future work activities was notable, with many participants expressing that it would significantly impact their professional endeavors. This forward-looking feedback suggests that the skills and knowledge gained from the training are likely to have a lasting effect, enhancing participants' capacity to respond effectively to post-natural disaster scenarios.

Effectiveness and knowledge gain

The effectiveness of the program was well-regarded, with high ratings for its ability to impart new knowledge. Participants found the training to be a valuable source of information, with a considerable number indicating that it was fully or fairly effective in expanding their understanding.

Structure and comprehensiveness

The training was praised for its structure and comprehensiveness. Participants felt that the program was well-organized and covered the necessary material thoroughly. This structured approach facilitated a better learning experience, making it easier for participants to follow and absorb the content.

Learning environment

The learning environment, a critical component of the e-learning platform, received positive feedback for its ease of navigation and user-friendliness. Participants found it accessible and well-connected with additional readings, which enhanced their overall learning experience. The availability and clarity of instructions further contributed to the program's effectiveness, ensuring that learners could progress smoothly through the material.

Overall satisfaction

Overall satisfaction with the program was high, with participants expressing strong satisfaction with various aspects, including the quality of modules, navigation, access to materials, quality of instructions, relevance, usefulness, and duration. This broad-based approval highlights the program's success in delivering a comprehensive and engaging training experience.

Partners insights

Italy

The RETOURN pilot training program in Italy, conducted by the University of Macerata (UNIMC) and the Chamber of Commerce of Umbria, was a comprehensive initiative aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of the training materials and methodologies developed for tourism recovery after natural disasters. The piloting phase spanned from February to May 2024 and included a diverse group of participants, encompassing both students and professionals from the tourism sector.

Objectives and Target Audience

- The primary objectives of the Italian pilot were to:
- Test and evaluate the training materials
- Assess the delivery methods
- Gather feedback for further improvement

The target audience consisted of:

- Undergraduate and graduate students in economics and tourism from UNIMC and other universities
- Tourism professionals, including SMEs and businesses affected by the 2016-2017 central Italy earthquakes

Methodology and Implementation

The pilot training was divided into two parallel streams to cater to different groups:

UNIMC focused on engaging students from the Departments of Economics and Tourism, promoting the program through seminars, public notices, social media, direct mail, and events. They also involved students from the Catholic University of Sacred Heart in Milan (UNICATT), who participated remotely.

The Chamber of Commerce of Umbria targeted tourism businesses, particularly those impacted by the earthquakes, involving them in both in-class and online learning.

The training program combined traditional lectures, e-learning, and experiential workshops using innovative teaching methods such as serious play. This multifaceted approach aimed to equip participants with strategic planning and disaster recovery skills.

Participation and engagement

A total of 65 participants registered on the RETOURN platform, surpassing the initial target of 20. The participants included:

- 43 students from UNIMC
- 4 business representatives from the Chamber of Commerce of Umbria

The pilot involved an initial presentation of the project, followed by structured lectures, individual e-learning sessions, and hands-on workshops. The training was led by Dr. Marta Giovannetti and Dr. Grazia Li Pomi, consisting of 8 hours of classroom instruction and 32 hours of individual study. Upon completion, participants received a certificate and 2 CFUs (university credits).

Feedback and evaluation

Participants provided feedback through a combination of formal questionnaires and informal discussions. The overall response was positive, with participants appreciating the relevance and innovative nature of the training. Key points from the feedback included:

- Content quality: Participants found the modules on sustainable and ethical tourism particularly valuable.
- Platform usability: While the platform was generally easy to navigate, some technical issues were reported, such as difficulties in downloading certificates and accessing certain materials.
- Learning experience: Students preferred a mixed mode of learning, combining in-person and online sessions. The experiential workshops were highly engaging and helped in applying theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios.

For professionals, the main challenge was time constraints, suggesting the need for modular content that can be easily integrated into their schedules. The workshops were particularly beneficial for practical application.

Challenges and recommendations

Several challenges were identified during the piloting phase:

- Initial drop-out of participants due to overlapping commitments
- Technical issues with the e-learning platform
- Based on the feedback, the following recommendations were made:
- Combine face-to-face sessions with online learning to enhance engagement
- Allocate adequate time for material review and self-assessment
- Include Q&A sessions to facilitate interaction with trainers
- Use modular training to accommodate the schedules of busy professionals
- Collect ongoing feedback to address issues promptly

Organizers' reflections

The Italian pilot phase of the RETOURN project successfully demonstrated the program's potential to enhance disaster recovery knowledge and skills within the tourism sector. The feedback received from both students and professionals will be instrumental in refining the training materials and methods. The positive reception and constructive suggestions indicate a strong foundation for future iterations of the program, aiming to support communities and businesses in building resilience and promoting sustainable tourism post-disasters.

Greece

The Greek pilot phase of the RETOURN project, executed by the Greek-Italian Chamber of Commerce and AKMI International, served as an essential step in testing and refining the training program. This phase aimed to evaluate the produced materials, delivery methods, and gather feedback for improvement. The target audience included students specializing in tourism and professionals working in the tourism sector, ensuring the training was relevant and practical.

Objectives and target audience

The primary objectives of the pilot were to test the effectiveness of the training materials, assess delivery methods, and collect recommendations for future improvements. The target audience consisted of company leaders, tourism managers, tour guides, graduates, and unemployed individuals with backgrounds in tourism and economics.

Methodology and participation

Nineteen participants registered on the RETOURN platform, with 11 successfully completing the training, resulting in a completion rate of approximately 58%. The participants included leaders of tourism companies, graduates, and undergraduates in tourism disciplines, reflecting a diverse professional background.

Outcomes and feedback

Participants generally found the training program met their expectations, with most rating it positively across various aspects such as interest, usefulness, relevance, and effectiveness. The content was deemed appropriately challenging, interesting, and valuable for their professional needs.

Learning environment evaluation

The learning environment was rated highly for its ability to reinforce learning, ease of navigation, connection with additional readings, accessibility of materials, user-friendliness, and clarity of instructions. This positive feedback indicates that the platform was well-designed and effective in facilitating learning.

Overall satisfaction

Overall satisfaction with the training program was high. Participants praised the quality of the modules, ease of navigation, access to materials, quality of instructions, relevance, usefulness, and duration of the training. This broad approval highlights the program's success in delivering a comprehensive and engaging learning experience.

Qualitative feedback

Participants provided valuable qualitative feedback, highlighting the most liked aspects and areas for improvement. The educational materials, particularly the modules on marketing, ethical, and sustainable tourism, were well-received. The SWOT analysis exercise was also appreciated for its practical application. However, some participants suggested including face-to-face or online live sessions to enhance interactivity

and learning experience. There were also recommendations for more videos, diagrams, and comparative case studies to further enrich the content.

Organizers' reflections

The piloting process revealed challenges in engaging participants with the asynchronous platform. Many participants preferred real-time interaction and required extensive communication to complete the training. Despite these challenges, the feedback provided valuable insights into the needs and preferences of the target audience, guiding future improvements to the training program and platform.

Hungary

The Hungarian pilot phase of the RETOURN project, managed by TREBAG LTD in collaboration with SOMA Optimus, was a critical step in testing and refining the training program's effectiveness. The pilot aimed to validate the produced materials, evaluate delivery methods, and gather feedback for improvements.

Objectives and target audience

The primary objectives were to:

- Test the produced materials
- Assess the delivery methods
- Improve the existing material
- Fine-tune the offerings and gather recommendations for improvement

The target audience consisted of individuals involved in the tourism sector, including company leaders, tourism managers, tour guides, graduates, undergraduates, and unemployed professionals with backgrounds in tourism and economics.

Recruitment and participation

Participant recruitment began in early 2024, with initial challenges in translating and adapting the platform. An English version was introduced first, targeting multipliers such as heads of tourism associations, adult education centers, and university departments. The Hungarian version of the platform was later introduced during an event in Hatvan on May 24, organized by Trebag and SOMA Optimus. This event facilitated the recruitment of participants, resulting in 22 applicants, 16 of whom registered on the e-learning platform. The majority of participants were from Heves county, providing valuable insights into the region's economic and touristic context.

Presentation and delivery

The project and platform were presented both asynchronously and during live events. For online presentations, participants received a modified PowerPoint presentation and step-by-step registration instructions via email. During the live event, the same materials were presented, and participants received hands-on assistance with registration.

Evaluation and feedback

Participants expressed high satisfaction with the content, structure, and delivery of the training program. Suggestions for improvement included diversifying training methods and enhancing the visual presentation of materials on the platform. Technical issues, such as automatic translations and initial platform access, were noted and addressed. Participants found the modules easy to navigate and highlighted the usefulness of quizzes, despite some difficulties with the quizzes in Modules 1 and 2. Modules 3 and 4, focusing on destination management and sustainable tourism, were particularly well-received.

SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis was conducted during a face-to-face session on May 24, involving representatives from public authorities, regional associations, and the private sector. The analysis aimed to map the preparedness and action-taking potential of the region, with a significant focus on the impact of COVID-19. The session resulted in a comprehensive SWOT analysis and fostered valuable networking among participants.

Organizers' reflections

The Hungarian pilot phase of the RETOURN project demonstrated the training program's effectiveness and relevance. The feedback provided insights into participant needs and preferences, guiding future improvements. Overall, the pilot was a success, contributing to the refinement of the training materials and methods, ensuring they meet high educational standards.

Slovenia

The RETOURN pilot training program in Slovenia, facilitated by the Institute for Business Education and the University of Maribor, was a pivotal phase in assessing the effectiveness of the training materials and delivery methods. This phase aimed to test the training components, gather participant feedback, and refine the program for broader implementation.

Objectives and target audience

The main objectives of the Slovenian pilot were to:

- Test the newly developed training materials
- Assess the effectiveness of delivery methods
- Gather recommendations for improving the training program

The target audience comprised individuals from the tourism sector and students specializing in tourism. This included company leaders, tourism managers, tour guides, graduates, undergraduates, and unemployed professionals with backgrounds in tourism and economics.

Methodology and implementation

The piloting in Slovenia consisted of two main components:

1. Learning by thinking: Participants accessed the online platform and progressed through the modules at their own pace. This component was conducted by the Institute for Business Education.

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2. Learning by doing: Participants engaged in laboratory activities and applied their knowledge through SWOT analysis of local territories. This component was managed by the University of Maribor.

The pilot training was conducted from January 2024 to the end of March 2024. Information about the program was disseminated through various channels, including the CPU website and direct communication with students at the University of Maribor.

Participation and feedback

Twenty-five participants registered on the RETOURN platform, with 11 providing feedback through an online survey. The participants included a mix of tourism professionals and students, offering a diverse perspective on the training program's effectiveness.

Training program evaluation

Participants provided positive feedback on several aspects of the training program:

1. Content quality: The modules were well-structured, interesting, and provided valuable knowledge on recovery after natural disasters.
2. Ease of access: The platform was easy to navigate, and the materials were accessible.
3. Relevance and usefulness: The content was relevant to their professional needs and useful for their work in the tourism sector.
4. Learning environment evaluation

The learning environment received high marks for:

- Navigation: The platform was user-friendly and easy to navigate.
- Material access: Participants appreciated the ease of access to materials and the general coverage of topics.
- Support: The clear instructions and availability of resources enhanced the learning experience.

Overall satisfaction

Participants expressed high overall satisfaction with the program. They appreciated the short, manageable learning units, the quizzes, and the practical applicability of the training. However, some suggestions for improvement included: shorter content clips (up to 20 seconds); more visual variety in the text (e.g., using different colors and bold text) and functionality to download certificates.

Organizers' reflections

The piloting process highlighted the program's strengths and areas for improvement. The participants, especially students involved in laboratory activities and SWOT analysis, were highly engaged and found the practical exercises valuable. They analyzed recent floods in Brežice, demonstrating the training's real-world applicability.

The main challenge encountered was the initial loss of participants who were informed about the pilot early in the project but could not participate due to the dynamic nature of the tourism sector. Despite this, the feedback and engagement levels from those who completed the training were overwhelmingly positive.

The Slovenian pilot phase of the RETOURN project successfully demonstrated the training program's effectiveness and relevance. The feedback from participants provided valuable insights for refining the materials and delivery methods, ensuring the program meets the highest standards of educational excellence. The positive reception and constructive suggestions will guide future improvements, making the RETOURN training program a robust tool for enhancing disaster recovery knowledge and skills in the tourism sector.

Conclusion

The piloting of the RETOURN project training program has been a comprehensive and largely successful initiative. Conducted across Italy, Hungary, Greece, and Slovenia, the pilot phase aimed to test and validate the training materials developed for improving post-natural disaster responses. This phase involved a diverse group of participants, engaging 146 individuals, which significantly exceeded the initial target of 65. The program was divided into two main components: "Learning by thinking" and "Learning by doing."

The "Learning by thinking" component included traditional face-to-face teaching sessions and the use of OERs for self-study. This method allowed participants to engage with the material in a structured manner while providing the flexibility to study independently. The "Learning by doing" component involved laboratory activities and the application of SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis to local territories. This hands-on approach ensured that theoretical knowledge was effectively translated into practical skills.

Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, highlighting the program's structure, comprehensiveness, and relevance. Survey results indicated high levels of satisfaction, with participants appreciating the content quality, ease of access, and practical applicability of the training. The diverse professional backgrounds of the participants, ranging from company leaders and tour guides to students and unemployed individuals with a background in tourism, provided a well-rounded perspective on the program's effectiveness.

Recommendations

Based on the feedback and insights from the piloting phase, the following recommendations are proposed to further enhance the RETOURN training program:

Incorporate "Face-to-Face" sessions: Introduce platform and experiential training in face-to-face/class sessions to define methods, times, and contents clearly. This approach will provide participants with structured learning and opportunities for direct interaction with trainers.

Allow adequate time for material assimilation: Ensure sufficient time is allocated for the material to be processed on the platform and for the completion of self-assessment tests. This will enable participants to thoroughly engage with the content at their own pace.

Facilitate Q&A or dialogue sessions: Organize formal or informal meetings with trainers to allow participants to ask questions and engage in discussions. This will help clarify doubts and enhance understanding.

Conduct interactive workshops: Implement workshops with elements of serious play to emphasize interaction, collaboration, and critical thinking. These activities should be interspersed with analysis and strategy definition sessions to maintain participant engagement.

Solicit continuous feedback: Collect formal and informal feedback throughout the learning process to identify and address any problems or barriers promptly. This will help improve the training experience continuously.

Enhance content delivery: Based on participant suggestions, consider shortening content clips, incorporating more visual variety (e.g., using different colors and bold text), and ensuring functionality for downloading certificates.

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ANNEX 1: Presentation of results from the Piloting survey

Survey Demographics

Total Responses: 53

Professional Background:
- Leaders of companies or associations: 20
- Tour guides or leaders: 7
- Graduate or undergraduate students: 28
- Unemployed with a background in tourism: 2

Country of Origin
- Greece: 11
- Hungary: 16
- Italy: 14
- Slovenia: 11

Interpretation of Survey Responses

Training Programme Expectations - The majority found the program met their expectations moderately to fully, with only a few finding it slightly met their expectations.

To what extent the training programme met your expectations?

0% — 4%
19%
19%
58%

■ 1 not at all ■ 2 slightly ■ 3 moderately ■ 4 fairly ■ 5 fully/completely

Difficulty level: Most participants found the difficulty appropriate, with a balanced distribution towards the higher end.

The level of difficulty was appropriate for you?

0% 4%

26%

21%

49%

- 1 not at all
- 2 slightly
- 3 moderately
- 4 fairly
- 5 fully/completely
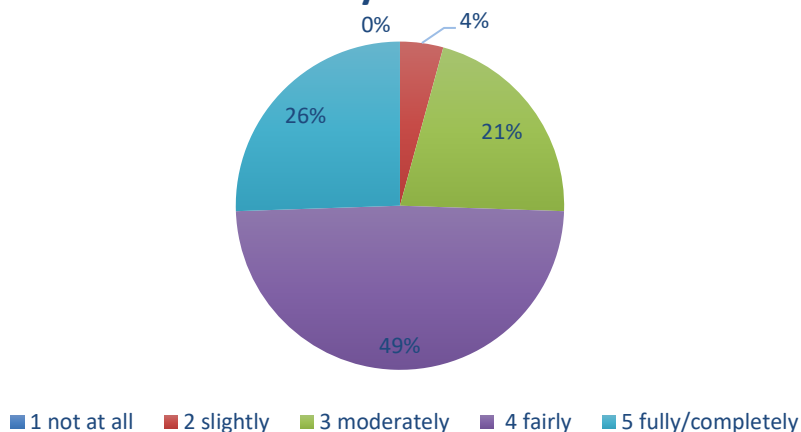
Interest Level: The program was found interesting by a large majority.

To what extent the training programme is interesting?

5; 10%

28; 54%

19; 36%

- 1 not at all
- 2 slightly
- 3 moderately
- 4 fairly
- 5 fully/completely
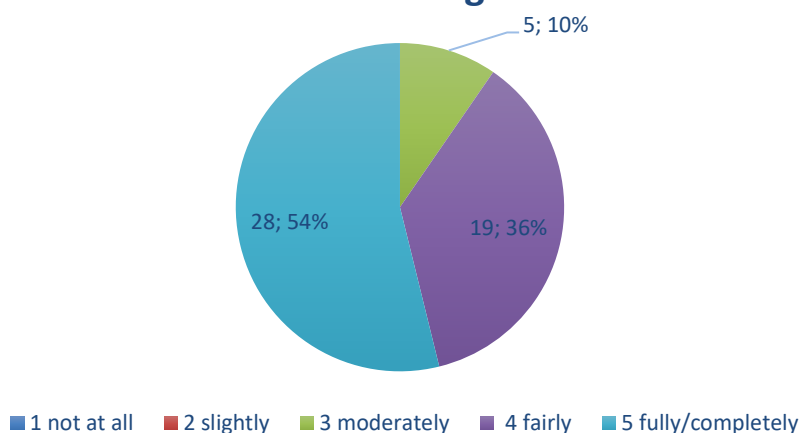
Usefulness: Many found the program useful for their work or study, though some found it interesting but not useful.

To what extent the training programme is interesting but not useful for my work or study.
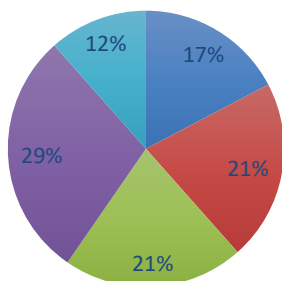
- 1 not at all
- 2 slightly
- 3 moderately
- 4 fairly
- 5 fully/completely

To what extent the training programme is useful for my work/study.
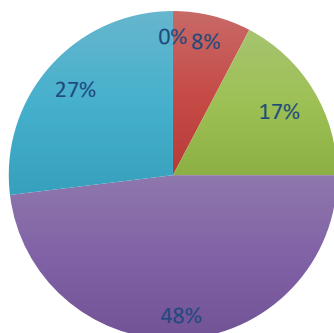
- 1 not at all
- 2 slightly
- 3 moderately
- 4 fairly
- 5 fully/completely

Relevance and Needs Addressed

Addressing needs: Participants felt the program addressed their needs to a good extent.

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To what extent the training programme addressed your needs.

0% 4%

23%

38%

35%

■ 1 not at all   ■ 2 slightly   ■ 3 moderately   ■ 4 fairly   ■ 5 fully/completely
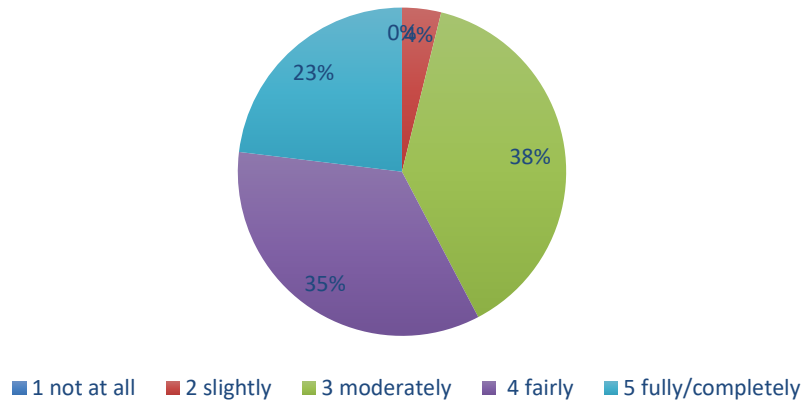
Relevance to Work: The relevance of the program to participants' work was also positively rated

To what extent the training programme is relevant for your work.

2% 8%

15%

29%

46%

■ 1 not at all   ■ 2 slightly   ■ 3 moderately   ■ 4 fairly   ■ 5 fully/completely
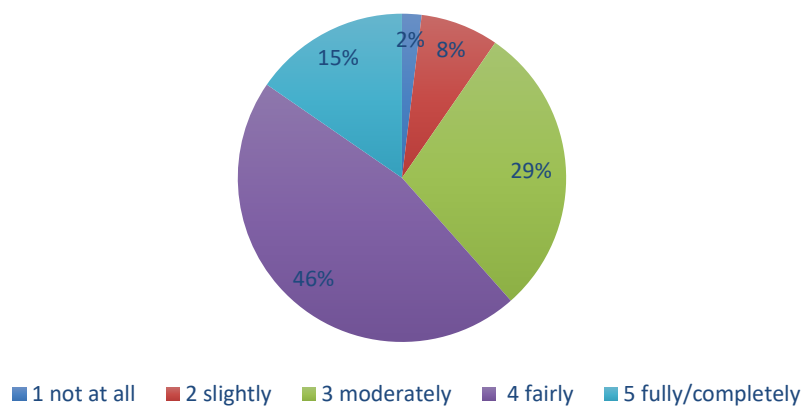
Impact on Future Work Activities

- **Future Activities**: Many participants felt the program would influence their future activities

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To what extent the training programme influenced your future activities at work.

2%
11%
21%
31%
35%

■ 1 not at all ■ 2 slightly ■ 3 moderately ■ 4 fairly ■ 5 fully/completely
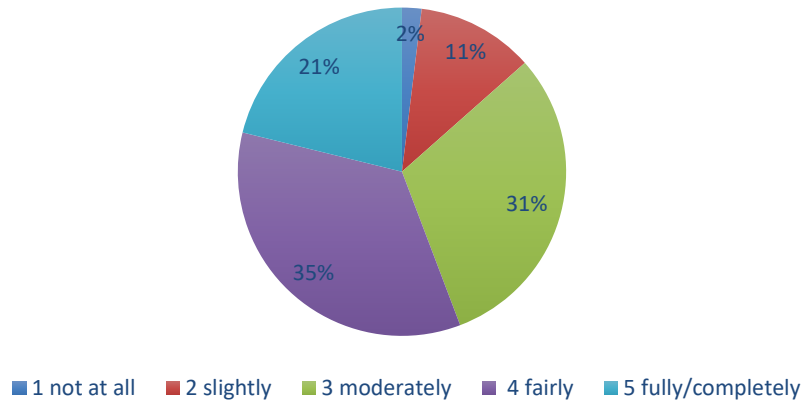
Effectiveness and Knowledge Gain

- **Effectiveness**: The program was rated as effective.

To what extent the training programme is effective.

0% 2%
21%
37%
40%

■ 1 not at all ■ 2 slightly ■ 3 moderately ■ 4 fairly ■ 5 fully/completely
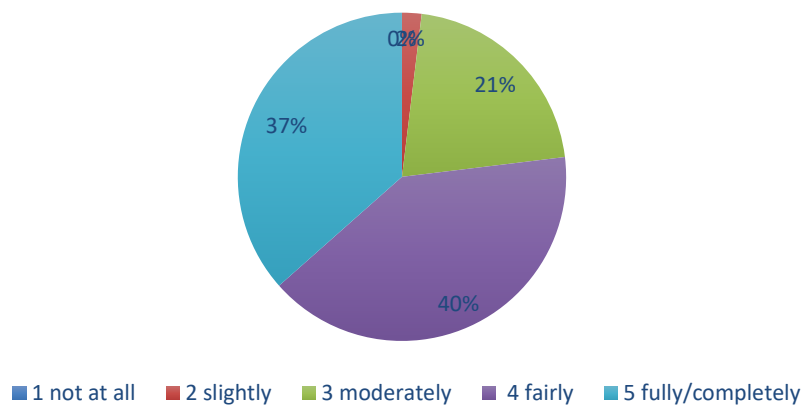
Source of New Knowledge: The program was seen as a good source of new knowledge.

To what extent the training programme is good sources of new knowledge.

0% 2% 7%
33%
58%

■ 1 not at all ■ 2 slightly ■ 3 moderately ■ 4 fairly ■ 5 fully/completely
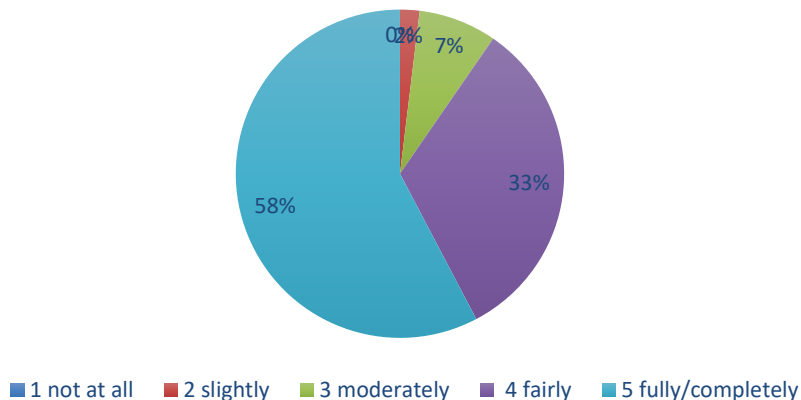
Structure and Comprehensiveness

- **Well Structured**: The structure of the program was well received.

To what extent the training programme is well structured.

2% 4% 6%
32%
56%

■ 1 not at all ■ 2 slightly ■ 3 moderately ■ 4 fairly ■ 5 fully/completely
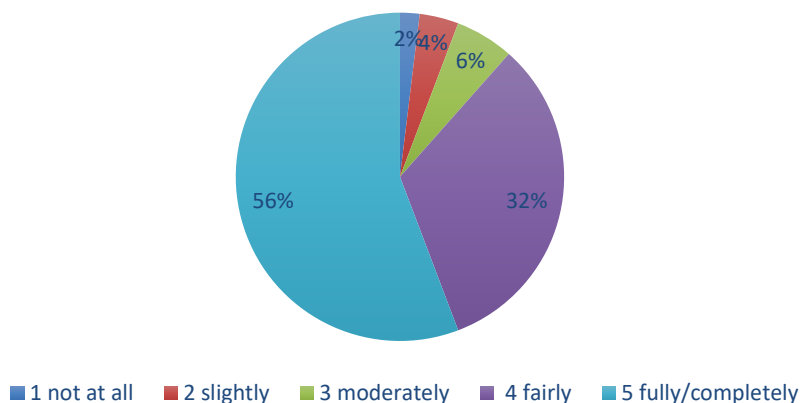
Comprehensive: Participants found the program comprehensive.

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To what extent the training programme is comprehensive.
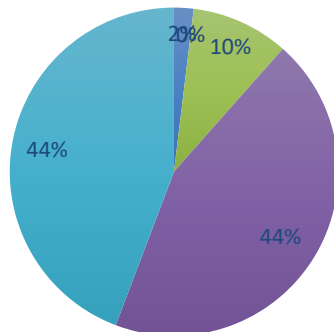
Legend: ■ 1 not at all ■ 2 slightly ■ 3 moderately ■ 4 fairly ■ 5 fully/completely

Learning Environment

- **Enforces Learning**: The learning environment was conducive to learning.

To what extent the learning environment enforces your learning.
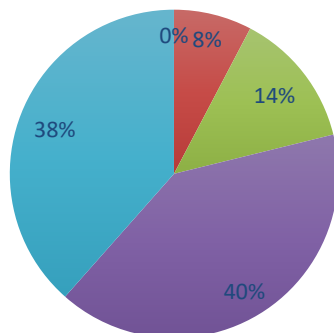
Legend: ■ 1 not at all ■ 2 slightly ■ 3 moderately ■ 4 fairly ■ 5 fully/completely

Ease of Navigation: Navigation of the learning environment was generally easy

To what extent the learning environment is easy to navigate.
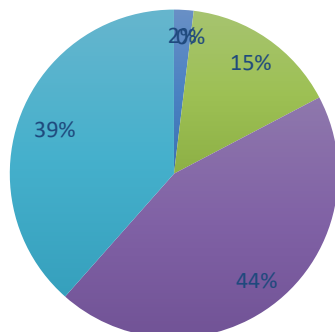
1 not at all   2 slightly   3 moderately   4 fairly   5 fully/completely

Connected with Additional Readings: The learning environment was well connected with additional readings.

To what extent the learning environment is well connected with additional readings.
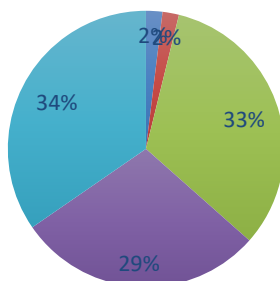
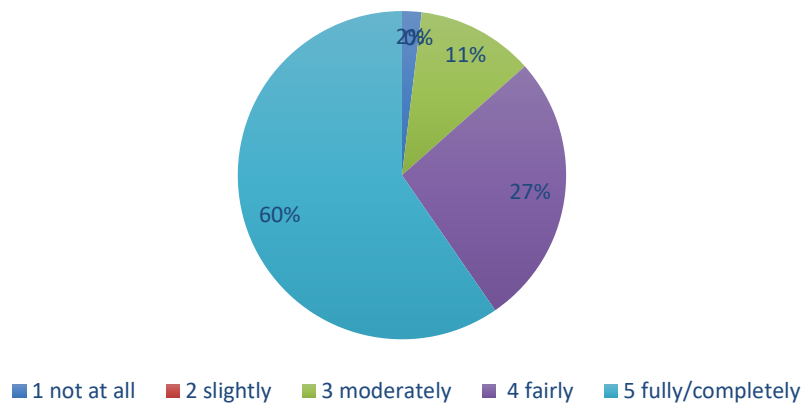1 not at all   2 slightly   3 moderately   4 fairly   5 fully/completely

Access to Desired Materials: Access to desired materials was easy.

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To what extent the learning environment brings you to desired materials easily.

0% 4%
21%
38%
37%

■ 1 not at all ■ 2 slightly ■ 3 moderately ■ 4 fairly ■ 5 fully/completely
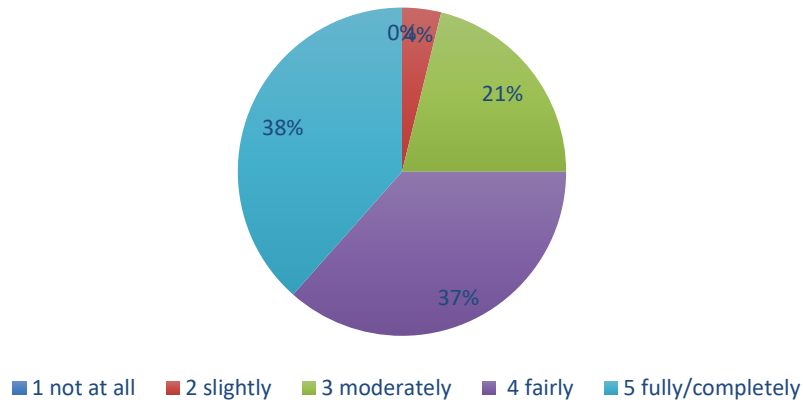
Availability: The learning environment was always available.

To what extent the learning environment is always available to you.

2% 0%
11%
60%
27%

■ 1 not at all ■ 2 slightly ■ 3 moderately ■ 4 fairly ■ 5 fully/completely

User-Friendly: The user-friendliness of the environment was highly rated.

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To what extent the learning environment is user-friendly.

Pie chart legend: 1 not at all, 2 slightly, 3 moderately, 4 fairly, 5 fully/completely. Values: 2%, 0%, 11%, 50%, 37%
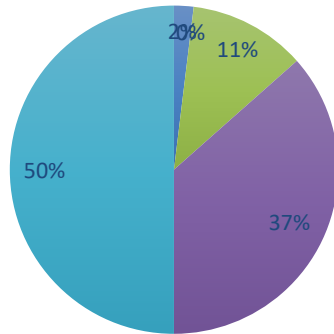
Clarity of Instructions: Instructions were clear.

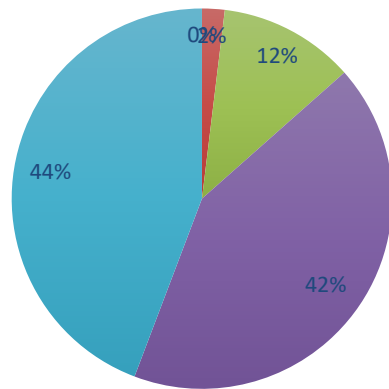## To what extent the learning environment contains clear instructions how to proceed.

Pie chart legend: 1 not at all, 2 slightly, 3 moderately, 4 fairly, 5 fully/completely. Values: 2%, 2%, 6%, 39%, 51%
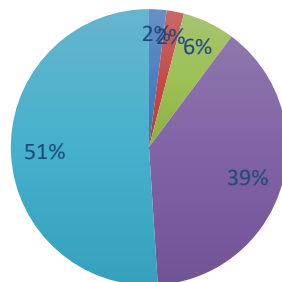
Overall Satisfaction

- **Quality of Modules**: High satisfaction with the quality of modules.

Satisfaction with the quality of Modules

0% 2% 12% 44% 42%

■ 1 strongly unsatisfied ■ 2 unsatisfied ■ 3 neutral ■ 4 satisfied ■ 5 strongly satisfied

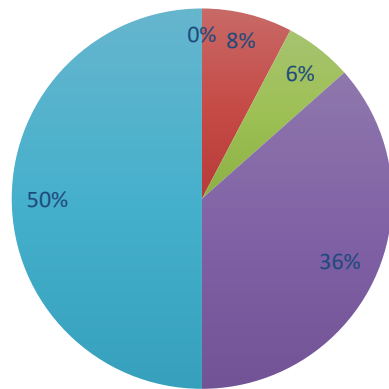**Navigation Satisfaction**: General satisfaction with navigation.

Satisfaction with navigation

0% 6% 17% 31% 46%
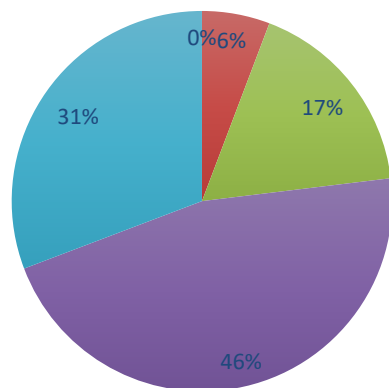
■ 1 strongly unsatisfied ■ 2 unsatisfied ■ 3 neutral ■ 4 satisfied ■ 5 strongly satisfied

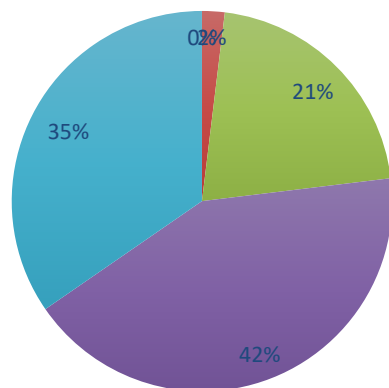**Access to Materials**: High satisfaction with access to materials.

Satisfaction with access to materials

0% 8% 6% 36% 50%

■ 1 strongly unsatisfied ■ 2 unsatisfied ■ 3 neutral ■ 4 satisfied ■ 5 strongly satisfied

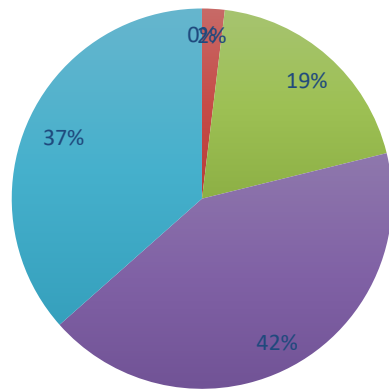**Quality of Instructions**: Satisfaction with the quality of instructions.

Satisfaction with quality of instructions

0% 2% 21% 35% 42%

■ 1 strongly unsatisfied ■ 2 unsatisfied ■ 3 neutral ■ 4 satisfied ■ 5 strongly satisfied
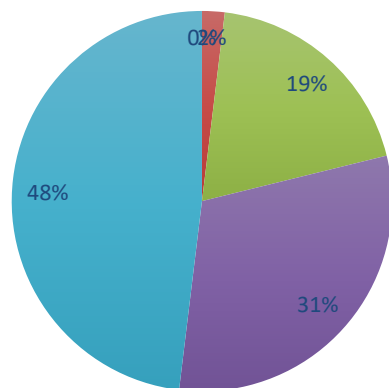
Relevance: High relevance of the program.

Satisfaction with relevance

- 0% 2% 19%
- 42%
- 37%

■ 1 strongly unsatisfied ■ 2 unsatisfied ■ 3 neutral ■ 4 satisfied ■ 5 strongly satisfied

Usefulness: High usefulness of the program.

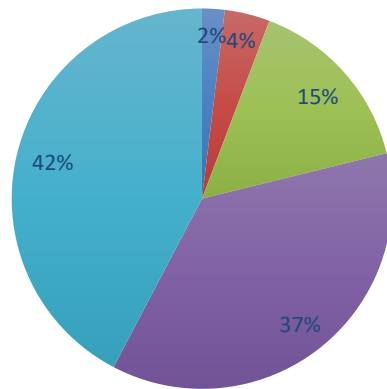## Satisfaction with usefulness

- 0% 2% 19%
- 31%
- 48%

■ 1 strongly unsatisfied ■ 2 unsatisfied ■ 3 neutral ■ 4 satisfied ■ 5 strongly satisfied

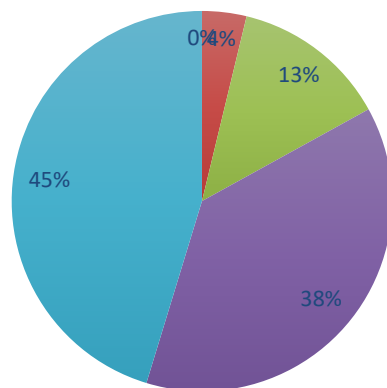**Duration Satisfaction**: Positive feedback on the duration of the program.

Satisfaction with duration

■ 1 strongly unsatisfied ■ 2 unsatisfied ■ 3 neutral ■ 4 satisfied ■ 5 strongly satisfied

Overall Experience: High overall satisfaction with the program.

Overall satisfaction with the experience

■ 1 strongly unsatisfied ■ 2 unsatisfied ■ 3 neutral ■ 4 satisfied ■ 5 strongly satisfied

The data gathered from the survey indicates that the RETOURN pilot training program has been well received by participants across different countries and professional backgrounds, demonstrating its effectiveness and relevance.