RAMONES-PL

Rural Advisory Monitoring and Evaluation System linked to Precision Learning

DRAFT

PROJECT
NEWS LETTER 2

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CONTENTS

RAMONES-PL PROJECT NEWSLETTER 2ND ISSUE

WHAT IS NEW IN THE PROJECT?

This is the second from the series of four project newsletters that are published every six months. From the publication of the first newsletter, the partners worked actively on the next project steps. As a reminder, previously partners implemented the survey in each country to assess the opinion of farmers and advisory organizations, designed the competence framework, developed methodologies for monitoring, evaluation and learning, as well as started the setting up of the information management platform. In the period from September 2021 until March 2022, partners worked on the tools for monitoring, evaluation and learning, started the pilot phase in the project, began working on the quality assurance scheme and organized numerous events and meetings.

The first wave of Multiplier events were implemented during the autumn 2021, informing participants about the first achievements and imminent next steps of launching the experimental personalized learning program (pilot). The event was organized in North Macedonia physically, in Hungary in blended way, while in Slovakia online.

Newsletter editor: FACE

DEVELOPING THE PLATFORM FOR MONITORING, EVALUATION AND PRECISION LEARNING (IO3)

Partners firstly defined the system requirements, to achieve the description of IT specifications in a concise document, describing the main technical components. However, partners of the project consortium have decided to prolong the deliverable deadline of IO3 / A1 until the end of the first phase of IO4 (December 2021). This was underpinned by the reasons, that partners in the target countries implementing the pilot activities expressed their wish to reserve the rights of requesting further adjustments, improvements (if needed) regarding the functioning of the system, by the experience from using it in the introductory phase, which may include the revision of the specification as well.

CUSTOMIZATION OF THE MONITORING ISSUE TRACKING SYSTEM

We have deliberately chosen an open-source, free to use monitoring tool, to record, track and evaluate the details of advisory service provision in the project, with the intention of making our methodology and results more adoptable and exploitable EU wide.

For the demonstration of the possibilities of extending the issue tracking system by adding new functions by programming, we established a connection with other system / database managing the clients / farmers registry, to populate the list options in Mantis multi select enumeration using dynamic data query from DB, assigned to MK project / users.

The activities which have been performed for the customization of the Mantis-BT system were:

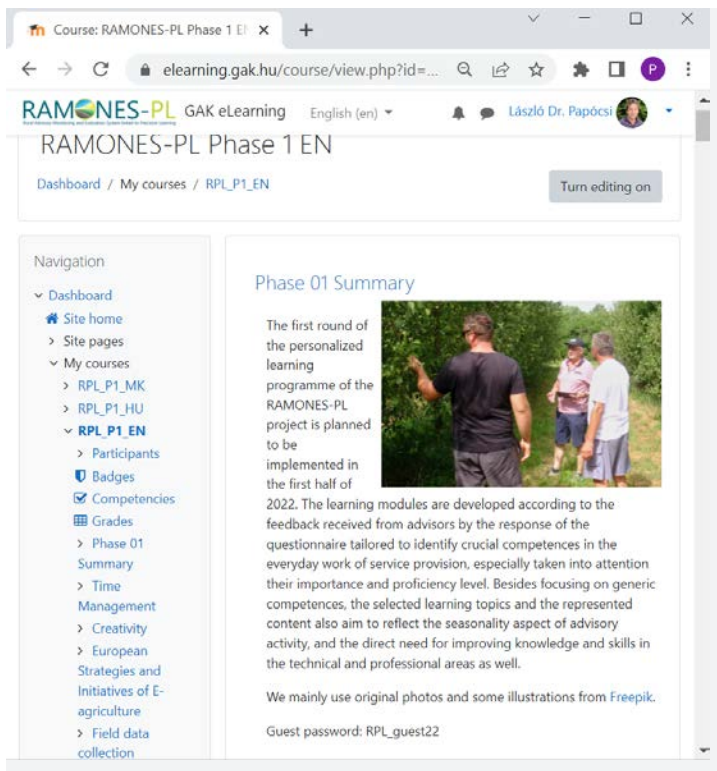Creating user groups (by countries/partner organizations) and users (farm advisors, supervisors). Assigning the language variants by the users' needs.

Setting up categorizations and a system of keywords to indicate the type of service activity and other details, which makes it possible to filter the entered data by these items.

Defining custom fields: adding single option selects for service activities, or multiple selects for the different countries of participants which statically lists the farmer clients that can be assigned to the specific users (farm advisors), so they can only see their own partners.

Time tracking: to enter the details of performing sub-tasks related to an issue, adding description, required time and other resource (such as needed traveling distance), other remark; enabling also the calculation of the costs of the total resources and therefore assign a value to the solution / provision of service in relation with the issue.

SETTING UP AND CUSTOMIZATION OF THE E-LEARNING PLATFORM

We have chosen the open-source Moodle Learning Management System as the core platform in the project to publish the precision e-learning modules and implement the online trainings.

The advantages of the selected LMS are that each piloting partner has previous experience with Moodle, which has well proven capabilities and new functionalities needed by our requirement definition such as support for competence framework and interactive components. We have started to represent the core set of competences identified in IO1 in the Moodle competency framework, also testing the export and import method of the CF in CSV format. Based on the CF, we created a learning plan template with a set of competencies to be assigned to a group of users. We also set up a new scale, for grading, and checked the possibility of using competency rules. Regarding the learning content development step, we focused (besides the traditional ones) on more engaging, interactive content types, so we also dedicated our attention to H5P, and tested all the different types, based on which we recommended several for the learning modules, for example: Interactive Video, Course Presentation, Sort the Paragraphs, Interactive Book, Quiz (Question Set), etc.

SHORT COURSE MODULES TO SUPPORT PERSONALIZED LEARNING

One of the most useful results of RAMONES-PL are a series of e-learning packages tailored to the need of field advisors by a series of well defined themes, according to the preliminary data collection steps of the project, such as the identification of the most frequent activities, the dictionary of competence, and the questionnaire to access importance and proficiency level of advisors regarding certain service areas. The modules will be available in the target country languages as well as a core version in English, also supporting EU wide dissemination and exploitation. We try to select and develop such themes which are the most relevant to advisory work, therefore we expect that national organizations supervising advisory networks and coordinating advisory training will be interested to use our packages, as a supplement to their compulsory modules.

A sample of the e-learning packages:

Soft skills

- Time Management
- Creativity
- Effective Communication
- Leadership Development
- Teamwork
- Conflict management
- Effective listening
- Customer relations
- Advisory process, advisory profile
- Stress management and burnout

Technical / specific skills:

- Direct sale of agricultural products
- Sustainable use of pesticides
- Interactive innovation
- Biomass renewable energy advisor
- Eco-farming (introduction)
- Cross compliance / conditionality
- New CAP
- Climate smart farming
- Farm sustainability assessment
- E-agriculture concepts, EU strategies
- Digital systems within Agriculture 4.0
- Advisory issue tracking monitoring
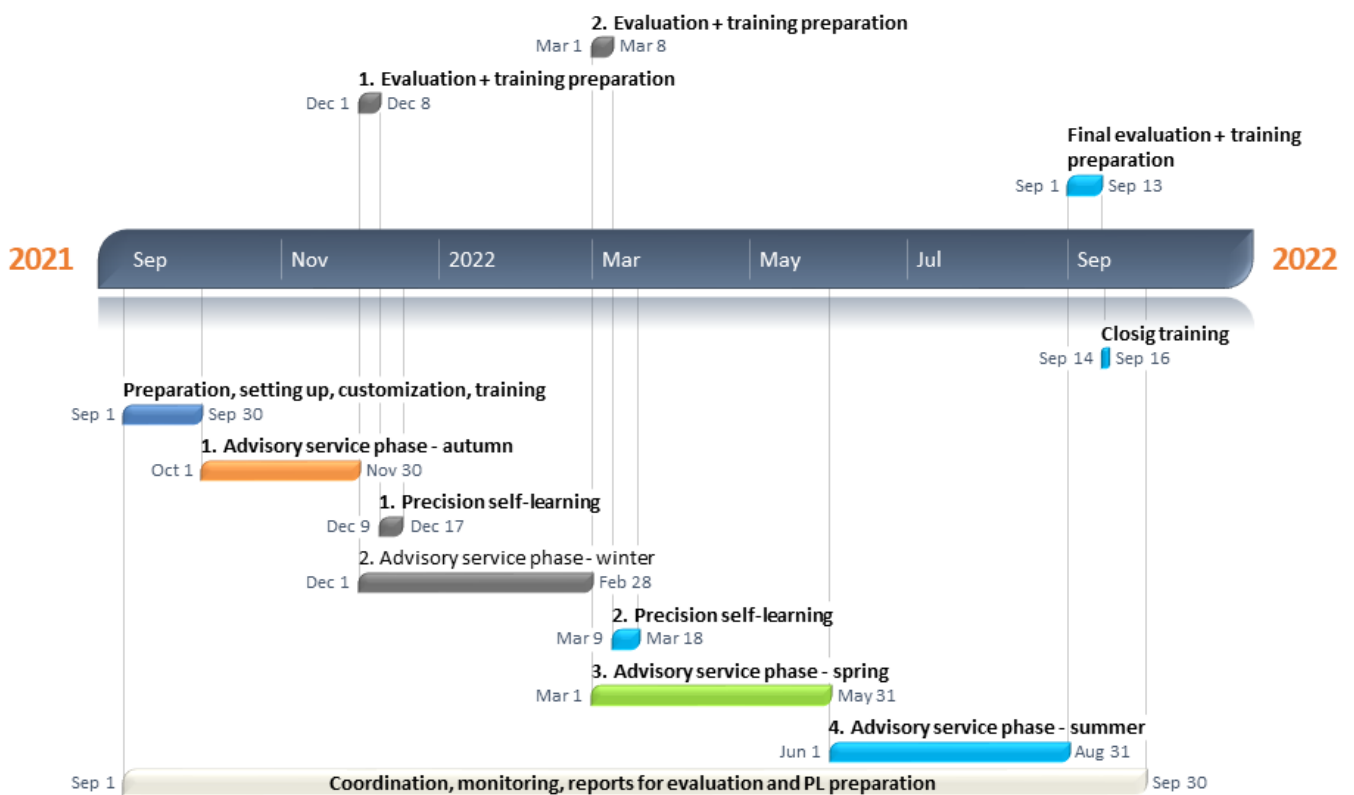- Useful mobile apps for advisory work

PLANNING AND UPDATING THE PHASES OF THE EXPERIMENTAL PRECISION LEARNING PROGRAM (PILOT)

We designed the schedule of the pilot to be run for one year, and split up the circle of advisory monitoring, evaluation, training preparation and implementation activities into four rounds, with the intention, that by each next iteration we will be able to introduce newer, deeper, more efficient ways to measure the performance of advisors and their competency (gaps) to be developed by the personalized approach, also considering the seasonal characteristics of the rural and agricultural production activities.

Partners have agreed that in the first round they will primarily use the questionnaire for advisors based on O2 A2 Methodology as a data source to analyze responses of individual advisors, which concentrates on the importance and proficiency level (and gaps between them) of certain competences linked with some of the main advisory services and related activities, and by the result, it can orientate which advisors are to be assigned with which training module. While in Hungary, the more detailed and deeper data source - the service monitoring issue tracking tool - is already in place by autumn 2021, it was common understanding that the first round should be targeting the same method, and by the 2nd phase, from summer 2022, hopefully each piloting partner will be in the situation to use the monitoring tool.

In order to support the above mentioned approach, we organized an online presentation for the MK and SK partners about a working best practice of advisory service monitoring, to provide a good example and increase confidence and better understand the goal and method. The precision learning program will be concluded by the end of the seasonal operations in 2022.

PROJECT SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES IN ITALY BY CREA

Since the very beginning of Ramones-PL, CREA has started a proficient collaboration with the National Council Agronomists and Foresters (CONAF) in order to get technical support and continuous feedback on the project activities.

Ultimately in November 2021, a specific working group composed by advisors and CREA researcher has been set up and have been meeting on-line on a a regular basis. This allows co-creating of the monitoring and evaluation tools foreseen, so that they could better fit advisors' actual needs and, also, to gather specific needs not just in the field of service evaluation but also in terms of competence development and training.

The first three meetings, have been aimed at presenting projects activities and discussing the concept of quality of professional performances and its connection with advisors' activities, so to identify the criteria that could be used to evaluate the professional activities from the perspective of both their recipients and providers.

The last two meetings have been instead devoted at sharing and discussing the evaluation framework of the professional activities developed in "O1-RAS dictionary of competencies". The framework has been the basis to discuss the elements that could enter the evaluation of professional activities according to their outputs, results and impacts.

The continuous confrontation with the advisors has helped researchers to "keep the feet on the ground" and has been extremely useful to fine-tuning the assessment tool to actual professional activities and tasks.

PILOT PHASE 1 LAUNCH IN MOSONMAGYARÓVÁR, HUNGARY

SCHEME FOR QUALIFIED RURAL FIELD ADVISOR

We started the implementation of the work task to "Develop Qualified Rural Field Advisor certification scheme" by organizing an online meeting on 10 September 2021 with the Output leader LLKC, which serves as the EUFRAS CECRA secretariat therefore having a strong experience in this field, to exchange our views on the required steps and start the needed activities right away. The topic was discussed during an on-line meeting (28 September 2021) with all the project partners and especially with CREA leading this activity. LLKC provided several useful inputs to this phase earlier, some of them already taken into attention in the learning methodology. We reviewed the CECRA information brochure, documents describing the accreditation process for certifying bodies, the application process and form for advisors, the format of the motivation letter, the guidance for writing a thesis, etc. which can be supportive for our project to learn from the good practices, to complement the existing European scheme, and going further, to achieve a certification program that is rather relevant at the level of actual service provision, in the field, as compared to the more general and static approaches.

Advisors and experts of Gazda Kontroll met in Mosonmagyaróvár, Hungary on 07-08 December 2021, when they participated in the exercise which was utilized in the formulation of personalized competence development, during the first learning phase. They responded to a short quiz containing open questions related to their everyday tasks with regards to the provision of advisory service. Based on the assessment of the results, the knowledge gaps can be better identified for each colleague, and the learning content created accordingly. This exercise is planned to be repeated every two months during the next year, supplemented by the broader questionnaire, according to the project methodology of Output 2.

MULTIPLIER EVENT IN NORTH MACEDONIA

The first multiplier event in North Macedonia was held on the November 24, 2021 in hotel Continental, Skopje. The event was attended by 30 representatives and advisors from the National Extension Agency, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy, the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and Food, representatives of the NGO sector and farmers that are using rural advisory services. The results of the RAMONES-PL project were presented at the event, as well as the tools from the project that will be used in the pilot phase of the project.

FINALIZATION OF PHASE 1 OF THE PILOTING IN HUNGARY

Project monitoring, survey, and e-learning platforms are ready to provide the combined functionalities required by the expectation of the project. RAMONES-PL farm advisors - experts working under the Gazda Kontroll RASP network - met on 04th of February in Godollo, Hungary to finalize the first phase of the pilot and as planned, to start the short evaluation and personalized learning period, before entering into the next round of the experimental learning program. Participants filled out the advisory questionnaire, developed by the results of Output 2, evaluation methodology. They were also informed about the learning topics, as represented in the online Moodle system. We will process the questionnaire input and based on it, our advisors will be assigned to specific learning modules and activities, which aim to target their knowledge shortages, in order to fill the gaps as much as possible.

MULTIPLIER EVENT IN HUNGARY

The first multiplier event was held in a blended way in Hungary in parallel with the start of the pilot learning program, on the 5th of November 2021 at MATE University in Gödöllő. The objective was to disseminate general information about the project, the specific results achieved so far, and the planned next steps. The organizers received great interest with nearly 150 participants attending, half of them taking part physically and the others joining online. Web page: https://www.ramones.eu/hu/me1_hu

3RD TRANSNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP MEETING IN SKOPJE, NORTH MACEDONIA

The Third Transnational Partnership Meeting of the project was held in Skopje, North Macedonia between 10-11.03.2022. The meeting was organized in a blended way, with online presence of some of the partners. Actually, this partenrship meeting was the first one which was possible to attend face to face.

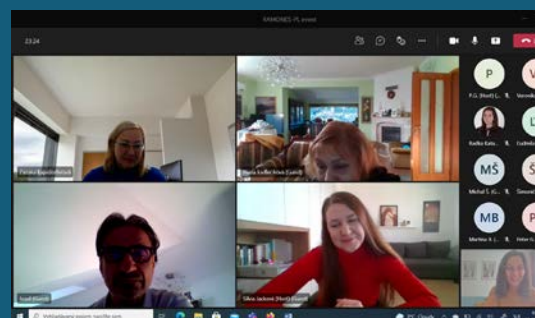During these two days participants discussed ongoing activities and next steps.

The main goals of the meeting were:

- summary and evaluation of the prepared methodology, learning content developed in IO2
- presentation and real-time testing of the online participant collaboration platform and mobile applications set up in IO3
- preparation for the IO4 activities, detailed discussion of activities and tasks by each partner and the consortium as a whole
- finalizing preparatory arrangements for the pilot activities
- planning IO5 Certification tasks
- project monitoring and progress evaluation, the overview of the status of financial and administrative record keeping.

The meeting provided great opportunity to agree on the main open issues, such as, for example, the selection of the topics for the learning modules, sharing the tasks of (and hands-on practising) content development, scheduling imminenet pilot actions in the target countries, such as localizing, deploying and assessing the advisory questionnaire and run the first round of e-learning.

MULTIPLIER EVENT IN SLOVAKIA

The first multiplier event in Slovakia was organized by SUA on 30th November 2021 online. The main goal of the event was to give information to the stakeholders about the RAMONES-PL project, its results achieved so far, as well as the planned activities in fulfilling the main objective of the project. This first online ME session will be continued in early spring 2022 hopefully face to face at Nitra University.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The objective of our project is to strengthen rural advisory services to improve their standards through a monitoring and evaluation system that can simultaneously support the development of a targeted, personalized, work based, vocational training programme and the establishment of a quality certification scheme.

The term precision is not unknown in agriculture, however, we will demonstrate that – besides production technology - it can also be relevant and successfully applied in knowledge transfer, for the sake of service providers and their clients. The learning activities aim to develop competencies in specific areas where our primary focus group, the rural advisors lack or miss adequate capacity, while, by the results of the learning programme, we expect that the quality of work performance will be increased, upon which the certification scheme is to be introduced.

We plan to adopt a novel method of using a state-of-the-art (digital, online) service tracking and monitoring system besides traditional data acquisition techniques, to support the collection of more detailed information with regards to increased data quantity and quality, right from the field level (where the service actually takes place).

PROJECT BASICS

Project title: Rural Advisory Monitoring and Evaluation System linked to Precision Learning

Acronym: Ramones-PL

Participating countries: Hungary, Slovak Republic, North Macedonia, Italy, Latvia, Croatia

Target countries: Hungary, Slovak Republic, North Macedonia

Timeline: 1 September 2020 – February 28 2023

Call: 2020 Round 1 KA2 - Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices

Type: KA202 - Strategic Partnerships for vocational education and training

Project ID: 2020-1-HU01-KA202-078738

TARGET GROUPS

1) The rural advisors working at the field level (providing assistance for clients to solve their actual problems raising from the everyday practice and introducing innovative methods)

2) The service provider organisations, who coordinate the work of their advisors and responsible for the overall process, and as the secondary group,

 3) The clients of the services themselves, primarily farmers and rural entrepreneurs.

Beneficiaries: Farmers, farm advisors

PARTNERSHIP

Coordinator

GAK Education and Operation Nonprofit Company, Hungary

Partners

SPU, Slovenská poľnohospodárska univerzita v Nitre, Slovak Republic

CREA, Consiglio per la ricerca in agricoltura e l'analisi dell'economia agraria, Italy

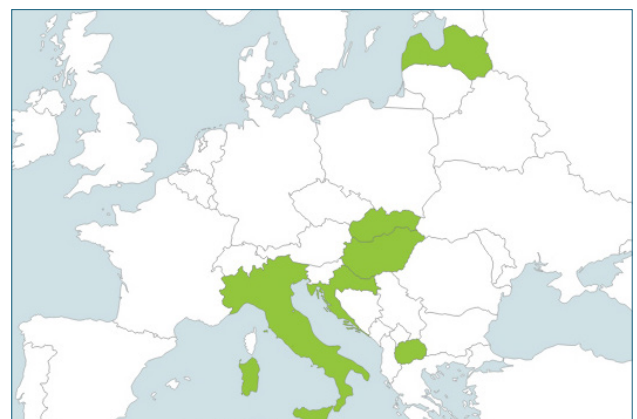Fondacija Agro Centar za Edukacija - FACE, North Macedonia

Gazda Kontroll Kft., Hungary

Latvijas Lauku konsultāciju un izglītības centrs, Latvia

Srednja škola "Arboretum Opeka", Croatia

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