



VIRTUALEDU: Virtual exchanges and education on Digital Skills

ASUE Launches New EU-Funded International Program: Virtual exchanges and education on digital skills

Beginning in 2023, the "Virtual Exchanges and Education on Digital Skills" initiative will be launched at the Armenian State University of Economics, under the coordination of Stiftelsen Kursverksamheten Vid U-Auniversitet (Fu-Uppsala). This project aims to engage over 2,500 students from EU and Eastern Neighborhood countries in enhancing their digital skills and cybersecurity awareness.

Funded by the European Union, the initiative revolves around a curriculum of 10 courses, offered via the MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) platform. MOOCs are digital platforms that offer wide-reaching, participative education, either for free or at a low cost. They are celebrated for their adaptability, capacity for large-scale instruction, and open access, thus democratizing high-quality education across the globe.

Within the scope of this project, consortium member universities collaborate on curriculum development, trainer education, and the execution of virtual exchanges. The program enriches the learning experience by incorporating a variety of materials, including online lectures, special video presentations, quizzes, and workshops. These resources support both self-paced (asynchronous) and real-time (synchronous) learning modalities.

The VIRTUALLYEDU project addresses the pressing issue of cyberbullying, which has become increasingly prevalent with the rise of digital communication and interaction. Recognizing the serious psychological, social, and technological impacts on victims and perpetrators, the project incorporates strategies and educational content aimed at combating cyberbullying.

This includes:

- **Awareness and Education:** The project emphasizes improving awareness about the hazards of the internet and equipping institutions with the tools to adapt their curricula to new socioeconomic realities, directly responding to the challenge of cyberbullying.
- **Virtual Exchange Activities:** Through virtual exchange activities, online training on cybersecurity, and internet safety initiatives, VIRTUALLYEDU aims to mitigate the risks associated with cyberbullying. By fostering advanced digital skills and ethical understanding among staff and learners, the project seeks to ensure a positive societal impact from the deployment of digital tools and applications.
- **Safety Online and Anti-discriminatory Techniques:** A specific focus is placed on safety online, highlighting the importance of understanding internet hazards and social media. The project outlines the need for anti-discriminatory techniques to counter hate speech online, integrating these components into the curriculum to foster a safe and inclusive online environment.
- **Comprehensive Approach:** The project's approach to tackling cyberbullying is multifaceted, involving the development of digital skills, promoting ethical internet use, and ensuring online safety. By incorporating these elements into the curriculum and virtual exchanges, VIRTUALLYEDU aims to create a more informed, respectful, and safe online community for students and educators alike.

Through these efforts, VIRTUALLYEDU contributes significantly to the fight against cyberbullying, demonstrating a comprehensive strategy that combines education, awareness, and the promotion of positive online behavior.

Albert Hayrapetyan, the senior lecturer at the Chair of International Economic Relations of ASUE highlighted that in the VIRTUALLYEDU project, the Armenian State University of Economics (ASUE) holds a multifaceted role, encompassing project management, curriculum development, training facilitation, and the implementation of virtual exchanges. ASUE's involvement is crucial in creating and delivering a curriculum that targets digital skills and

cybersecurity, aimed at bridging the digital skills gap and enhancing employability across partner countries. The university is instrumental in training facilitators to ensure the effective delivery of this curriculum and actively participates in facilitating virtual exchanges to foster cross-cultural understanding and digital literacy among students. Additionally, ASUE plays a strategic role in the project's steering committee, influencing decision-making and governance, while also contributing to the dissemination and exploitation of project outcomes, ensuring the project's sustainability and wider impact. Through these activities, ASUE demonstrates its commitment to advancing digital education and international collaboration.