

CO-DEAL NEWSLETTER

ENHANCING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND RESILIENCE THROUGH
VOCATIONAL TRAINING

May 2025 | Issue 1

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INTRODUCTION

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Over the past two decades, the **European Union** has experienced a steady increase in the **frequency, complexity and interconnectedness of crises** — ranging from climate-related disasters and public health emergencies to energy disruptions and social conflicts. These events have not only tested the capacity of institutions but also exposed significant **gaps in local preparedness** and in the articulation between **public systems and the communities they serve**.

Research across multiple disciplines, including **emergency management, public administration and social psychology**, increasingly points to the critical role of **community participation in crisis response and recovery**. As outlined by the IPCC (2024) and reinforced in the EU's Civil Protection Mechanism framework, resilience is no longer conceived merely as the capacity to absorb shocks, but as the collective ability to anticipate, adapt and transform in the face of adversity.

In this context, **municipal employees** play a pivotal — yet often underexamined — role. Positioned between national directives and grassroots realities, they are expected to make **rapid decisions, maintain public services, and engage with increasingly diverse populations**. However, most vocational training programs for public servants still focus on technical and legal competences, overlooking the **development of key transversal skills** such as empathy, inclusive communication, participatory leadership or the ability to mobilise community networks in times of crisis.

This disconnection reflects a broader tension: while **crises are increasingly social in nature**, the tools we use to prepare for them remain predominantly procedural and institutional. Addressing this mismatch **requires not only new content, but new methods** — ones that **can simulate uncertainty, challenge linear thinking, and train people for collaboration in conditions of high pressure and ambiguity**.

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Digital technologies, and particularly interactive simulations, offer promising avenues for this shift. When integrated within a well-structured pedagogical framework, simulations can promote deep learning, emotional engagement, and scenario-based reasoning. More importantly, they **allow public employees to practice decision-making in realistic but controlled environments**, where the stakes are pedagogical rather than punitive.






It is within this theoretical and empirical landscape that the CO-DEAL project situates itself. By co-designing a digital training toolkit focused on community-based crisis strategies, **CO-DEAL seeks to bridge the gap between institutional preparedness and civic engagement**. Through participatory methodologies, transnational collaboration and technological innovation, the project aims not only to train professionals, but to foster a cultural shift in how we understand, teach, and enact resilience in local governance.

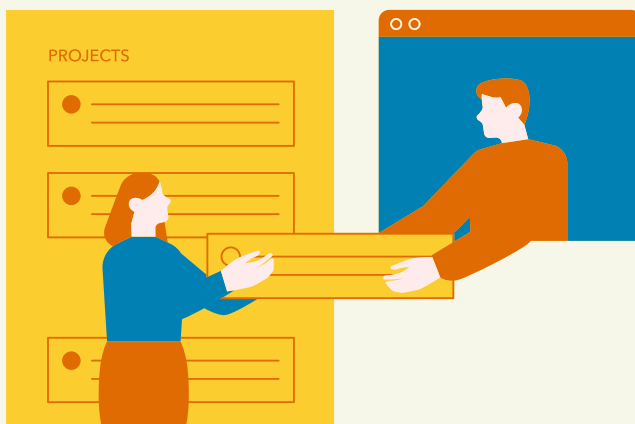


WHAT IS CO-DEAL?

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-  **CO-DEAL (Erasmus+ KA220-VET)** is a European cooperation project that develops **vocational training and digital tools** for municipal employees, focusing on how to manage crises more effectively — before, during and after they occur.
-  The project uses **interactive virtual simulations** to strengthen skills in communication, decision-making and inclusive participation, particularly in complex and unpredictable scenarios.
-  Its ultimate goal: **to help local governments build more resilient, participatory and inclusive communities.**



WHY IS THIS PROJECT NEEDED?

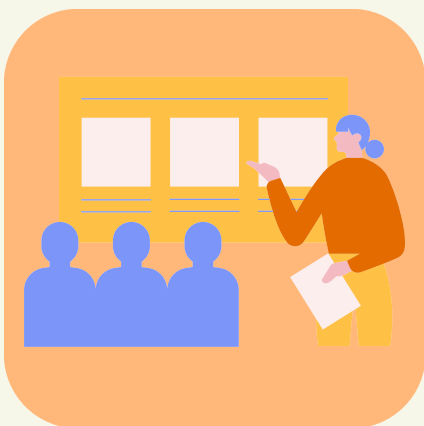
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Across Europe, municipalities are facing new and increasingly complex crises: climate-related events, social unrest, infrastructure failures, and more. But training in how to involve citizens in preparedness and decision-making is still rare in many public administration curricula.

CO-DEAL addresses this gap by:

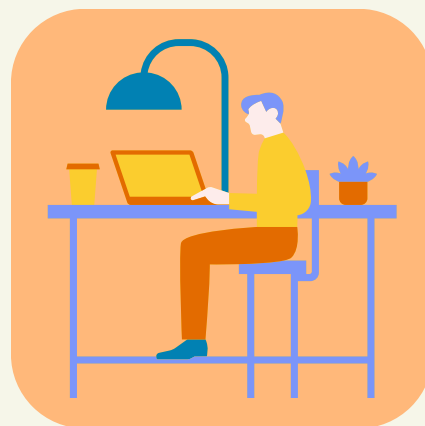
This project contributes directly to EU priorities on inclusion, civic engagement and climate adaptation.



Promoting **community engagement** in crisis management



Offering **flexible, accessible training** adapted to different local contexts



Using technology to **simulate real-life challenges** and responses

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The project is coordinated by the **Fachhochschule des Mittelstands (FHM)** in Germany and brings together an experienced international consortium:



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FHM is a private, non-profit, and state-accredited University of Applied Sciences founded in 2000 to meet the needs of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Germany. With more than 5,800 students, FHM offers 49 accredited bachelor's and master's degree programmes in areas such as economics, media and communication, human resources, health, and social work.

The university has a strong presence with its main campus in Bielefeld and nine additional locations, including Cologne, Berlin, and Rostock, along with a fully operational online university. FHM is particularly active in continuing education and competence development. Through its Institute of Continuing Education and R&D Project Department, it has led numerous innovation and capacity-building projects, especially aimed at increasing the competitiveness of SMEs. It maintains an extensive international network of VET institutions, universities, and businesses focused on educational development and applied research.



CreThiDev is a non-profit research and development organisation dedicated to fostering sustainable local development through life-long learning, environmental protection, employment strategies, health, innovation, and culture. Based in Greece, it works closely with local authorities and community stakeholders to design and implement evidence-based action plans. With a strong emphasis on citizen participation and social inclusion, CreThiDev contributes to CO-DEAL by ensuring methodological consistency, leading the quality assurance process, and coordinating the evaluation of training content and learning outcomes.



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The University of Seville (US), founded in 1505, is one of Spain's most historic and prestigious public institutions of higher education. With over 70,000 students, it is the second-largest university in Spain and the largest in Andalusia. Its campus is spread across the city of Seville, housing more than 26 faculties, 133 departments, and 80,000 m² of sports and cultural facilities. The University of Seville combines strong academic traditions with a clear focus on research, innovation, and social impact. Through its participation in CO-DEAL, the university contributes expertise in inclusive organisations, health promotion, training for municipal professionals, and evidence-based dissemination strategies. It also leads the project's engagement and communication plan.



SPIN is an innovative software development SME based in Maia, Northern Portugal, specialised in the design of digital learning solutions for a wide range of educational contexts. SPIN develops educational games, MOOCs, learning apps, and e-learning platforms tailored to vocational training, adult education, higher education, and secondary education.

SPIN collaborates with universities, local authorities, and educational networks, bringing cutting-edge expertise in multimedia content production and technology-enhanced learning. In CO-DEAL, SPIN is responsible for designing and implementing the virtual and mobile training environment, making learning interactive, accessible, and scalable.

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Founded in 2003, BETI is a leading Lithuanian institute in the field of educational technologies and digital innovation. Its team brings over 15 years of experience in the development of ICT-enhanced learning, distance education, multimedia production, and virtual learning environments.

BETI plays a pivotal role in CO-DEAL by designing interactive training scenarios, translating and integrating the training content into the digital environment, and supporting the technical development of the e-toolkit. It is also an important link between the project and wider networks of adult education providers, vocational institutions, and community centres across the Baltic region.



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OUR FIRST STEPS: KICK-OFF MEETING

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On January 30–31, all partners met in Bielefeld (Germany) for the project's kick-off meeting. This face-to-face encounter helped us:

-  Align our shared vision for the project
-  Set timelines and roles for the first work packages
-  Explore the structure of the training modules and simulation design
-  Highlight the importance of building resilience with communities, not just for them



WHAT'S NEXT?

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In the coming months, we will:

- Conduct focus groups in all partner countries
- Publish a literature review on best practices in community-based crisis training
- Begin co-designing the first interactive scenarios
- Launch our official website and communication platforms

Stay connected as we share progress, results and opportunities to get involved.



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About the project

Title: Enhancing community participation in developing strategies, actions, and communal resilience to deal with crises before, during and after

Duration: December 2024 – November 2026

Funding: Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

