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GREENEDGE

SUB-SECTION II. ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT STATE OF PEACE EDUCATION

Good practices in partner countries – GERMANY

COUNTRY

Germany

NAME OF GOOD PRACTICE

Zukunftszentren (Future Centres) – National Programme for Digital, Green and Entrepreneurial Competence Development

ORGANISATION RESPONSIBLE

Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, BMAS), co-financed by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF Plus); coordinated nationally by the 'Zentrum Zukunft der Arbeitswelt' (ZZA) and delivered through 12 Regional Zukunftszentren and the 'Haus der Selbstständigen', hosted by regional partners including universities, chambers and vocational training bodies

WEBSITE/REFERENCE LINK

https://zukunftszentren.de

YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION

2019 – Ongoing (current funding phase to 2026)

TYPE OF PRACTICE

– Policy Initiative

– Entrepreneurship Training

– Sustainable Entrepreneurship Initiative

– Digital Learning Platform

– Innovation Ecosystem Initiative

BACKGROUND

Zukunftszentren is a nationwide German programme, funded by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the European Social Fund Plus, that supports small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), their employees, and solo self-employed people in navigating digital, ecological and demographic change. It grew out of an earlier regional programme launched in eastern Germany in 2019 and was expanded into a unified, nationwide structure from 2023 onward.

The programme responds to a structural gap: most SMEs, which employ more than two-thirds of Germany's workforce, lack dedicated strategy or human-resources departments capable of managing simultaneous digital and green transformation. It is delivered through a coordinating hub, 12 Regional Zukunftszentren spread across all federal states, and a dedicated 'Haus der Selbstständigen' for solo self-employed people, each hosted by regional partners such as universities, research institutes and training providers, and jointly governed with state labour ministries.

OBJECTIVES

– Strengthen SMEs' and employees' digital competences, including AI-related skills, for workplace application.
– Support the ecological transformation of business models and work processes.
– Develop entrepreneurial and self-organisation competences among solo self-employed people.
– Co-design participatory, human-centred approaches to introducing new technologies in the workplace.
– Generate transferable knowledge on innovative workplace learning for policy development.

TARGET GROUPS

– SMEs

– Entrepreneurs

– Sustainability Professionals

– Other (employees and solo self-employed people)

MAIN ACTIVITIES

Regional Zukunftszentren offer SMEs free, tailored consulting based on an initial analysis of the company's digital, ecological and organisational needs, followed by co-developed qualification formats that are tested directly within the business. Around 100 innovative learning formats have been developed across the network, ranging from workshops on participatory introduction of digital technologies and AI-based systems to modules on sustainable business-model development.

One flagship example is CONSIDERATION, a free online learning and advisory platform developed within the network that guides SMEs step by step through digital and green transformation, covering topics such as sustainability, digitalisation, business-model development, competence development and knowledge management. The Haus der Selbstständigen complements this work by strengthening the self-organisation and design competence of solo self-employed people, supporting the formation of representative bodies and fairer working conditions.

Across the network, delivery combines in-person workshops, online formats, podcasts and published case studies documenting how individual companies have applied the programme's tools, with findings fed back into national labour-market and skills policy.

INNOVATIVE ELEMENTS

Zukunftszentren's innovative core is its integration of digital, ecological and entrepreneurial competence development within a single, publicly funded advisory infrastructure, rather than addressing each transformation separately. Learning formats are co-developed and tested directly with participating companies rather than delivered as generic training, and insights are systematically fed back into national policy.

Particularly innovative elements include:

– A combined digital, green and entrepreneurial competence-development model within one programme.

– Participatory, co-creative design of qualification formats directly with SMEs and employees.

– A dedicated free digital advisory tool (CONSIDERATION) guiding step-by-step transformation.

– Nationwide, publicly funded delivery ensuring reach into rural and structurally weaker regions.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

As of recent programme reporting, the Zukunftszentren network has reached more than 14,000 companies and developed around 100 innovative learning formats since 2019. Under the current funding phase, more than 23,000 awareness-raising and orientation consultations have been carried out, approximately 1,300 SMEs have received in-depth consulting and qualification support, and around 10,700 employees have participated in a Zukunftszentren training format.

The programme has been extended through 2026 based on demonstrated demand and effectiveness, and its findings are published to inform national workforce-development and labour-market policy, contributing to what the ministry describes as a 'learning Mittelstand.' Its nationwide coverage, including rural regions, has established it as one of Germany's principal instruments for building combined digital and green transformation competences at enterprise level.

RELEVANCE FOR GREENEDGE

Zukunftszentren offers GREENEDGE a rare, integrated model addressing sustainability skills, entrepreneurial competence and digital competence within a single national infrastructure, directly mirroring the GreenComp, EntreComp and DigComp frameworks GREENEDGE draws on. Its practice of co-developing and testing qualification formats directly with participating businesses offers a transferable approach for GREENEDGE's challenge-based and virtual incubator activities, where learning content could similarly be shaped and validated with real ventures rather than delivered as fixed curricula.

The CONSIDERATION platform, which guides users step by step through sustainability, digitalisation and business-model development in one free digital tool, offers a concrete reference for how GREENEDGE could structure its own digital learning pathway to move learners across all three competence areas within a single, coherent journey. The programme's regional network structure, spanning universities, chambers and training providers, also models the kind of multi-partner delivery GREENEDGE aims to achieve across its four participating universities.

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