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FreeTwinEV

D2.2 First report on trainings [Soft/hard skills]			
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Disclaimer AI-usage:

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Executive Summary

This deliverable provides the first report on the implementation of soft and hard skills trainings conducted within the FreeTwinEV project. It documents the training activities held during the reporting period (M7–M16), including sessions on proposal preparation, communication, and scientific excellence. The report also presents the training plan for upcoming activities to be implemented in the second phase of the project.

The deliverable is specifically addressing **Task T2.2 (Soft Skills Trainings)** and **Task T2.3 (Hard Skills Trainings)**. These tasks contribute directly to the project's objectives of strengthening research excellence, enhancing proposal development capacity, and fostering collaboration with leading partners in Horizon Europe. The activities are also closely linked with **Task T1.5 (Joint Horizon Europe proposal preparation and submission)**, as the knowledge and skills acquired through the trainings are applied in real proposal development processes.

During the reporting period, a comprehensive needs assessment was carried out to identify priority areas for training, with particular attention given to the requirements of open Horizon Europe calls. Based on this analysis, the project partners developed and initiated the training program, combining both soft and hard skills development activities.

In the area of soft skills, one training was delivered at the UTwente Summer School (May 2025), covering project concept preparation and pitching skills. These sessions helped participants improve their ability to design competitive project ideas and effectively communicate research results. A broader training plan for soft skills, including topics such as ethics, networking, and research impact, has been prepared for implementation in the second project phase.

In terms of hard skills, several practical sessions were carried out, focusing on Horizon Europe proposal preparation and MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowship applications. These included a dedicated training on navigating Horizon Europe (February 2025), an online MSCA training with follow-up mentoring (May–June

2025), and research-related skills exchanges during the Internal Conference (March 2025). As a direct outcome, two MSCA PF proposals were submitted by STU. Further hard skills trainings are planned, including advanced sessions on twinning proposals, audits, data management, and open science.

1. Task and deliverable methodology

1.1. Methodology

The training program was developed following a **three-step approach**:

1. **Needs identification** – Mapping the training requirements of different target groups (PhD students, postdocs, senior researchers, project office staff) in relation to their roles and Horizon Europe participation opportunities.
2. **Training plan design** – Aligning the identified needs with ongoing Horizon Europe calls and FreeTwinEV project objectives, ensuring relevance and immediate applicability.
3. **Implementation and monitoring** – Delivering trainings in cooperation with experienced partners (ADDSEN, LCM, UTWENTE) and visiting scientists, while collecting feedback from participants to adjust and refine future sessions.

1.2. Roles of partners

STUBA: Coordination of the training program, organisation of local sessions, and integration with inward visits of scientists.

ADDSEN: Lead trainer for hard and soft skills proposal-related sessions, including Horizon Europe and MSCA-focused modules.

UTWENTE: Host of the Summer School soft skills training and provider of scientific input through visiting researchers.

LCM: Contributor of specialised scientific trainings during inward visits and support in advanced research-related skills.

2. Soft and Hard skills trainings

The training activities within the project are divided into two main categories: **soft skills (Task T2.2)** and **hard skills (Task T2.3)**.

Soft Skills Training

To support overall research excellence, these trainings focus on strengthening the soft skills of senior researchers, PhD students, and undergraduate students across different areas of expertise. The trainings cover topics such as *how to shine at pitching, best practices for networking and collaboration, and the distinction between communication, exploitation, and dissemination*. These activities aim to enhance participants' ability to effectively present, communicate, and position their research in both academic and industrial contexts.

Hard Skills Training

The hard skills training primarily focus on the preparation of Horizon Europe RIA proposals and mobility projects (MSCA). These sessions will be highly practical and delivered by experienced partners with proven expertise in FP project proposal writing (ADDSEN, LCM, UTWENTE). The target groups include PhD students, post-docs, project office managers, and senior researchers, as well as other STU actors interested in European funding opportunities. In addition, training on research content will be provided by visiting scientists from leading scientific partners (LCM, UTWENTE) during their stays at STU.

2.1. Soft skills trainings

The activity commenced with the identification of needs and the preparation of a training plan for soft skills development. During this process, it was concluded that a stronger focus should be placed on hard skills directly linked to the preparation of Horizon Europe proposals, in line with the currently open calls. Nevertheless, soft skills remain an essential component in strengthening research excellence and supporting researchers in effectively presenting and communicating their ideas.

In the current reporting period, one soft skills training activity was implemented by ADSSEN within the framework of the **UTwente Summer School, held on 21–23 May 2025**. Two dedicated sessions were delivered:

- *How to prepare a project concept?*
- *How to pitch research ideas?*

These sessions provided practical guidance for researchers on developing competitive project concepts and improving their communication skills when presenting research ideas. The training supported participants in bridging the gap between research excellence and successful proposal preparation, contributing to their overall readiness for engagement in Horizon Europe initiatives.

Additional soft skills trainings are planned for the second phase of the project, identifying the target groups. The activities are outlined below:

No.	Theme of the training	Target group	Topics covered	Date	Location	Trainer
1.	Ethics	Researchers	Integrity, article writing.	12.2025	STU	TBA
2.	Networking and Partnerships	Researchers	Training on pitching skills, strategies for partnerships, presentation	Q1 2026	STU	ADSEN

			and communication skills			
3.	Don't mix communication, exploitation, and dissemination	Researchers	Identification of proper target groups for DEC, defining activities under DEC how they are connected and how they contribute to each other	Q2 2026	STU	ADSSEN
4.	Grants for junior researchers	ESRs	Basic proposal writing skills, Practical examples, Insight to ERC, Differences between academic and project writing	Q3 2026	STU	ADSSEN
5.	Scientist self-development and transferable skills	ESRs	Developing Personal Effectiveness, Understanding transferable skills, Personalized career development plan	Q4 2026	STU	ADSSEN
6.	Research impact, entrepreneurial mindset, business plan basics	ESRs	Understand research impact, cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset, Transforming research ideas into viable ventures, Tips and tricks	Q1 2027	STU	ADSSEN

The plan of the trainings can change due to the ad-hoc requests or need of the researchers.

2.2. Hard skills trainings

The activity began with the mapping of researchers' needs and the preparation of a training plan, designed in close alignment with the opportunities offered by ongoing Horizon Europe calls. This ensured that the trainings would be relevant, timely, and directly supportive of proposal preparation and participation in European research initiatives.

The **scientific hard skills trainings** are further connected with the planned inward visits of leading scientists to STU. During these visits, experts from partner institutions will provide targeted sessions on advanced research content and methodologies, complementing the practical trainings on proposal writing and project development.

This combined approach - integrating practical guidance on Horizon Europe proposal preparation with high-level scientific input - ensures that researchers gain both the technical and strategic skills needed to successfully engage in collaborative European projects.

During the reporting period **2 Horizon Europe hard skills** trainings and scientific herd skill training was held within the **Internal Conference**:

Horizon Europe Hard Skills:

1. **Navigating Horizon Europe: Key Insights and First Steps:** Training took place at STU on February 18, 2025, and was attended by 12 researchers and research managers from STU. Participants gained a foundational understanding of these topics:
 - **The Horizon Europe Framework:** A structured overview of the program's objectives, priorities, and funding landscape.
 - **Rules of Participation:** Key regulations and eligibility criteria for HEU projects. Overview of different types of actions and grants.
 - **Understanding Evaluation Criteria:** Insights into how proposals are reviewed and scored under HEU.
 - **Finding Information on Calls:** Navigating the Funding & Tenders Portal (FTP) to identify suitable calls for proposals.
 - **How to Read and Interpret the Work Programme:** Decoding work programmes to align research ideas with HEU priorities.

- **Preparing for Proposal Development:** Events participation. Pitch Presentation Basics. Consortium Building.
- **Engaging with National Structures:** Understanding the roles of programme committee delegates and National Contact Points (NCPs) and how to collaborate with them.



Blog post was published on the project website –
<https://freetwinev.stuba.sk/navigating-horizon-europe/>

2. MSCA Training

During the reporting period (M7–M16), a dedicated online training session was organised on the preparation of **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) Postdoctoral Fellowship (PF) proposals**. The webinar provided practical guidance for researchers interested in MSCA PF opportunities, with a particular emphasis on supporting applicants at STU. 17 registrations were received for the webinar.



The training introduced participants to the objectives, eligibility rules, and benefits of MSCA PF grants, including their complementarity with the FreeTwinEV project. Following the training, participants were invited to develop project concepts and pitch presentations. A follow-up meeting was held on **12 June 2025**, where submitted ideas were discussed, and the most mature

concepts received tailored mentoring and proposal development support. **As a direct outcome of these activities, two MSCA PF proposals were successfully submitted by STU.**

Blog post was published on the project website – <https://freetwinev.stuba.sk/online-webinar-msca-postdoctoral-fellowships-proposals/>

Research-Related Hard Skills:

1. Research hard skills were strengthened through two sessions of the “**Internal Conference**”, held on 12 March 2025 and 21 March 2025. These sessions enabled knowledge and experience sharing among project partners and researchers, fostering collaboration and the exchange of best practices. All the presentations from the Internal conference are shared on the [Knowledge Hub](#).

Additional hard skills trainings are planned for the second phase of the project, identifying the target groups. The activities are outlined below:

No.	Theme of the training	Target group	Topics covered	Date	Location	Trainer
1.	Project proposal preparation – Twinning (1)	RMA's + Researchers	Excellence	1.10.2025	STU	ADSSEN
2.	Project proposal preparation – Twinning (2)	RMA's + Researchers	Impact	1.10.2025	STU	ADSSEN
3.	Project proposal preparation – Twinning (3)	RMA's + Researchers	Implementation, Budget	2.10.2025	STU	ADSSEN
4.	Proposal submission, FTP and its functionalities	RMA's + Researchers	all activities carried out within Funding and tender portal	Q1 2026	STU	ADSSEN
5.	Budget (costs), Audits	RMA's + Researchers	types of costs, form of costs, costs calculation, 1st level, 2nd level audits,	Q2 2026	STU	ADSSEN
6.	Ethics	RMA's + Researchers	Ethics in proposal preparation and project implementation	Q3 2026	STU	ADSSEN
7.	Data Management	RMA's + Researchers	Creating Data Management Plan	Q4 2026	STU	ADSSEN

11.	Project review and Reporting	RMA's + Researchers	Periodic and Continuous Reporting, Final report, Review meetings	Q1 2027	STU	ADSSEN
12.	Open science	RMA's + Researchers	Everything about open science and open data sharing	Q1 2027	STU	ADSSEN
13.	Hard Skills training at LCM	Researchers	TBA	Q1 2026	LCM	LCM/STU

The plan of the trainings can change due to the ad-hoc requests, needs of the researchers or the relevant Horizon Europe calls.

3. Conclusions

The first phase of the FreeTwinEV training programme has successfully established a solid foundation for **strengthening both soft and hard skills among researchers, early-stage scientists, and research support** staff. By systematically mapping training needs, aligning them with Horizon Europe opportunities, and implementing targeted sessions, the consortium ensured that the activities delivered were timely, relevant, and directly supportive of project objectives.

Soft skills training, though limited in the reporting period, demonstrated clear value in enhancing participants' abilities to design competitive project concepts and communicate research ideas effectively. The sessions at the UTwente Summer School highlighted the importance of complementary skills such as **pitching, networking, and impact communication**, which will be expanded upon in the next project phase through a structured training plan.

Hard skills training represented a major focus of this period. Dedicated sessions on **Horizon Europe navigation, MSCA proposal preparation**, and research-focused exchanges provided participants with practical insights and concrete tools to engage in European research funding schemes. Notably, the structured MSCA training and mentoring process directly resulted in two proposal submissions, underscoring the tangible impact of

the programme. The Internal Conference further enriched scientific exchanges, fostering collaboration and peer learning within the consortium.

Looking ahead, the second project phase will scale up training activities with an expanded portfolio covering proposal development (RIA, MSCA, and Twinning), project management, audits, ethics, open science, and data management. Soft skills training will also broaden its scope, with sessions on ethics, networking, entrepreneurial mindset, and transferable skills, ensuring a holistic approach to researcher development.

In conclusion, the training activities implemented so far have proven highly effective in building capacity, enhancing competitiveness in Horizon Europe, and fostering a culture of collaboration and excellence within the FreeTwinEV consortium.