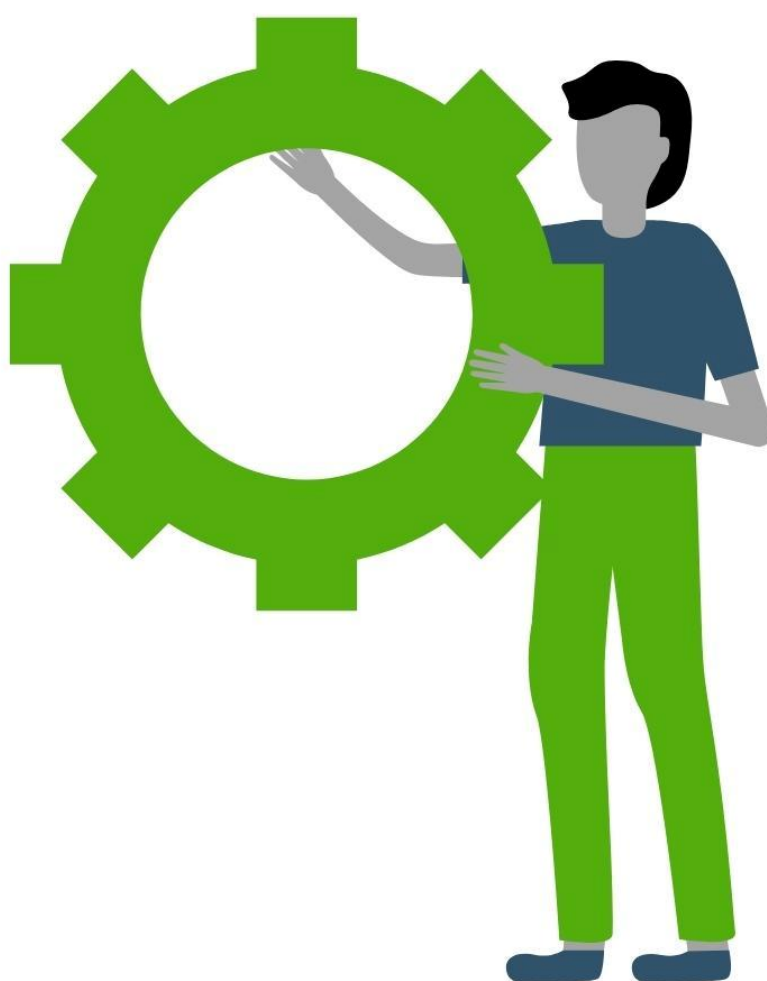

IT WORKS!

ASSISTED TRAINING SCHEME



2019-1-DE02-KA202-00636



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



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Introduction

“The Employable Youth: It Works!” project partners have been continuously working with young people from various backgrounds. In our daily work with young people, we have witnessed the difficulties that disadvantaged youth, especially, face when entering an internship or a training scheme.

Among the reasons why the particular group of young people faces difficulties in finding an internship/traineeship in the first place, and eventually receiving a job offer, is the lack of effective communication, steady discipline and professional attitude in the work environment. Our goal in “It Works!” project was to create a concrete, rounded intervention in the form of a training scheme, so as to assist our young participants overcome common obstacles observed along our work with them. A central component of our pilot intervention is the **mediating role of the youth worker** before, during and after the placements, to bridge the gaps between the trainee and the company offering a placement.

Our goal was to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges disadvantaged youth faces during the assisted training schemes so as to improve work-based learning. The method used in this project gave us valuable insights, which can be multiplied and adapted in several settings in the European context.

Thus, in this report, we collated the experiences and feedback gained during the implementation of the assisted training scheme. The young people were in assisted training and job placements in a range of fields (partner organizations own structures and network, restaurants, hotels, etc.). To collect our data, each partner formed **advisory groups** and conducted semi-structured and structured **interviews with the people involved in the assisted training schemes**: a) the youth social work professionals and trainers that guided/supported young people, b) the companies that provided placements to the young people, and c) the young people that participated in the training scheme pilot interventions. This procedure was implemented between April and August 2022. Additionally, YES Forum discussed the experiences gained and the project results in a one-day workshop gathering social and youth work professionals and experts of the field in May 2022.

Challenges

“It Works!” is a project that was planned before the Covid-19 pandemic crisis; nonetheless, it was mainly implemented during the pandemic. The partners had to deal with several restrictions in various ways in their home countries. In the meantime, a lot of businesses had to close, many workers were sacked and the job market was dealing with an unprecedented crisis.

Undoubtedly the pilot interventions we had planned in the “It Works!” project context were met with considerable obstacles, as well. Limited traineeship places and difficulties regarding the communication with the companies and employers were among the most often issues partners had to deal with. An equally important challenge was to organize the advisory groups of the people involved in the assisted training schemes. However, either through group meetings, or through bilateral meetings (depending on the Covid-19 rules at the time), partners managed to bring together professionals, employers and young people that tested the method and gained hands-on experience on the training schemes.

A significant aspect that partners had to consider during the implementation of the assisted training schemes was that **national infrastructures differ**. Our desk research highlighted from the beginning how each country deals with youth employability, in general, and assisted training schemes in particular. Some national employment mechanisms are more experienced and prepared to guide young people in their path towards accessing the labour market. Some educational systems are better oriented towards equipping young people with practical skills and soft skills to be used later in their work life. And some countries have better coping mechanisms and long-tested plans for precarious youth outside education, training or employment. Definitely, one-size-fits-all solutions cannot be implemented uniformly everywhere. An assisted training scheme has to be malleable to serve the needs of each national context and the needs of each participant.

The Assisted Training Scheme

The methodology we developed and applied in this project is described in 5 main steps:

1. The partners initially appoint the youth and social work professionals/counselors that are the “persons of reference” and responsible to assist the young participants throughout the project. The professionals are trained on the [It Works! Handbook and Toolbox for Professionals](#), a handbook collating our organizations’ experience working with precarious youth. The handbook consists of a toolbox for curriculum capacity building for professionals working with youngsters, so as to be able to provide the context, support and training to NEETs.
2. Following the participants’ recruitment, the youth professionals have one-to-one consultation sessions with the young people. Each participant’s goals, expectations and needs are clarified and the appropriate “solutions” are progressively defined. As a result, an **Individual Support Plan** is developed as the basis for a successful support planning.
3. At the next stage of the project, the youth professionals focus on delivering the [It Works! Soft Skills For Employability \(parts I, II, III\)](#) training to the young participants. There they are equipped with the necessary skillset to successfully enter the labor market.
4. With the mediation of the youth professionals, **training and job placements** are secured for the youngsters. The main goal is young participants overcoming the difficulties that the participating organizations have observed when a young person enters a new job. The project offers to the participants the opportunity to receive work-based learning and to overcome the difficulties often associated with their poorly developed soft skills.
5. The youth professionals/persons of reference are **consistently guiding the participant** before, during and after the training placement. Practically, their role is to act as mediators and to ensure that the work-based learning is taking place as planned. **Advisory groups** with the companies hosting the young participants are taking place in parallel, so that feedback is given to the intern/ trainee in a reflective, educational way that will allow for improvement.

Our reflections on the Assisted Training Scheme implementation and Advisory Groups interviews were discussed with all partners. The results of our experience are presented below, following the three major steps we took, beginning from our search of the suitable project participants and ending with providing them with follow-up evaluations on their performance.

I. Recruiting the participants

All the organizations involved in “It Works!” project are working with and for young people from various disadvantageous backgrounds in their own region and/or country. Each partner organization has an important number of youth that is daily working with. It was naturally a source of inspiration for us to particularly aim for the specific target group.

The selection of the project participants for most organizations was particularly fast. Frequently the youth workers had already contacts with them within previous projects. Our partners in Sweden and Germany were also able to find young participants cooperating with the municipality and through the job center of their communities.

However, this was not the case for all partners. Even if they had already an established network within their local and national settings, their target group was not interested in participating in a learning scheme. According to our partners in Greece and Romania, it was quite challenging to find people that would do an unpaid internship considering their priorities at the time. For some of these young people the priorities had completely shifted to finding quick solutions that “pay the bills” for them and their families. As a participant said, “learning new things is no longer a priority for me”.

Another interesting observation during the recruitment process was that there were applications from young people that would not traditionally fit the partners’ target group profile, and therefore could not qualify for participation to the project. It was nonetheless clear to us that the specific aims of the project can be interesting for other target groups, as well. On the other hand, the participants that eventually qualified for the pilot interventions were surprised to hear about the very existence of projects like “It Works!”.

II. Soft skills enhancement: Preparing the participants

Although most of the youth professionals involved in this project have a lot of youth work related experience with the particular target group, we have generally witnessed an increasing need for the enhancement of knowledge, tools and methodologies for all professionals in the field. It is of vital importance to ensure that all young people can receive quality guidance in their effort to access the labor market. All involved professionals need to work towards providing effective services towards successful employability for young adults, especially those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. Thus, the youth professionals started their work equipping first themselves with the appropriate tools for the next stages of the project.

The focus now was on reinforcing the young participants soft skills. A number of learning units were delivered during this stage. The partners were already familiar with the existing tools and methodologies employed in youth work to assist low skilled, out of education and away of formal education youth. In an attempt to collate valuable input and bridge the gap in the existing literature, they developed a module based on EQF regarding the employability soft skills reinforcement for the particular target group. The participants went through a number of activities, games, workshops and study visits. Among the aspects covered during these learning units' delivery was exploring talents and interests, setting goals and enhancing decision-making skills, verbal and non-verbal communication, work-place behavior, etc.

Generally, most partners agreed that the learning units were positively received by the majority of youngsters. As IEKEP youth workers pointed out, it was a great opportunity for participants to explore and realize their talents and learn how to use them to create their professional path. Several professionals also claimed that even when participants were more reserved in the beginning, they seemed to genuinely appreciate the work done there.

Nonetheless, they underlined the need to adapt the produced guidelines and methodologies accordingly to fit the participants needs and goals. For example, youth workers in Nevo Parudimos made two different groups and adjusted the implementation accordingly to fit the participants skills, interests and age. Considering some participants educational background, partners often considered it more appropriate to mainly facilitate discussions and use visual elements, and not really work on written documents. Some extra effort had to be concentrated in ensuring that the language was not a barrier to understanding and communication, especially for youngsters with immigrant background.

For most youth professionals, delivering the learning units on soft skills was an easy task. They all have experience working with this target group and thus know how to approach the topic. However, challenges are always more or less expected when working with people. For instance, a feedback received was that some participants were uncertain about the goals and usefulness of the activities employed during this stage. Naturally this attitude would stall the whole process as youth professionals had to dedicate more time in motivating and giving incentives to the youngsters.

III. Traineeships/Job placements

The most important step to ensure effective work-based learning for the youngsters, was to provide them with assisted training placements. More specifically, partners coupled the professionals working with the disadvantaged youngsters in the previous stages with employers and/or HR personnel. Thus, bridges of communication were built right from the start, and a “protected” learning space was established for the young trainees to grow personally and professionally.

As already explained in the previous chapter, it was inevitably challenging to find traineeship posts in companies in the first place. Equally challenging however was for young participants to agree on doing traineeships, as those would not be remunerated. The youth professionals did their best to find practical solutions to accommodate everyone’s needs. They provided constant support to the young participants during their placements, while some partners managed to secure directly, or indirectly, job placements for a considerable number of participants.

The youth professionals retained regular contact with the participants and employers throughout the project. As Pitea Kommun points out, they met initially at several occasions before the internship, “to ensure trust, stability and correct expectations from both trainee and professional”. Once the pilot interventions started, most participants reported that they were satisfied with their placements. Nevo Parudimos interviews with youngsters regarding job placements also highlighted that most young people were positive in their feedbacks. Even when they had concerns (e.g. the working hours, workload, etc.), they appreciated the learning experience and, in the particular case, the fact that they were already a part of the labour market. Most of the participants agreed that they felt that through the training, and the preparative activities, strengthened their skills, raised their confidence and felt more “employable”.

As most partners reported, they found that the employers were satisfied with the young trainees/workers. IEKEP commented that companies often said that they are not familiar with training people, so they found the assisted training scheme a great idea in general. The Inclusion Network reported that the companies were willing to be involved in similar projects again in the future.

Less frequently, the employers feedback was not as positive. As BAG KJS claimed, the feedback received by the young people and companies was often different. Companies sometimes had less positive or neutral feedback, but, in any case constructive for the youngsters. Pitea Kommun highlighted an observation extended in most work environments: trainees need time to learn how to work and this is something companies should keep in mind when involved in training schemes. They also found that companies could be further involved in the preparation stages, to ensure better results at the workplace.

Conclusions

The Assisted Training Scheme was, all in all, a successful experiment, which can be fine-tuned and adapted in different contexts and with different target groups. The produced manuals and guidelines provide a collection of adaptable material. Depending on the goals, needs and expectations of each participant, youth worker and employer, the assisted training scheme can be manipulated accordingly.

Working with youth from disadvantageous backgrounds, our observation from the beginning was that youth workers need to go to the target group. It is usually hard to reach precarious youth through the usual communication platforms, and thus, immediate contact and continuous involvement with the community will always facilitate our work. The key to providing quality services to our target group is recognizing their skills, but also help them adjust to the labour market reality. In other words, it is crucial for them to recognize how valuable their life experiences and acquired skills so far are, but also give them an assist to do a further step and put more effort in cultivating those skills they are lacking.

The feedback collected during this stage of the project gave us valuable insights. Detailed information and recommendations are developed and can be found in our [It Works! Guidelines: Assisted Training Scheme \(parts I, II, III\)](#).

Reference IO: IO4

IO Leader: BAG KJS

Project Title: The Employable Youth: It Works!

Project Acronym: It Works!

Project Number: 2019-1-DE02-KA202-006136

Imprint

This publication was created by all projects partners: BAG KJS, Centro San Viator, IEKEP, The Inclusion Network, Piteå Kommun, Nevo Parudimos and YES Forum. The text was written by Iliana Petsa (YES Forum). Coediting and design was done by YES Forum.

Disclaimer

The Employable Youth: It Works! (Grant Agreement No. 2019-1-DE02-KA202-006136) is a Strategic Partnership for Vocational Education and Training funded by the Erasmus+ programme, and coordinated by the YES Forum. For more information or to check our other Intellectual Outputs, please visit the project's website (<https://yes-forum.eu/our-work/projects/it-works-the-employable-youth/>) or contact us directly. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of the project partners and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union. Images used are made by and are therefore property of the YES Forum respectively its project partners. Usage by any other party is prohibited.

Date and year

August 2022



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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
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