Lessons learned and future plans

REVEALING THE HIDDEN RESOURCES:

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT FOR NEETS WITH SUPPORT NEEDS

swom

ŽISPB

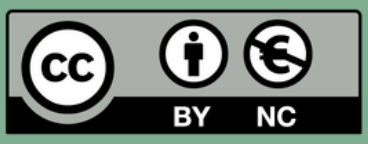
VALO valmennus yhdistys

Social Innovation Initiative

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HUMAK UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

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Revealing the Hidden Resources piloted the Dutch SWOM supported employment model in Lithuania and Finland. It worked with young people aged 18–29 who were outside employment, education or training and needed additional support to find and keep a job.

The pilots tested whether combining individual coaching with direct work with employers could make the transition into employment easier. Coaches helped young people identify their strengths, prepare for work and find vacancies suited to their circumstances. After a young person started work, the coach remained available to both the participant and the employer.

ŽISPB and VALO adapted and delivered the model in Lithuania and Finland, with training and advice from SWOM in the Netherlands. HUMAK evaluated how the approach worked in both countries. The pilots supported 91 young people against a target of 80. By the end of the project, 30 had entered employment, meeting the project target. In Lithuania, 17 of the 46 young people supported entered employment. In Finland, 13 of the 45 young people supported entered employment.

What worked in practice

Coaches began by building a personal profile with each young person. This helped them understand the person's strengths, interests and work experience, as well as what might make it difficult to start or stay in a job. In Lithuania, some participants wanted to work but first needed to establish a routine, explore which jobs were realistic and practise contacting employers. The profile gave the coach and participant a basis for agreeing on the next step and adjusting the pace as they went.

In Finland, VALO combined individual coaching with workshops on working life, CVs, job searches and interviews. The workshops gave participants a chance to practise skills they could use in their own applications. Individual coaching helped address barriers specific to the person or job. HUMAK's evaluation describes one participant who received support with the training and licence needed to become a taxi driver and subsequently entered employment.

Direct contact with employers helped coaches identify vacancies that suited both the young person and the workplace. Employers who contributed testimonials valued meeting candidates with a coach, being introduced to people whose strengths matched the role and having someone to contact after recruitment. Staying available after the person started work also gave coaches a way to respond to questions about onboarding and support needs as they arose.

How the project evolved

November 2024 to April 2025

The training week in The Hague gave the Lithuanian and Finnish teams a chance to learn how SWOM worked with young people and employers. The teams saw how SWOM introduced candidates through their strengths and stayed in contact with employers after recruitment. HUMAK's first evaluation recommended clarifying what each partner was responsible for, giving staff a clearer brief before intervision sessions and agreeing early on how participant stories would be collected.

May to October 2025

Staff recruitment and set-up took longer than expected. ŽISPB and VALO also needed time to find out which outreach channels worked and to build recognition among young people and employers. The Year 1 evaluation recommended keeping outreach active throughout the pilot and allowing more time for recruitment and staff training in future projects. HUMAK also highlighted SWOM's practice of sharing small successes within the team as a way to recognise progress between enrolment and employment.

November 2025 to April 2026

Both pilots were approaching the enrolment target. Existing local relationships helped ŽISPB and VALO reach young people, while finding suitable vacancies remained difficult, particularly in Finland. The evaluation found that direct contact with employers was most useful when coaches could discuss a specific vacancy and explain how a candidate's strengths matched the role. The intervisions and testimonial collection were behind schedule, so HUMAK recommended revising the intervision timetable and format and prioritising the remaining evidence and project outputs.

May to October 2026

The partners completed the five remaining intervisions, using cases from the pilots to discuss practical questions. They also collected all 45 planned participant stories, a target HUMAK had questioned in the Year 1 review. HUMAK analysed the stories and presented excerpts from 15 at the final conference. The stories illustrated how individual participants gained confidence, became more independent in their job search and experienced the move into work. The final evaluation confirmed that the pilots exceeded the enrolment target and met the employment target.

Recommendations for future delivery

Build a continuous route into employment

Agree who will refer young people, who will coordinate their support and who will stay in touch after they start work. Youth services, employment services, municipalities, education providers and NGOs can use these arrangements to connect outreach, assessment, preparation and job matching. Offer follow-up according to the young person's support needs, including when they do not have a formally recognised disability.

Give coaches time to adapt support

Start with an individual assessment and agree realistic next steps with the participant. Allow a longer preparation phase for young people who need to build a routine, practise applying for jobs or explore which roles suit them. Check transport, working hours and workplace accessibility before arranging an introduction. A vacancy is only a viable option if the young person can get to work and manage the schedule.

Help employers recruit and support young people

Build relationships with employers early so coaches understand what local workplaces need before proposing a match. Offer to introduce the candidate in person, explain what support is available and agree a named contact for both the employer and the young person during the first months of employment. Where transport or shift patterns repeatedly rule out otherwise suitable jobs, work with municipalities and employers to explore adjusted hours, transport support or placements closer to home.

Measure progress and job retention

Record entry into employment and the steps that help participants get there, such as attending regularly, applying independently, volunteering or returning to education. HUMAK's analysis of 45 participant stories showed how qualitative evidence can explain what changed for individuals. Future programmes should also plan follow-up at six months, record how many participants they were able to reach, and ask young people and employers whether the role remains a good fit and what support is still needed.

Plan for staff changes and joint learning

Allow time for recruitment, induction and outreach before expecting the pilot to run at full capacity. Keep a short handover covering partner responsibilities, deadlines and evidence requirements so work can continue when staff change. Schedule intervisions at key points in delivery, agree the purpose of each session in advance and ask teams to bring a case or question they can use to improve their practice.

How partners will continue the work

Lithuania

ŽISPB has secured follow-on funding to continue providing employment and social integration support. It plans to use the SWOM personal profile and Capacity to Work scale in its existing services, alongside individual coaching, direct work with employers and follow-up after participants start work. Staff trained in the model will share the tools and practices with colleagues. Cooperation with employment services, municipalities, probation services, local NGOs and employers will help ŽISPB reach people who need support and connect them with suitable opportunities.

Finland

VALO plans to continue individual coaching and workshops on working life, CVs, job searches and interviews through its regular services and the KOTE project, in cooperation with the Turku Employment Area and Sateenkaarikoto. HUMAK plans to share the evaluation findings through its community educator programmes and professional and academic networks. This will give students and practitioners examples they can draw on in municipal services and NGOs.

The Netherlands and wider transfer

SWOM plans to use the lessons from Lithuania and Finland in future training and international cooperation. The two pilots showed that organisations can use the same core approach while adapting the pace of coaching and the way they work with employers. The practitioner guidelines describe how the teams adapted the model, and the White Book brings together examples and recommendations for service providers and policymakers.
An organisation adopting the model needs trained coaches, clear referral routes, direct relationships with employers and enough staff time to support both sides after a placement begins. How that support is organised will depend on local vacancies, transport and the services already available. Where possible, follow-up at six months can help teams understand which placements have lasted and what further support may be needed.

Project sources

HUMAK, mid-evaluation reports dated 9 May 2025, 1 November 2025 and 22 May 2026.
HUMAK, Final Evaluation Report, 30 October 2026.
White Book on Supported Employment for Vulnerable NEETs, section 5.
Project Sustainability Plan, deliverable D2.4.
Practitioner guidelines for implementing the SWOM model in Lithuania and Finland.

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