MID-EVALUATION REPORT

November 2024 – April 2025

(9.5.2025)

PROJECT: Revealing the hidden resources:
supported employment for NEETs with support needs
(ESF-SI-2023-SKILSS-01)

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Executive summary

The six first months (November 2024 – April 2025) of the project have passed accordingly to the project plan. The activities and deliverables are on schedule.

The key discoveries of the first quartile of the projects are: 1) Team building has been success, the successful kick-off week, organized by the Dutch partner, has been in the central role in the team building, and especially the Lithuanian and the Finnish partner have bounded and discovered similarities in their work contexts. 2) The way young people are talked about in the SWOM model supports their goal to be employed. The use of the word “talent” instead of NEET reflects appreciation of the clients and creates a positive mindset towards the candidates helping the employers to see past the special needs of the candidates. 3) The SWOM collaboration with the employers differs from the Lithuanian and Finnish practices. Compared to the other partners, the Dutch collaboration with the employer network is more business like and the support lasts longer.

Even though the partner organizations and countries have several similar characteristics, there are also differences between the partner organizations and countries. These differences may have an impact on the project and its results.

The project – i.e., engagement of the stakeholders, competence building and quality - and its coordination have progressed accordingly to the project plan.

The recommendations contain 1) the crystallization of the roles of the partners, 2) the clarification of the content and the aims of the intervisions, 3) ensuring the smooth MSS collection process, 4) national development work in Lithuania and Finland on employer attitudes, 5) legislative lobbying in Lithuania and Finland, 6) the emphasis of the national dissemination activities and 7) monitoring of the unexpected products or side effect the project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

2 FINDINGS

3 SUMMARY

4 RECOMMENDATION

REFERENCES

1 INTRODUCTION

This mid-term evaluation report assesses progress made until 30 April 2025 in achieving the objectives of the project *Revealing the hidden resources: supported employment for NEETs with support needs*. The time period covers the progress of project during the first six months of the project (i.e., the first quartile of the two-year-long project). This mid-evaluation assesses the progress of 1) competence building activities, 2) engagement of stakeholders, and 3) the quality of collaboration.

The evaluation data contains the documents created in the project during the first quartile of the project, i.e., the presentations and other material, including 9 training reports (6 from Finland including the evaluator's own training report, 3 from Lithuania, 0 from the Netherlands) on the kick-off meeting in The Hague (from 24 February to 28 February 2025); the minutes of Steering Committee Meeting in November 2024, January 2025 and April 2025; the continuous reporting sheet of the project and the observations of the evaluator.

During the first quartile of the project (between November 2024 and April 2025) the following work packages and activities were in progress:

WP001 Management Y1

A001.001 Project coordination
A001.002 Online Steering Committee Meetings (28 November 2024, 22 January 2025 and 2 April 2025)
A001.003 Evaluation of progress and implementation
A001.004 Reporting

WP003 Capacity building

A003.001 International training on SWOM model
A003.002 Intervisions online
A003.003 Guidelines of the model
WP004 Piloting of the SWOM model
A004.001 Piloting the SWOM model
A004.002 Outreach youth work

WP005 Advocacy and dissemination

A005.001 Local dissemination events in Lithuania
A005.002 Local dissemination events in Finland
A005.003 Local dissemination events in the Netherlands
A005.007 Website
A005.008 Representation of the project in international conference or an event
A005.009 Testimonials

2 FINDINGS

Engagement of stakeholders

At this stage of the project, the stakeholders are limited to the partner organizations of the project and the term stakeholder is not used as a reference to the (future) clients or collaborators of the partner organizations in their countries unless otherwise indicated.

First of all, it should be noted that, similarly to many other projects, a considerable number of the members of the project staff did not take part in the writing of the project plan. The recruitment of the staff members took place during the first months of the project period, in November – December 2024 and at the beginning of the year 2025, depending on the personnel situation of the partners. Consequently, the kick-off meeting in The Hague (23-28 February 2025) played an important role in engaging the stakeholders.

The transferring the project from the writing team to those who will carry it out, can be challenging in the terms of staying in planned schedule and keeping the aims and objectives of the project clear. However, this has not been an issue with the project at hand. Naturally, at the beginning of the project, some time was needed to recruit the project staff in all countries and the most of the project staff had very little pre-knowledge on the project as they arrived to the kick-off meeting in The Hague. Consequently, the project staff members come to the kick-off meeting with open minds and without preconceptions. For some, the lack of pre-knowledge was a slightly uncomfortable situation, but most participants did not express any concerns about it**. It could be argued that not having previous information about the SWOM model and/or the project was an equalizing factor amongst the participants, which contributed to the feeling of togetherness of the participants and team building.**

The Lithuanian and Finnish participants found similarities in their countries and work quickly. For example, the same target group and the novelty of the idea that the NGOs could actually be paid by the enterprises for their recruitment services, and the similarities in their societies - such as the lack of similar legislation to the Netherlands - brought the two partners together.

The warm welcome of the SWOM personnel, and their captivating presentations, contributed to the engagement of the participants and their enthusiasm to learn more about the methods and experiences of SWOM. **The host organization built relaxed and enthusiastic meeting atmosphere.** The importance of the warm welcome was also noted in the training report as the hosts were given warm thanks and good feedback about the kick-off week. However, it was also noted that there was no one assigned person from the host organization who would have been present during the whole kick-off event. Consequently, **bounding with the Dutch staff members remained looser than the bonding between the two other partners**.

As the staff members of the Finnish and Lithuanian project teams had very little prior knowledge on the project when they arrived to The Hague meeting, the differences between the roles of the partners may not have been not properly understood. Perhaps, for this reason, the Finnish and Lithuanian staff members seemed to assume that each partner would have a similar role in the project whereas the Dutch staff members saw their role different already from the beginning of

the project. This slight confusion on the roles of the partners is the downside of the recruitment of staff members who had not been involved in the application process of the project.

From the view point of engagement, and regarding the upcoming intervisions (WP003/A003.002, start month 5), stronger bonding with all partner countries would have been an asset in the preparing the upcoming intervisions and drafting the Implementation Guidelines for Practitioners in Lithuania and Finland (WP003/A003.003). Especially, as knowledge on the local contexts in Lithuania and Finland is required in writing the guidelines, and the function of intervisions in the project remained somewhat unclear even after The Hague meeting for the Lithuanian and Finnish members of the project staff who had not been involved in the planning of the project.

To summarize, apart from the observation that all partner did not bond with each other equally, it can be concluded that the engagement of the stakeholders has been successful. On the basis of the training reports and the observations of the evaluator, the staff members were curious and excited about the project when they arrived to The Hague meeting. The training reports show that during the kick-off meeting, the participants had already started to innovate how to apply the SWOM model in their own work and national context.

Competence building activities

During the first kick-off meeting day, SWOM had three presentations (SWOM introduction, the importance of lobby and stakeholder collaboration) in addition to the general introduction and overview to the kick-off week.

On the second day, the hosts presented the SWOM Method, Pathway to Employment and Workplace Coaching. The rest of day was reserved for partner collaboration.

The third day began with the presentation of SWOM and Volksuniversiteit Den Haag, VU, an educational institution partner of SWOM, and continued with Lithuanian presentation on their situation, activities and best practices of NEET.

On the fourth day, Valo presented their best practices implemented in Finland followed by the Humak's presentation on transformative evaluation.

The fifth and the final day was dedicated to evaluation and reflection, Q&A and round-up.

On the basis of the training reports and the evaluator's observations, the presentation of the SWOM model shed light into the questions of the participants of the training, and was a good learning experience for the other partners. Even though the participants found similarities with the SWOM model and their own activities, they discovered novel ideas they could apply to their own work.

The use of the word "talent" as a reference to the clients of SWOM was noted by the participants of the training and generated important reflections on the vocabulary and the ways of introducing the clients to the potential employers. This was an important discovery and learning result for the

development of the Lithuanian/Finnish model on working with the employers. In fact, in the SWOM model attention is paid to clients and employers equally, which was another learning experience for the other two partners.

For the Lithuanian partners one of the most important learning results was **the structured way of working** at SWOM (and also at Valo), which the Lithuanians identified was a development need in their own work. Respectively, the Finnish partner paid attention **to the longer duration of the support offered to the client** in the SWOM model compared to their practice. In addition, the **more advanced employer collaboration in the Netherlands** was noted by the Finnish and Lithuanian partners.

One of the main learning results was **the notion of the impact value of the services of NGOs**. Attention was drawn to the impressive impact value calculation presented to the participants of the training. According to the calculations of Deloitte, 1€ invested results 2.83 € of social value, giving the return of investment 2.83 times back. Furthermore, the idea that the NGOs could be paid for recruiting talents in vulnerable situations for employers was a new concept for the Finnish and Lithuanian participants in the training. The transition from a non-profit approach to a business model was found intriguing both amongst the Lithuanian and Finnish participants. Consequently, the lobbying activity of SWOM also interested the participants.

The Finnish and Lithuanian project staff members were inspired by the Dutch example of the NGO being paid by the employers. There is, however, one significant difference between the Netherlands and Finland and Lithuania. Finland and Lithuania lack the Dutch Quota Act (2022) which obligates the Dutch employers, who employ the average number of employees 250 or more, to report to the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands (SER) their equality objectives within the top and sub-top levels of the company, as well as to submit a plan of action to achieve these objectives. The failure to comply the Quota Act can lead to the countability of the board of directors and the supervisory board.

The quality of collaboration

The quality of collaboration has been examined in terms of its timely progress and planned outputs.

All activities of the WP1 (WP001 Management YP1) have started during the first quartile of the project as planned. Similarly, the WP3 (WP003 Capacity building), the WP4 (WP004 Piloting the SWOM model) and the WP5 (WP005 Advocacy and dissemination) have been in action during the first quartile of the project.

WP1 (WP001 Management YP1) As the project started in November 2024, the online kick-off meeting was organized (A00.002) accordingly to the project plan. The Steering Committee (A001.002) has also been established and it has met (D001.001) three times during the mid-evaluation period. Furthermore, the Google Document file was created as the collaborative working platform for the project members. LP has also been in contact with BPs via email to

coordinate and advice. In addition, the evaluation plan (D001.002) is finished and the first mind-evaluation report (D001.003) process started and finished as envisioned in the project plan.

As already mentioned, the kick-off week (A001.002) took place in The Hague accordingly to the project plan and the training sessions described in the project plan were delivered during the kick-off week. Reflecting the training sessions in The Hague, they were carefully planned and informative. However, it was noted that the training on the transformative evaluation may have come too soon for the project staff. Apart from the Dutch partner, the partners did not have clients at that time. Consequently, the content of the training may not be fresh in the memory when it is time to start collecting meaningful stories.

WP3 (WP003 Capacity building) The international training on SWOM model (A003.001) took place in The Hague and was completed on the schedule of the project (month 4). As to the other activities of the WP3, their start was not planned until in March 2025 (month 5).

WP4 (WP004 Piloting the SWOM model) The activities of the WP4 have started in March 2025 (month 5) as planned excluding two activities (A004.003 White book of supported employment and A004.004 Certification) which were not scheduled to start during the first quartile of the project. These activities will be viewed in the later evaluation reports.

WP5 (WP005 Advocacy and dissemination) The activities of the WP5 have all started during the first quartile of the project. All partners have created websites (A005.007 / D005.003) and done postings in social media (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn). In addition, three partners have presented the project in live events. The advocacy and dissemination efforts of the partners who are engaged in working with their clients were also supported by Humak, the partner in charge of the evaluation of the project. However, the role of this partner is somewhat different from the partners who work with the clients, to maintain the credibility of the evaluation and the evaluation results.

3 SUMMARY

At the current phase of the project, the following strengths of the project can be identified. Firstly, the SWOM model is already in use in a partner country and it has been proven successful there. Secondly, the organizations involved and their staff members are highly professional and experienced in international collaboration. Thirdly, the Lithuanian and Finnish partner organizations have the same client group and similar employer network situation and work practices. Lithuania and Finland also share the definition of a young person. In both countries the age limit is 29 years, while in the Netherlands, under 35-year-olds are considered young professionals, even though the youth work is for the age group from 10 to approximately 23 years (Youth Wiki 2023). It should also be noted that Finland faces the challenges of the rapidly ageing population, which emphasizes the need to remove barriers to employment and include all young people in working life.

As to the challenges of the project, the SWOM model has been proven successful with a target group which differs from the target group in the other partner countries. Furthermore, the employer network is less developed and structured in these partner countries than in the

Netherlands. It may take time before the Lithuanian and Finnish employer networks are at the same level with their Dutch partner. In addition, the Netherlands has the Quota Act, which has been instrumental in the SWOM model. Corresponding legislation does not exist in the other partner countries. As comparing these three countries, one significant difference is the size of the population. The Dutch population is over three times larger than the Finnish population and over six times larger than the Lithuanian population. Similarly, there is a difference between the national gross national products per inhabitant in favour of the Netherlands. The differences in the contexts where development work will be done, may have an effect on the results.

The main pitfalls of the project may be the above-mentioned differences in national legislation and potential inability to root the idea of seeing the NEETS as talents and the benefits of paying the NGO's for their services in the recruitment processes in the Finnish and Lithuanian employer networks. This kind of changes in attitudes and practices are likely to take much longer than a project funding period. The further funding of the project's work may also be an issue in the current world economic situation.

Nevertheless, the project has great potential. If the employer attitudes can be changed, the project will have a significant importance for the clients of the Lithuanian and Finnish partner organizations. In addition, it has the potential for a groundbreaking innovation regarding the earning logic of the NGO's who work with vulnerable unemployed work applicants in Lithuania and Finland. Even though, the full potential of the SWOM model would not be reached in Lithuania and Finland, developing a more structured working method with the employer networks and prolonging the duration of the support offered by the NGO in Lithuania and Finland would be significant results and have added value for the clients and employer networks.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The crystallization of the roles of the partners. There are three different partner roles in the project: 1) expert role (SWOM), 2) benchmarking and piloting role (ZISBP and Valo) and 3) advisory role (Humak). The attention should be paid to the differences between the roles of the partners to avoid false expectations and misunderstandings. The differences should be taken into consideration also at the level of the activities of the project.

The clarification of the content and the aims of the intervisions. An introduction/synopsis of the intervisions for the participants before the first intervision would help the participants to set their expectations in line of the content of this activity. An introduction/synopsis could be a short written summary or video presentation on the objectives and what takes place in the intervisions. Alternatively, an advance assignment could be used to help the participants to focus on the activity. An advance assignment might also give valuable foreknowledge for the planning of the intervisions.

Ensuring the smooth MSS collection process. An online fresh up training / workshop on the transformative evaluation would be useful when the partners are ready to start collecting MSS. The online event could be one hour and contain a short summary of the steps included in the MSS method and a Q&A section.

National development work in Lithuania and Finland on employer attitudes. Introducing the way of talking and seeing young people in a vulnerable situation as talents instead of NEETs could prevent stigmatization and create a positive employee image and promote equality and equal opportunities of young people in a vulnerable situation. The use of the SWOM CV model (or a similar nationally modified document) and opinion-influencing work would support this aim.

Legislative lobbying in Lithuania and Finland. The current Dutch legislation suggests a notable difference between the Dutch and the Finnish and Lithuanian work contexts. This difference should be tackled in the piloting of the SWOM model in Finland and Lithuania by including governmental lobbying in the activities of the project. Depending on the national structures regarding the NGOs, it might also be possible to rally nationally the NGOs who work in the youth sector and join the forces in lobbying the change of legislation. In Finland, for example, *Nuorisoala- Finnish National Youth Council and Youth Sector* and *Into – Association for Outreach Youth Work and Workshop Activities* and in Lithuania, *LiJOT – the Lithuanian Youth Council* and *JIRA – Agency of Youth Affairs*, work at the national level. However, it should be noted that legislative changes take time and it is not foreseeable that they could be realized during the project period. Furthermore, at least in Finland, the current social and financial climate is not favourable for this kind of legislative changes. Nevertheless, increase in lobbying and political influence are important for long-term development in removing the barriers to employment.

The emphasis of the national dissemination activities. According to the project plan, dissemination takes place nationally and internationally. However, on the course of the kick-off week, it was discovered that the national context plays an extremely important role in the rooting of the results and best practices of the project. At this stage, it is advisable to concentrate on the national level. This could ensure wider impact of the project in the partner countries and more significant results nationally. Thus, producing more solid arguments for eventual international dissemination activities.

Monitoring of the unexpected products or side effect of the project. For the evaluation purposes it would be useful to add to the Continuous reporting sheet the explicatory column on the unexpected products (cf. GANTT). Currently, the Continuous reporting sheet does not offer additional information on unexpected products or side effect of the project. However, this type of information can be valuable for defining the innovativeness of the project and discoveries regarding the need of activities outside the actual frame of the project plan, such as political lobbying.

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