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Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Explanation
AI	Artificial intelligence
CES-D	Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale
CMO	Context, mechanism, outcomes
CV	Curriculum Vitae
D	Deliverable
HBO	Hoger Beroeps Onderwijs (Dutch: secondary higher vocational education)
HR	Human resources
IPS	Individual Placement and Support
LL	Living lab
M	Mean
MBO	Middelbaar Beroeps Onderwijs (Dutch: secondary midlevel vocational education)
n	Number
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
Q	Quarter
SD	Standard deviation
WP	Work package

Statement of originality

This deliverable contains original, unpublished work except where clearly indicated otherwise. Acknowledgement of previously published material and the work of others has been made through appropriate citation, quotation or both.

Abstract

This report presents the intermediate progress of the Living Labs, detailing their evaluation processes and showcasing preliminary results. It examines how interventions function under specific conditions and the role of regional coalitions, providing crucial insights for stakeholders. The evaluation covers the process and outcomes so far, including the education, training, promotion, and hiring of vulnerable workers and job seekers, as well as efforts to ensure sufficient data gathering and implementation of interventions. This deliverable presents an intermediate report on the quantitative and qualitative evaluation (Realist Evaluation; Pawson & Tilley, 1997) of each iterative implementation cycle (Task 2.1) to assess and improve interventions and the ENGINE for each Living Lab partner. The evaluation considers how interventions function under specific conditions and the varying responses of different partners. This understanding is crucial for policymakers, municipalities, employers, supervisors, coaches, instructors, job seekers and workers. It will aid Living Lab partners in deciding how interventions are best implemented, their timing, and how to adapt them to different circumstances. Each lead research partner will analyse and report results per Living Lab, guided by a plan of analysis and reporting formats from WP4. Additionally, the report covers the intermediate quantitative evaluation of outcomes, focusing on the number of vulnerable workers and job seekers recruited for interventions, educated or trained, the intervention processes, and baseline responses to self-efficacy, competencies, and skills using WP4 questionnaire data.

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Executive Summary

The Synclusive project aims to develop, monitor and evaluate a comprehensive approach to support vulnerable groups in the labour market across four European Living Labs in Bulgaria, Finland, the Netherlands, and Portugal. The project employs a system-oriented “ENGINE approach” to stimulate labour market mobility for low-educated/skilled employees within organisations while simultaneously promoting the inflow of unemployed, vulnerable job seekers to enhance their labour market inclusion.

This report presents the intermediate progress of the Living Labs, detailing their quantitative and qualitative evaluation processes and showcasing preliminary results. The qualitative evaluation examines how interventions function under specific conditions and the varying responses of different partners. Understanding the context and role of the regional coalitions is crucial for stakeholders, including employers, policymakers, municipalities, coaches, instructors, and target groups. In addition, the ongoing qualitative evaluation helps Living Lab partners decide on the implementation, timing, and adaptation of interventions. The evaluation considers the processes and outcomes so far, including the number of vulnerable workers and job seekers recruited for interventions, educated or trained, the intervention processes, and baseline responses to perceived self-efficacy, competencies, and skills. Finally, we assess the status of the evaluation, including efforts and adaptations to the action plan to ensure sufficient data gathering and implementation of interventions, such as coalition building and consolidation.

Creating and consolidating the coalition and implementing the ENGINE in all Living Labs is a significant challenge that requires constant efforts from the Living Lab partners. Engaging employers who are willing to include vulnerable job seekers and enhance employee mobility is particularly difficult. This process demands substantial investments from employers, which, given the current labour market with significant staff shortages, may not be the most efficient approach for them. Consequently, the Living Labs are actively discussing with employers how to find ways to engage them in the coalition and implement the ENGINE or parts of it.

Data collection is progressing gradually. So far, 55 job seekers in Finland, Portugal, and the Netherlands Living Labs and 62 employees in Dutch and Portuguese Living Labs have completed the baseline questionnaire for the quantitative analyses. The Finnish and Dutch Living Labs have conducted (group) interviews for the Realist evaluation with three trainers, twelve job seekers, six employees, and thirteen supervisors/managers in total. In Bulgaria, the data gathering started with two interviews with an HR partner and a trainer and is expected to advance with the start of the interventions. Overall, in all the Living Labs, new inflows of job seekers are anticipated, suggesting that within the next 1.5 years, the net number of job seekers per Living Lab may reach around 50, as aimed for. Collecting sufficient data to link job seeker inflow to employee development remains uncertain. These efforts are crucial for understanding and improving the inclusion and mobility of vulnerable groups in the labour market. However, alternatively, more focus will be put on retainment and inclusive employer behaviour to increase the inflow of vulnerable job seekers.

1. Introduction

The Synclusive project aims to develop, monitor and evaluate a comprehensive approach to support vulnerable groups in the labour market across four European Living Labs in Bulgaria, Finland, the Netherlands, and Portugal. The project employs a system-oriented “ENGINE approach” to stimulate labour market mobility for low-educated/skilled employees within organisations, thus providing space for the inclusion of unemployed, vulnerable job seekers. Interventions for both vulnerable groups are needed and should be attuned to one another to make the ENGINE work. Accordingly, the Living Labs involve two main target groups: vulnerable unemployed job seekers and low-educated/skilled employees seeking personal development and career progress. Additionally, regional stakeholders (e.g., employers and their companies, the municipality, educational institutes, and social society organisations) and their collaboration in a regional coalition are needed to support the ENGINE and facilitate the inflow, development and mobility of the two main target groups.

The Synclusive Action Plan report outlines which interventions will be implemented, how they will be carried out, and in collaboration with whom in each Living Lab (Ruokolainen et al., 2024). Each Living Lab has identified its specific target groups: unemployed women and men 50+ (Bulgaria), long-term unemployed (Finland), vulnerable job seekers and employees in the childcare and technical sectors (the Netherlands), and young (un)employed individuals aged 15 to 29 (Portugal). Although the target groups differ, the drivers, barriers, and solutions have many similarities (Ivanova et al., 2023), providing overarching insights that can be applied across different contexts.

This report aims to present the intermediate progress of the Living Labs, detailing their quantitative and qualitative evaluation processes (Realist Evaluation; Pawson & Tilley, 1997) and showcase some preliminary results. The overall evaluation involves an iterative implementation cycle to assess and improve the implementation of interventions and the ENGINE for each Living Lab partner. The qualitative intermediate evaluation considers how interventions function under specific conditions and the varying responses of different partners. Understanding how and why interventions work in their specific context and the role of the regional coalition is essential for stakeholders such as employers, policymakers, and municipalities. This knowledge will aid Living Lab partners in deciding how interventions should be implemented, their timing, and how to adapt them to different or changing circumstances. This intermediate qualitative and quantitative evaluation considers the process and the outcomes thus far, including the number of vulnerable workers and job seekers recruited for interventions, educated or trained, the intervention process and the number and types of interventions implemented, as well as the baseline responses to perceived self-efficacy, competencies, and skills. For each Living Lab, analyses are guided by an earlier drafted plan of analysis and reporting formats (Sousa et al., 2023, 2024). Finally, we assess the status of the evaluation, including efforts and adaptations to the action plan to ensure sufficient data gathering for the evaluation and implementation of interventions, such as coalition building and consolidation.

1.1 Objectives and Research Questions

The Synclusive project aims to develop, monitor, and evaluate a comprehensive approach to support vulnerable groups in the labour market across four European Living Labs. The key objectives that follow and are relevant to this report are:

1. To develop and consolidate a stakeholder network in regional Living Labs (i.e. regional coalition) to facilitate effective intervention implementation
2. To test the ENGINE approach and its working mechanisms for various vulnerable groups to enhance their perceived self-efficacy and stimulate labour market mobility
3. To identify drivers and barriers to the intervention implementation
4. To identify interoperable and comparative indicators and standards relevant to labour market inclusion, considering regional, national, and cultural contexts
5. To assess the impact of the ENGINE approach on labour market mobility and inclusion of vulnerable groups at the regional level within four European regions.

Whenever possible, when implementing the interventions according to the ENGINE principles, we aim to apply principles of peer learning and consider information on evidence-based intervention (methods) (Ruokolainen et al., 2024).

In Ruokolainen et al. (2024) and the results section of this report, we describe and update the regional coalitions and intervention packages (ENGINE approach) for each Living Lab as well as the results obtained so far, addressing objectives 1 and 2. The quantitative and qualitative Realist Evaluation address objectives 2 to 5. These analyses serve different purposes. The quantitative analyses aim to assess the impact of the implemented intervention package in each Living Lab (objective 5). The qualitative analyses (Realist Evaluation) aim to understand why the intervention package works (or not) and for whom by exploring the mechanisms, barriers, and drivers related to the interventions and contexts (objectives 2 and 3). The results from both quantitative and qualitative analyses provide insights for interoperable and comparative indicators and standards (objective 4).

The following research questions will be addressed by assessing the impact of the intervention package by the quantitative analyses (objective 5):

1. What is the impact of the intervention package on job seekers' self-efficacy and skills and self-reported inflow in the labour market?
2. What is the impact of the intervention package on employees' self-efficacy and skills and self-reported mobility or career progression in the labour market?
3. Does the quality of the coalition, collective partnership of regional stakeholders, and peer learning moderate the impact of the intervention package?
4. Does developing vulnerable employees facilitate or improve the inflow of vulnerable job seekers within the same organisation?

The mechanisms behind the mobility of vulnerable job seekers and employees will be assessed through qualitative Realist Evaluation.

The following research questions will be addressed by the qualitative realist evaluation (objectives 2 and 3):

1. a). What outcomes related to job search did the intervention package generate?
1. b). What outcomes related to job progression did the intervention package generate?
2. Through which mechanisms did this intervention package generate these outcomes?
3. What context variable(s) influence(s) these mechanisms?
4. How does the quality of the coalition and collective partnership of regional stakeholders and peer learning facilitate the effective implementation and impact of the intervention package, and through what mechanisms?
5. What are the drivers and barriers to implementing the intervention, and how do they operate in different contexts?
6. How do the quality of the coalition and collective partnership of regional stakeholders, as well as peer learning, facilitate the implementation and impact of the intervention package, and through what mechanisms?
7. Does context influence the relation between the development of vulnerable employees and the inflow of vulnerable job seekers within the same organisation? Through which mechanisms?

2. Overall Methods

The implementation stage of the intervention package outlined in the D1.2 Action Plan (Ruokolainen et al., 2024) varies across different Living Labs, depending on the specific contexts. Section 3.2 provides a brief overview of each Living Lab's current status. The quantitative and qualitative data and evaluation are based on the monitoring framework outlined in Sousa et al. (2023) and the data collection approach detailed in Sousa et al. (2024). Below, we summarise the most important data sources.

2.1 Quantitative Data

The questionnaires for job seekers and employees were developed using validated scales, supplemented with additional questions on participant and employer characteristics. The job seekers' questionnaire includes items on participation in learning activities (derived from the PIAAC questionnaire), barriers to employment (adapted from the Abilitator, see, e.g., Wikström et al., 2020), self-reported skills and qualifications (Wanberg et al., 2002), motivation for employment (Koen et al., 2013), job search self-efficacy (Koen et al., 2016), self-efficacy in performing intended work (Lagerveld et al., 2010), job-seeking activity (Vesalainen & Vuori, 1999), job search attitude (van Hooft, 2004), work ability (Tuomi et al., 1994), and mental health, assessed using the 8-item CES-D scale (van de Velde et al., 2010). Altogether, the questionnaire includes six pages, 18 scales and 66 items.

For employees, the questionnaire covers participation in learning activities (derived from the PIAAC questionnaire), job satisfaction (Meliá et al., 1989), barriers to career progression (adapted from the Abilitator), organisational mobility (Pearce & Randel, 2004), career planning (Koen et al., 2013), self-reported skills and qualifications, self-efficacy in performing current job tasks (Lagerfeld et al., 2010), self-efficacy for job progression (adapted from van Hooft, 2014), work ability (Tuomi et al., 1994), and mental health, using the 8-item CES-D scale (van

de Velde et al., 2010). Altogether, the questionnaire includes seven pages, 23 scales and 73 items.

Since not all scales were validated initially in the local languages, a two-step approach was used to ensure accuracy and cultural relevance. First, the scales were translated from English into the local languages of each Living Lab and then back translated into English. Any discrepancies were discussed and resolved by consensus among consortium researchers. Second, the questionnaires' comprehensibility, clarity, and usability were tested with a sample of 7 job seekers and 12 employees within the Living Labs. Issues identified during this testing phase were again discussed among consortium members, leading to agreed-upon revisions to finalise the questionnaires.

2.2 Realist Evaluation: Qualitative Data

Synclusive employs a Realist approach to evaluate what works, for whom, and under which circumstances (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Each Living Lab has developed initial working mechanisms for their interventions, as outlined in the D1.2 Action Plan (Ruokolainen et al., 2024). We critically examined and refined the initial context-mechanism-outcome (CMO) configurations identified in earlier stages through individual and focus group semi-structured interviews. These findings represent the beginning of the CMO refinement process, which will continue to be refined and consolidated in the coming years of the project. Chapter 3 describes more specifically the participants of this qualitative data collection for each living lab.

Overall, we aim for an inflow of job seekers (Outcome), which is hypothesised to be facilitated by employee development and career advancement (Outcome). The interventions for both job seekers and employees are intended to increase specific skills (probably different ones for job seekers and employees). These interventions will also result in increased self-efficacy and trust (in themselves and their colleagues). The context that may influence the success of the interventions in the way these mechanisms are (or are not) happening may be constituted by the job seekers' or employees' attitudes or family context (e.g. family responsibilities). In addition, context factors of the organisation (e.g. supervisor support or organisational climate), region (e.g. quality of the regional coalition or personnel shortages) or country (e.g. legislation or economy) may be relevant.

Analyses

In this report, we present findings for each Living Lab, separately based on the responses at T0 (i.e., at the baseline of the interventions):

- Numbers and proportions of outreach and response.
- Means (M), Standard deviations (SD), and percentages (%), (n) of participants' characteristics and on the primary Synclusive outcomes: perceived self-efficacy and skills. If data for ten or more participants is available, results are presented in tables, which may vary across Living Labs.
- Preliminary insights from Realist Interviews, focusing on the emerging context-mechanism-outcome relationships.

3. Living Lab-Specific Results

3.1 Living Lab Results Bulgaria

3.1.1 Building a Coalition

Implementing the interventions has been delayed due to the challenges the Bulgarian Living Lab (LL) has faced in recruiting employers and coalition members willing to cooperate with the project. The main challenges for the Bulgarian LL, as described by the SDA (the Synclusive project partner implementing the Living Lab in Bulgaria) during an interview with the Synclusive research partner ARC Fund, are the following: competing government programmes that already provide opportunities for upskilling and reskilling unemployed people, including this respective target group; and training programmes that are much longer and more elaborate compared to the project's training programme and provide certification of skills, as well as subsidies provided to the employers who participate in the government programmes and hire people from certain vulnerable groups. Such structured certified government-funded programmes have made it difficult for an NGO project of a much smaller scale to compete and offer better terms to attract employers. The Employment Agency, as a national-level authority on employment policies and programs for upskilling/reskilling, partners directly only with service providers. Since SDA is not a licensed service provider, SDA cannot directly partner with Sofia or any other region for such activities. This has been noted in the state-of-the-art report and the Sofia Living Lab Action Plan.

To address this, SDA has tried several entry points by initiating discussions with public and private enterprises with prior working relationships and with third parties, such as representatives of social partners in Bulgaria, to explore the potential for cooperation. From the start of the coalition building process - as a mitigation measure – SDA has included a licensed HR and training company that will facilitate the employment/mobility of the target groups. SDA has secured the participation of two prominent businesses in the project: (1) one of the leading mineral water bottling companies in Bulgaria and (2) a franchise of a hypermarket chain in Bulgaria. Some of the success factors in securing their cooperation are the size of the companies, which gives them more room to manoeuvre and predefines the higher demand for the labour force, and the personal aspect in the case of one of the companies, where the HR person is herself a woman of the age of the target group.

SDA continues negotiations with other companies, including with municipal enterprises to join the project as potential employers in the months following the start of the first project interventions. The first interventions will include both target groups: job seekers and employees looking for upward and sideward mobility by upskilling. There is an open recruitment process, managed by SDA, for individuals from the target group willing to participate. The same groups will be involved in the second phase of the interventions (pending in 2025). Recruitment of the target group (people over 50) is ongoing and will be further activated following the first public activation event on 25 October. The first intervention is expected to start at the beginning of November 2024. At present, the regional coalition consists of:

- Sofia Development Association (SDA)

- Sofia Municipality
- ARC Fund
- Young Talents+ and CTeam
- Sofia Urban Mobility Center
- Cleantech BG
- Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria
- Bureau for Integration and Social Innovation
- Virtech Ltd.
- Bulgarian Council on Refugees and Migrants.

More details will be provided following the first activation event.

3.1.2 The target groups

With regard to the target group, after discussions with companies and public bodies, SDA decided to amend the criteria for the target group to include not only women over 50 but also men over 50 looking for a job or employees considering upward and sideward mobility. One of the main reasons is that there is no legal framework to justify why the interventions are focused only on women and not men. Policies or other legal frameworks in this regulated market are aimed at both men and women. Furthermore, amending the target group to include both women and men would allow for the recruitment of a larger cohort. Nevertheless, all precautions will be taken during the interventions and in the work with the coalition to address any potential discrimination based on gender. If necessary, further actions will be implemented in this regard.

3.1.3 Implementation of the intervention package

The first interventions in the Living Lab in Bulgaria are planned to start in person and online in Sofia at the beginning of November 2024. The training programme is currently being developed based on a needs assessment of the digital and green skills required for people over 50 to be up to date with the needs of the labour market. As planned in the Synclusive project, an online learning platform is being developed and tested. The hybrid course of 30 hours will cover both online and in-person learning. It will help participants gain new knowledge and skills in the areas of 'digital skills' (business communication, content creation, using AI for work, etc.); 'green skills' (basics of circular economy in the office, materials used, etc.); and personal soft skills, competencies, and motivation (self-assessment, adaptability, financial literacy, etc.). During the interventions, individual and group consultations with a psychologist /career counsellor and job search assistance (CV and interview preparation, advice on starting your own business, etc.) will be available to the participants. All three courses/interventions are offered to the recruited participants. However, depending on their needs and aspirations, job seekers/employees may participate in one, two or all three courses. The training courses will be delivered by qualified trainers in the respective area, contracted by SDA.

The training courses are group-based and will bring together job seekers and employees looking for sideward/upward mobility for basic green and digital skills, according to the nomenclature of the Employment Agency. The two target groups are expected to have slightly

different skill levels, so the online course components are prepared to accommodate that diversity. However, bringing the two groups together is assumed to have other added values like peer learning and mutual support. This hypothesis will be evaluated after the completion of the first intervention.

3.1.4 Quantitative data

The survey questionnaires for the target group (job seekers, men and women over 50) are prepared to be completed as the baseline measurement (t0) for the first intervention. Considering that some individuals in the target group may have lower digital competencies, we have prepared two different modes of administration for the survey questionnaires: paper-based and online. Once participants register for a training course, their contact information will be shared with ARC Fund to administer the surveys. In addition, ARC Fund representatives will attend the first day of the training course to introduce themselves and the research procedure. Prior to the training, when ARC Fund administers the surveys, a few tablets will be distributed to those who want to complete the survey online. Paper questionnaires will be provided for those who prefer to complete the survey on paper. The ARC Fund members will be available to answer any questions and provide assistance.

Country-specific changes introduced in the survey questionnaires include only one change for the employees' survey questionnaire. In question 1.8, 'zero-sum contract' was substituted with 'civil contract,' as in Bulgaria, there is no common equivalent for 'zero-sum contract.'

3.1.5 Qualitative data

In Bulgaria, interviews will be conducted with the target group (following the survey implementation), trainers, and coalition members. The interview questionnaires are being finalised, as country-specific questions based on the CMOs developed for the national context are included.

ARC Fund members have begun the qualitative data collection by interviewing SDA and stakeholders suggested by them, such as trainers and coalition members. Amongst others, the aim was to collect information on the expected mechanisms to be set in motion by the interventions, as well as expected relevant context factors. So far, three interviews have been conducted with the following stakeholders: SDA, an HR company (a coalition member), and a trainer.

ARC Fund plans to conduct interviews with all trainers (if feasible), given their importance in the training process, as well as with selected members of the coalition (at least one member per organisation in the coalition). ARC Fund will arrange follow-up contacts and interviews with coalition members during the first activation event on 25 October 2024. Regarding the target group, ARC Fund plans to conduct both individual and small focus groups with participants undertaking the training to reach as many target group members as possible while ensuring more dynamic and open group discussions.

3.1.6 Preliminary quantitative evaluation (separately for job seekers and employees)

No questionnaires have been completed yet. As indicated in 3.1.1, data collection will start in November 2024.

3.1.7 Preliminary qualitative evaluation (separately for job seekers and employees)

As indicated in 3.1.3, the data collection of the qualitative interviews will start after completing the questionnaires in November 2024.

3.1.8 Progress review and future planning for data collection

As explained in 3.1.1, the initial challenge in recruiting employers for collaboration within the project has been overcome. Therefore, we expect that data gathering will be successfully implemented with the start of the first intervention at the beginning of November 2024. The quantitative instruments are ready — the survey questionnaires have been translated. They are prepared for implementation (both on paper and online via the Qualtrics platform). The qualitative interview guides are finalised based on the country-specific context and the tailored CMOs. The latter are being formulated in line with the training programme that is currently being developed.

The following steps outline the upcoming data collection process:

- Interviews will be conducted with the programme trainers.
- Following the first activation event on 25 October 2024, ARC Fund will organise and conduct individual interviews with selected coalition members.
- The interventions with job seekers and employees will start in November 2024. ARC Fund will administer the survey questionnaire for job seekers and upward/sideward mobility and conduct interviews at the baseline (T0), both individually and in focus groups.
- The planning of further data collection steps will be based on the timing of the interventions and will be well aligned with them.

The plan for the Living Lab implementation in Sofia is to continue discussions regarding recruiting new employers for collaboration and participants (people over 50) for the interventions. As explained in 3.1.1, due to existing limitations, the target group has already been amended to include men over 50 in addition to women over 50. The impact of this change on the target group will also be well-reflected in the planned research activities.

3.2 Living Lab Results Finland

3.2.1 Building a Coalition

In the Finnish living lab, the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (FIOH) and the municipal employment services of Kokkola organised four major coalition gatherings in 2023-2024. Participants included representatives from municipal and state employment services, training institutions, public business services, third-sector organisations, large and small-to-medium-sized employers, social security and healthcare organisations, and job seekers.

In October 2024, a broader local coalition meeting was held in Kokkola to engage local communities. In addition to previous coalition partners, new stakeholders such as regional and local policymakers, managers from the city of Kokkola, and representatives from trade unions and employers' associations were invited. A total of 27 participants from 14 organisations attended. Unfortunately, municipal policymakers and city managers could not attend due to scheduling conflicts with the municipal budgeting meeting for 2025. A separate meeting for these stakeholders is being considered later in 2024.

The current coalition consists of:

- Municipality of Kokkola: employment services, business services
- Local training institutions: Centria University of Applied Sciences, The Federation of Education in Central Ostrobothnia (Kpedu)
- Third sector organisations: The Finnish Red Cross
- Employers: Wellbeing Services County of Central Ostrobothnia, a retail company.

3.2.2 Target groups

The first target group of the Finnish Living Lab is the long-term unemployed job seekers. Currently, there are approximately 660 long-term unemployed individuals in Kokkola. The project's first intervention, Taite-coaching, is aimed at those who have been unemployed for over a year but have great potential and motivation to gain employment. This group typically does not face severe health challenges.

The second target group, introduced in the Action Plan report (Ruokolainen et al., 2024), should be the employees working in subsidised jobs via municipal employment services or employed by other municipal services and seeking more permanent positions. Due to the changes in municipal employment services and changed legislation on the use of pay subsidies (autumn 2024), we cannot proceed with this group as planned.

The third target group mentioned in the Action Plan report was young employees (under 29 years old) who are newcomers in working life, whose labour market position is still vulnerable, and whose education level is relatively low. The possibilities to support these employees' working life and career management skills, talent development and mobility inside their current workplaces are discussed with a local retail company and a healthcare organisation.

3.2.3 Implementation of the intervention package

The Finnish Living Lab has initiated interventions for job seekers, starting with the group-based Taite-coaching. Taite-coaching aims to enhance job-seeking skills and the mental well-being of the unemployed. The implementation process has been as follows: FIOH has trained eight instructors of Taite-coaching for the Kokkola region, primarily from the municipal and state-level employment services and a third sector organisation offering, for example, work trials for long-term unemployed. Six instructors have conducted three Taite-coaching groups for job seekers in the region: one in June 2024, one in September 2024 and one in October 2024. These instructors recruited a total of 22 job seekers for the three groups. Twenty job seekers participated in the training, with two no-shows.

Additionally, 14 of the recruited job seekers consented to participate in research activities related to Taite-coaching. The next group will be organised in November 2024. Recruiting and motivating control groups for research is more challenging than intervention groups. Moreover, job seekers who did not consent to participate cannot be contacted again to serve as a control group.

The initial feedback from both instructors and job seekers regarding Taite-coaching has been positive. With the national reform of employment services, municipalities will have greater autonomy in deciding which services to offer job seekers. Taite-coaching will remain available for long-term unemployed individuals in Kokkola, as the municipal employment services plan to replace other outsourced coaching services with it. This indicates a strong potential for Taite-coaching to remain a part of the region's employment services even after the Synclusive project concludes.

Another newly implemented intervention focuses on matching unemployed job seekers with potential employers. Conducted by the municipal employment services in September 2024, this intervention included organising a job market event where job seekers had the opportunity to introduce themselves to representatives from a private insurance company. Job seekers who participated in Taite-coaching were encouraged to attend this event and had rehearsed for it during their training. This demonstrates how different interventions can support each other. The experiences from this and upcoming events will be examined, particularly from the employers' perspective, to facilitate further development of job market events.

In the Action plan report (Ruokolainen et al., 2024), IPS (individual placement support) coaching was planned for job seekers with higher challenges in re-employment. However, the coaching has not started due to changes in municipal employment services. In November 2024, two job coaches from the municipal employment services will participate in IPS training for coaches and receive a certificate for delivering quality—and criteria-based IPS coaching for job seekers. The implementation of IPS coaching and the research related to it will start in early 2025.

FIOH has continued its efforts to engage larger companies and employers interested in developing their current employees' working life skills, talent and mobility. Discussions with the regional public health care organisation have revealed that they already employ

sophisticated methods to enhance employees' skills and mobility, indicating limited potential for cooperation in this area. However, discussions will continue with them and educational institutions to focus on enhancing supervisors' abilities to lead multicultural teams, which would facilitate the integration of international nurses once they obtain their certifications.

In addition, FIOH has negotiated with a big retail company in the region about possibilities to support primarily young employees (under 29 years old) who have received their first employment but are at a greater risk of quitting the job if they confront any setbacks at work. Integrating peer group-based training for young employees and their supervisors in 2025 might be possible. Furthermore, the local coalition meeting in October recommended exploring the possibility of implementing this intervention in small- and medium-sized enterprises, allowing for shared training groups across multiple businesses.

In summary, a vital feature of the Finnish Living Lab is its goal to integrate developed and refined interventions into the existing "system" (e.g., services, coalition members) to ensure their sustainability beyond the project's duration. The coalition shares this objective. During the project, the research partner will assist and enhance the local coalition's abilities to "tune the ENGINE and keep it working". For instance, employment services for job seekers will adopt new coaching methods, and employers and business services will adopt new employee training methods. The goal is for all these stakeholders to incorporate these new methods into their regular and normal operations without requiring additional funding.

3.2.4 Quantitative data

A research team member has been present at the start of each Taite-coaching session to facilitate the quantitative data collection process. So far, 14 participants of Taite-coaching (i.e., job seekers) have completed the paper questionnaire provided at the baseline. The first follow-up data have been collected during the final training session. Participants filled out the paper questionnaires, sealed them in envelopes, and the instructors mailed them to the researcher. In total, 13 job seekers have responded to this initial follow-up survey so far (groups 1–3). The follow-up questionnaire included some Living Lab-specific questions about participants' experiences with the implementation process and the benefits of the training. The second follow-up data will be collected four months after the baseline via a mailed survey to participants' home addresses. Thus far, two participants from Group 1 have responded to this last survey. Additionally, FIOH gathered register-based data on participants' employment status before the training and will repeat this four months after the training. Those consented to participate in the research also provided written permission to collect registered data.

Moreover, the instructors of Taite-coaching have also taken part in this study. After their first Taite-coaching experience, they completed an online questionnaire to assess the implementation process of Taite-coaching. By the end of October 2024, four instructors out of six had responded.

3.2.5 Qualitative data

Both instructors and participants of Taite-coaching were recruited for an interview study to explore their experiences and perspectives on the training and its CMOs. By the end of October 2024, three instructors and eight participants (job seekers) had been interviewed. The instructors conducted phone interviews before and after their first Taite-coaching group, while participants (job seekers) were interviewed only once after the training. These interviews were conducted by phone or face-to-face, depending on the participant's preference. Recruiting job seekers was challenging due to their mistrust of research activities. To address this, we created an informal video in which the interviewer introduces herself and explains the interview process, including the topics and questions that would be covered.

3.2.6 Preliminary quantitative evaluation

The first Taite-coaching group for job seekers was unsuccessful because participants did not receive all the necessary information about the research beforehand. Consequently, only three persons out of seven provided informed consent to participate. However, group 2 was more successful regarding response rates, with 8 out of 9 job seekers agreeing to participate. In group 3, three participants out of four agreed to participate.

Additionally, four of the six Taite-instructors involved in the training implementation have completed their own online surveys so far.

Table 3.1 provides an overview of the total response thus far. Table 3.2 presents some baseline characteristics.

Table 3.1 Response baseline questionnaires are for job seekers at LL Finland

	Job seekers	Employees
Outreach (number of questionnaires distributed) ¹	20	-
Planned number of respondents	20	-
Number of respondents who started the questionnaire	14	-
Number of respondents with fully completed questionnaires	14	-
Response rate	70,0	-

Note: Implementation of the ENGINE has started among job seekers in the Finnish Living.

¹⁾ The questionnaires were distributed only to participants who consented to participate.

Table 3.2 Baseline characteristics for job seekers (n=14)

Age	39.4 (M); 12.6 (SD)
Gender (% women)	57 %
Level of education	
• Basic education (secondary or lower)	21 %
• Intermediate education (upper secondary education, post-secondary non-tertiary education)	72 %
• Higher education (short cycle education tertiary or higher)	7 %
Employment situation	
• Unemployed	64%
• Community service	0%
• Student or apprentice	0%
• At-home parent or carer	14%
• On sick leave	0%
• Work trials	14%
• Other	7%
Skills (average of 7 items) (response scale x-x)	3.41 (M); 0.32 (SD)
Self-efficacy (average of 11 items) (response scale 1-6)	3.31 (M); 0.72 (SD)
Job progression self-efficacy (average of 7 items) (response scale 1-5)	4.90 (M); 0.65 (SD)

3.2.7 Preliminary qualitative evaluation

All six Taite-instructors were recruited for the interviews conducted before and after their first Taite-coaching group. Three of them agreed to participate at both measurement points. A main reason not to participate in the interview was the lack of time. In addition, job seekers who participated in the training were also asked to participate in the follow-up interview. Altogether, eight interviews were conducted among them. The main findings of these first six interviews among instructors and jobs seekers are summarised below.

According to Taite instructors, job seekers who participate in Taite-coaching may find employment in the open labour market (Outcome A) if they possess sufficient skills, motivation, and no significant challenges in work ability (personal characteristics context). Additionally, there must be a demand for their skills in the labour market (employment context). Furthermore, Taite instructors should have relevant work experience, knowledge of the target group, and adequate time resources to effectively implement the training (intervention context). Three job seekers who were interviewed shared these context factors and expressed confidence in securing employment in the open labour market. Notably, one of them had already found a job shortly after the coaching.

Taite instructors also thought that some job seekers may find supported employment (Outcome B), such as adjusted work or subsidised employment, if they are motivated to find a job (personal characteristics context), receive additional personal support for job searching beyond Taite-coaching (employment support context), employers are willing to hire them, and there are available pay subsidies (employment context).

In addition, the instructors supposed that some job seekers may pursue education or other skill-enhancing activities (Outcome C) instead of employment. This is possible if they are motivated to develop their skills (personal characteristics context) and if there are training or taking on apprenticeship opportunities available (employment/educational context). Additional personal support from job coaches is often needed (employment support context). Two of the interviewed job seekers described their strengthened intentions to pursue further education.

According to Taite instructors, Outcomes A, B, or C may not be realistic for all job seekers. However, if a job seeker is motivated to participate in Taite-coaching, i.e., they come voluntarily and are willing to learn new things (personal characteristics context), they may achieve some of the abilities or mindsets that are mechanisms of the primary outcomes. This appeared to be realised for one of the interviewed job seekers.

Both instructors and job seekers described similar mechanisms associated with these outcomes, including increased knowledge and skills in job searching, enhanced confidence in their ability to search for a secure employment, and improved ability to handle and solve job search-related setbacks. These factors, in turn, boost motivation, perseverance, and activity in job searching.

When discussing the mechanisms, the instructors referred to self-efficacy, although they did not use this specific term. The instructors described the following activities to promote participants' self-efficacy:

- Practicing for job interviews and recognizing one's own successes.
- Identifying one's own strengths, such as abilities, attitudes, and personality traits through exercises and discussions.
- Receiving positive feedback from instructors and other participants.
- Other participants and instructors acting as role models by sharing their experiences.
- Instructors sharing their own successes and setbacks in their professional careers, thereby setting an example of open sharing.
- Creating a relaxed atmosphere through activities like role plays in which instructors also participate and sharing coffee together during breaks to get to know each other better.
- Starting discussions using case study examples, so there is no immediate need to share personal life experiences.

3.2.8 Progress review and future planning for data collection

Data collection among job seekers has not progressed as well as expected. The more difficulties and setbacks job seekers have encountered in job searching, the more skeptical they have become about research and data collection. As a research partner, FIOH aims to build trust by taking responsibility for data collection instead of relying on training instructors. To increase participation, job seekers are offered a cinema ticket for completing surveys and participating in interviews. In the future, job seekers involved in Taite-coaching in 2024 and 2025 will also be invited to participate in this research, along with those involved in other potential interventions.

Data collection among trainers and instructors has proceeded as planned. However, the number of trainers is likely limited to 10 due to the small number of professionals in this field.

Data collection among employees and employers has not yet started, which deviates from the research plan. The Finnish Living Lab has faced challenges in recruiting larger employers to participate in the project. The primary reason for this difficulty is the lack of large employers in the region. Most companies in the area are micro-organizations (83%) with less than six employees. Large companies, which already have well-established practices and HR professionals for skill development, do not have a strong motivation or need to participate in this project. Conversely, small companies have limited resources and opportunities to promote mobility after skill development, reducing their need to develop their workers.

Nevertheless, in autumn 2024, FIOH initiated discussions with a large retail company to develop and implement interventions that support the working careers of young employees (see 3.2.3). Additionally, discussions with the regional public health care organisation and educational institutions will continue to explore ways to enhance supervisors' abilities to lead multicultural teams, facilitating the integration of international nursing students (see 3.2.3). Furthermore, the potential to study existing processes and experiences related to talent development and mobility will be considered in both health care and retail organisations.

The goal of helping 50 job seekers find employment and enabling 50 employees to transition to new positions or take on new tasks and responsibilities may be too ambitious for the Finnish Living Lab. Kokkola is a city with approximately 48,200 inhabitants. In November 2023, there were 383 vacancies in the region. At the end of 2023, the target group of long-term unemployed individuals numbered 649. Therefore, the employment region is much smaller, and the number of large employers and open vacancies are significantly lower compared to other cities and regions in this project. Recruiting 500 job seekers would require the participation of most of the long-term unemployed individuals, which is unrealistic given that almost half are unemployed due to disabilities or long-term illnesses.

3.3 Living Lab Results the Netherlands

3.3.1 Building a Coalition

The Netherlands' Living Lab is run by TNO (Netherlands Organisation of Applied Scientific Research) and the University of Tilburg. From the start the municipality of Amersfoort has been actively involved as the regional centre of the coalition. The municipality organised five coalition gatherings, bringing together regional employers, public organisations, such as educational institutions, and non-governmental organizations focused on vulnerable labour market groups. The coalition's strategy centers on implementing the ENGINE concept in sectors with labour shortages, starting with childcare and expanding to other sectors, such as the energy, construction, and technology sectors.

In the childcare sector, a private employer has challenges with both recruitment and retention. This employer has about 450 employees spread across 52 locations of Amersfoort.

The present coalition consists of:

- Childcare organisation
- Municipality of Amersfoort: Employer Service Point
- Learn-work counter: collaboration between Employee Insurance Agency (UWV), municipalities, education and employers
- Netherlands Employee Insurance Agency/social security administration (UWV) Central Netherlands Regional Education and Training Centre
- Foundation for cooperation on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market.

At present the possibility to develop another Living Lab in the energy, construction, and technology sector is under study. In the Amersfoort region employers in this sector are already active in stimulating inflow of personnel. The possibility to develop this new Living Lab will be followed up.

3.3.2 The target group

At present, both job seekers and employees in the childcare organisation that participates in the Living Lab will be considered. As for the job seekers, the childcare organisation recruited young migrant women to be trained to become assistants or even pedagogical employees. As for the employees, we are currently planning development and retention interventions. As indicated, this employer has about 450 employees in total, spread across 52 locations in the region of Amersfoort.

3.3.3 Implementation of the intervention package

In the childcare sector, the participating employer has challenges with both recruitment and retention. To address this, a customised training program with on-the-job learning for migrant women has been developed in collaboration with the municipality, Dutch Employee Insurance Agency, and Secondary Vocational Education Amersfoort. The education institute together with the Childcare employer implements the training.

In our ongoing efforts to explore employee development and retention strategies, we discuss several potential initiatives with the Childcare employer based on questionnaire outcomes and interviews with supervisors and employees. One option is to create an overview of development opportunities, both within and outside the childcare organisation, with the possibility of incorporating this into employee communications and onboarding processes. Additionally, we are exploring leadership development programs that could help leaders better identify and discuss employee training and development needs. We are also considering intervention session (i.e. structured peer group discussion) for supervisors to facilitate knowledge-sharing on supporting employee growth. Lastly, we are investigating the feasibility of offering combination jobs, both internally and externally, to expand development pathways.

3.3.4 Quantitative data

In June 2024, an online questionnaire was distributed to all 450 employees, 23 job seekers, and 29 supervisors. Not all participants will participate in the intervention, but some may act as controls in the evaluation. Because some job seekers might lack computer skills, the option was provided to complete the questionnaire with assistance of a researcher. To facilitate this, a researcher was present at the Childcare organisation during the period in September when questionnaires had been sent out to the employees and job seekers. The questionnaire included the following Living Lab-specific scales as extra scales:

- Team cohesion
- Supervisor support (support, approachability, training & development, individual consideration, social support, feedback).

In addition, two open-ended questions were included to gain a deeper understanding of team support within the organization ("Are you aware of interventions already in place within [organization] to foster team spirit?"), and training and development needs ("What would you need to further develop yourself within [organization]"?).

3.3.5 Qualitative data

In September, a focus group with six employees and one team coordinator discussed topics including team spirit (needs, barriers, and drivers), development opportunities, the possibility of holding dual jobs, and experiences with the shortened training program. Additionally, 12 individual interviews with team coordinators focused on the training and coaching they provided to job seekers and employees. This information will guide the further selection of interventions for the childcare organisation. Once the employer decides on and implements interventions, further interviews and focus groups will be conducted at the start and end of the implementation process.

Also in September, individual Realist interviews were conducted with six job seekers who began the shortened training program in the childcare organisation. These interviews explored the possible context and mechanisms, and more specifically, the job seekers' motivation, experiences, obstacles in applying learned skills, job search behaviour, expectations, group dynamics, skill and knowledge enhancement, self-efficacy, and supervisor support. All focus groups and interviews were conducted in person.

3.3.6 Preliminary quantitative evaluation (separately for job seekers and employees)

Table 3.3 shows the response to the baseline questionnaire. Seven job seekers and 62 employees filled out the questionnaire in total.

Table 3.3 Response baseline questionnaires LL the Netherlands childcare organisation

	Job seekers	Employees
Outreach (number of questionnaires distributed)	23	334
Planned number of respondents		
Number of respondents who started the questionnaire	11	89
Number of respondents with fully completed questionnaires	7	62
Response rate	30.4%	18.6%

No table was generated due to the limited participation in the job seekers questionnaire, with fewer than ten respondents. Many job seekers encountered language difficulties, making it challenging to complete the questionnaire. As a result, we prioritised the self-efficacy scale for this group. Notably, only two of the seven respondents completed the self-efficacy section. The mean self-efficacy of all seven respondents was 5.06 (on a 6-point scale), with an SD of 0.62.

Table 3.4 presents the baseline characteristics of the employees. The average age was 39.6, and all participants were women. The average self-efficacy for performing their work was 4.86 (on a scale of 1-6), and for job progression, 3.80 (on a scale of 1-5).

Table 3.4 Baseline characteristics for employees

62 employees	Means (SD) / Percentage (N)
Population characteristics	
Age	39.60 (11.96)
Gender (% women)	100% women
Level of education	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic education (secondary or lower) • Intermediate education (upper secondary education, post-secondary non-tertiary education) • Higher education (short cycle education tertiary or higher) 	<p>29%</p> <p>63%</p> <p>8%</p>
Years of employment	6.89 (1.95)
Self-efficacy (average of 11 items ⁷) (response scale 1-6)	4.86 (0.49)
Job progression self-efficacy (average of 7 items) (response scale 1-5)	3.80 (0.55)

3.3.7 Preliminary qualitative evaluation (separately for job seekers and employees)

Job Seekers: In the Dutch Living Lab, our initial plan included interviewing six job seekers at this stage, which we successfully accomplished. The job seekers' training course received

predominantly positive evaluations. Based on the first interviews, we identified the following context, mechanisms, and outcomes, which will be refined in the coming year.

Context: Job seekers entering the program bring varying levels of Dutch language proficiency, significantly impacting their experience. While many participants have some prior experience working with children, their limited language skills often hinder their ability to engage with the program and meet certification requirements fully. Additionally, the organisation of the course, particularly around deadlines and expectations, occasionally lacks clarity.

Mechanisms: The program's effectiveness is driven by hands-on experience in real-world childcare settings, significantly enhancing participants' self-efficacy and confidence. Acquiring specific skills, such as child development, contributes to this confidence. Another key mechanism is the strong sense of team spirit fostered among participants, encouraging mutual support. However, the inadequate Dutch language instruction limits progress for those with lower proficiency, reducing the intended impact of the training in this area.

Outcomes: The course has several positive outcomes, including increased motivation to pursue a childcare career and develop relevant skills. Participants generally feel more capable and confident in working with children. However, for those with insufficient language skills, the lack of adequate Dutch instruction remains a critical barrier to achieving certification and progressing in the field.

Employees: Our initial plan in the Dutch Living Lab involved conducting ten interviews with employee supervisors (or coordinators) and organising one focus group with at least five employees. Ultimately, we exceeded our interview target by conducting 12 interviews with supervisors (or coordinators) and held one focus group that included six employees and one supervisor. This initial qualitative examination aimed to identify the context, potential drivers, and barriers to employee retention and career progression. This process uncovered key themes related to employee development, team cohesion, and the potential for combination jobs. Based on the first interviews, we identified the following context, mechanisms and outcomes, which will be refined in the coming year.

Context: Several factors influence employees' ability to engage in development:

- Lack of clarity: Employees often lack an overview of available opportunities, and the steps required for career advancement.
- Life stage considerations: Balancing responsibilities, such as caregiving, limits time for development, as most opportunities require personal time investment.
- Preference for working directly with children: Some employees prefer staying in roles that focus on child interaction, which may not align with advancement opportunities.
- Limited advancement opportunities: Career pathways are restricted, challenging upward mobility.
- High workload: The demanding nature of their roles leaves little time for employees to pursue development outside of working hours.
- Educational requirements: Employees with MBO diplomas may not meet the qualifications for positions requiring HBO-level education.

- Initiative requirement: Supervisors rely on employees to express development wishes, often delegating the responsibility to initiate discussions to the employees.
- Reluctance to leave familiar roles: Advancing might require moving away from teams or roles that employees are comfortable in, especially those focused on direct work with children.
- Combination jobs: Employees and their supervisors often do not know exactly what the options are and what they mean. Furthermore, the organisation wants people to be available at least three days a week if they want to work at a fixed location. This is often a barrier to having a combination job, as one is often forced to be a flex worker. Furthermore, it is challenging to combine the organisational commitments of two jobs.

Mechanisms: Several factors drive employees' desire for development:

- A need for more challenging work to improve job satisfaction.
- A desire to support the team and help colleagues.
- The influence of external changes, such as organisational restructuring or encouragement from coordinators and peers.
- The role of supervisors, who are generally supportive but rely on employees to initiate conversations about development.

Team cohesion also plays a pivotal role in employee satisfaction. Mechanisms that promote team spirit include regular reflection moments, shared goals, team stability, supervisor support, and team-building activities. Conversely, frequent team changes, negativity, and large workplace sizes can undermine cohesion.

Outcomes: When the context supports development, employees are more motivated to engage in learning opportunities, enhancing job satisfaction, skill development, work-related self-efficacy, and readiness for career progression. However, where barriers persist, development remains limited, reducing the potential for retention and professional growth within the organisation.

3.3.8 Progress review and future planning for data collection

The data collection in the Netherlands is progressing on schedule. We have 23 job seekers participating in the intervention and baseline data for 62 employees, many of whom will soon be part of an intervention package. While we have sufficient quantitative baseline data for employees, data for job seekers is limited due to language barriers and low literacy, making the questionnaire difficult for many participants to understand. Even with face-to-face assistance from researchers, this remained challenging for some. Consequently, we focused on gathering data on primary outcomes, including self-efficacy. We will prioritise reliable qualitative data from Realist interviews for these participants, which provide insights into the outcomes, mechanisms, and context. We aim to organise follow-up interviews both during and after the training sessions and with participants who did not complete the training.

Over the coming year, we will monitor the further implementation of interventions at the childcare organisation and evaluate their effects and mechanisms both quantitatively and qualitatively. We have collected data from employees, job seekers, supervisors, and the management board, but we still need data from trainers. We may also follow another group of job seekers receiving the intervention at this employer in 2025, which would help us reach the necessary numbers for qualitative and quantitative evaluation.

We aim to involve more childcare employers in implementing similar interventions for job seekers and employees. We are collaborating closely with the municipality and have already discussed this with other childcare employers. Based on discussions with coalition members, this is a significant challenge, and it is still unclear whether this will be possible. Additionally, we aim to extend our efforts to other sectors, such as energy, construction, and technology, to develop and implement similar interventions. Before the summer, we held our first coalition meeting with stakeholders from the energy and technology sector. Following this meeting, we contacted additional relevant stakeholders and are now discussing the possibilities for forming a regional coalition for this specific sector. We plan to shape the initiative with other employers in the childcare sector and energy, construction, and technology by the first quarter in 2025, allowing at least a year to gather the necessary qualitative and quantitative data for evaluation.

Finally, we are consolidating and improving the regional coalition by involving more policymakers and other stakeholders and gathering data on its quality for evaluation purposes. We are on track, but significant efforts are still needed to achieve the Synclusive goals.

3.4 Living Lab Results Portugal

3.4.1 Building a Coalition

The Portuguese Living Lab is led by ISCTE, the Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, and is divided into four sections (see also the Action Plan; Ruokolainen et al., 2024): a physical Living Lab in Lisbon, one in Évora, Alentejo, one in Lagoa, Algarve, and a digital Living Lab for a nationwide reach. The following descriptions relate to the Lisbon Living Lab and the digital Living Lab, where interventions have already started. The interventions in Lagoa and Évora will start at the end of the present year, 2024. Building a coalition in the various regions has been successful, with over 30 organisations having been contacted by ISCTE's staff. Of these, 14 (mainly in the Lisbon metropolitan area) have signed associate partnership agreements and will collaborate with the Synclusive project, and 20 are in conversations at the moment to also become associated partners of the project.

Building a coalition, however, is not without its challenges, as many organisations or enterprises do not have the necessary conditions to allow for the inflow of job seekers or the mobility of employees. Most enterprises in Portugal are small to medium enterprises and, as such, cannot offer many job opportunities. Regardless, organisations such as public entities (e.g., universities, professional schools and associations) have been receptive to the project and its objectives and are eager to collaborate. Dissemination events are planned in the three physical living labs to promote the project, strengthen the existing partnerships and approach relevant stakeholders for new partnerships.

3.4.2 Target groups

The Portuguese Living Lab's target group comprises young job seekers and employees between 18 and 29. Three specific groups are considered: young people who have not finished mandatory education (until the 12th grade), young people who have completed mandatory education, and young people who already have a university degree (bachelor's or master's) or university experience.

3.4.3 Implementation of the intervention package

The intervention package developed for the Living Labs in Portugal is geared towards aligning the skill set of the emerging workforce with the evolving demands of the labour market. Recognising the significance of skill enhancement, the Living Lab emphasises the development of job seekers and employees. Innovative courses are designed and offered to both groups, covering a spectrum of vital skills such as digitalisation, leadership, entrepreneurship and other essentials for success in the contemporary job market.

Thus far, four interventions have been realised in the scope of TechSavvy Interventions for Job Seekers and Employees for Job Mobility: 2 courses in Programming with Python and two courses in Excel for Management. These interventions were conducted between May and July 2024. The trainers are skilled professors of ISCTE, specialising in pedagogy and the respective technological fields. A total of 71 people enrolled in the interventions; however, only 27 participants showed up to the training and successfully finished them. Six participants were employees, while the other 21 were job seekers.

The interventions related to Entrepreneurship and Mentoring will begin in October 2024, and the TechSavvy interventions will continue, with new training and courses, until the end of the year. Coalition partners and Stakeholders such as IEFP have provided trainees (job seekers mainly) for the interventions, REDO has provided the website and digital platform to hold the in-distance courses, PACT will start interventions in the Alentejo Living Lab in the Autumn of 2024, as well as the City Hall of Lagoa, for the Algarve Living Lab. In the meantime, partnership agreements have been reached with many small organisations within Lisbon that work with young people so that more job seekers and employees can be part of the Living Lab interventions.

3.4.4 Quantitative data

Data collection has been achieved by using the prepared questionnaires for both job seekers and employees and has been administered, so far, only online, using the software Qualtrix. The questionnaires were first shared in English but were later shared in Portuguese as well. Until now, no Living Lab-specific items have been added to the questionnaire. However, the “zero-hours contract” option was deleted, as this does not exist in Portugal. More information on the feedback of the questionnaires is presented in 3.4.6. So far, 71 questionnaire links have been shared, but only 26 have been completed.

3.4.5 Qualitative data

Qualitative data collection has not happened yet as the instruments were still being developed, and few people attended the interventions. However, as more interventions are realised, the qualitative data collection methods will mainly revolve around focus group discussions with job seekers and employees. These discussions would focus on understanding if job seekers and employees had a higher possibility of getting employed/were able to access upward and sideward mobility if they achieved these goals and if job seekers developed a higher possibility of creating their job through entrepreneurship. They will also address participants' feelings and experiences and expectations regarding the interventions. Individual interviews will be conducted with the trainers of these interventions and with coalition stakeholders to address CMOs and the outcomes of the Living Lab interventions. The interviews with the coalition stakeholders will be realised until the end of 2024, specifically during October and November, for all Living Lab regions.

3.4.6 Preliminary quantitative evaluation (separately for job seekers and employees)

Table 3.5 presents the response rate of the questionnaires shared for both job seekers and employees. All questionnaires were done online, and the link was sent to all intervention participants. Regarding the job seekers, 73 questionnaires were started, and 34 were finished, which amounts to a 47% response rate. For the employees, 25 questionnaires were started while only four were completed, which amounts to a 16% response rate. This shows a tendency for the questionnaires not to be completed, which is stronger in the employees' group than in the job seekers' group.

Table 3.5 Response baseline questionnaires Living Lab Portugal

	Job seekers	Employees
Outreach (number of questionnaires distributed)	Link distributed to all participants of the interventions	Link distributed to all participants of the interventions
Planned number of respondents	73	25
Number of respondents who started the questionnaire	73	25
Number of respondents with fully completed questionnaires	34	4
Response rate	47%	16%

Table 3.6 shows the baseline characteristics of the job seekers group; there is quite a lot of homogeneity between males and females, with 44% of female correspondents. Regarding education, most job seekers have an upper secondary education (41%), followed by those with a primary education (32%) and others with a bachelor/master's degree (27%). This shows that for this group of young people, the majority have an upper secondary education or a bachelor/master's degree. This is coherent with the results found in literature, where one of

the challenges young people face is having a higher education but not enough experience and job opportunities.

Due to the limited participation in the employees' questionnaire, only four completed the questionnaires; no table was generated.

Table 3.6 Baseline characteristics for job seekers (n=34)

Age	18-29
Gender (% women)	44%
Level of education	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic education (secondary or lower) • Intermediate education (upper secondary education, post-secondary non-tertiary education) • Higher education (short cycle education tertiary or higher) 	<p>32%</p> <p>41%</p> <p>27%</p>
Employment situation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployed • Community service • Student or apprentice • At-home parent or carer • On sick leave • Other 	<p>77%</p> <p>0%</p> <p>21%</p> <p>3%</p> <p>0%</p> <p>0%</p>
Skills (average of 7 items?)	3.01 (M); 1.27 (SD)
Self-efficacy (average of 11 items?) (response scale 1-6)	3.56 (M); 1.11 (SD)
Job progression self-efficacy (average of 7 items) (response scale 1-5)	4.95(M); 1.16 (SD)

3.4.7 Preliminary qualitative evaluation (separately for job seekers and employees)

The preliminary qualitative evaluation has not yet been conducted, as defined in 3.4.3. Interviews will be conducted with the trainers who participated in the four interventions so far and with the participants. Focus groups with stakeholders and the coalition will happen between October and December 2024. The planned number of recipients is at least five people per intervention group (job seekers and employees) until the end of the interventions.

3.4.8 Progress review and future planning for data collection

The data-gathering process for the Living Labs is progressing, though there have been some deviations from the original plan. Qualitative data collection, including interviews with trainers and focus groups with job seekers and employees, has not yet occurred due to the previous postponement of the development of the necessary instruments and limited participation in early interventions. However, focus groups and interviews with coalition stakeholders are scheduled between October and November 2024. As more interventions are completed,

qualitative data collection will become a focus to understand the impact of the interventions on participants' employment and mobility.

Quantitative data collection has been initiated, though response rates have been lower than expected. This trend indicates a stronger tendency among employees to abandon the questionnaire versus job seekers, although a response rate below 50% is common to both groups. To address this issue, certificates will be held back until the questionnaires are completed, and reminders will be sent to participants to improve response rates and ensure robust data collection.

For the remainder of the project, the data collection plan includes continued focus groups and individual interviews with participants, trainers, and stakeholders. Anticipated challenges include low participation in interventions and questionnaire completion, which will be mitigated through strengthened partnerships with local organisations, increased outreach efforts, and ongoing adaptations to recruitment strategies. The upcoming entrepreneurship and mentoring interventions will further support these goals, ensuring that the Living Labs provide valuable opportunities for job seekers and employees to enhance their skills and employment prospects.

4. Conclusions

This report provides an intermediate overview of the progress of the quantitative and qualitative data collection in the Living Labs developed in four countries as part of the Synclusive project. The Living Labs have been developed in all countries, and data collection has also started in Finland, the Netherlands, and Portugal. The data collection aims to monitor the process and impact of the intervention package(s). These packages are designed to encourage vulnerable employees to develop new skills, take on new tasks and responsibilities and move to new positions, thereby supporting the inflow of vulnerable, unemployed job seekers into the labour market. Within Synclusive, this linkage of employee development to stimulate the inflow of unemployed, vulnerable job seekers is called the 'ENGINE'.

Creating and consolidating the coalition and implementing the ENGINE in all Living Labs is a significant challenge that requires constant attention. Engaging employers willing to include vulnerable job seekers and employees is particularly difficult. This process demands substantial investments, which is not the most efficient approach for employers, given the current labour market with significant staff shortages. Consequently, the Living Labs are actively discussing ways to engage employers in the coalition and implement the ENGINE or parts of it.

Data collection is progressing gradually. So far, 55 job seekers in Finland, Portugal, and the Netherlands Living Labs and 66 employees in two Living Labs (Portugal and the Netherlands) have completed the baseline questionnaire for the quantitative analyses. The Finnish and Dutch Living Labs have conducted (group) interviews for the Realist evaluation with three

trainers, twelve job seekers, six employees, and thirteen supervisors/managers in total. In Bulgaria, data gathering is planned to start shortly. Overall, in all the Living Labs, new inflows of job seekers are anticipated, suggesting that within the next 1.5 years, the net number of job seekers per Living Lab may reach around 50, as aimed for. Collecting sufficient data to link job seeker inflow to employee development remains uncertain. These efforts are crucial for understanding and improving the inclusion and mobility of vulnerable groups in the labour market. However, alternatively, more focus will be put on retainment and inclusive employer behaviour to increase the inflow of vulnerable job seekers.

For the quantitative analyses, the numbers may be sufficient to analyse the intervention package's impact on job seekers entering the labour market. However, it is unclear whether we will have data to link the inflow of job seekers to the development and career advancement of employees in two of the four Living Labs, Finland and Portugal.

We may draw similar conclusions for the qualitative analyses, resulting in a realist evaluation aimed at understanding the mechanisms of what works for whom and under which circumstances. We will likely better understand the mechanisms leading to the inflow of vulnerable workers in all the Living Labs. However, it remains uncertain whether we can link the inflow of vulnerable job seekers into jobs to the development and career advancement of employees in the same organisations in two of the four Living Labs. Additionally, we expect to conclude the working mechanisms of the coalition, understanding how and when a regional coalition could improve the inflow of vulnerable job seekers and employee mobility. One of the following steps is to develop further the overall CMO framework, which includes central mechanisms across Living Labs, such as perceived self-efficacy and trust.

For further actions, the Synclusive team has developed a methodology brief that outlines specifics for the implementation plans, efforts for consolidation and extending the coalition, including the involvement of policymakers, monitoring activities to adapt interventions, and monitoring the progress of implementation as well as the quantitative and qualitative data and plans for analyses. Alongside this methodology brief, a visualisation of implementation progress for each Living Lab, a monthly checklist to assess progress and process of implementation, and logbooks for quantitative and qualitative data gathering ensure that continuous efforts are made to reach the Synclusive goals.

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