



OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers  
No. 300

Innovative approaches  
to tackle long-term  
unemployment

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## **Innovative approaches to tackle long-term unemployment**

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The paper is based on a joint project on [Innovative approaches to combat long-term unemployment in Wallonia](#) between the OECD, the European Commission and the Walloon Public Employment Service Le Forem. The material presented is closely linked to some of the outputs of the project. More specifically, Wallonia had requested support via the European Commission's [Technical Support Instrument](#) to address long-term unemployment, and received technical assistance from the OECD and the [Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support \(DG REFORM\)](#) of the European Commission. The project included a review of active labour market policies to tackle long-term unemployment in Belgium and other EU-countries and the identification of an innovative approach that could be implemented in Wallonia.

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# Abstract

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Long-term unemployment remains a structural challenge for most OECD countries. Despite major efforts to address this issue, the efficiency and effectiveness of many existing active labour market policies are limited for jobseekers who face major vulnerabilities and have no ties to the labour market. Therefore, there is a need for innovative approaches that specifically address the barriers faced by long-term unemployed individuals in their labour market (re)integration. This paper discusses examples of promising practices from across Europe, which can serve as a source of inspiration for policymakers seeking new approaches to assist vulnerable jobseekers in overcoming the challenge of long-term unemployment.

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# Résumé

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Le chômage de longue durée reste un défi structurel pour la plupart des pays de l'OCDE. Malgré des efforts considérables pour remédier à ce problème, de nombreuses politiques actives du marché du travail existantes montrent des limites en termes d'efficacité et d'efficience pour les demandeurs d'emploi qui sont confrontés à des vulnérabilités majeures et n'ont pas de lien avec le marché du travail. Par conséquent, il est nécessaire de concevoir des approches innovantes pour répondre aux obstacles spécifiques auxquels font face les demandeurs d'emploi de longue durée dans leur (ré)intégration sur le marché du travail. Ce document explore des exemples de pratiques prometteuses à travers l'Europe, offrant ainsi une source d'inspiration pour les responsables politiques en quête d'approches innovantes afin d'aider les demandeurs d'emploi vulnérables à surmonter le chômage de longue durée.

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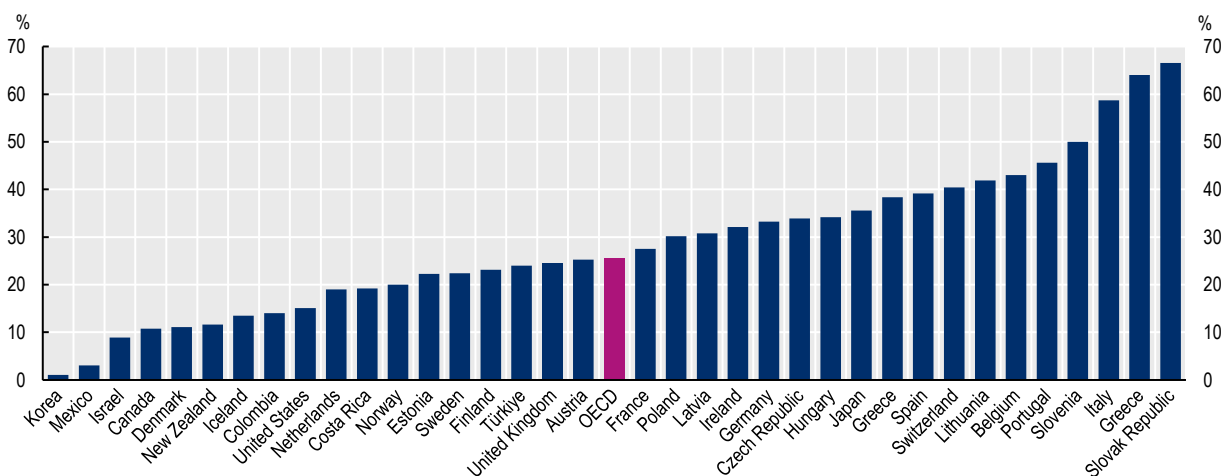
# 1. Introduction

In most OECD countries, unemployment rates have declined over the past decade, reflecting substantial labour market progress. On average across the OECD, the unemployment rate among people aged 15 and over decreased from 8% in 2012 to 5% in 2022, despite temporary headwinds related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Improvements were particularly strong in countries most affected by the global financial crisis or the European debt crisis a decade ago, where the labour market recovered markedly as the economy stabilised. For example, in both Ireland and Poland, the unemployment rate fell threefold between 2012 and 2022, from 15.4% to 4.5% and from 10.1% to 2.9%, respectively. The decline in unemployment can be observed in the vast majority of countries: 33 out of 38 OECD countries reported a lower unemployment rate in 2022 than in 2012.

However, despite these improvements, long-term unemployment, i.e., unemployment that lasts for more than one year, remains a major problem in many countries (Figure 1.1). On average in the OECD, 25.5% of the unemployed are long-term unemployed, underscoring that labour market difficulties are deeply entrenched for some population groups who did not benefit from the progress over the last years. In addition, while long-term unemployment as a percentage of the labour force has been falling over the last 10 years on average in the OECD, this has not been the case everywhere and some countries continue to face large numbers of long-term unemployed people, requiring new approaches to support those furthest from the labour market.

**Figure 1.1. Long-term unemployment remains a major concern in many countries**

Share of unemployed in total unemployment who have been out of employment for more than one year, 2022



Note: OECD is a weighted average.

Source: OECD Dataset: Incidence of unemployment by duration, <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?QueryId=9593>.

Long-term unemployed persons often face major labour market challenges, and their needs differ from those of people with shorter unemployment periods, as country experiences highlight. For example, evidence from Estonia suggests that 83% of people who have not worked for the last 12 months face at least two simultaneous challenges affecting their labour market prospects, such as caring responsibilities or health-related difficulties. This contrasts with 63% of people who remained unemployed for shorter periods and 34% among people in regular employment (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>). Similarly, in Australia, long-term unemployed persons with limited work experience and low education are particularly likely to face multiple employment barriers, significantly more than most other groups of jobseekers (Immervoll, Pacifico and Vandeweyer, 2019<sup>[2]</sup>).

As a result, many countries have introduced methods aiming to identify people at risk of long-term unemployment early on and to offer support that is tailored to their needs (OECD, 2021<sup>[3]</sup>; Langenbucher, Struyven and Desiere, 2019<sup>[4]</sup>). Active labour market policies (ALMPs) targeting vulnerable jobseekers (e.g. jobseekers facing specific labour market barriers or having a low chance of finding employment), and in particular long-term unemployed persons, should be well-tailored, individualised and part of an integrated service provision framework to be as effective as possible, allowing to address multiple labour market challenges at the same time. Several key steps are necessary to support long-term unemployed persons in an integrated way: reaching the long-term unemployed and identifying their needs; fostering life skills and motivation; strengthening labour market related skills; supporting job search activities; referral to suitable ALMPs, such as training or subsidised employment; and post-placement support (OECD, 2021<sup>[3]</sup>).

Integrated support to long-term unemployed persons should consist of a combination of employment support and other services, such as social, education or health services, to address different types of barriers. Therefore, the success of the support to vulnerable groups hinges also on the cooperation of different service providers, which is necessary to coordinate the support they deliver. For example, a coordination framework, which includes elements like data exchanges across institutions and formalising cooperation practices, can contribute to well-performing comprehensive support (OECD, 2023<sup>[5]</sup>) (OECD, 2023<sup>[6]</sup>) (OECD, 2015<sup>[7]</sup>). Public private partnerships in employment and related services can be one good way of organising integrated support efficiently (OECD, 2021<sup>[8]</sup>).

This paper presents five examples of innovative approaches that have been introduced in OECD countries to tackle long-term unemployment, all of which are tailored to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of people who have been out of employment for a long time (Table 1.1). While the list of approaches discussed in this paper does not aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the types of methods that exist, the examples were selected with a view to cover many different angles that are available to support jobseekers with vulnerabilities, and all the approaches have proven successful. Some of the approaches are implemented in some region/cities only, whereas others have been rolled out at the national level after being tested or initiated at the local level.

**Table 1.1. The approaches address long-term unemployment from various angles**

Key characteristics of the approaches to address long-term unemployment discussed in this paper

Programme	Country	Key characteristics
Launching Pads for Employment and Entrepreneurship	Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Combine job search assistance with collective empowerment</li> <li>Based on public-private partnerships</li> </ul>
Ohjaamo One-stop-shops	Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer a wide range of services under one roof</li> <li>Focus on young people</li> </ul>
In-placement Foundations	Austria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Direct involvement of employers</li> <li>Tackle long-term unemployment and labour shortages at the same time</li> </ul>
Munich Employment and Qualification Programme	Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consists of over 100 projects</li> <li>Among them, social enterprises provide learning and</li> </ul>

		working opportunities in a protected environment
Fit-4-Work	Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on jobseekers with multiple barriers to employment, including psychological difficulties</li> <li>• Support provided by an interdisciplinary team</li> </ul>

Source: OECD

The rest of the working paper is structured as follows: Section 3 discusses Launching Pads for Employment and Entrepreneurship in Spain; Section 2 describes Ohjaamo one-stop-shops in Finland; Section 4 presents In-placement Foundations in Austria; Section 5 summarises the Munich Employment and Qualification Programme (MBQ); Section 6 describes a Dutch pilot project to address the multiple barriers to employment of long-term unemployed people using an interdisciplinary approach.

## 2. Launching Pads for Employment and Entrepreneurship in Spain

### What is it about?

Launching Pads for Employment and Entrepreneurship (*Lanzaderas de Empleo y Emprendimiento Solidario*) are an innovative ALMP that seeks to reintegrate jobseekers – and in particular long-term unemployed people – into employment or self-employment by offering a combination of career guidance and training. The programme was developed by the NGO *Fundación Santa María la Real del Patrimonio Histórico*, which implements it in close collaboration with various stakeholders via public-private partnerships. The majority of the funding for the project comes from the Telefónica Foundation and the European Social Fund, which cover 80% of the total cost of all Launching Pads, while additional co-financing is obtained from public administrations such as Autonomous Communities and local public employment services, as well as private entities, such as banks (Santa Maria la Real, 2022<sup>[9]</sup>).

The programme was initiated in 2013 as a local initiative in the region of Castilla y León, at a time when Spain's unemployment rate exceeded 25% (OECD, 2022<sup>[10]</sup>), with the objective of addressing the challenges that jobseekers face and which affect their employment prospects, such as isolation and lack of motivation. The initiative enables jobseekers to utilise the time they spend out of work to improve their professional skills, while concurrently fostering their confidence and self-esteem.

Unlike other approaches that focus on the activation and upskilling of jobseekers, Launching Pads for Employment combine job search assistance with collective empowerment. They support jobseekers, addressing challenges such as loneliness and discouragement by fostering effective teamwork. More specifically, Launching Pads for Employment bring together jobseekers with diverse backgrounds and profiles in terms of age, gender, skills and professional objectives, assembling them into groups of 20 individuals. Participants take part in the programme on a voluntary basis and help each other with their job search. The group receives guidance and support from job coaches who lead them through a set of activities, offering valuable advice along the way. The programme includes activities aimed at enhancing both transversal skills, such as emotional intelligence and communication, and professional skills, such as preparing for job interviews, CV improvement, and training for specific occupations. Job coaches and jobseekers work together to draw up employability maps, both at individual and group level, which define the activities and training required to enable jobseekers to develop personally and professionally, and to improve their motivation, skills and employability. The programme also emphasises the importance of enabling participants to establish contacts with employers, find out about their needs and vacancies, and create their own professional networks.<sup>1</sup>

As the Launching Pads for Employment gained success, they expanded to more regions. Today, Launching Pads for Employment are an integral part of Spain's ALMP landscape, and are included in the

<sup>1</sup> Details of the programme are available on the main website: <https://www.lanzaderasdeempleo.es> (accessed on 22/05/2023).

Annual Employment Plan for 2022, which outlines national and regional employment objectives and identifies programmes for the portfolio of the National Employment System. Within this plan, the governments of Asturias, Cantabria, and La Rioja have identified Launching Pads for Employment as a targeted regional programme to tackle unemployment and, in addition, the approach has been included in the Spanish government's 2019-2021 youth employment action plan as a good practice to address youth unemployment. The programme's growth to a nationwide initiative showcases its effectiveness and adaptability.

One of the success factors of the Launching Pads for Employment and Entrepreneurship is the selection process used to identify participants. Job coaches work in collaboration with various partners, such as municipalities, local public employment services, and private companies to select a group of 20 jobseekers with different profiles in terms of age, gender, skills, and professional objectives. For instance, regional PES often refer jobseekers to the programme, ensuring a close link with the broader ALMP system. The programme seeks to reactivate and re-motivate all jobseekers but prioritises those who have been unemployed for more than 6 or 12 months (Lanzaderas de Empleo y Emprendimiento Solidario, 2022<sup>[11]</sup>). The selection process ensures that the Launching Pads bring together individuals from diverse demographic and socio-economic groups and professions to create potential for synergies and facilitate the generation of new perspectives and ideas. Between 2013 and 2018, 69% of participants were under 35 years old, and 13% were over 45 years old, with women representing 62% of beneficiaries (Lanzaderas de Empleo y Emprendimiento Solidario, 2018<sup>[12]</sup>).

In addition to the original Launching Pads (*Lanzaderas de empleo*), which are open to all jobseekers, with a focus on long-term unemployed, new types of Launching Pads have emerged over time. These Launching Pads offer specialised programmes for specific categories of jobseekers, such as women with difficulties accessing the labour market (*Lanzaderas para Mujeres*), jobseekers over 45 (*Lanzaderas Senior*), or those seeking work in specific sectors such as the renewable industry (*Lanzaderas Sectoriales*).

The cost of a Launching Pad varies between EUR 30 000 to EUR 40 000 depending on its duration. For instance, the operating costs of a six-month Launching Pad can sum up to about EUR 39 500 (see Table 2.1). Using a different methodology, measuring investments by sponsors rather than operating costs, a study conducted by the consultancy Redcrea estimates the cost of a 5-month Launching Pad at around EUR 33 000 (RedCrea, 2016<sup>[13]</sup>). As these estimates are a few years old they do not account for recent changes in the context of high inflation, and costs may have evolved to some extent since then.

**Table 2.1. Costs for a Launching Pad**

Expense	Amount in EUR	
	Minimum	Maximum
1. Salary of coach	20 000	20 000
2. Technical costs	11 000	12 000
3. Materials	4 500	5 000
4. Travel expenses	2 000	2 500
Total	37 500	39 500

Source: (OECD/European Union, 2016<sup>[14]</sup>)

## In detail

All Launching Pads for Employment and Entrepreneurship share the same methodology and objectives, but each Launching Pad has its own “ecosystem” and tailors aspects of the interventions to the profiles of the participants and the situation of the local labour market. All interventions aim to foster the development of emotional intelligence, new values and skills, and the promotion of a collaborative culture.

## ***Methodology and objectives***

The Launching Pads are based on collaboration and solidarity among participants, and operate similarly to cooperatives, with a strategic plan to achieve their objectives, and a clear organisational structure. Jobseekers meet and cooperate in groups at a designated location (i.e. an office) to actively engage in job search activities. At the beginning of the programme, the group establishes a timetable and participants commit to coming to the “workplace” regularly and on time. They meet three to five times a week for an average of five months. The Launching Pads are divided into “departments”, and each department focuses on specific tasks, such as identifying job offers, establishing contact with companies, and improving the visibility of the Launching Pad.

Fostering a collaborative culture allows exploiting synergies between participants and pooling their knowledge and expertise from previous experiences. Participants commit to working together, helping each other to find jobs, setting up their own projects and improving their professional skills. By embracing the principles of solidarity and mutual support, the Launching Pads aim to help jobseekers become active protagonists who creatively engaging with a dynamic society. In many cases, the programme fosters participants’ self-esteem and confidence, as they experience a sense of usefulness and purpose of their daily activities.

The Launching Pad methodology has four main objectives (Pérez González, 2015<sup>[15]</sup>):

1. *Fostering personal development*: restoring self-esteem and self-confidence and promoting the development of emotional intelligence of jobseekers through a teamwork approach based on mutual support.
2. *Improving the employability of participants*: mainly through job search assistance, skills assessments, analysis of the jobseeker's opportunities in relation to the local labour market, networking, and the establishment of personalised action plans.
3. *Encouraging entrepreneurship*: identifying and developing entrepreneurial skills, generating and developing business ideas (e.g. by applying creativity techniques), drawing up *business plans* and inviting employers and entrepreneurs to visit the Launching Pads.
4. *Establishing networks of connections/contacts*: with employers, professionals, entrepreneurs, and experts, as well as other start-up platforms in order to cover wider territorial areas and professional activities. Activities and events such as employment and entrepreneurship forums, Launching Pad meetings, charity activities, etc., are encouraged to facilitate these connections.

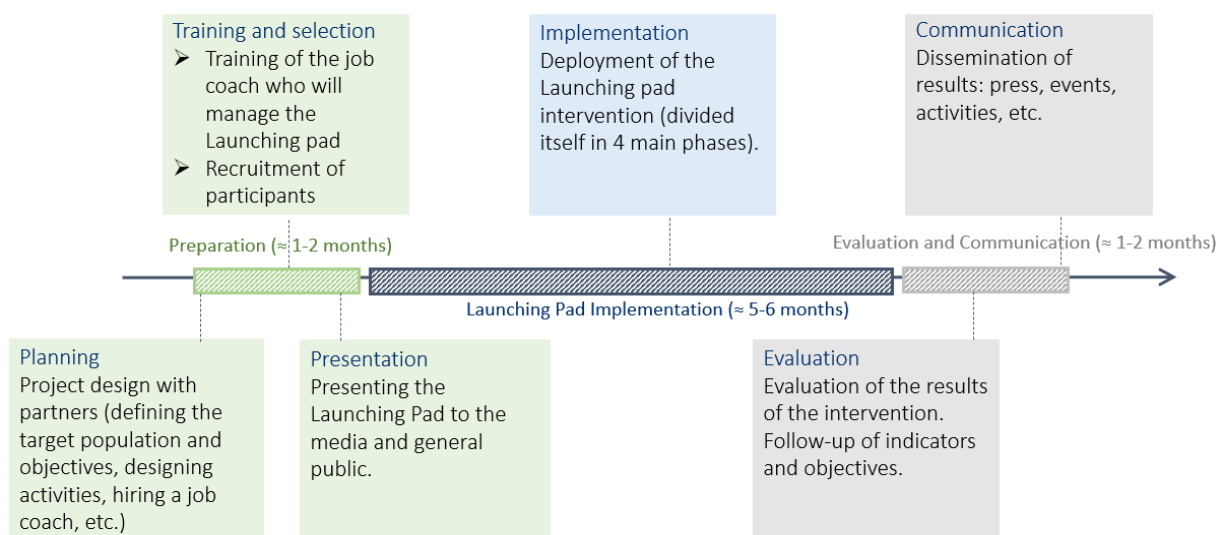
Each Launching Pad is coordinated and managed by a professional job coach. In contrast to programme participants, job coaches have an employment contract with Santa Maria la Real Foundation and work full-time. Before taking up their position, they undergo a selection process and are required to have a university degree, experience in team management, and good digital and communication skills. Once recruited, they receive 140 hours of training focusing on coaching techniques, human resources, entrepreneurship, leadership, etc. (OECD/European Union, 2016<sup>[14]</sup>). Job coaches are responsible for facilitating teamwork, organising individual and group activities, and inviting and selecting participants to engage with stakeholders outside of the group, such as municipalities, foundations, and public employment services.

## ***How a Launching Pad works***

The implementation of a Launching Pad follows a structured process and timetable (see Figure 2.1). As a first step, the Santa Maria la Real Foundation and project partners (municipalities, private companies, etc.) design and plan the project, identifying the target population, setting the objectives of the intervention, adapting the methodology to local circumstances, and selecting the job coach. Once the job coach is hired, training is provided to equip them with sufficient knowledge and skills to manage the Launching Pad. At this stage, the management team (Santa Maria la Real and project partners) and the job coach work

together to select the participants and the Launching Pad is officially presented to the media and the public. After these preparatory phases, the Launching Pad is ready to be implemented. Halfway through the programme, experts from the Santa Maria la Real Foundation carry out an intermediate evaluation on site. Once the Launching Pad is completed, its results are evaluated and findings are disseminated through various channels (website, events, etc.).

**Figure 2.1. Timeline for a Launching Pad for Employment and Entrepreneurship**



Source: Authors, adapted from (Lanzaderas de Empleo y Emprendimiento Solidario, 2017<sup>[16]</sup>).

Each Launching Pad is autonomous and its activities are adapted to meet the needs of the participants. Nevertheless, all Launching Pads follow a similar structure that encompasses four primary phases (OECD/European Union, 2016<sup>[14]</sup>):

- **Diagnosis:** In the first phase, participants develop self-awareness and emotional intelligence mainly through coaching sessions. They identify and share their feelings related to unemployment and get to know each other in order to start building a team spirit. They also receive information on the latest labour market trends.
- **Developing action plans:** In this phase, participants develop action plans, both at individual and team levels. They draw up employability maps and identify companies that might be of interest to them according to their career goals. Based on these action plans, participants start working on skills that are essential for finding a job or starting a business.
- **Interacting with the external environment:** At this stage, participants participate in networking sessions, visit employers or - in the case of those seeking to start their own business - entrepreneurs. Participants can apply for jobs and test the skills and ideas they have developed in the second phase and have the opportunity to develop their business plan.
- **Implementation of action plans:** The final phase is dedicated to implementing the personal and collective action plans. Additionally, the group reflects on how the network will continue after the official end of the programme and develops a good practice guide to share with future groups of Employment and Entrepreneurship Launching Pads participants.

### ***Changes following the COVID 19 pandemic***

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Launching Pads adapted their approach to comply with health and safety measures and restrictions, but also to provide tailor-made support to jobseekers faced with the need for digital skills. Among the initiatives launched in 2020 are Employment Connection Launching Pads ("Lanzaderas Conecta Empleo"), which provide professional guidance in an increasingly globalised, and technology-driven labour market that requires a digital transformation in all professions (Lanzaderas Conecta Empleo, 2022<sup>[17]</sup>).

The Employment Connection Launching Pads operate in a hybrid format, combining virtual and face-to-face sessions, which allows for up to 30 participants instead of the usual 20. This new format is particularly beneficial for the most vulnerable jobseekers, who can now receive the benefits of the traditional Launching Pads while strengthening their digital skills.

To support the development of digital skills, two additional activities have been added to the programme. First, the Digital literacy programme helps jobseekers familiarise themselves with a proficient use of the internet and develop digital skills through practical online workshops teaching the most popular tools and programmes (Gmail, Drive, social networks, CV creation programmes, video conferencing, obtaining digital certificates, etc.). Second, Employment Satellites are a series of online webinars that provide career guidance content for job seekers. Each session lasts one hour and includes advice on online interviews or the management of a LinkedIn account, as well as online administrative procedures (e.g. obtaining and renewing unemployment benefits), lectures on employment law, training programmes, etc.

## **Results**

Since the programme began in 2013, more than 730 Launching Pads have been implemented in over 300 cities in Spain, involving more than 19 000 jobseekers. Almost 60% of them have improved their professional situation thanks to this initiative: they found a job, created their own business or extended their training (Santa Maria la Real, 2022<sup>[9]</sup>).

A counterfactual impact evaluation focusing on 10 Launching Pads targeting young jobseekers under 35 estimates that the Launching Pads increase the probability of finding a job by 21 percentage points (RedCrea, 2016<sup>[13]</sup>)<sup>2</sup>. The effect is stronger for men, with a net impact of 29 percentage points, compared to 9.3 percentage points for women. Not only does the probability of finding a job increase for participants, but also the quality of the job found, with participants being 5 percentage points more likely to find a full-time, permanent contract.

Through qualitative interviews, the study also sheds light on the mechanisms behind the success of the programme. It shows that the programme works mainly by improving participants' ability to define their goals and career plans and by increasing their motivation to look for a job and their self-confidence. In addition, participants seem to search for a job more efficiently, they seem to be more confident during interviews, they know how to structure their CVs better, and they are better informed about the company they are going to apply to before sending their application. Additionally, the study also includes a cost-benefit analysis (RedCrea, 2016<sup>[13]</sup>). While the total cost of the ten launch pads is estimated at EUR 330 750, the benefits amount to EUR 918 551. In other words, for every euro invested, the programme generates a return of EUR 2.8 for society.

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<sup>2</sup> The evaluation method employed a counterfactual difference-in-differences approach. To mitigate selection bias, a comparison group was chosen, which closely matched the participant group in socio-demographic and structural variables. The outcomes of both the participant and comparison groups were then compared pre- and post-intervention to determine the programme's net impact. The study's objectives also included analysing the mechanisms driving observed changes and quantifying the programme's social value through a cost-benefit analysis.



## Conclusion: why is the approach promising?

The Launching Pads for Employment and Entrepreneurship have emerged as a valuable tool to address the challenges faced by long-term unemployed people in the labour market. By promoting emotional intelligence, self-confidence, and a collaborative culture, these programs tackle the lack of motivation and self-esteem that often hinder jobseekers from finding work. The collective approach of the Launching Pads creates a supportive environment as participants build relationships based on trust and mutual support, allowing for synergies, and fostering mutual learning between peers. Job coaching uses tools to deepen participants' self-awareness, motivation, and emotional intelligence. Thus, individual and group sessions are designed throughout the project, aiming to improve personal and professional goal setting, work on managing emotions, and push jobseekers to adopt a proactive attitude. In addition, the Launching Pads promote self-confidence by taking different forms in order to adapt and address the specific difficulties of targeted sub-groups of the population (e.g. Launching Pads for older jobseekers) and to cope with changes in the labour market that affect the most vulnerable jobseekers (e.g. with specific support to improve digital skills)

Employers are often reluctant to hire long-term unemployed persons, therefore the focus of Launching Pads for Employment and Entrepreneurship lies on establishing strong links with companies and entrepreneurs. Employability maps are developed to enable participants to connect with employers to find out about their needs and vacancies. This approach represents a major change from existing ALMPs, as it leads jobseekers to actively position themselves on the labour market, instead of passively waiting for a job offer to be published or relying on Public Employment Service (PES) counsellors to do the prospecting on their behalf. In addition to employability maps, coaching sessions and training, the Launching Pads facilitate this intermediation by organising workshops where companies visit the Launching Pad to express their needs and become familiar with the Launching Pad project and get to know participants.

Central to the success of the Launching Pads is the public-private partnership model. The programme, which was developed by the NGO Fundación Santa María la Real del Patrimonio Histórico, is based on close collaboration between various stakeholders, including public entities and private companies. The foundation's non-profit status distinguishes the initiative from partnerships that predominantly involve private, for-profit providers. This unique collaboration not only ensures diverse funding sources but also fosters a holistic approach to tackling unemployment. Such partnerships can serve as a model for other PES across the OECD, showcasing the potential benefits of combining public and private resources and expertise.

Finally, the Launching Pads for Employment and Entrepreneurship have shown very promising results. To guarantee their effectiveness, the central team of the Santa María la Real Foundation continuously monitors each Launching Pad. Intermediate and final qualitative and quantitative evaluations are carried out to assess whether the initial objectives have been achieved and to gather feedback from participants. This is followed by an activity report<sup>3</sup> which includes all the interventions during the five months, the general opinion of the participants and their results in terms of integration in the labour market. The results of this follow-up show that almost 60% of the participants have improved their professional situation thanks to the Launching Pads (Santa Maria la Real, 2022<sup>[9]</sup>). Furthermore, a counterfactual impact evaluation conducted to estimate the causal impact of this measure shows that it increases the probability of participants finding a job by more than 20 percentage points. In addition, this initiative is also cost-effective as the return to society for each euro invested is estimated to be EUR 2.8 (RedCrea, 2016<sup>[13]</sup>).

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<sup>3</sup> See an example here: <https://www.slideshare.net/despegatalavera/i-lanzadera-de-empleo-de-talavera-de-la-reina-despega-talavera-64898953> (accessed on 22/05/2023).

## 3. The Ohjaamo one-stop-shops in Finland

### What is it about?

Between 2014 and 2018, Finland ran a pilot project to test one-stop shops for young people, called Ohjaamo centres. Due to encouraging results, the approach is now fully deployed at national level (OECD, 2021<sup>[18]</sup>). While Ohjaamo centres focus specifically on young people with vulnerabilities, similar approaches could be considered for a wider audience, in particular all long-term unemployed jobseekers (Savolainen, 2022<sup>[19]</sup>).

Ohjaamo centres offer a wide range of services under one roof, facilitating the provision of support services in an integrated way across a range of areas, including career guidance, training, housing and social support. They aim both to reduce the duration of unemployment for young people and to promote their integration into society and their access to education and the labour market. In 2019, about 70 centres were operating in Finland with approximately 500 professionals from different sectors (Kettunen and Felt, 2020<sup>[20]</sup>).

One key feature of the Ohjaamo model is the direct involvement of young people in the implementation of the centres, which contributes to creating an informal and welcoming environment. In addition, recognising that the most marginalised people and those most in need of support may not enter such a facility, the centres make efforts to actively reach out to young people with vulnerabilities. By bringing together service providers from the private, public and third sectors under one roof, the Ohjaamo centres have streamlined and simplified services for young people, while eliminating some duplication that may have existed previously.

The centres are open to all individuals under the age of 30 who wish to benefit from the services. In 2016, two-thirds of the participants were aged between 18 and 24, and there were slightly more men (53%) than women (46%) among users (European Commission, 2018<sup>[21]</sup>).

During the pilot phase, the establishment of the Ohjaamo centres was co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) and national/local funding (European Commission, 2018<sup>[22]</sup>). For example, the Ohjaamo centre in Helsinki received funding amounting to EUR 3.1 million from the ESF, which was supplemented by EUR 1 million from the City of Helsinki. After the ESF funding ended, the Finnish Government committed to sustaining the operation of the centres by allocating EUR 5 million annually.

### In detail

The word Ohjaamo means "cockpit" in Finnish. The idea underlying this term is that the centres put young people at the control handle to improve their access to education, training, employment and welfare. The Ohjaamo centres model was developed based on feedback from young people, collected under Finland's Youth Guarantee programme (European Commission, 2018<sup>[22]</sup>). Ohjaamo centres are a first point of

access to information and counselling services for young people. The ambition is to create a stigma-free space where users feel safe and can seek help in accessing employment and accommodation and solving health or administrative issues. These centres rely on good coordination between professionals from different partner organisations.

### ***An integrated approach to address youth unemployment***

The Ohjaamo centres, functioning as one-stop shops where multiple services are offered at the same location, address unemployment as a complex and multidimensional problem. They recognise the diverse range of profiles and underlying factors contributing to unemployment among their users. To address this, they offer a wide range of services, which are provided by a network of professionals working together to find coherent and personalised solutions. While guidelines exist, the Ohjaamo centres are flexible in their work and can adapt to local contexts, explaining the great variability in the services offered across different centres.

The four main objectives of Ohjaamo centres for enhancing young people's access to employment are (Pitkänen and Kesä, 2018<sup>[23]</sup>):

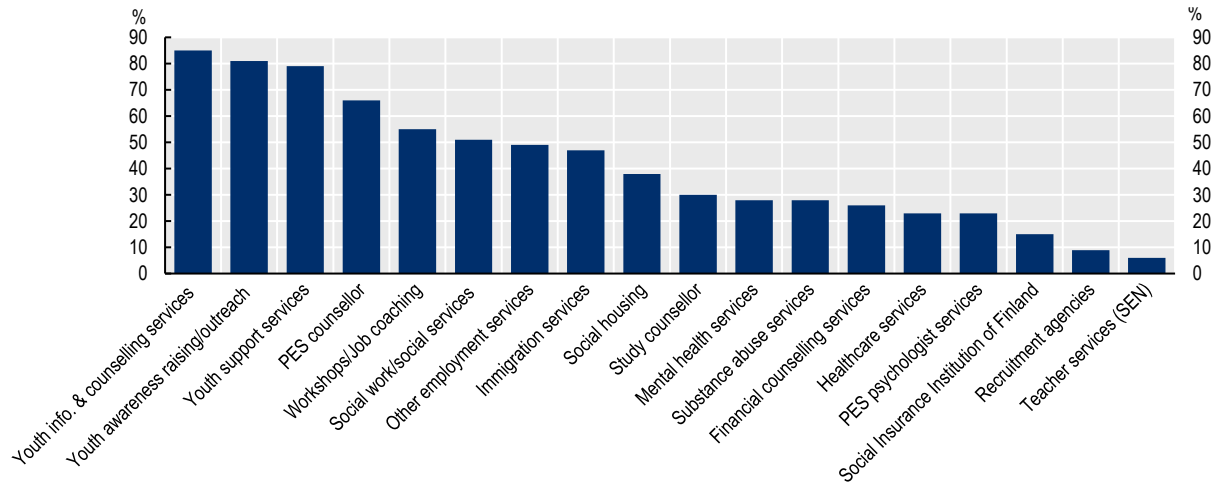
- *Developing job search skills:* The Ohjaamo centres offer counselling services and, in addition, cooperate closely with educational institutions and public employment services both at the national and local level. They serve as a first point of contact and refer jobseekers to institutions that offer skill development services tailored to their needs. Furthermore, through their collaboration with these institutions, Ohjaamo centres can help to design new skills development services (e.g. training) that are more tailored to the needs of young people.
- *Improving the match between young people and employers:* Ohjaamo Centres organise recruitment events that offer job search support services and connect young jobseekers with potential employers. In addition to establishing contact with employers directly, Ohjaamo Centres can partner with recruitment agencies that already have a portfolio of employers and vacancies. This can provide young people with job opportunities that were not available to them and short-term contracts that would allow them to demonstrate their skills.
- *Creating employment opportunities and new jobs:* Ohjaamo centres can offer summer jobs directly to young people. They can also help them gain experience by mobilising municipal funding and hiring grants. One-stop shops also stimulate job creation by offering young people jobs that have not yet been advertised or by encouraging them to send in unsolicited applications.
- *Improving the capacity of employers to create jobs:* The lack of job opportunities for young people may in some cases be linked to employers. Ohjaamo centres support employers to increase their capacity to offer jobs to young people, for example by supporting them in their communication strategy to reach young people.

Ohjaamos' services not only aim to improve the employability of their users, but also focus on the well-being of young people and their personal and professional development throughout the process. They provide a range of services that extend beyond job search and career planning, including health and mental health services, services for drug users, municipal social services, school guidance, information and counselling services, support and awareness-raising for young people. Youth services are the most common services offered in the centres (see Figure 3.1). Young people can benefit from individual coaching as well as group sessions, which aim to develop social and other life skills.

To ensure a wide range of services, Ohjaamo centres rely on professionals from various organisations such as public employment services, educational centres, and health centres. Social workers and nurses, for example, can provide advice on health and social security issues. The partnership model may vary by location, but municipalities and PES play a crucial role in all cases. Other partners, including NGOs and employers' organisations, can also contribute to the centres according to local needs.

**Figure 3.1. Youth services are the most common services offered in Ohjaamo Centres**

Availability of services (min. once a week) in Ohjaamo centres in February 2018 (% of 47 centres)



Source: Määttä (2018<sup>[24]</sup>).

### ***Better governance for more flexible and efficient public services***

In addition to providing multidimensional support for young people, Ohjaamo centres aim to address issues such as fragmentation, lack of collaboration, limited resources and duplication of employment and related social services.

The professionals working in the one-stop-shops remain employees of their original organisation (e.g. municipality, PES, educational institution, etc.) but are assigned to the premises of the centre. Their services vary from full-time work to periodic collaborative sessions (Sorsa, 2019<sup>[25]</sup>). The model does not require additional staff, but rather consists in reallocating existing human resources to make public services more flexible and efficient.

Getting individuals from different institutions and professional sectors to work together as a team is a process that requires a lot of time and effort. To achieve this, Ohjaamo centres ensure that they mobilise teamwork training and involve all employees in the development of the one-stop shop – to empower them and enable them to take ownership of the transition (Norden Association, 2020<sup>[26]</sup>). Thus, the Ohjaamo model is characterised by the blurring of boundaries between the 'traditional' roles played by different stakeholders and functions as a multi-sectoral cooperative network. Strategic issues are discussed in a committee that meets about 4 times a year. In addition, a coordination team can be set up to manage the cooperation between professionals and the development of activities (Keep In Pact, 2020<sup>[27]</sup>).

The multi-professional approach of the Ohjaamo centres allows professionals to link previously disconnected services and sectors, learn about the role of different institutions and partners, and provide a more targeted and individualised service offer to young people (Ahmed et al., 2017<sup>[28]</sup>). Through peer-to-peer learning and information sharing, Ohjaamo centres generate new knowledge to provide personalised services to young people and enhance the effectiveness of traditional public services. Collaborative efforts between professionals can reduce costs, avoid the duplication of services, and contribute to identifying individual needs more rapidly (Richardson and Patana, 2012<sup>[29]</sup>). Bringing all actors together under one roof also helps to improve the delivery of services.

The centres are governed by national-level guidelines and inter-ministerial strategic planning (the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health). The national coordinating authority, Kohtaamo,<sup>4</sup> acts as a mediator between the ministries and the Ohjaamo centres, supporting the design and implementation of the centres, developing a digital platform and common guidance, and evaluating the results (European Commission, 2018<sub>[22]</sub>). Ohjaamo centres have the flexibility to provide services that are best suited to local needs, but their activities must be consistent with national objectives. They are also required to carry out self-assessments to give the national steering committee a full picture of the achievement of their objectives (MEAE, 2018<sub>[30]</sub>). Finally, national authorities promote mutual learning between centres and share identified best practices to encourage continuous improvement.

### ***Reaching out and raising awareness among young people***

Ohjaamo centres employ several channels to reach young people such as awareness-raising events and social media. The concept of the Ohjaamo centres itself emerged from consultations with young people. As part of the Youth Guarantee programme in Finland, the Ministry conducted studies aiming to tailor the centres to the needs of youth, including surveys of young people's views on the types of services they would like to have and their perceptions of PES services (European Commission, 2018<sub>[22]</sub>). From these consultations, an initial finding emerged that may seem counterintuitive from a population that is generally used to digital tools: young people prefer face-to-face exchanges with specialists, especially when it comes to subjects they consider as important. Thus, Ohjaamo centres were designed to prioritise face-to-face interaction and build trusting personal relationships, in line with young people's wishes.

The implementation of one-stop shops in Finland follows a 4P approach: "public-private-population-partnership" (Ng, Wong and Wong, 2013<sub>[31]</sub>). To ensure the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of services, the approach foresees that different partners jointly deliver the services, and that people are directly involved in planning and organising the centres. Young people are involved in the co-design of the premises of each Ohjaamo centre, aiming to lead to an informal and casual atmosphere in the centres. For example, the Ohjaamo centre in Helsinki has a layout and design resembling a 'coffee shop' more than a government institution (European Commission, 2018<sub>[21]</sub>). The main objective of this participatory strategy is to achieve a space that makes young people feel safe and confident to address the issues that concern them most, such as loneliness, anxiety, financial problems or difficulties to find housing.

Ohjaamo centres recognise that the most marginalised young people may not come to the centres, despite these efforts to design informal spaces that attract young people. Therefore, they make additional efforts to reach out and raise awareness among distant young people (European Commission, 2018<sub>[21]</sub>). The centres collaborate with municipal social workers who accompany early school leavers and marginalised youth, with the objective to establish a contact with them. Ohjaamo centres also organise outreach events, especially in spaces known to be frequented by young people, and youth workers often play a leading role in these events. Additionally, even though one-stop-shops are characterised by a face-to-face approach, social networks often play an important role in reaching this target group.

### ***Changes following the COVID 19 pandemic***

The COVID 19 pandemic particularly affected the most vulnerable populations, including young people. In Finland, as in many European countries, the sanitary crisis was accompanied by an increase in unemployment among young people, at least temporarily, and worsened their learning opportunities. In this context, Finland's Recovery and Resilience Plan foresees the strengthening of Ohjaamo centres with

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<sup>4</sup> More information about Kohtaamo can be found here: <https://www.ely-keskus.fi/web/kohtaamo> (accessed on 22/05/2023).

a budget of EUR 13 million to increase multidisciplinary support and reduce barriers to labour market entry for young people (Finnish Government, 2021<sup>[32]</sup>).

In addition to the effects on employment, confinement measures and the uncertainty associated with the pandemic had a serious impact on the well-being of young adults. They led to high levels of stress and loneliness and, for some, to mental health problems (OECD, 2020<sup>[33]</sup>). In response to these difficulties, the Ministry of Employment provided additional funding to the Onni project, which provides psychological services to Ohjaamo centres. Mental wellbeing, social relationships, independence and management of daily life are the focus of this project.<sup>5</sup> It aims to build on the strengths and energy that young people have and mobilise them to achieve their personal and professional goals. While Onni started as a pilot project, the government decided to formalise it, making it a permanent support system that is available in Ohjaamo centres. To this end, new staff were hired in January 2021 (OECD, 2021<sup>[34]</sup>).

Although online services already existed in most Ohjaamo centres before 2020, the pandemic increased their use and led to new forms of digital service delivery. Following their closure in March 2020, Ohjaamo centres were forced to offer all their services online, thereby accelerating their digitalisation. For example, the Ohjaamo centre in the city of Jyväskylä hired a person to develop digital services for young people, and personal meetings were rapidly replaced by services on various online platforms such as Whatsapp, Instagram, Discord and Pointi chat. Not only did these initiatives reach young people who were already aware of the centre, they also attracted new users who were unaware of its existence.<sup>6</sup> The Ohjaamo centre in Mikkeli also mobilised these networks and even developed its chat channel, while group meetings for young people were organised through a virtual application.

Such initiatives have continued and expanded even after the end of lockdowns. The 'Ohjaamo Olkkari 2.0' project aims to give all young people in the Essote region access to the services of the Ohjaamo centres through digital services, establishing remote services for various professionals working at Ohjaamo and group activities through apps for young people.<sup>7</sup> Ohjaamo centres are moving towards an increasingly hybrid format, combining flexible access to services through the use of digital technology while retaining the original spirit of face-to-face meetings and safe spaces, especially for young people with the most difficulties.

## Results

An evaluation of the effectiveness of multidisciplinary cooperation in youth employment services, focusing on the Ohjaamo one-stop shops, was published in 2020 (Valtakari, 2020<sup>[35]</sup>). The report highlights that due to the multidisciplinary nature of the centre's staff and the services provided, Ohjaamo centres are better able to assess the situation and needs of beneficiaries in an integrated way. The report also states that the success of the centres is due to their strong ability to guide and direct clients to the most appropriate services and support. Additionally, the report carries out a cost-benefit analysis of the centres, which reveals that they not only cover their costs, but also save the Finnish government money. According to this calculation, the three centres studied in this evaluation would produce a net public benefit of more than EUR 300 000.

However, the report also points out challenges, including issues such as internal management discrepancies, high staff turnover, and the absence of a unified customer information system. The

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ely-keskus.fi/web/kohtaamo/onni> (accessed on 22/05/2023).

<sup>6</sup> <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-11392435> (accessed on 22/05/2023).

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.xamk.fi/tutkimus-ja-kehitys/ohjaamo-olkkari-2-0/> (accessed on 22/05/2023).

effectiveness of the centers is influenced by the broader regional youth service system, emphasizing the necessity for enhanced external cooperation, particularly with social and health services.

Recognizing these challenges, the government is piloting an incentive model funded by the EU Recovery Fund. This model aims to strengthen the multidisciplinary nature of the Ohjaamo Centres by providing funding for additional experts, further enhancing the services these centers offer (KEHA Centre, 2023<sup>[36]</sup>).

### **Conclusion: why is the approach promising?**

Ohjaamo is an innovative programme that aims to rethink and reorganise the way public services are delivered to address youth unemployment and marginalisation. Its governance model is an example of successful collaboration between the different stakeholders involved to provide integrated and effective support to this vulnerable group. By bringing together professionals from different sectors under one roof, Ohjaamo simplifies young people's access to the services they need. The coordination between actors allows for a more efficient use of public funds but also for tailor-made support adapted to the needs of each user.

To reach out and raise awareness among young people who are far from the labour market, the Ohjaamo model ensures that they are included in the design process of the centres from the beginning. Thus, the reception areas are rather informal and attract young people by giving them a sense of security. In addition, extra efforts are made to reach the most isolated young people and territories. This includes hosting events in public spaces and leveraging social networks.

Finally, following the COVID 19 pandemic, changes are being made in these centres: access to psychological and mental health support services and hybrid operation, which incorporates digital services with traditional support, are being reinforced.

If the Ohjaamo centres are specifically aimed at young people in Finland, a similar model aimed at the long-term unemployed could be considered both within Finland and in other countries. The main lessons that can be learned from the Finnish example would be applicable to one-stop shops for long-term unemployed persons of all ages. The universality of challenges like access to integrated services, the need for personalised support, and the importance of stakeholder collaboration makes the Ohjaamo model a potential blueprint.

## 4. In-placement Foundations (Implacementstiftungen) in Austria

### What is it about?

In many countries, employers are only partially involved in supporting the long-term unemployed. This limited participation may undermine the effectiveness of some ALMPs given that employer involvement can enhance the alignment of these policies with market demand, thus improving job matching. In addition, a significant number of employers face labour shortages and struggle to find qualified candidates for their job openings, calling for a stronger involvement of employers in supporting jobseekers, including the long-term unemployed.

In the early 2000s, Austria introduced the so-called In-placement Foundations (“*Implacementstiftungen*” in German), as a counterpart to the standard outplacement foundations<sup>8</sup>. This unique employer-led solution, which has grown in relevance and regional coverage over time, was established to help long-term unemployed persons find employment and concurrently address labour shortages. The primary goal of these foundations is to connect employers facing recruitment difficulties with jobseekers lacking some of the necessary skills to work for this employer, but who can acquire them through training. Employers provide practical and theoretical training to long-term unemployed people, who are hired upon successful completion of the programme. In return, employers cover only a limited part of the training costs, the rest being funded by the regional PES and/or the province.

While the duration of unemployment is not necessarily a criterion for benefiting from this programme, In-placement Foundations mainly target jobseekers with a low level of education and some foundations specifically target vulnerable groups that face a high risk of long-term unemployment, such as NEETs (youth neither in education, nor in employment, nor in training). In general, it would be possible to specifically target vulnerable groups that are at high risk of long-term unemployment to effectively reduce it (Waldner, 2022<sup>[37]</sup>).

### In detail

From a legal point of view, In-placement Foundations are usually associations or limited liability companies, allowing to benefit from regulatory flexibility in Austria. They can be established by one or more employers (companies from the same province or sector) facing labour shortages, and are jointly funded by the companies, the Public Employment Service and provincial governments (OECD, 2018<sup>[38]</sup>). Companies use In-placement Foundations when they are unable to recruit on their own and cannot identify qualified

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<sup>8</sup> In analogy to outplacement foundations, Austria created the neologism “implacement” foundations. This paper uses the term “in-placement” in English.



candidates registered with the PES. In-placement foundations can also be set up pre-emptively, i.e. companies do not necessarily have to face recruitment difficulties at the moment, but can also start an In-placement Foundation if they anticipate labour shortages in the coming years (AMS, 2021<sup>[39]</sup>).

In general, the establishment of In-placement Foundations follows the following steps (Prischl and Ledwinka, 2020<sup>[40]</sup>):

1. One or more employers have difficulties in recruiting or anticipate such difficulties and contact the PES, which has no qualified candidates to refer.
2. The employer(s) establish an In-placement Foundation that develops a so-called “integration concept” (e.g. the topics of the training to be followed), which must be validated by the PES.
3. The PES identifies candidates who would be able to acquire the required skills and submits their profiles to the employer.
4. The employer and the In-placement Foundation jointly select the candidates.
5. The In-placement Foundation establishes the details of the training to be followed based on the candidates' knowledge and skills.

In most cases, the training can last up to three years. The employer contributes approximately EUR 500/month per participant and assumes any uncovered costs, as the PES and/or the province covers a large part of the costs. Moreover, companies do not have to pay social security contributions for the candidate undertaking training. Exact rules may vary between provinces and PES. For example, in Upper Austria, the province covers up to 75% of the training costs, and the PES (and the province) pay unemployment benefits and an income supplement to participants throughout the training (AMS, 2021<sup>[39]</sup>).

Several In-placement Foundations explicitly target vulnerable groups, which are particularly affected by long-term unemployment. In 2022, almost 2 000 people were served by such specifically targeted foundations, out of a total of 8 500 jobseekers in any type of In-impacement foundation (Bundesministerium für Arbeit, 2023<sup>[41]</sup>). For example, the JUST 2 JOB Foundation<sup>9</sup> targets jobseekers aged 20-30 with a low level of education (compulsory schooling at most) (Bundesministerium für Arbeit, 2021<sup>[42]</sup>) and aims to enable them to acquire an apprenticeship qualification. More specifically, the foundation offers two types of pathways for jobseekers: on the one hand, training for young jobseekers who are ready to move to a province where there is a high demand for labour (“mobility pathway”); on the other hand, training for people who have not worked or studied for a long time, such as after childbirth, and wish to return to work (“reintegration pathway”). In both cases, benefits for participants include access to training that delivers a diploma in a sought-after occupation within a short period of time; unemployment/social assistance benefits throughout the training; and a monthly income supplement of EUR 200 (paid by the employer).

In-placement Foundations are a tool specifically designed for companies facing labour shortages. Companies must therefore meet specific criteria to benefit from In-placement Foundations. For example, in Vienna, the Environmental Foundation (*Umweltstiftung*) is an In-placement Foundation for local companies working in the environmental sector and struggling to recruit people with strong environment-related skills, such as waste and resource management, green mobility, or building technology. The foundation proposes to these companies to identify, in close cooperation with them and the PES, candidates who:

- Have registered with the PES as a jobseeker and are entitled to unemployment benefit or social assistance.
- Have no higher education (compulsory schooling or less).
- Are interested in training in the ecological field.

<sup>9</sup> More information is available here: [JUST2JOB - Aufleb](#) (accessed on 22/05/2023).

- Have a sufficient level of German and the right to work in Austria.

The Foundation offers these candidates an opportunity to acquire a recognised training qualification in ecology through an accelerated training course that takes only half the time of a "normal" training course. The PES of Vienna covers training costs of up to EUR 7 000 and the allowances that participants receive during their training. Companies pay a contribution of EUR 300 per month towards training costs and a minimum of EUR 200 in additional income to participants.

## Results

In 2022, about 8 500 jobseekers participated in In-placement foundations, and the employment rates of previous cohorts of participants indicate the success of the approach. Of the jobseekers who took part in the programme in 2019, 37% were employed immediately after its completion, and after 12 months, the employment rate increased to 63% (BMASK, 2021<sup>[43]</sup>). The long-term effect was even higher in previous years, as the COVID-19 pandemic had a strong impact on the labour market in 2020. For example, 68% of the 2014 participants were employed one year after the end of the programme (BMASK, 2017<sup>[44]</sup>). These reintegration rates of jobseekers into the labour market are higher than those observed for other ALMPs in Austria. In addition to the high return-to-work rates, the initiative is also a good example of shared responsibility in labour market policy between the public employment service and employers.

## Conclusion: why is the approach promising?

The involvement of employers is critical for the success of the In-placement Foundations, and companies that use the programme actively participate in the training of participants. The functioning of the Austrian In-placement Foundations resembles that of similar schemes in other countries. However, the Austrian approach has some specific features that contribute to its success. Firstly, the programme frequently addresses jobseekers with a low level of education, who are a vulnerable target group that faces a high risk of remaining unemployed for an extended period. If the aim is to combat long-term unemployment, it is essential to include vulnerable groups in the approach, even if they need more time to acquire the required skills. Secondly, and related to the previous point, In-placement Foundations provide rather long training courses that last up to three years, enabling participants to acquire the required skills thoroughly. Thirdly, the scheme explicitly targets employers who anticipate labour shortages even if they are not yet experiencing them, helping to prevent future recruitment problems.

## 5. The Munich Employment and Qualification Programme in Germany

### What is it about?

Supporting nearly 6 700 residents each year, the Munich Employment and Qualification Program (MBQ) has been the city's principal labour market policy instrument since 1993. It evolved from the former Labour Development Initiative (AFI), established in 1984, and it is therefore a deeply rooted ALMP with more than three decades of experience (Thierstein, Auernhammer and Wenner, 2016<sup>[45]</sup>). Its objectives are to tackle (long-term) unemployment and overcome existing structural obstacles to the integration of disadvantaged groups into the labour market, while at the same time safeguarding the supply of capable workers and contributing to the development of knowledge and expertise in companies and industries.

The MBQ programme consists of four pillars, which represent the initiative's priorities areas:

- The first pillar focuses on reducing long-term unemployment and its target group is therefore long-term unemployed individuals who receive unemployment benefits but for whom it is difficult to find work;
- The second pillar aims at fostering gender equality in the workplace and targets women looking for new careers and/or preparing for self-employment;
- The third pillar provides support for young people in the transition from school to the world of work;
- The fourth pillar aims at developing knowledge and expertise in companies and industries by directly targeting entrepreneurs and freelancers.

In addition, the MBQ currently includes two cross-sectional topics – namely, the integration of migrants into the labour market and the digitalisation of work. Each of these areas and pillars is structured around various projects, for a total of over 100 projects funded in 2020 by the MBQ.<sup>10</sup>

In terms of volume of support, the MBQ is Germany's largest municipal employment programme (City of Munich, 2010<sup>[46]</sup>). The entire MBQ has an annual budget of around EUR 29 million, which is financed in full by the City of Munich. In particular, most of the funds (EUR 24 million) come from the Department of Labor and Economic Development of the City of Munich, while the remaining EUR 5 million are financed by the Department of Social Services. By itself, the first pillar focusing on reducing long-term unemployment accounts for more than half of the available funds (approximately EUR 15.7 million). Of these, EUR 9.5 million go towards the financing of social enterprises, which are enterprises aiming to achieve objectives for the general public or vulnerable groups rather than private profit maximisation

<sup>10</sup> The full list of projects funded by the MBQ is available here: <https://www.mbg-projekte.de/projektuebersicht.php> (accessed on 22/05/2023).

(OECD, 2022<sup>[47]</sup>). The qualification and guidance area within the framework of the Work Prospects Project receives around EUR 6.2 million. The Federal Employment Agency (BA) does not contribute to MBQ's annual budget, although its local branch – Jobcenter München – covers the travel costs and a fixed flat-rate amount for participants in the first pillar that meet certain requirements (such as receiving social benefits).

## In detail

Among the numerous projects that form the MBQ, two are of particular interests for the scope of this report, since they target directly long-term unemployment and, by themselves, they receive over EUR 15.5 million of funding, thus representing more than half of all MBQ funds: the Social Enterprises initiative and the Work Prospects Project.

### **Social Enterprises**

The Social Enterprises initiative aims to provide long-term unemployed jobseekers facing multiple employment barriers with learning and working opportunities in order to improve their future chances of gaining access to the general job market. Within this project, long-term unemployed individuals receiving unemployment benefits are offered work and training opportunities in about 35 social enterprises located throughout Munich. These social enterprises offer participants realistic and market-oriented working conditions and combine these with socio-educational support. The positions can be based on different types of contracts, ranging from contracts for non-competitive work in the interest of the general public to work that is subject to social insurance contributions. Thanks to such realistic working conditions and regular counselling, participants learn to stabilise their life situations, (re-)enter a working routine and develop their social skills – a support that represents for many long-term unemployed people a significant opportunity to participate in social life again through work. As the ultimate goal is to increase participants' employability by improving their vocational skills, on-the-job training and apprenticeship placements play a key role in the social enterprises' approach.

Social enterprises in Munich operate in many different fields and sectors, including catering, housekeeping, administration, and social services.<sup>11</sup> Some of them offer environmental and ecological services, thus positively contributing to sustainable development. Some examples of social enterprises in Munich include the following:

- ConJob ([www.condrobs.de/einrichtungen/conjob](http://www.condrobs.de/einrichtungen/conjob)) is a social enterprise specialising in the disposal of electronic waste and IT recycling. At ConJob, long-term unemployed individuals experience professional reintegration through qualified employment in an ecologically sensible and socially necessary field. Participants are supported directly by their work instructors to acquire industry-specific skills, through on-the-job training. For example, courses can be completed to become a specialist in waste management or a clerk. In addition to work-related skills, participants acquire other important key transversal competences such as reliability, punctuality and perseverance. They learn to take responsibility within their means, experience social participation and find new self-esteem, also thanks to the individual psycho-social support provided by two social workers. In addition to funds by the MBQ, ConJob receives funding from the government of Upper Bavaria, the district of Upper Bavaria, and the local job centre, and it closes the remaining financing gap through their profits.

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<sup>11</sup> The list of social enterprises funded by the MBQ is available here: <https://www.m bq-projekte.de/programmBereich.php?pb=1&px=1> (accessed on 22/05/2023).

- Founded in 1998 as a cooperative, HausGemacht ([www.hausgemacht-muenchen.de](http://www.hausgemacht-muenchen.de)) is a social enterprise fighting against the large size of undeclared work in the field of housekeeping. Their 40 employees work for over 180 households and receive a fixed salary from the cooperative, as well as an insurance against accidents and liability during their working hours. New employees are initially deployed together with more experienced colleagues, who ensure that all necessary skills are acquired over the course of the induction period. About 85% of HausGemacht's financing comes from revenue from services, while the remaining 15% has to be financed by the MBQ, given that the market price for domestic services is severely limited due to the high level of undeclared work.

### **Work Prospects Project**

Launched in 2007 and renewed by Munich's City Council each year ever since, the Work Prospects Project (*Verbundprojekt Perspektive Arbeit – VPA*) also aims to help long-term unemployed individuals find gainful employment, but, unlike the Social Enterprises initiative, immediate job placement is not the primary objective. Its approach lies in a 360-degree support that seeks to promote sustainable change by offering a wide range of carefully coordinated coaching and training activities. To achieve this goal, the VPA brings together experienced training providers from the Munich area to form an effective counselling and qualification network. In addition to 16 independent training providers, partner institutions include the Local Employment and Qualification Policy Unit of the City of Munich, the Department of Labour and Economic Development, and the Housing and Migration Office of the Social Services Department.

The entry points into the VPA project are the Integration Advice Centres (*Integrationsberatungszentren – IBZ*). Focusing on participants' existing personal and professional situations, these Centers work with the adults to profile their skills set, understand their ambitions, and develop a coherent pathway to integrate them back into the job market. In their guidance, advisors also take into consideration the demand for specific skills on the local job market to ensure that the proposed upskilling and reskilling opportunities can then actually translate into jobs. To ensure that jobseekers can rapidly advance in their learning pathways or job placements, great value is also placed on the provision of partial qualifications. In addition to subject-related knowledge and transversal skills, particular attention is paid to professional and practical training so that the new competences acquired by the jobseekers are immediately useful in the labour market.

Six Integration Advice Centres operate throughout Munich, each focusing on a specific target group, such as single parents, the self-employed, and migrants in need of German courses. For example, the Centre for Single Parents and Work (*Zentrum Alleinerziehende & Beruf*) helps single parents reconcile family and future working life.<sup>12</sup> For a period of six months (or longer if necessary), participants join both individual and group coaching sessions, which are tailored to the special needs of the target group and have a flexible time schedule to help parents organise themselves. Group courses often focus on health issues or how to manage childcare while at work, as well as on boosting participants' practical competences (such as digital skills) that can increase their chances of being hired. In addition, personal advisors provide professionally qualified coaching throughout the entire process. This includes an individually tailored and step-by-step introduction to the job market, which is key since many single mothers and fathers are often not (or no longer) aware of their professional and personal abilities, which can lead to unrealistic ideas about their occupational opportunities. In doing so, participants' desired occupations are compared with the real professional requirements and development needs are identified.

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<sup>12</sup> The website of the Centre for Single Parents and Work is the following: <https://www.ibpro-beruf-familie.de/newpage54fc79b5> (accessed on 22/05/2023).

Similarly, the Integration Advice Centre for the Professions (*IBZ Beruf*) also offers long-term unemployed people a comprehensive range of advice and support.<sup>13</sup> As in the Centre for Single Parents and Work, also the advisors of the Integration Advice Centre for the Professions review and record the personal and professional competences of the participants, discuss their expectations and goals, and develop individual pathways with regard to further training and professional reorientation. However, the Centre specialises as the contact point for self-employed people who want to stabilise their precarious, and sometimes informal, self-employment status. In this context, coaching and training sessions focus mostly on debt management, finance, and business advice. In addition, the Centre also helps self-employed people who want to make the transition to dependent employment by arranging for them the necessary training measures.

In addition to the coaching done in-house, the Integration Advice Centres redirect their users towards the training offered by the 20 sub-projects offered by the VPA network. Example of these projects include the following:

- STEP IN is a vocational and language training programme aimed at the sustainable professional and social integration of migrants developed by the Vocational Training Centres of the Bavarian Economy (BFZ).<sup>14</sup> Its offer is primarily targeted towards migrants who have poor schooling and are more likely to learn the German language through practical experience. During an entry interview, guidance advisors assess the personal and skills profile of the participant and plan accordingly a set of personalised integration activities. The STEP IN project has in fact a modular structure and offers tailor-made qualifications for different tasks on the job market. These include a number of workshops and practical modules aimed at improving simultaneously the professional, linguistic and socio-cultural skills of the participants in various sectors (e.g., horticulture, food and beverage, personal care, sales, etc.). In addition, STEP IN offers German language lessons (levels A0 to B2), digital skills training, intercultural classes as well as internships and support with job applications. Integration assistants accompany participants throughout the whole process, and, at the end of the programme, participants receive a certificate with details of the training content.
- JOBFIT for the Office is an initiative offering 100 long-term unemployed women per year the possibility to be reintegrated in the labour market as office workers, even if they do not have previous professional experience in the field.<sup>15</sup> The programme consists of 5 months of office management training (with both compulsory and elective modules to be chosen by the person on the basis of her personal preferences) and 3 months of internship in a company. Through individual job coaching, participants are also supported in their search for a qualified job after the programme.

## Results

Since the MBQ is formed by over a hundred projects falling under four pillars each with different objectives, it is hard to condense its impact on the labour market. However, a more in-depth analysis can be done for its main two projects. In particular, more than 3 000 Munich residents benefit from the Work Prospects Project's guidance and training every year. In 2018, about 31% of VPA participants transitioned into stable employment or were no longer (fully) dependent on unemployment benefits.

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<sup>13</sup> More information about the work of the Integration Advice Centre for the Professions can be accessed here: <http://www.anderwerk.de/langzeitarbeitslose-ibz-beruf-hamburger-strasse> (accessed on 22/05/2023).

<sup>14</sup> More details on the project can be found here: <https://www.bfz.de/kurs/eca-91064/step-in> (accessed on 22/05/2023).

<sup>15</sup> The website of the JOBFIT project can be accessed here: <https://www.jobfit-fuers-office.de> (accessed on 22/05/2023).

In 2018, Munich's social enterprises helped about 2 200 participants, the vast majority of which (91%) were long-term unemployed. In terms of their personal characteristics, more than half of the participants (55%) had no vocational training, 40% were aged over 49 years old, 40% had a migration background, 16% had severe disabilities, and 11% were single parents. After their experiences in the social enterprises, about 13% of the participants moved into gainful employment on the primary labour market, while 20% were placed in further employment and training.

In the future, further assessments, including counterfactual impact evaluations of parts of the MBQ programme, would provide additional insights in the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme.

### **Conclusion: why is the approach promising?**

The MBQ programme is an innovative approach to supporting long-term unemployed people in accessing the labour market, and the parts of the programme for which assessments are available have proven to be successful. With almost three decades of experience, the MBQ programme recognises the complexity of the needs of this target group, and promotes individualised coaching, initial competence profiling and personalised learning and career paths in each of its projects.

The MBQ's governance structure, with its network of career guidance experts, training operators and social enterprises, provides a comprehensive and coordinated approach to supporting long-term unemployed individuals, ensuring that the most vulnerable groups receive personalised advice and support tailored to their individual needs.

The governance structure of MBQ is also particularly innovative. For example, in the Work Prospects Project, an essential role is played by the Integration Advice Centres, which act as points of first entry for individuals interested in receiving support for their socio-professional (re-)integration. Each of the six Centres focuses on one category of people – women, single parents, migrants, self-employed, etc. – and, as such, is able to offer very tailored advice on topics close to the interests of the applicants.

Finally, a strength of the MBQ is that it contains projects which have the capability to adapt flexibly and promptly to changing circumstances and that it has the ability to fund new projects in response to urgent, local demands. For example, the Integration Advice Centre for the Professions was created during the COVID-19 pandemic within a very short time to support all those self-employed persons who were particularly affected by the health and economic crisis

## 6. The Fit-4-Work project in the Netherlands

### What is it about?

Long-term unemployed persons frequently face several simultaneous and mutually reinforcing barriers to employment, which makes it difficult for them to (re)integrate the labour market. To address this problem, the Dutch public employment service, UWV (*Uitvoeringsinstituut Werknemersverzekeringen*), and the social and health services of five municipalities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht, The Hague and Capelle aan den IJssel) launched a pilot project called 'Fit-4-Work'<sup>16</sup> in 2013 to better coordinate services across sectors for clients who face several simultaneous problems (OECD, 2014<sup>[48]</sup>). The aim of the project was to (re)activate recipients of social benefits or unemployment who are not working due to psychosocial problems, by helping them finding sustainable employment and, at the same time, improving their health status. While the approach has not been rolled out nationally (at least for the time being), the lessons learned from this experience have several innovative features, most notably the emphasis on interdisciplinary work to alleviate the barriers of long-term unemployed individuals.

The pilot programme targeted people who faced psychological difficulties and simultaneously social problems and/or barriers to employment (Looij and Dujardin, 2015<sup>[49]</sup>). It aimed to help participants achieve the following objectives:

- Learning to work on one's skills (becoming aware of one's skills, competencies, and strengths, etc.).
- Strengthening the ability to manage stress (overcoming obstacles, increasing autonomy, etc.).
- Learning to solve problems (identifying and solving problems, especially those that prevent and hinder work).
- Strengthening self-confidence and autonomy (motivational and solution-oriented coaching).

In addition to providing coaching and job preparation elements for long-term unemployed people, the pilot programme also aimed to engage with employers and make them aware of the participants' profiles.

Beyond the interdisciplinary approach to mitigating barriers to employment, one of the specific features of the programme was its emphasis on placing participants in work experience placements (WEPs) as soon as possible, following a "place then train" approach (SEO, 2011<sup>[50]</sup>) (Gezondin, 2020<sup>[51]</sup>). This was in line with the programme's guiding principle of 'work as medicine' for psychological problems (Hazenoot et al., 2011<sup>[52]</sup>).

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<sup>16</sup> The programme should not be confused with other programmes in the Netherlands which share the same or very similar names.



## In detail

The pilot programme was successfully implemented in five municipalities by reintegration companies. Following a call for tenders, the private companies NCB and id Plein were selected to jointly implement the programme in Amsterdam, Utrecht and The Hague, while id Square Rotterdam was chosen to carry out the pilot in Rotterdam and Capelle aan den IJssel (Looij and Dujardin, 2015<sup>[49]</sup>). Throughout the implementation, the reintegration companies worked closely with the municipalities and the UWV.

The reintegration companies collaborated closely with the municipalities and UWV throughout the implementation. The teams from the reintegration companies included various coaches and coordinators, such as job counsellors, life coaches, and employer specialists, for a total of 322 participants. The employment counsellors focused on addressing barriers to employment and were responsible, for example, for coordinating individual work plans, while the life coaches (social workers) addressed social difficulties (such as debt) and the employer specialists identified WEP opportunities that matched the participants' profiles. All coaches and coordinators met regularly to discuss the progress of each participant. Health professionals, especially from the mental health sector, were also involved in the different stages of the programme and coordinated with the other coaches/coordinators. The programme process was divided into four stages, starting with participant selection and ending with post-placement support in WEP.

### ***Selection and admission***

The eligibility criteria for the programme were clearly defined and included being younger than 50 years old, receiving a social welfare benefit, having a recognised mental or psychological problem, facing difficulties in at least two of the following areas – finances, activities of daily living, health, need for care, criminal record, addiction, social or physical environment, or coping with life circumstances – having a sufficiently high chance of resolving the barriers to enable employment within 12 months, and being available for 32 hours per week.

The identification of eligible candidates was made possible through cross-referencing data held at the municipalities and the UWV, and advice from psychologists following individual consultations with the candidates. Additionally, participants were required to undergo occupational medical tests or present the results of recent occupational medical tests.

### ***Interdisciplinary work to establish and implement a work plan and monitor progress***

The Fit-4-Work programme adopted an interdisciplinary approach to address the barriers faced by participants, by bringing together professionals from different fields to analyse these barriers from different perspectives. The program aimed to address the participants' barriers to employment in an integrated way, by providing mental health care in combination with social and job search support (Looij and Dujardin, 2015<sup>[49]</sup>). Interdisciplinary consultations (IDCs) were used to develop tailor-made work plans based on each participant's strengths and difficulties, with input from at least four professionals, including counsellors of the UWV or municipalities, employment counsellors of the reintegration company, an employer specialist, and a mental health specialist (and sometimes a life coach).

IDCs were used to develop tailor-made work plans based on each participant's strengths and difficulties in order to address participants' problems in an integrated way. All experts had to approve the work plan to ensure that all important considerations were taken into account. In addition to determining the support priorities for each participant, the IDCs were also used to adjust the timing and sequencing of support, as well as to identify participants who were at risk of dropping out of the programme. In practice, due to time

constraints, IDCs were not always held in person, but often by telephone or e-mail (Looij and Dujardin, 2015<sup>[49]</sup>).

After the work plan was established, the counsellors and coaches provided various types of support depending on the individual barriers faced by each participant. This support included increasing the participant's capacity to work through rational-emotive therapy, mental health programmes, language training, and workplace coaching. Support was also provided to increase participants' capacity to manage problems, such as through life coaching, and to increase their autonomy and reduce stress levels, such as through coaching sessions and Tackling the Tough Skills training, a course designed to increase self-awareness and improve stress management developed at the University of Missouri.

### ***Work experience placements***

One of the main objectives of the programme was to use work as a means of reducing barriers for long-term unemployed people, to build a routine, and improve their general and vocational skills. To this end, Fit-4-Work aimed to place participants in three-month work experience placements (WEPs) as quickly as possible. Unlike other approaches, the programme did not offer specific vocational training prior to placement in the WEPs. As it was often difficult to place participants in WEP, the counsellors relied heavily on their professional networks to identify placement opportunities that matched the participants' skills and career aspirations. In addition, employer specialists were active in identifying additional WEP opportunities, also drawing on their professional networks. According to a subsequent evaluation of the pilot (see below), these networks played a central role in obtaining WEP offers, even more important than the exact profile of the participant (Looij and Dujardin, 2015<sup>[49]</sup>). In addition, coaches encouraged participants to expand and use their own personal networks to identify WEP opportunities. In cases where placement in an WEP with external companies was not possible, some (but not all) reintegration companies also had internal WEP opportunities.

### ***Accompaniment during the work experience placement***

During the WEP placement, the counsellors (and in part the health workers) provided continuous support to the participants. This was particularly the case in the initial phase of the WEP placement. The employment counsellors kept in touch with the participants throughout their placement, ensured that they were accompanied during the first appointments with employers and could also organise coaching sessions during the first days of work. The level and duration of post-placement support varied according to the participants' progress.

## **Results**

The pilot programme was implemented according to a detailed pilot plan to allow for subsequent evaluation of the results (Acda, 2013<sup>[53]</sup>). After a screening phase to verify eligibility, applicants were either declared eligible for Fit-4-work or referred to their UWV advisor. Half of all eligible candidates were then randomly selected to participate in Fit-4-work, while the other half received standard reintegration support. Both groups (treatment and control) were interviewed three times during and after the programme to assess their personal and professional situation: 1) at the beginning of the programme; 2) one year after the end of their participation; 3) two years after the end of their participation.

Two types of evaluation of the pilot were carried out: an evaluation of the implementation ("process evaluation") and an evaluation of the results ("impact evaluation"). The process evaluation was carried out by the research department of the city of Rotterdam (Looij and Dujardin, 2015<sup>[49]</sup>), while the impact evaluation was carried out by the Public Health Department of Erasmus MC (Burdorf, 2016<sup>[54]</sup>).

The process evaluation aimed to determine how participants were selected, whether the implementation of the programme was in line with the methodological framework developed beforehand and provided case studies of participants. It was based on working papers and interviews with labour market experts from the municipalities and the UWV, coaches from the reintegration companies and participants. The process evaluation identified strengths but also some weaknesses of the pilot project and made recommendations for improvement (Looij and Dujardin, 2015<sup>[49]</sup>). Based on the Dutch experience, the following points might be relevant for other countries that would like to implement a similar approach:

- It is important that all participants meet the eligibility criteria to ensure that the programme is cost-effective. Therefore, the eligibility criteria must be objective and unambiguous.
- The approach must ensure that appropriate interdisciplinary exchanges take place throughout the programme. This has not always been the case in the Dutch experience.
- For jobseekers with a wide range of limitations, the 'place and train' approach is not necessarily appropriate when they start the programme. Therefore, the duration of the programme should be flexible and vary according to individual needs, and extra time should be allowed if necessary.

The evaluation of the effects revealed, on the basis of a randomised experiment, a positive impact of the programme. Among the treatment group, i.e. those who participated in Fit-4-Work, 23% found paid work within two years after leaving the programme, compared to 18% in the control group (Burdorf, 2016<sup>[54]</sup>). This net positive employment effect of 5 percentage points, however, varied considerably across municipalities, ranging from negative net effects on employment outcomes in Amsterdam to a net positive effect of 12 percentage points in The Hague. The evaluation study also found improved outcomes on other dimensions, including mental health and social interaction.

### **Conclusion: why is the approach promising?**

The Dutch experience may be interesting and important for other countries for several reasons. Firstly, the approach was designed to address simultaneously employment barriers and social and mental health problems by bringing together professionals from different fields to develop an integrated support package in line with the individual characteristics of each participant. Mental health problems are often linked to other barriers to employment and other types of difficulties, and addressing these issues (e.g. by building self-confidence, learning to reduce stress) is, for many long-term unemployed people, a necessary condition for successful labour market re-entry. Moreover, a "place and then train" approach can be effective for job seekers with moderate challenges, enabling the rapid development of soft skills needed in a work context.

In addition, two evaluations of the approach have been conducted in the Netherlands, providing specific recommendations for improving the programme's implementation. Countries wishing to implement such an integrated approach could use these findings to maximise the chances of success of the programme and avoid potential pitfalls.

# Conclusion

OECD countries have adopted a wide array of innovative approaches to tackle long-term unemployment, with the goal of effectively addressing the labour market barriers encountered by those furthers from the labour market.

Several common lessons and key insights emerge from the review of these programmes. One consistent element across several programmes, such as Spain's Launching Pads and Finland's Ohjaamo centres, is the emphasis on individualised and integrated support that addresses the specific needs and vulnerabilities of the long-term unemployed. Coordinated approaches, coupled with a focus on personal development, can reconnect individuals, who face intricate employment barriers and need to overcome several obstacles to find employment, with the labour market. Therefore, PES should ensure that programmes are available for long-term unemployed people that are sufficiently flexible to address participants' individual needs rather than one-size-fits-all solutions.

Stakeholder collaboration is a second important factor for the success of these programmes. Depending on the approach, it requires a high level of cooperation between public and private sectors, local authorities, NGOs, and employers. Examples, such as Austria's In-placement Foundations and Munich's MBQ demonstrate the value of involving diverse stakeholders to enhance program delivery and alignment with market demand, underscoring the potential of public-private partnerships in enhancing the effectiveness of PES initiatives.

Furthermore, many of the programmes were initially piloted on a small scale or started locally. After proving that they have a high degree of adaptability to different or changing circumstances, they were successfully scaled up to broader regions or nationwide. By tailoring programmes to specific demographic groups or industry needs, but also to the growing digital requirements of contemporary labour markets, the approaches ensure a more effective alignment with local and changing conditions.

Finally, the need for rigorous evaluation is a crucial aspect of these programmes. Understanding what works, what does not, and why is essential for evidence-based policymaking. The use of counterfactual impact evaluations, as seen in the cases of Spain and the Netherlands, provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of interventions of the programmes. Given their utility, it would be beneficial to see more widespread use of thorough impact evaluations to enable continuous improvement of the programmes themselves and identify best practices for the design of new programmes.

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