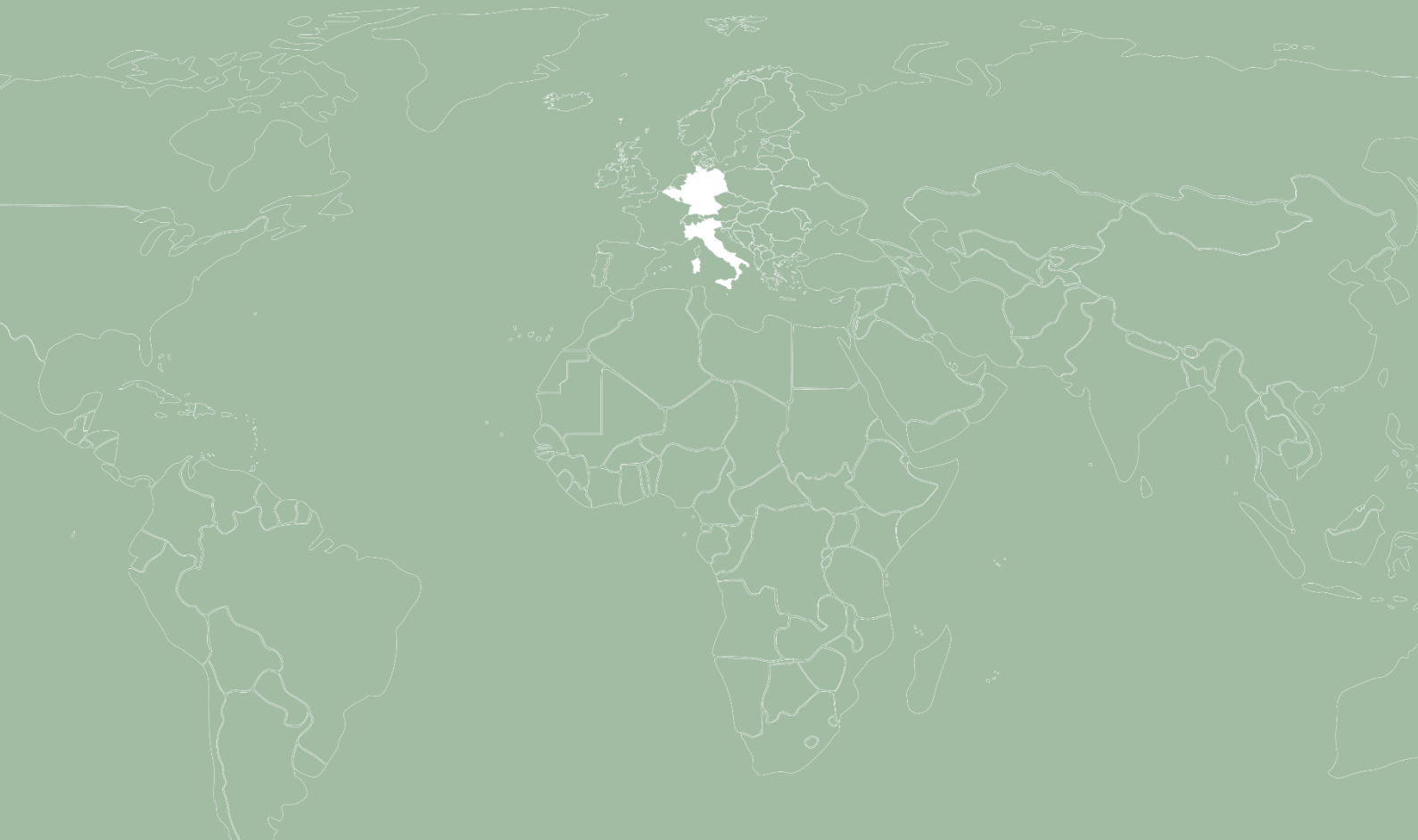


No Limit

NO LIMIT

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No Limit Booklet for Upscaling and Replicability



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TECHNICAL REFERENCES

PROJECT ACRONYM	NO LIMIT
PROJECT TITLE	STRENGTHENING PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS IN PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR THE PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION OF PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS AND SEVERE MENTAL ILLNESSES
PROJECT COORDINATOR	PRO ARBEIT – KREIS OFFENBACH (AÖR)
PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS	AGENZIA PIEMONTE LAVORO, EXAR, PRO ARBEIT, GAETAN-DATA, EUROPEAN SOCIAL NETWORK
PROJECT DURATION	05 / 2022 – 05 / 2023
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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the mental health of European citizens, referred to as a "second" or "silent" pandemic. Unemployment and economic insecurity further worsen mental health. Considering this and also the high level of competition in the labor market, public and private services need innovative methods and relationships to meet the increasing social needs, mainly related to support in accessing the labor market and improving the employability of people with mental health problems and/or certified mental illness. By sharing resources and best practices within a collaborative European framework the No Limit project aimed at strengthening the capacity of partners to formulate better solutions for the long-term labor-market inclusion of individuals with mental health problems.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The main objective of the project addressed public and social private adult education providers and operators in their crucial role in the creation of sustainable and innovative intervention models. By implementing this project, the project partners wanted to create mutual learning opportunities on a transnational level in order to support the capacity building of adult trainers and actors who are directly working with people with mental health problems or severe mental illnesses. As a concrete outcome, No Limit aimed to develop an innovative model of action for the professional integration of people with mental health problems that can be scaled up and replicated in different European contexts.

The project consortium was led by *Pro Arbeit – Kreis Offenbach (AöR)*, a public authority with many years of experience in working with the target group of unemployed people. With the establishment of the European Project Management department, it has the necessary skills and competences to coordinate the project. The second German partner is an educational institution (VET provider), *Gaetan-data GmbH*, which has been active in the field of staff qualification since 1983 and has developed and implemented various qualification courses since then. The Italian job center counterpart, *Agenzia Piemonte Lavoro (APL)*, has a large network of public employment services and brings expertise in labor market policies, while the second Italian partner, *EXAR*, is active in adult education and was part of the consortium of the EaSI project TSUNAMI, which was implemented in the Piemonte region and on which the project idea of No Limit is based. In order to best handle the project so that all partners formulate and express their goals and expectations in this project, the *European Social Network* assisted methodologically through their own developed concept of Peer Learning Visits. The partners were directed by the ESN in the creation of a learning plan, representing the basis of which the cooperation and knowledge exchange would be built on.

THE NO LIMIT BOOKLET

The No Limit project aimed at three major outcomes, which are compiled in this booklet:

- the learning plan for the Peer Learning Visits of the European Social Network
- the model of intervention the partners have created in order to achieve a better labor market inclusion of people with mental illnesses
- the profile of the operator working with the target group

LEARNING PLAN – PEER LEARNING VISITS

In order to facilitate the mutual exchange between the partners, the European Social Council provided insights into the concept of Peer Learning Visits. Both the hosting partners, EXAR and APL, as well as the visiting partners, Pro Arbeit and Gaetan drafted one learning plan per country, including all the topics each of them wanted to exchange on, the mutual questions they had for the other partners and how they were planning to implement the learnings.

Background and Objective of the Peer Learning Visits

Peer Learning Visits (PLV) is a programme applied by the European Social Network (ESN) to facilitate the exchange of best practices between social services organisations in Europe. The objective of a PLV is to learn about a practice, methodology, or strategy from an organisation in a different country, and to implement the learnings in your organisation.

There may be different local contexts and possibilities, but the goal is to use the learnings from other organisations to improve the services in your organisation.

In the scope of the No Limit project, the peer exchange between the project partners contributes to the development of a new intervention model aimed to improve existing services available to integrate adults with mental health problems in the labor market.

The No Limit project partners are:

- **Pro Arbeit**, *Job center in the County of Offenbach, Germany*
- **GAETAN**, *Educational Institutions with experience with long-term unemployment, Germany*
- **Agenzia Piemonte Lavoro**, *Public Agency for Labor Market of the Piedmont Region, Italy*
- **Exar** *provides employment services such as labor market integration of long-term unemployed people, Italy.*

Hosting Partners:

- **Agenzia Piemonte Lavoro, Italy**
- **Exar, Italy**

Visiting Partners:

- **Pro Arbeit, Germany**
- **GAETAN, Germany**

During the project period, two PLVs will take place:

- Peer Learning Visit 1: **21-23 November 2022, Turin, Italy**
- Peer Learning Visit 2: **29-31 March 2023, Turin, Italy**

The No Limit Project was inspired by the IPS (Individual Placement and Support) and place & train methodology, which the **hosting partners** previously implemented in the EaSI project TSUNAMI (A Traineeship as a Springboard out of Unemployment for those Affected by Mental Illness). Their approach was to stimulate an active labor market policy model that supports the placement of people

with mental health problems and/or certified mental illnesses in real, competitive employment so that they can experience first-hand the benefits and challenges of the work environment. The No Limit project seeks to build on the findings from the TSUNAMI project.

Innovation & Impact of the Peer Learning Visits

The innovative aspect of the PLVs is the development of the model of action as an effective, sustainable, and replicable model. Building the capacity of public and social-private educational institutions and operators allow for cross-national use, also for other target groups that are not focused on this project.

The PLVs was used to learn about practices in both Italy and Germany and the partners jointly worked to develop a model that they will implement in their local contexts.

The main impact of the PLVs will be to turn the jointly shaped model from the No Limit project into a larger-scale model. Secondly, the participation of staff from both Germany and Italy working directly with the target groups in this exchange will have an impact on their work as they can adopt the learnings in their daily work.

Overview of the activities during the Peer Learning Visits

The focus of the first PLV in Turin was to dive into the similarities and differences between the practices of the partners of the project. After the visit, both parties took these findings, discussed them with each of their local stakeholders, and used the outcomes of those discussions for shaping the new intervention model. This allows for the local context to be taken into consideration in the process of developing the model.

It is very important that the future model of intervention takes into consideration every aspect of the labor market in the two partner countries and how it affects the integration of people suffering from mental illnesses. Hence, the first exchange focused largely on comparing the legal frameworks surrounding unemployment in Germany and Italy as well as the current practices related to long-term unemployment of both labor market actors and education providers. Another block of the first PLV was the examination of the TSUNAMI project. The visiting partners prepared questions on the implementation of the project, its target group, and the subsequent evaluation of the project. The answers to those questions and the analysis of the evaluation of the TSUNAMI project were carefully analysed to ensure the shortcomings and unseen outcomes are considered when developing the new intervention model in the scope of the No Limit project.

The focus of the second PLV in Turin was to consolidate the results of the previous exchanges and finalise the intervention model.

Peer Learning Visit 1: 21-23 November 2022, Turin, Italy

21 November 2022	
3:00 pm	Welcome
3:30 – 4:30 pm	pm “Discussion of the Italian legal framework” APL Piemonte
4:30 pm – 5:30 pm	“Discussion on the German legal framework” Gaetan
5:30 pm – 5:45 pm	“Questions and comments”
22 November 2022	
9:00 am – 12:00 pm	“The experience of the project Tsunami: strengths and weaknesses” Exar and APL Piemonte
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm	“Visit at the Job Centre” APL Piemonte
1:00 pm – 2:30 pm	Lunch break
2:30 pm – 5:30 pm	“Working on and drafting a first model: Target group definition, cooperation with employers, measurements (e.g. internship)” All Partners

23 November	
9 am – 12 am	Recap of the model draft: strengths and weaknesses.

Peer Learning Visit 2: 29-31 March 2023, Turin, Italy

29 March 2023	
9:00 am – 11:00	Work session: Divided working groups Job Coaches: Final statements from the three bilateral groups APL & Pro Arbeit VET: Discussion of each drafted model on Miro EXAR & Gaetan
10:00 am – 12:00 pm	Presentation of the first model draft – VETs Gaetan & EXAR
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm	Open discussion between VETs and Job Coaches
1:00 pm – 2:030 pm	Lunch break
2:30 pm – 3:30 pm	Plenary on overlapping German and Italian models
3:30 pm – 5:30 pm	Presentation of the first draft of the finished model EXAR and Gaetan
30 March 2023	
10:00 am – 11:00 am	Model definition and definition of operator profile.
11:00 am – 12:00 pm	Possible applications of the intervention model on Italian and German territory
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm	Exploitation and Dissemination
31 March 2023	
9:00 am – 11:00 am	Project Management Issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Project work progress - Final Conference Organisation + new date for more intensive discussions - Finances - Reporting period
11:00 am – 11:30 am	Exploration of future funding channels
11:30 am – 12:00 pm	Closing and Departure

Objectives & Learning Outcomes of the Peer Learning Visits

1. To increase understanding of the both legal systems concerning labor market integration of people with mental health problems – common objective

An exchange of the two legal systems (German and Italian) provides a better understanding of what provisions the labor market integration framework in both countries is based on, specifically concerning the integration of (long-term) unemployed people with mental health problems.

This mutual examination of the legal systems in both countries was a crucial step in setting the foundation for a new intervention model. An understanding of the similarities and differences between the legal systems contributed to a better understanding of the possibilities and limits of the legal systems in both Germany and Italy.

2. To learn about the outcomes of the TSUNAMI project – German objective



The No Limit project is a derivative of the Italian implementation of the EaSI TSUNAMI project, which aimed to strengthen adult trainers in supporting the professional inclusion of people with mental health problems. The TSUNAMI project was an attempt to implement the IPS Methodology for fostering an active labor market process in the placement of people with mental problems. Despite this innovative approach, the model did not have the success it initially aimed at.

One of the learning outcomes of the German partners was to study the strengths and weaknesses of the TSUNAMI project and explore how the learnings can be implemented in already existing structures back in Offenbach County in Germany.

3. To increase the capacity of adult trainers and job coaches – Italian objective

The exchange of best practices and knowledge between the project partners can strengthen the capacity of the adult trainers and job coaches, which can contribute to an improved approach in the Italian context.

This capacity building with actors in other countries can contribute to an improved long-term vision of using new approaches to ensure inclusion in the labor market, which we hope can reach the attention of EU policy makers.

4. To create a first draft of a new intervention model - common objective

The outcome of the two PLVs is the draft of a new intervention model. This model should optimise existing services available to adults with mental health problems, provide innovations in the consulting process and create awareness amongst professionals working in the field.

The second PLV in March 2023 solely focused on the development of this model based on the learnings from the first visit in November 2022.

Implementation of learning outcomes from the Peer Learning Visits

The learning outcomes from both PLVs will be implemented in different stages.

Below is a 1-year plan of how the project partners wish to implement the learnings from the PLV within their respective organisations:

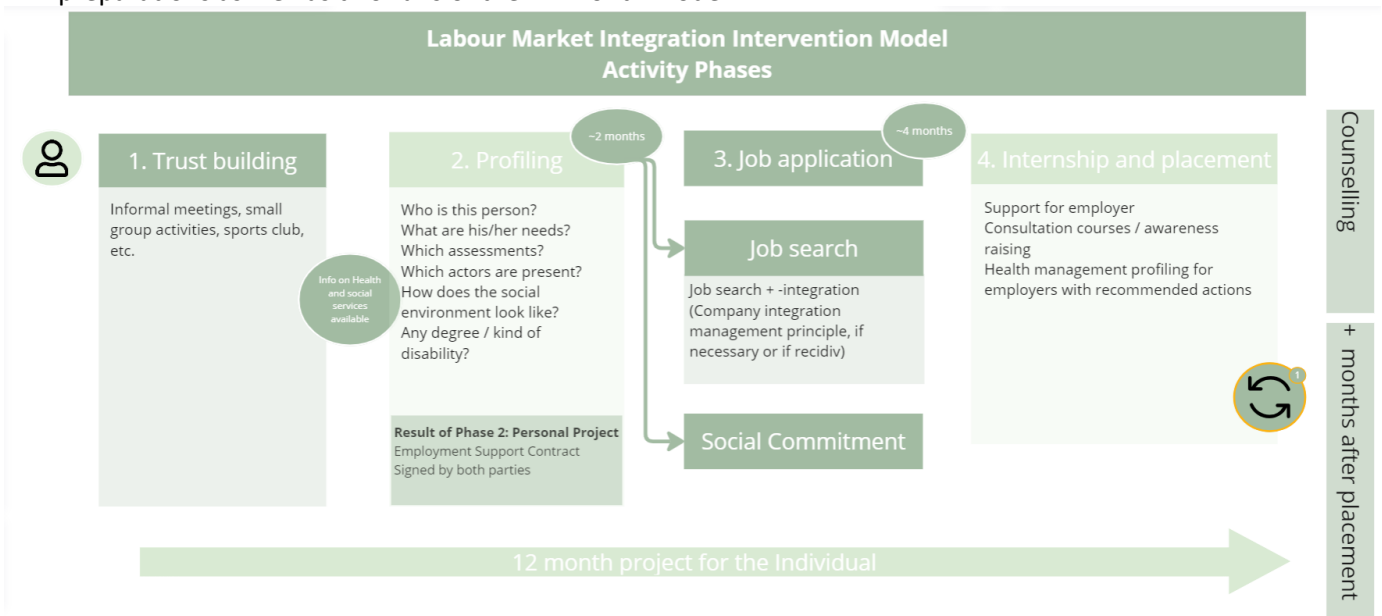
- From **June to October 2023**: Introduction of the new intervention model within their respective organisations;
- From **October to December 2023**: Experimentation of the new intervention model with adult trainers and job coaches;
- From **January to March 2024**: Design a new European project proposal based on the new intervention model to strengthen the reach and impact of the model in other countries.

MODEL OF INTERVENTION

The second outcome in the No Limit project was the design of an intervention model for the efficient and sustainable labor market integration of people with mental health problems and/or certified mental illnesses. The consortium, consisting of two job centers and two training providers from Germany and Italy, based its development on the approach of the IPS and place&train methodology of the Italian partners, who were previously involved in the EaSI project TSUNAMI.

Taking the legal framework of both countries into account as well as the social and labor needs of the final beneficiaries, an active labor market policy model was designed to support the placement of people with mental illness in real, competitive employment. The model provides useful tools for replication and scalability, so it could be applied in other European member states in the future. The pilot of the model should ideally take place

in an EU-funded follow-up project, which is planned for a period of 24 months. This provides room for preparations as well as two runs of the 12-month model.



Approach

Laying the foundations was very important in this process, as from the very beginning aspects like the legal framework in which the intervention would operate in the future, the exact definition of the target group as well as the different approaches and tools that the institutions use during counselling were shaped by the respective national context.

On the basis of the Peer Learning Visit learning plan, which set the methodological framework of the exchange, the partners at local level defined their goals and wishes for the exchange process, which were introduced at a first transnational meeting in Turin.

In order to respond to the desire for a more intensive exchange, a structured setting was created. In three thematic bilateral working groups, consisting of one job coach from each partner country, specific topics were worked on in order to then use the results for the creation of the model:

- The legal framework,
- relevant instruments for counseling the target group and
- a change of perspective to focus on the customer and his needs.

At the same time, the two training providers worked on a first draft of the model, which was to be expanded with the information and needs of the job coaches in the follow-up.

- On the German side, it was noted that IPS is not strongly represented in Germany, so that networking and exchange of best practices is limited.
- In addition, it was found that the pure IPS approach cannot be implemented without adapting it to regional conditions and health care systems, e.g. with regard to the envisaged rapid placement, both project partners from the job centers agreed that their clients need more intensive support.
- This also led to internal discussions on the Italian side about where to install this point of intensive support. While the German system sees the task clearly in the hands of the training provider, this has not yet been defined in the Italian system.

Taking these aspects into account, the intervention model was finalized during the second transnational meeting in Turin.

The model

The intervention model is a counselling offer to promote the employability of mentally ill people and follows the lines of the IPS approach: to place the target group primarily in a job on the primary labor market and to provide individual support on site by an IPS counsellor. Participation is voluntary and based on the client's own motivation. For the purpose of later transnational implementation, the consortium has considered existing national conditions and adapted the principles of the IPS to them.

The model extends over 12 months and is divided into four main phases and a project-accompanying fifth phase. It is important to note that neither these stages nor the time periods granted represent a rigid sequence of processes, but rather allow for a smooth transition in consultation. The five phases are:

1. Confidence building
2. Profile analysis
3. Job search or social engagement
4. Internship and job placement
5. Holistic support, even after placement

The first step is the admission of the client to the program by the IPS counsellor. In addition to the administrative activities and the initial assessment of his employability, this phase is about **building a relationship of trust**, which is based on a sense of security, openness and mutual respect. Interaction is based on empathy on the behalf of the job coach and provides a safe space for the participant to reveal his or her individual needs, goals and skills. Supportive interactions include informal meetings, participation in group activities, or shared activities where the job coach can engage in low-threshold conversation with the participant in a casual setting. When such a supportive and conducive environment is created, the best possible outcome can be achieved in the course of the project.

The next two months of the project focus on **profiling** the participant and better understanding his or her skills, interests, strengths, needs and career goals. During this process, the counsellor also learns about challenges such as health limitations, mental or physical impairments, family responsibilities, or other barriers that may affect vocational integration. It is also important to provide information about other actors involved in the system of care. Understanding all these aspects and challenges helps the counsellor to offer tailored support. At the end of this stage, there is the employment support contract, in which an individual plan for achieving the goals has been jointly defined and which is signed by both parties (counsellor and participant), thus acquiring a binding character.

From here on, the path that the participant can take is twofold: either commit to an **active job search** or proceed with a **social engagement**.

Should this short-term counselling not lead to the participant wanting to take steps for the reintegration onto the labor market, there is the option of social engagement. With regular support from the counsellor, the participant can thus remain active, make contacts, develop skills, strengthen his self-esteem and thus also come closer to a daily work routine. Examples include volunteering with non-profit organizations or aid projects, or joining hobby groups or local clubs.

If the participant feels ready to start looking for a job and re-enter the labor market, the counsellor initiates the orientation phase. It is important to match the participant's job placement expectations with the requirements of the labor market as quickly and efficiently as possible, and to address the next steps, such as identifying employment opportunities, assisting in the preparation and updating of application materials and references, and preparing for interviews.

After successful **job placement**, the IPS counsellor takes on a dual role by both continuing to support the participant and working closely with the employer. Workplace coaching helps the employer successfully train the employee and work together to overcome challenge or adjustment issues. The counsellor promotes communication and can act as a mediator to clarify potential misunderstandings and foster a positive working relationship. By raising awareness, the counsellor helps develop an understanding of the specific concerns and support needs of people with mental illness to create an inclusive work environment. In this way, mutual required adjustments or supports in the workplace can be identified and implemented. This may include providing flexible work schedules, specialized equipment, or establishing appropriate work environments that promote the employee's productivity and well-being. By keeping the IPS counsellor as the point of contact for the employer, it is possible to ensure that the workplace is successfully and sustainably maintained.

It is often the retention of the job that mentally ill employees find difficult. If, despite all these measures, there is a premature termination of the job, for whatever reason, the participant returns to the second phase of the profile analysis and, after an evaluation, creates a new goal plan together with his or her counsellor.

If the need for further qualification becomes apparent during this phase, the participant has the option of remaining in the program, with accompanying support from the IPS counsellor and implementation of the necessary further training.

The fifth and final phase that accompanies the program from beginning to end is the **continuous counselling** of the participant. This includes the counsellor's commitment to his or her client, through recognition of successes, encouragement in difficult times, and providing resources or assistance in any life situation. It also requires working closely with other professionals and coordinating services, such as physicians, therapists, or social workers, to provide comprehensive support. Even after successful placement in employment, the IPS counsellor provides ongoing follow-up to ensure long-term career stability and that the client is successful in his new position. This includes regular meetings to review progress, address challenges, and offer further support as needed.

OPERATOR PROFILE

As mentioned above, the role of the so-called IPS counsellor is crucial in ensuring a successful, effective and professional (re-)integration into the labor market of the target group. The third and last outcome focuses more in detail on the profile of the IPS counsellor.

Role of the IPS counsellor

The IPS counsellor is the contact person for the project recipient, follows the whole pathway from intake until the end of the experience. The IPS counsellor is the job placement professional, who uses assessment techniques and methods, individual guidance counselling, and designs customized intervention plans based on the recipient's resources and constraints.

The IPS counsellor analyses and evaluates the situation, skills of the recipients and searches for job offers consistent with his or her job profile, performs an essential mediation function between the worker and the company contact persons with the aim of supporting the project beneficiaries in coping with problematic situations.

This process, carried out and managed through a consultative approach, specifically involves vocational and career guidance, business scouting, mentoring, active search and job-search accompaniment, where the main objective of the intervention is job placement through strengthening the employability of the beneficiary.

Specifically, the IPS counsellor deals with:

Client Intake and trust building

- Establishing a relationship of trust with the participant in order to achieve the best possible outcome for the participant. The relationship of trust is imperative in order to obtain all relevant information from the participant, which ultimately leads to successful labor market integration. In addition, a constant motivation of the participant is only possible through a good and trustful relationship.
- Carrying out the intake, reception and signing of the service pact and the first employability assessment;
- Verification Job Center Enrolment and possible accompaniment to enrolment;

Profiling and orientation counselling

Profiling activities and definition of the Individual Action Plan, shared and agreed upon with the beneficiary following the assessment of individual needs in terms of training, guidance and available territorial services; for the definition of the Individual Action Plan, IPS counsellors will also have to interact with other experts activated during the course of the project by partners; (taking into account the network of operators involved in activities aimed at the beneficiary: health workers, social workers, etc.).

- Initiating the activity of Orientation Counselling. At this stage, the IPS counsellor's task is to concisely and as quickly as possible converge the recipient's job placement expectations with the real demand of the labor market and prepare the recipient for the job interview; orientation and accompaniment activities for beneficiaries to participate in project activities: targeted support for at least X months, accompaniment to training activities, and initiating job placement paths consistent with the skills and realistic expectations of the recipients, activation of work-life balance services, mapping services, identification of the beneficiary's need and the local Labor Market, formal and informal skills recognition activities aimed at increasing personal motivation, self-esteem and aspirations.
- Together with the participant a sketch of a "personal project" is made. Here, a perspective extending over the intervention is worked out and defined for the participant in a tailor-made manner. Strengths and necessary or desired further education, qualifications or training as well as fields of work and internships are recorded here.
- Carry out Active Search actions: individual interviews with recipients aimed at reflecting on the positive and negative aspects of the experience, development of skills useful in the job search and sharing of ways and tools useful in identifying employment opportunities, support in the drafting of the curriculum vitae and cover letter, request letter of reference from previous employers, preparation for individual and group interviews and assessments carried out both in person and through digital platforms, spontaneous application to companies and/or specific job offers held in line with one's profile.

Network of companies and intermediary role

- Implement Scouting activities, which consists of searching for business contexts willing to host internship/work placement paths: handling preliminary interviews with company representatives or managers, meeting with company personnel involved in the internship/work placement path, and preparing the placement of the intern within the production process by preparing all the necessary documentation, including the necessary information passage towards the intern on the rules that regulate his/her role, functions, and specific task. Finally, introduce the trainee to the organizational context that will host him or her, defining the training plan and the activation of the pathway;
- To carry out the mentoring activities related to the internship/work placement, aimed at providing companies and trainees with the tools for understanding each other's behaviours in order to contain, support, motivate and mediate problematic situations by evaluating when necessary possible interruptions and suspensions of the pathway. The activities will therefore consist of interviews aimed at mediating, evaluating and supporting the trainee's skills and competencies;
- continuous counselling activities throughout the project with a focus on everyday personal matters and need of support from the client.



Completion and wrap up

- Conduct the closing interview aimed at returning the experience and sending it to the relevant Job Center and the network of territorial services
- Draw up a final report at the end of the course on the progress and outcome of the intake and record/document all activities
- To ensure counselling over a period of a certain number of months after the successful placement onto the labor market
- Back Office: compilation of reporting materials.

CONCLUSION

The No Limit project saw four public and private institutions, two jobcenters and two educational training providers, from Germany and Italy go into an exchange process, guided by the methodology of the Peer Learning Visits of the European Social Network. The exchange, which took place over the course of one year, revolved around the topic of the sustainable and efficient labor market integration of people with mental health problems and and/or certified mental illnesses. By sharing resources and best practices within a collaborative European framework the No Limit project aimed at strengthening the capacity of partners to formulate better solutions for the long-term labor-market inclusion of individuals with mental health problems. The project's concrete outcome was an innovative model of action based on the method of Individual Placement and Support (IPS). By equipping adult trainers with a methodological toolkit, they can better identify beneficiaries' existing skills and training needs, and guide them towards tailor-made provision. This then leads to an improvement in the employability and long-term career of the participants. What the consortium most strived for, was to develop an intervention model that could be scaled up and replicated so it provided useful tools for different European Member States and could be applied to different national legal frameworks.



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