

European Toolkit for Schools

Project Learning for Young Adults (PLYA)

May 2021

WHEN WAS THE MEASURE FIRST STARTED?

The initial initiative arose in the early 1990s, when the labor market showed that young people aged up to 25 without education or profession represent a very significant proportion (36.3%) of jobseekers and that they remain unemployed in the long run. In 1999, the Expert Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Adult Education approved the PLYA program that was prepared by Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (SIAE). The program started in 2000, when the first contractors were selected and the first mentors' groups were trained.

WHAT WERE THE CONDITIONS AND STEPS TAKEN THAT HAVE CONTRIBUTED MOST TO THE SUCCESS OF THE MEASURE?

The success of the program is affected by several factors. In general, however, we can say that this is mainly due to good cooperation between the stakeholders of the program, which includes the professional public of various disciplines, relevant policies and program providers. There is constant communication between stakeholders. Another factor involves the way the program works, starting with identifying the needs of the participants and connecting the various actors who can help the participant to overcome the obstacles and problems he or she is facing. The program promotes group affiliation and is based on solving the problems of each individual participant.

WHICH STAKEHOLDERS WERE INVOLVED IN IDENTIFYING NEEDS AND IN THE PLANNING AND DESIGN OF THE MEASURE?

- Slovenian Institute for Adult Education
- Slovenian Employment Service
- Ministry for labor, social affairs, family and equal opportunities
- Ministry for education, science and sport
- Adult Education providers

WHO WAS INVOLVED IN IMPLEMENTING THE MEASURE? WHO HAS KEY RESPONSIBILITY FOR IMPLEMENTATION?

- Slovenian Institute for Adult Education
- Slovenian Employment Service
- Ministry for labor, social affairs, family and equal opportunities
- Ministry for education, science and sport
- 12 Adult Education providers

The initial implementation of the program depended largely on the SIAE, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, and the Employment Service. The willingness of education providers to accept the challenge of introducing a completely new and different program at the time was also important. It is similar today, except that the key responsibility has been taken over by the Department of Lifelong Learning at the Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities instead of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport.

HOW ARE THE DIFFERENT PEOPLE INVOLVED IN IMPLEMENTATION BEING SUPPORTED (E.G. DO THEY RECEIVE SPECIFIC TRAINING?)

The PLAY curriculum is publicly available. SIAE, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, also provides initial training for mentors working in the program and further in-service trainings. The implementing organization selects appropriate candidates for mentors in the local environment and enrolls them in a training program conducted by SIAE. SIAE conduct an internship interview with the proposed candidates to determine their initial qualifications and suitability to work in the program. Then they attend a 100-hour of introductory training, in which they need to pass if they want to become a mentor. Old mentors are involved in the initial training for new mentors by providing great amount of lectures and workshops. Each new candidate can also apply for the recognition of prior knowledge before enrolling in initial training.

Each year, the SIAE organizes 16 hours of in-service training for active mentors; the topics are selected according to the expressed needs of the mentors. In cooperation with the Employment Service and the Ministry, SIAE also organizes at least two annual meetings with providers where the results of the common work are presented and current issues are discussed.

WHAT HAVE BEEN THE OBSTACLES TO INTRODUCING THE MEASURE? HOW HAVE THEY BEEN ADDRESSED?

Initially, the problems were related to the placement of the program in the system and in this connection also to who is responsible for its financing. We tried to involve the local communities where the program started, but they were also faced with a limited budget, and they also did not know how much each municipality has to contribute, as participants from different municipalities were involved. With the expansion of the program providers, a problem also arose in securing funds from the state budget. The problem of funding is so far solved

with the help of European funds. The problem of funding is becoming actual again when the common perspective of ESF is ending; i.e. in 2022.

Difficulties in the initial implementation were also related to the understanding of the basic principles and learning approaches of PLYA. The classic role of teacher or counselor did not cover all the tasks performed by mentors. SIAE has programmed and implemented introductory training for new mentors, which unfortunately was not explicit enough - i.e. not practical enough. PLYA's innovations in Slovenian educational or social practice had had no example at that time, so we looked for examples in other countries, especially in Danish production schools. In this way, SIAE, in cooperation with Danish colleagues and with the help of the EU Grundtvig program, organized an expert excursion for the first group of mentors. This helped them understand and encouraged them to work. Their work has become the model for next generations of mentors.

The third set of obstacles relates to the involvement of participants in the program. This is partly due to the still relatively poor visibility of the program, but even more to the identification of the needs of potential participants and appropriate measures that can help them from a disadvantage. As PLYA is an informal program, both young people and even counselors who could refer young people to the program have initial doubts about its suitability. Even the professional public is still insufficiently aware that school failure is most often an indicator of the accumulated problems that a young person is facing and requires a holistic approach. The strategy for solving this problem relates to networking PLYA with various organizations and individuals working with these young people (e.g. counselors in schools, social work centers, with doctors, therapists, as well as non-governmental organizations). The outreach approaches we are developing are also important in this direction.

IS THERE A MONITORING/EVALUATION SYSTEM IN PLACE? WHAT IS MONITORED?

Yes, monitoring and evaluation mode is already set out in the PLYA curriculum. Monitoring includes the movement of participants by number, gender, educational and other needs, the position and achievements of participants, the type and number of completed learning projects, the scope and type of cooperation with the environment, the number of external collaborators, as well as obstacles and opportunities of a particular PLYA provider.

The external evaluation of an independent evaluator is also carried out regularly for about 10 years. So far, three external evaluations have been carried out, the last in 2019. The purpose of last evaluation of the PUM-O program was to provide an assessment of the implementation and the results of the program. This means to check its performance from the perspective of the involved persons, relevance of the selected content, harmony between the different projects and stakeholders, and the connection of the PUM-O program and the local environment.

WHO MONITORS AND HOW?

All documentation prescribed in the curriculum and by the contract between PLYA provider and Slovenian Employment Service enables the preparation of monthly and annual report, which is prepared separately by each provider for its implementation. All the annual reports are then processed centrally (SIAE and SES). The results are the basis for supplementing or changing the program. All the stakeholders are involved in monitoring.

ARE FURTHER EVALUATION PLANNED AND WHEN WILL THE RESULTS BE AVAILABLE?

The last external evaluation was done in 2019. The next external evaluation is not planned yet. Annual report for 2020 is almost completed – results will be available in May.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE IMPACT OF THE MEASURE?

The impact of the measure is mainly reflected in the performance of the participants. So far, all evaluations have shown that participants have become more successful in solving problems that prevent them from completing school or getting employment. About three quarters of participants achieve at least one of the PLYA objectives; i.e. completes or continues education or gets employment. In addition, participants claim that the program helped them improve their own self-esteem, they became more self-confident, creative and self-organized. They also emphasize the importance and good influence of the friendships and social networks they get in PLYA.

We also believe that PLYA, through its activities and collaboration with various important others, has contributed to the recognition of the phenomenon and position of NEET youth. It is also an example of good educational practice that can serve as an example for various educators and social workers.

All these promote cross-sectoral cooperation, which contributes to the identification of the needs of NEET youth and to a more appropriate solution to the problem.

WHAT RESOURCES ARE INVOLVED (MATERIAL, SPACE, AMOUNT OF FUNDING)?

The PLYA curriculum identifies the appropriate material and staff conditions. Spatial conditions require that the contractor provide adequate premises that allow group and individual work for at least 18 participants. There is also a small kitchen needed to prepare a shared meal. Namely, special care is given to the preparation of a common and healthy meal, as the participants acquire healthy living habits by example and experience. The providing organization has also provide an adequate number of computers so that participants can develop digital literacy. The adequate sanitary conditions shall be provided too.

Part of the PLYA budget is also intended for the purchase of materials for the implementation of project learning work, but the lump sum is usually not enough to cover all material needs, so the groups also help themselves by obtaining sponsors.

The amount of funding covers the salary costs of the three mentors, partly the operating costs, rents and other implementation costs. The mentor's groups stress the need for supervision, which help them to overcome the stress and heavy problems they face during their work with the participants. This is not yet widely recognized as an eligible cost, so it is not yet implemented in all the mentors' groups.

The Employment Service also partially covers the transport costs of PLYA participants (ie EUR 0.16 for each kilometer from the place of residence to PLYA and back if there is at least 1 kilometer in one direction between the two places) and activity allowance - is EUR 1.20 or EUR 0.75 for each hour of the participant's actual participation in PLYA. You pay for a program that lasts at least 100 hours.

IS THE MEASURE STILL RUNNING? IF NOT, WHY NOT?

Yes, the measure is still running.