



INTERCEPT PILOT EVALUATION REPORT

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IMPLEMENTED BY:



Regione Toscana



Fondazione
Polo Universitario
Grossetano

VISIONARY
ANALYTICS



CASE - Center for Social and Economic Research



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Abbreviations

ALMP	Active labour market policy
ANCI	National Association of Italian Municipalities
ANG	National Agency for Youth
ANPAL	Italian National Agency for Active Employment Policies
ARTI	Tuscan Regional Employment Service
ATE	Average Treatment Effects
ATET	Average Treatment Effects for the Treated
CEM	Coarsened Exact Matching
CEPA	Classification of environmental protection activities
CIA	Conditional independence assumption
CIE	Counterfactual impact evaluation
CReMA	Classification of resource management activities
FMO	Financial Mechanism Office
GBM	Generalized Boosted Modelling
GHG	Greenhouse gas
GOL	Programma Garanzia Occupabilità dei Lavoratori
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPW	Inverse Probability Weighting
IRPET	Tuscany Regional Institute for Economic Policy and Research
ISEE	Equivalent economic situation indicator
ISTAT	Italian National Statistics Institute
LT PES	Employment Services under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NACE	Statistical Classification of Economic Activities
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
PA	Public Administration
PES	Public employment services
PSM	Propensity Score Matching
RdC	Universal Basic Income (Reddito di cittadinanza)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SI	Social innovation

1. Introduction

This document is an evaluation report of three pilot schemes implemented in Italy (Tuscany, Lithuania and Malta under the INTERCEPT project.

The pilot programme aimed to activate NEETs to enter the green labour market. The acronym NEET stands for people who are not in employment, education or training. The term refers to young persons, aged between 15 and 29. In 2010, the European Commission Employment Committee (EMCO) agreed on the definition and methodology for measuring and monitoring NEETS in the EU as part of the Horizon 2020 strategy. Since then, the concept of NEETS was widely used to attract attention to vulnerable youth groups and solve young people's labour market problems. However, the concept of NEETS is often criticized since the term covers a highly heterogeneous set of youths under one term. Even though the group is united by the fact that they do not study or work, characteristics, needs and challenges may vary between different age groups or between different countries. For this reason, more targeted policies are needed for different age groups rather than for one heterogeneous NEET group¹.

Youth guarantee – a flagship EU initiative aimed at tackling youth unemployment after the great recession of 2008 – 2009 – initially focused on NEETs aged 15-24. Hence, their needs have been much better understood and addressed in comparison to the 25-29 age group. The younger NEETs typically face challenges related to a return to education and training and/or transitioning to the labour market. The older NEETs, however, face a different set of obstacles, such as young mothers having difficulty returning to the labour market.

The initiation of the INTERCEPT project was a response to the European Council's recommendation to reinforce the Youth Guarantee. Key suggestions from the Council included improving the identification of the target group to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the varied needs of NEETS) and the specific support they require. This involved a particular focus on NEETs adversely affected by the economic downturn, broadening the age range to encompass individuals aged 25 to 29, and facilitating upskilling and re-skilling in green skills. These foundational principles formed the basis of Project INTERCEPT, which involved in-depth research on NEETS, particularly those in the 25 to 29 age group, and the mobilization of NEETs in this age bracket through the development of green skills and placements that are oriented towards green skills. Project INTERCEPT benefits from a grant from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA and the Norway Grants Fund for Youth Employment.

The INTERCEPT project consisted of three main parts:

- 1) Research prior the intervention (characteristics of NEETs, their needs and challenges, overview of Active Labour Market Policies (ALMP), survey of stakeholders in the green sector). The research provided evidence and material for the pilot scheme creation.
- 2) Designing and implementing the pilot scheme, where NEETs would undergo 25-hours trainings and would be paid for 3-month internships in green companies.
- 3) Evaluation of the pilot.

This evaluation report relates to the third part of the project and provides an evaluation of the pilot's success as well as what lessons had been learned. The general **objective** of the report is to evaluate the pilots by addressing **eight evaluation criteria**:

1. Relevance - to what extent was the intervention relevant?
2. Effectiveness - did the intervention achieve the defined objectives?
3. Efficiency - to what extent were resources utilised efficiently?
4. Impact - what was the contribution of the intervention to the defined objectives?
5. Sustainability - to what extent is the intervention sustainable?
6. Transferability - to what extent is the intervention transferable to another country's context?

¹ Mascherini, Massimiliano. "Origins and future of the concept of NEETs in the European policy agenda." Youth Labor in Transition. Oxford University Press, 2019. 503-529.

7. Scalability - to what extent is the intervention scalable to a larger population?
8. Innovativeness - to what extent is the intervention innovative?

The main data collection and evaluation methods used in this evaluation include desk research, interviews with Public Employment Services (PES), NEETs and employers, pre-, mid- and post-intervention surveys based on the Kirkpatrick model, a counterfactual impact evaluation (CIE) and a cost-benefit analysis.

The evaluation report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 provides an overview of the intervention – what problems it seeks to address and the main characteristics of the intervention.
- Section 3 provides information on the Italian (Tuscany) pilot evaluation.
- Section 4 provides information on the Lithuanian pilot.
- Section 5 overviews the Maltese pilot.
- Section 6 horizontally overviews the pilots – Italy, Lithuania and Malta had in common, even when the pilots were not identical. That section provides a cross-case analysis and lessons learned.
- Finally, section 7 concludes the report.

2. Description of the intervention

2.1. Problems addressed

The following section aims to present the key problems that were addressed during the intervention. The summary flows from an analysis of the trends, needs, and challenges of NEETs in Tuscany (Italy), Lithuania and Malta. The target group of the INTERCEPT project was 25-29-year-old people who were not in employment, nor in education or training (hereafter – the target group). The target group appeared to be more influenced by labour market functioning and policy context at a national level.

The analysis showed some common aspects between the countries:

- Firstly, the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on the number of 25-29-year-old NEETs. During the pandemic, the number of NEETs grew in all three countries, even though, historically, in Lithuania and Malta, the number of people in the target group had been slightly declining over time. This was not the case in Tuscany.
- Secondly, there were significant gender differences and family-related worries in the target groups. Women were more prone to look after dependent family members and extend their maternity leave to look after their children. This was the most prominent in Tuscany and Malta, where females with lower secondary education and limited job experience were highly associated with core NEETs. Even though in Lithuania there were as many men as women in the target group, the analysis showed that more than a third of young jobseekers had family circumstances that hindered their sustainable integration into the labour market.
- Low education is associated with NEET status and poorer labour market prospects. This was the case in Lithuania and Malta where the majority of those in the target groups were associated with low education. However, educational qualification was not an issue for female NEETs aged 15-29. In fact, the share of females with a tertiary education was slightly higher among female NEETs (19.3%) than among the entire female population in Central Italy (18.3%).

To understand the problems in every country, detailed country descriptions are provided below.

In Tuscany, Italy, the core NEETs (NEETs with social and behavioural issues) are typically females who live in mono-parental households or in couples with children, foreigners, people with a low level of education, and people who face family-related worries. This indicates that females have a greater challenge than men in joining the labour market. There is a lack of good quality job opportunities in Tuscany. In addition to that, NEETs lack skills for entering the labour market, motivation, and confidence in their abilities.

Core NEETs in Lithuania usually have a secondary education or a professional qualification within the field of transportation or services. Data indicates that the target group is overrepresented in smaller municipalities and rural areas. Consequently, over 40 per cent of NEETs aged 25-29 face mobility challenges in reaching potential workplaces. As was noted above, family-related worries are prominent in Lithuania. More than a third of young jobseekers have family circumstances that hinder their sustainable integration into the labour market. The target group names a need to try something new and a desire to change jobs as the main reason why they are unemployed. This is followed by a lack of knowledge and skills that would help them to re-enter the job market.

In Malta, Core NEETs are typically people with multiple disadvantages such as lower educational attainment, females with care responsibilities or males with illnesses/disabilities, lower aspirations, and no prior work experience. Data illustrates how unemployment in the target group had started to rise even before the pandemic. However, even if there are minor differences between age groups as regards trends in the duration of unemployment, one of the features of the target group is how women have more difficulties than men in the labour market. This challenge has been met by providing accessible free childcare and has successfully reduced the number of women in the target group. And yet, childcare responsibilities still create barriers for the target group to reach labour market participation, which is the main reason why the target group does not work.

Thus, the problem of 25-29-year-old NEETs' inactivity, their lack of skills, knowledge and experience as well as low motivation will be addressed during the intervention (see Section 2).

Table 1. Summary of key findings from Tuscany, Lithuania, and Malta

	Tuscany	Lithuania	Malta
Changes in the number of 25-29-year-old NEETs over the past decade	The share of NEETs in Tuscany has been growing with some fluctuations and a more notable Covid-induced increase in 2020.	The share of NEETs has steadily declined, with a small Covid-induced bump in 2021.	The share of NEETs has steadily declined, with a small Covid-induced bump in 2020.
Characteristics of NEETs	Typically, females with upper secondary education and limited job experience.	Typically, a person from a smaller municipality or rural area with secondary education.	Typically, females with lower secondary education and limited job experience.
Characteristics of Core NEETs (NEETs with social and behavioural issues)	Typically, females who live in mono-parental households or in couples with children, foreigners, and people with a low level of education. Usually, face family-related worries. However, educational qualification is not an issue for female NEETs.	Persons with a secondary or secondary professional qualification who have work experience in the transportation or services field; typically live in smaller municipalities or rural areas; face challenges in reaching the workplace and have family-related worries.	Persons with multiple disadvantages: lower educational attainment, females with caring responsibilities or males with illnesses/disabilities, lower aspirations and no prior work experience.
Features of their generation, specific needs, labour market-related strengths and weaknesses	Women face greater challenges than men in the labour market. A low level of skill characterises Italy's labour market.	The target group is overrepresented in smaller municipalities and rural areas. Over 40 per cent of NEETs aged 25-29 face mobility challenges, i.e., difficulties in	Target group unemployment started to rise even before the pandemic. Minor differences between age groups as regards trends in duration of unemployment.

	<p>Young people were hit hardest by the crisis in Italy.</p> <p>Long-term unemployment remains high in Italy.</p>	<p>reaching potential workplaces.</p> <p>More than a third of young jobseekers have family circumstances that hinder their sustainable integration into the labour market.</p> <p>Low education is associated with a NEET status and poorer labour market prospects</p>	<p>Women face greater challenges than men in the labour market.</p> <p>Low education is associated with a NEET status and poorer labour market prospects.</p>
How the needs and challenges of the target group differ from other age groups	<p>They have family responsibilities and are more likely to face family-related worries.</p> <p>Usually have had little, often only occasional, work experience.</p> <p>Compared with the 30-34-year-olds group, they are considered to be less disappointed.</p>	<p>Compared to 18-24-year-old NEETs, young people aged 25-29 are more mature, have a better understanding of what they want and can formulate and achieve clearer goals. They already have more work experience. This age group is more likely to face family-related worries. Also, they are looking for more stable and better-paid jobs.</p>	<p>Although Malta has successfully reduced the female NEET population by providing accessible free childcare, room for further reduction remains.</p>
Why the target group does not work	<p>A lack of good quality job opportunities of good quality, consistent with the qualifications of the young, in their area of residence.</p> <p>Lack of skills for entering the labour market.</p> <p>Lack of stimulation, motivation, and confidence in their abilities, apathy, and discouragement.</p>	<p>According to the NEETs, the main reason for employment contract termination is a "desire to change jobs" and to try something new, whereas career consultants tend to think that NEETs are not satisfied with their pay.</p> <p>Knowledge and skills would help NEETs re-enter the job market.</p>	<p>Childcare responsibilities dominate among the barriers to labour market participation.</p>

Source: Compiled by the authors

2.2. Description of the intervention

Investment in the green economy is going to be the key driver of economic recovery and it is aimed at setting the environment on a more sustainable path. A green transition will affect the economy, society, jobs, and the skills needed to achieve it. The intervention being proposed was designed in a way where it addressed the most vulnerable groups of people, i.e young people not in employment, education, or training. Given the fact that it was created and implemented by partners from different European countries described in detail above, the scheme consisted of **innovative programmes**, tailored to the country's specific market needs. An expectation was also that a person would stay in employment; therefore, job placement was also included as a part of the scheme. An intervention was a new

experimental scheme that provided personalised support, training and work exposure to NEETs aged between 25 and 29 in Lithuania, Malta and Italy. The combination of profiling and follow up with youth workers allowed them to listen to the concerns of participants and be able to adapt the scheme and responses to their individual needs. Although the pilots in each country were adapted to their local contexts, Figure 1 shows the shared components that were present in all three pilots.

The main aspects were that participants underwent a paid 25-hour training program focused on equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills for the work placement phase in the green job sector. In addition, they had a paid work placement or internship lasting 240 hours over 12 weeks (approx. 3 months).

An additional shared component was the personalized support to NEETs through profiling, counselling, matching, and ongoing assistance to enhance their employability. Occupational Psychologists at PES profiled NEETs' interests in the green economy, assessed their skill abilities and helped to guide them towards the best job opportunities on the market. It also included a motivational element by identifying personal hurdles that they might have come across and sought to build a positive attitude and mindset. It is a starting point for the creation of interest in and a positive attitude towards the green economy. The project also directly engaged with both NEETs and employers to facilitate effective communication and collaboration. Concurrently and at the end of the intervention, various Active Labor Market Policy (ALMP) practices and initiatives were implemented to augment the overall impact. In addition, regular monitoring visits were conducted during the training and internship phases to ensure the smooth execution of all processes and activities.

In all three countries the allowance was disbursed in three instalments: (1) after completing the 25-hour training programme, (2) after completing 180 hours/8 weeks in the workplace, (3) after the full completion of the whole work placement (remaining 60 hours/4weeks). Participants also received payment on a pro-rata basis if they discontinued the intervention due to gainful employment or enrollment in an alternative training or schemes.

Finally, robust project documentation was ensured. The lead partner (Jobsplus) issued a sample of project documentation including agreements, FAQs, attendance sheets, certificates, and monitoring sheets. This helped to keep an overall internal coherence of the pilots.

Figure 1. Shared elements between the three pilots in Italy, Lithuania and Malta



Source: Compiled by the authors

In line with the project's aims, the general intervention was adapted to the country specifics, and in particular to the characteristics of the target group. Unique initiatives were introduced and implemented within the pilot projects by each country's implementing body (Jobsplus in Malta, ANCI Toscana in Italy, and the Lithuanian PES in Lithuania). These initiatives are listed in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Differences between the pilots in Italy, Lithuania and Malta

Malta	Italy	Lithuania
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional tutoring provided both in class and online. Free childcare assistance during training and the work placement phase. Full payment for training attendance of at least 80 %. Matching participants with another employer if they drop out during the work placement, allowing them to complete the full 240 hours. Testing and raising the allowance rate for NEETs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coverage of all expenses for internship activation, including insurance, individual protection devices, and specific training delivered by a tutor, up to a maximum contribution of EUR 500. Activation of internships, with activation, management, and monitoring handled in collaboration with ARTI. Pre-recorded training sessions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of free vocational training or subsidies for employment upon demand. In-house training conducted by PES staff. Offering traveling allowances to NEETs.

Source: Compiled by the authors

Table 31 in Annex 1: Summary of intervention in Italy, Lithuania and Malta presents a detailed overview of the similarities and differences of the intervention between the countries, when compared, to the specific needs of the target group.

3. Italian pilot evaluation

3.1. Context

In the last few years, young people in Italy have been a very vulnerable category of the population. The difficult transition from education or training to work was amplified by the pandemic that had important repercussions on the dimensions of youth discomfort, insecurity in study and work, and even their mental health.

As stated in the report “NEET Working” (2022)², there are more than 3 million NEETs in Italy in the 15-34 age group, with a female predominance of 1.7 million. The data show that 25.1% of young Italians aged between 15 and 34 do not work, study, or are involved in an educational pathway. Looking at the data by age group, it is possible to observe that in the 20-24 year age group, Italian NEETs number 70% more than the European average, and this percentage does not change in the post-university age group of 25-34 years. In relation to the gender dimension, just as is the case in other European countries, in Italy there is also a marked difference to the detriment of women.

Disaggregated by their family role and citizenship, NEETs in Italy in 2020 in the 15-29 age group were mainly 'children' (1 488 000), while among 'parents' (178 000), mothers were in the clear majority (161 000).

Although there are many factors that can determine whether young people remain in a NEET condition, those who are generally indicated their main risk factors as³:

- having a low level of educational achievement
- living in a family with low income
- coming from a family where one parent has experienced periods of unemployment
- growing up with only one parent
- being born in a country outside the EU
- live in a rural area

² Ministro Per Le Politiche Giovanili. (2022). (rep.). NEET Working. Retrieved from https://www.politichegiovani.gov.it/media/fodnvowp/piano_neet-2022_rev-gab.pdf

³ L'Agenzia nazionale per le politiche attive del lavoro. (2019). SECONDO RAPPORTO DI VALUTAZIONE DELLA GARANZIA GIOVANI E DEL PROGRAMMA OPERATIVO NAZIONALE INIZIATIVA OCCUPAZIONE GIOVANI. See: <https://garanziagiovani.anpal.gov.it/documents/827435/0/II-Rapporto-di%20valutazione-della-Garanzia-Giovani-e-del-Pon-log.pdf/45d609e0-eeb4-e44d-b6d2-63f91f398173>

- have a disability

Given these premises, it is clear that decisive action must be taken to combat this phenomenon that goes beyond the scope of the programmes that are already active - such as Garanzia Giovani - which must also be improved and strengthened in order to build an organic and integrated intervention on its territory.

NEETs in Tuscany

While the population size within the 15-29 age group has remained nearly constant at approximately 500 000 individuals, the composition of this cohort underwent significant shifts. The proportion of inactive and unemployed young people increased by 43% and 30%, respectively, while the percentage of employed individuals decreased by 19% from 2008 to 2019.

Among employed youth (under 30), the quality of employment deteriorated, marked by a rise in the proportion of fixed-term and collaborative contracts, as well as involuntary part-time employment. The precarious nature of employment and suboptimal working conditions for employed youth also holds relevance for the unemployed and inactive segment, potentially influencing their motivation to seek employment.

Recent data on NEETs, updated to 2020, reveal that Tuscany had 86 000 individuals classified as NEETs within the 15-29 age range. The increase of 7 000 individuals compared to 2019 is attributed to a rise in the 15-24 age group, while the number within the target group of 25-29-year-olds decreased from 37 000 to 36 000 individuals.

In contrast to the regional reverse U-shaped trend observed from 2009 to 2019, the province of Livorno consistently reported values higher than the regional average almost every year. Conversely, Grosseto has exhibited an upward trend in the rate, beginning in 2016, sharply deviating from the overall regional pattern. Lastly, values for the province of Siena fluctuate around the regional trend.

Despite the exclusion of unemployed individuals from the NEET definition, the proportion of NEETs in the provinces of Livorno and Grosseto were notably high compared to other provinces in the central regions of Italy. The impact of the pandemic was particularly pronounced in the Grosseto area, where the percentage of NEETs increased among individuals in the 25-34 age group, while it remained unchanged for those in the 15-24 age group.

Internship environment in Italy – general overview

Regional Disparities in Internship Activation

According to the Third Report of Monitoring on Extracurricular Traineeships⁴, between 2019 and 2021 the centre of Italy (where Tuscany is located) recorded the lowest level of internships in the peninsula, corresponding to 17.8%, compared to the North (55.7%) and to the South of Italy (20.3%); only the islands recorded a lower percentage of 6.3%. More specifically, the central region of Tuscany activated 4.1% of internships versus Lazio (9.4%), Marche (2.9%), and Umbria (1.4%).

Trends of job placement after internship

Placement rates are substantially similar, especially when looking at 6-month rates, for the northern and central regions, which record placements of around 50%.

Once again, it is in the North and especially in the Centre that traineeships show their greatest effectiveness, i.e. receiving job positions close to the end of internships or right after them, especially when first contracts are signed by the same employers that hosted the experiences. More generally, among the traineeships that record the activation of an employment or a parasubordinate contract in the first 31 days after their conclusion, in almost 7 out of 10 cases

⁴ L'Agenzia nazionale per le politiche attive del lavoro. (2022). TERZO RAPPORTO DI MONITORAGGIO NAZIONALE IN MATERIA DI TIROCINI EXTRACURRICULARI. See: <https://www.anpal.gov.it/documents/552016/587068/terzo-rapporto-monitoraggio.pdf/1e0b83df-4a4f-5449-b60e-490e0ab286d7?t=1669813130511#:~:text=Il%20volume%20complessivo%20di%20tirocini,del%20%2D3%2C9%25>

(69%) it has been a contract activated by the same employer that hosted the traineeship experience. This percentage drops to 56.4% at 6 months from the conclusion when the exposure to a longer job search time is likely to be reflected on a wider range of potential employers, professional fields, and work contexts.

Among the characteristics of the apprenticeship relevant for job placement, the duration of the experience takes on a further significant connotation. Shorter experiences (up to 3 months) present lower placement rates (38.5%) and a rather marginal percentage of transformations of the experience into an employment contract (14.1%). Those of medium-short duration, between 4 and 6 months, are those with the most numerous employment outcomes, i.e. up to 56.2% of job placements and 35.9% of transformations with the same employer. In the future, INTERCEPT should take this information into consideration for a more effective implementation of the programme.

Reimbursement of internships in Italy

A last important aspect is in regard to reimbursement. In Italy, employers must provide an allowance for any extracurricular traineeship. This sum is established by the Regional Administration and it can be between EUR 300 and EUR 800 per month. In Tuscany the minimum amount is EUR 500. For curricular traineeships, i.e. those required by universities as part of their training, reimbursement is not mandatory, even though the region of Tuscany opens yearly calls where host organisations can apply for regional co-funding of EUR 300 if they decide to pay at least EUR 500 gross per month to students aged between 18 and 32 who are completing curricular traineeships in the academic year of reference.

Lessons learned

Navigating Challenges: A Journey of Collaboration and Adaptation

The successful implementation of any project is often accompanied by a myriad of challenges and unforeseen bottlenecks. In the context of the INTERCEPT pilot programme in Italy, the comprehensive evaluation reveals four distinct phases marked by notable obstacles. These hurdles, spanning from legal constraints to bureaucratic delays and challenges in aligning institutional priorities, threatened the seamless execution of the project (for more detailed description, see section 3.4). However, through a dedicated commitment to open dialogue and the implementation of strategic mitigation measures, the collaboration between Anci Toscana⁵ and ARTI⁶ not only overcame these impediments but also evolved into a clearer and smoother partnership. This narrative unfolds across the following four crucial phases, each marked by its unique set of challenges and the collaborative solutions employed to ensure the realization of the pilot scheme in Tuscany.

In the dynamic landscape of the INTERCEPT pilot implementation in Italy, the encountered challenges provided invaluable insights and opportunities for growth. Through open dialogue, strategic mitigation measures, and a commitment to collaboration, Anci Toscana and ARTI successfully navigated legal constraints, bureaucratic delays, and alignment issues. The evolution from initial bottlenecks to a smoother partnership underscores the resilience and adaptability of the project's stakeholders. The lessons learned from the challenges outlined below emphasize the importance of proactive communication, a clear delineation of responsibilities, and flexibility in project timelines

Tailored approaches: A critical lesson derived from the INTERCEPT pilot implementation involves the recognition that the design and execution of outreach activities, along with proactive measures, must be tailored to the specific legal and contextual nuances of each country. The experience in Italy underscores the inadequacy of a one-size-fits-all approach, particularly in navigating legal agreements and addressing challenges unique to the region. The intricate interplay of legal frameworks, as highlighted in the Italian case, emphasizes the necessity for a nuanced and adaptable strategy. Future initiatives should prioritize a thorough understanding of local legal landscapes, ensuring that outreach activities and proactive measures are thoughtfully crafted to align seamlessly with the legal requirements of each

⁵ The Regional Association of Municipalities of Tuscany, also referred to as 'Anci Toscana', is a non-profit association. Institutional relations, representation, production and provision of services, technical assistance and support, conferences and training, planning: Anci Toscana works to create an 'assisted and facilitated' connection between member municipalities and development opportunities.

⁶ ARTI is Tuscan Regional Employment Service.

participating country. This tailored approach is fundamental for achieving success in similar cross-national pilot programmes, promoting effective collaboration and overcoming jurisdiction-specific obstacles.

Flexibility in project planning: The need for adjustments in the project timeline, such as extending internship activation periods, highlights the importance of building flexibility in project planning. Adaptable schedules can accommodate unforeseen challenges and contribute to the overall success of an initiative.

Continuous monitoring and adaptation: The need for ongoing monitoring, as evident in reporting challenges to higher authorities, highlights the importance of continuous evaluation and adaptation. Regular assessments can identify emerging issues and allow for timely adjustments to ensure a project's overall success.

Communication and collaboration: Effective communication and collaboration stand out as pivotal lessons from these scenarios. Clear and transparent communication is universally essential in any collaborative project. Regular dialogue helps align expectations and prevents any misunderstandings that may hinder progress. The successful resolution of issues through collaborative problem-solving and open discussions demonstrates the value of a cooperative approach.

3.2. Relevance

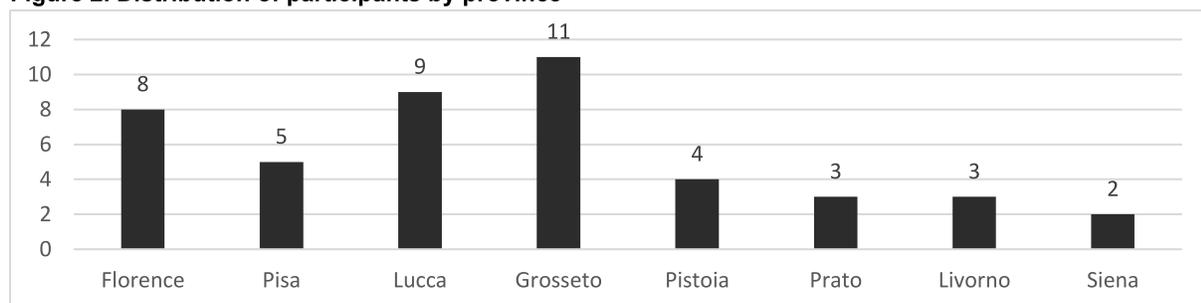
Relevance to the context

An assessment of the project's relevance to the needs of beneficiaries is crucial in understanding how well objectives align with the challenges faced by NEETs and the expectations of employers. This structured approach involves examining specific facets to comprehensively gauge alignment.

Regarding NEETs, the project's efficacy in targeting the relevant group is a critical aspect. This involves assessing how well the project addresses the specific needs and characteristics of NEETs.

The group of participants that were included in the INTERCEPT project covers 45 people from eight different provinces in Tuscany. The distribution of the population between the provinces is represented in Figure 2. It shows that the majority of the population was from the provinces of Grosseto, Lucca, and Florence (11, 9, and 8 participants accordingly), whereas the provinces with the least participants include Siena, Livorno, and Prato (2, 3, 3 participants accordingly). When it comes to sex distribution between participants, the majority of the population was male (55%) while 45% were female. This shows a slightly larger representation of males to females in the pilot contrary to the overall population of NEETs in Tuscany (where females account for 58.5% of all NEETs).

Figure 2. Distribution of participants by province



Source: Compiled by the authors

Note: N = 45

However, when it comes to the education level of the participants, the level of education claimed by the participants aligns with the analysis of the region. A large majority (60%) of the participants have a Bachelor's degree or higher, while the rest of the population has an upper secondary education (24%), a lower secondary education (5%), or other post-secondary school (2%).

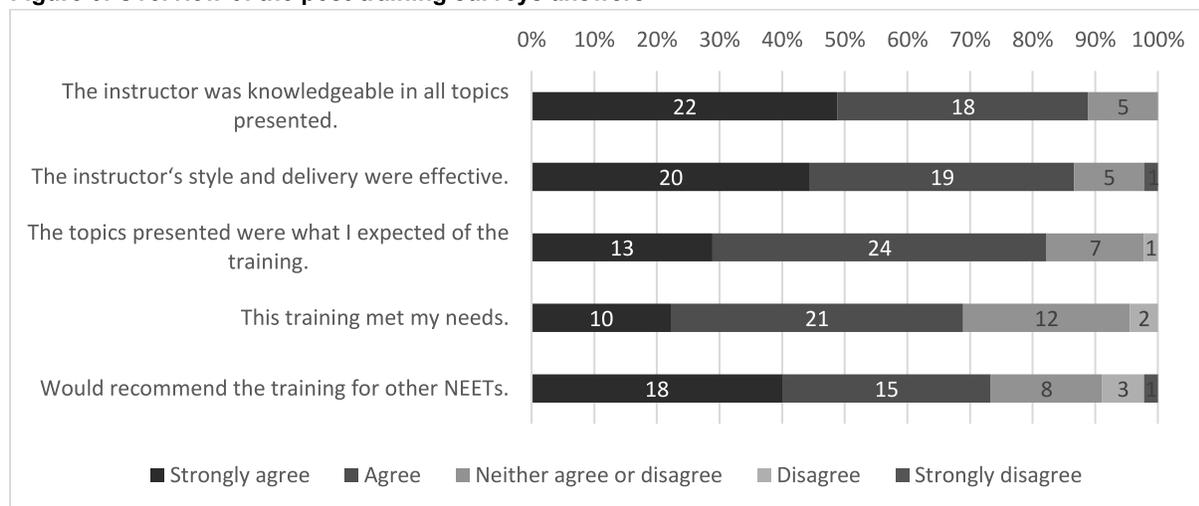
Also, according to the analysis of the region, half of NEETs are registered at a regional PES. That is to some extent representative of the covered group of participants, 35% had never been registered before participating in the project and 12% of them did not know the answer to the question. Considering the outcomes of the analysis, where the majority of NEETs usually do not register at PES, **the decision to offer enrolment in the pilot programme regardless of registration at PES during their application to the project is a reasonable and appropriate solution.** The cultural aspects which may imply some lack of trust or stigma regarding the institution or insufficient motivation to officially register as unemployed might suggest that providing participation opportunities to NEETs outside of PES can overcome these barriers and reach a broader population of targeted young people.

Relevance to the beneficiaries (NEETs)

Satisfaction with the training

In gauging NEETs' satisfaction with the training, the assessment differentiates between the perceived effectiveness of general competencies, soft skills, and those specific to green jobs. The participants filled in surveys before and after receiving the training. Comparing these results can help assess the beliefs and expectations of NEETs regarding the training and their experiences after having participated in the online course. The experiences of the participants regarding the training could be considered rather positive. In the eyes of the group surveyed, the instructor of the course was knowledgeable in all topics presented (Figure 3) and the style and delivery of the training's contents were effective.

Figure 3. Overview of the post-training surveys answers



Source: Compiled by the authors

Note: N = 45

Although a vast majority of the group had no issues accessing the online course (nearly 86%), many of them highlighted that they would prefer the course to be in person. That was particularly expressed in the surveys conducted after the training.

The NEET participants who engaged in the training conveyed a consensus regarding the format and delivery of the course, specifically addressing the limitations of the online, recorded format. One participant expressed a preference for live training, acknowledging its more stimulating nature, but understood the decision to use recorded sessions. Another participant echoed this sentiment, noting that their least favourite aspect was the asynchronous mode, which led to a loss of direct interaction with the lecturer. Similarly, a third participant appreciated the simplicity and clarity with which the topics were covered, making them accessible even to those outside the industry. However, they too felt that the absence of real-time interaction with the lecturer was a significant drawback, particularly in instances where such

engagement would have been beneficial. These reflections collectively highlighted a desire for more interactive and live elements in online training courses to enhance the learning experience.

The preference for in-person training was augmented by the possibility of asking questions, a potentially higher focus and interest in the topics covered, or a general preference of on-site learning. However, the issue of commuting was highlighted in regard to internships, where a lack of efficient public transportation was mentioned on many occasions. Therefore, it might be worth considering providing an option for participants to choose either in-person or online training based on the means available to NEETs.

Despite the challenges, the remote format of the green training helped participants to bypass logistical and scheduling issues, enabling them to begin their job placements immediately after completing the 25-hour course. The training's remote delivery, which was specifically targeted at applicants already paired with a hosting company for a green job placement, resulted in a notably low dropout rate in the Italian pilot. There was only one dropout after the 25-hour training and two others due to certified health problems.

Considering the duration of the training, most of the participants (69%) agreed or strongly agreed that the length of the course was adequate. However, the rest of the respondents either expressed that the training was too long or would have preferred to attain it during their internships.

From the responses of the NEETs, it could be concluded that the training was considered beneficial and positive. That could be derived from the fact that 82% of the group agreed or strongly agreed that the topics presented overlapped with what they had expected before participation. Moreover, nearly 69% of the respondents claimed that the training met their needs. This number might be surprising since even more of those surveyed stated that they would recommend the training to other NEETs (73%).

This shows an interesting notion regarding the training since a great group of respondents highlighted the general importance of the topics covered and their applicability to their everyday lives.

The NEET participants who attended the training shared insights into their learning experiences, focusing particularly on the relevance and impact of the topics covered. One participant appreciated the range of interesting topics addressed during the training, which provoked thoughtful consideration about the current environmental and climate situation. Another participant found the content not only engaging but also clearly and effectively presented, emphasizing the importance of informing and raising awareness about climate change. This need was highlighted against a backdrop of insufficient proactive measures from both grassroots and higher levels, as well as prevailing denialism around these issues. Additionally, a participant noted the utility of learning about various energy sources and their environmental impacts, acknowledging that while these might not be the primary skills required for a job, they are valuable in a broader, transversal context. These reflections underscore the training's effectiveness in providing comprehensive environmental education and its relevance in today's climate-conscious world.

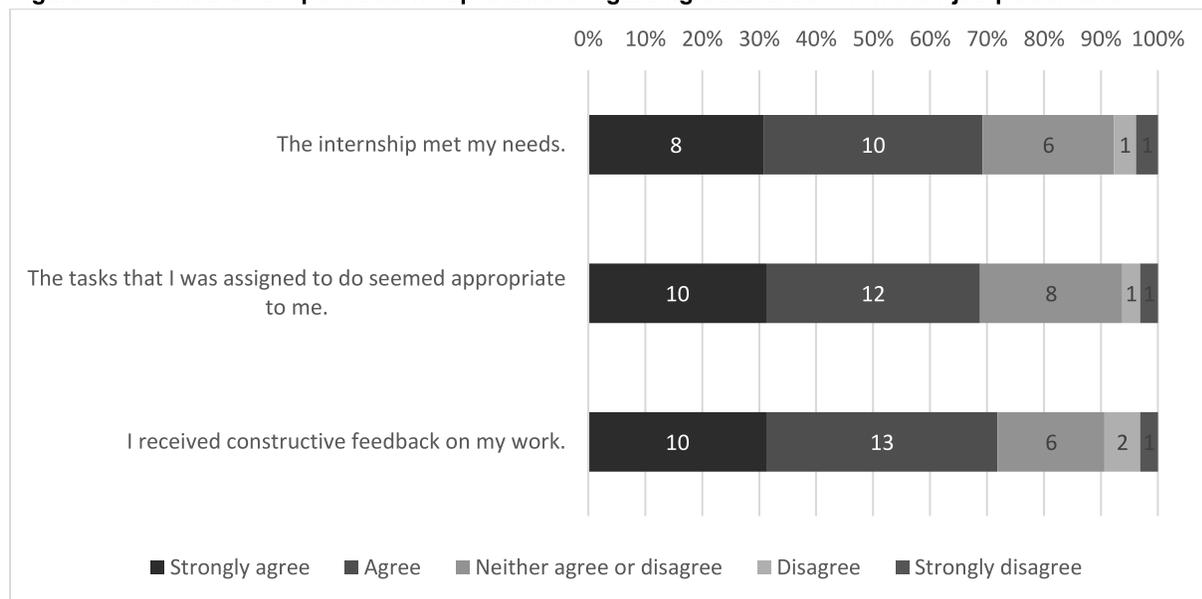
As presented above, the participants appreciated the up-to-date knowledge regarding sustainability, and ecological transition, and saw the benefit of being aware of ecological struggles and issues that modern society is facing.

Satisfaction with the internship

Similarly, the assessment of NEETs' satisfaction with internship outcomes delves into the practical application of acquired skills in real-world work settings.

Overall, after the internship, 69% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that the work placement met their needs (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Overview of the post-internship answers regarding satisfaction with their job placements



Source: Compiled by the authors

Note: N = 32, N the internship met my needs = 26

To some extent, it could be explained that during the internships participants perceived their assigned tasks to be appropriate (69%) and received constructive feedback (72%). Moreover, 66% of the participants appreciated their internships and claimed that they had learned a lot in its duration.

Barriers and challenges

A majority of the respondents were content with the length of their internships (nearly 67%). However, this does not correspond with some of the comments that were indicated in the open-ended answers and interviews.

Duration of the traineeship. 3 months is short - maybe 6 months or more. Left work half done or not started due to time constraints.

The voices that claimed the length of the internship was inadequate might be explained due to the fact that internships in Italy usually last around six months whereas work placements in the INTERCEPT project lasted only half of that time.

Moreover, another issue that was brought to light during the interviews and surveys was transportation. The internships, although in close proximity to the participants' provinces, were positioned outside of walking distance and must have required the use of other means of transportation. That turned out to be an issue for some of the NEETs, especially those without personal vehicles and those who did not have access to a well-functioning public transport system. When asked about the challenges faced during the pilot, one of the interviewees stated that *"getting around by public transport as I was without a car"*.

The NEET participants who partook in internships highlighted commuting as a significant challenge during their experiences. One interviewee specifically mentioned the burden of travel, facing three hours of daily commuting to reach the training location. This issue was further underscored by an additional comment from the interviewer, who noted that many internships were located in inconvenient places for the participants. This often compelled them to undertake lengthy journeys using public transport. These insights collectively point to the logistical difficulties faced by participants, particularly in terms of accessibility and the added strain of extensive travel to internship sites.

It is also worth highlighting that another INTERCEPT participant in the municipality of Reggello dropped out precisely because of travel issues. This challenge is worth taking into account in the future to prevent dropouts the programme and to ensure the most effective experience possible of NEETs.

Relevance to the beneficiaries (employers)

Satisfaction with the training

There were several challenges and successes associated with finding pre-trained individuals for a project. The notion that finding a pre-trained person is not easy underscores the scarcity of individuals with ready-made skills and qualifications for specific roles.

However, the project served up a solution to this difficulty by providing an avenue to connect with individuals possessing some level of training. This approach acknowledged the value of identifying and nurturing individuals who may not have been fully pre-trained but possessed a foundational level of knowledge or skills that could be built upon. The project's responses, as indicated in the quotes, seems to be a mixed bag. On one hand, there has been success in connecting with a person who is trained, suggesting that the initiative has indeed facilitated engagement with individuals prepared for the workforce. On the other hand, there has been the recognition that not all participants in the project have been equally well trained. This duality raises questions about the consistency and effectiveness of the training provided within the project and emphasizes the importance of ensuring a more uniform skill set among participants.

The companies participating in the project provided mixed feedback regarding how well the project met their needs. One company acknowledged that the project partially met their expectations, as they experienced varied levels of training among participants. They noted that while one girl was well-trained for her specific role, other participants in the project did not exhibit the same level of preparedness. Another employer, who had eagerly joined the initiative, echoed this sentiment. Despite selecting a couple of candidates, they observed a generally low level of preparation among them. These responses highlighted a discrepancy in the training effectiveness and preparedness of participants, indicating a need for more consistent and comprehensive training approaches within the project.

These notions shed light on the challenges of finding pre-trained individuals while also highlighting the positive impact of the project in bridging this gap. The project's effectiveness appears to vary among participants, underscoring the need for continuous evaluation and improvement in training methodologies to ensure a more standardized and successful outcome for all involved.

Satisfaction with the internships

Employers highlighted the valuable role that the project played in opening channels between NEETs and employers, particularly in introducing participants to potential new opportunities. The supervisor's efforts to convey entry channels into public administration reflected a commitment to broadening the perspectives of interns, who may not have initially considered the possibility of working in public bodies. This effort has been particularly crucial, given the common lack of awareness about the specific professionals sought by public administrations and the avenues available for entering the public sector job market.

The emphasis on expanding CV/profiles and knowledge of the participants aligned with the broader goal of equipping them for future employment opportunities. The project's benefits, as indicated by employer satisfaction, lay not only in providing theoretical knowledge but also in offering practical opportunities. The internship experience served as a bridge between academic learning and real-world applications, allowing participants to put their university education into practice.

Furthermore, companies highlighted a significant outcome where the participant, after the internship, felt more motivated to complete registration for a job, possibly as an agronomist. This reflected a tangible impact on the

individual's career trajectory, with newfound enthusiasm to pursue opportunities in both public and private institutions. The project, in this regard, not only imparted practical skills but also instilled motivation and a clearer career path for participants.

"Participation in the internship helped the participant to put into practice what she studied in her university education. Practical opportunities in that area. After her participation in the project, the participant was more motivated to complete her registration to the country register for her job (in order to be able to carry out this activity in a public or private institution.)"

"The work the participant did, the report he wrote, is still useful and relevant to their service."

These statements indicate that the project, from employers' perspectives, successfully addressed the gap in knowledge and awareness regarding employment. The focus on practical experience, expanding participants' profiles, and motivating them to take concrete steps towards professional registration reflected the project's effectiveness in preparing interns for future employment opportunities in their chosen fields. This was not only a win for the interns but also for the employers who benefited from more skilled and motivated individuals entering the workforce.

Employer alignment with the NEETs

The experiences of employers involved in the internship project reveal several positive and negative aspects related to the alignment of the employers' scope of organization and the participating interns. The feedback from companies participating in the project highlights challenges in aligning participant interests with the activities offered by the associations. One company pointed out a potential mismatch in the case of a participant who joined with a keen interest in environmental activities. While the association did its best to accommodate this interest, it was acknowledged that there might have been other associations more relevant to the participant's environmental focus. This situation was described as a "reductive choice for the boy," suggesting limitations in the range of options available that closely matched his interests and skills. Another company emphasized the difficulty in finding suitable tasks for the participant, rather than any issues with the association's core activities. These insights reflect a broader challenge in the project: effectively matching participants with projects and associations that align closely with their specific interests and skill sets, ensuring a more fulfilling and relevant experience.

The common thread in both quotes is the difficulty employers faced in finding meaningful tasks for the interns. In the first case, it is related to the challenge of aligning a participant's interests with the available activities. In the second case, it is more about finding appropriate tasks within the broader framework of the association's work, despite the participant being well-suited to the organization's initiatives.

In the experiences shared by companies participating in the project, there was a notable instance of adaptability and proactive placement. An employer interviewed a girl for a particular position, but upon recognizing that she was not a suitable fit for that role, they advised her to join the INTERCEPT project and undertake an internship with them instead. This decision was influenced by the company's shift towards sustainability, and the participant was placed in a team dealing specifically with this issue. This scenario underscores the employer's resourcefulness and flexibility in identifying a more appropriate role for the participant, demonstrating a commitment to finding a placement that aligns with both the participant's capabilities and the company's evolving focus on sustainability. This approach reflects a keen understanding of the need to match individual strengths and interests with the right opportunities within the organization.

The common thread is the difficulty employers faced in finding meaningful tasks for the interns. It is related to the challenge of aligning a participant's interests with available activities or is more about finding appropriate tasks within the broader framework of the association's work, despite the participant being well-suited to an organization's sustainability initiatives.

In an analytical context, these experiences underscore the importance of thoughtful participant-employer matching in internship programmes. It highlights the need for clear communication between employers and project organizers to ensure that participants are placed in roles where they can contribute meaningfully and align with the organization's goals.

Reflections on the length of the internship

One of the main challenges faced by employers participating in the INTERCEPT project is primarily related to the short duration of the internships. A recurring theme has been that the limited time frame, in this case, three months, poses significant constraints on the depth of exploration and the overall effectiveness of the internship experience.

Companies participating in the project consistently identified the limited duration of the internships as a significant issue. They pointed out that the short time frame did not allow for an in-depth exploration of various aspects, a constraint they viewed as the primary challenge of the program. This limited duration was seen as potentially penalizing for trainees, with a three-month period being notably brief compared to the more standard six-month internships that typically offer better learning experiences and align with industry norms for remuneration and engagement.

Further, it was noted that the short duration of the internships made it challenging to fully realize the investment in training. A period of three months was deemed insufficient for interns to effectively integrate into the workflow and contribute meaningfully, with the suggestion that at least six months would be necessary to recuperate the resources and efforts expended in training. This perspective underscores the need for a longer duration in internships to ensure a mutually beneficial experience for both employers and interns, allowing for a more comprehensive learning opportunity and a better return on the investment of training and integrating new personnel.

The notion of allowing for a longer placement period is grounded in the understanding that it takes time for a young person, potentially unfamiliar with workplace dynamics, to acclimate to a company's culture and workflow. The longer duration is seen not only as beneficial for the intern but also for the employer, providing ample time to assess the capabilities and fit of an intern within the organizational context.

In an analytical context, these quotes highlight the tension between the desire for comprehensive training and the practical constraints of a short internship period. While the project may have successfully facilitated training, the short duration raises concerns about the depth of the learning experience and the ability of interns to fully integrate into the workplace. In future iterations of the project, considerations for a more extended internship period could be crucial for enhancing the overall impact and effectiveness of the programme for both employers and interns.

3.3. Effectiveness

Extent to which intervention improves employment opportunities of young NEETs aged 25-29

From the perspective of NEETs, the project has played a role in expanding their horizons and creating new opportunities. Participants, who may have been previously unemployed or had limited exposure to certain fields, have experienced a shift in their career aspirations. The interviews highlight instances of individuals exploring new fields, such as public administration or pursuing state exams to become agronomists.

The acquisition of practical skills and interpersonal competencies during the internship not only broadened their professional capabilities but also translated into tangible employment outcomes, including fixed-term contracts. One participant described the experience as very effective, leading to ongoing collaborations with their employer even after the internship concluded. Another participant also found the internship highly effective, as it culminated in securing a fixed-term contract with the organization where they interned. The continued collaborations between participants and employers underscore the sustained impact of the project on their employment trajectories.

The employer's perspective, as reflected in the quote below, indicates a positive impact on employment opportunities. The successful placement of a project participant into a fixed-term contract demonstrates the tangible benefits for employers.

The project participant was a really good person, he helped with the calculation of energy tax credits, quite laborious: he looked at bills, made certain considerations, used Excel programmes.. In fact, the project participant got a fixed-term contract with them.

The participant's contribution in handling energy tax credits showcases the practical skills gained through the project, contributing to the employer's operations. This not only addressed business needs but also highlights the potential for long-term collaborations between employers and project participants, fostering a positive outcome for both parties.

This perspective from the Public Employment Service emphasizes the need for improvement in the matching process. While acknowledging the positive outcomes, there's a call for more refined filters in the matching process. The suggestion includes incorporating criteria such as educational background, language skills, and digital competencies to ensure a more targeted match between participants and available positions.

The participating companies in the project expressed insights on the operational aspects and potential improvements. One company noted the process where they sign up and propose a position that is then sent to participants without a filter on essential criteria like educational background, language, and digital skills. They suggested that companies should have the ability to specify the basic skills required for their projects, making these prerequisites clear to potential applicants. Another company reflected on the project's untapped potential, attributing it to the limited time available for soliciting responses from young people. They believed that allowing companies to apply outside of the scheduled application period would have led to a greater response from the youth, who were deterred by the unfavourable seasonal timing and the restricted number of company applications. These perspectives highlight the need for clearer skill requirements and a more inclusive application process to enhance participation and outcomes.

This recommendation reflects a commitment to enhancing the effectiveness of the project by aligning the skills and profiles of NEETs more closely with the requirements of participating companies. Additionally, the commentary on the potential for higher success with more time for soliciting responses from young people highlights the importance of timing and outreach strategies in maximizing the impact of the project.

Extent to which intervention enhances participants' activation and skills relevant to the green economy

The surveys provided to NEETs at different stages of the pilot allowed to assess the extent to which the intervention has enhanced participants' activation and skills relevant to the green economy. By comparing the responses from different stages of the pilot, it was possible to see how the participants' skills and interest in a career in the green economy changed over time (Figure 5).

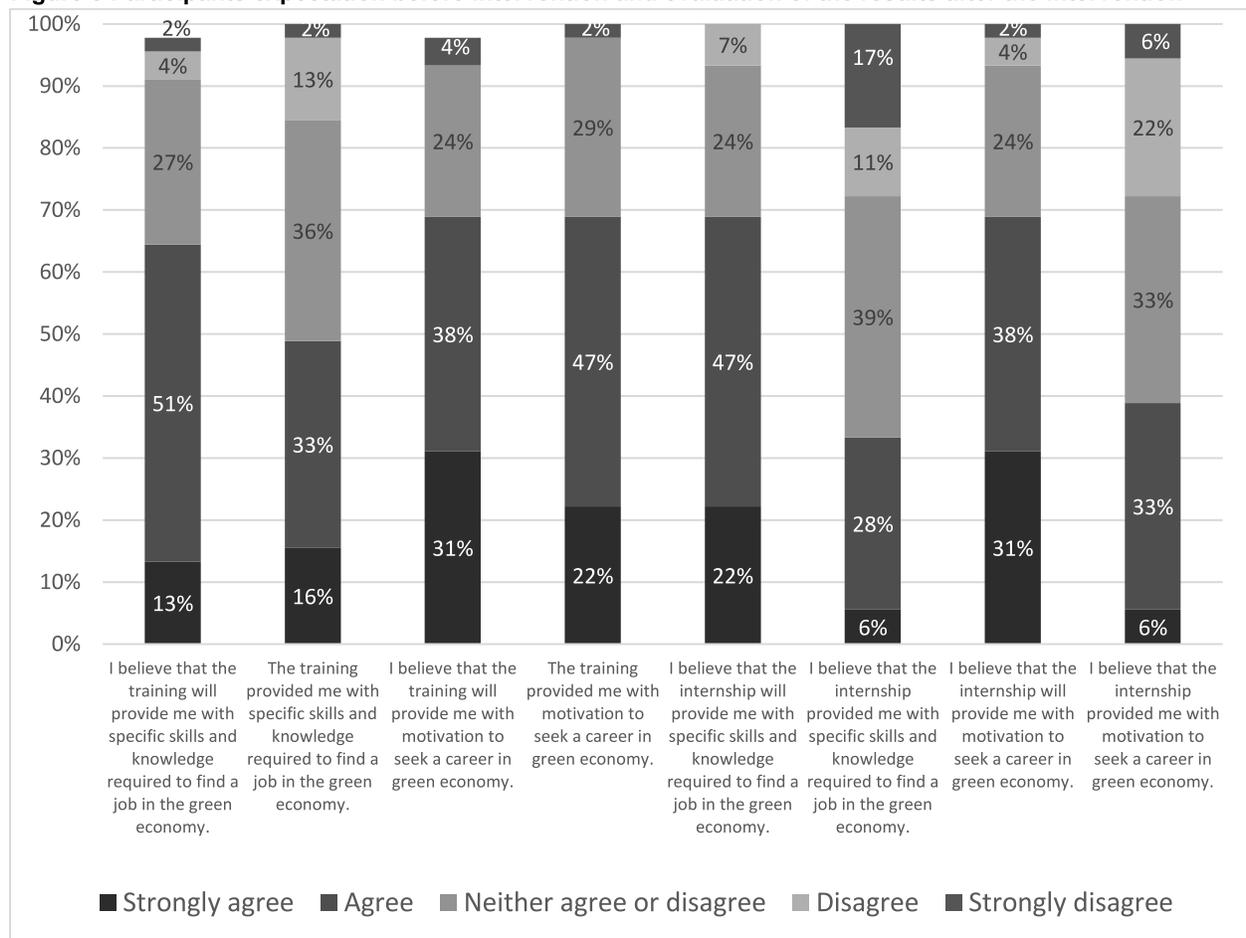
A significant finding is that 64.44% of participants either agree or strongly agree that the training provided them with specific skills and knowledge required for a job in the green economy. This indicates a positive impact of the program on skill development. However, post-internship, only 33.33% of participants agree that they acquired specific skills and knowledge relevant to the green economy, suggesting that while the internship component was somewhat effective, it might need improvements.

In terms of motivation towards a career in the green economy, the survey results show a discrepancy between participants' initial beliefs and their experiences. Initially, 68.89% of participants believed that the training would motivate them towards such a career, but post-training, only 38.89% felt motivated. A similar pattern is observed with the internship component, where initial belief in its motivational potential did not fully translate into actual motivation post-internship.

The overall impact of the program, as suggested by the data, reveals a gap between participants' expectations and their actual experiences. There was a notable optimism and high expectation from participants in the pre-intervention phase across all questions, but these were not fully met in reality.

Conclusively, while the program has been moderately successful in imparting relevant skills and knowledge for the green economy, there is clear evidence of a discrepancy between what participants expected and what they experienced. This indicates a need for improvement in both the training and internship phases. Future iterations of the program might benefit from incorporating more engaging content, hands-on experiences, or mentorship opportunities to sustain participants' interest and motivation. Given the varied backgrounds of the participants, a more tailored approach to training might also be necessary, involving personalized feedback, differentiated learning paths, and practical applications of skills. These insights should guide future enhancements to maximize the program's effectiveness in preparing participants for careers in the green economy.

Figure 5 Participants expectation before intervention and evaluation of the results after the intervention



Source: Compiled by the authors
Note: N pre-training = 45; N post-internship = 32

INTERCEPT as a channel between green economy employers and potential employees?

From the employers' perspective, the quotes highlight the successful creation of channels between NEETs and employers, particularly in public administration. This represents an essential outcome as it addresses the common oversight by those entering the job market, who may not consider opportunities within public bodies. The efforts made by the supervisor to convey these channels demonstrate a commitment to broadening the perspectives of the trainees.

In this specific case, a channel was opened between NEETs and public bodies. Often those entering the job market do not think about the possibility of working in public bodies. The supervisor tried to convey what the channels are to enter public administration, which the trainee had not considered before.

The feedback from companies participating in the project sheds light on the effectiveness of the initiative in creating channels for engagement with green economy employers and beyond. They reported the successful establishment of a network that extended past the green economy, facilitating substantial professional relationships. This network effect was evident in participants not only finding opportunities within the organization but also leveraging these connections to secure additional work with clients. Such outcomes demonstrate the project's ability to not only foster direct employment opportunities in the green economy but also to create broader professional networks with expansive possibilities.

One key challenge noted was aligning the NEET participant's role with the association's regular activities. In instances where the association's work differed from the INTERCEPT project's environmental theme, participants did not directly contribute to regular activities, but played distinct roles. This situation highlighted the need for adaptability and flexibility in integrating NEETs into different organizational contexts, with a focus on finding suitable tasks that matched their unique skills and interests.

Despite these challenges, employers acknowledged that the project successfully met their needs, particularly in fostering connections with participants. One employer highlighted the significant benefit of getting to know two participating girls who had a pre-existing interest in merging artistic themes with the environment. This connection suggests that the project was effective in bringing together individuals with aligned interests and goals.

Additionally, the internships were effective in allowing participants to apply their university education in practical settings. This bridging of theoretical knowledge with real-world scenarios underscores the project's success in providing valuable, hands-on experience that complements academic learning. Overall, these insights from employers suggest that while there were challenges in aligning participant roles with organizational needs, the internships were effective in fostering meaningful connections and practical application of academic knowledge.

In the past, challenges were also noted, particularly in the previous recruitment of NEETs. Companies found it difficult to attract NEETs, especially from neighbouring villages, due to insufficient incentives.

In terms of participant involvement, there was positive feedback about the extent of engagement in the projects. Participants were involved in all stages, including participating in the organization's competitions, which provided them with exposure to public administration procedures. This comprehensive involvement indicates the project's success in offering participants a wide-ranging experience, contributing to their understanding and engagement in various professional contexts.

Despite these challenges, the engagement with NEETs has gone beyond the internships, as participants are now involved in various stages of projects and even participate in the organization's competitions, providing them with valuable insights into public administration procedures.

From the NEETs' perspective, the potential of the project is to create a useful and productive network of people. This statement underscores the importance of networking opportunities provided by the project, suggesting that it goes beyond skill development and employment, contributing to the establishment of valuable professional connections. **NEETs, through their engagement in the project, had the chance to build relationships that extend beyond the immediate context, potentially opening doors to various opportunities in the green economy and beyond.**

The project has proven successful in broadening the career horizons of NEETs, guiding them towards previously unexplored sectors such as public administration and stimulating their pursuit of state exams for enhanced opportunities in both public and private sectors. Tangible employment outcomes, notably the acquisition of fixed-term contracts, underscore the practical efficacy of the project in facilitating meaningful employment for participants.

The project's effectiveness in creating channels between NEETs and employers, especially in public administration, demonstrates its role in broadening participants' perspectives about potential career paths. Recommendations to refine incentives and outreach underscore the project's ongoing commitment to participant engagement and network creation.

Kirkpatrick Four-level Evaluation model

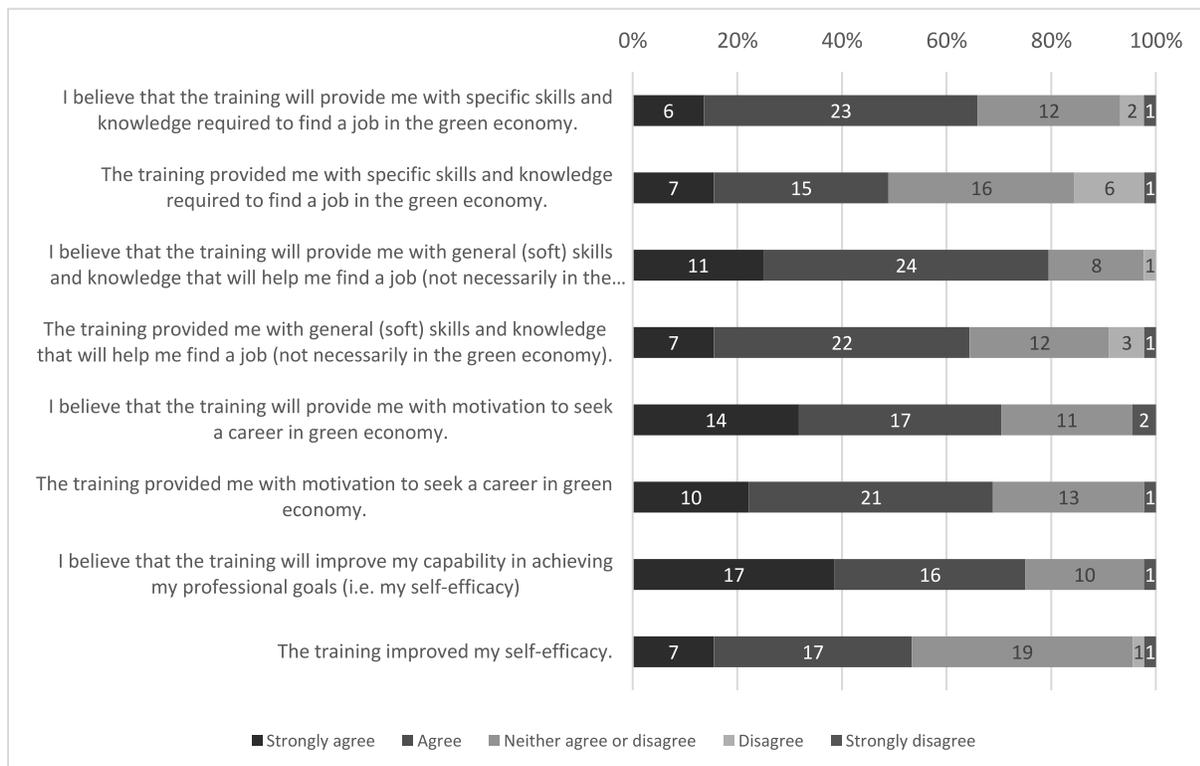
Further, the analysis of effectiveness is structured according to the first three levels of the Kirkpatrick Training Evaluation Model: reaction, learning and behaviour, and is based on survey and interview results.

Reaction

The reaction aspect evaluates if the participants deemed the training engaging, positive, and pertinent to their work roles. This was assessed by inquiring about their initial anticipations for the training and internship, and determining if these anticipations were fulfilled.

Before the training, over 64% of all participants agreed or strongly agreed that the training would provide them with specific skills and the knowledge required to find a job in the green economy (Figure 6). After training, 33% of participants continued to agree or strongly agree with this statement. However, when it came to the group that disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, the percentage of participants rose from nearly 7%, to nearly 28%. That might suggest that the contents of the training that were related to general knowledge required for a green job were not sufficient.

Figure 6. Overview of the pre-training and post-training survey answers



Source: Compiled by the authors

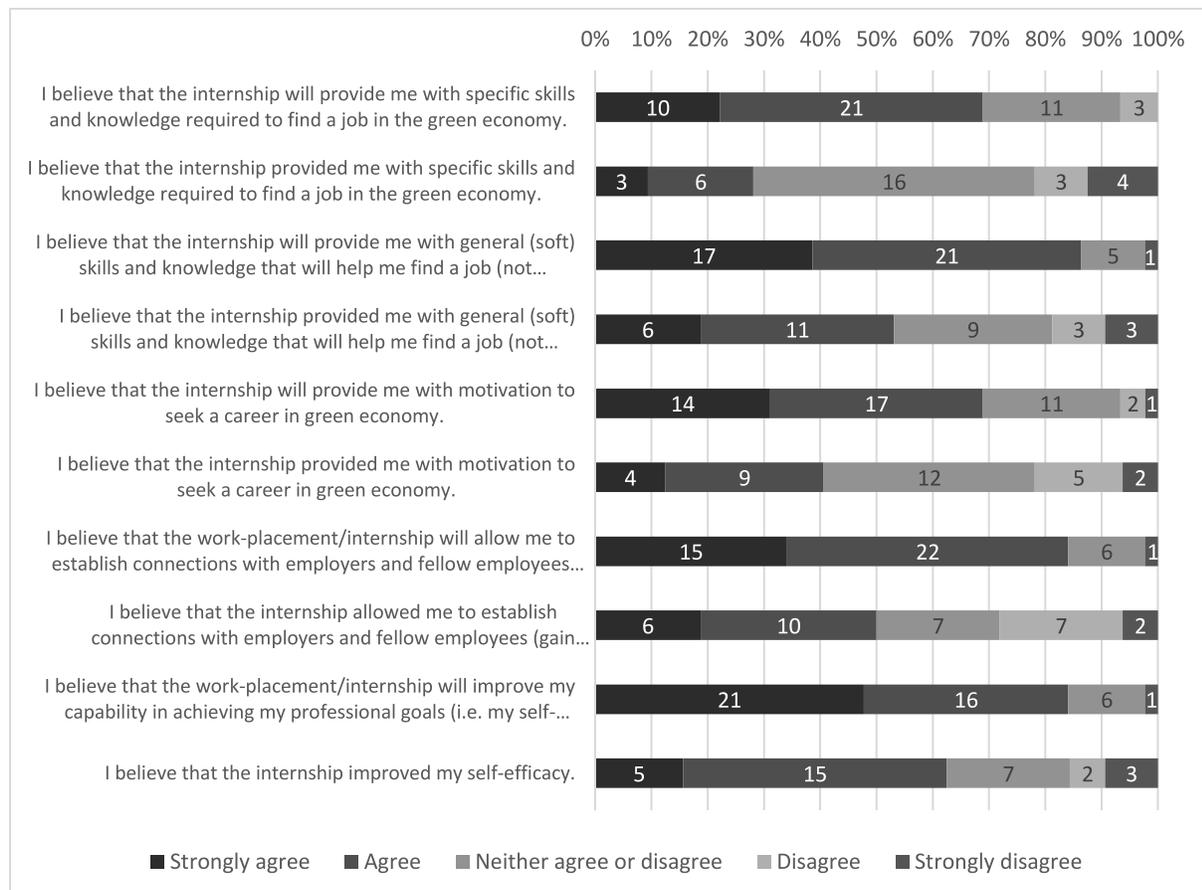
Note: N = 45

As much as 78% of the population expected that the training would provide them with general soft skills and knowledge. After the training the factual percentage that agreed that the training provided them with such skills dropped to 67%. Here, similarly to the specific skills and knowledge, but to a lesser extent, the group of participants that disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement increased from nearly 7% to nearly 9%. Generally, the section of the training dedicated to soft skills was considered “interesting” and “useful” by the participants which was expressed in their answers to the open questions of the survey.

When it comes to perceived capability in achieving one’s professional goals (i.e. self-efficacy) the expectations before the training were high since nearly 74% of the group agreed or strongly agreed with the statement while a vast majority of the rest (22%) did not have a clear view on the matter. The experiences in that regard noted a big drop, since after the training only nearly 61% agreed or strongly agreed that the training improved their self-efficacy. This shows a rather negative tendency, however, considering the theoretical nature of the training it might have been difficult for the participants to assess the outcomes of their training at that point in time.

The participants (NEETs) expressed great expectations regarding their upcoming internships. Most of the group (69%) claimed their belief that the internship would provide them with motivation to seek a career in the green economy (Figure 7). After the internship, the expressed motivation was lower than initially anticipated by the participants. A significant drop of 30% was noticed among the respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Figure 7. Overview of the pre-training and post-internship surveys' answers



Source: Compiled by the authors
 Note: N pre-training= 45; N post-internship=32

A positive attitude of the participants was expressed in establishing connections with employers and fellow employees i.e. social capital, and their self-efficacy. The group agreed or strongly agreed that the internship would be beneficial in these areas (82%, and 73% accordingly). After the internship, the respondents claimed that it did help them with gaining social capital and self-efficacy (32%, and 61% accordingly). **Although these numbers decreased, a great deal of additional comments from the surveys and the interviewees showed that gaining social capital was one of the most beneficial aspects of their internships.**

It's possible that the opportunities for the participants to engage in a professional setting and share experiences with colleagues are what led to their positive attitudes. Such experiences might have opened up new perspectives for the interns regarding their career choices. One of the interviewees elaborated that the social connections gained during the internship motivated the intern to pursue career choices related to a new area that the intern had not considered before.

The interviewees collectively underscored the diverse aspects of their experiences. One interviewee found value in being introduced to a new area of work, appreciating the opportunity to expand professional knowledge. Meanwhile, another NEET highlighted the social dimensions of the placement, cherishing moments shared with colleagues outside of work and the potential for future collaborations that emerged post-placement. In a similar vein, another person credited the experience with the formation of strong networks, which not only secured their current job position but also offered hope for future career opportunities. Complementing these perspectives, a comment from another interviewee reflected positively on the working environment, noting its friendliness and relaxed nature, along with the rewarding relationships established with colleagues, underscoring the importance of a supportive workplace atmosphere.

The abundance of these comments suggests taking into consideration the impact of social capital and being exposed to professionalism as important aspects in helping NEETs find jobs (in or out of the green economy).

In the host organisation, a NEET participant gained practical experience by implementing a waste separation project, delving into the intricacies of its functioning. The participant's experience was undeniably constructive and interesting, yet when reflecting on the initial questionnaire completed at the project's onset, one did not acknowledge engaging with the topics covered in the training. This disconnect suggests a disparity between the intended learning objectives and the perceived educational takeaways, indicating either a misalignment in the training content or a gap in the person's recognition of the covered material. This revelation prompted the participant to return to training to align with the content and topics covered in the project, showcasing a proactive approach to furthering expertise in green economy-related subjects.

The participants engaged in diverse activities. This multifaceted involvement sparked motivation to pursue a career in the green economy, a field the participants had not previously considered. One participant had engaged in a diverse array of activities, demonstrating an integrative approach to environmentalism that merged art, entertainment, and active ecological involvement. Her engagement spanned beyond passive pursuits, encompassing proactive roles in environmental conservation, highlighted by her participation in park maintenance and public awareness campaigns. This approach reflected a comprehensive grasp of environmentalism, integrating both aesthetic appreciation and practical engagement. Furthermore, her transition towards a career in the green economy, particularly through photography, signified a significant shift. Previously perceiving photography merely as a hobby, she came to recognize it as a viable profession within the green economy, illustrating the convergence of personal interests with sustainable career paths. This alignment emphasized the potential of harmonizing individual passions with the aims of environmental sustainability, thereby enriching personal fulfilment and contributing to the broader green economy narrative.

The project met the participant's needs and expectations, facilitated not only practical experience but also served as a catalyst for professional growth and a shift in career aspirations.

Learning

The assessment of the learning element in the Kirkpatrick model involved monitoring a shift in specific knowledge between the pre-intervention and mid-intervention phases. This specifically concentrated on understanding sustainable development goals and carbon footprints.

Regarding the participants' knowledge of sustainable development goals, the data reveals a notable shift from the pre-intervention to the mid-intervention stage (Table 3). It is encouraging to see that 71% of the participants improved their knowledge of SDGs, demonstrating a significant positive impact of the program in enhancing awareness and understanding of these crucial global objectives. However, there is a concern that 11% exhibited a decline in their knowledge, and for 9%, there was no detectable change. This mixed outcome suggests that while the majority benefitted from the program, a certain segment either did not engage effectively with the material or found it challenging to assimilate the information presented.

In terms of the participants' ability to comprehend and explain the concept of a carbon footprint, the results are somewhat similar but with a few key differences. A majority, 67%, showed improvement, which is a strong indicator of the program's effectiveness in imparting crucial environmental knowledge. However, a higher percentage, 18%, demonstrated a regression in their understanding, and for 4%, there was no change. This suggests a slightly less effective transmission of knowledge in this area compared to the SDGs.

Table 3 Participants' learning outcomes

	Knows sustainable development goals and can list some of them, change from pre-intervention to mid-intervention	Knows and can explain what carbon footprint is, change from pre-intervention to mid-intervention
Improved	71%	67%
Worse	11%	18%
No change	9%	4%

Source: Compiled by the authors from the participants' survey
N pre-training = 45; N post-internship = 32

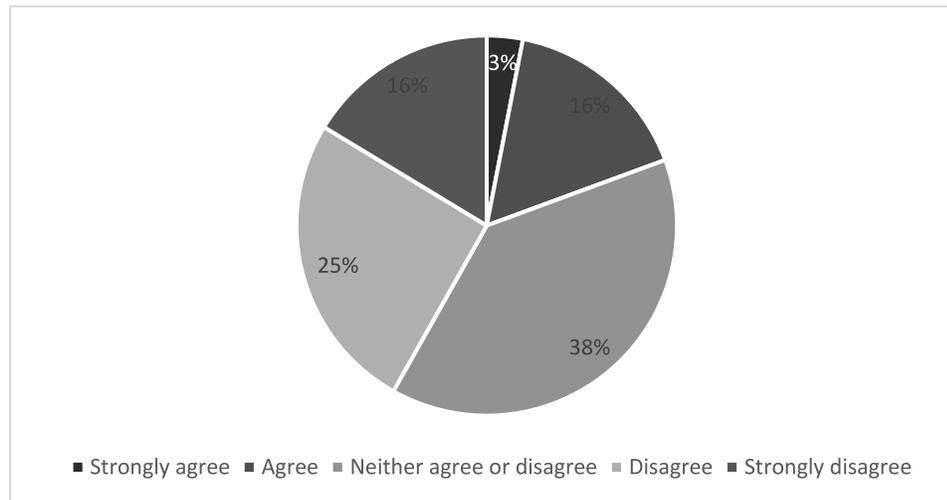
Overall, the results are very encouraging and underscore the program's potential in cultivating a well-informed and environmentally conscious workforce. With continued focus and improvement, the program is well-positioned to make an even greater impact in promoting sustainable practices and environmental stewardship among its participants.

Behaviour

The final aspect of the Kirkpatrick model to assess is behaviour, which examines whether the training genuinely influenced the participants and if they are utilizing the learned skills. This evaluation was conducted in the post-intervention survey, where participants were questioned about their ongoing use of the skills and networks they developed during the internship.

Although the participants to a positive extent enjoyed their internships and gained some relevant experience, it does bring to light their perception of the usefulness of the training in their work. Most of the respondents did not agree nor disagree whether they used specific skills and knowledge obtained during the training during the internship (44%) (Figure 8), while over 33% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

Figure 8. I have used the specific skills and knowledge acquired during the internship after the end of it.



Source: Compiled by the authors

Note: N = 32

The NEET participants shared varied perspectives on whether the training met their needs, particularly in relation to preparing them for tasks in the green economy. While the training did not always impart the necessary knowledge for specific tasks, it was noted that employers encouraged further self-education on topics related to the green economy. This proactive approach by employers highlights the training's role in sparking initial interest and learning in this field.

One interviewee mentioned that the project met their needs and expectations, as the company that eventually hired them encouraged continuous learning about green and renewable energy, as well as about the trade association. This implies that the training served as a foundation for further, more specialized learning within their professional role.

However, some feedback indicated that the training's utility was limited due to its general and short nature. It was pointed out that the course did not provide specific skills that are directly applicable in the labour market, nor did it equip participants with many tools for their internships in companies. Additionally, the training, while important for individual awareness and sensibility formation, was seen as having limited practical use in a job market described as unfair and inequitable. This feedback underscores the need for more specialized, in-depth training that directly aligns with labour market demands and the practical requirements of internships in the green economy sector.

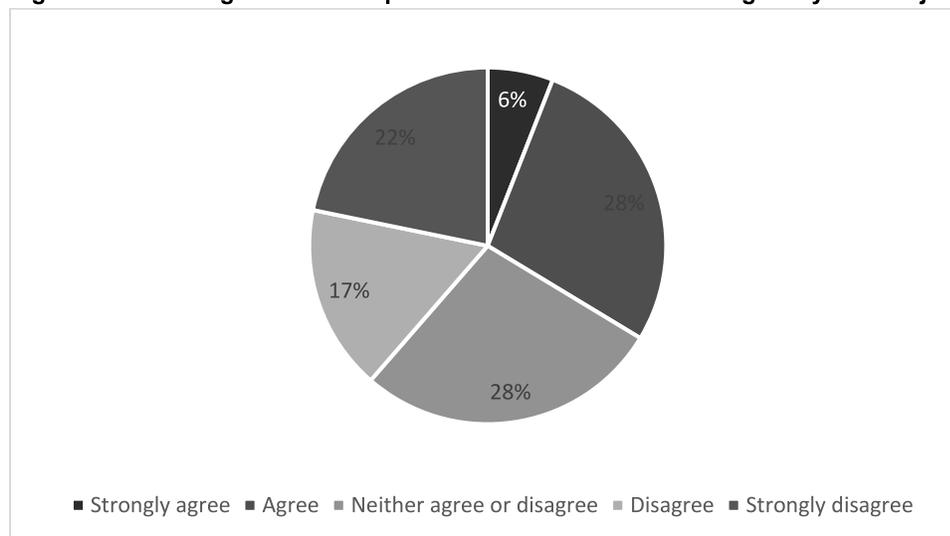
A critical facet that emerges from the narratives pertains to the alignment between the training curriculum and the practical experiences encountered by the NEET participants. The revelation that a participant did not recognize a correspondence between the questionnaire responses and subsequent project activities suggests a potential mismatch between the theoretical aspects covered in training and their practical applications in the field. **This misalignment signals an area for scrutiny and refinement in order to optimize the integration of theoretical knowledge and hands-on experiences, fostering a more cohesive and beneficial learning environment for the participants.**

This indicates a possible need for a deeper review of the training content, particularly if the program is to be implemented further. Given the diverse backgrounds of the NEET participants and the general nature of the course, it's important to explore more about how to effectively integrate the teaching of specific and soft skills, along with fundamental knowledge, ensuring their practical application during internships.

From those who are currently employed, voices regarding the relevance of the training in their current positions are greatly divided (Figure 9). Although nearly 29% of currently employed participants claim that they are using skills

acquired in the INTERCEPT training, the rest of the group either does not agree or disagrees with the statement (nearly 30%), or disagrees or strongly disagrees (nearly 43%).

Figure 9. I am using the skills acquired in the INTERCEPT training in my current job.



Source: Compiled by the authors

Note: N = 32

This might suggest adjusting the training to some extent, however, considering the vast scope of industries that might be covered under the term “Green jobs”, it might be difficult to generalize the training so that everyone, regardless of their backgrounds, can make use of the training. It might be worth considering the creation of different training courses based on the participants’ backgrounds and prior knowledge of the relevant topics.

Table 4. Main challenges considering the effectiveness of the pilot project

Challenge identified	Description of the challenge
Geographical constrains	The provinces of Siena and Grosseto alone would not have been sufficient to meet the project’s targets, so they decided to extend the programme to the entire region. Most importantly, they decided to extend the project additionally to companies that were not strictly connected to green economy issues, so as to activate a higher number of internships. However, this created dissatisfaction among some participants and frustration within those companies that were unable to meet the expectations of the NEETs. This aspect must be addressed with more attention in the future. On one hand, it’s reasonable to include in future initiatives those companies that aren’t entirely focused on the green economy, provided they are open to adopting green practices in their normal operations. On the other hand, it’s essential that these companies not only are willing but also have the requisite knowledge to effectively engage in such practices.
Timing of the outreach activities	The availability of seasonal employment became a critical factor affecting the activation of internships, as NEETs engaged in seasonal activities might have been less inclined to participate during this period. The potential impact of seasonal work on internship activations highlights the importance of aligning project timelines with the specific characteristics of the labour market. Future initiatives should consider these implications and strategize accordingly. This nuanced understanding of the temporal aspects of the labour market can significantly enhance the effectiveness of similar pilot programmes.

Contents of the training	Challenges have emerged concerning the perceived utility of training, indicating a potential misalignment between the theoretical knowledge conveyed in training sessions and practical experience gained during internships. This discrepancy indicates a need for careful examination and improvement in the integration of theoretical concepts with hands-on experiences. Addressing this misalignment is crucial for optimizing the learning environment, ensuring a more cohesive and beneficial educational experience for the participants.
Employers' alignment with NEETs	<p>The challenge faced by employers in aligning the roles of NEET participants with the regular activities of their companies (especially for those companies which didn't have a green mission per se but were trying to develop sustainability units). The difficulty expressed by employers lies in identifying suitable tasks that match the unique skills and interests of participants.</p> <p>Despite contextual differences, the project effectively met the needs of employers, particularly in establishing connections and fostering collaborations.</p>
Length of internships	Another concern is related to the fact that the duration of the internship was relatively short, and that was considered an issue for both NEETs and businesses. However, due to evaluation time constraints, the three-month duration could not be extended, and NEETs would not be allowed, under Tuscan regional law, to undertake another internship for the same professional role at the hosting business. At the same time, businesses were unwilling to go through ARTI's bureaucratic procedures for activating and implementing a mere three-month internship, sometimes leading to their withdrawal from the programme. From an interview with an ARTI representative in November 2023, it was clear that this issue was related to the length of the internship because, according to ARTI, the companies implementing curricular traineeships in the area with a view to the potential placement of the young person in the company are used to 6-month traineeships. The 11-week period with no possibility of extension discouraged companies from participating.

Source: Compiled by the authors

In conclusion, the project's successes in transforming career prospects, facilitating tangible employment outcomes, and creating valuable connections are noteworthy. However, challenges in recruitment, training alignment, and sustaining participant motivation necessitate ongoing refinement and strategic adjustments for future implementations. The project's potential adaptability, collaboration with employers, and commitment to continuous improvement could position it favourably for continued success.

3.4. Efficiency

Efficiency refers to how well inputs/resources have been converted into activities to achieve project results. Efficiency can be broken down into three dimensions: (1) economic efficiency (2) operational efficiency and (3) timeliness. The efficiency analysis for this case study has been particularly complicated due to high data constraints.

Economic efficiency

From this perspective, efficiency is calculated as the extent to which the costs of the project were justified by its benefits. Costs should not be understood in a simple financial dimension but should refer to the broadest concept of economic costs – hence including resources such as human capital and time.

Costs for ANCI Toscana

Anci Toscana spent around EUR 335 000 (including the forecasted expenditure for the final financial report) for the implementation of the project. The amount paid to the participants corresponds to EUR 52 500 + an additional EUR 9 000 to be paid to the rest of the participants that have just concluded their internships or are about to complete them. As a consequence, the overall amount allocated to participants was EUR 61 500 for a total of 45 NEETs. Of these 45, three were only paid pro-rata because they did not successfully complete all of the phases.

In addition, to give further support to the project, Anci Toscana aimed to cover all expenses for the activation of the internships, that is to say: a) insurance, b) individual protection devices, c) hours of specific training delivered by tutors in the hosting business up to a maximum contribution of EUR 500 per company. There were six companies that required these additional funds, so overall Anci spent EUR 2 997 (one of them received EUR 497) for this additional contribution.

In conclusion, the money spent per participant (considering both reimbursement for the NEETs and additional support for the companies) has been equal to EUR 433.27. The cost per hired participant corresponds to EUR 9 213.86.

Benefits for NEETs

From those who completed their internships and got jobs (7/18), it has emerged that only one of them believes that he found the job as a result of skills acquired during the internship. The other 5 are indifferent on this topic, and another participant disagrees. In this last one's view, chances for employment resulting from the project are really low. What made this project different from others is the reimbursement that participants received: in fact, many employers and participants mentioned the NEETs' satisfaction with the monthly EUR 500 allowance. This last aspect is certainly positive in terms of economic benefits for the participants.

Benefits for enterprises

The identification of benefits for enterprises has also been complex. Many employers that participated in the project were municipalities or similar public bodies that must follow public calls to hire new employees under the rules of Italian law. Since NEETs involved in internships could not be hired after the end of the programme, there were no resources available for the hiring of a public administrator. In addition, most of the employers that were interviewed affirmed that they did not have a shortage of employees, so they could not really consider the youngsters as a potential additional workforce. Others came to the same conclusion since the time period was considered to be too short to decide whether or not to hire the NEETs. It is therefore unclear of the benefit brought to employers in terms of saved resources on the recruiting process. Others also mentioned the difficulty of integrating the young resources in such a short period of time and on a specific theme (green economy-related) that was often missing in the context of the employers that participated in the project. From some interviews, it also seems that some unexpected organizational costs arose because of this complex integration.

Benefits for the public budget

The advantages of the programme can be measured either from an individual or a public budget standpoint. While the personal benefits for participants encompass a broader array of items, our current emphasis is on quantifiable advantages for the public budget. In particular, we consider the benefits derived from the generation of additional employment. This entails:

- Social contributions resulting from additional employment, contributed by both the employer and the employee.
- Income tax generated from the earnings of the additional employment.
- Savings on unemployment assistance expenditures linked to the presence of additional employment.

"Additional employment" refers to the net effect as quantified by the impact evaluation (refer to Table 5). The estimated net effects correspond to approximately 9 additional employed individuals for the entire pilot, considering the successful completion of 45 participants. The earning scenario considers the average wage for these individuals equal to the average wage observed in Italy for the year 2022, attested to EUR 30 284⁷. NB: there is no minimum wage requirement in Italy.

In the case of savings of direct costs to the public budget, we only assume eligibility for Unemployment Assistance at the level of one additional household member. It must be noted here that unemployment benefits in Italy have been

⁷ Information on Forbes for Average Salary in Italy: <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/it/business/stipendio-medio-italia/>

largely an object of political discussions. The new government guided by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni radically reduced the number of resources devoted to these welfare measures, but those will be in place from 1 January 2024. In this analysis, the old unemployment benefit (in Italian: “Reddito di Cittadinanza”) will be considered.

The amount of unemployment benefits disbursed depends on other welfare payments and income received by any particular household. The household is therefore only entitled to the maximum benefit if it does not receive welfare payments and other income recorded in the Equivalent economic situation indicator (ISEE)⁸. Here we consider a household of three adult members (on average, in Italy NEETs are adults who live with their parents).

Table 5. Benefits estimation for the public budget

	Weekly	Monthly	Annually
Social contributions due - Average wage	€55	€219	€2 632
Income tax - Average wage	€221	€883	€10 599
Unemployment Assistance savings	€295	€1 180	€14 160
Total - Average wage scenario	€571	€2 283	€27 391

Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of Italy

One of the limitations of this analysis relies on the fact that, according to recent studies, the proportion of NEETs receiving unemployment benefit is only 15.5% of those in the 18-29 age group.

Timeliness

As already mentioned in other parts of this paper, the limited duration of the programme has been an important issue for both NEETs and employers. In addition, ANCI Toscana had to ask for a time extension for the internship activation period to include the entire month of September, extending the previous deadline from August 31st. This enabled ANCI Toscana to achieve higher numbers of activated internships. However, only a portion of the internships have been included in the evaluation because the questionnaires for some of them will only be available in 2024 January. Overall, the timeframe was a realistic one, but significant bottlenecks (described below) created significant delays on the activation of the internships.

Navigating Legal Challenges (July - August 2022)

During the project planning and subsequent months of July to August 2022, temporal complexities surrounding the Italian pilot scheme's implementation posed a significant challenge. A project partner, Anci Toscana, encountered substantial impediments due to regional legislative constraints.

Through INTERCEPT, Anci Toscana expected to capitalise ConNEETtori, a previous project in which it supported the Region of Tuscany to carry out an informal multistakeholder outreach campaign for NEETs in various municipalities, in order to bring out the complexity of this phenomenon and to make the NEETs' voices heard. In fact, the ConNEETtori's participants were asked to describe which solutions and tools they believed to be most useful to keep them engaged in education, training or work. INTERCEPT represented a way for Anci Toscana to expand and foster the multistakeholder network and to test a possible solution to bring the NEETs closer to the green job's market opportunities. Anci Toscana also expected to do so by operating in an informal and experimental context, in which each institution's role would be enhanced by overcoming bureaucratic constraints to design and implement the pilot. At the time of the project design phase, ARTI (the regional PES) couldn't be included in the partnership.

Contrary to its initial expectations, Anci Toscana, the regional Association of Tuscan Municipalities, found itself without the legal authority to autonomously activate internships. Anci Toscana was able to finance and promote the scheme, however, there was no possibility of initiating internships without ARTI. After extensively analysing the legal situation and exploring possibilities on how to overcome its hurdles, in June 2022, Anci Toscana made a swift reassessment of

⁸ ISEE= equivalent economic situation indicator (allows for assessment of families' economic circumstances and takes into account income, assets and composition of the household)

the project's delivery strategy. To address their challenge, Anci Toscana took proactive mitigation measures during July and August 2022. Recognizing the need for collaboration, Anci Toscana initiated meetings with ARTI to formulate a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). This collaborative agreement delineated the roles and responsibilities of both Anci Toscana and ARTI in the promotion, financing, activation, management, and monitoring of INTERCEPT internships.

This collaborative effort culminated in approvals of the final MoU by both organizations at the end of August 2022. While legal limitations posed a challenge to the initial project timeline, the expeditious and collaborative approach adopted by Anci Toscana in conjunction with ARTI reflected a commendable commitment to overcoming obstacles while trying to ensure the successful realization of the pilot programme.

However, in September 2022, a significant impediment emerged in the project's progression, impacting the anticipated timeline. Despite the proactive efforts of Anci Toscana, the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with ARTI encountered a delay and extended the timeframe by an additional month.

Addressing Delay in Agreement Signing (September 2022)

The MoU, crucial for delineating the collaboration between Anci Toscana and ARTI was prepared and ready for signature in September. However, the actual signing was deferred until October, creating a discrepancy with Anci Toscana's initial timeline. During this period, Anci Toscana had already initiated the process by publishing calls for applications from NEETs and businesses.

To mitigate this delay, Anci Toscana pursued the signature of the MoU by actively soliciting ARTI's engagement. The MoU was ultimately signed at the end of October 2022, marking a delay of three months from its initial readiness for implementation.

Aligning Priorities: Overcoming ARTI's Limited Engagement (January - March 2023)

From January to March 2023, a challenge emerged for the project's progression as ARTI faced competing priorities within its institutional activities. This concern had been previously identified by Anci Toscana's staff between November and December 2022 and reported to the WP6 staff. Despite the key activities outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), ARTI's staff, not being formal project partners, showed hesitancy in participating in matching processes. Instead, their primary focus was on bureaucratic procedures for internship activations, with matching responsibility delegated to Anci Toscana which was not a non-Public Employment Service (PES) entity.

To mitigate this challenge, Anci Toscana took proactive measures. Firstly, a study visit was organized in March that fostered collaboration and empowered staff from both institutions on NEET-related topics and stressed the significance of supporting access to green jobs. During this visit, common procedures and templates facilitating the activation of ARTI's internships were approved.

Recognizing the limited progress in matching activities by ARTI, Anci Toscana implemented an additional mitigation measure. It involved sending updated internship lists whenever new NEETs or companies applied, collecting preferences, and facilitating communication between NEETs and potential hosting companies. Despite these efforts, the solution has been only partially efficient for several reasons:

- Anci Toscana, not being a PES, lacks direct access to NEETs' CVs or sensitive information about potential hosting companies and relies on self-declarations.
- The matching system relies on NEETs' expressed preferences, potentially leading to mismatches with their competencies.
- Anci Toscana's efforts, though necessary, are an interim solution as ARTI takes approximately two weeks to activate internships, during which time NEETs and companies may withdraw.

Despite these challenges, Anci Toscana's scheme serves as an example of a pragmatic mitigation measure, considering their limitations as a non-PES entity. This adaptive approach, though not without its constraints,

underscores their commitment to facilitating matchings and progressing towards the project's internship activation goals.

Advocating for Collaboration: Overcoming Implementation Obstacles (April - May 2023)

In the period from April to May 2023, the project encountered another notable challenge as ARTI's involvement in the Italian pilot remained suboptimal, despite the study visit in Livorno. Out of ARTI's 10 provincial units, only seven sent outreach materials both to young individuals and businesses. Insufficient support in the matching process, a critical aspect outlined in the MoU and reflective of ARTI's institutional role, became readily apparent. Anci Toscana once again took the initiative in making the most of the matchings, resulting in 12 completed internships, while an additional 10 were in the activation process. Given the smooth progress, projections as of May 2023 indicated 22 INTERCEPT internships were to be completed out of the targeted 120 by June. The response from NEETs and businesses had been promising, with 400 NEETs and 106 businesses offering over 200 internship positions.

In response to these challenges, Anci Toscana proactively addressed the issue by bringing it to the attention of the Presidency of the Region of Tuscany. This led to prompt action, with ARTI contacting Anci Toscana to schedule a plenary meeting. The meeting proved successful, involving representatives from all provinces, and resulted in increased commitment from ARTI to collaborate more during the matching phase. ARTI pledged to utilize its own platform, which had been underutilized, with the expectation that this approach would significantly contribute to increasing the number of activated internships during the summer.

This proactive engagement with higher authorities and the subsequent positive response from ARTI signified the end result of concerted efforts of Anci Toscana to address and overcome challenges faced during this phase of the project.

Recognizing the need for expediting the activation of internships and increasing the number of participants, Anci Toscana extended the internship activation period into September 2023. This decision, deviating from the initial August 31st deadline, allowed for a more flexible timeframe to achieve higher internship numbers.

By extending the activation period, Anci Toscana aimed to maximize opportunities for NEETs and businesses to participate in the INTERCEPT programme. While this approach facilitated a broader reach, it came with the understanding that not all activated internships within this extended period would be evaluated by WP6. Instead, a portion of the internships would undergo evaluation, ensuring continued progress in meeting project goals while accommodating the evolving circumstances and constraints encountered during the implementation phase. This adaptive strategy underscores Anci Toscana's commitment to optimizing internship outcomes within given constraints and a designated timeline.

Did the intervention lead to achieving overall net benefits?

Upon examining the group of 45 participants who successfully finished the program, we calculated the net effect of their participation on their removal from the unemployment lists. Our findings, as shown in Table 6, indicate a significant decrease in unemployment registration, with a 20% increase in absence from these registers. In practical terms, this means that out of the 45 participants, about nine individuals (20% of the cohort) have likely secured employment because of the program. We anticipate that these employment positions will be maintained in the long term.

Taking into account the anticipated benefits for the public budget outlined above, we find that if the earnings of the additionally employed participants were at the average wage, the costs of the pilot programme would be recouped in almost three months (95 days).

Table 6. Comparison between costs and benefits per pilot programme

Type	Item	Annually	Total per type
Costs per pilot programme	Payments to the participant	€61 500	€64 497

	Additional contribution to companies	€2 997	
Benefits per pilot	Social contributions	€23 688	€246 519
	Income tax	€95 391	
	Unemployment assistance savings	€127 440	

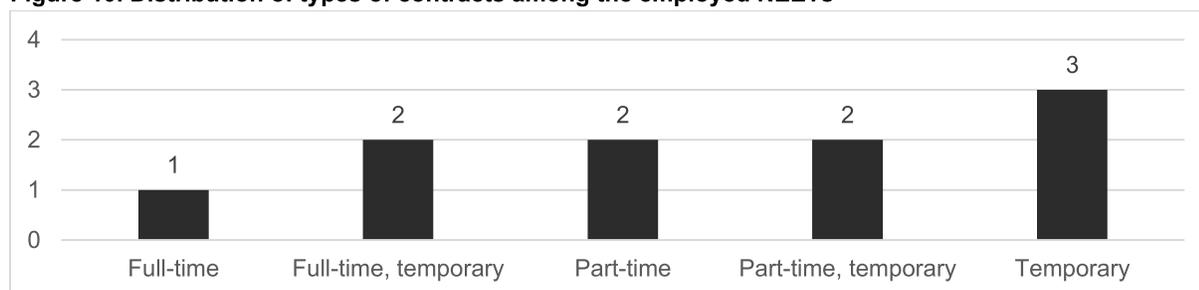
Source: Compiled by the authors using INTERCEPT data extract - 6 December 2023

3.5. Impact

At this point, it is useful to understand the impact of INTERCEPT on participants' employment and on labour market outcomes. As of today (January 2024), due to the extension given to the Italian pilot for the activation of internships also in September 2023, data are available only for 18 participants that completed the internship at least 1 month ago. From this small dataset, it is possible to see that only 39% of participants obtained a job, but all of them are satisfied with the job they found. It must be considered that many employers that participated in the programme are municipalities or public bodies that cannot hire people without instituting public calls. This was a major concern impeding PAs from hiring NEETs that participated in the project. For those completing internships in private companies, the process was easier: one of the NEETs that participated in the programme, in fact, is still collaborating with the company in which the NEET had an internship.

Another crucial aspect when analysing labour market outcomes is the type of contract a participant has received when obtaining a position. As indicated by the after-training survey, a decent job in the view of participants is one that is secure and pays sufficiently. Reimbursement for work and its sufficiency can be a subjective term and the survey did not ask further about the range. However, it can be noted that 100% of the participants appreciate these two aspects the most when thinking about their careers. Of the seven participants who claimed to be employed at the time of filling out the post-internship survey, their types of contracts varied highly. The majority of the employed NEETs stated that their contracts were temporary (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Distribution of types of contracts among the employed NEETs



Source: Compiled by the authors

Note: N = 10

In terms of activation, 30% of NEETs that completed their internships decided to pursue further studies, but none of them were on green-related issues. However, 41% of them affirmed that their internships were helpful in providing them with the motivation to seek a career in the green economy versus 22% that disagreed and 38% that were indifferent. From these numbers, the benefits of the project in terms of the activation of NEETs and their integration into the green economy seem unclear.

Given this premise, it now becomes necessary to understand the overall impact of the INTERCEPT pilot scheme in Italy by developing a counterfactual analysis between the NEETs that participated in the project (treatment group) and those that presented highly similar characteristics, but that did not participate (control group). Impact evaluations usually go beyond merely quantifying the gross impacts of the intervention and focus on the quantification of net impacts – that is, comparing actual outcomes with a counterfactual scenario in which the intervention did not take place. The focus on

the net effects is rooted in the fact that some changes in outcome variables might have occurred even without the intervention.

It was our view that the two groups under analysis must be similar. We selected the following demographic characteristics and believe that they may affect outcomes if they are not taken into account: gender, age, place of residence, highest level of education attained, length of registration within Public Employment Services.

The focus of the analysis will only be on changes attributable to INTERCEPT in answering the following main research question: did the intervention have a positive impact on participants' skills and activation?

We used registered employment as our outcome of interest to investigate the effectiveness of the intervention. We employed three different approaches widely used in causal inference analyses to estimate the treatment effect of the INTERCEPT programme:

1. Propensity Score Matching (PSM);
2. Nearest Neighbour Matching (NNM)
3. Inverse Probability Weighting (IPW)

We employed these techniques to calculate a propensity score, representing the likelihood that an individual will engage in a programme, relying on initial observable traits. Given the fact that it is not feasible to directly observe the causal impact on both a participant and a non-participant in the INTERCEPT scheme for the same NEET and considering the fact that NEETs are not assigned randomly to the programme, we relied on the assumption that selection into the programme is contingent on observable characteristics. This assumption, known as the conditional independence assumption (CIA), posits that observable traits might elucidate an individual's choice to enrol in the programme. To uphold the CIA, we included the following covariates as controls based on their availability: gender, province, age, highest education level attained, and registration status history. We understand that our analysis is limited due to the small number of variables we could include a result of significant data restrictions. To mitigate this, we applied logit models to determine the probabilities of participation for individuals classified as NEETs, based on their distinct characteristics. During this process, we also checked to ensure that there was a balanced representation of these characteristics in our analysis.

Table 7 shows an overview of differences in observed characteristics between the treatment group and the eligible group.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics of treatment and eligible group

Description	Treatment group	Control group
Number of NEETs	19	27301
Female (%)	63.2	53.3
Average age	27.2	26.9
Province split (%)		
Grosseto	36.8	9.0
Firenze	5.3	26.4
Livorno	15.8	11.1
Lucca	15.3	10.5
Pisa	10.5	13.3
Pistoia	5.3	9.6
Prato	5.3	6.8
Siena	10.5	8.4
Registration history		
Average length of registration in months	4.1	22.7
Employment status (%)	31.6	27.8

Source: Compiled by the authors using INTERCEPT data extract – 6 December 2023

We computed the Average Treatment Effects for the Treated (ATET). The ATET represents the average influence of those participating in the INTERCEPT programme for the subset of participants who successfully completed the programme. Essentially, we seek to compare the outcomes of participants with what the outcomes of non-participants might have been had they participated in the programme.

Table 8. Estimated effects of INTERCEPT participation on employment

Outcomes	Propensity Score Matching			Nearest Neighbour Matching			Inverse Probability Weighting		
	ATET	se	Sign.	ATET	se	Sign.	ATET	se	Sign.
Employment	0.208	0.039	***	0.134	0.093		0.200	0.042	***

Source: Compiled by the authors using INTERCEPT data extract – 6 December 2023

Note: ATET denotes the average treatment effects for the treated and measures a change in the predicted employment probability when the treatment equals 1, se denotes standard error. Significance level (Sign): *** 0.001, ** 0.01, * 0.05.

The estimated coefficients indicated that participation in the pilot programme is associated with an increase in the probability of getting a job at around 20%, with at least two out of three methodologies used. However, it is important to stress again that the very limited amount of data complicates the reliability of this analysis. In addition, it would be useful to repeat a similar analysis further on in the future to see if these effects persist.

3.6. Sustainability, transferability and scalability

In Italy, the most direct and traditional state channel responsible for implementing public policies on employment are the Public Employment Services (PES), known as Centri per l'Impiego (CPI). After a change made in April 2020, the PES are required to compulsorily convene all recipients of the Universal Basic Income (Reddito di cittadinanza, RdC) to establish the Pact for Work and Social Inclusion. This is an agreement aimed at accompanying the beneficiaries of the RdC to job placement or to joining a customised training pathway or other activity at the service of the community. The PES, if adequately effective, would qualify today as a key means in reducing the share of NEETs, since the latest data show that among the primary beneficiaries of the RdC are those who are precisely under 29, with an increasing share over time compared to all other age groups.

Recently, it was the Ministerial Decree signed on 22 May 2020, which provided for the implementation of an extraordinary plan to strengthen the PES, through the doubling of the number of staff by the end of 2021 and special infrastructural investments in their locations. However, the PES, coordinated by the individual Regions or Autonomous Provinces, seem to have had disappointing results compared to expectations, especially with regard to the implementation of active labour policies for those receiving the RdC. According to the latest ANPAL data, available as of 1 April 2021, it has emerged that, compared to the 1.656 million persons reached out the PES, just over 1.56 million have signed the Employment Pact while, as of February 2021, just over 152 000 persons had entered into a labour relationship after their date of application, i.e. about 15 per cent. Even the Court of Auditors has recently questioned the effectiveness of PES activity as a useful tool in promoting the matching of labour supply and demand. However, there are further difficulties and scepticism in investigating the success rate of the PES since there is still no adequately detailed data on their activity by individual region and there is not even the possibility of investigating the extent to which the under-29s summoned have actually undertaken a work or training pathway through this channel. Lastly, the precarious situation of the PES in Italy is expected to receive further shocks since the instrument of Universal Basic Income that encouraged the usage of PES has been radically restricted by the new government, becoming more and more an object of propaganda in every political programme.

The absence of noticeable legal changes poses a challenge in assessing the potential scalability of the pilot programme. Legal frameworks play a crucial role in shaping the landscape for project expansion and the lack of considerable changes has introduced uncertainty regarding the initiative's broader implementation. However, as presented in the

section on bottlenecks elaborated upon in the Context chapter, it is important for a proactive approach and an adaptation of mitigation measures in cases of legal constraint in the future.

The strong demand for the scheme among both employers and NEETs has added a compelling layer to prospects for upscaling. Most of the NEETs and all interviewed employers have expressed interest in and favoured the idea of upscaling the scheme. The evident market need suggests that there is a receptive audience for the programme that creates a favourable environment for its expansion. Additionally, the quite positive effects identified in the pilot evaluation contribute to the rationale for upscaling. The demonstrated impact on participants reinforces the potential benefits that could be extended to a larger audience.

However, the key factor of PES willingness to upscale the pilot programme, as revealed in an interview with ARTI, poses a challenge. Despite the identified interest and need from employers, the absence of current plans for upscaling within ARTI introduces a significant dilemma. To enhance the likelihood of successful upscaling, collaboration emerges as a critical element. Engaging in meaningful collaboration with PES and other stakeholders is essential. This collaborative approach can help address potential obstacles, align strategies with the broader objectives of PES, and capitalize on the demonstrated interest from employers. By fostering a cooperative environment, stakeholders can collectively navigate challenges and work towards the successful and sustainable upscaling of the pilot programme.

Despite the challenges faced by Anci and ARTI in their collaboration, there are optimistic signs pointing towards the development of sustainable networks and partnerships during the duration of the project. The dynamic nature of their interactions, marked by problem-solving and adaptability, reflects a commitment to overcoming obstacles. By navigating through differing priorities and role expectations, these challenges have presented opportunities for both entities to refine their collaborative approach. The ongoing efforts in relationship-building and clear communication indicate a positive trajectory towards a sustainable collaborative framework. Additionally, the external partnerships with employers and NEETs, that are critical for the project's success, hold promise as Anci and ARTI work together to address challenges and ensure a cohesive implementation strategy. The commitment to fostering both internal and external partnerships signals a promising outlook for the sustainability of the project's networks.

Moreover, in the case of upscaling of the scheme, it is necessary to take into account the length and timing of internships. As previously presented, the length of the internships should be adjusted to meet the needs of the employers and the NEETS. Accordingly, considering the local context, and the presence of seasonal activities during the summer, the timing of the application process and internships should be reviewed and take into account these implications. This could improve the number of private companies participating in the programme by enhancing the availability of strictly green work placements.

The number of NEETs and their positive responses in the pilot project underline a discernible demand for its expansion into other regions. However, it is essential to approach this expansion with a careful consideration of the diverse legislative landscapes governing non-curricular traineeships in each region. The variations in legal frameworks necessitate a region-specific review that take into account the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the specific legislation in each area. Moreover, the distinct production contexts in different regions, particularly those with abundant labour in the production and industrial sectors, may influence the utilization of internships differently. Recognizing these contextual disparities underscores the need for tailored outreach activities and proactive measures, acknowledging that a uniform approach may not be universally effective. The Italian case serves as a valuable lesson, emphasizing the importance of adapting strategies to the specific legal agreements and production contexts of each region, reinforcing the notion that a one-size-fits-all approach may not be conducive to successful project expansion.

3.7. Innovativeness

The pilot project sought to develop a creative and advanced approach to engage individual NEETs aged 25-29 in green occupations. Our examination of exemplary initiatives indicated a scarcity of projects addressing this specific objective. Consequently, the pilot initiative may be categorized as a form of social innovation (SI) aimed at addressing the issue of NEETs in the 25-29 age group. Social innovation, in a broader context, encompasses various social policy areas and can be defined by considering two perspectives: the scale of innovation and the scope of innovation.

Scale of innovation

Innovativeness can be assessed by looking at what value the SI created. Here, two types of SI can be distinguished – incremental (continuous or gradual improvements in existing solutions) and radical (development of an absolutely new

solution). In the case of Tuscany, the pilot programme was certainly a radical innovator. As expressed by most of the employers involved in the project that have been interviewed, INTERCEPT was innovative because it addressed topics related to environmental sustainability and provided NEETs with both training and fieldwork, which were relevant to acquiring green skills to be competitive in the current job market. This aspect was new in the context of Tuscany because even though there were already other projects involving NEETs, this was new in addressing specifically green skills to be applied to various sectors.

Scope of innovation

Second, innovativeness can be assessed by looking to whom the intervention is innovative. Here are several possible options:

- New to the organisation
- New to the target groups
- New to the region
- New to the social area globally

The project was certainly new in most of these aspects. First, on the organisation side, it was new for small entities in the area that would not have been able to hire interns if not supported by external funds. The economic recognition provided by the project to the participants allowed even small businesses or associations to participate, to train youngsters, and to show them the various career paths they could have in different fields, with an eye on environmental sustainability. One employer explained the importance of opening the project even to enterprises whose focus is not in the field of environmental sustainability, but that are adapting their business as usual to a new and green approach. This high flexibility allowed them to get in touch with two participants who are still collaborating with them after the end of their internships. The holistic approach implemented by INTERCEPT was crucial considering the fact that environmental sustainability and green skills today are relevant and necessary for all kinds of businesses.

Second, the project was also new for the target groups and the region itself. Again, the key point here is not about the presence or not of projects aimed at supporting NEETs to get training and enter the job market (for this, in Tuscany, there is already a well-known programme called 'Garanzia Giovani'), but it was new in the sense that it directly addressed the topic of environmental sustainability and its application in various fields.

4. Lithuanian pilot evaluation

4.1. Context

Research conducted prior to the beginning of the pilot project showed that an average 25-29 year-old NEET in Lithuania had a secondary or secondary professional qualification and some work experience, mostly in the field of services and construction. There were as many target group NEET women as men in the same age group and they were equally distributed between the largest cities in Lithuania and smaller municipalities. However, since more people are living in Lithuania's five largest cities, the target group's NEETs were over-represented in smaller municipalities and rural areas.

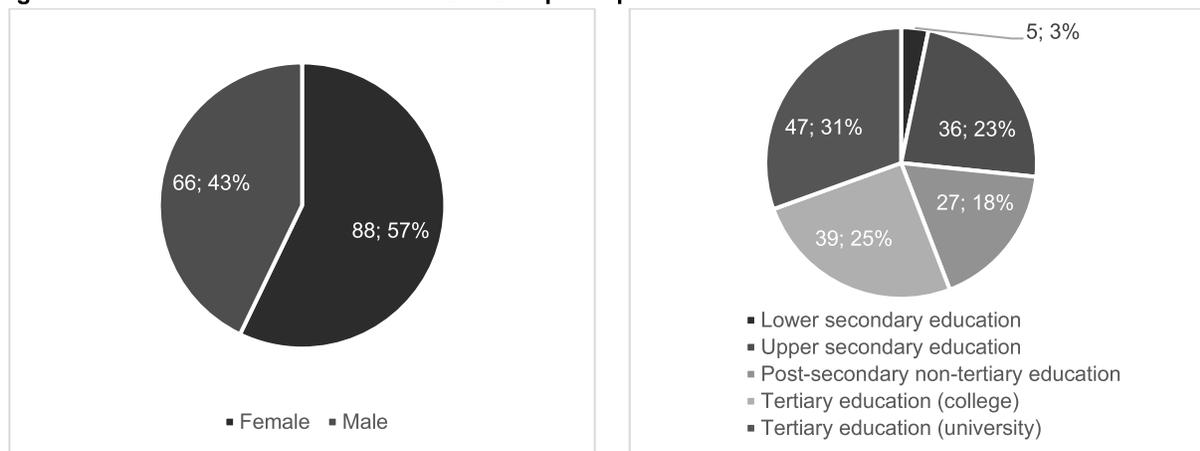
INTERCEPT - The pilot project scheme in Lithuania was implemented from 2023 March to 2023 December. The intervention aimed to train 25-29 NEETs and then offer them internship in green companies.

- The **training** was held in person in four Lithuanian municipalities – Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, and Marijampolė. Participants listened to a 40-hour course, where they learned about green jobs, and had self-motivation as well as behavioural skills classes. There were several groups of participant; the first groups started in March, while the last one took place in September.
- The training was followed by **internships**. Usually, the duration of the internship was three months. The internship possibilities were offered to the target age group NEETs by Lithuanian Public Employment Services (hereafter – LT PES) career consultants.

Participants received EUR 1200 compensation for participation in all project activities. In addition, some participants received support for commuting costs or necessary medical check-ups.

165 NEETs participated in the pilot in Lithuania. This evaluation will cover 154 participants, as the remaining 11 started trainings too late to be included in the evaluation (too little time has passed since the end of the project to have an impact, or the project has not yet been completed). Slightly more than half of the participants were woman (57%). In addition, more than half of the participants (56%) had a tertiary education (university or college degree). The rest had a post-secondary non-tertiary education (18%), upper (23%) or lower (3%) secondary education (see Figure 11 below).

Figure 11. Gender and education of INTERCEPT participants



Source: Compiled by the authors using LT PES data extract - 1 November 2023
Note: N = 154

In contrast to the other pilots in Italy and Malta, LT PES achieved a notably high participant count with an exceptionally low dropout rate. This success can be attributed to a distinctive outreach strategy compared to other countries. Instead of relying solely on online registration forms, LT PES predominantly utilised its own cadre of career consultants. These consultants extended direct invitations to NEETs during consultations, enabling them to provide detailed explanations of the project and address any queries from potential participants.

4.2. Relevance

Relevance to beneficiary needs

Beneficiaries of this type of intervention are not only participants, but also the green companies that receive interns into their company for three months. Thus, the intervention should be relevant for both. It is possible to distinguish between needs connected to both sides of the market:

- **Needs linked to the supply side of the labour market.** The pilot aimed to employ 25-29 year old NEETs in Green jobs. The research conducted showed that the target group in Lithuania had mostly a secondary education and some work experience (for more details see 3.1. Context part). The needs of the target group are highlighted in Table 9 below.
- **Needs linked to the demand side of the labour market.** The pilot program should train participants in a way that their soft and hard skills would be relevant for green companies. The needs of the employers are noted in Table 9 below.

Table 9. NEETs and employers needs from intervention

Group	Needs addressed
NEETs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need to find a job. One of main goals for NEETs was to find job placements through training and internships. 52% of NEETs who participated in INTERCEPT were employed as of 1 November 2023

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The desire to know oneself better. Certain NEETs expressed a sense of ongoing self-discovery, and for them, the chance to engage in training and explore alternative employment opportunities stood out as a key motivation for participating in the project. • Green jobs/skills as a primary interest. Several participants highlighted the fact that their motivation to engage in the project stemmed from an interest in sustainability and green themes. Those within this age group indicated a lack of information on sustainability, the green economy, and green jobs in their education. Therefore, the project presented a valuable opportunity for them to enhance their understanding of these areas. • Offered jobs matched education. Some participants, upon graduating in the Green jobs sector, faced challenges in securing employment within the field of green work. The project offered by LT PES had aligned closely with their aspirations to explore opportunities and gain experience in this particular domain. • Meet new people, socialization. Another commonly cited factor was the longing to connect with individuals of the same age and those who shared similar interests, fostering a sense of camaraderie. In interviews, participants noted that prolonged unemployment posed challenges in maintaining social connections, leading to a lack of socialization. This circumstance motivated NEETs to join the project, seeking opportunities for social engagement. • Improve soft skills. Some NEETs mentioned that being unemployed for a long time and staying at home leads to a decline in motivation, making it difficult to interact with people, and gaps in other soft skills emerge. It was precisely these NEETs who came to the project with the aim of improving their soft skills and motivation. • Learn something new. A desire to learn something new, get out of their comfort zones was mentioned among the needs from the intervention.
<p>Employers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges with employees' shortages. Some employers mentioned employees' shortages as the main issue motivating their participation in the project. • The desire to introduce young people to green jobs. Several employers noted that finding employees was not a challenge for them. However, their motivation to participate in the project stemmed from a desire to promote awareness about green jobs and highlight the appealing aspects of such roles. • Positive experience in cooperation with LT PES. Several employers noted that they had a positive experience with young jobseekers coming from LT PES that usually resulted in long-lasting employment. The possibility to participate in the project was offered to them and, due to positive interactions, businesses agreed to participate. • Experimenting. The project incentivized businesses to consider recruiting less experienced young individuals or those with diverse work experiences. Given that these recruits did not bring a heavy burden of responsibilities with them, businesses found themselves in a position to undertake bolder experiments.

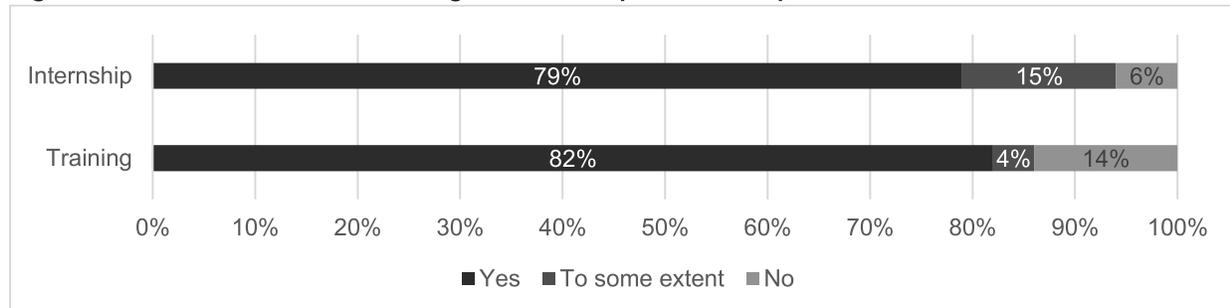
Source: Compiled by the authors from the interviews with employers and NEETs, pre-intervention survey

The data collected through surveys and interviews indicates that the pilot successfully addressed the needs of both NEETs and employers:

- Figure 12 shows that the majority of **NEETs** noted that trainings (82%) and internships (79%) met their expectations. Despite the distinctiveness in needs between the two groups and variations among participants, a substantial majority of NEETs and employers interviewed perceived a significant added value from the project. The ones who negatively evaluated trainings or internships lacked more details or expected to be hired after the internship, but this did not necessarily happen. More positive and negative aspects of the training and internships are overviewed in the Effectiveness (4.3.) part of the report.
- A significant advantage for **businesses** was that the young participants were already aware of the companies they were assigned to for their internships. They did not have to search "blindly" and saved the administrative

costs of carrying out job interviews. Career counsellors working with the NEETs already had some initial information about the companies. Consequently, they were able to provide a comprehensive introduction about a prospective internship location for the young individuals, thus averting potential misunderstandings.

Figure 12. Assessment whether training and internship have met expectations



Source: Compiled by the authors from the mid-intervention and post-intervention surveys

Note: N training = 131, N internship = 61.

Relevance to the local context

Local context is an integral component of the pilot project's success. As was evident in the Italian case, an understanding of work culture and the target group can be a key aspect that determines whether the pilot will be successful in that country.

Internships (Lith. *stažuotės*) may not be the most widely employed tool in the realm of LT PES, but it is a well-known tool used to engage youth in the labour market. All of the career consultants involved in the project possessed experience in coordinating internships. This contributed to an elevated level of productivity and efficiency in comparison to other facets of the project.

The target group characteristics in Lithuania slightly differed from those in Malta and Italy. For instance, prior to starting the intervention, the ratio of men to women in this category was equal. This was not the case in Italy or Malta, where more women were unemployed due to care responsibilities and more active child daycare services were needed. Thus, additional efforts to provide help for moms with care responsibilities were not needed.

For the most part, the local context was considered:

- Lithuania has been working towards a more sustainable and green economy. Green jobs typically involve work in sectors such as renewable energy (e.g. installing solar panels on roofs), energy efficiency, environmental protection (e.g., creating paper out of reused materials) and sustainable development. As the green economy has expanded, the number of green companies in Lithuania has been increasing. Consequently, the demand for employees has increased and even a shortage of employees with knowledge about the green economy has appeared. The intervention helped to solve two problems: (1) train NEETs about the green economy and find employees for green companies; (2) find employment opportunities for unemployed (NEETs). As the research before the intervention showed, NEETs had the most experience in the wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing as well as construction and administration economic areas. These areas are also favourable for green jobs.
- The project was carried out in the large cities of Lithuania, where there is a large concentration of green companies.
- Lithuanians, and especially the target group, are modest and less likely to take the initiative. Knowing that, several useful aspects were considered before starting the pilot. Firstly, unlike the pilots in Malta and Italy, the main outreach strategy was to contact NEETs one-on-one and offer them internships, explaining all the details and possibilities. This was a crucial aspect in attracting so many participants to the project. Secondly, throughout the project, they had a person at LT PES to whom they could turn for all of their concerns. This

helped keep the NEETs in this project. NEETs also had a psychologist on hand who was there to help in case one was needed.

- 25-29-year-old persons usually already have to fully support themselves, so payments for participating in the project greatly motivated them to join.

However, research conducted in 2022 showed that a significant part of NEETs faced challenges related to mobility within the municipality. In November 2021, 37% of NEETs' (registered within LT PES) employment opportunities were limited by transport problems, meaning that working hours and public transport schedules were not compatible. This difficulty is especially noticeable in rural areas and prevents NEETs from integrating into the labour market. Some interviewed and surveyed INTERCEPT participants also mentioned difficulties in reaching workplaces or training centres. In addition, the pilot project took place in the biggest Lithuanian cities, which also may have prevented core NEETs in rural areas from participating in the project.

To mitigate this issue, LT PES offered NEETs the possibility of receiving a EUR 100 commuting allowance. Participants who had to travel to another city for their internships received a larger amount. Within the framework of this project, it could be done quite flexibly, but if similar internships were financed from the LT PES budget in the future, it would be more difficult to allocate such an allowance.

Relevance of the intervention after the end of the pilot

At the end of the intervention, intervention remains relevant for the beneficiaries and in a local context. There were no major unforeseen or emerging issues that made the intervention non-relevant anymore.

The bridge between green companies and NEETs through LT PES was created. Green companies can proactively seek employees they need, knowing that their requirements are understood, and consultants can better select young individuals with the willingness and potential to work in the green sector. The experience gained by career consultants will also help identify NEETs who have the potential to work in the green sector.

4.3. Effectiveness

Extent to which intervention improves employment opportunities of young NEETs aged 25-29

According to the LT PES, the project offered very specific benefits: work experience and financial payment, which motivated young people to get involved much more compared to other activities where more attention is paid to theoretical training.

The NEETs themselves noted that the project not only provided them with soft and hard skills, but also allowed them to try themselves out in new and untried areas. It was not always a successful experience, but at least it brought with it the knowledge of whether or not a NEET would like to pursue a career along this path. In addition, NEETs mentioned that if they weren't able to find a job for a long time, their motivation fell. The project greatly motivated them to continue looking for work, and the opportunity to communicate with like-minded people was also a very useful addition to the project.

In the employees' view, each employee could take from the internship as much as (s)he wanted. Employees have been provided with the opportunity to learn new things, and each new experience brings with it greater employment opportunities in the future.

Extent to which intervention enhances participants' activation and skills relevant to the green economy

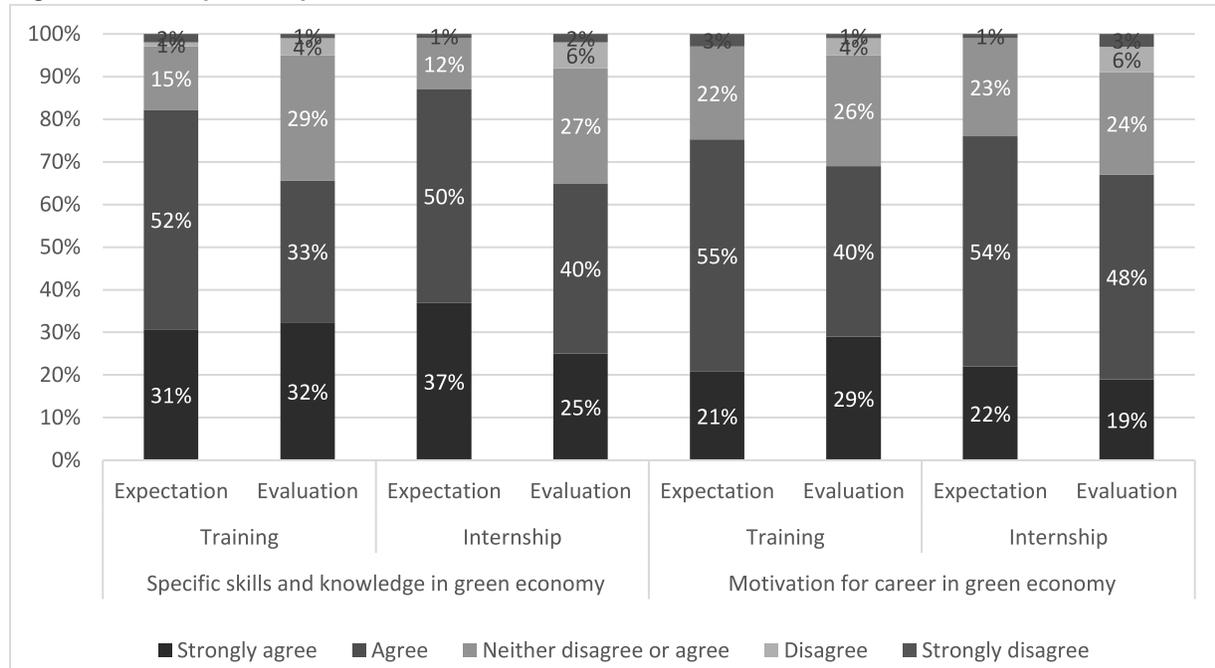
Figure 13 illustrates that participants had slightly higher expectations before the intervention in comparison to an evaluation of the training and internship afterwards. While more than 80% of respondents expected (agree or strongly

agree) that the training and internship would provide them with specific skills and knowledge in the green economy, only slightly more than 60% of them actually agreed or strongly agreed that they received those competencies.

Regarding the participants' activation, participants' expectations almost matched their evaluation of how the pilot motivated them to pursue a career in the green economy.

Interviewed participants agreed that the intervention contributed significantly to an improvement of their skills. However, general skills were mentioned more often than skills directly required for the green economy.

Figure 13. Participants expectation before intervention and evaluation of the results after the intervention



Source: Compiled by the authors from the participants' survey
 Note: N expectation =135, N training results = 135, N internship results = 63

INTERCEPT as a channel between green economy employers and potential employees?

Most of the participants agreed that it was only thanks to LT PES that they learned about this project and had the opportunity to participate in it. Therefore, LT PES is a very important link connecting target group NEETs and employers. The intervention may not have created a direct channel that connects employers with potential employees, but the foundations have been laid. During their interviews, employers mentioned that they now know that they can turn to LT PES to help solve the problem of a lack of workers in the green jobs area. LT PES, knowing the profiles of companies and unemployed people, can select the right candidate for the company. LT PES added that if Green Economy training were introduced as mandatory for every career counsellor, then this cooperation would exist continuously.

Kirkpatrick Four-level Evaluation model

Further, the analysis of effectiveness is structured according to the first three levels of the Kirkpatrick Training Evaluation Model: reaction, learning and behaviour, and is based on survey and interview results.

Reaction

Reaction focuses on whether learners found the training engaging, favourable, and relevant to their jobs and was measured by asking participants about their initial expectations from the training and internship and whether these expectations were met.

Table 10 presents participants' pre-intervention survey results on their initial expectations. The absolute majority ranging from 76 to 87 per cent had clear positive expectations in all respects of both the training and the internship. These high-rated expectations included acquiring specific and general skills and knowledge for finding a job in the green economy, gaining higher motivation and better abilities to perform in a career in the green economy and accumulating social capital. Meanwhile, only a small fraction of the participants was neutral or had negative expectations.

Table 10. Participants' pre-intervention expectations

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither disagree or agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Expected to acquire from training					
Specific skills and knowledge in green economy	31%	52%	15%	1%	2%
General skills and knowledge	34%	48%	16%	1%	1%
Motivation for career in the green economy	21%	55%	22%	0%	3%
Improved abilities to pursue career goals	30%	55%	14%	0%	1%
Expected to acquire from internship					
Specific skills and knowledge in the green economy	37%	50%	12%	0%	1%
General skills and knowledge	36%	46%	17%	0%	1%
Motivation for career in the green economy	22%	54%	23%	0%	1%
Good for accumulation of social capital	37%	51%	11%	1%	1%
Improved abilities to pursue career goals	34%	52%	13%	0%	1%

Source: Compiled by the authors from the participants' survey

Note: N = 158

The mid-intervention evaluation of training shows that these highly positive expectations were indeed met. Again, as presented in Table 11, most of the participants agreed or strongly agreed on various characteristics of the training. Importantly, 10 out of 14 of these characteristics were rated at 80 per cent or more. These included expectations about relevance of the topics learned as well as qualities of the instructor and learning environment. However, it seems that at this stage of the intervention a relatively large number of the participants ranging from 20 to 33 per cent were not sure whether the training was delivering a higher-level outcome related to improving general skills and specific skills and knowledge for work in the green economy as well as improving motivation and efficiency.

Table 11. Participants' mid-intervention evaluation of training

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither disagree or agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Topics were as expected	24%	59%	12%	4%	1%
Met my needs	27%	53%	18%	2%	1%
Duration was suitable	41%	43%	10%	5%	0%
Instructor was responsive and accessible	69%	29%	1%	1%	0%
Instructor was competent	51%	41%	7%	1%	1%

Instructor had all needed equipment	61%	36%	2%	1%	0%
Teaching style was suitable and efficient	55%	41%	2%	1%	1%
Learning environment was comfortable	64%	34%	2%	0%	0%
Work-rest regime was appropriate	71%	27%	2%	0%	0%
I would recommend training to others	62%	32%	5%	1%	0%
Received specific skills and knowledge in the green economy	32%	33%	29%	4%	1%
Received general skills	23%	53%	20%	2%	1%
Received motivation for career in the green economy	29%	40%	26%	4%	1%
Improved my efficiency	24%	35%	33%	6%	1%

Source: Compiled by the authors from the participants' survey

Note: N = 135

The high expectations of the participants continued to be met throughout the final stages of the intervention as well, however, to a slightly lower degree. The post-intervention survey results (Table 12) show that around 80 per cent of the participants evaluated the internship positively. This included the evaluation of the internship's design characteristics as well as the evaluation of the quantity of knowledge received. Nevertheless, around one tenth of the participants declared some unmet expectations or negative experiences from the internship. Open questions revealed that these negative experiences were mainly related to high workloads, relatively primitive tasks performed, poor organizational climate in the organization and weak relationship with the mentor.

The evaluation of post-intervention higher-level outcomes, again, is somewhat lower, yet still high. More than 60 per cent of the participants acquired specific skills and knowledge and received motivation for work in the knowledge economy. More than 70 per cent accumulated social capital and improved their efficiency. Importantly, these more modest levels of positive evaluation were not the result of relatively higher levels of negative assessments but mainly came from relatively higher levels of hesitation among some of the participants. This was especially the case with receiving higher motivation and improving personal efficiency.

Table 12. Participants' post-intervention evaluation of their internships and knowledge acquired

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither disagree or agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Evaluation of internship					
Met my needs	35%	41%	13%	8%	3%
Duration was suitable	47%	39%	11%	2%	2%
Tasks were appropriate	48%	33%	14%	5%	0%
Received good feedback	40%	40%	10%	11%	0%
Learned a lot	43%	33%	13%	6%	5%
Evaluation of knowledge acquired					
Received specific skills and knowledge in green economy	25%	40%	27%	6%	2%
Received general skills	33%	48%	13%	5%	2%
Received motivation for career in green economy	19%	48%	24%	6%	3%
Accumulation social capital	33%	43%	16%	8%	0%
Improved my efficiency	37%	38%	22%	2%	2%

Source: Compiled by the authors from the participants' survey

Note: N = 63

Learning

To evaluate the **learning** component of the Kirkpatrick model a change of certain knowledge from the pre-intervention to mid-intervention stage was tracked. In particular, the focus was on a knowledge of sustainable development goals and carbon footprints.

In these two fields, the learning dynamic proved to be indeed positive. Around 60 per cent of the participants, as demonstrated in Table 13, showed an improvement of their knowledge. No change of knowledge in both fields was experienced by around a third of the participants. Of these, less than half remained with little knowledge on sustainable development goals and one fifth remained with little knowledge on carbon footprints. Meanwhile, the rest had an appropriate initial level of knowledge, and thus demonstrated no change. Interestingly, some participants (2 per cent for the sustainable development goals and 11 per cent for the carbon footprint) experienced a worsening of their knowledge somewhat, which can be interpreted as the result of some sort of confusion experienced during the intervention.

Table 13. Participants' learning outcomes

	Knows sustainable development goals and can list some of them, change from pre-intervention to mid-intervention	Knows and can explain what carbon footprint is, change from pre-intervention to mid-intervention
Improved	63%	57%
Worse	2%	11%
No change	35%	32%

Source: Compiled by the authors from the participants' survey

Note: N = 103 and N = 110

Behaviour

The last dimension of the Kirkpatrick model to evaluate is **behaviour** that measures whether participants have been truly impacted by the learning and if they are applying what they learn. This was done in the post-intervention survey by asking participants about whether they have continued using the skills and networks they acquired during the internship. The results show a positive impact on behaviour in terms of skills, however the impact in terms of social capital was more limited. Around 50 per cent of participants reported continually using general and specific skills and knowledge from the internship (Table 14) while an additional 35 to 40 per cent were not sure. In sum, this suggests that there is only a minority of participants who are certain that they do not feel any continuous impact with regards to skills. However, it seems that the social capital acquired during the internship was more difficult to retain or to recognize its continuous presence. The share of participants that continuously used it after the internship was only 35 per cent, while 44 per cent were not sure about it. Of those who used it, a common explanation was that they successfully built good relationships with managers or the employees of enterprises during their internships, which continued afterwards or even led to employment in the enterprise. Unfortunately, more detailed explanations of causes behind the hesitation or a lack of continuity are absent.

Table 14. Behavioural impact

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither disagree or agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Continues using specific skills and knowledge acquired during the internship	8%	43%	35%	10%	5%
Continues using general skills and knowledge acquired during the internship	11%	40%	40%	5%	3%
Continues using social capital acquired during the internship	14%	21%	44%	14%	6%

Source: Compiled by the authors from the participants' survey

Note: N = 63

Results

To measure the results, a counter-factual impact evaluation was carried out. The detailed approach and calculations are provided in the 4.5. Impact sub-chapter. Participation in the INTERCEPT project significantly positively impacted the probability of employment. According to estimates produced by the CEM, GBM, and IPW models, by 1 November 2023 the average treatment effect for all project participants was approximately 9 percentage points (p.p.). The first group, which entered the intervention earlier and had more time to adjust afterwards, experienced significantly larger effects, averaging 17 percentage points based on more conservative estimates.

The analysis suggests that intervention also significantly increased the probability of withdrawing from the unemployment registry. According to estimates produced by the GBM, and IPW models, by 1 November 2023 the average treatment effect for all project participants was approximately 10 percentage points (p.p.) and is statistically significant.

4.4. Efficiency

Benefits of the intervention

To quantify the benefits of the intervention, we looked at savings to the public budget as the individual benefits (salaries, employment, etc) could be quantified only over time and with many assumptions. We account for the benefits arising from generated employment. These include:

- Social contributions from additional employment paid by employer and employee
- Income tax paid from income from additional employment
- Savings on unemployment benefits. The unemployment benefits may vary depending on the experience and the salary of the previous job. However, we will use average scenarios in two scenarios: minimal wage and average wage.

To estimate the net effect of employment, a counterfactual impact evaluation was carried out. The detailed approach and calculations are provided in the 4.5. Impact sub-chapter. The results show that participation in the INTERCEPT project significantly positively increased the probability of withdrawing from the unemployment registry. According to estimates produced by the GBM, and IPW models, by 1 November 2023 the average treatment effect for all project participants was approximately 10 percentage points (p.p.) and is statistically significant. With 158 participants successfully completing the entire pilot programme, this translates into approximately 16 additionally employed persons. We use two scenarios for these people's earnings: (1) they all earn the minimal wage (EUR 840); (2) they all earn the average wage observed in Lithuania for 2023 Q1-3 (EUR 1993).

Our analysis suggests that the intervention also significantly increased the probability of withdrawing from the unemployment registry. According to estimates produced by the GBM, and IPW models, by 1 November 2023 the average treatment effect for all project participants was approximately 10 percentage points (p.p.) and is statistically significant.

In the case of savings of direct costs from the public budget, we assumed two scenarios of unemployment benefits saved, assuming that participants: (1) earned a minimum salary; (2) earned an average salary. Income tax is 20%, while social contributions consist of mandatory health insurance (PSD, 6.98%), state social insurance (VSD, 1.77%) and pension social insurance (12.52%).

Table 15. Benefits of the public budget per one additionally employed participant

	Monthly	Annually
Social contributions due - Minimum wage	€178.67	€2144.04
Social contributions due - Average wage	€423.91	€5 086.92
Income tax - Minimum wage	€43.00	€516
Income tax - Average wage	€367.24	€4 406.88
Unemployment benefits – minimum wage	€342.09	€4 105.08

Unemployment benefits – Average wage	€813.89	€9 766.68
Total – Minimum wage scenario	€563.76	€6765.12
Total – Average wage scenario	€1 605.04	€19260.48

Source: Compiled by the authors

Cost of the intervention

To calculate economic efficiency, one should look at the extent to which the costs of the project were justified by its benefits. The main costs related to the pilot project are as follows:

- Costs related to trainings – EUR 65 400
- Administrative costs – EUR 188 000
- Direct cost to participants – EUR 164 000

Cost benefit analysis

Based on the sample of 158 participants who successfully completed the pilot project and using the minimum wage scenario, the pilot would pay off for the public budget after 3.9 years. Under an average wage scenario – after 1.4 years.

Table 16. Cost benefit analysis

Type	Item	Annually	Total per type
Costs per pilot	Training costs	€65 400.00	€417 400
	Administrative costs	€188 000.00	
	Payments to participants	€164 000.00	
Benefits per pilot - Minimum wage	Social contributions	€34 304.64	€108 241.92
	Income tax	€8256.00	
	Unemployment benefits	€65 681.28	
Benefits per pilot- Average wage	Social contributions	€81 390.72	€308 167.68
	Income tax	€70 510.08	
	Unemployment benefits	€156266.88	

Source: Compiled by the authors from their own calculations and data provided by LT PES

Alternative interventions and an efficient way of using resources

At the moment, there are no alternative interventions in LT PES that could achieve the same impact. INTERCEPT is the only project which trains and finds internship positions for 25-29 year-old NEETs in the green economy.

However, there are some alternatives that could make the use of resources more efficient. LT PES noted that it would be possible to upload training materials online and, after reviewing the material, correctly answering questions, or otherwise proving that the young persons have gone through the material, they would receive a training voucher. Then, having found a green company, completed an internship, and provided all the necessary evidence, they could redeem their vouchers. In this case, there would be no administrative costs left, and the outcome would be quite similar.

LT PES had the opportunity to send young people for further training after their internships if the youth felt that they lacked certain knowledge and skills necessary to continue working in the green sector. However, only a few young individuals took advantage of this opportunity.

Regarding a more efficient way to use resources – the available resources were used as planned and thus, the expenditures were as expected.

Timeframe

The launch date of the pilot was delayed. This was due to the fact that staff had to be trained about green jobs. However, this did not affect the course and the results of the pilot project. On the contrary – more NEETs were included in the pilot project than planned.

The negative unintended result of the delayed start was that some employers who initially expressed interest in the programme decided not to participate (not to offer internships).

4.5. Impact

The impact of the INTERCEPT project was evaluated using contractual analysis methods. Counterfactual impact evaluation methods were used to discern a programme's impact by comparing the outcomes of participants in their actual participation scenario with the outcomes that would arise in a counterfactual situation where they did not engage in the INTERCEPT programme. This approach highlighted the difference between the two, controlling for potential confounders and shedding light on the programme's true effects.

We employed four distinct approaches to estimate the treatment effect on the treated (ATT) of the INTERCEPT programme:

- 1) Propensity Score Matching (PSM);
- 2) Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM);
- 3) Inverse Probability Weighting (IPW) generated through entropy balancing;
- 4) Generalized Boosted Modelling (GBM).

PSM, CEM, and IPW are widely recognised statistical methods in causal inference. Additionally, we incorporated a machine learning technique known as GBM, or boosted classification and regression trees (CART). The flexibility and compatibility of ML algorithms make them ideal for both small and large datasets, with the capacity to account for nonlinearities. Among the group of methods relying on propensity score estimation, GBM and IPW are the most recent and are often considered superior to PSM and CEM. Therefore, we primarily relied on GBM and IPW to formulate statistical inferences when encountering diverging estimates. The Technical Annex presents the data balance statistics before and after matching. In each instance, the matching process significantly improved covariate balance. An additional logistic regression model was then performed to control for any remaining imbalances in the matched datasets.

Evaluation sample

In total, the evaluation sample contained 17 325 individuals of 25-29 years old. The Lithuanian Employment Service provided the dataset for the evaluation. The treatment group was comprised 149 NEET individuals who participated in the INTERCEPT project. These individuals started the programme by the end of July and had sufficient time for job placement by the time of the counterfactual analysis. The control group consisted of 17 176 NEETs who were unemployed at least once between 1 March and 31 October, 2023, and were eligible for programme participation but opted out.

To evaluate the treatment effects over time, we analysed a subset of 56 programme participants who began treatment during the first month of the active programme phase, which took place from 16 March to 7 April 2023 (thereafter – 1st group). This allowed us to assess the treatment's effectiveness from one to seven months after the intervention.

Outcome variables

The outcome of interest is the participation of the labour market. To ensure the robustness of results, we measured labour market participation using two alternative variables at different points after the intervention.

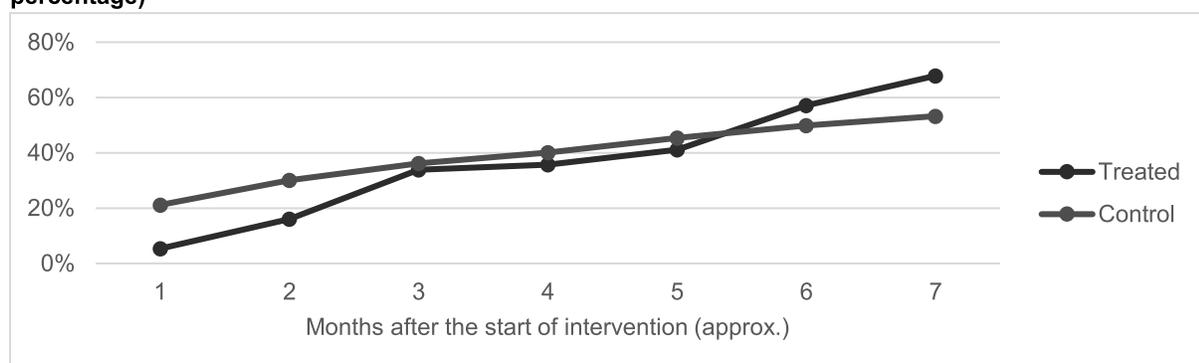
- 1) **Employment status.** This binary variable indicates if the individual was registered as a hired employee on 1 November 2023. Although this variable reliably captures hired individuals, it has a couple of limitations. First, it is available only at one point in time. To approximate the dynamic expression of the intervention effects, we

estimated the treatment impact for the first group of participants and all participants separately. Second, it does not capture other forms of employment, such as self-employment. We employ personal status in the registry of the unemployed to address any inaccuracies arising from the absence of information on other forms of employment.

- 2) **Status in the registry of the unemployed.** This variable indicates whether a person is registered as unemployed on a specific date. To improve this variable, we combined it with information on the reason for withdrawing from the list. If a person was absent from the registry on a particular date and withdrew because (s)he found employment (as an employee, self-employed, or starting their own business), the variable was assigned a value of 1 (the desired outcome). On the other hand, if a person remained registered as unemployed, lost the right to registered unemployment and related benefits, or withdrew for reasons unrelated to entering the labour market, the variable was assigned a value of 0.

We checked the status of the first group of participants at the end of every month, starting one month after the beginning of the intervention. This allowed us to directly observe changes in their employment status between April 30 and October 31 and to estimate the treatment effects by month. The raw share of NEETs who withdrew from the unemployment registry during the months following the intervention is presented in Figure 14. For statistical robustness, we also measured outcomes in terms of unemployment status for all treated participants on November 1st, the same date as the employment status is measured.

Figure 14. Share of NEETs who withdrew from the registry of unemployed due to finding work (cumulative percentage)



Source: Compiled by the authors

Note: The individuals who were not in the registry of employees by March 2023 are excluded from the sample

Covariates

We assumed that (self-)selection into the INTERCEPT programme was based on observed characteristics (conditional independence assumption). These characteristics could explain a decision to participate in the programme and the labour market outcomes after the intervention. Due to the availability and preparatory modelling results⁹, we controlled for the following covariates: gender, the highest level of education achieved, age, age at the time of registration, duration and type of last job, region, and unemployment level in the observed region at the start of the intervention. Table 17 summarises the variables and their mean values for the treatment and control groups prior to matching.

Table 17. Covariates and their distribution

Variable	Sub-category	Means Treated	Means Control
Gender	Male	56%	53%
	Tertiary at university	31%	28%

⁹ Logistic regression models indicating the effects of individual and regional characteristics on the probability of receiving treatment.

Highest attained education level (percentages)	Tertiary at college	26%	15%
	Upper secondary with vocational training	15%	19%
	Upper Secondary	24%	29%
	ISCED2 or lower (reference category)	3%	9%
Age at registration (months)		326	324
Age on March 2023 (months)		339	333
Duration of the last job (days)		384	452
Type of the last job (percentages)	Employed	80%	83%
	Self-employed	6%	5%
	No job experience (reference category)	14%	12%
Region (percentages)	Kaunas-Marijampolė	32%	36%
	Klaipeda	23%	14%
	Vilnius (reference category)	46%	50%
Unemployment rate in the district (percentages)		5%	5%

Source: Compiled by the authors

Evaluation results

Participation in the INTERCEPT project significantly positively impacted the probability of employment. According to estimates produced by the CEM, GBM, and IPW models, by 1 November 2023, the average treatment effect for all project participants was approximately 9 percentage points (p.p.). However, based on a PSM analysis, the effect could have been as high as 18 p.p. Although PSM produced a higher estimate, the first three models were characterised by a better balance between the covariates and lower errors (see Technical Annex). Therefore, the more conservative estimate of 9 p.p. is more likely to be closer to the true parameter. The first group, which entered the intervention earlier and had more time to adjust afterwards, experienced significantly larger effects, averaging 17 percentage points based on the more conservative estimates. The results of each model are summarised in Table 18.

Table 18. Average employment status treatment effects by 1 November 2023

	Method	Effect	s.e.	pval	Significance
Model 1: average treatment effects on all the treated (N treated = 149)	GBM	8%	4%	0.036	*
	IPW	11%	4%	0.009	**
	PSM	18%	5%	0.001	***
	CEM	7%	4%	0.094	.
Model 2: average treatment effects on the participants of the 1st group (N treated=56)	GBM	18%	6%	0.002	**
	IPW	19%	7%	0.01	**
	PSM	29%	7%	0	***
	CEM	16%	7%	0.034	*

Source: Compiled by the authors

Note: The effects are presented as the average marginal effects at the mean. "." -p-val.<0.1, "*" – p-val. <0.05, "***" – p-val.<0.01, "****" – p-val.<0.001

Status in the registry of the unemployed

Our analysis suggests that intervention also significantly increased the probability of withdrawing from the unemployment registry. According to estimates produced by the GBM and IPW models, by 1 November 2023 the

average treatment effect for all project participants was approximately 10 percentage points (p.p.) and is statistically significant. The CEM and PSM models indicate positive effects of a similar magnitude, but with less precision. A closer look at the performance of the 1st group of participants allowed us to evaluate the evolution of effects over time.

Table 19. Model 3: Average registered unemployment status treatment effects for all participants by Nov 1, 2023 (N treated =149)

Method	Effect	s.e.	pval	Significance
GBM	10%	4%	0.016	*
IPW	10%	4%	0.015	*
PSM	9%	6%	0.106	
CEM	7%	4%	0.128	

Source: Compiled by the authors

Note: The effects are presented as the average marginal effects at the mean. "." -p-val.<0.1, "*" – p-val. <0.05, "***" – p-val.<0.01, "****" – p-val.<0.001

The first group's results show that participation in the programme reduced the likelihood of withdrawing from unemployment during the initial months, but ultimately significantly increased the chances for withdrawal significantly. The GBM and IPW estimates revealed that by the end of the seventh month after entering the intervention, participants in the first group were 16% more likely to be withdrawn from the registry, citing finding business or employment opportunities as a reason. The average treatment effects on the 1st group by month are presented in Table 20 and Figure 15.

Table 20. Model 4: Average registered unemployment status treatment effects for the 1st group (N treated = 56)

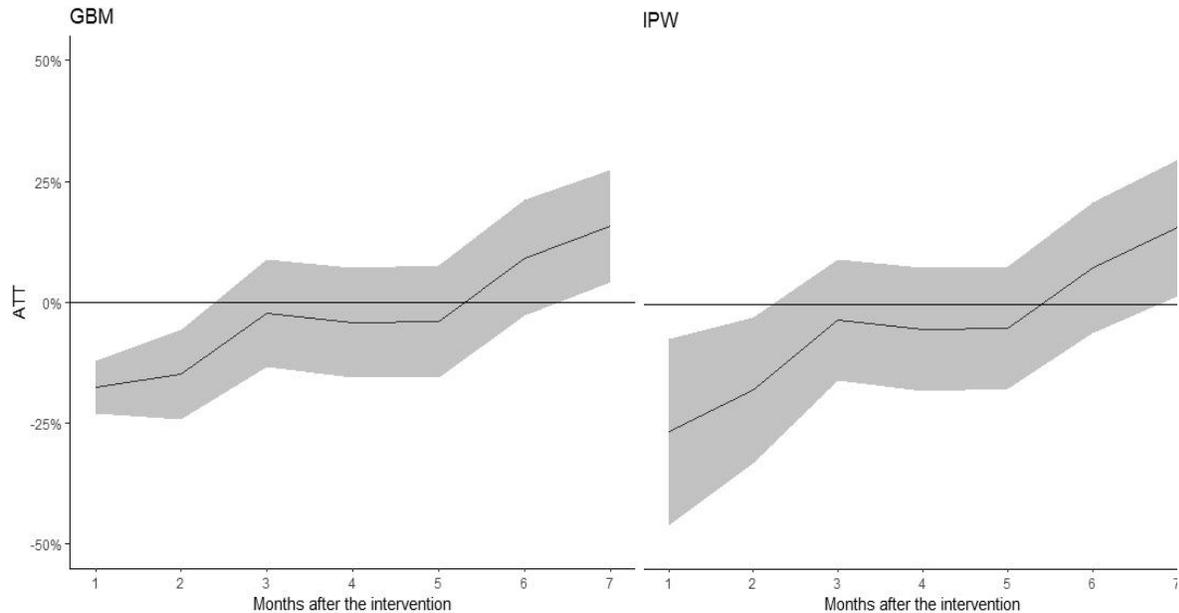
Months after the start of intervention	GBM		IPW		PSM		CEM	
	Effect	Significance	Effect	Significance	Effect	Significance	Effect	Significance
1	-27%	**	-18%	***	-9%		-	
2	-18%	*	-15%	**	-6%		261%	**
3	-3%		-2%		10%		-6%	
4	-5%		-4%		4%		-6%	
5	-5%		-4%		-1%		-7%	
6	8%		9%		14%		8%	
7	16%	*	16%	**	14%		12%	

Source: Compiled by the authors

Note: The effects are presented as the average marginal effects at the mean. "." -p-val.<0.1, "*" – p-val. <0.05, "***" – p-val.<0.01, "****" – p-val.<0.001

Several factors could contribute to the delayed expression of positive effects. Firstly, in the short term, participating in the program can be associated with opportunity costs: losing time that could otherwise be spent searching for job opportunities. Secondly, the delay in effects may signal that workplace exposure did not often lead to immediate job opportunities in one of the partnering institutions. Instead, participation in the program might have increased employment opportunities by other means, such as providing skills transferrable to other firms, increasing self-confidence, or acting as a signal of motivation to other potential employers.

Figure 15. Average registered unemployment status treatment effects for the 1st group (N treated = 56) with 95% confidence intervals



Source: Compiled by the authors

Men and women showed equally positive treatment effects. The difference in the estimated treatment effects regarding employment and registered unemployment status was not statistically significant. This is a crucial and relevant result for policy making since women have historically been underrepresented in the sectors that green transition initiatives target. For instance, in the conventional energy sector, women account for less than a quarter (22%) of the workforce (European Commission, 2021b), and in the renewable energy sector, they account for just under a third (32%) (IRENA, 2019). Without intervention, they are less likely to benefit from the predicted increase in job availability in these sectors.¹⁰

4.6. Sustainability, transferability and scalability

Scalability - likelihood to carry pilot at larger scale

The pilot intervention was successful in Lithuania. The number of planned and foreseen participants almost doubled in number. Green companies were also interested in the project. There is an opportunity to upscale some of the intervention aspects beyond the project's timeframe. Every year, LT PES has a budget allocation for internship funding. Currently, a possibility for redistributing resources and allocating part of the budget to green practices is being considered, thus continuing the development of the project.

LT PES plans to conduct training for career consultants and customer service specialists on the green economy. The aim is for these training sessions to take place regularly.

However, the administrative burden has to be taken into consideration. Funding the pilot from the project's funds provided it with flexibility that led to a quicker and more efficient use of tools. As an example, some tools include the decision to pay travel allowances to participants, to select places of practice, and criteria for participants.

Transferability – adopting pilot on a scale in another country

¹⁰ Source: <https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/Gender%20Equality%20Index%202023.pdf>

The interviewees thought that it would be difficult to adopt the pilot project at scale in another country/region. Interview participants believed it would be challenging because the legal regulations for internships are different in each country – their duration, compensation, country obligations, etc. The institutions that organize internships also differ, as does the collaboration between these institutions. However, even though other countries could benefit from the training material or specific managerial ideas, replicating the entire project structure would be difficult.

On the demand side, the pilot seems relevant for the PES of other countries as well. All countries have some inactive NEETs and the trend of the green economy is growing in around the world as well. The possibility to combine these two aspects might be of interest to other countries.

Regarding the supply side, the pilot project is not well documented. Beyond information provided to the FMO mid-annually, there is no detailed document explaining how the pilot project was implemented in Lithuania.

Sustainability – implementers' capacity building

The LT PES mentioned that the project team significantly improved during the pilot project:

- First, career consultants were trained about green jobs and can now consult NEETs and better match them with green companies.
- Second, LT PES employees often had to address non-standard situations that had not previously occurred in their work. This improved their skills.
- The partnership between LT PES and green companies is already in place and will continue building.
- Lastly, the system for implementing innovations in PES is currently under development. Project implementers already see that certain activities contained in the scope of the project will indeed be implemented to ensure continuity (e.g. staff training for green jobs, salary paid to interns, internships allocated to green jobs, etc.)

4.7. Innovativeness

The model for activating the unemployed when they are trained and then do an internship, is not new. A study conducted before the intervention showed that this is the most popular and effective way of activating the unemployed. The new aspect was that young people received one-time allowances that served as strong motivational tools. The employment service provides wage compensation for young people in certain policy measures. However, the compensation is paid to the employer. In this case, the number of allowances was uniform for everyone, regardless of the amount of their wage. This provided a certain guarantee and security for the youths. Additionally, project conditions were flexible, allowing for a freer use of the tools needed to activate NEETs. For instance, project implementers saw the need to offer allowances for commuting and provided them to NEETs. Thus, one could say that the intervention included an incremental process innovation.

Companies, on the other hand, did not see the interventions as an innovative way to employ NEETs. It is commendable that participant internships were funded from the project's resources and that a decision was made in consultation with a career consultant to determine whether the internship was specifically tailored to the participant. However, fundamentally, such a model where an unemployed individual undergoes a brief training and carries out an internship is standard and lacks innovation.

5. Maltese pilot evaluation

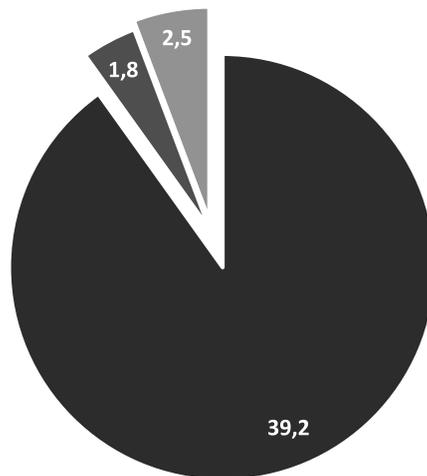
5.1. Context

The INTERCEPT project in Malta focused on NEETs aged between 25 and 29, with two primary goals: firstly, reintegrating them into the labour market by guiding them toward career pathways in emerging jobs within the green economy; additionally, the program aimed to provide targeted assistance to NEETs in the 25-29 age group, recognizing

that existing Active Labor Market Policy practices, like the Youth Guarantee Scheme, did not sufficiently cater to this demographic. According to an initial screening of the Maltese labour market, in 2022 there were **43 500 young people aged between 25-29 living in Malta**. More than 4 000 people (1 800 unemployed and 2 500 inactive) from this population group can be referred to as NEETs; they comprised almost 10% of the target population. The main reason for inactivity reported in 59 per cent of the cases was taking care of other family members. For the age bracket of 25-29 education and training play just a limited role and only 2 per cent of responses of the inactive mention this as reason for not seeking employment (shares aggregated for the period 2011-2020).

Figure 16 Population aged 25-29 by activity/employment status (in thousands of persons; 2022)

■ Employed persons ■ Unemployed persons ■ Persons outside the labour force

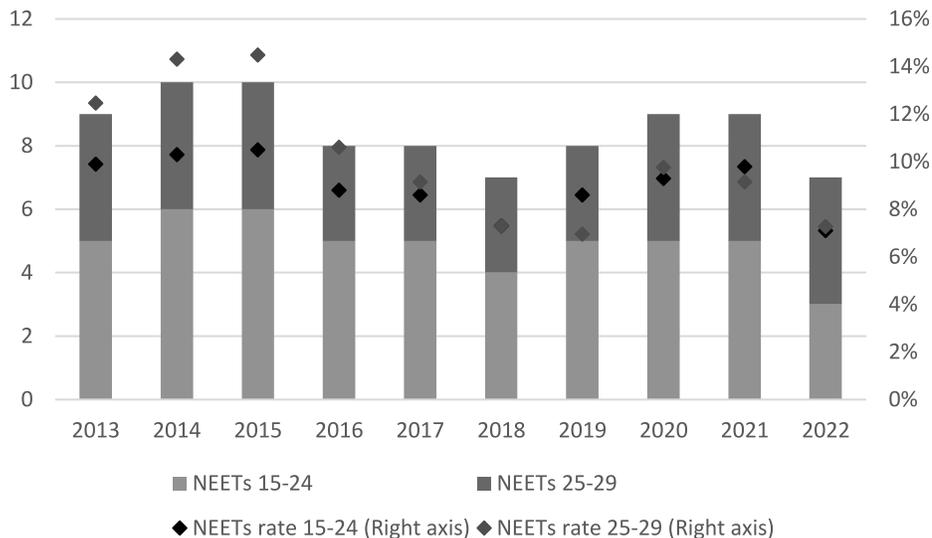


Source: Eurostat Database [lfsa_pganws]

In 2022, this group of **young people who were neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET)** consisted of 7 000 persons between the ages of 15-29. The population of female NEETs aged 15-29 declined in the past decade in absolute, but predominantly also in relative terms (from 12.7% to 7.3% between 2013 and 2022). In contrast, the population of male NEETs 15-29 did not change to such an extent - it declined from 9.1 to 7.0 per cent between 2013 and 2022 (Eurostat Database [lfsi_neet_a]).

Disaggregating the dynamics to narrower age-groups, the initially higher share of NEETs in the population of 25-29 year olds converged to the NEET rate observed for the population of 15-24 year olds. The share of NEETs in the total population grew from 7.9 to 9.5 per cent between 2019 and 2020, suggesting a negative effect of the COVID-19 Pandemics. This rate remained unchanged in 2021 and only dropped in 2022 (Figure 17).

Figure 17. The population of NEETs in Malta (in thousands and % of the population)



Source: Eurostat Database [lfsa_pganws; lfsi_neet_a]

Note: The NEETs rate is the share of NEETs on the total population in the respective age group

The overall goal of the INTERCEPT project was to engage 300 NEETs in three countries: Malta, Italy and Lithuania. The expected contribution of Malta was to engage 100 young participants in the scheme. During the course of the implementation, Jobsplus conducted a national outreach campaign, with nearly 200 people expressing interesting the pilot, representing approximately 5% of the target group. Out of the interested group, only 102 were deemed eligible to participate. However, a significant share of eligible participants (63), was not activated, i.e. received no payment¹¹ from the scheme. The population of those who were not activated was comprised of two different groups: the first and larger one consisted of 51 persons who never even started the training and the second smaller one (12) of those who started the training but failed to complete this phase.

Given the fact that more than half of the eligible participants did not even start the training after showing an initial interest, the reasons and factors behind this were investigated by conducting a focused survey and a series of short interviews. Half of the respondents from the non-participating group indicated that they had only finished compulsory education and had not continued afterwards. The majority of the eligible NEETs who did not participate stated that they had children and a significant part articulated that the training schedules conflicted with their children's commitments. The rest of the parents in the group said that the amount of the financial incentive was not adequate enough to motivate them. Interestingly, it was not only having to fulfil their children's commitments that limited their participation, but also mentioned as limiting factors was their time spent helping relatives, issues with their concentration on online content (ADHD) and their criminal records. This indicated that some of the NEETs need more personalized approaches to meet their limitations. The majority of the non-participants were keen to get involved but needed either more flexible time arrangements to be able to find a work-life balance or were lacking a guarantee of employment after participation in the scheme. This indicated that there was also an element of lack of self-confidence and independence, which was also partly reflected in the fact that half of the respondents were still living with their parents. None of the parents had gained a tertiary education and the majority of the households had an annual income in the EUR 10 000– 20 000 bracket. Interestingly, almost all (90 per cent) of the non-participants had previous work experience and the majority of them were first time employees before turning 18.

¹¹ Payments as motivation to participate were provided in two instalments. The first after completing the training and the second after a successful completion of the internship.

5.2. Relevance

The INTERCEPT project was initiated in response to the European Council's recommendation in October 2020 to strengthen the Youth Guarantee Program. Among the key recommendations put forth by the Council were enhancing the identification of the target group to gain a deeper understanding of the diverse needs of NEETs (young people not in education, employment, or training) and the specific support they require. This included a focus on NEETs negatively impacted by the economic recession; an expansion of the age range to include individuals aged 25 to 29, and the facilitation of upskilling and re-skilling in green skills. These fundamental elements served as the foundation of Project INTERCEPT, which entailed research on NEETs, particularly within the 25 to 29 age group, and the activation of NEETs in this age bracket through green skills development and green-skills-based work placements.

Relevance to the beneficiaries - NEETs

"I had no particular expectations when I began participating in the INTERCEPT Project. Frankly, I believed it would be an uninteresting course. However, as the process unfolded, my perspective completely changed, as it has provided me with numerous opportunities. I now collaborate with highly esteemed individuals, something I never thought possible. I would like to express my gratitude to all involved in creating this engaging project. It captured my interest, leading to my enthusiastic participation, and ultimately led to securing my dream job."

A quote extracted from interviews with NEETs participants in the INTERCEPT project in Malta

The design of the pilot programme combined training followed by a practical workplace experience with raising awareness on the growing importance of the green economy. This combination proved to fit the situation of Maltese NEETs. Based on a comparison of pre and post intervention surveys, we observed an increase in skills, motivation and green economy awareness of participants. This can be ascribed to the training element of the programme. The workplace experience element was identified as the most important part not only by the participating NEETs but also by employers. The inclusion of concept of the green economy in the project created a joint topic, in which some of the employers discovered that they fell within the green spectrum and participants declaring that they enjoyed the notion of contributing to a greener and thus sustainable future. Implementation of the pilot programme was under constant evaluation, leading to an increase in the hourly remuneration of participants and supplying them with additional information on other publicly financed programmes (e.g. free childcare scheme). In general, the pilot program demonstrated the potential to evolve into a functional component within Malta's employment policies.

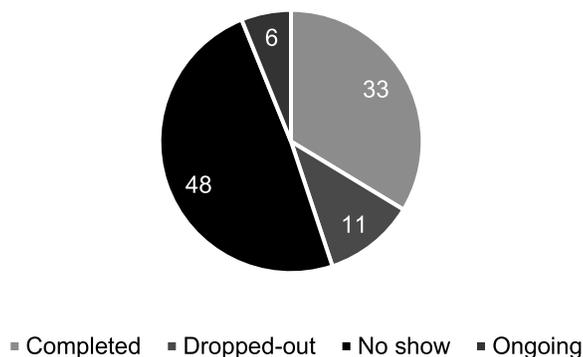
The pilot project's target group of NEETs

NEETs - INTERCEPT participants

The intervention provided a complex set of activities covering personalised support, training, and work exposure that were adapted to the specifics of Malta. In total, 197 applications were received and 102 of them were eligible to participate in the scheme. From the 102 applications, there were 4 duplicates, meaning that a NEET applied and dropped out and then reapplied again later.

Figure 18 shows the INTERCEPT participation status of NEETs in Malta. 39 individuals (including those who were at time of writing this report currently in internships) were successfully activated and represent a 40% rate of successful completion. 59 participants did not complete both the training and internship phases, 11 of them dropped-out and 48 did not show up.

Figure 18. INTERCEPT participation status



Source: Compiled by the authors using INTERCEPT data extract – 5 November 2023

Table 21 provides basic information on NEETs who either completed the entire pilot programme, are still ongoing participants or dropped out during the training or work placement phases because they found employment or joined another scheme.

Table 21. Descriptive statistics of activated NEETs who started INTERCEPT

Description	NEETs
Number of NEETs	50
Female (%)	50
Average age	27
Highest level of education attained (%)	
None	2
Early childhood education	2
Lower secondary education	11
Post-secondary non-tertiary education	34
Upper secondary education	23
Tertiary education (Bachelor's or above)	28
Children	
Children (%)	26
Average age of the youngest child	3.7
Employment history	
Previous employment (%)	88
Average age in first job	18
Previous PES registration (%)	70

Source: Compiled by the authors from the pre-intervention survey and INTERCEPT data extract - 5 November 2023

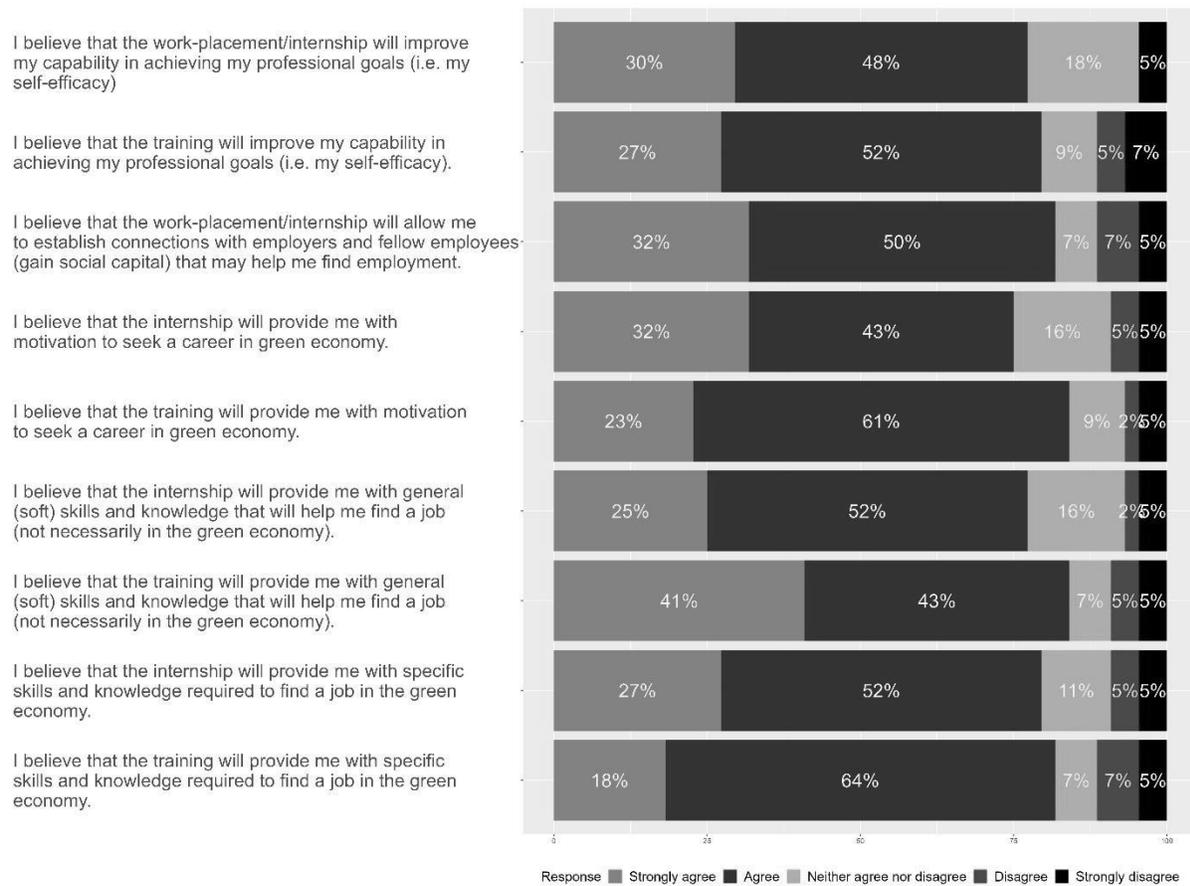
The average age of NEETs who entered the INTERCEPT pilot project was 27 years. The largest proportion of them had attained a post-secondary non-tertiary education and tertiary education (Bachelor's or above). 26% of the participants have children with the average age of the youngest child being close to under 4 years of age. The vast majority of participants had already been employed, and up to 70% had experienced being registered by the PES (Jobsplus).

Expectations of NEETs and their motivation to participate

According to the outcome of interviews with the NEETs, the pilot program captured the attention of young people who had either been trying to gain employment for some time, but had not been successful, (citing a poor presentation of their skills as the reason); young people who had jobs but were not satisfied with their career paths and were motivated by trying to find a change; and those who were directly interested in the topic of an environmentally friendly economy (even before their participation in the pilot programme).

Figure 19 shows a summary of NEETs' expectations regarding the training course and their work placement based on the pre-questionnaire. Each participant was asked to fill out a questionnaire at the beginning of the first day of the training course. The goal of the survey was to identify participants' expectations both for the training course and the work placement, and their prior knowledge of the material to be presented in the training course. The majority of the participants shared a positive attitude towards both phases of the pilot programme. They started with an optimistic approach towards it and their expectations were relatively high. They believed that their skills would be improved, and that the pilot project would help them in their professional development and increase their chances of finding a job in Malta.

Figure 19. Expectations regarding the training course and work placement.



Source: Compiled by the authors from the pre-intervention survey

Expectations on the employers' side

Several expectations of the INTERCEPT project can be deduced from the employers' responses which were identified as flexibility, the ability to meet specific human resource requirements, the possibility of savings on financial resources and the possibility to involve participants who wanted to learn and develop their skills. They saw flexibility from the point of view of working hours, providing enough space for participants to train as well as fulfil their professional obligations. For some companies, the ability to work remotely was also important, especially for those that do not have physical offices. For some companies, the INTERCEPT project was flexible in terms of its focus on the green economy. This focus gave them the opportunity to work on projects that were relevant to them. In terms of the ability to meet specific staffing needs, employers particularly highlighted the ability to quickly find skilled individuals who were ready to return to work. The project enabled employers to assess the working style and skills of people already in the workplace, rather than just during initial interviews. Employers, and especially start-ups with limited budgets in particular, mentioned the possibility of finding workers without spending financial resources.

Barriers to the employment of the target group addressed in the pilot project

Based on the Labour Force Survey data analysis, we were able to trace the reasons why NEETs aged 25-29 were not available to start working. We observed that the share of those available to start work was significantly higher among men. Over 12 per cent of the female NEET population aged 25-29 seek work but it is not available because of personal or family responsibilities and almost 60 per cent of them do not seek employment.

Table 22. The proportions of NEETs 25-29, based on their reasons for not being available for employment in the following two weeks (in %)

	Male	Female	Total
Available for work	69.84	23.65	38.74
Seeking work, but not available:	4.92	17.04	13.08
He/she must complete education or training	1.47	0.40	0.75
Personal or family responsibilities (including maternity)	0.15	12.34	8.35
Own illness or incapacity	1.81	1.55	1.63
Other reasons	1.49	2.76	2.34
Not seeking employment	25.24	59.30	48.17
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: European Union Labour Force Survey 2009-2020

Out of those NEETs aged 25-29 not seeking employment, half of the men declared a disability or illness as the main reason for not searching for employment. In contrast, only 10 per cent of female responses listed the same causes. Moreover, females stated that family-related responsibilities (36 per cent) and looking after children (35 per cent) were their most frequent reasons for not seeking work.

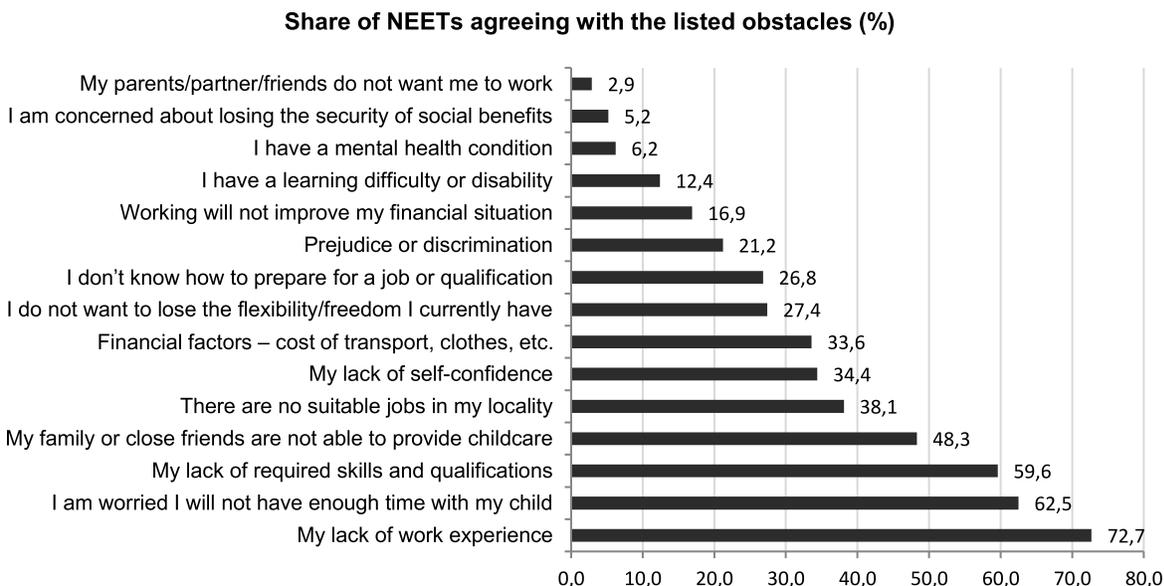
Table 23. The proportions of NEETs 25-29, based on their reasons for not searching employment (in %)

Reasons for not searching employment:	Male	Female	Total
Awaiting recall to work (persons on lay-off)	1%	0%	0%
Own illness or disability	48%	10%	16%
Looking after children or incapacitated adults (from 2006)	2%	35%	29%
Other personal or family responsibilities	1%	36%	30%
Education or training	9%	1%	2%
Belief that no work is available	2%	0%	0%
Other reasons	2%	0%	1%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Source: European Union Labour Force Survey 2009-2020

The evidence on the declared reasons for not entering or seeking a job underlines the importance of accessible childcare in activating Maltese NEETs aged 25-29. During the NEETs Census in 2015, participants were asked to list the obstacles and barriers preventing them from getting a job. The most frequently mentioned barriers involved a lack of work experience or skills and childcare related issues (see Figure 20).

Figure 20. Barriers and obstacles preventing NEETs from getting into work, education or training identified by CENSUS



Source: Census on Youths NEET: Report on Findings. Youth Guarantee ESF-3.231, Ministry for Education and Employment, ESF Malta 2007-2013, 2015

Country-specific barriers to employment for NEETs have been taken into account in the implementation of the project by the PES

Malta's economy is highly resilient with its labour market registering a positive performance. With record employment rates and low unemployment rates, the tightness of the labour market continues to present various challenges to industry in finding skilled human talents. This also means that anyone looking to activate themselves can easily do so by finding full time or part-time employment opportunities across all levels and sectors. However, the implementation of INTERCEPT project unveiled some of the challenges related to targeting 25-29-year-old inactive youth. The project highlighted the challenges in activating this target group due to their specific backgrounds especially in cases of family responsibilities and a heavy reliance on social benefits that were received in conjunction with free healthcare and - in many cases - free housing. Those factors do serve to counteract entry into the labour market as an attractive option. In order to mitigate these challenges, the allowance rate per hour in Malta was increased incrementally per group of participants (from an initial level of EUR 5 per hour to EUR 7.5 per hour) to try and attract more NEETs. Participants with young children were provided with free childcare. In terms of promotion, a dual approach was utilized. Firstly, a **Digital Campaign** was launched that included various platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn and an engagement of Instagram influencers and published articles online that was initiated. This was followed by a **Traditional Approach** which included radio ads on major stations, multiple email marketing campaigns, and direct postal letters to members of the target group. Another challenge was the transition phase between training and work placement. Despite allowances, quick responses were of clinical necessity due to the potential risk of losing participant interest.

Specific solutions

In the context of Malta, where access to specialized training and employment opportunities in the green economy were limited prior to the introduction of this project, both components, namely training and work placement, held significant relevance for participating NEETs. This was because the beneficiaries were not only equipped with skills tailored to the burgeoning green economy but were also provided with the necessary support to translate these skills into meaningful and sustainable employment.

Training Component

- The introduction of this micro-course incorporated emerging aspects related to Green jobs.
- Addressed motivation and behaviour-related topics, which played a crucial role in boosting the morale of participants, particularly those with low self-esteem.
- The availability of online training options proved beneficial for individuals, including mothers and those with caregiving responsibilities.

Work Placement Component

- Participants received an allowance rate higher than the minimum wage during their work placements.
- Free childcare services were offered during work placements, thereby assisting mothers in managing their commitments.
- Participants gained valuable experience in new job roles within the green sector.
- The work placement phase also presented an opportunity for job offers upon completion of the pilot scheme.

During the course of the INTERCEPT Project implementation, the potential to introduce Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) tailored for employers was identified as a missing element which could have been a beneficial component in the overall design of the scheme. These KPIs could have been devised with the aim of creating novel roles or helping existing ones to evolve to accommodate scheme participants. Such KPIs would have served as a venue to enhance support mechanisms for the transition into and development of Green jobs and fostering alignment with the overarching goals of the project.

NEETs' satisfaction with the project

Training

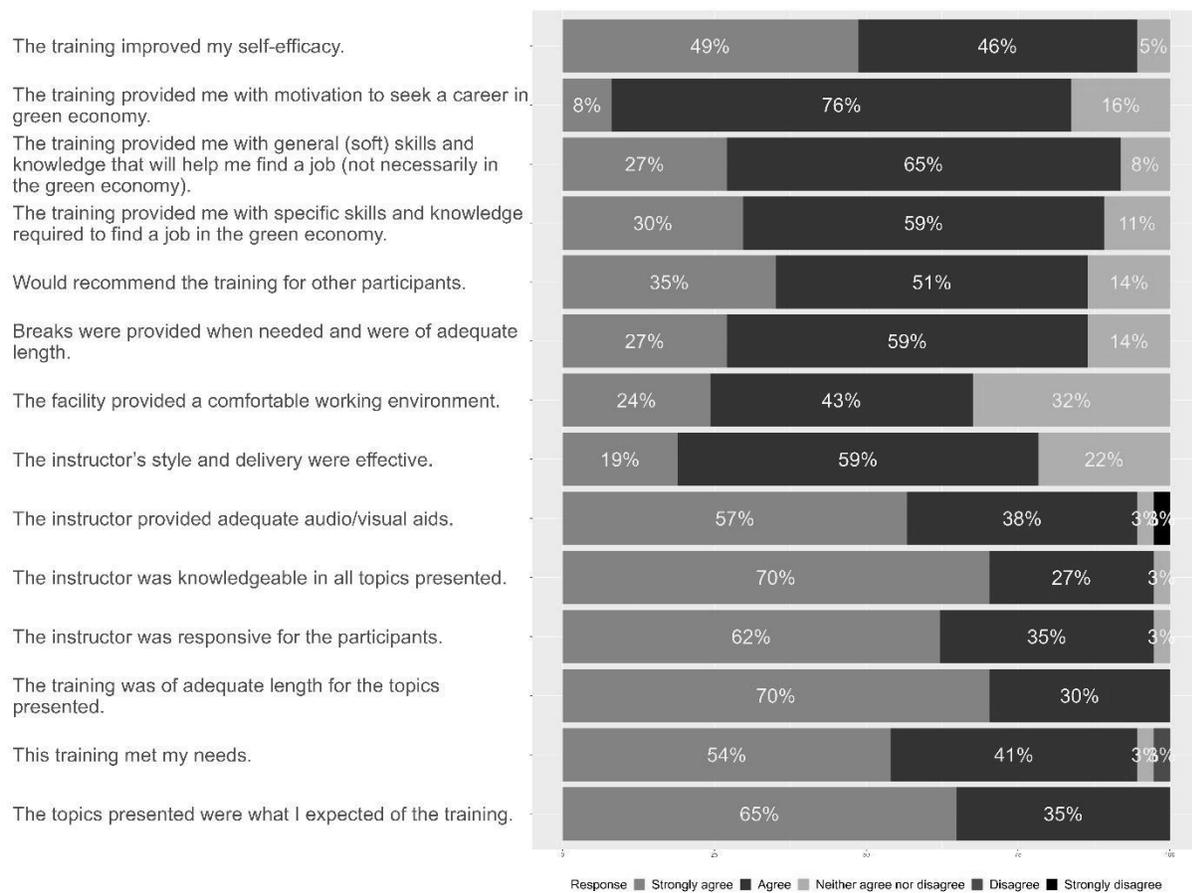
Based on interviews with NEETs, the relevance of the training phase was perceived differently by the participants, depending on their previous experiences. While some participants stated that the training covered areas, they already had information about, others responded that the training was more relevant to them than the internship because during the training phase they gained a significant amount of new knowledge with which they were not familiar before. For most respondents, both the training and the internship were important, since both provided valuable guidance and addressed their requirements. One NEET highlighted that in the training phase he had gained fundamental knowledge that he might not have encountered otherwise, for example on the topic of the SDGs. The training also improved his planning and organizational skills, which are of wider use in his professional as well as personal life. Thus, in their responses, participants reflected on the positive benefits of their acquired general knowledge as well as specific soft skills and information related to the green economy.

When asked specifically about their satisfaction with the training phase and their opinion on how it could be improved in the future, the majority stressed their great satisfaction with this phase of the scheme. However, during the interviews, several participants identified a few shortcomings and suggested improvements. For example, they recommended **going more in depth** on environmental aspects in the training phase and to elaborate more on definitions during the training, because, in their experience, tutors were hurriedly attempting to cover all the material within a given timeframe. Another recommendation was related to the organizational aspect, namely, to **improve communication** between the tutor and the participants, particularly regarding changes to the timetable. Some also recommended conducting sessions more frequently than just twice a week. It was also pointed out that the project did not take into account that some participants may not have a reliable internet connection at home or may have problems with the availability of a laptop. Another recommendation was to broaden the target group by including a wider age range so that more people would be eligible to participate in the initiative. At the end, all interviewees responded that in general they did not feel that there was anything missing from the pilot programme that could have made it more relevant to them. Satisfaction was also expressed with how the project is being implemented and managed by Jobsplus staff.

The implementation of the training phase revealed some important findings: due to the heterogeneity of the participants, some felt that they already had some of the information provided in this phase, so it was not as informative for them as expected; others, on the other hand, suggested going more in-depth on the topics and appreciated that the training had given them information that was engaging and potentially applicable to future job positions that they would not otherwise have gained. Another aspect of heterogeneity was highlighted by the participants themselves when they suggested

that training participants should be divided into two groups according to their educational background, i.e. to separate individuals with higher levels of education from those classified as low-skilled. This would, in their view, enable a **more streamlined training** phase.¹² Most of the respondents answered that the training phase was genuinely interesting, they appreciated the depth of integration of the participants in the soft skills part, the opportunity to acquire soft skills themselves and to discover their own abilities. The interactive approach and teaching methods of the tutors were especially praised as well. Since the tutors encouraged participants to share their suggestions and viewpoints on each topic, the opportunity to express their thoughts and opinions freely was particularly appreciated. It allowed them to understand other people's perspectives and gather knowledge from a diverse group of individuals. In their assessment, this was the opposite experience from standard education, where students passively take in information from lectures. The **interactive approach** in the INTERCEPT training sessions made it not only **exceptionally engaging** for the participants but led to a broader perspective of the young people involved and to a better ability to express and exchange valuable opinions and suggestions.

Figure 21. Reactions of NEETs to the training course



Source: Compiled by the authors from the mid-intervention survey

The findings from the in-depth interviews are consistent with the responses from the questionnaire survey in which all of the pilot programme participants took part. The prevalence of responses relating to the satisfaction or reactions to particular aspects of the training course are clearly illustrated in the figure below (Figure 21). The highest level of strongly positive and positive responses relates to the group of questions regarding the quality of the instructors. In the

¹² In the first group of training the NEETs were split per educational level and classroom or online basis. However, at the end of the Pilot it happened that the training was offered to only one participant in a group in a classroom format. Due to dropouts, most wanting online training and few eligible applications, the groups had to be mixed and this led to providing fully online training courses and without streaming.

matter of the type of skills that participants rated they had acquired in the training phase; slightly more positive responses were associated with general soft skills that would be potentially useful in finding usual employment rather than with specific green skills. However, in both cases the proportion of positive responses is significantly high, reaching levels of around 90%.

Of the 37 respondents to the questionnaire survey, only four did not give an unequivocally positive response when asked if the training had met their expectations. Some responded that they perceived the benefits of the training as unexpectedly positive.

Work-placements Most of the NEETs interviewed in-depth gave the following reasons for believing that the internship was the most relevant phase of the INTERCEPT project:

- It ultimately allowed them to remain employed by the company where they had completed their work placement experience
- They had gained specific skills that were applicable directly in the workplace environment
- The work placement created a channel to connect the participant with the company that turned out to be their dream job
- They learned to carry out duties they were engaged in during work placement
- The work placement allowed them to contextualise and apply the knowledge gained during the training phase

The majority of NEETs interviewed pointed out that the beginning of the work placement it was a challenge for them due to the initial learning process until they became accustomed to their job roles and responsibilities. This was related to the amount of new information and tasks they had to perform. They admitted that they struggled to meet deadlines in the beginning but added that their performance improved as time went on. Finally, they acknowledged that their initial problems related to their difficulty of adapting to work tasks but that ultimately broadened their horizons, improved their capabilities, and expanded their knowledge and skills, thus contributing to their personal growth. Among the other barriers or obstacles mentioned were the long distances between the employers' premises and their places of residence and the associated difficulty of travelling by public transport, especially during the summer months (high season in Malta). A low salary was also perceived to be an obstacle even though they understood that it came from a funded scheme. Some participants felt that it was not in line with the standards of some particular professions. There was one general reservation that the participants perceived and that was a deficiency in supervision and monitoring. On the other hand, most interviewees highlighted a strongly positive experience during the work placement phase, with several particularly appreciating the fact that their supervisors/company owners treated them as equal partners on the team, **respected their opinions**, and took **their recommendations into consideration**. They were motivated by the fact that employers appreciated their level of commitment and reflected this by offering them career progression within the company. They felt satisfaction at being part of a professional organization and appreciated being able to be present at important events. While some of them stressed that the experience allowed them to acquire specific **hard skills** needed to perform their duties, others said that the work placement made them realise that their individualistic approach could be perceived as a weakness, as it is important to be able to work as part of a team (**soft skills**). Others just stated in general terms that the work placement had taught them valuable lessons. In one case, it was highlighted that although the participant did not stay with the employer after the internship, the internship enabled him to make and later maintain contacts with other related companies, which made him confident that he would find employment in the field (**channel to possible employers**). The opportunity to work from home was also perceived as one of the benefits.

Relevance to the beneficiaries - Employers

The INTERCEPT pilot project aimed to bolster the availability of green skills, which has gained increasing prominence in the workforce landscape. Given the significance of employers in this endeavour, the scheme was meticulously structured to incorporate their valuable insights into the design and delivery of training programmes. This approach aimed to ensure alignment with industry demands and the specific targeting of priority skills. Notably, within the context of Malta's labour market, the work placement phase of the INTERCEPT project was particularly responsive to the needs of employers, primarily due to the prevailing labour shortage across various levels and employment sectors in Malta.

The INTERCEPT project also provided employers who may not have traditionally identified themselves as green companies as their core business activities and who may not have been exclusively focused on environmentally friendly practices, with opportunity to do so. Nevertheless, these employers were found to be introducing elements that contributed to the "greening" of their organizations, thereby situating themselves somewhere along the spectrum of sustainability. An integral aspect of the project encompassed the execution of a stakeholder survey, a component of project Work Package 4. The primary objectives of this survey were twofold: firstly, to identify the key cross-cutting competences that labour market stakeholders anticipate to be in demand in the near future within the realm of Green jobs, and secondly, to gain insights into stakeholders' expectations and requirements pertaining to the green economy in specific sectors such as agri-food, transport, services, energy, and resource management, construction and building, extractive industries, manufacturing, tourism, and hospitality.

Training

Employers were positive about the INTERCEPT project and mentioned that it aligns well with their companies' goals, particularly in the areas of sustainability and the green economy. The project is seen as comprehensive and covering all necessary aspects, providing valuable support to small companies that may not have the resources to have their own HR departments. The flexibility of remote working was highlighted as extremely beneficial. However, some employers were sceptical about the length of the training module that appears to be insufficient to adequately cover a fundamental knowledge of the green economy.

Work placement

Employers appreciate the enthusiasm of participants and their strong desire to learn, which is consistent with the company's intention to find individuals in the early stages of their careers. However, suggestions for the establishment of clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the assessment of candidates, indicating a desire for a more transparent assessment process, were made from the employers' side. The evaluation of employers on which mechanisms worked the best for NEETs in the work placement phase pointed to an increased self-efficacy and interpersonal soft skills.

Relevance to the local context

One key aspect of the pilot project's consistency within the local context is its role in preventing NEETs from being left behind in the rapidly evolving job market. Malta, like many other countries, has been grappling with the challenge of NEETs, which includes young people who are not in education, employment, or training. The local context in Malta is marked by a highly competitive labour market and an increased demand for skilled workers in emerging sectors such as the green economy one. The INTERCEPT project recognized this context and strategically addressed it by offering NEETs an opportunity to enter the job market in new evolving positions.

In Malta's specific context, the pilot project aligned with the national priorities of reducing youth unemployment and fostering economic growth. By focusing on green skills development and work placements in the green sector, the project tapped into a niche area where job opportunities are constantly emerging. This approach not only provided NEETs with a chance to gain relevant skills but also addressed the local demand for green talents. In this way, the project was consistent with the characteristics of the local context by bridging the gap between NEETs and new employment opportunities in a sector poised for growth.

Another dimension of the pilot project's consistency within the local context is its support for employers in embracing the green transition. Malta, like many regions, has been increasingly emphasizing sustainability and environmentally friendly practices. While some employers may not traditionally identify themselves as green companies, they are increasingly introducing elements that contribute to sustainability and environmental responsibility. The INTERCEPT project recognized this shift in the local business landscape and tailored its activities to align with it.

Additionally, employers' responses to the question about their assessment of the extent to which the objectives of the pilot project matched the characteristics of the local context revealed a discrepancy between the expected educational level of the participants and their actual educational level. This discrepancy posed a challenge as it required additional time and effort to train participants for specific duties and tasks. The project allowed participants to demonstrate their skills and commitment during an internship so that full-time or part-time employment could be considered. The project

provided an opportunity to assess participants beyond the scope of their interviews, which are largely influenced by participant stress and, in some cases, underrated self-confidence. At the same time, the project was also valued as a cost-effective solution for employers in their search for potential applicants. Employers appreciated the uniform structure of the programme and the possibility to overcome the limitations of traditional job interviews, which positively contributed to tailoring the project to the local context.

Contextual factors impact

Of particular note were the divergent responses of individuals in different age brackets to various outreach strategies. Younger participants, who are often more tech-savvy, exhibited a greater interest in the programme through its digital marketing efforts. On the other hand, older participants demonstrated a stronger response to traditional methods such as printed letters. This nuanced insight into the varying preferences of different age groups, even though all were in the same age bracket of 25-29, in responding to outreach strategies, provides valuable guidance for future initiatives. It underscored the importance of tailoring communication methods to specific target demographics, optimizing the chances of successful engagement. This knowledge will serve as a strategic advantage in ensuring that outreach efforts are finely tuned to reach the right audience through the most effective means possible, ultimately maximizing the impact of future initiatives.

The complexities of NEETs within the specific age bracket of the target group coupled with the current labour market situation in Malta posed a significant challenge to meet the set targets of the project.

- The majority of NEETs, especially those aged 25-29, lacked relevant employment experience.
- Dependency on social benefits like housing, healthcare, and transportation was significant.
- Many preferred inactivity to maintain a steady benefit income which created a challenging cycle to break.
- Work placements and potential employment were unattractive due to disrupting routines.
- Dropouts and no-shows were prevalent despite initial interest and applications.

Factors Contributing:

- Malta's consistently low unemployment rate limited the pool of candidates.
- A shortage of workers across sectors and skill levels in the country.
- Even NEETs with low skills had relatively easy access to employment.
- Caregiving responsibilities, especially for mothers, hindered labour market re-entry.

Complexity and Solutions:

- A single initiative like the INTERCEPT project might not be enough to sufficiently break the cycle.
- It served as a starting point that helped to reveal the main challenges, but didn't address the entire issue.
- National-level coordination is needed for comprehensive changes.
- Government policy changes, enforcement measures, and gradual benefit reductions are required to attract more NEETs.
- Implementation of change is challenging and could pose challenges to the status quo.
- Transitioning of social benefit access through means testing is a complex process.

Most of the employers interviewed agreed that the national/regional work culture is one of the contextual factors that have positively influenced the project and will undoubtedly play an important role in its future. They consider the characteristics of the labour market (supply of Green jobs, salaries, etc.) as another important factor, as well as other available active labour market measures for 25 – 29 year old NEETs in their region/country on the grounds that it is very difficult to find people in this age group who are willing to work. One respondent indicated that the skill level, particularly in the age range of 25 to 29 in the eligibility criteria, means that participants are more likely to be people with basic skills rather than the highly skilled. Other interviewees did not mention any other contextual factors influencing implementation of the pilot project's activities.

According to the results of interviews with the NEETs, the majority of them did not think that the listed contextual factors in their particular cases influenced the implementation of the project in any major way. Responses to this question were mainly related to commuting and wages. Given the density of settlements and the distance from employers as well as the cost and availability of transportation (including wasted time), NEETs appreciated the fact that they could do some of the work from home during the work placement phase (and they continued to do some of the work from home or had

flexibility in working hours in their subsequent jobs). They also appreciated the same advantages in the training phase. As for their salaries, they felt that they did not match local market conditions, however, they saw them as a bonus added to the opportunity to enhance their personal development and create future career opportunities. As mentioned earlier, they considered the age cut-offs of NEETs for eligibility to participate in the project to be strict and, in their view, the project was suitable for a wider age spectrum.

Relevance of the intervention after the end of the pilot project

According to PES representatives as the INTERCEPT pilot project was nearing its end, it was evident that the relevance of the project had not diminished. Instead, it had continued to grow, especially in light of the ongoing evolution of job roles prompted by the green transition. The global shift towards sustainability and environmentally friendly practices has accelerated, leading to an increased demand for individuals with green skills and expertise. This demand has only become more pronounced over time as industries across the spectrum continue to incorporate environmentally sustainable practices into their operations.

The intervention's enduring relevance lies in its capacity to equip NEETs with the skills and knowledge needed for emerging green careers. As job roles in the renewable energy, environmental management, sustainable agriculture, and other green sectors continue to evolve, an intervention remains a valuable point of reference for future initiatives aimed at connecting job seekers with evolving opportunities.

In the context of Malta, this initiative played a pivotal role in raising awareness among various stakeholders, including employers, NEETs, the general public, and staff from Jobsplus. It served as an educational platform, enlightening these groups about the emergence of green careers and the broader implications of the green transition. This awareness-raising aspect of the intervention has had a lasting impact in a local context.

Overall, employers found the project to be useful. Employers have wanted to continue their participation because they believe in the project's potential for both individuals and businesses. Some respondents suggested expanding the eligibility criteria and recommended including the digital economy in addition to the green one as a possible extension. They noted that the success of the project depends heavily on individuals. They see the potential for expanding the project, especially by investing more in applicants with lower initial levels of motivation and/or general skills together with the development of public investments into green policies.

5.3. Effectiveness

According to the perception of the PES, participants who actively took part in the pilot benefited from on-the-job training and acquired valuable work experience. While some of participants might not have secured immediate employment post-pilot, their gained work experience enhanced their chances for finding new job opportunities. This can be achieved also by highlighting scheme participation on their CVs. The scheme was very effective, especially in the sense that this is a training option specifically for NEETs and employers in the greening sectors available in Malta. With more knowledge, participants can then decide to delve deeper into a particular emerging sector in the green economy. Participation in the scheme also made participants more aware about current and future opportunities in growing sectors of the economy.

According to the employers, the intervention showed a positive impact on improving employment opportunities for NEETs aged 25-29. The success of the INTERCEPT project was reflected in the resolution of labour shortages in the participating companies. It made a significant contribution to improving productivity. Among other things, the project offered opportunities to acquire skills and alternatives and improved participants' future career prospects.

Employers agreed on the effectiveness and positive impact of the INTERCEPT project. They saw the development of soft skills, psychological empowerment, and the development of a green economy as key components contributing to the success of the project. The project's versatility in dealing with interpersonal and technical skills, as well as its ability to motivate participants to develop professionally and improve opportunities for young NEETs were also seen as very positive impacts of the project. When asked about other impacts that contributed to the effectiveness of the project, the

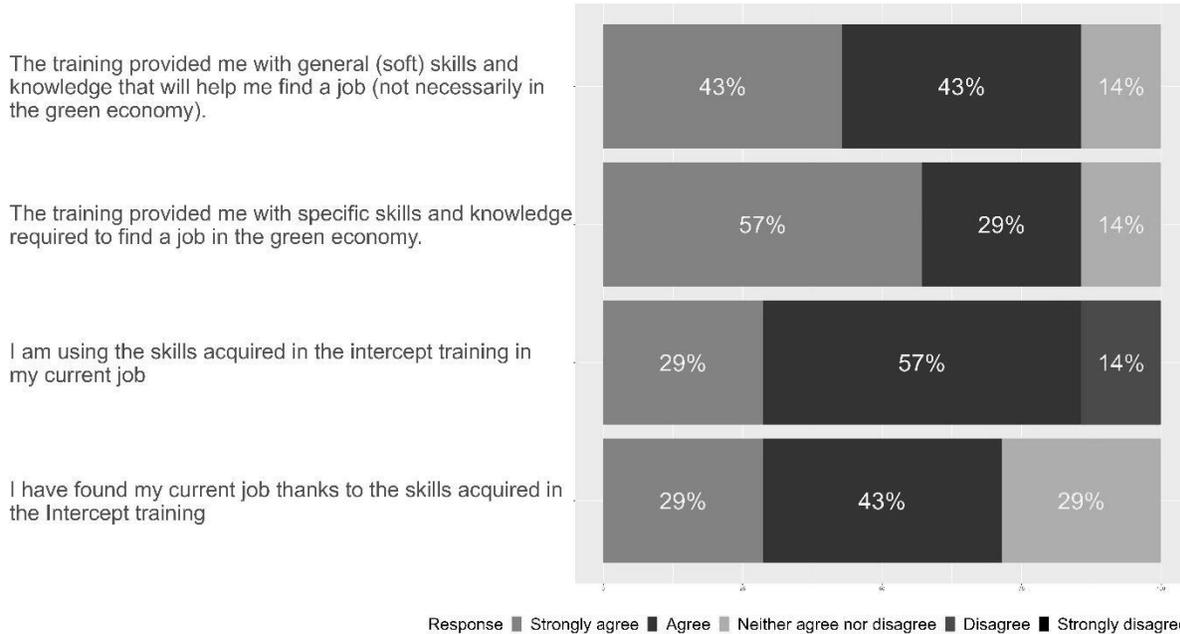
respondents were not able to identify any additional that came immediately to their mind. One employer mentioned the possibility of finding stable full-time employees through a project that prepared them for the recruitment process.

Interviews with NEETs regarding employment opportunities revealed a mixed picture. Some respondents were clearly inclined to view the pilot as having **increased their chances of employment**. It enabled them to gain valuable knowledge and skills from their internships and to revise their CVs, thus increasing their chances of getting better jobs in the future. Some said that it broadened their horizons not only locally but also internationally as they gained contacts with foreign participants during the course of the project. The opportunity to interact with individuals from different countries with different work cultures was mentioned several times during the interviews as an unintended positive outcome of the pilot. One participant attended two more follow-up training courses abroad (which were indirectly facilitated by his involvement in the INTERCEPT project) and has so far maintained the connections established through the courses, which he has evaluated as an extension of his employment prospects thanks to the INTERCEPT project. Another participant emphasized that his commitment and determination to learn during the work placement phase opened doors to other significant responsibilities and as a result he became the director of a new project and was offered another promotion within the company once the work exposure scheme ended, which contains a permanent contract offer, securing his position within the company indefinitely. Thus, in his view the pilot was a valuable opportunity to broaden his experience and paved the way for his further prospects. The other half of respondents, by contrast, said that they did not see a significant contribution to their chances of employment, even though it had captured their interest, for example, primarily because they were more qualified than other participants. However, they acknowledged that it had broadened their perspective on the green economy.

At the end of the training course, participants expressed opinions that the training was relevant for them in terms of developing their skills. They seemed to understand that working in a green job requires possessing skills and knowledge which are work specific. Based on the mid-questionnaires, most of the participants confirmed that the training provided them with the necessary knowledge and skills that would help them find a job not only in the green economy, but also in another economic sector as well (see Figure 22).

After the training, an assessment of the relevance of the skills received during the training changed slightly (see Figure 22). In any event, the set of skills gained during the training was still valuable for them. It helped them to get job offers (29% strongly agree and 43% agree). While one employed participant claimed that (s)he is not using the skills acquired during the training in current employment, most of the participants were able to apply their newly gained skills in their current jobs.

Figure 22. Participants' assessment of the relevance of skills received during training



Source: Compiled by the authors from the mid-intervention and post-intervention survey

In answers during the in-depth interviews, NEETs reported that the tasks assigned to them by their employers during the internship had significant relevance to their future endeavours and that they would like to find a full-time or part-time position in a job of a nature similar to the one they experienced during work placement. Several reported that the challenges and obstacles they initially had to overcome in their work placement, under the guidance and supervision of their employer, eventually led to their personal development and enhanced their capabilities. Among benefits, some respondents identified the opportunity to learn how to master new technologies that they needed in their work and that through this experience they found employment in reputable companies where they take sincere pleasure in the tasks they are assigned. A minority of respondents stated that the tasks during the work experience contributed to their accumulation of knowledge about the green economy. One participant stated that six months to gain work experience before a participant secures a job and some form of standard income is too long of a time period, and it would suffice to shorten it to 2 or 3 months.

During various stages of the interviews, NEETs declared their satisfaction with the job placement services provided to them. This applied to both services related to the project's implementation and services outside of the project. In the words of one of them, "the employment advisors provided me with excellent and professionally conducted assistance". Others responded by thanking the Jobsplus staff for their excellent management of the project's activities and for the efforts they had made to help young jobseekers progress in their career paths. One respondent expressed disappointment that the employer from the work placement phase was unable to retain him after the end of the project, but he continued his job search through Jobsplus, which offered him several vacancies suitable for his qualifications, but unfortunately none had aligned with his interests so far.

Enhanced activation and skills

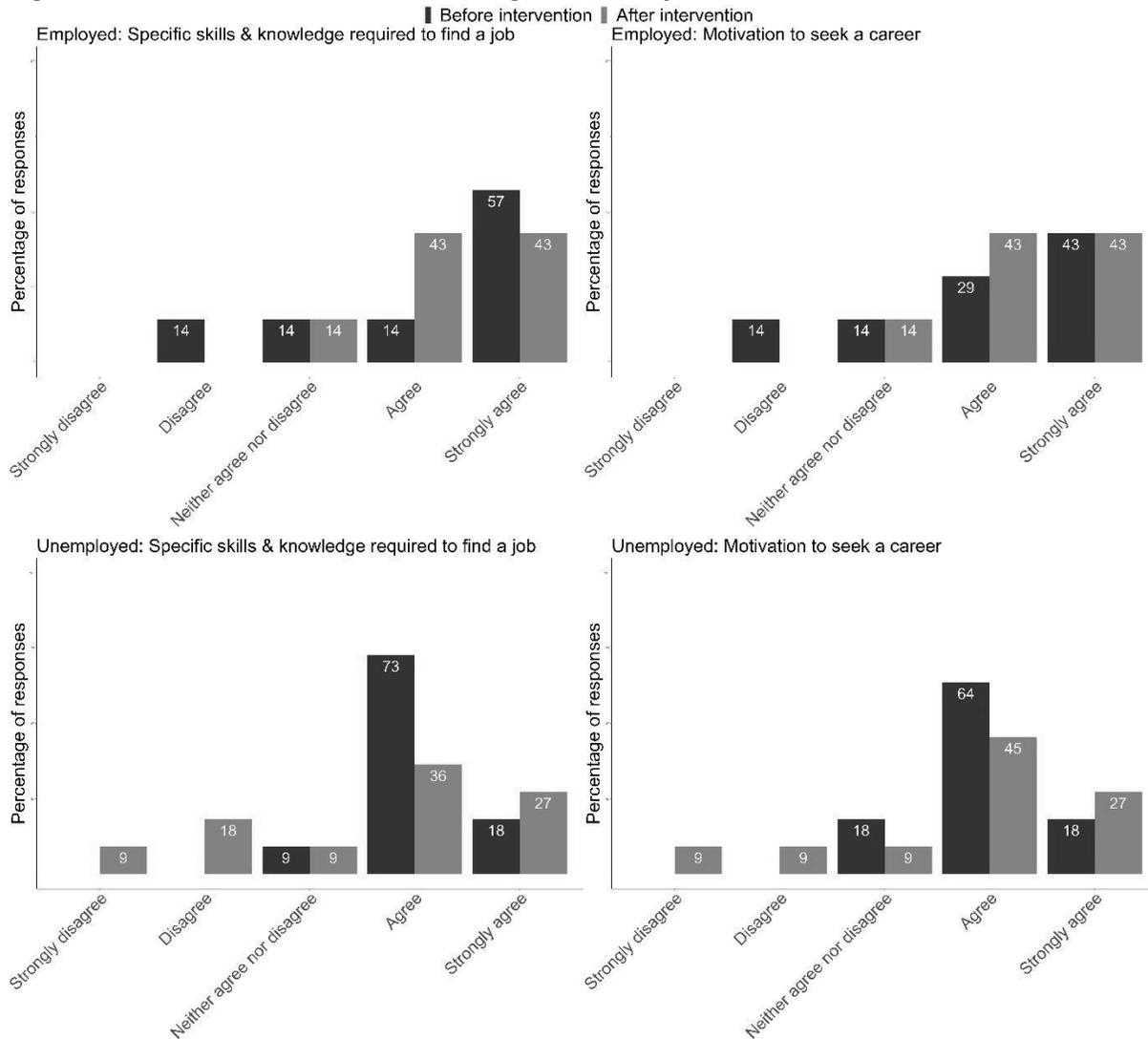
The initial training phase also played a pivotal role in cultivating essential soft skills such as communication and digital proficiency, along with providing knowledge about Green jobs. These skills were identified as crucial in Work Package 4 through employer surveys. In the following section, the views of employers and participants are presented in more detail and provide a more complex picture of the issue.

The project's intervention clearly improved skills related to the green economy. Responses from employers indicated that the INTERCEPT project solved the problem of finding suitable candidates interested in this particular sector of the

green economy and provided basic training prior to job placement. These trainings ensured that participants acquired the necessary skills to effectively perform tasks in the chosen sector, with a focus on developing their skills. During interviews with NEETs, in addition to confirming the success of the intervention in gaining knowledge of general soft skills and expanding their perspectives on the green economy, respondents also highlighted the opportunity to gather digital skills. In fact, most of the interviewees were placed in positions related in some way to the digital economy, as this trend has a significant overlap with the green economy. Therefore, participants tended to point out that their work experience provided them with valuable knowledge and skills also in the digital economy, rather than only in the green economy. However, they acknowledged that their work was in some way related to eco-friendliness, as the digital sector does contribute to environmental sustainability in its own way.

Before the intervention all participants were keen to gain skills and knowledge in green activities and sustainability (see Figure 23). The training part seemed to be fruitful and engaging for the participants. Most of the participants assessed the training session very positively in terms of gaining knowledge in green economy topics. After completing the work placement, we observed a perception difference in gained skills and motivation towards working in the green economy between employed vs unemployed participants. The majority of employed participants either agreed (43%) or strongly agreed (43%) that the work placement helped them to enhance their skills and knowledge in the green economy. Out of unemployed participants, the proportion is smaller but still more than 50% of them agree (36%) or strongly agree (27%) that the work placement was helpful.

Figure 23. Skills and motivation related to the green economy before and after the intervention



Source: Compiled by the authors from the pre-intervention and post-intervention survey

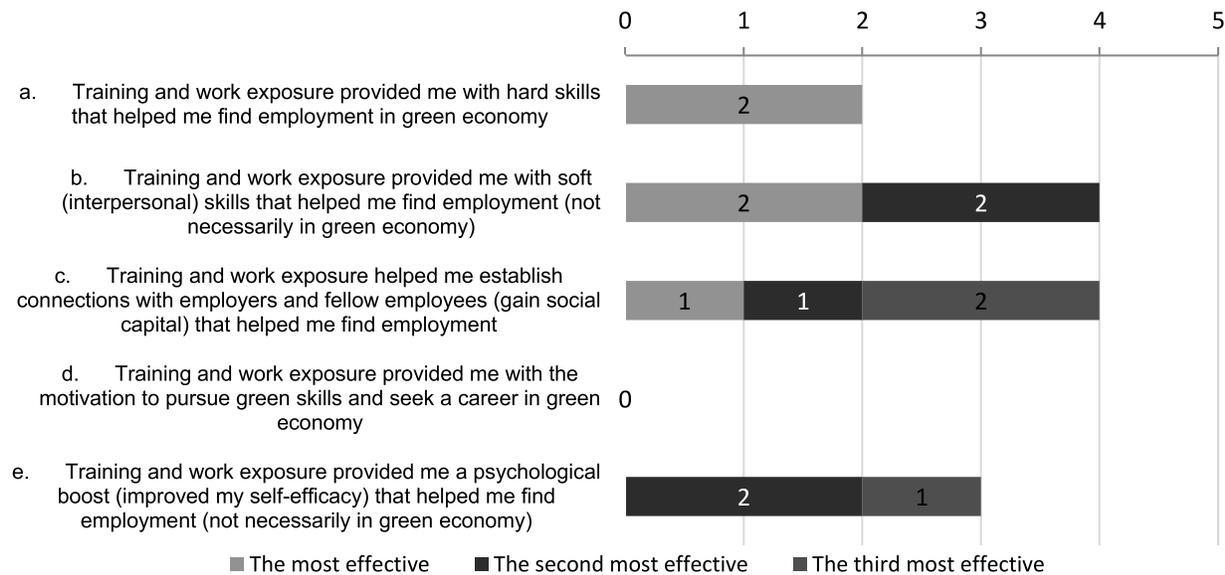
Notes: The first row shows expectations (green color) vs reality (blue color) captured by the employed group. The second row shows expectations vs reality captured by the unemployed group.

It seems that the work placement itself stimulated more interest in the green economy of employed participants rather than of unemployed participants. These NEETs would really like to continue to work in a sector related to the green economy while unemployed participants seem to be less motivated to seek a job in this kind of sector. This does not mean that unemployed participants found the green economy an uninteresting or unimportant topic, however it does seem that their particular work placements influenced their opinions.

Employment support mechanisms

During the interviews, NEETs were asked to rank the mechanisms for improving their chances of finding employment, which varied according to the strength of the link to the green economy. They were asked to rank the mechanisms according to which ones were the most effective, i.e. worked best for them during their participation in the pilot activities.

Figure 24. Mechanisms helping to find employment that were most effective during participation in the pilot activities as seen by the NEETs



Source: Compiled by the authors from the interviews with NEETs, Q9 (Theory-based evaluation)

Even after weighting responses by their degree of effectiveness, it is clear that NEETs considered the acquisition of soft skills, not necessarily tied to Green jobs, to be the most effective mechanism for gaining employment. They identified the second most effective mechanism as being the opportunity to establish relationships with employers and fellow employees, i.e. gaining social capital, which is also not directly related to the green economy focus. Only the third most effective channel to improve employability chances, according to them, is the acquisition of hard skills directly needed for green economy occupations. The fourth most effective mechanism, according to NEETs, was a psychological boost, which also may not be related to the performance of green economy occupations. None of the respondents assigned any of the top three weights to the offered option that training, and job exposure motivated them to acquire green skills and seek careers in the green economy. However, it must be taken into account that the sample of responses was rather limited for the in-depth interviews.

PES representatives believe that the pilot project undeniably succeeded in establishing an effective channel for engaging green companies with potential employees. Evidence of this success can be measured by the keen interest expressed by employers in receiving referrals for potential candidates, not only for the pilot programme but also for future employment opportunities. Importantly, this referral channel is expected to continue operating for current and upcoming initiatives and schemes led by Jobsplus. This sustained collaboration signifies a commitment to addressing the evolving needs of the labour market and the continued activation of NEETs. Thus, additional efforts building on the foundation of initial cooperation will need to be undertaken in the future.

This positive evaluation was also supported by NEETs' position on connections with employers and fellow employees. All across the board, participants (employed and unemployed after the scheme) believed that the work placement helped them to build professional connections and that the work placement created more opportunities to establish professional connections.

From the employers' perspective, the INTERCEPT project created an effective platform to connect employers in the green economy with people interested in these industries. Respondents recommended maintaining and supporting this platform and emphasized its importance. Employers' evaluations reflected the positive aspects of the programme, including the development of soft and hard skills, the motivation of participants to acquire green skills, and the building of social capital through contacts with potential employers and colleagues. It is important to note that the success of the INTERCEPT project in making connections that reliably **match green economy employers with qualified individuals increased** the likelihood of successful employment in the field. These positive results showed that the

programme not only supported existing businesses in the green economy, but also effectively contributed to the development of the sector and ensured that employers had access to a skilled workforce. On the other hand, employers emphasized the demanding training process that participants had to go through in order to be fully prepared for the jobs they were assigned. They also mentioned certain complications when it came to convincing supervisors to participate in the project. A minor problem was the manual recording and management of attendance hours and sheets during the training process. It was suggested to set up an online platform to facilitate their submission. The **biggest challenge was to find the right candidate for the designated role**, which took a lot of time and effort. Apart from these challenges, there were no major obstacles or difficulties.

Kirkpatrick Four-Level Training Evaluation Model

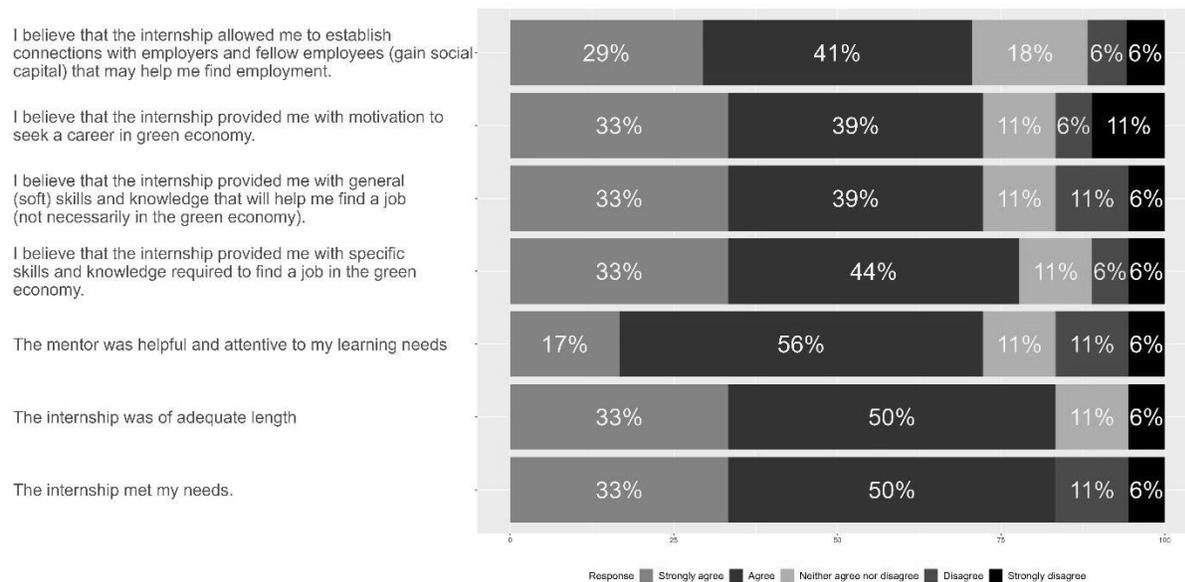
Reaction

From the responses of scheme participants at the start of the pilot programme, we have come up with two observations based on the pre-intervention survey. First, expectations from the training and the work placement were very similar across the participant group. Second, we observed that most of these participants shared pretty much the same expectations. Most of them were optimistic about the scheme and hopeful for positive outcomes. These findings can be supported by Figure 19, which provides more details on the NEETs' expectations in a quantifiable way. Furthermore, we identified two main expectations. They expected that i) the training would broaden their knowledge on green topics and ii) that this experience would help them in their professional careers.

Reactions of the NEETs to the training course were measured with the mid-intervention survey after the training had been delivered. Positive feedback of the NEETs to the training were captured by both answers to open end questions and Likert-scale survey questions. It seemed that the majority of the participants enjoyed the training course and perceived the training as effective and value-added. The training sessions were clear and informative, and the presented green topics were interesting for the NEETs. Additionally, the NEETs appreciated how the training was organized and how the instructors led the sessions. Positive feedback on the training was also confirmed by Figure 21, which quantitatively assessed the NEETs' opinions on the training. Overall, the training met the participants' expectations. It seems that the role of the instructor in the learning segment was of importance in the NEETs' reactions.

Based on the post-intervention survey, most participants found the work placement favourable in many aspects. This finding can be supported by Figure 25, which quantitatively measures the reactions of NEETs to the work placement. The internship not only met their needs (33% strongly agree and 50% agree), but also in more general terms, 83% of NEETs claimed that their expectations were met. Most of the NEETs were happy that they learned new skills, which were not only related to the green economy. On the other hand, the most common dislike was related to their remuneration which they felt could be more competitive. Considering the NEETs' reactions to the work placement, it seems that matching the NEETs with employers was in accordance with their preferences which is a positive outcome. However, it was suggested that more job options could have been offered.

Figure 25. Reactions to the internship and learning gained in relation to original expectations



Source: Compiled by the authors from the post-intervention survey

Learning

This part of the evaluation model assesses each individual's progress in learning, not only the extent of their acquired knowledge, but also the extent of their acquired attitude, confidence, and/or commitment. Participants were asked the same set of 5 questions before and after the training. The level of knowledge for each answer was in the assessment phase rated on a scale of 0, 1 and 2. Where 0 indicated no knowledge, 1 indicated basic knowledge and 2 indicated high level of knowledge. Pre- and post- training responses were paired for each respondent. From the differences between knowledge levels, it was possible to assess the degree of improvement in each survey question/issue for each participant. With the assigned knowledge level scale, it was also possible to assess the level of expertise after training, i.e., on which issue participants demonstrated the highest level of gained knowledge. Both verbal commentary and graph results for each question as well as a final comparison of the extent of learning for the entire group of participants are described below.

All 38 respondents answered the question ***Why do you think we need to make the transition to a more sustainable economy?*** Based on the answer's scaling, it is possible to conclude that the training helped the respondents to gain a deeper understanding of sustainability. The majority of respondents showed an improved familiarity with sustainability issues and the need of transition to a sustainable economy. Some of the responses indicated increased interest in climate change, social inequalities, and the responsibility of both society and individuals.

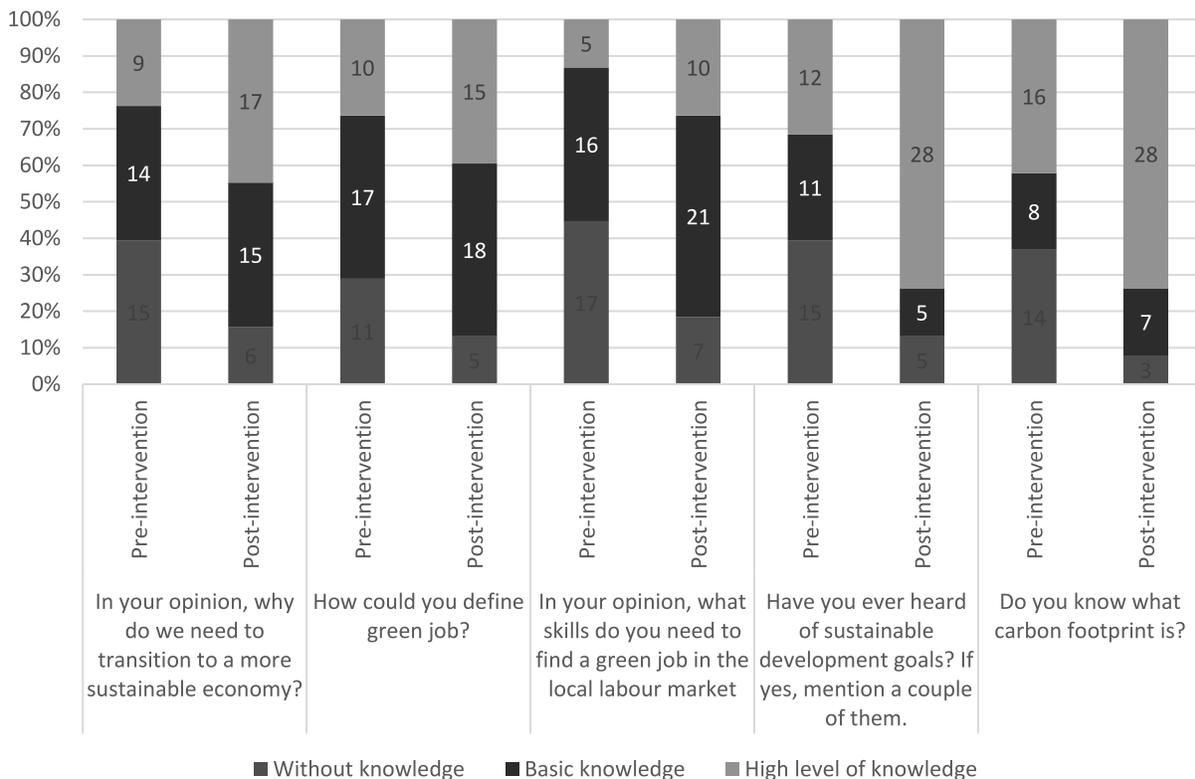
Based on answers to the question ***How would you define a green job? Could you give an example?*** before and after the training, it can be concluded that the training contributed to a better understanding of Green jobs among the participants. Post-training responses showed a better understanding, with respondents mentioning concepts such as environmental sustainability, energy efficiency, waste reduction and climate change. Examples given after the training included jobs in renewable energy, organic farming, sustainable tourism and working on carbon reduction projects.

Responses to the question ***What skills do you think you need to find a green job in the local labour market?*** indicate that the training helped to increase awareness and knowledge of the participants in the field of Green jobs and the requirements necessary for any applicant for the respective job. Many of the respondents showed the ability to apply technical and sector specific skills. Post-training responses were much more specific and reflected a greater commitment to the issue of sustainability and environmental protection. After the training, the number of participants without knowledge decreased significantly.

Based on pre- and post-training responses to the question **Have you ever heard of sustainable development goals? If yes, mention a couple of them**, we can conclude that the training clearly increased the accuracy of the participants' information about the 17 UN SDGs of 2015. While some respondents had an idea of what the goals refer to already before the training, i.e. they could guess their meaning or outcome, they were not able to either name them specifically or at least give the context (these answers were assigned the characteristic "basic knowledge"). Slightly more than half of the participants did not know about the SDGs before the training or were incorrect in their estimation. After the training, most of the participants were able to give precise examples of the SDGs; some of them also described the content of their chosen goals, while others added precise context (relation to the UN, number of SDGs, year of adoption, framing them in the 2030 Agenda, etc.).

Responses before and after the training to the question **Do you know what a carbon footprint is? Can you explain?** Provided evidence that participants had the most solid knowledge of the context of this issue already before the training compared to the other questions. Also, after the training, the fewest participants remained without knowing at least the basic answer compared to the other questions. Due to the good level of knowledge in this matter before training, there was not the highest shift in the level of knowledge observed (but still the second highest). However, it should be pointed out that many answers after training were significantly accurate, with several going into detail and giving examples.

Figure 26. The assesment of lerning component before and after training



Source: Compiled by the authors using pre-intervention and mid-intervention surveys

As the summary table illustrates, the lowest level of solid post-training confidence (on average) was observed for question 3 (skills needed for local Green jobs), and the highest level of post-training expertise was observed for theoretical questions 4 (SDGs) and 5 (carbon footprint). The trainees made the least progress in their knowledge in the area of question 2 (definition of Green jobs). On the contrary, the greatest shift in knowledge of the topic cumulatively for all trainees was observed in theoretical question 4 (SDGs). There was indeed a clear shift in the question with the least knowledge gained (Q2), especially when comparing the groups of participants with no and high knowledge,

however, most of them were still in the group with basic knowledge of the problem even after the training. In the question about sustainable development goals (Q4), where the greatest progress in learning was noted, there was a clear increase in theoretical knowledge about the context of adoption of the SDGs as well as about the goals themselves.

Table 24. Summary table for learning element of Kirkpatrick model

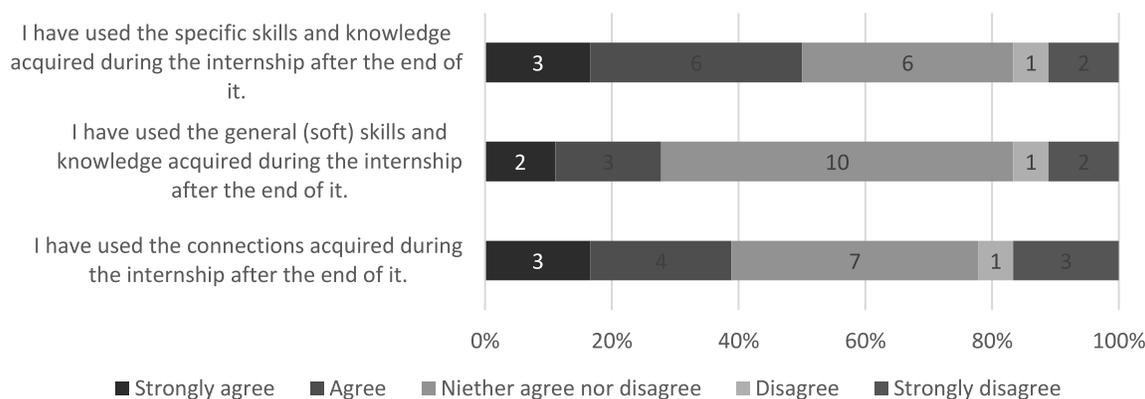
Indicator	Indicator's definition	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
Level of expertise	Average level of proficiency after training (share of knowledge_level_2 answers in total answers in %)	45%	39%	26%	74%	74%
Acquired knowledge	The extent of differences due to training (cumulative diff. in knowledge_level between individual's pre- and post-training answer)	17	11	15	26	23

Source: Compiled by the authors from the pre-intervention and post-intervention survey

Behaviour

After finishing their work placements, project participants indicated in their post-intervention questionnaires to what extent they used the skills, knowledge, and connections gained during their participation. Both specific and general (soft) skills were assessed. There is a clear distinction between the use of the different set of skills gained. Participants were keener to apply specific skills in their real lives after participation in the project (50 per cent agreed or strongly agreed) than the soft skills (28 per cent with positive responses). Connections acquired during the job experience phase were the second most applied asset from project participation just after its conclusion (38 per cent positive response). This also partially supports the evidence of the intervention impact on the creation of channels that engage green economy employers with potential employees.

Figure 27. Impact of the learning on the participants



Source: Compiled by the authors from the post-intervention survey

Some of the participants remained employed in the companies in which they completed the work placement or found jobs in the green sector and thus are using the specific skills gained directly. Few participants valued positively the impact on their personal abilities, self-confidence, ability to assist more proactively and to also find jobs outside of the green sector. Those who valued the connections acquired positively have been in contact with their current employers (former work-placement) and have managed to communicate with fellow employees and customers, created an informal network of acquaintances and made contacts with possible volunteering placement.

Results

To measure the results, we rely on a counterfactual impact evaluation (CIE). The CIE is a quantitative approach to estimate the impact that is attributable to the intervention. In this case, effectiveness is measured as the average treatment effect of the treated, meaning that the targeted outcome is the employment probability of the NEETs that completed the pilot. Based on different methods, we provided evidence that the intervention had a positive impact on the participants. Our findings indicated that the pilot programme increased the probability of employment. Participants who completed the pilot programme had a 13.6 percentage points higher probability of finding a job in October 2023 (based on Generalised boosted model). More details on the CIE can be found in the part 5.5. Impact.

As per WP5 Pilot Progress data (updated on 24 November 2023), 39 NEETs were successfully activated in the pilot programme. Out of them, 12 NEETs got jobs after the intervention and 4 individuals enrolled in other employment schemes.

5.4. Efficiency

The primary goal of the project in Malta was to engage 100 NEETs aged 25-29 years. This was the foreseen contribution of Malta towards the overall project goal of 300 participants. Overall, 197 applications were received in Malta for participation in the project, however only 102 were eligible, all of whom were provided assistance. The successful completion of both phases of the project occurred in the cases of 23 participants, additional 10 participants did only the training phase and another 6 dropped out during the intervention due to employment or enrolment in other schemes or training; out of whom 12 received employment and 4 continued onto other assistance programmes or training. The low completion rate was due to a significant drop-out rate of more than 60%. The overall expected number of in-employment participants was 80. This indicated that the expected employment efficiency of the scheme would reach 26.6% in Maltese case. Actual achieved employment efficiency of participants was more than 30% (12 of the 39 participants found employment). Same as in the employment case overall project rate of engagement in other schemes was expected to be achieved. However, in Malta only slightly above 10% of participants got enrolled to other assistance programmes.

Benefits of the intervention

The benefits of the programme can be quantifiable from the perspective of the individual or the public budget. While the individual (private) benefits from participation in the programme include a longer list of items, here we focus on the benefits quantifiable from the perspective of the public budget. More specifically, we account for benefits arising from additionally generated employment. Namely, we account for:

- Social contributions from additional employment paid by both the employer and the employee
- Income tax paid from income from additional employment
- Savings on unemployment assistance associated with additional employment

Under additional employment in the context of efficiency analysis we understand the net effect quantified by the impact evaluation (see Table 29). We round the estimated net effects to 13 percentage points, which, for the whole pilot programme (with 39 successfully activated participants) translates to approximately five additionally employed persons. We adopt two scenarios of earnings of these additionally employed persons. In the first scenario, we assume they all earn the minimum wage. In the second scenario, we assume their average wage equals the average wage observed for Malta in 2022.

In the case of savings of direct costs of the public budget, we only assume the eligibility for unemployment assistance at the level of one additional household member. We do not assume eligibility for the unemployment benefit since this is conditioned on previous work experience¹³. Additionally, we do not assume that participants form an independent

¹³ <https://mysocialsecurity.gov.mt/BenefitPaymentRates.aspx>

household, which would inflate the expected savings of the public budget. Our assumptions can be thus understood as conservative, estimating the lower bound of the total sum of public budget benefits.

Table 25. Benefits of the public budget per one additionally employed participant

	Weekly	Monthly	Annually
Social contributions due - Minimum wage	€38.60	€154.40	€2 007.20
Social contributions due - Average wage	€103.20	€412.80	€5 366.40
Income tax - Minimum wage	€28.91	€115.64	€1 503.29
Income tax - Average wage	€139.85	€559.38	€7 272.00
Unemployment Assistance savings	€8.15	€32.60	€423.80
Total - Minimum wage scenario	€75.66	€302.64	€3 934.29
Total - Average wage scenario	€251.20	€1 004.78	€13 062.20

Source: The Department of Social Security – Malta (<https://socialsecurity.gov.mt/en/information-and-applications-for-benefits-and-services/>)

Costs of the intervention

Different types of costs were incurred to implement the scheme, including direct and indirect expenditures. Apart from the benefits paid for participation in the training and work-placement, expenditures related to the provision of trainings (trainers' remuneration and administrative costs) were incurred. The direct costs related to all 39 participants' benefits amounted to EUR 39 550. In other words, the direct costs of participation in the programme per participant were around EUR 1 000. There were different rates applied due to the low attractiveness of the benefits initially set at EUR 5 per hour. This was later increased to EUR 6, however, was also evaluated as insufficient (only 3 participants engaged), and thus an additional increase was applied, changing the rate to EUR 7.5/hour which resulted in 11 additional project participants.

Apart from direct costs, indirect costs also arose that were related to the training. Those amounted to EUR 9 415 in trainers' remunerations and EUR 9 036 in administrative costs. This accounts for an additional expenditure of almost EUR 500 per programme participant. The overall costs per one participant in the pilot project reached on average slightly less than EUR 1 500.

Cost-benefit analysis

Based on the sample of 39 successfully finishing participants, we were able to estimate the average net impact of participation on their absence from registered unemployment lists. We estimated that participants had an approximately 13 percentage points higher absence rate from the unemployment register, consistently observable from the fourth month after participation until the end of the observation period in the seventh month (see Table 29). 13 per cent of 39 persons accounts for approximately five additionally employed persons. Therefore, we expect the pilot project to yield an impact of roughly five additionally employed persons. The additional employment is expected to be consistent over time. Accounting for the above-described expected benefits to the public budget, we see that if the additionally employed participants' earnings were at the level of minimum wage, the pilot would pay off for the public budget after 2.9 years. Under a less conservative assumption of the average wage, the costs of the pilot would yield a return in less than one year (320 days).

Table 26. Cost benefit analysis

Type	Item	Annually	Total per type
Costs per pilot	Payments to the participant	€39 550.00	€58 001.00
	Training and administration costs	€18 451.00	
	Social contributions	€10 176.50	€19 946.87

Benefits per pilot - Minimum wage	Income tax	€7 621.70	
	Unemployment assistance savings	€2 148.67	
Benefits per pilot- Average wage	Social contributions	€27 207.65	€66 225.35
	Income tax	€36 869.04	
	Unemployment assistance savings	€2 148.67	

Source: Compiled by the authors using INTERCEPT data extract – 5 November 2023

Alternative interventions and efficient ways of using resources

There were other similar initiatives related to work placements with allowances for NEETs in Malta, however it is difficult to assess whether they had a better cost-benefit ratio since it is important to note that those initiatives were not specifically focused on Green jobs and did not have a limited target group age between 25 and 29 years.

Alternative schemes were available and consistent assistance to NEETs was provided. However, according to PES representatives' knowledge, they probably did not have a better cost-benefit ratio. The aim of the pilot, especially in a Maltese context, was based on more of an individual approach. Implementers of the project's activities considered the support received from local administrations to be very useful.

The available resources were used in a manner following the planned sequence of the activities and were used in line with the expected expenditures in the project's budget. No major changes occurred and given the experimental nature of the project resources were used efficiently.

Timeframe

The delays in implementation of the project in Malta were not significant. The activation was launched in August 2022 and ran until November 2023, spanning more than one year. During this period, almost 200 NEETs showed interest in participating in the scheme, but given the specific circumstances of the local NEETs, successful transitions out of NEETs' status was only partially achieved. However, valuable information was gathered during the course of the project about the obstacles and motivations of the inactive population aged 25 - 29 on whether they wanted to change their current state or to remain in it.

5.5. Impact

Employment

The impact evaluation provides information on whether the observed changes or impacts were produced by the intervention. The key component of impact evaluation, causal inference, identifies the cause. In our case, it seeks to answer a specific cause-and-effect question: what is the impact (or causal effect) of participation in the pilot project on outcomes of interest, such as the employment prospects of participants, labour market outcomes and participants' skills and activation.

In the impact analysis, we evaluated participants who were activated by the pilot programme. Individuals are considered to be active based on three criteria:

- Individuals who dropped out but completed the training phase.
- Individuals who completed both the training and internship phase.
- Individuals who did not successfully complete both phases but found employment or joined another scheme or training.

Based on these criteria, the **pilot programme activated 39 individuals** which represents a total successful completion rate of 40%. The gender split is almost balanced with female participants representing 46%. Table 27 provides information on the age, education, children and employment for this group.

After completing the programme, 31% of participants found a job, 43% of employed participants signed full-time contracts; the same portion are working part-time (see Table 27). The employment rate of participants might be even higher because there are still 6 participants who are at the work placement at the time of writing this report. Based on the post-intervention survey, 67% of participants claim that they were satisfied with their current job/looking for a job. 47% of participants strongly agree that the work placement helped them to establish connections with the company where they completed their internships. Some participants were even offered a job at the same company.

Table 27. Descriptive statistics of activated NEETs

Description	NEETs
Number of activated NEETs	39
Female (%)	46
Average age	27
Highest level of education attained (%)	
Post-secondary non-tertiary education	39
Upper secondary education	39
Tertiary education (Bachelor's or above)	22
Children	
Children (%)	8
Average age of the youngest child	2.7
Employment	
Previous employment (%)	88
Working experience (months)	37.9
Employed (%)	31
Full-time contract (%)	43
Part-time contract (%)	43
Satisfied with the current job/looking for a job (%)	67%

Source: Compiled by the authors using INTERCEPT data extract – 5 November 2023 and the post-intervention survey

Labour market outcomes

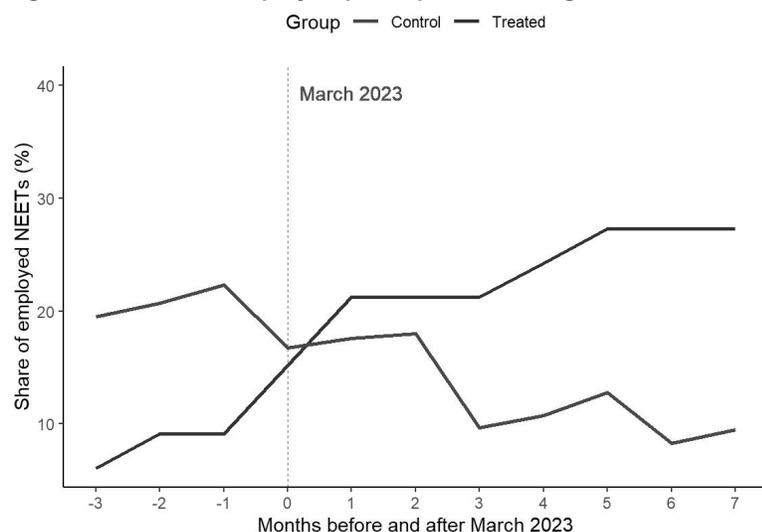
A **counterfactual impact evaluation** was performed to identify the impact of the intervention on participants' labour market outcomes. Counterfactual impact evaluation methods identify an impact based on the difference between:

- Outcomes of participants of their participation and
- Outcomes of participation in a counterfactual situation, if they had not participated in the INTERCEPT programme.

We used registered employment as our **outcome of interest** to investigate the effectiveness of the intervention. This is defined as the probability of absence from an unemployment register. This labour market outcome can also serve as a proxy of the employment rate and is based on data provided by Jobsplus. Figure 28 captures the development of the proxy of the employment rate. It compares the share of employed NEETs out of the unemployment register separately for INTERCEPT participants and of the eligible group of NEETs since December 2022.

Given the fact that information on the income of jobseekers is not available in the data of the Malta Public Employment Service, we focused on only one labour market outcome as defined above.

Figure 28. Share of employed participants and eligible individuals out of unemployment register



Source: Compiled by the authors using INTERCEPT data extract – 5 November 2023

We employed **four different approaches** to estimate the treatment effect of the INTERCEPT programme:

1. Propensity Score Matching (PSM);
2. Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM)
3. Inverse Probability Weighting (IPW) generated through entropy balancing
4. Generalized Boosted Modelling (GBM).

PSM, CEM and IPW are commonly used statistical methods in causal inference. Additionally, we applied a machine learning technique called GBM, also known as boosted classification and regression trees (CART). Using machine learning (ML) in causal analysis has become very popular. The advantage of ML algorithms is that they are flexible, allow for nonlinearities and enable one to estimate treatment effects using large data. We use these methods to estimate a propensity score which serves as the probability that an individual will participate in a programme based on baseline observable characteristics. We use logit models to obtain the probabilities of INTERCEPT participation conditional on various NEETs' characteristics. A more detailed description of methods used can be found in the Technical counterfactual evaluation Annex.

The **evaluation sample** is based on data provided by Jobsplus in November 2023. It contains individuals of 25-29 years old without disabilities. We divided the evaluation sample into the treatment and control group.

The **treatment group** had 33 participants who were activated by the pilot programme (excluding participants who are currently undergoing the work placement phase).

The **control group** had 3 857 young NEETs who were eligible to participate in the pilot programme, but they did not. This group should be very similar to the treatment group.

As we cannot observe the causal effect of participation and non-participation for the same NEET and the NEETs are not randomly assigned to the INTERCEPT scheme, we assume that the selection is based on observed characteristics, the so-called conditional independence assumption (CIA). These characteristics could explain an individual's decision to enrol in the programme. Based on availability, we control for the following covariates to assume the CIA: gender, region, individual labour market history (such as working experience) and registration status history. Table 28 shows an overview of differences in observed characteristics between the treatment group and the eligible group.

Table 28. Descriptive statistics of treatment and eligible groups

Description	Treatment group	Control group
Number of NEETs	33	3857
Female (%)	45	52

Average age	27	27
Region split (%)		
Gozo And Comino	3	8
Northern District	6	16
Northern Harbour District	27	29
South Eastern District	21	15
Southern Harbour District	21	19
Western District	21	14
Employment experience		
No previous employment (%)	12	11
Average length of employment (in months)	37.9	49.7
Registration history		
Currently registering	15	1
Never registered	27	67
Not currently registering	58	32
Average length of registration (in months)	3.9	1.1

Source: Compiled by the authors using INTERCEPT data extract on 5 November 2023

Before continuing to impact the evaluation itself, we performed diagnostics checks to assess the balance (see Technical counterfactual evaluation Annex). The treatment estimation and related diagnostics were all done in a free and open-source software RStudio.

We estimated the average treatment effects of INTERCEPT programme participation on the treated (ATET). The ATET captured the average impact of participation for the population of participants who completed the project i.e. we tried to compare the outcome of participants with the outcome of non-participants as if they would have participated. The first group of participants started their training in November 2022 and completed the work placement in the period between March 2023 and April 2023. Therefore, we decided to look at the ATET during a period of 7 months after March 2023.

In Table 29 we reported an estimated ATET on the NEETs who completed the pilot using different causal inference methods. Given that our outcomes of interest are binary variables (1 = employed, 0 = unemployed), we run a logistic regression model in order to predict the employment probability if a NEET participated in the pilot¹⁴.

¹⁴ The estimated coefficients from the logistic regression are on the logit-scale and indicate log odds of the outcome – likelihood that a NEET is not in the unemployment register. We calculated an average marginal effect in order to obtain a change in the predicted probability that the outcome equals 1 after the intervention.

Table 29. Estimated effects of INTERCEPT participation on the employment of participants

Outcomes	Propensity score matching			Coarsened exact matching			Inverse probability weighting			Generalized boosted modeling		
	Effect	se	Sign.	Effect	se	Sign.	Effect	se	Sign.	Effect	se	Sign.
Empl_3	-0.098	0.036	**	-0.132	0.028	***	-0.134	0.040	***	-0.184	0.041	***
Empl_2	-0.087	0.066		-0.125	0.037	***	-0.113	0.050	*	-0.145	0.073	*
Empl_1	-0.087	0.066		-0.149	0.038	***	-0.128	0.050	**	-0.168	0.076	*
Empl0	-0.008	0.064		-0.061	0.070		-0.022	0.059		0.009	0.064	
Empl1	0.057	0.083		0.006	0.082		0.024	0.067		0.051	0.058	
Empl2	0.057	0.083		0.003	0.083		0.019	0.067		0.048	0.059	
Empl3	0.128	0.075		0.186	0.089	*	0.121	0.066		0.087	0.027	***
Empl4	0.147	0.081		0.212	0.096	*	0.146	0.071	*	0.122	0.042	**
Empl5	0.190	0.084	*	0.203	0.097	*	0.155	0.074	*	0.127	0.043	**
Empl6	0.290	0.053	***	0.228	0.081	**	0.192	0.077	*	0.141	0.033	***
Empl7	0.290	0.053	***	0.173	0.077	*	0.161	0.074	*	0.136	0.036	***

Source: Compiled by the authors using IER calculation based on INTERCEPT data extract – 5 November 2023

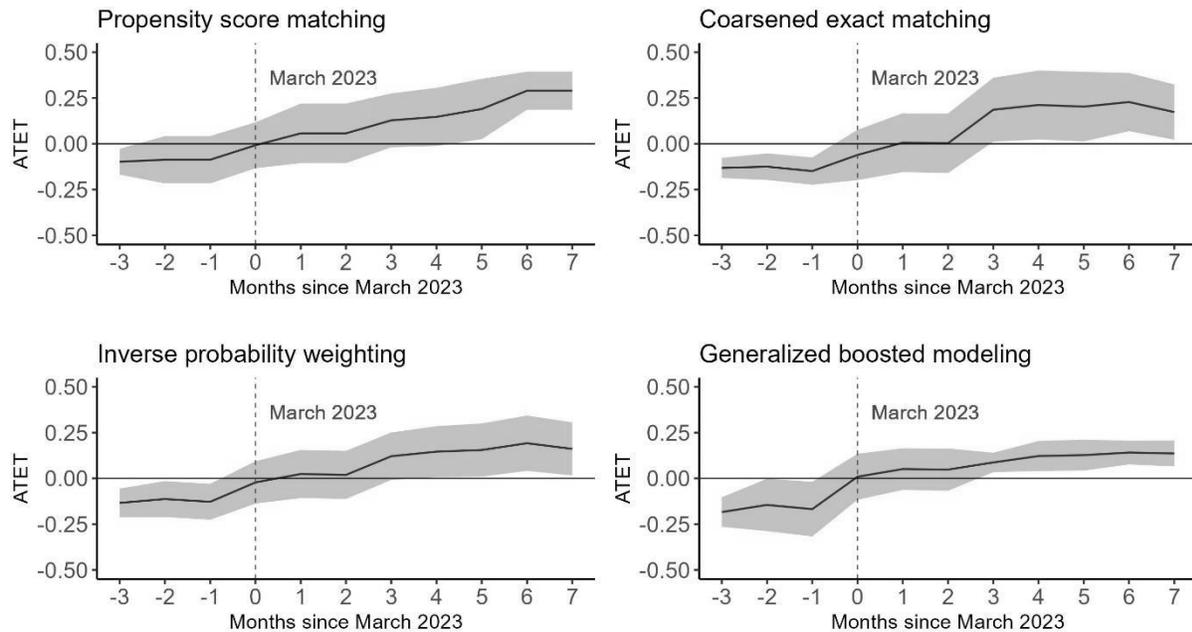
Note: Employment probability is measured n months before/after March 2023 (Empl0). Effect denotes the average treatment effects for the treated and measures a change in the predicted employment probability when the treatment equals 1, se denotes standard error. Significance level (Sign): *** 0.001, ** 0.01, * 0.05, 0.1.

The results indicate that Generalized boosted modelling (GBM) is the best model out of all models considering the significance levels and after inspecting the balance of the treatment and control groups. The estimated coefficients indicated that participation in the pilot is associated with an increase in the probability of getting a job.

We can observe a significant positive employment effect on the treated NEETs after completing the INTERCEPT starting in June until October (outcomes of interest Empl3- Empl7). For example, if we look at the outcome Empl6 (September) estimated by GBM, the change in the probability that an individual is employed (outcome=1) for treated NEET is 0.141 or 14.1%. It is the difference between the predicted probabilities for treatment and control groups.

Figure 29 visualizes the treatment effect size estimated by different methods. The shaded region provides the lower and upper bounds of the treatment effect estimates. The horizontal line at (ATET=0) represents the null effect. Before March 2023 we can observe very small ATET and negative ATET as during this period the participants were not employed due to their participation in the intervention. After the intervention, a short lock-in effect can be visible until May 2023. Then the estimated ATET increases until September 2023. The largest treatment effect is reported in the month of September (Empl6).

Figure 29. Estimated effect of the intervention on participants



Source: Compiled by the authors using IER calculation based on INTERCEPT data extract – 5 November 2023

Note: The blue line corresponds to estimated average treatment effects for the treated. The shaded region shows 95% confidence intervals.

Overall, the counterfactual impact evaluation indicates that the programme had a positive effect on the participants in terms of employment probability. The estimated results imply that thanks to the intervention these NEETs increased their employment prospects and have better chances of finding a job in the labour market than NEETs who did not participated in this programme.

However, our estimation has a limitation due to the small treatment group and a short evaluation period. It would be suitable to investigate further if these treated NEETs improve their job finding probability during a longer period after the intervention.

Skills and activation

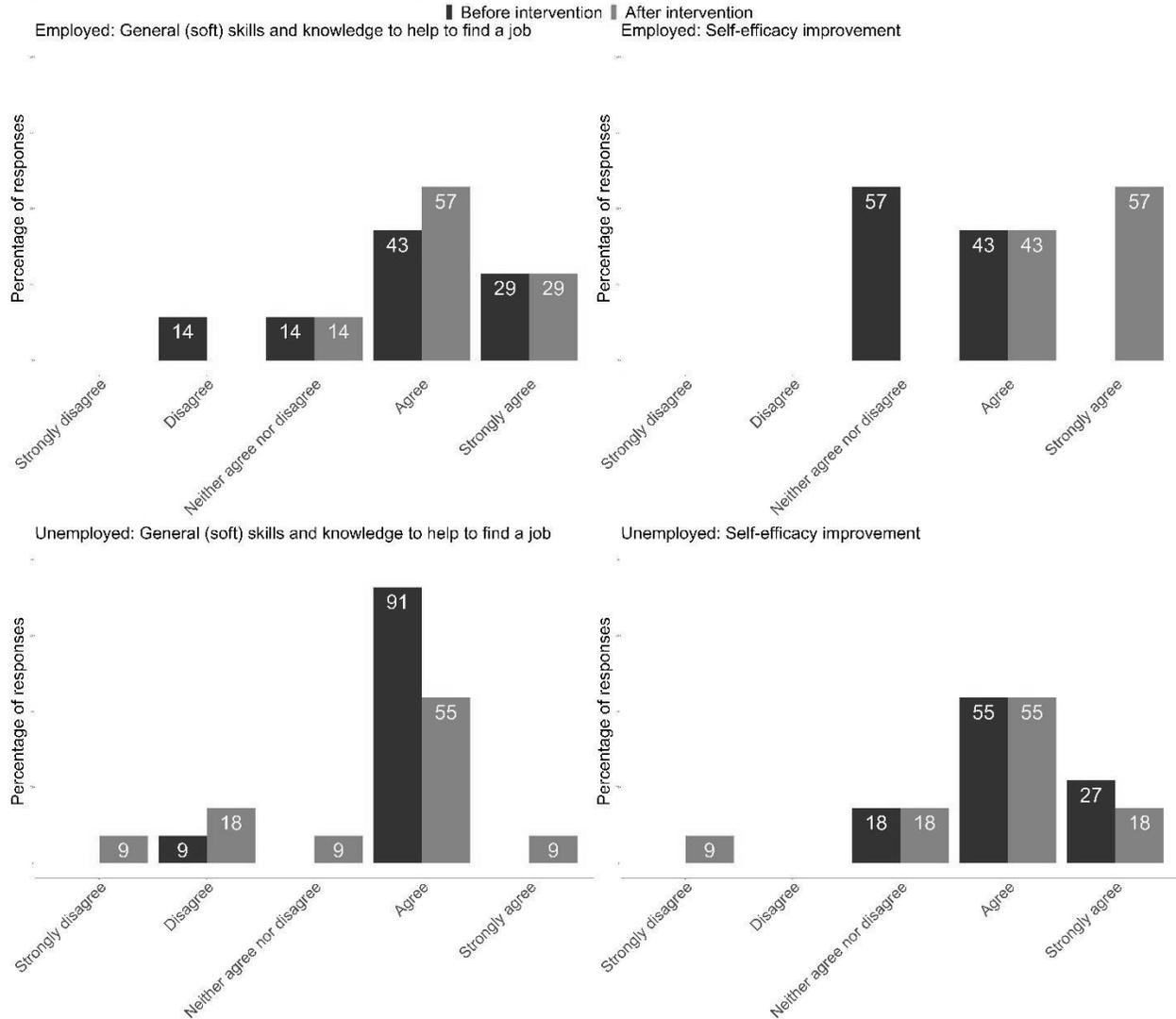
Post-intervention questions related to learning gained in relation to original expectations served to evaluate whether the intervention helped to enhance the skills and activation of participants. The degree to which expectations were met depends on whether these NEETs were employed or not after the intervention. Naturally, participants who found jobs shortly after the intervention or stayed with the same employer tended to have more positive replies than those that were subsequently unemployed.

Overall, the work placement had a positive impact on the self-efficacy on all participants. This programme helped to foster NEETs' belief that they can achieve a desired goal. In respect to the impact on skills and activation, psychometric surveys indicate that a group of employed participants profited more from the intervention. Based on Table 27 after the intervention, 67% of respondents were satisfied with their current job/looking for a job.

In more general terms, most of the participants found that the experience helped them to increase their employment prospects (see Figure 30). In particular, employed participants thought that this work placement was very important in their career growth. Additionally, this experience had a positive impact not only on their skills but also boosted their self-confidence. All of them agreed (43%) or strongly agreed (57%) that their self-efficacy was improved thanks to this intervention. Expectations in respect to their gained general skills and knowledge did not seem to be met by the unemployed participants, e.g., 91% of these NEETs believed that the traineeship would help them to find jobs, but this

share dropped after the intervention. After the end of the programme, only 64% of participants thought that the traineeship enhanced their skills (55% of NEETs agreed and 9% strongly agreed). We can observe a similar development of “expectations vs reality” towards impact on their self-efficacy. While the share of NEETs who agreed that the work placement improved their self-efficacy did not change (55%), the share of NEETs who strongly agree with this statement went down from 27% to 18%.

Figure 30. General skills and knowledge before and after the intervention

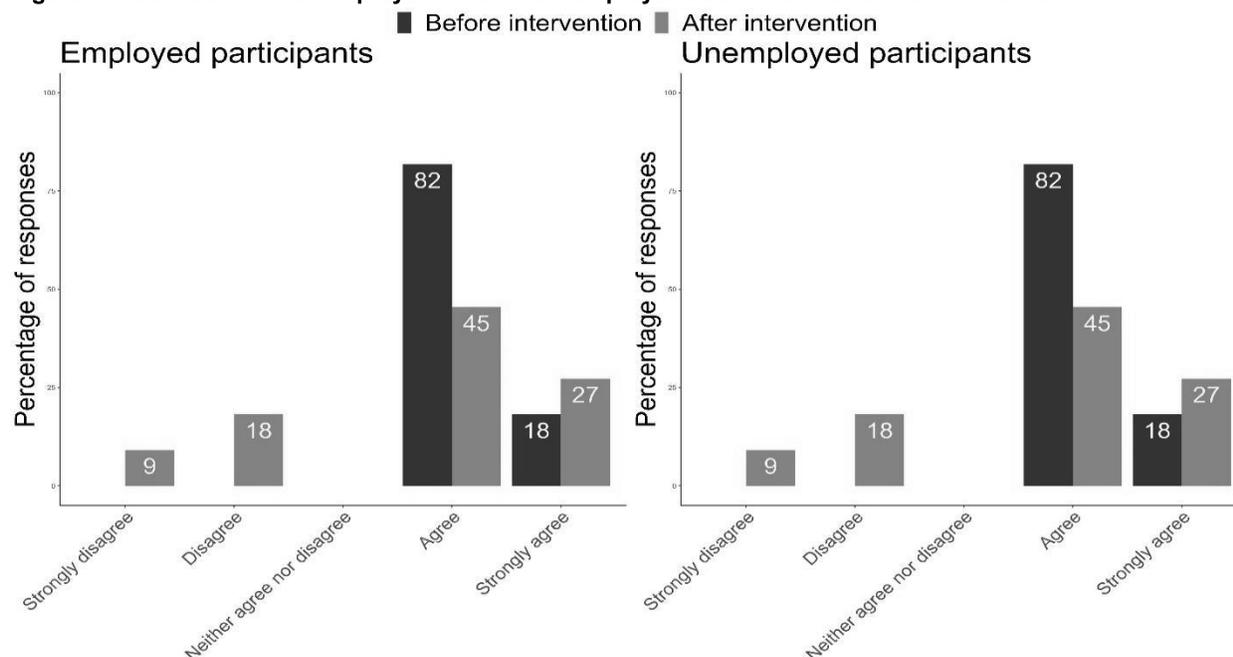


Source: Compiled by the authors from the pre-intervention and post-intervention survey

Notes: The first row shows expectations (green color) vs reality (blue color) captured by the employed group. The second row shows expectations vs reality captured by the unemployed group.

Obviously, participants who were employed after the intervention all believed that the work placement helped them to build professional connections (57% agreed and 43% strongly agreed with this statement), especially when their work placement employer offered them a job (see Figure 31). The unemployed group of participants did not seem to profit that much from networking with employers or colleagues. But, still the majority of them either agreed (45%) or strongly agreed (27%) that the work placement created more opportunities to establish professional connections.

Figure 31. Connection with employers and fellow employees before and after the intervention



Source: Compiled by the authors from pre-intervention and post-intervention survey

Notes: On left side the graph shows expectations (green color) vs reality (blue color) captured by the employed group; on the right the graph shows expectations vs reality captured by the unemployed group.

5.6. Sustainability, transferability and scalability

Scalability

In Malta, the INTERCEPT project has served to set the scene and take the lessons learnt through this project and should integrate them within the Youth Guarantee Program in the new programming period. One of the key takeaways has been the lessons learned in terms of the complexities of this age bracket. In fact, furtherin-depth research is currently being gathered through a NEETs' census. However, even before the project implementation several measures have been adopted to successfully address the needs of NEETs and achieve the project's targets and will be retained within the scope of the Youth Guarantee Program, including:

- Providing assistance to NEETs to complete work placements, even if they switch employers due to job fit issues.
- Setting the allowance rate significantly higher than the national minimum wage.
- Conducting online meetings with project staff instead of in-person meetings, offering support for CV and job interview preparation.

In addition to this, the training developed in the project will remain available for free to the public and has been integrated into the Jobsplus training portfolio.

The positive feedback combined with constructive suggestions for improvement from employers indicates that the project is suitable for implementation by the PES. Respondents see the benefits of the project for both small and large companies and its potential for expansion. Several suggested changes have led to potential innovations in the areas of marketing and an emphasis on increasing the visibility of the project through effective marketing activities. Another suggestion was to focus attention on non-working young people with higher education and to lower the age limit of the target group to 18 - 29, which can better meet the needs of employers and ensure more qualified participants. They also proposed extending the project duration from 3 to 6 months, which would allow companies to better monitor and evaluate participants. Innovations in the selection of applicants were also proposed, which would aim to better assess

the psychological and socio-economic readiness of participants, thus saving employers' time and financial resources. One of the employers also suggested a geographical expansion. These proposed innovations could contribute to a better fulfilment of the project's objectives and provide an even more valuable experience for employers and participants.

On the issue of upscaling the project, NEETs noted that they are aware that the labour market in Malta does not suffer from high unemployment, i.e. a lack of job opportunities, but they believe that the project is an appropriate platform to help those young people who are struggling to find suitable employment that suits them. This also applies to the limited opportunities for career change or career progression. In the matter of reaching out to a wider target group, NEETs suggested modifications in several aspects of the project: to increase the salary so that the project would attract more qualified individuals to apply, to reassess the definition of the target group to encourage a larger pool of highly educated candidates to participate, and/or to revise the eligibility criteria in general, and in relation to this to divide participants into two groups according to qualifications already during the training period with the tutors, as well as to increase advertising efforts since the participating NEETs noticed that there were still people unaware of the existence of the project. However, a significant proportion of the participants also valued the diversity of the groups and its positive impact on open discussions which enriched the group as a whole. One interviewee suggested an increase in monitoring visits to prevent any misuse, whether by the employee or the employer, in case the project was expanded. All NEETs interviewed expressed a positive view of the possibility of upscaling the project.

Feedback from employers and NEETs engaged in the programme was overall very positive and constructive. The only element that needed to be addressed was the attractiveness of the scheme so that it would have a lower drop-out rate. Additionally, the frequency of benefit payments was seen as one of the possible bottlenecks in attracting more participants. This should be considered if there is a similar programme design in the future. A set up that mimics real labour market rules more closely would be more attractive for NEETs and would also help them in the activation process.

Transferability

According to the lead partner of the project, considering all of the positive outcomes, particularly when examining the Lithuanian scenario, there is the potential for the programme to be replicated in other countries or regions. The reports detailing the pilot programme and its evaluation should offer valuable insights, encompassing aspects such as the target age bracket, training programmes, and the overall impact of the programme.

One challenge observed during the pilot programme was the notable number of no-shows and dropouts among participants. This complex issue appeared to be influenced by a combination of socio-political and economic factors. Understanding the underlying reasons for no-shows and dropouts is essential for developing effective mitigation strategies. The socio-political context, including policy changes and societal dynamics, can impact individuals' willingness and ability to participate fully in the programme. Similarly, economic factors, such as job opportunities or financial constraints, may have influenced participants' decisions. Recognizing and dissecting these challenges provides valuable insights for future interventions. Addressing these issues will require a holistic approach that takes into account both the external factors and the specific needs of participants, ultimately ensuring greater programme success and participant retention in future initiatives.

According to outcomes from interviews focusing on the no-shows and dropouts one of the significant barriers was their family related responsibilities which explained some of the NEETs' need for more flexible training and work-placement arrangements. This was also accompanied by significant geographical differences between work-placement and participants, which will need to be addressed in the future design of the matching process. Additionally, the level of financial remuneration was a discouraging factor from participation. Interestingly, when the no shows were asked about their future plans 40% of them had no plans or did not know what to do in the future, which translates to a need for tailored guidance for this target group.

Sustainability

The PES has adapted swiftly and embraced flexibility in implementing innovative measures to better support youths. A notable example involves learning from participants and striving to meet their needs to the fullest extent. For instance, Jobsplus listened to participants feedback and explored options such as increasing the allowance rate, conducting profiling and matching exercises online, transitioning all training to an online format, and deploying various outreach measures to actively engage them in the pilot.

Furthermore, PES staff seized the opportunity to undergo engaging and qualitative training. This involved study visits and physical training sessions with LIT-PES and ANCI staff in Malta. The training was designed to equip them with the necessary skills and provide an overview of Green jobs, the green transition, and the green economy. This preparation enabled them to effectively guide youths towards promising career pathways.

All the valuable insights gained from these experiences will be integrated into the new and reinforced Youth Guarantee programme in Malta. This programme will continue to offer youths the option to specialize and build their careers in the green sector.

The partners took advantage of the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the labour market in all partner countries, including the skills identified as essential for employers in green jobs during the research phases of the project. This engagement provided valuable insights into the similarities and differences among NEETs in various countries, shedding light on their diverse needs. It became evident that a one-size-fits-all approach may not be ideal, given the influential role of contextual factors.

Additionally, some partners actively participated in designing the training programme for youths and explored avenues for accrediting such training. This involvement reflects a commitment to shaping effective programmes and ensuring they meet accreditation standards.

Acknowledging the complexity of the implementation process, partners realized that it is not a straightforward endeavour. The impact of different national legislations, existing ALMPs, and varied processes can be substantial. Notably, partners have developed capacity in the evaluation aspect, acquiring the skills to implement, interpret, and effectively use collected data and feedback. This newfound ability contributes to a more comprehensive approach in assisting, designing, and evaluating interventions. These insights are crucial for shaping future policies aimed at assisting NEETs.

Through the project, partners have truly developed sustainable networks, evident in their collaborative efforts to address challenges. This was particularly notable when all partners actively engaged and offered productive suggestions to mitigate the risk of not meeting the initial target of assisting 300 youths. Furthermore, the depth of collaboration is underscored by various partners working in parallel through the pilot and evaluation phases over the past year.

Moreover, Malta solidified its commitment to collaboration by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Lithuanian PES for further joint initiatives. Additionally, several partners are actively involved in a new project, led by Jobsplus, called the atWork4NEETs project through Interreg Europe. This initiative aims to enhance the Youth Guarantee policy, showcasing an ongoing commitment to advancing policies and practices for the benefit of young individuals not in education, employment, or training.

Reinforced Youth Guarantee Programme Expansion:

- Age bracket extended from 15-24 to 15-29 in Malta.
- Lessons from the pilot crucial for shaping the new initiative.
- Aimed at effectively assisting NEETs aged 25-29.

Focus on Green Economy:

- Initiative highlighted the importance of the green economy.
- Impactful for Public Employment Service staff and participants.
- Staff received training in the emerging green sector.
- Staff can now guide NEETs toward sustainable career paths

5.7. Innovativeness

The intervention exhibited a degree of innovation in its approach to addressing the needs of NEETs, with a particular focus on those aged between 25 and 29 years. Through the INTERCEPT project, it was important to extract data on the unique challenges and opportunities faced by individuals in this age bracket specifically in Malta. This approach also aligned with the European Council's recommendation to reinforce the Youth Guarantee. By tailoring its efforts exclusively to this demographic, the intervention acknowledged that the transition from education to employment can be especially challenging for individuals in their mid-to-late twenties, who may have different needs and circumstances compared to younger NEETs. The project also shed light on the challenges to activate this target group due to their specific backgrounds especially in cases of family responsibilities and a heavy reliance on social benefits which, coupled with free healthcare, and in many cases free housing, do not look at entering the labour market as an attractive option.

Implementers also experienced innovation in the way online courses were delivered i.e. by creating Zoom breakout room meetings that provided the possibility to ask questions and gather valuable feedback throughout the training. Also newly developed and tested on the pilots' participants was a certified training course specifically targeting the NEETs bracket of 25–29-year-olds.

Additionally, compared to the original scheme design, flexibility in terms of completing the 240 hours was provided, allowing NEETs to finish within a minimum of 6 weeks and a maximum of 12 weeks. NEETs were given the opportunity to communicate and collaborate with employers to determine the best approach for conducting on-the-job experience. In the case of Malta, it was evident that participants needed more hand holding than anticipated for this age-bracket. Therefore, it was important to deploy additional efforts by project staff to keep the participants engaged.

Another notable innovation of this intervention was its effectiveness in providing diverse job experiences in cutting-edge fields. It went beyond conventional job placement programmes by offering opportunities in advanced domains such as AI Traffic Video Analytics for Smart Cities and Smart Digital Business utilizing NFC (Near Field Communication) technology. These job opportunities showcased the intervention's forward-looking approach to employment, introducing participants to emerging technologies and industries that are at the forefront of global innovation.

The intervention extended its innovative approach to staff at the Public Employment Service (PES). These staff members were provided with specialized training in the areas of green transition, green skills, and green jobs. This training was innovative in that it equipped PES personnel with the knowledge and expertise necessary to effectively support job seekers and employers in the emerging green economy. By empowering PES staff with this specialized training, the intervention ensured that employment services were better equipped to align with the changing dynamics of the labour market, making it a transformative initiative not only for NEETs, but also for employment service providers.

An important achievement noted during the pilot project was the significant progress made by Jobsplus in enhancing the NEETs' training programme. This programme has been successfully accredited at the ISCED level 3 with 2 ECTS credits. Such accreditation not only recognizes the programme's quality and rigour, but also elevates its status as an essential component within the free public training portfolio of Jobsplus. This development has far-reaching implications, as it enhances the programme's attractiveness to potential participants and employers alike. The accreditation not only validates the skills and knowledge acquired by NEETs. It also aligns the programme with international educational standards. This strategic move bolsters the programme's credibility and long-term relevance in the broader context of education and workforce development.

The project employs an innovative strategy by involving young people in the green economy, which makes it a very innovative project. The project provides them with the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the needs of green companies and offers them the opportunity for personal development. The project is perceived as mutually beneficial and creates a win-win situation for participants and employers alike: participants gain valuable experience and skills, while employers benefit from the active support of motivated applicants. In addition, they perceive the opportunity to acquire skills during the internships as positive. This innovative aspect ensures that participants not only gain theoretical

knowledge but also practical experience, thereby increasing their employability. It is a project with a focus on sustainability, which sets it apart from other programmes and serves as a source for identifying talent for environmentally conscious industries.

6. Horizontal evaluation of pilots

6.1. Cross-case analysis

The cross-case analysis aims to overview the three pilots in Italy, Lithuania and Malta in a complex way. Its goal is to derive overarching conclusions that were consistently achieved across all three pilot studies.

Relevance

In all three countries, the intervention was relevant for NEETs and employers as well as for the local context and remains relevant after the end of the pilot.

NEETs noted that the main needs from the intervention for them were (1) securing stable employment, (2) improving soft and gaining job-specific skills, (3) acquiring green skills and working in a green company, (4) establishing connections with employers and peers (socialize), and finally (5) securing internships close to home lasting for an extended period (6 months).

Employers expressed their interest in the pilot due to (1) access to pre-trained individuals alleviating challenges related to employee shortages, (2) the opportunity to introduce young individuals to green jobs, (3) the chance to screen potential employees at minimal cost, (4) enhanced understanding of the green economy concept, (5) positive prior experiences with Public Employment Services (PES), and (6) the ability to experiment with low-cost initiatives.

The intervention effectively addressed barriers to NEETs' employment, targeting issues such as (1) low enrolment of NEETs in PES (allowing participation in the pilot regardless), (2) challenges in reaching workplaces (mitigated through additional travel allowances, free childcare, and online courses), and (3) tackling issues of self-confidence and skills development.

Effectiveness

On the effectiveness part we looked at whether the intervention (1) improved employment opportunities of young NEETs, (2) enhanced participant's activation and skills relevant to green economy, or (3) created a channel of engaging green economy employers with potential employees. In addition, we evaluated the pilot based on the Kirkpatrick training evaluation model, which looks at the reaction, learning, behaviour and results of the training.

Evaluation shows that the intervention improved employment opportunities for 25-29 year-old NEETs. The project offered very specific benefits: work experience and financial payment. The NEETs themselves noted that the project not only provided them with soft and hard skills, but also allowed them to try themselves in new, untried areas. Participants, who may have been previously unemployed or had limited exposure to certain fields, have experienced a shift in their career aspirations. In addition, NEETs mentioned that if they could not find a job for a long time, their motivation fell. The project greatly motivated them to continue looking for work, and the opportunity to communicate with like-minded people was also a very useful addition to the project.

Regarding the skills related to the green economy, participants agree that the intervention contributed significantly to the improvement of their skills. Most of the participants assessed the training session very positively in terms of gaining knowledge in green economy topics. After completing their work placements, most participants agreed that they helped them to enhance their skills and knowledge in the green economy. However, acquired general skills were mentioned more often than specific skills required for the green economy. In addition, it seems that employed participants are now more motivated to work in a green economy than unemployed participants.

One of the expected intervention outputs was creating a channel between green economy employers and potential employees. Indeed, from the employers' perspective, the INTERCEPT project has created an effective platform to

connect employers in the green economy with people interested in these industries. Also, participants valued that the work placement helped them build professional connections and that it created more opportunities to establish professional connections. The creation of a channel has extended beyond the green economy, leading to substantial relationships (e.g. in Italy). The networking effect is evident, with participants not only finding opportunities within the organization but also leveraging these connections for additional work with clients.

In addition, the effectiveness was measured via the Kirkpatrick training evaluation model. It measures four levels of the training:

1. Reaction - the degree to which the training is favourable, engaging, and relevant to the participants. Most of the participants were optimistic about the whole pilot. They expected that the trainings would broaden their knowledge of green topics and the internships would help them in their professional careers. The majority of participants gave positive feedback on the training. Overall, the training met the participants' expectations. It seems that the role of the instructor in their learning was of importance for the NEETs' reactions. After the internship, 58% Italian, 80% Lithuanian and 83% Maltese participants agreed or strongly agreed that the work placement met their needs and evaluated their internships positively.
2. Learning – the degree to which participants got the intended knowledge, skills, and motivation as a result of the training. On average, knowledge of the green economy by participants improved and they claimed that they learned a lot during the training.
3. Behaviour – the degree to which participants apply what they learned. Approximately half of the participants used their specific skills after the intervention. There was only a minority of participants who were certain not to feel any continuous impact concerning skills. It seems, however, that the social capital acquired during the internship was more difficult to retain or to recognize its continuous presence. The share of participants that continued to use it after the internship is only around 35-40%, depending on the country.
4. Results – the degree to which outcomes occur due to the training. This will be covered in the next section.

Efficiency

The cost-benefit analysis in three countries took into account the benefits for the public budget if the earnings of the additional employed participant were at minimal wage¹⁵ and average wage scenarios. Although the benefits included in the model differed between countries due to the data limitations (for more information please see the efficiency part in every country pilot evaluation), the table below shows the time within which the costs of the pilot would be recouped:

Table 30. Cost-benefit analysis

	Minimal wage scenario	Average wage scenario
Italy	<i>No minimal wage in Italy</i>	95 days
Lithuania	3.9 years	511 days
Malta	2.9 years	320 days

Source: Compiled by the authors

At the moment there are no alternative interventions in Tuscany, Lithuania and Malta that specifically address NEETs in the green economy. INTERCEPT is the only project which trains and finds internship positions for 25-29 year-old NEETs in the green economy.

The resources in all three countries were used as planned and no significant changes were faced.

There were some delays in implementation, but it did not have a significant impact on the outcomes of the pilot. There were other factors that played a role in the underachievement for expected number of participants. However, the limited duration of the programme was an important issue for both NEETs and employers due to legal constraints and the low level of participation of NEETs/ employers (the availability of seasonal employment became a critical factor affecting the activation of internships).

¹⁵ Italy does not have minimal wage, thus no minimal wage scenario is present.

Impact

As for impact, we looked at two main indicators: whether the intervention had a positive impact on participants' (1) employment and (2) skills and activation.

Regarding employment, the counterfactual impact evaluation (CIE) was carried out to understand the impact of the pilot. The CIE in all three countries indicated that the intervention had a positive effect on participants' absence from the employment register. Some country level insights are provided below:

- In Italy, as of December 2023, data are available for only 18 participants. From this small dataset, it is possible to see that 39% of participants obtained jobs. The majority of the employed NEETs stated that their contracts were temporary.
- In Lithuania, according to estimates produced by the CEM, GBM, and IPW models, by 1 November 2023 the average treatment effect for all project participants was approximately 9 percentage points (p.p.). The analysis suggests that intervention also significantly increased the probability of withdrawing from the unemployment registry. According to the estimates produced by the GBM, and IPW models, by 1 November 2023 the average treatment effect for all project participants was approximately 10 percentage points (p.p.) The estimates reveal that by the end of the seventh month after entering the intervention, the first group of participants (that had the longest time for results to kick-in) were 16% more likely to be withdrawn from the registry, citing finding business or employment opportunities as a reason. Men and women showed equally positive treatment effects.
- In Malta, different evaluation methods, such as PSM, CEM, IPW and GMB, provided evidence of a short lock-in effect after the intervention and a positive average treatment effect of the treated NEETs starting from June until October 2023. These findings imply that the intervention led to a higher employment probability. The results estimated by the best model, GBM, showed that participants who completed the pilot had a 12.6 percentage points higher probability to find employment by October 2023. The INTERCEPT project increased NEETs' chances of finding a job in the labour market.

However, given the small treatment sample and short evaluation period, it is recommended to evaluate the impact on the participants during a longer period after the intervention.

Looking at the impact on participants' skills and activation, the extent of the impact depends on whether participants were employed or not after the intervention. Participants who found a job shortly after the intervention or stayed with the same employer tended to have benefited more from the intervention in terms of skills and activation. For employed participants, this experience was very important in their career growth. While most employed participants thought that the work placement enhanced their skills, this was not the case for unemployed participants. Similarly, the work placement helped more employed participants to build professional connections than unemployed participants.

Sustainability, transferability, scalability and innovativeness

Regarding **sustainability**, we looked to what extent the intervention built the capacity of project implementers to innovate and upscale/transfer their pilot at the organisational level and in general, to what extent the pilot strengthened the capacities of involved partners. In addition, we looked at whether project teams developed sustainable networks and partnerships during the project.

The evaluation showed that the intervention built the capacity of project implementers in that they were trained about green jobs and had to address non-standard situations. Additionally, partnerships between Public Employment Services and green companies were built which will help to employ NEETs in green jobs in the future.

As for **scalability**, we checked what the likelihood was that the pilot would be carried out on a larger scale by PES. Because of the local context, answers varied among the three countries:

- In Italy, a strong demand for the scheme among both employers and NEETs has added a compelling layer to the prospects of upscaling. Despite the identified interest and need from employers, the absence of current plans for upscaling within ARTI introduces a significant consideration. To enhance the likelihood of successful upscaling, collaboration emerges as a critical element.

- In Lithuania there is the possibility to upscale some of the intervention aspects beyond the project timeframe. Every year, the LT PES has a budget allocated for internship funding. Currently, the possibility of redistributing resources and allocating part of the budget to green practices is being considered, thus continuing the development of the project. LT PES plans to conduct trainings for career consultants and customer service specialists on the green economy. The aim is for these training sessions to take place regularly. However, the administrative burden has to be taken into consideration.
- In Malta, PES staff seized on the opportunity to undergo engaging and qualitative training. The training was designed to equip PES staff with the necessary skills and provide an overview of green jobs, the green transition, and the green economy. This preparation enabled PES staff to effectively guide youths towards promising career pathways. All the valuable insights gained from these experiences will be integrated into Malta's new and reinforced Youth Guarantee program. This program will continue to offer youth the option to specialise and build careers in the green sector.

Transferability refers to whether the pilot is likely to be adopted at scale in another country or by a different PES. We also looked at whether the project can be adapted to the local ecosystem. The evaluation showed that there is a potential for the pilot to be replicated in other countries or regions. However, interview participants believed it would be challenging because the legal regulations for internships vary in each country – duration, compensation, country obligations, etc. Several aspects should be considered:

- Diverse legislative landscapes governing non-curricular traineeships in each region/ country. The variations in legal frameworks necessitate a region-specific review, taking into account the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the specific legislation of each area. The distinct production contexts in different regions, particularly those with abundant labour in the production and industrial sectors, may influence the utilization of internships differently.
- No-shows and dropouts. One challenge observed during the pilot was the notable number of no-shows and dropouts among participants. This complex issue appeared to be influenced by a combination of socio-political and economic factors.

Finally, **innovativeness** measured whether the intervention was innovative. The most innovative aspect for all three countries was the strategy to involve young people in the green economy. The project provided them with the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the needs of green companies and offered them an opportunity for personal development. In addition, allowances were paid to participants (but not to the companies) and the project's conditions are very flexible. However, fundamentally, such a model where an unemployed individual undergoes brief training and carries out an internship is standard and lacks innovation.

6.2. Lessons learned

The project pilot did not unfold entirely as envisaged, necessitating adjustments to the initial planning by the core team. The forthcoming chapter will detail several lessons gained from this experience. The lessons will be categorised into the following categories – lessons concerning:

1. Outreach strategy
2. Training
3. Internships
4. Administrative/ organisational issues
5. Costs
6. Other lessons

Lessons concerning outreach strategy

The initial step before the training and the internship involves the identification of NEETs for the project. Italy, Lithuania, and Malta employed distinct outreach strategies, each with its own merits and drawbacks. These are outlined below:

- **Reaching NEETs through career consultants resulted in an exceptionally low drop-out rate.** The Lithuanian outreach strategy was to offer internships directly to the NEET via face-to-face meetings with career consultants. This approach allowed consultants to provide comprehensive explanations about the project and address any queries that NEETs might have. Furthermore, the assigned consultant remained available to assist NEETs throughout the entire project, contributing to a minimal dropout rate.

- **Varied outreach strategies tailored to different age groups proved to be successful.** In Malta, an important observation extracted from the pilot was the divergent responses of individuals in different age brackets to various outreach strategies. Younger participants, often more tech-savvy, exhibited a greater interest in the program through digital marketing efforts. On the other hand, older participants demonstrated a stronger response to traditional methods such as personalised letters with manual applications received at home.
- **The consideration of seasonal employment factors should be integrated into the planning of future initiatives.** Italy particularly faced problems with seasonal work. The potential impact of seasonal work on internship activations highlights the importance of aligning project timelines with the specific characteristics of the labour market. Future initiatives should consider these implications and strategise accordingly.

Lessons concerning training

While the NEETs training before the internship was evaluated as a positive aspect of the pilot, several areas for improvement were identified:

- **There is a need for improved alignment between the training and the internships.** NEETs highlighted a mismatch between the training received and the tasks carried out during internships/work placement. Likewise, employers noted that the disparity between the anticipated skills of potential employees and their actual capabilities presented a challenge, requiring extra time and effort to train participants for specific duties. Thus, a better alignment of training with future internship placements could yield additional gains from the programme.
- **More attention should be given to green jobs/skills.** NEETs noted that they lacked more information on green jobs and skills. The progress of NEETs in green jobs-related topics suggests that this area should be given more attention. When green jobs-related skills are correctly identified, upskilling might better equip job seekers for emerging and on-demand jobs.
- **Several options for the training should be suggested.** The preference for the training varied between the participants, as their characteristics and needs varied as well. The training in Italy was held online. Participants in Italy expressed a need for in-person training. However, logistical challenges, particularly transportation issues, need to be taken into account. In Lithuania, participants could follow only in-person training, and some complained that it was difficult to commute to the training place for a couple of hours of training. The Lithuanian Public Employment Services addressed this by offering reimbursement of commuting costs for participants residing in another city. Therefore, it may be worthwhile to consider providing NEETs with the flexibility to choose between online and on-site training (with a travel budget). On the other hand, Malta initially began with both in-person and online training. However, due to a higher demand for online training, there was a shift towards prioritising and offering only online training.
- **The length of the training could be longer.** Participants noted that the content of the training was interesting and useful for them. However, tutors did not have enough time to go through the content in-depth, thus, participants lacked more information, especially on the green job/skills-related topics.

Lessons concerning internships

The training was followed by a 3-months-long internship placement. There were some lessons learned regarding the targeting length, matching and remuneration of internships:

- **Longer internships would increase NEETs' and employers' interest.** During the pilot, the internships lasted for approx. 3 months. Participants expressed the need for a longer (at least 6 months) internship. The reason for this is rooted in different aspects of the countries. For instance, in Italy, most internships last for 6 months and potential interns tend to not consider shorter internships as it is difficult to find a job.
- **Matching for internships should consider geographical proximity.** In all three countries commuting to the internship place was mentioned as a challenging factor. On several occasions commuting repelled some participants from continuing in the scheme or discouraged the NEETs from participating.
- **Flexibility in remuneration of participants helps set up internships in a more efficient way.** Flexibility addresses the trade-off between the interest of participants seeking higher income and cost-effectiveness, which would be endangered by too high growth of the overall costs of the scheme. Moreover, higher remuneration attracts more motivated participants, with positive spill-over effects on the organisation of training sessions and workplace practice. Finally, more motivated participants were associated with higher satisfaction levels of employers engaged in the programme.

Lessons concerning administrative/ organizational issues

In general, the organisation of the pilot was smooth, however, the core team faced some challenges and offered a mitigation strategy for that. The pilot showed that flexibility is an important aspect of applying such pilot schemes in different countries. The main administrative/ organisational lesson is that **flexibility is needed in the context of significant variability of the participants' circumstances**. This includes:

- **Introducing additional budget needed to address the local context.** For instance:
 - NEET participants in Lithuania were provided with travel/ commuting allowances to reach the workplace. This is especially important as 40% of NEETs have difficulties in reaching the workplace. The allowance helped to have more NEETs in the project.
 - Participants in Malta received an allowance rate higher than the national minimum wage during their work placements. The PES was experimenting with raising the allowance rate to see whether this sparks more interest.
- **Introducing additional measures to support participants.** For example:
 - In Malta free childcare services were actively offered during work placements, thereby assisting mothers in managing their commitments.
 - The availability of online training options in Italy and Malta proved beneficial for individuals, including mothers and those with caregiving responsibilities.
- **Introducing tailored training for the project.** For instance:
 - The introduction of micro-courses incorporated emerging aspects related to green jobs.
 - Addressed motivation and behaviour-related topics played a crucial role in boosting the morale of participants, particularly those with low self-esteem.
- **Understanding the legal background and tailoring the project to it.**
 - The Italian experience highlights the limitations of a uniform approach, especially when dealing with legal agreements and overcoming region-specific challenges. The complex interaction of legal systems, as exemplified in the Italian situation, underscores the importance of adopting a nuanced and flexible strategy. Moving forward, it is crucial for upcoming initiatives to prioritize a comprehensive grasp of local legal contexts. This ensures that outreach efforts and proactive measures are carefully tailored to harmonize seamlessly with the specific legal requirements of each participating country.

Lessons concerning costs

- **The costs per participant incurred for implementation of the pilot were relatively low.** Further continuation and utilisation of the already created structures would help them even decrease.
- **Provided remuneration should be competitive.** As was noted in Malta's pilot, the remuneration should be higher than the national minimum wage. The implementation of the piloted programme was under constant evaluation, leading to an increase in the hourly remuneration of participants and supplying them with additional information on other publicly financed programmes (e.g. public childcare). This proved to be a success.
- **Alternatives to the piloted project could save even more costs.** It would be possible to make pre-recorded videos and create a voucher system. The NEETs should listen to training and find green jobs. Once they are employed – they would receive money for the training (voucher). This would reduce the cost of administration to a minimum and potentially produce a similar result.

Other lessons

Interim evaluation during the implementation needs to be stimulated and given space, as it might lead to valuable improvements in the programme set-up. The voices of the stakeholders in the field should be also considered.

7. Conclusions

This evaluation report provided an overview of three Intercept pilots implemented in Italy (Tuscany), Lithuania and Malta. In general, the pilots proved to be successful. The main findings are as follows:

- **Relevance** – The pilot was relevant to NEETs, employers, PES and in a local context. It still remains relevant after the end of the pilot.

- **Effectiveness** – The evaluation shows that the intervention improved employment opportunities for 25-29 year old NEETs. Regarding skills related to the green economy, participants agreed that the interventions contributed significantly to the improvement of their skills. INTERCEPT laid the foundation for further collaboration between PES and green employers.
- **Efficiency** - The cost-benefit analysis showed that in average wage scenario the benefits of the pilot would surpass its costs in from 95 days to 1.4 years depending on the country and the calculation model. There are no alternative interventions targeting 25-29 year old NEETs and employing them in green jobs. The resources in all three countries were used as planned and no significant changes were needed. There was some delay in implementation, but it did not have a significant impact on the outcomes of the pilots.
- **Impact** – We observed a positive impact on participants' absence from the unemployment register. The share of participants on the unemployment register was apx. 10-12 p.p. lower than that of the control group.
- **Sustainability, transferability, scalability** - The evaluation showed that the intervention built the capacity of project implementers in that they were trained about green jobs and had to address non-standard situations. Additionally, partnerships between Public Employment Services and green companies were built which will help to employ NEETs in green jobs in the future. Transferability of the project is challenging - it is possible if the pilot is flexible and adjusted to a local context.
- **Innovativeness** - The most innovative aspect for all three countries was the strategy to involve young people in the green economy. In addition, allowances were paid to participants (but not to the companies) and the project's conditions are very flexible. However, fundamentally, such a model where an unemployed individual undergoes a brief training and carries out an internship is standard and lacks innovation.

Although the three pilots were successful, several lessons learned are important to keep in mind.

First, the target groups and institutional context differ substantially between countries. The situation of NEETs 25-29 differs between countries. For instance, (1) females dominate in Malta, contrasting to the NEETs' gender balance in Lithuania; (2) the educational structure of NEETs differs between regions. The green economy is also different between the countries, for example, in Tuscany the green economy was more often associated with small farms, while in Malta, waste management and the circular economy have become relatively more important. The institutional context of the employment services provision is also country specific. Consequently, there is a need for flexibility in the design and implementation of the pilot.

Second, it is possible to implement one programme sharing the same elements but also respecting country-differences. Being aware of the country-specific contexts, a flexible programme design and implementation in practice was tested. Thus, flexibility in the programme design and implementation is possible and preferred. This enables a custom designed tailoring of the programme to the specific needs of the country/region, as well as addressing these needs to achieve a higher impact.

Third, being green motivates employees as well as employers. The idea of contributing to a common purpose, such as "saving the planet" or "fighting climate change", motivated and activated the participants. On the employers' side, when asked to participate in the project, employers were often surprised that they were considered to be a part of the green economy.

Furthermore, we observed a positive impact on the participants' absence from the unemployment register (approx. 10 p.p.). Our estimated impact is comparable to impact evaluation evidence from other countries (or relevant meta-analyses).

Finally, listening to stakeholders and having ongoing evaluations pays off. A list of stakeholders was involved in designing and implementing the pilot programme. The participation of NEETs was organised in waves. Each wave presented a new observation to be potentially evaluated. The time between the waves opened up the possibility for adjustments to improve the implementation of the pilot.

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Annexes

Annex 1: Summary of intervention in Italy, Lithuania and Malta

Table below presents the similarities and differences of the intervention between Italy, Lithuania and Malta, when compared to the specific needs of the target group.

Table 31. Summary of intervention in Italy, Lithuania and Malta

Characteristics of the intervention	Italy	Lithuania	Malta
Overview of the intervention			
Aims and activities	The same in all countries testing the tools		
Innovativeness	The intervention has no precedent, more tailored made to all previous tools being implemented within the YG programme	Integration of NEETs into the green labour market	Malta's YG scheme supported only NEETs aged 16-24. The pilot aimed to address this limitation and provided assistance to older NEETs. It was innovative for offering specific support to older NEETs. Efforts were made to raise awareness among inactive youths and employers about adapting to the green transition and evolving labour market needs.
Recruitment			
Target group	NEETs aged 25-29 with the particular focus on higher-educated women (inactive due to care responsibilities)	24-29 old NEETs	NEETs aged 25-29 were eligible. Participants had to have reached this age at the time of receiving their applications.
Registration in PES	All NEETs had to self-declare they were in a NEET state when they applied for the pilot scheme. However, in case they were matched with a potential hosting company they had to register to the PES which checked their NEET state through their system.	The participants are registered within PES	Inactive youths, not necessarily registered with the PES, were eligible for the pilot. A self-declaration was required by participants, and necessary checks with PES records were conducted
Outreach strategy and selection method	Two approaches selected: - a person voluntarily chooses to take part in the project, by registering online; - Announcement on the website through a public call. Communications on the call sent out through: 1) Anci Toscana's mailing lists to A) all municipalities which were asked to promote the initiative through their social / welfare services and youth information / support services and B) all youngsters who had	Participants had to fill a form and priority was given according to the submitting date and region. Career counsellors invited participants to participate in the pilot	A national campaign integrated traditional and digital components, including personalized invitations sent by postal mail, articles, and ads in printed magazines and newspapers, radio ads, social media ads, social media influencers' ads, email campaigns, and content on various online channels. NEETs were invited to voluntarily apply to participate in the pilot scheme.

Characteristics of the intervention	Italy	Lithuania	Malta
	<p>been rejected or had already finished the volunteering service at regional level, who received the call;</p> <p>2) The Region of Tuscany's and ARTI's promoted the call through their websites and mailing lists.</p> <p>First come, first served approach.</p>		
Recruitment process of employers	<p>A call for potential hosting bodies was published and promoted through:</p> <p>1) Anci Toscana's mailing lists to the Municipalities, which were asked to promote the initiative at local level with green businesses and to become hosting bodies themselves since they are involved in the management and delivery of many green services in Tuscany;</p> <p>2) Anci Toscana's mapping of green businesses who received direct emails with information on the call and on how to become hosting bodies;</p> <p>3) the Region of Tuscany's Agriculture Sector's mailing list;</p> <p>4) ARTI's mailing lists for companies.</p>	<p>Information campaign was organized to attract potential employers. Meetings with businesses associations and companies was organized.</p>	<p>In the initial phase, potential employers from the green economy were identified. Subsequently, they were contacted through various means, including email, phone calls, as well as articles and ads in printed magazines and newspapers, radio ads, and social media ads. Employers were encouraged to voluntarily express interest in offering work placements to NEETs.</p>
Application process	<p>The calls for companies and NEETs were opened until the end of August 2023. However, the activation of internships also included September. For timing reasons, only the internships activated until the end of August 2023 will be taken into account in the evaluation current report.</p>	<p>Call for NEETs was open until December 2022</p>	<p>The call for applications opened between August and September 2022 and lasted until around end of July 2023, allowing enough time for training and remaining work placements to be completed by the beginning of December 2023.</p> <p>Participants had the opportunity to either apply directly online on the website or send manual applications via postal mail or email, and these were inputted by the PES staff manually.</p>
Information about the participants (and	<p>Personal details (name, surname, address, age, email, phone number). In addition, for selected</p>	<p>To be specified later</p>	<p>Personal details, including name, surname, address, date of birth, identification number, email, and</p>

Characteristics of the intervention	Italy	Lithuania	Malta
those not selected)	participants: data deriving from the profiling and on assessment before and after the 25hs training, and after experience, level of education.		phone number, as well as the maximum level of education attained, were provided at the application stage. Additionally, employment and registration history from the PES records was used.
Training			
The start of the training	A 25hs green training (25hs GT) programme was delivered remotely through webinars only to those NEETs who had been matched with a hosting company. This meant that all NEETs who did the 25hs GT started their placement right after the 25hs GT's completion, there were very few dropouts after the 25hs GT since both 25hs GT and job placements were part of the internship agreement signed by the interns, PES ARTI and the hosting company. The training was delivered from February 2023 to October 2023.	March 2023	The training for the first group of participants initiated in October 2022.
Length of the training	25 hours general training, specific training on the internship was activated, plus training on security at the workplace	5-10 days, 2-4 hours a day	The total course duration is 25 hours.
Number of courses and topics covered	The 25hs training course was based on the WP4's training programme structure and covered all areas accordingly.	The 25hs training course was based on the WP4's training programme structure and covered all areas accordingly. Local specifics and topics were added to training.	1 course which is divided into five segments: Area A: Expectations – Introductory Workshop (2 hours) Area B: Green Jobs (6 hours) Area C: Self-Motivational Skills (7 hours) Area D: Behavioural Skills (7 hours) Area E: Reflections - Planting the Seeds (3 hours) Additionally, there is a 1-hour assessment. Core Modules: Areas B, C, and D
Examination after training	Provided before and after the training	3 surveys: before training, after training, after internship.	1-hour assessment with multiple-choice exercises.

Characteristics of the intervention	Italy	Lithuania	Malta
Training provider	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) General training was provided by Anci Toscana coaches 2) Specific training was provided by coaches in the company hosting the internship 	PES experts	External qualified and experienced trainers were hired to deliver the training. The trainers needed to have work experience in delivering training to youths and hold qualifications related to the topics being delivered.
Internship			
Start of the internship	February 2023	April 2023	January 2023
Length of the internship	12 weeks	200 hours	The total course duration is 240 hours spread on approx. 12 weeks.
Type of internship (paid, or not)	<p>3 step payment, upon completion of milestones:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) €125 after completion of the 25hs training (1 week); 2) €1000 after the completion of the first 8 weeks of job placement; 3) €375 after the completion of the last 3 weeks of the job placement. <p>If somebody dropped out because they found a job or enrolled in a course for further education, they were paid on the basis of the number of weeks they had completed.</p>	The internship was paid €1 200 plus travel expenses	Three phases were introduced, each with a different hourly rate: the first call paid at €5 per hour, the second call at €6 per hour, and the final call at €7.50 per hour.
Job placement			
Competences expected to be gained	<p>General training:</p> <p>Awareness Knowledge Values Attitude Motivation Experience Soft skills like (communication, digital, problem solving, flexibility, motivation, creativity)</p> <p>Specific and OJT: Depending on the type of internship</p>	Strengthen general career competences	<p>The anticipated competences from the work placement encompass:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness and understanding of green jobs • Development of life skills • Enhancement of soft skills, including communication, digital literacy, problem-solving, flexibility, motivation, and creativity • Hands-on experience in a workplace setting • Cultivation of independence • Advancement of motivational skills, responsibility, and accountability • Improvement in behavioural skills • Fostering teamwork

Source: Compiled by the authors

Annex 2: Methodological annex

Data collection methods

The methodology deployed for this evaluation included desk research, pre-, mid- and post-intervention surveys of INTERCEPT participants, interviews with Public Employment Services, NEETs and employers. This section describes these methods in more detail.

Desk research

Desk research consisted of a systematic review of the literature, including a bibliographic search through relevant databases (whereby relevant publications were identified using keywords) and the use of a ‘snowball sampling’ technique (where all the references of relevant publications were reviewed to identify additional relevant publications).

Interviews

The overall objective of interviewing was to obtain an in-depth understanding of the project nuances. In total, **49** interviews were carried out. The table below presents an overview of interviewees profile.

Table 32. Overview of interviewees profile

	Italy	Lithuania	Malta
PES	1	1	1
NEETs	5	6	5
Employers	7	6	5
Other	-	-	12 (2 trainers, 10 no-shows)
Total	13	13	23

Source: Compiled by the authors

Survey

Surveys for participating NEETs

Three surveys of participating NEETs were carried-out in the INTERCEPT evaluation: pre-intervention, mid-intervention and post-intervention. The survey questionnaires were drawn on Kirkpatrick theoretical model¹⁶ and sought to capture information relevant for answering key evaluation questions. Some of the questions included in the questionnaires were used in the theory-based evaluation. We go on to present the basic rationale behind each of the three surveys.

Pre-intervention survey. Each participant was required to complete an online questionnaire at the start of the first day of the training course. The survey aimed to ascertain participants' expectations for both the training course and the internship (essential for assessing Level 2 of the Kirkpatrick model) and their pre-existing knowledge of the material to be covered during the training course.

¹⁶ The Kirkpatrick Model is an internationally recognized tool for evaluating and analyzing the results of educational, training and learning programs. It consists of four levels of evaluation: Reaction, Learning, Behavior, and Results. “Reaction” measures whether learners find the training engaging, favorable, and relevant to their jobs. Level 2 gauges the learning of each participant based on whether learners acquire the intended knowledge, skills, attitude, confidence and commitment to the training. Level 3 measures whether participants were truly impacted by the learning and if they are applying what they learn. Finally, Level Four measures the learning against an organization’s business outcomes— the Key Performance Indicators that were established before learning was initiated. For more information on the model, see: <https://www.ardentlearning.com/blog/what-is-the-kirkpatrick-model>

Mid-intervention survey. The mid-intervention survey was administered at the very end of the training course. Participants were asked to complete an online questionnaire that sought to capture their reaction to the training course (Level 1 of the Kirkpatrick model), the degree to which their learning expectations were met (Level 2), and the actual learning outcomes. The latter were measured by a test reflecting the contents of the training course.

Post-intervention survey. The post-intervention survey was administered one month after the end of the internship. It measured participants' reaction to the internship (Level 1 of the Kirkpatrick model), the degree to which their learning expectations were met (Level 2), and behaviour change (Level 3).

Drop-outs and no-shows survey

Since there were quite significant number of drop-outs, there was an optional drop-outs survey for NEETs to understand why they dropped out from the pilot and what could be the reasons that would keep them. The drop-outs survey was launched in Italy and Malta.

To provide more complex information on the reasons why some of the NEETs after showing interest in participating in the scheme did not followed the path towards their activation in the field of green jobs optional short socio-demographic survey with short interview was developed.

Evaluation approaches

Theory-based evaluation

The theory-based evaluation of the INTERCEPT pilot adopted a realist approach (Pawson & Tilley 1997; Magenta Book 2020). According to the principal developers of this theory-based evaluation perspective, realist evaluation designs sought 'to produce ever more detailed answers to the question of why a program works for whom and in what circumstances' (Pawson & Tilley 1997, p. xvi). Realist evaluation relied on the premise that "programs work (have successful 'outcomes') only in so far as they introduce the appropriate ideas and opportunities ('mechanisms') to groups in the appropriate social and cultural conditions ('contexts')" (Pawson & Tilley 1997, p. 57). The base upon which realist explanation built was therefore the proposition that causal outcomes followed from mechanisms acting in contexts. This could be conveniently expressed in a simple conceptual matrix: *outcome = mechanism + context*. Therefore, realist evaluation placed the emphasis firmly on the mechanics of explanation.

The INTERCEPT program entails multiple micro processes that can potentially contribute to the improvement of participants' labour market outcomes (see Table 33). The most direct way in which the INTERCEPT program might work is through providing NEETs with specific hard skills that significantly increase participants' chances of finding employment (most probably in green economy). However, training and work exposure might also provide NEETs with soft (interpersonal) skills, help them establish valuable connections with employers and fellow employees, motivate participants to pursue a career in a specific sector of green economy or improve their self-efficacy. It is possible that for some participants multiple mechanisms will be activated simultaneously; for others, none or only one or two of them will work. Additionally, the INTERCEPT program comprises a macro process whereby a channel of engaging Green economy employers with potential employees should be created, leading to more green jobs being filled in future years.

Similarly, there are a few contextual factors that need to be considered when evaluating the INTERCEPT program. For example, certain national or regional work cultures are more accommodating of employees' autonomy than others. Autonomy can have an empowering effect as previous studies have shown that higher levels of autonomy during work placements were linked to increased self-esteem and perceived abilities at the end of the internship (Inceoglu et al. 2019, p. 325). Also, existing research points to the importance of specific firm environment for the success of the internship, with variables such as the presence of mentoring, the use of feedback mechanisms, types of tasks and others all cited in previous scientific work (Inceoglu et al. 2019, p. 326). It is also likely that the composition of the target group, labour market characteristics and alternative support measures available for 25-29 years-old NEETs might influence the effectiveness of the INTERCEPT program. The indicative (but by no means exhaustive) list of mechanisms, contexts and outcomes as well as the data sources to be used when analysing them is provided in Table 33.

Table 33. Mechanisms, contexts and outcomes of the INTERCEPT program

Mechanisms	Data sources	Contexts	Data sources	Outcomes
Training and work exposure might provide NEETs with hard skills that may help them find employment in green economy	Interviews with NEETs and PES; survey of NEETs	National/regional work culture	Desk research (previous studies on work culture in particular country/region); interviews with PES	Increase in the participants' employment probabilities
Training and work exposure might provide NEETs with soft (interpersonal) skills that may help them find employment (not necessarily in green economy)		Internship environment (type of tasks, do NEETs get a mentor, feedback etc.)	Interviews and surveys with NEETs and employers	Improvement in the participants' labour market outcomes
Training and work exposure might help NEETs establish connections with employers and fellow employees (gain social capital) that may help them find employment		Characteristics of the target group	WP3 findings on the composition of target groups across the three countries; analysis of administrative data on program participants	Improvement of skills of the participants that meet the requirements of the green economy
Training and work exposure might provide NEETs with the motivation to pursue green skills and seek a career in green economy		Labour market characteristics (supply of green jobs, salaries etc.)	Desk research (previous studies on labour markets in the three countries); WP3 findings; interviews with PES	
Training and work exposure might provide a psychological boost for NEETs (improve their self-efficacy) that may help them find employment (not necessarily in green economy)		Other available ALMPs for 25-29 NEETs (might have an effect on the demand for project activities)	Desk research; WP3 findings; interviews with PES	
The INTERCEPT pilot might create a channel of engaging Green economy employers with potential employees, leading to more green jobs being filled in future years				

Source: Compiled by the authors

Counterfactual impact evaluation

Impact evaluations are a particular type of evaluation that seeks to answer a specific cause-and-effect question: What is the impact (or causal effect) of a program on an outcome of interest? (World Bank, 2016, p. 8).

Counterfactual impact evaluation (CIE) methods identify the impact of a programme based on a difference between:

the outcomes of participants in the situation of their participation ($Y=1 \mid D=1$) and the outcomes of participation in a **counterfactual situation**, if they would not participate in the programme ($Y=1 \mid D=0$).

A straightforward difference between the mean values of these two outcomes defines the **average treatment on the treated (ATET)**. ATET captures the average impact of participation in the programme for the population of participants.

$$ATET = \Delta(Y=1 \mid D=1) - \Delta(Y=0 \mid D=1)$$

In contrast, the **average treatment effect (ATE)** captures the average impact on the total population eligible to enter the programme.

Since we are not able to observe the counterfactual situation, we have to impute this value under reasonable assumptions. The first and most acceptable assumption at hand is the randomization of the treatment assignment. Randomized participation is possible in an experiment – a **randomized controlled trial**.

In practice, random assignment is rarely possible due to organizational or ethical issues. Therefore, CIE studies often rely on data collected through observation (in contrast to experimental data); usually through survey or administrative data. In contrast to experimental data, observational data are subject to unobserved factors and can potentially impact both the treatment assignment and post-participation outcomes. This complicates the identification of the effect of participation on post-participation outcomes, which is the main aim of CIE. Despite this shortcoming of observational data, identifying impact is possible under stronger assumptions. Instead of an experimental design, CIE studies often rely on a so-called quasi-experimental design by adopting additional assumptions. In this design data are re-assessed in order to reconstruct an experiment ex post, based on observational data (after they were observed/collected).

Annex 3: Overview of current projects (ALPS) in Italy

The Programma Garanzia Occupabilità dei Lavoratori (GOL)

GOL is a reform action of the system of active labour policies and vocational training that is part of Mission 5 Component 1 Reform 1.1 of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), financed with NextGenerationEU European funds.

The aim of the GOL programme is to redesign employment services to improve people's employability by offering personalised pathways for entry or re-entry to work and by upgrading skills through retraining or upskilling. One of the core target groups of the programme are the NEETs.

The programme encompasses an offer of integrated services based on cooperation between public and private services, with paths of accompaniment to work, retraining or professional requalification, and paths in collaboration with other territorial services in cases of complex needs, such as those for people with disabilities or fragility. For 2022, resources allocated to Tuscany for the implementation of the programme amounted to 50.68 million euros. The programme, relevant and important for NEETs in the area, does not specifically address green skills and environmental sustainability, but mostly covers training on skills which are considered relevant for the major economic sectors in the Tuscany region i.e. hospitality, agriculture, construction, fashion, transportation, etc.

An important step towards the construction of networks was taken in the Budget Law 2022 with the allocation of funds dedicated to the establishing of services for young people in Job Centres (CPI). Thanks to these funds, youth desks have been set up in all CPIs with professionals with specific skills to deal with NEETs in order to manage any situations of social and/or psychological distress. In this way, these figures, in addition to welcoming young people, are now able to direct them more effectively to the most suitable local employer depending on their situations and to network with public and private training as well as with social services and with the productive sectors of the area to initiate young people into training or job placement.

As of today, the project has obtained some notable results. The most recent report of the ANPLA on the GOL project (June 2023) affirmed that the 180-day employment rate for new labour relations was 28.4% in Italy and 3.2% in Tuscany

after participation in the GOL project.¹⁷ Clearly, this territorial figure largely reflects the different labour market conditions but it is also partly conditioned by the different type of target group that was reached. Those who were not employed 180 days after entering GOL (66.8% in Italy, and 58.0% of the total in Tuscany) 7.1% in Italy, and 7.9 % in Tuscany of the beneficiaries had at least one contracted work experience in this period of time. So, overall, Tuscany has been outperforming the Italian average.

GIOVANI2030 (G2030)

GIOVANI2030 (G2030) is an online platform created with the aim of becoming a digital home for young people, i.e. a single access point for young people from 14 to 35 years of age with all the information they need to orientate their future choices in the fields of training, volunteering, and work as well as international and cultural initiatives throughout the country.

This platform already has thousands of users and aims to be a 'one-stop single gateway' to opportunities for projects and initiatives that are collected in dedicated sections. Central and regional public institutions as well as local universities and third sector organisations and associations make the information available to girls and boys. The platform is dedicated to becoming a point of point of reference for orientation where young people can access data and find information on universities, volunteering, international exchange experiences, vocational tertiary education, the labour market, and the expected evolution of labour demand.

Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps

In order to implement the Strategy for Inclusion and Diversity, the National Agency for Youth (ANG) is engaged in the preparation of a specific Multiannual National Plan for 2021-2027 on the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities in the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps Programmes that will enable the development of strategic objectives, indicators, monitoring and evaluation in terms of inclusion and diversity in the national context.

In line with the Founding Regulations of the Erasmus+ and the European Corps of Solidarity, the ANG National Plan addresses all young people who encounter obstacles in their life path, study or work placement which prevent them from accessing European opportunities. In particular, given the national context, the ANG intends to focus its efforts on NEETs and towards those who reside in inland areas of the country where there are no adequate connections to centres where relational, cultural, study, and work opportunities are more available.

Garanzia Giovani

Garanzia Giovani is a programme that provides participants with a job offer continuation of study, apprenticeship or traineeship. The offer is customised and takes into account the elements that make job placement more difficult (e.g. territorial, demographic, family, and individual variables). The offer must be made within 4 months of becoming unemployed or leaving the education or training system. According to the most recent report provided by ANPAL in May 2022¹⁸, of the 55.7% of young people who are employed 6 months after the end of the programme, 6.5% are in Tuscany. However, even though the project is still effective in the country and in the region, the overall number of internships activated through Garanzia Giovani has significantly dropped in Tuscany since 2020.

With the start of the Multiannual Financial Framework in the EU 2021-2027, the Garanzia Giovani programme in the new National Operational Programme (PON) 'Youth, Women and Work' has been refinanced, strengthened, and improved. In line with the recommendations of the Chamber of Deputies and the Council of the European Union on the strengthening of Garanzia Giovani, a review of this programme will be carried out. Considering the number of potential jobs created thanks to this initiative the quality of Garanzia Giovani will be taken into account.

¹⁷https://www.anpal.gov.it/documents/552016/1309678/Nota+GOL_Focus+ANPAL158_dati+al+30giugno2023.pdf/280b96cf-4484-8d40-db6a-aa6f27072804?t=1689972004760

¹⁸ https://www.anpal.gov.it/documents/552016/821517/S1_Nota+mensile+n5_maggio.pdf/f355e6af-c989-9988-e6b4-2966e07c8fe5?t=1658405184612

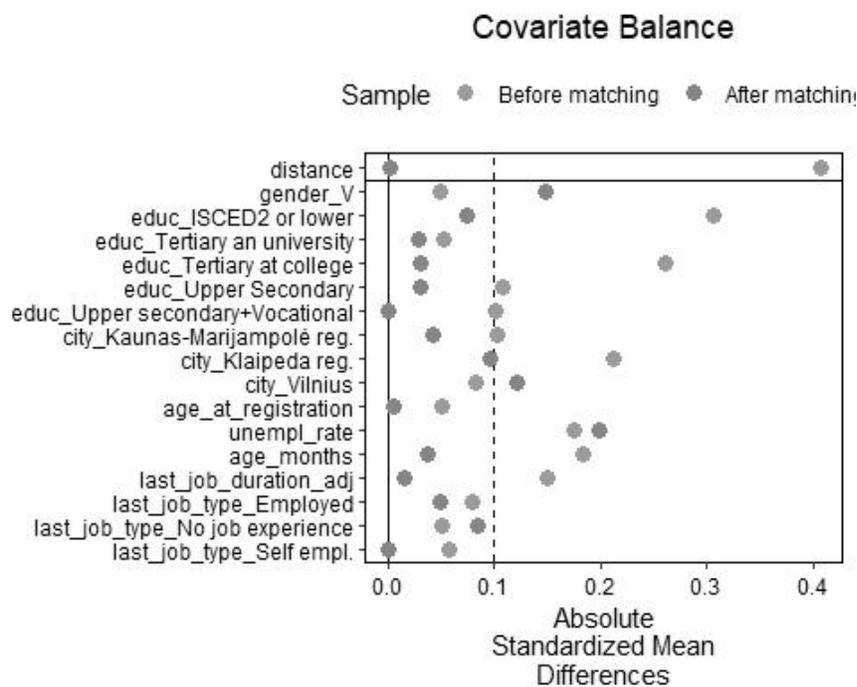
Such a project requires synergy between the National Agency for Active Employment Policies (ANPAL), the Ministry of Labour, regions, and autonomous provinces to increase investment in the more stable activation tools with better employment outcomes, such as apprenticeship training or orientation and training paths to self-entrepreneurship, guaranteeing opportunities to enhance the skills and qualifications of young persons and their integration into more stable and lasting professional paths.

In order for this to happen, a network of collaboration is needed between the actors involved who know how to systemise the interventions already in place and those that are on the way.

Annex 4: Technical counterfactual evaluation annex - Lithuania

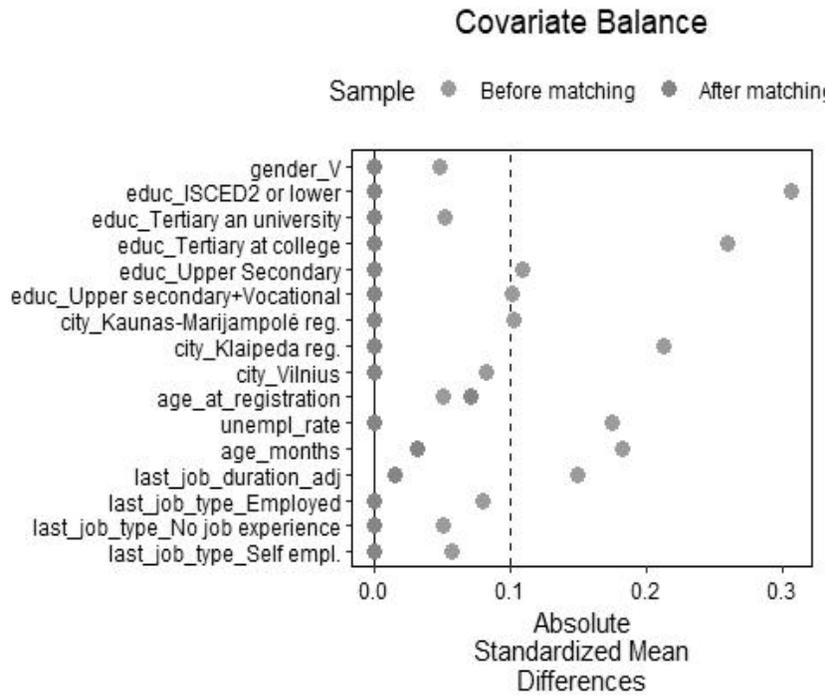
Covariate balance: Models 1 and 3 (N treated = 149)

Figure 32. Models 1 and 3: PSM



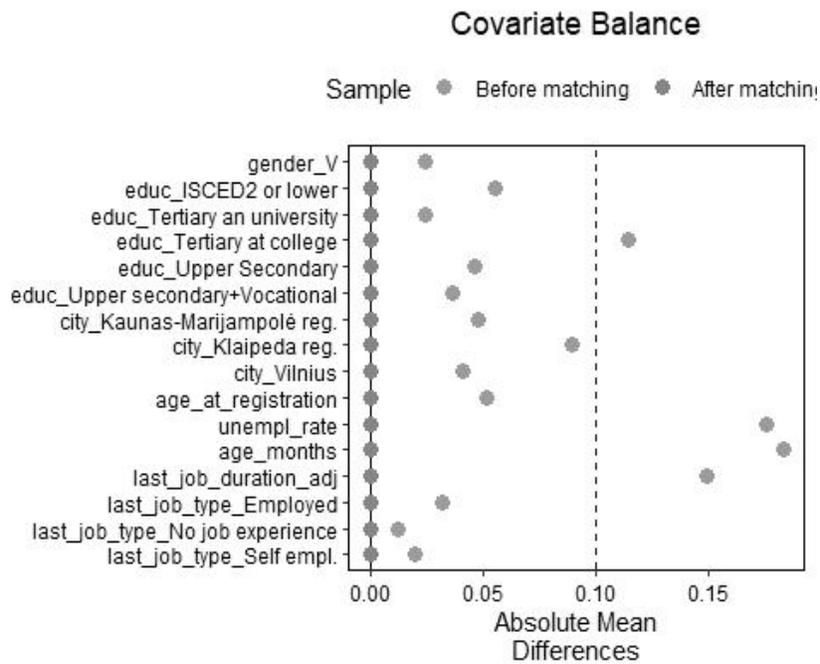
Source: Compiled by the authors

Figure 33. Models 1 and 3: CEM



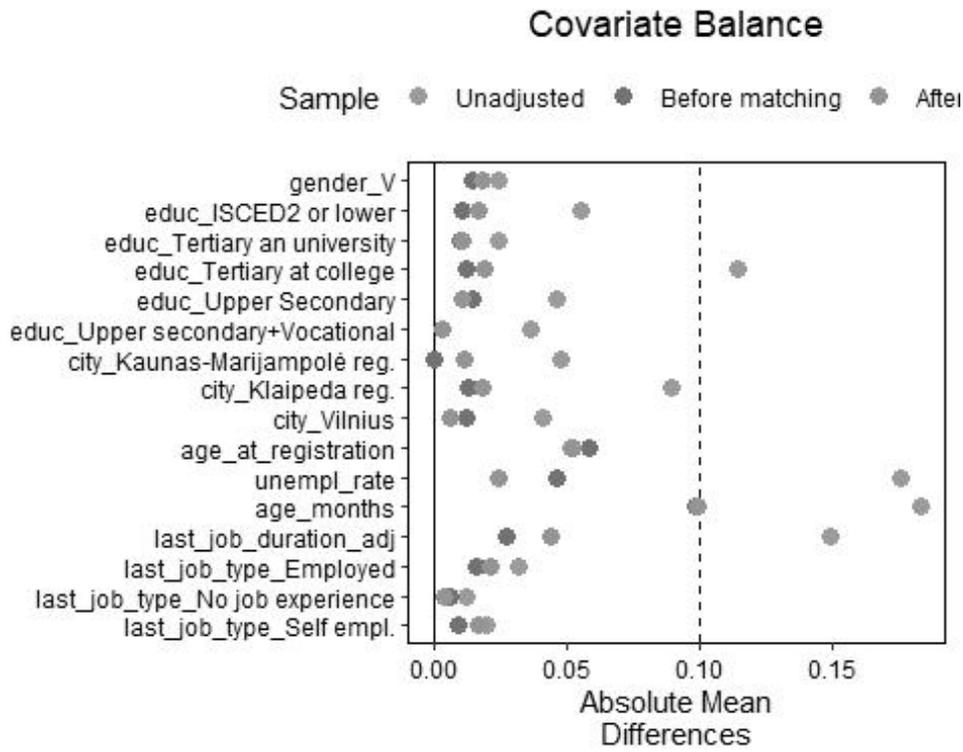
Source: Compiled by the authors

Figure 34. Models 1 and 3: IPW



Source: Compiled by the authors

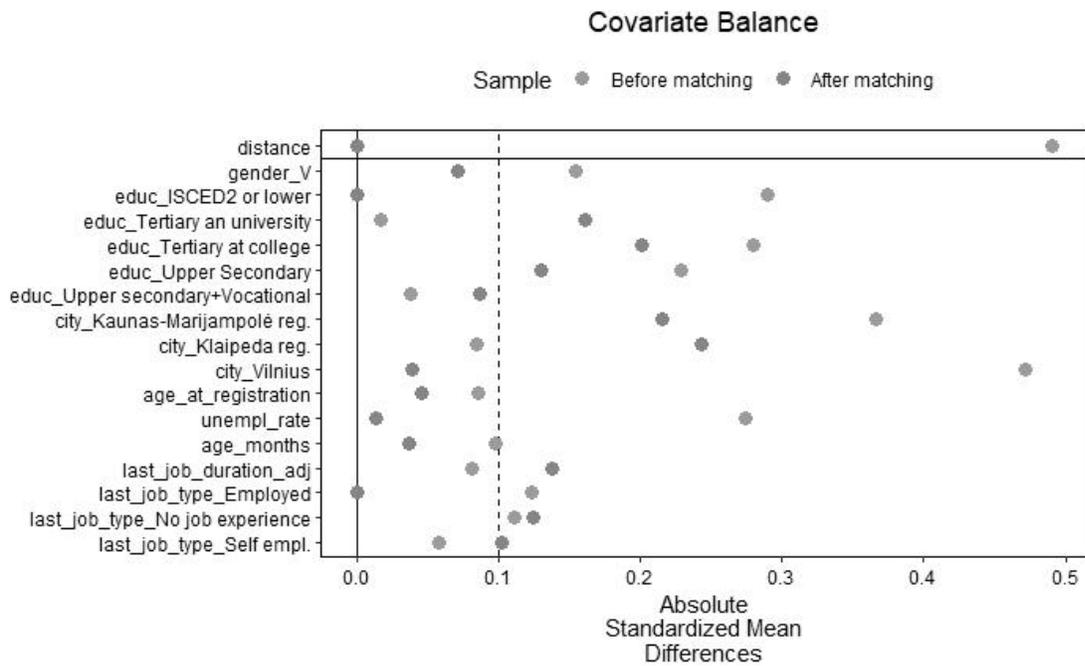
Figure 35. Models 1 and 3: GBM



Source: Compiled by the authors

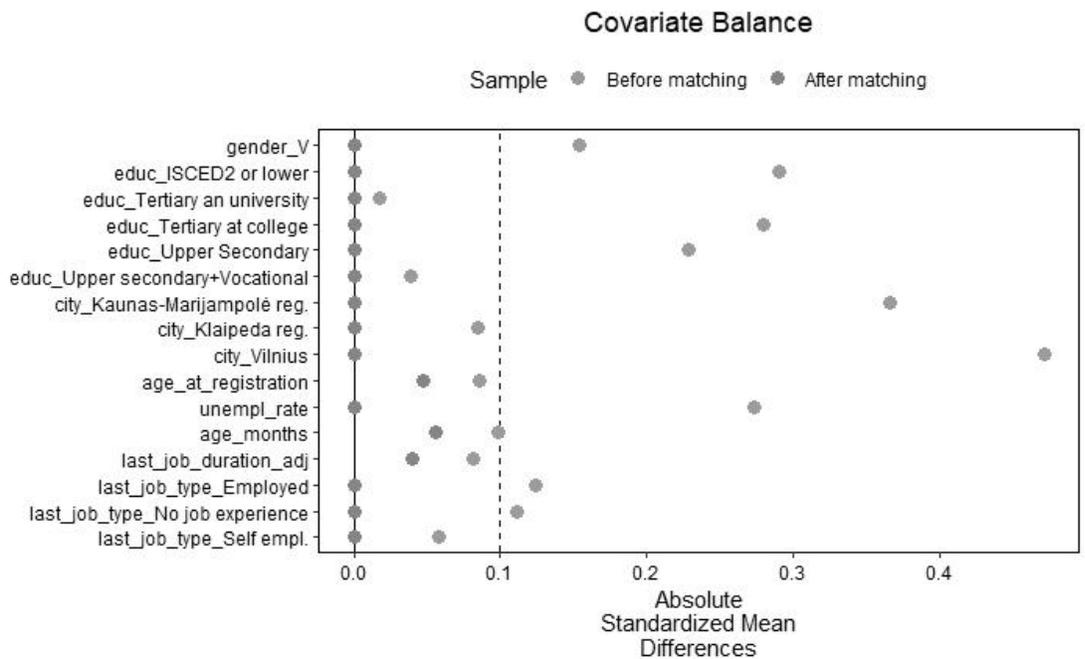
Covariate balance: Models 2 and 4 (N treated=56)

Figure 36. Models 2 and 4: PSM



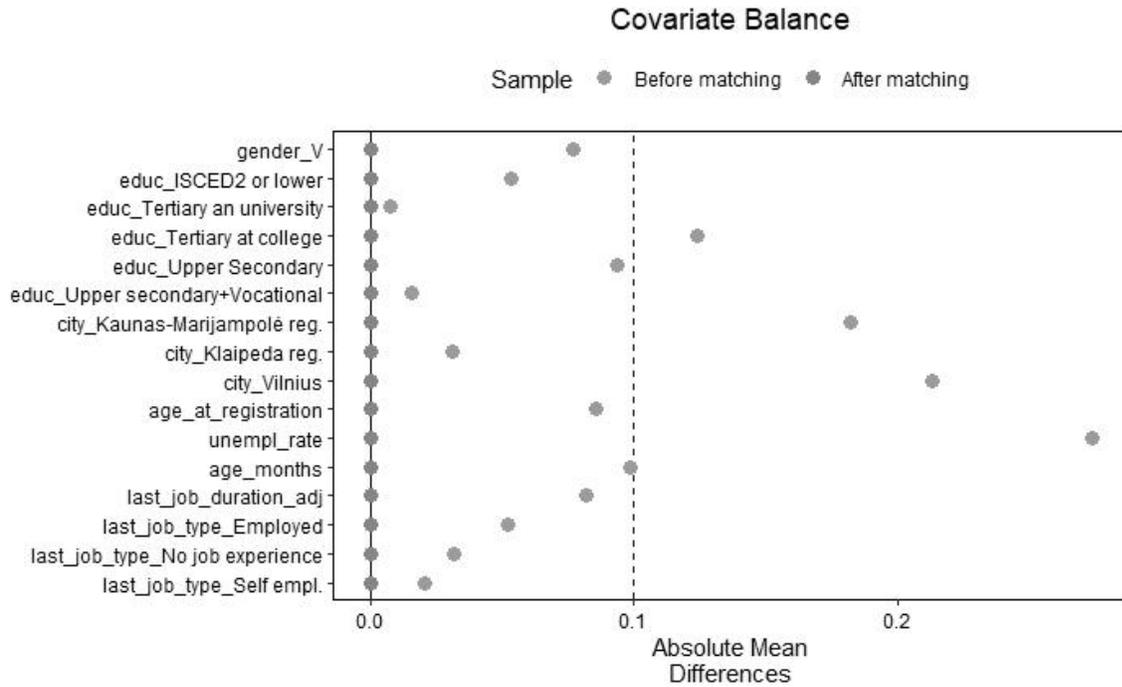
Source: Compiled by the authors

Figure 37. Models 2 and 4: CEM



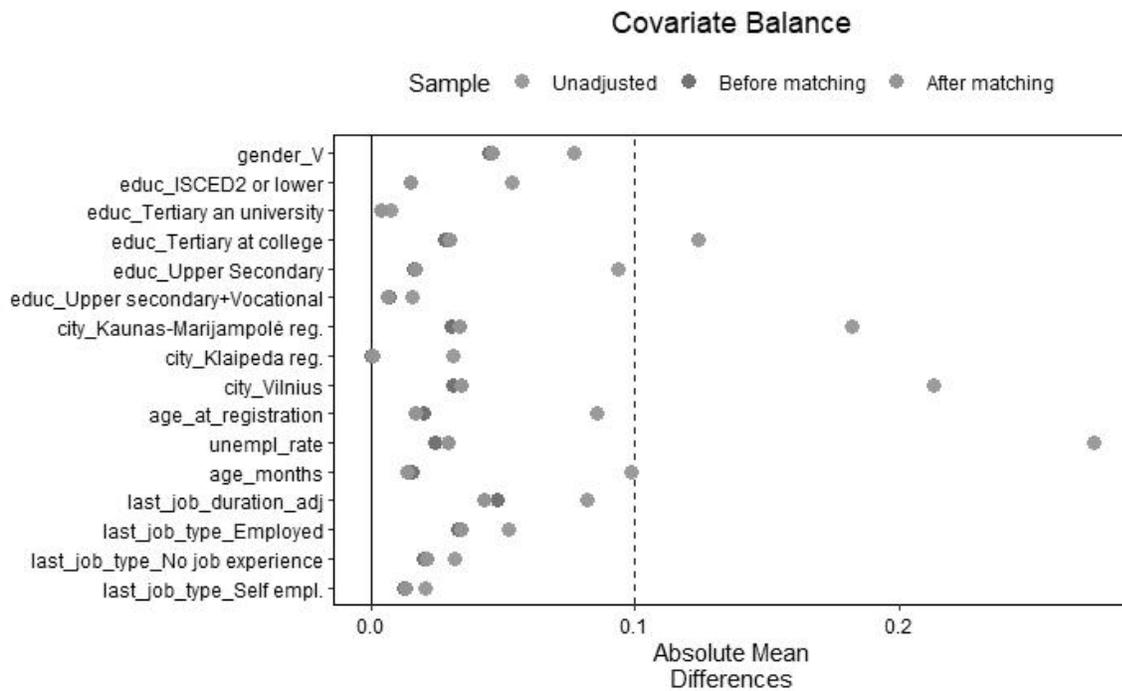
Source: Compiled by the authors

Figure 38. Models 2 and 4: IPW



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Figure 39. Models 2 and 4: GBM



Source: Compiled by the authors

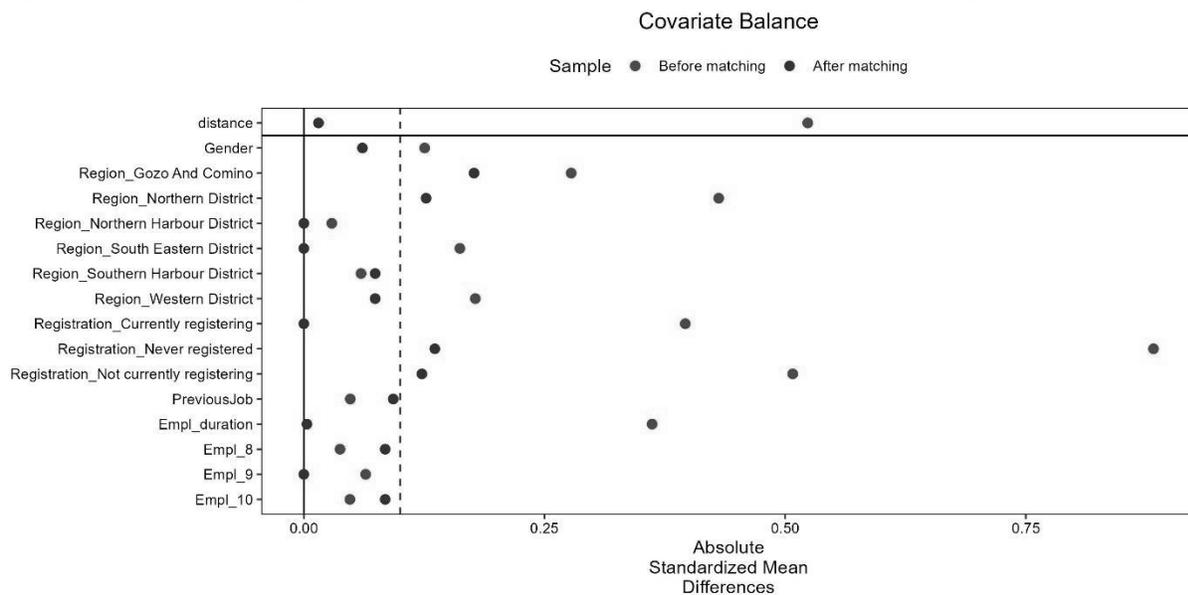
Annex 5: Technical counterfactual evaluation annex - Malta

Propensity Score Matching

Propensity score matching method tries to match the most similar NEETs in the control group to INTERCEPT participants (treatment group) based on the propensity score (probability of participating in the programme based on the observed characteristics such as age, gender, previous employment, registration status region and disability).

Figure 40 inspects the balance of selected characteristics between the participants and the control group before matching and after matching. Standardized absolute mean (SMD) is a commonly used statistic for the assessment of balance after PSM. Covariates with SMD with less than 0.1 could be considered as balanced¹⁹. After matching, most of covariates were balanced except of 4 variables related to Region and Registration.

Figure 40. Balance of the groups of participants and eligible before and after matching



Source: Compiled by the authors using IER calculation based on INTERCEPT data extract – 5 November 2023

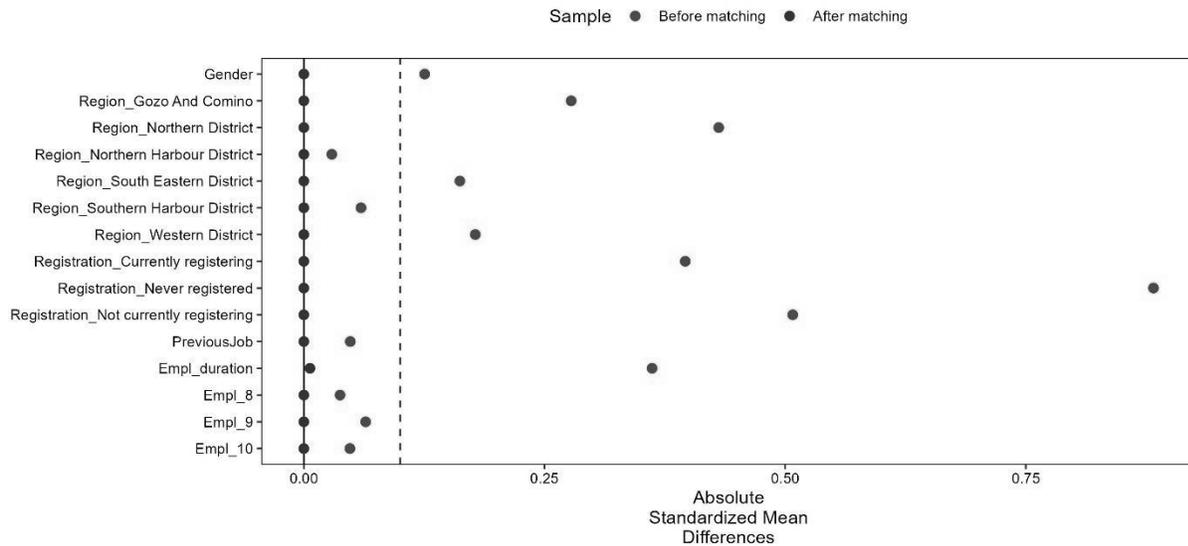
Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM)

With coarsened exact matching, covariates are coarsened into bins and then an exact matching is applied on these coarsened covariates to find comparable treatment and control groups.

Figure 41 shows a love plot indicating that all variables are balanced with standardized mean differences very close to 0.

¹⁹ Stuart EA - Lee BK - Leacy FP. 2013. Prognostic score-based balance measures can be a useful diagnostic for propensity score methods in comparative effectiveness research.

Figure 41. Balance of the groups of participants and eligible before and after matching
Covariate Balance



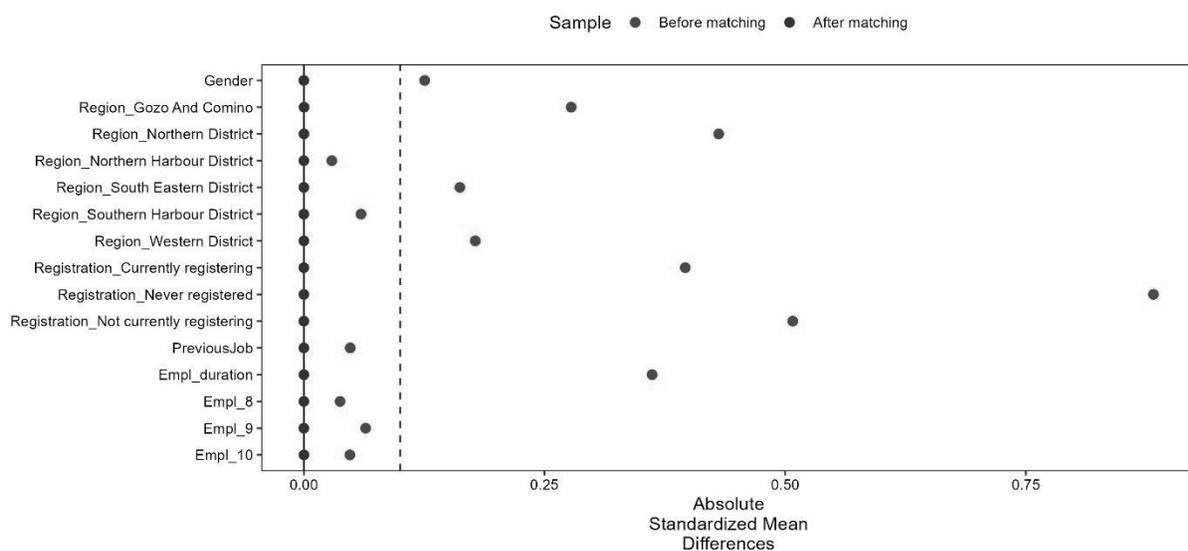
Source: Compiled by the authors using IER calculation based on INTERCEPT data extract - 5 November 2023

Inverse probability weighting (IPW)

Inverse probability weighting (IPW) is a propensity score-based approach that can provide an alternative to propensity scores matching. This approach can be applied if there is a concern that the treatment and control groups are imbalanced IPW computes weights as the inverse of the propensity scores. Weighting retains all units but does not treat them equally.

Figure 42 shows covariate balance before and after weighting. After weighting the covariate balance was improved as the weighted mean differences are smaller than commonly used threshold of 0.1.

Figure 42. Balance of the groups of participants and eligible before and after IPW
Covariate Balance



Source: Compiled by the authors using IER calculation based on INTERCEPT data extract - 5 November 2023

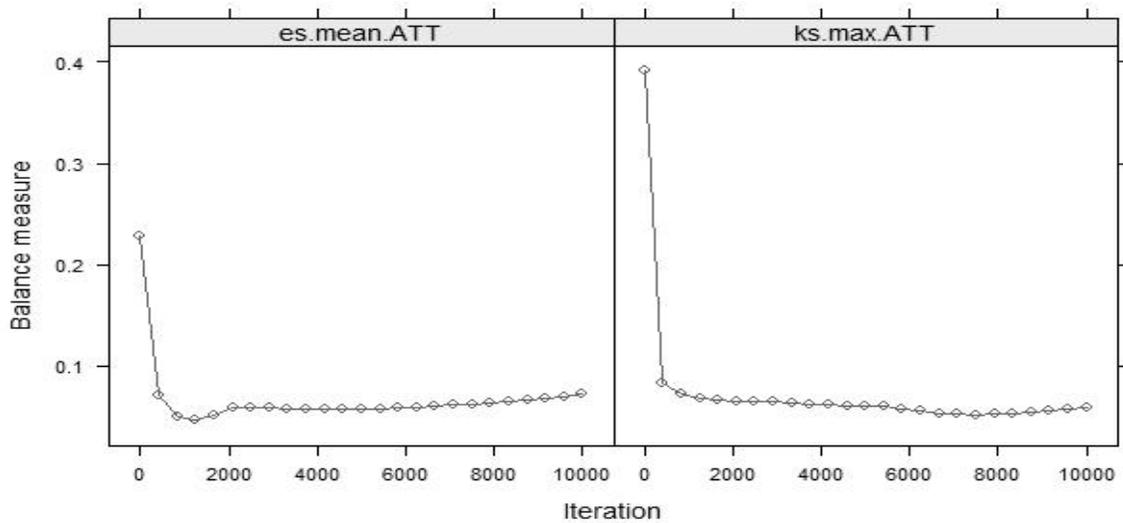
Generalized boosted modelling (GBM)

Generalized boosted modelling is a machine learning method that estimates the propensity scores by combining multiple regression trees built sequentially. GMB is supposed to capture complex and nonlinear relationships between treatment assignment and the pre-treatment covariates without over-fitting the data.

Figure 43 assess the convergence of the gradient boosting algorithm. The two panels give the two balance measures (es and KS) as a function of the number of iterations in the gradient boosting algorithm, with higher iterations corresponding to more complicated fitted models.

The algorithm should separately determine the iteration that minimizes the average absolute standardized effect size (es.mean) and the maximum KS statistic (ks.max). It seems that that each of the balance measure was able to reach an optimal iteration or find balance. In our case, the minimum value of the balance measure was reached before 2 000 iterations.

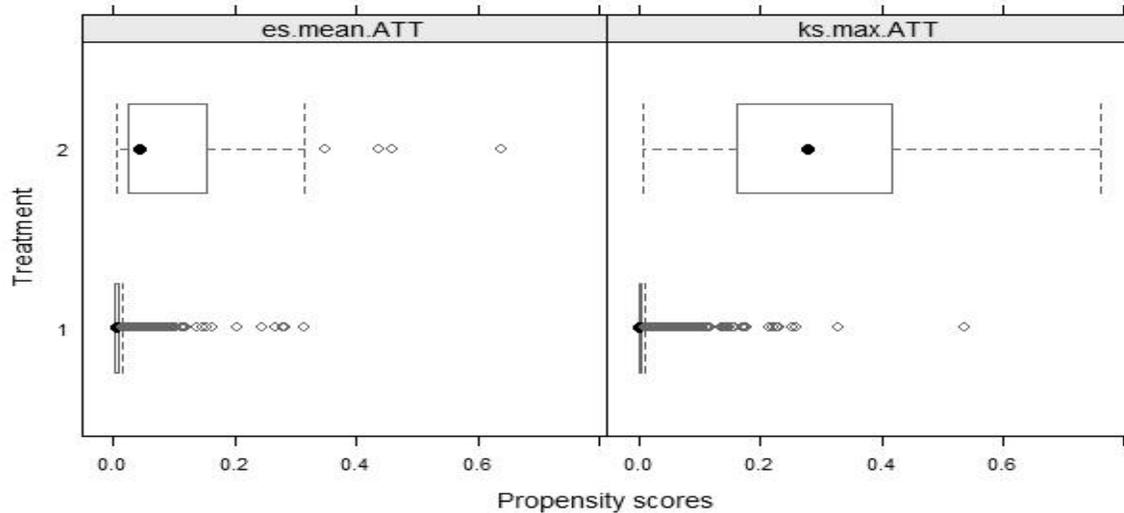
Figure 43. Convergence plots



Source: Compiled by the authors using IER calculation based on INTERCEPT data extract - 5 November 2023

Figure 44 illustrates the spread of the estimated propensity scores in the treatment and control groups. It appears that there is overlap across the propensity scores between the treatment group (2) and the control group (1).

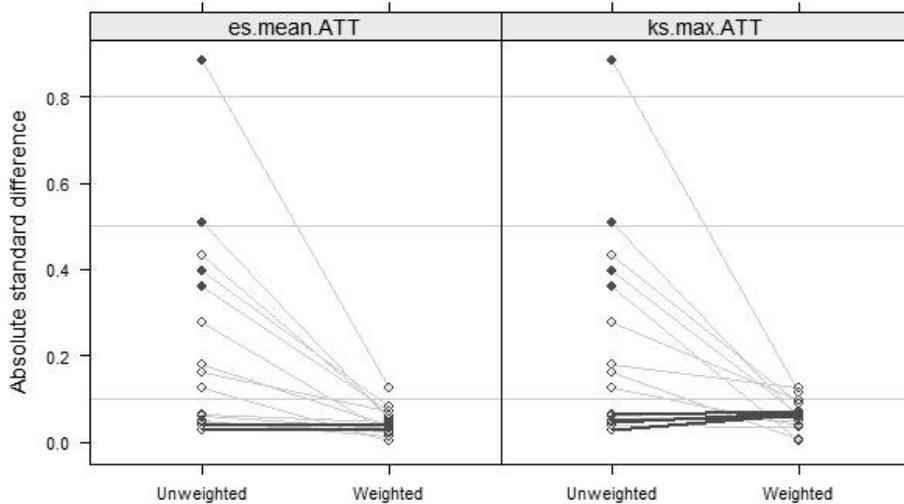
Figure 44. Distribution of the propensity scores



Source: Compiled by the authors using IER calculation based on INTERCEPT data extract - 5 November 2023

Figure 45 shows balance before and after weighting measured by absolute standardized mean difference (effect size) between for each covariate. The blue lines indicate reductions in absolute standardized mean differences. Closed red circles indicate a statistically significant difference before weighting.

Figure 45. Balance plots using absolute standardized mean difference

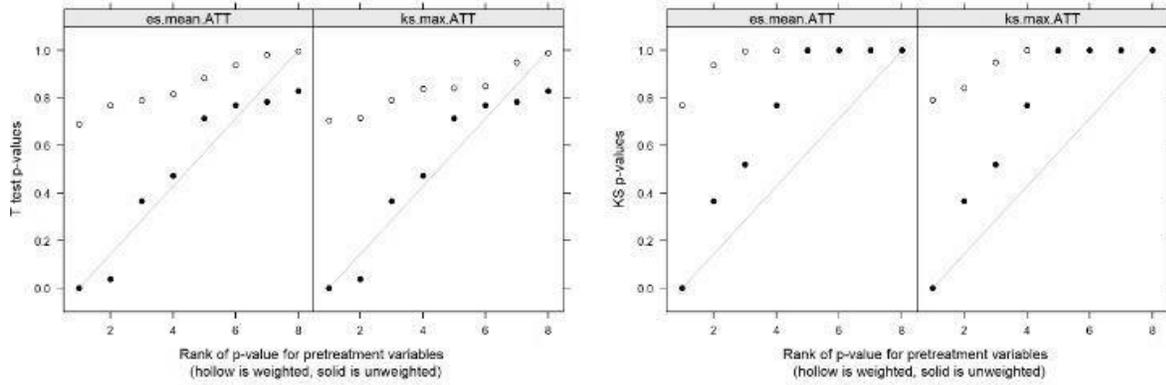


Source: Compiled by the authors using IER calculation based on INTERCEPT data extract - 5 November 2023

In Figure 46 we can check the p-values of the t-tests for group differences in the covariate means on the left plot and the p-values from testing the KS statistics for each covariate before and after weighting on the right plot.

Before weighting (closed circles) the standardized mean differences are statistically significant (small p-values). After weighting (open circles), it seems that the balance was achieved (larger p-values / above diagonal). We can observe a similar story for KS statistic on the right plot. The p-values are above the diagonal suggesting good balance in terms of the KS statistic for the covariates.

Figure 46. p-value plots for absolute standardized mean difference and the KS



Source: Compiled by the authors using IER calculation based on INTERCEPT data extract - 5 November 2023