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”Adaptation and enhancement of the European supported employment model to enable accessible labour market pathway for refugees and immigrants”

Pilot-Implementation National Report

Bulgaria

An ERASMUS+ small-scale partnership project in the vocational education and training
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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. PILOTERS	3
3. STAGES OF PILOTING	5
3.1. TIME SCHEDULE	5
3.2. MATERIALS	5
3.3. METHODOLOGY	5
4. FINDINGS	6
4.1. OVERALL PERCEPTION	15
5. CONCLUSIONS	16
ANNEX I - CASE STUDIES OF PILOTERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE PILOTING PHASE AND IMPLEMENTED WHAT THEY HAVE LEARNT INTO THEIR PRACTICE	17
Case Study: Olena	17
Case Study: Vasyl	18
Case Study: Mariya	19
Case Study: Oleksandra	21
Case Study: Volodymyr	22
Case Study: Halyna	23



1. INTRODUCTION

Based on the initially stated objectives of the ADAPTREF project, during the project realisation, the Bulgarian partner and project coordinator “Bulgarian Inclusion Support Team” Sofia, Bulgaria successfully adapted and enhanced the European Supported Employment model by developing career counselling guidelines to support the labour market inclusion of immigrants and refugees with the focus of those from Ukraine. The project target was to train minimum 10 existing or future career counsellors and supported employment consultants according to these guidelines, and to expand qualification opportunities for those people.

Therefore, in the period November 2023 – March 2024, we have elaborated a process of recruitment and therefore actual blended training (combination of face-to-face sessions and distance (online) support) with 12 people, who expressed willingness to participate in the training provided by the ADAPTREF project. The aim was to prepare professionals to offer tailored support, equipping refugees and immigrants with the skills and resources for seamless integration into the labour market.

Therefore, the blended trainings took place as part of the activity 3 of the ADAPTREF project. The pilot implementation training sessions were conducted in Sofia and in Plovdiv. These sessions were structured in alignment with the newly developed SE method guidelines. The content encompassed diverse aspects of SE, such as assessment techniques, job matching strategies, employer engagement, job rotation, and ongoing support for individuals with varied backgrounds, with a particular focus on refugees and immigrants from Ukraine. The overarching objective of the piloting phase was to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of the ADAPTREF didactic materials.

In this pilot report we are providing the essence from the implementation of the pilot process in Bulgaria. This contribution is intended to optimise project outcomes, specifically enhancing the ADAPTREF training content and materials based on pilot findings. It is noteworthy that the pilot plan, developed collaboratively by the project coordinator and Consultis, facilitated iterative testing and national piloting between November 2023 and March 2024. Participants were actively engaged throughout this period, enabling comprehensive testing, assessment, and refinement of the training content and materials.

2. PILOTERS

The target group was minimum 10 existing or future career counsellors and supported employment consultants. In order to ensure this target, we have recruited 2 more participants.



Before piloting took place, a few preparatory steps were followed:

- Identification of trainers and participants.
- Engagement of the participants into piloting.

Considering the number of interested candidates, 12 participants working in social inclusion of different groups were engaged, most of them in the career guidance and social workers. Their background was the following:



The experience of the participants encompassed the following topics:



The respondents were entitled to select more than one option while answering.



3. STAGES OF PILOTING

3.1. TIME SCHEDULE

The different piloting stages took place in the period from November 2023 to March 2024. 2 training sessions (introductory and final) were organised, while ongoing distance and online individual sessions and advices were provided to each of the involved piloters. During the pilot period and beyond, the BIST team provided continuous support and expert advice to all participants. Our proactive engagement involved sharing key insights and facilitating the practical application of the methodologies and techniques within their daily professional practices.

3.2. MATERIALS

For the training sessions, the following materials were made available:

Course material

- ADAPTREF results (R1: Enhanced and adapted version of the European supported employment model specifically related to the counseling and guidance of refugees and immigrants and R2: Career counseling guidelines for career counsellors and supported employment consultants to support the realisation of the process of their labour market inclusion) and ppts that highlight major topics either printed or electronically.

Supporting hardware

- Whiteboard and markers
- Laptop
- Beamer

3.3. METHODOLOGY

A total of 12 participants enrolled in the pilot training programme. Prior to the training sessions, the 12 participants briefly familiarized themselves with the didactic deliverables' content and structure using the two guides produced by ADAPTREF. 3 trainers/facilitators were engaged in conducting the training sessions.

Upon completion of the training sessions and the subsequent case-based assessment (with examples detailed in annex I), all participants satisfactorily met the program requirements. At the end of the piloting, each of the participants received a certificate for participation, which they included in their EUROPASS portfolio.



To gather feedback from the participants, a post-piloting satisfaction survey was distributed. The survey consisted of three parts:

I. Reasons for Participation: Participants were asked to provide insights into their motivations for joining the training, aiming to understand the factors driving their interest and engagement.

II. Aims and Thematic Scope: Participants were invited to share their perspectives on the training's objectives and thematic scope, assessing the alignment with their perceived needs.

III. Training Organization and Environment: This section focused on evaluating the organization and environment of the training sessions, including feedback on logistics, facilitation quality, and the overall learning environment.

4. FINDINGS

PART I – THE REASONS FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE TRAINING

Do you have any knowledge and experience with regards of any of the following topics?



The participants have various previous knowledge and experience.

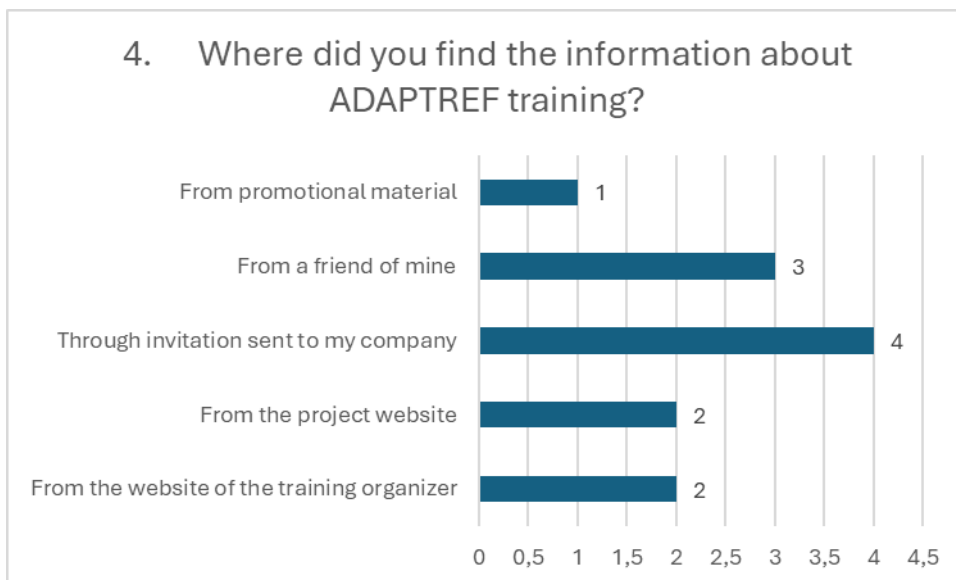


Have you participated before in such training?



It is obvious that most of the participants have not participated so far in similar training.

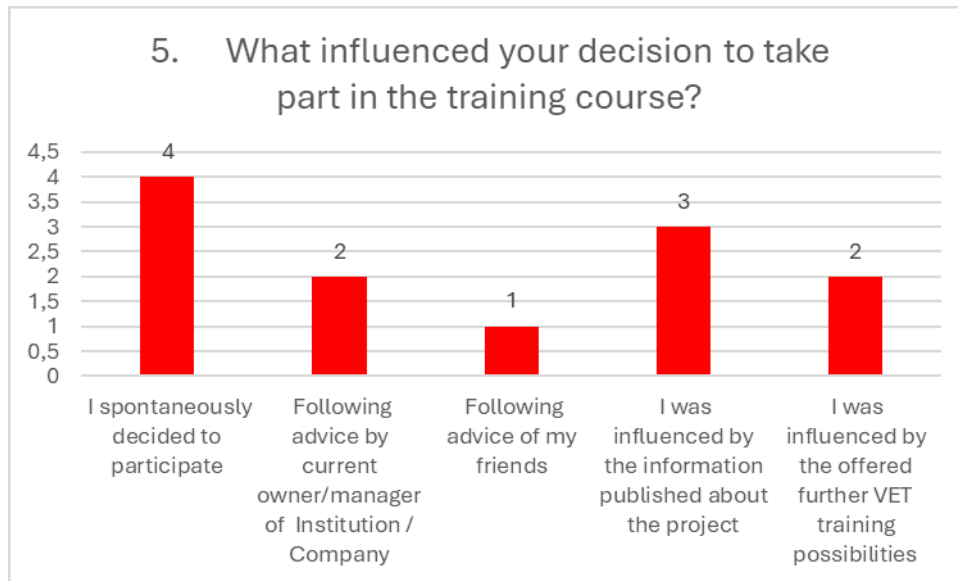
Where did you find the information about ADAPTREF training?



The participants mainly received the information through the invitation sent to their company or via friends, colleagues. Also, the project website and the BIST' website were indicated as a place, where the piloters learnt about the offered training.

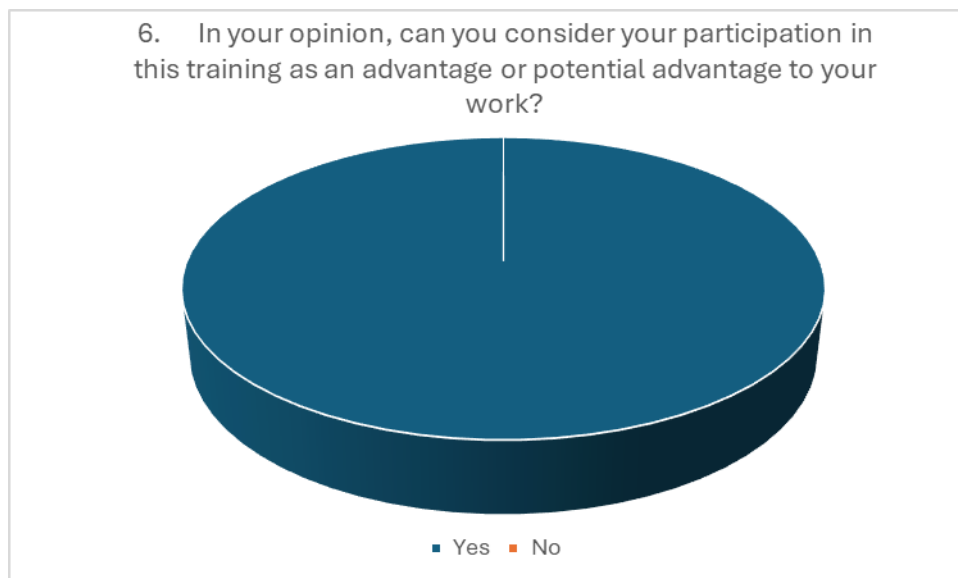


What influenced your decision to take part in the training course?



The participants were influenced to participate in the project piloting phase by spontaneous decision, following and advice by current manager at the institution, where they worked or by the information, published in the project website. Some of them considered the recommendation by their friends and colleagues or by the offered further VET training possibilities.

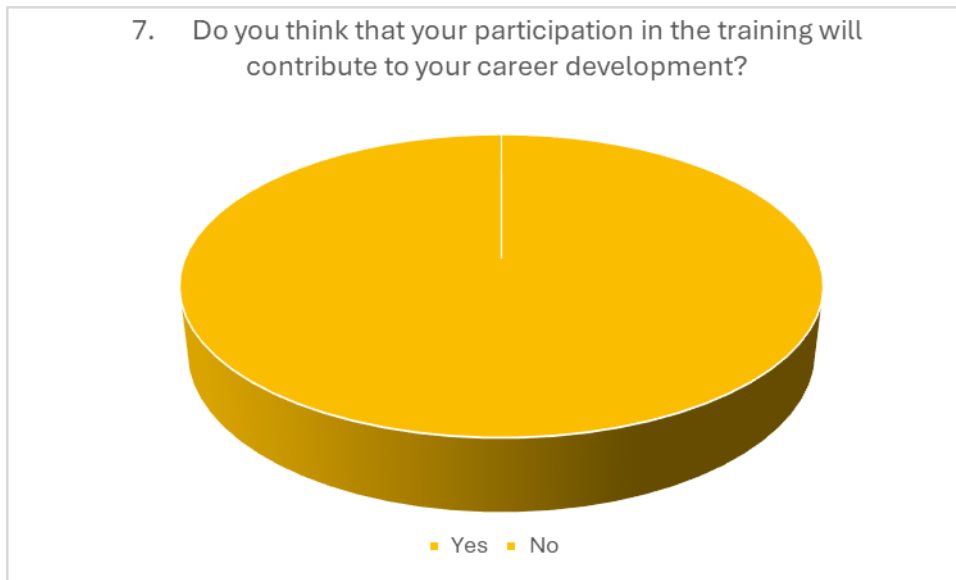
In your opinion, can you consider your participation in this training as an advantage or potential advantage to your work?





All respondents consider their participation in the training as a potential advantage to their work.

Do you think that your participation in the training will contribute to your career development?



All respondents consider that the acquired knowledge and skills will contribute to their career development.

What was your motivation to participate in the training? (You can select more than one answer)



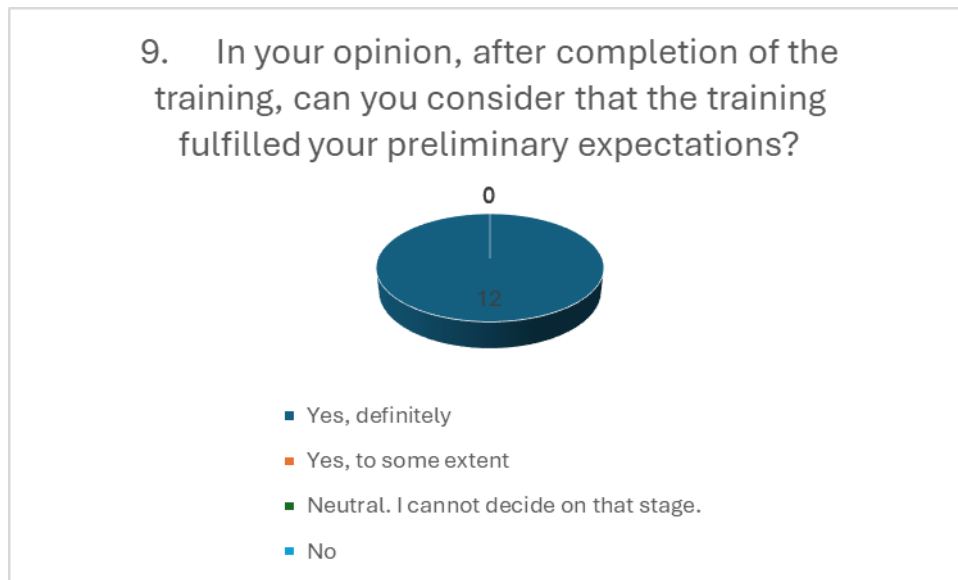
The motivation to participate in the training was conducted by the interest to become SE specialists as well as openness towards innovations and becoming more qualified. The



piloters were inspired by the opportunity to face challenges and to raise the personal and company's prestige.

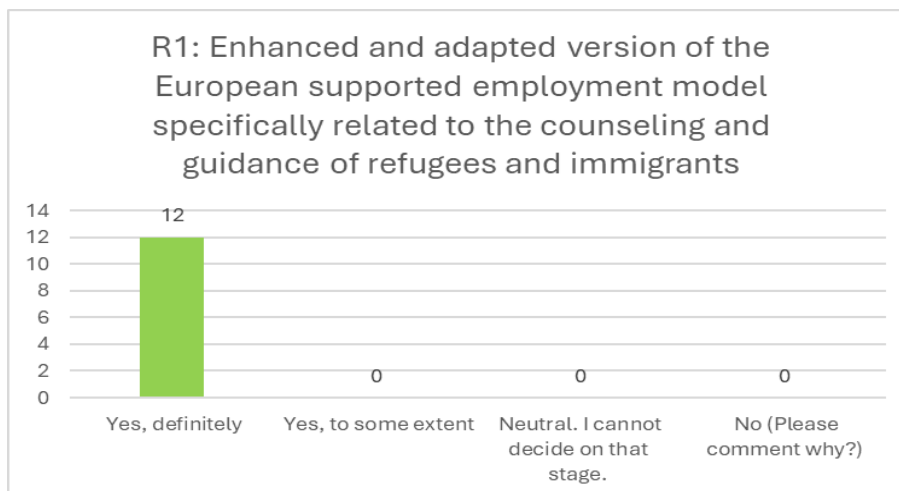
PART II - AIMS AND THEMATIC SCOPE OF THE TRAINING

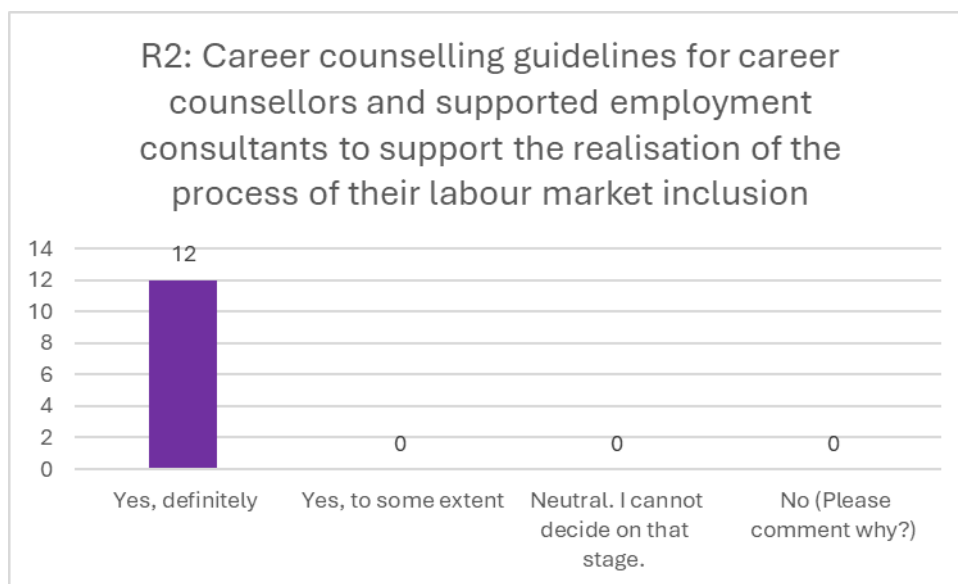
In your opinion, after completion of the training, can you consider that the training fulfilled your preliminary expectations?



All respondents consider that the training fulfilled their preliminary expectations.

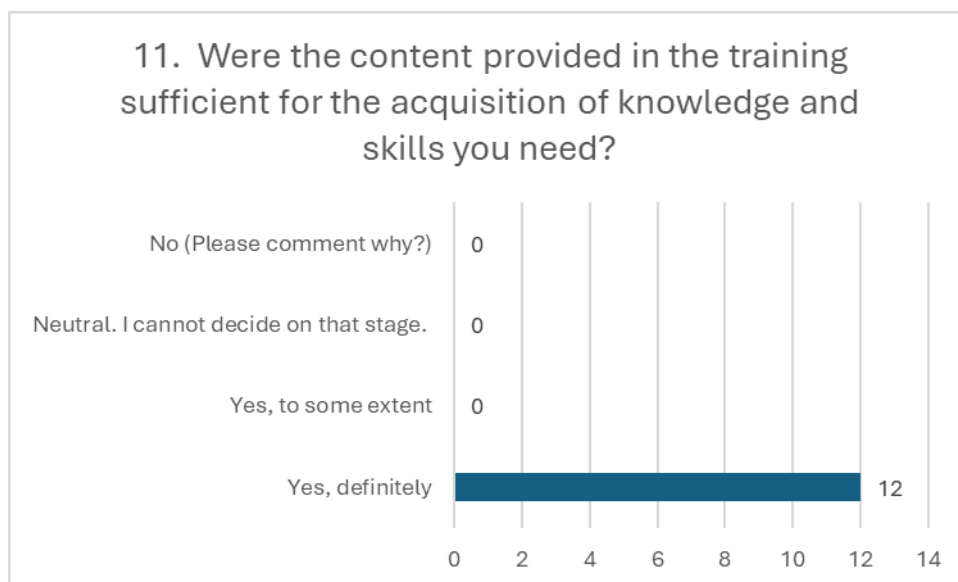
In your opinion, to what extent was the content of the training deliverables consistent and relevant to the topics and work duties that SE consultants are expected to do? Please select the most appropriate one for each module.





All respondents consider that the content and the framework of the project intellectual results is appropriate and comprehensive.

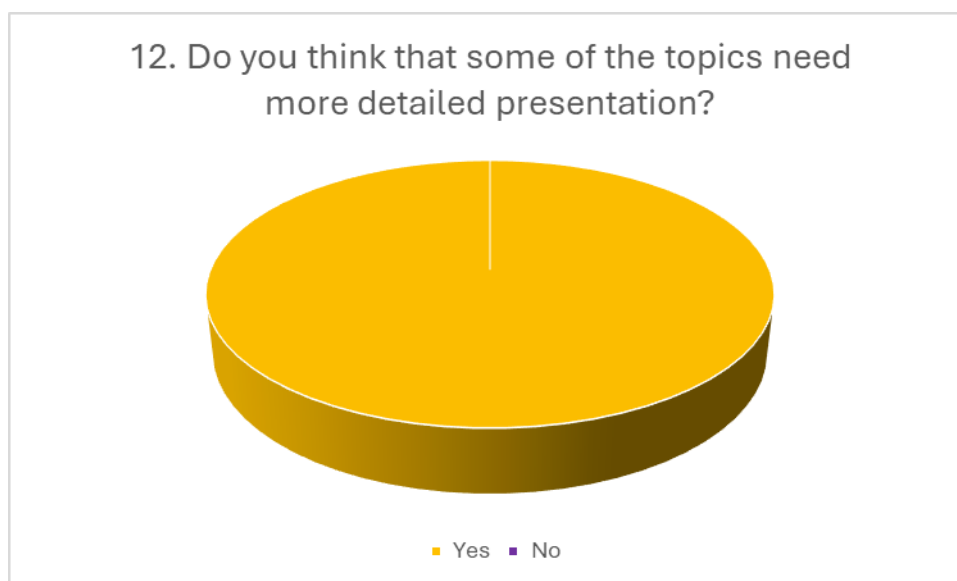
Was the content provided in the training sufficient for the acquisition of knowledge and skills you need?



The respondents' opinion is that the content of the intellectual results and the training overall are sufficient for the acquisition of the knowledge and skills they needed.

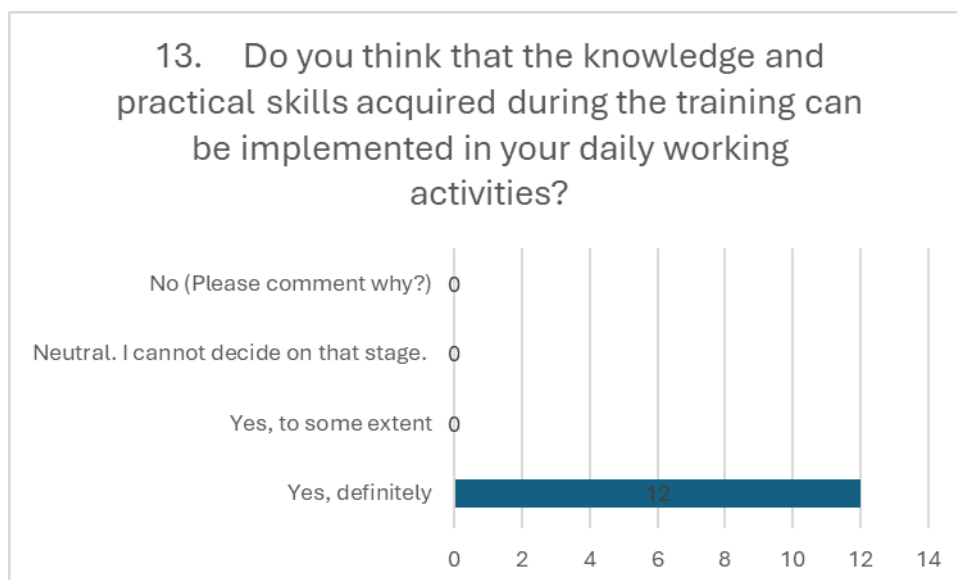


Do you think that some of the topics need more detailed presentation?



There were no extra topics suggested by the pilots.

Do you think that the knowledge and practical skills acquired during the training can be implemented in your daily working activities?

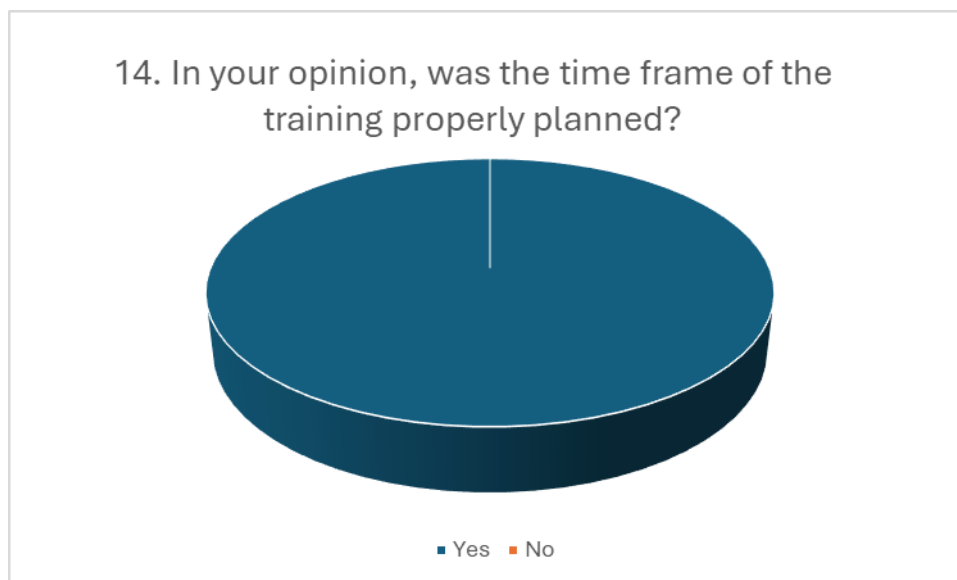


The pilots declared that the acquired knowledge and practical skills during the training will be implemented in their daily working activities.



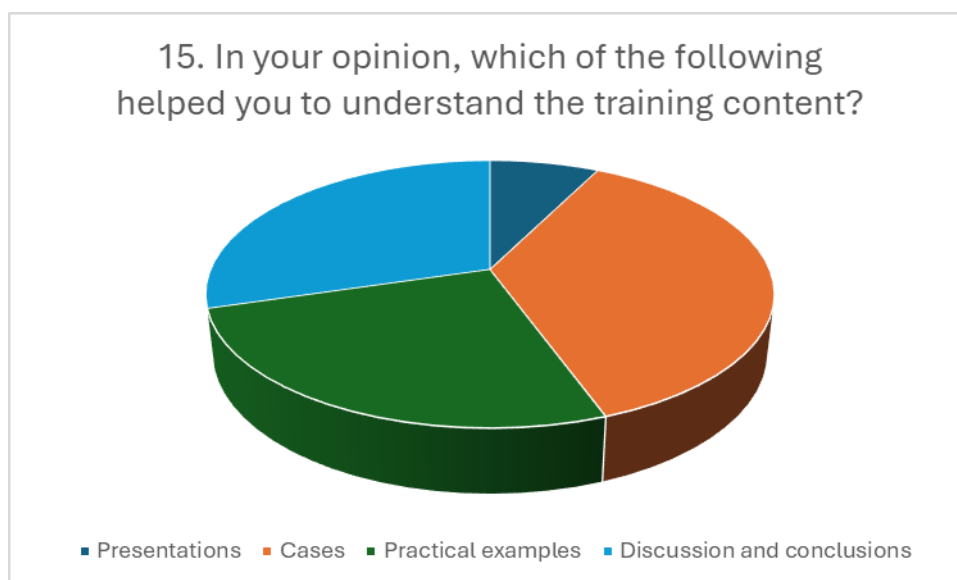
PART III - TRAINING ORGANISATION AND ITS ENVIRONMENT

In your opinion, was the time frame of the training properly planned?



The respondents evaluated the time frame of the training as appropriate.

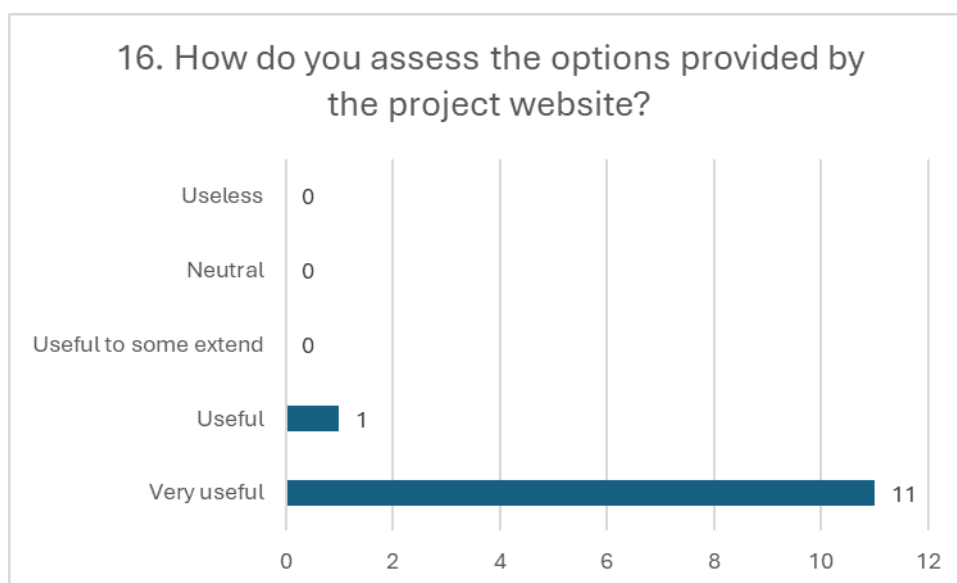
In your opinion, which of the following helped you to understand the training content?



The respondents appreciated provided practical examples, cases, discussion and presentations made.

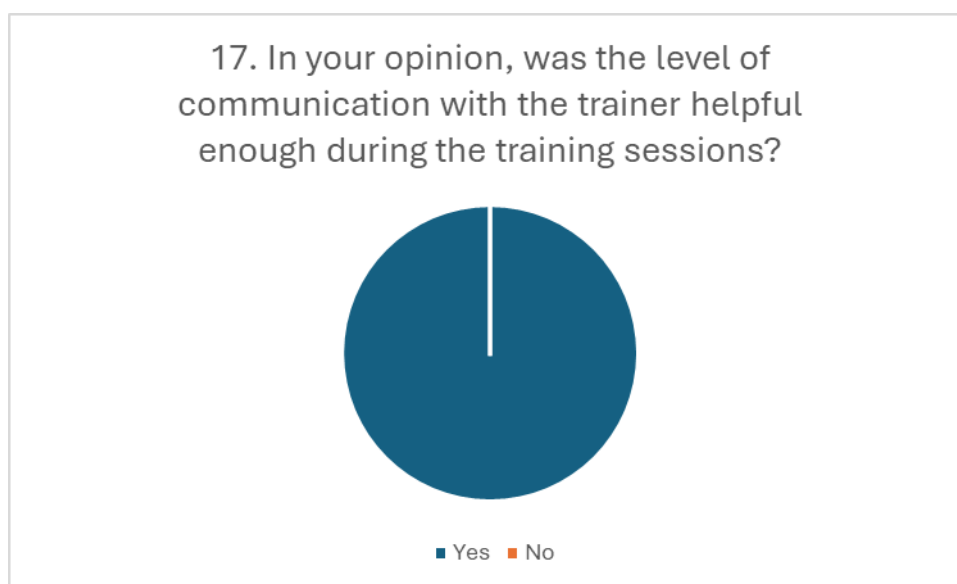


In your opinion, was the level of communication with the trainer helpful enough during the training sessions?



The respondents assessed the project website as very useful.

Do you think that the trainers are competent enough in terms of the topics covered by the curriculum?



The communication with the trainers was evaluated as very helpful.



What did you like the most in ADAPTREF training?

- “I enjoyed the hands-on approach and practical applications of the concepts taught during the ADAPTREF training.”
- “The trainers were knowledgeable and provided real-world examples that helped me understand how to apply the skills learned in my own projects.”
- “I appreciated the opportunity to work with a diverse group of professionals who brought different perspectives and experiences to the table.”
- “Overall, the training was well-structured, engaging, and provided valuable insights into the world of software development”
- “The training provided an interactive learning environment where participants could engage with each other and share their experiences. This made the learning process more enjoyable and allowed us to learn from one another's experiences.”
- “The trainers were highly knowledgeable and experienced in the field. They shared best practices and real-world examples that helped us understand the nuances of supporting refugees and immigrants in their job search and career development.”
- “The training equipped us with practical tools and resources that we can use in our daily work. These resources included templates, checklists, and strategies that have been proven effective in helping refugees and immigrants find and maintain employment.”
- “One of the most valuable aspects of the training was the networking opportunities it provided. By working with a diverse group of professionals, we were able to build connections and collaborate on future initiatives aimed at supporting refugees and immigrants.”
- “The training covered a wide range of topics related to supported employment and career guidance for refugees and immigrants. This comprehensive curriculum ensured that we gained a broad understanding of the issues involved and the strategies to address them.”

4.1. OVERALL PERCEPTION

The overall opinion of the 12 participants in the training sessions was very positive. All participants felt that the training was beneficial to their professional activities and would contribute to their career development. In fact, all participants considered that the knowledge and practical skills acquired during the training will be implemented in their daily work. Regarding the expectations of the participants, all responses were positive that the training met their preliminary expectations and considered that it met their expectations to some extent.



Regarding the two ADAPTREF intellectual results, all participants agreed that their content was consistent, relevant, and sufficient to the issues and work developed by supported employment advisors.

The overall perception of the training organisation and environment was also very positive, especially in terms of the time frame, the level of communication with the trainers and the competence of the trainers. During the training sessions, participants felt that the presentations, cases, practical examples, and discussions in the training room helped them to understand the training content.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the positive responses from the 12 professionals who participated in the piloting of the ADAPTREF training, several conclusions emerge:

All participants had relevant existing qualifications or training in career guidance, social work, or related fields. Despite differences in knowledge and experience, they shared a strong interest in advancing their expertise in supported employment (SE) and labour market inclusion, highlighting the potential for collaboration and growth within the program.

Participants felt that the training met their preliminary expectations and provided relevant content consistent with the duties expected of SE consultants. They particularly valued the career counselling guidelines within the adapted European SE model.

Participants commended the thoughtfully planned time frame of the training, acknowledging its efficacy in accommodating their learning needs. They valued the diverse components, including presentations, case studies, practical examples, and discussions, which collectively facilitated their comprehensive understanding and absorption of the training content.

Overall, participants appreciated the comprehensive nature of the training and believed that the knowledge and skills acquired could be applied effectively in their daily work activities.

In conclusion, the piloting of the ADAPTREF training proved successful, as participants expressed satisfaction with the content, organization, and delivery. Their positive feedback underscores the program's effectiveness in enhancing the skills and competencies of professionals in supporting labour market inclusion for refugees and immigrants. Furthermore, the results of the case-based assessment indicate that participants acquired the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively support refugees and immigrants in their integration into the labour market.



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ANNEX I - CASE STUDIES OF PILOTERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE PILOTING PHASE AND IMPLEMENTED WHAT THEY HAVE LEARNT INTO THEIR PRACTICE

Case Study: Olena

Engagement:

Olena is a Ukrainian immigrant who moved to Bulgaria with her family due to the conflict in Ukraine. She has a background in marketing and sales but is looking to adapt her skills to the Bulgarian market. During the engagement phase, the employment specialist worked with Olena to understand her goals and aspirations and identified potential career paths that align with her interests. They also discussed her previous work experience and the transferable skills she could bring to the Bulgarian job market.

Vocational Profiling:

During the vocational profiling phase, the employment specialist helped Olena identify her transferable skills from her previous job and explored alternative careers that would utilize those skills. They also provided guidance on the recognition of her marketing and sales degree and possible further education options in Bulgaria.

Job Finding:

For the job-finding phase, the employment specialist helped Olena create a resume and cover letter that showcased her relevant experience and skills. They also connected her with potential employers and assisted her in preparing for interviews. Olena was interested in roles in marketing and sales, so the employment specialist focused on identifying open positions in these fields.

Workplace Support:

Once Olena secured a job as a marketing assistant in a Bulgarian company, the employment specialist provided ongoing support during the workplace support phase. This included assistance with transportation, housing, and language classes. They also helped Olena navigate any workplace challenges or conflicts and provided guidance on Bulgarian workplace culture and etiquette.



Job Retention and Career Development:

During the job retention and career development phase, the employment specialist worked with Olena to explore opportunities for advancement within her current job or in a related field. They also provided guidance on financial planning and other life skills. Olena expressed interest in pursuing a leadership role in marketing, so the employment specialist connected her with mentors and resources to help her achieve her goal.

Throughout the supported employment process, Olena received individualized support and tailored services that helped her overcome barriers to employment and achieve greater economic independence in her new country. With the guidance of the employment specialist, Olena was able to successfully transition to a new job and begin building a successful career in Bulgaria.

Case Study: Vasyl

Engagement:

Vasyl is a 45-year-old Ukrainian immigrant who moved to Bulgaria with his wife and two children due to the conflict in Ukraine. He has a background in construction and has worked in various roles throughout his career. During the engagement phase, the employment specialist worked with Vasyl to understand his goals and aspirations and identified potential career paths that align with his interests. They also discussed his previous work experience and the transferable skills he could bring to the Bulgarian job market.

Vocational Profiling:

During the vocational profiling phase, the employment specialist helped Vasyl identify his transferable skills from his previous job and explored alternative careers that would utilize those skills. They also provided guidance on the recognition of his construction degree and possible further education options in Bulgaria.

Job Finding:

For the job-finding phase, the employment specialist helped Vasyl create a resume and cover letter that showcased his relevant experience and skills. They also connected him with potential employers and assisted him in preparing for interviews. Vasyl was



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interested in roles in construction, so the employment specialist focused on identifying open positions in this field.

Workplace Support:

Once Vasyl secured a job as a construction worker in a Bulgarian company, the employment specialist provided ongoing support during the workplace support phase. This included assistance with transportation, housing, and language classes. They also helped Vasyl navigate any workplace challenges or conflicts and provided guidance on Bulgarian workplace culture and etiquette.

Job Retention and Career Development:

During the job retention and career development phase, the employment specialist worked with Vasyl to explore opportunities for advancement within his current job or in a related field. They also provided guidance on financial planning and other life skills. Vasyl expressed interest in becoming a project manager in construction, so the employment specialist connected him with mentors and resources to help him achieve his goal.

Throughout the supported employment process, Vasyl received individualized support and tailored services that helped him overcome barriers to employment and achieve greater economic independence in his new country. With the guidance of the employment specialist, Vasyl was able to successfully transition to a new job and begin building a successful career in Bulgaria.

Case Study: Mariya

Engagement:

Mariya is a 38-year-old Ukrainian woman with visual impairment who moved to Bulgaria with her husband and two children due to the conflict in Ukraine. Despite her disability, she is determined to find employment and contribute to her new community. During the engagement phase, the employment specialist worked with Mariya to understand her goals and aspirations and identified potential career paths that align with her interests and abilities. They also discussed her previous work experience and the transferable skills she could bring to the Bulgarian job market.



Vocational Profiling:

During the vocational profiling phase, the employment specialist helped Mariya identify her transferable skills from her previous job and explored alternative careers that would utilize those skills. They also provided guidance on the recognition of her previous education and possible further education options in Bulgaria.

Job Finding:

For the job-finding phase, the employment specialist helped Mariya create a resume and cover letter that showcased her relevant experience and skills. They also connected her with potential employers and assisted her in preparing for interviews. Mariya was interested in roles in administration or customer service, so the employment specialist focused on identifying open positions in these fields.

Workplace Support:

Once Mariya secured a job as an administrative assistant in a Bulgarian company, the employment specialist provided ongoing support during the workplace support phase. This included assistance with transportation, housing, and language classes. They also helped Mariya navigate any workplace challenges or conflicts and provided guidance on Bulgarian workplace culture and etiquette.

Job Retention and Career Development:

During the job retention and career development phase, the employment specialist worked with Mariya to explore opportunities for advancement within her current job or in a related field. They also provided guidance on financial planning and other life skills. Mariya expressed interest in pursuing a leadership role in administration, so the employment specialist connected her with mentors and resources to help her achieve her goal.

Throughout the supported employment process, Mariya received individualized support and tailored services that helped her overcome barriers to employment and achieve greater economic independence in her new country. With the guidance of the employment specialist, Mariya was able to successfully transition to a new job and begin building a successful career in Bulgaria.



Case Study: Oleksandra

Engagement:

Oleksandra is a 19-year-old Ukrainian girl with mobility impairment due to the war who moved to Bulgaria with her mother and sister. Despite her disability, she is eager to find employment and contribute to her new community. During the engagement phase, the employment specialist worked with Oleksandra to understand her goals and aspirations and identified potential career paths that align with her interests and abilities. They also discussed her previous education and the transferable skills she could bring to the Bulgarian job market.

Vocational Profiling:

During the vocational profiling phase, the employment specialist helped Oleksandra identify her transferable skills from her previous education and explored alternative careers that would utilize those skills. They also provided guidance on the recognition of her previous education and possible further education options in Bulgaria.

Job Finding:

For the job-finding phase, the employment specialist helped Oleksandra create a resume and cover letter that showcased her relevant experience and skills. They also connected her with potential employers and assisted her in preparing for interviews. Oleksandra was interested in roles in customer service or administration, so the employment specialist focused on identifying open positions in these fields.

Workplace Support:

Once Oleksandra secured a job as a customer service representative in a Bulgarian company, the employment specialist provided ongoing support during the workplace support phase. This included assistance with transportation, housing, and language classes. They also helped Oleksandra navigate any workplace challenges or conflicts and provided guidance on Bulgarian workplace culture and etiquette.

Job Retention and Career Development:

During the job retention and career development phase, the employment specialist worked with Oleksandra to explore opportunities for advancement within her current



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job or in a related field. They also provided guidance on financial planning and other life skills. Oleksandra expressed interest in pursuing a leadership role in customer service, so the employment specialist connected her with mentors and resources to help her achieve her goal.

Throughout the supported employment process, Oleksandra received individualized support and tailored services that helped her overcome barriers to employment and achieve greater economic independence in her new country. With the guidance of the employment specialist, Oleksandra was able to successfully transition to a new job and begin building a successful career in Bulgaria.

Case Study: Volodymyr

Engagement:

Volodymyr is a 33-year-old Ukrainian man who participated as a soldier in the war and had to leave his home country due to the conflict. He is now seeking employment in Bulgaria to support himself and his family. During the engagement phase, the employment specialist worked with Volodymyr to understand his goals and aspirations and identified potential career paths that align with his interests and abilities. They also discussed his previous work experience and the transferable skills he could bring to the Bulgarian job market.

Vocational Profiling:

During the vocational profiling phase, the employment specialist helped Volodymyr identify his transferable skills from his previous job and explored alternative careers that would utilize those skills. They also provided guidance on the recognition of his previous education and possible further education options in Bulgaria.

Job Finding:

For the job-finding phase, the employment specialist helped Volodymyr create a resume and cover letter that showcased his relevant experience and skills. They also connected him with potential employers and assisted him in preparing for interviews. Volodymyr was interested in roles in construction or maintenance, so the employment specialist focused on identifying open positions in these fields.



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Workplace Support:

Once Volodymyr secured a job as a maintenance technician in a Bulgarian company, the employment specialist provided ongoing support during the workplace support phase. This included assistance with transportation, housing, and language classes. They also helped Volodymyr navigate any workplace challenges or conflicts and provided guidance on Bulgarian workplace culture and etiquette.

Job Retention and Career Development:

During the job retention and career development phase, the employment specialist worked with Volodymyr to explore opportunities for advancement within his current job or in a related field. They also provided guidance on financial planning and other life skills. Volodymyr expressed interest in pursuing a leadership role in maintenance, so the employment specialist connected him with mentors and resources to help him achieve his goal.

Throughout the supported employment process, Volodymyr received individualized support and tailored services that helped him overcome barriers to employment and achieve greater economic independence in his new country. With the guidance of the employment specialist, Volodymyr was able to successfully transition to a new job and begin building a successful career in Bulgaria.

Case Study: Halyna

Engagement:

Halyna is a 49-year-old Ukrainian lady with three children who had to leave her home country due to the conflict. She is now seeking employment in Bulgaria to support her family. During the engagement phase, the employment specialist worked with Halyna to understand her goals and aspirations and identified potential career paths that align with her interests and abilities. They also discussed her previous work experience and the transferable skills she could bring to the Bulgarian job market.

Vocational Profiling:

During the vocational profiling phase, the employment specialist helped Halyna identify her transferable skills from her previous job and explored alternative careers that would



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utilize those skills. They also provided guidance on the recognition of her previous education and possible further education options in Bulgaria.

Job Finding:

For the job-finding phase, the employment specialist helped Halyna create a resume and cover letter that showcased her relevant experience and skills. They also connected her with potential employers and assisted her in preparing for interviews. Halyna was interested in roles in administration or customer service, so the employment specialist focused on identifying open positions in these fields.

Workplace Support:

Once Halyna secured a job as an administrative assistant in a Bulgarian company, the employment specialist provided ongoing support during the workplace support phase. This included assistance with transportation, housing, and language classes. They also helped Halyna navigate any workplace challenges or conflicts and provided guidance on Bulgarian workplace culture and etiquette.

Job Retention and Career Development:

During the job retention and career development phase, the employment specialist worked with Halyna to explore opportunities for advancement within her current job or in a related field. They also provided guidance on financial planning and other life skills. Halyna expressed interest in pursuing a leadership role in administration, so the employment specialist connected her with mentors and resources to help her achieve her goal.

Throughout the supported employment process, Halyna received individualized support and tailored services that helped her overcome barriers to employment and achieve greater economic independence in her new country. With the guidance of the employment specialist, Halyna was able to successfully transition to a new job and begin building a successful career in Bulgaria.