



# Project Learning for Young Adults (PLYA)

A social integration programme helping young people back into work and education

## SLOVENIA

**Title of the practice (in original language)**

Projektno učenje mlajših odraslih (PUM-O)

**Who is/was implementing the practice?**

- The Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
- Employment Service of Slovenia (PES in Slovenia)
- Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (SIAE)

**Which other organisations are/were involved in the practice?**

Numerous stakeholders are involved as service providers, these include:

- People's University of Kočevje,
- Worker's University,
- faith-based organisations,
- youth organisations (providing non-formal education, youth street work, cultural and social activities for youth),
- centres for social work,
- employers,
- local authorities,
- schools.

Service providers support the promotion and implementation of PLYA. Along with members of Slovenian PES they work together to plan and develop a career plan for individuals.

**What are/were the main objectives of the practice?**

- To develop the professional identity of the participants, including a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, to approach or enter the labour market.
- To develop a range of soft skills to support young people when entering / returning to employment, further education or training.

**When was the practice implemented?**

Since 1999 (ongoing)

**Who is/was targeted by the practice?**

The target group of PLYA are young people aged 15 to 26 who:

- have an unemployed or first-time jobseeker status;
- have experienced difficulties because of leaving education;
- are not employed or do not have a job.

In addition, PLYA target individuals who have specific characteristics that make it difficult for them to make the transition into employment, education or training.

This includes:

- individuals who are socially excluded and have personal, behavioural, social or other difficulties;
- individuals who require incentives to enhance the healthy development of their identities and core capabilities;
- individuals who lack basic vocational or technical education, or are overqualified, resulting in long-term unemployment;
- individuals who have either never been employed, have limited work experience or are first-time jobseekers;
- individuals who have lost their student or apprentice status.

## What activities are/were carried out?

Employment counsellors at Slovenian PES can offer a place on PLYA to individuals enrolled with the employment service. Alternatively, individuals can express an interest in joining the programme through the service providers.

A team of mentors, which includes employment counsellors from PES as well as individuals (i.e. school counsellors, employers, social workers), decide whether the programme is suitable for the individual's needs.

The programme consists of the development and completion of a personal career plan (agreed between both participant and mentor). The mentor is often the person who first recommended the individual to the programme.

A personal career plan defines the purpose of the individual's participation in a series of different training, learning and leisure activities, including:

- Project work chosen according to the interests of the whole group;
- Production based project work where participants produce a hand-made craft or service, as well as learn about product manufacturing and business management;
- Optional group activities to raise motivation of the whole group (e.g. excursions, theatre and sports events);
- Individual learning aimed at the single person's aspirations for going back to education or entering employment.

These activities develop the participant's soft skills, time management and assists them with career decisions, as well as preparing them for reintegration into education or employment.

The expected learning outcomes are defined in the learner's personal career plan. Achievement of learning targets is expressed through the collection of evidence (e.g. certificate of participation in learning activities, performance in completing activities, mentor feedback).

Meetings between participant, mentor and an employment advisor (PES) take place periodically to monitor and, where necessary, modify the personal career plan.

The programme is usually completed after 10 months, with the possibility of extending it to a maximum of 12 months. It can also be completed in under 10 months.

Each quarter, the mentoring group organises a joint meeting of an expanded expert team, which, in addition to mentors, is also composed of PES advisers and professional staff from other institutions who send participants. The purpose of these meetings is to analyse the work done in the past, evaluate the progress of the PLYA group and each individual, and plan further steps.

The essential element for carrying out the plans is the coaching and mentoring programme to provide one-to-one support. The mentorship approach is based on specialised assistance from highly qualified professionals (with a degree from higher education as well as training approved by the programme framework). The focus on coaching differentiates the approach from the more traditional mentoring for job-seekers.

**What are/were the sources of funding?**

PLYA is co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

**What are/were the outputs: people reached and products?**

Since May 2016:

- 847 young adults under 26 years have participated in PLYA,
- 40 mentors have supported participants in the programme,
- 59 local offices of the ESS have provided counselling and recommendations for individuals to participate in the programme.

**What are/were the outcomes: medium-term results or effects?**

An evaluation study was carried during the period 2000 to 2002<sup>1</sup> showed that the programme achieved positive results. 94% of young people were satisfied with their participation in the project and 70% achieved the goals which had been set. Around 41% of young people chose to continue their education; 15% entered part-time employment; and 9% entered full-time employment.

Participants show improvement in confidence, self-control and communication skills. This adds to their personal development benefiting other aspects of their life, such as relationships and interaction with the community.

**What are/were the lessons learnt and success factors?**

**Lessons Learnt**

- Inclusive partnership approach: All major stakeholders (including the participants themselves, but also parents, support services/organisations, social partners and schools) need to be involved in the design and delivery of career plans and accompanying solutions.
- It is important for the key stakeholders to have common goals and work together. An integrated approach maximises the synergies and produces sustainable results. Both the participant and mentor periodically monitor the implementation of the career plan, while other counsellors assisting the participant in the programme may also occasionally contribute. Mentors and counsellors are kept informed of the participant's progress and together with them, the participants discuss any changes to the plan.
- An effective monitoring and evaluation system: An effective monitoring and evaluation system needs to be established to measure the success and quality of the programme, which is carried out in 12 organisations across the country.

**Success Factors**

- The central role of well-qualified mentors: Mentors act as role models by demonstrating what individuals can achieve and supporting them in dealing with the wide range of problems they might face. The mutual trust and respect between the mentors and young people is an effective way of ensuring the young person's engagement. Because of their central role, appropriate recruitment methods, skills development and training are essential to support their work. This should include peer learning from other mentors.

1 Dobrovoljc, Andreja, et al. (2003). Evalvacija socialnointegracijske vloge programa Projektno učenje za mlajše odrasle, Znanstveni inštitut Filozofske fakultete, Ljubljana. Tivadar, Blanka; Mrvar, Polona (2002). Flying over or falling through the cracks?: Young people in the risk society. Office for Youth of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana.

- A holistic and person-centred approach: Successful intervention needs to take account of the complex, multi-dimensional issues resulting in young people dropping out of school and not engaging in any type of employment or training. One of the strengths of the PLYA is the comprehensive and person-centred approach that supports the young person in all aspects of their reintegration journey with their needs addressed in a holistic manner.
- A greater emphasis on soft skills: Improved confidence, self-control and communication skills represent soft skills that benefit people throughout their life, in their relationships and interactions within their communities. The acquisition of soft skills is empowering for the individuals but also vital to their employability. Employers are increasingly looking for these skills and the policy framework is moving towards the accreditation of such skills, including those acquired informally.

## What are key sources of information?

Project Learning for Young Adults (PLYA) website:

<http://arhiv.acs.si/programi/PUM-O.pdf>

Programme Project Learning for Young Adults:

[https://www.ess.gov.si/iskalci\\_zaposlitve/programi/usposabljanje\\_in\\_izobrazevanje/pum-o](https://www.ess.gov.si/iskalci_zaposlitve/programi/usposabljanje_in_izobrazevanje/pum-o)

Peer Review focused on the Slovenian Project Learning for Young Adults (PLYA):

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1070&langId=en&newsId=1963&furtherNews=yes>

Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, Project Learning for Young Adults:

<https://www.acs.si/projekti/domaci/projektno-ucenje-mlajsih-odraslih/>