



Brussels, July 2020

Erasmus+ Programme
KA3 – Support for Policy Reform
Highlights from the
Support for small and medium sized enterprises engaging in
apprenticeships
Call for proposals EACEA 41/2015
Final Reports
Implementation period: 2016-2019

1. INTRODUCTION

This note covers some of the main findings of the assessment of the final reports for the Erasmus+ Programme, KA3 action: *Support for small and medium sized enterprises engaging in apprenticeships*.

The call for proposals met a large interest (i.e. 91 applications were submitted). Grant agreements were issued to 16 projects (12 projects under Lot 1 and 4 projects under Lot 2). 95% of the available budget (8,7 Mio €) was used.

The projects selected cover a period of 2 years, starting between September and November 2016.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE CALL AND SELECTED PROJECTS

The aim of this call was to support European projects that assisted SMEs to engage in apprenticeships.

The call was organised in two Lots, targeting different beneficiaries:

- ✓ **Lot 1:** Partnerships on building capacities for intermediary bodies or partnerships established by large companies to support SMEs;
- ✓ **Lot 2:** European level networks and organisations supporting SMEs through their national members or affiliates.

Under Lot 1, the projects included activities reinforcing capacities of intermediary bodies or using the supply chain of bigger companies to develop and set-up support structures for SMEs. The activities proposed under Lot 2 mainly included cooperation between the umbrella organisations of existing European networks and their national members or affiliates for developing and setting up support structures for SMEs, particularly for those with no previous experience with apprentices.

3. ANALYSIS OF ACHIEVEMENTS

The 16 selected projects in both lots addressed very well the aims of the action in terms of the implemented activities and they were geared towards the objectives of EU VET policy.

Firstly, in Lot 1 the projects conducted a thorough needs analysis actively engaging a large number of relevant stakeholders in the partner countries. This needs analysis focused on different aspects of the status quo of apprenticeships depending on the final objectives of the project. Some investigated the current situation and needs of SMEs with regard to apprenticeships, some analysed the differences and gaps in national VET systems and several projects examined the role of the in-company trainer. The collection and publication of best practise was also an important step in several projects.

The selected Lot 1 projects included many promotional and pedagogical activities to support SMEs. The projects provided a plethora of diversified strategies to support SMEs in hiring apprentices and increasing the quality of apprenticeships: one project organised study visits and peer reviews to promote trans-national learning, another project developed a new qualification profile and training material for an in-company trainer, several other projects developed databases to match demand and offer of apprenticeships, and many organised specific training for in-company trainers. A frequent strategy was to build capacity of intermediary bodies through workshops and trainings in order to establish helpdesks for SMEs providing assistance to them in all legal and management aspects of hiring apprentices.

Several projects then established a network of in-company trainers whose task was to promote apprenticeships and assist companies in setting up appropriate structures.

All project widely disseminated the developed learning material, helpdesks and platforms and other relevant resources. Some went a step further and organised large-scale attractiveness campaigns for apprenticeships targeting thousands of SMEs and other relevant stakeholders. One particular strategy to promote apprenticeships was to share videos of representatives of SMEs which had successfully implemented new traineeship schemes.

The 4 proposals selected under Lot 2 included important European networks in the area of stakeholder representation. Involving on average project partners in 10 countries, these projects firstly analyzed the needs of SMEs or examined national policies. As a next step, either the project teams developed benchmarking tools to identify the development needs of SMEs wishing to engage in apprenticeships or they trained apprenticeship coaches in intermediary bodies, which later liaised to form a network of support or provided support to SMEs in workshops and through online platforms. The partners then disseminated the tools and resources among their wide reaching networks.

In general, a noteworthy strength of most projects noted in the assessment of the final reports was the high number of SMEs, intermediary bodies and other relevant stakeholders actively involved both in the needs analysis as well as in workshops or pilot testing of the developed tools. Another strong aspect continuously observed throughout many projects was that they put much effort into using traditional and new communication tools to inform a large number of relevant external stakeholder of the benefits of the newly developed resources for SMEs.

Most projects had a cross sectoral focus, only one project in Lot 1 addressed the construction industry and one project in Lot 2 the textile industry. One project in Lot 1 aimed to support specifically apprenticeships in professional higher education institutes.

3.1. Objectives and final achievements of the projects

This section presents a synthesis of the objectives and outcomes of each of the 16 projects implemented:

✓ Lot 1

CORNWALL MARINE NETWORK LIMITED (UK)

572774



In this project, eight organisations from eight countries (Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Poland, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom) joined forces to create a blueprint that would make it easier for SMEs to grow their workforce through apprentices. Over the first project year, the project consortium implemented its own research to compare the national apprenticeship frameworks and identify already existing business support services, which had the potential to be transferred across Europe. Through desk-based research and business surveys conducted across 268 businesses, the partners documented the barriers to taking on apprentices and identified SMEs needs for support to overcome those barriers. The project partners appointed Skills Brokers and managed their training.

After one year of implementing a service by 13 skills brokers in 7 countries, the project managed to complete company training plans with a total of 173 companies across all sectors, 80% of them with less than 50 employees. Of these 173 SMEs supported, 85 have since chosen the apprenticeship route as a way to address their skills gaps and grow their workforce and they have already created 106 apprenticeships and additionally invested in the upskilling of 64 employees. The partners developed online step-by-step guides called the “Employers Pathways for Apprenticeships” to give businesses free access to resources and templates to help them at each stage of the process. In total 14 tools and templates were made available to businesses in seven languages, from apprenticeship vacancy description guidelines and interview assessment templates to a welcome package to facilitate the induction of the apprentice and a guide on the role and responsibilities of the apprenticeship mentor. In parallel, a network of 35 Apprenticeship Champions was set up to showcase role models among employers delivering quality apprenticeship schemes and willing to promote the value of apprenticeships in SMEs to their peers.

Website: www.serfa-project.eu/en

Get involved in EP4A: European Partnerships for Apprenticeships

HRVATSKA OBRTNICKA KOMORA (HR)

572663



This project set out to achieve two main results:

- ✓ To build and strengthen partnerships among businesses, VET providers and intermediary organisations together with public authorities and social partners in order to get more SMEs involved in apprenticeships, and
- ✓ To increase awareness of the benefits of apprenticeships among target SMEs through the implementation of tailor made attractiveness campaigns.

The project included four partners from Croatia, Serbia, Slovakia and the United Kingdom.

The project's main achievements encompass an analysis of the needs of SMEs and best practices in the four countries, and the introduction of a help desk line to assist SMEs in hiring apprentices and the development of roadmaps for enhanced partnership building.

The project mainly contributed to capacity building through the organisation of study visits and increased the attractiveness of VET by organising apprenticeship attractiveness campaigns.

Website: www.supportapprenticeships.eu

Strengthening the capacities of the chambers and partners to help SMEs to engage in apprenticeship

CROATIAN CHAMBER OF ECONOMY (HR)

572706



The project brought together a consortium of six partners from Croatia and Austria who set out to train staff and develop tools and supporting measures for SMEs and in-company mentors to make apprenticeships more accessible to SMEs.

The project enabled partners to:

- ✓ Better understand and grasp the characteristics of the Croatian VET system, especially from the point of view of SMEs and map the areas that can be improved;
 - ✓ Get an insight into the functioning of the Austrian VET system as a good practice and develop recommendations to apply its successful elements in the Croatian context;
 - ✓ Develop operational capabilities of partners so that they could provide assistance to SMEs to engage in work-based learning;
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- ✓ Develop useful resources for partners, SMEs, schools, students and other stakeholders (quality criteria for the approval of training companies, guidebook for in-company mentors, toolbox for Apprenticeship Advisors, database of training companies);
 - ✓ Develop a training programme that provided in-company mentors with the skills and competences for working with apprentices and VET providers. The project enabled setting up of permanent support system for SMEs.

Website: www.dualnoobrazovanje.hr

Support for small and medium sized enterprises engaging in apprenticeships: Regional Apprenticeship Alliances for SMEs

POLNOCNA IZBA GOSPODARCZA W SZCZECINIE (PL)

572713



The Apprenticeship Alliances project addressed the lack of support for SMEs by improving the capacity of intermediary bodies to develop and operate support structures, which helped SMEs, especially small and micro enterprises, to employ apprentices.

The nine partners from seven countries (Belgium, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom) managed to establish 6 regional Apprenticeship Alliances involving 99 intermediaries, VET providers and other relevant stakeholders and they created a toolkit to guide other regions in replicating this approach of joint collaboration of VET providers, intermediary organizations, SMEs and wider stakeholders in boosting apprenticeships in their region.

In addition, the consortium produced a teaching course, “Hire your Apprentice” for SMEs planning the recruitment, employment, and training of apprentices.

By the end of the project, more than 10.000 SMEs in participating countries benefited directly or indirectly from the project, being encouraged to take steps towards employing apprentices.

Website: www.apprenticeshipalliances.eu

Support for small and medium sized enterprises engaging in apprenticeships: Getting SMEs on board

CEDIT - CENTRO DIFFUSIONE IMPRENDITORIALE DELLA TOSCANA SCARL (IT)

572753



This project aimed to build sustainable links between VET providers, schools and SMEs and to support and foster micro and small enterprises to tackle unemployment, using a multi-stakeholder approach.

The SMEB project set out to support a conducive environment for SMEs' engagement in apprenticeships whilst improving existing or creating new sustainable links between VET providers, schools and SMEs, either directly or through strengthened intermediary bodies.

The consortium of five partners from Italy, Germany and Bosnia Herzegovina achieved among others the engagement of 1.300 SMEs, the creation of 3 databases for the matching of apprenticeships offer and demand, training toolkits and a training programme for tutors.

Website: www.smesonboard.eu

Growing Apprenticeship Partnerships for SMEs
THE MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY (UK)

572666

SME GAP

Engage Exchange Reform



SME GAP aimed to improve stakeholder networks and channels for the involvement of SMEs within a consortium of four organisations based in three countries (Austria, Estonia and the United Kingdom). Each partner created its own Regional Stakeholder Forum identifying priorities for action, new stakeholders and channels of information for dissemination.

The consortium also conducted trans-national peer reviews and subsequently established a peer review methodology to identify areas of existing good practice and areas, which could benefit from improvement focusing on 4 key themes: Perception of apprenticeships, existing or new partnerships to help engage apprenticeships, quality of apprenticeships (current offer and gaps), as well as apprenticeship policy.

A series of peer reviews between regions were carried out with external stakeholders and recommendations were drafted to improve SME engagement. The consortium organised awareness raising events to highlight the benefits of apprentices. The first Degree Apprenticeship Model was developed at the University of Cordoba and a readiness toolkit was developed for SMEs not previously involved in apprenticeships.

Website: <https://www.sme-gap.eu/>

Supporting Enterprises Towards APPrenticeship ISTITUTO FORMAZIONE OPERATORI AZIENDALI (IT)

572732



SET-APP set out to develop a supportive business environment, offering practical assistance to SMEs, by making chambers of commerce, employer organisations and trade unions, sectoral federations, VET providers and public employment services cooperate to promote an apprenticeship culture.

SET-APP delivered a comprehensive framework analysis, 10 local agreements among stakeholders in favour of apprenticeships, a set of self-training material for SMEs and staff at intermediary organisations and a website, giving visibility to companies wishing to train and employ apprentices.

The consortium of 7 partners from 4 countries (Austria, Germany, Italy and France) reached about 20.000 SMEs through dissemination and over 250 SMEs and decision makers were involved in the needs analysis.

Representatives from over 40 intermediary bodies/stakeholders were informed/trained to act as reference points for local SMEs and over 50 companies with no previous experience in apprenticeship starting training and employing apprentices in partner countries where the dual system is not operating yet.

By the end of the project, partners gained deeper understanding of respective apprenticeship systems, surveyed and reported features, success factors, best practices linked to apprenticeships, compared

systems and drew lessons from that, reached out to a huge number of SMEs and stakeholders, collected and developed tools for supporting their own and other intermediary organisations' roles, including video clips, training material, interviews with “ambassador” entrepreneurs and reached out to public authorities, decision makers, social partners, signing local agreements (“territorial pacts”) in favour of promoting apprenticeship contracts at the SME.

Website: <https://www.ucer.camcom.it/comunicazione/notizie/pdf-2018/Lusenti.pdf>

**AppHelp4SMEs - Apprenticeship Helpdesk for Small and Medium Size Enterprises
EMPORIKON KAI VIOMICHANIKON EPIMELITIRION PAFOU (CY)**

572735



The Apphelp4smes project aimed to build the capacities of intermediary bodies in Cyprus and Poland, notably chambers of commerce, employer organizations, government bodies and organizations representing SMEs, in an attempt to provide targeted support to SMEs for creating quality apprenticeship positions.

The seven partners from three countries (Cyprus, Poland and the United Kingdom) managed to develop the AppHelp4Smes Service, offered by the intermediary bodies in Cyprus and Poland, four helpdesks, which provided guidance on designing quality apprenticeships, guidance on in-company training and supervision of apprentices at the workplace and establish links between SMEs and VET training centers.

Website: <http://www.limassolchamber.eu/Gr/39/articles/514/2017/12/12/AppHelp4SMEs--3i-sunantisi-gia-to-europa-luml--ko-programma> (social media)

ALPRENTISSAGE

CHAMBRE DE COMMERCE ET D'INDUSTRIE RÉGION AUVERGNE-RHÔNE-ALPES (FR)

572687



Statistics show that the number of apprenticeships in Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes and Piemonte is low regarding the number of companies, especially SMEs. This situation is mainly due to the complexity of the procedures and regulation concerning apprenticeship, and to the fact that they are subject to frequent changes. The ALPRENTISSAGE project therefore aimed at facilitating the recruitment of apprentices by SMEs through the development of websites that provided all

useful information about apprenticeships for the French and Italian companies. These sites gathered all useful information on apprenticeship.

In addition, the two partners from Italy and France developed specific calculators, which are able to provide individual information to the companies about the financial support they may receive, according to their specific criteria. For France, another tool was developed to sort out the schools training apprentices classified by location and trade. These sites also include video testimonies of companies, which already recruited apprentices, as well as pedagogic presentation summarising the steps for recruiting apprentices. As complement to these sites, guides summarising the information about apprenticeships in France and Italy were produced. An information campaign was launched in order to disseminate the information to the companies of the regions Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes and Piemonte.

Website: www.alpprentissage.eu

Systematic approach to enhance the participation of construction industry SMEs in the apprenticeship programs

FUNDACION LABORAL DE LA CONSTRUCCION (ES)

572751



To tackle the high demand of skilled workforce in the construction industry, this project's aim was to improve SMEs involvement in apprenticeships based on two actions: To build capacities of construction business representatives as an intermediary body and to give support and motivation to SMEs and VET centers to assign qualified trainers as key players to guarantee a high quality training for apprentices.

The partnership of four organisations from Italy and Spain defined the status quo of in-company tutors in Spain and Italy, by carrying out a field study. Based on the results, the partnership was able to establish the core skills for the profile of an “in-company tutor in the building industry”. Consequently, a new EQF level 4 qualification was developed according to ECVET methodology, which was structured in 4 modules, has a training duration of 20 hours and awards 1 ECVET.

Website: www.cotutorproject.eu

Fostering Apprenticeships sharing Ideas and Resources

FORMAPER (IT)

572742



Bringing together 10 full partners and 7 associated partners from France, Italy and Romania, the FAIR project focused on 3 components: Networking and Dialogue between stakeholders for a policy framework supporting SMEs, information and services and capacity building. The project

developed the FAIR Promoting Apprenticeship Model, which is based on various steps, from the first informative contacts to SMEs up to customized assistance for SMEs and students/schools to develop successful learning paths. The FAIR key message was disseminated to 2.500 SMEs participating in events, pilot activities, workshops. Furthermore, 2.600 young potential apprentices and 100 teachers were involved in the FAIR activities. The FAIR project also exercised a strong capacity building action: 24 Chambers' Apprenticeship Promotion Angels were trained and they delivered pilot actions in each region, involving more than 600 SMEs.

Website: <https://www.facebook.com/Erasmus.FAIR.Project/> (social media)

Capacity Building for Intermediary Organisations through e-learning

ACTION SYNERGY SA (EL)

572727



The EAPPREN project's main objective was to build the capacity of the intermediary organisations and SMEs to support apprenticeships through the organisation of e-learning courses. The 10 partners from 8 countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia and Spain) supported intermediary organisations through the identification and publication of best practices, which could be replicable in the contexts of the partner countries and through specific and focused training. A research was organised in order to identify the needs of the intermediary organisations and the SMEs in relation with apprenticeships. Based on the results of the research, adequate training material was developed. Face to face and e-learning courses were organised. The project also developed a matching tool, which facilitated the selection of the most appropriate candidate for SMEs. The staff of the intermediate organisations who received training shared their knowledge in seminars on apprenticeship with SMEs, e-learning courses for mentors/ staff of SMEs, and in the context of the pilot test of the matching tool. The project contributed to the increase of the number of SMEs engaging in apprenticeships and ensured the sustainable involvement of intermediary organisations and stakeholders to support apprenticeships.

Website: <https://www.facebook.com/ActionSynergySA/videos/1605240519513537/>
(social media)

✓ Lot 2

**Support for small and medium sized enterprises engaging in apprenticeships:
apprenticeship coaches for SMEs**

**EUROCHAMBRES-ASSOCIATION DES CHAMBRES DE COMMERCE ET
D'INDUSTRIE EUROPEENNES ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE (BE)**

572770



AC4SME was a large-scale European project implemented by 17 full partners and 2 associated partners in 12 Erasmus+ countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, France, Italy, Latvia, Romania, Serbia, Spain and Turkey).

The aim of the AC4SME project was to involve a growing number of SMEs in apprenticeships. For this purpose, SME Apprenticeship Coaches in 13 European Chambers were trained and provided with adequate tools and skills to support SMEs to offer quality apprenticeship placements.

The SME Apprenticeship Coaches offered direct guidance to SMEs willing to host an apprentice. Partners developed two toolboxes publicly available on the project website.

Tools give a clear guidance for apprenticeship coaches and SMEs on awareness raising and promotion of apprenticeship, the legal context of the apprenticeship system, monitoring and evaluation of SMEs' readiness to host apprentice. As a result, agreement letters were signed with more than 120 SMEs agreeing to host the apprentice in the near future.

A policy paper with recommendations to feed VET and in particular apprenticeship policy areas was developed at regional, national and European level. Through the network of chambers, over 50.000 SMEs in 12 European regions were informed about the methods applied successfully in Austria and Germany, adapted to countries specificities and on adequate tools designed for them.

Around 700 SMEs were directly involved in project activities and more than 120 received face-to-face guidance and agreed to host apprentices in the near future. Hence, this project led to a direct increase in the supply of apprenticeship placements.

The project resulted in a network of trained SME apprenticeship coaches in CCIs in 10 European countries able to promote the benefits of apprenticeship, inform about apprenticeship schemes and training contracts, keep on accrediting new businesses, train the trainers within SMEs, help SMEs to select suitable apprentices and communicate desired learning outcomes.

Website: www.ac4sme.eu

Business in Europe Hosting Apprenticeships for Youth
CSR EUROPE THE BUSINESS NETWORK FOR CORPORATE SOCIAL
RESPONSIBILITY (BE)

572720



Bringing together 15 full partners and one associated partner in 13 countries (Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Serbia, Spain, and Turkey) the EUTalent project set out to increase SMEs' awareness of the benefits of apprenticeships, to improve the quality of apprenticeships in SMEs and to identify and remove policy obstacles.

Throughout the project over 70.000 SMEs were reached in an online communication campaign, laying out the business benefits of engaging in apprenticeships.

To support SMEs to increase their uptake of apprenticeships, a number of learning network activities were organised in 12 countries for 1.200 SMEs. These included stakeholders' meetings, national workshops and individual face-to-face meetings and had the purpose of providing SMEs with the information, knowledge and support to create an apprenticeship programme.

To improve the quality of apprenticeships in SMEs, the project created a quality framework and an online benchmarking assessment, taken up by over 200 SMEs, each of them receiving individual benchmarking reports.

Moreover, targeted pilot actions were launched in France, Spain, Italy, Poland and the Czech Republic to support a total of 99 SMEs to improve the quality of their apprenticeships through benchmarking, peer-learning and tailored support.

Finally, the key findings from the project were gathered in national and EU level policy recommendation reports, which laid out practical and direct feedback from SMEs on how to drive policy reforms in view of engaging small businesses in apprenticeships.

Website: www.eutalent.org

Integrated Strategy Initiative for Strengthening the Supply of APPrenticeships in TEXtile Sector

EUROPEAN APPAREL AND TEXTILE CONFEDERATION (BE)

572773



The TEXAPP project was designed and implemented by several textile and clothing European associations under the coordination of EURATEX - the European Apparel and Textile Confederation. This project, bringing together eight partners from 7 countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Portugal and the United Kingdom), aimed at addressing the need to improve the supply and the quality of apprenticeships in the textile and clothing sector (T&C).

The TEXAPP project set out to develop the competences and capacities of SMEs to engage in the delivery of successful apprenticeship programmes through supporting strategic activities between EURATEX and its members and affiliates.

The TEXAPP project also addressed the need to better cooperate with SMEs and relevant stakeholders on apprenticeships delivery, for instance with national sectoral associations, VET providers, schools and national authorities taking into account the legal framework of each partner's country.

The project team developed a guide that describes the capacities and competences required for SMEs to successfully manage and deliver an apprenticeship programme. Besides, a company assessment tool was developed in order to help companies to identify areas where development was required.

In addition, a package training courses for in-company trainers, supervisors and senior staff was developed in order to build the necessary skills and abilities to develop apprenticeship programmes. Another TEXAPP output is related to the Competence Centre for Apprenticeships, an interactive platform that shares information about the different apprenticeship systems of several European countries.

Overall, the TEXAPP project contributed to creating a better supply of apprenticeship programmes in the Textile and Clothing sector, providing targeted tools and resources especially designed for SMEs, as well as paving the ground for companies to engage in this field, learn from each other and share information and knowledge among the T&C community.

Website: <http://texapp.eu>

Supporting Apprenticeships between Professional Higher Education & Small and Medium Enterprises

ASSOCIATION EUROPEENNE D'INSTITUTIONS DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPERIEUR (BE)

572776



The SAPS project focused on the promotion of apprenticeships between professional higher education institutions (PHEI) and SMEs.

SAPS was established to improve the perception of SMEs of the benefits of engaging apprentices from PHEIs, lower the barriers to cooperation between PHEIs and SMEs and to establish more regular and structured cooperation between umbrella organisations for PHEIs and organisations representing SMEs.

The project involving ten partners from ten countries (Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom) developed a tool to help SMEs and PHEIs make the first step towards cooperation in the field of apprenticeships.

After the organisation of 8 national workshops with more than 150 participants, the Apprenticeship Quality Toolkit was developed, which provides a hands-on, easy-to-use management tool for PHEIs and SMEs in order to ensure the quality of apprenticeships. These developed quality criteria served as a basis for the development of the resource pack for SMEs, 'Mobilising apprenticeships across Europe'. The aim of this guide was to provide hands-on, practical material to be used by the staff of SMEs for easier understanding of the whole process, systems in place and support measures.

Website: <http://learntowork.eu>

3.2. Challenges

A shortcoming noted is that several sustainability plans are rather general and do not contain a sufficient number of concrete and relevant measures to ensure that the project results will have lasting benefits.

Furthermore, projects should be encouraged to incorporate a comprehensive external evaluation and consistently follow up on the mentioned recommendations to improve deliverables.

Project partners should also invest more in enhancing the user-friendliness of developed resources and online tools (using among others multimedia features) to have a larger impact.

3.3. Impact

The results of the evaluation of the reports highlight that all projects have actively involved a plethora of relevant stakeholders creating transnational alliances that ensure that the outcomes are anchored in sustainable networks. Partnerships among businesses, VET providers and intermediary organisations together with public authorities and social partners were built and/or further strengthened to get more SMEs involved in apprenticeships.

Large-scale attractiveness campaigns targeting up to thousands of SMEs increased the awareness of the benefits of apprenticeships. Projects that did not conduct awareness campaigns, nonetheless reached a wide number of relevant stakeholders through the organisation of events, workshops and pilot testing.

The capacity building of intermediary bodies based on the identified needs of SMEs and the collection of best practice enabled their staff to provide SMEs with guidance on designing quality apprenticeships including legal and managerial aspect and supervision and in-company training. Several projects built a network of trained apprenticeship experts across countries, whose task was to promote apprentices and provide guidance to SMEs throughout the project and beyond. Some of the projects managed to set up permanent helpdesks and support structures.

As numerous open educational recourses were created, the projects are expected to have a continuing impact on the selected target groups. Toolboxes, guidebooks, and documents describing procedures and necessary steps for taking on apprentices, as well as databases for SMEs to promote themselves to students and schools are largely still available and continuously facilitate guidance and information delivery and support SMEs to engage in apprenticeships.

In some countries, policy dialogue events were initiated with the aim to support the formation and functioning of apprenticeship partnerships and project partners drafted policy recommendations. They also reached out to public authorities, decision makers, social partners, signing with them local agreements in favour of further promoting apprenticeship contracts.

More concretely, due to trans-national cooperation, one project introduced a new Degree Apprenticeship model in Spain based on the United Kingdom model, which allows employees to complete a full degree as part of their apprenticeship. Another project involving 173 companies (out of which 80% have less than 50 employees) managed to assist 85 of them to establish new apprentice schemes.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The projects have reached the objectives outlined at the application stage and they have completed diversified activities and developed useful tools to provide support for SMEs, which are either newly engaging or substantially increasing their supply of apprenticeships.

Most individual projects conducted thorough quantitative research and consulted experts in the context of interviews or focus group discussions in the participating countries. These studies aimed to provide an analysis of the status quo of the delivery and policy of apprenticeships, the needs of SMEs, best practice or the skills required of in-company trainers. These documents are mostly still available on the websites of the projects and offer relevant information to SMEs and VET training institutions.

The majority of project teams created online resources to make useful information to increase the quality of apprenticeships publicly available and to provide guidance in the administrative process to SMEs. Some developed tools to assess the companies' readiness to hire apprentices and illustrate which aspects still need to be improved. Several projects also trained the staff of intermediary bodies or employees in SMEs to ensure continuous guidance and support. Many of these tools are still available on freely accessible online platforms.

All projects widely disseminated project results at events, on their social media platforms and in written communications. To raise the attractiveness of apprenticeships, some projects organised large-scale awareness campaigns targeting thousands of relevant stakeholders. The use of testimonies was a strategy used by several projects to highlight the benefits of apprenticeships.

Several projects encountered delays in the implementation process but managed to deliver all main deliverables by the end of the eligibility period or the amended eligibility period.

A better strategy for sustainability, a more thorough external evaluation and an enhanced effort to increase the user-friendliness and relevance for the selected target groups of the developed tools were mentioned as key aspects in need of further improvement in some instances.

The implemented dissemination strategies were highlighted as successful in the majority of projects. The good quality of communication and cooperation structures of many projects was also evident. In addition, stakeholder involvement was deemed very convincing as projects reached out to a large number of SMEs and other relevant stakeholders such as policy makers, public authorities and social partners.
