

REOPEN - NEXT GENERATION WORKFORCE – EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE FOR IMPROVED EMPLOYMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The challenge in the Central Baltic region is that the youth unemployment is quite high compared with other EU countries. In particular, in Finland it is 23.2% (or 146k unemployed young people, YP), in Latvia - 13,4% (or 9k), and in Estonia - 18% (or 6k). There is a considerable labour market slack (employment supply and demand mismatch) in this area in age 15–74 (*Eurostat, 2024*): in Finland - 14-15%, in Latvia - 10-11%, and in Estonia - 10-11%.

The REOPEN (*Next Generation Workforce – Empowering Young People for Improved Employment; Sep 2025 – Feb 2028*; <https://centralbaltic.eu/project/reopen>; Skendere & Paegle, 2025) project main aim is to create a very practical joint cross-border solution for these challenges, and to decrease mismatch between the employment supply and demand. This can be achieved by: (i) well-designed education /training in collaboration with employers, (ii) expanding cross-border collaboration to diversify the skills and needs match opportunities, and (iii) lowering the barriers to enter the labour market for YP.

METHODS AND APPROACHES

Joint targeted upskilling training for young people. REOPEN goal is to train 300 young people (YP) from Estonia, Latvia and Finland in soft skills, digital competencies, green skills and industry-specific knowledge to boost their competitiveness in the labour market. For achieving such goal, there is a plan: (i) to implement an outreach campaign, engaging at least 300 YP and 15 small- and medium size enterprises (SMEs) /organizations across various industry sectors; (ii) To identify existing workforce skill gaps and align them with YP training needs; and (iii) to design and deliver a comprehensive upskilling training program in 3 online/ virtual exchange Modules. These Modules are the following:

(1) “**Soft skills and competences in 21st century labour market**” (key topics - career development, work ethics, cross-cultural competences, leadership, design thinking and creativity, critical thinking, further education, financial literacy, time planning, motivation, adaptation skills, employment supply and demand across borders, etc.);

(2) “**Digital and green skills for labour market**” (key topics - digital and remote work skills, communication and collaboration tools, search info online, data management, elaboration of digital content, deployment of innovative AI technologies, simulated internship experiences and problem-solving exercises, as well as green skill as knowledge, abilities, values and attitudes needed to live in, develop and support a sustainable and resource-efficient society); and

(3) “**Internship onboarding training**” (key topics – specific field-related courses, delivered in smaller mixed groups, according to their field of specialization for the internship, industry specific skills, skills matching map of YP & SMEs).

Upon successful completion of each Module: YP will receive a Training Certificate (each 20 academic hours, 1 ECTS), certifying their qualification. The REOPEN’s target is 50% improvement in YP competency levels through pre- and post-training self-assessments and, at least, 75% positive feedback on training relevance and effectiveness. REOPEN will help YP to reduce their skills gaps and enhance their adaptability to a rapidly changing labour market.

Smart internships for improved employment opportunities for young people. REOPEN goal is also to offer YP from Estonia, Latvia and Finland hands-on work experience in a professional setting for practical application of the competencies acquired during the training by implementing 150 smart internships for YP.

For achieving such goal, there is a plan: (i) to develop a comprehensive internship program designed to be accessible for YP from diverse backgrounds while aligning with SMEs /organizations' needs in the labour market; (ii) to prepare and support, at least, 15 employers for hosting smart internships for 150 YP who will be enrolled from the training program; and (iii) to organize 75 cross-border and 75 local internships (1-2 months) during the program.

Based on the program results, a set of recommendations for policymakers on best practices in YP employment strategies will be developed. The REOPEN's target is that, at least, 75% positive feedback from both YP and employers regarding the internship experience. REOPEN will have positive impact to YP to achieve work affiliations after completing the internship.

The REOPEN comprehensive program framework will be developed detailing the goals, scope and structure of an internship scheme, delivering a training and handbook for mentors and guidelines for SMEs/ organizations seeking to implement similar programs. Internship program of cross-border and local internships in Latvia, Estonia and Finland will contribute to the program output indicator achieving 1-2-month work affiliations for 150 YP and providing them recommendation letters, certificates and new qualification gained.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

During the first year, the Campaign for young people (focused on youth training needs assessment and participants' enrolment) and Campaign for SMEs/ organisations (focused on needs assessment and enrolment of SMEs/ organizations) will take place, as well as all necessary steps (design of the training program, rollout and delivery in a form of virtual exchange for YP) for 3 Modules will be taken.

For the REOPEN project realisation the **horizontal principles** to be implemented such as: (i) Sustainable Development (socially, ecologically, culturally, and economically sustainable development); (ii) Equal Opportunities & Non-Discrimination (safe, inclusive and respectful environment free from discrimination and harassment, and encouraging YP with less opportunities to find their career path and entrance into the labour market); and (iii) Equality between Men and Women (equal participation opportunities for both genders, applying gender-mainstreaming approach and/or a positive action approach).

The REOPEN **long-term plans for long-lasting effect on the Nordic-Baltic region and population** are that the project outputs/deliverables are: (i) Ownership (joint property of all Partners & will be easily accessible, usable and adaptable for further use); (ii) Durability (to be used by relevant groups, project Partners or others also after the project lifetime); and (iii) Transferability (could be adapted or further developed to be used by other target groups or in other territories).

Who will benefit from the project? Among these are the general public, higher education institutions and research organisations, business support organisations, small- and medium- size enterprises, national public authorities, interest groups including non-governmental organizations.

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