Interreg Co-funded by the European Union

Central Baltic Programme

The Final Report

Date: 10/04/2025

1. Project story

Please describe the project's final achievements in a "Project Story" format. Ensure the story is engaging and understandable for non-specialists, as it may be used for publications.

Remember, you are expected to publish the "Achieved result(s)" on your project webspace and may use this text. Additionally, this story will be included in the KEEP.EU database, which aggregates data on European projects and beneficiaries.

Questions	Your project story
Context and problem: • What were the regional and sectoral challenges? • What specific problem was addressed?	Creating inclusive and supportive workplaces for migrants and refugees has become an increasingly urgent priority in both Finland and Estonia. With growing global mobility and recent crises, such as the war in Ukraine, both countries have experienced new waves of migration that demand swift and thoughtful responses. This project was developed in recognition of the fact that inclusion in the labor market goes beyond offering equal opportunities on paper. True inclusion also requires that public and private employers understand and support the unique challenges that international employees face, including differences in language, work culture, and societal expectations. The aim was therefore not only to promote fairness, but to support long-term integration by ensuring that migrant workers are given the tools and environment needed to succeed. In the long run, this benefits both employees and employers, enhancing individual well-being while also increasing workforce stability and productivity at a societal level. One of the most unexpected challenges encountered, particularly in Estonia, was the issue of self-selection among companies. Those organisations that could have benefited the most from cooperation, and had the potential to positively impact large numbers of migrants and refugees, proved the most difficult to reach. Many showed little interest in the topic, possibly due to perceived administrative burdens or even because they benefited from maintaining the status quo. These companies often declined to engage, even at the level of initial discussion.

	In contrast, companies already investing in DEI efforts, cultural sensitivity, and the employment of international staff were the most open to collaboration. However, these organisations often had limited room for additional improvements, as their structures and practices were already relatively inclusive. It became clear that without direct economic incentives, even strong arguments and research-backed recommendations could not persuade those who needed anti-discrimination reforms the most. Additionally, the project faced a structural challenge due to a miscalculation in the application phase: the Estonian partner was tasked with the same number of interviews and company collaborations as two Finnish partners combined. This imbalance became more evident as the project progressed and influenced the overall implementation capacity across borders.
Idea and solution • What was the core project idea? • What was the solution developed and implemented?	To find out attitudes, needs and resources of migrants and companies who need workforce.To find out companies practices in DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion), discuss with companies/organisations about adopting and improve their existing anti-discrimination policy. EASWork cooperated with 24 different companies with positive outcome. Regarding the solution that was developed, we relied mainly on our research. Lacking convincing evidence of the problems faced by refugees and migrants in Estonia and Finland, our interviews were crucial in establishing the kinds of problems the communities were facing and recognizing the emergent patterns in the labor market that were leading to instances of discrimination. These insights were highly valued in our discussions with companies, and were the main way we were able to illustrate the need for specific anti-discrimination policies. Without our research, it is unlikely we would have been taken as seriously.
Implementation and impact • Why was cooperation among partners crucial? • What impact was achieved in targeted regions and sectors? • What was the benefit for target groups?	We supported each other with knowledge, recruiting companies who were interested in anti-discrimination policy. We shared different approached e.g. Estonia had mostly Ukrainean refugees/migrants and Finland had migrants from several different countries. Impact and aims of the EASWork were achieved both in Finland and Estonia.

	Due to the imbalance in the distribution of planned activities, close cooperation among the project partners proved essential. The activities in Estonia were supported through shared expertise and contributions from the Finnish partners. Administrative and project management responsibilities were efficiently handled by the lead partner, ensuring the smooth coordination of the overall project. Beyond these practicalities, the cross border aspect was useful in comparing situations. Being that refugee and migrant communities in the two rather similar coutnries were so different, it was useful to understand the problems in both--especially where they were the same. .

2. Project's relevant mentions and prizes (will be published in Keep.eu database)

Please list any relevant mentions and prizes that you as a project achieved below. Only the name of the prize or mention should be indicated. In case the project did not receive mentions or prizes this section can be left empty.

Project's relevant mentions and prizes
Click or tap here to enter text.

3. Achieved results and outputs

Be as brief and to the point as possible.

Instructions	Your project's achieved results and outputs
3.1 Describe project contribution to Programme Objective result indicator. Please describe the achieved results behind the figures with concrete examples.	Several companies from various sectors participated in the project to assess and improve their anti-discrimination policies and approaches to workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Through dialogue and our evidence-based report we supported organisations in identifying concrete ways to create more inclusive and equitable workplaces for people with international backgrounds. Many of the participating companies implemented or committed to a wide range of tangible DEI-related improvements, for example: - Piloted the Duuni tutuksi job shadowing model, offering international jobseekers hands-on

	experience and companies a practical tool for inclusive recruitment. - Added DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) commitments into employee contracts, affirming values of fairness, inclusion, and non-discrimination. - Reviewed and updated anti-discrimination policies, ensuring alignment with current needs and best practices. - Refined job descriptions to focus on essential skills rather than formal qualifications. - Introduced structured interviews to standardize hiring and reduce bias. - Explored or implemented anonymous recruitment to promote equitable selection processes. - Launched English-language trainee programs, improving accessibility for international talent. - Translated onboarding materials and key internal documents into English for better inclusion of non-native speakers. - Offered internal language training to support multilingual collaboration. - Established mentorship programs, pairing international employees with more experienced, local colleagues. - Organized DEI workshops for management and broader staff to build awareness and competence. - Planned internal trainings and future workshops to sustain learning and engagement. - Conducted internal audits to evaluate the real-world effectiveness of their DEI policies. - Joined national diversity initiatives (e.g., diversity charters), reinforcing their public commitment to inclusive practices. - Participated in seminars and industry-wide dialogues, contributing to the broader development of inclusive labor markets. - Committed to sharing success stories and opportunities related to international recruitment—both internally and externally. While not all companies were able to implement immediate changes, many expressed ongoing interest in continuing their DEI efforts. The project's long-term impact lies not only in these direct organisational improvements but also in how the tools and insights shared continue to inspire broader systemic change.

3.2 Describe project contribution to Programme Objective output indicator(s). Please describe the achieved outputs behind the figures with concrete examples.	The EASWork project collaborated with 24 companies to support inclusive employment practices for individuals with foreign backgrounds. Companies varied in their progress—some had established DEI policies, others basic frameworks, while some were just starting. Engagement levels also differed based on priorities and resources, but all recognized that even small steps matter. Many companies already had a solid foundation regarding their DEI guidelines but were interested in discussing, reviewing, and potentially developing or expanding them. Some also expressed interest in continuing this work with an external DEI consultant after the project. Some of the results listed: Some companies translated onboarding materials and key documents into English and offered language training or mentorship programs to bridge language barriers. Recruitment processes were reviewed; job descriptions were refined to focus on skills rather than formal qualifications. Some companies implemented structured interviews, explored anonymous recruitment, or introduced English-language trainee programs. DEI awareness was raised, with some firms initiating training programs, particularly for management and planned to have workshops regarding these topics. It also became clear that, despite companies supporting English-speaking staff and hiring employees who don't speak the native language, their clients often requested cooperation with Finnish-speaking personnel, creating additional challenges. Common challenges identified were language requirements and rigid industry norms, especially in larger organizations where structural changes take time. However, most companies expressed commitment to continue their DEI efforts beyond the project, recognizing the value of gradual, sustainable progress.
3.3 Describe what other relevant achievements the project has reached that are not measured by result indicator.	- A comprehensive project report based on 60 in-depth interviews, including actionable recommendations for companies. Blog posts published by: - Arcada University of Applied Sciences

	- The Deaconess Foundation - Scientific article submission to Arcada's Open Access publication. - Dissemination of report findings through all Vamos youth service units across Finland. - Internal use and promotion within the Deaconess Foundation's networks. - Shared at national networks and seminars, including: Anti-Polarization Network (Tampere region), NUORI2025 seminar - Training use: Materials were integrated into expert trainings: employability and anti-discrimination (e.g., Way to Work project). - Events Organised by the Project: - Webinar (22.1.2025): Focused on how foreigners can access the Finnish labor market, with expert speakers from various organizations. - Final hybrid event (26.2.2025): Highlighted the employer perspective; company representatives shared insights and good practices related to international recruitment and DEI. Upcoming External Dissemination Events: - ICE event at University of Helsinki, April 2025. - Luckan seminar, May 2025. - NORDYRK conference, Aarhus, June 2025.
3.4 What has been the impact on the target groups? Please describe the involvement, participation and the benefits for the main target groups of the project.	Impact on SMEs: Throughout the project, SMEs engaged in direct contacts with project partners to identify their needs and challenges regarding the integration of migrant and refugee employees. These sessions provided practical, immediate guidance on improving recruitment and onboarding processes, helping SMEs tap into a broader talent pool and address labor shortages effectively. Many companies reported that the EASWork report played a key role in further developing their existing DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) and anti-discrimination structures, even for those that already had frameworks in place. They appreciated the opportunity to exchange experiences with other companies e.g through events, recognizing shared challenges and learning about practical solutions that

		improve the workplace experience for migrants and refugees. The project also supported SMEs in understanding how inclusive practices not only fulfill social responsibilities but enhance competitiveness by improving worker satisfaction, reducing turnover, and building a stronger employer brand.
		Impact on Interest Groups (Refugees, Migrants, NGOs): Refugees, migrants, and NGOs working with newcomers were central to the project. Through 60 in-depth interviews, these groups shared first-hand experiences of challenges in entering and navigating the Finnish and Estonian labor markets. Their insights directly shaped the content of the EASWork report and influenced the formulation of policy recommendations. As a result, the project helped design anti-discrimination measures tailored to real barriers, such as language requirements, cultural mismatches, and the lack of recognition for foreign qualifications. These solutions aimed to make it easier for international employees to secure jobs that match their competencies and support long-term career development. Additionally, the visibility of migrant perspectives—especially youth voices, throughout the project enhanced their societal inclusion and ensured that their needs remained central to all project outcomes.
		Impact on the General Public The project's efforts to combat workplace discrimination contributed broadly to social integration and cohesion. By promoting inclusive workplaces where individuals from all backgrounds are valued, the project encouraged wider societal change toward equality and mutual respect. When employers adopt inclusive policies and practices, this not only improves internal workplace culture but sends a strong public message. It fosters a ripple effect in society, enhancing the overall quality of life and encouraging acceptance of diversity as a strength. In this way, the EASWork project supported the development of more resilient and equitable communities, underlining the role of inclusive employment in building a better society for all.

4. Added value from cross-border cooperation

Be as brief and to the point as possible.

Instructions	Your project's added value from cross-border cooperation
4.1 Explain which specific contribution each partner brought to the project. Please describe how each partner was essential in the achievement of the project's outcomes.	As the lead partner, Arcada University of Applied Sciences was responsible for project and financial management, ensuring smooth coordination across all activities, hosting online and hybrid workshops and seminars, leading the dissemination and visibility efforts, including managing the project's webpage. The University of Tartu played a important role in providing research-based insights on labor market challenges, workplace discrimination, and policy frameworks in Estonia and Finland. The Deaconess Foundation/ Vamos, had a large network and existing cooperation of companies who were interested to join this project. They brought deep expertise in working with migrants, refugees, and socially vulnerable groups, making them essential for ensuring that the project was truly inclusive and responsive to the needs of target groups. The project was built on the synergy of expertise, practical application, and knowledge exchange among all three partners. This collaboration was particularly valuable when partners engaged with different companies. A successful solution tested by one partner served as inspiration for others, allowing them to introduce similar approaches to the companies they worked with.
4.2 Describe the joint activities and joint practical achievements the project has delivered. Please describe what could not have been reached without cross-border cooperation.	The success of the EASWork project was rooted in strong collaboration and teamwork across all partner organizations. While the initial research was conducted as a joint desktop research effort, the collaborative spirit extended beyond that phase. The analysis of the interview material and the writing of the report were also carried out as a shared effort, each partner actively contributing to shaping the final content. The report, as it stands, is the result of collective insight, discussion, and joint reflection. Teamwork was equally essential in the planning and execution of the online event held on 22 January. All partners were involved in shaping the content and

	format. Similarly, the final hybrid seminar on Feb 26th was the product of close collaboration, with shared responsibility for concept development, speaker selection, and coordination. Even in the company recruitment phase, the discussions, knowledge exchange, and mutual support between partners was important. The project's achievements were made possible thanks to the strong team dynamics and continuous communication throughout the entire process. Click or tap here to enter text.

5. Durability and transferability

Be as brief and to the point as possible.

Questions	Your project's durability and transferability
5.1 How do you plan to maintain and/or use the project's achievements? Please explain how you plan to keep the outcomes you have achieved available and alive.	The project outcomes have been shared in the EASWork report (based on the interviews), on the project webspace, in a blog post published by Arcada University of applied sciences on the Arcada blog, and in a blog post posted by the Deaconess foundation, and a submission has been made to Arcada's open access scientific publication. EASWork's results will also be presented at a ICE event hosted by the University of Helsinki in April 2025, at a seminar hosted by Luckan in May 2025 as well at the NORDYRK conference in Aarhus in June 2025 While not all engaged companies have implemented policy changes due to various constraints, many have shown a strong commitment to anti-discrimination initiatives and expressed their plans to integrate the proposed policies and practices into their operations in the future. Despite the official project activities ending, we promised to maintain communication with the companies we worked with, and if needed provide additional support and expertise when they decide to implement new policies.
5.2 Do you see that project's achievements could be developed further after the end of the project and how? Please reflect on what you can do to transfer project's achievements to others.	Achievement are developed through information about EASWork project outcomes. Yes, the project's achievements have clear potential for further development. By scaling up, integrating findings into policies, and creating easily accessible resources, we can ensure that the impact of this project extends well beyond its official duration. The insights and

	solutions developed in this project are not limited to Estonia and Finland, thus they could be applied to other regions facing similar challenges. We can continue to share findings through international conferences, publications, and collaborations with other organisations working on migrant labor inclusion.

6. Final reminders and confirmations

Please tick each statement, confirming that this is in place at the end of the project and will remain this way afterwards.
☒ Project related documentation is stored and available and will remain as such as described in the subsidy contract.
☒ Projects outcomes are and will remain freely available.
☒ The project will provide information related to result indicator achievement one year after the project has ended (upon Managing Authority's request).

Please fill in below the name and contact information of the person within the Lead Partner organisation with whom the Programme will be in contact after the project has ended. This person should be able to answer any request after the project has ended (availability of documents, audits, result indicator reporting, etc.):	
Name	Camilla Wikström-Grotell
Email	camilla.wikstrom-grotell@arcada.fi