StayOn_

A more inclusive, active and creative world!

2nd Impact Assessment

GREECE

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1. INTRODUCTION

StayOn is a transnational project coordinated through the cooperation of eight European partners whose ultimate objective is to create conditions that enable young people to "stay on" rural areas by ensuring access to opportunities, benefits, services, and jobs. With this impact assessment report, we intend to measure and assess Rezos Brands' impact to improve it. This report is to be read as part of the project's "Impact management and research" work package, representing a systematic effort to provide credible evidence on the causal impact of interventions meant to integrate young adults, and NEETs[1] especially in the labor market.

The work package is managed by the European Center for Social Finance (ECSF). It encompasses a series of activities, including developing a Theory of Change and related impact management framework, creating periodic impact evaluations, and learning to inform decision-making within and among the organizations involved. This report proceeds as follows. After a brief introduction, Section 2 briefly describes the two types of interventions implemented. In Section 3, the report focuses on detailing the focus group methodology used to conduct the evaluation. Section 4 presents the finding, while Section 5 interprets them and discusses practical recommendations to facilitate the translation of findings into practice for the project's partners.

2. INTERVENTIONS

The project StayOn foresees the implementation of a four-stage community-based development approach (CBD) in five European countries. The first stage is called "community involvement" and includes the implementation of continuous life/career individual coaching support and a series of training courses on digital and environmental topics according to the local needs[2] aimed at developing soft and hard skills that are useful for personal development and facilitate entry into the labor market. This step includes creating a group of young local NEETs, the "community shapers", who are interested in the social and economic development of their community and will continue their StayOn path through the three following phases: "community catalysis", "community co-innovation labs", and "community entrustment".

Training courses

Rezos Brands, a food-oriented Greek SME founded in 1983 is an organization that aims at contributing to the competitiveness of Europe, its sustainable economic growth and job creation by promoting and strengthening synergies and cooperation among start-ups, SMEs, educational institutions and the third sector. By the time the focus group was conducted, Rezos Brands had implemented the following training courses and the coaching concept described in the next section:

- Training and Certification in Food Industry focusing on Environmental Sustainability:
  Chapter 1 Environment and Production

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[1] Young persons not engaged in education, employment or training.
[2] See the potentials assessment report for Greece available at: https://www.stay-on.eu/impact-compass/.

- Training and Certification in Food Industry focusing on Environmental Sustainability:
  Chapter 2 Environmental Management and Sustainable Development
- Introduction to Informatics
- Building your own simple website quickly and efficiently
- Building your sophisticated web site quickly and efficiently
- Distributed Ledger Solutions in Holistic Quality Control in Organic Food Supply
- Blockchain technology and NFTs: How the pandemic boosted the "Digital Original" Trading & the Future Prospects
- Agripreneurship: Start your own business in the agri-food sector

Coaching

The main goal of the coaching in the context of StayOn is to support participants on their journey through the whole StayOn process:

- training, where they gain new skills and knowledge to improve their future career options; and also
- community shaping process, where they further explore their ideas for developing opportunities for youth in their communities.

The StayOn coaching process is aimed at developing a goal-oriented mindset with participants. The suggested methods to be used by coaches range from SMART goal methodology to dialogue groups. All sessions have a suggested outline to follow. However, these guidelines can be adjusted according to the coach's judgment to best use the process for the participants. The coach's role is to support the participants to make a change, learn something new and/or achieve their goals. The essence of coaching is not giving answers to participants but instead guiding them with curiosity and empathy to help them find answers on their own. Coaches in the StayOn project lead participants through the process of training & community involvement, help them identify their potential, and support them in overcoming obstacles to their empowerment.

Through the StayOn project, participants receive, on average, four individual coaching hours, mainly over a series of four sessions with the coach. Coaching sessions are divided into three main categories: I) introductory / starting session; II) implementation support / intermediate session; and III) follow-up/closing session. The coaches and coachees meet preferably in person, but some meetings also take place online. In order to create a relationship and create a more substantial impact, the coachees are encouraged to meet regularly and with a defined development goal, which also supports their training in the context of the StayOn project (or further). Coaches in the StayOn project participate in individual and group supervisions to help them better address the obstacles and opportunities of the coaching process. They help them be more flexible and open to opportunities in the process.

As of February 2023, Rezos Brands trained 146 people and coached 56. A selected group thereof will be involved in the focus group discussion at the center of this report.

3. METHODS

Focus group design

A focus group collects qualitative data by gathering individuals together to discuss a specific topic in a permissive, nonthreatening environment. The purpose is to understand better how people feel or think about an issue, idea, product, or service. Questions are open-ended to stimulate an informal discussion with participants to understand their perceptions, beliefs, fears, questions, and information needs. Participants are selected because they have specific characteristics in common (here: participants to training and/or coaching services offered by Rezos Brands) that relate to the focus group topic. The moderator creates a permissive environment that encourages participants to share perceptions and points of view. The aim is to generate a maximum number of different ideas and opinions. The group discussion is conducted in a semi-structured manner so that researchers can identify trends and patterns in perceptions (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Based on the "Focus Group Content Form" (Appendix A) received by Rezos Brands and other project partners, researchers at the ECSF created the focus group implementation concept that covers 90 minutes and is divided into five parts, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Focus group implementation concept

PARTS	AIM AND CONTENT	METHOD AND TOOLS	TIME (in min.)
Part I	**Setting the stage: Introductions and creation of a welcoming, safe and open space**	**Zoom/Microsoft Teams**	**20 in total**
Participants arrive	- Moderator and local representative allow participants to arrive and settle in the virtual room	/	~5
Welcome and moderator's introduction	- Moderator introduces him/herself (briefly) - Moderator explains the purpose of the focus group and the process, including the agenda and the "rules" - Moderator starts the recording	Optional slide n. 2 (Appendix D)	~5
Icebreaker and participants' introductions	- Getting a sense of who is in the room and getting feedback on recruitment, the moderator asks: "Could you please introduce yourself and tell us how you learned about the project StayOn in the first place?" - Participants' introductions	Optional slide n. 3 (Appendix D)	~10
Part II	**Getting feedback on minor activities**	**Zoom/Microsoft Teams**	**20 in total**
Getting feedback on minor activities (including day-to-day communication and use of technology in communication, awarding of certificates)	- What do you think of StayOn's channels of communication? - Was information communicated clearly at all times? - Did you get a StayOn certificate? How important is it to you? How do you plan to use it?	Optional slides n. 4 and 5 (Appendix D)	~20

Part III	Getting feedback on core activities: training courses	Zoom/Microsoft Teams	20 in total
Getting feedback on core activities: training courses	- What training contents do you think were the most relevant and why? - What training methodologies do you think were the most effective and why? - What aspects of the training courses could be improved and why?	Optional slide n. 6 (Appendix D)	~20
Part IV	Getting feedback on core activities: coaching	Zoom/Microsoft Teams	20 in total
Getting feedback on core activities: coaching	- Did coaching help you in setting goals/overcoming obstacles and why? - Would you continue with coaching if you had the opportunity and why? - What is one defining moment you remember from your coaching sessions? - How can you be supported further after the coaching ends? - What aspects of the coaching could be improved and why?	Optional slide n. 7 (Appendix D)	~20
Part V	Ideas generation and conclusion	Zoom/Microsoft Teams	10 in total
Generating ideas for new services and concluding the focus group	- What new services would you recommend and why? - Closing comments and overall impression - Time for questions - Moderator stops the recording	Optional slide n. 8 (Appendix D)	~10

Participants

Rezos Brands gathered four participants who:

-   share the same language at a high level (Greek);
-   are available at the agreed date and time of the focus group workshop;
-   have heterogeneous demographic characteristics;
-   are willing to openly communicate pain points as well as ready to question the status quo critically;
-   possess a PC with a stable internet connection.

We provide a summary of information regarding the seven participants selected in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Summary of participants selected for the focus group

PARTICIPANT #	GENDER (F/M/Other)	AGE	SERVICES USED	LABOR STATUS
1	F	29	Training and coaching	Unemployed
2	M	29	Training and coaching	Unemployed
3	M	28	Training and coaching	Unemployed
4	M	27	Training and coaching	Unemployed

Strategy and data analysis

In preparation for the focus group workshop, Rezos Brands filled out the "Focus Group Registration Form" (Appendix B). The moderator was provided with optional materials,

including the "Focus group Moderator Script" (Appendix C) and the "Focus Group Slides for Moderation" (Appendix D). The latter is a PowerPoint presentation template where slides 3 to 8 are representative of the feedback elicited (outreach and communication, including the awarding of certificates, training courses, and coaching) to stimulate discussion about the participants' opinions in the specific category. Analysis of the data collected co-occured with data collection. Researchers at the ECSF were responsible for analyzing the data further using a combination of approaches but roughly orienting themselves on Krueger's (1994) five key stages: familiarization, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting, mapping, and interpretation. The last two steps required active participation by the project partners.

4. FINDINGS

Procedure

The focus group in Greece occurred on 9 February 2023 in an online form. It hosted two participants (two of the four participants selected dropped out at the last moment) and lasted for about one hour and twenty minutes. The event was moderated in English via Zoom, recorded and transcribed to use the data best for the evaluation (the participants have been informed about the recording in advance). All information collected has been anonymized for the report. It has been ensured and conveyed to the participants that the focus groups, despite the recording, remained a safe space to express their opinions openly.

Themes

Several themes emerged from the three categories (outreach and communication, training courses, coaching) orienting the focus group discussion. These are described in the following paragraphs and summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Concept map of focus group categories and themes
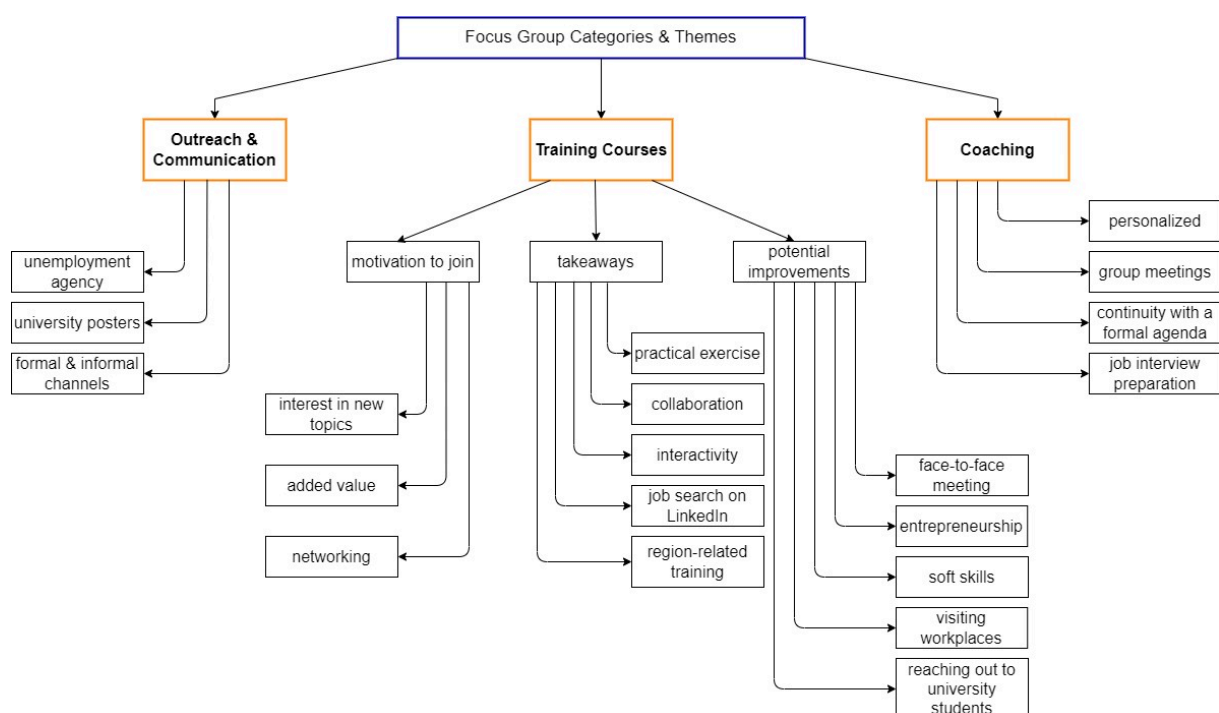
Outreach and communication. Regarding outreach, one participant in the focus group was recruited for the project by an *unemployment agency.* The other participant clarified that he got to know StayOn and related services through *university posters.* After visiting the project's website and contacting the Training Consultant within Rezos Brands, the participant obtained detailed information about the project and decided to participate. Once in the program, all participants declared that Rezos Brands employed a good mix of *formal and informal communication channels* to obtain and deliver information. Participant 1 explains: *"The communication was clear and very effective. We were encouraged to speak up, ask questions and I even requested feedback on the website I was developing ."* All the participants in the focus group stated that the communication was mainly online through e-mails and a messaging and calling app called Viber.

Training courses. Concerning the *motivation to join* the project, interest in learning new things and the specific training course topic guided the participants' decision to join and their choice among the several available courses. Participant 1 explicitly stated: *"It was interesting to me that there were some courses on subjects I wasn't familiar with, like energy and waste management. It's not common to find such courses in similar training programs."* For the other participant, digital skills training in the program was the primary motivation to join the project. She explained: *"I'm not into technical stuff. But we all live in a digital world, so I thought that I should really learn something and improve my digital skills because they're essential today."*

Additionally, all participants highlighted the potential value added that the training course and the related certificate would bring when competing in the labor market. However, Participant 1 stated that the certificates may only sometimes reflect the individual's current knowledge. He explained: *"I don't know if any employer is ever going to ask for the certificate but they could probably understand if we know the subject."* Another critical aspect for the participants was the networking opportunities that StayOn could provide throughout the implementation. Participant 1 explained his motivation: *"I was informed that multiple partners from various countries in Europe coordinate the project. And so, I figured it would be good to communicate with people from various countries outside of Greece."*

Participants in the focus group also discussed several *takeaways* from the training courses. First, they all highlighted the importance of practical group exercises on a specific topic. For instance, Participant 2 explained: "*Having a theoretical class first was the best because firstly, you get the information you need from the trainer, and then you can reflect on it and process it with many others. Each person has something different to contribute. This practical side was beneficial to me, at least.*" The advantages of a more practical approach to teaching and learning were directly connected to another takeaway pointed out by all participants: the collaboration established within the course. In line with the theoretical knowledge learned in the lesson, participants discussed the homework given in groups. A space was created where everyone could express their opinion and communicate. All participants in the focus group referred to the importance of working as a group from different fields of study and professional backgrounds.

The interactivity of the training sessions was one of the most prominent features of the focus group. Participants highlighted the fact that the group exercises led to an interactive teaching environment. Participant 1 explained: *"You know, it wasn't just 'I have 20 slides for you today and 20 for you tomorrow', and that's it. This is really how it differed from other courses I have participated in."* The participants also had the chance to get familiar with the LinkedIn platform. Participant 1 explained how they learned to search for jobs on LinkedIn, a useful social sharing and business platform. The way some training topics were handled also attracted the participants' attention, such as region-related training courses. Participant 1 assessed the Internet of Things course by Rezos Brands, stating that he discovered new aspects of agriculture through the implementation of IoT in rural regions of Greece.

Potential improvements highlighted by the participants include face-to-face meetings and some entrepreneurship topics for the future. Regarding the first aspect, one participant wished for an opening or closing face-to-face meeting since the training courses were held online. Additionally, the participants discussed the potential of entrepreneurship teaching for the future to receive information on how to build a business. In addition, although the participants emphasized the benefit of learning technical information on new subjects and subjects related to their professional areas, they also stated that it would be beneficial for them to be provided with specific training on soft skills. Participant 1 explained: *"I'd like it if there were courses on soft skills, like presentation skills. Our trainer did provide us with some guidance but I would like it if it was more structured, I have the feeling the coaches were focused mainly on hard skills."* The participants also highlighted the importance of soft skills such as communication, presentation skills, and empathy in a company's working environment. The participants also stated that visiting workplaces would be beneficial for developing the soft skills mentioned above. When inquired about the best way to promote the StayOn and Rezos Brands, all participants suggested that Rezos Brands could ask universities to contact their students and alumni.

Coaching. All participants in the focus group benefited from Rezos Brands' coaching services. The participants explained that the coaching hours had been beneficial in *personalized* needs and questions. Participant 2 also pointed out that she prefers *group meetings* during coaching hours since the group dynamic helps reduce stress while establishing a trustworthy environment. All participants expressed their interest in future coaching sessions structured with a formal plan. *Continuity with a formal agenda* could provide a formal and structured element to the existing coaching system.

5. MAIN MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, this focus group report provides a positive assessment regarding the services offered by Rezos Brands within the context of the StayOn project. This evaluation presents the perspectives of two NEETs currently involved in training and/or coaching. The main messages expressed by the focus group's participants and related recommendations have been discussed with one representative within Rezos Brands and are listed in the table below.

Table 2. Summary of messages and recommendations

MESSAGE	RECOMMENDATION
• Universities are crucial for enabling recruiting.	• Establishing a group of "ambassadors" to promote StayOn and Rezos Brands in the students' community.
• Both formal and informal communication channels seem adequate, depending on the type of message.	• Formal and informal communication channels should be used for follow-up after the end of training and/or coaching.
• The certificate is added value, but employers do not always check its validity.	• Improving the clarity of the training courses' content alignment with labor market needs and value-added during the job search.
• New training topics could be very useful and relevant.	• Introducing entrepreneurship and soft skills training.
• There are clearly identified advantages of in-person and group meetings.	• Increasing the number of face-to-face and online group meetings, considering the needs of the participants.

REFERENCES

Krueger, R. A. (1994). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. SAGE Publications.

Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2015). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (5th Edition). SAGE Publications.

APPENDIX A: Focus Group Content Form

1. Project partner: Insert the organization's name and country

3. Name, surname, and e-mail address of the person filling this form:

2. Focus group main purpose: What is the overall objective of the focus group? Are you interested in improving your services, changing them or generating ideas for potential new services?

3. Organizational services or practices: Are there specific services or practices you would like feedback on? (e. g., recruiting, service delivery, certificates awarding, communication, training, coaching)

4. List of questions: If you could choose anything, what questions would you like the independent moderator to ask?

5. Additional information: Do you have further comments, remarks or ideas?

APPENDIX B: Focus Group Registration Form

1. Project partner (*insert the organization's name and country*):

2. Focus group scheduled on (*insert the date and time*):

3. Local representative's contact[3] (*insert name, surname, and e-mail address*):

4. Modality (*fully online or hybrid, add the name of the platform you participants would prefer*):

5. Participants (*insert name/s, surname/s, gender, age, and all services used within the StayOn project, e.g., coaching*):

Name and surname	Gender (M/F/Other)	Age	Service/s used
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			

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[3] This refers to the local person responsible for the organization of the focus group.

APPENDIX C: Focus Group Moderator Script

Part I: Welcome and moderator's introduction

Moderator: Hi everybody, and welcome! My name is [NAME] and I work at / collaborate with the European Center for Social Finance. We're a competence center of Munich Business School in Germany, and we help several organizations in Europe evaluate their services and make them better. So, this is precisely why we're here today. I'd like to get your feedback on [NAME OF THE PROJECT PARTNER]'s services to learn how they can be improved in the future. Thank you for agreeing to take part in this focus group. I have a few guidelines and rules to facilitate our discussion:

- The focus group will last about one and a half hours and will be roughly divided into 5 parts.
- I want you to do the talking and we'd like everyone to participate. I may call on you if I haven't heard from you in a while.
- There are no right or wrong answers. Every person's experiences and opinions are important. Speak up whether you agree or disagree. We expect and want to hear a wide range of views and don't anticipate consensus, just sharing. You can address each other if you like. We are only here to assist in the discussion.
- I emphasize that what is said in this room should remain here. I will record this session. However, it remains confidential and all information collected will be anonymized for the report. We don't identify anyone by name in our findings. Therefore, you will remain anonymous. The recording won't be shared with anyone besides researchers at the European Center for Social Finance.

Are there any questions? Very well. Let's get started... [*Start recording.*]

Part I: Icebreaker and participants' introductions

Moderator: Could you please introduce yourself and tell us how you learned about the project StayOn in the first place?
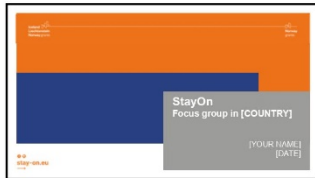
Parts III-V: General recommendations

Helpful probes include: Can you talk about that more?, Could you help me understand what you mean?, Can you give an example?

Strategies to facilitate the discussion include:

- Summarize the main idea of the feedback at the end of each question.
- Reflect the main idea back to the group "Just so I understand, what you are saying is...?"
- Self-appointed experts: "Thank you. What do other people think?" Or "Does anybody else have a different thought/strategy?"
- The dominator: "Let's have some other comments." Stand behind the dominator while addressing the group to elicit participation from others.
- The shy participant: Make eye contact; call on them; smile at them.
- The participant who talks very quietly: Ask them to repeat their response more loudly.
- If the conversation gets off-topic, restate the purpose of the research.

APPENDIX D: Focus Group Slides for Moderation