

# StayOn\_

A more inclusive, active  
and creative world!

Strengthening NGOs:

## CAPACITY BUILDING REPORT

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**stay-on.eu**



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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 their access to opportunities, benefits, services, and jobs. Through this impact assessment report, our aim is to evaluate and gauge the capacity-building efforts of three NGOs: CRESAÇOR (Portugal), Association ATIS (Italy), and Meath Partnership (Ireland) during the StayOn project. To be more precise, this report concentrates on the acquisition of new skills, knowledge, or capabilities among staff, enhancements in critical organizational procedures, valuable insights derived from challenges faced, and potential shifts in the organizations' strategic orientation.

This report should be considered within the framework of the project's "Impact Management and Research" work package, which is overseen by the European Center for Social Finance (ECSF). This work package encompasses a range of activities, such as the development of a Theory of Change and an associated impact management framework, the implementation of regular impact assessments, and the generation of insights to guide decision-making within the participating organizations and across them. The report is structured as follows: Following a brief introduction, Section 2 provides an overview of the evaluation methodology. Section 3 presents the findings, while Section 4 offers an interpretation of these findings and concludes the report.

# 2. METHODS

## Data collection

Data for this report were gathered during the second part of the knowledge transfer workshop, which took place on the 25th and 26th of September in Łomża and Warsaw, Poland. To facilitate data collection, each project partner was provided with detailed instructions, available in the appendix, outlining the process. They were tasked with recording their responses to a set of questions, aided by a selection of 12 images from which they could choose. Additionally, to ensure flexibility and inclusivity, partners were given the option to prepare their recordings in their respective local languages, accommodating diverse linguistic preferences.

## Data analysis

The data collected included responses and recordings, which were transcribed and translated into English as required. Subsequently, the written transcripts, along with the associated images, underwent a systematic content analysis process utilizing MAXQDA software. Each transcript was initially analyzed individually to extract relevant insights, after which common themes and patterns were identified and reported, allowing for a comprehensive and structured examination of the data.

### 3. FINDINGS

#### Themes

Several themes emerged from the four core categories (staff skill enhancement, organizational processes, challenges and setbacks, strategic shifts) orienting the data collection process. Due to the relatively short length of the transcripts by the three organizations, however, common themes did not frequently emerge in the data analysis. Therefore, underneath each category, we have displayed the themes even when they were found in just one of the three transcripts. These are described in the following paragraphs and summarized in Figure 1.

**Staff skill enhancement.** The responses in this category detail how the three organization's involvement in StayOn has contributed to the growth of new skills, knowledge, and capabilities among their staff and team members over the past two years. The account from CRESAÇOR explains how they organization's staff gained **adaptability** through the project. This skill highlights the ability to cope with changing conditions and requirements within the project. This skill encompasses the team's capability to quickly adapt to new contexts and realities. It also involves the need to develop creative solutions to effectively engage and keep young people active. The **transparency** theme, reveals low communication and knowledge sharing within the team at Meath Partnership before their involvement in StayOn. However, the introduction of the StayOn project prompted a shift towards openness and collaboration, with a focus on sharing knowledge and resource pooling. By sitting down with fellow team members, they found that their target group and available resources largely overlapped, enabling more efficient use of shared resources, such as databases. This cooperative approach is seen as highly beneficial for young people, as it allows them to benefit from multiple projects in different ways. Regarding **coaching and training skills**, Association ATIS highlights their notable improvements, particularly in the areas of coaching and training session management. In the **profiling unemployed youth** category, the account from Association ATIS discusses the organization's current involvement in the G.O.L. program, which is focused on profiling unemployed youth and individuals receiving benefits like NASPI. This theme signifies a commitment to understanding and assessing the needs and characteristics of the NEET demographic. The involvement in the profiling process with ANPAL (public employment centers) highlights the organization's dedication to improving the skills and capabilities required to effectively address the challenges and opportunities associated with assisting unemployed youth.

**Organizational processes.** This category focuses on various processes within the organization in the context of supporting rural youth. In the **expanding the spectrum of courses** theme, Association ATIS places a strong emphasis on qualifications and specific programs, such as OSA (Operational Security Agent) and OSS (Healthcare Operator). Simultaneously, the organization highlights the significance of tailoring courses to different regions while considering diverse local needs. As a direct consequence of transparency at the individual level, Meath Partnership emphasizes improved **cross-departmental cooperation** within the organization. Working groups

have been established to explore synergies and collaboration between different programs, ultimately benefiting the youth. Notably, cost savings are achieved by avoiding redundant events and leveraging existing resources. Within the scope of this project, there has been a ***need for new resources***, such as hiring psychologists. The addition of psychology professionals underscores a strategic decision to strengthen the support structure and improve the quality of services provided to project participants. The theme ***community involvement and awareness building*** emphasizes collaboration with universities and different associations. These partnerships have enabled Association ATIS and CRESAÇOR to undertake new significant projects and workshops, expanding their external stakeholder engagement. The theme underlines the active outreach to communities through programs and new tenders, involving various stakeholders, including governmental organizations and families. This demonstrates their commitment to addressing youth demotivation. The StayOn project has also facilitated new partnerships and provided a platform to showcase their impact, emphasizing the significance of external stakeholder engagement in their efforts to benefit young people and communities. This theme also underscores the necessity of involving the participants' families and creating awareness about the project's significance. CRESAÇOR's enthusiasm produced positive outcomes, leading to word-of-mouth promotion among both young participants and their families. This highlights the impact of comprehensive community strategies, ensuring that the project's benefits are understood and embraced by the target audience and their families, ultimately leading to increased participation.

**Challenges and setbacks.** The insights under this category provide valuable information on the difficulties encountered during the project and explain how the organizations addressed or learned from them. Regarding challenges in ***allocating resources efficiently***, ATIS emphasized how the project StayOn, was not part of its core business, leading to occasional skepticism and questions about the allocation of resources, including time. It indicates that there were hesitations and concerns about whether investing in the project would yield immediate results. However, their account emphasizes that despite initial setbacks and doubts, the long-term results of the investment proved to be positive. Always within the same theme, CRESAÇOR had to mobilize new transportation resources for their project team. This presented a significant challenge to the organization's structure as they had to always ensure the availability of two vehicles for StayOn-related activities. This highlights the practical obstacles they encountered in bridging geographical gaps and providing services to the target population, further emphasizing the complexities associated with working in isolated locations. Meath Partnership shared its concerns about ***reaching target values***. This theme highlights the organization's struggle to meet its numerical goals or targets, potentially due to seasonal or other factors specific to the summer period. CRESAÇOR faced similar challenges at the project's outset. However, as the project began to deliver positive results by demonstrating its potential to break the cycle of youth inactivity, interest and involvement from various organizations grew steadily throughout the project. Another theme closely related to the target group was the difficulty of ***working with NEETs for the first time*** faced by CRESAÇOR when participating in the StayOn project. The social backgrounds of the participants, specifically the fact that they mostly

came from disadvantaged backgrounds with significant social and family challenges led CRESAÇOR to acknowledge the need for sensitivity in their interventions due to the unique and challenging circumstances faced by the young people they were working with in the Azores. The organization also often felt isolated in their project implementation, even though they shared experiences with other countries. This was due to the distinct cultural differences and diverse ways of implementing the project in different regions.

**Strategic shifts.** This section explores whether the project has led to noteworthy shifts in the strategic direction of the organizations during its duration and in the future. The ***impact assessment*** theme underscores the evolution of CRESAÇOR 's approach to impact assessment, with the StayOn project, playing a pivotal role. StayOn not only reinforced the importance of impact assessment but also introduced new methods and approaches for its application. This has empowered the organization to effectively communicate and share the results with their partners. The most significant learning here is the ability to convey the impact of their projects and inspire other organizations to adopt impact assessment in their practices. CRESAÇOR 's role as a representative for 33 organizations within the cooperative highlights the critical exchange of knowledge. This signifies a proactive step towards enhancing impact assessment and promoting its adoption across a broader spectrum of organizations. Under the ***internationality*** theme, CRESAÇOR highlights its growing international experience. Creating an effective team within CRESAÇOR for the StayOn project was no simple task. It required careful consideration of the right professionals and profiles to handle different project phases. The hiring process involved establishing essential criteria, with a particular focus on language proficiency, adaptability to diverse contexts, and a strong command of English. Their heightened sensitivity to diversity resulting from this collaboration is evident. This awareness shapes their current and future application preparations and active involvement in international projects, including new initiatives in rural areas and Erasmus+ projects on culture and local development. Under **expanding the team**, the CRESAÇOR's shift is from isolation to active engagement, prompting a significant team expansion to cater to the diverse needs of the young individuals they encountered. Similarly, ATIS has acquired new resources, including 5-6 team members in Catania and additional hires in Palermo. Additionally, thanks to StayOn, Association ATIS is now considering ***extending target groups*** to include NEETs and unemployed youth, which were not previously targeted by the organization. This strategic shift signifies an expansion of the organization's outreach and aligns with their commitment to addressing a broader range of beneficiaries.

Figure 1 presented below illustrates the image selections made by three key organizations: Meath Partnership, representing the first column; CRESAÇOR, in the second column; and Association ATIS, in the third column. Meath Partnership's selection of the macaron image is associated with the transparency and cross-project collaboration themes, emphasizing the positive impact of sharing knowledge and engaging in discussions with colleagues. On the other hand, the second one depicting a statue symbolizes the organization's transition from internal fears and perspectives to a more outward-facing approach. The forest and stormy sea images were chosen by CRESAÇOR because they think these images represent the geographical isolation and

adaptability attributed to the distinct cultural differences among project participants and variations in project implementation methods. The choice of image “shirts” by Association ATIS reflects as a symbol of the development of young people through their programs and initiatives towards stable employment. Additionally, their selection of the camera symbolizes the influence of a specific training course – in this case, photography. This choice reflects the engagement with new external stakeholders since this training course was offered in collaboration with a university and a different association.

These carefully chosen images symbolize the unique pathways and insights each organization has acquired through its participation in the StayOn project. Each selection represents a different aspect of their journey and the valuable experiences gained.

Figure 1. Collage of the six images selected by the three informants



## 4. CONCLUSIONS

The StayOn project, a collaborative effort involving eight European partners, has made a significant impact on the capacity-building efforts of three NGOs—Meath Partnership, ATIS Association, and CRESAÇOR. This impact assessment report focused on four distinct categories: staff skill enhancement, organizational processes, challenges and setbacks, and strategic shifts, offering the following key insights.

**Staff skill enhancement.** The organizations have developed new skills, knowledge, and capabilities among their staff, particularly in areas like adaptability, transparency, cross-project collaboration, and coaching and training skills. They have learned to quickly

adapt to changing conditions, improve communication and knowledge sharing, and enhance their capacity to effectively engage with young people.

**Organizational processes.** The project has influenced the three NGOs to improve their internal processes, emphasizing cost savings, cross-departmental cooperation, efficient resource allocation, and outreach to external stakeholders. Collaboration with project partners from various countries has enriched their abilities, fostering a strong network for future collaborations.

**Challenges and setbacks.** Each organization has encountered unique challenges, such as resource allocation doubts, difficulties in reaching target values, and challenges related to working with NEETs, addressing participants' social backgrounds, dealing with geographical isolation. These challenges have provided valuable lessons and insights.

**Strategic Shifts.** The organizations have experienced shifts in their strategic approaches. For instance, CRESAÇOR has evolved its impact assessment methods and grown more internationally sensitive. They have also expanded their teams to adapt to diverse needs. Other organizations have similarly seen changes, such as acquiring new resources and extending their outreach to NEETs and unemployed youth.

In summary, the StayOn project has been a catalyst for growth, transformation, and strategic evolution within these private organizations. It has not only enhanced their skills and processes but also empowered them to tackle challenges and set new directions for their future endeavors. The lessons learned from this project will undoubtedly shape their continued commitment to creating opportunities for youth in rural areas.



## APPENDIX: Interview schedule

*Dear Partner,*

*Please, read the four questions below and look at these 12 images:*



*Then, record a voice message of ~10 minutes that answers the four questions below. This can be done in your own language, if you prefer.*

*Send the recording to me. I suggest to briefly think about your answers and note down your key messages before starting the recording.*

*Thanks!*

*Giulia Parola (ECSF GmbH)*

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1. How has your organization's involvement in StayOn over the past two years contributed to the development of new skills, knowledge, or capabilities among your staff or team members, particularly in the context of supporting young people in rural areas?

Please, explain the process by which these new skills and knowledge were acquired and select two images that symbolize this development. What inspired your choice of these two images?

2. As an **NGO**, which key organizational processes (e.g., new product/service development, stakeholder engagement, sales, target group outreach, impact management, etc.) were improved through the project's activities or collaboration with the project partners? Can you share any specific examples?

3. Conversely, were there any challenges or setbacks encountered, and how did you or your organization address or learn from them?

4. Have there been any notable shifts in your organization's strategic direction as a result of this project?

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