



# **Evaluation of the Empowerment Measurement Tool for Local Partnerships**

EVALUATION OF THE USE OF THE EMPOWERMENT QUESTIONNAIRE IN THE CONTEXT  
OF THE ESF+ CALL FOR LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS



# Executive summary

## CONTEXT

In this evaluation, we examine the empowerment measurement tool used within the ESF+ Call 64 Local Partnerships for the Sustainable Participation in the Labour Market of People with Complex Multi-Problems (hereafter referred to as the ESF+ Local Partnerships call). These local partnerships are structured as organizational networks composed of partners from local and/or regional authorities (VVSG, City of Antwerp, or City of Ghent), local and/or regional (non-public) organizations, VDAB (public employment services), and Public Social Welfare Centres (OCMW). Social workers (“Trajectory coaches”) support individuals with complex multi-problems in addressing their diverse needs and questions on the path to greater societal participation (including in the area of employment).

Given that the ESF+ call falls under the social inclusion priority of the ESF+ programme, the focus of the call is not solely on activating the target group towards employment, but also on taking steps toward broader societal inclusion. The aim of the empowerment measurement tool is to map the degree of empowerment among participants, thereby making the progress achieved in terms of social inclusion visible.

The objectives of the evaluation were defined as:

1. To gain insight into how the measurement tool is implemented and used in service delivery trajectories, with the aim of detecting problems and shortcomings in a timely manner so that the measurement can be adjusted during the remainder of the Local Partnerships call.
2. To explore the potential of using the data from the empowerment measurement as an indicator for social inclusion.

## EMPOWERMENT AND THE MEASUREMENT TOOL

The concept of empowerment is defined as “a process of strengthening through which individuals, organizations, and communities gain control over their own situation and environment by acquiring control, enhancing critical awareness, and encouraging participation” (Van Regenmortel, 2009, p. 24). In developing the measurement instrument, empowerment was understood as a result or outcome, consisting of three components: an intrapersonal component, an interpersonal component, and a behavioral component.

- The **intrapersonal component** consists of individuals' beliefs about their own abilities, their self-confidence, their perceived ability to influence their personal situations, and their willingness or motivation to do so.
- The **interpersonal component** relates to the critical awareness of social opportunities, norms, and resources, as well as the skills to use them and the capacity to mobilize resources.
- The **behavioral component** refers to active community involvement, participation, constructive behavior in new situations, and the ability to make choices.

The measurement tool used was developed based on prior experience and evaluation research<sup>1</sup> and takes the form of a questionnaire with nine items or questions based on the three components mentioned above. To support the trajectory coaches and communicate instructions to them, Europa WSE provided a manual with additional information. Trajectory coaches are asked to administer the measurement at the beginning and end of each support trajectory. In addition, interim measurements must be conducted no later than six months after the previous measurement (but not earlier than three months after it).

The questionnaire consisted of the following questions, each to be answered on a six-point scale indicating the extent to which the respondent agrees with the statement:

	Dimension	Question
Intrapersonal component	Self-image	I know what I am good at
	Perspective	I look positively toward the future
	Self-efficacy	I believe I can solve my problems myself
Interpersonal component	Social network	There are people I truly consider friends
	Critical awareness	I know where to go with my questions
	Using resources	I dare to ask for help
Community behavior	Societal involvement	I voluntarily take part in activities in my area
	Connectedness	My neighbors know me
	Advocacy	I stand up for myself when I find something important

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<sup>1</sup> Impact Evaluation of the ESF Call Outreach & Activation. Results of the Empowerment Measurement, 2023

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This evaluation used both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data consists of 18 in-depth interviews conducted with trajectory coaches. These interviews addressed topics such as the use of the questionnaire, the context in which it was administered, and the counselors' assessments of the responses given. The analysis also drew on various documents provided by Europa WSE in the context of the call (e.g., the ESF+ call or the manual made available to the guidance counselors). The quantitative data includes the results of the empowerment measurements that were conducted. By combining the analysis of the in-depth interviews (qualitative component) with descriptive statistical analyses of the empowerment measurement results (quantitative component), a more nuanced and reliable picture of the practice is presented.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Variation in the use and potential added value of the current questionnaire

There is considerable variation in how the questionnaire is completed and used. Some trajectory coaches make active use of the tool and engage in dialogue with the participant about the results, while others keep the time investment involved in completing the questionnaire to a minimum.

### Not all trajectory coaches see added value in the questionnaire

Support for the questionnaire is limited. Trajectory coaches often experience overlap with their existing tools and view the questionnaire as additional administration without clear added value. They predominantly frame the survey as a requirement stemming from Europa WSE.

### Progress on interpersonal and intrapersonal component, less pronounced effect on community behavior

Especially on the interpersonal and intrapersonal components of empowerment, progress is made. Progress on community behavior appears to be more limited, which is not surprising, as trajectory coaches consider this domain more difficult to influence. The results are in line with the empowerment measurement within the ESF call outreach & activation. A shortened measurement tool seems to produce similar results.

### Understanding of the underlying empowerment framework by trajectory coaches

Trajectory coaches spontaneously link empowerment to interpersonal and intrapersonal components, and to a lesser degree to community behavior. Trajectory coaches acknowledge the importance of community behavior, but indicate that some of the current items measuring

community behavior are less relevant for the participant. There is room to clarify the framework and align it more closely with practice.

### **Validity of questionnaire depending on moment of administration and participant's self-awareness**

The results of the questionnaire strongly depend on the moment of administration and the participant's self-awareness. Trajectory coaches wait for a convenient moment to administer the questionnaire, but by doing so, they unintentionally avoid low scores. It is also reported that participants frequently overestimate themselves in some areas, especially at the start. This may create a somewhat overly positive picture of their initial situation. For this reason, trajectory coaches want to provide additional context regarding the scores.

### **Trajectory coaches avoid asking confronting questions at the start of the trajectory**

Trajectory coaches avoid asking confronting questions at an early stage for fear of damaging the trusting relationship. This underscores the need for a flexible and context-specific way of administering the questionnaire. Practical barriers, such as a language barrier, often play a less decisive role in administration.

### **Lack of clarity about the intended use and objective of the questionnaire**

Most trajectory coaches do not use the questionnaire deliberately as a working tool, although sometimes it does provide them with valuable information about the participant. There is a lack of clarity as to whether the tool is meant as a measurement tool, a working tool, or both – and this combination proves difficult in practice. The manual also contains conflicting instructions, adding to the confusion about the desirable degree of dialogue with the participant regarding the survey items.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Clarify the objective of the instrument**

Clearly determine whether the instrument is intended as a scientific measurement tool (with a focus on standardized data collection) or as a working tool (focused on guidance and dialogue). As context and timing make standardization difficult, it is recommended to position it as a workable measurement tool – a guidance tool that also produces useful data.

### **Explain how the instrument can be used and its added value**

Provide trajectory coaches with more explanation about the practical use of the instrument and its benefits for both themselves and the participants. Emphasize how it can help in starting, following up, and visualizing progress in a trajectory.

### **Maintain the flexibility trajectory coaches have in completing it**

Allow room for flexibility in the way it is administered (for instance, whether or not to enter into dialogue about answers) and in its timing. At the same time, it is important to clearly indicate which elements are fixed and cannot be altered.

### **Provide the opportunity to record and share additional information**

Allow trajectory coaches to add additional context to frame or nuance the answers. Recording additional information helps trajectory coaches provide a more accurate view of the participant's actual situation.

### **Revise the manual and bring it back to the users' attention**

Thoroughly revise the manual with clear guidelines, practical examples, and frequently asked questions. Ensure it is easily accessible and consider offering both a brief and a more extensive version. Actively bring the manual back to the users' attention.

### **Consider clarifying the conceptual framework underlying the measurement tool**

Make the theoretical framework more accessible and specific, for instance by replacing the broader components with the more specific elements mentioned in the definition: control, critical awareness, and participation. Clearly link the items to these concepts for greater coherence.

### **Emphasize the importance of participation and operationalize it in a way that is relevant for participants**

Increase the emphasis on participation as a key component of empowerment. Consider measuring this component in an alternative way, for example, through self-anchored scales that leave room for the participant's own input.

### **Make some practical improvements to facilitate administration**

Improve ease of use by adding, for example, smileys to the response categories, and make sure the entire questionnaire fits on a single A4 page.

## Increase trajectory coaches' involvement in this process

Improve trajectory coaches' and partnerships' involvement in the application and further development of the instrument, including by sharing results and allowing space for feedback. At the same time, Europe WSE should communicate its view on empowerment more strongly, provide clear guidelines, and consistently highlight the importance and mandatory nature of the measurement.