

**Interreg
Danube Region**



**Co-funded by
the European Union**



IntegrAGE



HANDBOOK

IntegrAGE Living Learning Labs

piloting intergenerational learning and mentoring programme

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the Interreg Danube Region Program. Neither the European Union nor DRP can be held responsible for them.

CONTENT

1.	Introduction – IntegrAGE project context	
2.	What are the Living Learning Labs?	4
	2.1. A Definition Rooted in Real Life	5
	2.2. The Principles That Guide Living Learning Labs	5
	2.3. Why use Living Learning Labs	5
	2.4. Virtual Living Learning Labs	5
3.	IntegrAGE LLLs - piloting intergenerational learning and mentoring programme	6
	3.1. Goals and Objectives	6
	3.2. Whom to Involve?	6
	3.3. Process and Methodology	7
4.	Implementation within the IntegrAGE context	9
	4.1. Selecting Pilot Employers	12
	4.2. Train the Mentors - Approach and Methodology	12
	4.3. Mentoring Skills and Tips	15
	4.4. Monitoring Process and Results	20
5.	Knowledge transfer	24
	5.1. Lessons Learned	30
	5.2. Durability and Transferability	30
6.	Conclusion	32
		33
		35
		48
CASE STUDIES AND PRACTICAL RESOURCES		
ANNEXES		
	Annex 1: Mentee Profile and Development Needs Form	
	Annex 2: Mentoring Action Plan (MAP)	
	Annex 3: GROW Method for Mentoring Conversations	
	Annex 4: Mentoring Diary	
	Annex 5: Evaluation Records (Mentor and Mentee)	
	Annex 6: Group Evaluation Session Form	

Abbreviations used

GROW	Goal, Reality, Options and Will
HR	Human Resources
LLL	Living Learning Labs
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MTT	Multisectoral Task Team
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OKR	Objectives and Key Results
TWG	Task Work Group
WG	Work Group
WS	Workshop

This handbook is prepared by

Mateja Jamnik, JASA Association, Slovenia
Amira Kavgić, NERDA, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Ivana Kovačević, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, Serbia
Tereza Okurkova, Innovation Centre of the Usti Region, Czech Republic
Mirela Omerović, Momentum Consulting, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Dunja Pavlović, Educational Training Centre for Professional and Working Sills of Vojvodina, Serbia
Marta Regner, Pannon Novum, Hungary
Mariana Tancheva, Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Bulgaria
Siniša Tešić, Educational Training Centre for Professional and Working Sills of Vojvodina, Serbia
Sonja Vuković, Association Slap, Croatia

Edited by: Slap and ICUK
Graphic Design and Layout: Tünde Fucskó, Pannon Novum

1. INTRODUCTION – IntegrAGE project context

This handbook is based on real experiences from the IntegrAGE Living Learning Labs (LLs) implemented within the IntegrAGE project - A practical approach to support the healthy adaptation and integration of 55+ workforce into the labour market. The LLs were implemented by 7 partners from six Danube region countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia, Slovenia. Partners are coming from different sectors, bringing different perspectives, know-how and resources and representing multiple sectors:

- Two chambers of economy and industry (Bulgaria and Serbia) – public, business sector
- Business support organization (Hungary) – public, business sector / innovation
- Three NGOs dealing with socio-economic development and social economy (BiH, Croatia, Slovenia) – socio-economic sector and environmental protection
- Vocational education centre (Serbia) – educational / human resources development

The Handbook is introducing the Living Learning Labs as an innovative format gathering cross-sector stakeholders, providing supportive environment for testing new ideas and concepts in real-life settings. As an IntegrAGE team, we're providing an overview on main principles, how and when to use LL, the obvious benefits but also the main challenges that need to be considered.

IntegrAGE project is all about creating policies, actions, methodologies and practical tools for smart, more human and efficient age management of the persons 55+. Therefore, within the LL we're piloting intergenerational learning and mentoring programme; multisector teams in 6 countries are creating practical experiential learning environment and setting up a mentoring programme. Chapter 3 is providing detailed description on how the mentoring programme is envisioned, whom to involve and step-by-step methodology that was created within the IntegrAGE partnership.

In the next chapter we're sharing our experience and lessons learned going through the implementation process, focusing on selection procedures, communication, practices used and main challenges we were facing in different countries. One of the key actions was capacity building of mentors - Train the mentors' programme – so we give an overview of the training topics and methodology used. LL monitoring and evaluation system provided high quality feedback from all the stakeholders involved so we were able to come with the list of recommended mentoring skills and also tips for future mentors, willing to learn from our experience.

All practical tools are provided in the Annexes to this handbook.

IntegrAGE is also focusing on knowledge transfer and durability of project outputs and results so, there is the entire chapter dedicated to lessons learned and how tested and improved model can easily be transferred to another EU setting.

2. What are the Living Learning Labs?

2.1 A Definition Rooted in Real Life

Let us start with a simple definition. The European Network of Living Labs describes living labs as open innovation ecosystems where users and stakeholders work together to develop and test solutions in real-life settings.

In practice, this means bringing together people with different experiences and perspectives to address real challenges where they occur – in workplaces, communities, schools or online environments. Instead of designing solutions behind closed doors, participants experiment, learn from each other and adapt ideas based on real experience.

Living Learning Labs combine learning, collaboration and innovation. They encourage shared responsibility, active participation and continuous improvement, helping organisations and communities develop solutions that are both practical and meaningful.

2.2 The Principles That Guide Living Learning Labs

A Living Learning Lab is not a random gathering. It rests on several core principles that together make it effective.

- Innovative – encouraging new ideas and practical experimentation;
- Multisectoral – involving stakeholders from different sectors and backgrounds;
- Collaborative – promoting shared responsibility and equal participation;
- Co-creative – developing solutions together with those who will use them;
- Focused on knowledge transfer – creating opportunities for mutual learning;
- Based in real-life settings – testing ideas where they are meant to be applied;
- Impact-oriented – aiming to improve people's lives and create positive social change.

Together, these principles help ensure that solutions are practical, relevant and supported by those involved.

2.3 Why Use a Living Learning Labs?

Living Learning Labs offer a practical way to address complex challenges that cannot be solved by one organization or one profession alone.

They support experiential learning, strengthen partnerships and improve knowledge sharing. By working together, stakeholders can pool resources, build trust and develop solutions that better reflect real needs.

At the same time, Living Learning Labs require commitment. They involve coordination between multiple stakeholders, clear communication and sustained engagement over time. Having a dedicated facilitator and a shared vision is often key to success.

Despite these challenges, the benefits often outweigh the effort, especially when addressing issues that require collaboration across sectors and generations.

2.4 Virtual Living Learning Labs

Living Learning Labs can also take place online.

Virtual Living Learning Labs use digital tools such as video conferencing, shared documents and messaging platforms to support collaboration and learning across distances. They make it possible for participants from different organisations, regions or countries to work together without the need for frequent travel.

Although virtual settings bring additional challenges, such as digital fatigue or unequal digital skills, they can increase flexibility and accessibility when designed in a simple and inclusive way.

Whether face-to-face or online, the essence of a Living Learning Labs remains the same: people learning together while working on real challenges.

3. IntegrAGE LLLs - piloting intergenerational learning and mentoring programme

3.1. Goals and Objectives

The IntegrAGE Living Learning Labs were designed to test how intergenerational mentoring can work in practice and how organisations can benefit from it. The aim was not only to pilot a mentoring programme, but also to explore how this approach can strengthen knowledge sharing, support active ageing and contribute to more resilient and inclusive workplaces. The programme had three main objectives:

- To support knowledge transfer between generations by enabling experienced employees to share both explicit and tacit knowledge with younger colleagues, reducing the risk of knowledge loss caused by retirement or staff turnover.
- To promote active ageing and longer working lives by recognising older employees as valuable mentors, strengthening their engagement, motivation and sense of contribution within the organisation.
- To embed mentoring into everyday organisational practice by integrating it into existing knowledge management and human resource development processes, rather than treating it as a one-off activity.

Beyond these core objectives, the Living Learning Labs also aimed to strengthen organisational adaptability and a culture of continuous learning. By encouraging reciprocal learning

between generations, both mentors and mentees had opportunities to develop new skills, build mutual understanding and increase their ability to respond to changing workplace demands.

The implementation of Living Learning Labs across different countries and organisational contexts also provided valuable insights into what works in practice. These experiences helped refine the mentoring model, strengthen the capacity of project partners and generate evidence that can support future initiatives and policies related to active ageing, lifelong learning and age management.

Overall, the Living Learning Labs functioned not only as pilots of an intergenerational mentoring programme, but also as catalysts for organisational learning and cultural change.

3.2. Whom to Involve?



Living Learning Labs are built on collaboration between people with different experiences, expertise and perspectives. Their success depends on active participation, trust and shared ownership among all those involved.

In the IntegrAGE project, the Living Learning Labs followed the quadruple helix approach, bringing together representatives of the public sector, business, academia, civil society and the individuals directly participating in the mentoring process.

The following groups played an important role in the design, implementation and evaluation of the mentoring programme.

Public sector stakeholders

Public institutions help create an enabling environment for Living Learning Labs by ensuring alignment with broader policy priorities and labour market needs. They can support coordination across sectors, facilitate access to institutional networks and contribute to the sustainability of the approach beyond the project itself.

Examples include:

- national, regional and local government bodies;

- employment services and labour market institutions;
- authorities responsible for labour, education, social inclusion and ageing policies.

Industry and business sector

Employers are at the heart of the IntegrAGE Living Learning Labs, as mentoring takes place within real workplaces and everyday organisational settings. Their involvement ensures that mentoring activities address actual organisational needs and can become part of existing human resource practices.

Examples include:

- host companies from different sectors and of different sizes;
- HR managers, line managers and company leadership;
- employers' associations and chambers of commerce.

Academia and education sector

Academic and educational institutions contribute methodological expertise and support monitoring, re-reflection and evaluation. They help capture lessons learned and translate practical experiences into knowledge that can be shared and transferred to other contexts.

Examples include:

- universities and research institutes;
- faculties related to economics, management, social sciences and education;
- vocational training centres and lifelong learning providers.

Civil society and social economy

Civil society organisations bring valuable community perspectives and help ensure that the Living Learning Labs approach remains inclusive and people-centred. They can highlight social needs, support trust-building and strengthen the wider social impact of the activities.

Examples include:

- NGOs working in the areas of employment, ageing and inclusion;
- social enterprises and other social economy actors;
- trade unions and professional associations.

Individual participants

At the centre of every Living Learning Lab are the people directly involved in mentoring and learning. Their experiences, motivation and feedback shape the quality and success of the process. The reciprocal nature of mentoring creates opportunities for both mentors and mentees to learn, grow and build mutual understanding.

Examples include:

- senior employees and experts (55+) acting as mentors;
- younger employees participating as mentees;
- where relevant, retired professionals, freelancers or community mentors.

The exact composition of a Living Learning Lab may vary depending on the local context. What matters most is bringing together the people who can contribute different perspectives while sharing a common commitment to learning and collaboration.

3.3. Process and Methodology

Living Learning Labs implementation – Step-by-step approach

The IntegrAGE Living Learning Labs follow a structured but flexible methodology that helps organisations introduce and test intergenerational mentoring in real working environments.

The process is designed as a series of practical steps that build on one another while allowing adaptation to different organisational and national contexts. Continuous feedback and reflection are encouraged throughout the implementation, enabling participants to adjust the approach based on their experiences and emerging needs.

A key feature of the methodology is co-creation. Employers, employees and other relevant stakeholders actively contribute to the design, implementation and evaluation of the mentoring process. This helps ensure that the solutions developed are practical, relevant and supported by those involved.

The methodology presented below reflects the experience gained through the IntegrAGE pilots and can be adapted to suit different settings and organisational needs.

The implementation process consists of the following steps:



Step 1 - Establishing governance and coordination structures

The process starts with the establishment of a transnational Task Work Group (TWG) at project level. This group is composed of representatives of the IntegrAGE partners involved in piloting the Living Learning Labs.

The TWG is responsible for:

- coordinating the overall Living Learning Labs process;

- ensuring methodological coherence across countries;
- supporting national-level implementation;
- facilitating communication, mutual learning and exchange of experiences.

The Task Work Group functions as a central learning and coordination body throughout the entire implementation cycle.

Step 2 – Context analysis and selection of host employers

Before implementation, project partners carry out a basic context and needs analysis at national and organisational level. This step helps identify labour market challenges, organisational needs and opportunities for mentoring.

Based on this analysis, host employers are selected. Priority is given to organisations that:

- show strong motivation to introduce a mentoring programme;
- value knowledge management and intergenerational learning;
- are willing to allocate time and internal resources;
- are open to learning and sharing experiences with others.

Each selected employer commits to piloting the mentoring programme within its everyday work environment.

Step 3 – Forming the national Living Learning Labs support team

For each national Living Learning Lab, a multisectoral support team is established using the quadruple helix approach. The team typically includes representatives from:

- public institutions,
- academia or education,
- business support organisations,
- civil society or social economy actors.

The support team provides advisory input, methodological support and complementary expertise. Its role is to assist the host employers and mentors throughout the process, while keeping coordination efficient and focused.

Step 4 – Co-designing the mentoring programme

The mentoring programme is co-created with the active involvement of HR managers, mentors and relevant stakeholders. Through participatory workshops and structured meetings, the following elements are jointly defined:

- objectives and expected outcomes of mentoring;
- roles and responsibilities of mentors, mentees and HR staff;
- mentoring formats (e.g. one-to-one, group mentoring);
- timeframes, frequency and duration of sessions;
- feedback and reflection mechanisms.

This step ensures ownership, relevance and alignment with organisational goals.

Step 5 – Preparing and training mentors

Selected mentors participate in orientation and training sessions designed to build mentoring capacity and ensure a shared understanding of the Living Learning Labs approach.

Training focuses on:

- mentoring principles and techniques;
- communication and trust-building;
- intergenerational dynamics;
- reflective practice and feedback skills.

Training formats may combine in-person workshops, online sessions and peer learning, including exchanges with mentors from other countries when feasible.

Step 6 – Implementing the mentoring programme

The mentoring programme is piloted in real-life work settings over a defined implementation period. Mentoring activities are adapted to:

- the complexity of knowledge to be transferred;
- organisational realities and workloads;
- individual needs of mentors and mentees.

Mentors and mentees are encouraged to keep mentoring diaries, documenting sessions, progress, challenges and emerging insights. Flexibility is maintained throughout to allow adjustments based on experience.

Step 7 – Monitoring, evaluation and reflective learning

Monitoring and evaluation are embedded throughout the process and focus on learning rather than control. Evaluation takes place at multiple levels:

- individual level (mentor and mentee learning and development);
- organisational level (changes in practices, cooperation and culture);
- project level (effectiveness and transferability of the model).

Reflection workshops, group evaluations and cross-country peer exchanges support collective learning and help identify lessons learned and areas for improvement.

Step 8 – Co-creation, dissemination and sustainability

In the final step, experiences, evidence and lessons learned are synthesised into practical outputs, such as handbooks, guidelines and case studies. These are disseminated through:

- digital learning platforms,
- professional networks,
- events and stakeholder forums.

The focus is on supporting replication, scaling and long-term sustainability of the Living Learning Labs methodology and mentoring programmes beyond the project lifecycle.

4. Implementation within the IntegrAGE context

4.1. Selecting Pilot Employers

The IntegrAGE Living Learning Labs aimed to facilitate the intergenerational transfer of work-related knowledge and experience through a structured mentoring programme. Senior and younger employees were encouraged to learn from one another, supported by mentoring and coaching activities tailored to their organisational context.

Across six participating countries, project partners piloted the mentoring programme using the Living Learning Lab methodology. Host organisations introduced mentoring activities within their everyday work environments and adapted them to their specific needs and realities. The focus was on strengthening knowledge sharing, supporting cooperation between generations and creating practical mentoring models that could be sustained and replicated beyond the project.

Rather than relying solely on formal procedures and written instructions, the mentoring process helped transfer tacit knowledge – practical know-how, insights, lessons learned and experience that are often difficult to capture in documents but essential for organisational continuity and development.

A) Communication

Different communication approaches were used to identify and engage potential host employers. Most partners combined targeted outreach with broader visibility activities, depending on their existing networks and local context.

Common communication channels included:

- direct communication, such as emails, newsletters and personal contacts, which proved particularly effective in reaching motivated organisations and key decision-makers;
- digital and online channels, including organisational websites, social media and professional networks, which supported wider visibility and ongoing engagement.

In several countries, relationships established through previous IntegrAGE activities or earlier cooperation with employers also played an important role. Existing trust and familiarity often encouraged organisations to participate and explore mentoring as a new practice within their workplaces.

B) Selection of Host Employers

Selecting suitable host employers was an important step in creating supportive environments for piloting the mentoring programme. While the exact process differed across countries, partners generally looked for organisations that demonstrated motivation, organisational readiness and a genuine interest in strengthening intergenerational knowledge sharing.

The most frequently used selection criteria applied when choosing employers willing to host the Living Learning Labs were as follows:

- Demonstrated strong commitment to mentoring and learning - employers showing a clear interest in staff development and mentoring practices;
- Willingness to support intergenerational exchange - companies expressing openness to facilitating collaboration between different age groups, promoting mutual learning and knowledge sharing;
- Organizational capacity and resources - staff availability and infrastructure to host and support;
- Availability of suitable mentors and learners- employees willing to participate as mentors and mentees across different generations.

Implemented cases in the six piloting countries ¹

The six piloting countries implemented in total 29 mentoring cases. All of them, had selected a hosting employer on the grounds of their motivation, organizational capacity and willingness to boost the intergenerational “transfer of skills and knowledge” between generations. The piloting partners had chosen different approaches of implementation of the Living Learning Labs in their countries in line with the real working environment and conditions.

Bosnia & Herzegovina

The Development Association NERDA implemented 6 mentoring cases with 2 companies, demonstrating high motivation, capacity and willingness to offer piloting environment.

Bulgaria

The Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) implemented 4 mentoring cases. Two mentoring cases with the Association of women entrepreneurs “Vselena” and another two with small companies. The Association, except the strong motivation and capacity, demonstrated willingness to use the gained experience in replication of the mentoring scheme as a continuous practice and ensure sustainability. The decision for the participation of the small companies Almarex EOOD and Smart Group EOOD in the piloting scheme was justified by the necessity that the “smaller ones” have a greater need for help and support, since they have limited human resources.

Croatia

SLAP implemented 5 mentoring cases. They worked with two civic organizations: P.G.D.I. – community development NGO active for 25 years, also running social entrepreneurship and social services to young adults without parental care and older citizens - having two senior managers dedicated to human resources development, but not having structured mentoring system; the Association Zvono (Bell) - dedicated to providing care for children and youth with mental disabilities, running several social services and being well established in their

¹ Detailed reports for each partner country on selecting pilot employers are provided in the Annexes to this handbook.

local community – having three senior persons willing to transfer knowledge to younger colleagues through structured mentoring programme.

Hungary

The Pannon Novum Nonprofit Ltd. implemented 5 mentoring cases. They selected Mea-Gold Ltd. as a host employer. The company is an accredited employer and operates within a structured rehabilitation environment, employing a significant number of employees with reduced work capacity. Its guiding principle, “Everyone is differently the same,” reflects a strong commitment to inclusion, equal opportunities, and human dignity.

Serbia

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia (CCIS) and the Educational Training Centre for professional and working skills, Serbia implemented 4 mentoring cases in their own structures. This allowed them more easily to keep continuous contact with the mentors and mentees, to support them and monitor the process.

Slovenia

The Jasa Association and BSC Kranj, implemented 5 mentoring cases. They worked with Soroptimist Centre Zagreb, as they participated in special programme called the R.I.S.E. Leadership Academy for young women from across Europe. They engaged 5 mentors from the Centre, active as professors, NGO leaders and some of them working as employment counsellors/mentors at the Employment Service. This made them particularly well suited to support 5 young women, in their personal and professional development through mentoring, most of whom were still seeking their first employment opportunity.

C) Common Challenges and Solutions

Challenge 1: A key challenge emerged at the beginning of the process, when mentors tended to provide more general and theoretical explanations of tasks, while young mentees expected a more practical, case-based and directly applicable learning approach. This mismatch created initial difficulties in engagement and efficiency, as trainees preferred to focus immediately on concrete examples and hands-on guidance.

Solution: As the mentoring process evolved, mentors adjusted their approach by incorporating more real-life examples, alternative scenarios, and practical problem-solving situations, encouraging learning by doing, and gradually increasing mentees’ autonomy, while also helping them understand the importance of procedures in professional context. Communication styles were balanced over time, combining clarity with efficiency.

Challenge 2: The need to provide support to the mentors and implement periodic monitoring.

Solution: Use more digital tools for direct communication with the mentors, guide and support them during the journey.

Challenge 3: Reduction of written reporting and evaluation documentation

Solution: The introduction of on-line diaries facilitates the whole process of completion of

the mentoring process (filling in of information, task assignment, practical work performed, overall assessment of the knowledge obtained).

Challenge 4: Building openness and equality. Mutual mentoring works best when both participants feel safe, respected, and as equal as possible. This requires trust, openness, and a willingness to talk not only about work, but also about broader life circumstances that influence motivation and professional choices.

Solution: place greater emphasis on trust-building, equal participation, and open dialogue from the start of the process.

Challenge 5: Differences in mentoring culture and organizational readiness.

Social economy and civil sector organizations already have organisational culture suitable for volunteering and contributing to common good and sustainability.

Public and private companies need to work on motivation for their employees to do extra work and to see benefits from participating in the mentoring programme.

Solution: Introduce tangible motivation tools for mentors and mentees.

Conclusions:

- Employer engagement remains a key challenge in all contexts, regardless of national system maturity;
- Ensure enough planning time with HR and company/employer management;
- Apply individual and personal approach to different employers;
- Listen the needs and adjust the mentoring programme in line with the expectation of the mentees and their priorities;
- Ensure a professional support to the mentors;
- Provide continuous support and guidance to participating companies;
- Introduce online tools to monitor the process periodically and provide support, if needed;
- Simplify the documentation of the mentoring process, using online tools;
- Introduce tangible motivation tools for mentors and mentees;
- Look for smaller companies that do not have access to already existing mentoring programmes.

4.2. Train the Mentors - Approach and Methodology

Why we trained mentors?

The IntegrAGE mentor training was created to prepare mentors for a new type of intergenerational cooperation. The goal was not simply to provide a set of techniques, but to help mentors understand how to build a relationship in which trust, motivation, communication and reflection can lead to concrete developmental outcomes.

We decided on the topics of the training through a practical reading of what makes mentor-

ing effective in real working life. Three core areas emerged as essential. First, mentors need to understand motivation. Without motivation, mentoring easily becomes formal, passive or dependent on goodwill alone. Mentors therefore need to recognize what drives people, what discourages them, and how meaning, recognition, autonomy and collaboration shape learning and commitment.

Second, mentors need strong communication skills. In intergenerational mentoring, communication is not just about giving advice. It is about listening carefully, noticing emotions, asking useful questions, giving constructive feedback and creating psychological safety. This is particularly important in mutual and reverse mentoring, where both sides must feel respected.

Third, mentors need a clear mentoring methodology. Good intentions are not enough. Mentoring becomes more effective when it follows a structured cycle: building the relationship, agreeing goals, supporting learning, monitoring progress and closing the process with reflection and evaluation.

These three areas formed the backbone of the training because together they answer the central question of every mentoring programme: how to create a relationship that is human, purposeful and useful in practice.

How the mentoring programme was created?

The IntegrAGE mentoring programme was developed through shared know-how and transnational resource exchange among project partners from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Czech Republic. Rather than designing the programme from a single institutional perspective, partners contributed their own experience in adult learning, mentoring, communication training, organizational development and work with older employees. This made it possible to build a programme that was practical, context-sensitive and suitable for different organizational realities.

The overall methodology used in the activity was the LLL – Living Learning Labs approach, inspired by the broader Living Labs logic of co-creation, real-life testing, iterative learning and continuous improvement. In Living Labs approaches, end users and practitioners are not passive recipients of a finished solution; they are active participants in shaping, testing and refining it in real contexts. This fits the IntegrAGE model well, because the mentoring programme was not designed as a fixed package, but as something gradually strengthened through exchange, piloting, reflection and adaptation.

In practical terms, this meant that the programme grew slowly and deliberately. Knowledge was built through discussion among partners, preparation of training materials, exchange of resources, testing of methods, and reflection on what mentors actually need in order to guide intergenerational relationships. The online workshop format also supported this logic: mentors from different countries could learn together, compare contexts and contribute

to a shared understanding of good mentoring practice.

Main training objectives:

- focusing on improving mentoring skills and competences,
- providing insights and tips to use new techniques in transferring knowledge and building skills,
- help mentors to develop relationship with their mentees, building trust and open communication.

Train-the-Mentor programme was created to be practical and time efficient and at the same time to reach the objectives set up by the LLL partnership:

a) Orientation Session 1 – Introducing Mentoring Programme

- learning about IntegrAGE project, getting bigger picture of the LL approach,
- introducing the mentoring programme (process)
- getting better understanding of their roles in the mentoring process,
- goals to be reached and support to be provided
- Learning about generational differences
- Understanding strengths of mentors and mentees

b) 3 Training Modules – building Motivation and Skills

c) Mentoring Plan Creation Session:

- Internal process (mentor, mentee, HR manager)
- setting up clear goals and expectations of mentors, mentees, but also HR department
- creation of the mentoring plan (topics, areas of expertise and timeline) – framework and tools provided through WS 1(Personal and professional development matrix and OKR methodology) and WS 3 – Mentoring Methodology (Mentoring process and cycle- Creation of mentoring Action Plan)

Overview of the three mentors' workshops

The mentor training was organized as a set of three online thematic workshops covering the following topics:

Module 1: Motivation and mentoring skills

Module 2: Communication skills, active listening and empathy

Module 3. Mentoring methodology

Module 1

This first workshop focused on the foundations of mentor readiness. It helped participants

reflect on their own motivation for mentoring and identify the conditions that increase or weaken motivation in the workplace. The training drew on established motivational perspectives, such as needs, internal and external drivers, and the difference between factors that prevent dissatisfaction and factors that genuinely support engagement.

A particularly useful contribution of this module was its practical translation of theory into mentoring work. Mentors were encouraged to think about collaboration, meaningful content and freedom of choice as important conditions for learning. These ideas are especially relevant in mutual mentoring: older employees need to feel that their experience matters, while younger mentees need space to contribute, ask questions and influence the learning process.

The second part of the workshop turned toward the profile of a good mentor. The emphasis was not on perfection, but on self-awareness. Participants reflected on communication, emotional intelligence, goal setting, time management, collaboration, networking, professional boundaries and continuous self-development. In this sense, the module did not define mentoring as a static role, but as an evolving competence. A good mentor is someone who knows how to support others while also working on their own blind spots, assumptions and habits.

Module 2

The second workshop moved from general mentoring readiness to the heart of the mentoring relationship: communication. Its core message was simple but powerful. Knowledge does not move across generations through expertise alone. It moves through trust, attention and emotional safety.

This module clarified the difference between hearing and active listening, and between sympathy and empathy. The practical framework used in the workshop helped mentors focus on four steps: paying full attention, understanding both content and emotion, validating what they heard, and using open questions to empower the mentee. This is particularly important in reverse mentoring situations, where the older mentor may need to listen without dominating, and where the mentee may also become a source of new knowledge.

The role-play exercises were a strong methodological element of the workshop. They showed the difference between dismissive listening and genuine listening, not only at the level of behaviour but at the level of impact. When mentors interrupt, rush to solutions or minimize emotions, mentees often feel less capable and less willing to engage. When mentors validate emotions, slow down the conversation and encourage reflection, the relationship becomes more productive and more respectful.

The module therefore strengthened a key IntegrAGE principle: good mentoring is relational before it is instructional. A mentor does not create progress by speaking more, but by listening better.

Module 3

The third workshop provided the methodological structure that connects motivation and communication to a complete mentoring process. It introduced mentoring as a structured learning relationship with a clear cycle, measurable progress and meaningful outcomes. One important contribution of this module was to distinguish mentoring from coaching and training. This matters because mentors often feel pressure either to teach, to solve problems quickly, or to act as evaluators. The workshop made it clear that mentoring is different: it is longer-term, more reflective and more relational. Its purpose is not only to improve performance in a narrow sense, but to support broader personal and professional development.

The workshop then presented the mentoring cycle in four stages. The first stage focuses on initiation and contracting: understanding the mentee, building trust, agreeing expectations and clarifying boundaries. The second stage focuses on goal setting and planning, especially through SMART goals that are realistic, relevant and time-bound. The third stage is development and learning, where mentoring conversations become active, reflective and action-oriented. The fourth stage is closure, where progress is reviewed, learning is consolidated and the relationship is formally completed in a respectful way.

A particularly valuable feature of this module was its emphasis on tools that support structure without becoming rigid. The Mentoring Action Plan helps turn broad development needs into agreed priorities, steps and responsibilities. The GROW model helps mentors guide conversations from goal to action while keeping the mentee active and responsible. Monitoring and evaluation ensure that mentoring remains a learning process rather than an informal series of conversations.

Lessons learned from the workshops

The IntegrAGE train-the-mentors activity shows that good mentoring does not emerge by chance. It is built through preparation, shared methodology and reflective practice. By focusing on motivation, communication and mentoring skills, and by developing the programme through a Living Learning Labs approach based on co-creation and gradual exchange, the project created a solid foundation for future mentors.

Its strongest message is that mentoring in an ageing society must be both structured and mutual. Older employees should be recognized as carriers of experience, but also as active learners. Younger colleagues should be seen not only as recipients of knowledge, but also as contributors to organizational learning. In this sense, reverse mentoring is not an exception to mentoring; it is an important extension of it. For organizations that want to retain employees 55+, preserve knowledge and strengthen intergenerational cooperation, this approach offers real value. Current OECD evidence also supports this direction, highlighting age-inclusive workforce strategies, intergenerational knowledge transfer and reverse mentoring as useful responses to demographic change and skills transformation.

4.3. Mentoring Skills and Tips

What makes a good mentor?

A good mentor in IntegrAGE is not defined only by seniority or experience. In mutual mentoring, the mentor is above all a facilitator of learning, a builder of trust and a guide through reflection, not a person who simply transmits answers.

This means that a good mentor combines several qualities:

The first is motivational awareness. Mentors need to understand that people engage more deeply when they feel respected, when the work has meaning, and when they have some ownership over the process. This is especially important for employees 55+, who should not be approached as people in decline, but as professionals whose expertise remains valuable and whose continued learning also matters.

The second is communication maturity. A strong mentor listens actively, notices emotions, asks thoughtful questions and gives feedback in a way that strengthens rather than weakens confidence. In mutual mentoring, this also means being willing to learn from the mentee. The mentor does not lose authority by listening. On the contrary, listening is what makes the relationship credible.

The third is methodological discipline. Effective mentoring needs goals, rhythm and follow-up. The mentor should know how to open the relationship, clarify expectations, document progress, revisit goals and close the process well. Structure protects mentoring from becoming vague.

The fourth is self-reflection. Mentors bring experience, but they also bring habits, assumptions and biases. In intergenerational relationships, these can become barriers if they are not recognized. A good mentor remains curious, flexible and willing to adjust.

The fifth is respect for reciprocity. Because IntegrAGE promotes mutual and reverse mentoring, the mentee must also be understood as an active partner. The mentee is not simply a recipient of wisdom. The mentee contributes knowledge, questions, feedback, perspective and energy. Good mentoring depends on both sides.

Core Mentoring Skills Observed in the Pilot

The mentoring skills and practical tips presented in this section are not theoretical recommendations. They are drawn directly from the real life experiences of mentors and mentees who participated in the IntegrAGE Living Learning Labs across six partner countries (Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Hungary, and Bulgaria). The diaries, monthly records, and evaluation forms collected during the three month pilot have been analysed to identify what works, what challenges arise, and how successful mentors adapt their approach.

Below are the most frequently observed core mentoring skills, followed by a set of concrete tips that any mentor in an intergenerational setting can apply.

Skill	Description	Example from the diaries
Active listening without immediate judging	The mentor listens fully before offering any feedback or solution. This builds psychological safety, especially when a mentee admits a weakness (e.g., lack of focus, fear of delegating).	One mentor noted: "The mentee initially did not see any need for improvement. Instead of giving direct advice, I used open questions: What went well to-day? What could have been better?"
Reflective questioning	The mentor asks questions that help the mentee discover their own answers rather than being told what to do. This encourages self awareness and ownership.	A mentor working with an overburdened mentee explained: "We practised how to recognise tasks that can be delegated and how to ask for help without feeling guilty."
Structuring the learning process with simple tools	Effective mentors do not rely on abstract advice. They co create small, practical tools (checklists, time tracking sheets, prioritization matrices) that fit the mentee's daily reality.	One mentor introduced a laminated control list for event setup and the Pomodoro technique to reduce phone distractions. Another mentee started using a task diary and priority matrix (urgent vs. important).
Balancing support and autonomy	The mentor gradually reduces direct guidance as the mentee gains confidence. This is visible in the progress from month 1 to month 3 in almost all diaries.	A mentor reported: "In month 3, the mentee handled tasks independently. We moved from 'learning by doing with supervision' to 'independent work with reflection.'"

Skill	Description	Example from the diaries
Normalizing mistakes and setbacks	Mentors who openly discuss their own past difficulties help mentees see that setbacks are learning opportunities, not failures.	One mentor observed: "The mentee struggled with lack of confidence. We worked on accepting that imperfection is part of growth."
Focusing on wellbeing and boundaries	Several mentors actively helped mentees recognize signs of stress and set healthy boundaries between work and private life. This was especially important for younger mentees who tended to overwork or for seniors who felt pressure to prove themselves.	A mentor noted: "The mentee used to take work home and felt guilty when delegating. We introduced an 'end of day ritual' – writing down three achievements and one task for tomorrow."

Practical guidance for future mentors

For future mentors, several practical recommendations and tips emerged from the IntegrAGE training model:

- Start by building the relationship before trying to solve problems. The first meetings should focus on trust, expectations, communication style and learning needs. Ask more than you tell.
- Translate broad wishes into concrete goals. "Improve communication" is too vague. A better mentoring goal is specific, observable and connected to real work.
- Use conversation as a tool for thinking, not only for advising. The most useful mentor questions are often open, calm and reflective. They help the mentee understand the situation, identify options and commit to action.
- Treat motivation as something dynamic. People's engagement changes over time. Good mentors therefore watch for signs of stress, hesitation, overload or loss of confidence, and respond with support rather than judgment.
- Review progress regularly. Mentoring gains strength when mentor and mentee pause to ask what is working, what is changing and what should happen next.
- Finally, remember that closure matters. A mentoring relationship should not simply fade away. It should end with recognition of what has been learned, what has changed and what can continue beyond the formal process.

Based on the analysis of multiple mentoring pairs from all partner countries, the following

practical tips are extracted from the Mentoring Diaries, ready to be adopted:

Tip 1: Start with the mentee's reality, not the mentor's agenda.

In the first two weeks, spend at least 70% of the session time listening to how the mentee describes their tasks, frustrations, and small wins. One mentee initially saw their job as "just setting up chairs". The mentor did not argue. Instead, they asked: "What would a perfect event look like from your perspective?" That question opened a new way of thinking.

Tip 2: Replace "You should..." with "What if we tried...?"

Direct instructions often trigger resistance, especially across generations. Successful mentors in the pilot used collaborative language. For example, instead of saying "You must stop using your phone at work", one mentor said: "Let's try keeping your phone in your bag during events and using a small notebook for reminders. Would you be open to that for one week?"

Tip 3: Co create one small tool in the first month.

A single practical tool – a checklist, a time log template, a simple decision tree – has more impact than ten general suggestions. One mentee's transformation began with a shared spreadsheet where they logged estimated vs. actual task time. Another mentee's turnaround started with a laminated event day checklist. Keep the tool extremely simple (maximum one page).

Tip 4: Explicitly discuss "reverse mentoring" opportunities.

Intergenerational learning is two way. Ask the mentee: "What is one digital skill or new tool you could show me?" In the diaries, reverse mentoring was less frequent than expected, but where it happened (juniors showing seniors a collaboration platform or a shortcut), it significantly improved mutual respect.

Tip 5: Use the "3 wins / 1 next" reflection at the end of each week.

Before finishing the weekly session, ask: "What three things went well this week? What is the one thing you will do differently next week?" This simple structure was used informally by several mentors and reported as highly effective for maintaining momentum.

Tip 6: Address mobile phone distraction directly but without shame.

Phone overuse appeared in multiple diaries. The mentors who succeeded did not moralize. They pro-posed a behavioral experiment: "For the next three days, put your phone in a drawer during focused work blocks. Check it only during breaks. Let's compare how much you get done." After seeing the difference, mentees self corrected.

Tip 7: Plan the “exit” from the third month.

Sustainability should be discussed from month two. Ask: “When the formal mentoring ends, what is the simplest habit you will keep?” Several mentees created a short guide for future colleagues – this turned their learning into a lasting resource. The mentor’s role is to help the mentee design a low effort self monitoring system (e.g., a monthly self checklist).

Tip 8: Adapt your pace to the mentee’s confidence level, not their age.

Do not assume that a senior mentee needs slower explanations or that a junior mentee can move fast-er. Confidence varies individually. One young mentee (a psychologist) needed repeated reassurance and structured public speaking exercises. Another mentee (a middle aged programmer) needed permission to delegate. Observe the mentee’s behavior, not their generational label.

4.4. Monitoring Process and Results

Monitoring and evaluation process

The evaluation methodology was designed within the Living Learning Labs (LLL) framework, positioning evaluation as an integral and continuous component of the mentoring process rather than a final, standalone activity. The evaluation was designed as a mixed-method process, integrating continuous monitoring with structured feedback collection and final stakeholder validation. That is, throughout the implementation phase, the mentoring process was systematically tracked to ensure alignment with defined objectives, timely identification of challenges, and adaptive adjustments where necessary what enabled a dynamic evaluation approach.

Data collection relied on both formal mentoring tools and direct engagement with participants. Core instruments such as the Mentoring Action Plans and Mentoring Diaries provided structured, process-oriented data on goal setting, session dynamics, progress tracking, and achieved outcomes. These were complemented by regular consultations with mentors and mentees, allowing for deeper insight into individual experiences, learning processes, and perceived value of the mentoring activities.

A central element of the methodology was the use of developed standardized LLL tools, particularly the Mentoring Diary – Monthly Record, which ensured systematic monitoring throughout the three-month pilot period. On a monthly basis and after each session, mentors documented skills covered, mentee progress (rated on a 1–5 scale), challenges encountered, and solutions applied, alongside mentoring methodology used, key observations, and action points for the following period. This tool provided longitudinal insight into the mentoring process, capturing both technical and behavioural development, while also enabling early identification of bottlenecks and continuous improvement of mentoring practices.

At the end, evaluation was formalized through the Mentor Evaluation Record and Mentee Evaluation Record, applying a structured competency-based framework (rated 1–4). These tools assessed key dimensions such as motivation and initiative, knowledge transfer, communication, creativity and innovation, goal setting and time management, networking, and wellbeing support. The dual evaluation perspective ensured a 360-degree assessment of the mentoring relationship. In addition to scoring, both tools included qualitative feedback sections covering individual performance, the mentoring process, and the level of support provided by employers/HR and the IntegrAGE partnership, ensuring a balanced combination of measurable indicators and reflective insights. These documents were continuously reviewed by the engaged consultant that provided feedback and support to mentors and mentees.

A unique strength of the IntegrAGE LLL model is its structured evaluation and collective learning mechanism. This happens at two levels:

Level 1: National Group Evaluation Sessions

For each country (SRB, CRO, BiH, SLO, HU, BG), the local project partner organizes a national evaluation session near the end of the pilot phase. These sessions bring together all mentors and mentees from that country, the local partner (as facilitator), and optionally representatives from the national working group. Mentors and mentees openly discuss what worked well, share practical tips, identify national adaptations, and provide structured feedback using a common template. These sessions are active learning events where participants become co designers of the final LLL methodology.

What is discussed:

- **overall satisfaction with the LLL mentoring process**, using a standardized rating scale (1–4). This provided an initial benchmark of perceived quality and effectiveness of the programme, while also allowing comparison across participants (explored key drivers behind the ratings, such as relevance of mentoring content, quality of interaction, and practical applicability of the knowledge gained)
- **key positive outcomes**, explicitly distinguishing between personal-level and company-level impacts. At the personal level, participants reflected on improvements in skills, confidence, communication, and role performance. At the organizational level, the discussion focused on changes in work processes, coordination, efficiency, and overall team dynamics. The dual perspective ensured that both individual development and organizational value creation were captured.
- **main challenges and setbacks experienced during implementation**. Participants were encouraged to openly discuss operational, organizational, and interpersonal barriers, including issues related to time constraints, workload, communication gaps, or adaptation to the mentoring methodology. The question aimed to generate actionable insights on what should be avoided or improved in future programme cycles.
- **practical recommendations for future mentors and mentees**, focusing on how to im-

prove efficiency and overall experience what included advice on structuring mentoring sessions, communication approaches, goal setting, and engagement strategies.

- **additional support needs**, particularly in terms of institutional support from employers/HR and technical or methodological support from the IntegrAGE partnership.
- **sustainability and replication potential** through questions related to participants' willingness to repeat the mentoring experience and continue engaging in similar initiatives what provided direct insight into perceived value and long-term viability of the LLL approach within organizational contexts.

Level 2: Joint Evaluation Session (Transnational)

The Joint Evaluation Session is the capstone learning event of the mentoring programme, organized as an on-line evaluation session. Participants include representatives from all partners, selected mentors and mentees from each country (at least one pair per country), host representatives and external experts involved.

A structured set of questions was used to guide discussion and ensure that all relevant dimensions of the mentoring programme were systematically assessed. These questions were designed to primarily capture qualitative insights (through open discussion), enabling a comprehensive understanding of participant experience, programme impact and its transferability potential.

What is discussed:

- The process – how the LLL actually worked across different countries, common obstacles, how they were solved and unexpected successes
- The outcomes – whether knowledge transfer happened, whether intergenerational solidarity improved, and what measurable changes participants observed
- Future improvements – a co created list of recommendations to improve the LLL model.
- Ways to use the LLL after the project – how companies, other small employers, business support organizations, and public employment services can continue using and up scaling the methodology

Outcome of the Joint Evaluation Session:

- A final, validated LLL methodology (incorporated into this handbook)
- A roadmap for sustainable use (including how to organize future cross national mentoring exchanges)
- Stronger transnational bonds among mentors, mentees, and partners – turning a one time pilot into a lasting Danube region network

Overall, the methodology emphasized qualitative depth, reflective learning, and practical evidence of change, rather than relying solely on quantitative indicators. By integrating continuous monitoring, structured competency assessment, and participatory evaluation, the LLL approach ensured a comprehensive and multi-layered understanding of both the mentoring process and its outcomes, providing a strong basis for future programme refinement, sustainability, and scalability.

Evaluation Results

The evaluation results indicate a consistently high level of effectiveness of the mentoring programme, both in terms of individual development and organizational impact. Key observations highlight strong motivation and proactive engagement of mentees, alongside a solid development of operational understanding, analytical capacity, and practical application of knowledge. Notably, the transition from theoretical knowledge to hands-on implementation was successfully achieved, particularly in areas such as cost tracking, reporting, and operational coordination. Additionally, significant progress was recorded in leadership and problem-solving skills, with mentees demonstrating the ability to independently manage tasks, respond to operational challenges, and contribute to process improvements.

The mentoring process also contributed to improvements in communication, organization, and adaptability. While initial challenges were identified in cross-department communication and alignment with mentoring expectations, these were progressively addressed, resulting in improved organizational capability and more effective collaboration. Enhanced self-confidence, networking capacity, and openness to learning were also observed as important outcomes. At the same time, certain technical challenges remained context-specific, such as field measurement constraints, indicating areas for further practical refinement.

From a competency assessment perspective, both mentor and mentee evaluation records show uniformly high scores, confirming a strong performance across key dimensions such as motivation, knowledge transfer, communication, creativity, and goal setting. This consistency suggests that the mentoring methodology was effectively applied and well aligned with participant needs. Qualitative feedback further reinforces these findings, with mentees described as motivated, capable, and increasingly independent, while mentors were recognized as experienced, structured, and effective in knowledge transfer.

From the mentor perspective, the evaluation results indicate a highly successful mentoring process with strong outcomes at both individual and organizational levels. Mentors consistently rated mentees at the highest level (average score 4 across all criteria), highlighting strong motivation, rapid learning capacity, and the ability to apply knowledge in practical work situations. Mentees were perceived as increasingly independent, proactive, and capable of contributing to operational improvements, with several cases indicating readiness for greater responsibility or long-term engagement within the company.

From the mentee perspective, the mentoring programme was evaluated as highly effective, practical, and exceeding expectations. Mentees rated all key aspects of the mentoring relationship (motivation, knowledge transfer methodology, communication, goal setting, and networking) at the highest level, confirming a high level of satisfaction and perceived value. Mentees highlighted the quality of mentors as a critical success factor, describing them as experienced, approachable, precise, and highly effective in transferring knowledge. The mentoring approach was particularly valued for its practical orientation, enabling active participation and faster acquisition of skills compared to purely theoretical learning. This

hands-on approach facilitated better integration into daily work processes and contributed to improved performance and confidence.

The group evaluation sessions in all countries confirmed a very high level of satisfaction with the LLL mentoring process. It can be concluded that there is a strong consensus that the mentoring approach was both relevant and effectively implemented, delivering tangible value for participants and organizations.

At the personal level, participants emphasized improvements in work organization, focus, and planning capabilities. The mentoring process enabled mentees to better structure their tasks, prioritize activities, and approach responsibilities in a more systematic and analytical manner. These changes were not only perceived as immediate improvements but also as transferable skills applicable across different roles and future career development. Especially they stated the importance of being able to state their needs and evaluate their characteristics with their mentors, and together to work on their weaknesses during the mentoring process.

At the company level, the most significant outcome identified was the introduction of a structured and methodologically grounded mentoring process. Participants noted that prior to this programme, learning was primarily based on informal or less formal, task-oriented on job training without a clear developmental framework in all aspects and skills matrix required for certain job. The LLL approach, as stated by participants, introduced a more comprehensive model that combined technical skill development with structured reflection, including tools such as mentee assessment) and systematic tracking of progress. Additionally, the integration of soft skills—particularly communication and feedback were recognized as a key added value that had not been previously addressed in such a structured way.

A particularly important qualitative outcome relates to organizational culture and communication. Participants highlighted that the mentoring process fostered a shift from a traditional, one-directional model (mentor assigning tasks) to a more interactive and participatory approach. For the first time, as stated by some participants, there was an emphasis on mutual listening, dialogue, and understanding, which contributed to improved relationships, stronger engagement, and a more collaborative working environment.

In terms of challenges and areas for improvement, participants did not report any major setbacks that negatively affected implementation. However, a consistent recommendation was the need for more clearly defined timelines and step-by-step guidance for the mentoring process. This suggests that while the methodology itself is robust, its operationalization could be further enhanced through clearer sequencing of activities and more explicit implementation roadmaps.

Regarding recommendations for future participants, the feedback strongly emphasized behavioural factors as key success drivers. Openness to learning, active communication, willingness to ask questions, and adherence to the structured mentoring process were identified as critical elements for achieving optimal results what reinforces the importance

of participant engagement and mindset in maximizing the effectiveness of the mentoring model.

In relation to support mechanisms, the majority of participants indicated that the existing level of support—from both employers and the IntegrAGE partnership—was fully adequate. However, a minor suggestion was made to introduce opportunities for experience exchange with other companies implementing similar mentoring approaches. Such peer-learning mechanisms could further enhance understanding, provide benchmarking opportunities, and support continuous improvement of the model.

The evaluation results indicate a strong foundation for sustainability of the mentoring approach within participating employers. All participants expressed clear willingness to continue with mentoring activities and to repeat the experience, demonstrating both perceived value and internal acceptance of the LLL model. Importantly, sustainability is not viewed only as continuation of activities, but as institutionalization of mentoring practices—with participants explicitly recommending the integration of mentoring into internal company procedures, supported by formal rulebooks, defined roles, and structured processes.

The LLL methodology is recognized as operationally applicable and adaptable to existing organizational systems, particularly due to its structured tools (e.g. MAP, GROW, evaluation forms) and its balance between technical and soft skill development. The shift from informal, task-based training to a structured, reflective mentoring model represents a key systemic change that can be embedded into HR development and capacity-building practices.

Furthermore, participants expressed interest in sharing experiences with other companies and replicating the model indicates strong scalability potential. With minor improvements—such as clearer implementation timelines and visual process roadmaps—the approach can be standardized and transferred across sectors or in other companies. Overall, the programme demonstrates high sustainability potential, both at the organizational level (through internal adoption) and at a broader level (through replication and knowledge transfer).

All participants expressed clear willingness to repeat the mentoring experience and continue applying it within their organizations. Moreover, there was a strong recommendation to institutionalize mentoring as a formal internal process, as stated above, by both companies supported by defined procedures or rulebooks. Participants explicitly recognized the LLL mentoring model as transferable and scalable, with potential for application in other companies and sectors.

Finally, in terms of additional recommendations, participants suggested the development of clearer visual tools—such as step-by-step roadmaps or process timelines—to further support implementation. Overall, the feedback reflects a high level of satisfaction, strong perceived value, and a clear readiness for continued use and broader replication of the mentoring approach.

5. Knowledge transfer

The IntegrAGE Living Learning Labs were designed not only to test intergenerational mentoring but also to capture and transfer the knowledge gained during the pilot. This chapter summarizes what the project partners, mentors, and mentees learned during implementation. It also provides guidance on how to make mentoring practices durable beyond the project lifecycle and transferable to other organizations and contexts.

5.1. Main Lessons Learned

The following lessons are derived directly from the implementation of LLLs in six countries, the analysis of mentoring diaries, and the feedback collected from mentors, mentees, host employers, external experts but also project partners.

Lesson 1: Start with a simple, clear structure, but allow local adaptation

The step by step methodology (see Chapter 3.3) provided useful common framework. However, each company and each national context required adjustments. For example, some host employers preferred shorter, more frequent mentoring sessions, while others needed longer monthly meetings. The key is to keep the core elements (e.g., mentoring diaries, weekly reflection, co creation of tools) but let the format fit the organisation's routine.

Lesson 2: The first month determines the momentum

Analysis of the three month pilot showed that pairs who established a regular meeting rhythm and co created one small tool (e.g., a checklist, a priority matrix) within the first four weeks were significantly more likely to report positive outcomes. If the first month is unfocused or irregular, it is difficult to recover. Therefore, facilitators should monitor the first month closely.

Lesson 3. Support formal institutionalization within companies

The project should actively promote the integration of mentoring into company systems as a formal procedure what can include providing guidance on how to embed mentoring into HR policies, internal rulebooks, and staff development frameworks. Supporting companies in this transition will significantly increase sustainability beyond the project lifecycle.

Lesson 4: Promote the dual focus on technical and soft skills development

The evaluation clearly shows that one of the key added values of the programme is the integration of soft skills (communication, leadership, collaboration) with technical competencies. IntegrAGE should explicitly position this as a core feature of the methodology and ensure it is consistently applied across all implementations.

Lesson 5: Ensure continued expert and methodological support

The role of external support (e.g. consultants, project partners) proved to be important for successful implementation. Set up the mechanisms for continued advisory support—either through follow-up phases, mentoring of mentors, or development of internal champions within companies.

Lesson 6: Online diaries are effective for monitoring and peer learning.

The Bulgarian pilot introduced online diaries for all four LLLs. This allowed mentors to read each other's entries, share solutions, and feel less isolated. It also enabled the lab coordinator to provide real time support. For virtual or mixed LLLs, a shared simple digital log (e.g., a Google Sheet or a dedicated chat channel) is recommended.

Lesson 7: Reverse mentoring happens less automatically than expected – but it can be prompted.

In many pairs, junior employees did not spontaneously offer to share digital skills or new tools unless the mentor explicitly asked. The simple question “What is one digital skill you could show me?” was enough to start reverse mentoring. Without this prompt, intergenerational exchange often remained one sided (senior to junior). The future programmes should include this as a standard question in the second or third session.

Lesson 8: Increase visibility and policy-level positioning of the LLL model

Given its demonstrated impact, the LLL mentoring approach should be promoted as a good practice model within broader policy and institutional frameworks (e.g. lifelong learning, workforce development, active ageing). This would strengthen the strategic relevance of the project and support wider adoption.

Lesson 9: Continuously refine the methodology based on feedback loops

The project should maintain an iterative approach, using evaluation findings to continuously improve tools, processes, and support mechanisms.

Overall, the recommendations suggest that the IntegrAGE project has successfully validated a robust mentoring model, and the next phase should focus additionally on standardization, institutionalization, and scaling, ensuring long-term impact beyond the project implementation.

5.2. Durability and Transferability

Durability refers to how long the benefits of the mentoring programme continue after the formal pilot ends. Transferability refers to how easily the LLL methodology and mentoring

practices can be adopted by other organizations, sectors, or regions.

Factors that support durability

Based on the IntegrAGE pilot, the following factors increase the likelihood that mentoring practices will continue beyond the project:

Integration into existing HR processes – When mentoring is linked to onboarding, performance reviews, or career development plans, it becomes part of routine work rather than an extra activity.

Low effort documentation - Mentoring diaries that take no more than 5–10 minutes per week are more likely to be maintained. A simple template with three fields (What worked? What was difficult? What is next?) is sufficient.

Peer support among mentors - Mentors who have a channel to exchange experiences (e.g., a monthly online check in or a shared chat group) continue longer and report less burnout. Visible organizational support - When line managers or HR publicly acknowledge mentoring (e.g., through internal newsletters or a brief mention in team meetings), both mentors and mentees value the activity more and continue voluntarily.

Simple self monitoring tools for mentees - Mentees who keep a personal checklist or a one page action plan after the formal mentoring ends are more likely to retain new habits.

Factors that support transferability

The IntegrAGE LLL model was successfully tested in six countries with different economic, cultural, and organizational contexts. The following elements made transferability possible:

Modular methodology – The eight step process (Chapter 3.3) can be used in full for large organizations or in a shortened version (steps 2, 4, 6, 7) for smaller companies or shorter pilots.

Tool based approach – Practical tools (checklists, priority matrices, reflection templates) are easier to transfer than abstract concepts. The handbook provides templates that require minimal adaptation.

Low tech optionality – The model works with basic tools: email, shared documents, messaging apps. No expensive software is required. This makes it transferable to low resource settings, including rural areas and small businesses.

Quadruple helix as a flexible principle – Not every context requires all four helices equally. A small company can implement mentoring with only industry and academia support. The quadruple helix becomes a menu of potential partners, not a rigid requirement.

Cross country peer learning – The transnational Task Work Group (TWG) and cross country mentor exchanges proved valuable for adapting the model to new national contexts. New adopters are encouraged to establish similar peer learning structures.

6. Conclusion

The evaluation of the mentoring programme implemented within the IntegrAGE project confirms that the Living Learning Lab (LLL) approach represents a highly effective, practical, and adaptable model for workplace-based learning and capacity development. The pilot organisations involved in the IntegrAGE Living Learning Labs demonstrated that inter-generational mentoring can be a practical and effective tool for knowledge transfer, active ageing and organisational learning. The structured yet flexible methodology enabled mentees to transition from theoretical knowledge to practical application, while simultaneously strengthening soft skills such as communication, leadership, and problem-solving—areas that were previously underdeveloped in traditional training approaches.

A key strength of the programme lies in its ability to adapt to different organizational contexts, job roles, and industry specifics, while maintaining a coherent methodological framework. The diversity of technical skills covered reflects the specific operational needs of each company, whereas the development of core soft skills emerged as a common and transferable outcome across both environments. The balance between context-specific and universal competencies significantly increases the relevance and applicability of the LLL model.

Importantly, the programme also contributed to a shift in organizational culture, particularly in terms of communication and collaboration. Participants highlighted a transition from traditional, task-oriented training towards a more interactive, reflective, and dialogue-based approach. This change not only improved interpersonal dynamics but also supported more effective knowledge transfer and team coordination.

From a sustainability perspective, the results are particularly encouraging. There is a strong consensus among participants that mentoring should be formalized as an internal organizational procedure, similar to ISO-based processes indicating a clear pathway for institutionalization, where mentoring becomes an integrated part of HR development systems rather than a one-time project activity. Additionally, the expressed willingness to continue mentoring and replicate the model in other companies demonstrates strong potential for scaling and broader impact.

The IntegrAGE project has therefore successfully validated the LLL mentoring approach as a robust and transferable model. While only minor improvements are needed—primarily related to clearer implementation timelines and enhanced operational guidance—the core methodology has proven to be sound, effective, and ready for wider application. The next

phase should focus on standardization, institutional embedding, and cross-organizational knowledge exchange, ensuring that the benefits achieved through this pilot are sustained and expanded.

In conclusion, the mentoring programme has achieved its intended objectives and created a solid foundation for long-term impact. It has demonstrated that structured, well-supported mentoring can serve as a powerful tool for workforce development, organizational improvement, and lifelong learning, aligning closely with the strategic goals of the IntegrAGE project.

Case Studies and Practical Resources

Resource 1: Selection process – practice and experience by pilot countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Slovenia and Serbia)

Partner: Development Association NERDA

Country: Bosnia and Herzegovina

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS USED:

The selection process in B&H started with the organization of meetings with key stakeholders, as well as IntegrAge events such as business brunches. These events served as the primary platform to present the LLL programme and engage interested companies.

Following the initial outreach, information about the programme was further disseminated through:

- Direct contacts with companies
- Distribution of the promotional leaflets
- Follow-up communication with companies that expressed interest in participation

As a result, two companies — Solana d.d. Tuzla and Herceg d.o.o. Srebrenik — showed the strongest interest. Both companies demonstrated willingness not only to share their internal practices but also to actively participate in the educational and mentoring components of the programme.

After the draft outline of the LLL programme was developed, these companies formally confirmed their participation and identified a total of six mentor–mentee pairs.

SELECTING HOST EMPLOYERS:

Both interested companies were selected as host employers based on:

- Their strong motivation and commitment to participate in the programme
- Their readiness to share knowledge and internal practices
- Their organizational needs and capacity for improving knowledge and skills transfer processes

Additionally, both companies demonstrated openness to integrating broader age management practices, including:

- Participation in the recognition of experience process (completion of Fact Sheets)
- Contribution to the promotion of positive practices (one company participated in the IntegrAge promotional video)

Their engagement confirmed their suitability as pilot environments for implementing the LLL programme.

MAIN CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS:

One of the main challenges during implementation was the high workload and limited availability of staff, as both selected companies are large export-oriented businesses. This made it difficult to allocate sufficient time for mentoring and learning activities.

Another challenge was ensuring high-quality monitoring, follow-up and evaluation of the mentoring process. To address these challenges, the following solutions were implemented:

- Engagement of an external expert to provide continuous support, monitoring and guidance to participating companies
- Development of a clear and structured schedule for mentoring sessions
- Provision of precise guidelines and expectations to ensure efficient use of time and clarity in implementation

These measures helped maintain the quality and consistency of the LLL process despite operational constraints.

Partner: Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI),

Country: Bulgaria

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS USED:

BCCI used a mix of own dissemination channels to communicate SMEs for the piloting scheme as: direct online contact with different business communities, daily online bulletin Infobusiness, website www.bcci.bg and the social media. The Chamber worked out a short application for companies, willing to participate in the LLL programme, focussed on strong motivation, open to share their experience and ensure the gained knowledge on replication of the IntegrAGE leaving labs.

SELECTING OF HOST EMPLOYERS:

One of the employers selected for hosting the LLL programme was the Association of women entrepreneurs "Vselena". BCCI implemented with them a pitching session for "starts up" in the frame of SEEWBAN project (South-East woman business angel network), focussed on strengthening the "angel network" in BG. We trust "Vselena" because they are very active, well organised managing structure, open to innovative business approaches and actions, have qualified staff and provide a customised package of services to their members. The Chamber was sure that the new gained experience of "knowledge transfer" through mentoring and coaching would help them to replicate the piloting programme of the IntegrAge LLL for their member companies and ensure its sustainability. Two of our piloting labs were

organized with them for transfer of knowledge and skills – the first inside the Association between experienced elder workers and young employees, and the second transfer - from qualified association mentor to a new born company/member/ in the sphere of strengthening the communication knowledge and skills (incl. new technologies and IT models) for enlargement of the company activity.

Another 2 applications, which were qualified for the LLL programme, were made by small companies "Almarex" EOOD and Smarta Group "EOOD", providing specific consultancy services in management of national operational programmes and regional investment funds. The decision for their participation in the piloting programme was justified by the necessity that the "smaller ones" have a greater need for help and support, since they have limited human resources.

CHALLENGES:

A challenge emerged at the beginning of the process, when mentors tended to provide more general and theoretical explanations of tasks, while mentees expected a more practical, case-based and directly applicable learning approach. This mismatch created initial difficulties in engagement and efficiency, as trainees preferred to focus immediately on concrete examples and hands-on guidance.

Another challenge was the need to ensure continuous communication, coordination, and progress monitoring across four parallel Living Learning Labs over a three-month period. Both of challenges were addressed through adaptive and practice-oriented solutions.

SOLUTIONS:

As the mentoring process evolved, mentors adjusted their approach by incorporating more real-life examples, alternative scenarios, and practical problem-solving situations, which significantly improved the relevance and effectiveness of the learning experience and transformed the labs into more authentic work-based environments. It created trust and confidence between the mentors and mentees and the mentoring process was completed successfully.

In parallel, an online diary system was introduced for all four labs, enabling structured documentation of progress, regular exchange of experience between mentors, and real-time monitoring and support from the coordination team. This tool also facilitated knowledge sharing among the labs. Later, a link was created for the members of the National Support & Assessment Committee which allowed them to follow and support the process more effectively.

Overall, the Bulgarian experience demonstrated that flexibility in mentoring approaches and the use of digital coordination tools are key factors for ensuring consistency, engagement, and successful intergenerational knowledge transfer in complex, multi-actor pilot environments.

PARTNER: Association Slap

Country: Croatia

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS USED:

LLL as a project activity was promoted in early phase of meeting key stakeholders:

- Announcement of the activity (LLL – internal mentoring programme for employers)
- Presenting IntegrAGE LLL for the target group at the Stakeholder Business Brunch and also at the Training for Trainers

As a result, we had two interested companies: public utility company of the Osijek city – Unikom and Regional Development Agency of Slavonia and Baranja. Both public companies have prior experience working with Slap and partnering on other projects. We had one-on-one meeting with them (HR Manager of Unikom and Director of RDA).

We deliberately approached companies we know as this is an experiment and we needed organizations flexible enough, having open communication and being willing to host a lab in their already full schedules. Therefore, communications tools were limited to reach smaller number of target employers.

SELECTING HOST EMPLOYERS:

As Unikom planned to involve 5 mentor/mentee pairs and RDA only three, we decided to go with UNIKOM first. Only week before the first training, we got a call from UNIKOM HR manager, saying that it's a bigger challenge for them than expected for the following reasoning:

- Time consuming while selected persons (55+) already have many different tasks and their motivation before retirement is rather low
- Company doesn't have many tools and resources to motivate/reward them to participate
- It may be done if we would have more planning time to create a mentoring programme a year in advance so company can incorporate it in their HR development programme
- Therefore, we turned to our next candidate: Regional Development Agency to hear a very similar story:
- Director has difficulties in motivating senior employees to be the part of the mentoring programme as they already have too many tasks, responsibilities and deadlines concerning EU programmes
- Director is very much interested and he sees the development opportunity and know-how transfer but would have to deal with low motivation of his senior employees unless being able to offer them full motivational packages

Together with the management of both public companies we concluded that it needs to be incorporated in the policy documents and prepared thoroughly with very key ingredient – motivation tools (bonuses, free days, recognition, rewards) for mentors and possible opportunities for mentors to transfer their knowledge and experience to other companies as extra paid job after retirement.

As a final and practical solution, we turned to civil sector.

As Slap has years of cooperation and partnership with several organizations in the civil sector, we decided to approach two of them:

1. P.G.D.I. – community development NGO active for 25 years, also running social entrepreneurship and social services to young adults without parental care and older citizens - having two senior managers dedicated to human resources development, but not having structured mentoring system.
2. Association Zvono (Bell) - dedicated to providing care for children and youth with mental disabilities, running several social services and being well established in their local community – having three senior persons willing to transfer knowledge to younger colleagues through structured mentoring programme.

MAIN CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS:

1. More planning time with HR and company management

We needed more time and probably motivation sessions primarily with management and then with potential mentors and their mentees to give them time to become aware of all the benefits they can have on company, personal and professional levels.

2. Introducing tangible motivation tools

Public and private companies need to work on motivation for their employees to do extra work and to see benefits from participating in the mentoring programme. On the other hand, social economy and civil sector organizations already have organisational culture suitable for volunteering and contributing to common good and sustainability (joint ownership and dedication).

3. Providing more support to employers and mentors

Time management - due to multiple tasks and being understaffed - we needed to be in more often communication with both employers and also supporting mentors, giving them advice on very practical issues (time management, clearing up expectations from the IntegrAGE LLL - simplifying administrative tasks) and providing feedback that they are doing fine and making them proud to contribute and co-create a replicable mentoring model.

Partner: Pannon Novum Nonprofit Ltd.

Country: Hungary

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS USED:

The piloting process was supported through a combination of direct communication and

professional network-based outreach. The subcontracted expert organization, HumánProfess Kft., played a key role in identifying potential host companies by recommending several organizations suitable for implementing the mentoring programme.

The Pannon Novum Nonprofit Ltd. aimed to select one company where the mentoring process could be implemented in a real work environment with strong commitment from both management and employees. Therefore, communication primarily focused on targeted, trust-based interactions, including personal consultations, professional discussions, and direct engagement with company representatives.

Special attention was given to selecting an organization that had experienced senior employees (aged 55+) willing to act as mentors, younger employees open to learning, and a management team committed to knowledge transfer and development. Based on these criteria and continuous communication, the final choice was Mea-Gold Ltd., which proved to be highly suitable for piloting the mentoring programme due to its inclusive organizational culture and openness to innovation.

SELECTING HOST EMPLOYERS:

The selection of the host employer was a carefully designed process aimed at ensuring the successful implementation of the mentoring programme in a real and supportive work environment. Based on preliminary recommendations provided by HumánProfess Kft., several potential companies were identified that could meet the core requirements of the programme. The Pannon Novum Nonprofit Ltd. defined clear selection criteria, including the availability of experienced senior employees (55+) willing to take on mentoring roles, the presence of younger employees open to learning, and a management team committed to supporting intergenerational knowledge transfer.

Following consultations and evaluation of the proposed organizations, Mea-Gold Ltd. was selected as the host employer. The company has more than 20 years of experience as an accredited employer and operates within a structured rehabilitation environment, employing a significant number of employees with reduced work capacity. Its guiding principle, “Everyone is differently the same,” reflects a strong commitment to inclusion, equal opportunities, and human dignity.

Mea-Gold Ltd. provides a diverse range of job roles, allowing employees to work in positions that best match their individual abilities and health conditions. The company applies a well-developed competency and skills matrix system and ensures continuous internal and external training opportunities. In addition, rehabilitation mentors and advisors support employees’ development and integration. This structured yet flexible approach, combined with a strong organizational culture focused on adaptation and personal development, made the company an ideal setting for piloting the mentoring programme and facilitating effective knowledge transfer between generations.

MAIN CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS:

During the implementation of the mentoring programme, several key challenges were identified, mainly related to generational differences, communication styles, and the adaptation of traditional workplace practices. One of the main difficulties was the gap between rule-based, authority-driven approaches and the expectations of younger employees, who preferred more partnership-based, flexible, and feedback-oriented interactions. This often led to misunderstandings, especially when expectations were not clearly defined or were communicated in abstract terms.

Another challenge was the strong need of younger participants for continuous and immediate feedback. In cases where feedback was delayed or not specific enough, it reduced clarity and sometimes affected motivation. Additionally, differences in communication patterns—such as the preference for direct, emotionally aware communication versus formal, rule-based explanations—created further barriers in the mentoring relationship.

To address these challenges, several effective solutions and good practices were introduced. Mentors began applying SMART goals to ensure that expectations were specific, measurable, and easy to understand. The use of regular and immediate feedback, combined with positive reinforcement, helped maintain motivation and supported continuous development. Emphasis was also placed on empathetic, situation-based communication, which improved mutual understanding and trust between mentors and mentees.

Furthermore, reflective discussions were incorporated into the process to allow participants to jointly evaluate experiences and learn from them. Building trust and involving mentees in goal-setting also proved to be essential in strengthening engagement. Overall, the mentoring process highlighted the importance of adapting methods to changing workplace realities and demonstrated that flexibility, clear communication, and a supportive approach are key to successful intergenerational collaboration.

Partner: Jasa Association and BSC Kranj

Country: Slovenia

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS USED:

Communication and recruitment had already begun earlier in the course of the IntegrAGE project, during the search for participants for the Peer Learning Groups. At that stage, we also reached out to the Employment Service of Slovenia, all Slovenian trade unions, the Slovenian HR Association, and a large number of companies, especially in the Kranj and Gorenjska region, as the lead partner BSC Kranj is based there and also provides training facilities. It was during this phase that we first connected with Ms Mirjana Zgaga, Assistant Director of the Maribor Unit of the Employment Service of Slovenia. She also expressed interest in reverse mentoring programme. In the initial concept, the idea was to pilot reverse mentoring within the Employment Service as a way of supporting the onboarding of newly recruited unemployed candidates with little or no prior work experience.

The Employment Service intended to offer this model to companies seeking young employees, as a form of training programme that could potentially be funded through public resources for education, training, or labour market reskilling measures. In this way, some companies might receive support for mentoring activities while also gaining the opportunity to get to know new candidates in a particularly direct, practical, and experience-based way. At the same time, existing employees aged 55+ would also benefit, as they would strengthen their mentoring, communication, and intergenerational understanding skills.

Unfortunately, this pilot could not be implemented with the Employment Service of Slovenia, as it would have represented too large a bureaucratic step for the institution. Such an approach would have required support at multiple levels, including incorporation into the annual work plan, which was not feasible within such a short timeframe.

For this reason, the idea was later transferred to the Soroptimist Club Maribor, of which Ms Mirjana Zgaga is also a member. At that time, the club was implementing, together with the Soroptimist Centre Zagreb, a special programme called the R.I.S.E. Leadership Academy for young women from across Europe. As part of this initiative, five Soroptimist members aged 55+ each took on one young woman, most of whom were still seeking their first employment opportunity, for a three-month mentoring process.

During this mentoring period, they supported the young participants in strengthening their personal and employability competences, guided them in their career development, and assisted them in job searching or in rethinking their career pathways and employment options within their chosen field. At the same time, the mentors themselves also developed further, especially in gaining a better understanding of the needs, expectations, and characteristics of Generation Z.

SELECTING HOST EMPLOYERS:

Cooperation with the Soroptimist Club Maribor, whose members include Mirjana Žgaga and Smiljana Černež, both employed at the Employment Service Maribor, emerged in a very positive and spontaneous way. At that very time, they were already implementing the Leadership Academy for Young Women of Europe.

Through the IntegrAGE Living Labs Reverse Mentoring programme, these efforts were successfully brought together. The Soroptimists received a structured framework, the necessary knowledge and training, as well as forms and questionnaires that enabled them to carry out a three-month reverse mentoring process with young women.

The five Soroptimist mentors aged 55+ all have a strong social dimension in their professional and voluntary work. They are active as professors, NGO leaders, and, in two cases, as employment counsellors/mentors at the Employment Service. This made them particularly well suited to support young women in their personal and professional development through mentoring.

MAIN CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS:

1. Scheduling and attendance

One of the main challenges was the coordination of meeting times. Fixed calendar-based appointments were not always practical, and this sometimes increased the risk of absences or reduced the time available for meaningful conversation.

Suggested solution: meetings should be scheduled more flexibly and in closer coordination with both participants, ensuring that each session takes place at a time when both sides can fully engage.

2. Insufficient time for the initial phase

The initial getting-to-know-each-other phase was very important, but in practice it would have benefited from more time. A stronger beginning would have helped participants define goals, expectations, needs, and roles more precisely.

Suggested solution: allow more time for the introductory meeting and use this stage to clearly define the purpose, tasks, and desired outcomes of the mentoring relationship.

3. Need for better process structure

The mentoring process would have been more effective with stronger structure from the beginning.

Suggested solution: prepare mentoring diaries, assessment forms, and evaluation templates in advance, so that both mentors and mentees can follow progress more consistently and reflect on their development throughout the process.

4. Building openness and equality

Mutual mentoring works best when both participants feel safe, respected, and as equal as possible. This requires trust, openness, and a willingness to talk not only about work, but also about broader life circumstances that influence motivation and professional choices.

Suggested solution: place greater emphasis on trust-building, equal participation, and open dialogue from the start of the process.

5. Need for mentor support

Mentors also need guidance during the process, especially when challenges or uncertainties arise.

Suggested solution: provide supervision or regular support sessions for mentors, giving them a space for reflection, exchange, and professional guidance.

6. Training format and peer exchange

Online introductory training was useful, but it limited interaction among mentors.

Suggested solution: organise live, in-person introductory trainings whenever possible, so participants can connect more actively, learn from one another, and continue exchanging experiences afterwards.

7. Transfer of good practices

Participants would benefit from more exposure to concrete examples and tested models. Suggested solution: include examples of good practice and create opportunities for transferring successful approaches into other organisations or mentoring contexts.

8. More balanced documentation

The monthly mentoring diary focused mainly on the mentee perspective. Suggested solution: expand the diary so that mentors can also record their own needs, goals, observations, and progress, making the process more balanced and reflective for both sides.

Partners: Country Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia (CCIS)
Educational Training Centre for professional and working skills
Country: Serbia

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS USED:

Piloting 1. CCIS

The mentoring pilot in Serbia - CCIS was implemented in a slightly different way compared to other partners, as it took place within the internal environment of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia. This allowed us to rely less on formal outreach campaigns and more on direct, everyday communication.

The selection of participants was based primarily on internal knowledge of employees, their roles, and their readiness to engage in a mentoring process. Communication was informal and immediate – through daily interactions, internal meetings, and direct conversations. An interesting dynamic emerged from the very beginning: while mentors were more accustomed to structured communication (emails, formal instructions, step-by-step explanations), mentees naturally leaned towards faster and more flexible channels, preferring short messages, quick clarifications, and learning through practice rather than documentation. This combination of communication styles turned out to be both a challenge and a strength of the process.

Piloting 2. Pilot 2: Educational Training Centre

The second pilot took place in an Educational Centre, where the mentoring relationship was between three mentor – mentee pairs. Here, communication was structured around for-

mal, scheduled sessions (30 minutes to 1 hour, three times a week). The methodology was explicitly conversational and reflective, with the mentee encouraged to speak first, followed by the mentor's observations and joint conclusions. This formalized structure was essential for addressing specific challenges like building confidence and improving focus.

SELECTING HOST EMPLOYERS:

Pilot 1. CCIS

Unlike other countries that worked with external companies, our pilot (CCIS) was conducted within one institution – the Chamber itself – which acted as both the coordinator and the host organization.

Two mentoring pairs were formed within the Department for Education. Mentors were experienced senior advisors (55+) with extensive institutional knowledge, while mentees were young employees at the beginning of their professional careers.

The matching process was based not only on technical tasks but also on compatibility in terms of working style and openness to collaboration. The goal was to ensure that knowledge transfer would not remain theoretical, but would happen through real, everyday work situations – organizing trainings, communicating with participants, handling administrative procedures, and managing client expectations. This internal setup allowed for a very practical and hands-on mentoring experience, fully embedded in real working processes.

Pilot 2. Educational Training Centre

This pilot was conducted within an Educational Centre. The pairs consisted of a mentor and mentee who worked as psychologists and advisors within the same organization, and one pair of IT developers in an insurance company. The selection was based on the mentee's identified need for professional development in areas such as professional communication, workplace ethics, and self-confidence, despite having strong theoretical knowledge. The mentors were an experienced colleagues who could provide both professional guidance and support in navigating the organizational culture.

MAIN CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS:

Pilot1. CCIS

One of the most noticeable aspects of the mentoring process was the generational difference in approach to work. Mentors tended to approach tasks in a structured, "school-like" manner – explaining processes step by step, emphasizing rules, procedures, and accuracy. For them, documentation and clear instructions were a natural part of knowledge transfer. Mentees, on the other hand, were more digitally oriented and less inclined towards formal procedures. They preferred to learn by doing, through quick iterations, and often looked for faster and more flexible ways to complete tasks. At times, detailed explanations felt too

slow or unnecessary to them. This difference occasionally created a gap in expectations – mentors expected patience and attention to detail, while mentees expected efficiency and adaptability. However, this gap gradually turned into a learning opportunity for both sides. Mentors adapted by simplifying explanations, providing more practical examples, and allowing mentees more autonomy in task execution. Mentees, in turn, developed a better understanding of why certain procedures exist, especially in contexts involving official processes, communication with external stakeholders, and public responsibilities.

Another challenge was communication style. Mentors were more comfortable with formal communication, while mentees preferred more direct and informal exchanges. Over time, both sides adjusted – finding a balance between clarity and efficiency. The mentoring process showed that successful knowledge transfer is not only about expertise, but also about adapting communication, expectations, and working styles.

In the end, the cooperation between mentors and mentees was very positive. Despite initial differences, both sides reported improved understanding, stronger collaboration, and increased confidence. Mentees became more independent in performing tasks, while mentors gained new insights into how younger generations think, learn, and work. This mutual learning aspect turned out to be one of the most valuable outcomes of the pilot.

Pilot 2: Educational Training Centre

Throughout the three-month mentoring pilot at the Educational Centre, the relationship between mentor and mentee revealed several interconnected challenges, each addressed through patient, practical, and reflective solutions.

At the outset, the most visible challenge was punctuality. The mentee occasionally arrived a few minutes late, which the mentor framed not as a minor oversight but as a matter of professional respect and commitment. Through direct, open conversation and clear expectations, the mentee became consistently punctual from the second month onward—a change that laid the groundwork for greater accountability.

A deeper, more persistent challenge was the mentee's lack of self-confidence, particularly in communication and public speaking. Although she possessed strong theoretical knowledge in her field, she hesitated when presenting ideas, often second-guessing herself and double-checking her work unnecessarily, which consumed valuable time. The mentor responded with practical exercises: the mentee practiced presenting in front of a mirror, then gradually took on small presentations during team meetings. The mentor provided a supportive space for these rehearsals, offering constructive feedback and celebrating small successes. Over the three months, the mentee's confidence grew noticeably, though both agreed that continued development in this area would be beneficial.

A related challenge was maintaining focus during work hours. The mentee frequently checked her phone and social media, which fragmented attention and slowed task completion. To address this, the mentor introduced the Pomodoro technique—working in focused

intervals with short breaks. The mentee first familiarised herself with the method, then applied it consistently. This simple structural tool helped her regain control over her attention, leading to more efficient and satisfying work.

Annexes

The following annexes contain practical tools and supporting materials developed and tested during the IntegrAGE pilots. They are intended to help organisations adapt and implement intergenerational mentoring in their own contexts.

Annex 1: Mentee Profile and Development Needs Form

Annex 2: Mentoring Action Plan (MAP)

Annex 3: GROW Method for Mentoring Conversations

Annex 4: Mentoring Diary

Annex 5: Evaluation Records (Mentor and Mentee)

Annex 6: Group Evaluation Session Form

Annex 1: Mentee Profile and Development Needs Form

Purpose: To enable the mentor, at the very beginning of the mentoring relationship, to gain a clear understanding of the mentee's background, motivation, preferred learning styles, and development goals. The form supports a structured dialogue during the first meeting and serves as a reference document for future planning and progress monitoring.

Section 1. Basic Information

Mentee's Full Name	
Position / Role	
Organization / Department	
Date of the First Mentoring Meeting	
Mentor's Full Name	
Preferred Contact Method (e-mail / phone)	

Section 2. Motivation and Expectations

1. What motivated you to join this mentoring programme?

- Professional development
- Career change
- Personal development
- Networking
- Other:

2. How do you see the mentoring relationship?

- Guidance and support
- Learning partnership
- Skills transfer
- Career advice

3. Which areas of your professional or personal development would you like to improve? (e.g. communication, leadership, organization, self-confidence, technical skills, etc.)

.....

4. What outcomes or achievements would represent success for you by the end of this programme?

Section 3. Learning Style Self-Assessment

Strengths – what do you do well?

Weaknesses – what do you need to improve?

Opportunities – what could support your development?

Threats / Challenges – what could slow down or block your progress?

Section 4. Feedback and Communication Preferences

1. How do you prefer to receive feedback?

- Written summary
- Verbal discussion
- Practical demonstration
- Combination of the above

2. How often would you like to receive feedback?

- After each session
- Monthly
- As needed

3. Which communication channels suit you best?

- E-mail
- Phone
- Messaging app (Viber, WhatsApp, etc.)
- Online video meetings
- In person (face-to-face)

Section 5. Summary – Mentor's Notes

Mentor's Signature:

How to use this tool

- Complete it together during or immediately after the first mentoring session.
- One copy should be kept by the mentor in their documentation, and one by the mentee.
- Review and update the form midway through the mentoring cycle to reflect progress or changing needs.

Annex 2: Mentoring Action Plan (MAP)

Introduction: The Mentoring Action Plan (MAP) is the central working document of the mentoring relationship. It serves as a roadmap that translates the mentee’s learning needs and development priorities into structured, achievable goals supported by concrete activities, timelines, and indicators of progress. A well-prepared action plan helps transform mentoring from a series of conversations into a strategic learning process.

Purpose

- To convert identified learning needs into SMART goals and measurable results.
- To define clear roles, activities, and responsibilities of the mentor and mentee.
- To ensure alignment with the duration of mentoring, available resources, and the organizational context.
- To provide a framework for continuous reflection, feedback, and evaluation.

How it works

1. The mentor and mentee complete the Mentoring Action Plan together after the initial meetings.
2. The plan becomes the basis for session planning and progress discussions.
3. The plan is reviewed periodically in order to assess achievements, identify challenges, and adapt next steps.
4. The process concludes with a joint evaluation of results and the definition of future development directions.

Template A) Full Version

Section 1. Basic Information

Mentee’s Full Name	
Mentor’s Full Name	
Mentoring Period (from-to)	
Date of Plan Creation	
Review Dates (mid-term / final)	
Communication Format (in person / online / hybrid)	
Session Frequency (weekly / bi-weekly / monthly)	

Section 2. Development Priorities

Priority Area	Rationale / Why this area is important

Section 3. SMART Goals and Key Results

SMART Goal	Activities / Key Results
1.	By January 2026, the mentee will improve presentation skills by delivering two presentations to the team.
1.1.	The mentor and mentee will prepare the presentation together by 15 December 2025.
1.2	The mentee will deliver a trial presentation in front of colleagues by 10 January 2026.
1.3
2.

Section 4. Context and Feasibility Check

Factor	Reflection / Notes
Mentoring Period	
Resources	
Organizational Context	
Support Needed	

Section 5. Monitoring and Feedback

Date	Session Focus	Progress Achieved	Feedback Summary	Next Steps / Adjustments
Mid-term Review				
Final Review				

Mentor's Signature: Date:

Mentee's Signature: Date:

Template B) Short Version Section 1. Basic Information

Mentee's Full Name and position	
Mentor's Full Name and position	
Mentoring Period (from-to)	
Date of Plan Creation	
Communication Format (in person / online / hybrid)	
Session Frequency (weekly / bi-weekly / monthly)	

Section 2. Development Priorities

Priority Area	Rationale / Why this area is important

Section 3. SMART Goals and Key Results

Goals and expected results	
Goal 1	
R1.1.	
R1.2.	
R1.3.	
Goal 2	
R2.1.	
R2.2.	
R2.3.	
Goal 3	
R3.1.	
R3.2.	
R3.3.	

Annex 3: GROW Method for Mentoring Conversations

Overview: The GROW model is one of the most effective frameworks for structuring mentoring conversations. It provides a clear pathway that guides the discussion from exploring the mentee’s goals to defining concrete, actionable steps for improvement. Originally developed by Sir John Whitmore, the model is widely used in mentoring, coaching, and leadership development because of its simplicity, flexibility, and results orientation.

GROW stands for: G – Goal R – Reality O – Options W – Will / Way Forward

Purpose of the GROW method

The GROW model helps mentors lead conversations logically and purposefully, encouraging mentees to take responsibility for their own learning and action. It promotes reflection, analysis, and accountability while ensuring that each session ends with clear and achievable outcomes.

Overview of the GROW steps

Step	Guiding Questions for Mentor	Purpose	Practical Tips
G – Goal	What do you want to achieve from this session? What does success look like? How will you know you have achieved it?	Clarifies what the mentee wants to achieve in this session or in the longer term.	Make sure the goal is SMART and linked to the overall mentoring plan. Write it down in measurable terms.
R – Reality	What is happening right now? What have you tried so far? What obstacles are you facing? How do you feel about the situation?	Helps the mentee objectively analyze their current situation and challenges.	Encourage honesty; ask for facts and concrete examples, not assumptions. Avoid offering solutions too early.
O – Options	What could you do differently? What alternative approaches can you think of? Who or what could support you?	Generates ideas and possible steps forward.	Encourage brainstorming without judgment. Let the mentee take the lead in identifying solutions.

Step	Guiding Questions for Mentor	Purpose	Practical Tips
W – Will / Way Forward	What exactly will you do next? When will you do it? What support do you need? How committed are you to this step (1–10)?	Defines concrete next steps and level of commitment to action.	Ask the mentee to summarize the plan and send a short follow-up note after the meeting.

Example of a GROW-based mentoring dialogue

Stage	Example Mentor–Mentee Dialogue
G – Goal	Mentor: “What would you like us to work on today?” Mentee: “I want to learn how to give feedback without sounding critical.”
R – Reality	Mentor: “Tell me about the last time you gave feedback to someone.” Mentee: “I hesitated and in the end I said nothing. My colleague repeated the same mistake.”
O – Options	Mentor: “What approaches could you try next time?” Mentee: “Maybe I could start with something positive and then explain what could be improved.”
W – Will / Way Forward	Mentor: “Excellent. In which situation will you try that first?” Mentee: “At the next team meeting I will give feedback to one colleague and ask for their reaction.”

How to apply the GROW model in practice

- Use it as a flexible framework for guiding mentoring sessions from goal to concrete action.
- Document outcomes and review progress at the next meeting.
- Encourage reflection and ownership — the mentee should do most of the work in the conversation.
- Balance structure and flexibility; adapt the model to the pace and context of the mentee.

Tips for mentors

- Maintain a neutral, curious tone and avoid offering solutions too early.
- Allow silence — it gives the mentee space to think and process the question.
- Always end sessions with agreed next steps and follow-up points.
- Recognize and celebrate progress — small wins help maintain motivation.

Annex 4: Mentoring Diary

Mentoring Diary – Monthly Record

(To be maintained throughout the 3-month pilot period)

Month:

Mentor:

Mentee:

Date	Skills Covered	Progress (1-5)

Challenges	Solutions Tried

Mentoring methodology used:

Key observations:

Action items for the next month:

Annex 5: Evaluation Records (Mentor and Mentee)

Mentor Evaluation Record

(To be completed after the 3-month pilot period)

Please rate each category (1-4):

1 = Needs improvement 2 = Developing 3 = Proficient 4 = Exemplary

Mentor:

Position:

Mentee:

Position:

Criteria	Indicators	Score
Motivation and Initiative	Mentee demonstrates high motivation and initiative in the mentoring process	
Knowledge Transfer	Adopts and demonstrates applied skills	
Communication	Respectful and constructive Active listening, giving and receiving feedback	
Creativity / Innovation	Ease and adaptability in new situations Develops custom solutions for challenges	
Wellbeing Support	Addresses stress/ fatigue markers Flexible in time arrangement and task management	

OVERALL FEEDBACK

On Mentee	
On the mentoring process	
Support received from the Employer / HR management	
Support provided by the IntegrAGE partnership	

Mentee Evaluation Record

(To be completed after the 3-month pilot period)

Please rate each category (1-4):

1 = Needs improvement 2 = Developing 3 = Proficient 4 = Exemplary

Mentee: Position:

Mentor: Position:

Criteria	Indicators	Score
Motivation and Initiative	Mentor demonstrates high motivation and initiative Motivates and inspires	
Knowledge Transfer	Uses efficient knowledge transfer methodology Practices coaching rather than teaching	
Communication	Respectful and constructive Active listening, giving and receiving feedback	
Goal setting and time management	Sets up smart goals and expectations through joint effort and participation Helps balance tasks and improve performance	
Networking	Helps building relationships and connections Provides guidelines in networking, using own support network	

OVERALL FEEDBACK

On Mentee	
On the mentoring process	
Support received from the Employer / HR management	
Further support needed	

Tool 6: Group Evaluation Session Form

Group Evaluation Session

(to be conducted through the evaluation session with key stakeholders after mentoring is completed)

Participants: mentors, mentees, HR department representative(s) - 10-15 people
 Duration: 90 minutes session (preferably live or on-line)
 Language: local language
 Facilitation: experienced facilitator and notetaker (preferably also recording the entire session)
 Set up: round table or circle

PROCESS:

- Introduction: Explaining purpose, methodology, duration and evaluation process
- Brief introduction of facilitators and participants
- Going through the evaluation questions tending to involve all participants in an informal and re-laxed atmosphere so participants feel free to share their experience and express their ideas
- Answers to be recorded as main points (not as individual but group/collective answers)

PARTICIPANTS:

of Mentors: # of Mentees:

HR Department: Colleagues:

Facilitator

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your overall satisfaction with the LLL mentoring process (5 min)

Please use the following rate (1-4):

1 = Needs improvement 2 = Good 3 = Very Good 4 = Excellent

No of answers:

Rate 1: Rate 2: Rate 3: Rate 4:

2. What do you think is the most important positive outcome of this LLL experience?

- Personal level:
- Company/Employer level:

3. What were the main setbacks and issues that you would like to avoid and change in the next run? (10 min)

.....

4. Based on your experience, what would you advise to other mentors/mentees going through the mentoring process? What would improve their experience and efficiency?

.....

5. What kind of support would you expect and would benefit from to improve the experience and results of the LLL mentoring?

.....

6. Would you be willing to repeat that experience and continue with mentoring either in your organization or share your experience with other organizations?

YES: NO: Maybe:

7. Any other comments or recommendations that would help IntegrAGE LLL team to improve the mentoring process?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**Interreg
Danube Region**



**Co-funded by
the European Union**



IntegrAGE