

October 2020

Author:
Ronald Lievens
UIA Expert



The Urban Lab of Europe !

The Passport4Work project Journal N° 2

Project led by the City of Eindhoven



**JOBS & SKILLS
IN THE LOCAL ECONOMY**



The Passport4Work project – P4W

Passport4Work (P4W) is rooted in the Dutch Brainport region, also known as the “silicon valley of the Netherlands”. In this region, there is a growth paradox. Continued economic growth coexists with a growing distance to the labour market and decreased employability for the lower-educated workforce. Stakeholders on both the demand and supply sides of labour have called for a structural change.

P4W addresses this call for a structural change by creating a solution which redesigns the journey to (re)employment for the lower educated workforce. To achieve this, an intersectoral transformation of the labour market is pursued through the development of a low threshold, intersectoral platform. Through this P4W platform, a strong link will be established between employers, employees and educational institutes to foster sustainable matches on the labour market. Innovative features of this platform include gamified, personalized assessments and eLearnings tailored to target user needs, as well as a foundation, or “golden standard” through which information on skills can be effectively utilized for job matching purposes.

Partnerships:

- City of Eindhoven
- UWV
- Province of North Brabant
- Participation Employment Agency
- Organiq
- Building Changes
- WeEindhoven
- Transvorm
- Tilburg University
- MKB Eindhoven

Table of Contents

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
2. THE PROJECT'S IMPLEMENTATION SO FAR	5
3. IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES	8
4. PROJECT-SPECIFIC CHALLENGES	14
5. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS	16

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Passport4Work (P4W) has entered a phase of intensive technical development and prototyping. The groundwork, on which the different tools and services will be built, has been completed. Together with end user representatives, tests are taking place to further inform the prototyping process.

Strong connections with other relevant stakeholders have also been established, both on the local, regional and national levels. P4W is now a key contributor to a major shift in the Dutch labour market landscape, represented by CompetentNL. This is a Dutch skills language, which allows all stakeholders involved in the labour market to speak one language when it comes to skills. This causes more labour market transparency, reduces prevalent search frictions, and can as such be considered to be a true game changer.

The foundation of the P4W platform is finished. In the coming period, P4W will continue prototyping the different tools which will be built on this foundation, among which eLearnings, the gamified assessment and job matching modules. Furthermore, it will soon deploy its communication and activation campaigns, to ensure active use by its targeted end users (job seekers, employees, employers and intermediaries).

Of course, the project is, and has not been, subject to significant challenges and adversity. In this second project journal, a reflection on each of the operational UIA challenges is provided, as well as several challenges unique to P4W.

2. THE PROJECT'S IMPLEMENTATION SO FAR

Much of Passport4Work's activities this year revolve around technical development, testing and implementation of ideas. While COVID-19 has unquestionably left its mark, and will most likely continue to permeate throughout the rest of the project, substantial progress has been made in bringing ideas and concepts to fruition.

Most importantly, it should be noted that the necessary groundwork (in terms of analysis and strategy development) has now been done to allow the definition and building of the online platform. While the project team will continue to keep tabs on relevant developments in the dynamic labour market of today, the online platform which will be home to many of P4W's

features (such as the online assessment, more on that later in this journal) has now been established.

The online platform is best characterized as a container box. It comprises the foundation on which other functions will be built. It entails a front-end with a look and feel which caters to the target audience, and a back-end which allows the integration of different features (which are at various stages of completion). These features include an assessment of skills, job matching, eLearning and lifelong development (and possible others, pending relevant opportunities and requirements), as depicted in Figure 1.

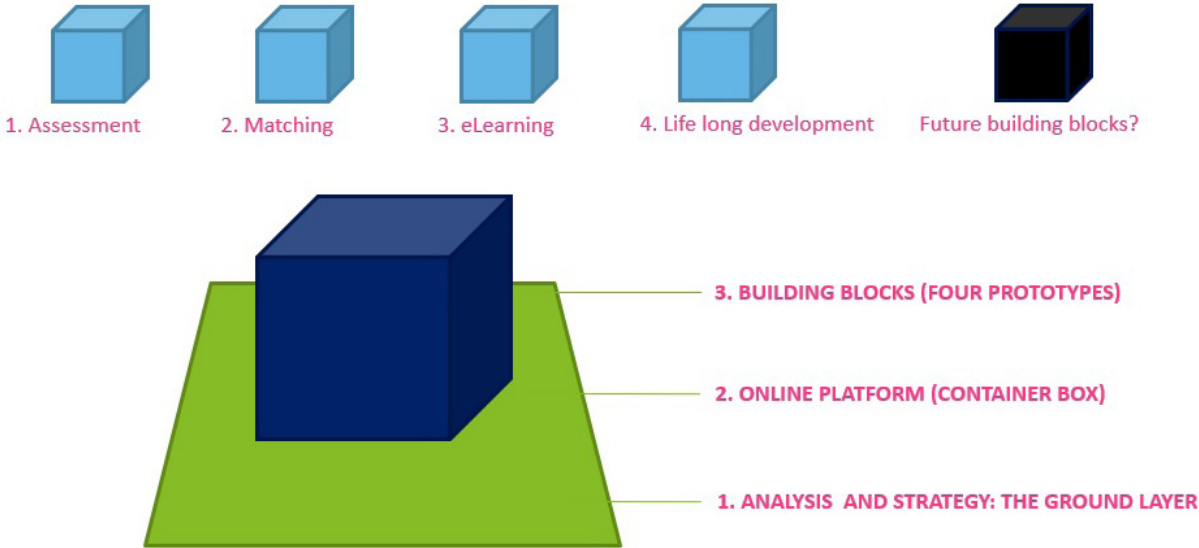


Figure 1. P4W container box and its building blocks

Each of these features is currently undergoing prototyping. The skills assessment, for instance, is building on proven elements of gamification and role-playing scenarios. However, combining these approaches for conducting a skills assessment is unprecedented and as such represents a unique approach. In the recent [Zoom-In Podcast](#), project members discuss the utility of soft skills for the project in great detail. To inform the skills assessment as much as possible, expert meetings are organized with labour market representatives to gather input on the focal points of such an assessment.

A concrete example is an assessment on the “active listening” skill. While O*NET (the language skill on which P4W is mainly based) provides a definition of this skill with certain behavioral anchors (for example, maintaining eye contact), these definitions are not differentiated to different occupations. Active listening in health care, for instance, arguably entails different behavior and implications than in construction (both industries which are represented in P4W, together with the technical industry). These differences have been explored and defined together with industry representatives, to provide as much realism as possible in the assessment (ultimately resulting in better eLearnings and matches).

Alongside the technical development, two major project initiatives are in full effect: [the translation of the abstract O*NET skills and definitions to the more accessible Dutch A2 level](#), and the [validation](#)

[of skills within the Dutch labour market through a national survey](#) among Dutch employers and employees. These contributions are vital to ultimately realize the envisioned [golden standard of skills](#). Further supporting these processes, P4W is collaborating with nationally represented sectors of industry.

The project has continued to seek and build meaningful and relevant connections with other parties and initiatives. These connections help to increase the impact of P4W beyond the borders of the Eindhoven region, by establishing regional and (inter)national connections. The national skills survey, for instance, is used as a direct input for the Dutch CompetentNL skills standard, coordinated by the Dutch public employment service (UWV). To ensure an appropriate response rate for the survey, which is a significant challenge in times of COVID-19, connections with other industry representatives are currently being sought.

In addition to this, in the coming months, the various prototypes will be subjected to testing and iterations. The first prototype of the skills assessment, for example, will be tested in November this year with target users through an extensive user experience (UX) test, by means of sophisticated eye-tracking technology. This will provide insight in the pace at which target users can use the tool, and helps to identify bottlenecks, which can then be remediated in a next iteration (followed by another UX test at a later point in time). Preliminary results of the first UX test will be shared in an upcoming web article.

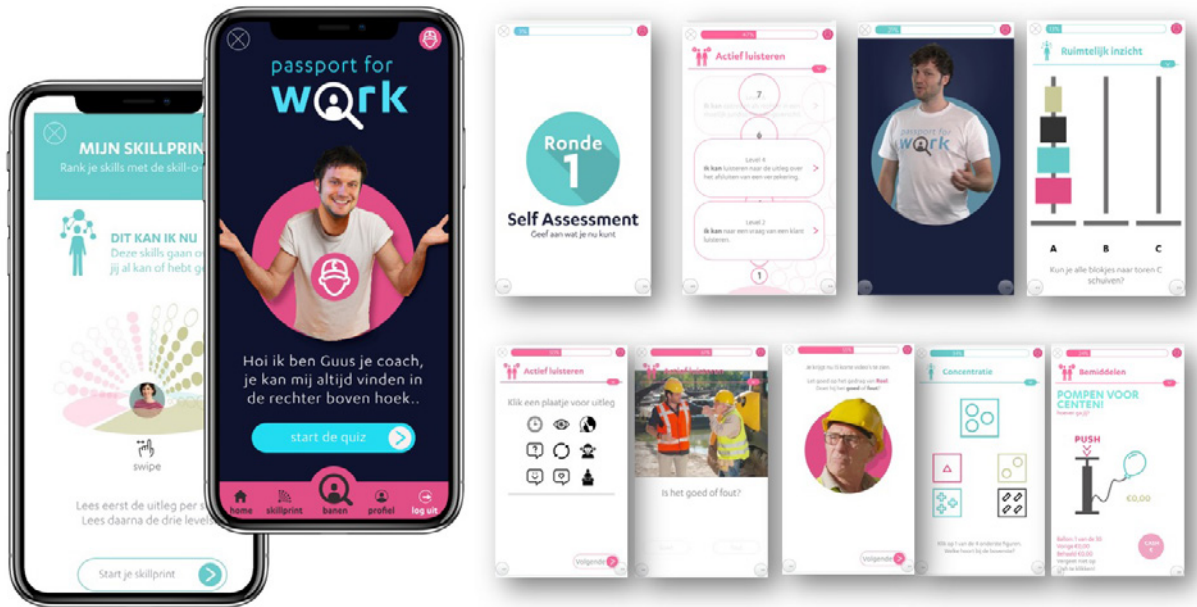


Figure 2. An impression of the look and feel of the current P4W prototypes

In parallel, an activation and branding strategy is in development to stimulate use among the different target groups. These will play an

instrumental role in deploying the platform together with the range of its features in the beginning of 2021.

3. IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Challenge 1. Leadership for implementation

URGENCY: MEDIUM

Relevance of the challenge

The P4W project team consists of 10 public and private partner organizations. The managing urban authority, as well as some of the other public partner organizations, are operating in a highly political environment. Priorities are dynamic, especially in times of COVID-19, so there is a nearly constant need for proving and legitimizing the importance and value of the project. Simultaneously, a certain degree of freedom is required for the project team to develop new ideas for which no precedents exist.

Mitigating the challenge

To help gain and maintain required levels of political support, it has been vital to make appropriate connections. For instance, the city of Eindhoven and its overarching province of North-Brabant are deeply invested in sustainable labour market initiatives. These initiatives pertain to the integration of refugees, the realization of climate change goals and overcoming dramatic COVID-19 shifts in supply and demand. By aligning the P4W project with these initiatives, in addition to its core activities, political support has been secured. Links with additional educational institutes in the region have also been made, in an attempt to involve them in the testing and development of P4W tools, and also by bringing in their specific needs from the tool. One observed trend, for instance, in education is the fostering of entrepreneurial skills. The project is now

exploring the feasibility of integrating these in the P4W tools together with a higher vocational institute, in an attempt to embed the project in the realities of day-to-day education.

Lessons learned

Most importantly, being transparent about the project's progress, as well as making appropriate and relevant connections in the region have been essential to secure political leadership and support. Considering the large degree of experimentation involved, both elements are vital to keep top-level stakeholders both committed and informed.

Challenge 2. (Smart) public procurement (using public spending to leverage more local innovation)

URGENCY: LOW

Relevance of the challenge

There is a tension between the local procurement regulations and the overarching EU guidelines. This has been an issue at the start of the project, where increasingly common flexible employment contracts and network organizations conflicted with requirements at the EU level. This has, later on in the project, also manifested itself in differing procurement and commissioning procedures and thresholds between public organizations. While it is obvious that public procurement processes should be conducted in a conscientious and careful manner, they do limit the project's degrees of freedom in situations where quick decision making is required.

Mitigating the challenge

In procurement procedures, the project team has developed a strong focus on the outcome and impact of procured services, rather than a rigid and extensive specifications list. This is crucial given the unpredictable nature of the innovation process, as it leaves more freedom and agility with regards to the route towards the end result. By defining procurement requirements in terms of outcomes (the added value of the procured service) rather than detailed process-oriented specifications, considerable time has been saved in procuring different services in the project (for example, [the procurement of a researching agency to distribute the national survey on skills among employers and employees](#)). The MUA does recommend however, that more flexible EU stipulations for public procurement would further benefit true innovative project execution.

Lessons learned

To avoid lengthy procurement processes, focusing on aspects pertaining to results and impact, with a flexible path towards these outcomes, rather than overly specified and rigid requirements helps speed up both the procurement process as well as the subsequent delivery. This requires an on-going dialogue with involved procurement offices, which at times barely deal with innovative projects. While these dialogues can be time consuming, in the end it pays off in terms of time saved in the project execution.

Challenge 3.

Organizational arrangements within the urban authority to deliver integrated innovative projects (cross-department working)

URGENCY: MEDIUM

Relevance of the challenge

The MUA project manager is operating in a broad playing field, with many relevant initiatives. This provides a lot of opportunities for integration within (and beyond) the MUA. However, this integration is dependent on a strong level of political acceptance and awareness of these opportunities. This is a growing process, by realizing one specific integration (for instance, making connections to other job matching systems in P4W) and being transparent about the added value for the project and the MUA, this opens doors for other opportunities as well. This requires a strong level of political and environmental awareness.

Mitigating the challenge

P4W is rooted in the regions' and cities' labour market agenda, which has only grown stronger recently with the detrimental effects of COVID-19 on industries and its jobs. In light of this, throughout the project's lifetime, several integrations have been realized within and across the MUA within this broad domain (for instance, relating to mitigating adverse effects of COVID-19 in the province of North-Brabant, the Robotics agenda and the earlier mentioned refugee integration and sustainability projects).

To realize this, there has to be a certain level of agility of flexibility, for the project leader to engage in new terrain. Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, at times it has been difficult to persuade political stakeholders within the MUA to look for

expertise outside of the organization, for instance. Despite a relatively loose governance structure surrounding the P4W project, diplomatic sensitivity and negotiation skills were very important to get these ideas off the ground. COVID-19 has, to some extent, lowered these political barriers. Due to the high sense of urgency within, but also beyond the MUA, it has become imperative to achieve results quickly, resulting in previously out-of-the-box ideas facing significantly less political resistance.

Nonetheless, it remains of high importance to keep other senior decisionmakers informed on the project's progress through frequent updates and contact points. These can result in different and unexpected synergy effects, especially within a large municipality as the city of Eindhoven. Environmental and political awareness, and actively managing both the project and the environment are key.

Lessons learned

A strong business case helps to get out-of-the-box ideas off the ground. Defining the need and impact of such an idea is essential to persuade decision makers to go along with the idea. While COVID-19 has reduced certain bureaucratic barriers, in addition the development of sound arguments and due diligence research for a certain project direction which requires approval at higher levels is a strong accelerator. The communications strategy can also be used to support this process. Through a multi-channel internal communications approach P4W has become increasingly more visible across the MUA (and beyond), resulting in new opportunities for collaboration.

Challenge 4. **Participative approach for co-implementation**

URGENCY: HIGH

Relevance of the challenge

Early on in the project, the P4W project struggled with getting all ten project partners on board. The project partners are a mixture of public and private organizations, of which not all are used to work on unproven solutions through innovative processes. Developing and maintaining a shared vision across the board has taken considerable time, and a lot of bilateral talks with partner representatives. Complicating this process, some of these representatives changed over time, upon which this onboarding and shared vision building process had to be started over. Beyond the project partners, there is a whole realm of relevant (inter)national stakeholders and projects to be considered as well. Considerable time has been invested in gaining traction among these initiatives, and realizing connections to prevent reinventing the wheel.

Mitigating the challenge

To keep all partners informed and committed, a new project team structure was devised. A number of key representatives, which were driving the project forward the most, was appointed for day-to-day decision making. Other partners, acting more on the sidelines, were involved at specific appropriate times. For instance, several partners are more active in the actual matching of job seekers to jobs. Their input is essential, but prior to having meaningful conversations, it has been essential to first realize the foundation of the P4W platform. Given the recent completion of this phase, other partner representatives are becoming increasingly involved in the project. A recent deepening of

this structure is the introduction of dedicated thematic working groups, among each of the tools' prototypes (assessment, matching, lifelong development and eLearnings). This allows for more targeted discussions with relevant partners (more on this in Challenge 10).

In addition, P4W has developed a growing network of relevant stakeholders and initiatives beyond the primary 10 project partners. Examples include the fields of education, private job matching and overarching national legislative bodies pertaining to job matching. These connections help increase the impact and possibilities for upscaling the project.

Lessons learned

Deviating from the originally devised management structure has been an important intervention to foster more effective decision making. Especially in a project with a large number of projects, it is key to assemble a daily task force with a balanced mix of individuals (considering, for instance, their strategic, operational and tactical capabilities). Observing and frequently discussing what works, and what doesn't work helps to guide this process. Investing time in building a relevant network around the project has also been continually essential. Especially in a fragmented domain (such as the labour market), it is important to invest in sustainable relationships and alliances of triple helix partners.

Challenge 5. Monitoring and evaluation

URGENCY: LOW

Relevance of the challenge

In P4W, a separate work package has been dedicated to the monitoring and evaluation of the project. This has been done in an attempt to

conduct the project in an evidence-based manner, with a clear focus on measurable and sustainable impact through various feedback loops based on scientific tests and experimentation. There are two prominent challenges here: first of all, realizing the availability of data (which project partners are either, reluctant or not permitted to share due to the personal and sensitive nature and relevant legislative restrictions such as the GDPR) and second managing the tension between the need for scientific rigor on the one hand, and maintaining a quick pace of decision making on the other. COVID-19 poses a possible third challenge, namely the availability of job seekers for experiments, but this is too early to tell.

Mitigating the challenge

Due to the fact that data on P4W end users cannot be easily obtained from a number of partners (based on mostly legitimate, GDPR-related reasons), the project team has decided to develop a dedicated administrative system to help track the end users in terms of their usage of P4W tools, subsequent job interviews and possible hirings. Based on this data, meaningful conclusions can be drawn on several of the project's impact indicators (whether an end user gains more insight in their job opportunities and skills gaps, for example). Furthermore, through a participative research approach, Tilburg University is in constant alignment with the project team to gauge the most feasible and non-disruptive opportunities for collecting data and organizing experiments. Furthermore, tests and experiments are primarily being held online, to minimize the impact of COVID-19 restrictions.

Lessons learned

To ensure appropriate impact measurements, it is important to invest in the availability of appropriate data. Given the different restrictions

and uncertainties at hand (namely related to GDPR), the project team took these matters in their own hands by taking centralized ownership of this, instead of expecting it from the different project partners. Furthermore, by involving a research representative in the project team, and by including the KPI measurements as an integral component of different working groups, the likelihood of effective impact measurements is increased.

Challenge 6. Communication with target beneficiaries and users

URGENCY: HIGH

Relevance of the challenge

P4W is completely dependent on input from its targeted end users: job seekers, employers, educational institutes, and (local) government representatives. Early on in the project, the decision was made to first develop a minimum viable product (MVP) of the platform, prior to actively involving the different end users. While input had been collected, their involvement was rather limited initially. This poses a major risk for the ultimate success of the project, which is contingent on end users actively using the tool.

Mitigating the challenge

Over time, the decision to involve users upon completion of the MVP of the tool was reversed as much as possible. At the time of writing, extensive user experience tests are taking place with target users, based on an early prototype of the platform. Connections are sought with the target users as much as possible. For example, recently [a meeting was organized with a local school to lower the complexity of skills terminology](#). As another example, employer support is key, both for providing input for a national survey the

project has introduced, as well as for providing input for job matching requirements. The project team is actively investing in these relationships (primarily through the partner networks) in an attempt to build awareness and commitment. Another challenge is the commitment of the actual job seekers: this is to be gained through the rollout of an elaborate branding and activation campaign, tailored to the specific perceptions and requirements of this audience. Furthermore, P4W is in the midst of defining its added value together with regional public employment services: by embedding the platform in existing processes, the likelihood of sustainable use is increased.

Lessons learned

The main lesson learned is not to wait too long with involving end users. Rather than working based on assumptions, close alignment with key target users early on in the process benefits both an informed development, as well as laying the groundwork for committed use after the prototyping phase. It is also essential to strive to embed the innovative solution in existing structures and processes as much as possible, to increase the likelihood of adoption and sustainable use upon project completion.

Challenge 7. Upscaling

URGENCY: MEDIUM

Relevance of the challenge

There are many initiatives dealing with the labour market. In the Netherlands, for instance, House of Skills is a project which shares a lot of P4W's ambitions. On the national level, there are also several relevant developments which overlap with the goals and ambitions of P4W. The challenge is to bridge these initiatives, rather than working in isolated silos.

Mitigating the challenge

P4W has aligned itself with many relevant initiatives. Through participation in national knowledge exchange and thematic brainstorming meetings, the project has become more visible among other relevant stakeholders. This has, for example, resulted in P4W now being a key player in the development of a Dutch national skills language (CompetentNL). This initiative is coordinated by the national public employment service, working together with other prominent public institutes (such as the CBS, the Dutch national bureau of statistics), to govern the introduction of this innovative new skills language. By working together on this level, P4W ensures the sustainable use of its outcomes upon

completion of the project. P4W is also closely working together with existing labour market intermediaries, in an attempt to strengthen their services, rather than being positioned as a replacement. This strategy is also expected to increase market adoption down the line.

Lessons learned

The most important lesson is to avoid contributing to fragmentation. Seeking connections with other relevant projects and organizations can be a lengthy, time-consuming process (which will be on-going throughout the remainder of the project), but it is of critical importance to ensure appropriate conditions for scalability and sustainability.

4. PROJECT-SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

Challenge 8. Privacy and ownership of data

URGENCY: HIGH

Relevance of the challenge

At the core of P4W is highly personal, sensitive information on an individual's skills and other personal characteristics used for labour market matching. The gamified assessment, for instance, results in personal insights on an individual's soft skills. In someone's passport for work, this information could be supplemented by other data, such as their educational history, personality or even their health and wellbeing. Deciding on the inclusion of these data types is heavily governed by general data protection regulation (GDPR).

Mitigating the challenge

The project team has tried to identify and overcome the GDPR restrictions, but this topic has proven to be extremely complex with a lot of intricacies related to the management, distribution, and storing data. As such, external expertise is going to be sought.

Lessons learned

Had the project team involved external expertise earlier, the GDPR issue could have been handled in an earlier stage. Given its apparent complexity, the project has been forced to look for external expertise. Testing the underlying assumption (that it could be managed internally) earlier could have saved time.

Challenge 9. Gaining formal recognition for unproven solutions

URGENCY: MEDIUM

Relevance of the challenge

P4W is building innovative skills assessments with gamified elements. This is relatively new terrain, for which no official standards or certifications exist. However, educational institutes and employers often rely on these "quality earmarks" prior to using them. The challenge is to provide this necessary credibility of the developed tools, in alternative ways.

Mitigating the challenge

The project team has explored the option of gaining official accreditation of certification of developed assessments and eLearning modules. Due to their innovative nature, this is not possible through organizations traditionally involved in this process. As an alternative approach, recognition is now sought among industry representatives and alliances themselves, rather than more traditional institutions.

Lessons learned

This is a matter of out-of-the-box problem solving. Especially in innovation projects, there can be an absence of best practices or precedents concerning certain project deliverables. Flexibility in approaching the solution proved to be beneficial here.

Challenge 10. Managing deviations from the original project plan

URGENCY: HIGH

Relevance of the challenge

An innovative project such as P4W is surrounded by high levels of unpredictability and unforeseen dynamics. As such, some of the originally set out project activities turn out to be either unfeasible or no longer realistic (also given contextual changes among the project's environment). To a certain extent, the original project plan is largely based on the assumption that this is more of a predictable, static process. The challenge is to remain true to the original goals and planning and its overarching ambitions, while also remaining flexible in its exact execution.

Mitigating the challenge

In response to the time-consuming, periodic comparing of current project activities to those initially formulated, the project team has recently appointed separate thematic working groups. These are assigned to critical overarching themes which are closely linked to product development. To illustrate, in P4W there are now dedicated groups working on job matching, the development of the skills assessment, lifelong learning, and eLearnings. As part of their bi-weekly meetings, each of these working groups mirror current project activities to those initially defined (as part of a broad range of fixed topics, also including interdependencies, external opportunities and developments, implications for project performance indicators). This way, the project

can stay true to the original plan as much as possible, and pinpoint any specific deviations, for which then supporting arguments are collected and discussed in the entire team. This way, any deviations are identified in a timely manner, and possible shifts in the project's deliverables and/or scope are based on informed discussions.

Lessons learned

By implementing different work packages into thematic working groups, different hurdles were tackled at once. By doing so, in these groups discussions on significant project deliverables could take place on a structural basis, allowing for a better perspective on the originally defined project activities, as well as overarching themes such as the project's KPI's, communication strategy, and issues pertaining to privacy legislation.

5. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

P4W has clearly entered a different phase of the project, with prototyping and technical development being the focal points of attention. The project has established important national connections, and is playing a key role in future-proofing the Dutch labour market through its involvement in the Dutch skills language, CompetentNL.

The most prominent and impactful challenges for P4W are maintaining a participative approach for co-creation and implementation, communication with target beneficiaries, as well as two project-specific challenges: adhering to privacy and managing deviations from the original project plan.

Given the fact that tools are now being developed and shortly deployed in practice, in the upcoming months the measures taken to overcome these challenges will be of critical importance. While contributing to the above-mentioned national governance of a skills language is a great first step, in the next period efforts will be made to complete the different tool prototypes, and successfully integrate these in the daily practices of the targeted end users for the purposes of professional development, skills assessment, job matching and lifelong learning.

Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) is an Initiative of the European Union that provides urban areas throughout Europe with resources to test new and unproven solutions to address urban challenges. Based on article 8 of ERDF, the Initiative has a total ERDF budget of EUR 372 million for 2014-2020.

UIA projects will produce a wealth of knowledge stemming from the implementation of the innovative solutions for sustainable urban development that are of interest for city practitioners and stakeholders across the EU. This journal is a paper written by a UIA Expert that captures and disseminates the lessons learnt from the project implementation and the good practices identified. The journals will be structured around the main challenges of implementation identified and faced at local level by UIA projects. They will be published on a regular basis on the UIA website.



Urban Innovative Actions

Les Arcuriales
45D rue de Tournai
F- 59000 Lille

+33 (0)3 61 76 59 34
info@uia-initiative.eu
www.uia-initiative.eu

Follow us on **twitter**
@UIA_Initiative
and on **Facebook**.