

YOUnite

YOUnite Pilot Implementation Evaluation Report

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Content

1.	Introduction	3
2.	Evaluation Design	4
3.	Results	5
3.1.	Results from the Participants 2-point-Survey	6
3.1.1.	Health and wellbeing	6
3.1.2.	Health literacy	8
3.1.3.	Healthy habits and lifestyle	9
3.1.4.	Future Ideas and job expectations	11
3.1.5.	Experiences with the training program	11
3.2.	Results from the Trainer Survey	15
3.2.1.	Trainers' assessment – activities, which where helpful for the participants:	15
3.2.2.	Trainers' assessment – change in the participants over the day(s) of the training	16
4.	Conclusion	20
5.	List of figures	22

1. Introduction

The YOUnite project was developed to address the integration of disadvantaged, obese youth into the labour market. According to a study by World of Labour, obesity is not just a health issue but affects many areas of life, including discrimination in the job market. Obese individuals often face negative stereotypes such as lack of self-control, unhealthy behaviours, and low self-esteem, all of which significantly affect their employment opportunities.

The YOUnite programme aims to support obese adolescents aged 15 to 24 by providing targeted training programmes to enhance their employability and improve their integration into the labour market. The programme consists of six modules – Medical, Nutrition, Sport, Stress Management, Awareness, and Employment Guidance – designed to strengthen both the physical and mental health of the participants while preparing them for employment.

In the early phases of the project, the content of these modules was developed in collaboration with stakeholders from the health and employment sectors. The next step focused on training youth coaches and trainers, equipping them with best practices for working with this vulnerable group. The core component of the project involved piloting the YOUnite programme with vulnerable youth, gathering feedback, and evaluating results in order to refine and optimize the training content.

The pilot implementation took place in 4 different countries: Austria, Finland, Hungary and Poland. The accompanying evaluation of the training workshops also took place in all 4 participating countries. Questionnaires were designed for the participants and trainers and translated into the respective languages of the countries of origin.

This evaluation report provides a comprehensive overview of the results and findings of the pilot phase with the adolescents. It aims to show impact of the programme and how the participants and trainers have experienced it's implementation.

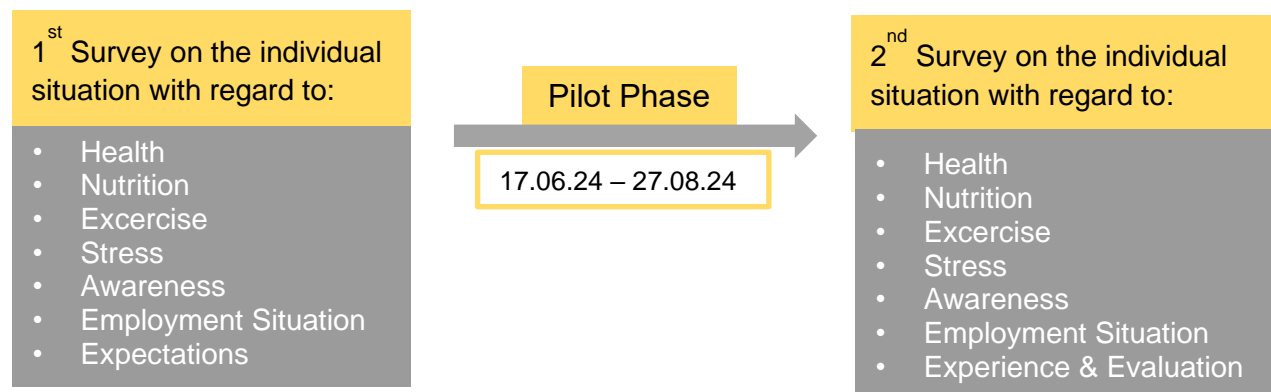
2. Evaluation Design

The evaluation of the pilot implementation in the participating countries was realised using quantitative methods. Therefore, a 2-point survey was developed for the participants and a follow-up survey for the trainers. The questionnaires were designed in English and German and translated by the respective partner countries into their own language.

In order to visualize an impact, the participants were surveyed at two points in time using different questionnaires. The first questionnaire was developed to record the initial situation of the participants before the training. The second questionnaire, implemented after the training, was developed to determine whether certain aspects such as self-confidence, body awareness or the health competence of the participants had changed in course of the training.

Participants: 2-point Survey

Figure 1: Participants 2-point Survey

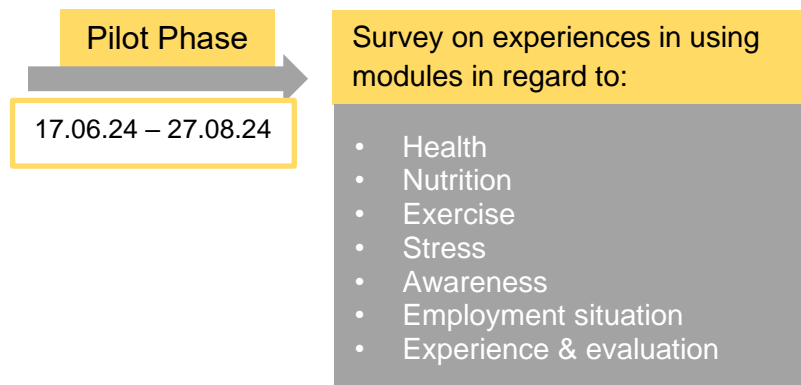


Dimensions: 2-point Participant-Survey

The questionnaires covered several dimensions, as shown in the figure above. At the beginning the participants were asked about their health and well-being and for example, what health issues they were concerned about. Then there were a few statements and questions about health literacy and body awareness. Different dimensions of health literacy were covered, such as understanding and applying health information, coping with health problems, empowerment and motivation to engage in health-promoting behaviour and perceived self-efficacy. Participants were also asked about their eating habits, motivation to exercise, leisure time, their prospects and their expectations to find a job in future. The first survey also included a section on expectations of the training programme. In the 2nd survey, some of the questions from the first survey are repeated to see if the answers have changed in the course of the training. Then there are several questions about the experience of the training.

Trainers: 1 follow-up Survey

Figure 2: Trainers: 1 follow-up Survey



Dimensions: follow-up Trainer-Survey

For the trainers there only one survey was conducted as a follow-up to the entire training programme. The Trainer Survey contained many open-ended questions to capture their individual perspective on the training. In the first part they were asked about their assessment of the youth during the training, like how they experienced them, if they were motivated, what kind of activities they liked etc. In the second part, the trainers were asked what it was like for them to work with the target group, how they felt prepared and what challenges they faced during the training.

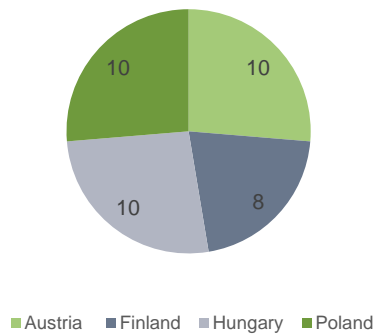
3. Results

The following section provides an overview of the results of the survey of participants and trainers. Due to the wide range of questions asked, the results presented focus on some specific aspects of interest for visualizing the impact of the training.

Overview on data basis

The total number of the participants who completed the first questionnaire was 38. The following graph **Figure 3** shows the distribution of participants by country: 10 were from Austria, 10 from Poland, another 10 from Hungary and 8 from Finland.

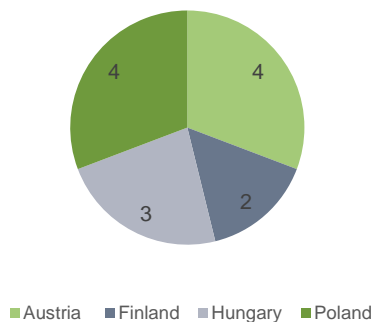
Figure 3: Country of residence – participants 1st Questionnaire



The second questionnaire was completed by 31 participants, as some participants dropped out during the training due to illness or other reasons.

The Trainer questionnaire (**Figure 4**) was completed by 13 trainers: 4 were from Austria, another 4 from Poland, 3 from Hungary and 2 from Finland:

Figure 4: Country of residence – trainers



3.1. Results from the Participants 2-point-Survey

3.1.1. Health and wellbeing

At the beginning of the questionnaire, participants were asked about their health and well-being. A few of questions were asked, such as how often they felt fit and well or full of energy, but also psychosocial aspects, such as how often they felt lonely or sad. As can be seen in the comparison of **Figure 5** and **Figure 6** participants rated their wellbeing better after the training in some aspects:

Figure 5: wellbeing before the training

Please think about how you have been feeling recently and tick what applies to you:

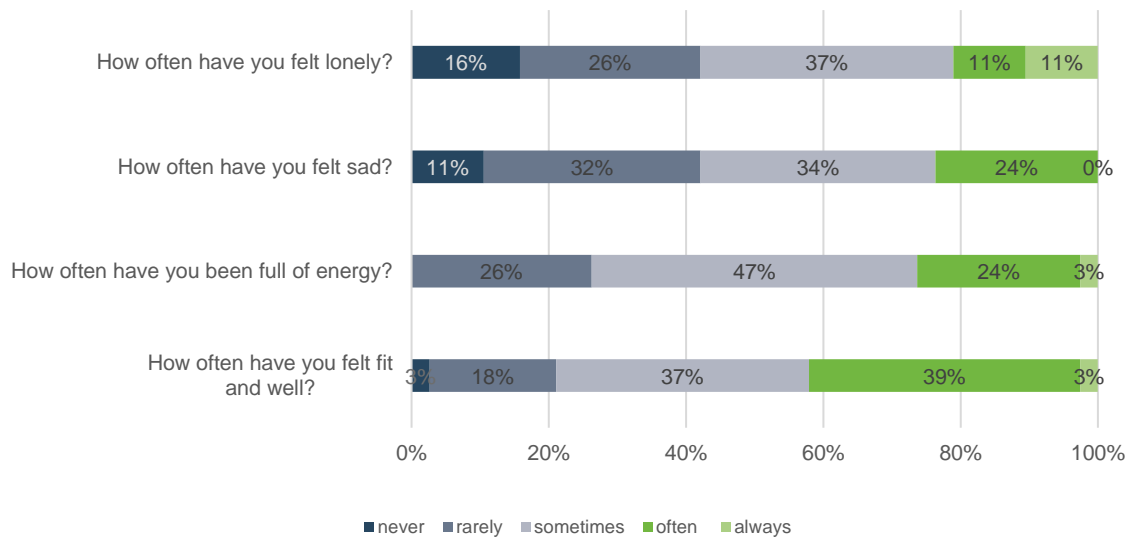
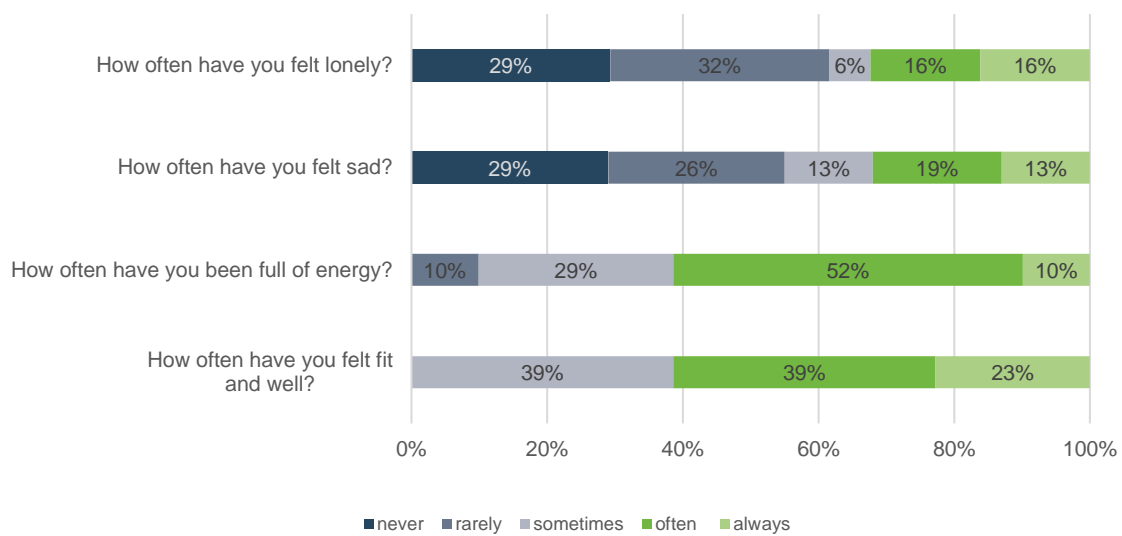


Figure 6: wellbeing after the training



While the first two questions ('How often have you felt lonely?' and 'How often have you felt sad?') show only small differences before and after the workshop, the answer to the 3rd and 4th questions (How often have you felt full of energy?' and 'How often have you felt fit and well?') show a significant change. Before the training, only 27% of participants reported feeling often or always full of energy (24% often 3% always). After the workshop, this figure rose to 62% (52% often, 10% always). This indicates that twice as many participants reported feeling more energetic after the training.

The same applies to the question below 'How often have you felt fit and well?' After the training, more participants indicate that they often or always feel fit and well: for example while only 3% of participants before the training stated that they always felt fit and well recently, this figure rises to 23% after the training.

3.1.2. Health literacy

After assessing their well-being, participants were asked to indicate their agreement with statements regarding health literacy and body awareness. Several questions addressed topics such as how easy or difficult it is for them to understand and apply health information, manage health issues, or motivate themselves to exercise. As shown in **Figure 7** and **Figure 8** below, participants' health literacy improved in course of the training.

Figure 7: Health literacy and body awareness before the training

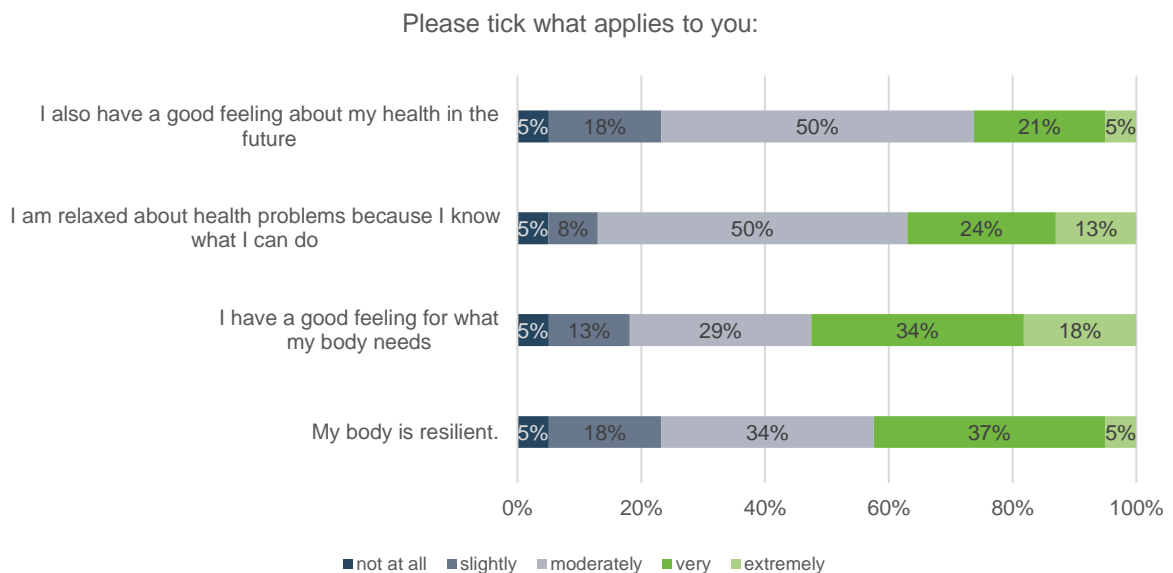
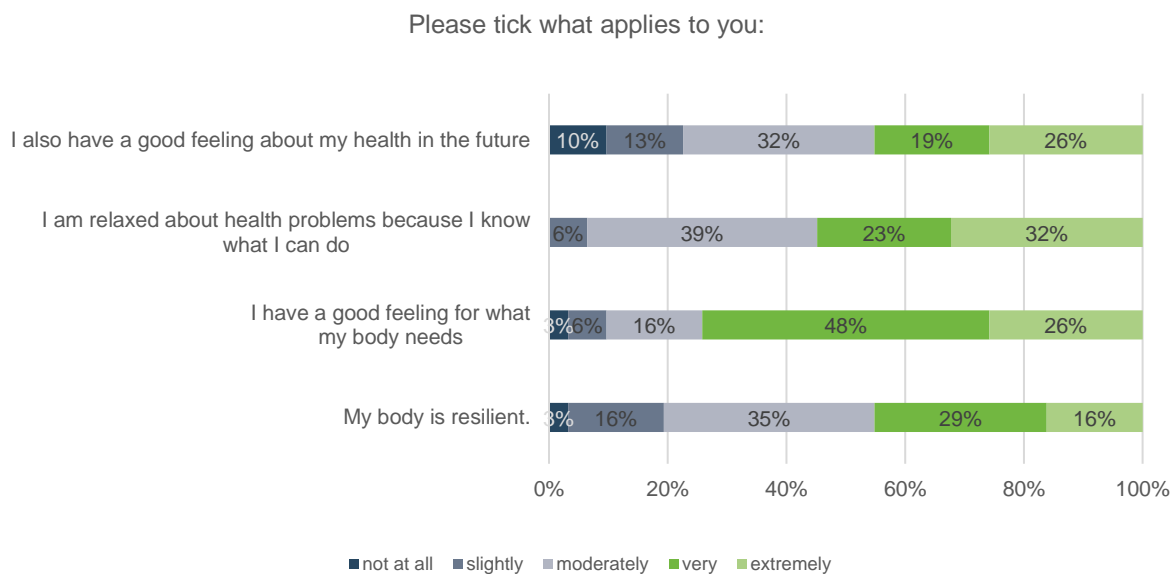


Figure 8: health literacy and body awareness after the training



A particularly noticeable difference can be observed in the first bar, representing the statement ‘I also have a good feeling about my health in the future.’ Before the training, only 5% of participants strongly agreed with this statement, but after the training, this number rose to 26%. Similarly, a significant change can be seen in the third bar, which reflects the statement ‘I have a good feeling of what my body needs.’ Before the training, 34% of participants agreed very and 18% agreed extremely with this statement. After the training, these figures increased to 48% and 26%, respectively, indicating a stronger awareness of their bodies' needs.

3.1.3. Healthy habits and lifestyle

A slight positive trend can also be seen in some questions related to healthy habits and lifestyle. For example, participants indicated that after the training, they were better able to assess the impact of unhealthy habits on their health and to make healthier dietary choices instead of opting for fast food. It's particularly interesting to note that there was little change in pre- and post- workshop scores on the questions of finding information on a healthy lifestyle. This suggests that the issue for young people is not in accessing information, but rather in evaluating and applying it effectively.

Figure 9: healthy habits and lifestyle before the training

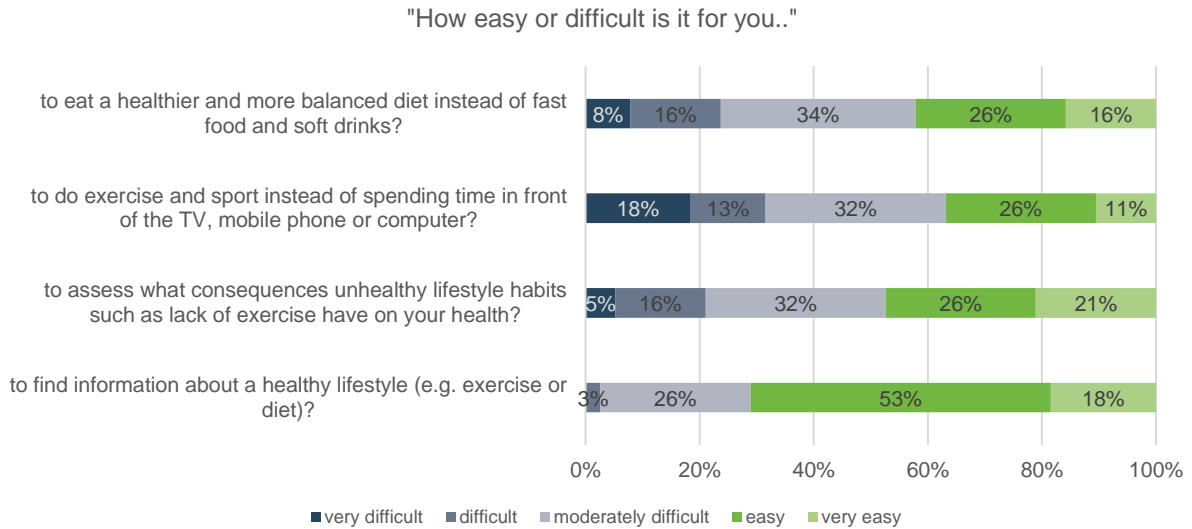
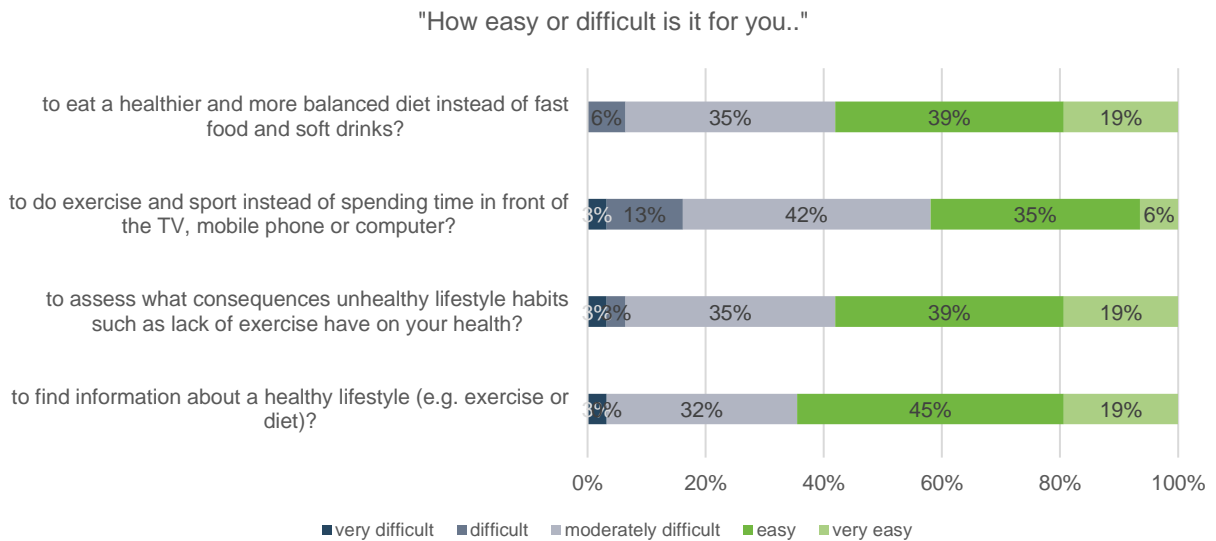


Figure 10: healthy habits and lifestyle after the training



3.1.4. Future Ideas and job expectations

After the section on their health and health literacy the participants were asked about their future prospects and job expectations, including the question, how they currently rated their chances of finding a suitable job in the future. As can be seen in **Figure 11** and **Figure 12** below, after the training more participants rated their chances of finding a suitable job as higher or good—an increase from 40% before the training to 61% after:

Figure 11: jobchances before the training

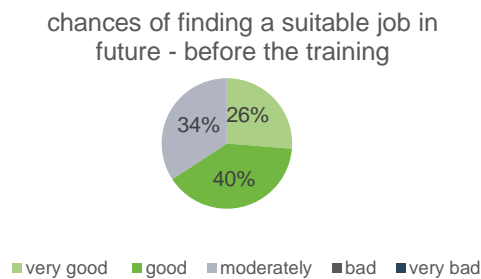
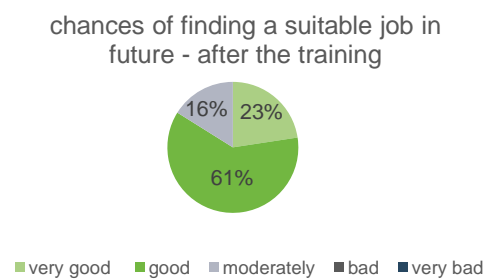


Figure 12: jobchances after the training

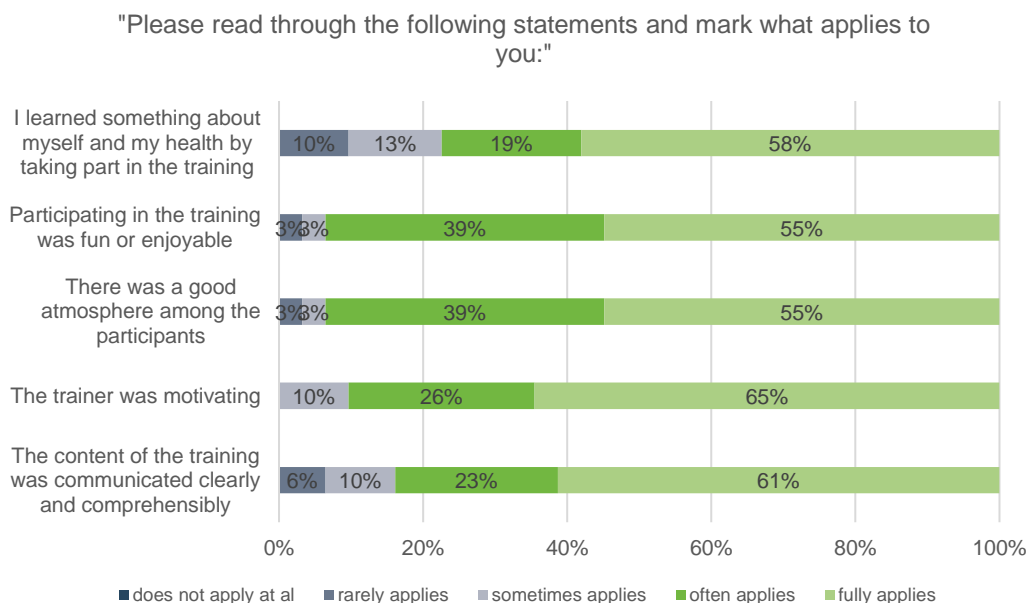


The assessment of increased job opportunities is a sign that the participants have gained more self-confidence as a result of the training, which also influences their positive vision of the future.

3.1.5. Experiences with the training programme

In the second post-workshop survey the participants were asked about their experience with the programme, like how it was for them taking part in the programme, how they liked it and what they learned during the programme. **Figure 13** shows how the participants experienced the training:

Figure 13: how participants experienced the training



As **Figure 13** shows, over 70% of participants indicated that they gained new insights into themselves and their health through the training. More than 90% reported that they found the training enjoyable and the atmosphere was positive and supportive. Over 90% of the participants found that the trainer was motivating and over 80% that the content was communicated clearly.

Participants were also asked what particular activities they enjoyed, here is a summary of some of the activities listed by the young people in the survey.

Particular activities the participants enjoyed:

- Sport activities (for example kayak, treasure hunt)
- Mindful eating, cooking together, reflecting eating habits
- Activities related to stress like meditation session
- Painting and group discussions
- Practice a job interview, working on the different CV and self-presentations.

Feedback from participants:

"I really liked the first day, during which I learnt a lot about obesity. All activities were truly engaging."

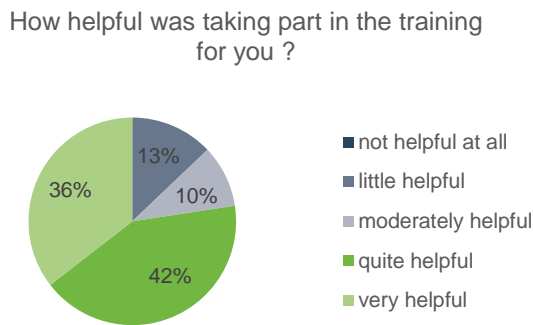
"I thought the topic would be boring, but it turned out to be very funny and exciting!"

„Relaxation was awesome!"

"It was a really wonderful training and nice to be with a good group of people."

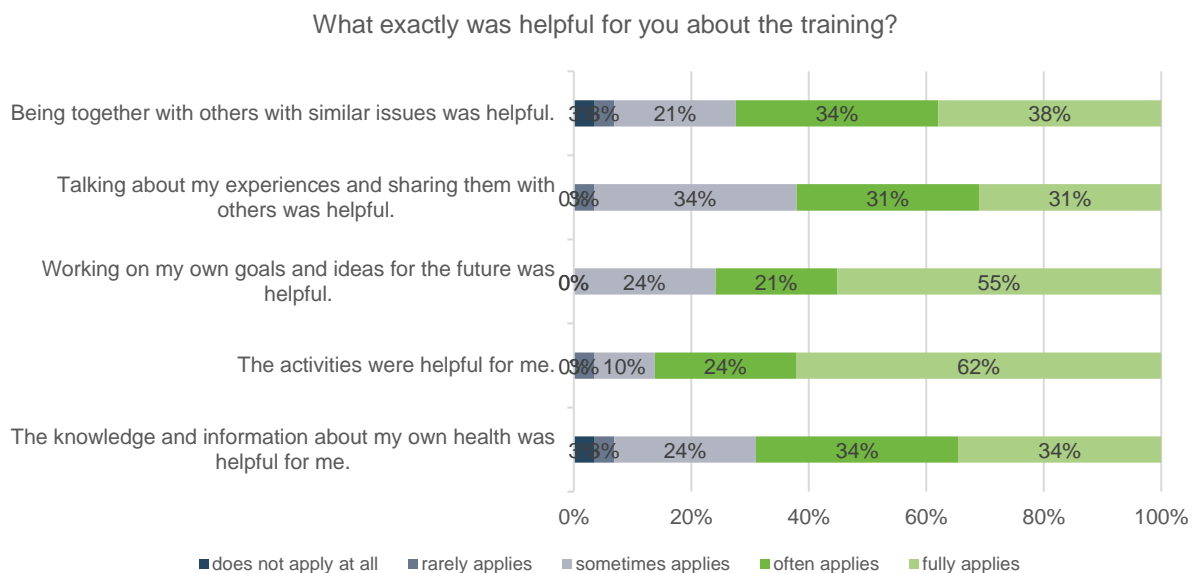
However, the participants were asked not only whether they liked it, but also whether it was helpful to them and whether it met the objective of the programme. **Figure 14** shows that for 42% of the participants it was quite helpful for them to take part in the training, 36% said it was very helpful, only 13% said it was little helpful and 10% said it was moderately helpful:

Figure 14: participants' assesment how helpful the training was



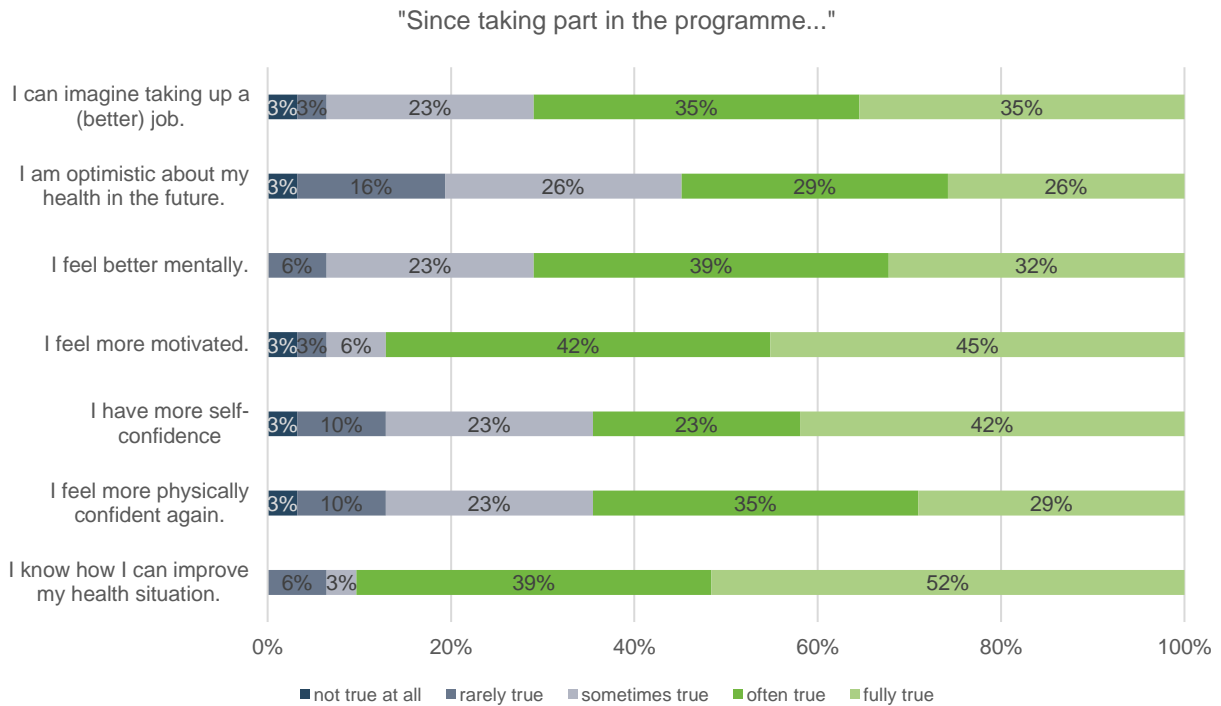
When they were asked about what was helpful for them, as it can be seen in **Figure 15** 38% of the participants fully agreed that being together with others with similar issues was helpful. More than half of the participants also fully agreed that working on their goals and ideas for the future was helpful and 62% fully agreed that the activities were helpful for them:

Figure 15: participants' assesment what was helpful for them



Last but not least, the participants were asked to rate how they felt after the training in order to measure the direct impact of the training on certain aspects. The graph on the next page **Figure 16: developments since participation in the programme** shows the results.

Figure 16: developments since participation in the programme



Overall, 70% of participants report that, following the training, they are often or completely able to better envision taking up a job. Half of the participants express optimism about their future prospects, while more than half indicate an improvement in their mental well-being and self-confidence. Notably, over 80% of participants feel more motivated after the training, underlining its role in motivating and empowering youth. Additionally, the final bar shows that the participants feel more knowledgeable about how to improve their health, reflecting a significant increase in health literacy.

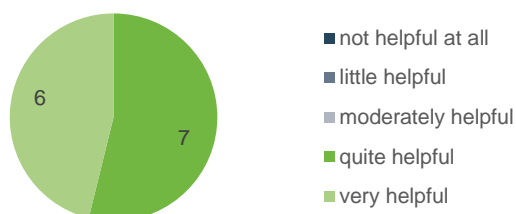
In addition to the positive feedback from the participants, the trainers also observed that the training was beneficial for most of the youth. This is further supported by the results of the trainer survey, which will be discussed in the next section.

3.2. Results from the Trainer Survey

The trainers' assessment of how helpful the training was for the participants shows that 7 out of 13 trainers thought it was quite helpful, the rest of it – 6 trainers thought it was very helpful for them:

Figure 17: Trainers' assessment of how helpful the training was for the participants

How helpful do you think was the training for the young people?



The trainers were also asked what activities they thought were helpful for the participants, here are a few of their responses.

3.2.1. Trainers' assessment – activities, which were helpful for the participants:

Activities from the nutrition topic

"I think they benefited most from shopping and preparing lunch together. Here, all the senses were addressed, fine motor skills were trained, and the topic of health and work was discussed at the same time." (trainer)

Interview activity of the employment topic

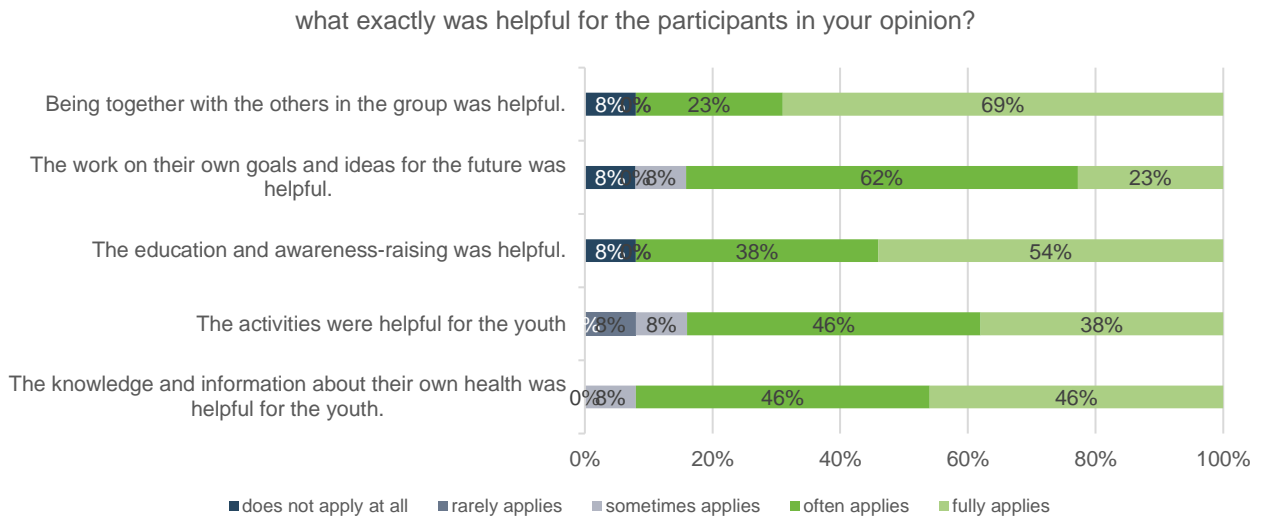
"We did a job interview and that was super relevant for those just entering the job market. Everyone got to play both roles – being the interviewer and the interviewee. This gave them valuable experience and confidence in handling real-life job interviews." (trainer)

Reflection of discrimination and biases of the awareness topic

"This was one of the most sensitive activities we did, as it encouraged participants to deeply reflect and discuss the discrimination and biases they might encounter in the workplace, particularly related to health issues like obesity." (trainer)

The following graph, **Figure 18** illustrates the trainers' assessment of which other aspects were helpful for the participants. If you compare this with the participants assessment in **Figure 14** you can see that the trainers give a better assessment than the youth. It is interesting to see here the discrepancy between the trainer's assessment and the assessment of the youth:

Figure 18: Trainers’ assesment: which aspects were helpful for the participants



The trainers also observed small changes in the participants over the course of the training, as the following findings show

3.2.2. Trainers’ assesment – change in the participants over the day(s) of the training

More interested in health & nutrition:

“Participants tried out more food and enjoyed it; they worked more actively and with greater concentration. Some of them then drank sugar-free iced tea instead of sugary tea. More interest in health and nutrition.” (trainer)

Increasing motivation exploring healthy activities

“While the project was short and didn’t allow enough time for major changes – since it takes at least 21 days to form a habit – we definitely noticed some positive shifts. The participants became more interested in exploring healthy activities they hadn’t tried before. For example, we all gave mindfulness meditation a shot, which was new for many of them. Additionally, each person chose an activity like biking, hiking, pilates, or stretching to try out as a weekly hobby during the summer. It was great to see their growing enthusiasm for incorporating these healthy practices into their lives.” (trainer)

Awareness regarding their health and their bodies:

“Participants became more aware of their health, their bodies their capabilities and limitations.” (trainer)

“Participants became more aware of obesity and how much it is also connected to the mental health” (trainer)

Shift in mindset towards personal growth and positive change:

“While five days isn’t enough time to observe any significant transformation among the participants, I did notice some important changes. Over the course of the training, participants began to analyse their lifestyles more critically, identifying areas of weakness and actively seeking solutions to improve them. This shift in mindset, though subtle, is a promising step toward personal growth and positive change.” (trainer)

“Encouraging their PROactive personality: Many of the participants had heard about the issues we focused on in our project but were not fully aware of them. Our biggest success in this training was not just providing information but emphasizing how they could take steps in their own lives and motivating them to take action after gaining awareness. The “awareness” module was particularly impactful in this regard. We received feedback like, “I knew this unhealthy habit was leading me towards obesity, but this training was the first time I felt the need to actually do something about it.” (trainer)

In addition to the transformation or change in the participants in the course of the training day(s), the trainers were also asked about specific skills that had improved in the participants. The following section shows an overview of the skills or abilities that the trainers felt had improved.

Trainers’ assessment: Specific skills or abilities of participants that have improved in the course of the training

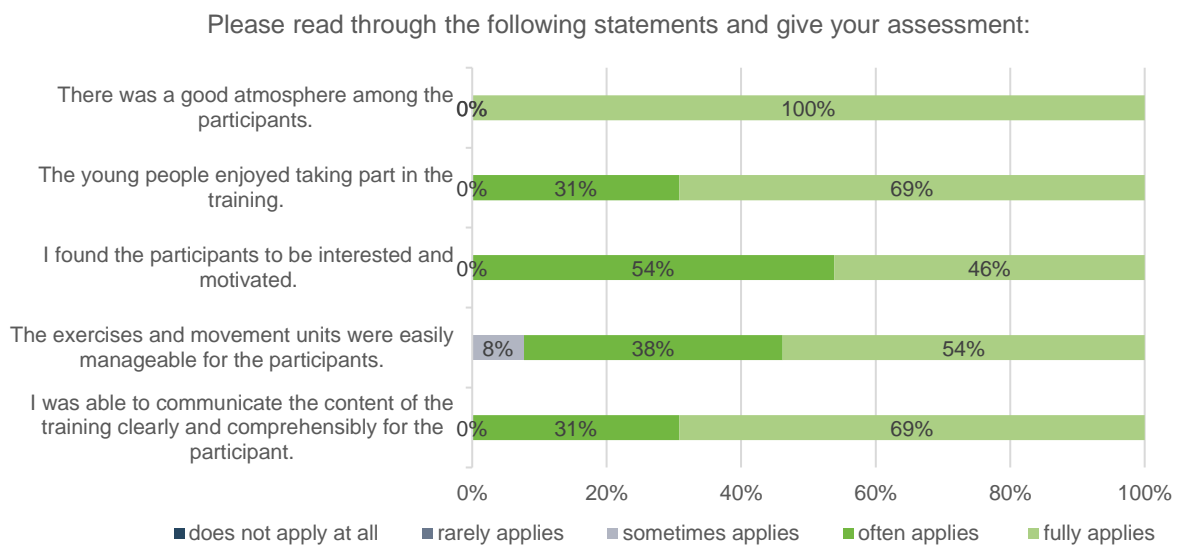
nutrition	employment	stress	awarness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improved ability to plan balanced meals • understanding nutritional information • making more informed choices about their diets • adopting healthier eating habits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communication and conversational skills • confidence in job interviews • realisation of the impact of health on professional careers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • awareness of the situations that stress them and how to deal with them • understanding psychological correlation between food and stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifying motives for unhealthy behaviours • deeper self-reflection and empathy • recognition of new strengths about themselves

Some trainers emphasize how the comprehensive approach of the training helped participants to understand the interconnections between various aspects of the modules:

“This comprehensive approach helped them to understand how each aspect influences the others, making it easier for them to apply this knowledge in their daily lives. By recognising these connections, they were better equipped to make informed decisions that support their overall well-being.” (trainer)

Figure 19 shows the trainers’ assessment of the training atmosphere. As can be seen, all the trainers fully agreed that there was a good atmosphere among the participants. In addition, 31% stated that it was often and 69% it was completely true that the participants enjoyed taking part in the programme and were interested and motivated.

Figure 19: trainers’ assessment: training atmosphere



“I was very positively surprised by the extremely good cooperation of the young people.” (trainer)

“The workshops were carefully planned, thought out to provide the necessary comfort and space for participants to act, without feeling embarrassed or stigmatised.” (trainer)

Most of the trainers also had the feeling that they could communicate the training clearly and comprehensibly for the participants. However, there was also some criticism of the programme: Some trainers claimed that the training could be more specific:

“Some topics could have been a bit more specific. But on the other hand, like this, they were also easy to talk through with everyone.” (trainer)

“I would make training more concrete and give participants also opportunity to choose what activities they want to have” (trainer)

Also, many trainers felt well-prepared for the training; however, some wished for additional documents or informational resources to support the training process.

“For me as a trainer those session introductions were clear but there were almost no data or informative source. That would be better if we include some graphics/data/some books movies or any kind of informative papers.” (trainer)

When the trainers were asked about their experience working with the specific target group, the answers were mixed, for some it was just natural and no difference from working with other target groups.

“Just as with non-obese adolescents” (trainer)

“I have already worked a lot with youths, so it was natural for me.” (trainer)

Others claimed that they had a very mixed group of people which was challenging:

“We had a mixed group of people with obesity, those at risk of obesity, and individuals who have a first-degree relative with obesity. It was challenging, but once I understood how to approach the situation and leveraged my experience working with people with various needs using non-offensive language, while being aware of comfort and panic zones, everything went smoothly” (trainer)

“There were some moments during the training when I felt like I reached my limits. Managing the diverse needs and expectations of the participants, particularly when adapting the programme to include a broader range of individuals, proved challenging. Balancing the delivery of content while ensuring meaningful engagement and interaction stretched my capabilities. However, these experiences also provided valuable learning opportunities and insights into areas where I can continue to improve and grow as a facilitator.” (trainer)

4. Conclusion

The evaluation shows that the YOUnite pilot implementation had a positive impact on the participants. The results of the point 2-survey with the youth show an increase in well-being, motivation and self-rated health competence after the training compared to before the training. Many of the youth experienced the training as helpful and gained valuable experiences and knowledge from the trainings about their health and how it is linked to their professional development.

In particular, practical activities such as cooking together and trying out new things, such as dishes, recipes and exercises, seem to have motivated young people to adopt healthier habits in their everyday lives. Working on personal goals and visions as well as practising job interviews also gave the participants more self-confidence. While feelings of loneliness and sadness showed minimal change, significant improvements were noted in participants' self-reported energy levels and overall well-being. Awareness regarding health and bodily needs also improved, with stronger agreement on statements about health perceptions, for instance, confidence in future health prospects. The ability to assess unhealthy habits and make healthier choices showed a slight positive trend, although accessing health information remained a challenge. Participants also reported increased self-confidence regarding job prospects. Participants enjoyed the training, praising its engaging atmosphere and the motivational qualities of the trainers. Feedback indicated that connection with peers, goal setting, and practical activities contributed to the training's effectiveness. A significant majority felt empowered and more knowledgeable about health, with many expressing increased motivation to pursue job opportunities.

Feedback from the trainers further highlights the positive impact of the training. They observed changes in the participants' attitudes and behaviours throughout the training.

The survey results reveal a positive consensus among trainers regarding the effectiveness of the training for youth participants. Trainers noted improvements in several key areas: participants demonstrated enhanced skills in nutrition, including meal planning and healthier dietary choices; they developed better communication and confidence for job interviews; they gained awareness of stress triggers and their relationship with eating habits; and they engaged in deeper self-reflection regarding unhealthy behaviours.

Even it was also challenging dealing with a very mixed target group the trainers themselves gained valuable facilitation experience and identified areas for their own professional growth, making the programme a rewarding experience for all involved. While trainers generally felt well-prepared for the sessions, some expressed a need for additional resources to enhance the training process. The training atmosphere was rated positively, with all trainers agreeing that a supportive environment was fostered. Most participants were reported to be engaged and motivated. Overall, the trainers' assessments align with the positive feedback received from participants, indicating that the training was beneficial in promoting essential skills related to nutrition, employment, stress management, and self-awareness.

Overall, the YOUNITE project has proven to be a successful and empowering initiative, effectively motivating and equipping participants with the knowledge, confidence, and motivation to improve their health and well-being. The workshop successfully fostered a positive transformation in participants' health perceptions, energy levels, and confidence in their future job prospects. The significant shifts in self-reported well-being and health literacy underscore the importance of such programmes in empowering youth. The training has effectively motivated participants and enhanced their self-awareness. Overall, the results suggest that engaging, supportive environments can lead to meaningful improvements in both mental health and future outlooks for young individuals.

5. List of figures

Figure 1: Participants 2-point Survey	4
Figure 2: Trainers: 1 follow-up Survey	5
Figure 3: Country of residence – participants 1 st Questionnaire.....	6
Figure 4: Country of residence – trainers.....	6
Figure 5: wellbeing before the training.....	7
Figure 6: wellbeing after the training.....	7
Figure 7: Health literacy and body awareness before the training	8
Figure 8: health literacy and body awareness after the training.....	9
Figure 9: healthy habits and lifestyle before the training	10
Figure 10: healthy habits and lifestyle after the training	10
Figure 11: jobchances before the training.....	11
Figure 12: jobchances after the training.....	11
Figure 13: how participants experienced the training	11
Figure 14: participants’ assesment how helpful the training was.....	13
Figure 15: participants’ assesment what was helpful for them	13
Figure 16: developments since participation in the programme	14
Figure 17: Trainers’ assesment of how helpful the training was for the participants.....	15
Figure 18: Trainers’ assesment: which aspects were helpful for the participants	16
Figure 19: trainers’ assesment: training atmosphere.....	18