Interreg Danube Region

Co-funded by the European Union

COOPOWER

D3.1.1: Joint implementation framework

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1. Executive summary

The COOPOWER project implements pilot actions in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine with the aim of strengthening cooperation mechanisms that support vulnerable young people aged 15–29 in their transition to education, training and employment. While these pilots are implemented in diverse institutional and socio-economic contexts, they are designed as coordinated components of a shared transnational approach.

The joint implementation framework (JIF) provides the common methodological structure that guides the design of these pilot actions. Rather than prescribing identical activities across participating countries, the framework defines a shared approach to articulating problems and needs, formulating objectives, structuring intervention logic and organising cooperation among relevant actors. This shared structure supports coherent pilot design across the project while allowing adaptation to local circumstances.

Within the COOPOWER project, pilot actions follow the Interreg Danube programme understanding of pilot activities as practical interventions that test or demonstrate new or adapted approaches under real implementation conditions. All pilots address vulnerable young people aged 15–29, while allowing flexibility to focus on specific subgroups depending on local needs and contexts. Across the project, the pilot actions collectively aim to reach approximately 800 young people.

The framework is conceptually anchored in a theory of change approach and structured through a logic model architecture. This approach requires that pilot designs clearly articulate the relationship between identified problems and underlying needs, planned activities and expected outcomes. By making this causal reasoning explicit, the framework supports internal coherence in pilot design and provides a common basis for describing interventions across participating countries.

Intersectoral cooperation constitutes the central implementation method of the COOPOWER pilots. The framework therefore emphasises collaboration among actors representing the quadruple helix, comprising public authorities, education and research institutions, business organisations and civil society. Different cooperation model variants are recognised depending on which sector is most closely aligned with the objectives and expected outcomes of a given pilot, while maintaining the principle that all four helices should be engaged where possible.

In addition to conceptual guidance, the framework defines shared design principles for pilot actions. These include replication-oriented activity design, milestone-based implementation planning within the project timeframe, consideration of barriers to participation and mitigation measures for the target group, and reflection on sustainability and transferability of pilot approaches beyond the project period. These elements provide a coherent structure for pilot design across the COOPOWER project. The joint implementation framework ensures that pilot actions are grounded in a shared methodological approach while remaining responsive to local needs and institutional contexts.

2. Introduction and purpose and scope of the joint implementation framework

The COOPOWER project develops and implements pilot actions across six countries (Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine) in the Danube Region to strengthen cooperation models that support vulnerable young people aged 15–29 in their transitions into education, training and employment. These pilots operate within diverse institutional arrangements, labour-market conditions and stakeholder ecosystems. At the same time, they form part of a shared project structure and are expected to generate comparable knowledge and transferable practice.

Intersectoral cooperation constitutes the shared methodological foundation of these pilot actions. The project does not treat cooperation as a complementary feature, but as a structured intervention mechanism through which access, continuity and quality of support for young people can be strengthened.

The joint implementation framework (JIF) sets out the shared structure within which all COOPOWER pilots are designed and implemented. The framework does not prescribe identical activities across participating countries. Instead, it defines a common approach to framing problems and needs, formulating objectives, describing intervention logic, specifying cooperation arrangements, and structuring implementation in ways that support comparison and learning. In this context, the JIF outlines structurally defined variants of intersectoral cooperation that may be adapted across national settings. These model variants provide analytical coherence without constraining contextual responsiveness.

The JIF is anchored in a theory of change and logic model approach as reflected in the pilot design template (see the Annex to this report). This approach requires that each pilot makes explicit how the identified local challenge, the underlying needs, the chosen activities and the expected short- and medium-term outcomes are linked. Making this causal reasoning explicit supports coherence in design and creates a basis for understanding variation in results across pilots.

The framework distinguishes between contribution and attribution. Pilot actions operate within complex institutional and socio-economic environments; outcomes are therefore understood as context-dependent and not as automatically generated by activities alone.

Alongside this shared causal structure, the framework sets minimum requirements for implementation clarity. These requirements concern, among other elements, the specification of key activities and their sequence, the definition of engagement levels (inform, reach, involve, engage) and expected participation, and the description of cooperation roles across sectors.

The framework also requires identification of barriers to participation and corresponding mitigation measures. Together, these elements reduce ambiguity, support consistent design and strengthen the basis for joint learning.

The joint implementation framework serves four closely related functions within the COOPOWER project:

1. It provides conceptual coherence across pilots through shared analytical distinctions and common definitions.
2. It supports implementation quality by clarifying what needs to be specified in each pilot design.
3. It enables structured comparison and learning across pilots by aligning core elements of planning.
4. It supports sustainability and transferability by requiring early consideration of which components can be maintained, adapted or taken up beyond the pilot period.

In this way, the framework provides a common methodological reference that supports both the design and the coordinated implementation of pilot actions across participating countries.

The JIF functions as a reference document for the design of all pilot actions under SO3 of the COOPOWER project. Pilot-specific designs are expected to align with the principles and minimum requirements defined in this framework, while remaining responsive to local conditions and stakeholder constellations. In this way, the pilots are positioned as coordinated components of a transnational learning process rather than as stand-alone local initiatives.

Collectively, the pilots are therefore understood as context-specific applications of a shared cooperation-based intervention logic, implemented within diverse institutional environments but guided by a common methodological structure.

The remainder of this document is structured to progressively clarify the shared elements that guide the design of the COOPOWER pilot actions. Chapter 3 addresses the question of what the pilots are about by outlining their overall objective, the common target group and the key design principles agreed within the project. Chapter 4 then considers what elements a pilot design must contain by introducing the conceptual foundations that guide intervention planning, including the theory of change approach, the logic model structure and the analytical distinctions used to articulate intervention logic. Chapter 5 addresses how actors cooperate within the pilots by describing intersectoral cooperation as the central implementation method and defining the structural principles and cooperation model variants applied in the project.

3. Shared characteristics of COOPOWER pilot actions

3.1. Common pilot definition and overall objective

Within the COOPOWER project, pilot actions are implemented in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine as practical interventions aimed at strengthening cooperation

mechanisms that support vulnerable young people in their transition to education, training and employment. Although the pilots are developed in diverse institutional and socio-economic contexts, they follow a shared understanding of what constitutes a pilot action.

During the project's co-creation process, partners agreed to adopt the pilot definition used by the Interreg Danube Region Programme as the common reference for the design of the COOPOWER pilots. This agreement was reached during the mini co-creation workshop held in Budapest and confirmed during the main co-creation workshop on pilot development held in Vienna.

The project therefore follows the programme definition of a pilot action:

> ***"A pilot action is to be understood as a practical implementation of newly developed solutions (e.g. services, tools, methods or approaches, even an investment). A pilot action has an experimental nature which aims at testing, evaluating and/or demonstrating the feasibility and effectiveness of a scheme. Therefore, it covers either the testing of innovative solutions or demonstrating the application of existing solutions to a certain territory or sector. A pilot action is limited in its scope (area, duration, scale etc.) and must be unprecedented in a comparable environment."***
>
> *(Interreg Danube Transnational Programme, 2016, glossary)*

Within this framework, the COOPOWER pilot actions focus specifically on **strengthening intersectoral cooperation mechanisms that support vulnerable young people aged 15–29 in their transition to education, training and employment.** The pilots are designed as context-sensitive interventions that respond to locally identified needs while operating within the shared methodological structure defined in this joint implementation framework.

3.2. The target group and vulnerability focus

The COOPOWER pilot actions focus on supporting **vulnerable young people aged 15-29** in their transition to education, training and employment. This age range reflects the shared target group defined within the project and is applied across all pilot actions implemented in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine.

Within this shared target group, pilots may focus on specific subgroups depending on the local context and the needs identified during the pilot design process. These subgroups may differ in terms of age range while remaining within the broader 15-29 age group, transition stage, risk profile or socio-economic circumstances. For example, pilots may target young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), young people at risk of early school leaving, or those facing barriers to labour market entry. Each pilot is therefore expected to clearly specify the subgroup it seeks to address and the contextual factors shaping this choice.

Across the project, the pilot actions collectively aim to reach approximately 800 young people, corresponding to roughly 150 participants per pilot. While this participation scope provides a shared reference point for the project, the exact number and characteristics of participants may vary depending on the design and duration of individual pilots.

Given the vulnerability of the target group, particular attention is given to equity and feasibility considerations in pilot design. Young people facing multiple disadvantages may encounter barriers that limit their ability to access or participate in support activities. These barriers may arise from structural, institutional or individual circumstances and may include, for example, limited access to information, transportation constraints, financial limitations, lack of trust in institutions, competing responsibilities or administrative requirements that restrict participation.

For this reason, pilot designs are expected to identify potential barriers to participation and to consider appropriate mitigation measures during the planning stage. Such measures may involve adapting outreach strategies, collaborating with trusted intermediary organisations, providing logistical support, adjusting activity formats or other practical arrangements that facilitate participation.

Where appropriate, pilot designs may also include incentives that encourage participation or reduce practical barriers to engagement. These may take different forms depending on the context and the characteristics of the target group. Examples may include small participation allowances, travel support, certification of participation, or other forms of recognition that acknowledge the time and effort of participants. The specific choice of incentives should remain proportionate to the objectives and design of the pilot.

Linking target group specification, participation barriers, mitigation measures and possible incentives, the framework seeks to ensure that pilot actions remain accessible and responsive to the circumstances of the young people they aim to support.

3.3. Shared pilot design principles

While pilot actions respond to different local contexts and target group needs, they follow a set of shared design principles agreed within the COOPOWER project. These principles aim to ensure that pilots are designed in a way that supports practical implementation, transparency of intervention logic and the potential for learning and transferability.

3.3.1. Replication-oriented activity design

Pilot activities are described in a structured and transparent manner so that the intervention logic and implementation steps can be clearly understood. Where possible, activities are defined in ways that make them replicable or adaptable in other contexts. This requires that pilot designs specify the sequence of key activities, the roles of participating actors and the intended outputs of the intervention in sufficient detail to avoid reliance on tacit knowledge or informal practices.

3.3.2. Milestone-based implementation planning

Pilot implementation is structured through clearly defined milestones that organise the preparation, delivery and closure phases of the intervention. Within the **COOPOWER** project, the overall **pilot period runs from April 2026 to March 2027**. This timeframe includes preparatory activities, implementation of pilot actions and finalisation steps.

The active implementation phase of pilot activities therefore represents only part of this overall period. In practice, pilot activities are expected to extend across **a minimum implementation window of approximately nine months**, while making use of the available timeframe as fully as possible within the project schedule. Where feasible, pilots are encouraged to sustain activities over a longer portion of the implementation period in order to allow sufficient time for trust building, participant engagement, cooperation among actors and consolidation of results.

Milestone-based planning helps ensure that pilot activities are sequenced realistically and that sufficient time is allocated to the key phases of preparation, delivery and closure.

Pilot designs are also expected to consider potential implementation risks and corresponding mitigation strategies. Anticipating operational challenges such as recruitment difficulties, institutional constraints or coordination issues supports realistic planning and strengthens the feasibility of the intervention.

3.3.3. Built-in sustainability and transferability

Pilots are designed with consideration for how their approaches may be continued, embedded or adapted beyond the project period. This does not imply that pilot actions will automatically be institutionalised. Rather, pilot designs are expected to reflect on possible pathways through which successful elements of the intervention could be sustained or transferred, for example through integration into existing institutional practices, continued cooperation between participating actors or adaptation of specific tools and methods.

3.3.4. Equity and feasibility considerations

Pilot design also takes into account the accessibility of activities for the intended target group. In line with the vulnerability focus described in Section 3.2, pilots are expected to consider potential barriers to participation and appropriate mitigation measures when planning activities. Addressing these aspects during the design stage helps ensure that planned interventions remain feasible and accessible for the young people they aim to support.

4. Conceptual foundations

4.1. Theory of change and intervention logic

The joint implementation framework is conceptually anchored in a theory of change approach. Within programme theory traditions, interventions are understood as structured propositions about how change is expected to occur under specified conditions (Chen, 1990; Weiss, 1995). Rather than assuming that activities automatically produce outcomes, the approach requires that the causal links between problems, needs, activities and expected changes are made explicit.

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In practice, many social interventions are shaped by organisational routines and established service formats. Activities often reflect what organisations are accustomed to delivering rather than what has been systematically derived from the specific needs of a defined target group. While such activities may be well intentioned and professionally delivered, the absence of an explicit causal rationale can weaken coherence and limit effectiveness. Programme theory literature emphasises that explicit causal reasoning linking problems, activities and outcomes improves intervention coherence (Chen, 1990; Weiss, 1995).

The theory of change approach is intended to counteract this tendency. It reduces the risk of activity-driven design by requiring that each activity is logically derived from an identified problem and an analysis of underlying needs. Rather than beginning with familiar formats such as workshops, mentoring sessions or awareness campaigns, the approach begins with a structured examination of the target group's situation and the conditions that sustain the problem. Activities are selected because they are expected to address these conditions, not because they are institutionally convenient.

This orientation is reflected in the pilot design template, which separates the articulation of the problem from the analysis of underlying needs and requires that objectives and activities are derived from that analysis. The template therefore operationalises theory of change not as an abstract concept, but as a structured design discipline.

The approach also supports proportionality and realism. Pilot actions operate within a defined timeframe and institutional scope. They cannot reasonably claim structural transformation of labour markets, education systems or broader socio-economic conditions. For this reason, the pilot design template includes a structured theory of change table. This table requires specification of short-term outcomes observable within the pilot period and medium-term outcomes to which the pilot may plausibly contribute. Longer-term societal impacts are not attributed solely to the pilot. This distinction reflects established programme theory principles that emphasise bounded and context-sensitive causal claims (Chen, 1990).

Theory of change does not claim predictive certainty. It does not imply that if activities are implemented as planned, outcomes will necessarily follow. Rather, it provides a structured representation of how change is expected to occur under specified assumptions and contextual conditions. This position is consistent with realist perspectives in evaluation, which emphasise that outcomes arise from the interaction between intervention mechanisms and contextual factors rather than from activities alone (Pawson & Tilley, 1997).

In this way, theory of change establishes the conceptual foundation of each pilot: it clarifies why particular activities are undertaken and under which conditions they are expected to contribute to change.

4.2. Core logic model architecture

The theory of change approach is operationalised through a structured logic model. While theory of change provides the overall causal reasoning, the logic model translates that reasoning into a structured representation of how the pilot is organised and what it is expected to produce.

Logic models are widely used in programme design and evaluation to clarify the relationships between resources, activities and expected changes (W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004; Funnell & Rogers, 2011). Their primary function is to make explicit how different components of an intervention relate to one another. In doing so, they support internal coherence and reduce the risk of implicit assumptions. As a result, where theory of change answers the question "why is change expected to occur?", the logic model answers the question "how is the intervention structured to pursue that change?".

It is important to note that logic models do not imply that change processes are strictly linear. Social interventions operate within dynamic environments. Feedback loops, contextual shifts and participant variability may influence implementation. The logic model does not attempt to eliminate this complexity. Rather, it provides a structured baseline against which deviations, adaptations and contextual influences can be interpreted.

Within the joint implementation framework, each pilot is required to structure its intervention logic through the following elements:

1. **Inputs**: Inputs refer to the resources and capacities required for implementation, including staff expertise, partnerships, institutional access and organisational infrastructure.
2. **Activities**: Activities describe the concrete actions undertaken within the pilot. These must be specified clearly enough to demonstrate how they address identified needs.
3. **Outputs**: Outputs refer to the immediate and tangible products of activities. They indicate what has been delivered, not yet what has changed.
4. **Short-term outcomes**: Short-term outcomes describe changes expected to occur within the pilot period. These may include changes in knowledge, skills, confidence, coordination practices or access to opportunities.
5. **Medium-term outcomes**: Medium-term outcomes describe developments to which the pilot may plausibly contribute beyond the immediate implementation period. These are framed cautiously and do not imply exclusive attribution.
6. **Assumptions and contextual factors**: Each pilot must identify key assumptions underlying its intervention logic and relevant contextual factors. Making these explicit recognises that outcomes depend not only on activities but also on institutional conditions, labour-market structures, policy environments and participant circumstances.

The inclusion of assumptions and contextual factors is central. It ensures that the model does not treat activities as self-sufficient. Instead, it acknowledges that change processes are contingent.

The use of a shared logic model architecture across pilots provides analytical consistency. It does not standardise content. Rather, it ensures that each pilot expresses its design within a comparable structure, thereby supporting structured cross-pilot reflection.

4.3. Analytical distinctions

The clarity of an intervention logic depends on the precision of the concepts used to describe it. For this reason, the joint implementation framework requires consistent use of several core analytical distinctions across all pilots. These distinctions structure how problems are framed, how needs are identified and how activities and outcomes are formulated.

1. **Problem statement**: A problem statement describes an observable situation affecting a defined target group within a specific local context. It establishes what is happening, for whom, and why a structured intervention, in the case of COOPOWER: a pilot action, is warranted.

   The problem statement provides the rationale for the intervention. It does not describe solutions, activities or institutional ambitions. Rather, it clarifies the nature and scope of the issue to be addressed. Problem statements should be grounded in available evidence and contextual information, including institutional, socio-economic and labour-market conditions relevant to the target group. By clearly defining the problem, the pilot establishes the analytical foundation from which subsequent needs, objectives and activities are derived.

2. **Underlying needs**: Underlying needs refer to the structural, relational, informational or institutional conditions that contribute to the persistence of the identified problem. While the problem describes an observable situation, needs describe the conditions that must change for that situation to improve. The distinction between problem and needs is central. Conflating the two weakens the logic of the intervention. A problem might describe low participation in training programmes; an underlying need might concern limited access to information, weak trust in institutions, or fragmented coordination between service providers. The explicit identification of underlying needs ensures that activities are designed in response to analytically identified conditions rather than organisational habits or assumptions, that is, addressing root causes rather than symptoms.

3. **Objectives**: Objectives define the specific changes that the pilot seeks to achieve within its implementation period. They are derived from identified needs and remain proportionate to the pilot's scope and duration. Objectives describe intended change, not activity delivery. They should be framed in terms of what is expected to improve, strengthen or increase, rather than in terms of events or outputs.

4. **Activities**: Activities refer to the concrete actions undertaken within the pilot. They are the means through which objectives are pursued. Activities must be logically connected to identified needs and clearly specified in terms of content, sequencing and target group.

5. **Outputs:** Outputs describe the immediate and tangible products of activities. They indicate what has been delivered, such as number of sessions conducted, participants engaged or materials developed. Outputs demonstrate implementation but do not in themselves constitute change.

6. **Outcomes and contribution**: Short-term outcomes refer to observable changes during the pilot period. These may include changes in knowledge, skills, confidence, access to opportunities or coordination practices between actors. Medium-term outcomes describe developments beyond the immediate implementation period to which the pilot may plausibly contribute. These are framed cautiously and do not imply exclusive causation. Pilot actions operate within complex institutional and socio-economic environments. Outcomes therefore depend on multiple interacting factors. For this reason, the framework limits outcome specification to changes that are proportionate to the pilot's scope and duration.

4.4. Intersectoral cooperation within the intervention logic

Intersectoral cooperation is widely recognised in governance and innovation research as a structured form of collaboration between actors operating in different institutional domains. It is typically adopted in policy fields characterised by complexity, where responsibilities, resources and expertise are distributed across multiple sectors (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

In the context of innovation and regional development, the quadruple helix model provides a commonly used conceptual framework for such collaboration. It distinguishes four interacting domains: public authorities, education and research institutions, business actors and civil society (Carayannis & Campbell, 2009). Each domain contributes distinct capacities and perspectives. Public authorities shape regulatory and policy frameworks. Education and research institutions provide knowledge and institutional anchoring. Business actors contribute labour-market orientation and opportunity structures. Civil society organisations facilitate outreach, trust-building and flexible forms of engagement.

COOPOWER adopts the quadruple helix as the guiding structure for intersectoral cooperation within its pilot actions. **Where possible, pilot designs are expected to involve actors from all four domains. Where the full configuration is not feasible in a specific context, the pilot design must provide a clear justification.**

Intersectoral cooperation is positioned within the intervention logic as a structural mechanism rather than an isolated activity. It influences how target groups are identified, how activities are delivered and how transitions between stages of support are managed. In this sense, cooperation shapes the conditions under which outcomes may occur.

At the same time, cooperation does not in itself guarantee improved results. Its effectiveness depends on role clarity, defined coordination mechanisms and alignment of expectations among participating actors. The operational requirements and model variants of intersectoral cooperation are defined in the following chapter.

4.5. Engagement framework and levels of participation

The joint implementation framework conceptualises engagement as varying in intensity rather than constituting a binary condition. Participation is not understood simply as present or absent.

Instead, the framework differentiates levels of engagement in order to clarify the depth, duration and continuity of interaction expected within each pilot.

This distinction is informed by implementation research demonstrating that the quality and intensity of programme delivery influence the likelihood and magnitude of observed outcomes (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Interventions that differ substantially in duration, frequency of contact or depth of interaction cannot reasonably be expected to produce comparable effects. Making engagement intensity explicit therefore strengthens the internal coherence of the intervention logic and supports realistic outcome specification.

Within COOPOWER, engagement is structured across four levels of participation:

Table 1: Engagement framework of COOPOWER pilot actions

Level	Description	Examples in practice
Inform	Young people **receive information** about opportunities, services, or rights. **Communication is one-way.**	Flyers, school visits, or social-media posts announce a new training or mentoring offer.
Reach	Young people are contacted and **take part once or briefly**, usually as participants or beneficiaries. **Their role is mainly passive.**	They join a single job-skills workshop or attend an event run by partners.
Involve	Young people **participate more than once in activities** and can **express opinions or preferences**, with potential to shape design.	They attend several mentoring sessions, share feedback, or help spread the word.
Engage	Young people take **part actively and continuously**, showing **commitment** and initiative within the activities. They help keep momentum and **bring their perspective** into planning, outreach, or implementation.	They participate throughout a full training cycle, mentor peers informally, or help sustain a youth group.

These levels do not represent a hierarchy of value, nor is progression to the highest level expected for all participants. Rather, the distinction clarifies the intended depth of interaction associated with different activities and objectives. It enables pilots to specify what degree of participation is required for particular short-term outcomes and what level of engagement may plausibly support medium-term developments.

The engagement framework is embedded within the intervention logic of each pilot and provides an additional layer of analytical clarity regarding how activities are expected to contribute to change. Each pilot specifies the operational thresholds corresponding to these engagement levels within its local context. While the duration and intensity of participation may vary across pilots, the shared categorisation enables structured comparison of participation patterns and their relationship to observed outcomes.

This shared categorisation therefore supports both analytical comparison of participation patterns and reporting against the project participation target of reaching approximately 800 young people across all pilot actions.

5. Intersectoral cooperation as the shared method and cooperation model variants

5.1. Rationale and structural principles

Intersectoral cooperation constitutes the shared methodological approach of all COOPOWER pilot actions. As established in Chapter 4.4., cooperation is positioned as a structural mechanism embedded within the intervention logic rather than as an auxiliary activity.

Building on the conceptual positioning of cooperation within the intervention logic described in Chapter 4.4, this section defines the operational principles that structure intersectoral collaboration within the pilots.

The project adopts the quadruple helix framework as its guiding structure. Cooperation is therefore conceptualised as collaboration across four institutional domains: public authorities, education and research institutions, business actors and civil society organisations. Each domain contributes distinct capacities relevant to supporting vulnerable young people in transition.

Where possible, pilot designs are expected to involve actors representing all four domains. In cases where full representation is not feasible due to contextual constraints, the pilot design provides a reasoned justification explaining the configuration adopted and its anticipated functional adequacy.

Intersectoral cooperation within COOPOWER is defined by three structural principles:

1. **Complementarity**: Actors contribute differentiated capacities rather than duplicating roles.
2. **Coordination**: Interaction between actors is expected to be structured through defined routines proportionate to the pilot context, rather than relying solely on ad hoc contact.
3. **Integration**: Cooperation is embedded within the intervention pathway and linked to specific stages of participant support.

Cooperation is not assumed to produce positive outcomes automatically. Its contribution depends on clarity of roles, alignment of expectations and defined communication mechanisms. For this reason, the following sections define minimum structural requirements for cooperation applicable across all pilots, followed by the cooperation model variants operationalised within the project.

5.2. Minimum structural requirements

To ensure coherence across diverse national contexts, the joint implementation framework defines minimum structural requirements applicable to all pilot actions. These requirements establish the baseline conditions for structured intersectoral cooperation within COOPOWER.

They do not prescribe identical institutional configurations. Rather, they define the core elements that must be articulated in each pilot design in order to ensure functional clarity and comparability across contexts.

1. **Clearly defined coordination responsibility**: Each pilot identifies a clearly defined coordinating actor or coordination function responsible for facilitating cooperation among participating organisations. This function ensures information flow, convenes interaction between actors and supports alignment across stages of implementation. The coordination function may be anchored within a lead organisation or exercised through a formally established cooperation structure. In all cases, responsibility for coordination is explicitly specified.

2. **Explicit role differentiation**: The roles and responsibilities of participating actors are described in relation to the intervention pathway. This includes clarification of contributions to outreach, delivery, mentoring, labour-market linkage, institutional anchoring and follow-up support. While collaboration may involve overlapping expertise, the functional contribution of each actor is articulated to avoid ambiguity and ensure complementarity.

3. **Structured interaction mechanisms**: Cooperation arrangements specify how interaction between actors is organised. This includes defined communication practices proportionate to the pilot context, such as recurring coordination meetings, agreed information-sharing mechanisms or established consultation routines. The framework requires that cooperation be structured rather than incidental. Interaction is organised through identifiable mechanisms that support continuity and coordination across participating actors.

4. **Defined decision-making and problem-resolution pathways**: Each pilot clarifies how operational decisions are taken within the cooperation arrangement and how emerging challenges are addressed. This includes identification of the actor or body responsible for coordination and, where relevant, procedures for resolving operational or strategic issues.

5. **Integration within the intervention pathway**: Intersectoral cooperation is embedded within defined stages of participant support. Pilot designs specify at which points in the pathway different actors engage and how transitions between stages are managed. Cooperation is thus directly linked to the intervention logic rather than functioning as parallel networking activity.

6. **Alignment with ethical and safeguarding standards**: Where pilots involve particularly vulnerable young people, cooperation arrangements align with applicable safeguarding, confidentiality and data protection requirements. Responsibilities concerning referral, risk management and information handling are clearly identified in accordance with national regulations and institutional standards.

5.3. Cooperation model variants

Within COOPOWER, intersectoral cooperation is structured through the quadruple helix framework. All pilot actions involve actors representing the four domains of the helix: public authorities, education and research institutions, business actors and civil society organisations. Meaningful integration across the domains constitutes a structural requirement of the cooperation approach.

Pilot designs may differ, however, in the domain that is most closely aligned with their primary objectives and expected outcomes. This alignment influences how cooperation is organised and which actors assume a more prominent role in shaping the intervention pathway. The distinction between cooperation model variants therefore concerns orientation in relation to objectives and intended results. It does not imply that any helix partner operates in isolation or that other domains are excluded.

On this basis, the joint implementation framework distinguishes the following cooperation model variants.

5.3.1. Public-authority–oriented model

In this model, the public-authority domain provides the principal reference point for objectives and expected outcomes. The intervention is closely aligned with public policy priorities or administrative coordination goals. Cooperation structures are shaped primarily by governance considerations, such as service alignment, referral pathways or implementation of an existing policy framework.

Example: Such a configuration may arise where a pilot seeks to strengthen coordination between employment services, schools and employers within a publicly defined youth strategy. In this case, public authorities shape the objectives and expected outcomes, while education institutions contribute participant access, business actors provide labour-market linkage, and civil society organisations support outreach or mentoring. The prominence of the public-authority domain derives from its role in defining and structuring the intervention's overall purpose.

5.3.2. Education-oriented model

In this model, the education domain constitutes the primary structural environment of the intervention. Objectives are closely linked to educational progression, skills development or transition from education to employment. Activities are organised within or closely connected to educational institutions.

Example: This configuration may be observed where a pilot integrates new learning modules, guidance mechanisms or transition support within schools or training institutions. Education institutions shape the expected outcomes, such as improved progression or completion rates. Business actors contribute labour-market insight or practical exposure, public authorities support institutional alignment or certification, and civil society organisations may facilitate mentoring or additional support. The model is categorised as education-oriented because educational objectives most directly frame the intervention logic.

5.3.3. Business–oriented model

In this model, the business or industry domain most strongly shapes objectives and activity design. Expected outcomes relate to employability, sector-specific skills acquisition, entrepreneurship or job placement. Activities are structured in response to identified economic needs or employer demand.

Example: Such a configuration may emerge where a pilot is designed to address skills shortages in a defined sector. Employers influence the definition of competencies and expected outcomes. Education institutions align curricula or training provision accordingly, public authorities support regulatory or funding frameworks, and civil society organisations facilitate outreach to the target group. The model is categorised as business–oriented because labour-market considerations most directly determine objectives and outcome framing.

5.3.4. Civil-society–oriented model

In this model, cooperation is structured around participant-centred pathways coordinated by the civil-society domain. Objectives emphasise accessibility, trust-building, re-engagement or stabilisation of vulnerable young people. The intervention logic prioritises responsiveness to individual needs.

Example: This configuration may be evident where a pilot focuses on supporting young people who are disengaged from formal education or employment systems. Civil society organisations coordinate mentoring or individual transition planning, while education institutions provide re-entry opportunities, public authorities ensure access to services, and business actors offer progression pathways. The model is categorised as civil-society–oriented because participant-centred support, rather than institutional or sector priorities, most directly shapes objectives and expected outcomes.

5.3.5. Dual- or multi-domain model

In this model, two or more domains are similarly prominent in shaping objectives and expected outcomes. Strategic orientation and structural responsibility are shared, and the intervention pathway reflects balanced influence.

Example: Such a configuration may occur where, for example, educational institutions and employer associations jointly define objectives, combining equal emphasis on curriculum integration and sector alignment. Public authorities may support institutional coordination, and civil society actors may facilitate engagement. The model is classified as dual- or multi-domain because no single domain clearly predominates in framing objectives and expected results.

Across all model variants, cooperation presupposes integration of actors from the four domains and compliance with the structural requirements defined in Section 5.2. The differentiation between models clarifies how objectives and expected outcomes shape cooperation structures while maintaining the integrity of the quadruple helix framework.

5.4. Application of cooperation models and contextual adaptation

The cooperation model variants described above provide a structured framework for organising intersectoral collaboration within the COOPOWER pilot actions. They clarify how the prominence of different domains may shape the objectives, implementation pathway and expected outcomes of an intervention.

The selection and operationalisation of a cooperation model derive from the needs of the target group and from the way pilot partners, together with their cooperating partners, design activities to address these needs. In line with the theory of change approach applied in this framework, the cooperation structure follows the intervention logic rather than determining it. Cooperation arrangements are therefore shaped by the relationship between identified needs, planned activities and the outcomes the pilot seeks to achieve.

Depending on how these needs are addressed through the intervention design, different cooperation structures may emerge. For example, pilots embedded primarily in educational environments may rely more strongly on the education domain, while interventions responding to sector-specific labour-market challenges may involve stronger engagement from business actors. In other cases, civil society organisations may play a central coordinating role in supporting vulnerable young people, or public authorities may shape cooperation through policy-driven coordination mechanisms.

At the same time, contextual flexibility does not imply the absence of structural expectations. All pilots are expected to involve actors representing the four domains, public authorities, education and research institutions, business actors and civil society organisations, in ways proportionate to the objectives and activities of the intervention. Where involvement of one or more domains is limited due to contextual constraints or the specific design of the pilot, this should be clearly justified.

All pilots are expected to comply with the minimum structural requirements defined in Section 4.2. In particular, cooperation arrangements should ensure clearly defined coordination responsibilities, differentiated roles among participating actors and structured mechanisms for interaction and information exchange.

5.5. Cross-pilot comparability

The joint implementation framework provides a shared conceptual structure for the design of pilot actions across participating countries. While the pilots operate in different institutional environments and address locally specific challenges, the use of common analytical distinctions and shared methodological principles supports comparability at the level of intervention design.

This comparability is particularly important in a transnational project context. Pilot actions are implemented in diverse governance settings, labour-market conditions and stakeholder ecosystems. A shared design framework helps ensure that key elements of the intervention logic such as the articulation of problems and needs, the formulation of objectives, the specification of activities and outcomes, and the structure of intersectoral cooperation are described in a consistent way across pilots.

The framework contributes to this objective in several ways. First, the theory of change and logic model approach ensures that pilots articulate the relationship between identified needs, planned activities and expected outcomes in a comparable structure. Second, the use of common analytical distinctions such as problem definition, underlying needs, objectives, activities and outcomes supports consistency in the formulation of pilot designs. Third, the cooperation model variants clarify how different configurations of the quadruple helix may shape the organisation of intersectoral collaboration.

At the same time, the framework recognises that variation across pilots is both expected and appropriate. Pilot actions are designed to respond to the specific needs of their target groups and to the institutional conditions of their respective contexts. The joint implementation framework therefore does not seek to standardise interventions, but to provide a shared structure within which diverse pilot designs can be articulated.

A further advantage of the shared design structure is that it facilitates project activities related to monitoring, evaluation and documentation. By requiring pilots to articulate their intervention logic, cooperation arrangements and expected outcomes in a consistent way, the framework contributes to the clarity and transparency of pilot designs. Clear articulation of programme logic is widely recognised in evaluation literature as a condition that improves evaluability and supports assessment of implementation fidelity (Chen, 1990; Rogers, 2008). While the joint implementation framework does not itself perform evaluation or documentation tasks, the structured formulation of pilot designs can support these processes within other components of the project (especially under Act. 3.2 in the COOPOWER project logic).

6. Overview of the COOPOWER pilots' joint implementation framework

A pilot design is considered aligned with the joint implementation framework when it addresses the core elements defined in this document. These elements establish a shared structure for pilot design across the COOPOWER project while allowing interventions to remain responsive to local needs and institutional contexts. The framework does not prescribe identical activities across participating regions. Rather, it defines a shared conceptual and structural basis through which pilot designs articulate their objectives, activities and cooperation arrangements in a consistent and transparent manner.

Table 2 below summarises the core design elements that pilot actions address in order to align with the joint implementation framework

Table 2: Core elements of the joint implementation framework

	JIF element	Description	Section
	What the pilot is about		
1.	Pilot definition	Pilot actions follow the Interreg Danube definition adopted by the consortium during the project co-creation workshops.	3.1
2.	Pilot objective	Pilots aim to strengthen cooperation mechanisms that support vulnerable young people aged 15-29 in their transition to education, training and employment.	3.1
3.	Target group	Pilots address vulnerable young people aged 15-29 and specify the subgroup targeted within the local context.	3.2
4.	Participation scope	Pilots contribute to the project objective of reaching at least 800 young people across all pilot actions.	3.2
5.	Accessibility considerations	Pilot designs consider barriers to participation and appropriate mitigation measures and incentives.	3.2 & 3.3.4
	How the pilot is designed		
6.	Pilot design principles	Activities are described in a structured and transparent manner to support replication and adaptation.	3.3
7.	Implementation planning	Activities are organised through milestone-based planning within the pilot period (April 2026–March 2027), with an implementation phase typically lasting at least nine months.	3.3.2

8.	Sustainability considerations	Pilot designs reflect on possible pathways for continuation, embedding or transfer of successful elements.	3.3.1 & 3.3.3
9.	Intervention logic	Pilot designs articulate a theory of change linking identified problems and needs with activities and expected outcomes.	4.1
10.	Logic model structure	Intervention logic is structured through a shared logic model linking inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes.	4.2
11.	Analytical distinctions	Pilots specify problem statements, underlying needs, objectives, activities, outputs and outcomes.	4.3
12.	Cooperation within intervention logic	Intersectoral cooperation is integrated within the causal structure of the intervention.	4.4
13.	Engagement framework	Pilot designs specify levels of participant engagement that reflect the intensity and continuity of interaction: Inform, reach, involve and engage.	4.5
How actors cooperate			
14.	Intersectoral cooperation	Pilots involve actors representing the quadruple helix domains: public authorities, education and research institutions, business actors and civil society organisations. Where possible, all four domains are engaged in the cooperation structure. If the involvement of one or more domains is not feasible due to contextual conditions (e.g. ecosystem characteristics, institutional availability or relevance to the intervention), this should be clearly justified in the pilot design.	5
15.	Cooperation model	Pilots identify the most prominent domain within the quadruple helix cooperation structure, reflecting the needs of the target group and the measures designed to address those needs. In some cases, two or more domains may have comparable prominence, resulting in a dual- or multi-domains cooperation model. Other domains contribute according to their roles in implementation.	5.3

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8. Annex: COOPOWER pilot design template

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1. Basic information

Rationale:

This section provides the core identifying information for the pilot. Clear and standardised basic information is necessary for accountability, comparability across pilots, and later evaluation and policy learning. Implementation research consistently shows that unclear ownership, partner roles or implementation periods lead to loss of fidelity and confusion during monitoring and evaluation. Providing precise metadata at the outset allows evaluators and third parties to situate the pilot unambiguously within the COOPOWER framework and the agreed implementation period.

How to complete this section:

This section should contain factual and administrative information only. Do not describe problems, needs, objectives or activities here; these are addressed in later sections. Fill in all fields using concise and unambiguous wording. Where several organisations are involved, distinguish clearly between the implementing and collaborative organisations/institutions.

- **Pilot title**: Use a short, descriptive title that reflects the core mechanism of the pilot. The title should remain consistent across all project documents.
- **Region / country**: Specify the main territorial focus of implementation.
- **Implementing organisation(s):** List the organisation(s) with primary responsibility for delivery, coordination and reporting.
- **Collaborating organisation(s) / initiative(s) involved**: List **only organisations / initiatives with an active operational role** in implementation (e.g. referrals, hosting activities, mentoring, coordination). Do not include purely advisory or informal contacts.
- **Contact details**: Provide one responsible contact person for the pilot.
- **Period of implementation**: Specify the start and end month and year, aligned with the DoA implementation period (M13–M24).

Example:

1.1 Pilot title: YouthBridge – Cross-sector mentoring for NEET prevention
1.2 Region / country: Vienna, Austria
1.3 Implementing organisation(s): Centre for Social Innovation (ZSI)
1.4 Collaborating organisation(s) / initiative(s) involved:

1. City of Vienna – Municipal Youth Services
2. Vocational School X (Vienna)
3. Employer A
4. Employer B

1.5 Contact details: Jane Doe, project manager, doe@zsi.at
1.6 Period of implementation: April 2026 – March 2027 [M13 – M24]

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1.1. Pilot title:

1.2. Region / country:

1.3. Implementing organisation(s):

1.4. Contact details:

1.5. Collaborating organisation(s) / initiative(s) involved:

1.6. Period of implementation:

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2. Problem statement (local challenge)

Rationale:

A clear and evidence-based problem statement anchors the entire pilot design. In Theory of Change approaches, the problem definition establishes what is happening in the local context and why intervention is warranted. Weak or overly broad problem statements lead to activity-driven designs and make it difficult to assess whether observed outcomes are plausibly linked to the pilot. A precise problem statement ensures coherence between the local context, identified needs, objectives, activities and evaluation.

How to complete this section:

Describe the specific local challenge affecting vulnerable young people that the pilot addresses. Focus on observable conditions and patterns, not on solutions or activities.

The problem statement should:

1. Be grounded in evidence (e.g. Country report on territorial and diagnostic analysis D1.1 for your country or region, especially data on youth labour-market challenges, NEET rates, skills gaps, socio-economic barriers and local system weaknesses; Insights generated during the Vienna co-creation workshop, including the stakeholder-mapping exercise, identification of cooperation gaps, and the barriers-and-mitigation exercise and Any additional local reports, statistics, or consultation findings from municipalities, NGOs, youth services or labour offices).
2. Describe what is happening and for whom.
3. Identify relevant weaknesses in local systems or cooperation structures, where applicable.

Do **not**:

- Describe underlying needs (these belong in the next section);
- Describe activities or objectives;
- Use deficit-based or stigmatising language.

Guiding questions:

- What concrete situation or pattern justifies the pilot in this territory?
- Which groups of young people are most affected?
- What evidence supports this description?
- Are there identifiable gaps or failures in existing support or cooperation structures?

Recommended length: 10 - 15 lines.

Example:

In Vienna, a significant number of young people aged 15–21 (X%) disengage during the transition from lower secondary or vocational education into training or employment. Administrative data and school-level reporting indicate that early school leaving, and interrupted training pathways are concentrated among young people with limited family support and weak connections to the labour market. Although Vienna has a dense landscape of youth services, schools, and employment support measures, stakeholders report fragmented cooperation and late referrals, particularly for young people who are not yet NEET but show early signs of disengagement. As a result, opportunities for preventive intervention are often missed, increasing the risk of prolonged disengagement after compulsory education.

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3. Underlying needs

Rationale:

This section identifies the underlying human, relational and organisational needs that explain why the problem described above persists. In Theory of Change approaches, distinguishing needs from problems and strategies is essential for sound causal reasoning. Needs describe the conditions that must be in place for change to occur; they are not activities, services or solutions. Making needs explicit helps ensure that later objectives and activities address root causes rather than symptoms, and supports ethically grounded, strengths-based youth work.

How to complete this section:

To support this distinction in practice, you may recall the exercise used during the Vienna co-creation workshop, which illustrated the difference between *underlying needs* and *potential strategies* through a simple needs–strategies circle. The purpose of this exercise was to stress that pilots should respond to underlying needs of young people, rather than defaulting to activities that align primarily with organisational routines, existing offers, or assumptions about what young people are thought to need.

List the key underlying needs that sit beneath the problem described in the previous section. These needs should explain ***why*** the problem occurs, **not** *what is happening* and **not** *what the pilot will do*. Problems describe observable situations (e.g. disengagement, fragmentation, low participation). Needs describe the underlying conditions that must change for these situations to improve (e.g. trust, continuity, coordination, clarity of pathways).

The needs listed here must:

- Be logically linked to the problem statement (Section 5);
- Be formulated in neutral, non-stigmatising language;
- Refer to human, relational, organisational or systemic conditions.

For clarity, needs may relate to different levels, for example (illustrative, not exhaustive):

- **Human conditions (individual-level enabling conditions)**: Safety, stability, manageable stress, self-efficacy, hope, predictable routines, fun, creativity, choice etc.
- **Relational conditions (quality of relationships and social support)**: Trust, respect, belonging, peer support, recognition, non-judgemental communication.
- **Organisational conditions (how services work around young people):** Accessible entry points, continuity of key workers, flexible scheduling, clear information, timely follow-up.
- **Systemic conditions (how the local support ecosystem functions):** predictable referral pathways, role clarity across actors, shared expectations, coordination mechanisms, reduced gaps between institutions.

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When formulating a need, it should still make sense if you complete the sentence: "For change to be possible, young people need …" or "For change to be possible, the local support system needs …"

Do **not**:

- Restate the problem in different words: Needs must be logically connected to the problems identified in Section 2, but they should **not** merely repeat them. Section 2 explains ***what is happening***; Section 3 explains ***why it is happening***.
- Describe activities, methods or services
- Frame needs as deficits of young people.

Guiding questions:

- What conditions need to be in place for the situation described in the problem statement (Section 5) to improve?
- What is currently missing, unstable or fragmented in young people's environments or in the support system?
- Which needs must be addressed before training, employment or participation measures can be effective?

Recommended length: 5–8 concise lines

Example:

- Need for stable, trust-based relationships with adults outside the immediate family or school context.
- Need for early, coordinated support during educational transitions, before disengagement becomes entrenched.
- Need for clear and realistic pathways linking education, training and local labour-market opportunities.
- Need for continuity of support across institutional boundaries (school, youth services, employment support).
- Need for recognition of young people's strengths and potential beyond formal qualifications.

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4. Target group

Rationale:

A precise definition of the target group is essential for implementation fidelity, comparability across pilots, and credible evaluation. In implementation science, poorly specified target populations are a common source of weak causal attribution and inconsistent delivery, as activities, engagement strategies and indicators depend directly on who the pilot is designed for. This section therefore clarifies for ***whom*** the pilot is intended, without restating problems or needs described elsewhere. It also addresses barriers to participation, inclusion and equity within that target group, recognising that eligibility alone does not ensure equitable access or meaningful participation.

How to complete this section:

***Note*:** Section 4 serves as a chapter-level framing and instruction section only. **Partners do not enter substantive content directly under Section 4**. All descriptive content should be provided under Section 4.1 (description of the target group) and Section 4.2 (barriers to participation, inclusion and equity).

4.1. Description of the target group

This section describes ***who the pilot is for.*** Focus on demographic, socio-economic and situational characteristics of the young people targeted.

Do **not**:

- Restate the problem (Section 2) or underlying needs (Section 3).
- Describe activities or services.
- Use vague or catch-all formulations (e.g. “vulnerable youth”).

Instead, specify characteristics that allow an external reader to understand exactly which group of young people the pilot is designed to reach.

Include, where relevant:

- Age range
- Geographical location
- Education or labour-market status
- Key vulnerability factors that define eligibility or priority.

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Vulnerability factors (examples):

Use ***only those factors that are relevant for your pilot***; do not attempt to cover all categories.

- **Socio-economic**: Poverty, long-term family unemployment, low access to services, rural or peri-urban isolation.
- **Educational**: Early school leaving, low attainment, poor language proficiency, interrupted schooling.
- **Labour-market**: no or limited work experience, unstable or seasonal work patterns, skills mismatch.
- **Social/relational**: Weak support networks, lack of trusted adults, social isolation.
- **Health/psychological**: Mental-health challenges, disabilities, trauma, substance-risk environments.
- **Identity-related**: Ethnic or linguistic minorities, Romani and Sinti youth, refugees or migrants, discrimination-exposed groups.
- **Family/care-related**: Young carers, youth in alternative care, family conflict situations.
- **Crisis-related**: displacement, interrupted schooling, conflict-related instability (may be especially relevant for the Ukrainian pilot)

These factors help define ***who*** the pilot targets. They should **not** be used to explain ***why problems*** occur (Section 2) or **what conditions are needed** (Section 3).

Guiding questions:

- Which young people is this pilot explicitly designed for?
- How would an external organisation identify an eligible participant based on this description?
- Which characteristics make this group distinct from the general youth population in the region?

Recommended format and length: Provide a short narrative description (one coherent paragraph; approximately 5–8 lines). Bullet points may be used only to clarify eligibility criteria if strictly necessary, but the main description should be written in prose to allow a holistic understanding of the target group.

Example:

The pilot targets young people **aged 15–21** living in **Vienna** who are **in lower secondary or vocational education**, **or who have recently left education without a clear transition into training or employment**. Priority is given to young people with **limited family support, little or no work experience**, and **weak connections to employers**. The target group includes young people from **low-income households** and those **experiencing educational discontinuity**, particularly during the transition from compulsory education to post-compulsory pathways.

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4.2. Barriers to participation and inclusion and equity considerations

Rationale:

Defining the target group alone does not guarantee equitable access or meaningful participation. Youth work and participation research shows that structural, social and practical barriers can prevent specific subgroups within the target population from engaging, even when they are formally eligible. Making these barriers explicit, and describing how they are addressed, supports ethical implementation, improves reach and retention, and reduces systematic exclusion.

How to complete this section

This subsection focuses on participation-related barriers within the defined target group and the measures taken to address them. It does **not** restate vulnerability factors (Section 4.1), problems (Section 5) or needs (Section 3).

Describe:

- Concrete barriers that may limit access or participation for specific subgroups.
- Measures that will be implemented by the pilot to mitigate these barriers.
- Any relevant equity, safeguarding or ethical considerations.

Do **not**:

- Repeat the target-group description.
- List general risks of the pilot (these belong in the risk section).
- Describe incentives in detail (these are addressed later).

Typical barriers (examples):

- Transport constraints (e.g. cost, distance, travel time)
- Language or literacy barriers
- Limited digital access
- Caring responsibilities
- Stigma or fear of participation
- Gender-specific or cultural barriers
- Accessibility needs related to youth abled differently

Measures for inclusion, equity and safeguarding (examples):

The following examples are illustrative only and are provided to clarify the types of measures pilots may plan to ensure inclusive access and equitable participation. They are not exhaustive and should not be treated as a checklist; use only those that are relevant and appropriate to your specific context.

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- **Measures to ensure inclusive access**:
  - Offering activities at accessible times and locations
  - Covering transportation costs
  - Providing interpretation or bilingual materials
  - Using low-literacy-friendly formats
  - Creating culturally safe spaces
  - Ensuring gender-sensitive facilitation.
- **Equity considerations across subgroups**:
  - Setting explicit outreach or participation targets for minority youth in cooperation with trusted community organisations.
  - Monitoring and actively balancing participation of girls and boys during recruitment and intake.
  - Working with Romani and Sinti mediators or organisations to support outreach and sustained participation of Romani and Sinti youth.
  - Designing adapted and flexible engagement processes for care-experienced youth in cooperation with child protection or after-care services.
  - Ensuring rural–urban balance through decentralised activities or transport support.
- **Ethical and safeguarding considerations**:
  - Obtaining informed consent/assent from participants (and parental consent where required).
  - Clear confidentiality limits explained in plain language.
  - Named safeguarding lead and documented escalation pathway.
  - Safe referral routes to youth-friendly services (e.g. counselling, protection services) with agreed handover procedures.
  - Secure data handling (data minimisation, role-based access, encrypted storage, defined retention period).
  - Risk assessment and safety protocols for off-site activities.
  - Protection procedures for minors and vulnerable participants (including mandatory reporting obligations where applicable).
  - Incentive rules to avoid coercion (proportionate value, alternatives for those who decline, no conditionality on sensitive disclosures).

These considerations help ensure that the pilot is not only accessible in theory but inclusive in practice.

Recommended format and length: Provide a short narrative description (one coherent paragraph or two short paragraphs; approximately 6–10 lines). Where helpful, a short list may be used to clarify barriers or measures, but the emphasis should remain on explaining how barriers are anticipated and addressed.

Example:

Some young people in the target group are expected to face **transport** and **time constraints** that may **limit participation** in mentoring sessions. These barriers will be addressed through **reimbursement of public transport costs** and by **scheduling mentoring sessions outside**

school hours. Young people with **low confidence or negative institutions** will be supported through **joint first meetings involving trusted referral partners and informal introductory sessions** before one-to-one mentoring begins. **Safeguarding and confidentiality** will be ensured through **informed consent procedures, a named safeguarding lead** within the implementing organisation, **clear communication** of confidentiality limits, and **agreed referral pathways** to youth-friendly support services where additional needs are identified.

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5. Pilot objectives

Rationale:

Objectives translate identified problems and underlying needs into intended changes that are expected to be observable by the end of the pilot period. They define what the pilot seeks to achieve in measurable and realistic terms, within its temporal and organisational scope. In Theory of Change and logic-model approaches, well-specified objectives function as outcome statements that anchor activities, outputs and evaluation, while remaining distinct from longer-term impacts that lie beyond the pilot's direct control.

Implementation science further emphasises that pilots should be held accountable for changes that are plausible given their duration, resources and degree of influence, rather than for systemic or population-level impacts that depend on multiple external factors. Clear, time-bounded objectives therefore prevent pilots from becoming collections of activities without purpose and provide evaluators with a defensible basis for assessing whether the intended changes have occurred.

How to complete this section:

This section specifies the **intended objectives of the pilot**, not the activities that will be implemented. Objectives must logically derive from the problems identified in Section 5 and the underlying needs identified in Section 3, and relate to the target group described in Section 4.

Objectives should be formulated in line with SMART principles (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound), without becoming overly narrow or activity-descriptive. They should describe what is expected to change by the end of the pilot, not what the pilot will do.

Formulate objectives that:

- Describe a change in situation, behaviour, capacity or cooperation
- Are clearly linked to the needs in Section 3
- Are realistic given available resources and engagement levels
- Are assessable within the pilot timeframe

Do **not**:

- List activities or methods (these are described later)
- Restate problems or needs verbatim
- Formulate objectives so broadly that progress cannot be assessed

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Types of objectives

To support clarity and comparability, objectives may be formulated at different levels. Not all pilots need objectives at every level, but the distinction helps structure thinking and avoid conflating outcomes with impact.

- **Participant-level objectives**: Changes expected for participating young people by the end of the pilot (e.g. engagement, skills, confidence, transitions).
- **Organisational or cooperation-level objectives**: changes in cooperation, coordination or practices among involved organisations that are observable within the pilot period.
- **System-level or sustainability-oriented objectives**: changes within the pilot period that prepare, enable or support continuation, embedding or uptake beyond the pilot (e.g. readiness, capacities, agreements), without claiming longer-term system impact.

Guiding questions:

- What concrete change should be observable by the end of the pilot?
- For whom is this change expected to occur?
- Which underlying needs does this objective address?
- Is the objective realistically achievable within the pilot's timeframe and resources?

Recommended format and length: List 3–5 objectives. Each objective should be written as one clear sentence. Short clarifications may be added if necessary, but avoid long narratives or compound objectives.

Example:

- Participating young people demonstrate increased engagement with education, training or employment pathways by the end of the pilot period.
- Participating young people report improved confidence and readiness for post-compulsory education or employment.
- More consistent and coordinated cooperation between schools, youth services and employers is established for young people at risk of disengagement.
- Local employers involved in the pilot strengthen their capacity to engage with and support young people during educational transitions.
- Elements of the mentoring and cooperation model are prepared for continuation or integration into existing local youth support structures after the pilot.

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6. Theory of change (core logic model)

Rationale:

The Theory of Change (ToC) and logic model articulate how and why the pilot is expected to achieve the objectives defined in Section 5. While objectives describe ***what should be different by the end of the pilot***, the ToC makes explicit the causal pathways linking inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes, as well as the key assumptions and contextual factors that underpin these links. Making this logic explicit is essential for implementation fidelity, learning, and credible evaluation, particularly for complex, intersectoral interventions.

This section builds directly on the objectives already defined and should not reformulate them. Instead, it explains the mechanisms through which the pilot's activities are expected to contribute to the intended changes within the pilot period, while also indicating how these changes may plausibly contribute to longer-term impact beyond the pilot's scope.

How to complete this section:

This section should be completed using the standard ToC / logic model table provided below. Partners should take the objectives from Section 5 as fixed reference points and map the causal chain that links planned activities to these objectives. All objectives listed in Section 5 should be reflected in the short-term outcomes column of a single, integrated logic model table.

When completing the table:

- Ensure internal consistency between activities, outputs, outcomes and objectives
- Keep the level of detail proportionate to a pilot design (not a full programme manual)
- Make assumptions and contextual conditions explicit where they are critical for success
- use one primary activity–output–outcome chain per row to keep the logic transparent and traceable.

Do **not**: Restate or rephrase objectives; Introduce new objectives that are not listed in Section 5; Describe activities in narrative form only (use the table structure); Claim long-term impact as an outcome of the pilot.

The intended impact should reflect longer-term labour-market and cooperation improvements beyond the pilot period.

- Keep statements concise, specific and measurable where possible.
- Describe activities in narrative form only (use the table structure).
- Claim long-term impact as an outcome of the pilot.

Guidance to columns:

- **Inputs**: Resources required to implement the pilot (e.g. staff time, expertise, partnerships, funding, facilities).
- **Activities**: Core actions implemented by the pilot (what is done), described briefly.
- **Outputs**: Direct, tangible products of the activities (e.g. number of sessions delivered, participants engaged, agreements signed).
- **Short-term outcomes:** Changes expected to occur for participants or organisations within the pilot period, corresponding to the objectives in Section 5.
- **Medium-term outcomes / contribution to impact**: Plausible changes beyond the pilot period to which the pilot is expected to contribute, without claiming attribution. This column deliberately combines medium-term outcomes and contribution to impact to avoid over-claiming long-term effects that lie beyond the pilot's scope.
- **Key assumptions & contextual factors**: Conditions that must hold true for the causal logic to work (e.g. stakeholder engagement, policy environment, external risks).

Example:

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term outcomes (within the pilot period)	Medium-term outcomes / contribution to impact	Key assumptions and contextual factors
Trained mentors	Matching young people with trained mentors	Number of mentor–mentee pairs established	Increased confidence and engagement among participating youth	Improved readiness for education or training transitions	Mentors are recruited and retained; young people engage voluntarily
Cooperation agreements; coordination staff	Joint school–youth service referral meetings	Number of referral protocols applied; number of joint cases discussed	Earlier and more coordinated support for young people at risk of disengagement	Reduced risk of prolonged disengagement from education or training	Schools & youth services maintain cooperation; data-sharing rules are respected

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Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term outcomes (within the pilot period)	Medium-term outcomes / contribution to impact	Key assumptions and contextual factors
Staff, partners, spaces, tools, funding…	*Workshops, mentoring, employer cooperation…*	*Participation numbers, activities delivered, partnerships formed…*	*Increased motivation, improved soft skills [be specific], greater sense of belonging…*	*Sustained participation, training completion, improved employability…*	*Stable cooperation ecosystem, continued stakeholder engagement…*

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7. Key activities

Scientific rationale:

Activities operationalise the causal logic set out in the Theory of Change (Section 6). In implementation science and replication-oriented programme design, activities must be specified at a level of detail that makes sequencing, decision points, roles, and handovers explicit. This level of specification is necessary to ensure implementation fidelity, enable third-party replication without informal explanations, and support credible evaluation of which components were essential for achieving the intended outcomes.

Activities listed here must correspond directly to the activities included in the ToC table. This section does not justify why activities are chosen; it documents ***how they will be implemented***.

How to complete this section:

Describe each core activity using the structured activity protocol below. This level of detail is required for all core activities. Activities should:

- Derive directly from the Theory of Change (Section 6).
- Be described step-by-step, making sequencing and decision points explicit.
- Clearly specify roles and responsibilities across organisations.
- Be feasible within the planned implementation period.
- Enable replication by a third party without additional explanation.

Do **not**:

- Restate objectives or outcomes.
- Repeat problem or needs analyses.
- Describe activities in abstract or aspirational terms.
- Omit safeguarding or coordination steps where relevant.

Required structure for each activity:

Create one sub-section per activity (e.g. Activity 7.1, 7.2). Each activity must include the following elements (7.1.1. to 7.1.7. → copy the structure for each activity:

- Activity title: Short, descriptive name.
- Linked objective: Which objective this activity contributes to (from Section 5).
- Target group: Which specific subgroup of youth this activity is for.
- Detailed description: Numbered steps describing the full activity cycle, including entry, delivery, review, and closure where applicable
  - Sequence of steps (1–2–3…)
  - Timing and duration

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- Roles and responsibilities of each partner: Describe roles and responsibilities **only as they apply to this specific activity**. Overall or standing responsibilities across the pilot should be described in Section 8.
- Methods: Approaches, formats and pedagogical or coordination methods applied (e.g. mentoring approach, case work model, facilitation method, employer visits)
- Materials and tools (incl. digital tools): Concrete materials, instruments or digital tools used to implement the activity (e.g. guides, templates, platforms, forms, software)

- Expected engagement level: Inform / Reach / Involve / Engage, per step.
- Key indicators: ***What will show that the activity worked***? (quantitative or qualitative). A small number of indicators that allow assessment of implementation and immediate effects (aligned with Section 6)

Example:

7.1. Activity title: Structured mentoring cycle with cross-sector support

Timeline: M13 – M24

Linked objective(s):

- Increase young people's confidence and readiness for post-compulsory education or employment
- Strengthen coordinated support across sectors.

Target group: Young people aged 15–21 with low confidence, limited supportive relationships, irregular routines, or at risk of becoming NEET.

Detailed description (step-by-step):

1. **Pre-referral information & outreach**: The implementing organisation, ZSI, informs schools, municipal youth offices, NGOs and community organisations about the mentoring offer through short briefings, an information sheet and a shared referral protocol. → Engagement level: Inform
2. **Referral & initial screening**: Schools, municipal youth offices and NGOs refer young people using a shared referral form. Youth workers from the implementing organisation, ZSI, conduct a brief needs and eligibility screening. → Engagement level: Reach
3. **Mentor recruitment & matching**: ZSI screens volunteer mentors; local businesses release staff for corporate volunteering. Matching considers gender, interests, language and safeguarding needs. → Engagement level: n.a. (internal step)
4. **Triadic kick-off meeting**: ZSI facilitates the first meeting with mentee and mentor. Safeguarding guidelines and confidentiality limits are explained. Employer mentors receive brief orientation. → Engagement level: Reach
5. **Weekly mentoring sessions**: Mentor and mentee meet for 60 minutes approximately once per week at a youth centre or employer location. Sessions follow a structured mentoring guide (prepared by ZSI during the pilot preparation phase), focusing on routine-building, communication skills and reflection. → Engagement level: Involve

6. **Career exposure integration**: Mentees are invited to participate in optional mini job-shadowing sessions organised by business partners, accompanied by mentors where appropriate. → Engagement level: Engage
7. **Closure & transition pathway**: *COOPOWER partner* documents progress; employer mentor provides skills feedback; youth office supports referrals to training, internships or further support services. → Engagement level: n.a. (internal)

Roles & responsibilities:

1. **Implementing organisation - ZSI (Lead):** Conducts screening and matching for this mentoring cycle; facilitates mentor–mentee meetings; documents participation and progress; applies safeguarding procedures within this activity.
2. **City of Vienna – Municipal Youth Services (MA13):** Provides case-specific social support when triggered by this mentoring activity, following referral from ZSI.
3. **Participating lower secondary and vocational schools in Vienna**: Identify and refer eligible students for participation in this mentoring activity and coordinate information relevant to educational transitions linked to the activity.
4. **Employer A; Employer B** (representing local SMEs/employers participating in the YouthBridge Vienna network): Release staff as volunteer mentors and host job-shadowing opportunities within this mentoring cycle.

Methods:

- Structured mentoring approach with regular one-to-one sessions
- Triadic kick-off meetings

Materials and tools (incl. digital tools)

- Structured mentoring guide
- Referral and screening forms
- Safeguarding protocol
- Session templates
- Reflection tools

Key indicators:

- At least 65% complete six or more mentoring sessions.
- Mentees demonstrate increased confidence between pre/post assessment.
- At least three intersectoral referrals occur per mentoring cycle.
- At least 30% of mentees participate in a job-shadowing or employer insight activity.

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7.1. Activity title:

7.1.1. Objective:

7.1.2. Target group:

7.1.3. Detailed description:

7.1.3.1. Sequence of steps

7.1.3.2. Timing and duration

7.1.3.3. Roles and responsibilities

7.1.3.4. Methods

7.1.3.5. Materials and tools (incl. digital tools)

7.1.4. Expected engagement

7.1.5. Key indicators

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7.2. Activity title:

7.2.1. Objective:

7.2.2. Target group:

7.2.3. Detailed description:

7.2.3.1. Sequence of steps

7.2.3.2. Timing and duration

7.2.3.3. Roles and responsibilities

7.2.3.4. Methods

7.2.3.5. Materials and tools (incl. digital tools)

7.2.4. Expected engagement

7.2.5. Key indicators

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8. Cooperation model

Rationale:

Clear governance and cooperation arrangements are critical determinants of implementation success in intersectoral pilot actions. Implementation research consistently shows that ambiguous role allocation, unclear responsibilities, weak communication structures and informal cooperation are among the most frequent causes of implementation failure, loss of fidelity and stakeholder disengagement, particularly in multi-actor interventions. Explicit governance descriptions also strengthen accountability, ethical compliance and evaluator credibility, especially where multiple sectors, mandates and organisational logics intersect.

This section explains ***how cooperation is structured and governed <u>across the pilot</u>*** as a whole. It does not repeat activity-level procedures (Section 7) or basic partner listings (Section 1), but provides an overview of who is involved from which sector, how responsibilities are distributed, how communication is organised, and how cooperation is expected to contribute to outcomes for young people.

How to complete this section:

Section 8 serves as a chapter-level instruction section for all its sub-sections (8.1 – 8.4). Partners should complete each sub-section using the formats indicated. Together, the sub-sections should provide a coherent picture of governance and cooperation arrangements at pilot level.

When completing Section 8:

- Be specific and name concrete organisations wherever possible.
- Distinguish clearly between sectors (civil society, public sector, business, education/ academia) according to the Quadruple Helix model.
- Ensure consistency with Sections 1, 6 and 7.
- Focus on structures and roles, not on justifying activities.

Do **<u>not:</u>**

- Restate problems, needs or objectives.
- Repeat detailed activity descriptions.
- Rely on vague statements such as “partners cooperate closely” without explanation.

8.1 Collaborating organisations/initiatives, roles and responsibilities

This sub-section provides an integrated overview of ***who is involved in the pilot and what their responsibilities are***. Complete the table below by listing only collaborating organisations or initiatives with an ***active role in implementation or coordination***. Be specific and name concrete organisations. Distinguish clearly between sectors.

8.2 Governance and communication structure

This sub-section describes how coordination and decision-making are organised in practice. Focus on communication routines, coordination bodies and decision rules rather than informal relationships.

Provide a short description (approximately 3–5 concise lines), preferably using structured bullet points, covering:

- Overall governance structure
- Coordination roles and routines
- Communication channels and frequency
- Decision-making and escalation pathways

8.4 How cooperation contributes to youth outcomes

This sub-section explains **why the chosen cooperation model matters for young people**. It links governance and cooperation arrangements to expected benefits for participants, without repeating objectives or outcomes.

Describe briefly, preferably using bullet points that make causal links explicit (e.g. X → Y → Z):

- How cooperation between sectors improves access, continuity or quality of support
- Which added value cooperation creates compared to single-actor approaches
- How coordination helps address the needs identified in Section 3

Recommended length and format: Follow the formats indicated for each sub-section. Narrative text should be concise (approximately 3–6 lines per narrative sub-section). Tables should be fully completed but limited to actors and roles that are central to the pilot.

Example:

Sector	Actor	Role and responsibility across the pilot	Why this role is needed at pilot level
Civil society	Centre for Social Innovation (ZSI)	Overall pilot coordination; safeguarding oversight; reporting and compliance	Ensure coherence, accountability and ethical compliance across all activities
Public	City of Vienna – Municipal Youth Services (MA13)	Standing referral role; provision of complementary social support when needed	Address social and welfare-related needs that sit beyond the scope of single activities
Business	Employer A	Provision of volunteer mentors	Contribute practical labour-market insight through mentoring
	Employer B	Hosting of job-shadowing and employer insight activities	Provide practical exposure to workplace environments and occupations
Academia / Education	Vocational School X (Vienna)	Identification and referral of eligible students; coordination around educational transitions	Enable early identification and continuity between education and support services

If you have more than one active stakeholder from a sector please include them in a separate line under the sector

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8.2 Governance and communication

- Monthly coordination meetings (all core partners: ZSI, MA13, education and business partners).
- Bi-weekly case reviews for active participants (ZSI + MA13).
- Quarterly employer roundtable to align mentoring, job-shadowing and labour-market expectations.
- Shared referral folder and participant progress log (access restricted to authorised partners)
- Jointly agreed safeguarding escalation pathway, activated when risks or protection concerns arise.

8.3 Contribution of cooperation to youth outcomes

- Joint referrals → clearer entry criteria and expectations → reduced early dropout
- Regular case reviews → faster identification of emerging issues → improved retention and continuity
- Employer engagement → realistic exposure to workplaces → increased motivation and employability
- School–youth service coordination → smoother educational transitions → higher completion rates

8.1. Collaborating organisations/initiatives, roles and responsibilities

Sector	Actor	Role and responsibility across the pilot	Why this role is needed at pilot level
Civil society			
Public			
Business			
Academia / Education			

8.2. Governance and communication structure

8.3. How cooperation contributes to youth outcomes

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9. Outreach strategy

Rationale:

Meaningful engagement of young people is a core determinant of pilot effectiveness, ethical quality and implementation fidelity in youth-focused interventions. Research in youth work and implementation science shows that participation levels, retention and outcomes depend less on the formal availability of activities and more on how young people are informed, approached, involved and supported over time. Explicit outreach strategies help prevent tokenistic participation, reduce drop-out, and ensure that pilots respond to young people's capacities, motivations and constraints in a respectful and realistic way.

In the COOPOWER context, outreach is understood as a process across the pilot lifecycle, not a single recruitment step. This section therefore focuses on how young people are contacted, informed, onboarded, supported and retained, and how outreach practices align with ethical and safeguarding standards.

How to complete this section:

Partners should describe their outreach strategy in a way that makes explicit:

- How young people are informed about the pilot and reached in practice
- How initial participation is enabled
- How sustained engagement is supported over time
- How ethical, inclusive and non-coercive participation is ensured

Descriptions should be practical and concrete, aligned with the target group defined in Section 4 and the activities described in Section 7. Engagement volumes and intensity should be realistic and consistent with the project's agreed performance targets. In line with the original COOPOWER design, a structured engagement strategy should enable pilots to reach approximately 100–250 young people, while actively engaging a smaller subset in more intensive or sustained activities.

Do **not**:

- Restate activity descriptions
- Describe engagement only in abstract terms (e.g. "youth are actively involved")
- Conflate engagement strategies with incentives alone

9.1. Engagement levels

This sub-section provides the shared engagement level definitions agreed during the Vienna co-creation workshop**. Partners do not add content here**. The definitions are intended to support a common understanding and comparability across pilots.

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9.2. Pilot-specific definition

This explains how the target group moves from initial awareness of the pilot to meaningful, sustained participation. Instead, it describes the pathway through which young people become progressively more engaged. Complete the table below to specify what "engagement" means in the context of this specific pilot, building on the shared engagement levels defined in Section 9.1.

Important:

- Use the numerical estimates you developed during the Vienna workshop or refined thereafter.
- Engagement levels describe behaviour, not intentions.
- The classification criteria must be specific and measurable.
- The funnel should reflect your actual pilot design, not abstract possibilities.

9.3. Barriers to engagement and mitigation measures

Identify the main barriers that may prevent young people from engaging or remaining engaged in the pilot and describe how these barriers will be addressed in practice. Typical barriers may include:

- Lack of trust in institutions
- Low motivation or self-confidence
- Transport constraints
- Childcare responsibilities
- Competing family obligations
- Digital access issues
- Language barriers
- Stigma or fear of failure

Example:

9.2. Pilot-specific breakdown

Level	Related activity / steps	Expected number of young people
Inform	Act 7.1 - step 1, *Act 7.X step X, Act 7.Y step Y…*	250
Reach	Act 7.1 - step 2, Act 7.1 - step 4, *Act 7.X step X, Act 7.Y step Y…*	120
Involve	Act 7.1 - step 5, *Act 7.X step X, Act 7.Y step Y…*	50
Engage	Act 7.1 - step 6, *Act 7.X step X, Act 7.Y step Y…*	30

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In Section 9.3 you need to describe specific barriers that may prevent young people from moving from REACH → INVOLVE → ENGAGE, and how your pilot will address them. Typical barriers may include:

- lack of trust in institutions
- low motivation or self-confidence
- transport constraints
- childcare responsibilities
- competing family obligations
- digital access issues
- language barriers
- stigma or fear of failure

For each barrier, provide a mitigation action.

Example:

Barrier	Mitigation measure
Low confidence	formal warm handover from Youth Office caseworker (joint first meeting) + first session structured as a 45-minute informal meeting focused on relationship-building, not assessment.
Transport	Provide travel reimbursement.
Irregular routines	Flexible attendance options & mentor text reminders

9.1. Shared COOPOWER baseline definitions

At the pilot co-creation meeting in November 2025 in Austria, all partners agreed that there are different engagement levels of the target group (see Table below). In the sections below, please describe what these engagement levels mean bases on your pilot's activities, cooperation model and local youth realities.

Level	Description	Examples in practice
Inform	Young people **receive information** about opportunities, services, or rights. **Communication is one-way.**	Flyers, school visits, or social-media posts announce a new training or mentoring offer.
Reach	Young people are contacted and **take part once or briefly**, usually as participants or beneficiaries. **Their role is mainly passive.**	They join a single job-skills workshop or attend an event run by partners.
Involve	Young people **participate more than once in activities** and can **express opinions or preferences**, with potential to shape design.	They attend several mentoring sessions, share feedback, or help spread the word.

Engage	Young people take **part actively and continuously**, showing **commitment** and initiative within the activities. They help keep momentum and **bring their perspective** into planning, outreach, or implementation.	They participate throughout a full training cycle, mentor peers informally, or help sustain a youth group.

9.2. Pilot-specific definition

Level	Related activity / steps	Expected number of young people
Inform		
Reach		
Involve		
Engage		

9.3. Barriers to engagement and mitigation measures

Barrier	Mitigation measure

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10. Incentive model

Rationale:

Evidence from youth work, behavioural economics, and motivation theory shows that sustained participation is supported not by a single incentive, but by a coherent mix of practical, social, learning and recognition incentives. Incentives must respond to identified needs (Section 3), address barriers to engagement (Section 9.3), and support progression through the engagement funnel (Section 9).

This section describes which incentives are used, for whom, at which stage of engagement, and why. Incentives are not rewards for compliance; they are enabling mechanisms that reduce barriers and strengthen motivation for sustained participation.

In COOPOWER, incentives must: support progression from Reach → Involve → Engage, be ethically appropriate and non-stigmatising, avoid dependency or coercion, be feasible within the pilot context.

Pilots should use a balanced mix of incentive types. Categories may overlap; what matters is their function.

a. **Practical & material incentives**: Reduce concrete participation barriers. Examples: transport reimbursement, meals, childcare support, materials, digital access.
b. **Social incentives**: Strengthen belonging, trust and peer motivation. Examples: peer mentors, group identity, informal networking moments, supportive relationships.
c. **Learning & progression incentives**: Make participation meaningful for future pathways. Examples: certificates, micro-credentials, documented skills, references, exposure to employers.
d. **Recognition & symbolic incentives**: Acknowledge effort and contribution. Examples: public recognition events, showcases, employer visibility, youth-led presentations.

In this section, specify which incentives are used at which engagement level, and explicitly link them to identified needs (Section 3) and barriers (Section 9.3).

Example:

Engagement level	Incentive	Needs addressed	Barrier addressed	Purpose / expected effect
Reach	Travel reimbursement	Accessibility, reliability	Transport constraints	Enable attendance
Involve	Assigned peer mentor	Belonging, trust	Low motivation& confidence	Support repeated participation and confidence
Engage	Certificate or employer reference	Recognition, progression	Unclear pathways	Support transitions into training or work

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Engagement level	Incentive	Needs addressed	Barrier addressed	Purpose / expected effect

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11. Risks and mitigation

Rationale:

Evidence from implementation research shows that pilot success depends not only on design quality but on the early identification of risks and the existence of realistic, assigned mitigation strategies. This section ensures that pilots are resilient, ethically sound, and implementable in real-world contexts.

This section identifies the main risks that could undermine implementation or outcomes of the pilot in general (and **NOT** barriers to engagement of the target group Section 10.3) and specifies concrete mitigation measures. Risks should be realistic, context-specific, and linked to earlier sections of the template. Here, identify the most relevant risks **for your pilot** (typically 5–8). Each risk must be accompanied by a concrete mitigation strategy and a responsible actor.

Important:

Do **not** repeat the content of Section 10.3 here. Section 10.3 shows *Why individual young people might disengage* and Section 11 shows *What could undermine the pilot at system level, even if the design is sound.*

Before completing the table, please use the definitions below to classify risks consistently. These categories are grounded in implementation science (e.g. CFIR) and programme evaluation literature and are used to distinguish where a risk operates.

Risk category definitions (use one per risk):

1. **Cooperation risks**: Risks arising from intersectoral collaboration, coordination, or partner commitment (e.g. disengagement of partners, unclear roles, employer withdrawal). These correspond to inner setting and process factors in implementation research.
2. **Operational risks**: Risks related to staffing, resources, scheduling, or organisational capacity that may disrupt delivery (e.g. staff turnover, overload, delays). These align with implementation capacity and readiness for implementation.
3. **Ethical & safeguarding risks**: Risks that may compromise the safety, rights, dignity, or well-being of young people (e.g. safeguarding incidents, consent issues). These relate to ethical standards and duty-of-care requirements in youth work.
4. **Data & M&E risks**: Risks affecting data quality, consistency, or availability for learning and evaluation (e.g. incomplete records, inconsistent indicators). These correspond to measurement and evaluation fidelity concerns.

Example:

Risk category	Description of risk	Likelihood [Low / medium / high]	Potential impact	Mitigation strategy	Responsible actor
Cooperation	Partner disengagement over time	Low - medium	Weakening cooperation model	▪ Regular coordination meetings ▪ clear role definitions	*COOPOWER partner*
Operational	Staff turnover	Medium	Disruption of continuity	Documentation	*COOPOWER partner*
Ethical / safeguarding	Participants internalise a deficit-based narrative (feeling that something is "wrong with them" due to being labelled as vulnerable youth)	Medium	▪ Reduced self-esteem, ▪ Disengagement ▪ Reinforcement of stigma	▪ Strengths-based framing ▪ Non-stigmatising language ▪ Voluntary participation ▪ Staff training on asset-based approaches	All actors
Data & M&E	Incomplete or inconsistent data	Medium	Gaps in evaluating and learning	▪ Simple tools ▪ Clear responsibilities	*COOPOWER partner*

12. Sustainability and transferability

Rationale:

This section explains how the pilot can leave a durable trace beyond the project period and what learning can be transferred to other contexts. Sustainability and transferability should be considered realistically, based on the pilot design, cooperation model, and local context.

How to complete this section:

Be concrete and realistic. Avoid general statements such as "the pilot will be sustainable if funding continues". Instead, focus on specific elements that could continue or be adapted.

Indicative length: ½–1 page.

13.1 Sustainability at local level

- Which activities, services, cooperation arrangements or tools could realistically continue after M24;
- Which actors (e.g. municipality, NGO, employer, school) could take ownership;
- What minimum conditions would be required (e.g. funding source, staff time, policy support).

Note: Focus on plausible continuation, not ideal scenarios.

13.2 Transferable elements

- Identify concrete elements that other regions could adapt, for example:
- Cooperation mechanisms (e.g. referral pathways, coordination formats);
- Engagement or incentive approaches;
- Tools, curricula, or processes;
- Governance or coordination practices.

13.3 Limits to transferability

Acknowledge context-specific factors that may limit transfer, such as:

- labour market structure;
- institutional or legal frameworks;
- availability of partners or resources.
- This strengthens credibility and learning value.

Briefly explain why elements are transferable; what would need to be adapted in a different territorial or institutional context.

Example:

13.1 Sustainability at local level

While the implementing organisation does not foresee continuing the pilot activities in their current form after M24, several core elements of the pilot could be embedded within existing municipal structures. During implementation, the pilot establishes structured cooperation between the municipal Youth Office, local schools, and employers, including referral pathways and coordination formats that align with the municipality's statutory youth support mandate.

Following the end of the project, the municipality could take ownership of the core mentoring and referral functions by integrating them into existing youth counselling services. This would not require replication of the full pilot model but rather the adoption of selected components, such as structured intake procedures, coordination meetings with employers, and the use of engagement criteria developed during COOPOWER.

The minimum conditions for continuation would include allocation of staff time within the Youth Office (e.g. reassignment of existing counsellor capacity), political or administrative endorsement of the approach, and continued cooperation with local employers. No direct continuation funding for the original implementing organisation would be required.

13.2 Transferable elements

The following elements of the pilot are considered transferable even in contexts where the original implementing organisation does not continue its involvement:

- the structured referral and coordination mechanisms between municipal services, schools, and employers;
- the engagement funnel logic and criteria for defining sustained participation;
- the cooperation agreements clarifying roles between public authorities and employers;
- the strengths-based approach to youth engagement and non-stigmatising communication practices.

These elements are transferable because they rely on governance arrangements and procedural tools rather than on the presence of a specific organisation. Adaptation would mainly concern the institutional location of coordination functions and the professional profiles of staff responsible for implementation.

13.3 Limits to transferability

Embedding the pilot within municipal structures may be limited by institutional rigidity, staff workload, or changes in political priorities. In municipalities with limited youth service capacity or high staff turnover, the transfer of pilot elements may be partial or require simplification. Legal or administrative constraints may also affect the extent to which employer cooperation can be formalised.

12.2. Transferable elements

12.3. Limits to transferability

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13. Timeline and workplan

Rationale:

Implementation research shows that pilots without sufficiently granular planning are at higher risk of delay, scope creep and uneven delivery, particularly when multiple actors and interdependent activities are involved.

This section translates the pilot design into a time-bound implementation plan, aligned with the COOPOWER implementation period (M13–M24). It focuses on when key activities and milestones take place, not on re-describing activities or objectives.

How to complete this section:

***Note*:** Section 13 serves as a chapter-level framing and instruction section only. Partners do not enter substantive content directly under Section 4. All descriptive content should be provided under Section 13.1 (milestone-based workplan) and Section 13.2 (Gantt chart).

Present a concise but sufficiently granular timeline covering the full pilot period, including preparation, implementation and finalisation phases. The timeline should allow external reviewers to assess feasibility and internal teams to monitor progress. When completing this section:

- Align the timeline with the official pilot implementation window (M13–M24)
- Use milestones rather than vague phases
- Show logical sequencing and dependencies between activities
- Ensure consistency with Sections 7 (activities), 8 (governance) and 9 (outreach)

Do **not**:

- Restate activity descriptions
- Use overly broad phases (e.g. “implementation”)
- Present a timeline that cannot realistically be delivered with available resources

11.1. Milestone-based workplan

Present the pilot timeline as a milestone-level workplan. Milestones should represent concrete, observable points of progress (e.g. completion of preparation, launch of first cycle etc.), not general intentions. **Note:** Milestones must be defined as clear completion points, expressed as a single month (e.g. May 2026 (M15)), not as start–end periods. The duration of work leading to each milestone should be shown only in the Gantt chart.

Use the table below. Add rows as needed, but keep the total number of milestones limited and meaningful.

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11.2. Gantt chart

Partners must complement the milestone table with a Gantt chart showing the duration, sequencing and overlap of key activities. The Gantt chart must be more granular than the milestone table and should break down work within months (e.g. by weeks) where relevant. Each activity or sub-activity in the Gantt must clearly contribute to one of the milestones defined in Section 11.1

If a Gantt chart is provided, ensure that:

- It corresponds exactly to the milestones listed above
- Major dependencies between activities are visible
- It covers the full M13–M24 period

Example:

13. Timeline and workplan

13.1. Milestone-based workplan

	Milestone	Key activities covered	Timeframe (month/year & project month)	Actor(s)
1.	Pilot preparation completed	Partner agreements finalised; staff onboarding; safeguarding setup	May 2026 (M14)	ZSI
2.	Outreach and referrals launched	School briefings; youth service referrals; information sessions	June 2026 (M15)	ZSI, MA13, schools
3.	Mentoring cycle 1 implemented	Matching; mentoring sessions; case reviews	October 2026 (M19)	ZSI, all partners
4.	Mid-term review completed	Review of participation and adjustments	October 2026 (M19)	ZSI, MA13
5.	Mentoring cycle 2 implemented	Second mentoring cycle; employer exposure	February 2027 (M23)	ZSI, all partners
6.	Pilot closed and documented	Closure; transition support; documentation	March 2027 (M24)	ZSI

13.2. Example: Gannt chart

M#	Activity/sub-activity	M13 April 26	M14 May 26	M15 June 26	M16 July 26	M17 Aug 26	M18 Sept 26	M19 Oct 26	M20 Nov 26	M21 Dec 26	M22 Jan 27	M23 Feb 27	M24 Mar 27
M1	Partner agreements												
M1	Staff on-boarding and safeguarding set-up												
M2	Outreach and planning materials												
M2	Outreach and referral intake												
M3	Mentor recruitment and matching												
M3	Mentoring sessions												
M3	Case reviews & adjustments (cycle 1)												
M4	Mid-term review & adaptation												
M5	Mentor matching (cycle 2)												
M5	Mentoring sessions (cycle 2)												
M5	Employer exposure & job shadowing												
M6	Closure transitions and documentation												

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13.1. Milestone-based workplan

	Milestone	Key activities covered	Timeframe (month/year & project month)	Actor(s)

13.2. Gantt-chart

		M13	M14	M15	M16	M17	M18	M19	M20	M21	M22	M23	M24
		April 26	May 26	June 26	July 26	Aug 26	Sept 26	Oct 26	Nov 26	Dec 26	Jan 27	Feb 27	Mar 27
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