



Strengthening the human and social capital of highly educated no-native speakers

**A theory-driven inquiry of an innovation ESF-project
in Flanders**

Joris Wauters

Joris Michielsen

Christiane Timmerman (promotor)

Noel Clycq (promotor)

Steunpunt Inburgering en Integratie

Steunpunt Inburgering en Integratie

Consortium Universiteit Antwerpen (CeMIS), Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (HIVA),
Universiteit Gent (SDL) en Universiteit Hasselt (SEIN)

Lange Nieuwstraat 55
B-2000 Antwerpen

www.steunpuntieni.be

steunpuntieni@uantwerpen.be

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, the labour market position of highly educated no-native speakers (HENNS) in Flanders has been at the centre of both societal and scientific attention. In this paper, we analyze and evaluate an innovative project (ESF-funded), aiming to strengthen the human and social capital of highly educated no-native speakers (HENNS). In doing so, the project also tries to improve the HENNS' labour market potential. We specifically focus on the importance of social networks and the availability of social capital, as they can provide important resources (in)directly guiding HENNS towards employment. We define HENNS as those people, both new- and oldcomers, with:

- a current or birth-nationality of a non-EU15-country; OR
- with at least one parent or two grandparents with a current or birth-nationality of a non-EU15-country; AND
- people possessing at least a bachelor degree from a foreign tertiary education institution.

Recent reports for Belgium show a low labour market participation of HENNS compared to other EU15-citizens. Among highly educated people between 25 and 64, a total of 87,9% of the people born in Belgium are employed. People born in other EU15-countries score 7,7 percent points lower. But only 67,1% of the people born outside an EU15-country is employed (Michielsens, Wauters, & De Cuyper, 2014; SERV, 2014). Moreover, HENNS with a job seem more frequently overqualified: 57% of the non-OECD-countries versus 22% of the people born in EU15-countries (Geets, Timmerman, & Mortelmans, 2010). This is not only unfavourable from an economic perspective, but it also impacts the integration trajectories and the wellbeing of HENNS. Earlier research showed how matching employment (degree, skillset) contributes to participation and integration (Chiswick, 2010).

SERV (2014) identified the major structural thresholds HENNS in Belgium face when seeking durable employment. These include the lack of a coordinated guidance of HENNS towards employment based on their educational degree or skillset (matching); different issues (delayed participation, lowered motivation and wellbeing etc.) caused by difficulties to obtain a formal acknowledgement of both foreign diplomas or competences; the lack of Dutch language courses tailored to HENNS (e.g. challenging courses at a higher pace, language learning on the job etc.); the lack of (professional) social networks around HENNS, orienting them on the labour market and guiding them towards a job; documented distrust and discrimination on the employer's side of the labour market; and a lack of support and incentives for employers to hire HENNS.

During the project evaluation, we also focus on the social networks surrounding the HENNS. As we know from social network theory, social networks can play an important role in the integration of people on the labour market and in society in general. Social networks enable individuals to access relevant resources (eg. information, support, etc.) made available by other individuals within the same network. This *social capital* in turn can strengthen one's social mobility within different societal fields. It is, however, not enough to just be part of one or more social networks. The configuration of the network (size, density, composition, homogeneity/heterogeneity, etc.) is an important factor predicting the usefulness of the social capital that can be tapped into by the network members. For example: a social network that is characterized by a closed ethnic-homogeneous structure and composition, with its members working uniquely in the domestic work-sector, is unlikely to provide the social capital that is needed to facilitate upward social mobility (Michielsen et al. 2013). HENNS in such social networks can thus be hindered by it, rather than be supported by it.

Before presenting the data, we will shortly provide the framework of our research: the followed methodology, the data collection process and a description of the case we studied.

METHODOLOGY

Because of the innovative character of the project under evaluation, it was decided to adopt a single case study design. This allows us to make an in-depth theory-driven evaluation and a comprehensive exploration of the operation of complex interventions; both as a whole and in their natural contexts (Yin, 2009). Theoretical generalization techniques can be adopted to overcome the main weakness of a single case study, thus generating useful knowledge by studying the details of one specific case (Denscombe, 2003). Or as Platt (2007: 107) states "the issue of whether one can generalize from a case study is an issue not of the number of cases studied but of the adequacy of the theory in relation to which it is interpreted, and the cogency of its theoretical interpretations against a background of knowledge of other cases."

We analyse and evaluate our case (detailed description follows below) using a *theory driven evaluation* (Chen, 1989; Weiss, 1997). Theory-driven evaluators deconstruct a project into different interventions that each hold a number of theoretical assumptions about how the intervention should work out in reality, called the *program theory* (PT). Against this PT, the illumination of cause and effect can be structured (Chen, 2005). We try to make these theoretical assumptions explicit, and consequently test their validity. We thereby not only take existing research into account, but also focus on the contextual and intervening factors that contribute to the success or failure of the project when practically implemented.

DATA COLLECTION

The data collection proceeded in two steps. In a first step, we studied a corpus of internal documents (meeting reports, project leaflets, the project proposal etc.) gathered on the servers of the project manager in order to get a first insight into the implicit and explicit theories that lie at the basis of the project design and implementation. This information allowed us to recreate of first version of the project's PT. This phase took place in September 2014.

Secondly, we collected data via qualitative interviews. A total of 12 interviews were conducted, using different interview protocols depending on the aim of the interview. The interviews were conducted between September and December 2014.

We organised a semi-structured interview with each of the two initial program designers. The aim of these interviews was to reconstruct the PT behind the innovative HENNS-project from their respective perspectives. In a first part of the interview, we deliberately gave the interviewees a lot of time to extensively present the aims, design etc. (=PT) of their project. In a second part, the designers were triggered to reflect on the project implementations and evaluate its outcomes. During these first two parts, the interviewer would hold back and refrain from asking specific and secondary questions. It was only in the third and final part of the interview that the discrepancies between both versions of the PT were addressed and the outcomes were further discussed or questioned. The interviewer specifically confronted the designers with his interpretation of the PT, and asked them to elaborate further. Doing so, the designers could clarify their motives and identify some of the underlying assumptions that were made.

We also organized a semi-structured interview with each of the both project implementers/executors. A similar interview protocol was foreseen, but we explicitly triggered reflection on the implementation process and on the execution of the project in the second part of the interview.

Finally, nine in-depth interviews with HENNS participating in the project were conducted, on a total of 38 HENNS starting in the project. These interviews focused on their participation in the project. The HENNS were triggered to reflect on and evaluate the project, its outcomes and the impact it had on their human and social capital on as well as on their labour market potential. Furthermore, we aimed to get an insight into the social networks surrounding every interviewee. This was operationalized via a participatory visual mapping technique. The interviewees were asked to write down in a printed drawing of three concentric circles persons, groups, institutions, etc. that were in some way or another 'important' to them at the time of the interview. The most

important elements were placed on the inner circle, those less important on the middle or outer circles. After this exercise, the interviewer asked more details on every element in the printout. Finally, the HENNS were asked to repeat the exercise but solely writing down those elements that they access or, more general, use in one way or another, when thinking about their labour market position and potential (Freeman, 2000). We were aware of the challenge this more abstract exercise could be, but it showed to be rather unproblematic for the highly educated respondents.

Respondents were asked to participate in the evaluation using email and follow-up telephone calls. In a first phase, an email was sent to all participants, explaining the goal of the research and asking the HENNS for their cooperation. An incentive of 15€ was promised to every participant. A reminder was sent two weeks later, also using email communication. HENNS that replied to one of both emails were asked in replied to propose a date and location for the interview. If necessary, a follow-up telephone call was made. A total of nine respondents self-selected. Three HENNS expressed their interest in the study, but were not able to participate in an interview. Four other HENNS expressed their unwillingness to participate.

Resp.	Age	Sex	Highest degree	Migr to FLA in	Project group
A	27	F	MA (Belgian diploma)	2009	2
B	26	F	BA	2012	2
C	38	F	MA	2003	1
D	32	M	MA	2011	2
E	29	M	MA	2010	1
F	29	M	MA (Belgian diploma)	2012	2
G	37	F	BA	2008	2
H	24	F	MA	2013	2
I	28	M	Certificate of Photography	2008	1

We are aware how respondents C and I do not match our definition of HENNS, but since they participated in the project under evaluation; they are nevertheless included in the research and the interviews.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. These transcriptions were coded and analyzed using the NViVo 10-software.

Anonymous participation was guaranteed, and we explicitly stipulated the respondents' rights to not answer one or more questions or even abort the interview in total.

An incentive of fifteen euro was paid to every HENN we interviewed.

DESCRIPTION OF THE CASE AND PROGRAM THEORY

In this section of the article, we will describe the project under evaluation. We will deconstruct it and identify the most important assumptions behind the designed interventions. We not only used the available sources on the project coordinators' server to build the PT, e.g. the project proposal, project meetings, leaflets; but also checked our first insights and deconstruction with the designers and implementers for further fine-tuning. The information presented in the PT therefore exceeds the information available in the project proposal. It is important to emphasize that this is presentation about how the project *in theory* should work.

Description of the case

The aim of the project is to empower HENNS by strengthening their human and social capital, allowing them to find employment that matches their degree and/or skillset. To achieve this goal, the project makes use of different existing interventions (coaching, mediation, formation, exchanging experiences etc.), but integrates them into one single trajectory that is tailored on the profile and needs of HENNS. Additionally, also the employer-side of the labour market is targeted: employers are informed about the advantages and possibilities of hiring HENNS and are encouraged to do so.

The project is implemented by two organisations: a regional integration centre and one private firm providing counseling, HR-solutions for enterprises and job coaching for individuals. The first partner is the initiator of the project. The centre has gathered a lot of experience and pioneering knowledge on HENNS (mainly in Antwerp), and on their rather difficult trajectories towards employment. They formulated a memo with different difficulties and possible solutions, based on the experimental projects they already had implemented. The private firm was brought on board for their extensive expertise in traditional job-coaching. This partner submitted the project proposal, based on the provided memo. The complementarity of both partners seems evident: the first partner has got the necessary experience and a network among HENNS, the other partner is specialized in job-coaching but lacks experience with the target group.

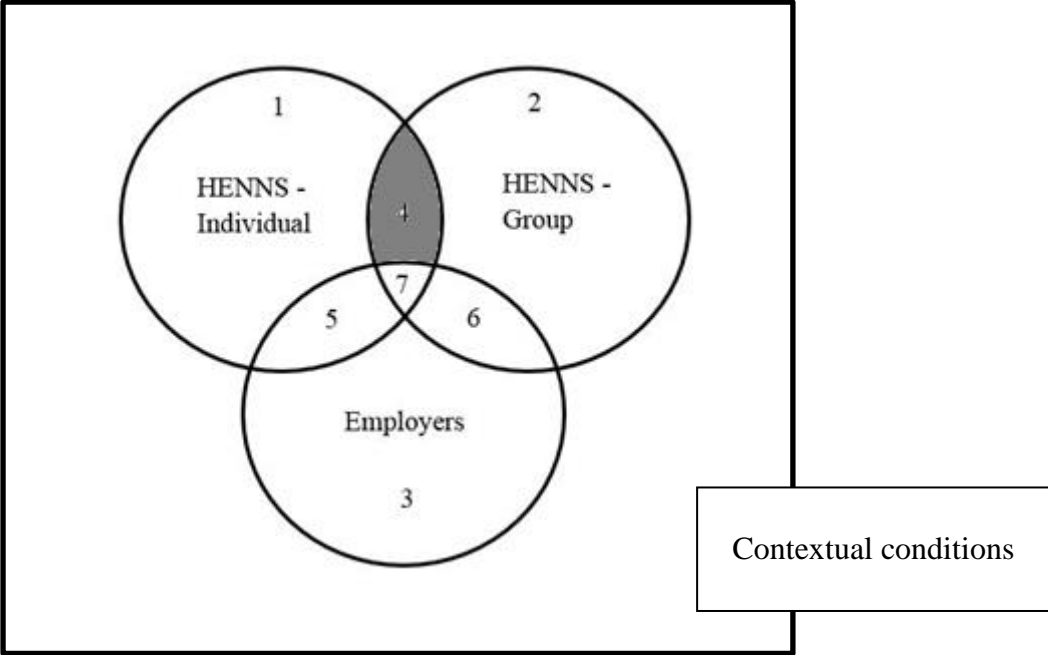
The innovative character of the project is constituted by the integrated approach, combining different interventions to better the HENNS' labour market position. Furthermore, the demarcation of HENNS as a specific target group of labour market-oriented interventions is also innovative.

Two groups with each around fifteen HENNS actively followed the trajectory of maximum twelve months. A first group started in March 2013, the second group in November 2013. Every HENNS could make use of ten coaching sessions in the one-year period.

Experiences from working with the first group were used to make adjustments in the trajectory of the second group. The participants were selected after intake-conversations. Important criteria thereby were: motivation, Dutch language skills (being able to make a standard conversation was a minimal requirement), period of stay in Belgium (maximum ten years), current employment situation (without employment or overqualified).

The project was formed around three major action levels. Specific interventions are designed at every level, as well as where different levels overlap. The action levels are: the individual HENNS, the group of HENNS, and potential employers of HENNS.

Below, we illustrate the project design. We deconstruct every action level and present the different interventions more in detail in the program theory (next section of this paper).



The program theory

	(A) INTERVENTIONS	(B) ASSUMPTIONS	(C) DESIRED OUTCOMES	(D) CONTEXTUAL REQs.
0	The whole program as the sum of all interventions	<p>The program prepares individual HENNS for labour market entry.</p> <p>The integral approach makes that the project as a whole has more impact than the sum of the different stand-alone interventions.</p>	<p>HENNS-participants are empowered and able to independently enter the labour market.</p> <p>The program guides HENNS to a durable and qualitative employment.</p>	<p>HENNS needs to be able to focus on their job-search and cannot be distracted from it by external factors (e.g. poverty, care-role for parents, psychological problems etc.).</p> <p>Underlying problems and challenges (e.g. HENNS in a multi-problem (poverty) situation) can shift the focus from the job search.</p> <p>HENNS need to be sufficiently fluent in Dutch before entering the program.</p> <p>Structural barriers outside of the HENNS control do not obstruct HENNS' participation: external structural thresholds (eg. discrimination based on age, ethnic background, subculture-affiliation etc.) are solved.</p>

1	Individual coaching trajectory.	<p>Job-coaches provide emotional support for the HENNS, strengthen them and raise their self-esteem and resilience. They clarify and focus the HENNS' professional and life aims.</p> <p>The Appreciative Inquiry (positive approach, mapping strengths and aims of HENNS) method is especially useful for HENNS, since it is expected that their experiences on the Belgian labour market makes them uncertain about themselves.</p> <p>In vain trying to find employment can also be frustrating and demotivating. HENNS don't always have the social network to 'unload' this emotional luggage.</p>	Individuals with an increased amount of self-esteem and self-trust; and with the necessary emotional and psychological stability allowing them to overcome certain disappointments in their search for employment.	<p>The coaches need to be sufficiently trained in the Appreciative Inquiry-method and have the skills to motivate and support the HENNS.</p> <p>The coaches need the necessary skills to cope with their HENNS' frustration, disappointment etc.</p> <p>The HENNS in coaching must be open to the methodological approach and must be able and willing to self-reflect.</p> <p>A relationship of trust between the HENNS and the coach.</p>
2	Group sessions, consisting of 2.1 and 2.2	The social dynamics created via group sessions, and the	Individuals with the necessary 'hard skills', knowledge and	

		knowledge and skills learned there, strengthen and elevate the individual HENNS.	formal and informal (professional) networks to enter the Belgian labour market.	
2.1	'Hard skills' formation and training: presenting, personal branding (LinkedIn), CV building etc.	The information provided in these sessions is useful for all HENNS, since they did not yet acquired it themselves in their countries of origin.	Knowledge of the Belgian labour market structure, on strategies for how to enter it.	
2.2	Exchange of information and network creation among HENNS	The group provides support, the possibility to share experiences and ideas, can guide and council. Experiences of one are therefore useful to others. These networks allow for the development and exchange of social capital among HENNS.	HENNS participating in the sessions build a social network among each other, thereby strengthening their available social capital. They use the network for the exchange of job opportunities, ideas, counseling...	In order for network-effects to take place, the reach and structure of the network is important. Heterogeneous networks with a combination of strong and weak bridging ties are the optimal networks to achieve the desired outcome. Homogeneous and bonding networks are, theoretically, less useful.
3	Activities pointed at potential employers, consisting of 3.1,	The unfavourable labour market position of HENNS is	Convincing employers of the potential of HENNS and	Employers need to overcome this 'reluctance' and need to be

	3.2, 3.3.	also the consequence of a certain 'reluctance' to hire HENNS on the employer-side of the labour market.	informing them about existing possibilities and good practices to involve HENNS in their firms.	willing to participate in the project. The creation of a win/win-situation for both HENNS (employment) and firms/enterprises should be found.
3.1	Raising awareness about the potential of HENNS	The reluctance of employers is based on a lack of information/the wrong information/prejudices about (the potential of) HENNS.	Employers are informed about the profile and potential of different HENNS. This contributes to their willingness to hire HENNS.	Openness of employers to participate in projects informing them about HENNS.
3.2	Disseminating good practices/examples of HENNS on the labour market	Good practices are transferrable from one firm/sector to another. They can inspire firms/enterprises to hire HENNS.	Employers are informed about good examples/practices in other firms where HENNS are employed. This contributes to their willingness to hire HENNS.	An organization/person should be responsible to document, analyze and disseminate specific projects and results; also after the end of the project currently under evaluation in this paper.
3.3	Start-up of a 'learning network' of employers (potentially) working with HENNS, for intervision, exchange of expertise etc.	Employer-to-employer-contact and exchange of experiences and expertise can inspire and motivate (potential) employers to hire HENNS.	Employers (interested in) working with HENNS are linked together in a specific learning network, facilitating the transfer information and good	An organization/person should be responsible to continue this 'learning network' after the end of the project currently under evaluation in this paper.

			practices. This leads to a better and faster integration of HENNS on the labour market.	
5	Coaching: assisting HENNS with their job search, including 5.1 and 5.2.	HENNS need the assistance of a job-coach, connecting them to the labour market. Their knowledge of the Belgian labour market (and how to enter it) is rather weak.	The coaches successfully support HENNS in their search for employment. They transfer and fine-tune skills and knowledge (e.g. doing a job interview, writing a CV).	The coaches need a good understanding of the structure and institutions of the labour market; as well as of the implicit and explicit 'codes of conduct'.
5.1	Orientation on labour market	HENNS are not familiar with the structure of the Belgian labour market (e.g. different professional sectors, firms, institutions etc.). HENNS require the support of a job coach to orient them on the labour market.	HENNS possess the insight in the structure and relevant sectors of the Belgian labour market. This allows them to aim their job search towards the firms and enterprises matching their profile or ambitions, and use the proper channels to do so.	The coaches need a good understanding of the structure and institutions of the labour market; as well as of the implicit and explicit 'codes of conduct'.
5.2	Individual formation and training: building CV, role-playing job interview, salary negotiations etc, CV building, expected job 'ethos' or local cultural norms, values,	Writing a good CV, doing job-interviews etc. requires country-specific knowledge about the Belgian labour market and its specific professional traditions (e.g.	HENNS possess the skills and insight to independently search employment and prepare themselves and the necessary documents following the most commonly accepted formats.	Knowledge of the language to be able to correctly interpret job offers (job description, required profile etc.), or the necessary resources to get the necessary assistance, is an

	professional traditions	<p>what to emphasize in a CV, when/ with whom to shake hands etc.). This is useful all HENNS, since they did not yet acquired it themselves in their countries of origin.</p> <p>HENNS need the support of a personal job coach to assist them in the job-seeking process, not only for the emotional/psychological aspect (see 1) but also for the 'knowledge-and-skills'-aspect covered in this intervention.</p>		important requirement.
6	<p>Group sessions aimed at bringing HENNS and potential employers closer to each other (meet & greet, speed-date session, company visit etc.), expanding the (professional) social network of both parties.</p>	<p>HENNS lack social and professional networks and the information necessary to develop them.</p> <p>Networking is a skill that can be learned.</p> <p>Encounter between (potential) employers and HENNS will at least partly eliminate the 'reluctance' of employers to</p>	<p>A higher amount of trust and appreciation of HENNS by potential employers.</p> <p>The broadening of both HENNS' and employers' professional networks.</p> <p>Specific vacancies will be filled in by HENNS.</p>	<p>Communication requirements: a common language facilitates networking.</p> <p>Building a durable network tie requires reciprocity. HENNS will only be able to build professional networks when they also can contribute to it.</p>

		<p>hire HENNS.</p> <p>These sessions will also expand the professional network of HENNS, facilitating their labour market entry.</p> <p>These sessions will also further deepen the HENNS' knowledge about the Belgian labour market.</p>		
7	<p>Job matching or -hunting for HENNS with the necessary social and human capital and skills to enter the labour market</p>	<p>Even when HENNS acquired the necessary self-esteem, knowledge and (professional) networks; additional efforts are necessary to guide them towards a job. Tailored assistance by a job matcher and job hunter can make the difference in finding employment.</p>	<p>Durable and tailored jobs matching the HENNS' respective profile, degree, skillset and ambitions.</p>	<p>The job matcher/hunter can profit from an extended professional network within the specific sectors HENNS try to find employment.</p> <p>The HENNS has the right profile to find a place on the labour market: stability, mastery of the necessary skills, language etc.</p>

RESULTS: EVALUATION AND THE ROLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

In what follows, we evaluate the project by checking the validity of the program theory against the analysis of our fieldwork with HENNS. For every intervention/subset of the PT, we verify if the theoretical assumptions that were made prove to be correct in practice. Wherever possible, we also check if this intervention led to the aspired outcomes; and what contextual conditions were, or were not, met. However, since most desired outcomes are not easily measured and oriented on the middle and long term, this is not often possible.

Interventions 1 & 5: coaching

We start the analysis with the coaching-intervention. This intervention focusses both on the HENNS as an individual person (nr. 1 of the project design) as well as on the HENNS in relation to employers and the labour market (nr. 5 of the project design).

Firstly, we focus on the individual coachings. Turning to the PT, we find that the individual coaching has two major goals: emotionally supporting the HENNS, thereby strengthening their self-confidence and resilience; and clarifying the HENNS' professional (and life-)focus in Flanders. In both cases, the coaches can act as a soundboard for the HENNS, providing the knowledge or support they could be lacking in their own social network and thereby countering feelings of frustration, depression... In the words of one of the coaches:

"One partly also is a safety net. Not to solve everything, but sometimes just to be present, to listen. To support emotionally, to provide feedback. These things."- coach

Our fieldwork with HENNS strongly shows the need for such support, confirming the validity of the assumptions made. However, we also have to point out a possible bias in the data. Since we only interviewed the respondents replying to our emails and calls, it is possible that these HENNS were more willing to participate because of the good relationship they uphold with their coaches; whereas those not cooperating possibly do not feel this personal connection. We can therefore only conclude the validity of the assumptions for at least a part of the HENNS.

We will use different quotes from our fieldwork, illustrating the added value of the coaching for the HENNS. Next to the positive influences, also possible pitfalls are discussed.

Positive influences: coaches compensate

Our fieldwork showed that the social networks surrounding the HENNS are rather limited, both in size as well in heterogeneity. The project met this need by employing coaches, who function as a go-to point for the HENNS; providing emotional support, advice and knowledge about their personal and professional goals in Flanders. Doing so, the coaches also compensate for this lack of available support and knowledge in the social networks surrounding the HENNS. The following quote shows the lack of support from the HENNS personal social network:

"Should someone be able to support me like that, I wouldn't need X (coach, authors). Because it is a psychological support. It is very important though, for I don't have this friend." – C.

The HENNS also testified about how depressing or frustrating their quest for employment can be. This assumption thus proved correct for the HENNS interviewed.

"Because the feeling to be... useless here. Unable to find something, always being 'just not good enough'. That is very depressing. And also very frustrating. I thought: 'I'm not a stupid woman, I cannot find anything here.' I've heard a lot of 'No'. I've been to job interviews, but it never was sufficient or good enough." – B.

The coaches can be a sound board and a counselor for HENNS:

"Because in this situation nobody is helping me. I always have to stay home alone and have no hope. Sometimes I think: 'I can't do anything in this country.' When I talk to X (coach, authors), I always find hope and a bit of energy. And that also is a good thing. I like that." – D.

In some cases, the coaches can also strengthen the HENNS in such a way that one pushes beyond his/her own limits and insecurities. In the following example, a HENNS successfully applied for a job that required Dutch because of the stimuli of the coach; whereas before the coaching sessions, he/she always tried to work in an English-speaking environment.

"I've made a big leap towards a job in Dutch with her. I would never have done that (on my own, authors). I never would have answered on the vacancy. Never. It was too much for me. Waw. I never have... I can't. In a different language, being responsible for the financial situation... No, I'm not capable. But she (coach, authors) told me: 'go ahead, you never know'" – C.

One designer also links this positive self-image to the building of social networks:

"Building a social network is strongly linked to your personal self-image. And hence, the individual coaching helps people to regain self-confidence. So I believe it to be an 'and/and-explanation'" – Designer

Possible pitfalls

We point out possible pitfalls that became clear during our fieldwork. Firstly, the trajectory towards a suitable employment that matches the desires and profile of the HENNS can have the effect to seemingly further complicate the situation one is in:

"The second part, when I had only had to work with an individual coach, was very depressing for me. She asked me this, and she asked me that... She complicated everything even more. I really no longer knew what I wanted and what I am capable of here." – B.

This can be further complicated when the advice given by the coach does not match other advices given to the HENNS; be it by other institutions or in one's social network. It also seems important to correctly manage expectations and possibilities of the HENNS. Positive appreciation and stimulation can also be interpreted as being unrealistic.

"X (coach, authors) boosted my energy level. I could do this, I was capable to do that... I started to look everywhere and was sent away by people and in the end I always received a 'No'. I was like: 'I can't do this any longer.' I really don't know if someone found a job via this project, because everybody was enthusiastic in the beginning but in the end it was: 'I will do it my way, as I already have done before'" – B.

For the coaches, their involvement and relationship with the HENNS goes beyond the usual coaching sessions they organize. More flexibility and a deeper commitment was sometimes needed, possibly also pushing the coaches out of their comfort zone.

"I sometimes don't know whether the roles of X en X (coaches, authors), if that doesn't overstretches regular coaching. It has to stay realistic within the coaching concept, but they went further." – Designer

Finally, we point out the temporal character of the coaching sessions. When the project comes to an end, the go-to point and all the connected benefits are no longer available to the HENNS. More durable social relationships with the same benefits could be a better alternative. One HENNS speaks about a good relationship with an elder from the neighborhood, that also provides this social and emotional support. Their relationship however is less orientated on finding employment.

Let us now focus on the role of the coaches when guiding HENNS towards employers and the labour market (nr. 5 of the project design).

According to our PT, this intervention is aimed at preparing HENNS to participate in the Flemish labour market. The designers thereby assumed that the strategies that need to be developed in order to achieve success on the local labour market, are different than those in the countries of origin. In the words of a designer:

"When applying in a foreign country, for example Egypt, other strategies apply. One really has to 'sell oneself' there. Doing that here, it is perceived as being really 'hautain'. An employer dislikes it. But more specifically at the higher levels: often there is the fear of superiors to hire someone trying to boss everyone around. While in reality it is an interviewstrategy valid in Egypt but not here." – Designer

From a theoretical point of view, we can translate this to the unfamiliarity of HENNS with the specific structure of and 'rules of the game' (behavior etc.) within the field of the Flemish labour market. Therefore, orientation on the labour market and the adaptation or fine-tuning of the HENNS' skillset and strategies is useful. This assumption is confirmed, both by scientific theories and the analysis of the conducted fieldwork.

"How can I present myself here? That is not an easy question for me to answer. So I asked: 'How can I present myself in a good way here? How can I present my situation here?' How can I show off my added value correctly to other people? So yeah, those people really helped me." – E.

*"Because where I am coming from, **things that are your strengths there, cannot be your strengths here.** It could be your weakness here. So that's why I thought, maybe it's interesting to know what people here think about the strong things in the personality or about the weak things in a personality." – F.*

"In Colombia the CV's are more serious, and 'more is better'. But here: 'less is better', for example. When one applies for a specific job, try to make your CV fit the specific vacancy." – G.

The added value in the coaching sessions clearly also lies with the development of **individual strategies and a tailored guidance** towards the labour market. From the perspective of the individual HENNS, this guidance is positively evaluated. Practical tips useful for CV-writing, role-playing exercises preparing for job interviews etc. are good examples of interventions addressing specificities of the Flemish labour market.

"But with X (coach, authors) it was specifically for me, my situation, my trajectory, my idea, my dreams, my..." – G.

Apart from the language barrier, this difficult compatibility of previous experiences on the labour market in the countries of origin with their efforts in Flanders is one of the most visible problem from the HENNS' perspectives. The intervention in the project addresses this in a very practical and short-term way.

Interventions 2 & 6: the added value of the group dynamic

Returning to the PT, we find that the aim of this subsets of interventions is threefold: it wants to create a group dynamic that works stimulating and inspiring for every participant; it aims to collectively transfer hard skills necessary on the labour market; and it aspires to build networks between HENNS and employers and between HENNS themselves. The designers made the distinction between 'group sessions' on the one hand, and 'group modules' on the other. The group sessions are part of intervention 2(.1) of the PT, whereas the modules are situated in nr. 6 of the PT. The sessions were set up from a coaching point of view and were organized by the project partner that also set up the coaching sessions. The modules were organized by the other project partner. These modules were part of another existing project targeting a group of HENNS that is larger than those HENNS participating in the project under evaluation.

The validity of the assumptions that were made is less clear for this part of the project. Our analysis found different opinions about the group sessions among the HENNS that were interviewed. However, it did become clear that the HENNS in general valued the individual coaching sessions more than they did the group sessions.

*"R: There were two sorts of sessions, one was a group session and the other was an individual coaching. And in the individual coaching we mostly talked about my experiences in my life, in X (country of origin, authors). And to find out what are my strengths, and how I made it up to here. So I discovered a lot in those meetings. I: Ok, and are the group sessions, did they have the same effect, positive effect, or do you have a different perspective on that? R: They were good enough as well, but **I found the individual meetings more interesting, more fruitful than group sessions.**" – F.*

Some HENNS formulated it even stronger:

"We come together and everybody talks about their experiences. Sometimes we there were over twenty people, everyone with his own story. I find it 'super', but sometimes I also think how I do not grow by hearing everybody's story. It's OK. But it doesn't make me... it doesn't change my... (...) The fact that one is a photographer, that I come from X (country of origin, authors), or... that doesn't nothing. For my, the group sessions were not necessary." – C.

"X (coach, authors) is always good. She is like: whenever youo have a problem: she always wants to help. She looks for alternative solutions. She is really mobile and very active. But with X (partner organising the group sessions, authors) I haven't learned anything, no." – D.

From the designers and coaches, we learned that the content of the group sessions was altered after the first group of HENNS evaluated the program. It was interesting to learn that the group sessions could, for some HENNS, have the opposite effect, namely mentally pulling the HENNS down. Since we also found positive evaluations of the

'training' part of the group sessions whereon more weight was put (see project design nr. 6 below), we believe the designers and coaches made the correct decision.

"Concerning the group coaching. In the beginning, with the first group, we wanted to focus on the positive qualities: aspirations, dreams for the future... exchanging positive experiences. However, it wasn't as stimulating for everyone as we hoped it would be. In the sense that, when talking about about the positive, we almost automatically arrived at the negative experiences. This was rather dressing for some people. This, of course, wasn't our intention. So with the second group we put more time and effort in the job application processes, more the 'active' part. In the first group, we already did so by organizing role playing sessions, exercises in presenting oneself and one's qualities etc. The HENNS really found it very interesting, so we enlarged this part of the groups sessions for the second group of participants. Since this was also a more 'objective' approach, rather than the subjective experiences, it was safer for the group and better for the group dynamics. It was safer to focus on that part (subjective experiences, authors) in the individual coaching sessions." – Coach

"It was emotional. Not everyone could handle it in a good way. There were individual stories that, sometimes, were stories of success. However, in the most testimonies that wasn't the case. People having to cope with yet another disappointment 'threw' it in the group, obligating us to deal with them. We couldn't let it go by without addressing the issues. Sometimes this indeed was demoralizing. However, sometimes there was a story of success, motivating the HENNS. By the way, for the HENNS it is important to see at first that they are not alone... (in their struggle, authors)." - Designer

Whereas for other HENNS, the group sessions did have a positive effect, as assumed by the program designers. This could be a motivational effect, but it could also be the transfer of useful information among participants.

"Most people are... really motivated to search for a job. In this company, in that company... Always. Always trying to find a job. That was really good for me to see. I was in the same situation. But sometimes I was demotivated whenever I couldn't find an answer, or received one. But they, they continuously try always." – G.

"Group sessions are useful to hear experiences of other people. For example, there were people who got their foreign diploma's recognized by NARIC. SO that was good: 'Ah, how did you do this? What documents did you send? What did they reply?'" – H.

One HENNS also emphasized the difference between the group sessions in the project and those at, for example, Inburgering. For this HENNS, having a similar level of education proved to be an extra positive element.

"I think it was very interesting just to listen to everybody. And in the end I felt 'on my own level'. Because in school I thought: 'Gho, that all is very easy.

These are dumb people.’ And: ‘Ooh, did you also attend university?’ And: ‘What profession do you have?’ etc.” – B.

When evaluating the subset of interventions nr. 2(.1 & .2) from the PT, we cannot draw any clear conclusions, since the appreciation is clearly different depending on the HENNS in question. For some, the group dynamic was inspirational and motivational, for others that was not the case. It is not possible to explain what causes this difference based on the available data.

What we do know from our questions about social networks surrounding the HENNS is that in almost none of the cases, another HENNS was mentioned to be valuable (included in the network drawing) when looking for employment. This indicates that no durable and useful relationship between HENNS were forged via the project. This was also indicated by a HENNS:

“Personally, whenever I have a conversation with someone it is not to prove I’m better than someone else. I just do it to get to know the person and his opinion. So with regards to that, it was a bit a difficult situation. The cohesion wasn’t that strong.” – A.

In one case however, a HENNS arranged a job for another HENNS, proving some weak tie did exist between them. The assumption that HENNS-to-HENNS social ties will develop can therefore not entirely be falsified; but it did become clear however, that the current efforts do not suffice to achieve this goal.

The dominant image however is that, throughout the project under evaluation, nor durable bonding social capital was developed, nor strategic alliances (weak ties) between HENNS were established.

We now turn to the project design nr. 6, that is aimed at bringing HENNS and potential employers closer to each other via specific initiatives or learning sessions (meet & greet, speed-date session, company visit, personal branding (LinkedIn) etc.), thereby expanding the (professional) social network of both parties.

According to a designer, the experiments that are being done to link employers and HENNS still need further finetuning:

“There still remains some work to be done, a need to take care of. It also is a bit of a search for us: how can we develop the networks of those people vis-à-vis employers? What is the most efficient way to broaden them? Is it using LinkedIn? Organising a company visit?” - Designer

Concerning the group sessions, our fieldwork shows that not many HENNS really explicitly mention the importance of those sessions. For some of them, the skills and knowledge they learned in (some of) the sessions was useful, for other HENNS that was

not always the case.

"There was a meeting with a woman from an employment agency. A meet and greet, I think it was. (...) There was a presentation about what to do when finding employment via an employment agency. This was good, it was a workshop. Another one was also good: about the CV. There were also other people, I don't know what organisations they come from since it was really a long time ago. (...) But some things... for example, there also was a woman – but that only was a small part of the group session, twenty, maybe thirty minutes. That was about... every library has some shelves for foreigners. There are book that are more easy to read etc. And this women, she read us from such a book for twenty minutes (pause) I didn't know what that was for..." – H.

When asked about the group sessions, most HENNS reflected only about the exchange of personal stories and experiences as we illustrated above. Most of them did not mention the specific 'skill and knowledge'-transfer that was also aspired in this part of the project. It is possible this is the case because a lot of the information given in the group sessions (e.g. CV building, presenting oneself) was also further fine-tuned during the individual coaching sessions. There however, the coaches tailored the information on the needs of the individual HENNS. Another possibility could be that the sometimes emotional aspect of the groups sessions were more easily remembered.

Returning to the PT, we know that this intervention also aspired to broaden the social networks of both HENNS and employers by connecting them and building ties via the sessions. Our research mapping the social networks around HENNS showed that, although there was a transfer of skills and knowledge, no durable social ties were developed. None of the interviewed HENNS named one or more of the session speakers nor their companies when asked to whom they would turn when looking for employment. The potential social capital available through these ties thus remains immobilized, We conclude that the aspired network effect was not realized.

The interventions 2 and 6 did however have an added value for the HENNS. Comparable with interventions 1 and 5, these interventions also had an effect on the motivation and labour market entry-strategies of the HENNS. These interventions also familiarized the HENNS with the specificities of the labour market in Flanders and with the skills and knowledge that is valorized. We will further elaborate on the congruency/overlap between the individual and group approach below, in the discussion. First, we present interventions nr. 3 and 7.

Intervention 3: the employer-side of the labour market

This subset of interventions strives for a better integration of HENNS on the labour market by trying to influence the employer-side of it. We learn in the PT how

'information' is considered as the primary lever to achieve this goal. Employers are informed about the profile and potential of HENNS, and about good practices in other firms. They can also participate in a 'learning network' of employers working with HENNS, exchanging experiences or discussing cases among peers. This should all contribute to countering the 'reluctance' to employ HENNS, be it because of (ethnic) discrimination motives or because of a possible fear of 'jumping into the unknown'.

Our research in preparation of the PT revealed that this part of the global project remained a bit neglected during the implementation of the different interventions. Employers were also involved in the project via interventions nr. 6 and 7, but the core-actions aimed at this target group were, at the time of our fieldwork, not implemented. We asked the designers and implementers if our observation was correct according to them.

"Yes, absolutely. In se it is included in the project proposal. But it was difficult ever since the beginning of the project. In fact, we cooperated with X (partner organization, authors) since the start of the project. He was responsible for the part of the project aimed at the employers. But something went wrong, also for interpersonal reasons. (...) But indeed, that part didn't really found its place. We are coaching individually, those people are in the group coaching sessions... X (project partner, authors) take care of the meet and greets, they also have more ties with employers. But indeed, that is something we weren't able to give enough attention to. I can't really to get to the nub of the matter and identify the causes." – coach

The designers confirmed this difficult cooperation with the person from the partner organisation responsible for this part of the project. His resignation and the lack of a replacement forced the project team to review the project design and its implementation.

"Partly... it also lies with X (partner organisation), the ties and contact with employers. But it shifted in the course of the project. Because the person responsible got fired and at that time nobody else possessed his expertise. It is at that time that we went looking for answers to 'how can we take care of the job hunting and strengthen the relations and ties with employers?' In fact we wanted to do more than we did. We even planned to start up a 'learning network' with enterprises, but had to adjust our course during the project." - Designer

As a result, the major efforts to inform employers were pushed forward in the project timing. They were linked to, and included in, the dissemination-phase at the end of the project. Since this dissemination took place parallel to the writing of this paper, we were not able to include this in our evaluation.

The most important deliverables in the light of informing potential employers, are the storybook and the brochure with good practices. In the storybook, the testimonies of some HENNS about the project will be recorded. Their stories are also told from the perspective and the experiences of their coach and employer. The brochure provides a summary of the lessons learned in the project.

We want to point out that this new approach of course can also have its merits. But because of this adaptation, the balance in the initial design of the project (three complementary sets of interventions) tilted away from the employer-side of the labour market towards a focus on the individual HENNS. The project focusses on strengthening them psychologically, training them, making them familiar with the specificities of the Flemish labour market etc.

Looking back, the designer emphasized the importance of this part of the project:

"If we would repeat the project a second time, we would put more effort into the employer-part. How can we generate more professional experiences for people? Because that is what people want: 'give me the chance to prove myself and show what I can do. Put my to work.' Hence our focus on the job hunting. If we would have foreseen this beforehand, we could even have done more, I believe." - designer

The 'job hunting' mentioned in the quote above was the seventh part of the PT, further elaborated on below.

Intervention 7: job matching and job hunting

The subset of interventions (project design nr. 7) aims to guide the HENNS to a durable and qualitative employment matching their interests and level of education. Interestingly, this intervention was only added in the course of the project, because the connections between HENNS and potential employers remained rather weak. Furthermore, it became visible that even those HENNS who were considered 'fully prepared to enter the labour market' after the coaching and training sessions, had difficulties finding employment.

"What we also noticed, and thus added to the project along the way, was the crucial importance of job hunting. Even when people have had five individual coaching sessions and a few group sessions, it still was hard for them to enter the labour market. We all had to put an extra effort into it. Calling companies, looking for internships... This was a part of the project wherein we had to invest more than initially foreseen.

(...)

The fact that one can provide a 'Dutch' name as a reference in an application letter ensures the employer that there are at least some contacts or that someone is supporting the application. Discrimination will remain an

important factor to explain why many people aren't even invited for a job interview. Job hunting compensates this at least partly. Having someone 'in between', acting as a bridge has really proved to be crucial. This person can pick up specific information, make a telephone call, serve as reference, use his own network for example..." - Designer

The two coaches confirm this:

"It is really necessary. We found that, when there is no job matching, it is even more difficult for HENNS to find employment. It thus is a vital link in the process."- Coach

"For me it was the most important to empower people so that eventually, in the long term, they become self-reliant and are able to look for a job themselves. We do notice, however, that this is not evident because there still are a lot of employers who aren't really open to hiring someone with a foreign name etc. The job matching, where we connect HENNS to employers, has proven crucial in many cases to successfully help people to find a job." - Coach

In the words of a HENNS:

"So X (partner organisation, authors) asked me to evaluate the project. They asked me: 'How is your professional situation?' I said: 'I am still looking for a job'. 'Send us your CV, we also have a network and will send your CV to different employers'. And so they did. I went to two interviews and got a job. So that was because of X (partner organisation, authors)." - H.

Both the coaches and the designers point to causes that lie beyond the individual traits of the HENNS when explaining this difficult 'last jump' towards the labour market: namely the barriers that are set up by employers.

This means that, even after intensively coaching the HENNS and preparing them for labour market entry, there is still a missing link that is crucial in the process of integrating HENNS on the labour market. This 'reluctance' from the employer-side can be neutralized when the HENNS can come up with a reference; someone that vouches for them or that even introduces them. This is an important observation, since it implies that projects that are aimed at integrating HENNS on the labour market can only succeed when also this issue at the employer-side is addressed.

Furthermore, it also shows that the unfavourable labour market position of HENNS cannot merely be brought back to the characteristics of the HENNS themselves – external influences also have to be taken into account.

Third, as long as this barrier between HENNS and potential employer still exists, attention should go to the importance of social networks and social capital within the field of the labour market. When matching or job hunting, the coaches and designers can only

be successful when they are perceived as respectable and legitimate by the other parties.

In the words of a designer:

"But it is hard: how do you build up a network? Usually that happens through your professional contacts. You meet someone interesting, connect on LinkedIn, or telephone one in a while. But when you are unemployed, you soon are no longer interesting for society. And so it also becomes very hard to build or expand a network." - Designer

If this perception is not present, the introduction of the matcher vouching for a HENNS will not carry much weight in the eyes of the potential employer. Jobmatchers should therefore ideally be able to act from out of a legitimate position in an extended social network wherein they both hold and can mobilize the social capital needed to introduce a HENNS on the labour market. Given their important role in this project, further research on this 'jobmatchers' profile' could be worth pursuing.

DISCUSSION

In what follows, we present the major conclusions of our evaluation of the project. We will discuss the key findings and simultaneously offer some reflections on the general project and its implications for policy makers.

Project outcomes in terms of Employment, Education or Training.

The long-term goal of the project was to strengthen the HENNS' labour market position. Thereto, the project aspired to strengthen the HENNS' human and social capital. Below, we show the professional situation of the HENNS allowed to participate in the project as it was in December, 2014. We also check if the HENNS (who all at least obtained a BA degree) are technically overqualified for their current position: does their highest degree fit the contract they are in? Although a more long term evaluation and longitudinal perspective is necessary, this kind of information can provide information about specific outcomes of the project.

	Result	Overqualified?		Result	Overqualified?		
GROUP 1	1	Dropped out of the project	n/a	GROUP 2	1	Working (temporary contract)	YES
	2	Working	NO		2	Working	NO
	3	<i>Volunteering</i>	n/a		3	Working	YES
	4	Dropped out of the project	n/a		4	Internship	YES
	5	Dropped out of the project	n/a		5	Education (Ba degree)	n/a
	6	Dropped out of the project	n/a		6	Working	NO
	7	Working	NO		7	<i>Extra training</i>	n/a
	8	<i>Volunteering</i>	n/a		8	<i>Volunteering</i> & Working	YES
	9	Dropped out of the project	n/a		9	Working	YES
	10	Working	NO		10	Working (temporary contract)	YES
	11	Working	YES		11	Working (abroad)	NO
	12	Dropped out of the project	n/a		12	Working	YES
	13	Working	YES		13	Working	YES
	14	Did never start	n/a		14	Trajectory suspended: pregnancy	n/a
	15	Working	NO		15	Dropped out of the project	n/a
	16	Working	YES		16	Working	NO
	17	Working	YES		17	Trajectory prolonged	n/a
	18	Working (temporary contract)	YES				
	19	Working	YES				
	20	Dropped out of the project	n/a				
	21	Repatriated	n/a				
	22	Working	YES				

The table shows how more HENNS dropped out in the first group of participants. As we know from the designers, the intake-procedure and conditions were changed with the second group: more emphasis was put on language mastery and motivation. We also see how most HENNS were integrated on the labour market, or found an internship or volunteering experience. However, most HENNS remained overqualified for their job.

We want to emphasize however, that the impact of the project cannot be measured with this information alone. The gained human and social capital, wellbeing, resilience etc. also should also be taken into account. Since our evaluation focused on mapping and analyzing the underlying project processes from a qualitative research perspective, no further specific quantified information is available. Furthermore, the information about (over)qualification should be strongly nuanced. First, there is a difference between profit and non-profit or even at sector-level. A majority of the people in the social non-profit sector, for example, are contracted at a BA level, whilst the job content could certainly be considered MA-level. Second, this dichotomy ignores the subjective experience of the HENNS and their social context. Some HENNS are perfectly content with a job for which they are overqualified, if this allows them the time and (mental) stability to invest in family, language skills, volunteering...

The role of the coaches

A key finding of this evaluation is the importance of the coaches in the process of integrating HENNS in the Flemish labour market. The project made clear that even highly-educated newcomers need extra support to enter the labour market in Flanders. Coaches can be an important part hereof. Not only do they provide the necessary psychological support, motivating HENNS and strengthening their self-esteem; they can also act as counselor and guide. As such, they assist the HENNS in clarifying both life goals and professional aims. It is, also from a theoretical perspective on integration, important that the coaches familiarize HENNS with the specificities ('game rules') and structures of the Flemish labour market field.

We also found how the coaches function as a go-to point for HENNS, compensating for the lack of (useful and relevant information in) the HENNS' personal social networks. The coaches thus are a 'bridge', a hub transferring social capital and information necessary for HENNS to enter the Flemish labour market.

Also being positively evaluated by the HENNS for its personal and tailor-fitted approach, the individual coaching sessions prove to be a promising and good practice in their strive for a better integration of HENNS on the labour market. The experiences with the target group of the coaches in this project could be inspirational for other coaches. We therefore recommend proper documentation and dissemination of their experiences in this innovative project.

The coaches thus play an important role. We want to stress the importance of them having the necessary background to cope with clients displaying negative emotions and possible resistance to the coaching sessions. Additionally, coaches need a good insight in the structure and the valued capital on the field of the labour market. These two elements can distinguish professional coaches from, for example, volunteers mentoring HENNS. However, additional job matching and job hunting still proved important to integrate HENNS on the labour market, as will be further discussed below. The importance of the coaches thus mainly lies with the individual empowerment and guidance.

Our fieldwork also revealed potential pitfalls. We learned how the coaching sessions can also complicate things further for HENNS, especially for those HENNS without a clear vision of their (professional) future. The abundance of possibilities apparently can have a paralyzing effect. Coaches should be aware of this pitfall and takes these HENNS more firmly by the hand in establishing professional aims and labour market trajectories. Another complication can occur when HENNS receive contradictory information, via their

social networks or from other (care-)professionals. Good communication and coordination between institutions supporting HENNS is suggested.

About the group sessions

The group sessions' aim was threefold: transferring skills (e.g. CV building) and knowledge (eg. via company visits, meet & greets...); building networks (both among HENNS and between HENNS and potential employers); and using the group dynamics (exchange of experiences etc.) to elevate the HENNS' motivation, resilience etc.

Our fieldwork showed the last two goals were not fully achieved. We found how the exchange of experiences in some cases led to more insight in specific processes or could strengthen a HENNS' motivation. In other cases however, these stories had no impact or even a negative impact on the moral of the HENNS. Since we also mapped the social networks of the HENNS, we can conclude that, one exception left out, no durable social ties were created; not among HENNS nor between HENNS and potential employers. HENNS' social networks remain rather homogeneous and static, mainly limited to people from their own ethnic community, family-in-law in the case of marriage migration, colleagues (if employed) and other newcomers HENNS know from Inburgering or Atlas. Because of the limitations of the available data, we cannot shed more light on why this did not work out as foreseen; further research is recommended.

The element of training and knowledge transfer was positively received by the HENNS. Our respondents mentioned some sessions proved more useful than others, but we found no pattern here; the evaluation and appreciation of specific sessions probably depends on the personal situation and needs of the individual HENNS. This longing for tailored advice and HENNS-specific counsel was repeatedly mentioned during the interviews. Where the group sessions provided the foundation, the first layer of general knowledge; the HENNS were more positive about the tailored follow-up during the individual coaching sessions. Since these one-on-one sessions are cost and time-intensive, we could say that, from a human/financial-resources perspective, the group sessions were a good option to transfer basic knowledge and skills first, before tailoring it on the profile of every individual HENNS.

The importance of job matching and the implications thereof

An important finding of the project under evaluation is that even those HENNS who were considered fully prepared to enter the labour market after the coaching and training sessions, had difficulties finding employment. This implies that projects that are aimed at integrating HENNS on the labour market can only succeed when also this issue at the employer-side is addressed. Furthermore, it also shows that the unfavourable labour

market position of HENNS cannot merely be explained by the characteristics of the HENNS themselves –external influences also have to be taken into account and addressed.

We want to emphasize that the group of HENNS participating in the project, already was a selection that took place after an intake-procedure whereby motivation, Dutch language skills and global socio-economic situation was taken into account, as underlying problems (eg. poverty, care-role for a family member etc.) can shift the focus from the job search.

The HENNS participating in the project therefore already had relatively good chances of finding employment. Yet, even for them, additional matching efforts were necessary. This pushes forward two issues: the importance of ‘contextual requirements’ as an important factor to take into account when trying to integrate HENNS on the Flemish labour market; and, connected, the question if the continuity of projects, such as, the one under evaluation should be a priority of policy makers.

Based on the positive experiences of the HENNS with especially the coaching sessions, and the lessons that are learned in the project; we advise the continuation of similar initiatives. We would however recommend a stronger focus on the network-building aspect that is embedded in the project but was not easily implemented. Further research could provide insight in the difficulties faced. We would also recommend intensifying the efforts made to involve potential employers to the project, as their openness towards HENNS clearly plays an important part in the integration process. The project under evaluation shifted the focus from this set of interventions. Given the analysis of the thresholds to employment, this is a missed opportunity.

Parallel to the continuation of similar projects, we strongly recommend policy makers to address the contextual requirements hindering HENNS to even enroll in good practice-projects; as this is – in the current format of the project – the *conditio sine qua non* for labour market participation.

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Steunpunt Inburgering en Integratie

Bezoekadres: Lange Nieuwstraat 55

Postadres: Prinsstraat 13

B-2000 Antwerpen

Tel.: +32 3 265 59 63

E-mail: steunpuntieni@uantwerpen.be

Website: <http://www.steunpuntieni.be>

Contact auteurs:

Joris Wauters

Prinsstraat, 13

B-2000 Antwerpen

+32 3 265 59 52

joris.wauters@uantwerpen.be

Dr. Joris Michielsen

Prinsstraat, 13

B-2000 Antwerpen

+32 3 265 59 49

joris.michielsen@uantwerpen.be