



ENGAGING ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEMS FOR THE YOUTH

Mentoring programme Evaluation of the first pilot

Deliverable No.	D3.4
Due date	31.05.2025
Type	Report
Dissemination level	Public (PU)
Status	final
Lead beneficiary	RAPIV
Authors	Mariya Zlateva (RAPIV)



Funded by
the European Union

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No. 101100432. Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or EISMEA. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

About this document

This document is prepared by the Regional Agency for Entrepreneurship and Innovations – Varna as part of the working package 3 "Mentoring", Task 3.4 Evaluation and optimisation of the mentoring programme.

Suggested citation:

Zlateva, M. (2025): Mentoring programme: Evaluation of the first pilot. Deliverable Nr 3.4. of the project Ecosys4you – Engaging Entrepreneurial Ecosystems for the Youth, funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Programme. Regional Agency for Entrepreneurship and Innovations – Varna (RAPIV).

Content

1	Objective.....	1
2	General information about the Mentoring programme	1
3	Evaluation of the Mentoring programme	2
	Evaluation methodology	2
	Monthly evaluation	2
	Final evaluation	3
4	Conclusion	8

1 Objective

The Ecosys4you Mentoring programme is designed for any organisation interested in receiving assistance in establishing and maintaining an effective formal, international mentoring programme for young people preparing to start a company. The document includes evaluation results from the first edition of the Mentoring programme and suggestions for improvement.

2 General information about the Mentoring programme

The **Ecosys4you Mentoring Programme** was developed to support young people—students and early-stage entrepreneurs—who are preparing to start their own businesses. As part of the broader **Ecosys4you project**, funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe programme (Grant Agreement No. 101100432), the mentoring initiative aims to foster connections across entrepreneurial ecosystems in the Ruhr (Germany), Varna (Bulgaria), and Slovenia.

The first edition of the programme ran for six months (December 2024 – May 2025) and offered a structured, fully virtual format combining one-on-one mentoring, business consulting, and networking opportunities. A total of **14 mentoring pairs** were formed, involving **17 young participants** guided by experienced mentors (see figure 1). After organized matchmaking events were formed nationals and international types of pairs as it follows:

- **National pairs:** both Bulgarian mentees and mentors – 2 pairs; both German mentees and mentors – 3 pairs; both Slovenian mentees and mentors – 4 pairs;
- **International pairs:** Bulgarian mentees and German/ Slovenian mentors - 4 pairs; German mentees and Bulgarian mentor – 1 pair.

An overview of the implementation strategy and action plan for starting the international mentoring programme can be found at <https://www.ecosys4you.eu/project/publications/>.

This report presents the **evaluation of the first edition** of the mentoring programme. It includes an overview of its objectives, general structure, and outcomes, as well as feedback collected from both mentors and mentees. The goal of this evaluation is to assess the programme's effectiveness, highlight its strengths, and identify areas for improvement in future editions. Evaluation templates used to collect feedback are provided in the annexes.

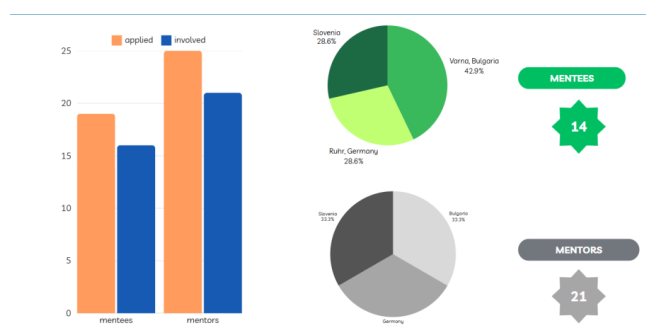


Figure 1. Ecosys4you Mentoring Programme: Results from recruitment from the first edition

3 Evaluation of the Mentoring programme

Evaluation is an essential part of every Ecosys4you activity to ensure optimisation. It is recommended to gather feedback from both mentors and mentees at the end of the programme to identify what went well, areas for improvement, and mistakes that should be avoided. Templates of evaluation forms are provided in the Annexes.

Evaluation methodology

The evaluation of the first edition of the **Ecosys4you Mentoring Programme** was designed to capture qualitative feedback from participants, assessing the programme's effectiveness, relevance, and impact. The evaluation focused on the experiences of both **mentors** and **mentees**, with the goal of identifying strengths, areas for improvement, and lessons learned to inform future editions of the programme.

The process was organised in two levels:

- *Monthly feedback*
- *Final feedback*

The evaluation was structured around the following key objectives:

- To assess the quality of mentor-mentee interactions and communication
- To evaluate the level of engagement and commitment from both parties
- To understand the perceived value and outcomes of the mentoring experience
- To identify changes in entrepreneurial confidence, skills, and mindset
- To collect suggestions for improvement of the mentoring structure and support mechanisms.

Monthly evaluation

The evaluation started in January 2025. On a monthly basis, mentors and mentees were asked to send evaluation feedback by filling a online questionnaire. The average response rate is approximately 50%, for both mentors and mentees. Some limitations of the evaluation process include:

- Non-responses from a few participants potentially skewing results
- Variability in the frequency and depth of mentor-mentee interactions
- Subjectivity in self-assessment and personal interpretation of questions

The evaluation of the Ecosys4you Mentoring Programme during its initial two months reflects a generally positive experience for both mentees and mentors, with a strong foundation of engagement, communication, and perceived value. However, the analysis also reveals differences in perspectives between the two groups, which provide valuable insights for future improvement. Figure two shows the feedback provided in the first two months of the programme.



Figure 2. Ecosys4you Mentoring Programme: Evaluation feedback for M1-M2

The mentees expressed a high level of satisfaction with their mentoring experience. The majority of responses across all key indicators fell into the "Strongly agree" category. Most participants reported that their mentors were accessible, communicated regularly, and provided meaningful guidance. In particular, mentees highlighted that their mentors demonstrated personal interest and were perceived as valuable assets throughout the process.

A notable outcome from the feedback is that mentees felt significantly more confident in starting or developing a business as a result of the mentoring programme. This suggests that the program has achieved one of its core objectives—empowering young people with entrepreneurial ambition.

Only isolated neutral or disagreeing responses were observed, particularly regarding the mentor's concern or ability to direct them to appropriate resources. These may be linked to individual mismatches or communication styles within certain pairs.

After the evaluation, the mentees with disagreeable responses were contacted, and where necessary, the mentor was replaced.

While mentor responses were also generally positive, they exhibited a broader distribution across the evaluation scale. Mentors largely agreed that their mentees were accessible and communicated regularly. However, when evaluating mentee motivation, initiative, and responsiveness, a more mixed picture emerged. Some mentors expressed uncertainty ("Cannot decide now") or even disagreement in areas such as mentee motivation and the regularity of reaching out when facing challenges.

This variation suggests that not all mentees engaged equally in the mentoring relationship, which is common in early-stage mentoring programmes. Nevertheless, most mentors agreed or strongly agreed that their mentees learned from the experience, and many anticipated a continued relationship beyond the formal programme.

Final evaluation

With regard to the final evaluation, mentors and mentees were asked provide evaluation feedback by filling a online questionnaire. The average response rate is approximately 57%, for mentors and 60% for mentees. The questionnaire included several types of questions for evaluation of the satisfaction from attending of the programme, to identify challenges and strong aspects of the mentoring process, and to provide recommendations for improvement.

Mentors feedback

The final feedback collected from mentors after the six-month duration of the programme reveals a consistent and overall positive experience (see figure 3). The responses, covering nine key evaluation

areas, reflect a stable level of engagement, professionalism, and impact across most of the mentoring relationships.

Across the indicators evaluating mentee accessibility, communication, and engagement, the majority of mentors responded with "Agree", indicating that mentees remained available and communicative throughout the programme. This suggests that the structure of the programme and the support mechanisms in place contributed to regular and effective interactions between mentors and mentees. However, several "Neutral" responses suggest that in a few cases, communication was not entirely consistent or could have been improved. One mentor explicitly mentioned they were unable to complete the mentoring activities due to **their mentees leaving the programme**.

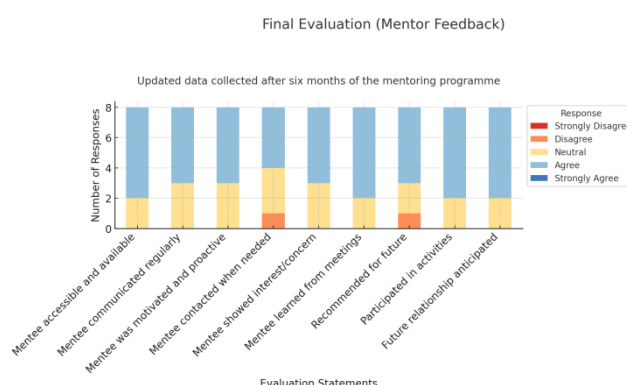


Figure 3. Ecosys4you Mentoring Programme: Final evaluation feedback mentors - M1-M6¹

Mentors largely agreed that their mentees were **motivated to start or develop a business and demonstrated a willingness to overcome challenges**. However, a notable number of "Neutral" responses—particularly in the areas of contacting mentors when needed and seeking performance improvement—suggest a gap in mentee proactiveness for some pairs. Additionally, one "Disagree" response was recorded regarding mentees reaching out when additional support was needed. This highlights an area for improvement in mentee training or onboarding, where expectations regarding self-initiative and communication should be further clarified.

Mentors consistently agreed that their mentees **participated in most mentoring activities**. Neutral feedback, although limited, was present across indicators related to **initiative, interest, and long-term relationship potential**, which may reflect a more passive or cautious approach by some mentees.

In terms of outcomes, mentors broadly agreed that **mentees learned from their meetings and showed progress over time**. While "Agree" remained the dominant response, some neutral ratings suggest that in a few cases, visible learning outcomes were either less evident or harder to assess. Regarding future collaboration and recommendations, mentors were mostly supportive, although two ratings (one "Neutral" and one "Disagree") suggest that some mentoring relationships may not have met expectations for a deeper, long-term impact.

¹ Data collected by questionnaires till 29/05/2025

“Guiding my mentee through the process of shaping and refining her business idea offered me fresh perspectives on innovation and problem-solving. The mentoring itself helped me further develop my leadership, coaching, and communication skills. Additionally, the program allowed me to expand my professional network by connecting with other mentors and talented mentees. Most importantly, I found it deeply fulfilling to play a role in helping others achieve their goals. Seeing mentees grow in confidence, refine their ideas, and take meaningful steps forward was a powerful reminder of the impact mentorship can have on aspiring entrepreneurs.”
(Evaluation feedback from mentors #1, 25.05.2025).

“What I gained most from the program was the experience of having regular, meaningful contact with my mentee. Before starting, I honestly wasn’t sure if I’d be the right fit to help someone else grow. But throughout the sessions, my mentee shared his goals and actively applied the strategies we discussed. He even told me in our final session that without me and the program, he likely would have given up on his project much earlier. For me, this experience reinforced how impactful mentorship can be and gave me the confidence and motivation to continue supporting others in the future.” (Evaluation feedback from mentors #8, 28.05.2025).

The feedback from mentors participating in the first edition of the Ecosys4you Mentoring Programme highlights a highly positive and **enriching experience for both professional and personal development**. Mentors consistently expressed that their involvement offered them renewed perspectives on entrepreneurship, innovation, and leadership. Many described how guiding their mentees through the entrepreneurial journey helped them refine their own coaching and communication skills, deepen their expertise in strategic mentoring, and expand their networks. The sense of fulfilment derived from supporting young, aspiring entrepreneurs—witnessing their growth, confidence, and resilience—was a recurring theme in their reflections.

Mentors provided substantial assistance to their mentees, spanning both strategic and practical aspects of business development. They guided mentees through tasks such as setting clear and measurable goals, validating customer needs, conducting competitor and market analyses, developing business models, and creating branding or visual identity strategies. In several cases, mentors engaged in hands-on activities, such as building online platforms or preparing product prototypes, thereby bridging the gap between theory and execution. Some reported working in collaborative digital spaces or maintaining continuous contact through informal communication tools to sustain momentum and address blockers in real-time.

As a result of the mentoring experience, several mentors noted a **shift in their own professional outlook**. They became more adaptive, patient, and intentional about balancing high-level strategic input with practical support. Many mentors recognised the value of working at the mentees' pace and being mindful of the unique challenges that young entrepreneurs face, such as managing multiple responsibilities or refining still-evolving ideas. Some mentors shared that **this experience strengthened their own entrepreneurial mindset** and confirmed their interest in continuing to support others in future mentoring initiatives.

“From the program side, I was really pleased with how smoothly everything was organized. Communication was clear, and any questions I had were answered quickly, which, coming from a background of navigating German bureaucracy, I really appreciated! From the mentee side, I was genuinely happy to have been matched with someone, and even more so that we connected so well. My mentee was consistently kind, respectful, and made a real effort to implement what we discussed. The only small challenge was that I often had to take the initiative to schedule our meetings, as he needed reminders to choose a time slot. While this occasionally made me feel a bit like I was babysitting, I recognize that this isn’t something the program can necessarily fix—it’s more about individual mindset and personal responsibility. Overall, it was a rewarding experience.” (Evaluation feedback from mentors #7, 28.05.2025).

While the programme was broadly praised for its structure, organisation, and communication, mentors also **shared suggestions for improvement**. These included:

- enhancing the initial matchmaking session with a clearer structure, offering mentors the option to work with more than one mentee, and
- organising more specialised guest speaker sessions on topics like certification, manufacturing, or marketing.
- Concerns were also raised about mentee engagement in the later stages of the programme, particularly in the group sessions and
- A few mentors noted that the early dropout of their mentees was a missed opportunity for deeper collaboration.

Mentees feedback

The final evaluation feedback collected from mentees after the six-month mentoring programme reveals a highly positive perception of the overall experience (see figure 4). Most mentees strongly agreed that their **mentors were accessible, communicated regularly, and were effective in directing them to appropriate resources**. This level of consistency in the highest rating categories reflects a well-established structure of support and responsiveness from mentors. Mentors were also seen as personally engaged, with mentees acknowledging the interest and concern shown toward their development. This **interpersonal connection** was an essential element in fostering trust and motivation throughout the programme. Notably, all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their **mentor was an asset to their growth**, which reinforces the value of mentorship in both practical and emotional terms. The area with slightly more variation in responses concerned mentees' confidence in starting and developing a business as a result of the mentoring experience. While this statement still received only positive ratings—split between "agree" and "strongly agree"—it suggests that individual readiness and progress varied slightly among participants. This is natural in a diverse group, especially when considering differences in background, business maturity, and personal circumstances.

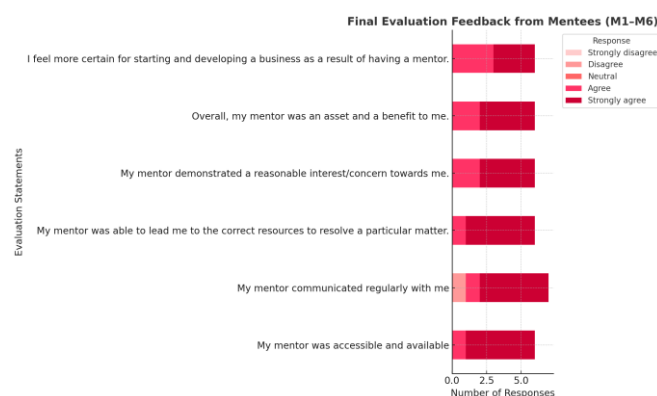


Figure 4. Ecosys4you Mentoring Programme: Final evaluation feedback mentees - M1-M6²

“I gained valuable experience in building a business model, understanding the vintage resale market, and developing creative strategies for marketing and customer engagement. The mentor also helped me strengthen my entrepreneurial skills and expand my network.” (Evaluation feedback from mentees #3, 28.05.2025).

“The program boosted my entrepreneurial mindset and helped me refine my idea.” (Evaluation feedback from mentees #6, 29.05.2025).

The **qualitative feedback from mentees** participating in the mentoring programme reveals a consistent appreciation for the practical support and personal growth they experienced. Most mentees highlighted **the acquisition of valuable knowledge**, particularly in areas such as business planning, competitor analysis, marketing strategies, and patenting. These contributions helped them refine their business ideas and take more structured steps toward implementation.

Mentors assisted with a variety of goals, including defining business models, setting sales objectives, analysing markets, and improving branding and financial planning. These targeted interventions appeared to have a meaningful impact on the mentees' confidence and strategic clarity. While the frequency of meetings varied slightly—ranging from monthly sessions to biweekly discussions—the **regularity of mentor contact supported continuity in their progress**.

Several mentees reported shifts in perspective as a result of the mentoring process. For example, participants with technical backgrounds reported that they had begun to adopt a more business-oriented mindset, striking a balance between technical thinking and broader entrepreneurial planning. Others noted an increase in self-belief and motivation, which they attributed to their mentor's encouragement and structured guidance.

² Data collected by questionnaires till 29/05/2025

"I am really happy about the program. It helped me to connect not only with one mentor but also gave a chance to other experts in different regions. I wish this program continues and supports other entrepreneurs like me. I really thank and appreciate the time and effort the organising team put in to coordinate this program." (Evaluation feedback from mentees #5, 28.05.2025).

Suggestions for programme improvement were modest but constructive. Mentees proposed extending the programme's duration, increasing the frequency of meetings, and including more interactive elements such as hands-on workshops, real-life case studies, and opportunities for direct networking with experienced professionals in relevant fields. Overall, the feedback confirms that the mentoring component of the programme was impactful, with clear benefits in terms of both business development and personal growth.

The overall progress of mentees was also followed during implementation of the Mentoring programme. Until the end of the programme, it was declared that **three business ideas were integrated into new business initiatives**, including the registration of a company (Germany -1, Slovenia – 1) and 1 application for patent was submitted (Bulgaria), confirming that young people from all three ecosystems profited from the Mentoring programme.

4 Conclusion

The first edition of the Ecosys4you Mentoring Programme, conducted from December 2024 to May 2025, has proven to be a well-structured and impactful initiative, successfully fulfilling its objective of supporting aspiring young entrepreneurs in developing their business ideas and entrepreneurial mindset. The mentoring experience brought together mentors and mentees from Germany, Bulgaria, and Slovenia, creating a unique international environment of shared learning, guidance, and collaboration.

Both the quantitative and qualitative evaluations, collected through monthly and final feedback from participants, point to high levels of satisfaction and engagement. Mentees consistently highlighted the value of their mentors' availability, personal commitment, and targeted business support. Many credited the programme with helping them gain confidence, clarity, and practical knowledge, as well as with strengthening their motivation to pursue entrepreneurial ventures. Equally, mentors expressed deep personal and professional growth, underscoring the rewarding nature of their involvement, both in terms of skills development and the opportunity to guide and inspire the next generation of entrepreneurs.

The programme also demonstrated concrete results, with several mentees making significant progress on their business ideas, including company registrations and patent applications. This reflects not only the mentees' dedication but also the relevance and depth of support provided by the mentors.

However, the evaluation also identified areas for enhancement. A small number of mentees disengaged during the programme, and communication inconsistencies were noted in a few mentor-mentee pairs. Suggestions for improvement included clearer matchmaking processes, increased preparation for mentees, additional thematic sessions with industry experts, and more interactive, hands-on learning formats. Mentors also recommended the opportunity to mentor multiple participants and called for better structure in group sessions to boost participation and exchange. All the feedback will be considered in the preparation of the second pilot of the programme from October 2025 to March 2026.

Imprint

Publisher and Contact

Regional Agency for Entrepreneurship and Innovations - Varna

Mariya Zlateva

6 Prof. Assen Zlatarov Str., office 3

9010 Varna, Bulgaria

www.rapiv.org/en



Ecosys4you – Engaging Entrepreneurial Ecosystems for the Youth (2023-2026) strives to bridge the entrepreneurial ecosystems of the Ruhr, Germany, Varna, Bulgaria and Slovenia by connecting young founders, start-ups, HEIs and other ecosystem actors.

Consortium



Funded by



Funded by
the European Union

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No. 101100432.

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