Language Buddy

Support the language learning of migrant children and young people through language buddies.

D4.1. Summary Pilot Report

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1. Introduction and Context

1.1. Background and Purpose of the Report

This report presents a transnational analysis of a mentoring programme implemented across eight European countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Romania and Spain. The programme was designed to support young migrants and refugees —adolescents aged 12-17 — through structured one-to-one mentoring relationships, with the primary aim of improving language skills, fostering social inclusion, and promoting intercultural exchange.

The initiative brought together a diverse consortium of coordinating organisations, including NGOs, universities, cooperatives, and vocational education and training (VET) institutions. Each national pilot was implemented within its own local context, yet all shared a common methodological framework: trained volunteer mentors were paired with migrant or refugee mentees to provide regular, personalised support over a defined period. While the core model was consistent, each country adapted its approach to reflect local needs, institutional capacities, and participant profiles.

This general piloting report synthesises the findings from all eight pilot implementations. Its purpose is threefold:

1. To provide a comprehensive overview of how the programme was implemented across the eight countries, including key project data, participant profiles, and operational models.
2. To analyse the main results and impact of the programme, drawing on the extensive evaluation data collected throughout the implementation period.
3. To identify cross-cutting challenges, best practices and recommendations that can inform future editions of the programme, and contribute to the broader field of mentoring for migrant and refugee youth.

The report is structured thematically rather than geographically. While individual countries are referenced where their experiences offer particularly valuable insights — for example, Malta's retention challenges, Austria's fixed-location model, or Portugal's late matching issue — the primary focus is on aggregated findings and shared patterns across all pilots.

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1.2. Programme Scope and Scale

The eight national pilots were implemented between March 2025 and October 2026, with varying durations reflecting different local conditions and academic calendars. The programme's overall scale is summarised below:

Country	Duration	Mentor-Mentee Pairs	Sessions Held	Evaluations Analysed
Austria	10 months (Nov 2025 – Aug 2026)	53	721	546
Bulgaria	8 months (Mar – Oct 2026)	46	735	Not specified
Greece	7 months (Dec 2025 – Jun 2026)	50	653	591
Italy	6 months (Feb – Jul 2026)	49	392	278
Malta	10 months (Oct 2025 – Jul 2026)	17	202	57
Portugal	4 months (Mar – Jun 2026)	50	813	278
Romania	6 months (Jan – Jun 2026)	52	397	245
Spain	6 months (Nov 2025 – Apr 2026)	53	669	1,118
Total	–	**370 pairs**	**4,582 sessions**	–

Note: The total number of pairs is approximate due to differences in how countries recorded initial vs. final participation, and because some countries experienced significant dropouts during implementation.

Across the eight pilots, the programme involved:

- Approximately 370 mentor-mentee pairs.
- Over 4,500 mentoring sessions were delivered.

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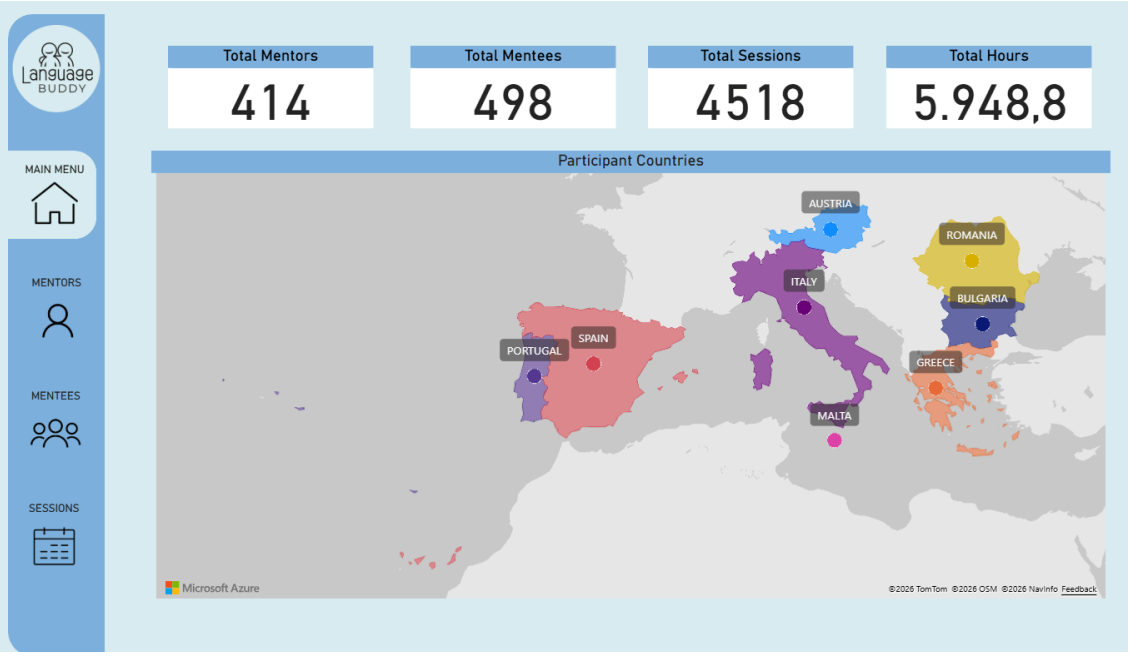
- Nearly 3,100 evaluations collected and analysed, including post-sessions evaluations, final evaluations and withdrawal forms.
- Over 400 mentors trained and engaged.
- Over 450 mentees supported.



1.3. Coordinating Organisations and Institutional Models

Each national pilot was led by a different coordinating organisation or partnership, reflecting the diversity of institutional actors working in this field:

- Austria: BildungsLAB (an organisation specialising in innovative learning and vocational education).
- Bulgaria: University of National and World Economy (UNWE) in cooperation with Multi Kulti Collective (access to migrant families and community settings).
- Greece: PDE (a regional education authority), UoM (University of Macedonia), and Symplexis (an NGO specialising in social innovation).
- Italy: COSPE (an NGO focused on international cooperation and intercultural education) and the University of Florence.
- Malta: SOS Malta (an NGO with a long history of migrant support) and Advenio eAcademy (AeA, a private education provider).

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- Portugal: Casa do Professor (a teachers' association) and UCP Braga (Catholic University of Portugal, Braga campus).
- Romania: Migrant Integration Center Brașov (community-based access to migrant families) and Transilvania University of Brașov.
- Spain: Peñascal S.Coop. (a cooperative with expertise in social inclusion and vocational training) and EHU (University of the Basque Country).

These partnerships reveal three main institutional models:

1. University-led or university-partnered models: These benefited from access to student mentors, academic expertise, and institutional recognition. They also faced challenges related to academic calendars and the availability of students during exam periods.
2. NGO-led models: These brought flexibility, community embeddedness, and expertise in working with vulnerable populations. However, they sometimes faced greater difficulty in recruiting and retaining mentors, particularly those with the right linguistic and cultural profiles.
3. Cooperative/VET-led models: These offered strong links to vocational training and employment pathways, and were able to provide stable physical locations for sessions.

The dual coordination model, where two organisations shared responsibility, was a feature in several countries and was identified as a key success factor, particularly for conflict resolution and for reaching both mentors and mentees.

1.4. Common Methodology and Shared Features

Despite contextual differences, all eight pilots shared a common methodological core:

- One-to-one mentoring: Each mentor was paired with a mentee for the duration of the programme, with the aim of building a trusting, supportive relationship.
- Initial mentor training: All countries provided preparatory training for mentors, covering communication skills, intercultural awareness, safeguarding, and the programme's objectives. This was consistently identified as a critical success factor.
- Regular sessions: The frequency and duration of sessions varied, but all pilots emphasised regularity and consistency.
- Group sessions: Most countries organised 1-3 group sessions, though formats varied.

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- Ongoing coordination support: Each pilot had a coordinating team responsible for monitoring pairs, providing advice, and resolving issues. This support was rated highly across all countries.
- Evaluation and monitoring: All pilots collected post-session evaluations, final evaluations, and in some cases withdrawal forms. The tools and frequency varied, which has implications for comparability.

1.5. Data Sources and Evaluation Methodology

The findings in this report draw on multiple data sources:

- Post-session evaluations: Completed by mentors and mentees after each session in some countries. These captured immediate feedback on session quality, objectives met, and relationship development.
- Final evaluations: Completed by mentors and mentees at the end of the programme, covering overall satisfaction, perceived impact, relationship quality, and recommendations.
- Withdrawal forms: Collected in Malta to understand why participants left the programme early.
- Coordinator assessments: Qualitative and quantitative assessments from the coordinating teams in each country.

1.6. Limitations and Caveats

While the data set is substantial, several limitations should be noted:

1. Non-comparable evaluation tools: Countries used different survey instruments, scales, and frequencies. For example, some collected evaluations after every session, while others used monthly summaries. This adds to the range of procedures that have been tested.
2. Variation in duration: Programmes ranged from 4 months (Portugal) to 10 months (Malta, Austria), which affects the depth of relationships and the amount of data collected.
3. Self-reporting bias: Satisfaction and impact data rely on self-reporting by mentors and mentees, which may be influenced by social desirability or the desire to please coordinators.

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4. Attrition and missing data: In countries with high dropout rates (Malta, Greece), the final evaluations may over-represent those who had positive experiences, as those who withdrew were less likely to complete final evaluations.

Despite these limitations, the consistency of findings across countries — particularly regarding relationship quality, satisfaction, and the structural nature of challenges — provides a strong basis for the conclusions and recommendations in this report.

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2. Programme Overview at Transnational Level

This section provides a comparative snapshot of the eight national pilots, presenting the key structural and operational data side by side. The purpose is to give the reader a clear picture of the programme's shape and scale before diving into thematic analysis.

It is important to note from the outset that the pilots were not identical in design: durations, evaluation tools, and operational models varied according to local contexts, institutional capacities, and participant needs. This variation is itself a finding, reflecting the programme's adaptability, but it also means that direct numerical comparison should be approached with caution.

2.1. Analysis of Key Dimensions

- **Duration**

The programme duration ranged from 4 months (Portugal) to 10 months (Malta and Austria), with a median of approximately 7 months across all pilots:

  - Short-duration pilots: Portugal's 4-month duration was the shortest and was identified by both mentors and mentees as a significant limitation, aggravated by the late start and the concentration of sessions.
  - Long-duration pilots: Malta and Austria's 10-month duration allowed for deeper relationship development and more sustained engagement.
  - Medium-duration pilots: Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Romania and Spain (6-8 months) occupied a middle ground.

Taken together, each duration category presents a distinct trade-off: short pilots offer intensity and a lighter commitment but proved too brief to build trust or support meaningful language acquisition, while long pilots allow for deeper relationship development and more sustained engagement at the cost of greater operational demands and exposure to attrition; medium pilots strike a workable balance between the two, though participants in these countries still requested more time.

Since participants in every country where the question was asked for a longer programme, duration emerges not merely as a chronological variable but as a determinant of depth. This suggests that short-duration pilot programs should be viewed as introductory exercises or

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initial explorations rather than as models for full-scale implementation, whereas medium- and long-duration formats offer the most viable foundation for large-scale expansion.

- **Scale of participation**

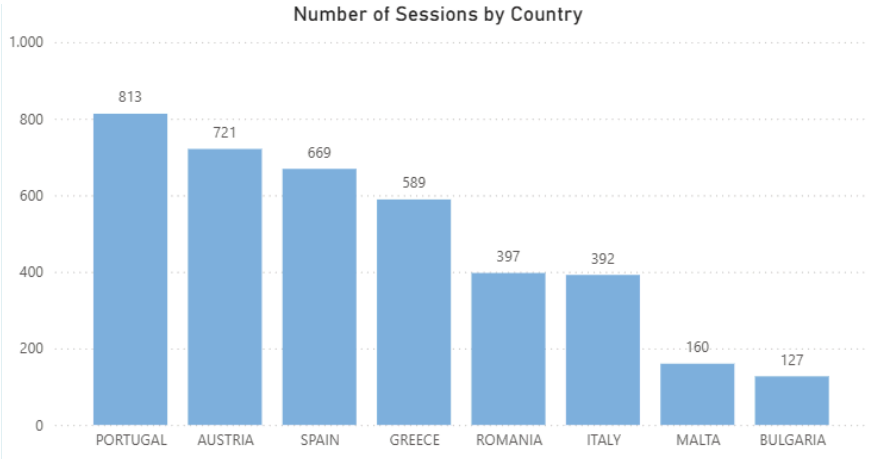
The number of mentor-mentee pairs varied considerably. Greece had the largest initial group (76 pairs) but experienced a significant dropout rate (34.2%), ending with 50 active pairs. Spain and Austria had similar scales (54 and 53 pairs respectively). Malta was the smallest pilot, with 21 active groups and high withdrawal rates. Ultimately, total scale did not determine success; the critical factors driving positive outcomes were match quality, coordination, and ongoing support.

- **Session volume and intensity**

Total session counts reflected differences in pilot duration and structural delivery models:

  - Portugal delivered the highest number of sessions (813), largely because of the compressed timeline.
  - Austria delivered 721 sessions across two groups, with a structured format of weekly group activities plus individual mentoring sessions.
  - Spain delivered 664 sessions across 54 pairs.
  - Bulgaria delivered 735 sessions.
  - Greece delivered 653 sessions, Italy 392, Romania 397 and Malta 202.

These figures suggest that the most effective approach is regular, sustained engagement over an extended period—rather than concentrating sessions into a short timeframe (as in Portugal) or distributing them too sparsely



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- **Evaluation volume and tools**

The volume of evaluations collected varied significantly, from 1,118 in Spain to 57 in Malta (the number of couples, which is lower, must also be taken into account). Evaluation tools and frequency also differed across pilots:

- **Post-session evaluations (Austria, Italy, Malta, Spain):**
  - *Advantages*: Generate rich, granular, session-level data that captures participant reactions in real time, allowing for fine-grained tracking of satisfaction and emerging issues.
  - *Limitations*: Impose a high administrative burden on facilitators and participants, and can lead to evaluation fatigue, potentially reducing response quality over time.
- **Monthly evaluations (Greece, Portugal, Romania):**
  - *Advantages:* Considerably lighter administrative load, easier to sustain over the programme's duration, and better suited to capturing reflective, cumulative feedback rather than immediate reactions.
  - *Limitations:* Lower granularity, with less detail on individual sessions and a greater risk that specific issues are smoothed over or forgotten before being recorded.
- **Monthly summaries in place of post-session evaluations (Austria):**
  - *Advantages:* Reduced administrative burden and was explicitly recommended as best practice, suggesting a more sustainable model for longer programmes.
  - *Limitations:* Trades session-level detail for aggregation, meaning nuance and time-specific insights are lost.

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This variation limits direct comparability between pilots. It also reveals a tension between the level of effort invested in evaluation and the level of detail and depth: more frequent tools produce richer data but a higher administrative cost, while lighter tools are more sustainable but less granular, meaning the choice of evaluation model is ultimately a trade-off between what is feasible to collect and what is meaningful to analyse.

- **Institutional models and coordination**

The coordinating organisations reflected three main institutional models: university-led/partnered, NGO-led and cooperative/VET-led. Several countries operated a dual coordination model, which was consistently identified as a key success factor, particularly for reaching both mentors and mentees through different channels, conflict resolution and combining academic and community-based expertise. The most effective coordination models combined institutional reach with community embeddedness.

- **Completion and retention rates**

Retention varied substantially across countries. Spain reported the fewest dropouts, losing only one mentor and one mentee. Greece experienced the most dropouts overall; but Italy was not far behind, with a similar number. Factors associated with high retention included strong coordination, early and careful matching, flexible delivery models, and institutional support. Factors associated with dropout included late matching, lack of common language, scheduling incompatibility, and inadequate pre-matching assessment.

An incident management tool developed during the project proved valuable in this context. It was used to log events and the actions taken to manage them, giving pilots a structured way to record problems as they arose—such as matching difficulties, communication breakdowns, or participant withdrawals—alongside the responses implemented. This served two purposes during the pilot phase: it supported coordinators in responding consistently to issues in real time, and it created a record that helped identify patterns behind dropout, feeding directly into the retention factors outlined above. In effect, the tool helped turn individual incidents into transferable learning for the program as a whole.

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3. Participant Profile

This section examines the profile of participants across all eight national pilots, focusing on both mentors and mentees. Understanding who took part is essential for interpreting the programme's results, challenges and recommendations. The data reveals a programme that brought together two very different groups: predominantly female and, relatively well-educated mentors, and predominantly male and adolescent mentees with migrant or refugee backgrounds. This demographic asymmetry — particularly in terms of gender, age, language and life experience — shaped the dynamics of the mentoring relationships and emerged as one of the programme's most consistent structural features.

The analysis below is organised thematically, covering age, gender, institutional origin, countries of origin, mother tongues and length of residence. Where relevant, individual countries are highlighted as illustrative examples of broader patterns.

3.1. Mentors

- **Age**

Mentors ranged in age from 18 to 68 years, though the distribution was heavily concentrated in the younger adult years. The mentor group was predominantly composed of young adults, typically university students or recent graduates.

Spain had the youngest mentor profile (54% aged 18-19), while Malta had the oldest (average age approximately 32). This age distribution is consistent with the university-partnered model adopted in several countries, where mentors were recruited from undergraduate or postgraduate student populations.

The age gap between mentors and mentees was therefore relatively small in most countries — typically 5 to 10 years — which may have facilitated peer-like relationships but also meant that mentors often lacked extensive life experience or teaching expertise.

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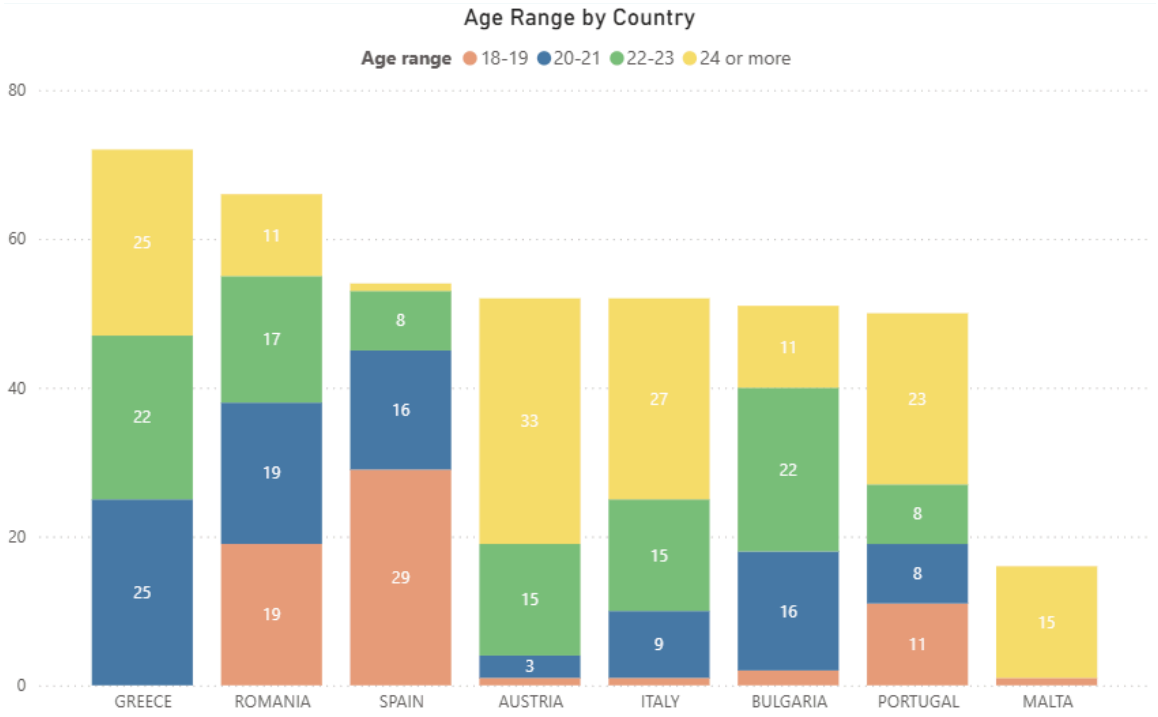

The proximity in age positioned mentors somewhere between peers and authority figures: close enough to relate to mentees' experiences and build rapport, yet potentially limited in their capacity to offer the kind of guidance that comes from greater maturity or professional experience.

- **Gender**

The gender distribution among mentors was markedly imbalanced. Across all eight countries, mentors were predominantly female, ranging from 59.6% in Austria to 94.4% in Greece, with only Austria approaching a more balanced distribution. This contrasts with a predominantly male mentee population, a mismatch explicitly identified as a significant challenge in Bulgaria, Greece and Spain.

The result is a structural gap between who delivers and who receives mentoring, which may affect matching options, the relevance of role models, and the capacity to address gender-specific needs within the programme.

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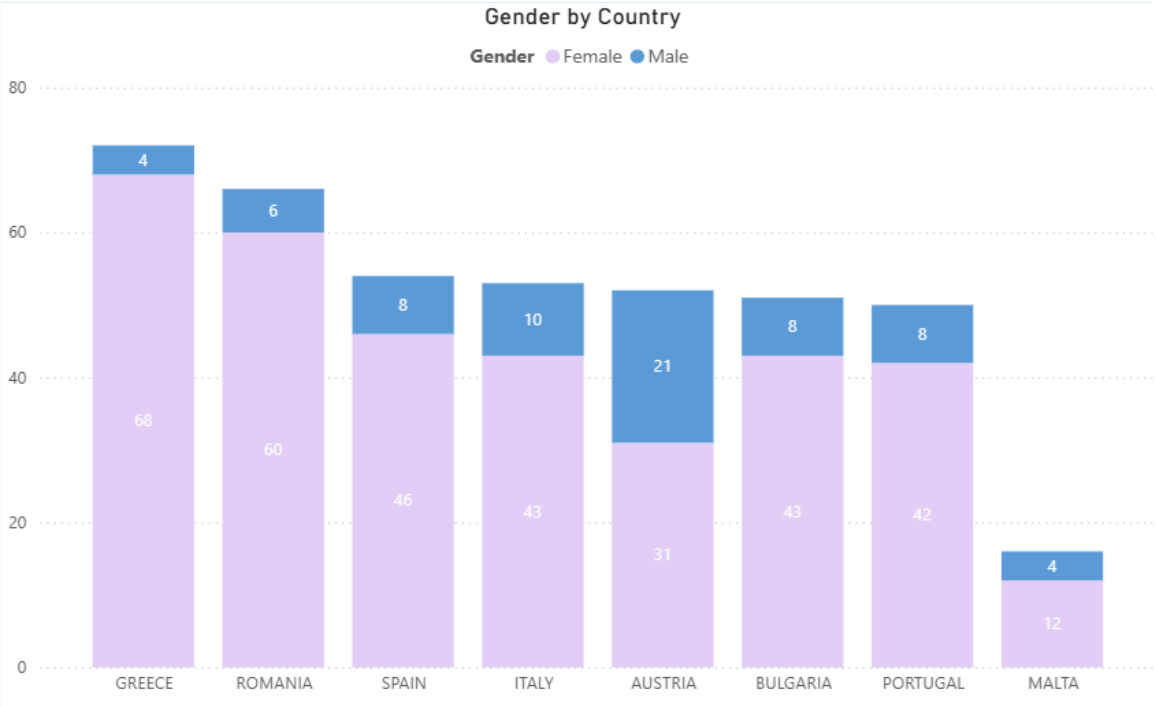

This gender imbalance is highlighted as a challenge for future editions, with recommendations to develop strategies to attract more male mentors.

- **Mother Tongue**

Mentors' mother tongues reflected the linguistic contexts of each country. In most countries, mentors were native speakers of the dominant language, which positioned them as linguistic resources for mentees. Malta was the exception, where mentors were predominantly Nigerian and spoke Yoruba, Igbo or other Nigerian languages.

This created a more complex linguistic dynamic, where both mentors and mentees were navigating a non-native language. Italy stood out for its culturally diverse mentor cohort, which included mother tongues such as Chinese, Korean, Albanian, Spanish, Russian and Arabic. Across all the countries combined, mentors represented **25 distinct mother tongues**.

The diversity of mother tongues on the population groups was seen as an asset, enabling mentors to relate to mentees' linguistic and cultural challenges.

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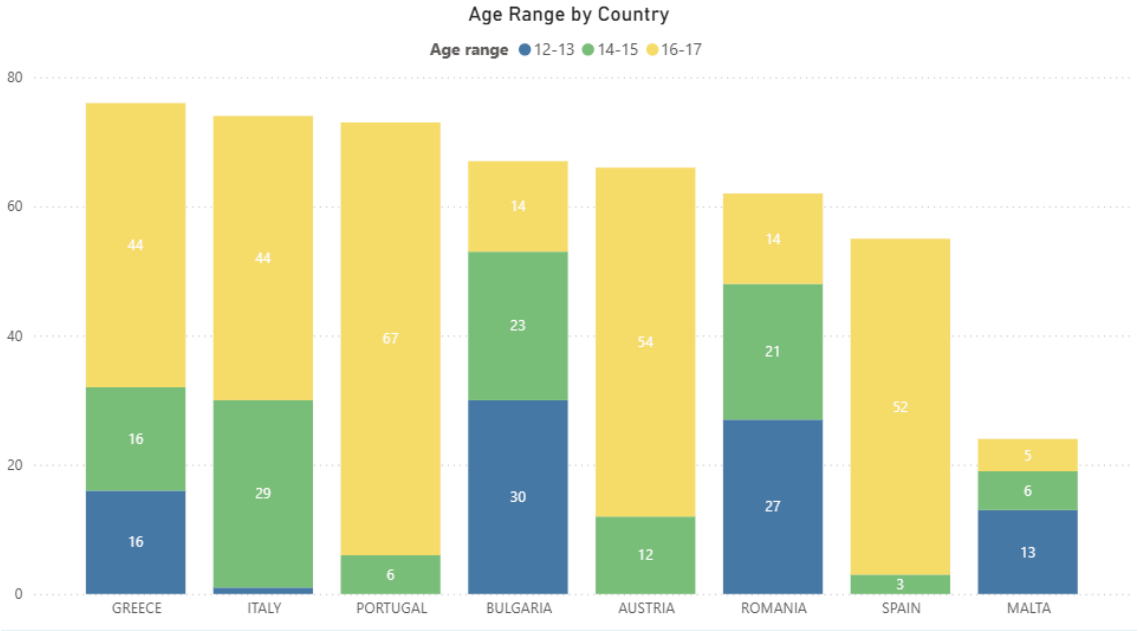
3.2. Mentees

- **Age**

Mentees were adolescents, with the majority aged 12-17. The mentee cohort was adolescent-centred, with a particular concentration at aged 15-17. Malta and Bulgaria were the exception, with a younger profile.

This age range is significant because adolescence is a period of identity formation, educational transition and heightened vulnerability, particularly for migrant youth who are simultaneously navigating a new language, culture and school system.



The age gap between mentors (typically 18-25) and mentees (typically 15-17) was relatively small, which may have facilitated peer-like relationships but also meant that mentors were sometimes only a few years older than the young people they were supporting.

- **Gender**

The gender distribution among mentees was more varied than among mentors, but still showed a predominantly male skew in most countries. This variation reflects differences in recruitment pathways and local migration patterns.

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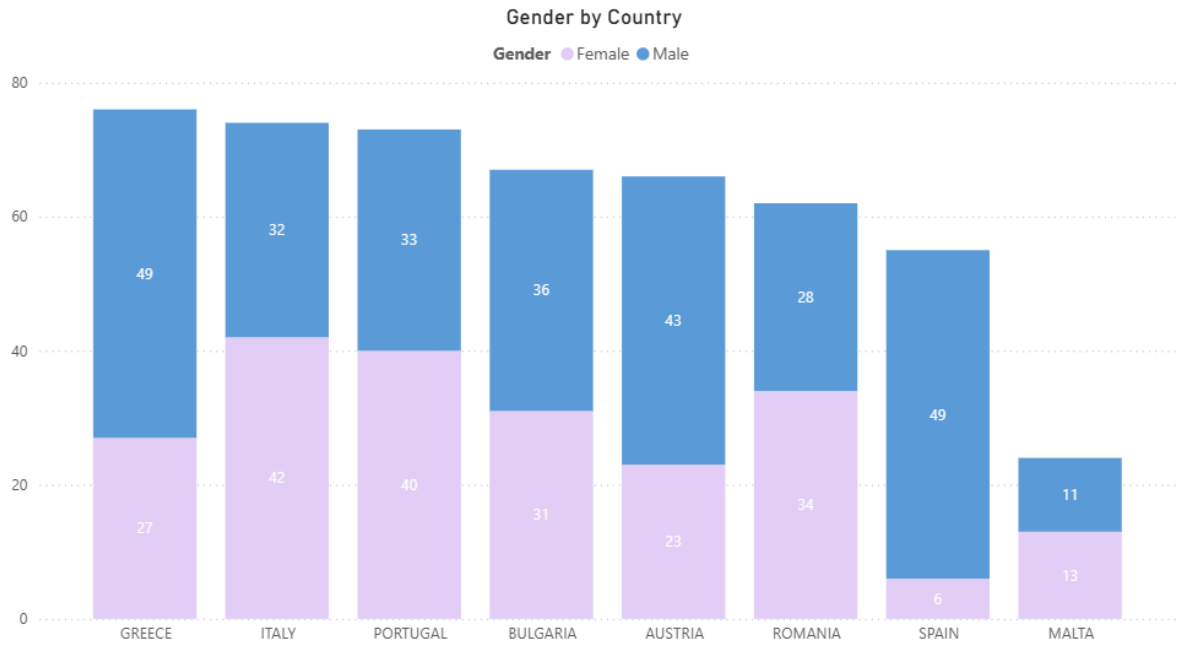
In Spain, for example, the mentees were predominantly young men from North and West Africa, while in Portugal and in Italy, the mentee cohorts included more young women from Portuguese-speaking countries and China respectively.



The combination of predominantly female mentors and predominantly male mentees in several countries created a gender dynamic that was identified as a challenge, potentially affecting matching, relationship-building and the types of activities offered.

- **Countries of Origin**

The programme supported mentees from **49 origin countries** in total, with significant regional concentrations:

- North and West Africa dominated in Spain and was also significant in Malta and Greece.
- Portuguese-speaking countries dominated in Portugal.
- China was the single largest group in Italy.
- Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan were the main groups in Austria (71.2% combined).
- Middle East and Latin America featured in Malta (Syria, Palestine, Libya, Colombia).

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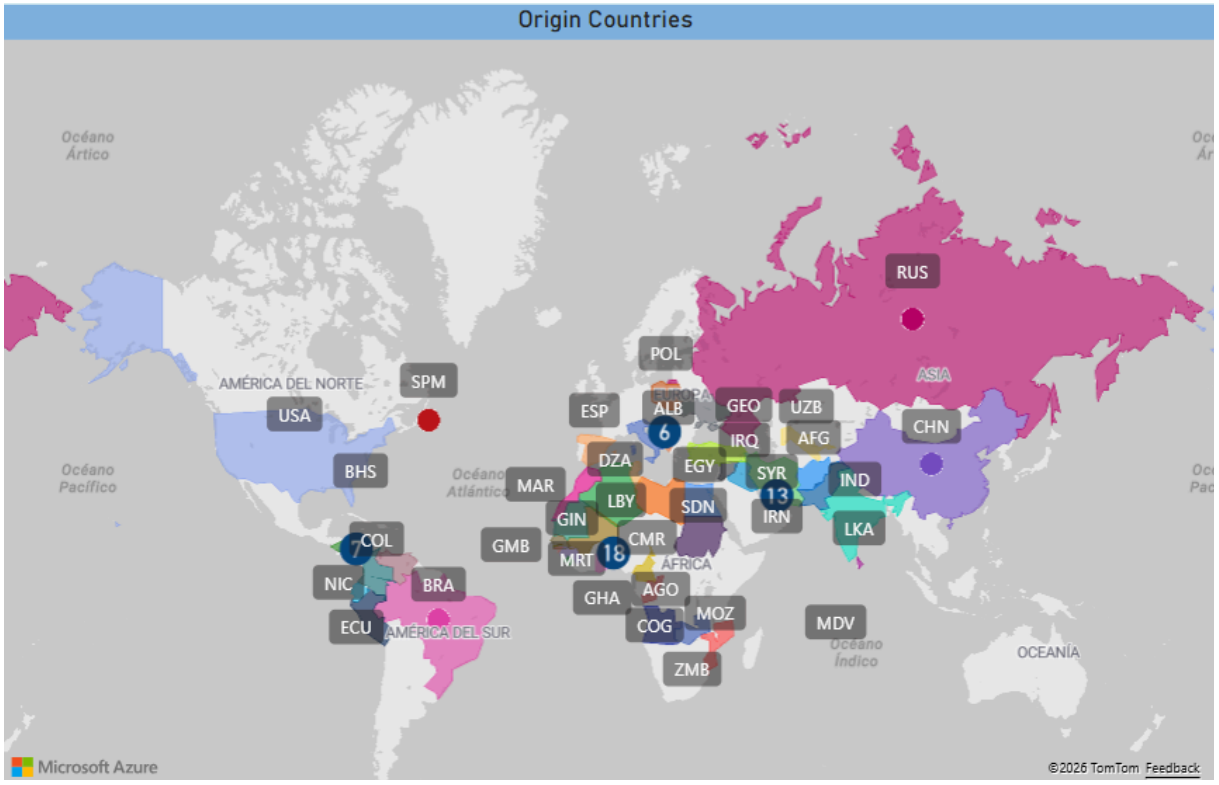

This diversity meant that the programme was operating across multiple linguistic and cultural contexts simultaneously, requiring mentors to adapt to very different needs and backgrounds. It also meant that no single "migrant profile" dominated the programme as a whole, though individual countries had more concentrated populations.

- **Mother Tongue**

Mentees' mother tongues reflected their countries of origin and presented a complex linguistic landscape. The linguistic diversity of mentees was one of the programme's most defining features. Across the eight countries, mentees spoke **42 different mother tongues** in total, the most widely spoken of which was **Ukrainian**. Arabic, various African languages (Mandinka, Wolof, Forro, Lingala), Chinese, Spanish, Zambian and others were represented.

This created a complex linguistic context for mentoring:

- In most countries, mentors and mentees did not share a common mother tongue.
- The language of the host country was the primary target for improvement, but was often not the language of initial communication.

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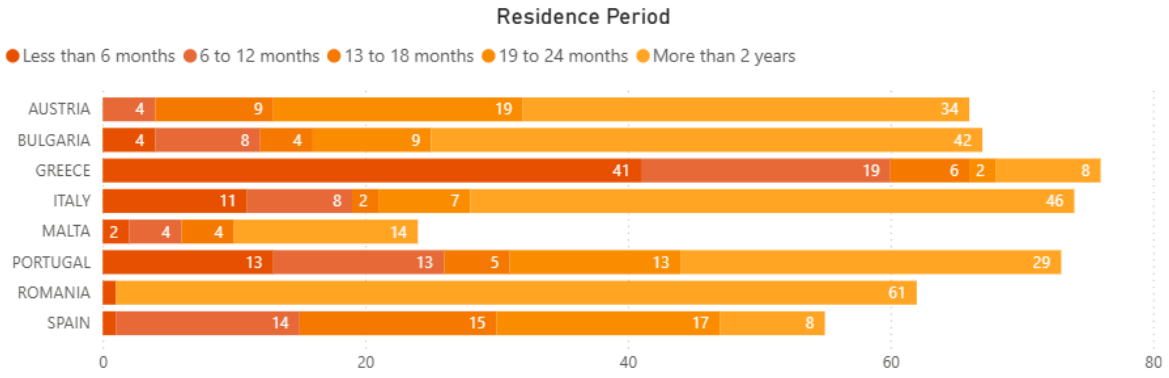
- In some cases, a bridge language was needed — English was used in Greece and Malta.
- The lack of common language was identified as a main challenge and a contributing factor to dropout in some cases.

- **Length of Residence in the Host Country**

The length of time mentees had lived in the host country varied significantly across the programme countries, reflecting different stages of settlement:

- Greece had the most recently arrived population, with over half of its mentees having been in the country for less than six months. This represents a high-vulnerability profile with immediate language and integration needs.
- Portugal and Spain had significant proportions of mentees who had arrived 6 months to 2 years before, suggesting a transition phase in which initial needs may be giving way to longer-term integration challenges.
- Austria, Bulgaria, Italy, Malta and Romania had predominantly longer-settled populations, with majority of mentees having lived in the host country for more than two years. This indicates that the programme was also serving young people who had been in the country for some time but still needed language and social support.



Overall, the programme supported mentees at very different stages of settlement. This variation has implications for programme design: recently arrived mentees may need more intensive, basic language support and orientation, while longer-settled mentees may need support with academic language, social integration and educational pathways.

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3.3. Comparative Overview

The table below summarises the key differences and similarities between mentors and mentees across the programme:

Dimension	Mentors	Mentees
Age	18–25 years (typical); range 18–68	12–17 years; concentrated at 15–17
Gender	Predominantly women	Mixed, but predominantly men in Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Spain; slight female majority in Portugal, Malta, Italy and Romania
Countries of origin	Predominantly host country nationals (except Malta)	Diverse: North/West Africa, Middle East, Latin America, China, Ukraine, etc.
Mother tongue	Host country language (mostly)	Diverse: Arabic, African languages, Chinese, Spanish, Ukrainian, etc.
Length of residence	Mostly native or long-term residents	Varied: from <6 months to >2 years

3.4. Implications for Programme Design

The participant profile has several implications for programme design and future editions:

- Gender balance: Strategies are needed to attract more male mentors and, in some countries, more female mentees. This may require targeted outreach, role models and partnership with organisations that work with specific groups.
- Age-appropriate approaches: The adolescent age profile of mentees requires approaches that are engaging, respectful of their developing autonomy and sensitive to the challenges of adolescence — particularly for young people navigating migration and identity formation.
- Flexibility for different settlement stages: Programme activities and objectives should be adaptable to mentees who have recently arrived (needing orientation and basic

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language) versus those who have been in the country longer (needing academic language and social integration).

- Mentor support and training: Given the young age and relative inexperience of many mentors, initial training and ongoing supervision are essential — particularly for managing expectations, dealing with shyness and lack of confidence, and adapting to complex linguistic and cultural contexts.

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4. Main Results and Impact

This section presents the main results and impact of the mentoring programme across the eight national pilots. It draws on the extensive evaluation data collected throughout implementation, including post-session evaluations, monthly evaluations, final evaluations and coordinator assessments. The analysis is organised around five key outcome areas:

1. Overall satisfaction and recommendation
2. Relationship quality
3. Session objectives and commitment
4. Language, personal and skills development

Across all eight countries, the results are consistent in their overall direction: participants reported high levels of satisfaction, strong and positive relationships, meaningful language improvement and significant personal growth. At the same time, there is variation in the intensity of these outcomes, with some countries reporting exceptionally high scores and others more moderate results.

4.1. Overall Satisfaction and Recommendation

Overall satisfaction was measured on a 10-point scale in most countries, with consistently high scores from both mentors and mentees. In Romania, satisfaction reached 8.9/10 when combining mentor and mentee responses, while Bulgaria followed closely at 8.8/10, also reflecting the combined scores of both groups. Mentees consistently reported higher satisfaction than mentors in Spain (9.6 vs. 8.7), Portugal (8.6 vs. 8.0), Italy (8.8 vs. 7.5) and Malta (8.4 vs. 9.3 — the exception, where mentors were more satisfied). Greece reported the highest satisfaction, with the majority of mentors giving 10/10 and mentees giving 9–10/10. Italy reported the lowest mentor satisfaction (7.5/10), which may reflect the challenges identified in the Italian report, including initial communication difficulties and organisational constraints. Taken together, satisfaction across the programme averaged approximately **8.8/10**.

Recommendation rates were exceptionally high. Near-universal recommendation from mentors was reported in all eight countries. Recommendation rates among mentees ranged from 90% to 100%. Despite the program's success in terms of recommendations, in every country there were participants who would recommend the program “with improvements”. This suggests

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that, while the program was highly valued, participants perceived clear room for improvement, particularly regarding duration, resources, and logistics.

4.2. Relationship Quality

Participants were asked to rate the quality of the mentoring relationship. The results show overwhelmingly positive relationships, with zero negative relationships reported in most countries. In Austria, 87.8% of mentors and 73.2% of mentees described the relationship as "very close and positive," while 12.2% of mentors and 22.0% of mentees rated it as "adequate." Bulgaria reported that 68.2% of mentors rated the relationship as "very close and positive" and 27.3% as "adequate." In Greece, the majority of mentors and an overwhelming majority of mentees gave positive ratings. Italy reported that 75% of mentors and 100% of mentees rated the relationship as very positive or appropriate.

Malta showed more variation: 66.7% of mentors and 40% of mentees described the relationship as "very close and positive," while 33.3% of mentors and 60% of mentees rated it as "adequate." Portugal reported that 20% of mentors and 55.6% of mentees rated the relationship as "very close and positive," while the majority of mentors (64%) and 44.4% of mentees described it as "adequate." Romania did not provide data for this category. In Spain, 69.4% of mentors and 78.8% of mentees rated the relationship as "very close and positive," 22.4% of mentors and 21.2% of mentees rated it as "adequate," and 2% of mentors reported a negative relationship, while no mentees did. No negative relationships were reported in any of the other countries listed.

Mentees consistently rated relationships more positively than mentors in Spain, Portugal, and Malta (the exception being one country where mentors rated more positively). Austria reported the highest proportion of "very close and positive" relationships from mentors, while Portugal reported the lowest, with the majority describing the relationship as "adequate." This may reflect the short duration of the Portuguese programme and the late matching, which limited the time available for deep relationship-building. Commitment was assessed in several countries, typically by mentors rating their mentees' commitment, ranging from 75% to 93.5% excellent or good. Austria (92.7%) and Spain (93.5%) reported the highest commitment levels, while Malta (75%) and Greece (75.8–84.1%) reported slightly lower levels.

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Overall, the mentoring relationships were overwhelmingly positive across most countries, with negative relationships reported only in Spain and at very low levels; however, the notable variation between countries—and the tendency for mentees to rate relationships more positively than mentors in several cases—suggests that relationship quality was influenced by contextual factors such as programme duration and matching timing, with Portugal's lower ratings illustrating how limited time for relationship-building can constrain mentoring quality.

4.3. Session Objectives and Commitment

Participants were asked whether session objectives were fully met. In Austria, 87.8% of mentors reported that all objectives were achieved and 12.2% that most were achieved; among mentees, 63.4% felt their expectations were fully met and 29.3% that they were largely met. Bulgaria reported that 45.5% of mentors indicated all objectives had been achieved, 47.7% that most had been achieved, and 6.8% that only some had been achieved. In Greece, 83% of mentors and 82.2% of mentees reported that objectives were fully met. Italy reported that 75% of mentors and 80% of mentees achieved most or all objectives. Malta showed the highest combined rates, with 95% of mentors and 100% of mentees reporting objectives fully or partially met, though the small sample size means these figures should be interpreted with caution.

Portugal reported the lowest rates, with 66% of mentors and 64.4% of mentees indicating that objectives were met, which may reflect the compressed timeline and late matching that limited the number of sessions and the depth of engagement. Romania did not distinguish between mentors and mentees, reporting that 51.3% of respondents felt objectives were fully achieved, 44.9% that they were partially achieved, and 3.8% that they were not achieved. In Spain, 76.7% of mentors and 86.8% of mentees reported that objectives were met. Overall, Greece and Austria reported the highest rates of objectives being fully met.

Attendance and participation data, where available, showed generally high levels of engagement: Spain reported that 92.4% of mentors and 96% of mentees experienced no significant difficulties, and in Bulgaria 95.5% of mentors reported the same. Austria rated 92.7% of mentees as having excellent or good commitment, while Greece reported high motivation, with 84.1% rated as excellent. The main challenge was not the quality of sessions but retention and continuity.

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Session objectives were met at high rates in most countries—with Greece and Austria reporting the strongest results—while Portugal's comparatively lower figures again point to the compressed timeline and late matching as limiting factors; crucially, attendance and participation data indicate that the main challenge was not the quality of sessions but rather retention and continuity.

4.4. Language, Personal and Skills Development

Language improvement was a core objective of the programme and results were consistently positive. In Austria, 82.9% of mentors observed outstanding, clear or significant progress, 14.6% reported clear progress, and 2.5% noted minimal or inconsistent improvement. Bulgaria reported improvements in Bulgarian language skills, greater confidence in speaking, increased willingness to communicate, and greater independence in social interactions; in some cases, the change was described not simply in terms of linguistic competence but also as increased self-confidence and social adaptation.

Greece reported noticeable progress in speaking, reading, writing and understanding, while Italy reported moderate to significant progress. In Malta, 100% of mentors observed notable or clearly visible progress, alongside 60% of mentees; 20% of mentees reported moderate improvement and 20% low improvement. Portugal reported that 30% of mentors and 55.6% of mentees observed significant improvement, while 70% of mentors and 44.4% of mentees reported moderate improvement, with no low or no improvement reported by either group. In Romania, language development was one of the clearest outcomes: mentees reported improved Romanian vocabulary, increased confidence speaking Romanian, better English communication skills, and a reduced fear of making mistakes. Spain reported that 53.1% of mentors and 69.2% of mentees observed significant improvement, 42.9% of mentors and 28.8% of mentees moderate improvement, and 2% of mentors and 1.9% of mentees low or no improvement.

Improvement covered speaking and oral communication (most frequently mentioned), listening comprehension, vocabulary, pronunciation, reading and writing, and confidence in speaking. Italy provided particularly detailed evidence, with 70% of mentees giving satisfaction scores of 9–10 and substantial gains in vocabulary, oral communication, pronunciation and

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fluency. In Greece and Italy, language improvement was reported as universal though not always quantified.

Mentors reported significant personal and professional growth in all countries, with the highest levels in Malta (100% "very significant"), Austria (87.8% "meaningful") and Spain (61.2% "very significant"). Key skills developed consistently included patience, active listening, communication, flexibility, adaptability, empathy and intercultural awareness. Reciprocal learning was a recurring theme, and Austria captured a particularly insightful mentor learning: "Being a good mentor is much more about listening than giving advice all the time."

Language improvement was the most consistently reported outcome for mentees across all countries, followed by increased confidence (particularly in speaking and participating in daily life) and social skills and integration (forming friendships, better understanding of the host culture, greater participation in social and educational settings). Academic support was specifically mentioned, and emotional and psychological benefits included a sense of support and empowerment, reduced fear of making mistakes and renewed motivation.

Language improvement emerged as the most consistently reported outcome for mentees across all countries, while mentors simultaneously reported significant personal and professional growth, particularly in patience, active listening, empathy and intercultural awareness; notably, these gains extended beyond linguistic competence to include increased confidence, social integration and emotional empowerment, with reciprocal learning emerging as a recurring theme throughout.

In conclusion, the mentoring programme achieved its core objectives across all eight national pilots, with particularly strong results in language development, relationship quality, and participant satisfaction. While outcomes were consistently positive, variation in intensity suggests that structural factors significantly influence depth of impact. The findings support the programme's continuation and expansion, with recommendations to address duration, resources, and logistical constraints to maximise effectiveness in all contexts.

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5. Evaluation of Support

This section examines the support structures that underpinned the mentoring programme across the eight national pilots —coordination, teaching resources, group sessions, tools and platforms and initial mentor training —and examines the main challenges encountered during implementation.

The findings reveal a clear pattern: human support was strong; material support was weak. Coordination support was rated as excellent by the vast majority of participants across all countries, while teaching resources for mentors were consistently identified as the weakest element. The challenges encountered — language barriers, shyness, scheduling difficulties, retention, and resource gaps — were structural and logistical, not relational. The quality of mentoring relationships remained high throughout.

5.1. Coordination Support

Coordination support was rated highly across all countries where data was available. In Austria, mentors rated coordination support as excellent in 97.6% of cases, while mentees gave an excellent rating of 78.0%. In Bulgaria, 100% of respondents rated support as excellent or good, although no separate mentee rating was available. Greece reported excellent ratings from both groups, with 100% of mentors and 100% of mentees giving the highest rating. In Italy, both mentors and mentees assessed coordination positively, describing it as good or excellent. Malta also reported strong results, with 100% of mentors and 80% of mentees rating support as excellent. Portugal showed excellent ratings from 64% of mentors and 82% of mentees. Romania reported that 100% of respondents rated support as excellent or good, with no separate mentee figure provided. Finally, Spain recorded excellent ratings from 81.6% of mentors and 88.5% of mentees.

Coordination was rated excellent by 64-100% of mentors and 78-100% of mentees, with zero negative ratings reported in Portugal, Greece, Spain and Malta. The national reports describe a range of valued coordination functions: ongoing monitoring, close daily contact (in Portugal, UCP maintained near-24/7 contact via WhatsApp and calls), problem-solving and conflict resolution, reassurance (particularly for young, inexperienced mentors), logistical support, safeguarding procedures, and on-site accessibility. The most valued dimensions were availability, responsiveness and continuity.

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Across all eight countries, coordination support emerged as a structural pillar of the programme's success. It was identified as essential for retention, key to conflict resolution, a source of reassurance and a factor in quality. Coordination was not merely an administrative function; it was a relational and emotional resource that enabled mentors and mentees to persist through challenges. Its consistent high rating suggests that investment in coordination is one of the most reliable ways to support programme quality.

5.2. Teaching Resources and Tools

Teaching resources for **mentors** were consistently identified as the weakest element of the support system. In Austria, 68.3% of mentors rated the resources as "very useful" and 31.7% as "useful". In Bulgaria, 88.6% rated them "very useful" and 13.6% "useful". Greece reported that 44.9% of mentors considered the resources "not very useful". In Italy, some respondents indicated that materials could be strengthened. Malta reported that 83.3% of mentors rated the resources as "very useful". Portugal reported that 100% of mentors found them "useful" or "very useful". No mentor rating was available from Romania. Spain also reported that 44.9% of mentors considered the resources "not very useful".

Spain and Greece reported the lowest ratings (44.9% "not very useful" in both), a striking coincidence suggesting a common problem with the design of the resources. Bulgaria, Portugal, Malta and Austria reported high ratings. This discrepancy between countries may reflect differences in the resources themselves, but also in how they were used: in Austria, the e-learning platform was useful for preparation but less practical for ongoing sessions, suggesting resources may serve different purposes at different stages.

Where mentors were critical, the reasons were consistent: materials were too basic, designed for the classroom rather than one-to-one tutoring, not adaptable to different language levels and needs, not practical for online delivery, too complex for continuous use and created an administrative burden. The most common criticism was that resources were not designed for the reality of one-to-one mentoring. Mentors wanted practical, adaptable, ready-to-use activities. Specifically: they requested more practical and flexible resources, co-design with mentors, activity templates and pedagogical resources for online one-to-one sessions, materials for various levels, simplified platforms, and reduced administrative burden.

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Teaching resources for **mentees** were rated more positively than mentors' ratings, though still with some criticism. In Austria, 73.2% of mentees rated the resources as "very useful" and 24.4% as "useful", giving a combined positive rating of 97.6%. No mentee rating was available for Bulgaria. Greece reported that mentees found the resources "very useful". Italy reported a positive assessment. Malta reported that 40% of mentees rated the resources as "very useful", 40% as "useful" and 20% as "not useful". Portugal reported that 40% of mentees found them "not very useful". Spain reported a positive rating, and no ratings were available for the mentees from Romania or Bulgaria.

Greece and Austria reported the highest ratings. Portugal and Malta reported more mixed results. The discrepancy between mentor and mentee ratings is notable: In Portugal, mentors rated resources 100% positively, while 40% of mentees found them "not very useful". In Malta, mentors rated resources 83.3% "very useful", while mentees were more mixed. This suggests resources may have been designed with mentors in mind but did not always meet mentees' needs. Where mentees were critical, reasons included resources not suited to their level, not practical and a lack of face-to-face interaction.

Tools and platforms were the least developed and least valued element of the support system. Portugal reported the lowest rating (6/10 from the coordinator, with 40% of mentees finding them "not very useful"). Austria found the e-learning platform useful for preparation but too complex for ongoing use. Greece, Italy and Malta identified technical and logistical constraints with online delivery, including internet connectivity issues, difficulty explaining concepts online, and lack of suitable resources for online one-to-one sessions. Participants wanted simpler tools, practical and ready-to-use resources, resources for online one-to-one sessions, reduced administrative burden, and better technical support.

5.3. Group Sessions

Group sessions were organised in all eight countries, though the number and format varied. Most countries organised 2-3 group sessions at key points: an initial team-building session, a mid-programme activity and a closing evaluation session. Austria was the exception, with weekly group activities integrated into the programme structure alongside individual sessions — an intensive format seen as a strength. Malta organised one group activity, which was valued but limited in frequency. Group sessions served multiple purposes: team-building, reducing

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initial uncertainty, cultural exchange, strengthening bonds, re-engagement and shared evaluation.

Group sessions were consistently valued across all countries. In Austria, the weekly group activities were a core feature of the model, providing social interaction, informal language practice and creative activities; the combination of group and one-to-one formats was identified as a best practice. In Bulgaria, group activities took the form of collective mentoring, informal workshops and community-based meetings. In Greece, the two initial group sessions were highly valued for building a sense of community and setting expectations. In Italy, the initial meeting built a shared sense of community and the final closure session fostered belonging and peer cohesion. In Malta, the guided tour showed that in-person contact helps build trust and rapport.

In Portugal, group sessions were identified as "key to reactivating mentor-mentee pairs", particularly when pairs had lost momentum; a third session combining progress-sharing, peer problem-solving and reflective goal-setting helped re-engage less active pairs and sustain their commitment thorough to the programme's completion. In Romania, two painting workshops early in the programme were used as an icebreaker, and a cultural visit to Peleș Castle strengthened communication and exchange between participants. In Spain, group sessions fostered a sense of community and provided cultural experiences, structured around three sessions: an introductory team-building meeting, a mid-point session featuring traditional Basque sports, and a final closure built around a collaborative visual mural.

Group sessions were universally valued as a complement to individual mentoring, serving to build community and reduce isolation, provide informal language practice, create emotional milestones, re-engage pairs, foster belonging and peer cohesion, and offer cultural exchange and non-formal learning.

5.4. Initial Mentor Training

Initial mentor training was implemented in all eight countries and was consistently identified as a key success factor. It served to build mentors' confidence and skills, clarify roles and expectations, prepare mentors for intercultural and linguistic challenges, establish safeguarding and ethical frameworks, and create a sense of community among mentors. Despite its

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recognised importance, initial training had some gaps: several countries recommended a more structured "Session 0" to clarify objectives, roles, expectations and tools from the outset; some recommended regular supervision amongst mentors (support groups); Greece recommended institutionalising mid-programme feedback, especially for inexperienced mentors; and mentors wanted more practical, ready-to-use resources as part of their training.

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6. Main Challenges

This section examines the main challenges encountered across the eight national pilots. While Section 4 demonstrated that the programme achieved consistently high levels of satisfaction, strong relationships and meaningful language improvement, the implementation was not without difficulties. The challenges identified by coordinators, mentors and mentees were remarkably consistent across countries, revealing structural and logistical issues that transcended local contexts. Crucially, these challenges were not relational — the quality of mentoring relationships and the commitment of participants remained high throughout. The difficulties were instead structural, logistical and resource-related, affecting the continuity, depth and reach of the programme rather than its fundamental quality.

6.1. Initial Language Barriers, Shyness and Psychological Readiness

Initial language barriers were the most consistently reported challenge. Mentors and mentees did not share a common mother tongue, and mentees often had very low levels of the host country language at the start of the programme. The severity of these barriers depended largely on two factors: the mentee's level in the host language and the availability of a bridge language. Where no common language or bridge existed, communication became almost impossible for some pairs, and the challenge was severe enough to contribute to dropout.

In many contexts, language barriers were compounded by a complex linguistic landscape: mentors were often highly multilingual but rarely spoke the mentees' native languages, while mentees predominantly spoke Arabic, Spanish or African languages. In some cases, mentors who did not speak the host language or English faced particularly severe difficulties. In others, linguistic affinity between mentors and mentees — for example, where mentees came from countries sharing a language with the host country — made the barrier present but less acute.

The initial sessions were consistently identified as the most sensitive phase, with language barriers and communication difficulties most acute at the start. Strategies for overcoming them included patience, adapting communication styles, translation tools, English as a bridge language and dynamic activities. The progressive fostering of trust was identified as good practice in several countries.

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Shyness and an initial lack of confidence among mentees posed a recurring challenge, particularly in the early stages. Shyness was most intense during initial sessions and gradually diminished as trust was established. In some cases, shyness was compounded by unassessed trauma-related needs or by a lack of genuine interest where participants had not been adequately informed beforehand. In other instances, motivation and communication issues led to periods of unresponsiveness that frustrated mentors.

These challenges were predictable and manageable but required patience, persistence and a gradual approach. They became more complex where participants had unassessed psychological needs or had not been properly prepared for the programme. Overall, the evidence suggests that early attention to language support, expectation-setting and trust-building is essential to prevent initial barriers from escalating into disengagement or dropout.

Initial language barriers and mentee shyness were the most consistently reported challenges—most acute in the earliest sessions and in cases lacking a bridge language—yet they proved predictable and manageable through patience, adapted communication and trust-building, highlighting that early language support, expectation-setting and trust-building are essential to prevent initial barriers from escalating into disengagement or dropout.

6.2. Scheduling, Retention and Dropout

Scheduling and time incompatibility were structural challenges affecting retention and continuity. In Portugal, sessions at the end of an exhausting working day were the most frequent difficulty reported by mentees, suggesting scheduling should account for energy levels and competing commitments. Mentor availability was a major factor in Malta, where 60% of mentor withdrawals were attributed to work, study or personal commitments. Last-minute cancellations and no-shows were the main problem for mentors in Greece, severe enough to warrant a recommendation for a clear attendance/cancellation policy. Session duration was also an issue: participants in Greece requested an increase from 1 to 1.5 hours, and in Austria, longer and more flexible sessions were requested. The most effective mitigations were flexible delivery models (online, face-to-face, hybrid) and careful scheduling.

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Retention was the single most significant structural challenge in some countries. Malta and Greece experienced the most severe difficulties, with dropout rates of 34–52%. Factors associated with dropout included late matching, lack of common language, mentor availability and commitment, scheduling incompatibility, inadequate pre-matching assessment, limited mentor pool, and personal/family circumstances. Factors associated with high retention included strong coordination and close monitoring, early and careful matching, flexible delivery models, fixed locations and predictable scheduling, and institutional support. Mentor withdrawal was a significant issue in Malta, where the pool was limited and mentors were themselves international students with competing commitments. Retention is therefore not an inevitable challenge but one that can be mitigated through careful programme design.

6.3. Resources, Face-to-Face Interaction and Matching

Teaching resources for mentors were consistently identified as the weakest element of the support system. The most common criticism was that resources were too basic, too classroom-oriented and not adaptable to one-to-one mentoring; they were often designed for the classroom rather than individualised, conversational sessions, which was particularly problematic in Greece where they were also unsuitable for online delivery. Administrative burden was a related issue: in Austria, requiring evaluations after every session proved difficult, and monthly summaries were suggested as a more sustainable alternative. Mentors wanted practical, flexible, ready-to-use activities deployable across different contexts and language levels. The gap between resources provided and resources needed was most acute in Spain and Greece but present to some degree in all countries.

The lack of face-to-face interaction was a consistent challenge, particularly where sessions were delivered online. Online delivery was a practical necessity in some contexts but was consistently perceived as less effective for building trust and rapport. Technical constraints compounded the challenge: internet connectivity issues, difficulty explaining concepts online, screen-sharing and device access problems, and lack of suitable resources for online one-to-one sessions. The desire for face-to-face interaction extended beyond sessions to group activities, cultural visits and community-based learning. While online delivery enabled flexibility and reach, it could not fully replace in-person contact; the most effective models combined online and face-to-face elements.

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Late matching compressed the programme into a shorter period, reducing the time available for relationship-building and language development. In Portugal, this was identified as the main structural issue, leading to recommendations to start earlier in the school year and spread sessions gradually. Late matching also reduced the opportunity for rematching when pairs proved incompatible: in Greece, where lack of common language was a problem, there was insufficient time to reassign pairs. Early matching and gradual phasing of sessions were consistently recommended as solutions.

Teaching resources were consistently the weakest element of the support system—too basic, too classroom-oriented and poorly suited to one-to-one mentoring—while the lack of face-to-face interaction, particularly in online delivery, limited trust and rapport building; late matching further compressed the programme, reducing time for relationship-building and leaving no room for rematching when pairs proved incompatible, with early matching, gradual phasing and more flexible, practical resources emerging as the key recommendations.

6.4. Institutional, Motivational and Structural Gaps

Some mentees lacked genuine interest or had unassessed psychological needs that affected engagement. Unassessed traumatic needs were identified in Greece as a factor affecting motivation and psychological readiness, suggesting some mentees needed more support than the programme was designed to provide. Lack of genuine interest was also reported in Greece, particularly where mentees had not been adequately informed beforehand, highlighting the importance of pre-programme orientation. Personal and family circumstances were key external factors in Malta, where health issues, relocation and family responsibilities contributed to withdrawal. Motivation and psychological readiness were therefore underassessed in some contexts, pointing to a need for better pre-matching assessment and more support for vulnerable mentees.

In Italy, mentors emphasised the need for clearer communication with schools and teachers, structured cooperation mechanisms and alignment with educational needs. In Portugal, the teacher-facilitator role was recommended as a way to support mentees' continued participation, suggesting schools can play a key role in retention. Stronger collaboration with schools was identified as a need in both countries: schools can serve as recruitment channels,

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retention supports and alignment mechanisms, but this requires structured cooperation and clear communication.

Gender imbalance was most acute in Spain, Greece and Italy, where female mentors vastly outnumbered male mentors while mentees were predominantly male. Austria approached a more balanced distribution (62% women, 38% men mentors), suggesting targeted recruitment can improve balance. Addressing this requires targeted recruitment strategies and possibly partnerships with organisations working with underrepresented groups.

Taken together, the challenges documented across the eight national pilots point to a clear conclusion: the difficulties that emerged during implementation were structural rather than relational. The quality of mentoring relationships and the commitment of participants remained high throughout, and the obstacles encountered did not undermine the fundamental value of the programme. What they did affect was its continuity, depth and reach. This distinction is important, because it means the programme's core model works, what needs strengthening is the scaffolding around it.

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7. Support Strategies Implemented

This section describes the strategies implemented across the eight national pilots to overcome the challenges identified in Section 6. The strategies were remarkably consistent across countries, reflecting a shared understanding of what works in mentoring relationships with migrant and refugee youth. They can be grouped into six broad categories: gradual trust-building; flexible and adaptive communication; group sessions and community-building; close coordination and ongoing monitoring; initial mentor training and preparation; and structural and logistical adaptations. Together, these strategies formed a coherent response to the challenges of language barriers, shyness, scheduling difficulties, retention, and resource gaps. Their effectiveness is evidenced by the consistently high satisfaction and relationship quality reported in Section 4.

7.1. Gradual Trust-Building and Flexible Communication

Gradual trust-building was the most universally implemented strategy across all eight countries. It was described as a step-by-step process of overcoming shyness and language barriers, respecting each pair's pace, and building confidence over time. Key features included: starting slowly, with the first sessions identified as the most sensitive phase (Spain, Italy, Austria); respecting each pair's pace without pressure for immediate results (Portugal, Austria); consistency and reliability through regular, predictable sessions (Austria); normalising mistakes by creating a safe environment where errors were accepted as part of learning (Greece); and celebrating small wins to build confidence (Italy). Gradual trust-building was not a single technique but a mindset that shaped the entire mentoring relationship, requiring patience, consistency, and a willingness to let the relationship develop organically rather than forcing intimacy or rapid progress.

Flexible and adaptive communication was the second most consistently implemented strategy. It involved adjusting language, activities, and approaches to meet the needs and interests of each mentee. Key features included: using bridge languages (English in Greece and Malta, translation tools where necessary); adapting to the mentee's language level, from very basic to more advanced (Italy, Greece); playful approaches, moving from structured to playful activities depending on interests and energy (Spain, Greece, Austria); incorporating the mentee's personal interests as a basis for activities and conversation (Italy, Austria); and adjusting session length and format, including flexibility about online versus in-person delivery (Austria, Malta).

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Flexible and adaptive communication was essential for maintaining engagement and motivation. It required mentors to read the situation, respond to the mentee's needs, and be willing to change approach when something was not working — particularly important in the early stages when language barriers and shyness were most acute.

7.2. Group Sessions and Close Coordination

Group sessions were implemented in all eight countries as a complement to individual mentoring, serving multiple purposes: team-building, reducing initial uncertainty, cultural exchange, strengthening bonds, re-engagement, and shared evaluation. Key features included: initial team-building to reduce uncertainty and build a sense of community from the start (Spain, Portugal, Greece, Italy, Austria); cultural activities such as traditional Basque sport (Spain), a guided tour of Mdina (Malta), and cultural visits (Italy, Austria, Romania); re-engagement to reactivate pairs that had lost momentum (Portugal); shared evaluation through a collaborative mural (Spain) and final closure sessions (Italy); weekly integration in Austria, which built group activities into the weekly structure; and Portugal's Infoday, identified as a decisive success factor that prevented several mentors from dropping out.

Group sessions were universally valued as a complement to individual mentoring, providing social interaction, informal language practice, emotional milestones, and a sense of belonging. The most effective models combined regular individual sessions with periodic group activities, with Austria's weekly format being the most intensive and Malta's single activity the least frequent. The consistent request across all countries was for more group activities, more face-to-face interaction, and more non-formal learning opportunities.

Close coordination and ongoing monitoring were identified as the backbone of the programme across all eight countries. Coordination teams provided monitoring, problem-solving, reassurance, and continuity. Key features included: regular contact through WhatsApp, calls, and in-person meetings; problem-solving when issues arose, such as matching incompatibilities, scheduling conflicts, or communication breakdowns; reassurance, particularly for young, inexperienced mentors needing guidance and emotional support; accessibility, with Austria's coordination team on-site at the fixed meeting location and Portugal's UCP providing support "almost 24/7"; safeguarding procedures for working with minors (Austria); and dual

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coordination, where two organisations shared coordination, identified as a key success factor for conflict resolution and reaching both mentors and mentees.

Coordination support was the most highly rated element of the support system across all countries: in Greece and Malta, 100% of mentors rated it as excellent; in Austria, 97.6% of mentors and 78.0% of mentees rated it as excellent. This suggests that investment in coordination is one of the most reliable ways to ensure programme quality.

7.3. Initial Training and Structural Adaptations

Initial mentor training was implemented in all countries and was consistently identified as a key success factor. Key features included: clarifying roles and expectations, helping mentors understand what was expected of them and what they could expect from the programme; building confidence, with mentors who participated actively in training demonstrating higher confidence; intercultural preparation covering intercultural awareness and communication; safeguarding procedures for working with minors; practical preparation providing tools and strategies for common challenges; and setting minimum commitment, as Greece used the second initial session to establish, which helped set expectations. Initial mentor training was universally recognised as essential, serving to build confidence, clarify expectations, prepare mentors for intercultural and linguistic challenges, and establish safeguarding frameworks. However, several countries recommended a more structured Session 0 to clarify objectives, roles, expectations, and tools from the outset.

Structural and logistical adaptations were implemented in several countries to overcome practical challenges. These included: flexible delivery (online, face-to-face, and hybrid options) to respond to practical constraints and family circumstances; a fixed meeting location at a VET organisation in Austria, which provided stability, reduced logistical barriers, and created continuity; predictable scheduling through Austria's fixed weekly format, creating a stable organisational framework; reduced administrative burden, with some countries' monthly summaries instead of after-every-session evaluations; institutional partnerships, with Italy's partnership between COSPE, University of Florence, secondary schools, and reception centres identified as highly effective; bridge languages and translation tools, with Greece using English as a bridge language and translation tools; and dual coordination, with Portugal's model (UCP + CDP) key to conflict resolution. The most effective adaptations were flexible delivery models,

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fixed locations, predictable scheduling, reduced administrative burden, and strong institutional partnerships, all of which required coordination teams to be responsive and creative in solving problems.

The principal strategies to overcome the challenges detected were:

- Gradual Trust-Building and Flexible Communication

- Group Sessions and Close Coordination

- Initial Training and Structural Adaptations

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8. Learning and Growth

This section examines the learning and growth reported by both mentors and mentees across the eight national pilots. The programme was designed not only to support mentees' language and social integration but also to foster personal and professional development for mentors. The findings demonstrate that the programme achieved mutual learning and growth, benefiting both parties in profound and often unexpected ways. The analysis covers mentor learning and growth, mentee learning and growth, and a synthesis of cross-cutting themes.

8.1. Mentor Learning and Growth

Mentors reported significant personal and professional growth across all pilot countries. High levels of meaningful or significant growth were reported consistently, with key skills including patience, active listening, communication, flexibility, adaptability, empathy and intercultural awareness, alongside professional skills such as teaching, mentoring, leadership and time management. Renewed motivation and a sense of professional purpose were also notable outcomes.

Intercultural and interpersonal learning was a core outcome for mentors across all countries. It included understanding the challenges faced by migrant and refugee youth, developing empathy and cultural sensitivity, gaining new cultural perspectives, building confidence in cross-cultural communication, and experiencing enriching cultural exchange.

A recurring theme was reciprocal learning — the idea that mentoring was a two-way process benefiting both parties. Mentors consistently reported that they learned as much as they taught, gaining new cultural perspectives, innovative teaching strategies and greater confidence. This challenges the traditional one-way model of mentoring and suggests that peer-to-peer, reciprocal relationships are more effective and satisfying for both parties. Some of the most powerful insights came from mentors themselves, such as the reflection that *"being a good mentor is much more about listening than giving advice all the time"*. Mentors gained practical wisdom about mentoring, communication and intercultural relationships that went beyond formal training, suggesting the programme was not only a service to mentees but also a learning opportunity for mentors with professional and personal value.

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8.2. Mentee Learning and Growth

Language improvement was the most consistently reported outcome for mentees across all pilot countries. In every country where data was collected, all mentees reported some improvement in language skills. Speaking and oral communication were the most frequently mentioned areas, and confidence in speaking was a recurring theme, with mentees reporting reduced fear of making mistakes. Listening comprehension, vocabulary, pronunciation, reading and writing were also mentioned in several countries.

Social skills and integration were core outcomes for mentees. The programme helped them form friendships, understand the host culture, build confidence in social situations, participate more actively in daily life, and develop independence and organisation. Academic support was a valuable but not universal outcome: where it was provided, it contributed to mentees' educational progress and confidence, suggesting mentoring programmes can play a role in supporting academic achievement, particularly for students navigating a new language and education system. Personal and emotional development was profound: mentees built self-confidence, reduced their fear of making mistakes, felt supported and empowered, developed a sense of belonging, and formed meaningful relationships.

Drawing the findings together, mentees reported key outcomes in language improvement (speaking, listening, vocabulary, pronunciation, reading, writing), increased confidence, social skills, cultural insight, academic support, emotional support, and independence.

The learning and growth reported across the eight national pilots reveals a programme that achieved mutual benefit for both mentors and mentees:

- Mentors grew personally and professionally. They developed patience, communication skills, intercultural awareness and confidence, and many reported renewed motivation and a sense of professional purpose. The most profound learning was often about listening rather than giving advice.
- Mentees improved their language skills and confidence. 100% reported language improvement, and most reported increased confidence, social skills and cultural understanding. For many, the programme provided a sense of support and empowerment that extended beyond language learning.

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- Learning was reciprocal. Both mentors and mentees reported gaining new perspectives, cultural understanding and personal growth. The peer-to-peer nature of the relationship — rather than a one-way transfer of knowledge — was a key feature of the programme's success.
- Growth extended beyond language. While language improvement was a core objective, the programme also fostered social integration, academic support, emotional development and intercultural understanding, all valued by both mentors and mentees.
- The programme created meaningful relationships. The most consistent finding across all countries was the value of the mentoring relationship itself. Mentors and mentees formed friendships, built trust and experienced enriching cultural exchange; these relationships were the foundation for all other outcomes.
- Learning was transformative. For many, the programme was not just a skills-building exercise but a transformative experience, with mentors reporting personal and professional growth and mentees reporting increased confidence, social integration and a sense of belonging.
- The programme's impact extends beyond its duration. Mentors and mentees reported outcomes that would continue to benefit them after the programme ended: language skills, confidence, friendships and intercultural understanding.

Language improvement was the most consistently reported outcome for mentees, while social integration, academic support and profound personal and emotional development rounded out the benefits they experienced. Mentors, in turn, grew personally and professionally, developing patience, communication skills, intercultural awareness and a renewed sense of purpose, with the deepest learning often being about listening rather than giving advice. Critically, this growth was reciprocal: the peer-to-peer nature of the relationship, rather than a one-way transfer of knowledge, was central to the programme's success. Ultimately, the impact extended well beyond language—fostering meaningful relationships, transformative experiences and a sense of belonging that would continue to benefit both mentors and mentees long after the programme ended.

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9. Best Practices Identified

This section consolidates the best practices identified across the eight national pilots. These are the strategies, approaches and features that were consistently associated with positive outcomes and that are recommended for replication in future editions. The best practices are grouped into nine categories.

1. Dual Coordination Models

Where two organisations shared coordination responsibility, this was consistently identified as a success factor. Splitting the coordination role allowed one partner to focus on institutional/academic reach and the other on community embeddedness, gave pairs two channels for support and conflict resolution, and combined complementary areas of expertise. This model is transferable to any future edition regardless of country context, provided the two partner organisations have clearly divided responsibilities.

2. Structured Initial Mentor Training

Preparatory training — covering communication skills, intercultural awareness, safeguarding and programme objectives — was implemented in all eight countries and was universally recognised as a critical success factor. It built mentor confidence, clarified roles and expectations, and created an early sense of community among mentors. The recurring recommendation for a more structured "Session 0" points to training as an area where further formalisation, rather than reinvention, would add value.

3. Close, Accessible Coordination Support

Coordination support was the most consistently highly rated element of the entire programme (64–100% "excellent" from mentors, 78–100% from mentees), and the evidence points to specific features that drove this: high availability and responsiveness (e.g. Portugal's near-24/7 WhatsApp contact), proactive monitoring rather than reactive problem-solving, and reassurance for young, inexperienced mentors. Coordination functioned as an emotional and relational resource, not merely an administrative one, and was identified as essential for retention.

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4. **Combining Individual and Group Formats**

Group sessions were universally valued as a complement to one-to-one mentoring, and the most intensive model — Austria's weekly group activities alongside individual sessions — was identified as a best practice. Group sessions served several distinct functions across the pilots: initial team-building, mid-programme "reactivation" of pairs that had lost momentum (Portugal's Infoday), cultural exchange, and closure/shared evaluation. The consistent cross-country demand for more group activities suggests this is an area with room to scale, not merely maintain.

5. **Gradual, Pace-Respecting Trust-Building**

The most universally implemented strategy across all eight pilots was a deliberate, unhurried approach to relationship-building: treating the first sessions as the most sensitive phase, respecting each pair's pace, normalising mistakes, and celebrating small wins. This was described less as a technique than as a mindset, and its consistency across very different institutional and cultural contexts suggests it is a transferable core principle of the mentoring model itself.

6. **Flexible, Adaptive Communication**

Adjusting language, format and activities to the mentee's needs — using bridge languages where necessary, moving between structured and playful activities, and incorporating mentees' personal interests — was identified as essential for sustaining engagement, particularly in the early, language-barrier-heavy stages of the relationship.

7. **Structural and Logistical Stability**

Austria's model — a fixed meeting location, a predictable weekly schedule, and monthly (rather than per-session) evaluations — reduced both logistical barriers for participants and administrative burden for mentors, and is highlighted as best practice on both counts. More broadly, flexible delivery (online/face-to-face/hybrid) combined with a stable "anchor" format emerged as more effective than either purely online or rigid in-person delivery alone.

8. **Early and Careful Matching**

Countries with earlier matching processes and longer implementation periods (Austria, Malta) showed stronger relationship depth and lower dropout, while late matching (Portugal, and to

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some extent Greece) compressed the time available for trust-building and reduced the possibility of rematching incompatible pairs. Early, careful matching — including pre-matching assessment of language, availability and psychological readiness — is a recurring condition for success rather than an optional refinement.

9. Institutional Partnerships Bridging Schools and Community

Italy's partnership structure (COSPE, University of Florence, secondary schools and reception centres) and Portugal's recommended teacher-facilitator role both point to schools as an underused lever for recruitment, retention and alignment with mentees' educational needs. Structured cooperation with schools — not just informal contact — was identified as a gap worth closing.

1. Dual Coordination Models
2. Structured Initial Mentor Training
3. Close, Accessible Coordination Support
4. Combining Individual and Group Formats
5. Gradual, Pace-Respecting Trust-Building
6. Flexible, Adaptive Communication
7. Structural and Logistical Stability
8. Early and Careful Matching
9. Institutional Partnerships Bridging Schools and Community

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10. Key Recommendations

The recommendations below are organised around the structural challenges identified, and are intended to apply across future editions of the programme regardless of national context, while noting where a challenge was more acute in specific countries.

1. Programme Duration and Timing

- Extend minimum programme duration. In every country where mentors and mentees were asked, participants requested a longer programme. A minimum duration closer to 7–10 months (the range associated with the strongest relationship outcomes in Austria and Malta) should be the target rather than the exception.
- Start matching earlier. Late matching (Portugal's principal structural issue, and a contributing factor in Greece) should be avoided by beginning recruitment and matching before the start of the relevant academic or programme year, with sessions phased in gradually rather than compressed.
- Avoid compressing sessions into a short timeframe. Portugal's high session count over a short period did not translate into stronger outcomes; sustained engagement over a longer period is preferable to intensity within a short one.

2. Matching and Retention

- Introduce structured pre-matching assessment, covering language level, availability, and — where relevant — psychological readiness, to reduce the incompatibilities that drove dropout in Malta and Greece.
- Build in a rematching mechanism for pairs identified early as incompatible (particularly on language grounds), rather than only addressing this reactively once problems have emerged.
- Set clear attendance/cancellation expectations from the outset, addressing the late cancellations and no-shows reported as a major issue in Greece.
- Diversify and expand the mentor pool in contexts where it is narrow or itself precarious (e.g. Malta's reliance on international students with competing commitments), to reduce mentor-side attrition.

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3. **Coordination**

- Preserve and formalise the dual-coordination model where feasible, given its consistent association with stronger conflict resolution and broader reach into both mentor and mentee communities.
- Maintain high-responsiveness coordination channels (e.g. WhatsApp/phone-based contact) as a standard feature rather than a national variation, given how strongly this was linked to participant satisfaction and retention.
- Reduce administrative burden through monthly rather than per-session evaluation where appropriate, following Austria's model, while retaining enough data granularity for programme monitoring.

4. **Teaching Resources and Tools**

- Redesign mentor-facing materials specifically for one-to-one, non-classroom mentoring. The most common and consistent criticism — echoed most strongly in Spain and Greece — was that materials were too classroom-oriented, too basic, and not adaptable across language levels.
- Co-design resources with mentors, drawing on their direct experience of what is practical and usable in live sessions.
- Develop resources specifically for online one-to-one delivery, addressing the gap identified in Greece, Italy and Malta, including simplified platforms and reduced technical friction.
- Review mentee-facing resources separately from mentor-facing ones, given the notable gap between mentor and mentee satisfaction with the same materials in Portugal and Malta.

5. **Language and Communication Support**

- Formalise the use of bridge languages (as used in Greece and Malta) as a recognised, supported strategy rather than an improvised solution, including guidance and translation tools for mentors.
- Front-load language and communication strategy training, since the initial sessions were consistently identified as the most sensitive phase across all countries.

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6. **Group Activities**

- Increase the number and frequency of group sessions, in direct response to the consistent cross-country demand for more group and face-to-face interaction.
- Use group sessions deliberately as a re-engagement tool for pairs that have lost momentum, following Portugal's evidence that this function was decisive in preventing mentor dropout.

7. **Mentor Training and Support**

- Introduce a structured "Session 0" at the start of the programme to clarify objectives, roles, expectations and tools — a gap identified independently in Spain, Greece and Italy.
- Establish ongoing peer supervision or support groups for mentors, not only front-loaded initial training, to sustain confidence and address difficulties as they arise mid-programme.
- Institutionalise mid-programme feedback checkpoints, particularly for less experienced mentors, following Greece's recommendation.

8. **Gender Balance**

- Develop targeted recruitment strategies to attract more male mentors, given the persistent and significant gender asymmetry between predominantly female mentors and predominantly male mentees in Spain, Greece, Bulgaria and Italy. Austria's comparatively balanced distribution (62%/38%) suggests this is achievable through deliberate outreach rather than being a fixed feature of the volunteer pool.

9. **Schools and Institutional Alignment**

- Formalise cooperation mechanisms with schools, including a defined teacher-facilitator or liaison role to support recruitment, retention and educational alignment.

10. **Evaluation and Data Comparability**

- Standardise evaluation tools and frequency across future national pilots where feasible, to improve cross-country comparability while balancing this against the administrative-burden lessons learned from Austria's shift to monthly summaries.

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Taken together, these recommendations point to a single underlying conclusion: the mentoring model itself — one-to-one relationships, grounded in training, coordination and gradual trust-building — is sound and does not require redesign. What requires strengthening is the scaffolding around it: duration, matching timelines, resource quality, and structural support for both mentors and mentees

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