



# GOOD PRACTICE INVENTORY

Exploiting Potentials of

Social Enterprises through Standardized

European Evaluation

and Development System

## SOCIAL SEEDS

Interreg Europe



SME competitiveness



European Union  
European Regional  
Development Fund

## I. GOOD PRACTICE COLLECTION

### 1. Name of the good practice (100 characters)

Estonian Blind Masseurs Association

### 2. Overview (2000 characters)

The purpose of the Estonian Blind Masseurs Association (hereinafter the EBMA) is to assist visually impaired people in entering the open labour market by means of providing them with masseur's training and qualification. This is an initiative of the people with special needs themselves.

The EBMA is a good example of a social enterprise that has all of the following:

- a specific social impact indicator (i.e. the number of visually impaired people who have found permanent employment). The majority of the masseurs trained by the organisation work, which amounts to almost 100% employment and is a rare phenomenon in the given target group.
- a diversified and balanced revenue model (selling services to individuals and organisations, providing public services primarily in relation with labour market services, project financing, as well as the involvement of individuals' and organisations' donations).

The income of the organisation is 109,875.84 euros (2015), of which sales revenue amounts to 30,200 euros. There are 90 blind masseurs in Estonia (2016), and the EBMA has trained 63 of these. There are 21 blind masseurs employed by the EBMA Massage Centre. (2016). The number of additional newly trained blind masseurs is about 8—10 people each 1.5 year.

The primary social activity of the EBMA is providing visually impaired people with masseur's training and qualification as well continuing education. Visually impaired people need special training methods as regular training courses with the use of visual materials are not exactly suitable for them.

The EBMA also provides necessary supplementary services to blind masseurs (entrepreneurship training and counselling for those who are about to start working as masseurs, mentoring and peer support, administration service, leasing of massage facilities). In addition, the association works in order to raise the awareness of prospective customers and the general public about the value of visually impaired people as workforce.

### 3. Abstract (500 characters)

The purpose of the Estonian Blind Masseurs Association (hereinafter the EBMA) is to assist visually impaired people in entering the open labour market by means of providing them with masseur's training and qualification.

The EBMA has:

- a specific social impact indicator (i.e. the number of visually impaired people who have found permanent employment). The employment of those who have completed the training is almost 100%.
- a diversified and balanced revenue model (selling services to individuals and organisations, providing public services primarily in relation with labour market services, project financing, as well as the involvement of individuals' and organisations' donations).

#### 4. Coherence with the Dimension of the Social Enterprise Inventory

*Social innovation (including services)*

*Social impact and measurement opportunities*

*Cooperation atmosphere (PPPs)*

*Regulatory frameworks and bottom-up grassroots*

*Social entrepreneurship skills and competencies*

*Access to finance (including external funding)*

*Access to market (including the internationalization approach)*

*New(ly) established social enterprise model*

*Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_*

*You can tick more than one dimension, but emphasize which one is the most significant!*

#### 5. Policy Instrument connected with the good practice

Name: the framework for implementation of EU cohesion policy and for the utilization of the EU cohesion and structural funds in Estonia for 2014-2020

Focus on priority axes: 2.1. "Qualifications and skills meeting the needs of society and the labour markets" 2.2 « Increasing social inclusion »and 2.3." Improvement of access to, and prevention of dropping out of, the labour market" – all co-funded by ESF

Managing Authority in charge: Foundation Innove

The potential policy instruments to be added:

- Work ability reform: linking social entrepreneurship with the work ability reform. Social entrepreneurship which provides employment for people with special needs or fosters their employment by means of supporting services directly supports the achievement of the work ability reform objectives.

- Entrepreneurship policy: guiding visually impaired people to entrepreneurship and supporting the creation of jobs. Some of the visually impaired people trained by the EBMA have started working as sole proprietors.

The following policy instruments are also related to the involvement of visually impaired people and increasing their employment opportunities:

- Development Plan of Tallinn 2009–2027, chapter 6, main objective 4, sub-objective 4.1., because the EBMA is physically located in Tallinn;
- Agreement on cooperation of and provision of social security of the disabled and people with health impairments.

## 6. Location

Primarily in Tallinn where the centre is situated. There are members from all over Estonia: 1 from Hiiumaa, 2 from Pärnu, 1 from Tartu, 1 from Järva-Jaani; see the web page for details.

## 7. Start date (tentative)

The association was established in February 1999 in order to organise further training courses for working blind masseurs. The operation was expanded in the spring of 2013.

The first massage room was located in the building of the North-Estonian Association of the Blind, and its renovation was financed from the regional investment foundation. In 2003 some facilities that needed renovation and were located in the Tõnismäe clinic, which is a part of the East-Tallinn Central Hospital were allocated to the EBMA; the money for renovation was provided by Tallinn City, which also provided rent compensation later.

In 2013, the association moved in the building of the North-Estonian Association of the Blind once again, with the renovation financed partly by the donations to the 2011 “Jõulutunnel” TV show, partly by the regional investment foundation and partly from the association’s earnings. Renovation has not been completed yet, and donations for renovation are also being raised in Swedbank’s “I Love to Help” donation environment.

During 2012-2013, when the new EBMA centre building was prepared and opened in the building at Tondi 8a, one of important supporters was the National Foundation of Civil Society, whose project “Development of the Training and Massage Centre for Blind Masseurs” contributed to the growth spurt of the association.

## 8. Total revenue / income created / personnel employed by the good practice (EUR)

The income of the organisation is 109,875.84 euros (2015), of which sales revenue amounts to 30,200 euros. There are 4 administrative workers and 21 contractual masseurs. In the recent years, EBMA’s protected employment service has also been receiving 30,000 euros of aid per year from the Council of the Gambling Tax in the form of project-based work. There were no public procurements in 2015, and in 2016 the association has successfully

participated in the protected employment service tender which allows it to provide the long-term protected employment service to 15 visually impaired people. The number of masseurs' customers amounts to 350 per month (2016).

In more detail, the EBMA's revenue model consists of the following components.

- Business income from renting out facilities and mediating massage services: at the moment 21 blind masseurs work in 5 massage rooms in the EBMA centre. The centre has an average of 350 customers per month. At the moment, the EBMA has 24 external customer companies (where masseurs provide services on the company's premises), 11 of which are government institutions and 13 are private companies. It is the flexibility that is especially worth attention because masseurs go on site to provide services to corporate customers in various sectors (ministries, large companies).
- Providing masseur's initial and further training to visually impaired clients of the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa).
- Renting out premises to training facilities and rehabilitation institutions.
- Operating costs have been financed from the projects supported by the Council of the Gambling Tax.

## 9. Challenges

As far as moving into the centre's premises in 2013 is concerned, the main challenge was the renovation because there was no financial aid for that purpose at that point. It is namely for the renovation of the premises that the start-up support could have been used: this is an ongoing challenge. It seems that there are no relevant support schemes for NGOs.

Judging by the construction company's estimate, at the moment we need 49,000 euros for the complete renovation of the Centre's facilities, and, in addition, approximately 4,000 euros for the installation of the automatic fire alarm system.

The business income that the massage centre earns by selling services has not so far been sufficient to cover all the operating expenses of the organisation. Financing in relation to the renovation and opening of the centre's new premises in March of 2013 needed to be obtained from projects and donations (e.g., the National Foundation of Civil Society, the Council of the Gambling Tax, Tallinn Social Welfare and Health Care Department, the Olympic Online grant) during the two years before. This is why business income amounted to 26.4% of the total income in 2011 and to 17.6% in 2012. Starting with 2013, the share of business income has increased significantly due to the stabilisation of operating costs.

As the point was to keep the prices of the centre's services provided to masseurs low, the masseurs pay 20% of their revenue to the centre. However, the above does not cover the centre's expenses, especially personnel costs. As there are 30 masseurs all over Estonia, the 4 administrative workers employed at the moment (3 of whom work full time) are not enough.

## 10. Would this programme work well in another European context?

Basically, it is rather transferable to EU states and other countries. A similar centre could be established in another European state; there are unlikely to be any major obstacles in terms of legislation or the functioning of the social system.

AKTIVO 2000 united blind masseurs all over Europe 15 years ago, but its activity has subsided. In Sweden, the operation of the blind masseurs' association is very well organised; the same is true for Italy, but there it only covers the people who have been visually impaired since childhood. In this respect, the operation of the centre in Estonia is better organised: it includes those whose impairment occurred later in life. There is also a similar service in Finland, and it used to be very popular. A relevant association operates in Poland as well. In Latvia, such an organisation has not been established yet; Latvian specialists visited us 5 years ago to study our experience, but there is no information as to the existence of such an association.

## 11. Activities (2000 characters)

In order to give a systematic description of the EBMA's activities in the context of the organisation's impact goals, we are presenting two theories of change which the EBMA has used as guidance to choose its activities.

**Desired impact: visually impaired people fulfil their potential as masseurs, working flexibly and in accordance with their interests, abilities and capabilities**

### TARGET GROUP

Unemployed visually impaired residents of Estonia who are interested in masseur's professional training.

### PROBLEM

Visually impaired people cannot find employment because they need adjustments of the working environment and training in the suitable profession with regard to their special needs.

### ACTIVITIES

Professional training and further training, basic knowledge about running a business, mentoring and peer support, administrative management of the services, preparation of accounting documentation, opportunity to rent the necessary facilities.

### EXPECTED IMPACT

The rate of employment of visually impaired people and their coping will increase according to the respective capabilities.

### DIRECT IMPACT OF THE EBMA

Of the people who have taken part in the association's activities, 90% are working as masseurs (even if it is part-time employment of at least 10 hours per week) a year after joining the association.

#### PREREQUISITE

Provided that market obstacles (high training costs and expensive equipment) are eliminated, visually impaired in working as masseurs.

**Desired impact: professional blind masseurs have an opportunity to survive in the open market conditions if they want to try it and have the potential**

#### TARGET GROUP

Blind masseurs who have had initial training and have obtained the relevant certificate.

#### PROBLEM

Numerous visually impaired people cannot find customers because they lack administrative management and entrepreneurship skills. Neither do they have resources for equipping the relevant facilities, marketing (finding clients) and upgrading their qualification.

#### ACTIVITIES

Further training, providing administrative management services and opportunities of renting the facilities in the EBMA massage centre and in other locations on the premises of external customers (the masseur is provided with a portable table and other equipment).

#### EXPECTED IMPACT

Visually impaired people can maintain and expand their customer bases and have an entrepreneurial status for providing services to customers in the masseur's preferred location (at home or in the EBMA's facilities).

#### DIRECT IMPACT OF THE EBMA

Of the people who have taken part in the association's activities, 70% are working as masseurs with moderate work load (on average 20 hours per week) three years after joining the association.

#### PREREQUISITES

If the blind masseur provides high-quality services in properly equipped facilities, customers who have visited them once often become loyal clients.

## 12. Achievements so far

Indicators of the success of societal benefits

- Total number of blind masseurs: 90 (2016) (the EBMA has trained 63 of these)
- The number of blind masseurs working in the EBMA massage centre: 21 (2016)

- The number of new blind masseurs to be added: 8-10 every 1.5 year

The organisation's primary achievements are the following

- The EBMA has created a support system to help people who have lost their eyesight achieve coping with everyday activities through rehabilitation and become gradually engaged in regular life again. (Visually impaired people who would like to become masseurs undergo masseur's training in the EBMA centre, then have apprenticeship in massage there and can start working in the EBMA's protected employment centre after completing the training course. This allows maximum employment of visually impaired people who have completed the training to be ensured.)
- The EBMA provides visually impaired people with a package service. We conduct initial training and further training courses for masseurs and provide associated services (counselling in entrepreneurship, mentoring, peer support, administrative management service, renting out massage facilities).
- Starting with 2016, the organisation has also provided the protected employment service. We have been persistently adjusting the attitude of society to visually impaired workers to make it friendlier. (The EBMA centre makes the services of blind masseurs available to anyone, thus raising the public's awareness about blind employees as qualified specialists.)

Most of the blind masseurs trained by us work, making the employment rate reach almost 100%, which is very rare for this target group. First, the candidates come to the training courses, then have apprenticeship in massage on site and start working right after that, which eliminates the risk of dropping out. If someone gets behind the group, individual work is performed until they catch up with the others, so our activities are organised on a case-by-case basis.

Our students have good professional skills, which helps them find employment in GP medical centres all over Estonia, etc. Still, the centre helps them, counselling about all the available opportunities; for example, we can recommend apprenticeship provided by the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa).

### **13. Strengths, weaknesses, difficulties and lessons learned**

The lack of investment grants suitable for social enterprises and other relevant opportunities.

We must constantly monitor our financial calculations to make ends meet.

While an organisation conducting the training courses does not guarantee that its students will find employment, the centre is required to provide employment for each trainee because otherwise the centre will lose customers.

Written advertising does not work; information is spread by word of mouth.

Customer service must also be adequate; negative aspects are amplified.

#### 14. Tips for success

When the EBMA entered the market, the time was right and there was the required market niche. Its peculiar characteristic is that it is a blind masseur who provides service to the customer: some customers do not want the masseur to see them; so confidentiality is important.

Consistency is significant: preparation, rehabilitation and then immediate employment.

#### 15. Dissemination and sustainability

At the moment financed by the public sector:

- Current financing from Tallinn City Government (renting the premises)
- Council of the Gambling Tax (salary of the administrative employees)

If the above stopped financing, the centre would run into great difficulties, primarily with paying the rent and paying salary to the administrative employees.

#### 16. Source – URL or Facebook

[www.pimemassoorid.ee](http://www.pimemassoorid.ee)

#### 17. Contact person and details

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