

Employment House: developing a rural social enterprise model for inclusion and local job creation in Lithuania

SUMMARY

In the remote Lithuanian village of Tulpiakiemis, the Employment House initiative helps residents access paid work locally. It provides workspaces in modular containers where they can carry out manual tasks outsourced from companies. With growing demand for its services, Employment House expanded in 2020, creating 2 full-time jobs and engaging 11 people in work. The initiative received national recognition in 2021 with a Lithuanian Rural Network award.



CONTEXT

Tulpiakiemis is a remote village in Ukmergė district, around 30 km from the nearest town. Buses only run a few days per week and residents have limited access to private cars. This makes it difficult to commute to jobs and services outside the village. The area has a high share of older residents, low-income households and people with limited work experience or skills, while also facing outmigration of younger people, a lack of local employers, social isolation and low community engagement.

Residents who want to work often cannot reach employment opportunities. Employment House opened to help provide access to work locally. It provides workspaces, housed in modular containers, where people from socially vulnerable groups carry out manual tasks that machines cannot perform. Growing demand for these services meant there was a need to expand.



OBJECTIVES

- > Create local employment opportunities in a remote rural area where commuting is difficult;
- > Reduce social exclusion by engaging people facing barriers to employment in accessible work;
- > Test a practical and adaptable rural social business model that could be sustained beyond the project period.



Themes: LEADER/CLLD, access to services, social inclusion, social economy, rural revitalisation

Country: Lithuania

Organisations:

- > VšĮ 'Užimtumo namai', civil society organisation
- > Ukmergė Region Local Action Group, LAG
- > Ukmergė district municipal administration, public authority

Start & end date: 02/2020 - 08/2020

Budget: EUR 42 817

Funding sources:

- > European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)
- > National public funding
- > Private contribution

Website: <https://ukmergesvvg.lt/projektai/2016-2023-m-igyvendinti-projektai/igyvendinti-leader-19-2-5/pareiskejas-vsi-uzimtumo-namai/>

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ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

Between February and August 2020, the project 'Development of Social Business by Užimtumo namai' expanded Employment House, along with the social enterprise activities carried out by the Užimtumo namai. This included:

- > **Providing more workspaces:** additional modular containers were installed, equipped with workstations, a break room, sanitary facilities and a storage area;
- > **Securing work through subcontracting:** the organisation obtained orders from companies for manual tasks that can be outsourced and are not easily automated, such as assembling calendars, putting together magazines and SIM cards, and sewing/packing;
- > **Ensuring accessibility and flexibility:** work was organised to allow people to participate according to their availability. Užimtumo namai employs people under business licenses as the number who work each day varies and compensation depends on the volume of orders and the amount of work performed by each person;
- > **Targeting people facing barriers to work:** priority was given to residents with limited access to commuting or those re-entering employment, including older people, low-income residents, women with care responsibilities, people with limited skills or work experience, and long-term unemployed/inactive people.

Užimtumo namai carried out the initiative with EU, national and private co-financing. The project was implemented under the Ukmergė Local Action Group's local development strategy, through the LEADER measure 'Creation and Development of NGO Social Business'.



RESULTS

- > **2 full-time jobs** were created during the project.
- > **11 socially vulnerable residents** were directly **engaged in work** during the implementation period.
- > Participation increased after the project, **growing from fewer than 10 people** working at Employment House **to more than 20 people**.
- > The **initiative received national recognition** in 2021, winning first place in the 'Well-being Creators' category of the **Future Village Creators Awards**, organised by the Lithuanian Rural Network.
- > As the volume of work increased, Užimtumo namai later relocated operations to the town of Ukmergė, **organising transport for workers from surrounding rural areas**, including people with disabilities.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

- > **Bring work closer to people:** organising work locally can be effective where transport is limited and commuting is difficult.
- > **Stay flexible:** adapting hours and participation to people's availability helped involve residents with different daily constraints.
- > **Small investments can unlock social impact:** the initiative shows that a modest LEADER-supported set-up can deliver tangible outcomes in a remote area.
- > **Secure a flow of work orders:** cooperation with private companies was important to ensure a continuous flow of tasks.
- > **Plan for growth:** as demand and work volumes rise, the operating model may need to adapt (e.g. location and transport arrangements).



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