Online Buddies for Job Seekers: A Field Experiment

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Abstract

We design an online platform to connect unemployed job seekers with 'buddies': former job seekers who recently found employment. We focus on job seekers who search in occupations with poor prospects and buddies who successfully switched occupations. In a randomized controlled trial, we evaluate the impact of access to the platform on labor market outcomes. We find sizable effects. Thirteen to 18 months after getting access, initially unemployed job seekers are 6 percentage points (11%) more likely to be employed and earn €226 more per month than those without access. The positive impact is concentrated among the long-term unemployed.

Keywords: Job search, occupational mobility, randomized experiment, role models
JEL codes: J62, J64, C93

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Searching for a job is a rather complex activity that involves a range of specific tasks such as identifying suitable job opportunities, preparing a resume and application package, navigating interviews, etc. All these steps are unusual for most people, and are likely to bring most job seekers out of their comfort zone (Belot et al., 2024). Moreover, because job search is a temporary and transient state, there are few opportunities to build a stock of knowledge and experience on how to search.

Social connections have long been recognized as an important resource for unemployed job seekers to overcome these challenges by providing information about particular jobs, about preferences for working in new jobs, or about strategies for finding jobs (see, e.g., Ioannides and Loury, 2004; Lalive et al., 2023; Topa, 2011, for surveys). While this is intellectually interesting, little effort has been devoted in economic research or by employment agencies to enhance such social connections: social connections tend to be viewed as part of the "informal labor market" that exists separately from the "formal labor market" represented by formal job ads and the work of employment agencies. Yet, employment agencies have access to an important resource to facilitate social connections: former job seekers. Thousands of individuals leave unemployment each month, of which some might be willing to form social connections with those who have not yet been able to do so. Such connections seem difficult to make for unemployed job seekers, evidenced by the fact that they are less well-connected to the employed (Chetty et al., 2022a,b; Dustmann et al., 2016; Faberman et al., 2019).

In this paper, we propose and evaluate a digital tool designed to support unemployed job seekers in their job search by connecting them with 'buddies', i.e., former successful job seekers. We developed the tool, an online platform that matches job seekers to buddies, in collaboration with the Dutch public employment service. Access to the platform was randomized to study its impact. For this initial study, we focus on job seekers searching in occupations with poor employment prospects, while the buddies are former job seekers who have recently switched occupations. These buddies are therefore able to share insights both on how it feels to switch occupation (preferences) and strategies to find jobs in new occupations (actions) with the job seekers who face a tough labor market in their preferred occupation. We did not provide monetary compensation in order to attract intrinsically motivated buddies and to ensure the public employment services could roll out the platform at larger scale (if successful) without incurring significant costs.

Through the platform, job seekers and buddies can connect and engage in conversation. We only provide general guidance on interactions, and job seekers and buddies are free to interact as they wish, online or in other ways. We deliberately do not monitor or intervene in the conversations to foster open and honest exchanges. Instead, we collect information via surveys to get a sense of what the interactions involved.

We evaluate the impact of the intervention using administrative data. Our analysis sample consists of 524 unemployed job seekers. Of the treated, 53% created an account and 19% found a buddy. We find that job seekers who got access to the platform achieved significantly better labor market outcomes in the 18 months following the intervention. While initial differences are insignificant, we find that 13 to 18 months after the treatment those who were invited to join the platform are 6 percentage points (11%) more likely to be employed than the control group, and receive €226 (16%) more in monthly earnings. Cumulative over the entire 18 months of the study, the treatment group earns €2,185 more than the control group (11.4%). The delay in impact is likely to be related to the length of unemployment duration. For those who were longer-term unemployed (over 17 weeks) at the time of the intervention, impacts are immediate and large: employment increases by 9 percentage points (mostly driven by employment in stable jobs that last for more than six months), and cumulative labor earnings over the course of the study increase by over €5,000. We find no evidence of changes in motivation to search for work or in the volume of job applications. We do observe that the control group reports a declining number and breadth of occupations of interest, while the treatment group maintains a steady level, pointing towards a channel that helps job seekers maintain a broad outlook.

As stated, the inspiration for the platform comes from evidence that personal connections and social support matter in job search. There are several reasons why this may be the case. First, buddies could help alleviate psychological barriers related to job search. When considering other occupations, job seekers may feel that they lack familiarity, or perceive the potential transition as a threat to their identity (Ibarra, 1999; Lim et al., 2019; Ulfsdotter Eriksson and Linde, 2014). Second, buddies could help job seekers navigate the job search process in general and even help them identify suitable opportunities. There is indeed evidence that many job seekers find jobs through personal connections (Bachmann and Baumgarten, 2013; Caliendo et al., 2015; Cingano and Rosolia, 2012; Franzen and Hangartner, 2006; Granovetter, 1973, 1995). Buddies could enlarge

the networks of the job seekers in a relevant way and increase their chances of finding employment (Bramoullé and Saint-Paul, 2010). Finally, buddies could also act as enforcers of a social norm related to job search (Kondo and Shoji, 2019). Some of the above tasks may also be performed by caseworkers. However, job seekers tend to have infrequent contact with them and may thus not get the same benefits. Additionally, caseworkers may be harder for job seekers to "identify with", and their supervisory role may prohibit job seekers from sharing relevant details that might make them look bad.

Our work contributes to the growing literature on active labor market policies (see, e.g., Card et al., 2018 for an overview), and specifically to recent work exploring the potential for digital tools to support job search (see, e.g., Altmann et al., 2022; Bächli et al., 2025; Belot et al., 2026; Bied et al., 2023; Le Barbanchon et al., 2023). These studies focus on informational constraints (i.e., which occupation should I look for work in? Which firms are likely to be a good fit?) or job recommendation algorithms. The goal here is broader; to provide job seekers with connections to other individuals who have successfully found employment and can help them with a range of issues.

It is related to work on role models and mentoring interventions targeting students. A first strand of this literature shows that role models can have a large impact on students' decisions to exert effort (Riley, 2024) or enroll in certain courses (Del Carpio and Guadalupe, 2021; Porter and Serra, 2020). Our intervention includes a video of nine role models who changed occupations sometime in the recent past, in which they share their experiences. More intensive, person-to-person interventions have also been shown to increase aspirations and academic effort exerted, reflected by an increase likelihood to enroll in academically oriented tracks (Biroli et al., 2024; Falk et al., 2026). In addition, there is evidence that such person-to-person interventions increase confidence in skills (Kosse et al., 2024). Mentors can also be useful in guiding the school-to-work transition for students in vocational programs in developing countries by correcting initially overoptimistic beliefs and encouraging persistence (Alfonsi et al., 2024).

Our idea shares a similar spirit, which is to create connections between a population in a vulnerable situation and others who have experienced success and whom they can relate to. The population is however very different. The mean age of job seekers in our sample is 48 years old; they are not 'fresh graduates' looking for a first job. To our knowledge, this is the first study targeting a much

older population. Of further relevance is a strand of literature focusing on "job seeker support groups" (see e.g., Azrin et al., 1975; Broder et al., 2025). These differ from our intervention in that they study the impact of support from other job seekers. Critically, these peers are in the same situation and may not be able to share any experiences about making a successful transition to (different) employment. Moreover, they may compete with each other for jobs.

Our intervention highlights how employment agencies could use a low-cost digital tool to utilize a resource that they have ample access to: former job seekers who managed to find a new job. If some of these are willing to interact with those that have not yet managed to find a new job, our intervention suggests there are large possible gains.

1 Experiment

1.1 The intervention: overstapbuddy.nl

The goal of our intervention is to facilitate interactions between (i) job seekers searching in occupations with poor prospects (identified by a low 'job finding score'; a metric computed by the Dutch public employment service) who are interested in switching occupations, and (ii) individuals who recently found employment and switched occupations (i.e., buddies). To achieve these goals, we designed an online platform, and hired a software development company to build it. The platform provides a way for job seekers to find a buddy and supports an online chat functionality through which conversations can take place. We named the platform 'overstapbuddy.nl'.[1] Beyond the opportunity to chat with a buddy, we also included a professionally edited video of nine individuals who share their experience transitioning to a different occupation (see Supplemental Appendix F for the video transcript).

Buddies were recruited through a survey that was part of a previous experiment (Belot et al., 2025) and via LinkedIn. Recruitment specifically targeted people who recently found employment in a different occupation than their former occupation. Job seekers were randomly allocated to treatment and control in ways we explain below.

[1]The name of the platform is a combination of two words: 'overstap' and 'buddy'. 'Overstap' means transition, in the sense of an occupational transition, and buddy holds the same meaning as it does in English.

The platform has a number of features to help job seekers find suitable buddies, and to connect with them. Screenshots of the relevant screens are provided in the Supplemental Appendix. First, job seekers and buddies can register ('sign up') on the platform (see Figure C1) and create a profile with their first name, age, gender, and province of residence, all of which are publicly displayed. Job seekers are also asked to state their former occupation, and a set of occupations they are interested in. Buddies are asked about their previous and current occupations. Lastly, both are encouraged to provide a brief description of their (expected) experience on the labor market. As we describe in more detail in Section 1.2, job seekers received an invitation to sign up only after all buddies had signed up.

Once job seekers create an account on the platform, they are redirected to the homepage, which includes a link to the page to search for a buddy and the video compilation of former job seekers discussing their experience transitioning to a new occupation (see Figure C2). On the buddy search page (Figure C3), job seekers see the profiles of up to seven buddies they can connect with. They see the first names, previous occupation, current occupation, province of residence and labor market experience description. The reason for restricting the number of buddies each job seeker sees is twofold. First, it avoids congestion. Second, it provides us with an instrument to assess the effectiveness of our treatment by occupational distance to the buddy.[2] Job seekers can send a contact request to up to three buddies (see Figure C4).

Upon receiving a contact request from a job seeker, buddies receive an email and are asked to accept or reject the request. Buddies can match with at most five job seekers. Once a buddy accepts the request from a job seeker, the job seeker is notified and appears in the buddy's contact list and vice versa. The job seeker and the buddy can then both initiate the first conversation.

Job seekers and buddies have a number of ways to interact. Each buddy-job seeker pair has a dedicated chat window (Figure C5) that they can use to send messages. This chat window also contains a button to schedule a meeting (see Figure C6). The initiator can propose a time, method of communication (chat or call), and provide their phone number. The receiving party can then reject or accept the meeting. Of course, job seekers and buddies can also informally agree to a call through the chat function. For privacy reasons, we did not record the content of the exchange between job seeker and buddy on the platform; only the

[2] As we show in Section 2.1 we unfortunately lack statistical power to exploit this feature.

number of characters sent.

1.2 Sample and Recruitment

1.2.1 Buddies

We recruited buddies in two ways. First, we approached all successful job finders from a previous experiment (Belot et al., 2025) that indicated they would be willing to share their experiences with other job seekers. Second, members of the research team created a LinkedIn post to attract buddies.[3] Since we aimed to recruit buddies that were intrinsically motivated to help job seekers, and to assess the feasibility of rolling out the platform at low cost, we did not offer any monetary compensation. Potential buddies received information on the goal of the platform, how to sign up, and were told that they would be contributing to academic research. We organized two 'information sessions' buddies could participate in to receive more information about what their participation would involve, as well as advice on how to be a good buddy. Beyond being informative, we believed these sessions would increase their commitment to the platform. A week after the information sessions, those who indicated interest received an email stating that they could sign up to the platform. In this email, we reiterated the goal of the platform and shared two videos from the information session for those who could not attend.

1.2.2 Job seekers

Job seekers were recruited in two steps. First, we sent an information message about the platform to all eligible job seekers: those registered with the Dutch public employment service as primarily searching in one of 31 occupations with poor job-finding prospects.[4] The message contained a brief description of the platform, and a direct link job seekers could click on to express interest in joining the platform. We further explained that spots were limited and that we could therefore not guarantee a spot. For the full text, please see Supplemental Appendix D.2. Second, two weeks after the initial email, we selected a random 50% of those who indicated interest in the platform to create an account (see

[3]For the full (translated) text of this post, see Supplemental Appendix D.1.

[4]In addition, we required participants to (i) have completed an online resume, (ii) have sufficient written and spoken Dutch language skills and (iii) have at least 90 days of unemployment benefits rights left. All of these are recorded by the employment office.

Supplemental Appendix D.3). To the other half, we mentioned that they were not selected (see Supplemental Appendix D.4). This group serves as our control group.

1.3 Timeline and sample sizes

We recruited buddies in September and October 2022, and 54 created an account on the platform. Of these, 11 were recruited through the outflow surveys of the previous experiment, and 43 through LinkedIn. Figure B2 shows the occupational composition of the buddies at the 2-digit (i.e., occupational segment) level. The experiment took place in two waves. The employment office sent out the first email to 6,048 job seekers to gauge their interest in October of 2022. They did this in two batches, one on October 17 and another on October 21. These two batches received a reminder on October 21 and October 26, respectively. Rates of opening the email are high (over 70% for the first message, 80% for the reminder) compared to the average of emails sent by the employment office (50%). Job seekers who expressed interest (367; 6%) and were assigned to the treatment (183) received the invitation to create an account on the platform on November 4, and a reminder to do so on November 10. The rate of opening these messages was 87% for both. Control group assignment messages were sent on November 16. The employment office sent out the first message of the second wave on January 9, 2023 to 4,972 job seekers. The reminder was sent on January 13, 2023. 346 expressed interest (7%), and the invitation to sign up was sent to 173 treated individuals on January 26. Rates of opening the messages and conversion rates here were similar to before. In total, 713 job seekers took part in the experiment.[5]

1.4 Data sources

We evaluate the intervention using a combination of administrative and survey data. The public employment services provided administrative data on monthly unemployment benefits, labor earnings, and working hours, from 10 months prior to 20 months post-intervention. They also shared data on online job search on the public employment service's website. To learn about the use of the platform, as well as labor market beliefs and job search activities, we sent

[5]The numbers in Table 1 deviate because we focus our main analysis on those who did not hold any job at the time of intervention as discussed in Section 1.5.

Table 1: Summary statistics: control/treatment balance

	Overall	Control	Treatment	P-value
Demographics:				
Male	30%	30%	31%	0.89
Age	48 (10)	47 (10)	49 (10)	0.010
Unemployment duration (wks.)	26 (23)	25 (22)	27 (24)	0.40
Remaining UI eligibility (wks.)	61 (32)	59 (32)	62 (33)	0.27
Lower education	13%	12%	14%	0.57
Medium education	45%	46%	44%	0.60
Higher education	42%	42%	42%	0.89
Experiment:				
Account	27%	0%	53%	<0.001
Buddy	9.4%	0%	19%	<0.001
Observations	524	260	264	

This table contains the sample of individuals with zero working hours at the month of the platform invitation. Unemployment duration and remaining unemployment insurance (UI) eligibility measured at the time of sample selection (the month preceding the platform invitation). Lower education contains elementary school and lower level vocational degrees; Medium education contains higher level vocational degrees and higher level high school degrees; Higher education contains university degrees including universities of applied sciences.

out three surveys: pre-intervention (one week before the platform invitation), post-intervention (four weeks after platform invitation), and an outflow survey (sent out approximately every three months to participants who found a new job). Details on the surveys can be found in Supplemental Appendix E.

1.5 Descriptive statistics

In our analysis, we focus only on those who were unemployed (i.e., worked zero hours) the month before the intervention (74%). We used the same sample selection criterion in Belot et al. (2025). Table 1 shows summary statistics about the sample.[6] It is balanced on most demographics, except for age. The treatment group skews slightly older than the control group. The selection occupations are shown in Figure B1 (separately for control and treatment group).

Table 1 shows that compliance is 53%; the share of treated job seekers that

[6] A comparison of those with and without employment at the time of the intervention is provided in Table A1.

creates an account on the platform and therefore got to see their list of potential buddies and the video compilation. Over half of this group did not match with a buddy, leading to 19% of the treatment group actually getting matched. Table A2 shows the differences between those who found a buddy and those who did not. Men are more likely to find a buddy, as are people with lower remaining benefits eligibility. Those who find a buddy are also somewhat less likely to have attained medium levels of education (i.e., an academic high school degree, or a post-secondary vocational education degree). Of course, finding a buddy is a choice based on the perceived suitability of existing buddies, and the effect on the treated cannot be expected to generalize to those individuals who (intentionally) did not find a buddy or did not create an account at all. Our main analysis will therefore focus on the intention-to-treat effect.

Table 2 shows job seekers' attitudes towards job search based on survey data. Most importantly, we do not find any notable imbalance between the control and treatment groups here either. These job seekers appear open to consider jobs outside their primary occupation of interest. They apply to jobs in their primary occupation of interest, as well as their preferred alternative and other occupations, and plan to continue doing so. The scores on indicators for beliefs and motivation related to searching for work in different occupations paint a similar picture. For instance, the average score for motivation to search in new occupations is 4.1 on a 5-point Likert scale. For agreement with the statement that applying to a job in an occupation in which you have no experience is a waste of skills, the score is only 2.18 on average. Lastly, job seekers tend to experience enthusiasm and happiness when applying to occupations in which they do not have experience, rather than fear, insecurity, sadness or anger.

1.6 Engagement with the platform

Figures B3 - B8 in the Supplemental Appendix present descriptive statistics on engagement with the platform. Figure B3 shows the distribution of sign-up dates (created accounts) of buddies and job seekers. The vast majority of buddies signed up in October 2022, while almost all job seekers registered closely after receiving their invitations (November 2022 for Wave 1 and January 2023 for Wave 2). Users were encouraged to provide a detailed profile description when registering. Figure B4 shows the distribution of the length of the profile description. Most job seekers provided a description of 100-300 characters. The descriptions provided by the buddies were longer on average (around 400 characters).

Table 2: Summary statistics: Pre-intervention survey responses

	Overall	Control	Treatment	P-value
Job search:				
Applications sent for primary occupation	1.81 (2.63)	2.08 (3.30)	1.51 (1.57)	0.13
Applications sent for alternative occupation	1.42 (2.37)	1.68 (2.95)	1.11 (1.31)	0.10
Applications sent for other occupations	1.81 (2.60)	1.91 (3.30)	1.71 (1.60)	0.64
Interviews for primary occupation	0.44 (0.96)	0.45 (0.95)	0.43 (0.98)	0.89
Interviews for alternative occupation	0.36 (0.87)	0.37 (1.02)	0.34 (0.65)	0.80
Interviews for other occupations	0.61 (1.24)	0.69 (1.47)	0.53 (0.97)	0.44
Planned applications for primary occupation	2.30 (3.00)	2.31 (2.22)	2.28 (3.69)	0.94
Planned applications for alternative occupation	2.28 (3.55)	2.17 (2.31)	2.41 (4.66)	0.70
Planned applications for other occupations	2.01 (2.60)	1.95 (1.83)	2.09 (3.29)	0.76
Beliefs and motivation (Likert scale 1-5):				
Willing to apply without experience	3.79 (0.73)	3.86 (0.77)	3.71 (0.68)	0.12
Lower chance without experience	3.71 (0.92)	3.81 (0.90)	3.59 (0.93)	0.083
Expect lower salary without experience	3.55 (0.92)	3.52 (0.97)	3.58 (0.86)	0.62
Accept lower salary without experience	3.17 (0.92)	3.20 (0.98)	3.15 (0.86)	0.66
Confidence in work without experience	4.01 (0.64)	4.03 (0.71)	4.00 (0.56)	0.76
Skills are transferable	3.95 (0.65)	3.98 (0.62)	3.92 (0.68)	0.50
Motivated to search new occupations	4.10 (0.66)	4.16 (0.73)	4.04 (0.58)	0.19
Search without experience is useful	4.00 (0.67)	4.06 (0.69)	3.93 (0.63)	0.15
Search without experience is annoying	2.63 (0.93)	2.57 (0.95)	2.69 (0.91)	0.36
No experience wastes skills	2.18 (0.77)	2.10 (0.76)	2.27 (0.78)	0.094
Able to ask job search questions	3.54 (0.81)	3.48 (0.87)	3.61 (0.73)	0.22
UWV support fits needs	3.56 (0.84)	3.57 (0.89)	3.53 (0.79)	0.73
Emotions (Likert scale 1-5):				
Fear when applying without experience	2.28 (1.16)	2.34 (1.17)	2.21 (1.16)	0.43
Insecurity when applying without experience	2.83 (1.21)	2.96 (1.25)	2.70 (1.17)	0.12
Enthusiasm when applying without experience	3.66 (1.02)	3.73 (1.02)	3.58 (1.01)	0.29
Sadness when applying without experience	1.84 (1.09)	1.97 (1.23)	1.70 (0.88)	0.067
Happiness when applying without experience	3.39 (0.98)	3.41 (1.01)	3.38 (0.96)	0.82
Anger when applying without experience	1.78 (1.02)	1.83 (1.10)	1.73 (0.92)	0.44
Observations	218	115	103	

Only participants with zero hours employment at selection month. Table shows mean values with standard deviations in brackets. Primary occupation refers to the selection occupation. Alternative occupation refers to job seekers' main alternative. Other occupations refers to all other occupations the job seekers is looking for work in. Full questions can be found in Supplemental Appendix Supplemental Appendix E.

Figure B5 shows engagement with the platform over the duration of the study. Engagement corresponds to any type of activity, such as sending a message, reading a message, sending a contact invitation, scheduling an online meeting time. We observe clear spikes closely after the experimental waves started, with 50-75 log-ins per week. This number gradually declines, and engagement drops to close to zero after approximately 3 months. Note that this does not necessarily mean that contact between job seekers and buddies has ceased. They may have

exchanged contact details to stay in touch outside the platform.

Contact invitations are the essential first step to establish contact with a buddy. In Figure B6 we find that around 15-25 invitations were sent in the first weeks of the experimental waves, with fewer invitations sent at a later stage. After an invitation was accepted, users could chat or exchange phone numbers. In total, 49 matches were formed. Figure B7 shows the distribution of the number of chat messages sent over time, and Figure B8 shows the distribution of the lengths of the messages sent. While privacy agreements prevent us from analyzing the content of chat messages, we asked job seekers what they discussed with their buddy. Fourteen job seekers who found a buddy responded to this survey. We present the results in Table A3. About a third of respondents indicated they discussed how to switch to a new occupation with their buddy. In many cases, they discussed other topics.[7] Job seekers moderately agree with the fact that the platform was useful.

2 Results

2.1 Treatment effects on administrative data: employment and earnings

We follow our pre-analysis plan and estimate the monthly intention-to-treat impact of enrollment in the study.[8] Separately for each month $t \in (-10, 20)$ relative to treatment, we regress the outcome measure on a constant (γ), demographic (time-invariant) controls (X_i; age, gender and UI duration at time of intervention), and a treatment group dummy (T_i):

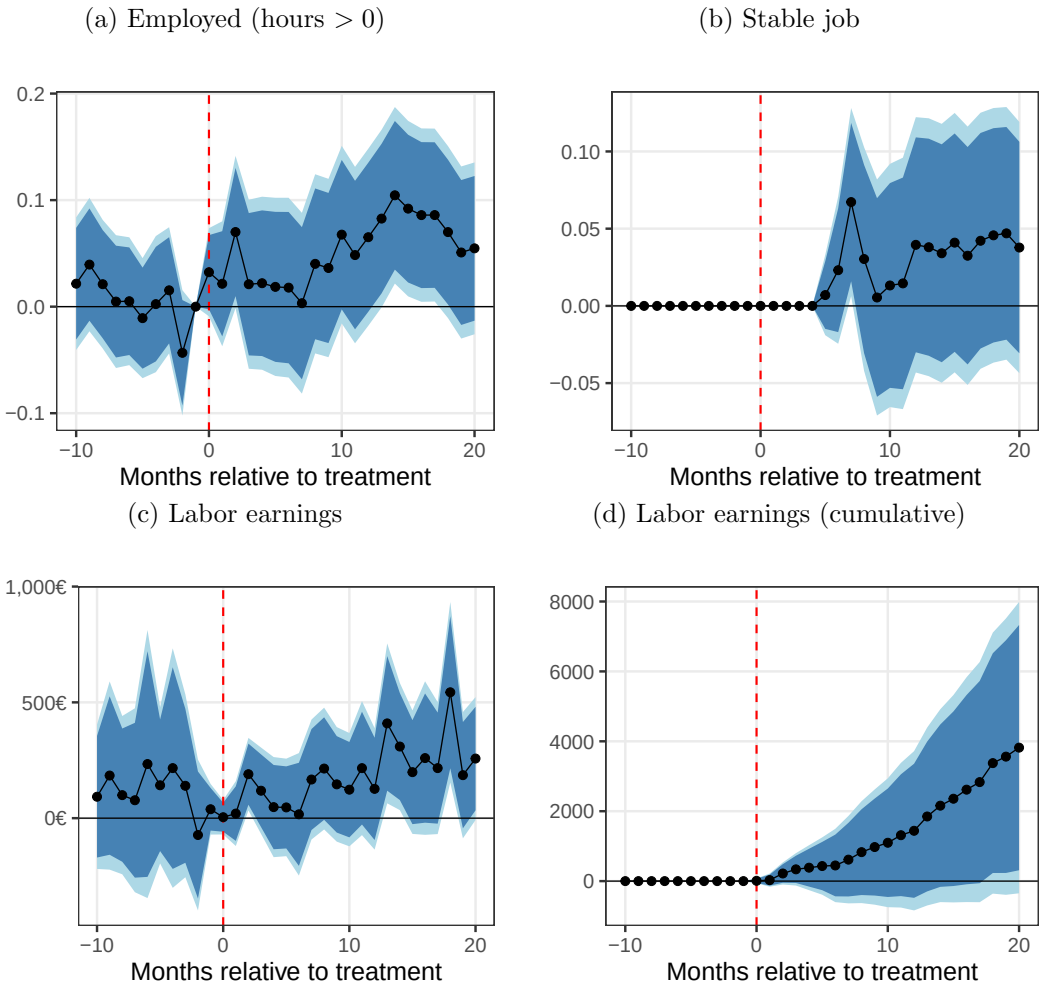
$$Y_i(t) = \gamma + X_i\beta + \lambda T_i + \varepsilon_i \tag{1}$$

Here $t = 20$ refers to the latest date covered by our data, $t = 0$ refers to the month in which job seekers were invited (November for wave 1, January for

[7] In a free text field, job seekers indicated that they discussed the following: determining one's interests and abilities, goal setting, finding customers and generating revenue for a business, using personal connections to find a job, finding work at older age.

[8] As discussed, we believe this to be the cleanest metric. To interpret the average treatment effect on the treated as causal, we have to assume that the invitation did not stimulate job seekers to consider finding a buddy themselves in their own social network. Since compliance was 53% for creating an account, the average treatment effect on the treated would be roughly twice as large as the ITT estimates.

Figure 1: Treatment impacts (ITT) on employment and earnings



Note: Only individuals that worked zero hours in the month prior to the buddyplatform-invitation (October 2022 for Wave 1 and December 2022 for Wave 2). The dashed red line indicates the month in which the platform invitation was sent.

wave 2), while $t = 18$ (one and a half years after treatment) corresponds to the preregistered time horizon and serves as the reference point for our discussion.

Figure 1 presents the coefficient estimates of λ, including 90% and 95% confidence-intervals, for employment (defined as positive hours of work; panel (a)), holding a stable job (defined as having worked in the same job for at least 6 consecutive months with at least 16 working hours per week; panel (b)), and monthly and cumulative labor earnings (panels (c) and (d)).

The point estimates for the treatment impact is positive for all outcomes, in all months. However, they are small and insignificant in the first twelve months. In the six months thereafter, the effect sizes become economically large:

employment is about 6 percentage points higher during the last half-year (11% relative to the base rate of 52 percentage points in the control group in months 13-18). The treatment induces €226 additional monthly earnings (16% higher than the average of €1392 in the control group in months 13-18). Earnings track closely with an increase of monthly hours worked by 6 hours (9% higher relative to the 63 monthly hours in the control group; not pre-registered, Supplemental Appendix Figure B9). Cumulatively over the course of all pre-registered 18 months, treated individuals worked 38 more hours (4% more relative to control group mean) and earned €2185 more (11.4%).

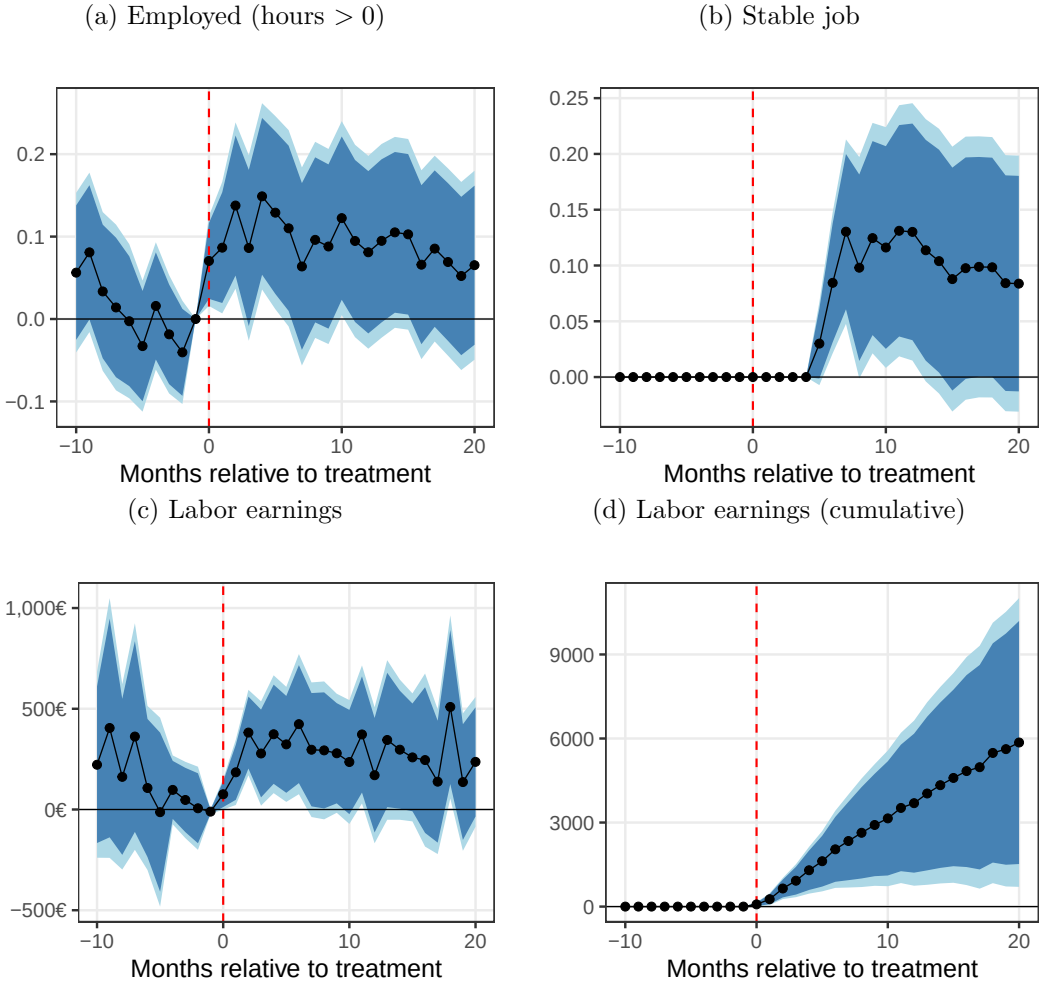
The average point estimate of the impact on holding a stable job is smaller, at about 1.5 percentage point (3% larger than control average) and is not statistically significant. Note that the definition of stable job is conservative. A job that has not yet been held for longer than six months is not considered stable, but may still turn out to be. Given that the treatment effects on employment mostly show up after a year, the data does not reach far enough to study whether the jobs that the treated job seekers find during that time are indeed stable or not.

The delay in the onset of positive treatment effects is striking. In our analysis plan, we pre-specified that we would conduct heterogeneity analysis based on initial unemployment duration. We hypothesized that "longer duration leads to more willingness to consider alternatives following the treatment". Earlier studies have indeed found that interventions that encourage job seekers to consider alternative occupations are most effective among the long-term unemployed (see e.g., Belot et al., 2019, 2025, 2026). Following the pre-analysis plan, we define the long-term unemployed as having an unemployment duration above the median at the time of our intervention; which corresponds to those with more than 17 weeks of unemployment in our sample.

Before looking at the differential impact, it is worth noting that the treatment take-up differs between the long-term unemployed and those who have been unemployed for a shorter time. Treated job seekers who are long-term unemployed are somewhat more likely to create an account (54% versus 52%) and comparatively more likely to find a buddy (20% versus 17%), see Table A4, though this difference is not statistically significant.

Figure 2 shows the results for the long-term unemployed, which shows that the treatment is much more effective for this group. The most striking difference between Figure 2 and Figure 1 is that the treatment effect among the long-term

Figure 2: Treatment impacts (ITT) on employment and earnings: only individuals with more than 17 weeks of UI duration at the time of intervention



Note: Only individuals that worked zero hours and were unemployed for more than 17 weeks in the month prior to the buddyplatform-invitation (October 2022 for Wave 1 and December 2022 for Wave 2). The dashed red line indicates the month in which the platform invitation was sent.

unemployed is much more immediate. Impacts are realized within two months of the treatment, and remain relatively stable over the subsequent months, with a slight downward drift in some outcomes. The treatment induces an initial jump in employment of about 9 percentage points for the longer-term unemployed that slowly drops down to about 6 percentage points, with most of this coming from stable jobs. These effects are large relative to the 45% mean monthly employment of the longer-term unemployed in the control group (in months 13-18). Labor earnings increase by approximately €270 per month on average over the 1.5 years of treatment, leading to a significant increase in cumulative earnings throughout

the study period. After 18 months, cumulative earnings have increased by over €5,000 for the treatment group (33% relative to the longer-unemployed control group average). This is driven by a little over 11 additional hours worked per month, totaling 212 additional hours worked after 18 months (a 30% increase relative to the control mean; not pre-registered; see Supplemental Appendix Figure B10). Treatment impacts for those with unemployment spell length below the median are close to zero and not statistically significant (see Supplemental Appendix Figure B11).

We also pre-registered an analysis to measure heterogeneity by the occupational distance between the buddy and job seeker's previous occupations. The random occupational composition of the set of buddies from which the job seeker could select, can function as an instrument for the distance between the job seeker's and the buddy's occupation. In our pre-analysis plan, we mentioned that "we will assess the feasibility of this analysis as soon as we have the data". Unfortunately, it turns out that such an IV strategy demands too much from our small sample, yielding very imprecise results. For completeness, Supplemental Appendix Figure B12 provides estimates from the reduced-form regression analyzing the effect of our intended instrument (the occupational distance to the previous occupation of the closest available buddy), which indeed increases the average occupational distance with the matched buddy, on the likelihood of finding a job and total labor earnings. The point estimates are as expected: a larger distance decreases the likelihood of finding a job, and lowers labor earnings. However, the effects are not statistically significant.

2.2 Treatment effects on occupational mobility

The initial goal of the treatment was to assist job seekers in making an occupational transition. We study how successful the treatment was in this regard by analyzing the occupational distance between the new job found and the job seeker's selection occupation. By nature of the analysis, we are only able to do this for those who found a new job and answered the outflow survey.

Panel 1 of Table 3 shows that job finders in the treatment group are more likely to find a job in an occupation that differs from their primary occupation of interest, at all levels of granularity. Similarly, the distance between their new and initial occupation is larger. The point estimates are large, but so are the standard errors due to the limited sample size. At the 4-digit (occupation) level, treated job finders end up in their initial selection occupation only 14% of the time,

while this is 35% for the control group; a 21 percentage point difference. The gap changes across aggregation levels of occupations. It is 11 percentage points at the 3-digit (occupational group) level, 22 percentage points at the 2-digit (occupational segment) level, and 16 percentage points at the 1-digit (occupational class) level. The difference is marginally significant at the 4-digit and 2-digit levels. We also define the distance between a participant's new occupation and their initial occupation: let i be the lowest digit where both differ, then $5 - i$ is the distance. The average distance for the treatment group is three digits (i.e., the new occupation is in the same class but a different segment). For the control group it is lower at just 2.31 digits, though the difference is not statistically significant.

2.3 Treatment effects on search behavior and motivation

Lastly, we study the impact of the treatment on search behavior and motivation to try and explain our findings. Panel 2 of Table 3 reports the *change* in search behavior, measured by self-reported activities and beliefs (only individuals that completed the pre- and post-survey) and observed online search behavior (individuals that searched online at least once prior to the intervention).[9] We do not observe significant differences in the number of applications in the survey and online search data. We also do not find that job seekers in the treatment group are more or less motivated to search for new occupations, or spend more time doing so. It does look like the control group narrows their search further. The number of distinct occupation listed decreases in the control group, while it remains stable in the treatment group. The same holds for the breadth of listed search occupations, which lines up with the findings on realized occupational mobility in Section 2.2.[10] Both differences are marginally significant. These results suggest that the treatment encouraged job seekers to keep a broad outlook. We do not observe any impact on search intensity on the employment office's platform, but this may be caused by the generally low usage levels of this platform.

[9]Table 3 covers all dimensions that we pre-registered as secondary outcomes, except for time spent *searching* for jobs. This question was ultimately not included in the survey. Table A5 shows the post-intervention average responses for all survey questions.

[10]We calculate occupational breadth using the methodology from Belot et al. (2019), adapted to survey data. Specifically, we construct a set of all unique listed occupation pairs (i.e., if we have A-B, we do not include B-A) with replacement (i.e., we include pairs of an occupation with itself; A-A). We then calculate the average distance over these pairs at the individual level.

Table 3: Treatment-control comparison for likelihood that occupation of new jobs differs from selection occupation, and changes in search behavior

	Obs	Control	Treatment	P-value
PANEL 1: OCCUPATIONAL TRANSITIONS				
New job differs from selection occupation...				
...at 4-digit level	55	0.65 (0.49)	0.86 (0.35)	0.078
...at 3-digit level	55	0.65 (0.49)	0.76 (0.44)	0.41
...at 2-digit level	55	0.50 (0.51)	0.72 (0.45)	0.093
...at 1-digit level	55	0.50 (0.51)	0.66 (0.48)	0.25
Distance new job to selection occupation (0-4)	55	2.31 (1.85)	3.00 (1.56)	0.14
PANEL 2: SEARCH BEHAVIOR (SURVEY & SEARCH DATA)				
Survey				
Applications sent to primary occupation	139	-0.10 (2.87)	0.25 (1.71)	0.39
Applications sent to alternative occupation	139	0.03 (2.64)	0.01 (1.60)	0.97
Applications sent to other occupations	139	-0.37 (2.65)	-0.36 (1.65)	0.98
Motivated to search new occupations	141	0.00 (0.77)	0.03 (0.64)	0.81
Time exploring alternative occupations	141	-0.32 (6.14)	-0.76 (8.28)	0.72
Number of search occupations	141	-0.54 (1.55)	-0.01 (1.65)	0.055
Breadth of search occupations	141	-0.30 (0.94)	-0.02 (0.97)	0.082
Online search data				
No. of applications	232	-0.08 (0.97)	-0.08 (0.49)	0.98
No. of saved vacancies	232	-0.14 (1.26)	-0.19 (0.74)	0.74
No. of applications in other occupation	232	-0.06 (0.60)	-0.06 (0.47)	>0.99
No. of applications in selection occ.	232	-0.02 (0.45)	-0.02 (0.13)	0.96
No. of saved vacancies in other occupation	232	-0.14 (1.17)	-0.15 (0.70)	0.91
No. of saved vacancies in selection occ.	232	0.00 (0.45)	-0.03 (0.18)	0.49

Panel 1 shows results related to the likelihood of finding a job in an occupation different from the individual's selection occupation. Panel 2 shows results for search behavior based on survey responses and online search behavior. All data excludes participants with employment at the time of the intervention. Online search data is based on participants that searched at least once on the platform prior to the intervention, and compares the 30 days prior to the platform invitation against the 30 after the invitation. This table compares the within-individual changes (before/after intervention). For survey based variables, only participants who completed both surveys are therefore included. Standard deviations in parenthesis. Full survey questions can be found in Supplemental Appendix E.

3 Conclusion

Social connections have long been associated with improved job search outcomes for the unemployed. This study aims to increase such connections and evaluate their impact using a digital platform to bring together currently unemployed workers with those who have already found a new job.

Looking for work in a new occupation in particular carries many challenges. Having a "buddy" (i.e., someone you can talk to who has made an occupational transition before) may help better understand and navigate these challenges. Compared to caseworkers, job seekers may be better able to identify with buddies while avoiding issues of competition that could be present when discussing job search with other active job seekers. The fact that "buddies" have been successful means that their search strategies might be on average superior, and our design

choice of conditioning on success in a new occupation might be particularly helpful for our set of job seekers who search in occupations with low employment prospects.

Indeed, our results are a proof-of-concept that shows that gaining access to a platform that allows job seekers to connect with such a buddy increases their likelihood of finding a job and their total labor earnings. The benefits appear larger for long-term unemployed, who are also more likely to use the platform. We also find suggestive evidence that access to the buddy platform increases the likelihood of switching out of one's initial occupation of interest, by avoiding a gradual narrowing of search over time. Future work might explore other types of buddies (e.g., those that did not switch occupation, or those that find employment in the same occupation as the job seeker), as well as which traits and characteristics make an effective buddy. We were not able to do so due to the limited sample size. Other groups of job seekers (e.g., also those in occupations with better employment prospects) are also of further interest.

Overall, our results show that an online buddy-support-system can effectively assist job seekers transitioning out of unemployment. Although the intervention incorporates a "human touch", implementation costs for a public employment services are low once the platform is set up. This is because public employment services have ample access to previously unemployed job seekers who successfully made an occupational transition and can be approached to temporarily volunteer as "buddies"; this can generate a steady stream of buddies even if each one of these only serves for a short amount of time.

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Supplemental Appendix A Additional Tables

Table A1: Summary statistics: comparison of part-time employed and non-employed job seekers

	Overall	Positive hours	Zero hours	P-value
Demographics:				
Male	29%	25%	30%	0.18
Age	48 (10)	50 (9)	48 (10)	0.018
Unemployment duration (wks.)	28 (25)	35 (31)	26 (23)	<0.001
Remaining UI eligibility (wks.)	60 (33)	59 (33)	61 (32)	0.49
Lower education	13%	12%	13%	0.80
Medium education	46%	51%	45%	0.18
Higher education	41%	37%	42%	0.23
Experiment:				
Treatment	50%	49%	50%	0.69
Account	25%	22%	27%	0.18
Buddy	8.3%	5.3%	9.4%	0.051
Wave 1	51%	47%	53%	0.16
Wave 2	49%	53%	47%	0.16
Observations	713	189	524	

The columns "Positive hours" and "Zero hours" refer to the number of worked hours in the month preceding the buddyplatform invitation. We focus our analysis on those with zero hours. Unemployment duration measured at the time of sample selection (the month preceding the platform invitation). Lower education contains elementary school and lower level vocational degrees; Medium education contains higher level vocational degrees and higher level high school degrees; Higher education contains university degrees including universities of applied sciences.

Table A2: Characteristics of job seekers with and without buddy

	(1) Control	(2) Treated No buddy	(3) Treated With buddy	P-value (3)-(2)
Demographics:				
Male	31%	28%	41%	0.11
Age	49 (10)	49 (10)	51 (10)	0.088
Unemployment duration (wks.)	27 (24)	26 (23)	32 (26)	0.15
Remaining UI eligibility (wks.)	62 (33)	64 (33)	54 (34)	0.071
Lower education	14%	13%	18%	0.47
Medium education	44%	46%	36%	0.22
Higher education	42%	41%	47%	0.52
Experiment:				
Account	53%	42%	100%	<0.001
Observations	264	215	49	

Only treated job seekers; zero employment hours at selection month. Lower education contains elementary school and lower level vocational degrees; Medium education contains higher level vocational degrees and higher level high school degrees; Higher education contains university degrees including universities of applied sciences.

Table A3: User experience of job seekers that made a buddy connection

Topics discussed with Buddy:	
What kind of work fits me	0.07 (0.27)
How to search for jobs	0.07 (0.27)
How to switch to a new occupation	0.36 (0.50)
How to deal with setbacks	0.0000 (0.0000)
Other topics	0.64 (0.50)
Platform experience (Likert scale 1-5):	
Platform supported my search	3.29 (1.14)
Platform easy to use	3.21 (1.19)
Satisfied with contacts	3.62 (1.19)
Would recommend platform	3.14 (1.03)
Observations	14

Only respodents with zero hours employment at selection month.

Table A4: Summary statistics: comparison of long and short-term unemployed (only treatment group)

	Overall	Short duration	Long duration	P-value
Demographics:				
Male	31%	25%	36%	0.066
Age	49 (10)	46 (10)	52 (9)	<0.001
Unemployment duration (wks.)	27 (24)	9 (4)	44 (23)	<0.001
Remaining UI eligibility (wks.)	62 (33)	73 (35)	52 (28)	<0.001
Lower education	14%	7.0%	21%	0.002
Medium education	44%	44%	43%	0.82
Higher education	42%	49%	36%	0.048
Experiment:				
Account	53%	52%	54%	0.72
Buddy	19%	17%	20%	0.50
Observations	264	130	134	

This table contains the sample of individuals with zero working hours at the month of the platform invitation. Columns 2 and 3 split the sample at the median unemployment duration (17 weeks). Unemployment duration and remaining UI eligibility measured at the time of sample selection (the month preceding the platform invitation). Lower education contains elementary school and lower level vocational degrees; Medium education contains higher level vocational degrees and higher level high school degrees; Higher education contains university degrees including universities of applied sciences.

Table A5: Summary statistics: Post-intervention survey responses

	Overall	Control	Treatment	P-value
Sample characteristics:				
Wave 1	0.49 (0.50)	0.49 (0.50)	0.48 (0.50)	0.81
Wave 2	0.51 (0.50)	0.51 (0.50)	0.52 (0.50)	0.81
Account	0.29 (0.45)	0.00 (0.00)	0.60 (0.49)	<0.001
Contacted buddy	0.13 (0.33)	0.00 (0.00)	0.27 (0.44)	<0.001
Job search:				
Applications sent for primary occupation	1.61 (2.16)	1.81 (2.48)	1.41 (1.75)	0.23
Applications sent for alternative occupation	1.28 (1.98)	1.42 (2.46)	1.11 (1.21)	0.33
Applications sent for other occupations	1.58 (1.90)	1.76 (2.12)	1.36 (1.60)	0.23
Interviews for primary occupation	0.46 (0.89)	0.52 (0.99)	0.39 (0.77)	0.34
Interviews for alternative occupation	0.44 (0.75)	0.50 (0.86)	0.37 (0.62)	0.32
Interviews for other occupations	0.39 (0.74)	0.42 (0.79)	0.37 (0.69)	0.71
Planned applications for primary occupation	2.4 (3.3)	2.7 (3.4)	2.2 (3.2)	0.37
Planned applications for alternative occupation	2.1 (3.1)	2.3 (3.0)	1.8 (3.2)	0.36
Planned applications for other occupations	1.72 (2.61)	2.18 (3.26)	1.18 (1.40)	0.021
Beliefs and motivation (Likert scale 1-5):				
Willing to apply without experience	3.75 (0.87)	3.77 (0.87)	3.72 (0.89)	0.72
Lower chance without experience	3.69 (0.95)	3.65 (0.95)	3.73 (0.96)	0.53
Expect lower salary without experience	3.58 (0.97)	3.46 (0.99)	3.71 (0.94)	0.081
Accept lower salary without experience	3.28 (0.94)	3.22 (0.99)	3.33 (0.90)	0.42
Confidence in work without experience	3.88 (0.70)	3.83 (0.70)	3.94 (0.69)	0.25
Skills are transferable	3.89 (0.65)	3.93 (0.64)	3.86 (0.66)	0.44
Motivated to search new occupations	4.10 (0.67)	4.09 (0.67)	4.10 (0.67)	0.93
Search without experience is useful	3.96 (0.74)	3.97 (0.72)	3.94 (0.77)	0.82
Search without experience is annoying	2.65 (0.90)	2.61 (0.93)	2.69 (0.86)	0.53
No experience wastes skills	2.26 (0.82)	2.20 (0.83)	2.32 (0.80)	0.31
Able to ask job search questions	3.63 (0.77)	3.60 (0.84)	3.68 (0.68)	0.46
UWV support fits needs	3.62 (0.84)	3.74 (0.75)	3.50 (0.91)	0.054
Emotions (Likert scale 1-5):				
Fear when applying without experience	2.28 (1.10)	2.44 (1.15)	2.10 (1.02)	0.030
Insecurity when applying without experience	2.84 (1.18)	2.94 (1.22)	2.72 (1.12)	0.20
Enthusiasm when applying without experience	3.62 (1.00)	3.69 (0.99)	3.54 (1.02)	0.33
Sadness when applying without experience	1.78 (1.09)	1.88 (1.15)	1.68 (1.00)	0.20
Happiness when applying without experience	3.41 (0.96)	3.40 (1.01)	3.41 (0.91)	0.96
Anger when applying without experience	1.71 (1.06)	1.77 (1.11)	1.64 (1.00)	0.42
Observations	189	99	90	

Only participants with zero hours employment at selection month.

Supplemental Appendix B Additional Figures

Figure B1: Distribution of Selection Occupations

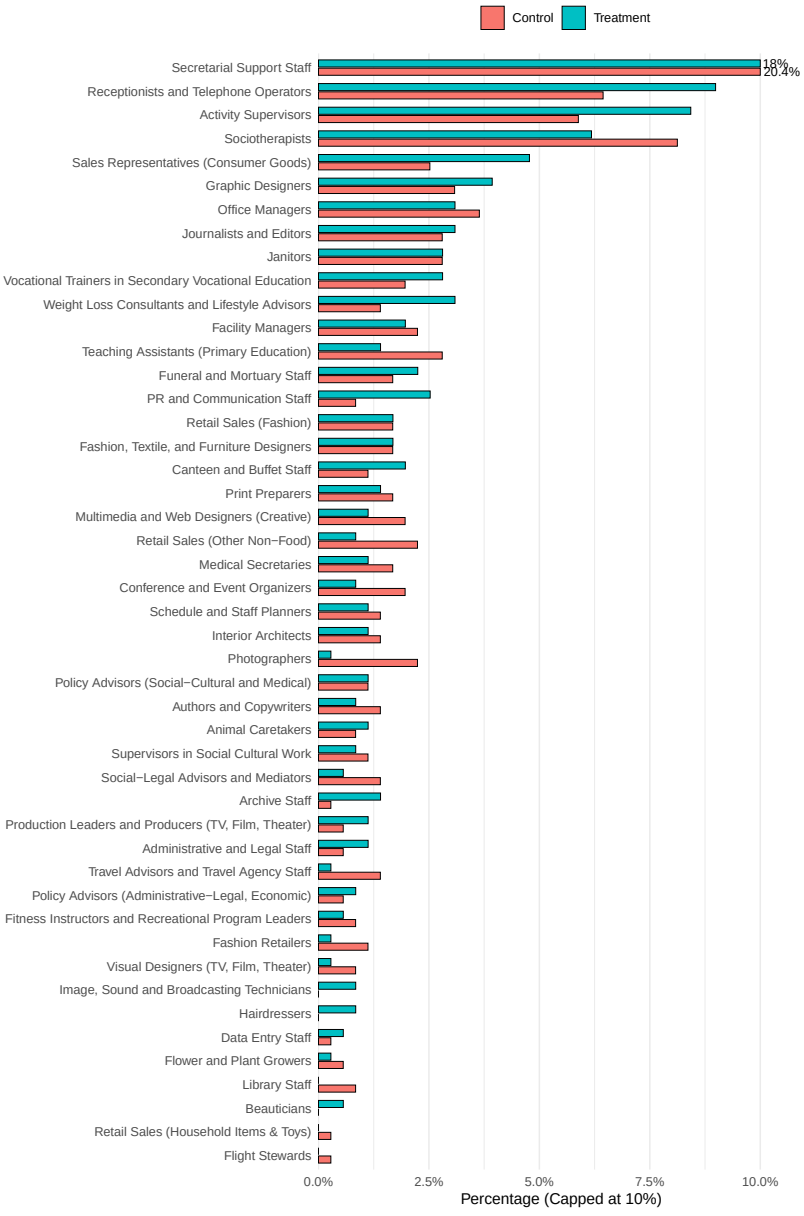


Figure B2: Distribution of Buddies' Occupations (2-digits)

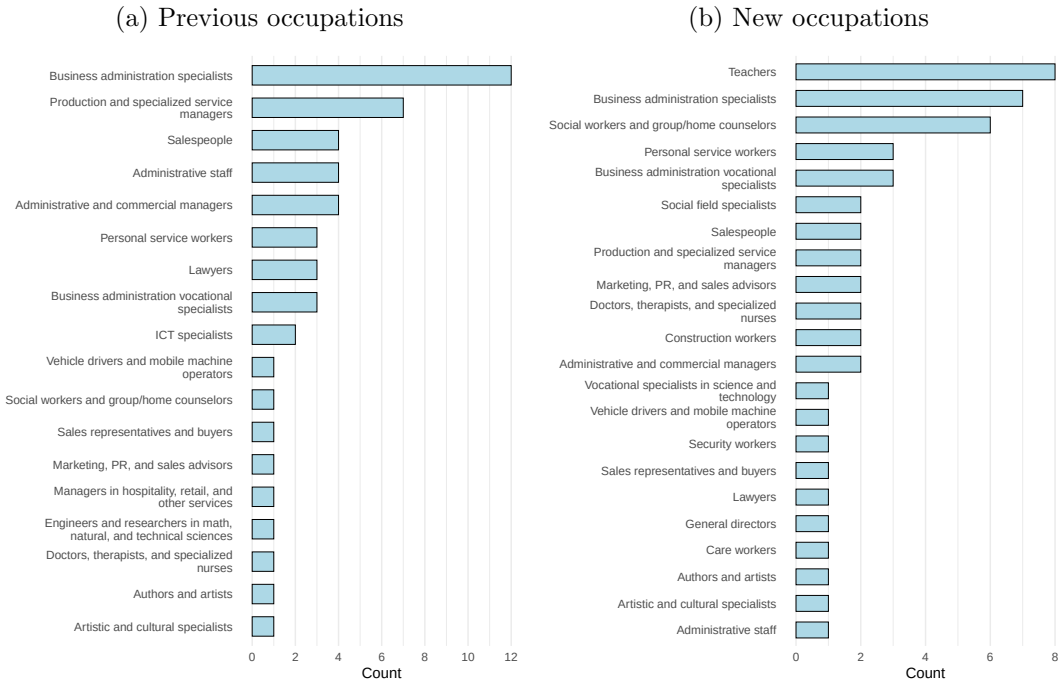


Figure B3: Number of sign-ups on the platform per week

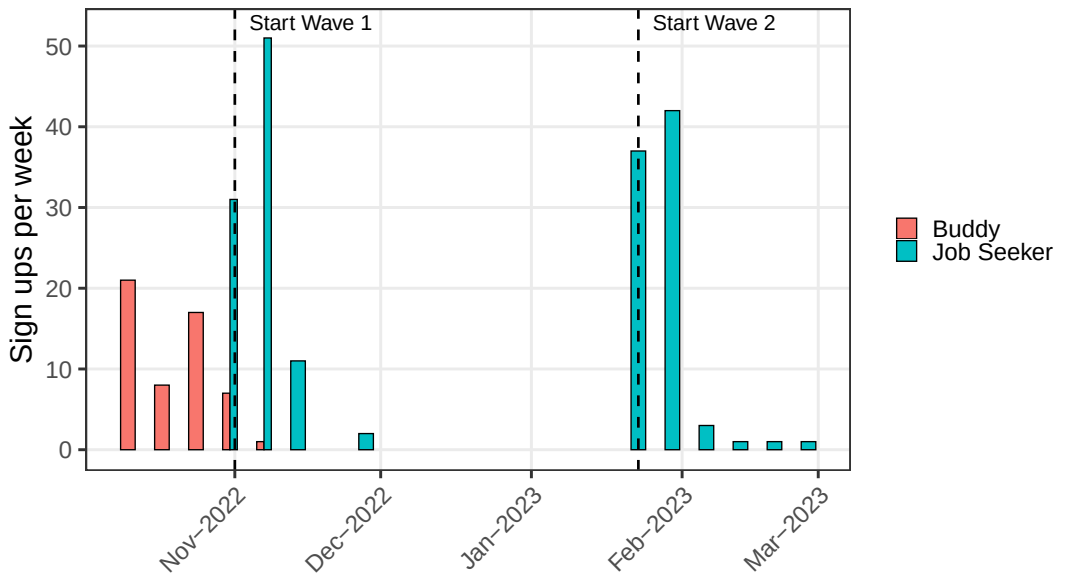


Figure B4: Length of profile descriptions

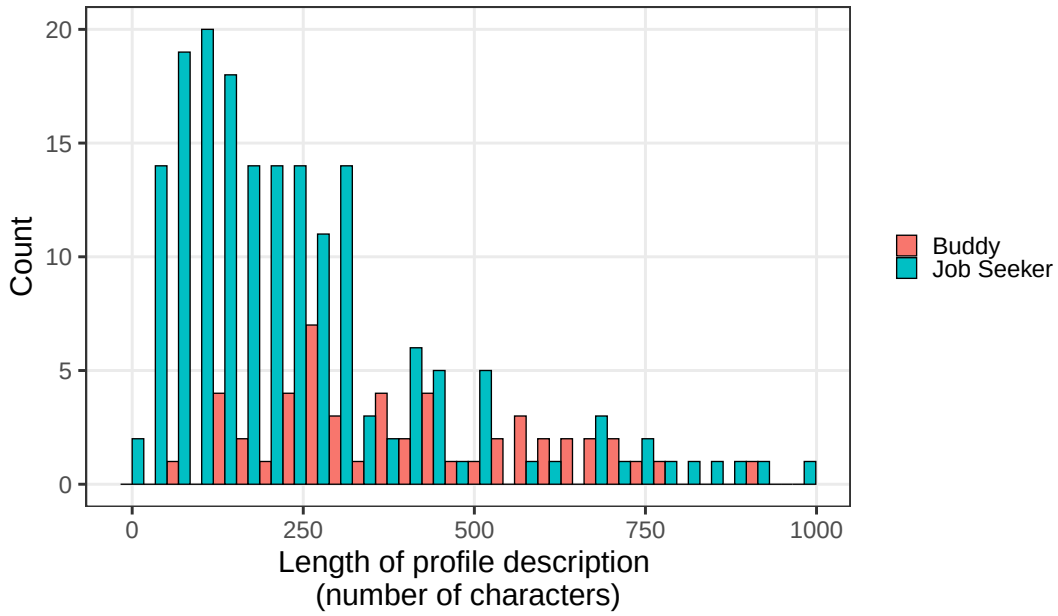


Figure B5: Number of logins on the platform per week

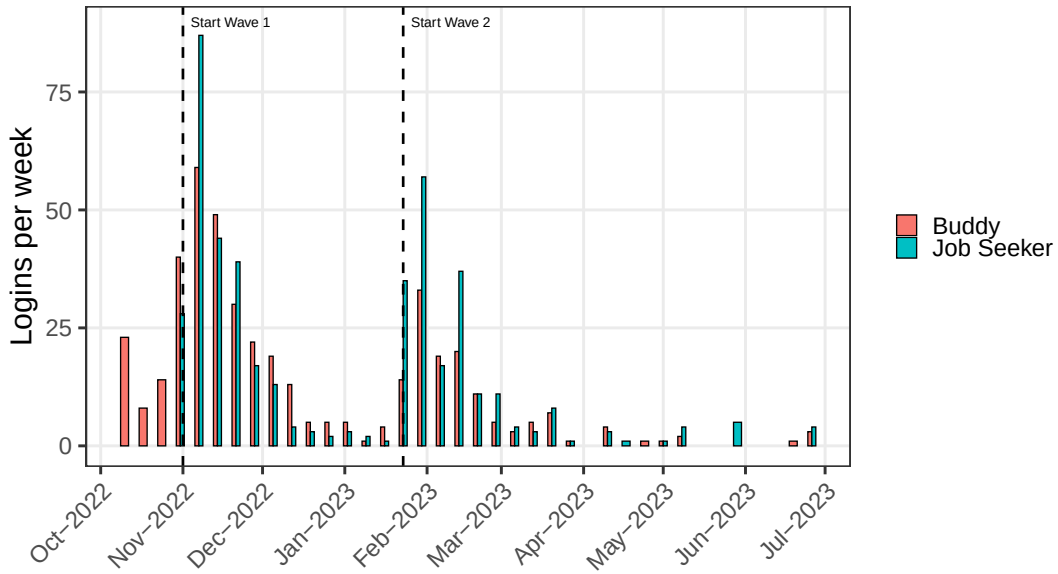


Figure B6: Number of invitations sent to buddies on the platform per week

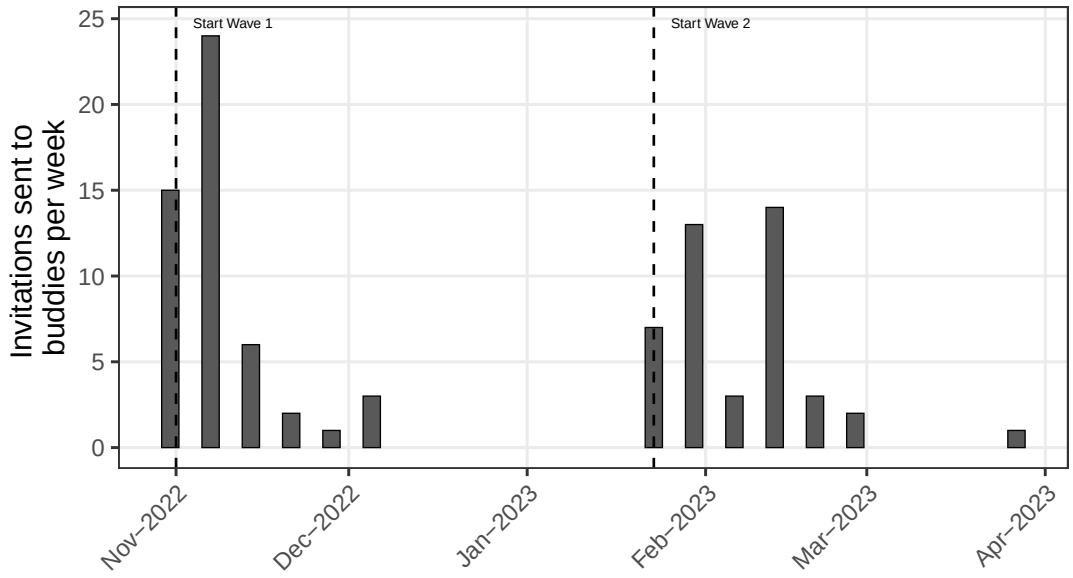


Figure B7: Chat contact between job seekers and buddies (Number of messages)

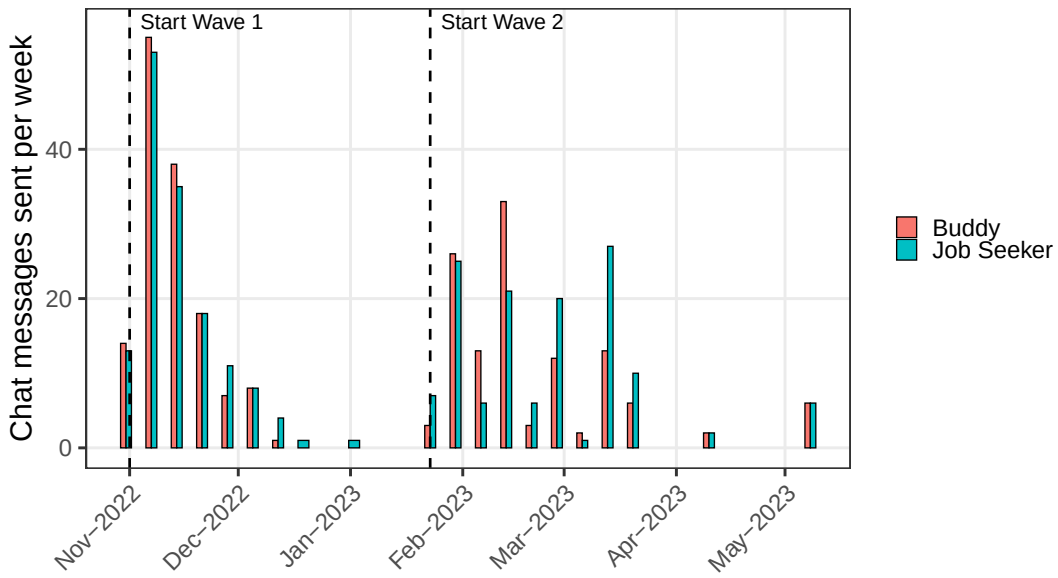


Figure B8: Chat contact between job seekers and buddies (Number of characters)

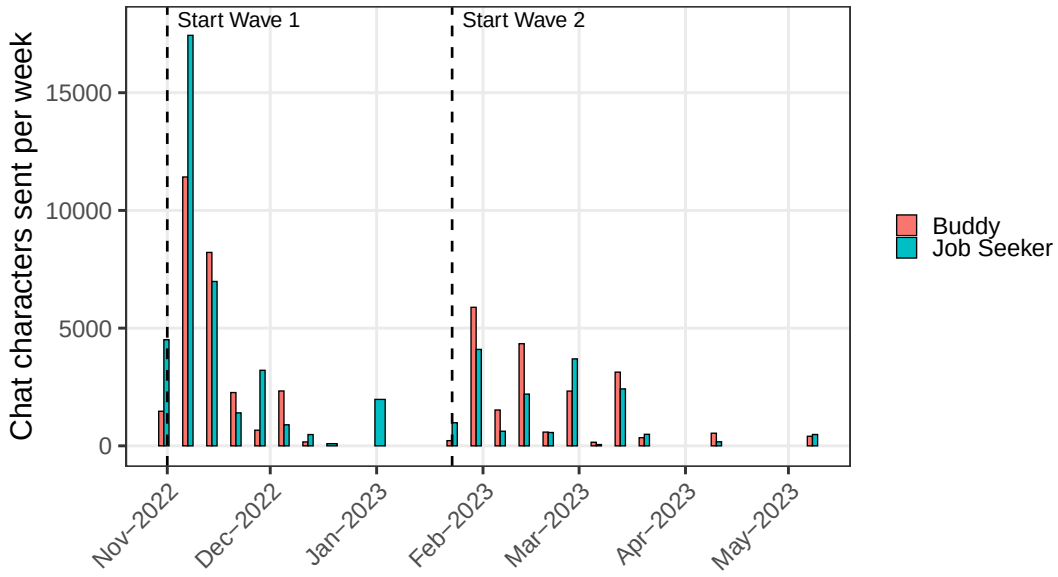
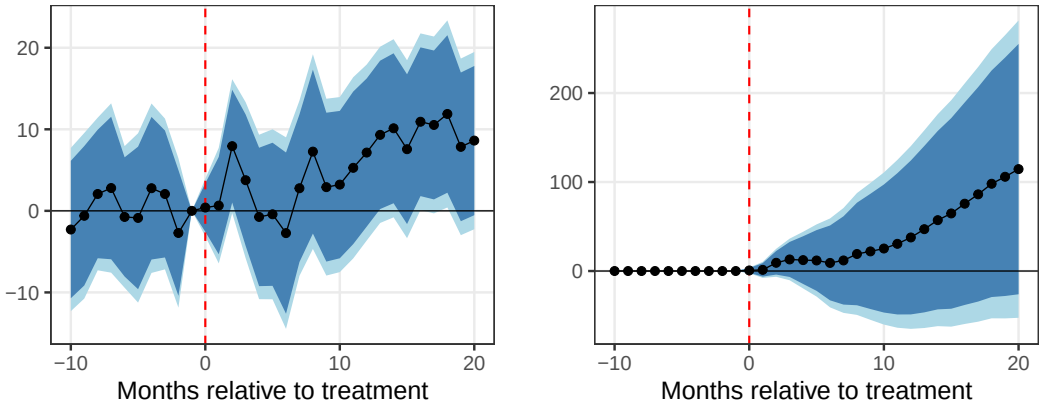


Figure B9: Treatment impacts (ITT) on hours worked

(a) Hours worked

(b) Hours worked (cumulative)

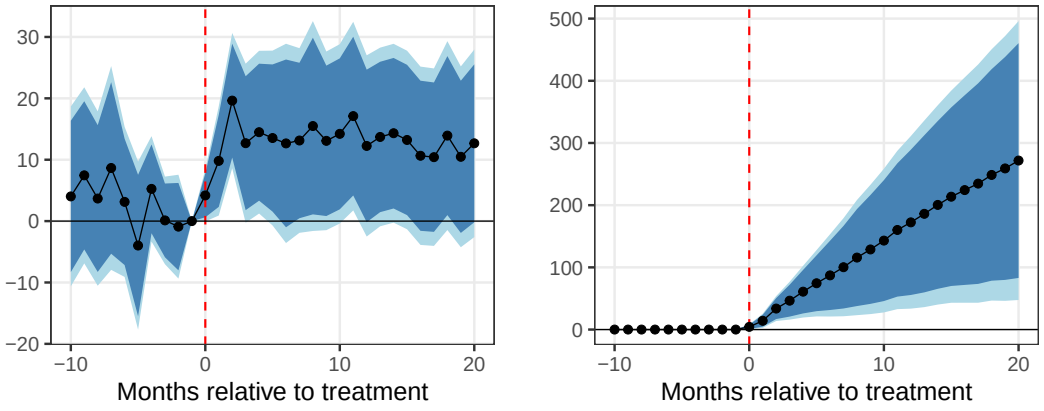


Note: Only individuals that worked zero hours in the month prior to the buddyplatform-invitation (October 2022 for Wave 1 and December 2022 for Wave 2). The dashed red line indicates the platform invitation.

Figure B10: Treatment impacts (ITT) on hours worked: only individuals with more than 17 weeks of UI duration at the time of intervention

(a) Hours worked

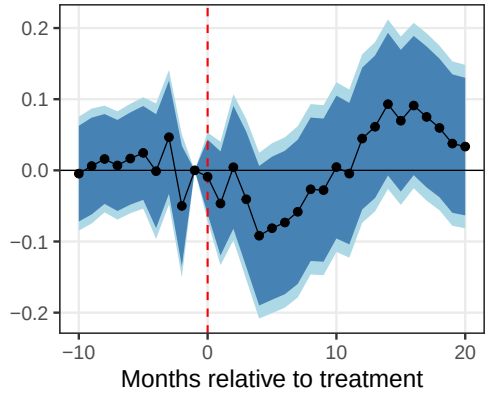
(b) Hours worked (cumulative)



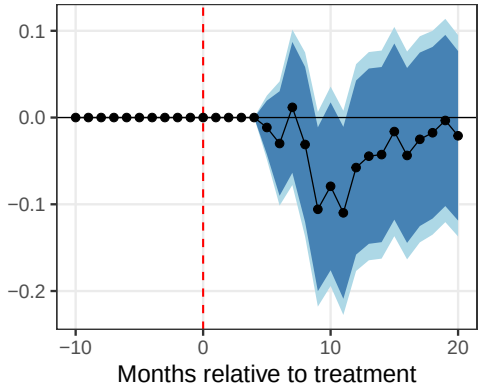
Note: Only individuals that worked zero hours and were unemployed for more than 17 weeks in the month prior to the buddyplatform-invitation (October 2022 for Wave 1 and December 2022 for Wave 2). The dashed red line indicates the platform invitation.

Figure B11: Treatment impacts (ITT) on employment: only individuals with at most 17 weeks of UI duration at the time of intervention

(a) Employed (hours > 0)

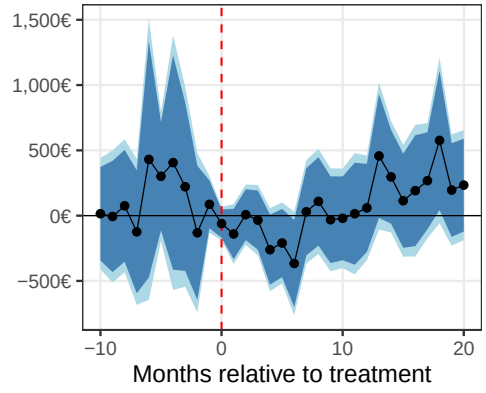


(b) Stable job

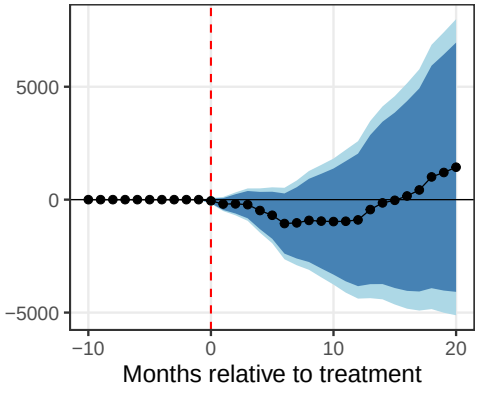


(c) Labor earnings

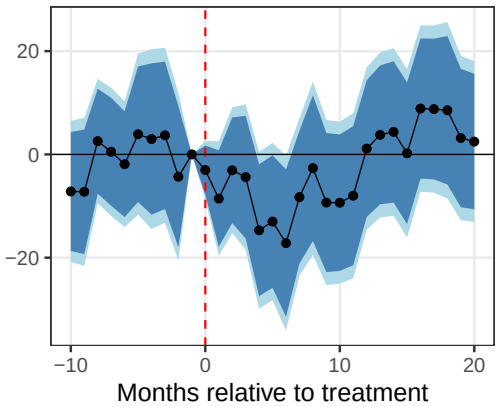
(d) Labor earnings (cumulative)

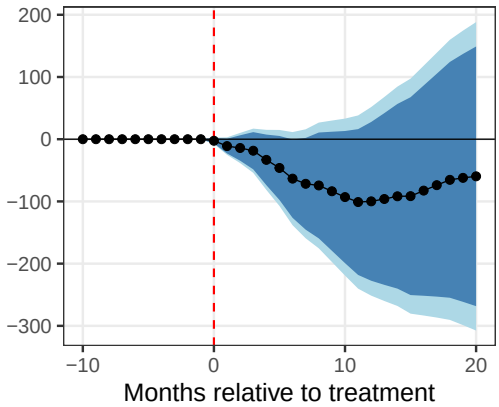


(e) Hours worked (not pre-registered)



(f) Hours worked (cumulative) (not pre-registered)

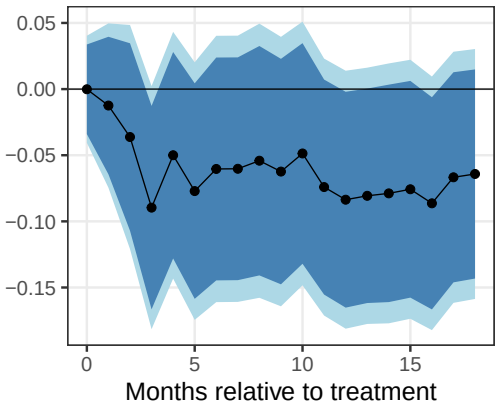




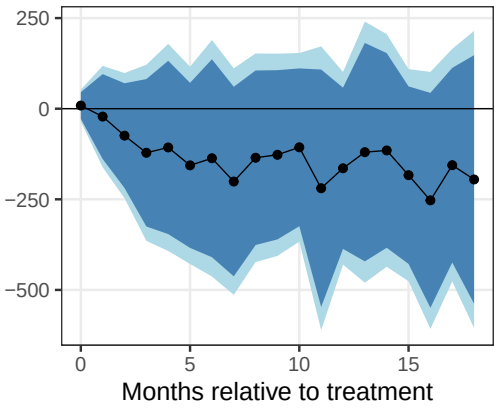
Note: Only individuals that worked zero hours and were unemployed for at most 17 weeks in the month prior to the buddyplatform-invitation (October 2022 for Wave 1 and December 2022 for Wave 2). The dashed red line indicates the platform invitation.

Figure B12: Reduced-form estimates from the IV design for the impact of occupational distance between buddy and job seeker on labour market outcomes

(a) Employed (earnings > 0)



(b) Labour earnings



Note: Outline of analysis

The figures show estimated β's from the regression model:

$$Y_{it} = \alpha + \beta_t Dist_i + \gamma_t MeanDist_i + \delta_t X_i + \varepsilon_{it}.$$

Here, $Dist_i$ is the occupational distance between the previous occupations of the job seeker and the closest previous occupation in their randomly selected set of buddies. Because distance is a function of the job seeker's occupation, we control for $MeanDist_i$, which captures the expected minimum distance in the set (which we obtain by simulation) to control for the fact that different occupations may have different expected minimum distances, but also provide different labor market prospects. Finally, X_i contains demographic controls (age, gender and UI duration). Confidence intervals (90% and 95%) are included in the figure, and based on robust standard errors. We include only individuals that worked zero hours in the month prior to the buddyplatform-invitation (October 2022 for Wave 1 and December 2022 for Wave 2) and created an account.

Supplemental Appendix C Screenshots

Figure C1: Signup screen

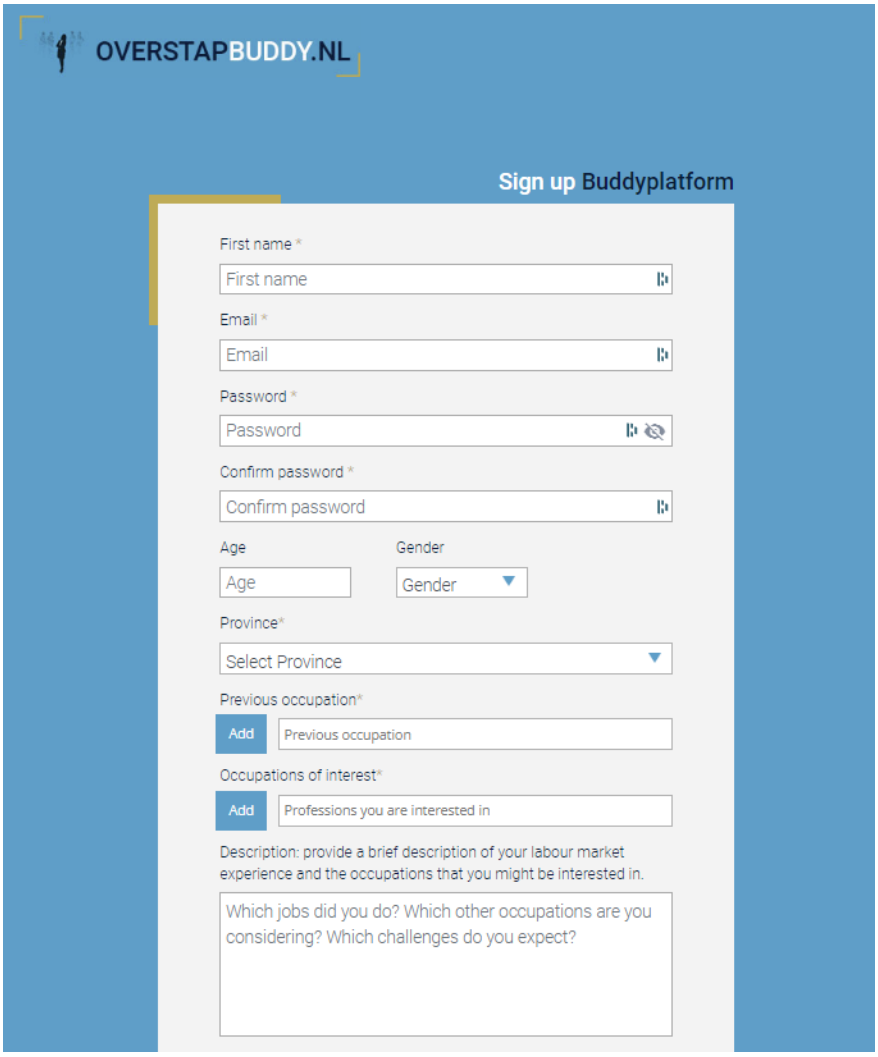


Figure C2: First view of homepage

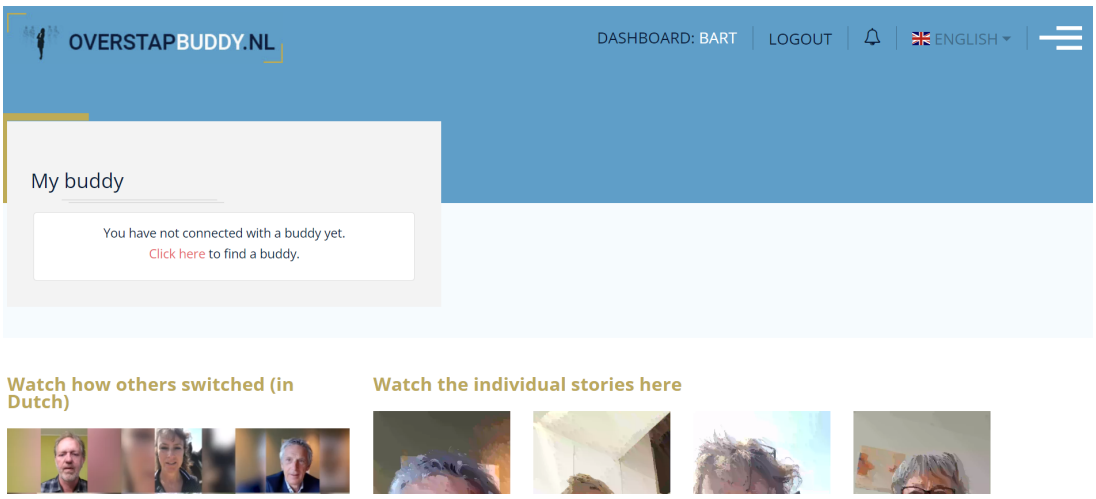


Figure C3: Buddy search screen

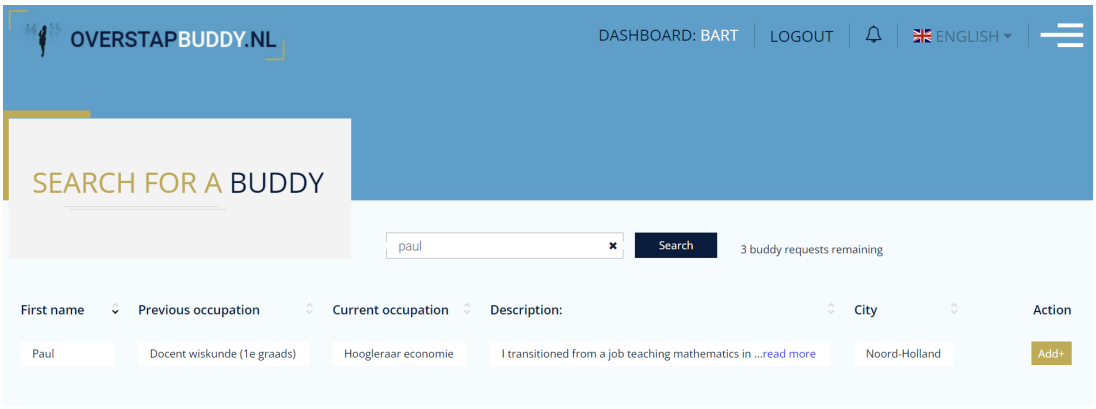


Figure C4: Connect with buddy screen

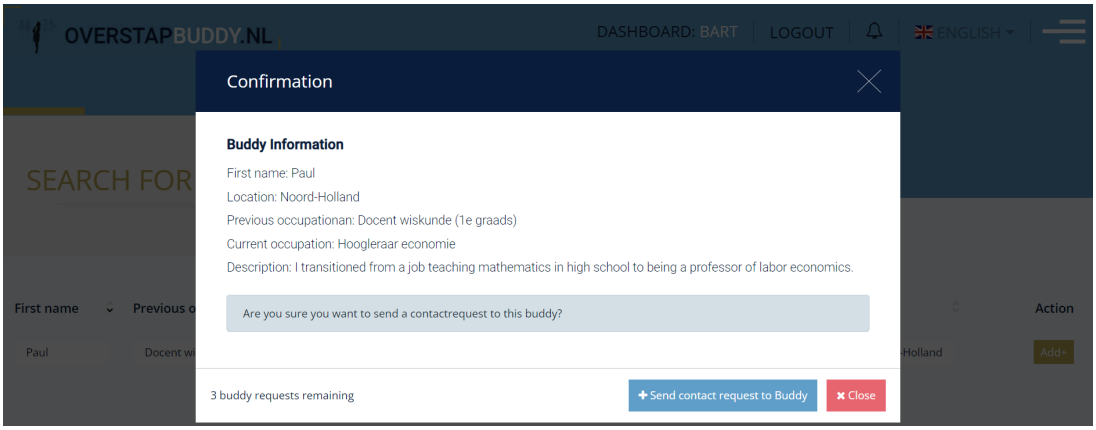


Figure C5: Chat functionality

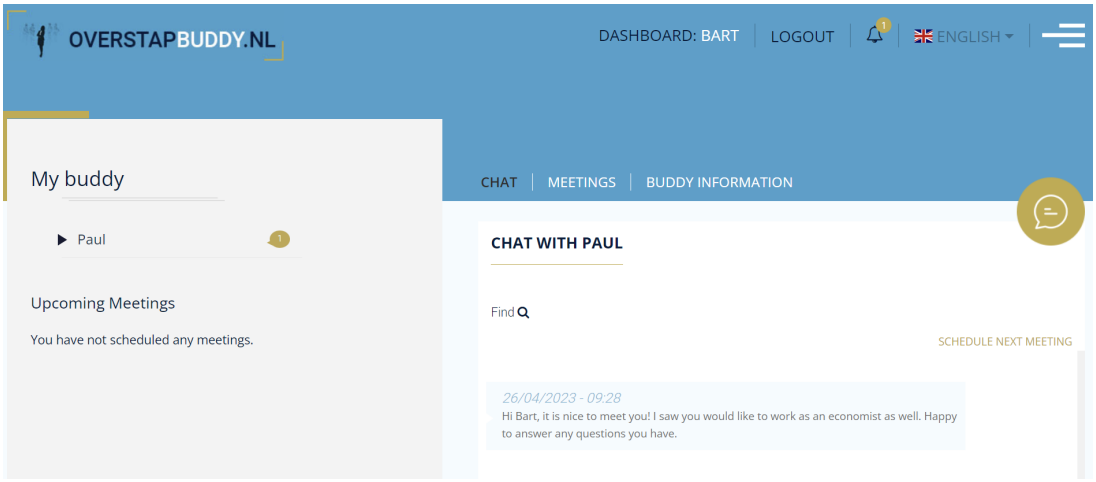
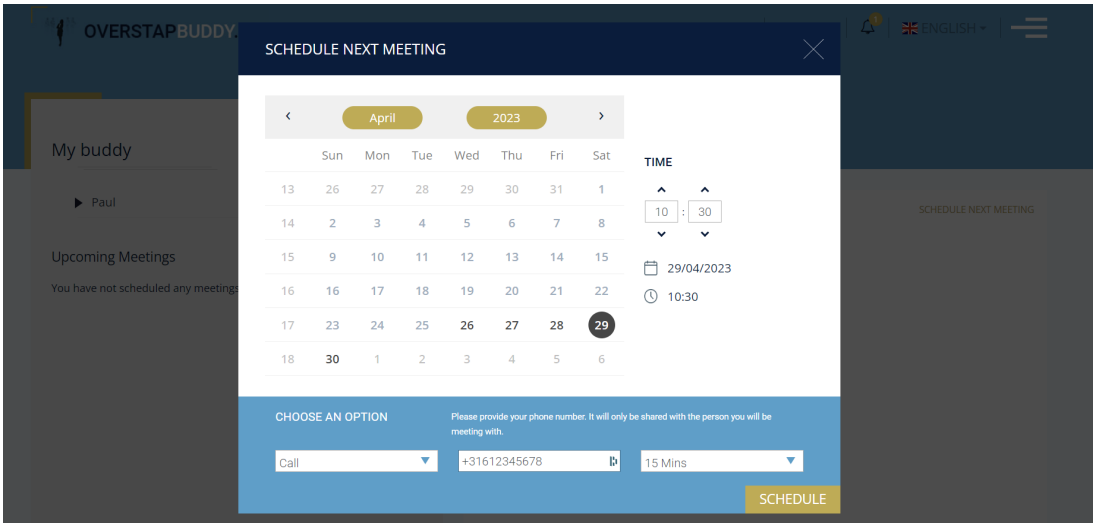


Figure C6: Meeting scheduler



Supplemental Appendix D Recruitment Post and Emails

Supplemental Appendix D.1 LinkedIn post for buddies

Who wants to help people take the step toward a new profession?

For many people, this is the moment to switch to a different profession. Maybe it has always been your dream, maybe it's closer to home, or maybe it pays better. Whatever the reason, the tight labor market is a great opportunity to make that change.

Research shows that many people hesitate for a long time before taking the step. What can help is having a buddy: someone who has changed professions themselves, who can think along about practical concerns, or someone who has already made a similar transition.

Together with a team of researchers, I am working on a project that supports people considering a career change. We do this through a buddy platform where individuals interested in switching professions are matched with people who have relevant experience. Would you like to be such a buddy, or do you know someone who has changed professions and is willing to share their experience?

We will organize online information sessions on October 10 and October 12 (19:30–20:30). During these sessions, we explain how the project works and what participation involves. You can sign up through a registration link.

Participants in the buddy platform will receive a certificate of recognition afterward. But the biggest reward is helping people with one of the most important decisions of their lives.

Thank you in advance!

Supplemental Appendix D.2 Initial recruitment email for job seekers

Subject: Do you ever think about finding work in a different occupation?

Dear Sir/Madam,

Overstapbuddy.nl is a new website from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU). On overstapbuddy.nl, you can contact people who have changed occupations. These "buddies" share their experiences and provide essential tips to help you make a successful transition. They also think along with you, so you don't have to reinvent the wheel yourself.

Contact with a buddy takes place via chat or phone. You can choose what you prefer. Participation is voluntary, and you can stop at any time.

Would you like to use overstapbuddy.nl?

Please submit your choice by November 4.

Yes, I am interested >

No, I am not interested >

A small group of job seekers will have access to overstapbuddy.nl. Because there are only a limited number of buddies, the available spots are also limited. Therefore, we cannot guarantee that all interested participants will be able to use overstapbuddy.nl. You will hear by November 4 whether you have been selected.

Collaboration between UWV and VU

VU and UWV are jointly researching whether overstapbuddy.nl helps job seekers find work. You can find more information on werk.nl. Participation in overstapbuddy.nl has no effect on the services or benefits you receive from UWV.

Kind regards,

UWV

Supplemental Appendix D.3 Treatment email

Subject: Create an account on overstapbuddy.nl and find a buddy

Dear Sir/Madam,

You have been selected to participate in Overstapbuddy. A week ago, you expressed interest in overstapbuddy.nl, a new website for job seekers who are considering changing professions. You can now create an account.

With your account, you can search for a buddy and send him or her a chat message. You can also arrange a phone conversation if you wish.

Create account >

Overstapbuddy.nl is a website of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU). By participating in overstapbuddy.nl, you give VU permission to share the data collected on the website with UWV. The research team uses this data only to study whether overstapbuddy.nl helps people in their job search. You can read exactly which data are shared in the privacy statement.

Collaboration between UWV and VU

VU and UWV are jointly researching whether overstapbuddy.nl helps job seekers find work. You can find more information on werk.nl. Participation in overstapbuddy.nl has no effect on the services or benefits you receive from UWV.

We hope that contact with a buddy will help you move forward. Questions? Please contact us at info@overstapbuddy.nl.

Kind regards,

UWV

Supplemental Appendix D.4 Control email

Subject: You are on the waitlist for Overstapbuddy.nl

Dear Sir/Madam,

A week ago, you indicated that you were interested in overstapbuddy.nl, a website from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU) for job seekers who are considering changing professions. Unfortunately, VU currently has no available spot for you. Because there are only a limited number of buddies, the number of available spots is also limited.

Collaboration between UWV and VU

VU and UWV are jointly researching whether overstapbuddy.nl helps job seekers in finding work. You can find more information on werk.nl.

As soon as a spot becomes available, you will hear from us.

Kind regards,

UWV

Supplemental Appendix E Surveys

Supplemental Appendix E.1 Pre-survey

1. Is your main occupation of interest [selection occupation]?
    - Yes
    - No
2. If no for (1), what is your main occupation of interest?
3. Which other occupation are you interested in? [Can list up to five]
4. In which alternative occupation [of the five] are you most interested?
5. How much time have you spent in the past 30 days exploring other occupations than [main occupation of interest]. Think about searching for information about other occupation, searching for information about education and training, but also time you spent applying to positions in these occupations.
6. How often did you apply in the last two weeks?
    (a) For [main occupation]:
    (b) For [primary alternative of interest]:
    (c) For other occupations:
7. How many interviews did you have in the last two weeks?
    (a) For [main occupation]:
    (b) For [primary alternative of interest]:
    (c) For other occupations:
8. How often do you plan to apply in the coming two weeks?
    (a) For [main occupation]:
    (b) For [primary alternative of interest]:
    (c) For other occupations:

[Questions below are asked on 5-point Likert scale unless otherwise noted]

9. I am prepared to apply to a job in which I do not have any experience.
10. I think that without experience, I will have a smaller chance of being invited for an interview.
11. I think that after transitioning to a new occupation in which I do not yet have experience, I will earn a lower salary.
12. I am prepared to give up some salary to transition to an occupation in which I do not yet have any experience.
13. I am confident in my ability to perform work in which I have no experience yet, but which may suit me.
14. My skills can be used in many different positions.
15. I am motivated to search for work in which I have no experience yet, but which suits me.
16. I find it useful to search for work in which I have no experience yet, but which suits me.
17. I find it unpleasant to search for work in which I have no experience yet, but which suits me.
18. Searching for work in which I have no experience is a waste of my knowledge and experience.
19. If I have questions about searching for work, I can easily contact someone.
20. The Employment Agency (UWV) supports me in my job search in a way that suits me.
21. How can the Employment Agency (UWV) help you find work? [Open text]
22. To which degree do you feel the below emotions when searching for work in which you have no experience?
    (a) Fear
    (b) Uncertainty
    (c) Enthusiasm
    (d) Sadness

(e) Happiness

(f) Anger

23. If you have any comments about this questionnaire, you can enter them below [Open text].

Supplemental Appendix E.2 Post-survey

1. Is your main occupation of interest [selection occupation]?

   - Yes
   - No

2. If no for (1), what is your main occupation of interest?

   Questions 3-23 are the same as in the pre-survey.

   For treated job seekers

24. Have you had any contact with a buddy on overstapbuddy.nl?

    - Yes
    - No

    If no:

25. Why did you not have any contact with a buddy?

    If yes:

26. Can you briefly summarize what you talked about with your buddy?

27. Did you discuss any of the following?

    - What sort of work fits me
    - Looking for work
    - Interviews
    - Tips to transition to a new occupation
    - Dealing with setbacks
    - Other...

28. Through overstapbuddy.nl, I felt supported in my search for a job.
29. Overstapbuddy.nl was easy to use.
30. I am satisfied about the contact I had with my buddy.
31. I would recommend overstapbuddy.nl to other job seekers
32. What did you like about overstapbuddy.nl?
33. Do you have suggestions for improvements to overstapbuddy.nl?
34. Do you have any other comments or suggestions about overstapbuddy.nl?

    All
35. If you have any comments about this questionnaire, you can enter them below [Open text].

Supplemental Appendix E.3 Outflow survey

1. Did you find a job in the past six months?
2. What is your new occupation/role called?
3. How did you find this job?
4. Would you like to shortly expand on how you found this job?
5. Is the new occupation the same as the one you had before?
6. [If made transition] How satisfied are you with the transition?
7. If it were up to you, would you keep doing this job for the next couple of years?

Supplemental Appendix F Video transcript

[Everyone (paraphrased)] Hello!

[Person 1] I finished a degree in personnel and labor studies at a university of applied sciences. Unfortunately, there was no more work in that field for me, part-time. So I made the switch to becoming a math teacher.

[Person 2] Five years ago, I made the transition from being an occupational therapist inhealthcare to the government, where I now work as a WMO consultant.

[Person 3] I switched from financial services to being a coach using horses. This means you use horses as a way to help people.

[Person 4] 35 years ago, I was a house painter, but because of knee problems, I had to give this up. But I did not want to go into disability insurance, so now I work in IT.

[Person 5] After six years, I was done with my old profession and decided to do what I had always wanted: start my own business.

[Person 6] In a special way, I ended up in a conversation to temporarily become a project leader for an initiative to help people aged 56+ find work.

[Person 7] I switched to a job as a communications adviser.

[Person 8] Were there perhaps other jobs where I could gain much more experience and enjoy my work more? It turns out that there were. And it turned out to be in the field of human resources.

[Person 9] I once started in radio, then held positions as executive secretary, HR advisor and career coach. So, I've made quite a few steps over the years. My expectations were: I always found it quite exciting to make such a switch. And when I'd been at it for a few weeks, and looking back now, I would always think: yes, it actually always turned out fine.

[Person 1] It was an exciting choice, because you don't know what to expect, and sometimes you have to do things where you think: does this really suit me? I've noticed that you don't always know that in advance, so I'd say: go experience it.

[Person 2] Make sure your family stands behind you, and persevere.

[Person 5] The switch to being self-employed was of course a big one. I learned a great deal from it. In practice definitely. I also learned about the theory, about several things, several details, by taking very specific courses and attending lectures. I also, and this is very important, listened carefully to people, who already had a lot of knowledge in certain elements of entrepreneurship. Talk to people who already do what you really want to do, and learn a great deal from them.

[Person 6] The advice from my career coach, my presentation skills, and my positive attitude were particularly useful to me.

[Person 7] What disappointed me was the fact that it wasn't a mobile job, so suddenly I was sitting in an office eight hours a day. What surprised me positively was that common sense got me a long way. Besides that, I had a very good coach. A seasoned professional who taught me a lot in the area of communication.

[Person 9] When I didn't know things, or didn't understand tasks, or didn't understand systems, I always stayed open about that. Then it turned out there were plenty of helpful colleagues willing to help. In addition, I've always continued to develop myself in general. I did part-time programs, but also short courses, and now on the digital highway I find all kinds of webinars, so I continue to feed my curiosity that way. Lastly, don't let yourself be distracted by job titles.

[Person 3] I enrolled in a program. At that time, there were fewer programs than there are today. From there, I began to develop myself into a coach using horses and started using this in, among other things, reintegration programs.

[Person 1] I started my first job through a temp agency. I like it a lot. My goal is to become a teacher. From August 1st, I have a contract at my internship school.

[Person 2] My tip is: keep moving, stay active, and you'll get somewhere.

[Person 4] Great work, very good employer, nice colleagues, I can recommend it to everyone.

[Person 5] For me, and I really mean this, the best choice ever. So don't hesitate to switch, follow your heart, and make it a success.

[Person 7] It has brought me a lot. Especially in terms of self-worth; I really got a boost. In the sense of: I actually went and did it.

[Person 9] So if you don't have that job yet, don't let it get you down. It really is waiting for you somewhere.

[Person 8] Dare. Do. Discuss. Make what's in your head, and what might not seem possible, possible, by discussing what seems impossible and going for it.

[Everyone (paraphrased)] Best of luck! Goodbye!