InnoSocial

Mainstreaming Inclusive Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship in Higher Education

2022-1-PL01-KA220-HED-000089820

InnoSocial Course Piloting:
Collection of Lessons Learnt and Good practices

Co-funded by
the European Union

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The InnoSocial Collection of Lessons Learnt and Good Practices was developed based on the outcomes of the pilot implementation of the Inclusive Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship course at partner universities: University of Social Sciences, Poland, University of Applied Sciences, Lithuania, and University of Pavia, Italy.

Authors:
- University of Pavia (UNIPV), Italy
- Vilniaus Kolegija (VIKO), Lithuania
- University of Social Sciences (SAN), Poland

Editors:
Evgenia Nikulina and Silviya Georgieva, Tetra Solutions Ltd.

Reviewers:
Agnieszka Zając and Rafał Wojszko, InCREA Foundation

Contacts:
www.innosocial.eu

CONTENTS

InnoSocial

FOREWORD

THE INNOSOCIAL PROJECT

The InnoSocial project is a 30-month Erasmus+ initiative (1 November 2022 – 30 April 2025) that aims to facilitate mainstreaming of Inclusive Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship (II&SE) education and training in universities' curricula, thus promoting wider integration of the social dimension in the knowledge triangle practices implemented by higher education institutions (HEIs).

The specific project objectives are:
- To provide a comprehensive foundation for design and delivery of education in II&SE
- To contribute to a teaching and learning base in the field of II&SE
- To improve capacity of HEIs' academic staff to design and deliver education in II&SE
- To raise awareness of the role of HEIs in promoting II&SE among key stakeholders.

The main project results include:
- Toolkit for design & delivery of II&SE education: Guidelines for embedding II&SE education in HEIs' curricula;
- Course in Inclusive Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship, integrated in the education offer of the partner universities;
- Collection of "lesson learnt" and "success stories" related to mainstreaming of II&SE education in HEIs' curricula, based on the pilot implementation of the InnoSocial course.

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FOREWORD

THE INNOSOCIAL COURSE PILOTING

The InnoSocial course (75 hours / 3 ECTS) is focused on the principles and practices of inclusive innovation, equipping students with the knowledge and skills to design, develop, and scale socially impactful ventures. Engaging with the course, students explore case studies of successful inclusive innovation and social enterprises, and engage in experiential learning activities and collaborative projects. The course is designed to enable students to engage in a transformative journey to harness the power of inclusive innovation, driving meaningful change and fostering a more just and equitable world.

The InnoSocial course includes five interconnected modules:
- Module 1: Inclusive innovation and social entrepreneurship
- Module 2: Designing inclusive innovations to solve societal challenges
- Module 3: Tools for designing a social enterprise
- Module 4: Establishing a social enterprise
- Module 5: Ensuring sustainability of a social enterprise and measuring social impact

In the period of June 2024 – January 2025, three partner universities – University of Social Sciences (SAN), Poland, Vilniaus Kolegija (VIKO), Lithuania, and University of Pavia (UNIPV), Italy – piloted the InnoSocial course with their students. A total of 88 students took part in the InnoSocial training and engaged in the development of inclusive innovation and social enterprise ideas. As a result of the course piloting, the partner universities collected the lessons learnt and good practices presented in these compendium.

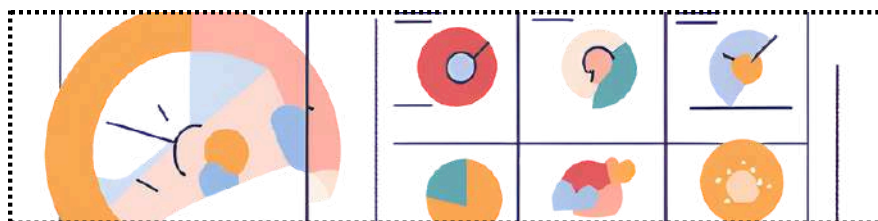InnoSocial

I. LESSONS LEARNT VILNIAUS KOLEGIJA

1.1. LESSONS IN COLLABORATION

I have always wanted to create a business that would make a difference. My participation in the InnoSocial course let me understand that teamwork is crucial in achieving this goal.

At the beginning of the course, our group was asked to split into teams to develop ideas for social enterprises. I happened to be in a team with three motivated, creative, and ambitious groupmates. As the weeks progressed, however, it became clear to me that there were vast differences between the teams. Some had students with complementary skills and efficient workflows. Others struggled with imbalances, bringing together more experienced team members and students who had difficulties contributing at the same level. Our team seemed to be somewhere in the middle. Sometimes, we worked well together, coming up ideas and solutions. But at other times, we were stuck, lacking the perspective that a more balanced team might have had.

Close to the end of the course, during a debriefing session, our teacher asked us to think what we would change if there were a chance to start over again. I thought that it might have been more effective if the teacher assigned teams rather than let us form them ourselves. This would help to make teams more balanced. However, after giving it another thought I said that our team should have developed a better strategy of overcoming challenges and learning to organize team work more effectively.

1.2. TAKING CONTROL

It was the end of the course. Our team was preparing for the final presentation of the social business idea we had been working on. All team members were doing everything to complete the project, except for one student who stopped contributing to it. He skipped meetings, delayed tasks, and barely responded to messages. By the time we realized that, it was too late – without the inputs he promised to provide, we could hardly move forward. We were just about to fail the project, but no one was coming to fix the situation for us. That was the biggest lesson. No one will save you by doing the work you are avoiding. You either take control, or you let things fall apart.

Next time, I will not make the same mistake. I will form my team carefully, making sure that all members are dependable and motivated. I won't wait for team members to act – I will make sure things are getting done. Success is not about luck. It is about knowing when to take control and responsibility.

1.3. BUILDING SOMETHING REAL

Before this course, I had a vague idea of how a business was created. I understood the theory, but shaping an idea into something real was new to me. During the course, our team worked on developing a social business. We brainstormed ideas, refined our concept, and practiced pitching it. At first, I thought our idea was clear, but once we started explaining it to others, I realized how much we needed to refine our message. Every conversation helped us make our vision more precise. Learning how to communicate our ideas was essential for successfully presenting our social enterprise to stakeholders.

The lectures were very engaging. The teacher didn't just give lectures to us. She made sure we applied what we learned through interesting tasks. Everything felt structured and purposeful. At the end of the course, I wasn't just familiar with the steps of building a company – I had experienced them. The biggest lesson I learnt is that a good idea is just the beginning. Teamwork and communication turn it into something real.

1.4. LEARNING BY DOING

From the very first class, I knew this course would make a difference. It wasn't just about listening to lectures. It was about developing a social enterprise together. Our team had a clear plan, and everyone had a role. Some students focused on the ideation, others on analysing the business side. I had never worked this way before, where everything felt so structured but creative at the same time. The real challenge came at the mock company fair. Everything we had learned came together in a way that created a strong sense of accomplishment. Presenting our idea with confidence to external guests was an incredible experience.

Looking back, I realize that "learning by doing" helped me develop the entrepreneurial skills I will use in the future to establish a real social business. The most important takeaway is my understanding of how powerful this approach to learning is when everyone is committed to a shared goal.

1.5. SHAPING THE IDEA

When we started the course, I had a social business idea. But as we moved forward, I realized that it was not enough. We had to shape the idea to fit the structure of a real business. It was extremely challenging to adapt it to the standard business templates that our teacher asked to complete. But then I understood that these templates were not limiting us. On the contrary, they were helping us clarify our vision. The more we refined our answers, the more precise and convincing our business model became.

I also noticed how important leadership was. Without someone to guide the discussions, we risked being stuck. Eventually, one of our team members stepped up and helped organize our thoughts, making sure we stayed focused. My main lesson learnt is: However innovative your business idea is, you still have to answer the fundamental questions all businesses face. And the clearer your answers are, the stronger your project is.

1.6. FROM IDEA TO ACTION

When we started the course, I had a social business idea. But as we moved forward, I realized that it was not enough. We had to shape the idea to fit the structure of a real business. It was extremely challenging to adapt it to the standard business templates that our teacher asked to complete. But then I understood that these templates were not limiting us. On the contrary, they were helping us clarify our vision. The more we refined our answers, the more precise and convincing our business model became.

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1.7. LEARNING TO WORK TOGETHER

Before this course, I had no idea what a social business was and how to create one. Now, after working through each step, I understand the process, the key activities, and what it takes to turn an idea into an enterprise.

One of the most valuable lessons was learning how to work effectively in a team. We learnt to divide tasks based on our strengths which made the process of working together much smoother. This way, we managed to complete even complex assignments efficiently. Beyond teamwork, I learnt how to analyse a social business, identify risks, and assess competitors. Most importantly, I've gained the confidence to develop a business idea from scratch – something I never imagined I could do before.

1.8. A WINNING EXPERIENCE

Reflecting on this course, I can say it was an incredible experience! I learn how to create a social business and gained skills that will stay with me for the future. The highlight was the Ideas Fair competition. The preparation was intense. We spent long hours analysing our idea, refining our pitch, and making sure everything was in place. But all that effort paid off when we won the Golden award. That moment proved that we had managed to develop a promising social enterprise idea and present it in a convincing way to our teachers and guests.

What made our team successful was how well we organized work. There was no need to chase after anyone: each person believed in our project and was motivated to do their part. That made all the difference. Thanks to this course, I now know how to structure a business idea, argue my points effectively, and find the right information when needed. I might not yet see the full impact of this course, but one thing is clear: when I start a business in the future, I'll know exactly how to make it work.

1.9. FINDING COMMON GROUND

Creating a social business from scratch was a bigger challenge than I expected. At first, our team struggled. Each of us had different ideas, and it was difficult to decide which one to develop. But instead of choosing just one, we found a solution in creating a synergy between two ideas. In the end, I think we come up with a truly meaningful mock social business.

One of the most rewarding moments was participating in the Mock Company Fair. We worked long hours, refining our idea and preparing our presentation. The intensive preparation created a lot of stress, but receiving feedback on our work made it worthwhile. As a result of this experience, I learned how to present ideas clearly, both in writing and in speech, so that they are easy to understand for everyone. I also gained valuable skills in researching, selecting, and using information effectively. But most important is that this experience gave me the confidence to think differently and more broadly. My participation in this course reassured me that hard work and right team can make great things happen.

1.10. CREATING A SOCIAL BUSINESS PLAN

Working on a social business plan was a challenge, but it was also one of the most valuable experiences I have ever had. We had to consider every detail, from budgeting to legal requirements. I learned so much about business laws and what it takes to set up a social enterprise. We created a professional, detailed document that could actually serve as a foundation for a real business. The sense of accomplishment that we had in the end made all the hard work worth it.

The experience I gained through this course strengthened my skills in teamwork, research, and business planning. I know these competencies will be useful in my future career, and I feel more confident about tackling real-world business challenges.

1.11. BUILDING A BUSINESS WITH PURPOSE

Developing our social business idea was a great opportunity to make a difference. From the beginning, we focused on how our business could contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals. One of the biggest lessons I learned was that social entrepreneurship is not just about starting a business. It is about creating a venture that benefits the society. We explored different social business models, planning tools, and legal structures suitable for social enterprises, and learned how to manage and sustain a social enterprise.

Working as a team helped us complete tasks efficiently, and linking our idea to SDGs made our project even stronger. The entire experience was a valuable contribution to my professional development. I made me feel more confident about planning, structuring, and managing a social enterprise in the future. This course showed me that a business can be more than profit-driven. With the right purpose, it can truly make a difference.

1.12. THE POWER OF TEAMWORK

I have always known that teamwork is important, but this project showed me just how essential it really is. At first, working from home made us lazy, and motivation was low. Deadlines felt distant, and no one wanted to take the first step. We needed leadership, a clear plan, and someone to push the team forward. So, we took the initiative by dividing tasks, setting goals, and encouraging each other to stay on track. Once we started, everything moved faster.

What I learned most wasn't about the project itself, but about how teamwork really works. Sometimes, people just need direction. Most of us are capable, but without motivation and structure, progress is slow. Having the right team – one that supports and drives each other – is the clue to success. In the end, we met our deadlines and delivered a great project. More importantly, I now understand that a business is not just about ideas. It is about the people who bring them to life.

SPOŁECZNA AKADEMIA NAUK
UNIVERSITY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

1.13. COURSE ORGANIZATION

During the pilot implementation of the course, students worked in international teams on the development of social business models. Many encountered challenges related to time planning, communication across different cultural backgrounds, and aligning diverse expectations within their groups. One participant from Poland noted that "*at first it was hard to coordinate work with colleagues from different time zones and academic backgrounds, but by the end of the course, we had found a rhythm that worked for everyone.*"

An important moment was the group assignment to design a social enterprise. One team focused their idea on the intersection of two fields - environmental sustainability and refugee integration. Another group struggled at first to align on a shared vision but eventually merged two proposals - a food waste solution and a youth employment initiative - into a unified concept that satisfied both aims.

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1.14. POSITIVE OUTCOMES AND CHALLENGES

The students involved in the course reported that working in mixed teams improved their intercultural communication skills and gave them a broader perspective on social challenges in different countries. They successfully used the course framework (tools, lectures, templates) to design business models that included financial, environmental, and social value components. The participants felt empowered to continue developing their ideas beyond the course, with several expressing interest in pitching them to local NGOs or competitions.

As a challenge, some students found the theoretical part too dense and initially struggled to understand how to apply it to their context. One student from Tunisia mentioned: "*I wasn't sure how to implement the EU-based models in my region, but after group discussions, I realized how to adapt them to local structures.*" Remote collaboration was sometimes difficult due to differing levels of technological fluency and group coordination. However, these issues were streamlined through close cooperation with the lecturer.

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1.15. HOW THE OUTCOMES WERE ACHIEVED

Achieving the positive outcomes of the course was possible due to the combination of the following factors:

- The variety of students' professional and academic backgrounds contributed to creative discussions, but also created friction at times that stimulated even more productive exchange of viewpoints.
- Teams that established clear internal communication and division of roles early on performed better and reported higher satisfaction.
- Students who actively participated in discussions and case study reviews tended to gain more from the experience and reported a deeper understanding of the subject matter.
- Learning from European case studies (such as Perma Fungi) helped students connect abstract concepts with real-world applications, even if the cultural or market contexts were different.

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UNIVERSITY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

1.16. KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Working on real-world problems in diverse teams enhances both personal growth and professional competence.
- Teamwork, clear communication, and task distribution are essential in social entrepreneurship development.
- Social businesses can and should pursue financial sustainability without losing sight of social goals.
- Inspiration from best practices across Europe showed students how small-scale, community-rooted ideas can scale and have broad social impact.
- Many students expressed increased motivation to explore entrepreneurship as a career path. One student stated: "*Before the course, I didn't see myself as a founder - now I do.*"
- Participants reported increased confidence in presenting ideas publicly, as well as greater awareness of global sustainability challenges.
- The majority of students emphasized that the experience gave them tools to act, not just reflect - from stakeholder analysis to business modelling.
- One student concluded: "*This course changed my mindset. I used to think in terms of business OR society - now I see they can grow together.*"

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1.17. STUDENT'S INSIGHTS "BUSINESS WITH A PURPOSE"

Before taking part in the InnoSocial course, I had always connected entrepreneurship to profit – reducing costs, increasing revenue, and making the business financially stable. But during the course, I understood that business success is much more than positive numbers on a balance sheet.

One of the most inspiring insights for me was that a business can be both financially sustainable and socially responsible. It was eye-opening to see that inclusive innovation and social entrepreneurship represent an essential part of sustainable development and inclusive growth. The idea that economy and society are interconnected and mutually dependable concepts resonates most my own believes. A business that makes a positive impact on its community doesn't have to sacrifice profitability. On the contrary, social responsibility can stimulate business growth.

The InnoSocial course changed my understanding of what makes a business truly successful. It's not just financial gain but about creating long-term value for local people and communities.

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1.18. TEACHER'S REFLECTION ON THE COURSE

Students involved in the pilot implementation of the InnoSocial course enjoyed the topic. Some of them, being students of the Sustainable Management track, highlighted the alignment between the course topic and their field of study.

The areas of lesson learnt were different considering the different levels of education. In particular, bachelor students appreciated the theoretical part of Unit 1.1 Sustainable development goals and societal challenges, since they were quite new to the topics of the course. Instead, master students were particularly satisfied with the following units that are more practical. The provision of the tools for designing a social enterprise in Module 3 have been appreciated by the majority of the students, because these tools are very practical. They reduce the gap between the theoretical explanation and the practical implementation of the topics.

After a frontal presentation of the theoretical topics, the students were asked to split in groups for the assignment of developing inclusive innovation. This assignment allowed students to deepen their abilities to work in group.

With regard to the content, for the master students, the course provided an opportunity to recap concepts that they already knew from previous studies. For the bachelor students, the course served as an entry point to the field of inclusive innovation and social entrepreneurship.

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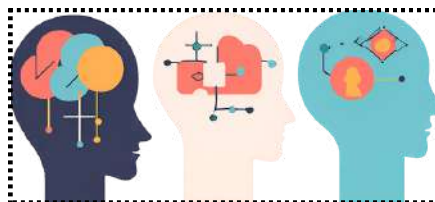
2.1. SOSCLEANING – A SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE CLEANING SERVICE

Short description

SOSCleaning is a mobile application that offers professional cleaning services while promoting social responsibility and sustainability. The platform connects customers with skilled workers from vulnerable groups, such as emigrants, former prisoners, and socially disadvantaged individuals, providing them with employment opportunities. In addition, the service incorporates eco-friendly cleaning products and methods, ensuring both social and environmental impact.

Problem

Many vulnerable groups face difficulties in integrating into the labour market, limiting their access to stable work. At the same time, traditional cleaning service platforms often lack transparency, convenience, and sustainability. SOSCleaning addresses these challenges by providing an easy-to-use digital platform that not only ensures fair employment opportunities but also promotes ecological cleaning practices.

Innovative elements

- *Digital accessibility*: A user-friendly mobile app (similar to Bolt) that simplifies the process of ordering cleaning services.
- *Social impact*: The platform prioritizes hiring socially disadvantaged individuals, helping them reintegrate into the workforce.
- *Ecological sustainability*: The service exclusively uses environmentally friendly cleaning products, contributing to sustainable development.
- *Flexible partnerships*: SOSCleaning collaborates with cultural institutions, museums, hotels, and schools, ensuring that workers have diverse opportunities beyond traditional cleaning services.
- *Transparent operations*: The app provides clear service tracking, fair pricing, and a reliable hiring process for both customers and workers.

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Impact

- *Economic inclusion*: The service creates employment opportunities for vulnerable groups, promoting fair wages and decent working conditions.
- *Sustainability*: The service implements eco-friendly cleaning solutions, reducing environmental harm and promoting responsible consumption.
- *Customer satisfaction*: The app offers a quick, efficient, and transparent platform for ordering services, improving user experience.
- *Cultural contribution*: SOSCleaning partners with the arts and cultural sector to maintain and preserve cultural heritage sites.
- *Measurable outcomes*: Progress is assessed every six months using qualitative and quantitative indicators, ensuring continuous improvement.

By aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), SOSCleaning promotes social equality, poverty reduction, responsible consumption, and a more inclusive society. Through its combination of technology, social responsibility, and sustainability, the initiative delivers a meaningful impact for both individuals and communities.

2.2. MUSEUM "TOUCHED" – AN INCLUSIVE CULTURAL SPACE

Short description

Touched is a unique cultural space that combines a fully accessible museum for people with disabilities and creative workshops for young artists. The project addresses both the lack of cultural spaces adapted for blind, deaf, and mobility-impaired individuals and the difficulties young artists face in securing affordable workspaces. In addition to exhibitions, Touched offers educational programs, events, and a platform for artists to showcase and sell their work.

Problem

- Many cultural institutions in Lithuania are not adapted for people with disabilities, limiting their access to art and cultural experiences.
- Young artists struggle to find affordable studios to create and develop their work after graduation, making it difficult to sustain a career in the arts.
- The lack of inclusive cultural spaces results in social exclusion and missed opportunities for both artists and audiences.

Innovative elements

- *Inclusive museum*: A fully accessible museum where all exhibits are tactile, ensuring blind visitors can experience art through touch. Audio guides, Braille descriptions, and visual adaptations for the deaf enhance accessibility.
- *Affordable creative spaces*: A dedicated workspace for young artists, providing modern, well-equipped studios at half the market price.
- *Dual-purpose institution*: Combining a museum with artist workshops is an entirely new concept in Lithuania, creating a cultural hub that serves both artists and diverse audiences.

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- *Universal design*: The building is fully adapted for people with mobility disabilities, featuring automatic doors, wide door frames, and low thresholds.

Impact

- *Cultural inclusion*: The project ensures that people with disabilities can experience art without barriers, making culture more accessible and engaging.
- *Support for emerging artists*: It provides affordable studio space and exhibition opportunities, helping young artists enter the market and sustain creative careers.
- *Tourism and community development*: It establishes a unique cultural destination that attracts visitors, fosters social engagement, and strengthens the local art scene.

By bridging the gap between accessibility and artistic opportunity, Touched not only creates a more inclusive cultural landscape but also fosters innovation and creativity within Lithuania's art community.

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2.3. EDUCATIONAL BAKERY "BANDELE PO BANDELES"

Short description

"Bandelė po Bandelės" is a social enterprise bakery in Vilnius that combines a wide range of baked goods with pastry-making lessons for children from socially vulnerable groups. The bakery not only teaches children valuable culinary skills but also promotes responsible consumption, reduces poverty and hunger, and provides meaningful after-school activities. Additionally, the initiative supports charity efforts by donating baked goods to children's homes and low-income families.

Problem
- Lack of access to extracurricular activities for children from low-income families and orphanages.
- Limited opportunities for children to develop practical skills and engage in structured after-school programs.
- Food insecurity and poverty among socially vulnerable children.

Innovative elements
- *First-of-its-kind bakery*: The only bakery in Lithuania dedicated to after-school programs for socially vulnerable children.
- *Free pastry lessons*: Children learn to bake for free, gaining culinary skills and engaging in creative, hands-on learning.
- *Charitable contribution*: Those who do not wish to take home their baked goods can donate them to children's homes and families in need.
- *Social and emotional well-being*: The bakery creates a warm and welcoming space where children can feel valued, cared for, and involved in a positive community.

InnoSocial

Impact

- *Improved emotional and social well-being*: The bakery provides a nurturing environment where children feel included and supported.
- *Skill development and empowerment*: It equips children with practical skills that can be valuable for their future.
- *Community engagement*: The bakery promotes generosity and responsible consumption through donations and shared activities.
- *Poverty reduction*: It addresses food insecurity by ensuring that vulnerable children have access to nutritious baked goods.

By blending education, charity, and entrepreneurship, "Bandelė po Bandelės" creates a space where children can learn, grow, and contribute to their community in a meaningful way.
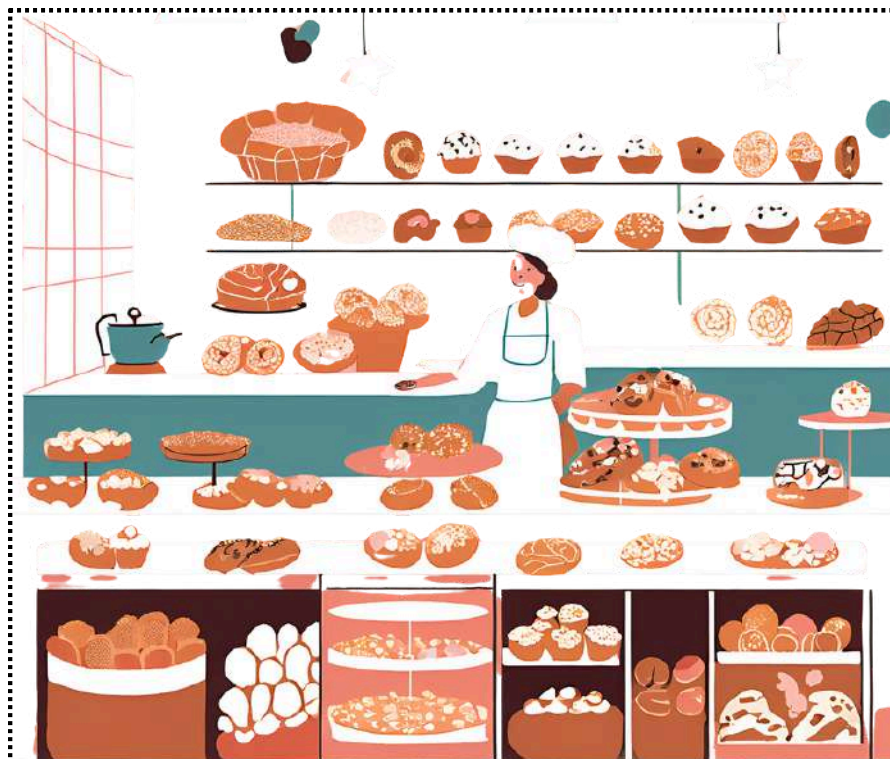
2.4. KULTURAS – EDUCATIONAL PUBLISHING HOUSE

Short description

KULTuras is a social enterprise that combines educational publishing with cultural activities to promote equal learning opportunities for children and adolescents from socially disadvantaged families. By partnering with schools and nursing homes, KULTuras provides free educational lessons and after-school activities, ensuring that vulnerable children have access to quality education and cultural enrichment.

Problem

- *Social exclusion in education*: Many children from socially disadvantaged families struggle to access quality education due to financial constraints and a lack of resources.
- *Lack of after-school opportunities*: Without structured educational and cultural activities, children may experience lower motivation, reduced academic performance, and fewer future opportunities.
- *Limited access to books*: Reading and cultural engagement play a crucial role in learning and personal growth, yet many disadvantaged children lack access to books and educational resources.

Innovative elements

- *Educational publishing with a social mission*: KULTuras publishes and distributes literary works specifically aimed at engaging and inspiring children and adolescents from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.
- *Partnerships with schools and nursing homes*: KULTuras establishes agreements to provide free lessons and after-school activities, ensuring access to quality education.
- *Holistic development*: KULTuras focuses not only on academic success but also on improving psychological well-being and motivation to learn.

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Impact

- *Improved educational opportunities*: By providing free lessons and after-school activities, KULTuras helps children from disadvantaged backgrounds access quality education, reducing the education gap.
- *Enhanced psychological well-being*: Through cultural and educational engagement, children gain confidence, motivation, and a sense of belonging, which supports their overall mental health.
- *Reduction of social discrimination*: By ensuring equal learning opportunities, KULTuras works toward breaking down barriers that contribute to social exclusion.
- *Improved literacy and cultural awareness*: Access to books and cultural materials fosters a reading habit, improving literacy rates and broadening children's perspectives.
- *Long-term social impact*: By equipping children with knowledge, skills, and motivation, KULTuras empowers future generations, contributing to a more inclusive and educated society.

Through its innovative approach to education and cultural engagement, KULTuras transforms learning into an accessible and enriching experience, ensuring that all children, regardless of their background, have the opportunity to grow, learn, and thrive.

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2.5. MENAT: SUPPORTING ARTISTS THROUGH SUSTAINABLE MERCHANDISE

Short description

MENAT is a social enterprise designed to support unemployed artists by providing them with opportunities to create, test, and distribute sustainable merchandise. The store serves as both a marketplace and a community hub, where artists can showcase their work, earn a stable income, and connect with a wider audience. By promoting sustainability, MENAT ensures that artists have access to high-quality, eco-friendly materials for their creations.

Problem

- *High unemployment rates among artists*: Many talented artists struggle to find stable work and income, often lacking platforms to sell their work effectively.
- *Limited access to quality, sustainable materials*: Artists frequently face difficulties in sourcing high-quality, environmentally friendly materials, leading to waste and increased costs.
- *Barriers to market entry*: Many emerging artists lack the resources, marketing knowledge, or distribution channels to reach potential buyers, limiting their ability to turn their passion into a profession.

Innovative elements

- *Artist employment and support:* MENAT actively employs unemployed artists, providing them with a space to create and a direct way to sell their work.
- *Sustainable merchandise model:* The store ensures that all products are made from sustainable, high-quality materials, reducing waste and promoting responsible consumption.

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- *Community building:* MENAT creates a hub where artists can collaborate, share resources, and support each other in their creative and professional journeys.
- *Testing and quality assurance*: Artists can experiment with different materials before choosing the best options for their merchandise, ensuring that they offer customers only the highest quality products.

Impact

- *Economic empowerment for artists*: MENAT provides a stable income for artists who might otherwise struggle to make a living from their work.
- *Increased access to sustainable art supplies*: By curating eco-friendly materials, MENAT helps reduce waste and encourages sustainable practices within the art community.
- *Stronger artistic community*: By bringing artists together, MENAT fosters collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and a sense of belonging among creatives.
- *Long-term sustainability*: The initiative not only benefits current artists but also creates a long-term, self-sustaining ecosystem for future generations of creatives.

By bridging the gap between artists, sustainable materials, and potential buyers, MENAT transforms the way art is produced, sold, and appreciated, ensuring that creativity and sustainability go hand in hand.

2.6. GREEN HEAT

Problem

The Green Heat project addresses the dual problem of excessive food waste and the lack of access to affordable, clean energy in rural areas. In many regions, organic waste is disposed of inefficiently, while at the same time, many low-income communities struggle with rising heating costs. The student behind this idea pointed out: "*Where I come from, people throw away tons of food, while others burn trash to heat their homes.*"

Solution

Green Heat proposes the installation of small-scale biogas converters that process food waste from local restaurants and households into clean energy for heating. The project also includes a community education campaign about waste separation. The business model includes subscription-based waste collection and heat delivery.

Innovative elements

Green Heat combines two major issues – food waste and energy access – into a closed-loop system. Its uniqueness lies in its scalability and ability to be implemented in both rural and urban areas.

Feasibility

The Green Heat project was based on existing biogas technologies already used in EU-funded rural development programs. Students identified local partners (restaurants, housing associations) who could provide waste and use the energy.

Impact

Green Heat reduces landfill use and emissions, and offers low-cost energy to low-income households.

2.7. SOLARBOX

Problem

Access to electricity in remote areas is still unreliable or non-existent. The problem identified was energy poverty and poor storage infrastructure. One team of students proposed creating an affordable, portable energy storage system for solar panels. "*The idea was born from the reality in my village, where even if you have panels, you can't use the power at night,*" said a student from Georgia.

Solution

SolarBox is a compact, modular battery system designed to store solar energy for households and small businesses in off-grid areas. The system uses recycled materials and is assembled by local workers, promoting job creation. "*It's a technical solution with a social twist,*" as the creators described it.

Innovative elements

SolarBox is not just a battery, but a social product assembled by vulnerable groups (e.g., unemployed youth or migrants), offering both technical and social innovation.

Feasibility

SolarBox team noted that components for their prototype could be sourced from recycled devices, and training locals to build the boxes would reduce costs while increasing impact.

Impact

SolarBox addresses energy poverty and boosts employment through local production.

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2.8. SOCIAL MARKET CAFÉ

Problem
Several students were concerned with youth unemployment and social isolation in their city. They identified that many young people – especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds – lacked job experience and access to safe spaces. "*There's nowhere to go after school that feels productive. Many teens just hang out and do nothing,*" said one participant.

Solution
Social Market Café would function as a coffee shop run by and for young people at risk of exclusion. It would offer part-time training and employment, creative workshops, and affordable meals made from surplus food. The café would collaborate with local farmers and NGOs.

Innovative elements
Social Market Café integrates sustainability with community development, turning food surplus into opportunity and empowering young people.

Feasibility
Students from Social Market Café discussed possible partnerships with local municipalities, social foundations, and farmers – all of whom would benefit from reducing food waste and youth unemployment.

Impact
Social Market Café empowers marginalized youth and reduces food waste through circular food usage.

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2.9. EDUCYCLE

Problem

This idea addressed the issue of lack of environmental education among children. The student team noticed that local schools often lacked modern, interactive tools for teaching sustainability. "*We wanted to create something fun and educational that could be used in schools to show how circular economy really works,*" one student explained.

Solution

EduCycle is a mobile educational kit that includes hands-on activities and experiments showing the principles of recycling, composting, and sustainable design. The idea is to sell or donate the kits to schools and run workshops in collaboration with municipalities.

Innovative elements

EduCycle is one of the few educational tools on the market that integrates sustainability, hands-on learning, and social entrepreneurship.

Feasibility

EduCycle was seen as highly feasible due to its low production cost and strong alignment with local and EU educational goals. The team said: "*We think we can get local funding or CSR support for our first 50 kits.*"

Impact

EduCycle promotes environmental literacy and inspires young changemakers.

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2.10. SECOND CHANCE DESIGN – UPCYCLING WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Short description

Second Chance Design is an inclusive design studio in Milan that produces fashion and home accessories from recycled materials, designed and produced by people with physical and/or mental disabilities. The project combines creative work, environmental awareness and social participation. The focus is on high quality products, inclusive work on an equal level and sustainability in product design.

Problem

People with disabilities often face significant barriers to entering the labour market - especially in creative and design-oriented professions. At the same time, huge amounts of usable materials are discarded by industry and households. There is a lack of innovative initiatives that address both social inclusion and environmental sustainability in an integrated way.

Innovative elements

- *Upcycling meets inclusion*: Creative work with used materials not only promotes sustainability, but also participation and helps to integrate people with disabilities. Second Chance Design combines social and environmental sustainability.
- *Design co-creation*: People with disabilities work as equal designers in the team, not as "assistants".
- *Design and impact combined*: The products are professionally designed, have a high quality of manufacturing and carry a clear social message.
- Workshop as a meeting place and social awareness: Open workshops and exhibitions make inclusion visible and encourage a change of perspective.

- *Local material cycles*: Working with businesses, tradespeople and households to obtain materials enables the recycling of materials.

Impact

- *Social inclusion*: People with disabilities gain access not only to the labour market but also to meaningful, creative and socially visible work.
- *Sustainable use of resources*: Used materials do not have to be thrown away but are transformed into long-lasting design objects.
- *Public awareness*: The project raises awareness of inclusion, sustainability and the value of handmade products.
- *Economic independence and empowerment*: Through their work at Second Chance Design, people with disabilities are empowered to develop their own skills and creative potential. This promotes not only self-confidence, but also economic independence and personal empowerment.
- *Promoting diversity in creativity*: Second Chance Design opens up the creative sector to people of all abilities and helps to further establish diversity and inclusion in the design and craft sector.

Second Chance Design shows how creative processes and social inclusion can be combined. The project not only promotes the professional participation of people with disabilities, but also actively contributes to conserving resources and promoting the circular economy. With a clear focus on sustainability and empowerment, Second Chance Design is setting an example for a more inclusive and resource-efficient future.

2.11. CUCINA INTERCULTURALE E INCLUSIVA – A MULTICULTURAL RESTAURANT WITH REFUGEES

Short description

Cucina Interculturale e Inclusiva is a unique restaurant in Florence that provides refugees with valuable opportunities to find employment and integrate into society. Refugees can receive training to become chefs, or take on roles in cooking, service or cleaning, gaining both skills and a sense of belonging. The restaurant's multicultural spirit is not only reflected in its diverse team but also in its menu, which features culinary specialities from around the world. In doing so, it creates new career paths for refugees while fostering inclusion, cultural exchange, and community. Guests are invited to engage with the staff, hear their personal stories and gain an intercultural experience with insights into different journeys and backgrounds.

Problem

Refugees often face social exclusion and limited access to the job market, leaving them marginalized and financially vulnerable. Cucina Interculturale e Inclusiva offers a solution by employing refugees. This not only provides them with financial stability but also promotes social integration. Working in a multicultural team fosters meaningful connections with both locals and people from diverse backgrounds, helping build a stronger, more inclusive community.

Innovative elements

- *Refugee employment and support:* Refugees are offered the opportunity to receive paid training in the catering industry directly within the company – covering everything from kitchen practice and service to hygiene standards and language skills.

- *Cultural events:* Guests can try dishes from other countries and learn about the refugees' life stories.
- *Social integration:* By interacting with guests, it allows refugees to integrate into society and interact with locals as well as other nations.
- *Language courses in the kitchen*: Refugees are not only trained in the kitchen, but also learn Italian, which is useful for future jobs and integration into society.

Impact

- *Labour market integration of refugees*: Through training, employment and support, Cucina Interculturale e Inclusiva promotes access for refugees to skilled and fairly paid work in the gastronomy sector.
- *Reducing prejudice*: Direct contact between guests and staff creates personal connections that help break down stereotypes about migration and refugees.
- *Strengthening intercultural understanding*: The restaurant becomes a place where cultural diversity is not only visible, but can be experienced through food, dialogue and events.
- *Social integration*: By working in the restaurant, refugees interact with locals and find it easier to make connections in society. At the same time, the personal interaction promotes openness, understanding and greater acceptance of refugees among the local population.
- *Improved language skills*: Accompanying language courses in the kitchen and during training help refugees to improve their Italian language skills. In the service area, they can apply and consolidate what they have learned by interacting directly with guests.
- *Empowerment and self-confidence*: Refugee employees take an active role, contribute their identity and experience, and are perceived as competent employers. This strengthens their self-confidence and social participation.

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Cucina Interculturale e Inclusiva combines integration, empowerment and cultural exchange in a gastronomic concept. The project promotes social participation, reduces prejudice and strengthens the economic prospects of refugees, contributing to a more inclusive and diverse society in line with the global sustainability goals.

2.12. MOMPRENEUR - EMPOWERMENT FOR SINGLE MOTHERS THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Short description

MomPreneur is an initiative that empowers single mothers to start and run their own small businesses. The programme provides comprehensive training in entrepreneurship, finance, marketing and time management to help mothers achieve their professional goals while balancing their family responsibilities.

Problem

Single mothers often find it difficult to reconcile work and family life, especially if they do not have access to flexible working arrangements or financial resources. At the same time, there is gender inequality in entrepreneurship: men are more likely to start a business than women. In particular, single mothers often do not have the same resources or networks to start a successful business.

Innovative elements

- *Flexible learning options*: Online courses and workshops tailored to the needs of single mothers so they can manage their time flexibly.
- *Mentoring and coaching*: Experienced female entrepreneurs and experts from a range of sectors provide individual support and advice.
- *Financial support*: The programme provides access to microcredit and small seed capital funds to facilitate entry into entrepreneurship.
- *Childcare*: Working with local facilities to provide childcare during learning and work periods.

Impact

- *Economic independence*: Single mothers can become financially independent by starting their own business while caring for their family.

- *Strengthening professional skills*: Mothers gain new skills in entrepreneurship, finance and management that improve their career prospects.
- *Work-life balance*: The programme supports the development of flexible working models that enable mothers to combine work and family life.
- *Long-term positive impact on society*: Promoting mothers' entrepreneurial activities also improves families' economic opportunities in the long term, reducing poverty and social inequality.
- *Tackling the gender gap in entrepreneurship*: The programme actively contributes to reducing gender inequality in entrepreneurship by providing all mothers, especially single mothers, with the necessary resources and networks to successfully start and run a business.

MomPreneur is an initiative that equips single mothers with the resources and skills they need to successfully start their own business. Through tailored training, mentoring and financial support, mothers are empowered to become economically independent while fulfilling their family responsibilities. The initiative not only promotes the independence of mothers but also contributes to improving the quality of life for their families and creating a more equitable society.

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2.13. ELDERTECH - TECHNOLOGY ASSISTANTS FOR SENIORS

Short description
ElderTech is a social service project that helps older people access the digital world through personal technology assistants. Young people - such as students - are trained to help older people use digital devices, applications, online services and communication platforms. The project promotes intergenerational learning, digital inclusion and health literacy.

Problem
Many older people find it difficult to use modern technology, which can affect their independence and quality of life. At the same time, they are vulnerable to isolation and health problems that could be better monitored and mitigated through the use of digital tools. There is a lack of personalised support when going digital, which limits independence, health and social participation.

Innovative elements
- *Personal technology assistance:* Young assistants provide one-on-one support for using devices, applications and online services - at home, in community centres or online.
- Health-related applications: Older people learn how to use tools such as pedometers, blood glucose apps, telemedicine platforms and medication reminders. Digital tools can help identify and mitigate health problems at an early stage.
- Intergenerational exchange: The project strengthens the bond between young and old through respectful learning and mutual support.
- Qualification programme: Assistants are prepared for dealing with older people - with content on data protection, digital security, communication and health knowledge.

**Impacts**

- *Digital inclusion*: Older people gain access to digital and health services and can use them independently.
- *Health promotion*: The use of digital health applications enables older people to better manage their health and identify health risks early.
- *Social participation*: Contact with family, friends and social programmes is facilitated by digital communication, preventing isolation.
- *Strengthening independence*: The use of technology promotes personal responsibility and increases the possibility of independent living.
- Intergenerational understanding & engagement: Young people take on social responsibility and acquire key social and digital skills.

ElderTech not only promotes digital participation but also makes an active contribution to health prevention and independence in old age. Personalised support makes it easier for older people to access digital health solutions. At the same time, it creates an intergenerational initiative that combines technological development with social cohesion. ElderTech thus contributes to several Sustainable Development Goals.
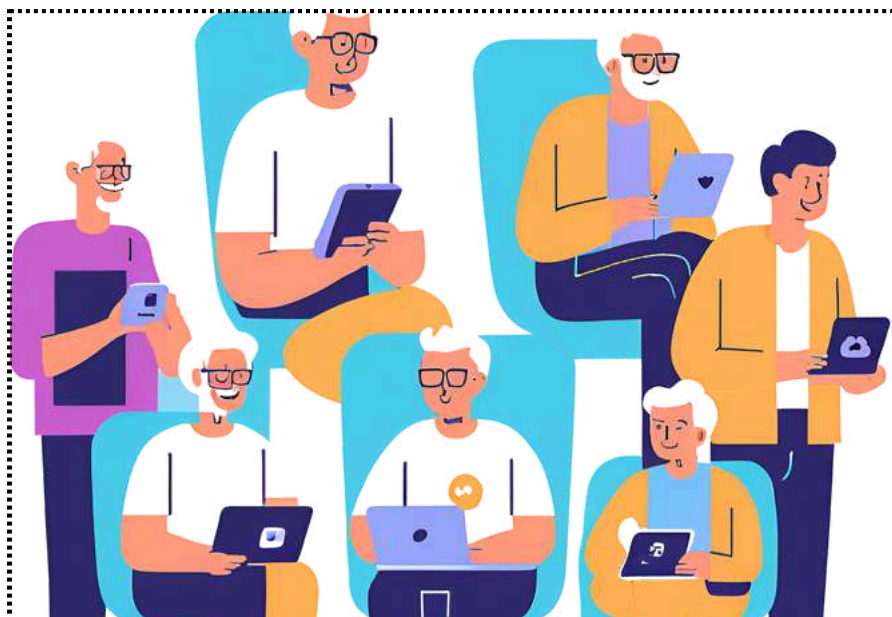
2.14. EDUCATION AND EQUITY

Short description

A number of social initiatives across Brazil are actively working to reduce racial inequality in the labor market by providing free training and professional development for Black youth and women. These programs focus on high-impact areas such as technology, language education, and employability, equipping participants with the skills, confidence, and networks needed to access strategic career opportunities and break cycles of exclusion.

Problem

- *Racial inequality in employment*: Structural racism in Brazil has led to persistent disparities in the labor market. According to the latest national household survey, the unemployment rate among Black women is three times higher than that of white men.
- *Barriers to education and training*: Many black individuals face obstacles in accessing quality education and technical training due to financial and systemic limitations.
- *Underrepresentation in strategic sectors*: Despite the growth of the tech industry and other high-opportunity fields, black professionals remain largely underrepresented.
- *Lack of inclusive development paths*: Traditional training programs often overlook the specific challenges faced by Black individuals, leaving them without adequate support or pathways for growth.

Innovative elements

- *PretaLab – Black and Indigenous Women in Tech*: A movement that increases the presence of Black and Indigenous women in the tech sector through free programming courses and events, in partnership with companies like Microsoft and Oracle.

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- *Reprograma – Coding for Black Women:* Offers intensive, beginner-friendly web development programs exclusively for Black women, providing them with tools to enter and grow in the tech job market.
- *MOVER – English Scholarships & Career Development*: A coalition of companies offering over 30,000 scholarships for English courses through EF Education First, as well as other employability-focused programs to support the Black population.
- *AfroPython – Accessible Programming Workshops*: Introduces Black youth to the Python programming language through free, inclusive workshops, opening doors to software development and tech careers.
- *Programa Prosseguir (CEERT)*: Created by the Center for the Study of Labor Relations and Inequalities, this program focuses on employability for Black youth, especially in underserved regions like Northern Brazil, fostering leadership and social inclusion.

Impact

- *Expanded access to education and training*: Thousands of black individuals gain free access to quality technical and professional education through these initiatives.
- *Increased employability in strategic areas*: Participants are equipped with practical skills in high-demand sectors like technology and languages, enhancing their job prospects and income potential.
- *Strengthening of support networks*: By creating spaces for connection and mentorship, these initiatives help foster belonging, confidence, and long-term personal and professional development.

2.15. BLACK AT BAIN MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Short description

Black at Bain is a strategic mentorship initiative by Bain & Company that aims to promote racial equity and increase Black representation in the consulting industry, providing personalized mentorship, practical training, and exposure to real consulting cases. The program is part of Bain's broader commitment to fostering inclusive leadership, breaking systemic barriers, and empowering black individuals to thrive in high-impact careers.

Problem

- *Racial underrepresentation in consulting*: Black individuals remain significantly underrepresented in the field of strategic consulting due to systemic racism and a lack of inclusive recruitment pipelines.
- *Barriers to career advancement*: Without tailored development programs, Black professionals often face challenges in navigating competitive corporate environments and advancing into leadership roles.
- *Lack of cultural belonging*: A gap in representation and inclusion can lead to feelings of isolation, limiting confidence and long-term engagement within the industry.

Innovative elements

- *Tailored mentorship journey*: Participants receive one-on-one guidance from Bain consultants, fostering personalized professional development and confidence-building.
- *Exposure to real consulting practices*: Through training sessions and business case simulations, mentees gain practical insights into the consulting field and Bain's strategic methodologies.

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- *Affinity-driven support network:* The initiative is part of the Black at Bain affinity group, which creates spaces for dialogue, shared experiences, and community among Black professionals.

Impact

- *Talent development and empowerment*: The program equips participants with knowledge, skills, and support to successfully pursue careers in strategic consulting.
- *Increased representation*: By fostering Black talent early in their careers, the program contributes to diversifying the consulting industry and strengthening inclusive leadership pipelines.
- *Sense of belonging*: Participants gain a sense of community and confidence, which supports their long-term growth and engagement in the corporate world.

2.16. AFROSAÚDE – INCLUSIVE HEALTHTECH FOR RACIAL EQUITY

Short description

AfroSaúde is a pioneering healthtech and social enterprise that works to democratize access to healthcare for the Black and marginalized population in Brazil. Through a digital health platform and corporate wellness programs, AfroSaúde connects patients with Black healthcare professionals, promotes culturally sensitive care, and supports organizations in building inclusive health and well-being strategies.

Problem

- *Structural racism in healthcare:* The Black population in Brazil has historically faced systemic barriers to accessing quality healthcare, often due to lack of representation and implicit bias.
- *Underrepresentation of Black professionals*: From medical schools to patient care, there is a critical absence of Black professionals, which limits trust, accessibility, and the cultural relevance of treatment.
- *Inequitable mental health support*: Mental health services often ignore racial and cultural factors, leaving Black individuals without adequate emotional and psychological support.

Innovative elements

- *Culturally competent digital health platform:* AfroSaúde connects patients with over 2,000 Black health professionals across Brazil, ensuring care that respects identity, culture, and lived experiences.
- *AfroSaúde subscription model*: Members receive discounted consultations and benefits on pharmaceutical products.
- *Corporate wellness programs*: AfroSaúde supports organizations in designing inclusive mental health and well-being initiatives tailored to the Black experience.
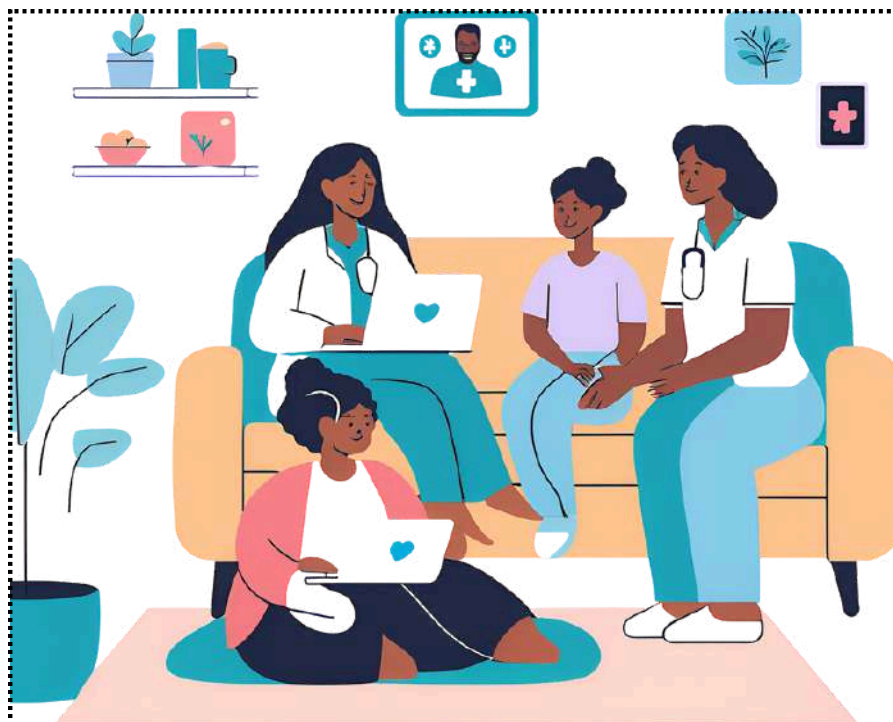
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Impact

- *Increased access to inclusive care:* Thousands of patients from underrepresented communities now receive care from professionals who understand and respect their identities.
- *Empowerment of Black professionals*: AfroSaúde strengthens the visibility and market presence of Black healthcare providers, contributing to systemic change.
- *Public awareness and advocacy*: AfroSaúde's work sparks national dialogue on racial equity in healthcare, influencing public policies and social attitudes among companies.

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