

# **Mainstreaming Inclusive Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship in Higher Education**

2022-1-PL01-KA220-HED-000089820



## **Good Practice** **University of National and World Economy, Bulgaria**



## Acknowledgements

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- **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Moraliyska**, Deputy Head of International Economic Relations and Business Development Department
- **Chief Assist. Prof. Dr. Ivan Bozhikin**, Department of Economics
- **Chief Assist. Prof. Dr. Silviya Georgieva**, Department of Entrepreneurship
- **Chief Assist. Prof. Dr. Iliya Kerezhev**, Department of Management
- **Chief Assist. Prof. Dr. Antoan Shotarov**, Department of Economics
- **Chief Assist. Prof. Dr. Kristian Zhelev**, Department of International Economic Relations and Business Development
- **Mr. Atanas Dimitrov**, Director of Inter-University Center for Career Development
- **Mr. Anton Krustev**, Chief Expert at Inter-University Center for Career Development

## 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 InnoSocial consortium includes five partner organisations from four European countries:

Partner	Country	Organisation	
Coordinator	Poland	SAN	University of Social Sciences, Lodz
P1	Bulgaria	TETRA	Tetra Solutions Ltd, Sofia
P2	Lithuania	VIKO	Vilnius University of Applied Sciences, Vilnius
P3	Italy	UNIPAVIA	University of Pavia, Pavia
P4	Poland	InCREA	InCREA Foundation, Lublin

The main project results are:

- Toolkit for design & delivery of II&SE education: Guidelines for embedding II&SE education in HEIs' curricula;
- Course in Inclusive Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship (3 ECTS / 75-hour), 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.

### UNWE's Good Practice

The Good Practice of the University of National and World Economy, Bulgaria, on embedding inclusive innovation and social entrepreneurship in higher education was prepared within the InnoSocial project activities dedicated to the development of the Toolkit for design & delivery of II&SE education.

The Good Practice was documented based on semi-structured interviews with eight UNWE staff members, conducted by Tetra Solutions team. The interviews were carried out from June 15th to July 14th, 2023, either face-to-face at the University, or online using video-conferencing tools. All interviews were structured around the following questions:

- Options for embedding II&SE in higher education
- Content of II&SE education
- Teaching/learning approaches and methods used in II&SE education
- Strategies for involving stakeholders in II&SE education
- Approaches and methods for assessing the impact of II&SE education

The interview participants were asked to share their experience and expert opinion related to each question. The interviews were recorded; the recordings were transcribed and analysed by the Tetra's project team members. The Good Practice described below presents a summative overview of thoughts and ideas shared by all participants in the interviews.

The Good Practice is published under consent of the UNWE's staff members who took part in the interviews.



## Interview Participants



***Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Moraliyska***

*Deputy Head of International Economic Relations and Business Development Department*

Research interests: European economic integration, European economy, European institutions, and International economic relations

External evaluator to the Erasmus+ National Agency in Bulgaria, focusing on social issues and inclusion of vulnerable groups



***Chief Assist. Prof. Dr. Ivan Bozhikin***

*Department of Economics*

Research interests: Fiscal policy for sustainable development; Social entrepreneurship ecosystem; The role of government and key non-state actors in social entrepreneurship

Research fellow at Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Center for Social Entrepreneurship

Editorial Board Member of Journal of Cleaner Production; Managing Guest Editor in Cleaner & Responsible Consumption (indexing in Scopus); Special issue "Social entrepreneurship, creative territories, and responsible consumption"



***Chief Assist. Prof. Dr. Silviya Georgieva***

*Department of Entrepreneurship*

Research interests: Social entrepreneurship, Youth entrepreneurship, Female entrepreneurship, Small and medium-sized enterprises

Research expert in the joint initiative of the EC and OECD in the field of social youth entrepreneurship, aimed to analyse social entrepreneurship policies and suggest improvements



***Chief Assist. Prof. Dr. Iliya Kerezhev***

*Department of Management*

Research interest: Strategic management, Corporate management, Small and medium-sized enterprises, Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Research expert in the Erasmus+, Capacity Building in Higher Education project "European Latin American Network in Support of Social Entrepreneurs / ELANET"





***Chief Assist. Prof. Dr. Antoan Shotarov***

*Department of Economics*

Research interests: Innovation, Economics of innovation, Entrepreneurship

Co-founder of several private nursery schools in Sofia, an IT company, and a start-up - online platform for ordering video greeting

Mentor in the UNWE's Start-Up Hub



***Chief Assist. Prof. Dr. Kristian Zhelev***

*Department of International Economic Relations and Business Development*

Research interests: Corporate management, International management and marketing, Innovation

Research expert in the Erasmus+, University Alliance project "European University Engaged in Societal Change / ENGAGE.eu", aimed to foster the third and fourth mission of universities



***Mr. Atanas Dimitrov***

*Director of Inter-University Center for Career Development*

Expertise: Professional orientation and counselling, Career development, University-business cooperation

Founder of the Inter-University Center for Career Development and the first university-led Start-Up Hub in Bulgaria

Main organizer of Student Start-Up Competition



***Mr. Anton Krustev***

*Chief Expert at Inter-University Center for Career Development*

Expertise: Professional development, Career development, and Counselling

Organizer of Start-Up Mentorship Cafes, Start-Up Competition and open lectures in innovation and entrepreneurship







## Levels of Integrating Inclusive Innovation & Social Entrepreneurship in education at UNWE

### Policies and strategies

#### UN Global Compact

In 2016, UNWE joined the global initiative for social responsibility and sustainable development and became a member of the UN Global Compact (UNGC).



**United Nations  
Global Compact**

Within the framework of this initiative, UNWE conducts a number of activities and various events to promote welfare of the society and the environment. Inclusive Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship are among the issues addressed within the UNGC initiative, and therefore integrated in education, research, and community outreach activities.

#### Sustainable Development Network

In 2022, UNWE became the host university for the National Sustainable Development Solutions Network "SDSN Bulgaria".

The UN SDSN was launched in 2012 as a forum for debate on a range of social, environmental and economic issues, that ultimately led to the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The SDSN quickly grew and established its Global Networking Programme - a membership-based alliance of top-level, knowledge-generating institutions focused on sustainable development.

UNWE, as the host of the SDSN Bulgaria, promotes the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at national and local level by empowering cooperation of universities, research institutes, companies, government and local municipal bodies, as well as civil society organisations.

Inclusive Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship (II&SE) play pivotal roles in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals by fostering equitable access to resources, driving economic growth within marginalized communities, and addressing pressing societal challenges. By combining innovative approaches with a strong commitment to social and environmental impact, II&SE initiatives contribute to sustainable development, empower underserved populations, and create a more inclusive and resilient global economy. Therefore, UNWE promotes the integration of Inclusive Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship in the curriculum and extracurricular activities.



#### National Strategies

The integration of social and environmental issues in research, education and training at UNWE is also supported by the National Strategy for Corporate Social Responsibility 2019-2023 and the annual Action Plans for implementation of the National Concept for Social Economy.

As a contribution to the objectives of these Strategies, UNWE has committed to:

- Providing and widely promoting education and training in the fields of study related to social economy;
- Conducting research in the field of social economy and disseminating the results through publications, conferences, and other scientific and public events;
- Cooperating with a variety of stakeholders to drive the development of social economy at local, national and international level.



## Structural units

UNWE has several units, whose mandate and research areas encompass Inclusive Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship, among other issues:

### Center for Sustainable Development

Objective: organise and implement interdisciplinary research covering social, environmental, economic and institutional dimensions of sustainable development.

### Academic Network for Social Responsibility

Objective: implement the principles of the UN Global Compact and uphold socially responsible behaviour.

## Curriculum

The topics related to Inclusive Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship are well embedded in the UNWE's curricula at bachelor and master level. There are stand-alone disciplines focused entirely on innovation and social entrepreneurship.

**“Innovation”** and **“Economics of Innovation”**: these disciplines provide a theoretical foundation underpinning the process of innovation, and focus on building skills for developing innovative solutions that address societal challenges. These disciplines lead students through the process of identifying a social problem, solving it through innovation, and bringing the solution to the market through a new business. These disciplines are delivered by the Department of Economics and are open to all students at the university. Both disciplines are contextualized to fit the specialization of the study programme, in which they are embedded. This means that the content of these disciplines is attuned to the context of different fields of study, for example business administration, management, tourism, cybersecurity, and others.

### Entrepreneurship Development Institute and Entrepreneurship Department

Objective: conduct research on entrepreneurship and SMEs (incl. social entrepreneurship and social businesses) in national, regional and international contexts and use findings in education.

### Start-Up Hub at the Inter-University Center for Career Development

Objective: provide structured support and mentorship to students for developing innovation ideas, testing prototypes, establishing, managing and scaling up start-ups.

**“Social Entrepreneurship”**: this discipline is part of the Bachelor programme in Entrepreneurship; it is delivered to all fourth-year students enrolled in this programme. The objective of this discipline is to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and mindset needed to create and lead impactful ventures that drive positive change in society while maintaining financial sustainability. It helps students:

- Comprehend various social and environmental challenges;
- Apply entrepreneurial principles to design and implement innovative, sustainable, and socially impactful solutions to address these challenges;
- Acquire business skills and strategies tailored for social ventures, including budgeting, marketing, fundraising, and operational management;
- Cultivate ethical decision-making and leadership skills to navigate complex social and ethical considerations inherent in social entrepreneurship;
- Understand methods for measuring and evaluating the social and environmental impact of social enterprises, ensuring accountability and effectiveness.



Furthermore, the topics related to Inclusive Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship are integrated in other disciplines, such as:

- Entrepreneurship, Business Operations, Corporate social responsibility, where II&SE issues are viewed from the perspective of business models and business model innovations suitable for social ventures;
- Marketing, where II&SE issues are viewed from the perspective of a consumer;

- Public Administration and Economic Policies, that discuss how policies can support II&SE;

- Economics of Development, that discuss how II&SE can support sustainable development and inclusive growth in low- and middle-income countries.

The examples provided above show that II&SE issues are integrated in the UNWE's curricula as stand-alone disciplines or topics within a variety of related courses.

## Extracurricular activities

UNWE provides a plethora of opportunities for students to acquire innovation and (social) entrepreneurship skills by engaging in extracurricular activities, such as those organized by the **Start-Up Hub**:

- **Open lectures** delivered by external stakeholders on various topics, for example, "Entrepreneurship with limited resources" or "Entrepreneurial skills";
- **Mentoring cafés**, where students get support of external mentors in developing a solid plan for their start-up. Mentors - successful entrepreneurs and experts in finance, marketing, and sales - usually come from local companies and organizations supporting start-ups.
- **Start-Up Competition**, an annual event, at which students pitch their start-up ideas to a jury and winners get funding to launch their start-up. Usually, the competition is preceded by a series of mentoring cafés.
- **Role play sessions**, aimed to test a start-up in the environment simulating a real market, thus allowing start-up idea-holders to understand the process and challenges of launching a start-up.

Start-Up Hub team encourages students to work on start-up ideas that would have social and environmental impact, and provides targeted support to students with fewer opportunities and special needs (impairments).

UNWE also promotes **Pro-bono and Skills-based volunteering**. Students supported by faculty members and business mentors help local NGOs and social enterprises to tackle pressing challenges, such as donor engagement, strategic planning, or data analysis. This programme not only drives social impact for the greater good, but also grows student talent through experiential learning.

### Conferences, forums and discussion panels

UNWE regularly hosts different events related to social entrepreneurship. The most recent stakeholder roundtables and forums were held within the framework of the Erasmus+ project ELANET (*European Latin American Network in Support of Social Entrepreneurs*), which aims to build a model infrastructure for social entrepreneurship and to transfer this experience to the developing countries of South America - Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. These events encouraged an open dialogue among stakeholders on factors that have a positive or negative impact on social entrepreneurship, gaps in the social entrepreneurship ecosystem, and opportunities for development of social entrepreneurship in Bulgaria, in Europe and in the South American partner countries.

Such events offer a great opportunity for faculty members and students to engage in a debate on issues related to II&SE.







## Content of II&SE education

Speaking about the content of II&SE education, it is important to understand how it would be delivered – as a stand-alone discipline or as several topics within other disciplines; how many learning hours would be dedicated to this discipline or topics; how this discipline would complement the other disciplines within the curriculum of the degree programme, in which it is embedded; or how the II&SE topics would be connected with the other topics constituting the content of the discipline, in which they are integrated. The content of II&SE education should be predicated upon the objectives and workload of the given unit of learning, as well as the objectives and intended learning outcomes of the degree programme, in which it is included.

For a stand-alone course or module in II&SE, the following elements of content (topics) could be considered:

- **Building a theoretical foundation for II&SE:** the concepts of innovation, social innovation and inclusive innovation; entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship; relationship between inclusive innovation and social entrepreneurship; motivation for an entrepreneur to invest in II&SE;
- **Developing inclusive innovations** (e.g. based on the design thinking process):

understanding social needs; defining a problem; generating ideas (applying idea generation techniques); assessing feasibility and sustainability of ideas; prototyping and testing of ideas; launching innovations;

- **Establishing a social enterprise:** legal forms of social enterprises (laws and legal acts governing establishment & operation of social businesses at EU and national level); innovative business models suitable for social ventures; applying a Social Business Model Canvas; developing a Business Plan for a social enterprise; fundraising; business strategies, management, accounting, marketing suitable for social enterprises; ethical issues and concerns; assessing impact of inclusive innovations and social ventures.

The relevance of the content of II&SE education should be assessed from the perspective of the skill set that students will have to have to succeed in the future. **Artificial Intelligence** is gaining momentum in innovation and entrepreneurship. Integrating AI knowledge and skills in an II&SE course or module would definitely add value. It is important to acquaint students with how AI works, what it is capable of, how to use it to develop innovations, products or services, to develop start-ups, and streamline day-to-day operations.

## Educational approaches and methods used in II&SE education

The approach to teaching II&SE advocated by UNWE's faculty members emphasizes a holistic and practical learning experience. It rests on a strong theoretical foundation, enabling students to understand the underlying concepts and methodologies. However, the core of this approach lies in experiential learning, often referred to as "**learning by doing**." It involves a series of progressively challenging activities that span from conceptualization to execution. Practical assignments play central role, such

as exploring innovative techniques like design thinking and brainstorming, crafting a social enterprise idea, and formulating a business model and plan.

To enhance the practical dimension of teaching and learning, the faculty members leverage **real-world cases** by inviting experienced practitioners – **guest lecturers** – to share insights. This infusion of external perspectives not only provides valuable



industry knowledge but also serves as a source of inspiration for students.

Furthermore, the UNWE's approach transcends the confines of traditional classroom settings. Learning extends beyond the university walls into the real world, where students engage in **classes conducted within social enterprises and innovative companies**. This immersive experience not only reinforces classroom learning but also exposes students to the challenges and dynamics of actual social entrepreneurship environments.

The overarching goal of the UNWE's educational approach is to equip students with practical entrepreneurial skills and a

mindset primed for innovation. The synthesis of various teaching methods – lectures, practical training, discussions, analysis of case studies, and interactions with industry experts – creates a **synergetic learning environment**. As students navigate through theoretical knowledge and hands-on experiences, they develop critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and the capacity to translate ideas into actionable social ventures. Ultimately, this comprehensive pedagogical approach empowers students to tackle real-world social challenges and contribute meaningfully to the field of social entrepreneurship.

## Strategies for stakeholder involvement in II&SE education

At UNWE, a comprehensive stakeholder engagement approach is employed to enrich the Inclusive Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship education:

- **Ecosystem Integration:** The university fosters the Social Entrepreneurship Ecosystem that engages diverse stakeholder groups. This dynamic network ensures collaboration among stakeholders, including researchers, practitioners, and community representatives. Stakeholders engage in an open dialogue, share resources and co-create solutions to support social entrepreneurship development at local and national level.

- **Shared Value Promotion:** The stakeholder involvement strategy emphasizes shared value creation. Cooperation is framed in a way that highlights the benefits for all parties involved, encouraging synergies and leveraging each other's expertise and resources. This approach establishes sustainable partnerships based on shared interests and responsibilities.

- **External Expertise:** The university frequently invites successful entrepreneurs as guest lecturers. These entrepreneurs share their practical experiences,

challenges, and solutions, enabling students to learn from real-world examples and gain insights into the intricacies of starting and running businesses.

- **University-Business Initiatives:** Collaborative initiatives with businesses, like mentorship programs and master classes, create a bridge between academia and the business world. These joint efforts enhance students' skillsets and provide them with opportunities for hands-on learning from industry professionals.

- **Curriculum Alignment:** The university consults external stakeholders, including businesses, to ensure that the curriculum aligns with the skills and competencies needed in the field. This responsive approach keeps education up-to-date and relevant to industry needs.

- **Student Involvement:** University students and graduates actively support social enterprises through problem-solving projects, addressing specific challenges faced by partner companies. This engagement enhances students' practical understanding of social entrepreneurship and provides valuable assistance to social enterprises.



▪ **Platforms for Social Entrepreneurship:** Inspired by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and the Impact Belgium platform, UNWE has contributed to stakeholder co-creation of the Impact BG platform ([www.bg-impact.org](http://www.bg-impact.org)), that facilitates crowdfunding for social business ideas, providing financial support and community engagement.

▪ **Local Administration and NGOs:** Collaboration with local administration and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) enhances practical relevance. The university's connection with local

administration and NGOs helps students address real-world problems, connect with marginalized groups, and apply their learning in meaningful ways.

By actively involving stakeholders in curriculum development, inviting guest lecturers, carrying out joint University-Business initiatives, and promoting community engagement, UNWE ensures that II&SE education is enriched with real-world perspectives that foster well-rounded and impactful learning experiences for students.

## Approaches and methods for assessing the impact of II&SE education

The impact of II&SE education can be measured at the levels of students, faculty members, the university and the society. The impact indicators are usually set up in accordance with the impact measurement objectives and target group(s). The examples of **impact indicators** suggested by the UNWE faculty members are:

- Number (No) of students who enrolled in an II&SE course and successfully completed it
- No of students who established a social business or implemented an II&SE project in two years following the completion of the II&SE course
- No of graduates employed in social and/or innovative companies
- No of faculty members involved in II&SE research projects and II&SE courses
- No of scientific publications in the field of II&SE made by faculty members
- No of conferences, forums, stakeholder roundtables, etc. dedicated to II&SE issues that the University conducted
- No of research or educational projects in the field of II&SE carried out by the University
- No of people informed about and involved in these projects

The methods of impact measurement employed at UNWE include:

▪ **Student Feedback:** Faculty members gather feedback from students to assess course quality in the middle and at the end of the course through discussions, anonymous questionnaires, and brainstorming sessions. This student-centric approach ensures continuous improvement and update of the curriculum.

▪ **Alumni Feedback:** The university collects feedback from alumni to gain insights into their experiences and professional outcomes, enriching the understanding of how II&SE education contributes to graduates' career trajectories.

▪ **Professional Realization Data:** UNWE leverages data on graduates' professional realization and employment in social and innovative companies. This information provides a tangible indicator of the practical application of II&SE education and underscores its real-world impact.

By setting up measurable indicators and employing a combination of different impact measurement methods, UNWE gains a comprehensive understanding of the impact of education in the field of innovation and social entrepreneurship. This approach enables continuous improvement and supports the development of socially conscious and entrepreneurial individuals.

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