



PRESS RELEASE 1

Academic staff will be able to use new tools for learning inclusive innovation and social entrepreneurship

Expert teams delegated by academics, representatives of social partners and entrepreneurs from various EU countries have been working for the past year on materials to support the learning of inclusive innovation and social entrepreneurship. Among them are specialists from Italy, Poland, Lithuania and Bulgaria. In November 2023 they were made available to teachers from universities across Europe. The InnoSocial Toolkit provides the necessary background knowledge for Higher Education Institutes' (HEIs) faculty to devise a framework for designing, implementing and measuring the impact of education and training in Inclusive Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship (II&SE).

Higher education institutions have been viewed by European Commission and market stakeholders as drivers of innovation due to their capacity to link the three major elements of the knowledge triangle – education, research and innovation. European universities have been striving to integrate innovation in their mandates by fostering knowledge co-creation by academia, industry and policy makers. The prolonged economic and social crises exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and ever-increasing influx of migrants to the EU member states, however, has shifted the focus from purely market-driven innovation aimed to boost economic growth to socially-driven innovation aimed to resolve the emerging societal challenges. In this context, universities are facing the need to enrich their knowledge triangle practices by embedding a social dimension into them.

Inclusive innovation is targeted at excluded or underserved population like youth, women, elderly people, persons with disabilities, migrants, refugees, low-income groups and aimed to expand their access to education, health care, employment, environmentally-friendly services, etc. Inclusive innovation can provide a business opportunity for social entrepreneurship. And social entrepreneurship, in its turn, can serve as a vehicle for valorising innovative solutions to societal problems.

Based on the literature review, the analysis of the curricula, and the findings of the stakeholder consultations meetings, the InnoSocial consortium partners compiled the Toolkit to help university faculty and other stakeholders to integrate inclusive innovation and social entrepreneurship in higher education programmes and courses. The stakeholder consultation meetings were conducted in Bulgaria, Italy, Lithuania, and Poland from June 15 to July 14, 2023 in the form of group discussion panels or individual interviews. A total of 72 stakeholders took part in the meetings, including university faculty, management and administrative staff, PhD students, representatives of business, NGOs, public bodies, vocational and secondary schools, grassroots innovators and social entrepreneurs.

The aim of the Toolkit is to provide an evidence base and methodological framework for design and delivery of education in II&SE – a precondition for mainstreaming teaching and learning in this field in HEIs' curricula. It also serves as a basis for developing teaching and learning resources in the field of II&SE - Course in Inclusive Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship which is the second major result of the InnoSocial project.



The Toolkit allows its readers to:

- Understand the options for mainstreaming II&SE education in HEIs' curricula, particularly to explore the possibilities and requirements for the implementation of the following scenarios: incorporating II&SE in the HEIs' education offer as a stand-alone course; embedding knowledge and skills relevant for II&SE in existing courses; and delivering non-formal training in II&SE at HEIs' business incubators, start-up hubs, entrepreneurship centers or similar structures.
- Define the scope of II&SE education that should be mainstreamed in HEI curricula, in particular knowledge and skills that should be addressed, and ways (teaching methods) through which these knowledge and skills can be developed.
- Map stakeholders' interests for cooperation with HEIs in design and delivery of II&SE education.

The work is being carried out as part of a project co-financed by the European Union under the Erasmus+ programme. The Innosocial project is a 30-month initiative (1 November 2022 – 30 April 2025) that aims to facilitate mainstreaming of Inclusive Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship education and training in universities' curricula, thus promoting wider integration of the social dimension in the knowledge triangle practices implemented by higher education institutions.

The specific project objectives include also:

- 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.

As part of the project, a consortium led by the University of Social Sciences from Poland together with University of Pavia from Italy, Vilnius University of Applied Sciences from Lithuania, Tetra Solutions from Bulgaria and InCrea Foundation from Poland develop a

- 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.

All materials will be successively published on the project website <https://www.innosocial.eu/>. The project completion and the conferences at which the results will be presented are planned for the first half of 2025.