

Social Innovators

Socialni inovatorji

Date of creation

2019

Description

The Social Innovators project is an innovative, transnational initiative aimed at addressing high youth unemployment rates, especially among social science and humanities graduates, by leveraging opportunities within the NGO sector. Its primary focus is to prepare NEET (not in employment, education, or training) youth, particularly those with academic backgrounds in social sciences and humanities, for meaningful employment in social innovation roles within non-profit organisations.

Key components of the project

1. **Education programme:** The project developed a specialised [training curriculum](#) aimed at bridging the skills gap for social science graduates. This 150-hour social innovation practitioner course includes modules on project management, social innovation skills, and essential competences for NGO work. The programme was delivered through 15 pilot sessions across Bulgaria, Croatia, and Slovenia, engaging over 450 youth in practical, job-oriented education.
2. **NGO apprenticeships:** Recognising the potential for the non-profit sector as a training ground, Social Innovators introduced the NGO TRAINED internship model. This model provided 320 young participants with placements in over 128 NGOs, offering firsthand experience in socially impactful work. Mentorship resources and training sessions for NGO staff enhanced the sustainability of this hands-on training.
3. **IDEAhubs for social innovation:** The project also established physical and conceptual IDEAhub spaces in each participating country, acting as incubators for social projects. These hubs provided a collaborative environment where youth could develop social innovation ideas, participate in events, and work toward project-based solutions for community challenges. With over 1,550 visitors and numerous public events, the hubs fostered networking, ideation, and skill-building among young social innovators.
4. **Employment Opportunities and Job Challenges:** As a direct pathway to employment, Social Innovators launched Job Challenge competitions, which offered three one-year employment contracts in NGOs. The initiative also included national job fairs and workshops that positioned the non-profit sector as an attractive career option, emphasising its role in skills development and social impact.
5. **Transnational Impact and Sustainability:** Through its collaborative approach, Social Innovators linked NGOs, educational institutions, and young people across borders, fostering shared learning and innovation in tackling youth unemployment. The project positioned NGOs as essential contributors to the job market, advocating for the inclusion of NGO-based training in national Youth Guarantee Schemes through discussions with Office for Youth and Ministries. They also managed to upgrade the project through working with the University of Ljubljana on quality practice schemes and the project also contributed to raising awareness of the NGO sector's potential for economic and social impact. At the end of the project, Social Innovators not only created new educational and employment pathways for youth but also established a sustainable model for long-term collaboration and innovation across Europe's non-profit sector.

Beneficiaries

 [NEETs in recent search](#)

Countries

 [Bulgaria](#)

 [Croatia](#)

 [Norway](#)

 [Slovenia](#)

Education level and sector

 [Upper secondary vocational education and training \(work-based learning\)](#)

Level of implementation / Scope

 [Provider level](#)  [Local level](#)

2019 -2022

Aims of policy/initiative

Project SOCIAL INNOVATORS presents an innovative model that addresses the challenge of high youth unemployment while also tackling the low employment rate in the non-governmental sector. Both represent a significant loss of human potential and missed opportunities for a greater contribution to social change, not only in the partner countries but across the EU. Through the non-governmental sector, young people gain work experience and participated in some of the most important initiatives and programmes addressing social challenges in Europe.

EDUCATION

The project prepared students and graduates in social sciences and humanities for social innovation and work in the non-governmental sector.

- Conducted the Social Innovators [GAP Study](#), which measured the distance between acquired and required skills.
- Developed a 150-hour Social Innovation Practitioner training programme.
- Carried out 15 pilot implementations of the training for a total of 450 young people in Bulgaria, Croatia, and Slovenia.
- Prepared a promotional brochure for the educational programme.

INTERNSHIPS IN NGOS

The project built a bridge to career paths for young people, actively involving NEET youth in the work environment and introducing them to work in the non-governmental sector.

- Developed the NGO TRAINED internship model.
- Prepared a [manual](#) and conducted training for NGO mentors.
- Involved 320 young people in internships across at least 128 NGOs in Bulgaria, Croatia, and Slovenia.
- Held the JOB CHALLENGE competition, resulting in three one-year employment

positions in NGOs.

SOCIAL INNOVATORS HUB

The project established hubs for social innovators where ideas for projects and initiatives with social impact were generated, providing a supportive environment for exploring possibilities in social innovation.

- Developed the HUB model.
- Operated three HUB centres in Bulgaria, Croatia, and Slovenia, which attracted 1,550 visitors and held 60 public events.
- Organised three national IDEATHON competitions

Features and types of activities implemented

The Social Innovators initiative features a blend of targeted education, practical work experience, and community-building activities designed to empower youth in social innovation roles within the NGO sector. Key features and activities include:

1. **Educational programme in Social Innovation:** A 150-hour training curriculum was developed specifically for youth with social science and humanities backgrounds. This programme addressed skill gaps, preparing participants for careers in social innovation and NGO environments. The training covered project management, soft skills, and essential competences for impactful work.
2. **NGO apprenticeships (NGO TRAINED Model):** The initiative facilitated hands-on learning experiences through apprenticeships in NGOs, helping youth gain valuable work experience while engaging in socially impactful projects. The model was supported by mentor training and resources, enabling NGOs to act as training grounds for future social innovators.
3. **IDEAhubs for Social innovation:** Physical and conceptual hubs were established as collaborative spaces where young people could generate, develop, and test ideas for social innovation projects. These hubs hosted events, workshops, and competitions, fostering an environment of creativity and entrepreneurship in the social sector.
4. **Job challenges and employment fairs:** To encourage long-term employment opportunities, the project held job challenges that led to one-year contracts in NGOs, as well as employment fairs and awareness-raising events that highlighted the non-profit sector as a viable career path.
5. **Transnational collaboration and advocacy:** Partners across Slovenia, Bulgaria, and Croatia collaborated to create a model that could be sustained and replicated, including advocacy efforts to incorporate NGO-based training into national Youth Guarantee Schemes. This approach emphasised the NGO sector's role as a catalyst for social change and youth employment across Europe.

Target group

The Social Innovators initiative targets various stakeholders working with or supporting NEETs (young people not in employment, education, or training). These include:

- **NGOs and Civil society organisations:** Organisations in the non-profit sector provide apprenticeship opportunities and hands-on experience for NEETs, helping them build skills in social innovation.
- **Youth workers and mentors:** Trained mentors within NGOs who support NEETs through structured learning and guidance, assisting their transition into the workforce.
- **Educational institutions:** Universities and training providers deliver the Social Innovation Practitioner curriculum, bridging the gap between academic knowledge

- and practical skills.
- **Policy advocates and National authorities**: Entities involved in promoting NGO-based training models to be included in Youth Guarantee Schemes, ensuring the long-term sustainability and systemic impact of the initiative.
- **Employers in the social economy**: Social enterprises and employers who are open to recruiting NEETs with the competences gained through the initiative, thus strengthening the social innovation workforce.

Resources

The Social Innovators initiative was funded primarily through the EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Youth Employment, with a total budget of EUR 1 316 003, of which EUR 1 118 603 was a grant. This funding covered the creation and delivery of educational programmes, mentorship resources, apprenticeship placements, and the establishment of IDEAhubs in participating countries.

Financial Resources

- **Grant amount**: EUR 1 118 603 provided by the EEA and Norway Grants.
- **Total project budget**: EUR 1 316 003.
- **Additional support**: This budget included financial provisions for training materials, the development of a project management curriculum, operational costs of IDEAhubs, and resources for job challenges and employment fairs.

Human resources

- **Project team**: The initiative involved a transnational team led by the Association for Culture and Education PINA, with project managers, coordinators, mentors, and support staff from partner organisations across Slovenia, Bulgaria, and Croatia.
- **Mentors and trainers**: Trained professionals in NGOs and educational institutions were engaged to guide NEETs through apprenticeships, training, and social innovation projects.
- **Collaborating organisations**: Partnerships with local NGOs, universities, and public institutions provided additional human resources and expertise in implementing the various activities of the project.

Evaluation of the measure

The Social Innovators initiative was evaluated to measure its impact on youth employment and skill development among NEETs. The evaluation focused on several key aspects, including participant outcomes, the effectiveness of the NGO apprenticeship model, and the impact of IDEAhubs on fostering social innovation.

Main Findings:

Improved employability: Participants reported significant improvements in employability skills, including project management, soft skills, and practical work experience, making them better equipped for the job market.

Increased employment rates: A substantial number of NEETs transitioned to employment, with many securing positions within NGOs or initiating their own social innovation projects.

Positive social impact: The IDEAhubs served as a successful model for generating social innovation ideas and fostering collaboration among young people, NGOs, and local communities.

Sustainability and replicability: The project demonstrated that the NGO-based apprenticeship model and IDEAhubs are sustainable and replicable across different regions, providing a framework for future initiatives targeting youth employment in the social sector.

The evaluation report is internal only.

Evidence of effectiveness of the measure

The Social Innovators initiative had a substantial positive impact on empowering young NEETs by providing them with the skills, experience, and opportunities needed to enter the workforce and engage in social innovation.

Key outcomes include:

Enhanced skill development: NEET participants gained valuable skills in project management, social innovation, and problem-solving, which boosted their employability and confidence in the job market.

Increased employment opportunities: Many NEETs transitioned into full-time roles within NGOs (60 of the 180 we had in practices) or pursued their own social innovation ventures (20) after completing the programme. The project created numerous pathways to sustainable employment within the social sector.

Community engagement and social impact: Through IDEAhubs, participants actively contributed to their communities by developing and implementing projects addressing local social challenges, thus empowering them to make a tangible impact.

Sustainable networks and support systems: The initiative fostered a strong network of NGOs, mentors, and young innovators, providing ongoing support and collaboration opportunities for NEETs beyond the programme's duration.

Success factors

The Social Innovators initiative incorporated several key innovative elements that distinguished it from other youth employment programmes and contributed to its success:

Targeted skill development for social science graduates: The initiative specifically addressed the skill gaps of NEETs with backgrounds in social sciences and humanities, offering tailored training in project management and social innovation. This focus on a niche demographic made the programme particularly impactful for a group often overlooked in traditional employment initiatives.

NGO Apprenticeship model (NGO TRAINED): By creating a structured apprenticeship model within NGOs, Social Innovators provided young people with hands-on experience in the social sector. This model blended formal training with on-the-job learning, enabling participants to acquire relevant skills while contributing to impactful projects. The apprenticeship structure also empowered NGOs to act as incubators for talent, enhancing their role in youth employment.

IDEAhubs for Social innovation: The establishment of IDEAhubs as collaborative spaces for young people to develop and implement social innovation projects was a unique aspect of the initiative. These hubs not only served as incubators for ideas but also facilitated networking, mentorship, and community engagement, creating a supportive ecosystem for young social innovators.

Job challenges and competitions: Through job challenges and IDEATHON competitions, the initiative introduced creative approaches to make the NGO sector more attractive to youth. These competitions provided real employment opportunities and encouraged participants to view the NGO sector as a viable career path, positioning NGOs as a soft skills accelerator.

and an exciting place to work.

Transnational collaboration and systemic advocacy: The initiative fostered collaboration between organisations in Slovenia, Bulgaria, and Croatia, leveraging transnational networks to share best practices and resources. This cross-border approach not only enriched the programme but also strengthened advocacy efforts, promoting the inclusion of NGO-based training in national Youth Guarantee schemes and enhancing the sustainability of the model.

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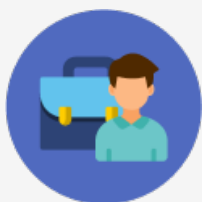
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