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**YOUTH SOCIAL INNOVATION BROKERS**  
**MOBIUS**

# **MOBIUS EUROPEAN COUNTRY REPORT – POLAND**



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# 1. Introduction

Social innovation is increasingly recognized as a powerful tool for addressing complex societal challenges, especially in the context of youth development. In Poland, social innovation is emerging as a crucial strategy to tackle issues ranging from poverty and inequality to climate change and public health. This approach involves the introduction of new products, processes, or services that not only aim to solve these pressing problems but also create long-term, sustainable impact. Central to social innovation is the principle of collaboration—bringing together non-governmental organizations, businesses, academic institutions, and communities to co-create solutions that are both innovative and practical.

In recent years, Poland's standing in international innovation rankings has highlighted the country's potential in this field. For instance, the "Global Innovation Index 2021" placed Poland among the moderate innovators, ranking it 40th out of 132 economies. Similarly, the "Bloomberg Innovation Index 2021" ranked Poland 23rd overall out of 111 countries (*Bloomberg - Are You a Robot?*, 2021; WIPO, 2021). These rankings underscore the intellectual and social capital available in Poland, suggesting a fertile ground for further advancements in social innovation.

For young people, social innovation is particularly important. It offers a platform for empowerment, enabling them to take an active role in shaping their futures and addressing the issues that directly impact their lives. By engaging in social innovation, young people develop critical skills such as creativity, leadership, and entrepreneurship. These skills are not only essential for personal and professional growth but also for fostering a sense of civic responsibility and social commitment.

Moreover, social innovation promotes social inclusion by addressing systemic issues like inequality and discrimination. Young people, with their unique perspectives and proximity to many of these issues, are well-positioned to devise solutions that are inclusive and equitable. This involvement also allows them to tackle youth-specific challenges, such as access to education, employment opportunities, mental health concerns, and environmental sustainability.



The benefits of involving young people in social innovation are manifold. They bring fresh perspectives and creative solutions to the table, which are often more innovative and effective than traditional approaches. Participating in social innovation projects also helps young people build resilience and adaptability, skills that are invaluable in the face of challenges and setbacks. These projects often have a direct, positive impact on local communities, enhancing the quality of life and meeting specific needs. Additionally, the experience gained through social innovation initiatives can significantly increase young people's employability, making them more competitive in the job market.

Despite these advantages, the widespread use of social innovation in youth work in Poland is still developing. However, as awareness grows and more resources are directed towards these initiatives, the potential for social innovation to transform both individual lives and broader society becomes increasingly apparent. In this context, promoting and supporting social innovation among young people is not just beneficial—it is essential for building a more resilient, inclusive, and innovative society.

## 2. Analysis and Diagnosis of Existing Literature

### Key Studies on Social Innovation in Poland

Social innovation in Poland has been the focus of several studies, each highlighting different aspects of the concept and its application. However, there is no single, comprehensive overview or a set of key literature that thoroughly examines the state of social innovation in the country.

One of the significant studies on social innovations is the report *“Wizja 2050: Innowacje społeczne – Podsumowanie prac grupy roboczej w 2013 r.”* prepared by the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Environment, the Forum for Responsible Business, and PwC, in collaboration with 150 representatives from major Polish companies, organizations, and other institutions. This report emphasizes the importance of cross-sectoral cooperation between non-governmental organizations,



businesses, and the academic sector. The main takeaway is that revolutionary solutions can be found at the intersection of these sectors, which not only benefit entrepreneurs but also contribute to solving social problems. The report also reviews key theories on social innovation and highlights six main areas where change is needed for Poland to achieve its ambitious development goals. These areas are: Social capital, Human capital, Infrastructure, Natural resources, Energy, and Quality of institutions. The general conclusion is that in all these areas, which collectively encompass the resources available for Poland's development, society must learn to operate more efficiently and effectively, achieving greater results with more limited resources (Ministry of Economy et al., n.d.).

Another noteworthy study is *"Innowacje społeczne w Polsce oraz szanse ich rozwoju na tle innych państw"* by Alicja Staszal (2019). The aim of this report is to evaluate the level of social innovation in Poland and compare it with the levels in other European countries. The methodology includes a review of literature and EU analyses in this area. The key takeaway is that each country has different potential for introducing social innovations and uses that potential to varying degrees. As a developing country, Poland has enormous potential for implementing innovative solutions that benefit society. Policymakers should be aware of this and strive to further develop social innovations. Supporting social innovation is made easier through various social programs, including those run by the European Union. Therefore, the Polish government must learn to effectively utilize these programs to improve its position in the ranking of the most innovative countries. Additionally, studies should be conducted to identify the current social needs expressed by citizens, and governmental decisions should be adapted to these needs.

There is no specific study focused solely on social innovations in the context of youth. However, a study worth mentioning that touches on the topic is the *"Raport końcowy z badania innowacji społecznych w ramach Programu Operacyjnego Wiedza Edukacja Rozwój"* by EGO-Evaluation for Government Organizations s.c. and Ośrodek Ewaluacji Sp. z o.o. from 2022. This report summarizes the collaboration and the annual thematic studies that were carried out between 2017 and 2022 as part of the Knowledge Education Development Program (POWER) - the most comprehensive mechanism supporting the development of social innovations in Poland and the competitions for micro and macro innovations conducted within it. The development



of social innovation in Poland gained momentum thanks to POWER, as it provided a formal and organizational framework for creating innovations and, most importantly, made it possible to finance such activities. Apart from EU support, it is difficult to point to other systems of support for social innovation—these are rare, much smaller in scale, and often ad hoc. Regarding the topic of social innovations and youth, the report provides an example of an interesting social innovation for youth. An intriguing system supporting social innovation is the *Zwolnieni z Teorii* platform, which has been operating since 2014 (run by a foundation of the same name). It allows high school and university students to create innovative social projects with the support of mentors. Projects go through various phases, including design, planning, implementation, and evaluation. Participants have access to expert knowledge, organizational support, and easier access to external funding due to the platform's recognized brand. Through these projects, young people not only contribute to solving or mitigating social problems but also enhance their soft skills and foster pro-innovative and civic attitudes. Additionally, they increase their employability, as the foundation helps build relationships between companies and the project creators. The platform is primarily supported by large private entities.

## Educational Practices and Methodologies

Poland has seen the emergence of several innovative educational practices aimed at promoting social innovation, some of which are specifically targeted at youth. Most of these educational practices are developed and offered by NGOs and other organizations, with funding from EU and national sources. Additionally, several universities have introduced initiatives as part of their educational offerings, including the [Economic University in Kraków](#), [AGH in Kraków](#), and Uniwersytet SWPS in Warsaw (see below).

Here is an overview of the most relevant educational initiatives:

- **"Morze możliwości, aby zmieniać świat. Kurs projektowania innowacji społecznych" (A Sea of Possibilities to Change the World: Social Innovation Design Course)**



Links:

<https://swps.pl/my-universytet/aktualnosci/wyklady-i-spotkania/33464-morze-mozliwosci-aby-zmieniac-swiat-kurs-projektowania-innowacji-spoecznych>

<https://siecprzedsiębiorczychkobiet.pl/kurs-projektowania-innowacji-spoecznych-bezplatne-materialy-do-pobrania/>

This social innovation design course was developed by the Women's Entrepreneurship Network (Sieć Przedsiębiorczych Kobiet), SWPS University, and the Norwegian foundation MIA and funded through the EOG funds. The course aims to support innovators in designing, implementing, and developing social initiatives that address future challenges. It is an open, 30-hour workshop conducted over seven sessions. Offered for free in 2023, the course materials are now available for free download online. This course is intended for anyone willing and brave enough to engage in actions that benefit society and the environment.

- **School of Ideas: projektowanie innowacji (School of Ideas: Social Innovation Design)**

Link:

<https://swps.pl/oferta/warszawa/studia-pierwszego-stopnia/projektowanie-innowacji-soi>

Offered by SWPS University, the "School of Ideas" is a bachelor's degree program that utilizes practical knowledge, methods, and tools from various disciplines—such as cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, and psychology—to introduce students to the world of creative work related to the design of services and social and business processes focused on human needs. The duration of the program is three years.

- **Rural Social Innovation Academy (RSI)**

Links:

<https://cofund.org.pl/wiadomosci/rsi-akademia-innowacji>

<https://skyrocketplatform.eu/en/knowledge-hub/rsi-academy>

Partners from seven Central European countries, including the Polish partner –



Fundacja Fundusz Współpracy (Cooperation Fund Foundation) – collaborated with local action groups, regional development organizations, NGOs, and local communities to create a course on implementing social innovations in rural and peri-urban areas. The course, titled "RSI: Akademia Innowacji – Kurs online nt. Innowacji Społecznych Na Obszarach Wiejskich I Peryferyjnych," was offered for free on the Skyrocket platform and consisted of five thematic modules:

1. Strengthening and Developing Rural and Peri-Urban Areas
2. Identifying Local Community Needs
3. Designing Business Models
4. Measuring the Impact of Social Innovation
5. Designing Environmentally and Socially Friendly Activities

- **Kreatywna młodzież (Creative Youth)**

Link: <https://pcyf.org.pl/programy/realizowane/kreatywna-mlodziez/o-programie>

The "Kreatywna Młodzież" program is implemented as part of the public task "Creative Youth 2023-2024," funded by the City of Warsaw. This program is aimed at students of Warsaw's secondary schools, including vocational schools, technical schools, and general secondary schools, as well as students of Warsaw universities. The program's goal is to develop creativity, innovation, and social competencies that foster entrepreneurial attitudes and youth employment. It also supports youth initiatives and creative activities, providing conditions for acquiring practical skills through project-based learning. The program is conducted in the form of a competition for technical innovations (aimed at secondary school students) and a competition for social innovation projects (aimed at university students). Youth groups participating in the innovation competition receive substantive support and financial resources to develop prototypes. Authors of the best technical innovation projects receive financial awards.

- **Tydzień Ekonomii Społecznej (Social Economy Week)**

Link: <https://www.es.malopolska.pl/dzialania-edukacyjne/dla-studentow>



The Regional Social Policy Center in Kraków, in partnership with universities in the Małopolska region, organizes an annual autumn event called "Social Economy Week." This event is part of Global Entrepreneurship Week and is targeted at students, who are potential future leaders of social enterprises.

The goal of Social Economy Week is to promote knowledge of the social economy among students through various activities such as workshops, seminars, study visits to social economy entities (PES), discussions with PES leaders and employees, Oxford-style debates, film screenings, field games, and other engaging formats. These activities are designed to introduce the concept of social entrepreneurship to Małopolska students in a practical, accessible, and interesting way. Beyond simply providing information about the social economy, students are actively involved in discussions about the development potential of such initiatives.

From 2010 to 2024, a total of 9,275 students from nine universities in Małopolska participated in the various events held during Social Economy Week.

- **POPOJUTRZE**

Link: <https://popojutrze2.pl/#:~:text=POPOJUTRZE%20to%20jedyny%20inkubator%20w,tworzymy%20rozwi%C4%85zania%20zmieniaj%C4%85ce%20polsk%C4%85%20edukacj%C4%99>

POPOJUTRZE is the only incubator in Poland selected by the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy to support Social Innovation in the area of "EDUCATION." Funded by the European Union, this project aims to create solutions that transform Polish education. Through a broad, nationwide promotional campaign, 409 ideas were submitted for the project. Out of these, 167 teams were chosen for the pre-incubation stage, and 72 of those advanced to the crucial incubation phase, where they received substantive, organizational, and financial support. The outcome: 15 awarded innovations have been disseminated, contributing to the advancement of educational practices in Poland.



### 3. Current State of Social Innovation

Social innovation in Poland is primarily supported by Social Innovation Incubators located throughout the country. Examples of such incubators include: the [Inkubator Innowacji Społecznych Wielkich Jutra Dostępność +](#), [Inkubator pomysłów 3](#), [Inkubator Włączenia Społecznego 2.0](#), or [TransferHUB 2](#). These incubators are run by Regional Centers for Social Policy, as well as by companies and NGOs (Kto Może Mi Pomóc - Innowacje Społeczne, 2023).

In terms of financial programs, the European Union supports the development of innovation through various financial instruments, including programs that allocate funds to such initiatives in Poland (Staszal, 2019). Among these are the European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund, the European Union Program for Social Change and Innovation, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, Horizon 2020, and the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (COSME) program for 2014–2020 (Staszal, 2019).

In Poland, various programs have been and are being implemented to promote social innovation, many of which were or are supported by the European Social Fund through initiatives such as the Equal Community Initiative (2004–2006). The development of actions for society was also financed through the Human Capital Operational Program (2007–2013). During the 2014–2020 period, the Knowledge Education Development Operational Program (POWER) was implemented to support social innovation in Poland. The primary focus of this program was on social innovations and transnational cooperation (Staszal, 2019). Within the fourth priority axis of POWER, social innovations were supported in two main formats. The first was macro-innovations, which were larger projects with significant budgets aimed at addressing problems defined by the themes of the competitions. These projects were intended to develop and test solutions for major issues on a national scale, such as adult education or social services for specific target groups. The second format was micro-innovations, which were much smaller projects funded through grants provided by selected incubators. The nature of these innovations and the specific problems they addressed were not predefined but were proposed by the innovators themselves, limited only by the broader area of intervention and the scope



defined by the incubators. Unlike macro-innovations, micro-innovations allowed participation from individuals and informal groups.

Four competitions for social innovation incubators were announced under the POWER program. From 2014 to 2020, over PLN 114 million from the European Social Fund was allocated to these incubators. Most of the funding was invested in social inclusion, including accessibility (59%), education (29%), and employment (12%). In this way, 29 incubators were funded, which supported the development of over 1,200 new micro-solutions to various social problems and disseminated over 150 of these solutions to other entities that could apply them in practice.

In February 2024, the Minister of Funds and Regional Policy, Katarzyna Pełczyńska-Nałęcz, and Deputy Minister Monika Sikora signed agreements with seven beneficiaries to implement projects from the "Incubation and Acceleration of Social Innovations" competition (Wspieramy Innowacje Społeczne - Uruchamiamy Inkubatory Innowacji Społecznych - Ministerstwo Funduszy i Polityki Regionalnej - Portal Gov.pl, n.d.). These organizations will receive nearly PLN 70 million in support to create more than 230 new solutions that will improve the quality of life and working conditions for society. The Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy signed agreements with NGOs, government agencies, and companies with extensive experience in implementing projects for social inclusion, employment, and education. Together with their partners, they will act as social innovation incubators.

The signing of these agreements marks another step in the development of the social innovation support system in Poland, which the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy has been implementing for many years with the help of European Funds. In the European Funds for Social Development (FERS) program for 2021–2027, approximately PLN 900 million has been allocated for this purpose. These funds will be used to seek out new solutions, as well as to refine and expand the application of existing micro-innovations. This competition is a continuation of the micro-innovation funding system initiated under the Knowledge Education Development Operational Program (POWER), which was implemented in the previous EU financial perspective.



## 4. Linking Foundation's experiences

The most significant project on social innovation implemented by the Linking Foundation from Poland is the Social Innovation Brokers project. This initiative served as an inspiration for the current MOBIUS project, of which this report is a part.

The Social Innovation Brokers project was a collaborative effort between the Linking Foundation and the European Centre for Women and Technology from Norway. The project's goal was to develop and pilot an innovative training program for Social Innovation Brokers—bridge builders who connect innovators with stakeholders and help bring their ideas to life. The Social Innovation Brokers project was co-financed by the EEA and Norway Grants, Project Number: EOG/21/K3/W/0042, with a budget of €181,060, running from May 1, 2022, to April 30, 2024.

As part of the project, we developed various materials that are available for free on the project website: <https://socialinnovationbrokers.eu/resources/>.

The core of the project involved developing the training curriculum and piloting the Social Innovation Brokers training, which took place from February 11, 2023, to May 27, 2023. Led by specialists and practitioners with international project experience, the program consisted of 100 hours of practical lectures, workshops, mentoring, and project work. During the training, participants refined their innovative ideas and worked on implementing them. The curriculum was thoughtfully designed to cover a wide range of relevant topics, providing participants with a comprehensive understanding of social innovation and its practical application.

To accommodate participants' diverse schedules, the training included online meetings held on Saturdays and weekday evenings. This flexible approach enabled participants to engage in the training without significant disruptions to their professional or personal commitments. The training was conducted in English, aiming to foster cross-cultural communication and enhance participants' proficiency in the language. This linguistic aspect enabled trainees to access a broader range of international resources and collaborate with professionals beyond the local context.



Beyond acquiring skills and knowledge, the training sought to empower participants to formulate concrete ideas and support them in transforming these ideas into reality. A crucial element of the pilot program was the emphasis on group work. Participants were divided into five thematic groups based on their interests. They collaborated within these groups during practical exercises, lectures, workshops, and mentoring sessions. Additionally, the Social Innovation Brokers Training was complemented by a Social Innovation Brokers Mentoring Program, provided in five thematic groups, with two hours per group per week.

The Social Innovation Brokers Training program achieved remarkable success in cultivating a community of passionate and skilled social innovation practitioners. Through its engaging curriculum, practical learning experiences, and mentorship, the program empowered participants to drive positive change and develop innovative solutions to societal challenges. The overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants, along with their expressed desire for continued engagement, demonstrates the program's lasting impact and significance.

In addition to the positive feedback, evaluation surveys, focus groups, and participant reflections provided valuable insights into areas for improvement and potential enhancements to the training program. Participants suggested, among other things, offering clearer information about the program's goals and expected outcomes at the outset to enhance their understanding and engagement. Incorporating more practical exercises, case studies, and real-world tasks could further enrich participants' learning experiences and facilitate hands-on application. Ensuring consistent and active involvement from mentors in participants' projects would maximize the benefits of the mentorship program. Offering opportunities for participants to work on their own innovation projects could better cater to individual interests and aspirations. By addressing these areas and incorporating feedback into future iterations, the program can continue to evolve and maintain its relevance and effectiveness.



## 5. Recommendations

To enhance social innovation initiatives for youth in Poland, several targeted actions can be recommended:

- **Strengthen Collaborative Networks:** Foster stronger partnerships among NGOs, educational institutions, businesses, and governmental bodies to create a more cohesive ecosystem for social innovation. This can be achieved by establishing formal platforms for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and resource pooling. Such networks would help streamline efforts, avoid duplication, and scale successful initiatives.
- **Increase Accessibility to Funding and Resources:** Many youth-driven social innovations struggle with access to adequate funding and resources. Expanding financial support through grants, micro-financing, and investment opportunities specifically tailored for youth initiatives can significantly boost the development of innovative projects. Additionally, providing access to co-working spaces, technological tools, and mentorship can empower young innovators to develop and implement their ideas more effectively.
- **Integrate Social Innovation into Formal Education:** Embedding social innovation concepts into school curricula and university programs can cultivate an early interest in social entrepreneurship and problem-solving among young people. Educational institutions should incorporate project-based learning, where students can work on real-world social challenges, as well as offer courses and workshops on social innovation and entrepreneurship. These efforts would not only build relevant skills but also instill a sense of civic responsibility.
- **Promote Awareness and Recognition:** Increasing the visibility of successful youth-led social innovations through media campaigns, competitions, and awards can inspire other young people to engage in similar activities. Recognizing and celebrating these achievements can also elevate the status of social innovation as a viable and impactful career path.
- **Policy Support and Incentives:** Governmental policies should be oriented toward creating a supportive environment for social innovation. This could include tax incentives for businesses that support youth-led social projects,



streamlined regulatory processes for social enterprises, and the integration of social innovation goals into national development strategies. Additionally, ensuring that policy frameworks are adaptive to the changing needs of young innovators is crucial for sustained growth.

- **Focus on Inclusivity:** Special attention should be given to ensuring that social innovation initiatives are inclusive and accessible to all segments of youth, particularly those from marginalized or underrepresented groups. Programs should be designed to address the unique challenges faced by these groups, such as lack of access to education, limited financial resources, and social exclusion.

## 6. Conclusion

The analysis highlights Poland's growing potential in the field of social innovation, particularly as it pertains to youth development. With Poland already making strides in global innovation rankings, there is a clear opportunity to further harness this potential by fostering a supportive ecosystem for young social innovators. Key findings indicate that while there are promising initiatives in place, there is a need for better resource accessibility, increased awareness, stronger collaborations, and more integrated educational practices.

Implementing the recommendations provided could significantly enhance the social innovation landscape for youth in Poland. By improving access to resources, expanding practical learning opportunities, and ensuring policy support, Poland can cultivate a new generation of socially conscious innovators. These changes have the potential to create a ripple effect, leading to more robust, sustainable social innovation projects that not only address pressing societal challenges but also empower young people to be active agents of change.

The potential impact of these recommendations is substantial. By equipping young people with the tools, knowledge, and support they need, Poland can ensure that its youth are not just passive recipients of change but active drivers of social progress. This, in turn, can contribute to a more inclusive, resilient, and innovative society,



capable of addressing the complex challenges of the future.

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