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YOUTH SOCIAL INNOVATION BROKERS
M O B I U S

MOBIUS EUROPEAN REPORT



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TABLE OF CONTENT

1. Objective of the report	3
2. Introduction to social innovation	4
3. Analysis and diagnosis of existing literature	6
4. Current situation of social innovation for young people.	11
Current state of social innovation in France	13
Current state of social innovation in Spain	14
Current state of social innovation in Greece	15
Current state of social innovation in Poland	16
Current state of social innovation in Bulgaria	18
Overview of the situation of social innovation in Europe	19
5. Partners own experience	20
Infinitivity Design Labs (IDL) (France)	20
Backslash (Spain)	21
K.A.N.E. (Greece)	22
Linking Foundation (Poland)	24
Know & Can (Bulgaria)	24
Overall experience	25
6. Recommendations	26
7. Conclusions	29
7. References	32



1. Objective of the report

The European Mobius report has been developed as part of the European project “MOBIUS: Youth Brokers of Social Innovation”, KA220-YOU with reference number 2023-2-PL01-KA220-YOU-000171409 coordinated by Linking Foundation (Poland) and the partners SOCIAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CIVIL NONPROFIT SOCIETY (Greece), I KNOW IT AND I CAN DO IT (Bulgaria), Infinity Design Labs (France) and BACKSLASH (Spain).

The aim of the MOBIUS project is to stimulate the activity of young people in the field of social innovation on a local, national, and European level, giving youth an active role where they can develop their competencies, providing relevant tools, and sharing experiences and best practices. The main goal is to enhance the skills and abilities of Social Innovation Brokers, particularly in the area of educational activities focused on partnership, entrepreneurship, and co-creation of innovations.

To achieve this, in the first phase of the project development, research has been carried out by the entire consortium to tackle the situation of social innovation in each of the partners countries, keeping the focus on youth. The result of the national research is this report, which, after unifying the different realities compiled by the partners in their countries, aims to offer an overview of the reality of social innovation in the European context.

This report offers an overview of the state of the art of social innovation in Poland, Greece, Bulgaria, France and Spain, comparing the support systems that exist in each country, from those that have government-driven policies to promote social innovation, to those in which these measures are practically non-existent. In addition, the experience of each partner in the area of social innovation is presented, from the perspective of their expertise, ending with recommendations on how to improve the situation of social change through innovation.

This study will be the basis to continue developing the project outcomes in order to achieve its goal. As part of these outcomes, a unique training program for future Youth Social Innovation Brokers will be created, providing young people with all the knowledge, tools, and practical experience they need to start their way in social



innovation and be part of the change. Also, an international network of Innovation Brokers will be established with the aim of giving support to young people starting their journey in social innovation.

2. Introduction to social innovation

Social innovation is the search for creative and innovative solutions to solve social, environmental or economic problems affecting the community that traditional methods haven't been able to handle effectively, while fostering collaboration and sustainable development.

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 organisations, businesses, academic institutions, and communities to co-create solutions that are both innovative and practical.

Social innovation is emerging as a crucial strategy to tackle issues ranging from poverty and inequality to climate change and public health. For example, 27.1% of children in Spain live in households below the poverty line, according to Red Cross sources; or in Bulgaria in 2020 the percentage of unemployed young people was among the highest in the EU - 18% compared to an average of 14% in Europe, according to the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\)](#). These kinds of challenges need to be faced with innovative approaches.

That's why social innovation is increasingly recognized as a powerful tool for addressing complex societal challenges, especially in the context of youth development. Young people are aware of the existing problems in the society as they are one of the most affected by the current crisis, the precarious conditions, the high unemployment rates and the difficulties for emancipating themselves, which also leads to mental health problems. With their unique perspectives and proximity to many of these issues, youth is well-positioned to devise creative solutions that are inclusive and equitable and take the role of social brokers.



Participating in social innovation brings incredible benefits to young people. 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, at the same time that build resilience and adaptability, skills that are invaluable in the face of challenges and setbacks. These skills are essential for personal and professional growth, by making them more competitive in the job market, but also for fostering a sense of civic responsibility and social commitment.

The involvement of youth in social innovation is not only beneficial for them, but also for the whole society, as they bring fresh perspectives and creative solutions to the table, which are often more innovative and effective than traditional approaches. These projects often have a direct, positive impact on local communities, enhancing the quality of life and meeting specific needs. Also, this contributes to the country's economic growth by fostering a new generation of socially responsible entrepreneurs. As future leaders, today's youth will be responsible for shaping the policies and practices of tomorrow. By equipping them with the tools and mindset for social innovation ensures a more sustainable and just future.

However, despite the potential of social innovation for society in general and for young people in particular, its implementation is unequal in the European context. After analysing the situation in Poland, France, Greece, Bulgaria and Spain, significant differences have been detected in these areas. Countries such as Bulgaria, which according to the *European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS)* from the European Commission has an emerging potential for social innovation, see limited action due to the lack of support from governmental institutions dedicated to this area.

Poland, Greece and Spain appear to be in a quite similar situation: although Poland is considered as an emerging innovator and Greece and Spain are considered countries with a moderated potential for social innovation according to the EIS, the three of them have certain initiatives promoting social innovation. While Poland relies heavily on European funding to carry out its projects, Greece and Spain receive more government support in addition to EU funds. However, this support is still not enough, so a significant portion of social innovation in these countries depends on initiatives launched by private entities, foundations, or NGOs.



Despite the similarities between these three countries, Greece is one step ahead in regards to social innovation, where social economy is formally recognised and civil society is highly involved by taking part in informal groups that step in to fill gaps left by the state constrained by financial limitations, acting as crucial players in addressing social needs. Also, the country promotes initiatives such as social entrepreneurship courses or community-based projects. However, the use of social innovation in youth work is not yet widespread, with significant potential for further development.

A more favourable perspective is found in France, where social innovation has a rich history, with a strong tradition of social solidarity and public welfare. In contrast to the previous countries, the French government has a central role in promoting social innovation with initiatives such as the [French Impact](#), a national program to support social enterprises, and La French Tech, which fosters innovation in technology and social entrepreneurship.

There is still a long way to go to reach a level where social innovation is efficient and sustainable. 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.

3. Analysis and diagnosis of existing literature

To identify the most relevant studies in social innovation, particularly those focusing on youth, and the methodologies used in education to promote social innovation, each member country of the Project conducted a brief review of the existing literature on the topic.

Regarding **studies on social innovation**, it was found that while all countries have some material on this subject, the focus, and scope differ depending on the country.



For example, in Poland, no studies providing a general overview of the state of social innovation in the country were found.

In Bulgaria, a study by the University of Veliko Tarnovo (2021) gives a **historical overview** of the concept of "social innovation," emphasising its role in promoting social change, inclusion, and a green, digital, and inclusive Europe. The study highlights the need for new approaches to social innovation to foster progress, social cohesion, and well-being through appropriate policies and strategies. Also, some studies assess the **level of social innovation** in a country and its potential. For example, "Innowacje społeczne w Polsce oraz szanse ich rozwoju na tle innych państw" by Alicja Staszal (2019) in Poland highlights the country's significant potential in social innovation.

Key studies highlight the importance of **cross-sectoral social innovation** agents, such as "La dynamique de l'innovation sociale en France" (2014) by CGSP in France and "Wizja 2050: Innowacje społeczne – Podsumowanie prac grupy roboczej w 2013 r." in Poland. These emphasise fostering collaboration between NGOs, businesses, and the academic sector to develop innovative solutions to social problems while benefiting entrepreneurs.

Other studies focus on the **practical application of social innovation**, like "Innovations sociales: de la théorie à la pratique" (2015) by Philippe Eynaud and Jean-Louis Laville in France. Additionally, some studies address the **challenges facing the social economy** from a policy perspective, such as the OECD's 2012 report and the CIRIEC report "The Social Economy in the European Union." These provide a comprehensive analysis of the social economy, identifying contributions and barriers to growth, like the lack of institutional support and financial sustainability.

Studies like ["Les nouveaux défis de l'innovation sociale"](#) (2019) by Fondation de France analyse **social issues** that require social innovation for solutions, including those in **rural areas**. The [Rural Social Innovation Academy \(RSI\)](#) Project, with partners in Central Europe including Poland, aims to create a course on implementing social innovations in rural and peri-urban areas in collaboration with local and regional groups. Similarly, research by Koutsou, Partalidou, and Ragkos titled "Young Farmers' Social Capital in Greece: Trust, Networks and Social Innovation" highlights the role of



rural youth in driving social innovation and addressing economic challenges in Greece's rural communities.

With a **focus in young people**, in Spain, the study "Global Youth: Cosmopolitan Identities and Scenarios for Action" (Torres, 2015) analyses the potential of young people as change agents, stressing the need for an interdisciplinary approach that promotes social entrepreneurship and social innovation through creativity. It also highlights that despite feeling empowered to undertake projects, Spanish youth face institutional and financial barriers, resulting in Spain ranking relatively low (14th out of 27) in terms of innovation in the European Union. Similarly, the article "*Social innovation and effective participation of children and adolescents.*" (Vila-Viñas, 2020) discusses how societal perspectives limit youth participation by associating it with immaturity and dependence, suggesting a paradigm shift to promote youth involvement and investment in public policies that promote equal opportunities, strengthen support networks for families and young people, and encourage their active participation in society.

In countries like Poland, no significant studies on social innovation specifically focused on youth were found. However, the report "Raport końcowy z badania innowacji społecznych w ramach Programu Operacyjnego Wiedza Edukacja Rozwój," part of the Knowledge Education Development Program (POWER), mentions the Zwolnieni z Teorii platform. Supported primarily by large private entities, this platform has allowed high school and university students to create innovative social projects since 2014, with mentor support, contributing to solving social problems and fostering innovative and civic attitudes, and building relationships between companies and the project creators.

These **studies** are **essential** not only academically but also **for developing policies** aligned with the situation and challenges they describe, boosting social innovation with institutional support. However, as social innovation goes hand in hand with change and uncertainty, it is vital to create a conducive ecosystem for its development, which requires support from public institutions, policymakers, and professional organisations. Currently, the intervention model is closed and pre-designed, with bureaucracy hindering social innovation. Therefore, it may be key to involve these institutions in co-designing solutions, reducing the risks associated



with innovation, increasing funding opportunities, and reaching innovative solutions through collective intelligence.

In this line, Dr. Ioannis K. Nasioulas' work, "Greek Social Economy Revisited: Voluntary, Civic and Cooperative Challenges in the 21st Century," explores the roles of cooperatives and civic initiatives in Greece. He emphasises the need for an independent third sector to drive social innovation, free from political and economic interests. In Poland, the study "Innowacje społeczne w Polsce oraz szanse ich rozwoju na tle innych państw" by Alicja Staszal (2019) highlights the country's significant potential in social innovation, which policymakers should consider implementing social programs effectively and improve their position in European rankings. In France, these studies have been instrumental in designing initiatives like the French Impact, which aims to create a supportive ecosystem for social enterprises. Additionally, the focus on practical applications in these studies has fostered collaboration between academia, government, and civil society, leading to more effective and scalable social innovation projects, making France a leader in social innovation.

To address these needs, **innovative educational methodologies** have been developed to foster values like social entrepreneurship, active participation, and civic engagement among young people, the future agents of change. These methodologies include:

- **Project-Based Learning (PBL):** Students work on real-world problems, collaborating with local communities, NGOs, or social enterprises, enhancing skills like problem-solving, creativity, cooperation, and critical thinking while promoting values like social responsibility and active citizenship. In countries like France and Greece, PBL is integrated into both school and university curricula. In Poland, an example of PBL comes with the course ["A Sea of Possibilities to Change the World"](#), that supports innovators in designing and implementing social initiatives through a 30-hour workshop with [freely downloadable material](#). Also in this country, the ["Kreatywna Młodzież"](#) program stands out, enabling students in Warsaw to develop creativity, innovation, and social competencies that foster entrepreneurial attitudes and youth employment.



- **Design Thinking:** This methodology teaches students to empathise with users, define problems, ideate solutions, prototype, and test their ideas. This user-centred approach is particularly effective in developing socially innovative solutions. In France, design thinking is implemented in educational programs focusing on social innovation.
- **Service Learning (SL):** This methodology combines academic studies with community service, allowing students to use their knowledge to address social issues, deepening understanding, and generating civic awareness. Service Learning is also gaining strength in France. In Poland, the ["School of Ideas"](#) project by SWPS University uses practical knowledge and tools from various disciplines to introduce students to creative work related to designing services and processes focused on human needs.

Apart from these innovative methodologies, the last few years also highlights the implementation of **gamification**, which uses elements of games to make learning more attractive and motivating, encouraging collaboration and problem solving. **Emotional education** is gaining strength in formal education, as it fosters the development of young people's socio-emotional skills, such as empathy, self-awareness and emotion management, so that they can be agents of change in their communities. Furthermore, **digitalisation** is fundamental in this process, understood from the point of view of using digital tools to promote collaborative processes, without the digital replacing the face-to-face.

These methodologies are crucial in **equipping young people** with the **skills**, mindset, and motivation needed to become **leaders in social innovation** and contribute meaningfully to society. However, there is still a long way to go before its implementation in formal education becomes a reality. In Poland, most of these practices are developed by NGOs and organisations with European or national funding in, mostly in non-formal contexts. Universities like the [Economic University in Kraków](#), [AGH in Kraków](#), and Uniwersytet SWPS in Warsaw have also started introducing these initiatives into their educational practices.

After this diagnosis of the literature, it has been noticed that one area that requires further development is the **evaluation of social innovation projects**. There is currently no clear methodology on how to evaluate them, and it is often assumed that good



intentions are sufficient. However, assessing the impact of these processes is essential to learn from them and consolidate social innovation as a genuine tool for change.

In conclusion, the exploration of social innovation across various countries shows a diverse array of approaches and priorities. Despite these variations, there is a shared understanding of social innovation's importance in driving societal change, particularly through the active involvement of youth. Innovative educational methodologies such as project-based learning, design thinking, and service learning are essential in preparing young people to become leaders in this field. To fully realise the potential of these initiatives, it is crucial to develop ecosystems that promote collaboration across sectors, streamline bureaucratic processes, and establish effective methods for evaluating the impact of social innovation. By focusing on these areas, countries can effectively leverage social innovation to tackle pressing social challenges and pave the way for more inclusive and sustainable development.

4. Current situation of social innovation for young people.

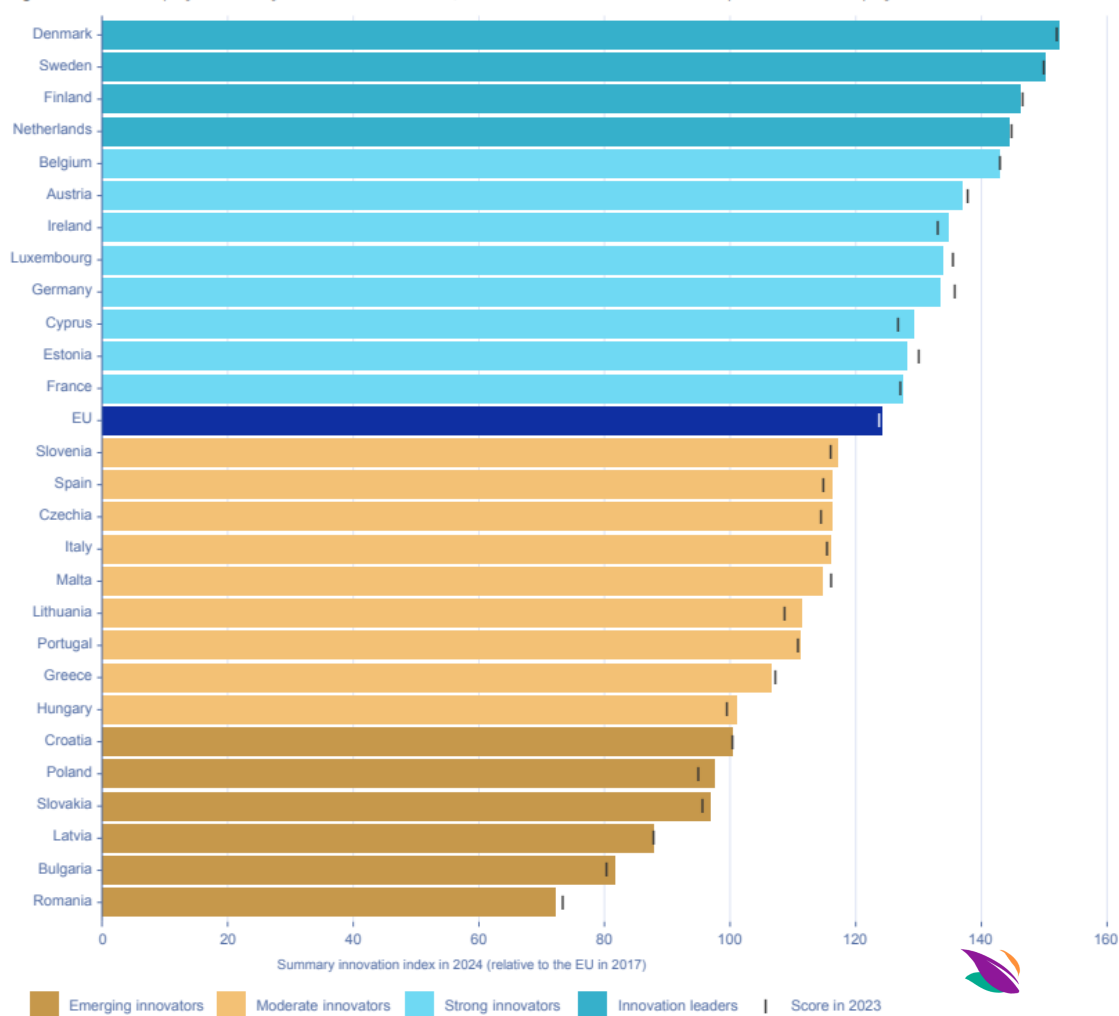
After making a wide review of literature on social innovation involving young people in Poland, Bulgaria, France, Greece and Spain and getting an overview of the overall picture, the next step is to analyse the current situation in each of these countries to understand how the reality of social innovation is.

To make this, the existing framework of action had been analysed, with a focus on programs and reference frameworks related to innovation and social action with youth. Examples of best practices at different levels (national, regional, and local/municipal) will be discussed also in this chapter. This approach is particularly important in countries like Spain, where territorial organisation distributes competencies across different levels of government, leading to diverse realities and projects in each area.



One of the main instruments used by the European Commission to evaluate the performance of EU Member States and neighbouring European countries in terms of innovation is the **European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS)**. According to this data, in 2024 **France** is positioned as a **strong innovator** ranking 12th out of 27 EU countries, with a position even higher than the EU average, thanks to its robust investment in R&D, well-developed infrastructure, and a supportive ecosystem for technology and education. In contrast, **Spain and Greece** are classified as **moderate innovators**, holding the positions 14th and 20th respectively. While Spain shows an improvement with a growth rate higher than the EU average since 2014, Greece continues to face challenges related to economic factors and infrastructure, which hold back its innovation potential according to the EIS. At the bottom of the table are **Poland** in 23th place and **Bulgaria** in the penultimate position, classified as **emerging innovators**. Poland has shown regional disparities, with cities like Warsaw leading innovation efforts while Bulgaria ranks the lowest among these countries, dealing with significant obstacles such as limited R&D investment and a less developed innovation infrastructure.

Figure 2: Innovation performance of the EU Member States, relative to the EU in 2017 and compared to national performance in 2023.



Note: All performance scores are relative to that of the EU in 2017. Coloured bars show countries' performance in 2024, using the most recent data for 32 indicators. The vertical bars show performance in 2023, using the next most recent data.



This comparison illustrates the diverse innovation landscape across these five countries with France leading the way, Spain making steady progress, and Poland, Greece, and Bulgaria working to overcome various challenges in their innovation ecosystems. This situation allows us to predict that the general situation in Europe in the area of social innovation is very varied and unequal, as we will see below with concrete examples, not only between countries but also among regions within countries.

After understanding the position of these countries in terms of innovation, we then move on to analysing concrete examples of best practices.

Current state of social innovation in France

France's ecosystem for social innovation involves a mix of public institutions, private organisations, NGOs, and social enterprises operating at national, regional, and local levels. Financial support comes from impact investing, government grants, and philanthropic funding. Social innovation is quite closely aligned with youth as there are various policies and programs focused on empowering youth in social entrepreneurship and community development.

Nationally, the **government promotes social innovation** through initiatives like the **French Impact Initiative**, launched in 2018, which supports youth social enterprises with funding, mentorship, and networking. **Service Civique**, established in 2010, engages young people in community service to address social issues, fostering civic engagement and skill development. The **National Pact for the Social and Solidarity Economy (ESS)** provides funding and resources for cooperatives and social enterprises, encouraging innovation. **La French Tech**, initially technology-focused, now also supports tech-driven social innovation among young entrepreneurs, offering incubation and access to a global network.

European programs like **Erasmus+** and the **European Social Fund (ESF)** play a role in supporting youth participation and social inclusion, facilitating cross-border collaboration and improving employment opportunities.

Both at the local and national level, **NGOs and private initiatives** like **Unis-Cité**, **Les Déterminés**, and **L'Ecole de la Deuxième Chance (E2C)** are crucial in providing



opportunities for young people, from civic service and entrepreneurship training to educational reintegration. Additionally, various training programs offered by universities, NGOs, and social enterprises equip youth with the skills needed for social innovation.

Overall, France's social innovation landscape combines government support with dynamic NGO and private sector involvement, creating a comprehensive environment for youth engagement in social innovation.

Current state of social innovation in Spain

At the national level, in Spain there is **no specific public body** dedicated to social innovation. However, several programs and strategies promote it. Key initiatives include the [Recovery, Transformation, and Resilience Plan \(PRTR\)](#), funded by **Next Generation EU**, aimed at modernising social services, and the [Program for Employment and Social Innovation](#), which focuses on job creation and social progress. Although there are not specific programs in Spain with the focus in youth, initiatives like the [Spanish Active Employment Support Strategy \(2021-2024\)](#) targets long-term unemployed individuals and young people, emphasising the development of employability skills with a social perspective. Despite these initiatives, public funding for social innovation, such as subsidies from the Ministry of Social Rights, tends to be on an annual basis, making it difficult to implement significant long-term projects.

Regionally, the level of social innovation varies across Spain with areas like **Navarra** and the **Basque Country** leading due to strong public-private collaboration. **Navarra's Social Reality Observatory** and the Basque Country's emphasis on the social economy and the third sector are key examples of regional strengths. However, **disparities exist**, with some regions like the Canary Islands where there is lower public and private investment in innovation and development. These differences highlight the need for more balanced innovation policies across all regions.

At the local level, cities such as Madrid and Barcelona have established significant local initiatives. **Madrid** has a **Social Innovation Office and incubators** for social projects, while **Barcelona's Social Innovation Plan** promotes citizen participation and



digital transformation. These city-level initiatives demonstrate how local governments can act as change agents and fund innovative projects, often in alignment with European initiatives like the [Urban Innovative Actions Initiative](#).

Apart from the government initiatives, the private sector, including **NGOs and foundations**, plays a crucial role in driving social innovation. At the national level, the [COTEC Foundation](#) facilitates knowledge exchange between companies, public administration, and experts. "[La Caixa Foundation](#)" develops innovative social inclusion projects, such as EPYCO, which focuses on employment training in prisons. [Ashoka](#), a global network of social entrepreneurs, is particularly active in Spain, promoting youth social entrepreneurship through programs like [Young Changemakers](#) and the [Transformative Education Program](#). Educational institutions like the [ESADE Institute for Social Innovation](#) also contribute by training future leaders in social innovation and corporate social responsibility. At local level the NGO [JovesSólides](#) focus on engaging young people in social commitment and active participation in their communities; and initiatives like the [Culturama Awards for Social Innovation in Youth](#), recognize innovative projects that promote community development through art and culture

While government programs provide important frameworks and funding for social innovation, NGOs, foundations, and the private sector often lead in implementation and creativity, especially in areas like youth engagement and social entrepreneurship. The lack of a centralised national approach results in uneven progress across regions. Strengthening collaboration between public initiatives and private organisations could enhance the overall impact of social innovation in Spain.

Current state of social innovation in Greece

One remarkable thing about the Greece government is the implementation of **policies to support social innovation among youth**, notably with Law 4019/2011, which formalised the social economy and introduced the concept of Social Cooperative Enterprises (KoinSEp). This law marked a significant step in institutionalising social innovation, although it has been criticised for its restrictive nature. The **National Youth Strategy (2017-2027)** is another key framework aimed at promoting youth entrepreneurship and social innovation, focusing on providing skills and resources.



However, as it also happened in Spain, implementation varies regionally, resulting in uneven support.

At the national level, several organisations are crucial in promoting social innovation. **Impact Hub Athens** leads in supporting social entrepreneurs through co-working spaces, mentoring, and funding access, effectively engaging young people in developing innovative social projects. The **Social Solidarity Economy Network (SSE Network)** advances social economy and solidarity initiatives, providing resources for social enterprises, especially those led by youth. The **Youth Foundation for Lifelong Learning (INEDIVIM)** manages EU-funded programs, helping young people develop skills in social entrepreneurship.

Locally, institutions play a significant role in fostering social innovation within communities. Many **local projects** emphasise experiential learning, sustainability, and inclusion of marginalised groups. Collaborating with educational institutions, these initiatives provide practical skills and promote social cohesion. **Local cultural centres and art museums** engage in community-based activities like workshops and exhibitions that encourage social learning and inclusivity. Additionally, local **sustainability-focused organisations** involve community members in practices such as organic farming and waste management, promoting environmental education. They also focus on **integrating marginalised groups** through vocational training and social entrepreneurship, empowering individuals and fostering an inclusive environment for youth-driven social innovation.

Overall, while the Greek government has set a framework for supporting social innovation, much of the effective engagement and support come from national organisations as well as local institutions that provide practical, community-based opportunities for youth involvement.

Current state of social innovation in Poland

In Poland, social innovation is primarily driven by a **network of Social Innovation Incubators**, such as [Inkubator Innowacji Społecznych Wielkich Jutra Dostępność +](#) and [TransferHUB 2](#). These incubators, operated by regional centres, companies, and NGOs, play a crucial role in nurturing innovative solutions to societal challenges. The



European Union significantly supports these initiatives through various financial instruments like the **European Social Fund**, **Horizon 2020**, and the **Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (COSME)** program.

Nationally, programs like the **Equal Community Initiative**, **Human Capital Operational Program** (2007–2013), and the **Knowledge Education Development Operational Program (POWER)** have been central in promoting social innovation. The POWER program (2014–2020) particularly emphasised social innovations and transnational cooperation, with over PLN 114 million (€24 million) allocated to fund social innovation incubators. This support fostered both macro-innovations, large-scale projects tackling national issues, and micro-innovations, smaller projects allowing for individual and informal group participation. Over 1,200 new micro-solutions were developed through these incubators.

In February 2024, the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy further bolstered these efforts by signing agreements with seven beneficiaries, including NGOs and government agencies, to implement projects under the "**Incubation and Acceleration of Social Innovations**" competition. This initiative, with nearly PLN 70 million (€14.7 million) in funding, aims to develop over 230 new solutions to enhance the quality of life and working conditions. Additionally, the **European Funds for Social Development (FERS)** program for 2021–2027 has allocated approximately PLN 900 million (€189 million) to continue supporting social innovation.

At a **regional** level, **incubators** managed by various organisations contribute to the decentralised nature of Poland's social innovation landscape. These centres support the development and implementation of innovative projects tailored to local needs, focusing on areas such as social inclusion, education, and employment. The regional centres, alongside **NGOs and private companies**, act as hubs for testing and scaling solutions at the local level.

NGOs and private companies are deeply involved in the social innovation ecosystem in Poland. They collaborate with the government to run incubators, develop projects, and advocate for policy changes. These entities bring expertise, networks, and resources, complementing government efforts and ensuring that social innovation initiatives are diverse and well-supported. By fostering collaborations and creating



new solutions, they play an indispensable role in the ongoing development of social innovation across the country.

Current state of social innovation in Bulgaria

As seen at the beginning, Bulgaria's low position in the EIS with performance below 50% of the EU average in 2020 highlights the need for enhanced innovation in this country, especially in the context of NextGenerationEU and the national recovery plan.

NGOs play a crucial role at the national level in advancing social entrepreneurship and innovation in Bulgaria. They integrate innovative approaches in their operations, such as fundraising and public engagement, to support various social causes. Over time, these methods have evolved into social innovations, attracting more organisations to replicate them. Several funding programs, notably the **European Social Fund (ESF) and Erasmus+**, focus on this area, indicating a significant interest in social innovation among NGOs and some businesses. However, scepticism remains in the business sector, where 'social' and "non-profit" is often associated with low quality.

On the governmental side, the **State Agency for Research and Innovation** and other national bodies show limited recognition of social innovation, and it is not a central theme in leading innovation forums. The **Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation 2021-2027** aims to make Bulgaria an innovative, smart, and green economy. However, despite its goals to enhance research, innovation, and technology interaction, social innovation is not a primary focus.

Regionally and locally, there is **no strong evidence** of specific organisations or institutions prioritising social innovation. Public authorities, businesses, and academic institutions generally overlook this area. This lack of emphasis is particularly evident in universities and research institutions, which mostly ignore the topic. Therefore, while there is an emerging interest in social innovation among NGOs and some business sectors, it lacks the systemic support and recognition from the government and key stakeholders at various levels.



Overview of the situation of social innovation in Europe

As can be seen after this analysis, in Europe, the landscape of social innovation varies significantly, with different countries demonstrating diverse levels of governmental support, reliance on EU funds, and engagement from private institutions.

Countries like France stand out with strong governmental backing for social innovation. In contrast, Spain and Greece exhibit moderate governmental support. Spain lacks a centralised national body but leverages regional efforts and EU funding for social innovation. Greece, while having frameworks like Law 4019/2011 and the National Youth Strategy, faces regional disparities in implementation.

All these countries have the support of European funding like European Social Fund and Horizon 2020, however, some are more dependent on this financing than others. Poland and Bulgaria are heavily reliant on EU financial instruments to support their social innovation ecosystems. Especially in the case of Bulgaria that lacks a strong national government endorsement for social innovation.

Private institutions and NGOs are instrumental in driving social innovation, particularly in countries with less governmental support. In Spain and Greece, NGOs and private organisations play a significant role in implementing social innovation projects, often filling gaps left by insufficient public support. In Poland, a combination of private sector involvement and EU funding supports social innovation, with NGOs and private entities running many incubators. Bulgaria relies heavily on NGOs to push social innovation forward due to limited governmental focus.

Overall, while France benefits from a well-integrated approach combining government, EU funding, and private sector engagement, Spain, Greece, Poland, and Bulgaria display a more fragmented support system, with varying levels of governmental involvement and reliance on EU funds and private institutions to foster social innovation.



This varied landscape of social innovation across Europe highlights the need for a unified approach to support and sustain these initiatives. While some countries benefit from robust government support and effective integration of EU funds and private sector involvement, others struggle with fragmented systems and heavy reliance on external financing. To address these disparities and enhance the impact of social innovation, Europe must foster more cohesive and collaborative frameworks that streamline support mechanisms, promote cross-sector partnerships, and ensure equitable resource distribution. Such efforts will enable a more inclusive and effective social innovation ecosystem capable of tackling Europe's pressing social challenges and driving sustainable development across the continent.

5. Partners own experience

Once the literature on social innovation and its current state has been analysed, we move on to examining the role that the partners in the Mobius project consortium play in the field of social innovation, with the aim of gathering examples of good practices that could be useful in ensuring the sustainability of this project.

Infinitivity Design Labs (IDL) (France)

IDL is a leading organisation in France recognized for its innovative integration of traditional design methodologies with cutting-edge technologies. They are specialised in leveraging **Design Thinking** to support social entrepreneurs in creating innovative solutions for societal challenges. Their work includes organising workshops, mentoring, and collaborating with NGOs and startups to develop sustainable social business models. They focus on blending creativity with practical applications to tackle urgent social issues.

In addition to Design Thinking, the lab excels in Serious Gaming, Artificial Intelligence, and Audio & Image signal analysis. Their expertise covers gamification, e-learning content creation, user experience, accessibility, Augmented and Virtual Reality (AR/VR), and Big Data analysis. They use advanced techniques such as Deep Learning and natural language processing (NLP), and are skilled in biomedical signal processing, particularly in audiovisual content analysis.



IDL standout capability in AI-powered data analysis transforms raw data into actionable insights through sophisticated statistical and computational techniques. This includes services such as market segmentation, supply chain optimization, fraud detection, and customer churn prediction. Additionally, their expertise in sound analysis is exemplified by the SoundMaster iOS app series, used for advanced acoustic measurements in various sectors, showcasing their innovation and versatility.

Infinitivity Design Labs has undertaken several high-impact projects, often funded by the European Union under programs like Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe. These projects showcase their commitment to tackling contemporary challenges through innovative design and technology. For example, the **CONVERT Project** under Erasmus+ aims to boost digital skills among non-ICT graduates and junior employees, with the lab developing impactful training modules. The **TEX4.0 Project**, also under Erasmus+, seeks to enhance vocational education and training in the textile industry, with IDL creating engaging learning experiences. The **PreschoolABA Project** focuses on Applied Behavior Analysis for educators working with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, reflecting their dedication to inclusive educational environments. Additionally, the lab's AI-powered data analysis services provide deep insights into customer behaviour, operational inefficiencies, and market trends, further demonstrating their expertise in advanced technological solutions.

Backslash (Spain)

Backslash is a nonprofit organisation in Spain specialising in **youth cooperation projects**, mainly in the framework of Erasmus+ initiatives. Their primary goal is to empower young people and foster social inclusion, which aligns closely with the principles of social innovation. Backslash has a proven track record in developing innovative social innovation projects. A good example of them are FUSION and Creative Invisibles.

FUSION project aims to harness the potential of festivals as platforms for social innovation. By encouraging young people in organisations to use festivals to implement their own ideas, products, and technologies, FUSION seeks to create a positive impact on society. Festivals are no longer just about music and partying;



they also serve as venues for workshops, exhibitions, talks, and awareness-raising campaigns. FUSION leverages this opportunity to transform festivals into incubators of social innovation, empowering young people to become agents of change.

To achieve this, Backslash conducted focus groups with festival and social cause experts to identify the challenges and opportunities of merging social innovation with festivals. The resulting materials include a guide with best practices, educational tools, and FUSION alliances to connect festivals, youth organisations, and young people.

[Creative Invisibles](#) is another European project involving Backslash. This initiative focuses on introducing new models of entrepreneurship training in the creative sector through street culture. By addressing the high rates of youth unemployment, especially post-COVID-19, Creative Invisibles aims to mobilise young people and "NEETS" (not in employment, education, or training).

The project provides training and resources for both professionals in the creative sector and young people interested in street culture entrepreneurship. These resources include a good practice guide, a methodological guide for creating partnerships, educational materials, and a [mobile app](#).

Through projects like FUSION and Creative Invisibles, Backslash is actively working to create opportunities for young people to contribute to positive social change and develop their entrepreneurial skills.

K.A.N.E. (Greece)

K.A.N.E. (SOCIAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CIVIL NONPROFIT SOCIETY) is a Greek organisation dedicated to promoting social innovation, particularly among young people. Through various projects, K.A.N.E. has been instrumental in fostering social entrepreneurship, building capacity, and encouraging creativity within the youth sector in Greece.

One of K.A.N.E.'s key projects is **SE-HUB: Empowering Change-makers**. This EU-funded initiative aimed to strengthen the capacity of youth organisations in Europe and partner countries to foster youth-led social entrepreneurial ventures and



implement socially innovative approaches. The project resulted in capacity-building activities, training materials, and the creation of Social Innovation Training Hubs.

Another notable project is **Entrepreneurship in Rural Areas**. Originally launched as "The Social Start-up Cultivators," this project provides participants with essential knowledge in social entrepreneurship, with a focus on rural communities. The program covers impact-centred business models, management skills, and practical tools.

In addition, K.A.N.E.'s **Making Space 365** project focuses on creative and cultural entrepreneurship, developing tools and approaches to help youth and community organisations foster ownership and pride in community-driven projects.

The **MUSICLING project** integrates social entrepreneurship with the arts, encouraging youth to create instruments from recycled materials. Participants develop entrepreneurial skills related to music and crafts, while also learning about project management and social media promotion.

K.A.N.E. has also been involved in successful social innovation initiatives in Greece, such as the cooperative formed by Cattle and Sheep Breeders in Western Thessaly and the Pieria Action Team. These initiatives demonstrated the power of collective action in achieving economic benefits and social change.

However, promoting social innovation in Greece faces significant challenges, including over-regulation, political interference, and limited awareness of social innovation among the public. To overcome these challenges, K.A.N.E. has been leveraging digital platforms, forming partnerships, and collaborating with institutions to raise awareness and foster greater community engagement.

By addressing these challenges and continuing its efforts to promote social innovation, K.A.N.E. is making a valuable contribution to the development of a more informed and active society in Greece.



Linking Foundation (Poland)

The Polish organisation Linking Foundation is a leading force in promoting social innovation in the country. Their key social innovation project is the **Social Innovation Brokers** initiative, which inspired the current MOBIUS project. This collaborative effort with the European Centre for Women and Technology from Norway aimed to create and pilot a training program for Social Innovation Brokers—individuals who connect innovators with stakeholders and help bring ideas to life. Funded by the EEA and Norway Grants with a budget of €181,060, the project ran from May 1, 2022, to April 30, 2024.

As part of the project's program a comprehensive curriculum was developed, which was piloted between February 11, 2023, and May 27, 2023. It featured 100 hours of practical lectures, workshops, mentoring, and project work, conducted in English to facilitate international collaboration. The training was flexible, with online sessions scheduled on weekends and evenings to accommodate participants' schedules. The curriculum emphasized practical application and group work, with participants working in thematic groups and receiving additional mentorship. All the resources are available [here](#).

The program successfully built a community of skilled social innovation practitioners and received positive feedback. Participants appreciated the program's practical approach but suggested improvements, such as clearer goals and expected outcomes, more practical exercises, case studies, and real-world tasks, increased mentor involvement and work on their own innovation projects to better cater to individual interests and aspirations. This experience and suggestions for improvement can be taken into account as a reference for the current Mobius project in order to make it more relevant and efficient.

Know & Can (Bulgaria)

Know & Can is a Bulgarian organisation dedicated to fostering active citizenship and social entrepreneurship. They empower individuals and organisations through innovative educational programs, capacity building initiatives, and research projects, aiming to create positive social change.



As an example of their experience in promoting social innovation, their **PROSPER project** should be highlighted. This project aims to address youth unemployment and social group marginalisation by providing young people with opportunities to learn about social entrepreneurship and gain relevant skills and knowledge needed to become social entrepreneurs and contribute to a prosperous society. The project will create an innovative educational program for higher education, tested in five pilot countries.

SEIS and **Schools Engage** are two key initiatives under the PROSPER umbrella. SEIS focuses on building capacity in youth social entrepreneurship promotion, while Schools Engage develops a curriculum for active citizenship education in secondary schools.

Both projects faced challenges during implementation, including difficulties in defining social innovation and convincing young people of its value. The lack of legal frameworks and societal interest in social entrepreneurship also posed obstacles.

Despite these challenges, the projects have achieved significant outcomes. Schools Engage has developed a teacher training program and Service Learning (SL) Resource Bank to support teachers in implementing service-learning activities. SEIS has created a capacity-building platform for youth workers and a mobile application for young people interested in social entrepreneurship.

Through these initiatives, Know and Can is making a valuable contribution to fostering social entrepreneurship and empowering young people in Bulgaria to create positive change in their communities.

Overall experience

As it has been demonstrated, the Mobius project consortium brings together a diverse group of partners with extensive experience in social innovation. These organisations have demonstrated a strong commitment to empowering young people, fostering social inclusion, and driving positive change. Infinitivity Design Labs offers expertise in **Design Thinking, Serious Gaming, and AI-powered data** analysis. Backslash specialises in **youth cooperation** projects, while K.A.N.E. promotes **social entrepreneurship** in Greece. The Linking Foundation has pioneered **social innovation**



in Poland, and Know and Can focuses on **active citizenship** and social entrepreneurship. By leveraging the combined experience of these partners, the Mobius project can ensure its sustainability and effectiveness in driving positive social change.

6. Recommendations

After carrying out this broad analysis of the situation of social innovation in Europe, reviewing studies and methodologies that focus on social innovation, to the state of social innovation from the point of view of the consortium member countries, we have obtained a vision of the inequality that exists in general in the European panorama.

In order to reverse this situation and promote social innovation, especially among young people, as part of the Mobius project, a series of recommendations have been launched to give a boost to sustainable social innovation in Europe. These recommendations can be divided into the following categories:

Funding and Resources

- **Increase Access to Funding and Resources:** Expand financial support through grants, micro-financing, and investment opportunities specifically tailored for youth initiatives. Additionally, provide access to co-working spaces, technological tools, and mentorship.
- **Address Financial Constraints:** Establish dedicated funds to finance youth-focused projects, encourage collaboration between NGOs and businesses, and increase government funding for social inclusion and innovation programs.
- **Ensure Sustainable Funding:** Develop innovative financial instruments that can attract private capital and de-risk investments in social innovation.
- **Evaluate projects performance:** develop indicators and methodologies that allow the impact of these projects to be measured and their results to be communicated effectively in order to make them sustainable and to make wise use of the funds.



Policy and Governance

- **Provide Policy Support and Incentives:** Governmental policies should create a supportive environment for social innovation, including tax incentives, streamlined regulatory processes, and integration of social innovation goals into national development strategies.
- **Formal Recognition of Youth Work:** Advocate for the formal recognition of youth work as a profession to empower youth workers and disseminate social innovation practices.
- **European policies aligned:** greater advocacy efforts are needed to align national and European policies, creating an enabling environment for social innovation to thrive across the continent.

Education and Capacity Building

- **Integrate Social Innovation into Formal Education:** Embed social innovation concepts into school curricula and university programs to cultivate an early interest in social entrepreneurship and problem-solving among young people, encouraging critical thinking, creativity and social commitment in students.
- **Promote Societal Awareness and Recognition:** Increase the visibility of successful youth-led social innovations through media campaigns, competitions, and awards. Highlight the successes and benefits of social innovation, draw attention to successful examples through media coverage, and engage with municipal authorities to promote and support local initiatives.
- **Focus on Inclusivity:** Ensure that social innovation initiatives are inclusive and accessible to all segments of youth, particularly those from marginalised or underrepresented groups.
- **Address the NEETs Challenge:** Develop a comprehensive national strategy to address the specific problems faced by NEETs, including improving educational practices, supporting teachers, and involving the community and parents.



- **Develop Innovative Educational Methodologies:** Create specialised training for educators and platforms that allow students to engage in real-life social innovation projects.
- **Provide Tailored Support for Early-Stage Initiatives:** Offer more tailored support for early-stage social enterprises and grassroots initiatives, including access to resources like incubators or social accelerators and networks.
- **Give young people an active role:** involve them from the very beginning of the projects and use participatory methodologies that guarantee a solution to the problems posed.

Community and Collaboration

- **Strengthen Collaborative Networks:** Foster 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.
- **Leverage Digital Platforms:** Develop digital spaces for sharing ideas, resources, and best practices, and stimulate collaboration between different organisations and groups of youth activists.
- **Learn from International Experience:** Establish partnerships with international NGOs to exchange knowledge and practices and participate in European or global initiatives that offer resources and training.
- **Scale Successful Models Across Europe:** Address the challenges of scaling social innovation models to other European contexts by considering the diversity of social, economic, and regulatory environments.

Promoting social innovation requires a multifaceted approach that includes increased funding, supportive policies, integrated education, and strong community collaboration. By providing financial resources, fostering partnerships, and promoting inclusivity, we can empower youth-led initiatives to drive meaningful change. Cultivating a supportive ecosystem will ensure that social innovation continues to address societal challenges effectively and sustainably.



7. Conclusions

Conducting this comprehensive study has allowed us to develop a thorough understanding of the social innovation landscape within the European context, with a particular focus on the situation in the member countries of the Mobius project consortium to which this report belongs.

After an initial review of the literature in these countries, it was concluded that while there are diverse approaches and priorities regarding social innovation, there is a common recognition of its role in driving societal change, especially through youth involvement. Innovative educational methods such as project-based learning, design thinking, and service learning are crucial for preparing young leaders. To fully harness these initiatives, it is essential to build ecosystems that foster cross-sector collaboration, simplify bureaucratic processes, and implement effective impact evaluation methods. Addressing these areas can help countries leverage social innovation to address key social challenges and promote more inclusive and sustainable development.

The analysis of the current state of social innovation in France, Spain, Greece, Poland, and Bulgaria highlights a significant diversity in approaches and levels of governmental support, as well as reliance on EU funds and engagement from private institutions. France stands out for its strong government backing and effective integration of EU funds with private sector involvement. In contrast, Spain and Greece exhibit moderate governmental support, with Spain relying on regional efforts and EU funding, and Greece facing regional disparities despite existing frameworks.

On the other hand, Poland and Bulgaria show a heavy dependence on EU financial instruments to support their social innovation ecosystems, with Bulgaria notably lacking strong national government support. In these contexts, private institutions and NGOs are crucial, especially where government support is limited. This varied landscape underscores the need for a more unified approach across Europe to support and sustain social innovation. By fostering cohesive frameworks, promoting cross-sector partnerships, and ensuring equitable resource distribution, Europe can build a more inclusive and effective ecosystem to address social challenges and drive sustainable development across the continent.

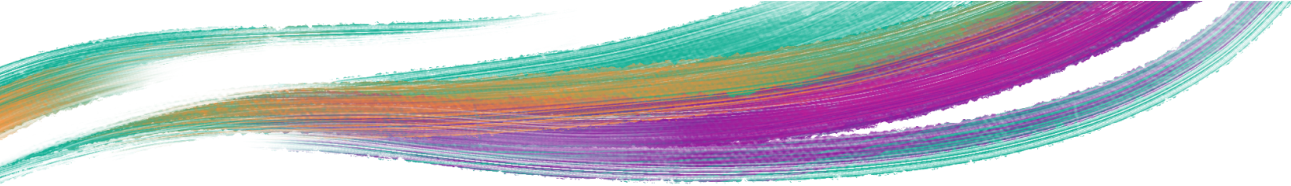


Once the whole picture for social innovation in Europe is defined, Mobius project partners propose several recommendations to enhance and support sustainable social innovation, particularly among young people. Due to the significant disparities across the continent, a need for concerted action to bridge these gaps is highlighted. To address these inequalities, the Mobius project emphasizes the importance of increasing access to funding and resources, including tailored financial support for youth initiatives, co-working spaces, and mentorship programs. It also advocates for establishing dedicated funds and innovative financial instruments to ensure sustainable support for social innovation projects.

In terms of policy and governance, the recommendations stress the need for supportive governmental policies, including tax incentives and streamlined regulatory processes. The formal recognition of youth work as a profession and alignment of national policies with European goals are essential to create an enabling environment for social innovation. Additionally, integrating social innovation into formal education, promoting societal awareness, and focusing on inclusivity are crucial for fostering a culture of innovation among young people. Addressing specific challenges such as NEETs and providing tailored support for early-stage initiatives are also key to nurturing new social enterprises.

Finally, strengthening collaborative networks and leveraging digital platforms are vital for creating a cohesive ecosystem for social innovation. By fostering partnerships among NGOs, educational institutions, and businesses, and scaling successful models across diverse European contexts, the Mobius project aims to build a more integrated and effective approach to social innovation. These efforts will empower youth-led initiatives and ensure that social innovation continues to address societal challenges effectively and sustainably across Europe.

Based on the insights from this report, we have a strong starting point for moving forward with the project. As a main result, the training program for future Youth Social Innovation Brokers will be developed taking into account this recommendations. The aim of this program is to give young people across Europe the knowledge and skills they need to drive change and develop innovative solutions to the social challenges in their communities and also to create a network to support new social innovators in their journey, bringing social innovation to a new paradigm.





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