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# **Social innovation: inspirational practices supporting people throughout their lives**

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Social innovation:  
inspirational practices supporting  
people throughout their lives

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# Introduction

The sustainability of welfare and social protection systems is a growing challenge in Europe. Welfare systems face increasing pressure, in terms of budgetary cuts and demographic changes, particularly in the context of a rapidly ageing population. This is coupled with technological changes that influence the world of work and the skills that people must develop to adapt to a changing labour market. We need sustainable solutions to tackle these evolving social challenges. Social innovation has a key role to play in this.

Social innovation is the development and implementation of new ideas (products, services and models) to meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations. It represents new responses to pressing social demands, aimed at improving human well-being. Social innovations are innovations that are social in both their ends and their means. They are new solutions that are not only good for society, but also enhance individuals' capacity to act.

This brochure includes 27 examples of social innovation initiatives across the European Union, one from each Member State. It highlights the diversity and success of existing social innovations in Europe, aiming to raise awareness of the significant positive impact that such innovations can have on people and communities. Its goal is to inform Member States, organisations and other actors about existing good practices on social innovation, facilitating learning exchange and transnational cooperation, particularly in the context of the future European Social Fund Plus.

# Foreword

Social innovation is about generating positive societal change. It can play a large role in advancing the EU's political agenda, which is marked by the green, digital and just transitions and, of course, the recovery from the socio-economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. These transitions are transforming the world of work, education and training and social services, and the way people live, consume and participate in society.

Social innovation is a transversal concept that is relevant to a wide range of policy fields. Employment, social inclusion, education and skills, social protection and delivery of social and health services are policy areas in which more social innovation is crucial. But social innovation can also contribute to less obvious areas such as consumer policy, enterprise policy, finance, agriculture and food systems, the circular economy and sustainable development goals, just to name a few. The European Commission is therefore keen to promote social innovation across a wide spectrum of policy areas, so that we can all reap the benefits.

I am very pleased to present this brochure which includes one example of social innovation from each Member State. The initiatives presented tackle a range of social challenges, from unemployment and lack of skills, to inadequate care services and social isolation. Yet, despite their diversity, they all have one thing in common: they impact people's lives for the better. Pupils, the elderly, newly arrived migrants, persons with disabilities, excluded young people, the homeless – people across different generations and from all walks of life are supported in these examples.

Looking at the richness of these initiatives, it is no wonder that the European Union has been promoting and supporting social innovation for many years. Through the European Structural and Investment Funds and other Union programmes, we offer a range of possibilities to our partners to invest in social innovation.

The European Commission will continue to support social innovation. Our proposal for the European Social Fund Plus holds a prominent place for social innovation. It explicitly promotes innovative actions, calling on Member States to support social experimentation projects, bottom-up approaches and partnerships that have a social core.

I invite you to explore the brochure and delve into these exciting initiatives. They bring social innovation to life, giving it a human face, from the people involved in setting up the initiative, to the people that are directly supported in their daily lives through this work.



© European Commission, 2020

*Nicolas Schmit*

*European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights*

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'N. Schmit' with a stylized flourish at the end.





# Inspirational Practices





## Germany

# Tackling social segregation in large multicultural metropolises

## Berlin Neighbourhood Management programme

### Problem addressed

Deprived urban areas in the 1990s in Berlin were characterised by increasing segregation, unemployment, discrimination, security issues and a lack of (social) infrastructure. This led to a range of interlinked social problems, particularly in the older inner city, affecting local and often migrant communities that resided there.

### Innovative solution

The Berlin Neighbourhood Management programme was introduced in 1999 by the Berlin Senate to promote self-sustainable neighbourhoods through local networks, the development of local infrastructure and active participation of its citizens. Unlike other similar funding mechanisms, the programme was built on a participatory approach that directly involves citizens in its decisions on neighbourhood funding.

The city of Berlin identifies socially deprived neighbourhoods through its monitoring system which assesses the unemployment rate, social benefit payments and child

poverty in each area. Each selected neighbourhood establishes a neighbourhood council, made up of local resident volunteers and organisations, such as sports clubs, schools and churches. The neighbourhood council identifies local needs and develops solutions to address them, which are then financed by the programme. The neighbourhood management office, set up by the programme, is responsible for implementation, in close collaboration with the council.

This bottom-up approach helps to develop solutions that respond directly to the challenges that each neighbourhood faces. For example, the Brunnenstrasse neighbourhood faced increasing segregation, a high level of dependency on state aid and a high level of non-German speakers, including children in education. Based on suggestions from local residents, the neighbourhood council and management office developed homework support for children with German as a second language, sports courses to help children integrate and a parent's café as a social space to support parents' integration..

### Neighbourhood Management Donaustraße Nord: Nachbarschaftsgarten





© Neighbourhood Management Brunnenstraße, Sulamit Sallan, 2015-2019

Neighbourhood Management Brunnenstraße: Gartenschau

## Key results and benefits

The programme has reached about 465 500 residents in 34 neighbourhoods, across 8 boroughs. Sustainable change was achieved by facilitating integration among the people in the district and improving education opportunities. A 2017 evaluation of the programme showed that eight neighbourhoods have been deemed more sustainable and increasingly independent as a result of participating in the programme. These neighbourhoods will not need funding support after 2020.

## Potential for mainstreaming

The Berlin Neighbourhood Management programme is financed by the German Federal Urban Development Programme, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Land Berlin. Between 1999 and 2019, the programme received EUR 472 million. The new phase of the Berlin Neighbourhood Management programme will start in 2021, with a focus on social inequalities and housing issues.

The programme has strong potential to be transferred to other European contexts. Substantial funding support and collaboration between public services to identify deprived neighbourhoods are two key conditions for such a transfer.

In 2013, the programme was awarded the title 'City Star' at the EU RegioStars Awards. The award identifies innovative regional projects and provides them with visibility at European level, encouraging the exchange of good practices.



**'LIFE HAS BECOME A LITTLE EASIER. THROUGH COUNSELLING FROM THE SOCIAL WORKERS, I LEARNED TO ACCEPT HELP FOR MY FAMILY AND I, AND NOT TO STRUGGLE ON MY OWN.'**

*- Beneficiary of the Open Family Apartment project, Falkenhagener Field West neighbourhood*

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quartiersmanagement/index\\_en.shtml](http://stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/wohnen/quartiersmanagement/index_en.shtml)



## Hungary

# Tackling discrimination against Roma people through participatory mutual learning

## Roma-Net

### Problem addressed

Roma people are the EU's largest minority but despite widespread policy efforts to facilitate their integration, they continue to suffer from ethnic discrimination and socio-economic deprivation. 78% of Roma people surveyed in 2019 lived in overcrowded housing, whilst only 43% of Roma adults were in employment. Roma social policy initiatives across Europe have tended to treat Roma community members as passive recipients. Initiatives are often designed and implemented by actors outside the community, impacting how relevant they are to the needs of Roma people, and how effectively they can provide support.

### Innovative solution

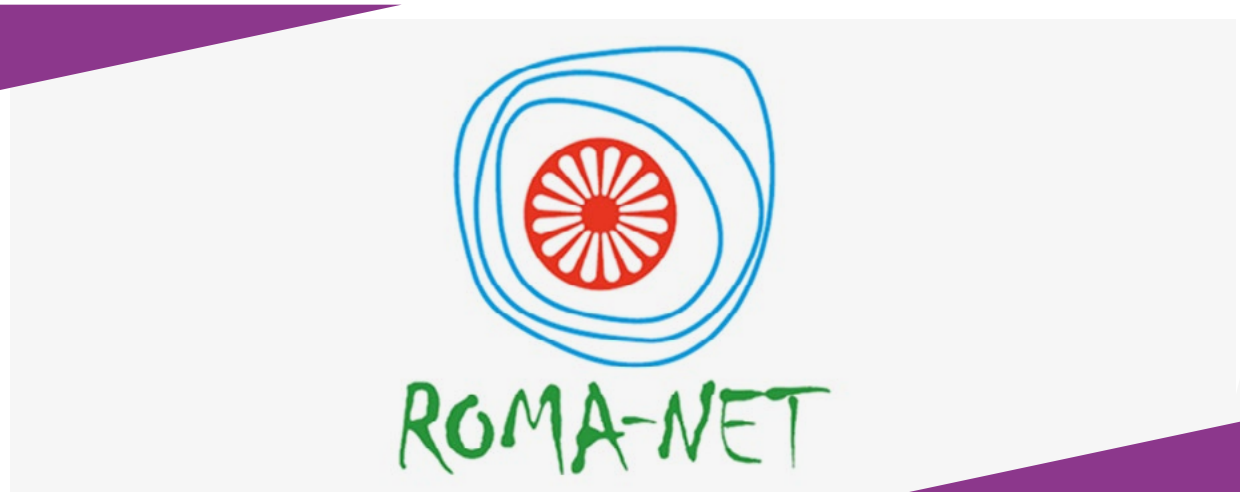
Roma-Net was launched in 2009 to combat discrimination towards Roma people through mutual learning based on the voice of the Roma community itself. It is a network of nine cities in Spain, France, Italy, Czechia, Slovakia, the UK and Hungary - with Budapest as lead partner. All participating cities establish local support groups, which

bring local Roma organisations into contact with local authorities from a range of sectors including healthcare, housing, education and policing.

Local support groups enable Roma representatives to inform public authorities of their community's concerns and develop action plans tailored to their specific needs. Roma-Net also provides a platform for cities to share their experiences of implementing these tailored intervention strategies, thus mutually increasing expertise and contributing to more effective support for the Roma population.

Roma-Net organised six meetings, called 'learning clusters', on key topics affecting Roma people, such as: local empowerment and active community engagement; area-based approaches towards exclusion and segregation; and transitioning to the labour market. These events brought together 220 participants including Roma people, public authorities and members of local support groups to exchange information on good practices and develop local action plans for long-term Roma social and economic inclusion.

### Logo of Roma-Net Urbact project







© Baloghne Juhász Adrienn, 2015

Co-creation of paintings by Roma and non-Roma children

## Key results and benefits

The participation of local people in the development of the local action plans helped to raise awareness of the problem of Roma segregation within public and municipalities, inspiring concrete action. Glasgow's action plan, for example, recommended employing Roma people as mediators and assistants in schools to build a stronger connection with parents. The municipality of Karvina, in Czechia, established a position for a Roma mentor, enabling local authorities to communicate directly with Roma people and include them in discussions on local policy-making.

## Potential for mainstreaming

Roma-Net has received funding from the European Urbact programme, an exchange and learning programme for the development of solutions to common urban challenges.

As Roma-Net involves a participatory approach and invites local organisations from different sectors to participate in its exchange sessions, the project has strong potential to become a long-term part of the local community in any setting. The continued implementation of the local action plans is a strong indicator of the project's sustainability. Building on the current ROMA-Net network, some of the cities (Glasgow, Budapest, Bologna, Kosice) have joined the RomaMatrix project, which focuses on issues related to racism, intolerance, and xenophobia, and is co-funded by the European Union's Fundamental Rights and Citizenship programme.



**'THE ROMA COMMUNITY HAS BECOME MUCH MORE INGRAINED – A PART OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY.'**

*- Stephen McAllister, Police Commander (senior police officer) and member of the Glasgow local support group*

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 Ireland

# Supporting community businesses to employ disadvantaged groups

## Community Services Programme

### Problem addressed

Irish employment activation programmes and welfare payment schemes focus on assisting individuals for a defined period of time to gain work experience and secure paid jobs. However, people with disabilities, people with convictions who are in contact with the probation service, homeless people, those with a history of substance abuse, travellers and long-term unemployed people often struggle to compete with other jobseekers in the labour market. New approaches to supporting the employment of disadvantaged individuals are needed, including an emphasis on job creation.

### Old Presbyterian church that is used for community facilities in the Sliabh Ardagh area



© Alan Curtis, 2019

### Innovative solution

The Community Services Programme (CSP) was created in 2006 with support from the Irish Government, to create sustainable employment opportunities for marginalised individuals. The CSP provides organisations with funding and capacity-building to create sustainable jobs, 70% of which must be for people from disadvantaged groups. Three types of organisations are eligible for funding: those delivering community services that target disadvantaged groups; community enterprises that employ people outside the labour force; and community halls and facilities such as care homes.

The CSP provides organisations with a fixed annual co-funding contribution towards the cost of employing a manager and/or a specified number of full-time positions. The CSP also provides organisations with a range of business support to build and develop their capacity for sustainability issues, business planning and effectively supporting staff from vulnerable groups.

The CSP is managed by Pobal, a governmental entity which collects data on the demographic, recent employment history and category of work of CSP beneficiaries. This information enables further research into the challenges vulnerable groups face when re-entering the labour market, to inform the design of better capacity-building measures for CSP-funded organisations.



© Alan Curtis, 2019

Lafcadio Hearn Japanese Gardens in the old town centre of Tramore, managed by the Tramore Development Trust, with the support of Pobal (CSP)

## **Key results and benefits**

Since its creation in 2006, the CSP has contributed around EUR 650 million to over 500 community businesses. The CSP supports the delivery of 400 different services every year with a contribution of approximately EUR 43 million. Funding has allowed community businesses to develop their social enterprise model and employ an additional 830 full and part-time staff. As of 2017, 87% of the staff were receiving welfare benefits, the majority of whom were women. The effectiveness and sustainability of the CSP's results are evidenced by the high number of employees that are able to find another job, despite a history of long-term unemployment.

## **Potential for mainstreaming**

The CSP has potential for transferability as the model can easily be adapted to local community needs. An important success factor for the transfer of the initiative is the substantial up-front public funding that is required. While this may be a barrier in the short-term, the CSP's model has a range of long-term, cost-saving benefits that are deemed to make up for initial start-up costs.

The CSP has been recognised as a best practice by the 'Interreg Europe Project RaiSE<sup>1</sup>', an initiative of the European Commission (EC) that brings together seven partners in mutual learning on how to enhance the competitiveness of social enterprises through improved business support policies.



**'CSP FUNDING AND SUPPORT HAS ENABLED US TO ESTABLISH AND DEVELOP OUR SERVICE FROM THE START AND GROW A DIVERSE, INCLUSIVE TEAM OF 16 PEOPLE FROM VULNERABLE GROUPS, ACHIEVING NATIONAL IMPACT.'**

*- Social enterprise benefitting from CSP funding*

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1. Interreg Europe Project Raise, [www.interregeurope.eu/raise](http://www.interregeurope.eu/raise)





# Facilitating student integration into employment

## Demola

### Problem addressed

Young graduates often struggle to find their first employment opportunities. This is caused, in part, by limited work experience, lack of a professional network and skill mismatches. In Latvia, young people are almost twice as likely to be unemployed compared to the rest of the population. Work-based learning can be an efficient way of addressing labour market imbalances, allowing young people to acquire valuable skills to help them to land their first job. Nevertheless, access to quality work-based learning opportunities remains unequal across the EU.

### Innovative solution

The Demola platform, established in 2014 in Finland, connects companies with university students to give students a chance to develop their skills, whilst providing a solution to a company need. The main innovation of Demola is that it presents students to companies as potential problem-solvers instead of as young people in need of work experience. Companies can submit a specific problem situation for students to address. Students participate in teams in

problem-solving workshops, facilitated by university staff. Each team presents potential solutions to the company in a final pitch session and, if it is interested, the company can purchase one of the innovative solutions. The financial compensation is then shared among the students.

Since 2016, the Demola platform in Latvia has been run by the Riga Technical University (RTU) Design Factory and the University of Latvia, with the support of the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia. The universities primarily liaise with companies and support the students' work.

### Key results and benefits

Since 2016, 625 students in total have applied to the project in Latvia. Of these, 195 students from 15 different secondary education institutes were eventually selected to participate in 50 different cases submitted by the participating companies.

One of the key benefits of this project is that students are given the opportunity to gain practical experience in designing,

### Student creative space at Riga Technical University Design Factory







© Riga Technical University, 2018

JAM workshop at Riga Technical University



providing and selling solutions for business in different areas. Students develop social and professional skills through implementing different business models, methodological and research approaches, as well as working in a team and experiencing customer-oriented relationships.

### **Potential for mainstreaming**

The Demola platform originated in Finland and is now implemented in 16 different countries, bringing together more than 50 universities, 750 000 students and a number of major companies from around the world. This demonstrates the platform's substantial potential for transferability as it uses methodologies and working processes that can be easily replicated and are particularly cost-effective.

During its piloting phase in Latvia, the platform received Interreg funding from the European Regional Development Fund and, since 2019, it is financed under the Latvian ERDF Operational Programme. Thanks to the support of other international branches, Demola Latvia has revamped its business model to also rely on local funds (i.e. the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia) and financial contributions provided by the participating companies, thus increasing its potential for sustainability.

**'I THINK THAT EVERYONE SHOULD LEARN HOW TO WORK WITH PEOPLE THAT HAVE DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES AND OPINIONS. IT HELPED ME TO DEFINE A PROBLEM AND FIND SOLUTIONS FOR IT.'**

*- Sintija Erte, Beneficiary of the Demola platform*

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# Tackling social exclusion via the circular economy

## Digital Inclusion and Digi4all

### Problem addressed

Refugees and migrants may have limited access to information communication technology (ICT) equipment when arriving in a new country, due to lack of financial resources or digital skills. This can delay their integration in their new country by impacting their chances of finding a job and a social network.

### Innovative solution

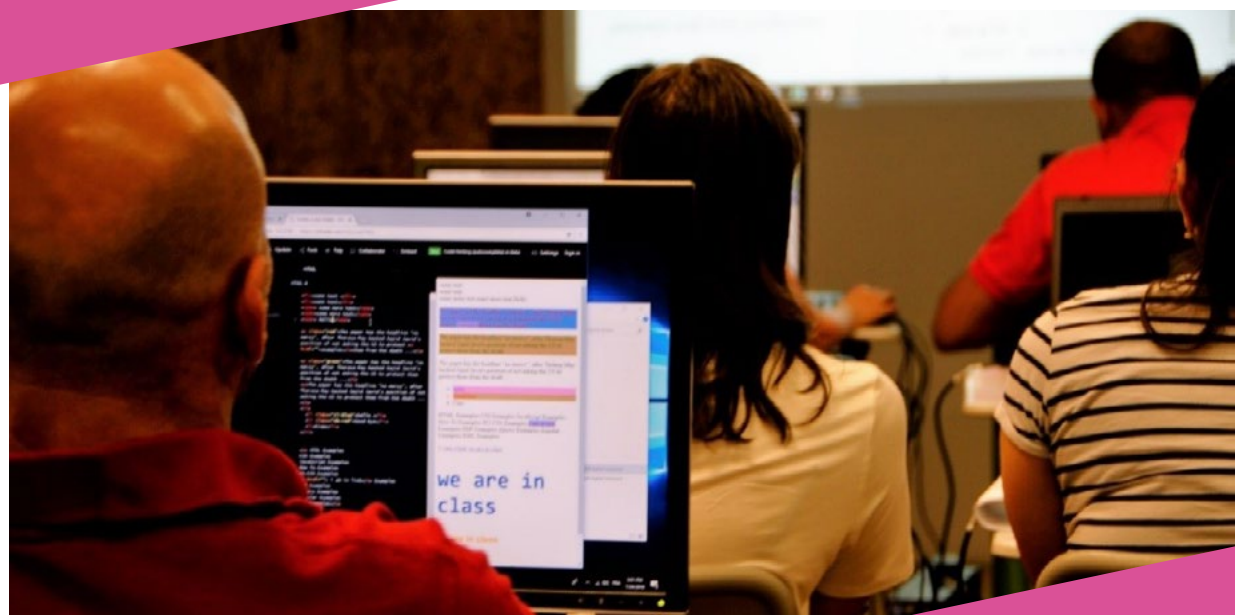
Digital Inclusion, a non-profit organisation in Luxembourg, provides donated digital devices, such as laptops and smartphones, to refugees and other marginalised groups. The material support is combined with educational support through the programme Digi4all. Through Digi4all, the recipients of digital devices learn how to fix the donated equipment through refurbishing workshops and ICT skill classes. These are delivered in different languages (such as Arabic and English) to reach a wider audience.

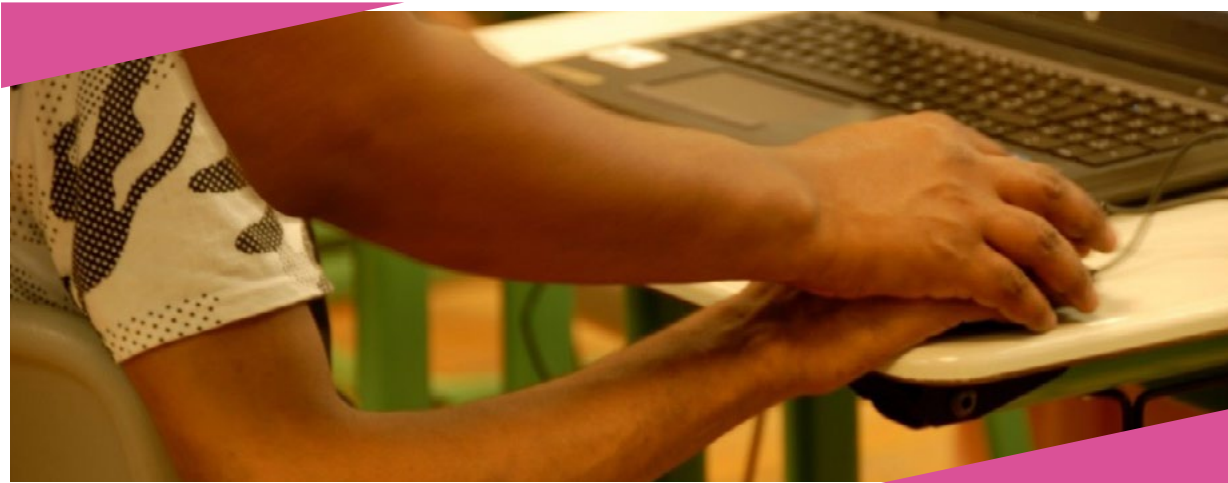
The team conducting the activities is an interdisciplinary one, composed of sociologists and engineers, to respond to the different needs of the target group.

The project is innovative as it views digitalisation as an enabling factor for integration, whilst also having a positive environmental impact through the re-use of ICT equipment. Since 2020, most of the Digi4all activities have been followed by participation in a new European Social Fund (ESF) project, DigiCoach, which further boosts the employability of participants through coaching.

A small core team of employees, half of which are refugees, manage the project with the help of volunteers.

**'We are in class' - students of one of Digital Inclusion's free website creation courses**





© Digital Inclusion, 2018

**'Digital Inclusion'** - Digital Inclusion's teacher of digital literacy in Amharic language shows a student how to use a mouse



### **Key results and benefits**

More than 2 300 people have already received, donated and repaired devices as a result of the Digital Inclusion activities since its launch in 2016. More than 1 000 people have acquired a new set of digital and technical skills, thus improving their chances of securing employment.

### **Potential for mainstreaming**

Given the limited human and financial resources needed, the project has potential for transferability to different national contexts and could easily be used to support other vulnerable groups, including the elderly or low-income families. The initiative is currently co-funded by the ESF, the Ministry of Labour, Employment and the Social and Solidarity Economy, the Ministry of Family Affairs, Integration and the Greater Region, and the Œuvre Nationale<sup>2</sup>. The circular economy business model strengthens the project's long-term financial sustainability. The project is looking at future scalability options through more direct collaboration with governments and the social sector.

Digital Inclusion has been acknowledged as a successful and innovative initiative at national level through the following awards in Luxembourg: the 'Communication & Values of the Organisation' category of the Diversity Awards Lëtzebuerg in 2019; the 'Coup de Pouce' prize and the 'Prix Etika' prize for the best independent sustainable project in 2018; the Start-up Europe Awards #SEUA17 in the social category in 2018; and the 'Coup de Coeur' award in 2017.

**'THE DIGI4ALL PROJECT HAS OFFERED ME A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY TO PRACTICE MY INTEREST, WHICH IS IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY. THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT WAS WELL-EQUIPPED AND WELCOMING.'**

*- Elmowafak Salim, 21-years-old, born and raised in Sudan, currently living in Luxembourg*

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## Bulgaria

# Economically empowering the Roma population

## Land Source of Income

### **Problem addressed**

As many as 80% of Roma people surveyed by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (2016) live below their country's at-risk-of-poverty threshold. Around 33% do not have access to tap water and every third Roma child lives in a household where someone went to bed hungry at least once in the month preceding the survey. Roma poverty is linked to low employment rates, below-par educational attainment, labour market discrimination and spatial segregation.

### **Innovative solution**

Since 2003, the Land Source of Income Foundation has been supporting Roma-led small and medium farming enterprises in the rural regions of Bulgaria by helping families to buy land. The foundation contributes 70% of the land price as a loan. Beneficiary families have five years to repay the loan. During this time, the foundation provides the family

with continuous assistance to reach financial autonomy. Agronomy consultants, for example, visit the farm regularly and advise owners on crop choice, equipment and products to use to develop sustainable agricultural practices.

The foundation recognises the link between the material dimensions of disadvantage and psycho-social ones, notably trust. It has partnered with local schools and culture centres to organise events such as dancing festivals and showcases of the Roma culture to promote intercultural exchanges and social cohesion.

### **A woman working in a field**





© European Union, 2020

A man working in nature

## **Key results and benefits**

The foundation supports more than 170 families across the country, reaching over 500 people. It has allowed beneficiary families to accumulate assets from which they can generate stable revenue. The additional activities have also raised awareness of Roma success stories, helping to combat negative stereotypes. The project has started collaborating with a marketing specialist to successfully market beneficiaries' agricultural products from the farm. Thanks to the family-focused approach adopted by the foundation, and the improved marketing techniques, the son of one of the first beneficiaries of the organisation has now started to supply local supermarkets with his products.

## **Potential for mainstreaming**

The foundation has attracted funding from public and private partners, including support from the ESF. This has allowed the foundation to research sustainable agricultural practices and to replicate the approach in different Bulgarian regions. As a result, independent partners are now using its business support model and resources to support more families. These partners are also developing a network to exchange learning and knowledge. It therefore has strong potential to be transferred to other contexts.

The foundation is also interested in using technology to further enhance its sustainability and transferability. Digital maps, for example, that provide step-by-step guidance on how to develop a crop will be created to further support beneficiaries.



**'IT HELPED ME TO BUY 4 ACRES, AND I NOW HAVE 32 ACRES. IF THE STATE ADOPTED THE MODEL, THE SITUATION WOULD BE MUCH BETTER FOR ROMA PEOPLE.'**

*- Farmer benefitting from the project*

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## Croatia

# Integrating migrants through culinary experiences

## Taste of home (*Okus Doma*)

### Problem addressed

Refugees face several challenges in integrating into their destination countries. In Croatia, in 2014 only 7.5% of those granted refugee status did not depend on state welfare and were employed in some way. Newcomers' slow social integration is linked to a range of societal prejudices and stereotypes as well as a lack of access to adequate support services.

### Innovative solution

Food, gastronomy and dining play a central role in Croatian culture. The Centre for Peace Studies (CPS), a Croatian NGO, aimed to use this to break down negative stereotypes of refugees and migrants in Croatia. In 2014, it published the Taste of Home cookbook, sharing personal and culinary stories of refugees. Culinary workshops and public presentations

were organised in Croatian cities with refugee shelters. A media campaign, 'If we accepted food, why wouldn't we embrace people, too?' was launched with the aim of reaching out to the Croatian public and promoting universal messages of tolerance and respect. In conjunction with the media campaign, the story of Taste of Home was presented in an ethnographic documentary (*Okus doma*, 2016).

Following the success of the cookbook initiative, Taste of Home was established as a social enterprise in 2016. It offered catering services prepared by refugees and migrants, providing them with a source of income to become financially independent.

### Taste of Home cookbook cover





© Taste of Home, 2014

A project participant cooking

## Key results and benefits

The Taste of Home initiative brought together 30 refugees and volunteers. The shared stories and food raised awareness of their situation among Croatian citizens. The initiative also gave refugees the opportunity to socially interact with each other and the local community in a friendly and informal environment.

## Potential for mainstreaming

The ESF financed 80% of one of the streams of the project, under the name Quality Integration Solution for Refugees. Taste of Home was acknowledged as an example of good practice at EU level by receiving the European Citizenship Award for Social Enterprise of the Year in 2017. It is also part of the Migrent network<sup>3</sup>, which gathers around 50 European migrant businesses.

As there is currently limited economic and political support for social enterprises in Croatia, the Taste of Home social enterprise primarily relied on financial income generated through its catering activities. However, this was not sufficient to ensure its sustainability and the social enterprise ceased its activities in 2018. In other countries, with more developed social economy environments, this model could thrive more easily.



**‘THIS PROJECT AIMED TO TACKLE THE BARRIERS AND STEREOTYPES THAT DIVIDE PEOPLE, AS WELL AS CREATING BRIDGES WHICH LEAD TO STRONGER INTERACTIONS FOR ALL MEMBERS OF SOCIETY.’**

*- Beneficiary of Taste of Home*

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3. Taste of Home, [www.okus-doma.hr/en/tekstovi/migrent/migrent-publikacija](http://www.okus-doma.hr/en/tekstovi/migrent/migrent-publikacija)



# Reinserting marginalised groups into work through fashion

## Progetto Quid

### **Problem addressed**

Labour market access is particularly difficult for disadvantaged groups – such as victims of violence and human trafficking, ex-offenders, migrants or people with disabilities. The gap in employment rates between disadvantaged groups and the adult population in Italy is reported to be the third largest in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Failure to secure stable, rewarding and dignified employment can exacerbate material and psycho-social disadvantage, contributing to a cycle of exclusion.

### **Innovative solution**

Progetto Quid is a fashion company established in 2013 as a social enterprise in Verona, Italy, that employs vulnerable individuals who face significant employment barriers. The enterprise collaborates with other social service projects to support its beneficiaries in a range of areas. Through the project Liberamente, employees can access services such

as psychological assistance and support when navigating bureaucracy. These services are provided by a psychologist and a welfare officer and are available at the Progetto Quid premises once or twice a week.

The holistic support means that employees are provided with a safe environment, a sense of belonging to a community rather than being isolated and marginalised, and opportunities to increase control over their own lives. The skills learnt – digital and fashion skills – are in high demand, increasing their employability.

The social enterprise combines its social impact focus with a successful market strategy. Unlike other such organisations, Progetto Quid has an entrepreneurial focus that has enabled it to satisfy consumers and stakeholders with its high-quality, stylish products and has thus become financially sustainable.

### Women working in Cooperativa Quid







© MOMA Photographers, 2017

Person working in Cooperativa Quid

## Key results and benefits

Since its creation, Progetto Quid has substantially strengthened its impact. The enterprise currently employs around 138 people from marginalised groups, 80% of whom are women. This constitutes a substantial increase compared to the 60 employees in 2016. The turnover has reached EUR 3.3 million, up from EUR 1 million in 2016.

Progetto Quid clothing and accessories are sold at the company's flagship stores in Verona and Vicenza, or through the distribution channels of partner companies such as Calzedonia, Intimissimi and Tezenis.

## Potential for mainstreaming

In 2014, Progetto Quid was granted EUR 30 000 through the Social Innovation Tournament<sup>4</sup>, by the European Investment Bank (EIB) institute, and EUR 30 000 through the European Social Innovation competition. In 2018, the enterprise became a recipient of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and will receive EUR 180 000.

Progetto Quid's market strategy is a key condition for a successful transfer to another context as it makes it sustainable financially, allowing it to have long-term social and environmental impacts. To increase its potential for mainstreaming, Progetto Quid intends to establish a mentorship system that could help like-minded social entrepreneurs create similar projects in other Italian regions and in Europe more broadly.

Progetto Quid has been awarded the 2017 Civil Society Prize by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the Award for Innovation Angelo Ferro in 2017, the United Nations Momentum for Change Lighthouse Activity in the category 'Women for Results' in 2017, and the Woman Entrepreneurship of the Year Award in 2019.



**'I LOVE THIS WORK... I  
TOOK IT TO SAVE MY LIFE.'**

*- Sanneh Sherifo, Gambia*

**'WE CREATE CLOTHES  
WITH PASSION... I AM  
HAPPY TO BE A PART  
OF THIS COMMUNITY.'**

*- Stefania Zullo, Verona*

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4. European Investment Bank, [www.eib.org/en/stories/fashion-employing-vulnerable-people](http://www.eib.org/en/stories/fashion-employing-vulnerable-people)



Poland

# Enhancing the independence of older people and people with disabilities

## Malopolska Incubator for Social Innovation

### **Problem addressed**

The ageing population poses a range of personal and policy challenges across the EU. By 2050, one third of citizens in Malopolska, Poland, will be over the age of 65, and one tenth will be over the age of 80. People with pronounced disabilities make up almost 12% of the population of Malopolska – a proportion that is set to grow as the population gets older. Many of these people will require home-based care and residential care systems may lack the capacity to meet growing demands for appropriate assistance.

### **Innovative solution**

The Malopolska Incubator for Social Innovation was set up to implement innovative, bottom-up solutions to address the needs of older people, people with disabilities and their caregivers. Established in Krakow by the Regional Centre for Social Policy, the Incubator provided citizens with grants (up to EUR 20 000) for developing, testing and implementing projects to address the needs of dependent people.

Ideas for innovative products and services were developed by elderly people or people with disabilities themselves. All innovators went through a counselling process with an innovation advisor who provided them with guidance on how their idea could be transformed into a real innovation. Ideas were then submitted to the Regional Centre for Social Policy and assessed. Selected ideas were tested by 300 older people and people with disabilities. Innovators were guided through all stages of the development including the needs assessment, concretisation of the idea, technical and organisational support, networking and legal and financial advice.

Examples of innovations that were developed include a model for a self-service shop for people with visual impairments, a raincoat for people in a wheelchair to ensure thermal comfort and high functional utility (thus strengthening the independence of people with reduced mobility), and a voice navigation application, Teleasystent, which allows people with visual impairments to get around public utility buildings more easily.

### **Raincoat designed for people in wheelchairs**





© European Commission, 2002

Person with a disability boarding a train

## Key results and benefits

103 innovative ideas were submitted and 39 innovations were selected and tested, including seven products, 26 services, and six IT solutions. Nine of the innovations tested through the Malopolska Incubator for Social Innovation were selected by the Polish Ministry of Investment and Economic Development and the Council for Social Innovations and were upscaled to the rest of the country. Feedback gathered during the implementation of the project shows that the Incubator and the supported innovations can be an effective way to create better living conditions in Malopolska.

## Potential for mainstreaming

The project shows that the effective financing of innovation at local level creates optimal conditions for the development of social innovations that are useful, scalable and cost-effective. For the initiative to be transferred to another context, key conditions would be access to funding, selecting applications according to multi-dimensional criteria and providing projects with comprehensive supervision during implementation.

Building on the success of the project, the Ministry of Investment and Economic Development has decided to announce another call for projects implementing innovation-incubating mechanisms. As a result, social innovation incubators will be created in other regions of the country.



**'THANKS TO THIS APP, I CAN FUNCTION ALMOST LIKE A SIGHTED PERSON. I AM LOVING MY LIFE. BEFORE, IF I NEEDED TO GO SOMEWHERE AND NO ONE WAS IN THE STREET, I COULD ONLY GUESS WHICH DIRECTION TO CHOOSE AND HOPE FOR SOMEONE TO COME AND SHOW ME THE WAY.'**

*- Beneficiary of Telesystem, one of the innovations of the initiative*

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[rops.krakow.pl/lewa/innowacje-spoleczne-25/o-projekcie-malopolski-inkubator-innowacji-spolecznych-96.html](https://rops.krakow.pl/lewa/innowacje-spoleczne-25/o-projekcie-malopolski-inkubator-innowacji-spolecznych-96.html)

 Romania

# A holistic and centralised approach to supporting patients with rare diseases

## The NoRo Centre

### Problem addressed

In Romania, approximately 1.3 million people are affected by rare diseases, 90% of whom do not receive a correct diagnosis or adequate medical care. Although declared a national priority in Romania's National Health Strategy in 2014, rare diseases are often not adequately addressed by the national health system due to their small and disconnected patient populations, the lack of knowledge of doctors on rare diseases and the lack of diagnosis centres, leading to fragmented medical and social services.

### Innovative solution

The Pilot Reference Centre for Rare Diseases, NoRo, launched in 2011, is a one-stop-shop for people living with a rare disease in Romania. It takes a holistic and centralised approach to rare disease care, combining medical, social and educational services for patients and their families. Patients at the NoRo Centre have a designated case

manager who provides them with guidance and counselling through all of the different services available to them. The centre was set up by the Romanian Prader Willi Association, in partnership with the leading Norwegian Frambu Resource Centre for Rare Disorders.

NoRo raises awareness of rare diseases on a national scale. It has trained almost 500 health specialists and doctors and brings together a network of 50 pro-bono doctors to work collaboratively on an information website about rare diseases, a national online map of services, and guidelines and magazines for patients and professionals. The centre also works with schools to raise the empathy level of teachers and pupils via role-playing and debates around the topic of rare diseases.

### A young patient receives treatment at the NoRo Centre







© European Union, 2017

A patient hands his European health insurance card to a medical professional

## Key results and benefits

The project currently offers services to over 10% of patients diagnosed with rare diseases in the country. In the past six years, NoRo doctors have undertaken over 2 200 consultations. Today, the centre supports 73 children and 12 young people with daily services. Since 2015, over 900 patients from across the country have joined NoRo's support groups, summer camps, therapeutic weekends and residential programmes.

The work pioneered by the NoRo project has also opened the door to a re-evaluation of how rare diseases are treated in Romania. The Romanian Government increased the national budget allocated to rare diseases by 46% in 2014. This expanded the list of recognised rare diseases and access to more treatments, thus reaching 25% more people. The role of case management for patients with rare diseases was integrated by the Ministry of Health in the community care framework. An online platform for case workers is also being developed, which will ease the process of registering patients, tracking their history and connecting them to doctors and therapists.

## Potential for mainstreaming

The NoRo Centre was funded by the European Economic Area and Norway grants, the Romanian Ministry of Health and local and regional authorities. The initiative has strong potential for transferability and is already inspiring other countries, both in the region (Serbia, Slovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria) as well as further afield (such as Croatia, Sweden, Norway, Portugal and Spain). The project is also part of the European Network of Resource Centres for Rare Diseases, which provides a space for mutual learning.



**'IT WAS GREAT TO HAVE SOMEONE TO TAKE CARE OF ME AND FIND THE RIGHT SERVICES FOR ME. IT IS A TERRIBLE FEELING, BEING SO LONELY AND MISUNDERSTOOD. THESE CASE MANAGERS ANSWERED MY NEEDS.'**

*- NoRo Centre patient*

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© ERGO Network, 2015

Participants painting a wall as part of the Wall-free Europe campaign, 2015

The network has supported the capacity building of its member organisations, promoted coalition-building and raised awareness of the funding possibilities offered at EU level.

The ERGO network has successfully raised awareness of antigypsyism as the root cause for poverty and social exclusion among EU policy-makers. Its activities had good visibility and outreach in 2018 with 20 000 visitors to its webpage, 3 800 twitter followers and 13 policy and research papers published.

The Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) supports the project Roma Included in Social Europe (2018–2020), under which the network organised 45 meetings, events and training with 1 222 participants in 2018.

### **Potential for mainstreaming**

To ensure its sustainability and scalability, the ERGO network is increasingly focusing on community-led local development activities involving Roma people and organisations at local level. This will further support the integration of the Roma voice into bottom-up community initiatives, supporting the sustainability of measures to support Roma integration.

The network has strong potential to be further transferred to other contexts and it is actively cooperating with numerous well-known European and international organisations to do so, including the TernType Youth Network, Open Society European Policy Institute, European Network Against Racism, European Roma Rights Centre, Amnesty International, the World Bank, Roma Entrepreneurship Development Initiative, Fundacion Secretariado Gitano, the Documentation Centre for German Sinti and Roma and the Social Platform.



**‘I WOULD LIKE TO RAISE A ROMA CHILD IN A SOCIETY IN WHICH ALL CHILDREN ARE TREATED EQUALLY REGARDLESS OF THEIR ORIGINS.’**

*- Representative from a national member organisation of the ERGO network*

**‘THIS PROJECT HAS ALLOWED US TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN EU POLICY-MAKERS AND ROMA GRASSROOTS COMMUNITIES. THROUGH OUR WORK, POLICY-MAKERS HAVE BETTER KNOWLEDGE OF GRASSROOTS REALITIES, AND ROMA COMMUNITIES ARE EMPOWERED TO MAKE USE OF EU PROGRAMMES AND POLICIES.’**

*- Christine Sudbrock, Project Manager, ERGO network*

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# Tackling early school leaving and youth unemployment through local counselling

## Youth Competence Centres

### **Problem addressed**

Leaving school early produces many negative consequences for individuals including unemployment, social exclusion, poverty and poor health. In Antwerp, the early school leaving rate is 21.7%. The city also has one of the highest levels of youth unemployment in the Flanders region. In 2020, the youth unemployment rate in Flanders stood at 17.7%, while in Antwerp the rate was 25.2%.

### **Innovative solution**

Youth Competence Centres (YCCs) are spaces where young people in Antwerp can receive advice and counselling on their future personal and professional development. The centres are open to all young people aged 16 to 25, but particularly target those from disadvantaged backgrounds. These young people may feel disillusioned and distrustful

of formal education institutions or 'authority figures' due to negative past experiences. YCCs' innovative approach is to build a trusting, personal relationship between counsellors and young people to overcome this.

Youth workers and counsellors meet young people at youth centres and in informal settings, such as parks and cultural and sports events. This ensures that the young people are at ease in a familiar setting when communicating with counsellors, supporting the trust-building process. Counsellors provide support either individually or in groups. Counselling sessions either focus on work-related acquired competences (WAC) or on the recognition of acquired competences (RAC). The WAC type of counselling primarily targets unemployed youth and early school leavers to ease their transition into the labour market. The RAC type of counselling targets young people aged 16–25 and focuses on finding volunteering experiences for them.

Photo of young people taken during counsellors' fieldwork







© JES vzw, 2013

Photo of young people taken during counsellors' fieldwork

## Key results and benefits

Between 2017 and 2019, of the 1 135 people who received intensive coaching sessions, 35% resumed their education activities, 19% found a job and 6% started a training course.

Overall, 60% of the young people participating in the coaching found employment or a training opportunity (with the limitation that most of the work opportunities were temporary). The majority of those young people found jobs in sectors such as logistics (warehouses), industry or electronics. In addition to employment opportunities, young people have increasingly participated in volunteering activities at youth centres as a result of being involved in the YCCs.

## Potential for mainstreaming

YCCs are principally funded through agreements between the city of Antwerp and the youth NGOs JES, Formaat and Kras Jeugdwerk which are renewed on a yearly basis. Each of these organisations manages two YCCs.

YCCs have been replicated in Brussels and Ghent, demonstrating their potential for scalability and transferability to other contexts. One of the key success factors of the YCC project is that it employs youth counsellors with a thorough understanding of the local context. Counsellors are trained on the specific education and employment issues young people face in their area. Aligning the project with local government structures has been pivotal in ensuring the sustainability of the YCCs, as it provides a steady flow of financial, administrative and human resources. This would be an important condition for successful transfer to another context.



**'I WAS A SHY PERSON AND I HAD A LOT OF TROUBLE EXPRESSING MYSELF. I HAD LOW SELF-ESTEEM. THE COUNSELLOR, MOSTAFA, NEVER STOPPED SAYING I HAD TO WORK ON MY ATTITUDE IN GENERAL, MY ARTICULATION AND SELF-CARE. AND IT WORKED. I HAVE LEARNT TO PRESENT MYSELF AND I HAVE BEEN WORKING FOR TWO YEARS AS A 'FIRE WATCH' FOR THE CITY OF ANTWERP.'**

*- Sofyane, 22-years-old*

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Finland

# Tackling food waste with an app

## ResQ Club

### Problem addressed

Around 88 million tonnes of food are wasted annually in the EU, resulting in an estimated cost of EUR 143 billion. In Finland alone, about 120–160 million kilograms of food are wasted by households (about 20–25 kilograms per person). This waste has significant negative effects on the environment as food waste depletes the world of finite natural resources, such as water, and contributes to global warming.

### Innovative solution

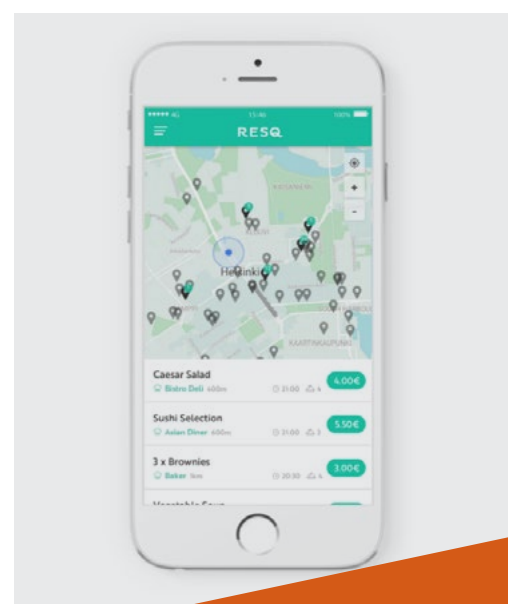
The Finnish start-up ResQ Club has developed a location-based mobile app that enables consumers to buy surplus food that would otherwise be thrown away by restaurants, cafes, hotels and grocery stores. The food is discounted by 30–100%. The chosen meals can be bought through the app, using a payment card or PayPal. Once the transaction has gone through, consumers are able to pick up the meal whenever they want from a pick-up window without having to wait in line. ResQ Club's overall goal is to limit the amount of food that goes to waste in restaurants and reduce it down to zero.

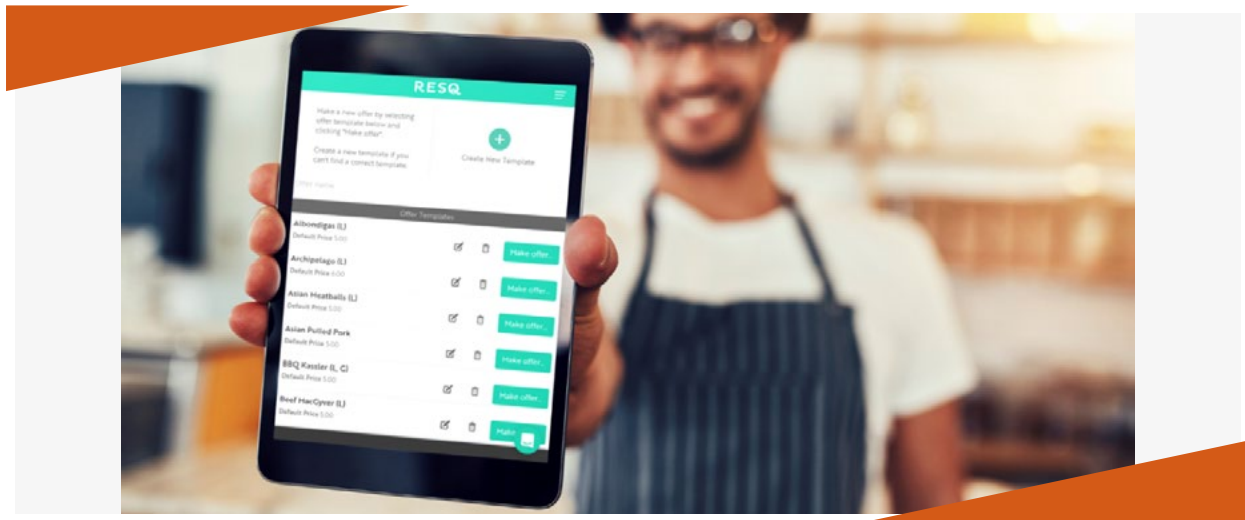
ResQ Club adopts a franchising model but also operates some market areas itself. Its management remains centralised in Finland. All of the profits made by ResQ Club are re-invested back into the company, mostly for hiring purposes.

### Key results and benefits

The benefits of this initiative extend both to restaurants and customers. Consumers are able to buy food that is close to its expiry date at a reduced price. Restaurants, cafes and grocery stores are able to sell food that would otherwise go to waste. The app has over 30 000 active monthly users and, in the cities where ResQ Club is active, sells about 70 000 portions of food each month. The app has been downloaded 800 000 times and, so far, 7 000 restaurants, cafes and grocery stores have registered on the app. According to one grocery store owner, daily food waste at his store 'has gone down from three shopping carts to half a shopping cart<sup>5</sup>'.

The location-based mobile app allows for people to find cheap food options that would otherwise go to waste





© ResQ Club, 2018

ResQ Club helps connect cafes, restaurants, hotels and grocery stores with potential consumers

ResQ Club helps to save 273 tonnes of CO2 emissions every month, which is equivalent to 44 car rides around the world, 227 flights between Helsinki and New York and 43 tonnes of edible food.

### Potential for mainstreaming

ResQ Club was set up in 2015 in Finland but has quickly grown and now operates in four countries: Finland, Sweden, Germany and Poland. Thanks to ResQ Club's expansion to date, it has become sustainable and cash-positive, and its current success demonstrates strong potential for transferability to other European contexts. The mobile app is key in the success of the project, as it ensures the wide reach of the service by making the process of buying and selling surplus food as easy as possible. Key conditions for a successful transfer to another context would be the development of an appropriate app and widespread publicity in order to reach potential partners.

ResQ Club's success is demonstrated by nominations and awards. In the Nordic Start-up Awards in Finland, ResQ Club won 'Best Newcomer' in 2017, 'Best Social Impact Start-up' in 2017 and 2018 and 'People's Choice' in 2018. ResQ Club also won the 'Environmental Act of the Year' from the City of Helsinki in 2017 and has been nominated among the top three in the 'Global Mobile Internet Creative Development Competition' held by the tech media company IDG in 2017.



**'RESQ CLUB IS AN EASY AND QUICK WAY TO REDUCE WASTE. YOU WILL EARN EXTRA MONEY, AS WELL AS BRING NEW CUSTOMERS TO YOUR GROCERY STORE. THOSE CUSTOMERS WILL OFTEN BUY SOMETHING EXTRA, SO IT'S A GREAT MARKETING TOOL TOO.'**

*- Aleksi Siltanen, Owner of K-Market Lapuankatu, a supermarket that benefits from ResQ*

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France

# A new life for unused medical equipment

## Envie Autonomie

### Problem addressed

In France, expenditure on health for people with disabilities is high and has increased by EUR 13.5 billion since 2005. Despite this increase in public health spending, individuals with disabilities in France spend a substantial amount on medical equipment – EUR 1.4 billion in 2013 alone. At the same time, a large amount of viable medical equipment is abandoned every year and goes to waste.

### Innovative solution

Run by the Envie network, Envie Autonomie recovers, recycles and reuses old medical equipment in order to lower expenses for disabled people. The innovative aspect lies in the fact that it offers employment opportunities to vulnerable people in the process.

The Envie network is made up of 50 companies that are committed to social inclusion. The companies collectively employ 2 500 people under the Envie Autonomie project. These employees were previously either in a precarious

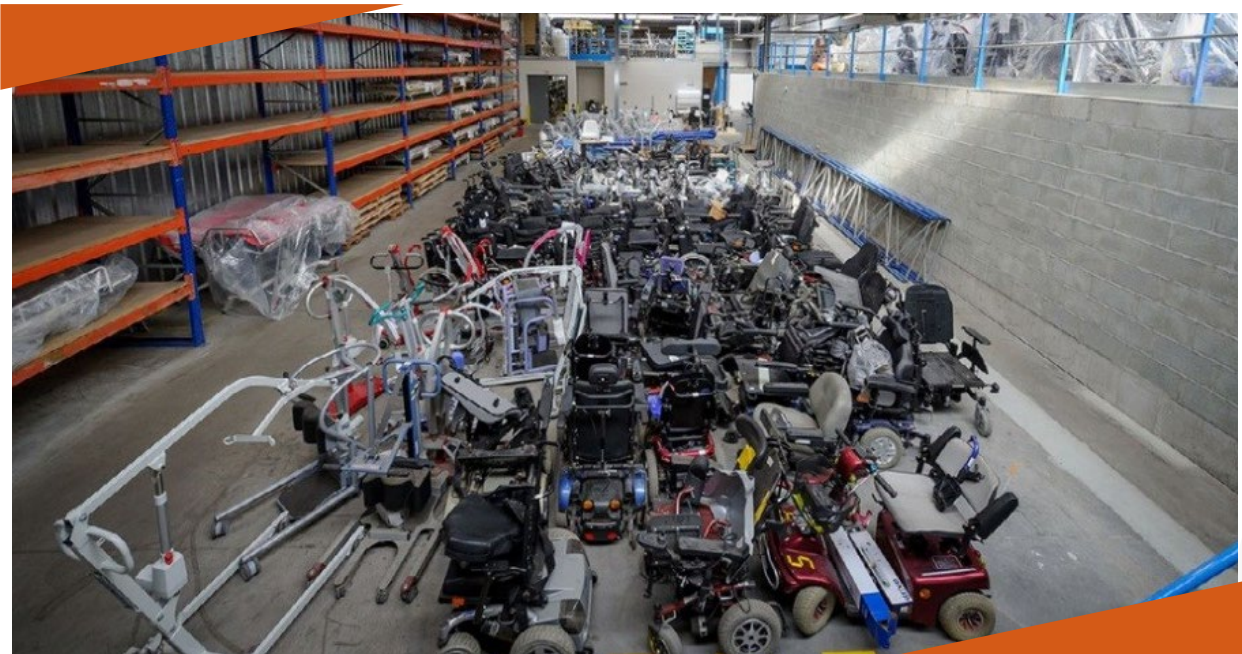
work situation or long-term unemployed. They find and collect medical equipment that is no longer wanted, sort through it and restore it. The equipment can then be rented or purchased by anyone who needs it at a cost that is between 50% and 70% cheaper than the cost of purchasing new equipment.

Envie Autonomie also supports people with disabilities to access the equipment. It provides loans and financial services if needed and offers technical assistance for the delivery and installation of equipment.

### Key results and benefits

Since 2015, the project has hired 50 full-time employees and 2 450 employees on a temporary basis. It has collected 14 000 medical items and equipped 2 200 individuals with 2 500 refurbished materials. The project is enabling vulnerable people who have had trouble accessing full-time and stable work to gain marketable, specialised skills

Equipment collected by Envie Autonomie ready for repair and sanitisation before sale or rent





The current and future locations of Envie Autonomie

and sustainable employment. Customers – elderly people and disabled people who could not otherwise afford the medical equipment they need – also benefit from more affordable products.

The project also has a positive environmental impact as it works on a circular economy model that has increased the amount of medical equipment that is recycled.

### **Potential for mainstreaming**

Envie Autonomie operates in eight locations in France. It is financially sustainable, with up to 20% of its income from the state and the rest from the products that it sells. Key conditions for a successful transfer to another context would include state funding to cover a percentage of the costs and the creation of a good cooperation network between key partners, such as economic and social foundations, representatives of people with disabilities and trainers.

By 2022, Envie Autonomie plans to open 10 new units with funding from the National Solidarity Fund for Autonomy (Caisse nationale de solidarité pour l'autonomie). The project is also advocating for policy change to allow reimbursements from social security to be applied to second-hand equipment. This would help it to further scale-up its activities and impact.

Envie Autonomie was recognised as a promising practice by French Impact in 2019.

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**‘FOLLOWING A STROKE, MY HUSBAND RETURNED HOME WITH REDUCED AUTONOMY. WE HAD TO REFURBISH OUR HOME ACCORDINGLY AND MANY PIECES OF MEDICAL EQUIPMENT ARE NOT FUNDED BY SOCIAL PROTECTION OR MUTUAL HEALTH INSURANCE AND ARE VERY EXPENSIVE. ENVIE AUTONOMIE ALLOWED US TO ACCESS MATERIAL AT A LOWER COST.’**

*- Beneficiary of Envie Autonomie*

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## Cyprus

# Recycling used cooking oil for environmental and educational impact

## Tiganokinisi

### **Problem addressed**

Municipal waste is one of Europe's major sustainability challenges. In 2017, only 46.3% of municipal waste in the EU was recycled (material recycling and composting). Cooking oil used domestically is one of the major waste streams that is inadequately managed. This issue is particularly salient in Cyprus, which has one of the highest levels of municipal waste generated per person in the EU: more than 2 000 tonnes of used cooking oil is wasted every year in the country.

### **Innovative solution**

Tiganokinisi (loosely meaning 'frying pan movement' in Greek) is an environmental education programme that transforms used cooking oil into a renewable energy source. This programme has been developed by the Cypriot small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) Isotech and is run by the NGO Akti Project and Research Centre, in partnership with the Pedagogic Institute of the Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture. This partnership

ensures the commitment of schools and has allowed the programme to gain high-profile political visibility and cross-party support.

The programme is based on an innovative circular bioeconomy model, with schools acting as collection points for used cooking oil. The Akti Project and Research Centre sells the used oil to companies, which then transform it into biodiesel. Profits go back to the schools to be invested in environmental education and the promotion of green technological innovation.

Municipalities, central governments, enterprises and the wider public all play an active part in the programme. Enterprises, for example, can give their unused cooking oil to local schools as part of their corporate social responsibility strategy. In this way, Tiganokinisi goes beyond the classroom, raising awareness in the wider community of an urgent environmental concern.

### Tiganokinisi logo on a lorry







© Tiganokinisi, 2011

Tiganokinisi scientists showing pupils how oil is converted to biodiesel

### **Key results and benefits**

Tiganokinisi has been instrumental in bringing the topic of sustainable development into schools across Cyprus. It has grown from a pilot project involving five schools in 2012, to a nationwide programme involving over 85% of Cypriot schools. Trained project staff visit around 300 schools per year to run educational workshops on environmental issues. The programme has also created jobs for science university graduates who are employed to deliver the educational activities of the programme. Since 2014, over EUR 250 000 from the programme has been invested in green infrastructure and technologies in participating schools. Tiganokinisi has also contributed to policy and legislative change. Cyprus has no legal, regulatory or fiscal framework for social enterprises, but a new law on social enterprises was proposed in 2019 and is now at the final stages of approval, in part thanks to the success of programmes such as Tiganokinisi.

### **Potential for mainstreaming**

This programme is an example of the circular economy in action. The simplicity of the action – collecting oil from one's home or workplace – makes the project transferable to other countries in Europe. Political support and partnerships with relevant educational authorities are also key success factors. Tiganokinisi is planning to develop cooperation with waste management authorities to address the problem of waste in the country more comprehensively and diversify its funding sources.

Isotech was awarded a Horizon 2020 SME Instrument Phase 1 grant following interest in replicating the programme internationally. The grant of EUR 50 000 is for the development of a business model and feasibility study for the internationalisation of the Tiganokinisi programme under its new name 'InnovOleum'.



**'TIGANOKINISI DOESN'T SIMPLY FOCUS ON COLLECTING USED COOKING OIL. IT DEVELOPS ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN STUDENTS, WHO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO ACT ON THEIR LOVE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AND THEIR SCHOOL. THE SCHOOL IS FINANCIALLY SUPPORTED, ALLOWING US TO TAKE FURTHER ACTION TO CREATE AN ECOLOGICAL AND SUSTAINABLE PLACE, TOGETHER.'**

*- Maria Metta, Biologist and Tiganokinisi School Coordinator*

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Malta

# A holistic approach to promoting sustainable fair trade

## Koperattiva Kummerċ Ġust

### Problem addressed

Unfair trade is a major driver of poverty and an obstacle to sustainable development. While ethical choices are available to consumers, a 2018 survey conducted by the European Commission has shown that only 10% of Maltese people make ethical choices when shopping for groceries. This is far below the European average (21%).

### Innovative solution

Koperattiva Kummerċ Ġust (KKĠ) is a not-for-profit cooperative that was established in Malta in 1996. It aims to raise awareness about poverty in the global south and promote sustainable fair trade. It does so through fair trade education and cooperation with producers from the global south.

KKĠ has a bottom-up approach to fair trade education, actively engaging schools, young people and social groups to help them to run educational events. Consumers of all ages are engaged through awareness-raising events and

KKĠ also cooperates with musicians and artists to make these occasions more attractive and accessible to the general public.

KKĠ brings producers from developing countries directly to Malta. In this way, producers can meet with trade unions and policy-makers and present their work and products to schools and community groups. KKĠ also provides Maltese retailers and consumers with information on how they can deal with producers from the global south directly.

KKĠ is instrumental in supporting the capacity building of other local NGOs. For example, through its membership of the Malta Forum for Social Justice and Development and Malta's National Platform of Development NGOs (NGDO Platform), KKĠ shares expertise, empowering non-profit actors that are working on sustainability.

KKĠ has 200 paying members, as well as volunteers. In line with KKĠ's cooperative status, members have the chance to vote during meetings, stand for committee elections and attend national or international meetings.

**Street theatre organised by Koperattiva Kummerċ Ġust in front of the prime minister's office to highlight the abuse of labour conditions on fruit farms**







© Joelle Mifsud Talianna, 2014

The shop owned by Koperattiva Kummerċ Ġust in Valletta, from where the cooperative sells its products

### Key results and benefits

Through its large-scale events that attract up to 2 000 people, KKG is able to reach a wide audience of consumers in Malta and to influence behaviours and attitudes towards sustainable living in the population. Farmers and producers in the global south also benefit from the awareness-raising initiatives on ethical consumerism that are implemented by the cooperative.

KKG also has a social impact beyond Malta, thanks to its involvement in a number of pan-European projects. Through the 'Make Fruit Fair' campaign, KKG successfully lobbied multinational supermarkets to consider implementing social criteria on the producers of the fruit they sell, in order to support workers' rights.

### Potential for mainstreaming

KKG largely depends on donations from the public, along with EuropeAid funding. KKG uses a wide range of resources and publications to disseminate best practices and ensure that it reaches a wide audience. Key conditions for a successful transfer to another context would be strong partnerships with the local community – schools, NGOs, cultural centres, for example – as this is one of the key ways through which KKG ensures the wide reach of its activities.

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**'THROUGH KOPERATTIVA KUMMERC ĠUST, I HELD NUMEROUS MEETINGS AND EDUCATIONAL SESSIONS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AND CHILDREN TO DISCUSS DEVELOPMENT ISSUES IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH. I ALSO HAD MANY MEETINGS WITH EDUCATORS, IN ORDER TO SUPPORT THEM IN PRESENTING THESE ISSUES TO THEIR STUDENTS.'**

*- Marthese Formosa, Former Education Officer at Koperattiva Kummerċ Ġust*

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## Czechia

# Fostering inclusive integration through public services

## Intercultural Assistants

### Problem addressed

Brno, the second largest city in Czechia, has a large migrant population. 33 000 migrants, from diverse cultural backgrounds, make up around 8% of the city's population. Cultural and language barriers can make communication between public officers and migrants difficult, resulting not only in misunderstandings and conflicts, but also in difficulties for migrants to access education and health services.

### Innovative solution

Intercultural Assistant is a project that started in 2017, as part of the strategic plan for social inclusion developed by the Municipal Department for Social Affairs and the State Agency for Social Inclusion. The project aims to make public services accessible to all by introducing a new role in social services – the intercultural assistant. These assistants, employed by the municipality, are responsible for removing barriers between migrants and public service officers. They provide personalised support and counselling to migrants and can accompany them to meetings with different public services such as hospitals or schools. They also assist public service officers who often do not know how to deal with migrants and therefore have limited capacity to help them.

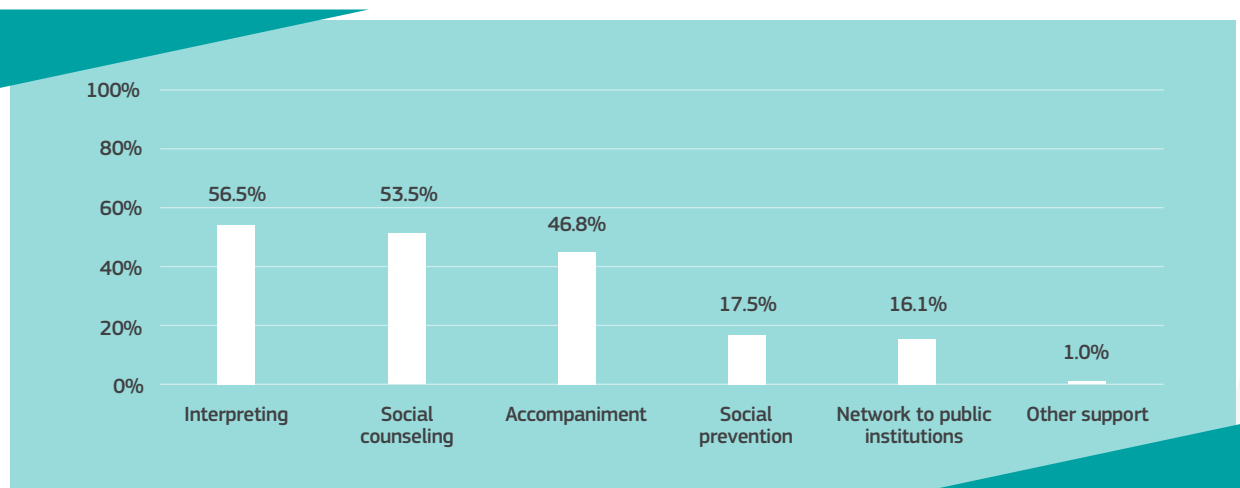
Intercultural assistants are experts on the issues faced by the minority groups. Most of them come from the community themselves and speak the language of the minority group. They receive mediation, conflict prevention and resolution training from a partner organisation, Sociofactor<sup>6</sup>. There is also intercultural training for the officers.

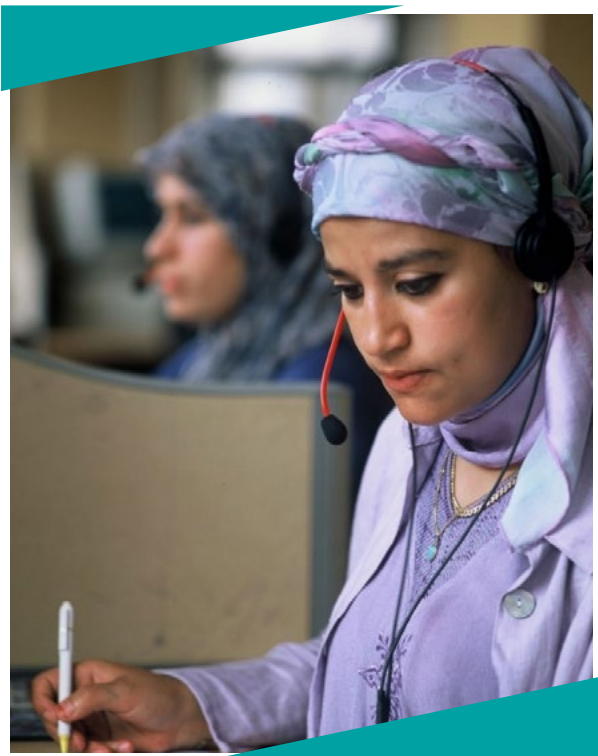
### Key results and benefits

Four intercultural assistants are now employed full-time by the Municipal Department for Social Affairs. These assistants reached out to 635 migrants during the one and a half years that the project has been running. The intercultural assistants help the largest minority groups in Brno, including Russian, Ukrainian, Arab, Moldavian, Romanian and Vietnamese migrants. The type of support most requested by migrants is translation or counselling services. Overall, the project has eased communication between migrants and public services and facilitated social integration.

Evaluation of the project has shown that the officers who received project support have become more open and tolerant towards migrants and have increased their intercultural competences.

### Type of support provided by intercultural workers





© European Communities, 2002

**Support for employment: a migrant who works at a telecentre**

Intercultural assistants also shared the expertise gained through their work with the municipality to support the development of a strategy for the integration of migrants in Brno 2020–2026.

### **Potential for mainstreaming**

Since 2017, the project has received approximately EUR 300 000 in funding. 5% of this came from the Brno municipality and 95% is financed by the ESF.

The project has already inspired other cities in Czechia and Slovakia. In cooperation with a regional integration centre, support for migrants in the South Moravian region<sup>7</sup>, intercultural assistants have shared their experience and examples of good practice with regional and local municipalities that are interested in implementing this approach. A key condition for transferring the project to other contexts would be political buy-in from local public authorities as well as ensuring that training is available to both assistants and officers.

The long-term vision of the city of Brno is to support migrants in finding suitable employment that will benefit them and the local labour market. This approach is inspired by the positive example of the Integration Centre in Antwerp and the Skill Centre in Helsinki where migrants receive coaching, training and language courses.



**‘WHEN I SAID THAT I WAS A FOREIGNER, THERE WAS A BIT OF PANIC ON BOTH SIDES, BUT NOW I’VE NOTICED THAT THEY [THE PUBLIC SERVICE OFFICERS] ARE MORE RELAXED AND THEIR APPROACH HAS CHANGED A LOT – ESPECIALLY IN FOREIGN POLICE, AS THEY KNOW THAT WE HAVE SUPPORT FROM AN INTERCULTURAL ASSISTANT.’**

*- Romanian migrant working in Brno who receives support from an intercultural assistant*

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6. Sociofactor, [www.sociofactor.eu](http://www.sociofactor.eu)

7. EU support for citizens in the South Moravian region, [www.cizincijmkcz/en/eu](http://www.cizincijmkcz/en/eu)



## Slovenia

# Connecting freelancers for a better work-life balance

## Create Responsible

### Problem addressed

Individuals in the cultural sector are more likely to be self-employed or to be working in temporary employment. Across the EU, the proportion of people who were self-employed in the creative industry was more than double the average observed for the whole economy in 2018 – 33% and 14%, respectively. Freelancing and job flexibility are more common in the creative sector but may result in job insecurity and considerable variations in income over time. To avoid this, freelancers need to rely on strong professional networks to find and retain employment. However, initiatives that help freelancers in specific sectors develop such networks and strengthen their entrepreneurial skills are limited.

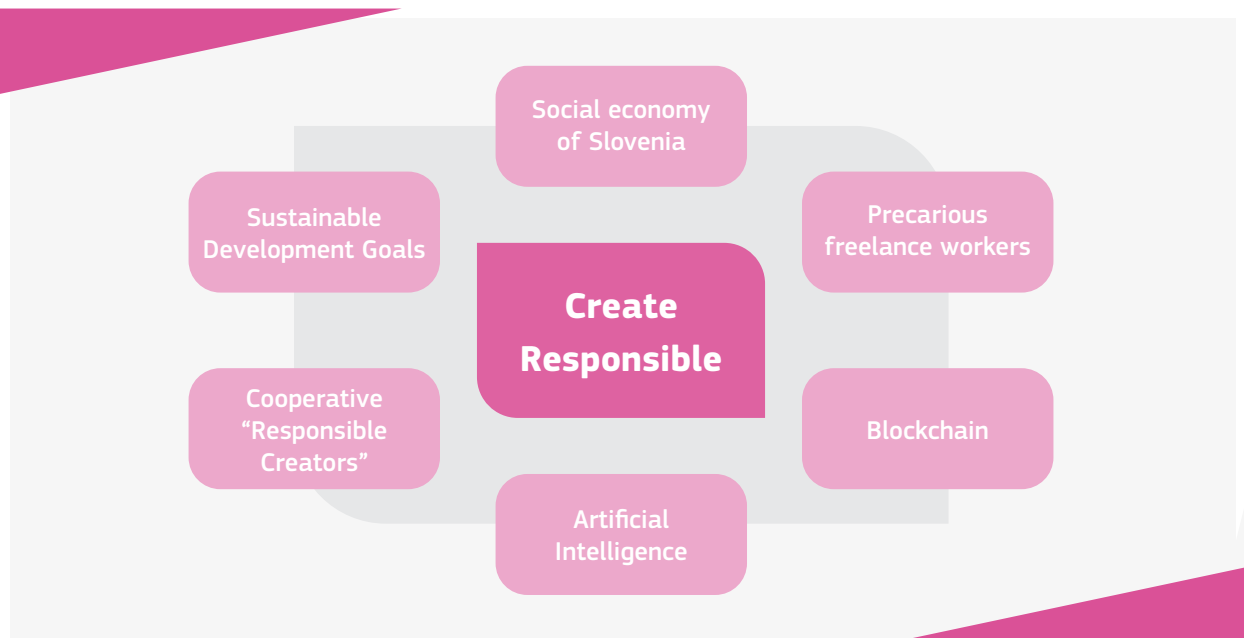
### Innovative solution

Create Responsible is the first e-cooperative in Slovenia to use a digital platform to support, connect and empower freelancers, part-time workers and the unemployed, particularly those in the creative sector, such as designers

and artists. The core function of the platform is to create an online space where these workers can connect with industry professionals and with each other. Through this online space, Create Responsible aims to help creative workers to create a sustainable and stable workflow, which improves the predictability of work, therefore creating a better work-life balance. The platform is also used to provide support and training, giving individuals the opportunity to continue adapting their skills and remain competitive within their markets.

Following the success of this initiative, Create Responsible opened a 'Buy Responsible' physical store. This is the first store that connects socially conscious producers in Slovenia. The store also offers a testing ground for new businesses that are not yet sure whether their product is market-ready, building skills that may support innovative and entrepreneurial ideas that counter new forms of self-employment based on precariousness.

### The different areas of Create Responsible's activities







© Create Responsible

## The benefits of smaller organisations cooperating

### Key results and benefits

Between December 2017 and December 2018, Create Responsible engaged over 200 designers and artists in Slovenia across 9 municipalities, providing them with access to new markets and opportunities and creating a network of skilled individuals who can promote socially conscious business activities. The project has also strengthened its members' entrepreneurial skills through mentoring, training and education.

Through its platform, the initiative has also promoted social enterprises, encouraging businesses to implement socially conscious business decisions in their day-to-day activities.

### Potential for mainstreaming

The total budget of the project was EUR 107 000, co-financed by the ESF. The initiative has strong potential to be transferred to another context given its online nature which has low implementation costs.

Create Responsible presented its practice at the European Parliament Social Economy Intergroup in 2019 and has attended a number of international conferences on innovative social movements and cooperatives. The initiative has future ambitions to develop the platform at European level and to establish an international e-cooperative.



**'FROM WORKING WITH CREATE RESPONSIBLE, I HAVE REALISED THAT COOPERATIVES ARE ONE OF THE FAIREST FORMS OF COMPANY, ETHICALLY. I HAVE ALSO GAINED ADDITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCES REGARDING COOPERATIVES AND THE SOCIAL ECONOMY.'**

*- Mihec Miro, beneficiary and member of the cooperative, working as an economist in ethical advertising and social marketing*

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## Slovakia

# Tackling long-term unemployment in deindustrialised areas

## WASCO Cooperative

### Problem addressed

Only 20% of Roma people in Slovakia were found to be employed or self-employed by a 2016 EU Fundamental Rights Agency survey. Discrimination, together with the relatively low education level and labour market experience of Roma people, as well as limited national and local job supply, contribute to this situation.

### Innovative solution

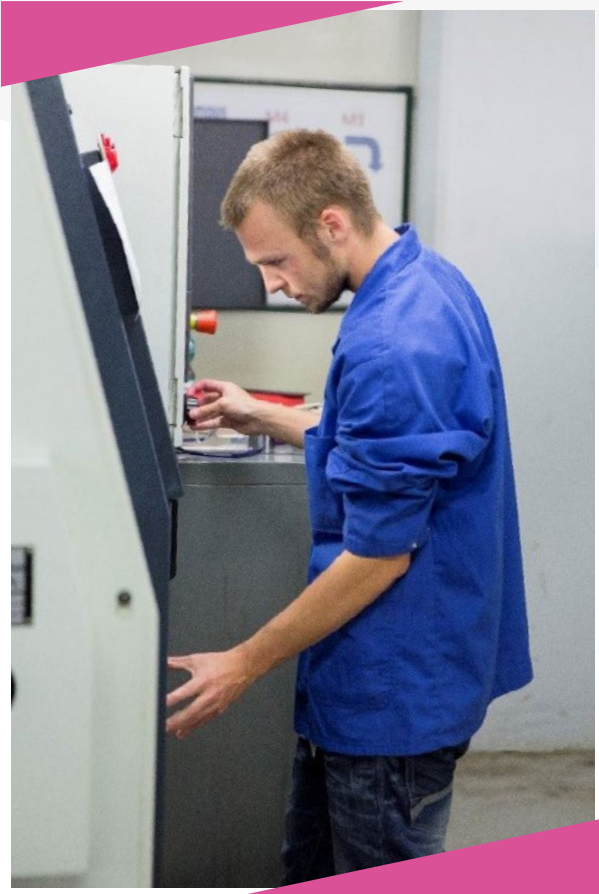
The WASCO Cooperative adopts an empowering and anti-stigmatising approach to dealing with the challenge of Roma long-term unemployment. It was set up in 2015 in Horehronie, a town in Slovakia, to support Roma integration. The cooperative provides beneficiaries with work in laundry and ironing services and operates within the 900 m<sup>2</sup> space of a refurbished old factory. It targets Roma people in Horehronie although other groups in vulnerable situations, such as single-mothers, people with health and disability issues and the elderly, are also supported. The employment is accompanied by training in order to help the beneficiaries to develop their skills and experience. In the longer-term, the cooperative helps participants to move on to employment elsewhere by providing tailored guidance on searching for and securing a job.

To increase its impact, the project cooperates with local and national institutions, including the Slovakian Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and the Family.

### Key results and benefits

The project employs 24 people and now has 150 clients. It has provided employees with work experience, hours of training and networks of contacts for future employment. Former employees have been able to go on to secure jobs in hotels, ministries, labour offices and cafeterias. For all of these reasons, WASCO is considered by its founders as an incubator – a protective and safe environment for the care and development of its participants.

### New employment opportunities: a jobseeker receives vocational training



© European Union, 2015



© European Union, 2015

Long-term unemployed: a group of women line up outside a job centre



## **Potential for mainstreaming**

The initiative was inspired by a similar model in Belgium. Key conditions for successful transfer to other contexts include a focus from the outset on increasing confidence and empowering beneficiaries in a supportive and safe environment without prejudice.

The programme is supported by the EU's Europe for Citizens programme. Since its inception, the project has gone from initially making a loss in its first year, to generating a EUR 9 935 profit in 2017. 100% of the profit is used to improve the quality of the service.

**'I WAS AFRAID TO WORK AT FIRST – I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO OPERATE A WASHER OR DRYER BUT AS SOON AS YOU GET THE GRIP OF IT, THE WORK GETS EASIER AND MORE PLEASANT.'**

*- Ediita, beneficiary of the project*

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Greece

# Integrating refugees through community-led co-designed activities

## Curing the Limbo

### Problem addressed

Refugees are often caught in a vicious circle of inactivity and end up in a type of 'limbo' in their host countries, from which it is difficult to escape. This is especially visible in the city of Athens, which is home to an estimated 15 000 to 20 000 refugees. After a decade of financial crisis, the city is still suffering from high unemployment rates, making it even more difficult for refugees to enter the labour market.

### Innovative solution

The Curing the Limbo project aims to actively support refugees to move out of inactivity. The project, running from April 2018 to March 2021, is based on a dynamic model of action to support the full integration of refugees into local life, with the active participation of the local community.

The project is innovative in its holistic approach that actively involves local residents. The project runs a range of activities for refugees, targeted at enabling them to become socially active. Beneficiaries attend courses on Greek, English and ICT, connect with active citizen groups and participate voluntarily

in city activities, giving back to the community. They take part in a training programme that includes psycho-social support and basic social and soft skills. Job counselling services are provided to increase their chance of entering the Greek labour market and becoming economically self-sufficient.

City activities that refugees can take part in are identified by project partners and co-designed with local community groups. This bridges the gap between locals and new residents, allowing the community to be part of the solution.

Through its housing facilitation unit, the programme also addresses the obstacles refugees face when accessing affordable housing. It acts as an intermediary between prospective renters and property owners, offering both parties a range of support services and financial assurances.

The project is implemented through an innovative partnership between the city of Athens, as the leading partner, the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, the Catholic Relief Services, the International Rescue Committee and the Athens Development and Destination Management Agency. Each agency provides specific services and, through this integrated approach, refugees are supported in different areas of their lives.

A Greek language class at the Serafio of Athens, where the premises of Curing the Limbo are located







© Curing the Limbo, 2019

A project participant taking part in one of Curing the Limbo's cultural activities

## Key results and benefits

200 refugees are already taking part in 488 community activities with local citizens. The programme is ongoing so the results are not yet fully available. 400 people are expected to be housed through 110 affordable housing units and more than 400 people will attend Greek and English language and ICT courses. At the end of the programme, participants are expected to feel autonomous and able to build a life in their new city. The project also promotes social cohesion by building a relationship between the new and old residents of Athenian neighbourhoods.

## Potential for mainstreaming

Curing the Limbo is a European pilot integration programme led by the city of Athens and co-financed by the ERDF through the Urban Innovative Actions initiative, an EU initiative that promotes pilot projects in the field of sustainable urban development. The total ERDF budget granted was EUR 4 999 748. Beyond its impact in Athens, the strategic objective of the project is to transform its model into a public policy proposal transferrable to different European cities. The citizens' involvement at the heart of the project supports its sustainability, through fostering a strong sense of community and active citizenship.

Curing the Limbo was presented as one of the projects that helped to highlight Athens' innovation, and which led Athens to winning the EU Innovation Capital 2019.



**'CURING THE LIMBO  
IS A SPARK OF LIGHT  
FOR THOSE WHO  
DON'T HAVE HOPE.'**

*- Iman, beneficiary of the project*

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Austria

# Retaining employees in rural areas through improved work-life balance

## V/Faktor

### Problem addressed

In Austria, levels of rural unemployment and monetary deprivation are among the lowest in the EU. However, there are particularly high levels of high-skilled emigration from rural to urban areas among women and young parents and this has raised concerns about the future prosperity of Austria's rural areas. Excessive rural emigration among skilled workers can lead to long-term economic stagnation in affected areas, given that certain industries may fail to attract or retain qualified staff. Reasons for the emigration of high-skilled staff include inadequate childcare arrangements, stereotypical gender role models and inadequate mobility opportunities.

### Innovative solution

V/Faktor (2017–2019) is an innovative pilot project launched in three rural Austrian regions with high emigration rates among qualified women and young families. This initiative aims to help businesses to retain or attract qualified workers by facilitating the reconciliation of work, family and private life for employees with personal responsibilities such as childcare, education, caring for relatives or volunteering.

Measures to improve the work-life balance of employees are traditionally organised through national legislation or the initiative of individual companies. By contrast, V/Faktor works at regional level by fostering partnerships between businesses, municipal authorities and other stakeholders to develop innovative and locally relevant work-life balance initiatives.

The project conducted an initial consultation to understand local businesses' satisfaction with existing work-life balance measures and identify their needs. The online survey, which reached nearly 600 companies, was supplemented with 240 personal interviews, revealing common challenges to equality and reconciliation among the three Austrian regions. These included inadequate childcare, stereotypical gender role models and inadequate mobility concepts.

Participating businesses were then connected to V/Faktor project partners (consulting firms ABZ\*Austria, BAB and ÖAR) to receive tailored consulting for the design and implementation of work-life balance measures that are appropriate to their industrial and regional contexts.

### V/Faktor flyers





V/Faktor staff

## Key results and benefits

120 of the nearly 600 participating companies (around 40 per region) followed an in-depth consulting process to develop company and region-specific work-life balance solutions. Some examples of the successfully implemented initiatives include the development of internal company childcare facilities, the introduction of remote working opportunities, the improvement of parental leave management, strengthening female entrepreneurs / improving reconciliation for female leaders, corporate gender equality plans and management training initiatives.

## Potential for mainstreaming

V/Faktor is one of seven pilot projects funded under the ESF's Investment Priority Gender Equality and is also funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection. It is therefore free-of-charge for participating companies.

Using different communication activities (such as events, a website and a periodical newsletter), the project is estimated to reach around 2 000–3 000 stakeholders. The project holds different events at national and European level that strengthen collaboration between regions with the aim of facilitating long-term change. Cooperation is continuing beyond the project, helping to shape sustainable work-life balance policies across different regions of Austria, thus also increasing the transferability of the project to other contexts.



**‘IN THE PAST WE WERE TOLD, IN RURAL AREAS, TO SET UP BUSINESSES. NOW WE HAVE BUSINESSES AND WE ARE SHORT OF WORKERS. IN ORDER FOR THEM TO COME OR STAY, WE NEED GOOD STRUCTURES THAT MAKE WORK AND PRIVATE LIFE COMPATIBLE.’**

*- Mayor from participating region*

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## Estonia

# Affordable and timely homecare services for all

## CareMate

### Problem addressed

The Estonian population is ageing – reflecting an overall European trend. The proportion of people above 65-years-old has now reached almost 20% of the total population in Estonia. Health and care services are traditionally provided by local governments, which need to meet increasing demands with constrained resources. People in need of homecare services therefore struggle to find quality support at an affordable price. In 2016 alone, around 40% of people reported an unmet need for homecare services due to financial reasons, which is among the highest rates in the EU.

### Innovative solution

CareMate is innovative in its ability to connect and match supply and demand for care, with a very local focus, allowing it to support both people in need of care and local municipalities in need of service providers. This initiative is a peer-to-peer online platform established in 2018 that is structured as a social enterprise and connects care workers with people in need of homecare services.

Users select the type and the length of service they need, and an available carer who lives nearby. Various care services such as washing and ironing, personal care or assistance with medical visits are available. People in need receive the fastest possible response at a relatively low fee per service. This arrangement means that carers themselves do not spend as much time driving from client to client and can provide their services to more people than was previously the case. The platform also gives carers the flexibility to decide on their working schedule themselves. All carers are either already trained or are required to complete appropriate training provided by the platform. The courses are also available to family members who want to extend their knowledge on how to care for their relatives.

### Key results and benefits

Over the last year, there have been 500 sign-ups for care, with 200 actual clients who paid and received services. At the same time, 200 people underwent CareMate's training and were hired as caregivers. Approximately 200 active

CareMate was the winner of 'Idea Garage: Estonian Wellbeing 2017'







© European Commission, 2017

### Care worker and an older person

caregivers are offering their services via CareMate to date. The customers have responded with positive feedback, reporting that they value being able to choose the specific caregiver they want, which is something that is not possible with other care services.

### Potential for mainstreaming

The platform now operates in Tallinn and Tartu, with plans to expand at national and international level. With approximately 150 000 people with disabilities in Estonia, there is clear potential to provide such services on a larger scale. CareMate received EUR 185 000 in funding from the ESF in February 2020, which has already supported the construction of a new and more accessible platform.

CareMate is able to provide its services at a relatively low rate. This is because service providers such as caregivers in Estonia can open an ‘entrepreneur account’<sup>8</sup> which enables them to pay less tax, thus keeping the cost of services low for those in need of care. This would be a key condition for its successful transfer to another context. CareMate also relies on the fact that some of the simpler services provided can be performed by carers without extensive medical experience, which is not the case in many countries.

The idea of CareMate won the hackathon, ‘Idea Garage: Estonian Wellbeing 2017’, at the SEB Innovation Centre in Tallinn. The platform reached the top 30 in the competition Ajujaht, the biggest business idea competition in the country.



**‘I OWE MY BIGGEST THANKS TO THE HELPER – SHE REALLY IS FANTASTIC. THERE WERE NO PROBLEMS, AND THERE WAS EVEN TIME TO HAVE A LITTLE CHAT. SHE ASKED MANY TIMES IF THERE WAS ANYTHING ELSE THAT NEEDED TO BE DONE. WE HAD A GOOD RELATIONSHIP RIGHT AWAY.’**

*- Valdo, beneficiary of the project*

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## Lithuania

# Empowering individuals with disabilities through employment

## Regseda

### Problem addressed

For people with disabilities, opportunities for work can be scarce and often unsustainable. People with disabilities are an especially vulnerable group due to the health- and stigma-related challenges they face, and persistent unemployment can place them at even higher risk of isolation, social exclusion and economic deprivation. Many people with disabilities also face a number of practical challenges in everyday life, which increases dependency and reduces employment opportunities. In Lithuania, approximately 8% of the population is classified as disabled, and most are outside the labour market. In 2018, the proportion of people with a disability at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Lithuania was 43%, the third highest rate among EU countries.

### Innovative solution

Regseda is a social enterprise in Lithuania that has recognised the long-term problem of social inclusion and employment of people with disabilities in the country, and has been employing people with various disabilities, and specifically visual impairments, since 1959. Regseda began in 1959 as a factory in Klaipėda, Lithuania, employing mainly blind workers. It has since become one of the largest social enterprises in the country, providing training and paid work in manufacturing to individuals with

visual, hearing, nervous system, behavioural and mobility disorders. The social enterprise empowers its employees beyond employment alone. It also focuses on children and young people, aiming to change their self-perception from people with disabilities to self-sustaining, socially active and empowered citizens. Furthermore, the management and board of directors of Regseda is made up of people with disabilities, including those with visual impairments. The board is composed of members of the Union of Blind and Visually Impaired People of Lithuania.

Regseda also supports the wider community of people with disabilities, providing a free space for the union to organise cultural or social activities, some of them financed by the enterprise itself. It runs a summer camp for blind and visually impaired children and young people, many of whom grow up to become employees.

Regseda has a contract with the National Labour Exchange, which provides the enterprise with state subsidies that partially cover wages and assistance services.

### Key results and benefits

The company has grown dramatically in the past few years and is now a supplier for some of the largest furniture producers in the country and internationally. In 2016, the company generated a turnover of EUR 3.2 million.

### Workers in the Regseda factory





© Egidijus Jankevičius, 2018

**A person with a visual impairment working in the Regseda factory**

All of the profits made are re-invested into the main aim of the enterprise: the social integration of people with disabilities. As such, Regseda tripled its number of employees between 2009 and 2018. Today it employs 196 people, 155 of which are people with disabilities and 84 of which have a visual impairment. Regseda creates 2–3 new jobs every year.

### **Potential for mainstreaming**

Regseda is both a social enterprise and a well-established community of people with disabilities who support and empower each other, aiming to increase the self-esteem of those with disabilities in a wider sense. The community has been active since 1959 and is currently growing rapidly. The organisation has achieved positive and sustainable results despite being unable to receive donations or charity due to its limited liability status. This success is due to its successful business model, subsidies and grants, and the existence of a reliable and strong community.

The model could be transferable to other cities or countries with similar needs in relation to the social integration and employment of people with disabilities. In the case of Regseda, success factors include a tax exemption on the 2.7 hectares of land on which the factory stands, as well as a contract with the Lithuanian Labour Exchange that qualifies the enterprise for state subsidies. A similar social enterprise elsewhere would potentially need to adapt to stricter fiscal conditions and require further financial start-up support from local government or EU funding to establish itself and scale up in the same way.



**‘OUR COMPANY IS ENGAGED IN THE PACKAGING OF FURNITURE. EVERYTHING HERE IS ADAPTED TO THE NEEDS OF THE DISABLED. IF YOU HAVE PROBLEMS, WE HAVE ASSISTANTS WHO HELP. FOR ME, WORK IS EVERYTHING – EMPLOYMENT, SELF-ACTUALISATION. AFTER ALL, DISABLED PEOPLE HAVE TO MAKE A LIVING – THE DISABILITY ALLOWANCE IS NOT HIGH, AND THE PRICES IN STORES ARE THE SAME FOR EVERYONE.’**

*- Vytautas Alisauskas,  
Regseda factory worker*

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## Sweden

# Integrating unemployed and excluded groups into the tourism sector

## Le Mat

### Problem addressed

Despite a well-functioning labour market with high employment rates, certain groups in Sweden face a number of barriers to finding a job. In particular, former prisoners, people who have a disability or those with a migrant background face stigmatisation when seeking employment. This, coupled with a lack of skills and experience, makes it harder for these groups to find and retain quality employment.

### Innovative solution

Le Mat Sweden is a social cooperative hotel set up in 2010 in Göteborg City to employ people who have encountered difficulties joining the labour market, specifically prisoners, people who have a disability and older people. Le Mat Sweden is innovative in that it proposes a holistic way of integrating unemployed and excluded people into the tourism sector. It has developed a recruitment partnership with social referral services, local authorities and employment services to offer relevant work-based training to people in need, ensuring that they are provided with meaningful work.

Le Mat Sweden was initiated by a consortium partnership between Vägen Ut! (VU) and Coompanion. VU developed and implemented the primary Le Mat Sweden location in Göteborg City and Coompanion expanded the brand to additional locations.

Le Mat Sweden is part of a Europe-wide social franchising cooperative, Le Mat Europe. The cooperative has roots in Italy where, in Trieste in 1985, Hotel Tritone was established to provide employment and work-based training for people who had difficulties in securing work. In 2005, the social franchising cooperative Le Mat was set up to expand the work of the hotel across Italy, supported by the ESF's EQUAL Community Initiative. Le Mat developed a brand, a management model, a franchising model and a quality management and training system. Le Mat Europe was subsequently created to support social entrepreneurs to replicate the Le Mat model in other countries. Le Mat Europe was one of the first social franchises to operate hostels, hotels and bed and breakfasts throughout Europe.

### Le Mat Göteborg City, reception







© Le Mat Sweden, 2015

Le Mat Göteborg City, room interior

## Key results and benefits

Since Le Mat Sweden's establishment in 2014, three locations have been created by Coompanion in Göteborg City, Akersberga and Jonsereds Fabriker. Across its three locations, Le Mat Sweden has 23 full-time employees. Since 2014, approximately 100 people have been employed or undertaken work-based training with the project.

Le Mat Europe has established hotels in Italy and Sweden and supported the establishment of hotels under other brands in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary and Poland.

## Potential for mainstreaming

Le Mat Sweden has benefitted from funding from the ESF, which has enabled it to secure different locations and train employees. It has collated its knowledge and experience into a set of training tools to encourage the creation of more tourism-focused social cooperatives that aim to support vulnerable groups in the workplace. This will support the transfer of the model to other contexts, which has already been proven possible thanks to Le Mat Europe.

Le Mat Sweden was recognised as good practice by the European Parliament for its role as a social enterprise improving the social economy. The Le Mat in Jonsereds Fabriker received the Golden Label Excellence Award in 2017 from the European Network of Cities and Regions for Social Economy (REVES).



**'I GOT THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK AT MY OWN TEMPO AND RECOVER FROM MY ILLNESS. NOW, I USE MY SKILLS TO EMPOWER MY COOPERATIVE COLLEAGUES IN A BUSINESS FOR GOOD.'**

*- Eva Strömvall, former work-based trainee and current CEO of Le Mat Åkersberga*

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 Denmark

# Decentralisation of active labour market policy

## Reform of Public Employment Services

### Problem addressed

During the 1990s, Denmark experienced higher levels of unemployment, reaching a peak of 11% in 1993. This prompted criticism of the existing government interventions in the labour market to promote employment, which were characterised by generous and long-duration unemployment benefits and expensive labour activation policies. In 2002, the Danish Government began to radically reform the delivery of public employment services (PES) in the country.

### Innovative solution

The Danish Government set in a motion a radical reform of PES in the country to decentralise responsibility for them at municipal level. This marked a shift from the former division of responsibility between the state and municipalities. It particularly aimed to enable better tailoring of employment support services to local needs. By placing services at the municipal level, jobseekers could use one, more easily accessible, 'entry point'.

Since the introduction of the reforms, PES centres have the freedom to cooperate with local partners and other municipalities in implementing their locally developed employment strategies. The Danish Agency of Labour Market and Recruitment (STAR) undertakes the implementation and evaluation of national employment policies in Denmark. The STAR supports municipalities to set ambitious goals and ensures that best practices are disseminated across the country. The STAR also ensures public accountability of PES centres.

### Key results and benefits

Bringing decision-making closer to where problems and individuals are has had a positive impact on the effectiveness of active labour market policies (ALMPs). Denmark is a frontrunner in developing ALMPs. Municipalities deliver a vast range of ALMPs targeted at the local situation.

An example of the impact of decentralisation is the municipality of Hjørring. Here, the authority's long-term goal was to reduce the average amount of time that individuals spend on public benefits in one year. Known as the 'Hjørring Method', a panel of multidisciplinary PES employees identify

### Teacher giving training course to jobseekers (computer-aided design)





© European Union, 2015



**‘MANAGEMENT OF EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVES IN DENMARK FOCUSES ON ESTABLISHING THE BEST POSSIBLE FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL ADMINISTRATION IN ORDER TO ENSURE CONSISTENT MANAGEMENT OF EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, WHILE MAINTAINING AUTONOMY IN THE LOCAL ADMINISTRATION.’**

*- Kasper Håkansson,  
Head of Finance and Resources  
Division, STAR*

### **Lifelong learning: jobseekers receive technical retraining**

citizens at risk of spending a prolonged period of time on benefits and assess them based on their individual needs. As a result of this system, the number of cases per PES employee decreased and people began finding their way back into employment more quickly and, as a result, spent less time on social welfare benefits. The Hjørring example shows how municipalities and regions can be successful within a few years of decentralising their services if they plan their investments in PES and the expertise of their internal teams over the long term<sup>9</sup>.

### **Potential for mainstreaming**

The potential transferability of the Danish model of active labour market policy varies, depending on the set-up of countries' employment services. The Danish example shows that system change on this level is possible, but that it requires long-term engagement and structural reform, as well as adaptability to address emerging challenges and cooperation between different levels of government and other actors.

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## Portugal

# Fostering active youth participation in local decision-making

## Youth Participatory Budgeting

### **Problem addressed**

Providing meaningful social, civic and political engagement opportunities for all young people is one of the priorities of the EU. As outlined in the EU Youth Strategy, young people generally show interest in politics and are socially active but tend to turn away from traditional forms of political participation. Young people prefer to support causes that are directly relevant to them, engaging in them through alternative political participation methods such as volunteering or online support. Alternative means of civic and democratic participation are, however, not widespread in many European countries. This limits the opportunities for young people to engage in politics in a way that interests and motivates them.

### **Innovative solution**

Youth Participatory Budgeting (YPB) is a Portuguese initiative that aims to foster the active and informed participation of young people in decision-making and promote a stronger sense of citizenship by providing an online platform that caters to young people's need for alternative means of civic and democratic participation.

Citizens aged 14–30 can present project proposals related to education, employment and sustainable development, and receive up to EUR 100 000 to implement them. Portugal is the first country in the world to implement YPB across the whole country.

In partnership with the National Youth Council, the National Federation of Youth Organisations and several municipalities, the Portuguese Institute for Sport and Youth (IPDJ) organises participatory meetings throughout the country to recruit and guide young people in developing and presenting project proposals. Proposals are then pre-selected by relevant public administrations and submitted to a public vote online or through a free SMS system. Winning projects are implemented through collaboration between IPDJ, local NGOs, municipalities and young people.

By creating opportunities for young people to shape local policies and services, the YPB approach inspires genuine civic engagement, departing from a narrower focus on the promotion of voting among young people. Young people collaborate with public authorities and NGOs on the implementation of winning projects, familiarising them with the policy-making process and strengthening their civic participation.

### **Presentation of YPB to relevant stakeholders**







© Ana Bento, 2017

Participatory meeting with young people developing their projects

### Key results and benefits

During the first two editions of the YPB in 2017 and 2019, around 40 participatory meetings were organised, more than 800 project proposals were presented, 14 winning projects were selected and 15 000 young people from more than 142 municipalities participated as either project designers or voters. Among the projects given an award was 'Minhotacletas', a free bike-sharing service in touristic locations, the 'Caderneta do Aluno', a smartphone application that facilitates communication between students, teachers and school administrators, and the Resource Centre for Inclusive Sport, which aims to promote equal access to sport facilities for people with disabilities.

### Potential for mainstreaming

Key conditions for a successful transfer to another context would include strong political support from public authorities and a will to involve youth organisations, local NGOs, schools and universities in the promotion of the programme. YPB builds on a number of local participatory budgeting initiatives dating back to 1989 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, which have since been implemented all over the world. YPB has been praised for its potential for replication in different contexts. Portugal is considered a laboratory of participatory budgeting experiments, given the nationwide scope of the initiative. Portugal has also implemented the National Participatory Budgeting Portugal (NPBP) scheme at both municipal and parish levels, and the School Participatory Budgeting (SPB) scheme, in order to enable public primary and secondary students to shape their school environments.

In 2019, and with an IPDJ budget of EUR 500 000, YPB is in its third edition and will operate until at least 2021.



**'MY PROJECT AIMED TO TURN STUDENTS' CURRENT PAPER BOOKLET INTO A SMARTPHONE APPLICATION, ENABLING EASIER COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTIVITY BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS AND PARENTS. THIS PROJECT ALLOWED ME TO GIVE A LITTLE MORE OF MYSELF TO THE EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY.'**

*- Ana Bento, Creator of 'App Caderneta do Aluno', funded by YPB*

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## Spain

# Empowering vulnerable groups to participate in digital skills

## Employing Digital

### Problem addressed

The demand for digital skills in the workplace is growing rapidly and it is estimated that 9 out of 10 jobs will require digital skills in the near future. This means that some level of knowledge of advanced digital skills such as coding or debugging will be increasingly required for entry into many jobs, barring access to people with low levels of qualifications. For people from vulnerable backgrounds, such as the Roma community, this could mean an increased risk of exclusion from the labour market and further economic hardship if they do not have access to digital and technological training.

### Innovative solution

The Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG) was established in the 1960s in order to improve the well-being of the Roma community in Spain. It accomplishes its mission through a series of programmes which include the #EmpleandoDigital programme. #EmpleandoDigital focuses on developing the digital skills of people at risk of social exclusion through a

digital skills training scheme. The training courses provided to the community are designed in tandem with major companies and each one aims at providing the beneficiary with basic and advanced digital skills as well as training for 1 of 23 identified occupations by Accenture as having the greatest employment prospects in an increasingly digitalised labour market. 80% of the beneficiaries of the programme are from the Roma community.

While similar initiatives exist in Spain, the strength of #EmpleandoDigital lies in the innovative partnership between public, private and non-profit organisations and the focus of providing training that is based on occupations that will be the most sought after in an increasingly digitalised labour market. This gives it access to a range of expertise and funding. The Red Cross and FSG bring expertise on working with vulnerable groups and a long-standing relationship with the Roma community. The Accenture Foundation provides technical assistance and high-profile support and has also designed a number of innovative digital tools to support the implementation of the #EmpleandoDigital project.

### An Employing Digital training session





© Raul Perez, 2019

A beneficiary discovering virtual reality

## Key results and benefits

From 2017 to 2019, #EmpleandoDigital was deployed in 12 out of 17 regions in Spain. Over 300 professionals from the FSG and the Red Cross have been directly involved in the programme. Overall, 9 826 people at risk of exclusion have participated in the programme, 5 924 people have improved their digital skills through basic courses (such as training on basic IT applications) and 2 328 have taken an advanced course (including Java and Java script training). Furthermore, 235 people have participated in 1 of the 23 courses covering occupations that are being modified by digital transformation.

## Potential for mainstreaming

The programme is co-financed by the Accenture Foundation and the ESF. EU funding has allowed the programme to run for two years, to experiment with different training courses and to secure the partnership with Accenture. Programme representatives are looking to share their experience with other countries with a large Roma community. Transfer to another context would require a strong public-private-non-profit partnership, which is central to the programme's operation.

In 2019, the programme was awarded the Vocational, Education and Training Excellence Award under the 'European Funding for Excellence' category by the European Commission.



**'THE COURSE HAS CHANGED MY LIFE, MY WAY OF THINKING AND MY CONCEPT OF WORK.'**

*- Diego García, 23 years old, alumnus from the first edition of the course. He has now secured a job at Accenture as a result of his participation in the programme.*

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The brochure 'Social Innovation: inspirational practices supporting people throughout their lives' presents 27 examples of social innovation initiatives across the European Union, one from each Member State. It highlights the diversity and success of social innovations in Europe, showcasing initiatives that facilitate transitions, integrate disadvantaged groups, redesign business models, empower people, build partnerships and deliver public policies, in new and creative ways. Innovators include NGOs, social enterprises, local, regional and national authorities, social partners and the private sector, often working in partnership to improve people's lives. The brochure aims to raise awareness of the significant positive impact that such innovations can have on people and communities. Its goal is to inform Member States, organisations and other actors about existing good practices on social innovation, facilitating learning exchange and transnational cooperation, particularly in the context of the future European Social Fund Plus.

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