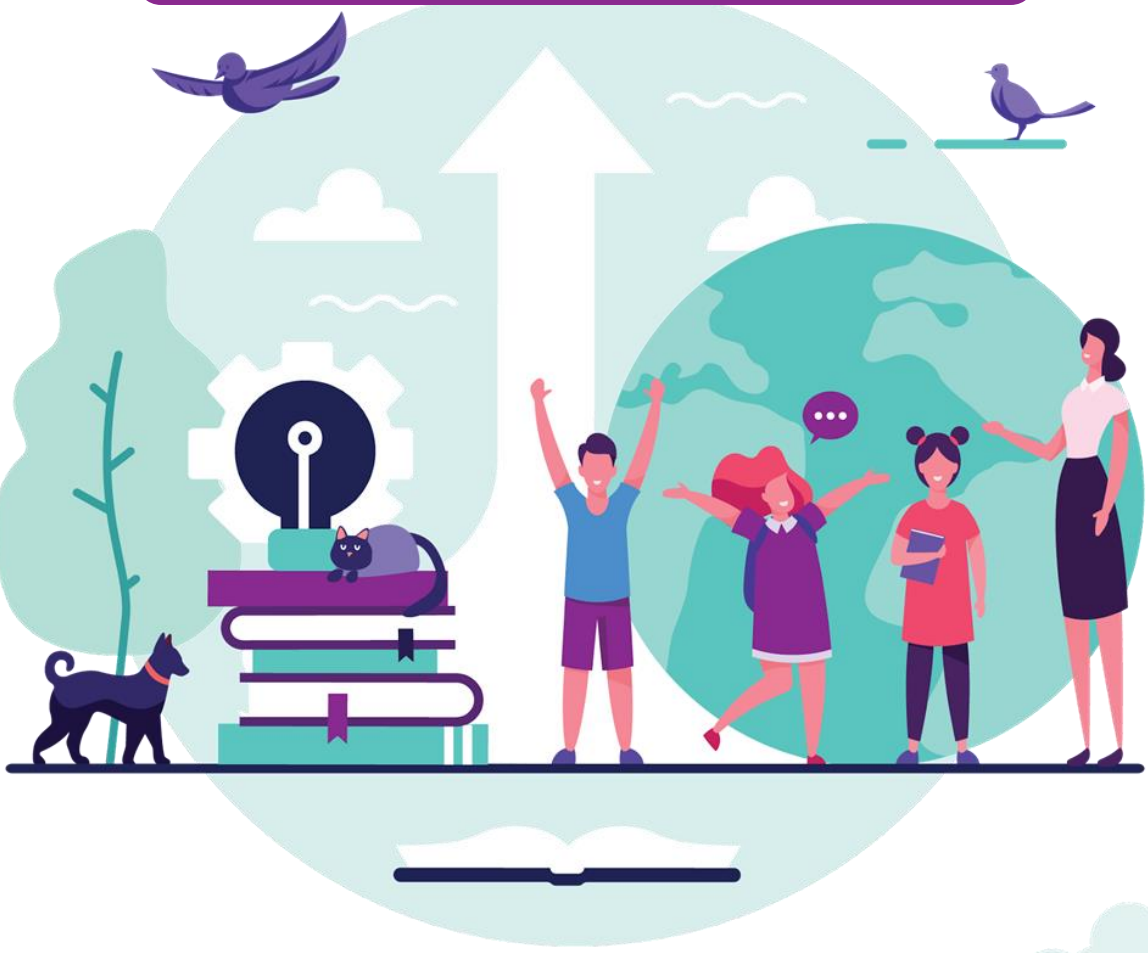
CSS-EU

CHANGE SHAPING SCHOOLS

WP6 O6.2 Policy Recommendations



Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication (communication) reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein. Project number: 621466-EPP-1-2020-1-EL-EPPKA3-IPI-SOC-IN

Table of contents

Introduction 3

Overview 4

SIE in policy 5

EU context 5

National contexts in participating countries 7

Croatia 7

Cyprus 10

Romania 12

Serbia 14

Policy recommendations 18

1. Public awareness of social innovation and SIE 19

Develop awareness campaigns to reach a diverse audience and disseminate information effectively 20

Encourage connection with other existing initiatives to increase the relevance of SIE 21

2. Curriculum integration and scaling potential 22

Leverage existing opportunities in national curricula 22

Support implementation efforts across all levels of education 23

Promote long-term monitoring and research to build understanding of SIE and its impact 24

Nurture a value-based learning approach in the education system 25

3. Teacher education and support 27

Provide structured training programs in SIE, offering diverse training formats complete with practical materials. 27

Create support structures for teachers through community building, mentorship and formal recognition of efforts. 29

Provide additional support to teachers by allowing more flexibility in their roles 30

Promote innovation and leadership among school management 31

4. Community engagement 33

Actively involve parents in the education process and innovative practices 34

Encourage public authorities to support school initiatives 35

Conclusions 36

References 38
Annex I: Policy meetings questionnaire.....41
Annex II: Participant consent form.....43

Introduction

This report aims to produce context specific policy recommendations in the field of education and training for bringing the SIE model to scale in different localities, but also on a wider European level.

Social Innovation Education (SIE) is a model that introduces **a collective and collaborative learning process for the empowerment and socio/political activation of students to drive positive social change**. Through this process, students develop a set of social and civic related competences that enable them to: (i) identify opportunities for social value creation, (ii) form collaborations and build social relationships and (iii) take innovative action for more democratic and sustainable societies. The long-term vision of SIE is to transform schools so that they take a stronger role in their environment as community hubs promoting citizens empowerment through collective relationships and SI competences.

The concept of SIE was first established in 2017 by the H2020 NEMESIS project, the first consolidated attempt to integrate Social Innovation (SI) in formal primary and secondary education. Over the course of the project, the thoroughly researched and co-created model was piloted in over 40 schools, with participation of 200 teachers and more than 4000 students (NEMESIS Policy Recommendations, 2021). The student-centered approach of NEMESIS, an essential component of SIE, provided independence, allowing students to ideate and implement projects, fostering a sense of self-empowerment and engagement. Additionally, the social orientation of SIE projects, aiming to benefit communities both inside and outside the school, contributed to students feeling that they could make a difference, fostering a strong sense of belonging and connectedness within their communities. Evaluation results also showed that SIE had a positive impact on students' cognitive and behavioural engagement (Kalemaki, Garefi, Protopsaltis, 2021).

The success of the project, showcasing the transformative potential of SIE backed by research and empirical evidence, paved the path for following initiatives to diffuse the model on the wider EU level.

The ChangeShaping Schools project (CSS-EU) is one such initiative. Launched in 2021 and funded through the Erasmus+ programme, the project aimed to scale up the SIE model in different EU countries, with **Croatia, Cyprus, Serbia and Romania** selected for piloting in schools. Over the last three years, the model was refined, new learning materials were developed for teachers, and over **250 teachers** trained. The pilot was successfully implemented in 31 primary and secondary schools in four countries, with more than **1400 students** participating in the process that resulted in numerous exemplary student projects.

Drawing from the piloting experiences, feedback from teachers and informed opinion of education experts and policy makers, this report aims to define priority areas susceptible to policy changes that would ensure further scaling and successful integration of SIE in schools across Europe, as well as support inclusion in the education process and promotion of common values. We wish to emphasise the potential for transformative change through a well-planned, collaborative effort involving all stakeholders.

Overview

This report is based on data collected at various stages of implementation of the CSS-EU project through the following activities:

- Desk research on national contexts regarding education systems and SIE development in Croatia, Cyprus, Romania and Serbia. The research activities were conducted by partners in their respective countries at the initial stages of implementation in 2021, with data revised and expanded with new information where applicable in late 2023;
- Online surveys, focus groups and semi-structured interviews conducted with teachers, policy makers and representatives of civic organisations, focusing on training needs and gaps and stakeholder engagement in the SIE context;
- Feedback from teachers and school leaders participating in pilot implementation;
- Online evaluation surveys with teachers and other stakeholders after the pilot implementation;
- A series of meetings with public authorities, policy makers and education experts. A total of 40 meetings were organised in six countries participating in the project, discussing the policy gaps and practices needed to implement SIE in the national curricula;
- Conclusions from upscaling events organised in all partner countries over the course of the project;
- Feedback from participants of the CSS-EU final International Policy Conference.

Detailed insight resulting from some of these activities is presented in other project outputs, including **O2.1: Needs and contextual analysis report** and **O4.2: Pilot implementation report**. For the purposes of compiling this report, priority areas were defined primarily on the basis of piloting evaluation and interviews with policy makers and other education experts. Recommendations stem from real-life experiences of educating staff and were developed to answer to the common challenges and gaps presented by relevant stakeholders. This report also

takes into account the conclusions presented in the set of policy recommendations delivered by the NEMESIS project that ran from 2018 to 2020. As NEMESIS engaged other countries whose education systems differ compared to those involved in CSS-EU, we wished to explore whether there were similarities in the findings, as well as define which specific issues arise from different contexts.

SIE in policy

EU context

Over the last decade, the European Commission has championed social innovation through various initiatives and frameworks. In the Guide to Social innovation (European Union, 2013) SI was defined as "development and implementation of new ideas ... to meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations". Throughout the years, scholars, policymakers and SI practitioners discussed the concept; although a singular commonly accepted definition of SI has not been established to this day, across various policy domains it is seen as a broad approach to the development of solutions for urgent social challenges, ranging from unemployment and poverty to healthcare and environmental sustainability. It is thus often blended with the concepts of social enterprise and social economy.

A cornerstone of the EU policies involving SI lies in its commitment to promoting an ecosystem that nurtures creativity, collaboration, and experimentation. By leveraging diverse approaches, including co-creation and cross-sectoral partnerships, the EU endeavours to drive systemic change and empower communities. There are various EU funding frameworks that directly or indirectly support SI initiatives, including the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, and the European Social Innovation Competition.

At the policy level, the EU does not explicitly feature SI in strategic documents related to education. However, various elements and learning goals of SIE are found embedded across EU legislation. **Sustainability and the development of green skills** are one such example; in 2022, the Council of the European Union adopted the Recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development. The recommendation encourages all member states to support learning for the green transition as a priority in their education systems, so that learners of all ages can develop the knowledge and skills to live more sustainably and contribute to societal transformation (Council of the European Union, 2022). Furthermore, the EU's emphasis on social innovation aligns with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), underpinning its commitment to achieving a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable future; education for

sustainable development (ESD) is thus often featured in policy in this area. UNESCO's *ESD for 2030* framework highlights the importance of education in the achievement of SDGs, encouraging policy makers in sustainable development sectors to actively support the integration of ESD in education policies. A strong emphasis is put on several other points that are integral principles of SIE: the **empowerment of young people** as actors and initiators of change, social connection, and collective action, as well as **capacity building of teachers** and educators (UNESCO, 2020). **Active citizenship and the development of civic competences** have long been treated as educational priorities, principles which should be embedded in educational reforms across member states (EC, 2008; EACEA, 2012).

Furthermore, the European Parliament and the Council launched the initiative European Year of Skills in 2023 to strategically support the green and digital transition through reskilling, upskilling and lifelong learning. Multiple facets of SIE are reflected in this initiative: it promotes **inclusive learning opportunities**, ensuring that learners of all ages and backgrounds have access to quality, relevant education; it also encourages collaboration of educational institutions with businesses and local communities to bridge the gap between education and employment. Finally, it advocates for the importance of **digital literacy and green skills** as tools that empower individuals to contribute to positive social change (European Parliament and the Council, Decision 2023/936). Development of transversal skills such as **problem-solving, critical and creative thinking and teamwork** is highlighted in other EU initiatives and documents as well, including the European Skills Agenda and the Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (EC, 2024).

In the light of the EU's increasing support for social innovation or its core principles that are reflected in various areas of social interest, CSS-EU and similar projects highlight the potential of SIE in the process of transformative social action and provide valuable empirical evidence that can contribute to future policy development.

National contexts in participating countries

In order to better understand the policy gaps and needs of the education sector in the context of adoption of SIE in schools, this section will present educational frameworks of four countries that participated in the CSS-EU pilot, highlighting key policies, challenges, and opportunities within their respective systems. Similarities certainly exist between education systems of the involved countries, particularly Croatia and Serbia, but we wish to explore how the concept of social innovation and SIE in particular has been evolving in different cultural, economic, and social circumstances. Each subsection will define the competent state bodies and policy makers in education, describe available frameworks for teacher education and training, outline the evolution of social innovation and explore existing SIE initiatives and opportunities for their further incorporation.

Croatia

Governance

The education governance structure in Croatia aims to maintain a balance between centralised education policies and decentralised management at the regional and local levels. The overall framework of the education system is set by the Ministry of Science and Education which is responsible for formulating education policies and overseeing the implementation of education laws and regulations at the national level. Regional and local departments of education handle practical implementation and specific educational needs, with varying degrees of autonomy in managing schools and educational resources.

The Agency for Vocational Education and Adult Education which oversees vocational and lifelong learning programs works under the ministry, while the Agency for Science and Higher Education operates independently and is responsible for the quality assurance and evaluation of higher education institutions and programs.

Teacher education and professional development

Following graduation, all teachers in Croatia must undergo a one-year traineeship under supervision and after they pass the licensing exam they become qualified teachers.

Teachers have the right and obligation to continuous professional development (CPD), which is ensured by the state and implemented by education agencies and other authorised bodies (Eurydice, 2023). The Education and Teacher Training Agency (ETTA) serves as the authority

responsible for organising and overseeing professional development and training opportunities for teachers and educators on a national level, complementing the training provided by universities.

In recent years, Croatia has been actively involved in educational reforms, aligning its teacher training programs with European standards and guidelines. The national Action plan for the implementation of the National Education System Development Plan for the period up to 2024 involves a measure to improve the working conditions of teachers and associates in order to increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession and to enrich the possibilities of CPD.

Furthermore, a model internship program for early-career teachers will be explored and tested. The initiative aims to create a program to attract high-quality candidates to the teaching profession, retain existing staff, and continually enhance the profession's appeal (Ministry of Science and Education, 2023).

The action plan also foresees the planning of training programs for school leaders with a focus on increasing their competence and responsibility. The goal of the program is to focus on defining competency standards for principals and their objective verification. The main emphasis lies on the responsibilities related to the management of the institution, the quality of education, the management of human resources and cooperation with the environment. Defining clear roles of directors aims to facilitate their responsibility, establish competency standards and enable greater autonomy.

Social innovation in the national context

In Croatia, the integration of social innovation concepts within strategic documents has been a gradual process, primarily evident in policies related to the third sector. The Strategy for Civil Society Development 2012–2016 acknowledged social innovation and entrepreneurship as ways for civil society organisations to contribute to societal and economic progress. Similarly, the strategy for 2017–2021 aimed to promote new socio-economic models through social innovations, but has not been delivered due to political challenges (Baturina, 2022). The Strategy for Social Entrepreneurship Development for the period 2015–2020 highlighted social innovation, but only briefly in the context of stimulating financial mechanisms for public welfare (Ministry of Labour, 2015).

Certain academic institutions incorporate social innovation into their research and teaching agendas. The National Foundation for Civil Society Development actively promoted this concept by organising the Social Innovation Award from 2012 to 2014. Government bodies like the Office for Cooperation with NGOs and the Croatian Chamber of Economy are increasingly endorsing social entrepreneurship and innovation, as reflected in strategic documents and initiatives.

Additionally, international stakeholders, such as the OECD's South-East Europe Regional Programme, have made contributions through competitions, policy frameworks, and support for social enterprises (Baturina, 2022).

Despite these efforts, Croatia's social innovation ecosystem remains in its early stages compared to some European counterparts and is mostly supported through occasional projects and tenders.

SIE: opportunities in the curriculum and beyond

Social innovation is not explicitly mentioned in the national curriculum, nor is there a specific subject dedicated solely to SIE. However, the curriculum emphasises the development of competencies that align with the principles of SIE, including collaborative work, critical thinking, and civic engagement. These values are embedded in **cross-curricular topics**, an element of the national curriculum referring to themes or subjects that allow for interdisciplinary learning and the integration of diverse knowledge areas. The curricula offer flexibility for teachers to weave the topics into their lesson plans, creating a more interconnected and meaningful learning experience for students.

The emphasis on cross-curricular topics and their inclusion in teaching practices in Croatia are expected to evolve over time based on educational reforms and societal needs. Among the seven cross-curricular topics, Civic education and Entrepreneurship are most compatible with the SIE philosophy and thus represent an opportunity for seamless incorporation of SIE in teaching. Another highly compatible topic is Sustainable development.

- Civic education promotes fundamental values such as responsibility, human dignity, freedom, equality, and solidarity. Importance is attached to the development of a responsible attitude towards common public goods. (NN 10/2019)

- Entrepreneurship is defined as the value of creative, responsible, and innovative activation of personal potentials in different areas of life and different social roles; it is an ability of an individual to turn ideas into action. Entrepreneurship competence is one of the key competences of the European Framework of Reference for Lifelong Learning, needed by every individual in (self) employment and personal growth and development in the knowledge society. (NN 7/2019).

Apart from described developments in primary and secondary education, in recent years there have been significant efforts to introduce SI in the higher education system. Several universities in Croatia offer courses on the topic, including the Faculty of Economics and Tourism ‘Dr. Mijo Mirković’ in Pula (Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship), the Faculty of Political Sciences in

Zagreb (Sustainable Development and Social Innovations), the Faculty of Law in Zagreb (Social Innovations and Societal Changes) and the Polytechnic of Rijeka (Social Entrepreneurship). The private university VERN in Zagreb also offers an elective course named Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation in their undergraduate program Entrepreneurship Economics. These examples show there is potential for further integration of SIE in higher education, both in intra-curricular and extracurricular formats.

Cyprus

Governance

In Cyprus, several state bodies oversee different aspects of the education system. The Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth is the competent body for setting educational policies, curriculum development, and implementing reforms across all educational levels. It oversees public schools, allocates budgets, and administers teacher training and certification. Departments for Primary and Secondary Education oversee curriculum development, assessment procedures, and educational standards for primary and secondary schools respectively. Educational programs and institutions are accredited by the Council for Educational Evaluation and Accreditation – SEKAP.

Operating under the Ministry of Education, the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute is responsible for designing and delivering professional development programs for teachers, conducting research in education, and implementing innovative teaching methodologies.

Teacher education and professional development

The most common route of formal teacher education in Cyprus involves completing a Bachelor of Education degree at universities or other tertiary institutions. Some universities have pedagogical departments that offer specialised programs focusing on educational theory, teaching methodologies, and practical classroom experience. Graduates can pursue a Master's in Education or other related postgraduate degrees to deepen their understanding of educational principles, leadership roles in education, or specialisation in particular fields like curriculum development, educational psychology, or administration.

The Cyprus Pedagogical Institute offers teacher training programs, continuing the Ministry of Education's 2017 policy for professional teacher training in primary and secondary schools. All schools are encouraged to create and execute an Action Plan for CPD of teachers as part of their broader School Unit Improvement Plan.

The Institute also offers a limited number of schools the chance to participate in the Vocational Support Program of Learning (VLSP), providing year-round systematic support for in-depth teacher training and detailed methodology. Since 2021, the Institute has been offering a teacher training program for Digital Capacity Development in collaboration with several academic institutions in Cyprus, allowing for flexible, self-guided learning to accommodate individual needs of participating teachers (Eurydice, 2023).

Social innovation in the national context

The concept of social innovation in Cyprus is primarily tied to the social enterprise sector and cooperative practices. Despite its recent involvement in these areas, Cyprus progressed in integrating social enterprise into its economy through EU-funded projects. Initiatives like the 'Social Entrepreneurship Support Europe' and the Commission's 'Initiative for Social Enterprise' were pivotal in exploring opportunities and developing capacities in these domains. Awards were introduced to recognize organisations dealing with Social Innovation, indicating a growing emphasis on this sector's importance.

In recent years, several institutions dedicated to promoting social innovation were established in Cyprus. The Center for Social Innovation, a partner in the CSS-EU project is one such organisation, aiming to tackle systemic social issues by introducing innovative solutions. Other institutions include Citizens in Power, EuroCY Innovations, Caritas-Cyprus, Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, and the Association for Historical Dialogue and Research.

SIE: opportunities in the curriculum and beyond

SIE is not formally featured in the national curriculum in Cyprus, but its principles are present in elements of secondary education which incorporates entrepreneurship and citizenship education through specific courses and initiatives. Two existing courses, Economics and Family Economics, focus on theoretical entrepreneurship knowledge and overall social well-being, touching on civic education. Although Cypriot teachers generally agree that the rigid structure of the curriculum represents an obstacle to the integration of SIE, such courses could be a way to introduce SIE principles in teaching practices.

The Cyprus Pedagogical Institute recognizes active citizenship skills as essential for modern societies, aiming to integrate them into the education system. The Ministry of Education also offers non-formal adult education, featuring courses like Business Administration, Philosophy, and Sociology, emphasising aspects of entrepreneurship and social engagement. Noteworthy initiatives, like the Junior Achievement Cyprus Organisation, reach thousands of students, offering various programs and workshops to foster entrepreneurship and innovation skills.

Both public and private sectors contribute to social innovation and entrepreneurship education. Public initiatives like EUROSCOLA and Health Education promote fundamental rights, well-being, and citizenship skills. Private institutions, exemplified by the American International School in Cyprus, engage in Service Learning, involving community collaboration. EU membership also significantly impacts Cypriot education policies, as ERASMUS+ projects are seen as a tool to enhance teacher development and student engagement in social activities, fostering civic attributes.

Romania

Governance

Romania's education system is heavily centralised, with the Ministry of Education and Research bearing the primary responsibility for strategy, curriculum development, and implementation. While specialised bodies do advise the Minister, elected authorities do not contribute significantly. When it comes to schools, although they are granted a level of autonomy over elective subjects, they lack influence in practice.

The National Centre for Curriculum and Evaluation is the responsible body for designing national examinations, assessments, and standardised tests for primary, secondary, and high school students, while the regional National Education Inspectorates oversee schools' compliance with educational standards, curriculum implementation, teacher evaluation, and student assessments.

There have been several waves of reforms of the Romanian education system in recent decades. Reform efforts in 2005 and 2011 aimed for quality, fairness, and decentralisation, but faced reversals and modifications in their implementation. In 2016, the president launched an initiative named “Educated Romania" aiming to involve local stakeholders in addressing social issues and outlining objectives that led to a new legal framework in school education and higher education. Two new laws, which came into effect at the beginning of the school year 2023/2024, support reforms that will “ensure access to education for all children, irrespective of their background, so that students can see school as an encouraging environment which helps them grow.”

Teacher education and professional development

In Romania, formal teacher education consists of several pathways. Prospective teachers typically pursue Bachelor of Education degrees at universities or pedagogical universities. Master

programmes in Education allow teachers to further specialise in educational fields or to advance their teaching careers.

Career progression is achieved through obtaining teaching degrees aligned with the National Qualifications Framework and specialised occupational standards, wherein obtaining a definitive teaching degree validates minimum competencies for the profession. CPD of teachers, as well as school managers and other supporting staff, is defined as a right and an obligation. The 2nd degree signifies further professionalisation, and the 1st degree represents high expertise, designating the teacher as a model for good practice in schools. Teaching staff are required to regularly engage in training programs, aiming to accumulate a minimum of 90 professional credits every five years, which are transferable between intervals. (Law 1/2011).

Teacher training institutes are responsible for professional development of teachers, offering courses, workshops, and certifications to enhance teaching skills and adapt to new methodologies.

In 2017, Romania introduced the CRED program aiming to train 55.000 teachers from primary and lower secondary education until 2021. The project focused on developing methodological guides supporting teachers in implementing the new curriculum, addressing interdisciplinary competencies and aiming to engage teachers in effective teaching practices for lifelong learning (Euroguidance, 2020).

Social innovation in the national context

Social innovation in Romania, led by NGOs and civil society, sees initiatives like Ashoka and the Social Impact Award mapping the ecosystem and recognizing social entrepreneurs. Other initiatives such as Innovating Society recognise a difference between social innovation and social entrepreneurship, describing the former as a more abstract field focusing on socially-oriented ideas and projects, and the latter as more practical. In general, it has been observed that social innovators are active mainly in the areas of education and social inclusion, but connections with other fields are lacking.

Competitions and incubator programs, like Innovators for Children, help to upscale the concept of social innovation with mentoring and finance, which is largely driven by European funding. Such efforts contribute to the understanding and awareness of this evolving field in Romania.

SIE: opportunities in the curriculum and beyond

Romania's educational transformation, initiated by the 2015 competency-based curriculum and the subsequent CRED teacher training program, emphasises entrepreneurship education and

active citizenship. However, while the new curriculum has seen a shift from a teacher-centric approach to a student-centric one, translating these changes into classrooms remains a challenge due to insufficient teacher training in new methodologies.

The curriculum shift toward competency-based learning introduced eight main competencies in alignment with the EU Reference Framework. Civic Education is embedded in primary and secondary curricula, while Entrepreneurial Education is included at high school level. Innovative classes are being implemented but do not feature SIE, presenting an opportunity for future curriculum enhancement.

Civil society supplements formal structures with initiatives like “I want to be an Entrepreneur” and Junior Achievement, mainly targeting high schoolers with competitions and conferences. Funky Citizens and Active Citizens Fund focus on Active Citizenship Education, emphasising institutional aspects, human rights, and advocacy, backed by the European Union or EEA Grants. Social innovation initiatives exist, but few focus on SIE.

To enhance SIE, initiatives such as Ashoka and New Horizon Foundation can infuse service learning programs with modules explicitly focusing on social innovation concepts and practical applications, while initiatives like SuperTeach and Teach for Romania can integrate social innovation into their capacity-building programs for teachers. Additionally, the aforementioned Educated Romania initiative could foster collaborations between civil society programs and formal education structures, emphasising SI methodologies and cross-sectoral partnerships in teacher training programs.

Serbia

Governance

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development is the central authority responsible for formulating national education policies in Serbia, managing educational institutions, developing curricula, and implementing reforms across all levels of education. The Ministry is assisted by the National Education Council, an advisory body that specialises in the development of educational strategies and proposes reforms.

Institute for the Improvement of Upbringing and Education is a supporting body which monitors the education system, conducts research and carries out initiatives to advance the quality of education and upbringing in Serbia. Its integral unit, Center for professional development of

employees in education, sets competency standards for the teaching profession, and prepares and oversees CPD and training programs.

Teacher education and professional development

In November 2021, Serbia's Ministry of Education adopted an updated Bylaw on Continuous Professional Development for educational staff. It delineates CPD participation, licensing, and career pathways for educators across all educational levels and includes staff in adult education and student dormitories. The document emphasises Serbia's multi-level teaching career model, considering service years, participation in training, and appraisal as the main factors for considering promotion. It also outlines CPD priorities, accreditation procedures, and mandates teachers to maintain personal CPD plans (portfolios).

Implementation of CSS-EU resulted in a notable contribution to the CPD offer in Serbia. Namely, KidHub developed a training course named **Education for Social Innovation - Implementation of Design Marathon in PBL learning**, which has been available on the Moodle platform since January 2023. It is a seminar accredited by the Institute for the Improvement of Upbringing and Education in Serbia for the period of three school years, and was created based on the experience of working in the CSS-EU project and other complementary educational programs and methods that Kidhub applies in its work. The course is credited with 24 points in the Serbian CPD framework and will be implemented in a hybrid format.

Social innovation in the national context

Social innovation is a relatively novel concept in Serbia and is still predominantly linked to social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurs and civil societies collaborate to tackle socio-economic issues, addressing challenges like refugee integration, disabilities, and unemployment. At present, around 400 social enterprises operate in Serbia, mostly associations and foundations. However, sustainability of such initiatives remains a challenge due to limited support and institutional understanding.

A significant step forward was made in February 2022 when Serbia adopted the Law on Social Entrepreneurship, whose draft was collaboratively formed by a diverse working group representing various ministries, unions, NGOs, and business entities. The law defines social entrepreneurship as the performance of activities of general interest for the purpose of creating new and innovative opportunities for solving social problems, problems of individuals or sensitive groups in order to eliminate the consequences of social exclusion. Profit generated by this business model is invested in the integration of socially sensitive groups, environmental protection, rural development, education, culture, social innovations and other areas of wider social interest. These recent developments are a promising step forward, signalling a potential embrace of social innovation which could pave the way for more inclusive and impactful solutions addressing societal challenges in the country.

Serbian NGOs such as Smart Kolektiv and The Coalition for Solidarity Economy Development (CSED) advocate for social economy policies through their work. Together with KidHub as a partner in the CSS-EU project, these organisations participated in SIE piloting in Serbia, showcasing the potential of collaborative work and strengthening community networks when it comes to the diffusion of the SIE model.

SIE: opportunities in the curriculum and beyond

The 2012 Strategy for the Development of Education in Serbia by 2020 aimed to enhance Serbia's education quality, access, and resource efficiency. Initiatives like dual education and entrepreneurship were prioritised from 2016, with the 2017 Law on dual education integrating work experience in the formal education process.

Published in 2021, the Strategy for the development of education in Serbia by 2030 emphasises accessibility, quality of teaching and learning, and digital transformation. While the document does not explicitly mention SIE and refers to innovation in the context of technological and scientific development, the emphasis on the importance of teacher training and professional development shows there is potential for introduction of innovative teaching methodologies such as SIE.

> *The vision of the new Education Development Strategy in Serbia until 2030 aims to ensure quality education for all children and young people in the Republic of Serbia in order to ensure their full potential in order to contribute to the development of society in the whole. Specifically, we will work on the development of a culture of lifelong learning, critical thinking, media and information literacy in accordance with modern achievements of science, technology and technology. The focus is also on an intersectoral approach and networking between different actors of education. So the educational program of SIE that you presented is in line with the overall educational strategy in Serbia.*

Representative of the Ministry of Education, Serbia

Several concepts inherent to SIE are also present in elements of the education system in varying degrees and formats. Introduced as an elective subject in 2001, **civic education** is taught in primary and secondary schools and still lacks official textbooks and institutional support. A study of the program implementation published in 2019 highlights the need for additional topics related to democratic values and promotes encouragement of student-led initiatives, their participation in institutional functioning of schools, and addressing the issues of the local community. In addition, the authors recommend including parents, NGOs and local authorities in school activities to a greater degree; they also advocate for more community-related project work to support real-world application of knowledge (Baucal et al., 2019). SIE seems like an excellent tool to address these needs.

Entrepreneurship and **sustainable development** are also featured in formal education, but both concepts are still in development. Serbia initiated entrepreneurship education along with other initiatives within the education reforms in 2002, integrating them into high school curricula with EU funding (Čekić-Marković, 2015). Sustainable development in particular is an elective subject in some secondary schools, but teachers still do not see its benefit or grasp its importance (Vukić T., 2020).

Student Entrepreneurship programs and the Junior Achievement program gained traction in 2003 and 2005, involving thousands of students. Initiatives like Social Impact Award and StartIT supported youth entrepreneurship, while Active Citizenship Education, driven by NGOs post-90s, evolved into teaching active citizenship. Although they were not explicitly connected with the term SIE, numerous programs of a similar philosophy emerged, including MAP, Designathon Works, Design for Change, and LiceUlice. Typically implemented by NGOs outside formal education structures, such programs aim to instil problem-solving skills and social awareness in young people. Given the success of these initiatives, collaboration should be encouraged between civil society organisations as generators of progress and educational authorities to further shape the curriculum. In the meantime, programs in the civil sector and existing networks provide ample opportunities to implement SIE initiatives.

Policy recommendations

As demonstrated in the national overview, there is no explicit mention of SIE in the curricula in piloting countries involved in CSS-EU, and existing educational policies do not specifically support or promote its implementation. That being said, the countries share a tendency to align with European priorities, and the recent educational reforms in several countries have seen the national curricula increasingly focusing on competency building and inclusive practices, creating opportunities for future action.

Desk research, pilot implementation experiences and interviews with education stakeholders conducted during CSS-EU have shown there are common challenges and needs across all four countries in the context of SIE:

- There is little to no public discourse about SIE or social innovation as a whole. Considering SI, the term is loosely defined and the public seems to relate the concept to either social entrepreneurship or innovation in a technological sense. In the educational context, SI is mostly acknowledged in relation to STEAM initiatives, or confounded with topics such as civic education and sustainable development education. SIE is not recognised as an approach to learning.

- National curricula are either too rigid to allow for introduction of new practices, or do not allow a lot of autonomy to schools when it comes to selection of programs to implement. However, elements such as cross-curricular topics or elective subjects feature concepts and principles well aligned with SIE, creating room to incorporate SIE in teaching and learning without explicit need for sweeping policy changes.

- In order to be truly successful as an educational model, SIE requires long-term implementation, as standalone projects and initiatives typically do not last long enough to achieve a lasting impact on students, teachers and communities. Additionally, monitoring and research are lacking, as a formal body of evidence is needed to convince decision makers of the model's relevance and to launch changes in policy.

- A variety of teacher training programs exists in involved countries, and there are CPD strategies and frameworks in place. However, two issues arise: firstly, the existing offer is not well aligned with recent curricular development, and does not support competency building that teachers need to implement innovative topics and practices in teaching. This especially applies to SIE, which is not featured in teacher training. Secondly, in some instances, training priorities are prescribed by educational authorities according to topics of national importance, or by school leaders if they are granted the autonomy to do so.

Resulting decisions are not often aligned with teachers' needs or their individual professional development plans.

- Across the board, teachers are overly burdened with administrative tasks and are prevented from experimenting with innovative practices by time constraints. More flexibility and understanding are needed to support teachers and allow them to truly dedicate time to students.

- Education systems are predominantly focused on knowledge-based assessment and do not cater to a variety of student abilities and needs. As a result, parents are often focused on exam results as an indicator of their children's progress, instead of other benefits of education. In contexts where educational strategies are shifting towards skill development and entrepreneurship, learning takes on a competitive nature and students are left under extreme pressure to get ahead. Neither environment supports collaboration and the formation of socially-oriented values and principles.

- Education is confined to schools and does not involve a dialogue with their environment. Parents are not significantly involved in school activities as active participants, and the community as a whole often isn't well informed of valuable initiatives that are taking place in schools. As a result, all these stakeholders are missing an opportunity to connect, enhance the education experience and take collaborative action that would bring progress to their community.

With all this in mind, several themed priority areas were defined that require action or present opportunities to promote SIE in the future.

1. Public awareness of social innovation and SIE

The needs analysis conducted at the start of the CSS-EU project showed that SIE is a novel concept in all four countries where the model has since been piloted, with the public virtually unaware of its principles and benefits it could have for the education system. While social innovation initiatives are increasingly present in national contexts, SI still does not have a common definition across all countries nor has it been introduced in the public discourse systematically. As a result, many struggle to comprehend what social innovation actually entails.

> *In Serbia, in the last decade, the word "innovation" is quite present, but it has a different meaning in different sectors. It is least present in education and teachers are really not familiar with what innovations actually are and they mostly*

understand them as part of technological innovations and entrepreneurship. I think that teachers lack exposure to good examples from which they will better understand what social innovation is, what innovation in education is, and what being creative is - I think they mix it up a lot.

Policy maker, Serbia

For this reason, we believe that elevating awareness of SI and SIE not only in the education system, but among the general public as well, is the key step in all future efforts to promote and scale SIE across Europe. It is imperative to ensure thorough understanding of what values SIE promotes, what its goals are, and how it differs from other similar themes such as social entrepreneurship or service-based learning.

Interviewed education stakeholders are convinced that community buy-in is the first step in creating an environment conducive to embracing and implementing SIE, ultimately opening opportunities to create impactful policy changes.

To this end, we propose the following steps:

Develop awareness campaigns to reach a diverse audience and disseminate information effectively

Teachers agree that public promotion of SIE should primarily involve sharing of good practices, success stories and real-life examples on how the model works in practice to foster better understanding. Effective communication with various stakeholders in the community is highlighted as crucial in this process.

I think it is important for the community to be involved from the beginning in the work to help the school and that it is necessary for the schools to have good communication with the media, which would follow more positive examples that attract the community and the school, eventually increasing the integrity of the schools and the trust of the community.

(NGO representative, Serbia)

Celebrating successful project outcomes can encourage more people to embrace SIE, particularly those not prone to experimentation.

Project results and testimonials are really important. In Romania people are afraid to try something new, they want to see others doing it first and not assume the risks. This is why awareness is important. It will give those people who are risk averse the reason to try it themselves too and become afraid to miss out on the opportunity.

(teacher, Romania)

A way to achieve this is to develop targeted and comprehensive awareness campaigns utilising various media platforms such as social media, traditional media, webinars, and workshops to spread information effectively to different demographics. As generators of change, schools are certainly the best promoters of SIE and can share their ongoing projects through their websites and other platforms to keep the community informed. That being said, there is great potential in other stakeholders such as businesses, parents, NGOs and local authorities who can promote good experiences through their own channels to reach as diverse of an audience as possible. The power of networks should be harnessed wherever possible for scaling purposes:

Your organisation is part of our network and you are directly involved in the topic group education within it. This means that the network can provide support in the further promotion of this program in Serbia, every organisation that is part of the network and deals with children and youth can receive training from you and each of them in their own domain can continue to work on the promotion of the SIE program.

(NGO representative, Serbia)

Encourage connection with other existing initiatives to increase the relevance of SIE

Educators believe that intertwining SIE with other established frameworks that are better known to the public holds a lot of potential to increase its relevance. Sustainable development, for example, is an integral principle of SIE and has been embedded in the CSS-EU project pilot through the connection of the SIE teaching methodology with SDGs. Students are actively encouraged to align their projects with one or multiple SDGs, to recognise sustainability challenges in their local environments, and to think how their actions could contribute to sustainable development of their communities.

I think the SDGs are a great way to build more awareness, they are becoming more known and lots of people know about them. This needs to be more communicated. There are also the Green and Different weeks which also follow the SDGs and this is an opportunity.

(teacher, Romania)

Themed weeks focusing on various socially relevant aspects such as environmental awareness, diversity or mental health also provide opportunities to showcase that SIE principles support societal progress. Schools can organise events, workshops, or projects during these weeks that specifically highlight how SIE methodologies can generate innovative solutions to these areas of interest.

Creating interdisciplinary connections between SIE and other ongoing initiatives like entrepreneurship programs or innovation challenges could demonstrate how SIE complements and enhances existing educational frameworks. Such a collaboration can showcase the capacity of SIE to not only develop skills and competences but also foster a sense of social responsibility, aligning it with broader educational goals and ultimately achieving the aim of SIE as an educational model.

2. Curriculum integration and scaling potential

Integration of SIE in teaching and learning does not necessitate large-scale policy changes or curriculum revisions. Interviews with education stakeholders uncovered multiple avenues for SIE to be integrated in the education process, allowing for flexibility and enabling teachers to seamlessly incorporate SIE in their teaching. Such an approach allows for a better understanding of SIE practices and its impact before calling for nationwide reforms.

Leverage existing opportunities in national curricula

Schools have the ability to introduce SIE through existing elective courses without much interference in policy. Teachers often advocate for the elective approach when it comes to younger students in primary schools, whereas some favour student-led clubs as a way to build a sustainable and scalable model of implementation:

If we have an elective on SIE, it is not really a solution - there are so many nice ones and nobody chooses them. I think we need to consider the option of SIE as part of

a student club and have students teach younger kids and lead the activities. We will have a win-win situation.

(School Inspectorate representative, Romania)

When it comes to intercurricular activities, interdisciplinary and cross-curricular topics represent a convenient gateway for introduction of SIE as their principles and priorities are often well matched. Topics such as Civic education, Entrepreneurship, Sustainable development or Health education allow teachers space to introduce SIE activities provided they are aligned with the learning outcomes of each respective subject.

The crucial barrier would be the reluctance of the stakeholders responsible for curriculum implementation due to the frequent changes our national curriculum has been facing. In my view, intercurricular activities are the best way to implement such a model, as well as cross-curricular activities based on the model.

(professor of pedagogy, Croatia)

Support implementation efforts across all levels of education

Pilot implementation of CSS-EU primarily focused on primary and secondary schools with successful results, showing that the SIE model is suitable for adaptation to various levels of education. Taking this a step further, featuring SIE throughout the entire education process, from pre-school to higher education and lifelong learning, would ensure continuity of learning experiences that develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and social responsibility at every age. This expansive implementation approach would ensure understanding of SI principles from a young age, equipping future generations with the necessary skills and mindset to address societal challenges.

We have young people who are very creative and capable of creating social change. Once we expose them to collaboration and promote active citizenship we shape them for life. I think we need to start early on and ensure those kids have the 21st century skills because once they have them early on they will carry them for life.

(teacher, Romania)

Teachers also advocate for continuous revision of learning materials based on implementation activities, as well as adaptation of activities in line with the students' age, ability level and context-specific priorities. This would cultivate an inclusive learning environment, supporting every student in participation in collaborative work.

> *It would be necessary to further develop the materials with teachers who had the opportunity to pilot the program in schools because they know best what they are missing during their work. Probably specific lesson plans, and the program itself should be adapted more to topics that are important in our education system.*
>
> *(teacher, Romania)*

Promote long-term monitoring and research to build understanding of SIE and its impact

The promotion of SIE within educational policies demands a comprehensive understanding of its long-term impact and effectiveness. In this context, supporting continuous monitoring and research is crucial in order to assess the success, sustainability, and adaptability of SIE in different contexts. This is particularly important in relation to policy framework, as empirical evidence and research are required for informed decision-making and development of educational strategies.

> *Understanding the role of social innovations is especially complicated in unstable institutional environments, e.g. in developing countries and countries in transition like Serbia. To begin with, one should probably delimit the entrenched understanding of social innovation as part of entrepreneurship and focus on a change in the way of thinking and acting with a focus on solving problems that do not necessarily have to be through entrepreneurship. I think that this change should come from universities through research and various studies, projects that will illuminate and connect education and social innovation, and then directly connect this research to the development of future national curricula.*
>
> *(professor of pedagogy, Serbia)*

Teachers also agree on the importance of monitoring SIE initiatives over a longer period of time, tracking the long-term effects of SIE on students, school staff, communities, and society as a whole. In some national contexts, a higher level of teacher attrition or career mobility can present an obstacle to long-term implementation, as it is difficult to ensure continuity of projects in cases of staff turnover. In such cases, EU-funded projects focusing on social innovation can help

support schools in their efforts over a longer duration as this would provide external monitoring; authorities can also provide support through public funding and promotion, or the creation of tools for long-term monitoring on a regional or national level.

> *There must be a possibility to implement the SIE program on a long-term basis, at least 5 years, so that a whole generation has the opportunity to go through the program and to measure its performance. However, it is difficult to provide continuous support.*
>
> *(UNICEF representative, Serbia)*
>
> *School leaders could be supported with actual resources, with good research which challenges some of the taken for granted ways of approaching skills development and demonstrate the benefits of SIE and with supportive policy which empowers them to develop the approaches in which you are interested.*
>
> *(senior lecturer, UK)*

Nurture a value-based learning approach in the education system

Education systems in countries involved in CSS-EU are still predominantly based on knowledge-based assessment and evaluation. This creates a culture where a focus on exam results and grades promotes a narrow view of learning progress and success, both among students and parents.

> *Parents also need to be convinced and made aware of the benefits since they can be great allies. They want their kids to study for exams and see this type of work as a waste of time, this needs to change.*
>
> *(education counsellor, Romania)*

In contexts where educational trends are evolving, the recent tendency to embrace competency building has led to some novel approaches to learning. However, even project-based learning and skill development efforts can inadvertently lead to negative outcomes if they are framed as competitive activities, as they leave some children behind and overlook crucial aspects like empathy, cooperation, and understanding.

> *Enterprise education, which is the educational space where social innovation education could flourish, tends to be characterised by competitive activities which*

can be exclusionary and alienating for children and young people. Educators need time and support to critically explore concepts such as SIE and to create their own responses and activities which are inclusive of children and their communities.

(senior lecturer, UK)

With this in mind, we advocate for an approach to education which embraces common values and fosters respect for diversity. Such a shift enables students to develop not just academically, but also as compassionate individuals equipped to thrive in modern society.

Achieving this shift in practice involves integrating value-based education into the curriculum. Encouraging open discussions and appreciating various perspectives will in turn create inclusive environments that celebrate diversity.

Experiences from the NEMESIS project showed that SIE increases the emotional, cognitive and agentic engagement of students through active participation in a learning environment where they feel that their opinion is valued. CSS-EU continued promoting SIE as an i**nclusive model which gives all students a way to participate in collaborative work**, regardless of their initial confidence or ability levels. Such an approach also opens up the space for developing empathy through experiential learning and empowering educators to prioritise emotional development alongside academic achievement. A great example comes from Serbia, where students of the E**lementary School "United Nations"** swapped roles with teachers in a dramatised simulation, exploring different points of view and ultimately gaining more understanding and empathy for each other.

3. Teacher education and support

Piloting experiences reveal a consensus on several key aspects, the leading one being the importance of teacher training and professional development.

Feedback from teachers and education experts revolves around the need for comprehensive, ongoing, and practical training programs supported by collaborative communities, systemic integration within educational frameworks, and recognition of the challenges teachers face in implementing innovative educational approaches like SIE. There is a clear call for support structures that provide resources, mentorship, recognition, and time considerations to enable successful implementation and long-term adoption of SIE in schools.

We propose several steps to address the training needs of teachers:

Provide structured training programs in SIE, offering diverse training formats complete with practical materials.

Teachers unanimously express the need for comprehensive training in SIE, highlighting the scarcity of courses on this matter and emphasising the value of practical training, theoretical understanding, and continuous support. In order to address this, it is crucial to develop training programs on SIE in a variety of (preferably free) training formats to meet individual needs, including accessible online courses and in-person workshops and seminars to facilitate an exchange of knowledge and good practices. This should also include exposure of teachers to diverse examples of social innovation, innovation in education, and creative practices to expand their understanding of these concepts. The aforementioned **teacher training seminar developed by KidHub in Serbia** is a notable example of much-needed instruction and guidance on SIE.

> *I think the first step would be to develop some kind of resource centre for support so that you can maintain the interest of the schools and teachers you have already involved and have the ability to involve new schools.*
>
> *(UNICEF representative, Serbia)*
>
> *Existing teacher training programmes lack this type of training, and unfortunately, this is evident from the teachers' competencies needs in that field. (…) The best way would be to include these topics in the yearly plan of the National Agency for Education as the central national institution for developing, organising and providing teacher training programs.*

(professor of pedagogy, Croatia)

Considering the practical application of SIE, educators stress the importance of transitioning from theory to practice, seeking impactful activities and sharing resources like lesson plans, videos, and stories for inspiration and guidance. To this end, the CSS-EU project developed **learning materials** introducing the principles of SIE and the co-creation process, including guidelines to help teachers implement the model in various educational contexts. The materials include a **ChangeShaping Guide, an SIE Handbook and a Bank of Activities**, providing resources and numerous ready-to-use activities adaptable for students of different ages and skill levels. This toolkit for teachers includes several videos outlining the SIE model and is complete with good practices and success stories. To make it as accessible as possible and to ensure a wider reach, the materials have been translated into multiple languages and are available for download. Teachers who piloted SIE in their schools during the CSS-EU project commonly praised these resources in their feedback.

> *I really like that the CSS-EU project had the Activity bank, that was something super useful. We need resources to inspire us and help us when implementing activities. Links, videos and stories all are helpful when implementing SIE.*
>
> *(school inspector, Romania)*
>
> *The materials you prepared during the ChangeShaping Schools project are very solid and varied and represent good initial support for teachers and it is good that as an ambassador of the program it remains a resource for other schools.*
>
> *(teacher, Romania)*

Some interviewees have pointed out that a broad offer of CPD programs does not necessarily imply effective training in reality. Priority topics are often imposed from above, either by school management as part of wider development plans for school units, or by the relevant authorities deciding on subjects of national importance. As a result, teachers are either not motivated to choose programs relevant to their needs for various reasons, or do not have the option to do so in the first place. Educators should be allowed flexibility in choosing training paths aligned with their teaching styles and subject expertise, with measures introduced to ensure this is truly implemented in practice.

> *…teachers are generally not interested enough in additional training. They choose training that lasts a short time, where there is not much to do, and as far as I have seen at the training themselves, they are insufficiently active. All of this makes the training process meaningless if, on the other hand, you have someone who is there*

because the director sent him, because he knows he has to, and so on, instead of because he wants to and believes that it will really help him in his work. The added thing is that schools are given a list of priority training that teachers must attend, which is not always what is most beneficial to teachers. And other trainings that the teachers would have chosen themselves, then they have to pay for them independently, which further demotivates them.

(teacher training provider, Serbia)

Finally, embedding SIE training from the very beginning of teacher education, i.e. study programs at the university level, would be beneficial as to raise awareness of the model during teachers' initial education and qualification, making it easier for them to continue building knowledge and skills during following CPD programs later in their teaching career.

It would be important to advocate SIE on the initial teachers' education level. In Croatia, for that level are responsible faculties of teacher education and faculties of humanities and social sciences.

(professor of pedagogy, Croatia)

Create support structures for teachers through community building, mentorship and formal recognition of efforts.

Community building is a cornerstone of the SIE model. It thus makes sense to encourage the creation of communities and networks among educators, helping sustain their interest and facilitating the sharing of experiences, challenges, and successful practices, ensuring continuity of implementation. Teachers also emphasised the effectiveness of educators learning from each other.

Teachers could participate in relevant workshops and seminars and create a community of dialogue and practice in order to discuss their interests and difficulties they face.

(Director of Primary Education Western Thessaloniki)

During CSS-EU, a Facebook group for teachers was created with the aim of connecting educators and providing them with a platform to share their experiences and seek advice on practical implementation of SIE. This proved to be a good example of how social media can be leveraged as a tool for community building. Going forward, teachers can expand this existing network or

create new online communities of their own. On a more institutional level, nationwide or transnational communities can be developed offering ongoing support, guidance and resources to prospective practitioners of SIE.

> *I believe that the training for teachers, such as the one conducted by the Institute for the Improvement of Education, is not sufficient because it is short-term, and then the teachers are again left to their own devices. It is necessary to introduce continuous professional development of teachers in one area, to introduce mentoring in schools, the obligation that what is passed in the seminar be applied in the school, that teachers build a network of their colleagues with whom they will work in some program.*
>
> *(professor of pedagogy, Serbia)*
>
> *…continuous free training, monitoring and long-term mentoring. In this regard, I think the first step would be to develop some kind of resource center for support so that you can maintain the interest of the schools and teachers you have already involved and have the ability to involve new schools.*
>
> *(UNICEF representative, Serbia)*

It should also be noted that teachers seek and deserve recognition and respect for their efforts in implementing innovative educational approaches, suggesting that support should extend beyond training. To that end, certain mechanisms should be designed to acknowledge the dedication of teachers who have introduced social innovation in their schools and communities, acting as drivers of social change.

> *I think a good way to start is, for example, some award for teachers at the national level who would be involved in innovation in education, because it would be a direct motivation for teachers, schools and, above all, school principals to guide their colleagues better.*
>
> *(representative of the Coalition for the development of the solidarity economy, Serbia)*

Provide additional support to teachers by allowing more flexibility in their roles

Teachers unanimously express concerns about their busy schedules, citing time constraints and workload pressures among the main obstacles to the adoption of innovative teaching practices. There is an evident need for manageable and practical approaches that would not additionally burden them.

Teachers' timetables are too busy and they often don't have enough time to carry out their call role, let alone have time to do extra activities. They are under such pressure to achieve realistic demands but, unless they are extremely passionate about social innovation education, they probably won't attempt it.

(educator, UK)

No one prevents teachers from applying anything that is in line with existing development strategies. However, this requires that the priority in teaching be shifted from meeting the set targets to the improvement of teaching and a more personal approach in education, for which there is usually no time, will and space in everyday work. Teacher motivation is a big challenge today.

(representative of the Ministry of Education, Serbia)

Providing more flexibility in their work schedules would allow teachers to manage their time more effectively and make them more open to new practices. This goal can also be achieved by fostering collaboration among teachers - encouraging them to combine their subjects or activities and collectively implement innovative practices, thus distributing teaching responsibilities and reducing individual workloads. In the context of policy, more emphasis is needed on improving the working conditions of teachers and reducing the administrative workload they are tasked with.

Promote innovation and leadership among school management

School leaders play a pivotal role in the successful implementation of SIE in schools. Their guidance, advocacy, and endorsement are crucial in fostering a culture of innovation, as they have the power to create an environment where teachers feel encouraged and empowered to explore innovative educational approaches. Principals and school directors have significant influence as they allocate resources, and provide the necessary support for teachers to incorporate SIE practices.

School directors are the ones with a lot of decisional power, but when they accept to enter a project, the battle is already won since they will bring their team on board. The school leaders are more of a facilitator who can make SIE projects possible, they can also support and motivate educators to continue their work and motivate them.

(education counsellor, Romania)

Piloting experiences showed that school principals are predominantly the deciding factor when it comes to introduction of innovative practices in schools. School leaders who expressed willingness to participate in the project were able to easily engage teachers and set a path to successful pilot implementation. On the other hand, there were cases of individual teachers willing to participate but ultimately pulling out due to lack of support or interest from school management. Budget constraints, limited human resources and specific national priorities are some of the leading factors that prevent principals from prioritising innovative approaches to learning.

> *School leaders are crucial to any form of school development and (...) juggle extreme pressure, workload and social expectation with ever diminishing budgets and resources. School leaders could be supported with actual resources, with good research which challenges some of the taken for granted ways of approaching skills development and demonstrate the benefits of SIE and with supportive policy which empowers them to develop the approaches in which you are interested. The accountability system, high stakes testing, league tables and inspecting regimes do not support Head Teachers to take risks to try new approaches.*
>
> *(senior lecturer, UK)*

Feedback from educators points to the fact that school leaders might be more willing to introduce innovative practices in schools if they had a better understanding of the SIE model and its potential in fostering social empowerment. This should involve providing a clear outline of how SIE could ultimately drive the school progress and benefit the wider community.

> *School principals could be excellent promoters of the program if they see a clear benefit for their collective.*
>
> *(UNICEF representative, Serbia)*
>
> *A lot of school leaders have a lot of work and there are many initiatives coming towards them - this is why it is important to differentiate it and communicate clearly how SIE is different - what will they gain from it and why it is important. Keep it simple!*
>
> *(teacher, Romania)*

Another common finding in countries participating in the CSS-EU project is that existing training programs for school principals often primarily focus on administrative and managerial duties.

Introducing specialised training programs for school leaders based on understanding and championing social innovation would be beneficial in shifting their focus from administration to leadership and nurturing learning cultures. Such programs should involve resources and tools that aid school leaders in advocating the importance and benefits of SIE, ensuring they understand its significance and are capable of effectively promoting it within their institutions. This would enable them to offer meaningful support and select CPD opportunities tailored to teachers' needs.

> *[Principals] have special training aimed unfortunately more at the administrative and logistical management of the school, and much less at the development of the culture of learning in the school.*
>
> *(Institute for the Improvement of Education, Serbia)*
>
> *It is important for school leaders to know what SIE is about and create spaces in their school where people from the school and community can interact. They could lead these activities.*
>
> *(school inspector, Romania)*

4. Community engagement

Building communal relationships is one of the key aspects of the SIE philosophy, aligned with the EU's aim to foster social cohesion and inclusive belonging (Council of the European Union, 2018/C 195/01). By involving diverse community stakeholders beyond the school environment, such as parents and families, local businesses, various organisations and social innovators, SIE cultivates shared values and reflects how the community benefits from innovative solutions designed by students. Such a process builds confidence in students while increasing community awareness and involvement that is crucial for fostering open education and active citizenship.

> *The school has a unique position to bring new opportunities to the community. There are many people who first reach out to the school when they want to start something because this is where they can find a community and access to people of all ages, so the school is normally a go-to place for new projects since it has structures in place. The schools need to leverage more this position and bring more awareness into what they are doing at community level so that more members of the community are involved and the school's value added also grows.*

(education counsellor, Romania)

Transforming schools into community centres promotes citizen empowerment through collective relationships and social innovation skills. This creates a path for social progress on a larger scale, opening doors for diverse workshops, job development programs, and community involvement.

Actively involve parents in the education process and innovative practices

The SIE model involves the engagement of parents as stakeholders and active participants in co-creation labs, acting as a link between students and the community. The importance of parent involvement has been highlighted by numerous teachers who piloted the CSS-EU project, although sometimes proving difficult to achieve in practice.

> *Parents are mostly in a passive role or someone who is there to provide money for school trips or similar activities. This program has the potential to change that.*
>
> *(teacher, Serbia)*

Experiences with parents vary, with some lacking interest in school activities, others tending to question teaching practices. According to piloting experiences from Serbia, collaboration between teachers and parents in general lacks mutual engagement. Teachers seek parental resources - financial or logistical - but struggle to involve them genuinely, fearing increased parental involvement in teaching. Similarly, Croatian teachers have difficulties involving parents in school projects to a greater degree than simply keeping them informed.

With that said, it was noticed that raising awareness of SIE among parents, ensuring they understand the concept and efficiently communicating the benefits resulted in strengthened relationships between parents, schools and the community.

> *This project has brought the quality involvement of parents, whom teachers avoid involving in the work of the school because they think that they interfere too much in the work of teachers and school decisions. Now it turns out that parents want to be involved in a meaningful way, to donate their time, and often resources and knowledge, and are willing to take the role of team members and collaborators of teachers and children instead of those who constantly complain about the work of the school and teachers.*
>
> *(teacher, Serbia)*

Encourage public authorities to support school initiatives

Experiences from the needs analysis and project implementation showed that engaging local authorities in school projects can be highly beneficial in terms of raising public awareness, obtaining funding and gaining institutional support, often resulting in greater impact and sustainability of student-led initiatives. As representatives of the community, local authorities can bring attention to schools' efforts, encouraging participation of the community in school projects and support from other local stakeholders. During pilot implementation, multiple primary and secondary schools in Romania and Serbia engaged with local governmental units who offered support to students through funding and promotion, helping raise the profile of their projects.

> *…councils can be extremely helpful. Often involving the councils allows a project to be more sustainable as the council would want to keep something for a longer time.*
>
> *(teacher, Cyprus)*

On the other hand, securing support from local authorities often presents a difficulty, particularly in bigger urban areas. Collaboration proposals tend to get rejected due to lack of resources, complex bureaucratic processes, or conflicting priorities on a local level.

> *It is difficult to reach them, and if so, more difficult to get their response.*
>
> *(teacher, Croatia)*
>
> *It is good to work with businesses, but local authorities need to be supportive and support the schools which conduct such projects. They need to have awareness on what important role they have.*
>
> *(teacher, Romania)*

To this end, we propose to engage public figures within the education ministry or influential individuals to leverage their platforms and amplify the message regarding social innovation in education. Efforts should be made to relay how SIE aligns with broader government goals and supports community progress, thereby showing it is aligned with public interest.

Conclusions

The CSS-EU pilot implementation process showed that educators across all countries were interested in the project and that they considered SIE an attractive practice. They noted its positive impact on their professional development and observed that 21st century competencies were enhanced in their students at the end of piloting. Building on the experiences of the NEMESIS project, its learning outcomes and competences were achieved in CSS-EU as well, showcasing the flexibility and relevance of the SIE model. Teachers who understood the methodology and its principles successfully integrated it in their teaching practice as an adaptable model, primarily in civic education and STEM subjects. Students, too, generally enjoyed the experience and saw first-hand the tangible impact of their efforts on the wider community.

At present, the adoption of SIE calls for additional effort of educators, implying that a certain level of enthusiasm and inherent motivation on teachers' behalf is required for the model to be implemented well. Several other challenges were observed across all participating countries, including rigid national curricula and education systems that are not susceptible to major changes, non-existent or insufficient teacher training in innovative methodologies, a lack of funding for schools and limited support from school management.

With this in mind, this report aims to highlight the fact that swooping changes of national curricula or large-scale educational reforms are not a prerequisite for further scaling of SIE. In different national contexts, educators share the opinion that a bottom-up approach to implementation would be the most conducive to the wider adoption of SIE. Various avenues exist for the embedding of SIE principles and activities in education, reflected in specific policy pointers presented in this report.

Firstly, it was observed that SIE is a relatively novel and unfamiliar concept in the countries where it has been piloted. Despite the increasing presence of SI initiatives, there is no common definition or public understanding of social innovation, let alone SIE. This is aligned with the findings presented in the NEMESIS Policy Recommendations, which concluded that no explicit reference on SIE was found in the educational policies and documents of the countries targeted by the project. The key step we both propose is to continue raising awareness of SIE and its values, not only within the education system but also among the public. Stakeholders emphasised community buy-in as crucial, suggesting awareness campaigns, sharing success stories, and celebrating outcomes. Additionally, integrating SIE with well-known frameworks such as SDGs and connecting it with themed weeks on relevant societal issues is recommended to enhance its relevance and impact.

In terms of realistic and immediate integration of SIE in teaching, existing opportunities in national curricula can be leveraged by practising SIE through elective courses, student-led clubs, and intercurricular activities. This flexible approach allows for a better understanding of SIE practices before advocating for nationwide reforms. Another key factor is the importance of promoting long-term monitoring and research, crucial for assessing the success, sustainability, and adaptability of SIE in diverse contexts, aiding informed decision-making in educational policies. We also advocate for a value-based learning approach to shift from a narrow educational focus on exam results to a more holistic development, fostering empathy, cooperation, and inclusion as some of the key competences and goals of SIE.

The results of CSS-EU show there is a need for structured, ongoing, and practical teacher training programs in various formats, including online courses and workshops, to meet the diverse needs of teachers. This appears to remain a common challenge, as NEMESIS also found that teachers are not adequately prepared to introduce socially innovative practices in their teaching; educators also pointed out that they do not have enough time in their schedules or support from school leaders in this regard. It is thus concluded that support structures, such as community building, mentorship, and formal recognition, are essential for sustaining teachers' interest and acknowledging their efforts. There is an urgent need for flexibility in teacher roles and improved working conditions, as well as promoting innovation and leadership among school management, with the aim of empowering educators to practise SIE and nurture a culture of learning in schools.

Finally, as the ultimate goal of SIE is to transform schools into community hubs, it is imperative to engage diverse stakeholders beyond schools, including parents, local businesses, organisations, and social innovators. The involvement of public figures and influential individuals within educational authorities to advocate for SIE would be immensely beneficial in emphasising its significance for community progress.

We believe that SIE not only cultivates shared values but also demonstrates how communities can benefit when relationships are built between students, educators and external stakeholders. This report aims to contribute to the advancement and awareness of SIE through the presented set of measures as individual steps that can be taken on a policy or practical level in various national contexts. Through combined efforts, the SIE model can be scaled as a powerful tool for fostering collaborative relationships and social innovation skills, paving the way for broader social progress.

References

Baturina, D. (2022). *Pathways towards Enhancing HEI's Role in the Local Social İnnovation Ecosystem*. Social Innovation in Higher Education, Springer, p. 37-59. Retrieved from: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-84044-0_3

Baucal, A., Džamonja Ignjatović, T., Pavlović, Z., Damnjanović, K. *Punoletstvo i zrelost građanskog vaspitanja: evaluacija efekata* (2019). Građanske inicijative, Beograd.

Council of the European Union (2018). *Council recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching.* Retrieved from: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32018H0607(01)&rid=4

Council of the European Union (2022). *Proposal for a Council Recommendation on learning for environmental sustainability.* Retrieved from: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52022DC0011

Euroguidance (2020). *Relevant Curriculum, Open Education for All (CRED).* Retrieved from: https://euroguidance.eu/guidance-systems-and-practice/good-practices/relevant-curriculum-open-education-for-all-cred

European Parliament and Council of the European Union (2023). *Decision on a European Year of Skills.* Retrieved from: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32023D0936

European Union (2013). *Guide on Social Innovation*. Retrieved from: https://publications.europa.eu/resource/cellar/12d044fe-617a-4131-93c2-5e0a951a095c.0001.02/DOC_1

European Union (2024). Transversal skills factsheet. Retrieved from: https://year-of-skills.europa.eu/document/download/92562485-9deb-43a8-ac5f-826ff8bdb32a_en?filename=Transversal_skills_factsheet_3.pdf

Eurydice (2023). *National Education Systems. Croatia.* Retrieved from: https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/croatia/organisation-and-governance

Eurydice (2023). *National Education Systems. Cyprus.* Retrieved from: https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/cyprus/continuing-professional-development-teachers-working-early

Kalemaki, Garefi, Protopsaltis (2021). *Assessing the Impact of Social Innovation Education on Student's Engagement.* European Journal of Sustainable Development (2021), 10,1,389-400. Retrieved from: https://ecsdev.org/ojs/index.php/ejsd/article/view/1178/1161

Ministarstvo prosvete, nauke i tehnološkog razvoja (2021). *Strategija razvoja obrazovanja i vaspitanja u Republici Srbiji do 2030. godine.* Službeni glasnik RS, br. 63/2021. Retrieved from: http://demo.paragraf.rs/demo/combined/Old/t/t2021_06/SG_063_2021_001.htm

Ministarstvo rada i mirovinskog sustava (2015). *Strategija razvoja društvenog poduzetništva u Republici Hrvatskoj za razdoblje od 2015. do 2020. godine*. Retrieved from: https://www.esf.hr/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Strategija-razvoja-dru%C5%A1tvenog-poduzetni%C5%A1tva-u-RH-za-razdoblje-2015-2020.pdf

Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja (2019). *Odluka o donošenju kurikuluma za međupredmetnu temu Poduzetništvo za osnovne i srednje škole u Republici Hrvatskoj.* NN7/2019. Retrieved from: https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2019_01_7_157.html

Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja (2019). *Odluka o donošenju kurikuluma za međupredmetnu temu Građanski odgoj i obrazovanje za osnovne i srednje škole u Republici Hrvatskoj*. NN 10/2019. Retrieved from: https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2019_01_10_217.html

Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja (2023). *Akcijski plan za provedbu Nacionalnog plana razvoja sustava obrazovanja za razdoblje do 2027. godine, za razdoblje do 2024. godine*. Retrieved from: https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Obrazovanje/AkcijskiINacionalniPlan/Akcijski-plan-za-provedbu-Nacionalnog-plana-razvoja-sustava-obrazovanja-za-razdoblje-do-2024.pdf

Ministarstvo prosvete, nauke i tehnološkog razvoja (2021). *Pravilnik o stalnom stručnom usavršavanju i napredovanju u zvanja nastavnika, vaspitača i stručnih saradnika*. Službeni glasnik RS, br. 109/2021. Retrieved from: https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/pravilnik-strucnom-usavrsavanju-napredovanju-zvanja-nastavnika-vaspitaca-strucnih.html

NEMESIS: New Educational Model Enabling Social Innovation Skills Development; H2020 project (2021). *Policy Recommendations.*

Tim za socijalno uključivanje i smanjenje siromaštva, Vlada Republike Srbije (2015). *Preduzetničko obrazovanje. Komparativni pregled obrazovnih politika, modela i prakse*. Retrieved from: https://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Preduzetnicko_obrazovanje%E2%80%93Komparativni_pregled.pdf

Vlada Republike Srbije (2022). *Zakon o socijalnom preduzetništvu*. Službeni glasnik RS, br. 14/2022. Retrieved from: http://www.parlament.gov.rs/upload/archive/files/cir/pdf/zakoni/2022/2505-21.pdf

Vukić, T. (2020). *Obrazovanje za održivi razvoj kao izborni program.* Research in Pedagogy, Vol.10, No.1, 93-107. Retrieved from: https://research.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2217-7337_v10_n01_p093.pdf

Annex I: Policy meetings questionnaire

Project Stage:	Scaling
Type:	Meeting
Objective:	Country level Ambassadors will organise meetings for the purpose of interviewing policy makers and other relevant stakeholders of the project regarding the state of policy in relation to the SIE model, as well as to collect feedback, insights and ideas for further upscaling in different countries and contexts. These meetings will take place face to face, as a video call, or over the phone. A set of questions has been prepared covering the topics where feedback is needed.
Responsible:	***[name of Ambassador organisation]***
Stakeholder:	***[name and position of interviewee]***
Date:	***[date of meeting]***
Place:	***[name of venue]***

Questions

1. The long-term vision of SIE is to change schools, so they take a stronger role in their environment as community hubs promoting citizens empowerment through collective relationships and SI competences. What is needed to accomplish this long-term goal?

2. What are the existing opportunities and barriers to integrate Social Innovation Education (SIE) in the national curriculum? Do you believe that intracurricular social innovative activities would be beneficial for both students and teachers?

3. How could teachers be better supported to implement SIE in schools in practice? Do the existing teacher training programmes in your country prepare teachers adequately for implementing alternative pedagogical concepts like SIE? Are there any opportunities to introduce or further integrate SIE in teacher training?

4. What is the role of school leaders for integrating SIE at schools? How could they be supported?

5. How can we ensure SIE is not just another extracurricular activity project and start truly implementing transformative educational projects?

6. How can we raise public awareness of social innovation and help strengthen the relationships between schools and the community?

Annex II: Participant consent form

I _____ hereby declare that:

1. I have been informed about the Change Shaping Schools - CSS-EU project in a clear manner about the method, purpose and activities of the project. I understand that this research meets the GDPR (European data protection legislation) standard. I understand that the collected data is only processed anonymously and confidentially and can be used for scientific purposes (e.g. publications) or dissemination purposes (e.g. presentations). My questions have been answered satisfactorily.

2. I have accepted to take part in an interview as my personal experience will contribute much to the development and understanding of issues under study. My participation is entirely voluntary and I can withdraw from the project at any time. If I choose to withdraw, I will inform project partners in a written document of my decision before January 2024.

3. My name will not be published or communicated to anyone outside of the research team. Only the researchers will be able to identify me and will keep my name and position confidential. Any opinions and data I share during the interview may be quoted or cited in a general manner, but there will be no connection to my identity or contact information in any reports or publications.

4. I agree to the recording or transcript of my testimonials during the interview. All recordings and data collected during the interview will be used internally within the context of the project and will not be accessible to third parties.

5. The information I will provide will only be used for this project and to make improvements to the project documents and provide policy recommendations for the integration of Social Innovation Education in the European schools.

_____	_____	_____
Name of the participant	Signature	Date

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

ChangeShaping Schools Project has received funding from the European Union's Erasmus+ programme under grant agreement 621466-EPP-1-2020-1-EL-EPPKA3-IPI-SOC-IN