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### Social innovation: “New ways to provide new skills for new societies”

The European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL) brings together 25 European networks working in education and training. Together, they cover all sectors of education and training including networks for secondary and higher education, vocational education and training, adult education and popular education. Together they represent millions of students, school heads, parents, human resources professionals, teachers and trainers, reaching out to hundreds of millions learners all over Europe and beyond. Encouraging social innovation is a key to reach the ambitious targets set in the Europe 2020 Strategy and in the Education and Training 2020 work programme. We believe that **lifelong learning is a driver of social innovation and it is necessary to further support innovative pedagogies and learning methods in Europe**. New pedagogical approaches can deliver a broader view on education and allow for more comprehensive inclusion policies. Along those lines, our members are committed to encourage social innovation in education and training systems. According to them, **social innovation takes place at all levels and in all sectors of education and training, but most of the time, it remains limited to a particular territory or sector**. Public and private resources should be mobilised to further support innovative community-based solutions. Moreover, creating bridges across sectors and countries can encourage (social) innovation.

### What is social innovation?

Surprisingly little is known about social innovation compared to the vast amount of research into innovation in business and science. We understand social innovation as **changes in ideas, practices and institutions that aim to resolve existing social, cultural, economic and environmental challenges for the general interest**. It is “social” innovation because society is at the core of the analysis. In education and training, it **covers a wide range of models** from childcare to web-based learning, second-chance schools, to the delivery of learning in prisons or in hospitals. **Social innovation dynamics are bottom-up**. One key challenge for our networks is social innovation that leads to a better inclusion of excluded groups or individuals into various spheres of society. Access and participation to learning is a crucial determinant of social cohesion, economic competitiveness and the exercise of citizenship. Struggling against risks of exclusion requires **innovative initiatives** in education and training not only in applying new technologies but also in proposing innovative governance and sustainable partnerships. Social innovation is also about **finding the appropriate drivers** to give people enthusiasm about acquiring learning.

### Why is lifelong learning the relevant paradigm?

Our societies are facing constant changes notably linked to the digital era, globalization and demographic changes and are always more characterized by a **de-synchronization and fragmentation** in family and professional lives. To face these challenges, **innovation in education and training systems shall take place at all levels and in all sectors in a lifelong learning perspective**. As we mentioned before, social innovation puts the human being at the center and lifelong learning - by aiming to allow citizens to become lifelong learners - fosters such a **holistic approach to learning**. It covers education and training across all ages and in all areas of life be it formal, non-formal or informal. It not only aims at better employability but also at active citizenship and personal development. It contributes to a better understanding of cultural, social and personal differences, to a more active participation within society and more generally to greater social cohesion. In that sense lifelong learning is a concrete and **powerful tool of social innovation**.

### Social innovation can be encouraged by a favourable lifelong learning environment:

This requires:

- ✓ **Increasing the permeability of education and training systems** to allow innovative partnerships to take place.
- ✓ **Creating complementarities between formal, non-formal and informal learning settings:** non-formal education can be beneficial to disadvantaged publics as it is based on participatory and learner-centered approaches that can contribute to overcome learning blockages.



- ✓ **Opening and connecting organisations at local level:** education and training organizations should be connected and encouraged to set up partnerships. Most of the time successful projects/policies are those that involve different actors from civil society, professionals and decision-makers. This requires sufficient preparation and cooperation and a clear implementation strategy.

This is not possible without:

- ✓ **Learning networks:** they represent an important tool since flexibility is currently an indispensable condition for providers in terms of logistics, content and pedagogy to set up suitable learning settings. Social Media should be seen as an open source instrument to improve new learning approaches.
- ✓ **Local, national, European or International networks:** work as developers of innovation. European networks contribute to re-thinking education and training systems but many barriers prevent the full participation of actors in this knowledge exchange process (i.e. teacher leaver authorization, difficult access to funds, etc.)
- ✓ **International partnerships and mobility:** it is important to involve external partners, to enable and encourage participation in international short-term events, in international networks of practitioners or experts and in learning mobility periods. This cross-fertilization of ideas is very positive in order to foster new ideas, methods or concepts.

### Decision makers and organisations should further support innovative pedagogies and learning methods

This requires to:

- ✓ **Rethink knowledge delivery:** teaching providers should begin to transfer basic skills as well as skills needed in our society. A learner-oriented approach is needed to improve for instance intercultural skills, collaborative competences and teamwork attitudes.
- ✓ **Develop cooperative methodologies:** these can bring added value in the way of teaching and learning. For instance linking research and actions and theoretical and operative competences could be an effective way to progress towards quality education. Creativity always occurs in collaborative settings using participatory methodologies, community empowerment, etc.
- ✓ **Use new teaching methods:** for instance using project-based learning which main feature is to ensure learners' participation.
- ✓ **Experimental dimension of the didactical activity** should take into account social and collaborative dimensions. Connectivity between disciplines should be encouraged. New methods have to be experimented, evaluated and redesigned to deliver the expected outcomes.
- ✓ **Rethink assessment methods:** innovative solutions to assess individual and group work but also develop **new ways to assess and validate learning** (formative as well as self-assessment) and notably the validation of prior learning.

This is not possible without:

- ✓ **Investing in the professional development of teachers, social or youth workers and volunteers.**
- ✓ **Balancing academic and pedagogic content** in initial and continuing teacher training and linking their training to that of other partners for example by providing joint modules (common training modules for teachers, youth workers and other professionals).
- ✓ **Applying the full potential of communication technologies** notably to reach vulnerable groups with concrete and sustainable schemes at local, regional and European level.
- ✓ **Mainstreaming and sharing best practices.**
- ✓ **Adopting a long-term perspective and providing a sustainable support** to efficient existing programmes/organisations.

We remain available for further information.

