



# REPORT PR3.2

REPORT ON THE ENTREPRENEURSHIP TRAINING COURSES AT  
EUROPEAN UNION LEVEL



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## SUMMARY

This document provides an analysis of European social incubators for people at risk of exclusion. The report includes a summary, contents, information about the project, the consortium involved, and an introduction to the conceptualization of social exclusion. It also discusses the role of social incubators and presents cases of European social incubators, such as The Human Safety Net in Italy, TERN in the United Kingdom, and others. The report also conceptualizes social exclusion, citing the United Nations and the World Bank's definitions and dimensions of social exclusion. The project aims to help NGOs diversify their income sources, leverage new legislation and job opportunities, and empower people at risk of exclusion by providing training and mentoring. The consortium consists of five partners with unique expertise in the project.

## THE PROJECT

In recent decades, NGOs have faced consecutive crises, including the 2008 financial crisis and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. These events have strained their finances as their public funding decreases annually, and private corporate support is often unreliable. To ensure sustainability and offer new services, NGOs need to explore new revenue models, such as offering entrepreneurial services to those at risk of exclusion.

The DRAGGING project addresses these challenges by creating outcomes that can be transformed into services and tools for NGOs and local public administrations. It aims to bridge the gap between local administrations and social organizations, fostering collaboration and generating business opportunities. The project's key objectives are as follows:

- **Diversify Income Sources:** Help NGOs diversify their income sources, reducing their dependence on public funds.
- **Leverage New Legislation and Job Opportunities:** Assist in taking advantage of new legislation and public funding opportunities to generate income and job opportunities.
- **Empower People at Risk of Exclusion:** Provide training and mentoring to professionals, equipping them with skills in business strategy, finance, marketing, and more. This training will help create companies in collaboration with people at risk of exclusion, addressing their primary need for employment.

## THE CONSORTIUM



The Dragging team is a consortium of five partners, each bringing unique expertise to the project:

- **FI Group:** A global consulting company specializing in R&D&I financing management. They focus on designing and implementing actions to enhance companies' technological and economic development, including R&D&I tax incentives and public grant management.
- **PCG Polska:** An integral part of the Public Consulting Group, with extensive experience in sectors like education, healthcare, and social care. They lead an Innovation Generator grant distribution project for social innovations supporting aging societies.
- **The Rural Hub:** An association in Ireland, established to address economic challenges in rural areas. They specialize in community development, social inclusion, and use creative approaches and digital media resources to promote social cohesion.
- **Con Valores Association (ACV):** A non-profit organization supporting work reintegration and social economy. They assist entrepreneurs at risk of exclusion and aim to create a resilient model for small business incubation.
- **RDA BSC SMEs:** A regional development agency in Bulgaria, actively participating in regional economic development, innovation policies, and various development plans and strategies.

## INTRODUCTION

Social incubators have emerged as a powerful tool in the fight against social exclusion, providing support and resources to individuals at risk of marginalization. These innovative organizations play a crucial role in fostering social inclusion and empowering those who are most vulnerable, by offering opportunities for personal and professional growth, and ultimately, creating opportunities to improve their overall well-being.

Social exclusion is both a process and a state that encompasses a wide array of factors such as economic, social, cultural, and political barriers, which prevents individuals or groups from full participation in social, economic, and political life and from asserting their rights. This way, understanding and tackling social exclusion has the potential to contribute in a significant way to long term poverty reduction by focusing on the notions of vulnerability and capabilities (Frota, 2007).

In response to this challenge, social incubators have emerged as a solution-oriented approach to provide targeted support and resources. Therefore, social incubators aim to address these barriers by providing a nurturing and supportive environment for those at risk of exclusion through tailored programs, resources, and mentorship. By equipping them with the necessary skills, knowledge, and networks, social incubators strive to break down the barriers that contribute to social exclusion and create more inclusive societies for all.

## CONCEPTUALIZING SOCIAL EXCLUSION

United Nations (2016:18) defines social exclusion as “a state in which individuals are unable to participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life, as well as the process leading to and sustaining such a state.”

According to the 2022 World Bank report by Cuesta, López-Nova, and Niño-Zarazúa (2022: 3), – whose findings are also rooted in and informed by a rich body of preexisting scholarly literature such as Atkinson (1998), Sen (2000), Levitas (2006) and Hoff and Walsh (2018)–, social exclusion arises from a diverse array of deprivations, generally stemming from three primary dimensions. First, individuals may be excluded due to identities that deviate from established norms and customs, such as gender, age, race, caste, ethnicity, religion, or political affiliations. Second, exclusion may result from specific circumstances, like forced displacement due to conflict or poverty, or victimization from gender-based violence, particularly in settings where discriminatory norms, laws, and institutions prevail. Third, individuals in disadvantaged socioeconomic positions face exclusion due to restricted access to labor, credit, and insurance markets, or limitations in exercising political rights, resulting from low educational attainment, unemployment, or poverty.

In the European context, it is pointed out that since the Treaty of Amsterdam, in 1999, the European Union has incorporated social exclusion into its social policy framework. Later initiatives, such as the 2000 Lisbon strategy to combat poverty, the 2008 recommendation for including those excluded from the labor market, and the 2021 European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, all prioritize reducing poverty and social exclusion risks (European Commission, 2021).

While a consensus on the most critical dimensions of social exclusion for global empirical analyses remains elusive, there is a general understanding of its multidimensional, dynamic nature and the relational processes that result in this phenomenon. Alongside its multilayered dimensions, it is also a reality where various actors contribute, including economic forces related to globalization, nation-states and their institutions, and individuals, whose interactions produce outcomes at different levels, from local to global, individual to structural.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that nature of social exclusion is as dynamic and changing as the emergence of political crises, disasters, conflicts, economic shocks, or demographic transitions, which can result in the heightening of exclusion and discrimination risks among underrepresented groups (European Commission, 2021).

In addition, we must acknowledge that social exclusion is long-term and structural. Therefore, in light of the complexities and multifaceted nature of social exclusion, addressing this issue calls for innovative and pragmatic solutions. One such approach that has been gaining traction is the development of social incubators, which can help operationalize strategies to tackle social exclusion through grassroots projects.

In the following section, we will delve into the concept of social incubators and explore how they can serve as a valuable instrument in combating social exclusion and fostering a more inclusive society.

## THE ROLE OF SOCIAL INCUBATORS

As entrepreneurship has become a key driver of social and economic development, there has been a surge in entrepreneurial support activities. In this context, incubators have emerged at the forefront of these efforts, offering a wide array of services, such as office space, capital, training, and support, to assist start-ups and entrepreneurial teams in their quest to survive and thrive.

Hackett and Dilts (2004 cited in Sansone, Andreotti, Colombelli and Landoni, 2020: 122) defined incubators as “enterprises that facilitate the early-stage development of firms by providing office space, shared services and business assistance”.

While various types of incubators have been explored in the literature (Mian et al., 2016 cited in Sansone, Andreotti, Colombelli and Landoni, 2020: 124), social incubators remain relatively under-researched. As a newer concept, a clear definition for social incubators is still lacking, and existing studies indicate that more research is necessary to better understand this emerging topic.

Rudy Aernoudt (2004) is one of the first to use the term *social incubator*, stating that they provide the same services as other incubators, but with a distinct mission. He describes their aims as:

“[...] To stimulate and to support the development, growth and continuity of companies employing people with low employment capacities. The aim is to bridge the social gap by increasing employment possibilities for people with low employment capacities such as disabled people, minimum guaranteed income beneficiaries, low-skilled workers, long-term unemployed, immigrants, political refugees, etc.” (2004: 129).

Similarly, Casanovas and Bruno (2013: 180) described social incubators as "programs that support the scaling process of organizations that primarily address social challenges through innovative and market-oriented solutions."

However, Lundgren and Youcefi (2017: 9) argue that Aernoudt’s *social incubator* term should instead be labelled *social business incubator*, indicating its focus on the business development itself. However, there are incubators that take a different approach to addressing social issues. For instance, some incubators bypass the intermediate step of incubating businesses and instead work directly with individuals experiencing the issue.



These authors coin the expression *individual incubators*, to describe those that focus on directly incubating individuals. Encouraging individuals to act entrepreneurially benefits not only the incubatee and society as creating an entrepreneurial environment spurs economic growth and development, but also may eradicate social and institutional void. Social incubators help both micro-entrepreneurs and other individuals by addressing their needs and, by extension, reduce educational, social, and economic gaps.

Therefore, we understand social incubators as organizations or programs designed to support and nurture the growth of social enterprises, startups, and initiatives that focus on addressing social, environmental, or community challenges. These incubators provide resources, mentorship, training, and networking opportunities to help entrepreneurs and innovators develop and scale their projects with the goal of creating positive social impact.

In summary, while incubators have been extensively studied, social incubators are a relatively new concept that requires further research. They share similarities with traditional incubators but are specifically focused on supporting organizations addressing social challenges and employing individuals with low employment capacities. As social entrepreneurship continues to grow, social incubators are likely to become increasingly important in fostering the development of socially driven enterprises.

## CASES OF EUROPEAN SOCIAL INCUBATORS

To select our case studies, we began with a comprehensive search for incubators. Next, we examined the initial sample to determine if they met the criteria for social business incubators based on the given definition. From this refined sample, we analyzed their incubation approaches to identify the most diverse methods. Lastly, we gathered qualitative data from publicly available sources regarding the business models and practices of fifteen well-established social business and individual incubators.

### THE HUMAN SAFETY NET (ITALY)

The Human Safety Net (THSN) is a global initiative launched by Generali, a leading insurance company, aimed at creating a positive social impact by empowering disadvantaged communities. The program focuses on three main areas: supporting families, unlocking the potential of refugee entrepreneurs, and helping children with early childhood development.

- **For Families:** The goal of this program is to support parents in vulnerable situations by providing them with the tools, knowledge, and resources necessary to ensure a nurturing and supportive environment for their children. This is achieved through parenting workshops, home visits, and community events that focus on early childhood development, positive parenting practices, and the importance of a strong parent-child bond. In 2021, THSN expanded its network of Family Centers, reaching over 5,600 parents and children across 22 countries. These centers provide parenting workshops, home visits, and community events focusing on early childhood development, positive parenting practices, and the importance of a strong parent-child bond. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the program adapted its approach, offering online resources and remote support to ensure continued assistance to families in need.

- **For Refugee Start-ups:** This program focuses on unlocking the potential of refugee entrepreneurs by providing them with the necessary support to establish and grow their businesses. The Human Safety Net offers tailored business training, mentorship, access to networks, and funding opportunities for refugees with innovative business ideas. By empowering refugees to become self-sufficient, this program aims to promote social inclusion and economic integration. The Human Safety Net's refugee entrepreneurship program supported 1,100 refugees in starting and growing their businesses in 2021. By offering tailored business training, mentorship, access to networks, and funding opportunities, the program aims to promote social inclusion and economic integration. In response to the pandemic, THSN provided emergency grants to support refugee businesses, while also offering webinars and online resources to help entrepreneurs adapt to the new economic landscape.
- **For Newborns:** This initiative aims to improve the lives of newborns in neonatal intensive care units (NICUs) by offering specialized training for healthcare professionals and investing in advanced medical equipment. The program seeks to reduce infant mortality rates and improve the quality of life for premature and at-risk babies, while also providing support and guidance to their families during this critical period. In 2021, THSN continued its efforts to improve the lives of newborns in neonatal intensive care units (NICUs) by providing specialized training to over 1,000 healthcare professionals and investing in advanced medical equipment. Their commitment to reducing infant mortality rates and improving the quality of life for premature and at-risk babies extended to 12 countries and reached over 6,000 newborns and their families.

By combining these three programs, The Human Safety Net aims to create a safety net for vulnerable individuals and families, empowering them to overcome challenges, unlock their potential, and ultimately transform their lives for the better.

In 2021, THSN introduced the THSN Community, a digital platform aimed at fostering connections and engagement among beneficiaries, partners, and supporters by facilitating the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and best practices. This initiative further demonstrates THSN's dedication to establishing partnerships and collaborations, as they work closely with local organizations, experts, and volunteers to optimize the impact of their programs.

## TERN (UNITED KINGDOM)

TERN (The Entrepreneurial Refugee Network) is an organization, founded in 2016, dedicated to empowering and supporting refugees in the United Kingdom to start and scale their own businesses. The idea came out of the recognition that, despite the emerging forced migration crisis that was happening at the time (particularly in wake of the Syrian conflict), European societies were failing to include refugee populations effectively into society and local communities.

Their mission is to enable refugees to thrive through the power of their ideas and business ventures, fostering economic independence, integration, and community contributions.

TERN's primary focus is on assisting refugee entrepreneurs throughout various stages of their business journey. They offer an array of services, including access to funding, mentorship, tailored business support, and a community of like-minded individuals. Their support helps refugee entrepreneurs overcome challenges and barriers specific to their situation, enabling them to create successful businesses and contribute to their local communities.

Their approach aims to overcome three significant obstacles faced by refugee entrepreneurs in the UK:

- **The scattered refugee population** (with no central registry or support organizations). Refugee entrepreneurs often lack the necessary networks to promote their brands, as they may not have friends and family in the UK to support them. TERN addresses this issue by connecting them with potential customers and launching an online marketplace for refugee entrepreneurs to showcase their products and services.
- **The absence of local credit (or personal) history for refugees.** The lack of credit and capital can hinder their businesses from taking off. TERN is working to overcome this challenge and help refugee entrepreneurs secure the financial resources they need to succeed.
- **Their limited familiarity with a new culture and intricate bureaucratic systems.** Accessing knowledge and adapting their previous experience to the UK market can be challenging due to isolation and unfamiliarity with local regulations and customer preferences. TERN helps bridge this gap by providing guidance on business registration, idea validation, and market competitiveness.

Their 12-weeks-program (plus other 12-week-final growth coaching) includes three core components:

1. **Onboarding** - This stage is focused on helping refugees generate business ideas, identify their target market, and develop their unique selling points.
2. **Incubation** - In this stage, TERN assists refugees in testing their business concepts, mentoring, refining their ideas, and validating their products or services with potential customers.
3. **Growth Acceleration** - TERN supports refugees in the final stage of launching their businesses, including registering their company, accessing financing, and developing marketing strategies.

By fostering a strong network of refugee entrepreneurs and partners, TERN is promoting a positive change in the narrative surrounding refugees and encouraging a more inclusive, diverse, and innovative business ecosystem.

Furthermore, TERN strives to change the misconceptions surrounding refugees by highlighting their entrepreneurial potential and reframing the narrative from hardship to livelihoods. The organization emphasizes that refugees have valuable skills and experience that, if supported, can help them create businesses and jobs in their new communities.

One effective way to change the narrative is by showcasing the success stories of refugees who have started businesses in local communities, rather than focusing on high-profile examples like Steve Jobs or Michael Marks. TERN's online marketplace, which features refugee-led businesses, allows people to directly support these entrepreneurs, fostering a more positive perception of refugees.

By connecting the refugee experience to local entrepreneurship, TERN aims to create a more inclusive environment and change the way people view refugees. Encouraging people to support and buy from refugee-owned businesses can ultimately shift public opinion and promote a more inclusive and understanding society.

## LIAISE PROJECT (EUROPEAN UNION)

LIAISE (Linking Incubation Actors for Inclusive and Social Entrepreneurship) is a European Union funded project, under the program framework of Employment and Social Innovation. Its main objective is to encourage inclusive and social entrepreneurship across Europe. LIAISE focuses on empowering and mobilizing business support organizations (BSOs) to offer efficient support to social enterprises and potential entrepreneurs from underrepresented communities, assisting them in securing financial resources and expanding their businesses.

This project is a collaborative effort between The European Business and Innovation Centre Network (EBN), Impact Hub (IHUB), and the European Venture Philanthropy Association (EVPA) – three leading organizations and networks that have come together to drive systemic change by enhancing the skills, methods, and approaches of BSOs in assisting entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs from diverse social backgrounds.

Each of the project partners shares the same vision and values, while bringing complementary expertise and unique experiences that are essential for the project's success. Additionally, Caritas Europa contributes valuable hands-on experience working with vulnerable groups, further enriching the project.

LIAISE's program is built on two key elements, a capacity building program for business support organizations (BSOs) and a cultural paradigm shift. The program recognizes that pure learning and knowledge exchange is not enough to create real impact in the incubation industry because incubators and BSOs work within larger regional, national, and European ecosystems.

The project intends to promote entrepreneurship and self-employment as a means to create job opportunities, enhance skill development and enable unemployed and vulnerable individuals to participate fully in society and the economy.

With the collaboration of the three networks, LIAISE is working towards a paradigm shift in the industry, ensuring that incubation services are integrated into a more inclusive and impact-driven ecosystem to extend their reach to inclusive and social entrepreneurship. The project aims to help under-represented groups access financial resources and increase the survival and growth of their businesses.

## BETTER INCUBATION (EUROPEAN UNION)

Better Incubation is an initiative funded by the European Commission, driven by the LIAISE Project. In line with the vision of the project, this initiative aims to introduce a systemic change by bringing incubation and business support services closer to society.

Better Incubation strives to advance entrepreneurship as a significant solution to social, ecological, and economic problems in Europe. It aims to provide inclusive opportunities for self-employment and job creation to underrepresented groups, allowing them to fully participate in society and the economy.

Better Incubation offers a series of capacity building and networking opportunities that are organized along 4 key pillars within the LIAISE project:

1. **Capacity building:** The provision to BSOs with knowledge and tools to pilot incubation programs for social and inclusive entrepreneurs through the development of 5 thematic Communities of Practice (CoPs) and delivering capacity building online program to BSOs.
2. **Cultural paradigm shift:** The project aims to involve various stakeholders in developing a more inclusive and impact-focused ecosystem. The partners will ensure that the outcomes of the project are implemented and validated by national and European ecosystem players.
3. **Impact assessment framework for incubation programs:** The project aims to develop, prototype, and implement a shared assessment framework to evaluate and measure the impact of the incubation programs conducted by the project's participating members.
4. **Stakeholders' mobilization and alliances:** Ensuring cohesive communication and widespread dissemination of project outcomes across the three networks. Additionally, the project seeks to foster long-term partnerships among key stakeholders in the realm of social and inclusive entrepreneurship support, with the aim of continuously improving the practices and assistance provided by mainstream incubators and other BSOs.

## PULSE (FRANCE)

PULSE is an association created in 2006 whose mission is to support and promote entrepreneurship as a lever for inclusive and sustainable development. Founded with the conviction that everyone can become an actor of change, PULSE promotes, in the 18 countries where it is active, accessibility to entrepreneurship and its financing through awareness-raising actions and support programs.

PULSE operates several incubation sites in Africa and Europe, including Lab'ess (Tunisia), Oribi (South Africa), Jógjéf (Senegal) and PULSE Montreuil (France). Each year, more than 500 project leaders are supported in the launch and development of their activity.

PULSE Montreuil has been actively involved in supporting various entrepreneurial initiatives that focus on diverse social and environmental themes. Some of these areas include:

- **Refugee entrepreneurship:** Pulse Group assists entrepreneurs who are refugees, helping them develop their businesses and integrate into their host countries' economies. This support can foster economic independence, social inclusion, and create job opportunities for both the entrepreneurs and their communities. Their program, #tempo, is aimed at making entrepreneurship accessible to refugees in France. Through the creation of ecosystems and the deployment of specialized support pathways in various regions, #tempo aims to facilitate the development of entrepreneurial ideas and projects led by refugees, providing them with the necessary tools and connections to bring their ideas to life. The program's goal is to enable 40 aspiring refugee entrepreneurs to solidify their ideas and provide 25 of them with support to launch their businesses.
  
- **Women entrepreneurship:** Pulse Group promotes women-led businesses by offering tailored support and resources to female entrepreneurs, aiming to bridge the gender gap in entrepreneurship and empower women to achieve economic success. Operating in both Marseille and Île-de-France, and in collaboration with local partners, #EllesEnsemble aims to support women who are distant from entrepreneurship, particularly the younger generation or those residing in priority districts (QPV). Through this program, PULSE seeks to facilitate the emergence of socially and environmentally impactful projects led by women.



- **+45 entrepreneurship:** Recognizing the potential and experience of older entrepreneurs, Pulse Group supports individuals aged 45 and above in launching or growing their businesses, tapping into their skills, and leveraging their unique perspectives. Their initiative, #NouveauCap, is a support program designed for individuals over 45 years old who wish to give new meaning to their careers by exploring the opportunities provided by impact entrepreneurship. The program offers inspiration sessions, training, individual guidance, and personal development, all free of charge. It aims to help participants move from idea to action, giving their careers a new direction.
- **Circular economy:** Pulse Group encourages projects that focus on the circular economy, promoting resource efficiency, waste reduction, and sustainable practices. By supporting businesses in this area, they contribute to a more environmentally friendly and economically viable future. #LaSaisonCirculaire is a 6-month incubation program aimed at project leaders in the circular economy. The goal is to accelerate the ecological and economic transition by promoting the identification and development of projects that focus on the pillars of the circular economy. This program offers an incubation program for its winners, combining PULSE's expertise in the social and solidarity economy (SSE) with SUEZ (utility company which operates largely in the water and waste management sectors) knowledge of circular economy processes. PULSE and SUEZ designed this program to have a regional impact in Île-de-France, particularly in the Seine-Saint-Denis area.
- **Solidarity projects:** #LaSaisonSolidaire is a 6-month incubation program for project leaders responding to one or more solidarity issues (promoting employment and integration, building a more inclusive society, strengthening social ties and civic engagement). The primary aim of #LaSaisonSolidaire is to provide participating entrepreneurs with optimal conditions to launch and accelerate their impact projects. This is achieved through a combination of coaching, training, mentoring, inspiration sessions, and personal development opportunities. The program has a significant influence in the Île-de-France region, with a particular focus on the Seine-Saint-Denis territories.

## RISE (WESTERN BALKANS)

The RISE (Regional Incubator for Social Entrepreneurs) project is focused on supporting social entrepreneurship in the Western Balkans. The project considers the region's unique needs, as well as its historical and political context, in to foster reconciliation.

RISE is funded by the French Development Agency (AFD), the European Union, and the Regional Youth Cooperation Office for the Balkans (RYCO). The coordinating consortium includes RYCO, the Franco-German Youth Office (OFAJ), South-East Europe Youth Network (SEEYN), and PULSE (Groupe SOS).

Local implementation of the RISE project is carried out by social incubators in the region, such as ARNO (North Macedonia), Nesto Vise (Bosnia-Herzegovina), Yunus Social Business Balkans (Albania), Smart Kolektiv (Serbia), IEC Technopolis (Montenegro), and Balkan Green Foundation (Kosovo\*).

The primary goal of the RISE project is to address a crucial need in the Western Balkans by fostering reconciliation among the region's youth through social entrepreneurship. Given its regional focus, the project aims to increase cross-border interactions surrounding social entrepreneurship over its three-year duration and beyond.

Key objectives of the RISE project include:

- **Enhancing the capacity of the social entrepreneurship ecosystem:** This objective focuses on local support structures (RISE incubators), which promote innovative and social projects as well as project leaders.
- **Promoting reconciliation through social entrepreneurship:** Creating a conducive environment for the development of entrepreneurial projects is essential. Raising awareness of social entrepreneurship in Western Balkan societies is a critical aspect of the project, intended to cultivate a dynamic and informed community of young social entrepreneurs.

The RISE Journey is a tailor-made support program for young change-makers in the Western Balkan region. It aims to help them develop their impactful ideas into sustainable social businesses. The program is implemented by six local incubators from different parts of the region. The RISE Journey consists of several steps:

- **Design Thinking Workshop:** Participants learn about social entrepreneurship and Design Thinking, an interactive session based on five stages: Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test.

- **Call for Projects:** Young people aged 18 to 35 from the Western Balkans are encouraged to apply for the RISE Journey with their ideas for positive impact.
- **Ideation Phase:** The local incubator helps transform ideas into sustainable social business models through trainings, workshops, and interactions with other projects in the region.
- **Demo Day:** Participants pitch their projects to a jury, who selects the best social projects to join the incubation program.
- **RISE Bootcamp:** A 6-day event for knowledge and ideas exchange, networking, and participation in sessions such as peer learning, prototyping, and social business development training.
- **Regional Mobility Program:** Participants receive a business development and mobility grant to travel across the region, connect with peers and experienced businesses, and share lessons learned.
- **RISE Forum:** A gathering of RISE participants and key actors of social entrepreneurship in the region to discuss the state of social entrepreneurship, best practices, and European initiatives.
- **RISE Alumni Community:** Graduates of the program join the RISE Alumni community, sharing successes and opportunities with all generations of Risers.

One of the key motivations behind the RISE project was the high youth unemployment rate in the Western Balkans, states RISE's Project Coordinator Adrien Delaby (Sermaxhaj, 2021), which is among the highest in the world. The labor markets in the region are still divided, and there is significant room for improvement in cross-regional mobility and exchange.

On the other hand, although progress has been made in youth participation in decision-making processes, it still lags behind the level of youth participation seen in EU countries.

Considering these challenges, the development of social entrepreneurship initiated by the target group is an effective solution to combat youth unemployment and address social and environmental issues in the region. The RISE project aims to empower young people to become change-makers and drive sustainable social business growth, thereby fostering reconciliation and regional collaboration.

## SOY EMPRENDEDORA (SPAIN - COSTA RICA)

“Soy Emprendedora” is a project that was created in May of 2020 to provide support to women entrepreneurs and business owners in Costa Rica who relied on their businesses for their livelihoods. As a collateral effect of the pandemic and the adopted health measures, these women saw significant impacts on their income, with some even experiencing the closure of their ventures.

The project was implemented in all regions of the country, financed by the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), and executed by the National Women's Institute (INAMU) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

This initiative seeks to promote gender equality, reduce the gender gap in the labor market, and foster economic growth. The program focuses on improving women's technical, digital, and entrepreneurial skills, ultimately enhancing their self-sufficiency and financial independence.

The training process took place from September 2021 to June 2022, a period in which 276 women from all over the country managed to improve some aspects of their business, for example, the dissemination processes on social networks. Other women managed to strengthen the venture and the image of the product or formalized the venture.

Training topics included talks on internal logistics, external logistics, infrastructure, purchasing, after-sales service, human resources, and operations.

Participants in this training and accompaniment process included: women heads of household with active productive businesses prior to the pandemic and/or during the pandemic; women with care responsibilities; entrepreneurs/businesswomen who hired personnel with emphasis on hiring women; and entrepreneurs/businesswomen who led businesses in the productive activities that were most affected by the crisis, such as agro-industry, services, textiles, handicrafts, agriculture and livestock, commerce, and tourism. The training process was carried out by the school of the School of Administration of the National University.

The final product of the project was the creation of the *Soy Emprendedora* website [www.soyemprededora.inamu.go.cr](http://www.soyemprededora.inamu.go.cr) which contains a series of videos and documents that provide and based-on-needs guidance to those women (an in general, to those) who wish to start and formalize a business, so that they can find, in a single place, practical advice on how to do so.

## DO SCHOOL (GERMANY)

The DO School is an international non-profit organization that focuses on empowering and inspiring individuals to become purpose-driven leaders, entrepreneurs, and changemakers. Its mission is to create a more equitable, sustainable, and innovative world by fostering an ecosystem of collaboration and learning.

Founded in Germany, the DO School operates across various locations worldwide, offering a range of programs, events, and initiatives designed to develop the skills and mindset necessary to tackle global challenges. Their approach combines hands-on learning, mentorship, and peer-to-peer support to help participants transform ideas into action.

The DO School unites prominent organizations, esteemed experts, and gifted impact-driven entrepreneurs to refine innovative ideas and rapidly transform them into new products, processes, and services. By inspiring profound cultural changes, The DO School fosters the evolution of people, businesses, and society as a whole. The ultimate goal is to create not only better businesses but also a better world for everyone.

Key features of The DO School:

- **Innovative Programs:** The DO School offers a variety of programs such as fellowships, workshops, and incubators, tailored to different stages of personal and professional development. These programs often focus on themes like social impact, sustainability, and entrepreneurship.
- **Global Network:** Participants in The DO School programs become part of a diverse and global network of like-minded individuals, organizations, and alumni. This network fosters collaboration and provides opportunities for networking and future partnerships.
- **Expert Mentorship:** The DO School connects participants with experienced mentors and industry experts who can provide valuable guidance, insights, and support in the pursuit of their goals.
- **Hands-on Learning:** The DO School emphasizes experiential learning, enabling participants to apply their knowledge and skills in real-world situations. This helps to deepen understanding and ensure that the learning outcomes are practical and relevant.
- **Focus on Impact:** The DO School's core philosophy is centered on creating tangible, positive impact on society and the environment. Participants are encouraged to think critically about the consequences of their actions and develop solutions that address pressing global challenges.

By offering these resources, The DO School aims to empower individuals and organizations to create a better future for all.

## **ELLAS LO BORDAN (SPAIN)**

*Ellas lo bordan* is a social enterprise project that operates under the umbrella of the Manresa Foundation's social inclusion programs, which belong to the Society of Jesus. Established in 2017 in the Entrevías neighborhood of Madrid, its primary goal is to provide professional skills to women at risk of labor market exclusion due to their educational background or personal and family circumstances.

At the heart of this transformational process is a textile workshop, where women receive technical training in a trade while enhancing their versatile skills to support social and professional integration. The entire workforce consists of women, with the company focusing on textile manufacturing and offering quality standards above the market average.

Newcomers to *Ellas lo Bordan* undergo two months of intensive training before joining the workshop, where a team of textile experts oversees operations and services to produce high-quality products tailored to individual client needs.

The company also focuses on sustainability and circular economy processes, creating various products from recycled fabrics, including tablecloths, aprons, tote bags, and cardholders. This approach fosters personal growth, contributes to local development, and offers a responsible purchasing alternative for social transformation.

*Ellas lo bordan's* unique model combines economic activity with social impact, emphasizing dignity, equality, and cooperation. By promoting innovative, creative, and respectful methodologies, they facilitate the autonomy of the women they employ and create a meeting space free of discrimination. This triple-impact approach – economic, social, and environmental – sets them apart as a sustainable production company dedicated to social transformation.

As we have examined, all these initiatives, projects, programs and incubators share the same elements, which include:

- **Focus on social impact:** Unlike traditional business incubators, social incubators prioritize projects and ventures that seek to solve social problems or address community needs. Their primary objective is to create social value rather than solely focusing on financial gain.
- **Training and capacity building:** Social incubators provide educational programs and workshops to help participants develop essential skills for managing a social enterprise, such as business planning, marketing, financial management, and impact measurement.
- **Mentorship and guidance:** Experienced professionals, often from the social entrepreneurship or nonprofit sectors, offer guidance, advice, and support to participants in a social incubator. This mentorship helps entrepreneurs overcome challenges and make informed decisions as they develop their projects.
- **Networking opportunities:** Social incubators create opportunities for participants to connect with like-minded individuals, potential partners, investors, and other stakeholders in the social impact ecosystem. This helps them build a strong support network and collaborate on projects.
- **Funding and resources:** Social incubators may provide seed funding, grants, or other financial assistance to support the development and growth of social enterprises. Additionally, they may offer resources such as office space, equipment, or technical support to help participants bring their ideas to fruition.
- **Advocacy and Awareness:** Social incubators play a significant role in raising awareness about social exclusion and promoting the importance of social innovation. They advocate for inclusive policies and create opportunities for dialogue between policymakers, social entrepreneurs, and disadvantaged communities. This helps foster a more inclusive and equitable society.

## RETHINK IRELAND (IRELAND)

Rethink Ireland is a non-profit organization that supports social entrepreneurs and innovative projects that have the potential to create positive social impact in Ireland. Rethink Ireland provides funding, mentoring, and support to social enterprises, charities, and non-profits through a range of programs and initiatives.

Rethink Ireland's main funding program is the Social Enterprise Development Fund, which provides grants and support to social enterprises at all stages of development. Rethink IRELAND also operates the Ability to Work Fund, which provides funding to organisations working to support people with disabilities in the workforce, and the Children and Youth Education Fund, which supports innovative projects focused on improving education and opportunities for children and young people in Ireland.

In addition to its funding programs, Rethink Ireland also provides training, mentoring, and support to social entrepreneurs through its Academy for Social Entrepreneurs program. This program offers a six-month course that helps social entrepreneurs develop their ideas, build their skills, and create sustainable businesses that have a positive social impact.

Overall, Rethink Ireland is committed to promoting social innovation and entrepreneurship in Ireland, and to supporting innovative projects and organisations that are working to create positive social change in their communities.



## UPSOCIAL (SPAIN)

UpSocial is a non-profit organisation based in Spain that provides support and resources to social entrepreneurs and organisations working to create positive social impact in their communities. The organisation was founded in 2013 with the aim of promoting social innovation and entrepreneurship in Spain and beyond.

UpSocial's main focus is on providing training, mentoring, and financial support to social entrepreneurs, with the aim of helping them to develop sustainable and scalable businesses that have a positive social impact. The organisation runs a range of programs and initiatives, including an incubation program for social enterprises, a social investment fund, and a mentorship program that pairs social entrepreneurs with experienced business leaders.

In addition to its work with social entrepreneurs, UpSocial also collaborates with a range of partners, including corporations, foundations, and universities, to promote social innovation and entrepreneurship more broadly. The organisation has a strong focus on impact measurement and works closely with its partners to track and evaluate the social impact of its programs and initiatives.

Overall, UpSocial is committed to building a more inclusive and sustainable economy through social entrepreneurship and innovation, and to supporting individuals and organisations that are working to create positive social change in their communities.

### **UpSocial's work is organised around five lines of action:**

1. **Innovation:** UpSocial supports social innovators in developing and implementing new ideas and solutions to social problems. It provides resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities to help social entrepreneurs and organisations develop innovative business models, products, and services that address social and environmental challenges.
2. **Capacity building:** UpSocial provides capacity-building support to social entrepreneurs and organisations to help them strengthen their operations and achieve greater impact. This includes providing training and coaching on topics such as financial management, marketing, and strategic planning.
3. **Scaling:** UpSocial helps social entrepreneurs and organisations scale their impact by providing access to funding, mentorship, and other resources. It also helps social innovators identify and navigate new markets, partnerships, and opportunities for growth.

4. **Policies:** UpSocial works to promote policies that support social innovation and social entrepreneurship. This includes conducting research on best practices in social innovation and advocating for policies that create a more supportive environment for social entrepreneurs.
5. **Learnings:** UpSocial believes in the importance of learning and sharing knowledge in the social innovation space. It conducts research and gathers data on social innovation trends and best practices and shares this knowledge with its community of social innovators and stakeholders to promote collaboration and learning across the sector.

## ASHOKA (EUROPE)

Ashoka is a global non-profit organization that supports social entrepreneurs and changemakers around the world, including in Europe. Ashoka's work in Europe is focused on identifying and supporting social entrepreneurs who are developing innovative solutions to social and environmental problems, and on creating a more supportive ecosystem for social entrepreneurship across the region.

One of the keyways that Ashoka supports social entrepreneurs in Europe is by identifying and selecting Ashoka Fellows, who are social entrepreneurs with a track record of success in creating and implementing innovative solutions to social problems. Once selected, Ashoka provides its Fellows with a range of resources, including financial support, mentorship, and access to a global network of peers and supporters. Ashoka also works to connect its Fellows with other stakeholders, such as policymakers, business leaders, and civil society organisations, to help them achieve greater impact.

Ashoka also works to create a more supportive ecosystem for social entrepreneurship in Europe. This includes advocating for policies that support social innovation and changemaking and fostering collaborations between social entrepreneurs and other stakeholders in the region. Ashoka also conducts research on social entrepreneurship and shares best practices with its network of social entrepreneurs and supporters.

In addition to its work supporting social entrepreneurs, Ashoka also runs programs and initiatives to promote social innovation and changemaking across Europe. For example, Ashoka's "Changemaker Schools" initiative works with schools across the region to promote social and emotional learning, and to help students develop the skills and mindset needed to become changemakers in their communities.

## **YUNUS SOCIAL BUSINESS (SPAIN, FRANCE AND GERMANY)**

Yunus Social Business (YSB) is a non-profit organization that was founded by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus in 2011. YSB works to promote social entrepreneurship and to create sustainable solutions to some of the world's most pressing social problems.

YSB focuses on supporting social entrepreneurs who are developing innovative and sustainable business models that have a positive impact on society.

Yunus Social Business (YSB) has a presence in several European countries, including Germany, France, and Spain. In Europe, YSB works to support social entrepreneurs who are developing innovative solutions to some of the region's most pressing social and environmental problems.

One of the keyways that YSB supports social entrepreneurs in Europe is by providing seed funding and other financial support. YSB works with social entrepreneurs to develop and refine their business models, and then provides funding to help them get their businesses off the ground. YSB also provides mentorship and other resources to help social entrepreneurs scale their businesses and increase their impact.

YSB also works to create partnerships with corporations, governments, and other organisations in Europe to promote social entrepreneurship and social business. These partnerships help to create a more supportive environment for social entrepreneurs, by providing access to resources such as funding, mentorship, and networking opportunities.

In addition to its work supporting social entrepreneurs, YSB also conducts research and advocacy on social entrepreneurship and social business in Europe. It works to raise awareness of the importance of social entrepreneurship and to promote policies and practices that support the growth of the social entrepreneurship sector in Europe.

## IMPACT HUB (EUROPE)

Impact Hub is a global network of social business incubators and coworking spaces that support social entrepreneurs and changemakers around the world. Impact Hub was founded in 2005 in London and has since grown to become a network of over 100 Impact Hubs in more than 50 countries.

In Europe, Impact Hub has a strong presence, with Impact Hubs in cities such as Berlin, Amsterdam, Vienna, and Madrid, among others. Each Impact Hub provides a coworking space where social entrepreneurs and changemakers can work, collaborate, and network with like-minded individuals. In addition to coworking space, Impact Hubs also provide a range of resources to support social entrepreneurs, including mentorship, training, and access to funding.

Impact Hub's focus is on promoting social innovation and entrepreneurship. It provides support to social entrepreneurs who are developing innovative solutions to social and environmental problems and aims to create a more supportive ecosystem for social entrepreneurship around the world.

Impact Hub also runs programs and initiatives to promote social entrepreneurship and social innovation. For example, the Impact Hub Fellowship is a program that provides funding and support to social entrepreneurs who are developing innovative solutions to social problems. Impact Hub also runs accelerator programs and hackathons to support social entrepreneurs at different stages of their entrepreneurial journey.

Overall, Impact Hub's work in Europe is focused on creating a more supportive ecosystem for social entrepreneurship, and on supporting social entrepreneurs who are developing innovative solutions to social and environmental problems. Its network of coworking spaces and social business incubators provide a platform for collaboration, innovation, and impact across Europe and around the world.

## THE YOUNG FOUNDATION (UNITED KINGDOM)

The Young Foundation is a UK-based social innovation organization that was founded in 1954 by the social entrepreneur Michael Young. Its mission is to create and sustain social innovation by empowering people and organisations to develop and implement new ideas that tackle some of the most pressing social challenges of our time.

One of the keyways that The Young Foundation supports social innovation is through its research and thought leadership activities. They conduct research and analysis on social issues, exploring innovative solutions and developing new insights into how social problems can be addressed.

The Young Foundation also works in partnership with government, business, and civil society organisations to promote social innovation and support the development of effective policies and practices. They have worked on a range of social issues, including health, education, employment, and community development.

The Young Foundation operates as a social incubator, supporting social entrepreneurs and social enterprises to develop their ideas and grow their impact. They provide a range of services and resources to help these organisations, including funding, mentoring, coaching, and networking opportunities.

The Young Foundation provides a range of support services to social entrepreneurs to help them develop their ideas and grow their impact. Here are some of the ways in which they help social entrepreneurs:

- **Funding:** The Young Foundation offers funding and investment opportunities to social entrepreneurs, including seed funding and venture capital. They also help social entrepreneurs to access other sources of funding, such as grants and loans.
- **Mentoring and coaching:** The Young Foundation provides one-on-one mentoring and coaching to social entrepreneurs, helping them to develop their skills and knowledge and overcome any challenges they may face.
- **Training and workshops:** The Young Foundation offers training and workshops on a range of topics, including business planning, marketing, fundraising, and impact measurement.
- **Networking opportunities:** The Young Foundation provides opportunities for social entrepreneurs to connect with each other, as well as with investors, policy makers, and other stakeholders in the social innovation ecosystem.

- **Incubation space:** The Young Foundation provides incubation space for social entrepreneurs, giving them access to office space, meeting rooms, and other resources they need to grow their organisations.
- **Research and insights:** The Young Foundation conducts research and provides insights into social issues and emerging trends in social innovation, helping social entrepreneurs to stay up-to-date and informed.

## UNLTD (UNITED KINGDOM)

UnLtd is a leading UK-based social incubator and charity that supports social entrepreneurs who are working to create positive social change. Their mission is to provide funding, mentoring, and other support services to help social entrepreneurs develop their ideas and grow their impact.

UnLtd offers a range of programs and services to support social entrepreneurs, including:

**Funding:** UnLtd provides funding to social entrepreneurs at all stages of their development, from early-stage startups to established social enterprises. They offer seed funding, development funding, and investment funding, as well as access to other sources of funding such as grants and loans.

- **Mentoring and coaching:** UnLtd provides one-on-one mentoring and coaching to social entrepreneurs, helping them to develop their skills and knowledge and overcome any challenges they may face.
- **Training and workshops:** UnLtd offer training and workshops on a range of topics, including business planning, marketing, fundraising, and impact measurement.
- **Networking opportunities:** UnLtd provides opportunities for social entrepreneurs to connect with each other, as well as with investors, policy makers, and other stakeholders in the social innovation ecosystem.
- **Research and insights:** UnLtd conduct research and provides insights into social issues and emerging trends in social innovation, helping social entrepreneurs to stay up-to-date and informed.
- **Advocacy and policy:** UnLtd work to influence policy and advocate for the interests of social entrepreneurs, helping to create a more supportive environment for social innovation.

Overall, UnLtd's support services are designed to help social entrepreneurs at all stages of their development, from early-stage startups to established social enterprises. By providing funding, mentoring, training, and networking opportunities, they help social entrepreneurs to build sustainable, impactful organisations that create positive social change. UnLtd has supported thousands of social entrepreneurs over the years and has played a key role in promoting social innovation in the UK and beyond.



## CONCLUSIONS

The mapping of European social incubators resulted in the identification of several key findings. Firstly, social incubators have emerged as a powerful tool in the fight against social exclusion, providing support and resources to individuals at risk of marginalization. Secondly, social exclusion arises from a diverse array of deprivations, generally stemming from three primary dimensions: identities that deviate from established norms and customs, specific circumstances, and disadvantaged socioeconomic positions. Thirdly, social incubators aim to address these barriers by providing a nurturing and supportive environment for those at risk of exclusion through tailored programs, resources, and mentorship. The social challenges that the analyzed incubators address are:

- **Poverty and unemployment:** Social incubators provide resources, mentorship, and training to individuals at risk of exclusion, empowering them to start their own businesses and create job opportunities for themselves and others.
- **Social exclusion and marginalization:** Social incubators aim to address the barriers that contribute to social exclusion by providing a nurturing and supportive environment for those at risk of exclusion through tailored programs, resources, and mentorship.
- **Environmental challenges:** Some social incubators focus on promoting sustainable and environmentally friendly practices, such as reducing waste and promoting renewable energy.
- **Health and well-being:** Social incubators may address health and well-being challenges by supporting initiatives that promote healthy lifestyles, mental health, and access to healthcare.
- **Education and skill development:** Social incubators may provide training and resources to individuals who lack access to education and skill development opportunities, empowering them to improve their employability and overall well-being.
- **Refugee integration:** Social incubators may support refugees by providing them with the necessary resources and support to establish and grow their businesses, promoting social inclusion and economic integration.

The mapping identified several key pillars for capacity building and networking opportunities that are organized in social incubators programs, which include:

1. **Training and capacity building:** Social incubators provide educational programs and workshops to help participants develop essential skills for managing a social enterprise, the most commons being business planning, marketing, financial management, and impact measurement.
2. **Mentorship and guidance:** Experienced professionals, often from the social entrepreneurship or nonprofit sectors, offer guidance, advice, and support to participants in a social incubator. This mentorship helps entrepreneurs overcome challenges and make informed decisions as they develop their projects.
3. **Networking opportunities:** Social incubators create opportunities for participants to connect with like-minded individuals, potential partners, investors, and other stakeholders in the social impact ecosystem. This helps them build a strong support network and collaborate on projects.
4. **Funding and resources:** Social incubators may provide seed funding, grants, or other financial assistance to support the development and growth of social enterprises. Additionally, they may offer resources such as office space, equipment, or technical support to help participants bring their ideas to fruition.
5. **Advocacy and Awareness:** Social incubators play a significant role in raising awareness about social exclusion and promoting the importance of social innovation. They advocate for inclusive policies and create opportunities for dialogue between policymakers, social entrepreneurs, and disadvantaged communities. This helps foster a more inclusive and equitable society.

In summary, the mapping of incubation and training programs has provided us with valuable insights into the available resources for individuals at risk of exclusion and third-sector organizations. It is evident that several essential elements are crucial for the successful implementation of incubation initiatives. However, it is noteworthy that there remains a gap in the landscape of social incubator programs, as very few comprehensively integrate these critical elements while adopting a human rights perspective for individuals facing exclusion.

In light of these findings, our conclusion emphasizes the need to incorporate the best practices identified in the report and address the challenges that have been identified but remain unaddressed. This necessitates the development of an innovative incubation program that can bridge these gaps and better serve the needs of marginalized individuals and third-sector organizations.

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