



SIVSEN

GUIDE

Return on Investment Guide

for work experience in
social enterprise



Foreword

Increasingly, young people are looking for careers that have more purpose and jobs that create positive social and environmental impact. What, then, is the role of colleges, universities, schools and employers in supporting these aspirations? And how can we do the best we can to ensure that young people are supported every step of the way to make that leap from education to work?

I'm delighted to say that this report - produced by a fantastic, EU Erasmus+ funded project - provides some of the answers. The report outlines the return on investment in young people and work placements - both for the student and the employer. Importantly, we can also see the extra value of social enterprises hosting these placements both on home soil and internationally.

The returns are compelling. For the student: improved skills and learning; better communications; developing team working and problem solving; understanding different business models; increased confidence and maturity and more. For the social enterprise: staff development; increased diversity of workforce; fresh perspectives, energy and innovation; extra capacity to deliver; new contacts and networks and much, much more.

We operate in challenging times. Productivity remains low. We face a cost-of-living crisis. Poverty and inequality are on the increase. Every day we see, more and more, the impact we are having on our planet and environment. We owe it to young people to nurture learning, provide opportunities to develop and to align education to the needs of the now and future labour market.

Social enterprises are innovative, diverse and passionate. This makes them ideal places for work experience opportunities as this research demonstrates. Social enterprises need young people. Young people need social enterprises. A world where the aspiration for business to have a tangible positive impact beyond profit is not a dream. It is real, it's right here and now, and it's growing.



Richard Stevens
Chair of Plymouth Growth Board
Chair of Governors, City College Plymouth



Contents

Foreword	2
Contents	3
Summary	4
The SIVSEN Project	5
Introduction	5
Some definitions	6
Social enterprise work experience: an overview	6
Impact of Covid 19 and digital work experience	8
Implementation challenges for work placements	8
Challenges specific to social enterprise work placements	8
SIVSEN Social Enterprise Programme Framework	9
Return on Investment for Work Placements in Social Enterprise	9
Participant benefits	9
Organisation benefits	14
Wider Benefits	17
Internationalisation	19
Further Resources	20
Italy	20
Romania	20
Sweden	21
UK	21
Internationalisation of social enterprise	22
The Turing Scheme	22
The SIVSEN partnership	23



Summary

This Return on Investment Guide brings together what we have learned about work experience in social enterprise during the two years of the Erasmus+ funded SIVSEN project and partnership. It focuses on the benefits of work experience in social enterprise to the student, to the social enterprise employer and to society. It draws on the extensive experience of the project partners as well as desk research, focus groups and interviews with young people. It builds on our comparison survey of work experience and social enterprise in four countries, (the UK, Italy, Sweden and Romania) and our social enterprise work experience framework.

Workplace experience as an element of vocational education has been championed by governments and educators in recent years. It is seen as key to the development of employability skills, and credited with supporting young people to arrive in the workplace equipped with the skills, attitudes and mindset that employers need.

There are many ways in which work experience in social enterprise is similar to work experience in any other business, so this guide focuses on what is unique about a social enterprise work experience placement.

Why social enterprise?

Many young people want a career that aligns with their values, but many conventional work experience options don't emphasise this aspect of career choice. For the social enterprise, supporting a young person in their vocational development is a good fit with their social mission. The supportive ethos and emphasis on workplace wellbeing found in many social enterprises is one of the factors that educators value in work experience placements, particularly for young people who are just starting to be ready to think about work or may be trying out different sectors before committing.

Challenges for work experience in social enterprise

Social enterprises are frequently smaller organisations without a large staff team, which can make hosting a social enterprise placement seem daunting. The challenges of operating with grant funding can make it difficult to plan ahead and free up staff time to support a student. Interestingly, we also found that misperceptions about what social enterprise is or does can also discourage students from thinking about social enterprise as a work placement choice or career option.

Benefits of work experience in social enterprise

Social enterprises are diverse, innovative, productive workplaces which benefit young people by providing inspiring role models, enabling students to consider their own values and sense of purpose. They can enable young people to learn workplace skills in a highly supportive environment.

The project found that students appreciated being supported to work independently and creatively, being able to make a genuine contribution and the opportunity to meet and learn from social enterprise beneficiaries. Educators valued the opportunity for students to broaden their horizons by learning about social enterprise business models and their social impact.



Social enterprises benefit from the insight, creativity and skills the young people brought. Digital, media and marketing skills were particularly valued by the social enterprises we spoke to. Social enterprise employers are keen to develop a new generation of socially motivated potential employees and view work placement as a positive PR opportunity for their own business and for the sector as a whole.

Future of work

Many social enterprises place a strong emphasis on workplace wellbeing, employee engagement and offer an opportunity for work that is in tune with socially and environmentally aligned values. The leadership of a social enterprise is more likely to be female, and/or from an ethnic minority or disadvantaged neighbourhood than is the case in other SMEs. Many social enterprises are organised along democratic lines. Taken together, these factors suggest that work experience in a social enterprise might also provide young people with a glimpse of a positive future where work is rewarding, nourishing and makes a positive difference in the world.

The SIVSEN Project

SIVSEN is an Erasmus+ funded Key Action 2 partnership project, between partners from four countries: Italy, Romania, Sweden and the UK. The acronym stands for Social Innovation through VET (Vocational Education and Training) and Social Enterprise Networks.

The project started on 31 December 2020 and will end in December 2022. SIVSEN brought together educators from VET and higher education, employers from the social enterprise sector, and young learners interested in exploring work placements in social enterprises. The project's ultimate goal was to make VET colleges, schools, and universities work more and better with social enterprises to ensure that young people entering the workforce are aware of the opportunities to work in social enterprises on both a local, regional and international level.

Introduction

This Return on Investment Guide examines the value of work experience in social enterprise for VET students, and for social enterprise organisations, based on work in four European countries: Italy, Romania, Sweden and UK. It is one of three key documents produced by the SIVSEN project.

We know that increasing numbers of young people want to work for organisations which have a positive social and environmental impact, nurture a diverse working environment and pay attention to workplace wellbeing. [The Deloitte Global 2021 Millennial and Gen Z Survey](https://www2.deloitte.com/cn/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/millennialsurvey-2021.html) <https://www2.deloitte.com/cn/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/millennialsurvey-2021.html> and [The Deloitte Global 2022 Gen Z and Millennial Survey | Deloitte Global](https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/about/people/social-responsibility/genzmillennialsurvey.html) <https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/about/people/social-responsibility/genzmillennialsurvey.html>

SIVSEN emerged from partners' experience of social enterprises as organisations which frequently deliver on these aspirations; are a growing sector within all four countries and tend to be under-represented among work experience opportunities offered to young people.



The key questions addressed in this report are:

- What are the benefits to the young person of a work experience placement in a social enterprise?
- What are the benefits to the social enterprise of hosting a work experience student?

Our secondary question is:

- What are the opportunities for internationalisation of social enterprise work placement opportunities?

Some definitions

Work experience happens where for a period of time a student or young person temporarily works for an employer to get experience of the workplace or sector. We are using the term to include both long and short, formal and informal, paid and unpaid work experience opportunities.

As terminology in each partner country differs, it is of note that at UK or European level, for this project, when we talk about apprenticeship or work experience it is the same activity where for a period of time a student/young person temporarily works for an employer to get experience of the workplace/sector.

Social enterprises are organisations with a social purpose which trade and which re-invest their profits for that purpose. They take a variety of different legal forms and have a different culture and history in the four countries.

VET stands for Vocational Education and Training. It refers to training in skills and teaching of knowledge related to a specific trade, occupation or vocation. In the four participating countries this takes place from age 14 in a variety of compulsory and post compulsory education settings.

Social enterprise work experience: an overview

Across Europe, there is an increased emphasis on workplace experience as part of VET. Alongside this, there is increasing recognition of the importance of [“transversal skills”](#) <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en> (i.e., non-sector specific and therefore transferable) in preparing young people for a rapidly changing labour market.

The [Gatsby benchmarks](https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/gatsby-sir-john-holman-good-career-guidance-2014.pdf), <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/gatsby-sir-john-holman-good-career-guidance-2014.pdf> based on research in six countries, include workplace experience. Benchmark six is *“Every pupil should have first-hand experiences of the workplace through work visits, work shadowing and/or work experience to help their exploration of career opportunities, and expand their networks.”* (The Gatsby Foundation, 2014)

Our [comparison survey](https://sivsen.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Social-Enterprise-Comparison-Survey-AllCountries.pdf) <https://sivsen.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Social-Enterprise-Comparison-Survey-AllCountries.pdf> provides a detailed picture of the education system in each country and their frameworks for work experience, which include both formal and informal opportunities.



Key similarities between the four countries include:

- Work experience is a feature of most VET programmes
- Education policy emphasises a need to align education to labour market needs, and includes an expectation that students will gain workplace experience as part of their education
- Formal work experience in social enterprise happens, but in an ad hoc way dependent on the presence of local networks, and the knowledge and contacts of individual teachers
- Misconceptions about what a social enterprise is or does can prevent both educators and young people from seeing social enterprise as a viable career option or a suitable option for work experience
- There is a significant overlap between the goals and values of educators and social enterprises in relation to supporting young people
- Non-statutory programmes, typically led by charities and NGOs as well as by social enterprises, exist to provide young people with experience working in the social purpose sector in a variety of informal ways

In Italy the social purpose sector is strong, established, and well integrated with the public sector. Many social purpose organisations provide volunteering, internship and other work experience opportunities in formal and informal ways. Alternating periods in education and the workplace is a feature of vocational education, and is now called PCTO (*Percorsi per le competenze trasversali e per l'orientamento*) in recognition of the demand for transversal skills. [Linee guida dei percorsi per le competenze trasversali e per l'orientamento](https://www.miur.gov.it/-/linee-guida-dei-percorsi-per-le-competenze-trasversali-e-per-l-orientamento)
<https://www.miur.gov.it/-/linee-guida-dei-percorsi-per-le-competenze-trasversali-e-per-l-orientamento>

In Romania most social enterprise work experience takes place via non-formal programmes, often led by the social sector. These tend to be aimed at University level students. However, there is a relatively new “Dual VET” programme where employers take a lead on providing vocational learning experiences and participate in school-company partnerships aimed at ensuring education is relevant to workplace needs. It would be possible for the employer to come from a social sector organisation. [Romania: initial dual VET | CEDEFOP \(europa.eu\)](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/romania-initial-dual-vet)
<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/romania-initial-dual-vet>

Swedish schools are responsible for work placements and apprenticeships, called *arbetsplatsförlagt lärande* or APL. Guidelines state that the APL workplace must be a “good working environment” which prioritises the safety and wellbeing of the student. There are relatively few social enterprises in Sweden, so most APL placements are in the public or private sector. [Traineeships and apprenticeships | YouthWiki \(europa.eu\)](https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/sweden/35-traineeships-and-apprenticeships). <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/sweden/35-traineeships-and-apprenticeships>. At University level, the work placement is called VFU and is arranged by the University student as part of their learning programme.

In the UK, T levels are being introduced. These will have a significant work-based component and enable employers to have an input to the curriculum. In addition, students are expected to carry out a “social action” project as part of their education, but this is distinct from their work experience. Even in areas like Plymouth where there is a significant social enterprise presence most work experience placements have been in private sector organisations. [T Levels | The Next Level Qualification](https://www.tlevels.gov.uk/) <https://www.tlevels.gov.uk/>



Impact of Covid 19 and digital work experience

Since Spring 2020, opportunities for traditional in-person workplace experiences have been significantly impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic. One consequence of this has been the development of [digital workplace experiences](https://wex.careersandenterprise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/1412_Careers-In-Context-Employer-GuideG_1.pdf) https://wex.careersandenterprise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/1412_Careers-In-Context-Employer-GuideG_1.pdf such as [virtual tours](https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=0jlidUHhH1A&skip_registered_account_check=true), https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=0jlidUHhH1A&skip_registered_account_check=true “meet the employee” online panels, and virtual communities. The need for digital work experience during 2020 and 2021 has paved the way for the development of hybrid initiatives, which have the potential to combine the best of both online and in-person work experience opportunities.

Implementation challenges for work placements

The comparison survey highlighted some common challenges in the implementation of social enterprise work placements. These challenges are generic: they were raised in all four countries, and they are likely to be encountered in all settings, not just social enterprise:

- Lack of resources (time, staff) in both educational institutions and workplaces, to design and manage placements
- Absence of support and guidance in designing and managing a successful work placement
- Poor matching or insufficient information can lead to placements breaking down
- Lack of clarity about the responsibilities of the education provider and those of the placement provider
- Absence of clear framework for student assessment or placement evaluation
- Lack of awareness of the potential benefits to the organisation
- Lack of awareness of the potential benefits to the student

Challenges specific to social enterprise work placements

Challenges and nuances specific to social enterprise work experience include that social enterprises are often (but not always) smaller organisations with limited staff resources. Smaller organisations can accommodate fewer students during any given time period, so the resource needed per student for planning and supervising will be proportionately higher than in a larger organisation. Moreover, a smaller team makes it less likely that there will be an employee with skills and experience specific to planning and supporting work experience placements.

Many social enterprises are wholly or partially reliant on grant funding, making it harder to plan ahead and fit in with the timeframes required by the education provider. Grant funding is often restricted to a specific project, making it difficult for social enterprises to resource work experience placements from this type of funding.

Lack of public familiarity with social enterprise can make it less likely that students and educators will opt for a social enterprise work experience placement, or increase the amount of planning and information needed. Misperceptions include ideas such as: all work in social enterprises is voluntary or the only roles available are “caring” roles; Social enterprises need to overcome these misperceptions to compete with more well known employers. It also takes more work to ensure that students and educators have enough information to know what to expect from the placement opportunity.



SIVSEN Social Enterprise Programme Framework

The [SIVSEN Social Enterprise Programme Framework](https://sivsen.eu/io2-social-enterprise-programme-framework/) <https://sivsen.eu/io2-social-enterprise-programme-framework/> is a modular framework which aims to guide the user through a social enterprise work experience and provides some tools and ideas for structuring a placement. It is designed to cover the perspective of the employer, the student and the education provider.

Return on Investment for Work Placements in Social Enterprise

Participant benefits

Social enterprise work placements and consultancy projects became popular in university business schools after the 2001 Enron scandal which drew attention to corporate fraud on an international scale. Business educators became worried that they were training the financial crooks of the future and wanted a way to minimise that risk. As a result there is plenty of published research on social enterprise work placements in the business education literature. It tells us that such placements:

- Provide inspiring role models
- Enable students to learn informally from others in the workplace and absorb their values, attitudes and behaviours
- Create an opportunity for the student to learn about their own values by reflecting on the experience
- Can challenge the student to think critically about social issues

We also know that social enterprises are more innovative, more productive and have more diverse leadership than SME equivalents, making them ideal environments for work experience opportunities for young people.

This is in addition to the benefits of student work placements in general, which are understood to be:

Most of the research that has been carried out on the benefits of work experience for students is on mainstream (i.e. not social enterprise specific) work placements and uses interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups to elicit students' perceptions of the benefit to them. The benefits are:

- Improved communication and interpersonal skills
- Increased confidence and maturity
- Development of team working, time management and problem-solving skills
- Developing a positive attitude towards work
- Increasing motivation in the classroom
- Better awareness of career options leading to a lower chance of becoming NEET, (NEET, an acronym for "Not in Education, Employment, or Training)
- Opportunities for part time work whilst in education



Evidence suggests that well-designed, interactive, engaging placements can make students more likely to pursue a career in a particular sector, even when that sector was previously perceived to be challenging or unattractive. Benefits can be greater when:

- The college is actively involved in the choice of placement, addressing stereotyping and socioeconomic limitations
- The student gets career advice first, and placement reflects their career aspirations
- Good preparation enables students to know what to expect, particularly for those from less advantaged backgrounds. This can involve input from existing employees, or students who have previously had work experience with that employer or in the same sector
- Placements are structured to support the students learning (See the Framework for more about how to structure a SE work placement)
- Employer feedback and reflective debriefing sessions are provided to help the student consolidate what they have learned

Internship Cluj

From 2016-2019, Internship Cluj has offered qualitative, transparent, and equitable internships for over 1300 students in Cluj. Fundatia Danis, one of the SIVSEN project partners, supported and encouraged students to take a stand in their life and be responsible for themselves and others.

Fundatia Danis created the link between the students and the local companies and offered young people the chance to develop themselves professionally, with the support of mentors from local companies and organisations. They partnered with local universities, the municipality, and student associations. In total, 229 students and approximately 25 companies/organisations participated between 2016 and 2018.

Internship Cluj generated insights which are relevant to the SIVSEN research. Over 80% of the students reported that the internship helped them to clarify their career options and that the internship would definitely help them in finding a job once they finish their studies.

What the students appreciated the most in the company/NGO they did their internship:

- The good and easy communication within the company
- The openness and the support of the team
- Patience of the team members
- The quality of the people and the organisation's atmosphere
- The interesting tasks they received

What they appreciated the most in their mentors:

- Patience
- Support
- Availability
- Attention and interest in the intern's development and as a person/team member
- Listen to the new suggestions coming from the intern
- Supportive attitude when students made mistakes
- Their passion for the field
- The way in which they motivated the students to learn new things.



SIVSEN research

SIVSEN carried out focus groups with educators and social enterprise employers in each of the four countries. Participants were asked to list the top three benefits to students of social enterprise work experience.

What are the top three benefits that you think/know for sure that the apprentice/work experience participant gains for him/herself?

Educator responses

UK
1) Understanding of alternative business models
2) Awareness that life isn't just about profitability
3) Social enterprises are more supportive of the students
Sweden
1) It can lead to work for the student
2) Learning by doing is a good thing - what the student has only had experience of in theory is good to be put into practice
3) Real work assignments, which can motivate the student
Italy
1) Trying out new things
2) Embarking on a work experience without "performance anxiety" as one who is called upon to learn and therefore to "take" from the company
3) Orienting and testing personal skills and knowledge before officially entering the labour market
Romania
1) Increased chances to find a job
2) Developing skills and knowledge and teamwork experience in a real work environment
3) Direct contact with an employer, but also networking and getting inspired by starting similar businesses if they are interested in taking the entrepreneurship path



Employer responses

UK
1) Real experience that can go on a CV
2) Soft skills
3) Confidence building
Sweden
1) Knowledge of social enterprises
2) Knowledge of the target group that the company works for and see that there is a place for everyone in the society
3) Work experience, contacts with employers
Italy
1) Facing and overcoming prejudices and growing emotionally
2) Develop personal sensitivities, gain experience of human and professional growth, begin to learn about and enter the world of work
Romania
1) Practising and developing skills and knowledge related to a specific job/career in the social sector
2) Exploring and connecting to a specific employer, and see if this could be the future employer, before really applying for a job
3) Real connection and understanding of the labour market and the social economy sector

Discussion of focus group findings

There are some differences in the focus groups which are likely to be due in part to the different profile of social enterprise in each of the four countries. There are also differences between the main benefits as perceived by employers and those prioritised by educators. In addition, the responses cover both benefits which are specific to a social enterprise work placement, and those which might apply to any work placement.

Social enterprises and educational institutions emphasised slightly different sets of benefits for the young person from the social enterprise work placement. Social enterprise employers reported the benefits of “real world” experience in a highly supportive environment, and the development of confidence and soft skills. Educators focused on the benefits of exposure to alternative business models and the opportunity to experience purpose-led workplaces, whilst also noting high levels of support for young people, including disadvantaged young people in a social enterprise work placement.



Interviews with young people

SIVSEN partners also conducted interviews with young people about their social enterprise work experiences. Some of these are featured on our website. <https://sivsen.eu/news/work-experience-virtual-experience-internships-and-student-consultancies/>

Themes we heard them talk about were:

- Work experience in a social enterprise had more variety and flexibility than other options available
- Openness towards, and inclusion of social enterprise beneficiaries was valued
- Working directly with beneficiaries was both challenging and rewarding
- The work experience provided opportunities to “think outside the box” and contribute to the organisation in new ways
- Developing leadership skills
- Learning practical workplace skills such as project management, writing and interviewing skills
- Feeling safe, supported and appreciated
- The satisfaction associated with making a difference to a community
- Finding out that not all social purpose organisations have a charitable model and it’s possible to combine impact and income-generation
- Not realising it was a social enterprise until the work experience was under way
- The experience cemented a commitment to a purposeful career or helped them work out what they wanted to do

These themes reinforce what we heard from educators and social entrepreneurs about the benefits of social enterprise work placements for young people.

Summary of the benefits to the student of social enterprise work placements:

Based on our reading, focus groups and interviews with young people, the benefits of work placements in social enterprises fall into two categories - the benefits which would apply to any work placement, but which are reported as being stronger in a social enterprise context, and the benefits which are unique to the social enterprise work placement experience.

Benefits which are specific to social enterprise work placements are:

- Understanding of alternative business models
- Awareness that life isn’t just about profitability
- Social enterprises are more supportive of the students
- Knowledge of social enterprises
- Knowledge of the target group that the company works for and see that there is a place for everyone in the society
- Practising and developing skills and knowledge related to a specific job/career in the social sector
- Real connection and understanding of the labour market and the social economy sector



Benefits which apply in both mainstream and social enterprise work placements, but may be more pronounced in social enterprise work placements are:

- Real work assignments, which can motivate the student
- Direct contact with an employer, but also networking and getting inspired by starting similar businesses if they are interested in taking the entrepreneurship path
- Facing and overcoming prejudices and growing emotionally
- Develop personal sensitivities, gain experience of human and professional growth, begin to learn about and enter the world of work

Organisation benefits

The [benefits of hosting work experience placements https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/work-experience-placements-that-work_2012_tcm18-10941.pdf](https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/work-experience-placements-that-work_2012_tcm18-10941.pdf) for employers are well documented and include those in the table below, taken from a UK publication by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

HOW WORK EXPERIENCE WORKS FOR EMPLOYERS

Apart from making a real difference to someone's working life, offering work experience is beneficial for organisations for a number of reasons:

- **Recruitment opportunities:** providing work experience placements can be a way to access the local labour market and explore a talent pipeline that the employer would not have considered otherwise.
- **Staff development:** supervising and coaching young people on work experience offers an excellent opportunity to develop employees' management capabilities, particularly for those who may not normally have any line management responsibilities.
- **A more engaged workforce:** providing work experience sends a positive message to the wider workforce about the values of the organisation, which can support efforts to build employee engagement.
- **Engagement in the local community:** investors, customers, consumers and service users have increasingly strong opinions about the ethical role employers can and should play in society. Work experience placements provide a valuable means of creating a positive image, in which the organisation helps to address social issues related to worklessness in the community.
- **Contribution to economic development in the local area:** by helping to tackle some of the issues around deprivation and youth unemployment.

Other benefits include the chance to bring in new and imaginative ideas by listening to younger team members, and the chance to increase diversity by giving opportunities to young people from a wide range of backgrounds, including non-traditional backgrounds in your sector. The opportunity to develop partnerships with local colleges and training providers can be an additional bonus for employers who host work experience students.



Internship Cluj

The Internship Cluj project which worked with “mentors” from within 25 businesses over three years reported the following benefits:

- The interns took on their shoulders some of the regular team’s tasks
- Less work pressure on the team
- The students were, most of the time, capable of doing the tasks properly and getting the results wanted
- The opportunity to implement new tasks/projects for which they did not have the time and the human resources before
- New employees/colleagues and new friends

The mentors mostly appreciated the interns:

- Commitment, seriousness
- Openness
- Perseverance
- Willingness to learn
- Punctuality
- Motivation and enthusiasm
- Positive attitude

SIVSEN research

Social enterprise focus groups

SIVSEN carried out focus groups with social enterprise employers in four countries. Participants were asked to list the top three benefits of hosting work placement students

What are the top three benefits that you gain as a social entrepreneur from hosting a work experience placement?

UK
1) Reputation and PR
2) Diversifying the workforce and recruiting future workforce - leading to innovation
3) Brings in specific skills
Sweden
1) We get input from elsewhere, we get knowledge and experience from elsewhere other than our own sector
2) It is a way for us to increase knowledge about society and education by having an intern or trainees
3) We get new contacts with training providers



Italy
1) Expanding social interaction
2) Skills, new ideas, young energies
Romania
1) Extra workforce for a period of time, focusing on specific tasks and using their creativity and resources for the organisation
2) Linking the organisation and staff to the new generation of young people, who come with new ideas/visions, and who could also motivate the staff in their work
3) Potential to select new employees, and improve the organisation's good image in the community

Other points raised in the focus groups included:

- The parents and families of work experience placements are often potential customers and advocates for the business
- The work experience students of today are often future employees
- Diversity in the context of having younger voices, ideas and perspectives in the organisation leading to innovation and business opportunities; and in relation to providing work experience to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds
- The need to develop capacity in specific sectors, such as the environmental sector
- Valuable digital skills are perceived to be stronger in the work experience age group

Discussion of focus group findings

The fresh perspective that a work experience placement student can bring to a social enterprise was highlighted as one of the top benefits across all three countries. They were perceived to bring knowledge of specific social issues, and of how these issues impact on their age group. The ability to look at old problems in new ways was also valued as of course was the actual work the young people carried out, and the specific skills they brought. Our focus group participants talked about digital and marketing skills in particular. The idea that these young people might be future employees was discussed, and importantly, many of our social entrepreneurs felt that it was a good fit with their mission to nurture learning, development and awareness of social issues with the next generation. For many social enterprises located in deprived communities, providing work experience opportunities is part of their social impact.

Finally, social enterprises often saw work experience students as potential ambassadors, both for their specific business and for the sector in general.



Kate Smith, founder and CEO of Memory Matters CIC, speaking at our SIVSEN C2 event:

“The team absolutely love it when we have work experience people here.” Kate went on to explain how work experience students provide a valued perspective on everything Memory Matters does, from the Moments Cafe menu, to feedback on and design of marketing materials to appeal to diverse audiences. She emphasised that it creates an opportunity to let young people know that they can bring their authentic selves to work and choose a career where they are valued and every interaction matters. [Learn about values-based recruitment and other key characteristics of a social enterprise - SIVSEN](#)



Gareth Hart, Director of Iridescent Ideas writes about the benefits and challenges of student work placements in this blog [Work experience, virtual experience, internships and student consultancies - SIVSEN](#). <https://sivsen.eu/news/work-experience-virtual-experience-internships-and-student-consultancies/>



Iridescent Ideas benefited from specific skills that placement students could bring, including knowledge of Google ads and insights which enabled them to develop their marketing strategy. He also notes that the process of managing work placement students has led to improved leadership and management skills within the organisation.

“Several years later one of the students contacted me to say that her experience finding out more about our work had really opened her eyes to social purpose businesses. This was a great moment! She’d gone on to develop a career in NGOs and social enterprises internationally.”

Wider Benefits

Wider benefits of work experience in social enterprise, that have been mentioned in the course of the SIVSEN project, but which we have not had the chance to fully explore are:

Authentic values and purpose aligned career paths

Might it be that young people feel more able to become their authentic selves if they know a career path which aligns with their values and sense of purpose is possible? When social enterprise support organisations go into schools - often for “Entrepreneurship Days” where students are facilitated to imagine and create entrepreneurial projects - they notice that the majority of entrepreneurial ideas generated also have social and environmental outcomes.



The aspiration for entrepreneurship to have a tangible positive impact beyond income generation seems to be the norm for young entrepreneurs, and yet when it comes to “real world” career choices these aspirations get set aside in favour of career options where social and environmental impact is either secondary or even dismissed as naive or unrealistic.

We also notice that older members of the workforce and retired people frequently make time for activities that enable them to “give back” such as volunteering, mentoring or straightforward philanthropy. What if those aspirations didn’t have to be abandoned when the time comes for work experience, further education or job applications? What would the impact be on student motivation, or on their health and wellbeing if they could be fully integrated into career choices? What would be the impact on society? Might the availability of work experience in social enterprise help to realise these benefits?

Addressing Inequality

Our focus groups highlighted that the work experience landscape tends to reinforce existing privilege and entrench barriers to social mobility. Young people tend to find work experience placements through family and friends of the family, and are more likely to seek work experience in a sector they are familiar with, or where they stand a chance of securing a much-needed part time or holiday job. This means that young people from poorer families are more likely to have their work experience in retail or catering or other lower paid career options.

In Romania, less advantaged students find their way into work experience in the automotive industry, retail and construction and there are similar patterns in the other SIVSEN partner countries. Research shows that students from less advantaged backgrounds also tend to do work experience of lower educational value, meaning they come away from it having learned less than their better off peers. We also know that these disadvantages are mitigated when the education provider is more involved with setting up placements and when the placements are structured.

There was a perception expressed in our focus groups that students in vocational education settings, students from poorer backgrounds and those with additional difficulties don’t factor in social issues when thinking about a career. To what extent is this perception justified, based on some of the barriers above? How do we create, communicate and manage social enterprise work experiences that help break down barriers to mobility?

Democratic organisations

Many social enterprises practise some form of democratic governance. For example, worker co-operatives are owned and/or managed by their employees. In the UK, Community Benefit Societies can be owned and managed by the communities they serve and many other social enterprise structures facilitate employee and community engagement in business strategy, planning and decision-making.

Skills and a mindset for communicating and negotiating, hearing and understanding diverse viewpoints, critically assessing information and making decisions based on that information become essential and need to be nurtured and developed in democratic working environments. Arguably, these skills are also essential in a democratic nation. Might it be the case that broad exposure to democratic organisations and working environments will strengthen our democracies throughout Europe at a time when this is much needed?



Internationalisation

Our secondary question was about the opportunities for and benefits of international social enterprise work placement opportunities.

Projects like SIVSEN generate new international connections between education, training and social enterprise activities, and create pathways for students from one country to undertake work placements in another. For example, as a result of SIVSEN and similar projects it would be possible for a student from City College Plymouth (UK) to undertake work experience at Urkraft in Sweden, or Fundatiana Danis in Romania. Connections have been made so that a young person from MateraHub in Italy could easily find a work placement with a social enterprise in Plymouth.

The value added to this project through the international dimension has been significant, as partners have been enabled to gain fresh perspectives through working with peers in other European countries. Opportunities for learning about the national, social and cultural contexts were created at each face to face partner meeting. Social enterprise and social purpose became a unifying thread, and project partners have talked about shared values and a shared sense of purpose as a cohesive and motivating factor throughout the SIVSEN project.

Based on what we have learned about young people's interest in social purpose careers, their motivations for undertaking social enterprise work experience and the benefits that they gain from it, it seems likely that internationalising the social enterprise work experience would add a hugely beneficial additional dimension for the young person participating.

There are a number of ways it is possible to do this.

The Turing Scheme is the UK's global programme for studying, working and living abroad, offering once-in-a-lifetime opportunities for personal and professional development for students. Post Brexit and as an alternative to Erasmus+, Turing supports Global Britain by providing an opportunity for UK organisations from the higher education, further education, vocational education and training and schools sectors to offer their students, learners and pupils life-changing experiences to study or work abroad. The scheme operates on an annual application basis, organisations apply directly through the application portal.

Erasmus Plus is the European Union programme for education, training, youth and sport, creating opportunities across Europe. It creates opportunities for participants to study, train, volunteer or spend time abroad through Erasmus+ projects and exchanges. The EU works with National Agencies to bring the Erasmus+ programme as close as possible to the participants. National Agencies are based in [EU Member States and third countries associated to the Programme](#) (previously called Programme Countries) and their role involves:

- Providing information on Erasmus+
- Selecting projects to be funded
- Monitoring and evaluating Erasmus+
- Supporting applicants and participants
- Working with other National Agencies and the EU
- Promoting Erasmus+
- Sharing success stories and best practices



Further Resources

Italy

About social enterprise

- Networks for Social Cooperatives <https://www.confcooperative.it/>; <https://www.federsolidarieta.confcooperative.it/>; <https://www.legacoopsociali.it/>
- Local social enterprise consortia www.cgm.coop
- Conferences for social entrepreneurs and researchers <https://irisnetwork.it/>
- Erasmus Plus
- <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/contacts/national-agencies>
- <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-a/eligible-countries?>

Romania

About social enterprise

- <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=20959&langId=en> European Commission, Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Updated country report: Romania, 2019.
- <https://accelerator.alaturidevoi.ro/romania>, The map of social enterprises in Romania.
- <https://riseromania.ro/en/home>, The Romanian Network for Social Enterprises in Romania.

Work experience (for employers)

- <http://internshipcluj.ro/ghid-de-bune-practici-internship-cluj/>, Good practices for organising internship experiences, Fundatia Danis, 2014.
- <https://www.hipo.ro/locuri-de-munca/vizualizareArticol/1904/Ghidul-Angajatorilor-Internship-%26-Trainee-2016>, Employee Guide for Internship and Trainee, 2016.

Work experience (for educators)

- <https://enpower.yourkite.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/ENPowerMentorshipProgram-EN.pdf>, How to organise a mentorship programme, edited by Fundația Danis, 2019.

Other

Erasmus Plus:

- <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/contacts/national-agencies>
- <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-a/eligible-countries?>
- Young people from Romania and social innovation <https://www.ashoka.org/ro-ro/story/barometru-ashoka-1-din-2-tineri-spun-c%C4%83-ar-avea-nevoie-de-mentori-de-la-care-s%C4%83-%C3%AEnve%C8%9Be-despre>
- Young people's perspective on entrepreneurship - <https://www.startupcafe.ro/idei-antreprenori/antreprenoriat-tineri-romania.htm>
- Young people's top interests when searching for work experiences, <https://www.startupcafe.ro/afaceri/top-industrii-studenti-romani-joburi.htm>



Sweden

About social enterprise

- Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe
<https://op.europa.eu/s/xmu0>
- Social Enterprises in Sweden – Intertextual Consensus and Hidden Paradoxes
<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/oa-edit/10.4324/9780429055140-13-15/social-enterprises-sweden-malin-gawell>

Work experience (for employers)

- Arbetspraktikens betydelse (The meaning of work practice – A qualitative study about young adults and their views on unemployment, work practice and employability)
<https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1489072/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- För dig som är arbetsgivare och tar emot elever på din arbetsplats. Här finns bland annat stöd för handledning.
<https://www.skolverket.se/for-dig-som-.../arbetsgivare>

Work experience (for educators)

- Effekter av arbetsmarknadspolitiska program 2010–2018
<https://arbetsformedlingen.se/download/18.7887697f1763d9e809671c2/1611838181325/effekter-av-arbetsmarknadspolitiska-program-2010-2018.pdf>

Other

Erasmus Plus:

- <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/contacts/national-agencies>
- <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-a/eligible-countries?>

UK

About social enterprise

- [No health, no economy \(iridescentideas.com\)](http://iridescentideas.com) A summary of research into employee wellbeing in social enterprise in the UK
- [All about Social Enterprise | Social Enterprise UK](#)

Work experience (for employers)

- [CEC \(careersandenterprise.co.uk\)](http://careersandenterprise.co.uk) How to give students a good experience of your work place including digital work experience options
- [work-experience-placements-that-work_2012_tcm18-10941.pdf \(cipd.co.uk\)](#) Guidelines for creating an excellent work experience.

Work experience (for educators)

- [good-career-guidance-handbook-digital.pdf \(gatsby.org.uk\)](#) Benchmarks for careers guidance (including work placements) in the UK



Other

- Research into young people's work related attitudes and values [The Deloitte Global 2021 Millennial and Gen Z Survey](#) and [The Deloitte Global 2022 Gen Z and Millennial Survey | Deloitte Global](#)

Internationalisation of social enterprise

- Internationalization of the social entrepreneurship – Social Enterprise Development in the Baltic Sea Region (socialenterprisesr.net)

The Turing Scheme

- <https://www.turing-scheme.org.uk/>



The SIVSEN partnership

This report was created by the [SIVSEN partnership](https://sivsen.eu/partners/) <https://sivsen.eu/partners/>

[City College Plymouth](https://www.cityplym.ac.uk/) <https://www.cityplym.ac.uk/> is a large vocational and technical General Further Education College offering both Further and Higher Education provision. The College is a significant contributor to the educational, cultural and economic life of Plymouth, providing courses for those aged 16-18, adults and for young people aged 14 to 16 (schools provision). The College is the largest provider of full-time 16-18 education in Plymouth, UK.

[Fundatia Danis](https://fundatiadanis.ro/) <https://fundatiadanis.ro/> in Cluj Napoca, Romania is a non-profit organisation whose main expertise is entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship education and youth professional and personal development. In the last 15 years, through CSR programs of SMEs and multinational companies, Fundatia Danis has provided internship and apprenticeship experiences to approximately 1500 university and high school students.

[Materahub](https://materahub.it) <https://materahub.it> in Matera, Italy manages international pilot projects to support cultural and creative industries, encouraging innovation and inclusion processes and a new entrepreneurial vision to face contemporary challenges. Materahub organises several international Capacity Building activities and projects funded by the European Erasmus + programs, Cosme, Interreg and Horizon 2020.

[Plymouth Social Enterprise Network \(PSEN\)](https://plymsocent.org.uk/) <https://plymsocent.org.uk/> Plymouth, UK includes all kinds of social enterprises including co-operatives, community interest companies, charities, community businesses and more. All are joined by a common bond – that of doing business for a good cause.

[Urkraft](https://urkraft.se/) <https://urkraft.se/> is an NGO based in Skellefteå, Västerbotten in northern Sweden set up from an initial funding investment in 1988. The organisation is a social enterprise that provides vocational training and education for unemployed people. Employing 12 people, the staff mainly work with vocational education and training tailored to both the needs of the individual, but also to society's need of skilled professionals – people who possess a belief in themselves, their abilities and their future.





SIVSEN

