HOME

The House of Engagement and More

In-depth understanding of preferences and challenges of students and future facilitators to properly implement and recognise Social Engagement Activities

A.2.8. U. PORTO PROPOSAL

RECOMMENDATION LIST - document creation

ENHANCING STUDENT SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT:

TARGETED RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON NEEDS AND BARRIERS

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document presents the key findings and recommendations from the project *The House of Engagement and More* (HOME). The insights are based on both quantitative data (surveys) and qualitative input (focus groups), exploring how students and facilitators perceive civic engagement.

- **Key Barriers and Challenges:**

  - The main barrier identified is a **lack of budget** to support initiatives.
  - Students often do not have access to or **visibility of available opportunities**.
  - There is **limited awareness of social issues** and little **formal recognition** for civic engagement activities.
  - Communication strategies are seen as **exclusive**, and student structures are fragmented.

- **Student Needs and Preferences:**

  - Student's value hands-on, **practical activities** that lead to visible impact.
  - There is a clear interest in **playful approaches**, including **and games and gamification**.
  - **Students want their efforts to be formally recognized**, either with ECTS credits or certificates.

- **Key Recommendations:**

  - Develop a **centralised digital platform** to list all civic engagement opportunities.
  - Integrate civic engagement into the **academic curriculum**.
  - Provide **formal recognition** through credits or reward systems.
  - Simplify **bureaucratic procedures** and ensure financial support is available.

II.   INTRODUCTION

This study is part of the project The House of Engagement and More (HOME), co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union.

The aim of this study is to better understand how civic engagement is perceived and practiced, particularly within universities. To achieve this, the research used two complementary methods:

- o a quantitative survey to collect structured data from a wide range of respondents;
- o focus groups to gather more in-depth qualitative insights from students and facilitators.

III.   SCOPE, OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY OF THE QUANTITATIVE STUDY

- **Project context**

This quantitative study is part of the project *2024-1-ES01-KA220-HED-000255511 The House of Engagement and More* (HOME), It was designed and led by the Autonoma University of Madrid, with participation from partners across all countries involved in the project.

While focused on higher education, the study also considers civic engagement practices in schools, the public sector, businesses, and NGOs.

- **Main objectives**

The study aims to:

1. Offer a realistic overview of civic engagement in universities;
2. Compare practices between universities and schools;
3. Understand the perceptions of different stakeholders;
4. Identify the impacts, challenges, and levels of influence of civic engagement;
5. Produce actionable insights for future reports and publications

- **Dimensions and variables**

The study focuses on three main areas:

A. Engagement dimensions

a. Learning

b. Employability

c. Research

d. Engagement on campus

e. Citizenship and well-being

f. Other civic engagement practices

B. Profiles of respondents

a. Type of organization

b. Gender (female, male, other)

c. Field of study

d. Age

e. The country (among project partners)

C. Engagement analysis

a. Level of civic engagement achieved

b. Challenges faced (e.g., constraints or barriers)

c. Impact of engagement activities (in each dimension above)

The combination of these variables created a complex and diverse dataset with many possible cross-analyses.

- **Methodology**

Since there was no existing database, the research team created a new survey. It was developed by the HOME team at the Autonoma University of Madrid and distributed in all participating countries.

- o The final dataset included 628 valid responses.
- o Data was cleaned and harmonized into a single database.
- o The three areas with the most responses are engineering, economics and management, and philosophy, humanities and arts.

In summary, this part of the quantitative study provided a comprehensive overview of civic engagement in partner countries. It revealed important patterns in student engagement, barriers, and areas for institutional improvement. The final dataset included 628 valid responses, focusing on three areas: **engagement dimensions, profiles of respondents** and **engagement analysis.**

IV.   SCOPE, OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY OF THE QUALITATIVE STUDY

The qualitative study was carried out to complement the findings from the quantitative survey. The main goal was to gather in-depth insights into civic engagement and volunteering, especially in universities.

The study used focus groups to explore the perspectives of:

- o students
- o University and faculty staff
- o other stakeholders from the public sector, businesses, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and schools.

These sessions provided space for open discussion, allowing participants to share personal experiences, reflect on barriers and suggest solutions.

- **Methodology: The World Café Approach**

The focus group followed the World Café method - a collaborative, structured conversation technique. The format included three discussion tables, each covering one key theme:

1. Needs and preferences
2. Barriers to civic engagement
3. Validation and recognition methods (e.g., ECTS credits)

- **Session flow**:

  o Each table had one host who stayed throughout the session.
  o Participants rotated between the tables, spending 10 minutes at each.
  o After all rotations, a collective sharing session was held:
    ▪ Table host summarised the main inputs;
    ▪ Participants could add details or clarifications;
    ▪ This phase also lasted 10 minutes.

- **Participation**:

In total, 85 participants from 6 project countries took part in the focus groups. Overall, the focus groups involved 85 participants from the 6 countries involved in the project.

In summary, this part of the qualitative study provided a general overview of civic engagement and volunteering, with a particular focus on universities. Using the World Café methodology in a series of focus groups, which 85 participants from the six partner countries, we were able to identify the main barriers to civic engagement, the expectations and motivations of young people, and practical recommendations to improve incentives for civic participation. Finally, the study also compiled recommendations from key stakeholders responsible for implementing these participation strategies.

PART I: WHAT'S HOLDING US BACK? — UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

- **Insights from the Quantitative Study**

The quantitative data revealed that the main barrier to civic engagement is the lack of budget, even though many organisations express strong support for its value (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Challenges to adopt civic engagement practices
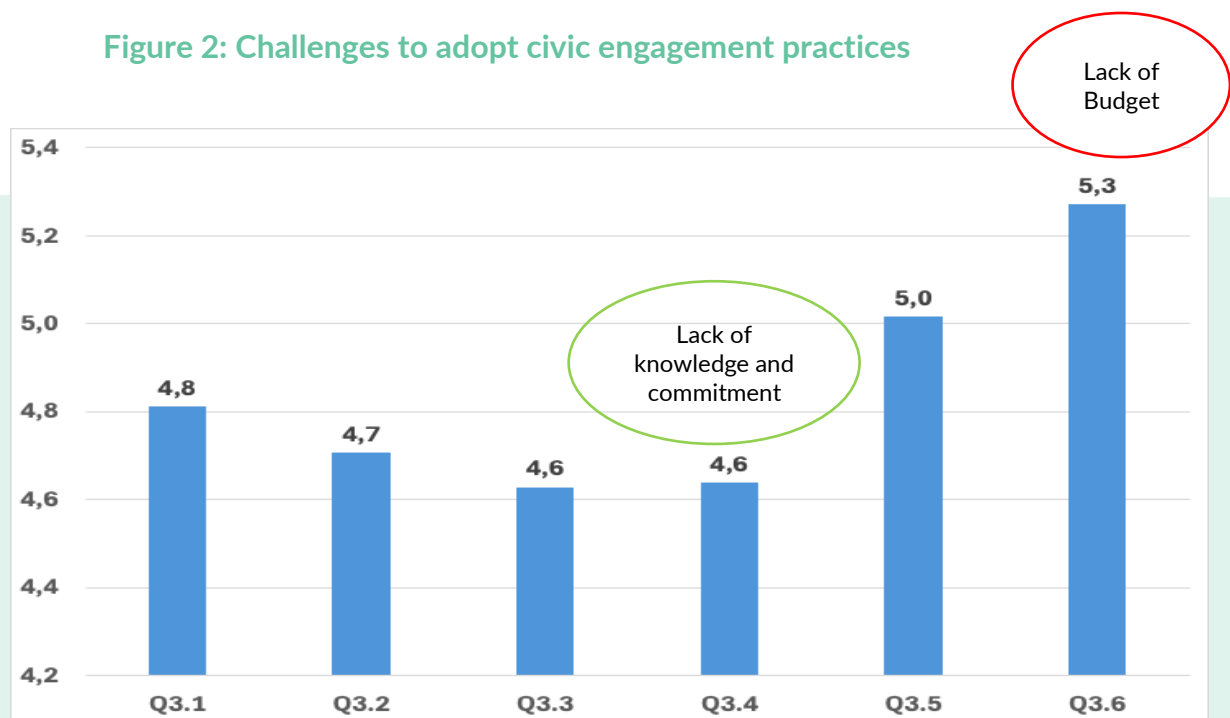
- **Insights from the Qualitative Study**

The focus groups helped identify and explore four key barriers to civic engagement from the perspective of students and staff. These barriers go beyond resources. They involve issues of access, motivation, emotional connection, and communication.

1: *"I Want to Help, But I Don't Know Where"* – The Access & Visibility Gap

Focus: Lack of clear, centralized, and accessible information.

- o Students often want to get involved but don't know where to find opportunities.
- o Many are unaware of elective courses that involve civic engagement or learning outside the classroom.
- o Even when these courses exist, the enrolment process is confusing or unclear.

As a result, students turn to conferences, forums, and external projects, which feel more open and easier to access.

Telling excerpts from the focus groups are:

"There's no clear place to find out how to get involved."

"We need posters, banners — like a wall in the university where all volunteer missions are listed."

"This visibility should extend beyond campus, with regular updates on social media platforms as well."

"Not enough support and accompaniment for the student who doesn't know where to engage themselves for the time that they have."

"Among the lack of resources, it is key to mention the lack of physical spaces to organize initiatives within the campus community."

"Lack of "effective" and "efficient" information to bear fruit."

2: *"Why Should I Care?"* – The Awareness and Emotional Disconnect

Focus: Civic issues feel distant from students' academic and personal lives.

- Many students (and some staff) report a low level of awareness and social commitment.

- There's often uncertainty about what the real issues are, and how to make a difference.
- Social polarization makes some students hesitant to engage with civic topics. Post-pandemic campus life is also a factor: reduced emotional connection and weakened community ties have led to a drop in engagement and motivation.

Telling excerpts from the focus groups are:

"Students don't know what issues exist or where they could help."

"We need to see people who need support, to be placed in situations where we learn about real problems."
"We just don't think about a lot of the problems that need solutions — we don't know they exist."

" Current paradigm: polarisation."

"University life has been lost, especially since the pandemic. You don't live on campus as much anymore."

"Lack of social awareness in general."

"Lack of empathy and awareness."

3: *"It Feels Like a Closed Club"* – The Communication and Inclusion Breakdown

Focus: Limited communication and exclusive student structures restrict engagement.

- Student initiatives are often not shared widely across the university.
- Many students feel excluded because information about civic opportunities is not communicated through official channels or across student associations.
- Some student groups intentionally limit visibility of opportunities to maintain internal control, influence, or exclusivity.

- As a result, only small, already-engaged groups are informed about new initiatives — newcomers or less-connected students are left out.
- This lack of transparency and communication also prevents students from discovering job and volunteering opportunities in social organisations.

Telling excerpts from the focus groups are:

"The things the Student Council organizes feel closed off. No one knows what's going on."

"We need more visibility and communication."

"Students are not informed, only those who are already committed."

"Lack of knowledge of these activities."

"Low job viability in the social sector. Many students are unaware that they can work in social organisations."

4: *"It's a Lot of Effort for Nothing"* – The Recognition and Reward Gap

Focus: Lack of formal, symbolic or practical recognition for civic engagement efforts.

- Students feel that their time and effort are not valued.
  There is a lack of:
    - ECTS credit recognition for civic work
    - Official certification or reward systems
    - Clear communication about how budgets are allocated
    - Inclusion in decision-making processes

- Heavy academic workloads and the absence of time allowances make it hard to engage in social causes. Students are often expected to do this work in their free time, without support.

- University staff face similar issues:

- o Participation in civic initiatives is not recognised in performance evaluations.
- o There is no formal encouragement or reward.
- o Burnout and overload are frequent among staff who try to help.

- Many universities lack the technical and organisational capacity to support civic initiatives. This includes:
  - o A need for mentoring and training programs, not just for students but also for staff.
  - o Greater administrative flexibility to support social engagement without bureaucratic obstacles.

- Inclusivity gaps are also present:
  - o Social initiatives aimed at students with special educational needs, international students, or exchange students often lack support.
  - o Without proper recognition of these efforts, other students and staff feel less motivated to engage in inclusion activities.

Students also report a lack of transparency in how contributors are identified and rewarded, as well as budget allocation criteria.

Telling excerpts from the focus groups are:

"There is a budget, but no one talks about it."

"Students should have access and give input on how that budget is used for social causes."

"Intention isn't enough because time isn't managed to have dedicated time for it."

"Lack of time."

"Lack of motivation if there is no direct benefit: feeling that "compensation" is needed for more participation."

"Certain profiles (technology, business administration, etc.) seek remuneration for their work and do not see the value of making a social commitment with their skills."

"They have a utilitarian approach focused on their employability."

"Lack of academic recognition or official certification that you can include in your CV."

"The current metrics of success in academic careers: the teacher is measured by certain things, but social engagement is not valued in this. "

"There is a lack of an international ranking of universities that really values these aspects."

"Excessive academic load. "

"Red tape and bureaucracy hindering participation."

In summary, Part I of this qualitative study provided insight into the barriers and challenges those that participants identified in engaging in civic and volunteer activities. The main points mentioned are:

- Lack of clear, centralized, and accessible information
- Low levels of awareness and social commitment
- Limited communication and activities exclusively for students
- Lack of formal, symbolic, or practical recognition for civic engagement efforts

PART II: WHAT SPARKS ENGAGEMENT? — STUDENT VOICES: NEEDS, EXPECTATIONS AND MOTIVATIONS

- **Quantitative findings**

The survey was structured around two key dimensions:

  o Interest in implementation (Q2)
  o Perceived impact of implementation (Q4)

- **Overall Survey Results**

After cleaning and validating the data, 628 responses were analysed. Key findings include:

  o A strong overall interest in civic engagement across all dimensions.
  o Most respondents rated their interest positively:
    ▪ Mode: 7 (on a scale of 1–7)
    ▪ Mean: 5.6, Median: 6
    ▪ Spread: ~20% around the mean

Table 2: Questions about the desire to carry out civic engagement practices

QUESTIONS	MEAN	STD	MODE	MEDIAN	CASES
Q2.1.1	5,9	1,3	7	6	658
Q2.1.2	5,6	1,4	7	6	653
Q2.1.3	5,3	1,6	7	6	637
Q2.1.4	5,0	1,7	7	5	643
Q2.2.1	5,6	1,5	7	6	655
Q2.2.2	5,5	1,5	7	6	655
Q2.2.3	5,5	1,5	7	6	663
Q2.2.4	5,9	1,3	7	6	662
Q2.2.5	5,5	1,5	7	6	638
Q2.2.6	5,8	1,4	7	6	631

Q2.3.1	5,7	1,4	7	6	661
Q2.3.2	5,6	1,4	7	6	658
Q2.3.3	5,6	1,5	7	6	666
Q2.3.4	5,7	1,4	7	6	664
Q2.3.5	5,4	1,5	7	6	628
Q2.4.1	5,7	1,4	7	6	665
Q2.4.2	5,7	1,4	7	6	658
Q2.4.3	6,0	1,3	7	6	656
Q2.4.4	5,4	1,6	7	6	647
Q2.5.1	5,6	1,4	7	6	607
Q2.5.2	5,5	1,5	7	6	605
Q2.5.3	5,5	1,5	7	6	608
Q2.5.4	5,6	1,4	7	6	604

Figure 3: Interest in implementation by dimensions

Summarizing the findings, it can seem that:

Key insights by dimension

- o **Learning**: students value practical engagement and collaboration with local organisations as highly effective for learning outcomes. They prioritise acquiring specific competencies over general social integration.
- o **Employability**: volunteering is seen as a career development tool. Respondents associate it with becoming a socially responsible leader and gaining awareness of social justice issues.
- o **Research**: students and staff see value in community-based research and collaborations with NGOs.
- o **Campus engagement**: Participants associate engagement with a stronger campus community and practical benefits (e.g., tuition discounts or grants).
- o **Citizenship & well-being**: Engagement contributes to greater civic knowledge, a sense of belonging, and resilience in the face of political instability.

Figure 4: Impact of implementation

Demographic insights:

- **Gender:**
  - Across all dimensions, female respondents expressed stronger support for civic engagement than male or non-binary participants.
  - However, perceptions of challenges were similar across genders.

- **Country:**
  - **Highest positive perceptions:** Portugal, Hungary, and France (to some extent).
  - **Lower scores**: Spain and Bulgaria.

In Italy, results vary by domain, possibly due to a sample bias toward engineering students.

- **Roles:**
  - Public sector and private companies showed the most positive perceptions.
  - Surprisingly, NGO representatives were less enthusiastic than expected.
  - Academics, researchers, and students reported the least optimistic views.

- **Field of study:**
  - Those with backgrounds in psychology, humanities, law, and health fields showed greater alignment with civic engagement values.
  - Scientists and engineers showed the lowest engagement sensitivity.

- **Age:**

Lowest interest:

  - Under 22 years
  - Over 50 years

- **Strongest interest:**
  - Ages 36–50, though results vary by dimension.

Qualitative perspective:

The focus groups provided a deeper understanding of student needs and preferences. These insights complement the quantitative data and highlight what truly motivates students to engage — beyond statistics.

1: "*Make It Hands-On*" – Learning through real-word experience
Students show a clear preference for activities that allow them to engage directly with social issues — not just learn about them in theory. They want to get involved in practical, hands-on initiatives that create visible impact.

- **Preferred formats:**
  - Interactive workshops
  - Structured volunteering projects
  - Sports events with a charitable purpose

- **Common themes:**

Students are particularly drawn to solving real problems in their daily surroundings — e.g., local waste management, support for elderly people living alone, working with small farmers, or helping revitalize urban areas.

This desire reflects a need for meaningful learning that connects academic life with tangible change in their communities.

Telling excerpts from the focus groups are:

> *"To go on-site and see how an organization works, even join them on missions."*

> *"Valorise the local community and territory with ad-hoc initiatives."*

2: "*Let Me Walk in Their Shoes*" – Empathy Through Immersive Activities
Students want experiences that allow them to understand the lives of marginalized groups — not just conceptually, but emotionally.

As one student expressed:

"*To step into someone else's shoes — like spending half an hour in a specific university faculty to understand what it's like to be part of a marginalized group.*"

They ask for activities that are:

- o Immersive
- o Community-based
- o Rooted in the local social reality

Students believe that universities should act as bridges between academia and society, creating opportunities for:

- o Collaboration with local NGOs
- o Community-based research
- o Technology transfer to underserved areas

Telling excerpts from the focus groups are:

"To step into someone else's shoes — like spending half an hour in a specific university faculty to understand what it's like to be part of a marginalized group."

"Universities should serve as bridges between the academic world and the surrounding social reality, facilitating meaningful partnerships with local organizations."

3: "*Make It Social, Make It Fun*" – Engagement Through Play and Purpose

Young people respond positively to gamified and playful approaches to civic engagement.

When done well, these approaches:

- o Turn social commitment into a fun, collective experience
- o Foster peer support networks
- o Help build sustainable, long-term engagement

This highlights that's students want engagement to be purposeful, but also enjoyable — not framed as a chore or obligation.

Telling excerpts from the focus groups are:

"Particularly appreciated are activities that incorporate playful and gamification elements, making social commitment more attractive and engaging for young people."

"Creating peer support networks is seen as particularly valuable for sustaining long-term commitment."

4: "*Show Me It Matters*" – Recognition and Meaningful Outcomes

One of the strongest demands is for formal recognition of civic engagement.
Students want their contributions to be:

- o Recognised with academic credits (ECTS)
- o Counted as part of their official educational pathway
- o Valued with certificates or even course integration

They suggest that volunteering, social innovation projects, and participation in student associations should "count" academically — just like traditional coursework.

Students also stress the need for guidance and support, including:

- o Mentorship from experienced peers or professionals
- o Field visits to social organisations
- o First-hand testimonials from social impact practitioners

This support helps students navigate real-world involvement, understand career options, and feel emotionally supported.

Telling excerpts from the focus groups are:

"Academic recognition in most projects and organisations partnered with U. Porto is currently given through participation certificates and recognition ceremonies for those involved."

"There is a budget, but no one talks about it. Students should have access and give input on how that budget is used for social causes."

In summary, this Part II of the quantitative study provided insight into young people's needs, expectations and motivations for civic participation. The main conclusions were:

- Collaboration with local organisations is highly valued as being as it leads to effective for learning outcomes;
- Volunteering is seen as a tool for professional development;
- and Civic participation contributes to greater civic knowledge, a sense of belonging and resilience in the face of political instability.

The focus groups in the qualitative study provided a deeper understanding of students' needs and preferences. They highlight what really truly motivates students to be more participatory, emphasising aspects such as:

- The opportunity for real-world and enjoyable learning experiences;
- The development of skills such as like empathy,
- The academic and civic social recognition they can achieve, through their efforts.

PART III: WHAT'S NEXT? — PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the findings mentioned above, this section outlines concrete steps to strengthen student participation in civic activities. These actions are designed to meet students' needs and overcome structural barriers, helping to build inclusive, sustainable systems of engagement.

1. **Improve access to information**

   a) **Create a centralised digital platform:** develop a user-friendly online portal listing all civic engagement opportunities. It should include filters for interest area, time availability, language, and type of activity. This would make it easier for all students, including international ones, to find relevant options.

b) **Strengthen campus communication:** combine digital tools (social media, apps) with traditional methods (bulletin boards, classroom announcements). Apps could offer recognition features for highly involved students and connect them with peers abroad. Monthly thematic campaigns could boost visibility of urgent social topics.

2. **Integrate engagement into academic curriculum**

   a) **Institutionalise service-learning and pro bono programmes**: design credit-bearing courses incorporating real-world civic tasks in collaboration with NGOs and communities.

   b) **Support interdisciplinary projects:** promote cross-faculty projects that align with learning goals and allow diverse problem-solving approaches, supported by academic mentors.

3. **Provide recognition and incentives**

   a) **Offer formal acknowledgement:** recognise civic work with ECTS credits, official certificates, and records in academic transcripts. Staff should also be formally recognised and allocated time for engagement-related work.

   b) **Develop Reward Systems**: use awards, public events, and social media recognition to boost participation. Consider scholarships or mentorship incentives.

4. **Reduce participation barriers**

   a) **Enhance flexibility:** allow flexible scheduling and cross-disciplinary elective recognition. Avoid overlapping civic engagement with exams.

   b) **Provide financial support:** offer micro-grants or stipends for materials, travel, or time investment. These could be sponsored by corporate partners.

   c) **Simplify procedures**: digitise and streamline registration, validation, and proposal processes. Avoid requesting already available information.

5. **Build student capacities**

a) **Deliver skills training:** offer short modules on pro bono basics, empathy, leadership, teamwork, and public speaking. Some of these should be embedded in existing academic programmes.
b) **Support peer mentoring:** create mentorship systems pairing experienced and new students to increase confidence and sustain engagement.

6. **Reinforce cultural and social motivation**

a) **Reframe engagement as personal and professional growth:** show how civic work develops employability and life skills. Share success stories and real-world links to course content.
b) **Promote inclusive, immersive formats**: organise experiential days, social sports, and gamified events to appeal to a broad range of students and build empathy.

In summary, Part III describes measures to strengthen student participation in civic activities. The main recommendations include:

- Creating a user-friendly digital platform to publicise available civic opportunities,
- Strengthening of communication and dissemination channels to promote these opportunities,
- Developing pro bono and on the job, training courses and programmes,
- Implementing formal recognition and reward systems for youth,
- Reducing institutional barriers and bureaucratic processes,
- Increasing financial support,
- Developing support systems such as mentoring,
- Fostering a culture that encourages young people to become actively involved in society.

PART IV: Who does what? Recommendations by stakeholder

This section identifies key actors responsible for implementing engagement strategies across different levels of the university ecosystem.

1. **University Leadership and Governance**

   - Adopt a strategic engagement framework.
   - Create a Civic Engagement Office.
   - Allocate recurring funding.
   - Join international civic impact networks.
   - Engage with NGOs and corporate partners.

2. **Faculties and academic departments**

   - Offer service-learning electives.
   - Embed civic tasks in coursework.
   - Support interdisciplinary collaboration.
   - Incentivise faculty engagement and supervision.

3. **Administrative units (e.g., Student Services, Communications and International Offices)**

   - Develop and maintain the digital platform.
   - Run communication campaigns and onboarding sessions.
   - Provide multilingual and inclusive resources.
   - Coordinate with faculties on scheduling and support.

4. **Teaching staff and educators**

   - Promote social engagement opportunities in classroom.
   - Supervise civic projects.
   - Include reflection components in assessments.

5. **Student Associations and Peer Groups**

   o   Organise inclusive and accessible activities.
   o   Co-design engagement formats.
   o   Support peer mentoring and tutoring systems.

6. **Individual students**

   o   Actively explore and propose initiatives.
   o   Join training and reflect on civic motivations.
   o   Support peers and give feedback.

7. **External stakeholders (NGOs, public bodies, enterprises)**

   o   Co-design meaningful, impactful projects.
   o   Offer internships, and funding.
   o   Respect inclusion and academic context standards.

In summary, this Part IV provides practical recommendations for key stakeholders responsible for implementing engagement strategies at ~~different~~ various levels of the university ecosystem. Measures are highlighted ~~in the areas of~~ for:

- University Leadership and Governance,
- Faculties and Departments,
- Administrative Units,
- Teachers and Educators,
- Student Associations,
- Students themselves,
- External agents and partners.

V.   ANNEXES / APPENDICES

List of Social Engagement Activities for University Students

Name of the Activity	Brief Description
Welcome to Volunteering – Introductory Workshop	This short workshop is designed for **newly arrived students at the university** and takes place at the **beginning of each academic year**. Its aim is to **introduce the concept and values of volunteering**, as well as the personal and social benefits it brings. The session includes: c) An overview of **what volunteering is and how to get involved** d) **Inspiring stories and case examples** from past student volunteers e) Information on **volunteering opportunities** available locally and within the university The workshop serves as an **entry point into civic engagement**, helping students to connect with the community, develop a sense of purpose, and discover opportunities for personal growth through volunteer work. In this sense, this activity fosters a variety of skills, such as: c) **Openness and learning mindset** d) **Self-awareness and presence** e) **Empathy, compassion, and connectedness**
Business Game Competition	Universities do not always offer sufficient opportunities for students to apply theoretical concepts in real-world scenarios. To address this gap, the Business Game Competition invites 4 to 8 teams of Master's students in Management Engineering to participate in a competitive challenge using a Business Game platform that simulates a company case study.

	To be selected, candidate teams must first complete an online test focused on core topics in Management Engineering. Shortlisted teams are then interviewed by partner companies involved in the initiative. The case study focuses on key areas such as: • Strategic and operations management of the simulated company • Data analysis and decision-making processes Throughout the competition, students are directly observed by managers and HR representatives from the partner companies and sponsors. Awards are given to the top-performing teams based on criteria such as managerial performance, quality of the final pitch, and other achievements. This activity enhances a range of competencies related to **strategic thinking, teamwork, and problem-solving**, including: • **Critical thinking and complexity awareness** • **Communication and co-creation skills** • **Creativity and decision-making under pressure** • **Systems thinking and connectedness** • **Collaborative problem-solving in competitive environments**
Student exchange Led by Student Associations	These exchange programs, organized and managed by student associations, **host 15–20 international students annually**. The local teams handle all aspects of the stay, including **welcome procedures, registration, accommodation arrangements, funding and bookings**, as well as general **room and board solutions**. The initiative typically involves **students from European countries**, who are only required to cover **travel costs and personal expenses**. All other core services are provided by the host student association. During the stay, participants engage in a rich program that includes: 6. **Workshops focused on personal development** 7. **Cultural visits** to local landmarks and attractions 8. **Pro bono lectures by professors**, covering **emerging topics, innovative methodologies**, and themes

	aligned with the focus of the event These exchanges promote intercultural collaboration, academic enrichment, and the development of soft skills in a non-formal learning environment. This initiative fosters a broad set of **personal, interpersonal, and intercultural skills**, including: - **Self-awareness and openness to learning** - **Empathy, compassion, and humility** - **Communication skills and intercultural competence** - **Connectedness and appreciation of diversity** - **Optimism, courage, and inclusive mindset** - **Critical thinking in cross-cultural contexts**
Internships with Vulnerable Groups	Opportunities to work directly with vulnerable populations are often limited, particularly outside of special education programs. To address this gap, **service learning projects** involving students from **various bachelor's degrees** are organized to engage with these groups in meaningful ways. These initiatives allow students to **develop both knowledge and practical skills** while fostering a deeper **social awareness and empathy**. By working closely with vulnerable individuals, participants gain a **heightened civic sense**, which supports their growth as **socially responsible professionals and citizens**. These projects not only benefit the communities involved but also serve as **powerful experiential learning tools**, enhancing students' understanding of social issues and encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration. This activity promotes both **personal growth and social sensitivity**, helping students to develop: - **Openness to learning and presence** - **Empathy, compassion, and connectedness** - **Integrity and authenticity in professional contexts** - **Inclusive mindset and intercultural competence** - **Sense-making and appreciation of social realities**

Internship Opportunities for Vulnerable Students	Students from vulnerable backgrounds often face significant challenges in accessing the labor market, which can limit their long-term employability and professional development. To address this issue, initiatives are developed to promote **internship opportunities specifically targeted at these students**. These programs involve identifying and partnering with **organizations willing to host or prioritize interns from vulnerable groups**, offering them meaningful work experiences that align with their field of study. By participating in real-world professional environments, students are able to **apply their skills, build confidence, and strengthen their career prospects**. Such internships not only promote **greater visibility and inclusion** of these students in the labor market but also help create **more equitable access** to professional pathways and long-term opportunities. This activity supports the **professional and personal empowerment** of vulnerable students through the development of: • **Self-awareness, presence, and openness to learning** • **Critical thinking and complexity awareness** • **Perspective skills and long-term visioning** • **Communication and intercultural competence** • **Sense-making and inclusive mindset**
Student Helpers (Peer Academic Mentoring Programs)	In these initiatives, **experienced students offer academic guidance and support to their peers**, fostering a culture of **collaboration and peer-to-peer learning** within the university community. These programs play a key role in **supporting the integration and academic success** of students who may face additional challenges. The mentoring is tailored to meet the needs of diverse student groups, including: • **International students** • **Students with special needs** • **Students struggling with adaptation to academic life** By leveraging the experience and empathy of senior students, the program not only reinforces academic performance but also **strengthens students' sense of belonging** and contributes to a more inclusive and

	supportive learning environment.
EXPO with a Cause – NGO Fair and Student Ideation Workshop	This event is structured as an **NGO fair**, where multiple **non-profit organizations present their missions, projects, and social impact** to the student community. The activity is designed not only to raise awareness but also to foster **active student engagement with real-world social issues**.
	After the initial presentation phase, students are divided into **small teams**, each focusing on a specific cause or aspect of an NGO's work. The teams then develop **creative ideas or proposals** related to that cause — such as outreach campaigns, new project concepts, or innovative solutions.
	Each team **presents their ideas back to the NGOs**, who in turn provide **feedback, guidance, and professional insights**, creating a dynamic space of **co-learning and collaboration** between civil society actors and students.
	This format encourages:
	● **Critical thinking** ● **Social innovation** ● **Civic awareness** ● **Mutual exchange between students and NGOs**
Pro Bono Projects and Pro Bono Marathon with University Students	This initiative invites university students to participate in **skills-based volunteering projects (pro bono projects)** that create tangible social impact while promoting professional growth. Students collaborate with **nonprofit organizations**, guided by **corporate and academic mentors**, to solve real-world challenges using their academic and technical skills.
	The program includes two main formats:
	• **Pro Bono Projects**: Medium- to long-term collaborations where students contribute to specific NGO needs over time, bridging academic knowledge with social purpose. • **Pro Bono Marathon**: A focused, intensive format where students, after studying a **diagnostic document** provided by the nonprofit, participate in one or multiple **8-hour working sessions**. Alongside their mentors,

	they co-create solutions to a defined challenge presented by the NGO.

Following the Marathon, mentors conduct a **skills debrief** with students, offering feedback and guidance on how to further develop the strengths and talents observed during the session.

This initiative enhances:

c) **Intersectoral collaboration**
d) **Applied learning: Perspective-taking and co-creation skills, Communication and creativity.**
e) **Talent development**
f) **Civic engagement**
g) **Critical thinking and complexity awareness**
h) **Courage, perseverance, and optimism in collaborative problem-solving** |
| **Life Cycle Game – Circular Economy Workshop** | This dynamic and interactive workshop is designed to help students **grasp the core principles of the circular economy** through both **experiential learning and critical discussion**.

The session is structured in two parts:

• A **hands-on activity**, where students engage in a simulated exercise that illustrates the key concepts of product life cycles, resource use, and waste reduction in practice.

• An **open debate**, guided by a brief theoretical introduction to the **principles of the circular economy**, encouraging students to reflect, discuss, and apply their insights to real-world sustainability challenges.

This workshop promotes:

• **Systems thinking**
• **Environmental awareness**
• **Collaborative learning**
• **Critical reflection on sustainability practices** |

Ikigai Workshop – Purpose-Driven Career Development	The **Ikigai Workshop** is a reflective and participatory session designed to help students explore their **personal and professional purpose**. Inspired by the Japanese concept of *ikigai* ("reason for being"), the workshop serves as a guide for aligning one's values, passions, and strengths with meaningful career paths. Participants are encouraged to consider not only **personal fulfillment and professional ambition**, but also how their careers can integrate **social and environmental contributions**. Through guided exercises and group discussion, students gain clarity on their motivations and how to navigate their careers with purpose and impact. This workshop supports: • **Self-awareness and inner development** • **Values-based career planning** • **Motivation and long-term vision** • **Social and environmental responsibility**
"Walk-in-Their-Shoes" – Immersive Inclusion Workshop	This half-day workshop offers students an **experiential journey into the daily realities faced by vulnerable or marginalized communities**, such as people with disabilities or refugees. Co-created with a local **social NGO**, the activity blends **simulation, reflection, and action**. The format includes: • **Experience Stations**: In small groups, students rotate through hands-on challenges that replicate real barriers (e.g., navigating campus in a wheelchair or managing paperwork in an unfamiliar language). • **Facilitated Debrief**: After each station, trained facilitators lead short reflective dialogues to process emotional reactions, raise awareness, and explore systemic issues. • **Solution Sprint**: The session concludes with an ideation phase where students co-design practical "micro-solutions" that could be implemented on campus, such as **inclusive signage, peer support programs**, or **awareness campaigns**. This immersive experience nurtures **deep empathy and inclusive action**, enhancing: • **Self-awareness and emotional presence** • **Empathy and the ability to relate across differences**

	• Inclusive mindset and social responsibility • Collaborative problem-solving and creative thinking

Summary of the list of social involvement activities for university students:

- **Welcome to Volunteering – Introductory Workshop:** A workshop designed for new students, introducing the concept and values of volunteering, encouraging community participation and personal development.

- **Business Game Competition:** A competition where students from an Engineering and Management Master's programme simulate a company case study. The goal is to develop skills such as strategic thinking, teamwork, and problem-solving.

- **Student Exchange Run by Student Associations:** Exchange programmes organised and managed by student associations that promote intercultural collaboration and the development of personal skills.

- **Internships with Vulnerable Groups:** Service-learning projects that allow students to work directly with vulnerable populations, developing skills and a greater social awareness.

- **Internship Opportunities for Vulnerable Students:** Initiatives that promote internships specifically aimed at students from vulnerable backgrounds, helping them apply their skills and strengthen their career prospects.

- **Student Helpers (Academic Peer Mentoring Programmes):** Initiatives where more experienced students offer academic guidance and support to their peers, promoting integration and academic success.

- *EXPO with a Cause* **– NGO Fair and Student Ideation Workshop:** An event that serves as a fair for NGOs to present their projects, followed by a workshop where students develop creative ideas for the causes.

- *Pro Bono* **Projects and** *Pro Bono* **Marathon with University Students:** An initiative that invites students to participate in skills-based volunteering projects (*pro bono*), collaborating with non-profit organisations to solve real-world challenges.

- *Life Cycle Game* **– Circular Economy Workshop:** An interactive workshop to help students understand the principles of the circular economy through experiential learning and debate.

- *Ikigai* **Workshop – Career Development with Purpose:** A participatory session that helps students explore their personal and professional purpose, aligning values and passions with meaningful careers.

- *"Walk-in-Their-Shoes"* – **Immersive Inclusion Workshop:** A workshop that offers students an experiential journey through the daily realities of marginalised communities, promoting empathy and inclusive action.