

CARE + CONNECT

Delivering Mental Health Supports in Higher
Education Institutions across Europe



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Project No: 2025-1-PL01-KA220-HED-000357751

The quiet crisis on campuses: how the University of Social Sciences is uniting Europe in the battle for Sstudents' mental health

Stress prior to examinations, apprehensions regarding future careers, and feelings of isolation are challenges encountered by students throughout Europe. The circumstances are comparable in Łódź, Dublin, and Bucharest. The contemporary academic landscape, while presenting significant opportunities for growth, imposes unparalleled pressure on young individuals. European universities acknowledge this issue; however, current support frameworks frequently fall short—assistance is disjointed, and the waiting periods for complimentary psychological consultations are excessively prolonged.

The University of Social Sciences has opted for a systematic approach to this issue. As the leader of this international initiative, we have assembled experts from Spain, Germany, Ireland, Romania, and Cyprus. Our objective is to establish a unified, effective support standard that will be applicable in each of these countries, irrespective of local cultural or organizational contexts.

Digital therapy that fosters a sense of safety for students

Experience indicates that the traditional model of care has distinct limitations. Numerous young individuals experience significant shame when attempting to schedule an appointment with a specialist independently. Relying solely on intervention during a severe crisis is a misstep. Consequently, as part of the CARE + CONNECT initiative, we are introducing support tools into the environments where young people engage daily—the virtual realm.

We are creating an innovative eight-module program centered on digital cognitive behavioral therapy (iCBT). This is not merely a compilation of generic advice; rather, it is a scientifically validated online tool. It offers free, discreet, and immediate access to techniques designed to manage anxiety, chronic stress, and enhance daily mental resilience. The application facilitates systematic engagement with one's well-being, empowering students with a sense of agency and complete control over their recovery journey.



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Individuals in the limelight, or the peer support system

However, we recognize that even the most sophisticated digital tools are insufficient on their own. Equally crucial, and often decisive, is the presence of a real person. This is why we are concurrently developing the CONNECT program, which aims to establish genuine and enduring peer-to-peer support networks.

Rather than expecting lecturers or classmates to function as professional psychologists, we equip them with the skills of wise empathy and effective communication. We instruct them on recognizing early indicators of emotional distress in those around them, how to initiate challenging conversations safely, and ultimately, how to direct individuals toward professional assistance. This is accomplished while upholding clear boundaries regarding personal involvement. We foster an inclusive atmosphere at universities, where attentiveness to others is seamlessly integrated into the organizational culture.

A comprehensive solution for the entire educational system

Thanks to our collaboration within the Erasmus+ program, we are not confined to developing local tools for a single faculty or university. By integrating established international practices from across Europe, we are crafting a multidimensional support ecosystem.

It will culminate in a practical implementation guide and an integrated digital platform. This represents a comprehensive, ready-to-implement solution that any European higher education institution can adapt within its own framework at no cost. The University of Social Sciences exemplifies how a Polish university can serve as a catalyst for genuine change on the international stage, integrating knowledge from across Europe and providing innovative solutions in the critical area of mental health. Experts from Ireland, representing the Spectrum Research Centre, specialists from Spain's Universidad del País Vasco, and the Cypriot Institute of Development, led by Neophytos Charalambous, are collaborating on this pioneering system. Our coalition is further strengthened by prominent European academic institutions such as the University of Paderborn in Germany and the Romanian Universitatea Națională de Știință și Tehnologie Politehnica București. This remarkable diversity of experience and shared objectives ensures the success of the entire initiative.



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