



Supporting Trauma-Informed Higher Education Practices

STEP Project Newsletter #1

Welcome to the STEP Project

We are pleased to welcome you to the first newsletter of the STEP project (Supporting Trauma-Informed Higher Education Practices), a two-year Erasmus+ cooperation partnership (KA220) running from October 2025 to September 2027.

STEP responds to an increasingly urgent challenge across Europe: how higher education institutions can support students affected by trauma, including those with refugee and migrant backgrounds, while ensuring psychologically safe, inclusive, and high-quality learning environments for all.

Why STEP?

Across Europe, higher education institutions are educating an increasing number of students who have been affected by war, forced displacement, migration, and other crisis-related or adverse life events. Research and institutional experience show that trauma-related stress can significantly influence students' learning, concentration, participation, sense of belonging, and overall well-being, and may increase the risk of disengagement or dropout.

At the same time, higher education teachers play a key role in shaping learning environments, yet trauma-informed pedagogical competence in higher education remains fragmented and underdeveloped. STEP strengthens educators' competencies through research-based, trauma-informed pedagogy, providing practical tools to create psychologically safe and inclusive learning environments—without turning teachers into therapists.

Project Aim and Key Objectives

The overall aim of STEP is to embed trauma-informed teaching practices into European higher education in a sustainable and scalable way.

The project will:

- develop a research-based trauma-informed teaching curriculum,
- strengthen educators' competencies through training and train-the-trainer models,
- produce a practical guidebook and open-access learning materials, and
- support institutional and policy-level integration of trauma-informed approaches.

An International Partnership

STEP brings together five European organisations with complementary expertise in higher education, pedagogy, trauma, mental health, and migration research:

- Savonia University of Applied Sciences (Finland) – Project Coordinator
- Duale Hochschule Baden-Würtemberg (Germany)
- FH JOANNEUM University of Applied Sciences (Austria)
- Institute for Migration Research (Croatia)
- Khmelnytskyi National University (Ukraine)

Together, the consortium combines academic research, applied pedagogy, and real-world experience from diverse European and war-affected contexts.

What Has Happened So Far?

The project officially started in October 2025.

A kick-off meeting was held in Kuopio, Finland (30–31 October), bringing together project partners to lay a strong foundation for collaborative work over the next two years.

The collection of research evidence on trauma-informed teaching in higher education settings is currently underway.

What Comes Next?

In the coming months, STEP will focus on a scoping review of existing research on trauma-informed teaching in higher education, an international expert survey across partner countries, identifying good practices and development needs from educators' perspectives.

These findings will directly inform the development of the STEP curriculum and training materials.

Who Is This Project For?

STEP is relevant for:

- Higher education teachers and teacher educators,
- Upper secondary educators preparing students for HE,
- Higher education leadership and quality developers, and
- Education policymakers and stakeholders concerned with inclusion, student well-being, and educational equity.

Stay Connected

Project results, open-access materials, and upcoming events will be shared throughout the project website traumainformed.savonia.fi. More information will be available soon.