

English Transcript: Eu!Radio Paris Interview with RDIUP – November 2023

Eu!Radio Paris Host : Lou Surrans

RDIUP Representatives: Fatiha Zaouia & Khaoula Mouhand

Lou: Eu!Radio. Production Guest. Lou Surrans. Project SMILE: Supporting Mental Health in Young People, is a project funded by Horizon Europe, a European funding programme dedicated to research and innovation. It started in May 2023, so to discuss it, I'm in the Eu!Radio Paris studio with Khaoula Mouhand and Fatiha Zaouia. So, you both work at RDIUP, hello.

Fatiha: Hello.

Khaoula: Hello.

Lou: First of all, could you introduce RDIUP?

Fatiha: RDIUP is an innovative start-up based in Les Mureaux, in the Yvelines department (78), created in 2018. We are involved in several European projects and specialise in the development and operation of innovative digital systems in the health, energy, transport, and education sectors.

Lou: So, as I said at the beginning, you're one of the participants in the SMILE project. Who are your other partners in this project, and which European countries are involved?

Fatiha: SMILE brings together 14 partners from 9 European countries, including our company RDIUP in France, FTK, our coordinator, Heidelberg University Hospital and NuroGames in Germany. Heriot Watt University and Edinburgh University in the UK. IRCCS AOUBOU in Italy, the University and Municipality of Maribor in Slovenia, CIP in Cyprus, the NVISION company and the INTRAS foundation in Spain, the WIZ company in Romania, and SWPS, the University of Humanities and Social Sciences in Poland.

Lou: And so, what is the SMILE project? What are its objectives?

Khaoula: The aim of RDIUP and its partners, with SMILE, is to significantly improve the mental health of young people through innovation and artificial intelligence. We aim to provide wider and equitable access to mental health services by integrating digital tools and participatory approaches. On the one hand we aim to promote resilience, mental flexibility, and social skills in young people. On the other, we aim to enable clinicians to make more informed decisions based on evidence. This initiative will foster close collaboration between health professionals, researchers, businesses, and young people, creating a lasting impact on mental health, the economy, and society as a whole.

Lou: What are these digital tools designed to promote the mental health of young people, for example?

Khaoula: Through SMILE, we offer the Open Knowledge Platform, known as the OKP, a platform designed to facilitate access to scientific and evidence-based knowledge to raise awareness among the general public. Using artificial intelligence and gamification, SMILE offers self-assessment tools, gamified scenarios, and self-monitoring features to promote resilience and mental well-being. For example, interactive games will help young people develop thinking, coping and self-management skills, contributing to personalised, evidence-based interventions.

Lou: aAd you've been talking about gamification for a while now, in other words?

Khaoula: When we talk about gamification in the SMILE project, we're referring to an interactive video game. It will be a collaborative gaming ecosystem developed with computer scientists, researchers, and psychologists. It will offer a non-competitive environment based on a small town where users can represent themselves through avatars, navigate, and interact with each other. Therefore, game design will be developed through active participation from various stakeholders.

Lou: What is the objective of this game? Is it to raise awareness, prevent mental health disorders, inform...?

Khaoula: Indeed, this game will provide peer support and assistance. It will be facilitated through multiplayer scenarios, allowing users to share similar experiences and support each other in a playful manner, without feeling stigmatized, especially in specific digital environments.

Lou: Do you have another example of a tool being developed as part of the SMILE project?

Khaoula: Yes, we have the mobile application being developed by RDIUP. This application will provide sophisticated tools for self-assessment, learning, training, and psychoeducation. It will also recommend suitable physical activities, healthy dietary patterns, appropriate sleep habits, breathing exercises, and encourage a healthy lifestyle.

Lou: So, who are the young people who will use these tools?

Khaoula: The target users of SMILE are young people aged between 10 and 24. This demographic group includes children, teenagers, and young adults. The aim is to provide digital solutions tailored to different age groups within this same population, by offering a variety of tools. By actively involving young people in the design and evaluation process, SMILE aims to provide a precise and relevant response to the needs of this age group, encouraging their involvement in maintaining good mental health.

Lou: Yes, so it's actually prevention.

Khaoula: We could say it's prevention, yes.

Lou: How important do you think it is to change attitudes and tools in relation to young people's mental health?

Khaoula: The evolution of mentality and tools in the mental health of young people is crucial in these days and at this time, a time that is marked by rapid digital transformation. As an innovative project, SMILE recognises the importance of this evolution. And by experimenting the impact of this digital evolution on young people's mental stress, the project aims to transform the way we understand and approach mental health issues. The aim is to create innovative methods, including gamification, to raise awareness, diagnose and support young people. And it is by adapting our approaches, and adopting digital tools, that we aspire to respond more effectively to the mental needs of young people, thereby contributing to better mental health on a European scale.

Lou: When will your tools be available?

Khaoula: The mobile application is under development, as is the game. We have weekly meetings with computer scientists, researchers, and psychologists, and we're in the process of developing this interactive game, and it's the same for the platform. I'd say it will be released towards the end of the project, in 2026, but we don't have a precise date yet.

Lou: Who will have access to these tools, will it be all the children and young people in the partner countries, do you have partnerships with schools and universities, how will this work in practice, will it really be accessible to everyone?

Khaoula: Yes, it's going to be accessible to all young Europeans in the 9 partner countries, and not only that, it is going to be open access, so it's really open to the general public. So, it's accessible to everyone, even outside these countries. And among our partners, we have universities, so the information will be disseminated within the universities, we also have university hospitals, so the information will of course be disseminated within the partners, but also to the general public.

Lou: To work on these tools, are you in contact with healthcare professionals and young people?

Khaoula: We are in contact with psychologists, within our partnership. and these psychologists are typically affiliated with university hospitals or general hospitals. So, they are in contact with young people who suffer from psychological disorders, anxiety, depression, so yes.

Fatiha: Harassment too, moral and psychological harassment, especially in schools.

Lou: A theme that is all the more topical, particularly in France.

Fatiha: That's it, that's exactly it, and especially in relation to moral and psychological harassment in schools among young people, especially between the ages of 10 and 24, which is a very sensitive age for children and it really affects their personality, it affects their mental health too, and through SMILE we're trying to provide a solution that can help them to self-assess and better overcome this phase.

Lou: And then what type of recommendations can be found?

Khaoula: On the one hand, this will involve practising sport, healthy eating, peer-to-peer exchanges via the video game, and on the other hand, in this same mobile application that will be developed by RDIUP, for an hour a week, for example, we will bring together these teenagers, young adults and children to talk to each other, with the presence of a health worker, a psychologist, to ensure that there is no stigmatisation or harassment.

Lou: And so, before we finish this interview in the Eu!Radio Paris studio, can you perhaps just give us a brief summary of the SMILE project, supporting mental health in young people?

Khaoula: To sum up, SMILE represents a promising initiative, aimed at transforming the way society addresses the mental health of young people, using technology in an innovative and inclusive manner through its participatory approach involving various stakeholders. The open knowledge platform, video game and mobile application are all designed to offer personalised and accessible solutions, encouraging resilience, mental flexibility, and stress management in young people.

Lou: Very good, well thank you both very much for coming to the Eu!Radio Paris studio.

Khaoula: We thank you for this opportunity.

Fatiha: Thank you.